

research report

Employability skills explored



Rob Martin, Frank Villeneuve-Smith,
Liz Marshall and Ewan McKenzie



Research report

Employability skills explored

Rob Martin, Frank Villeneuve-Smith,
Liz Marshall and Ewan McKenzie

Published by the Learning and Skills Network

www.LSNeducation.org.uk

LSN is committed to providing publications that are accessible to all. To request additional copies of this publication or a different format, please contact:

Information and Customer Centre
Learning and Skills Network
Fifth Floor
Holborn Centre,
120 Holborn,
London EC1N 2AD

Tel 0845 071 0800
Fax 020 7492 5001

enquiries@LSNeducation.org.uk

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Copyeditor: Jenny Warner
Designer: Tania Field
Printer: Blackmore Ltd, Shaftesbury, Dorset

CIMS 080040RS/04/08/2000

ISBN 978-1-84572-706-2

© Learning and Skills Network 2008

You are welcome to copy this publication for internal use within your organisation. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Further information

For further information about the issues discussed in this publication please contact:

Frank Villeneuve-Smith
Learning and Skills Network
Tel 0845 071 0800
enquiries@LSNeducation.org.uk

Contents

Foreword	
1 Executive summary	1
2 Introduction	5
3 Background	7
4 Part 1: What are employability skills?	11
5 Part 2: Employers' views on employability skills	15
6 Conclusions	43
Appendix 1 The survey questionnaire	46
Appendix 2 Sample breakdown	53
Appendix 3 Survey responses – summary	56

Acknowledgements

The LSN project team would like to thank colleagues from across the FE system who participated in our expert seminar, particularly Sue Georgious of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Richard Stone of Deloitte and Touche, and Tara Morris of Asset Skills for their contributions. We'd also like to thank Silvia Munoz and Sylvia Gentleman at LSN for their support and advice throughout the project.

The cover illustration for this publication is a reproduction of 'Employability' by Joel Quartey.

Foreword

The employability debate has been raging for some time. In one corner, employers are demanding the right skills to meet the ever-changing needs of today's global economy and this has become something of a war cry. In the other corner is the learning and skills sector, which is working hard to help develop a better skilled workforce.

At a national level we have the Leitch agenda leading a policy focus on skills and organisations such as the Sector Skills Councils and the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills to help employers articulate their needs. But, despite this focus, it can sometimes feel like the learning and skills sector and employers are speaking two different languages. To help bring the two sides together, this research investigates the views of both the learning and skills sector and employers.

One objective of this research was to develop a clearer understanding of the skills employers expect young people coming into the workforce to hold. Unemployment among 16–24 year olds remains a key issue. This was underlined in research by The Prince's Trust, which estimated that youth unemployment is costing the economy £10 million each day.¹ Indeed, according to government Labour Force data from March 2008, unemployment in the UK was running at 5.2% but among 16–24 year olds this figure stood at 14.1%.

One very clear message from this research is that, above all else, employers want young people coming into the workforce who are literate, numerate and communicate well. Attitude is also important – employers want young people to turn up on time and show enthusiasm and commitment. During their first five years of employment, employers are prepared to invest in people to help them develop more sophisticated work-related skills, but very few appear to be prepared to give a young candidate an entry-level job unless they have the basics. Indeed, this research seems to suggest that a lack of communication, literacy and numeracy is a significant barrier to young people entering the workforce, with only a substantial minority of employers reporting that they can always find young people with the right skills for their business.

A second imperative is funding to help people develop the skills they need for employment. The research explores employers' views on who is responsible for funding activity that helps people develop the skills they need for work. Employers rightly consider it the state's responsibility to fund the 14–19 phase of education and many are clearly not prepared to pay to help people develop the basic skills that they consider essential for employment. By contrast, a substantial number are prepared to fund activity that helps people develop the work-related and professional skills that they need to successfully run their business.

¹ *The cost of exclusion: counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK*, The Prince's Trust, April 2007

Since the publication of the Leitch Review there has been a sharper policy focus on helping people develop the skills that are demanded by employers. Further education colleges have been encouraged to deliver vocational training, national campaigns have urged people to improve their skills and new initiatives such as Skills Brokers have been helping employers to identify their training needs and access provision.

This research takes a snapshot look at the impact of this focus on employers and the picture is disappointing. Alarming, 76% of the employers surveyed indicated that they don't work with their local college and only 6% of employers had worked with a government-funded Skills Broker.

Overall, the research reveals that there is some way to go before we can realise the ambition of a post-16 education system that meets employers' demands for a better skilled workforce. One crucial step is redoubling our focus on ensuring that young people leave education with the skills that they need to get their first job. A second lies in encouraging employers to access the support that is already available to help them improve the skills of their workforce. Getting these things right will help ensure that UK plc has the skilled people it needs to meet the ever-changing challenges of our global economy.

John Stone

Chief Executive
Learning and Skills Network

1 Executive summary

This research explores the issue of employability skills. Through an expert seminar, LSN investigated the views of the post-16 education sector on the skills people need to be employable, current policy that is driving the focus on the acquisition of skills and a shared definition of employability skills.

Working with YouGov, LSN then surveyed 1137 employers to get their views on skills and what they consider necessary for employment.

Key findings from the expert seminar

The one clear message from the expert seminar is that the employability skills landscape is complex. The seminar centred around the question ‘Can we agree a definition of employability skills that will help take forward our future work in this area?’ However, the discussion suggested that skills needed for employability depend on many different factors such as job type, industry sector and career stage. In these circumstances creating one universally relevant definition of employability skills is impossible.

Despite a lack of agreement on the definition of employability skills, seminar participants did conclude that any definition of employability skills must reflect the mix of skills, attributes and behaviours necessary to find and sustain employment. They also strongly held the view that the acquisition of employability skills should be seen as a continuum of learning that supports job progression, not just entry into the workforce.

Key findings from the survey

1 Employers want young people entering their first job to be good at timekeeping, possess literacy skills and numeracy skills, and show enthusiasm and commitment.

The first question in the survey explored the skills employers expect to see in a job candidate who has just left school, college or a training scheme. They indicated that there are four skills they expect to see fully developed in this sort of candidate. Eighty per cent of employers said young people must be good at timekeeping; 79% said they must have fully developed literacy skills; 77% prioritised numeracy skills and 75% said enthusiasm and commitment.

The survey moved on to ask employers which skills they consider the most critical in a young person looking for a job, and rank them according to priority. The results mirrored those from the previous questions: communication was ranked first, literacy second, numeracy third and enthusiasm/commitment fourth.

There is inevitably a trade-off in any recruitment process, so the next section of the survey explored the skills that, if not present, would actively prevent a young candidate being considered employable. Fifty-five per cent of employers identified lack of literacy skills as a 'deal breaker'; 51% said communication skills; 48% enthusiasm and commitment; and 47% numeracy skills.

2. After five years of employment employers expect employees to have developed a more sophisticated set of skills.

Responses to earlier questions show that although employers have very clear ideas on the skills they think young people entering the workforce should possess, they do not expect them to be the 'finished article'.

The next question explored how well developed employers expect a job candidate's skills to be after five years of employment. The results suggest literacy, timekeeping, communication skills and enthusiasm and commitment remain critical. However, employers then also expect these candidates to hold a more sophisticated and often work-specific set of skills. Eight-six per cent of employers said that personal presentation should be fully developed, suggesting they want to employ people who appear to be professional. Seventy-seven per cent of employers want people to have fully developed team-working skills and 71% want people to have fully developed problem-solving skills.

3. Employers aren't prepared to fund training to help people develop the skills that they see as a basic requirement for employment. However, they are prepared to pay to help people develop more sophisticated job-related skills.

The results from the survey suggest that employers don't believe it is their responsibility to fund training to help individuals develop the skills that were identified as essential to employment in the earlier part of the survey:

- 37% of respondents believed that it was the individual's responsibility to pay for the development of their literacy skills
- 36% thought the individual was responsible for funding the development of numeracy skills
- 71% believed that developing timekeeping skills was the responsibility of the individual
- 72% stated that enthusiasm/commitment was the individual's responsibility.

By contrast, employers believe it is their responsibility to fund training that helps people develop the more sophisticated generic skills that they need for work. Just over half of the employers surveyed said they believe it is their responsibility to fund the development of skills for business awareness and customer-care skills.

4. Employers are struggling to recruit school and college leavers with the skills they need for their businesses.

The survey results showed that over half of the employers who took part had tried to recruit a recent school or college leaver in the past 12 months but of those that had tried, only 13.8% had always been successful.

The next question asked those employers who had found it difficult to recruit young people what skills these candidates were lacking. The top four reasons reflected the early findings in the study. Nineteen per cent of the total reasons given by employers for why they were not able to recruit young people related to literacy problems and 18% related to numeracy problems. Attitudinal reasons, such as motivation and work ethics, accounted for 16% of the reasons given, with poor communication skills accounting for 12%.

One further interesting finding is that many employers would prefer to recruit an employee aged over 50 who lacks the generic skills (such as IT) but has good vocational skills, rather than a more inexperienced recent school or college leaver. Given the choice, 58% of employers would select a candidate who is over 50.

5. Respondents who say they can't find appropriately skilled young people are more likely to be over the age of 55, showing a potential generational divide in opinion about skills.

There appears to be a generational divide between those who say they can find young people with the appropriate skills and those who can't. Sixty-two per cent of respondents aged 55 and over who often had responsibility for recruitment said that no, they could not find a suitably skilled young person. For respondents aged 25–34 who had the same responsibility, this figure drops to 26%.

6. Few employers are engaging with the FE system.

In recent years there has been a policy shift encouraging employers and the FE system to work closely together. The closing section of the survey explored whether the system is achieving this ambition.

First, the survey explored whether employers are working with the FE colleges. Alarming, most of the employers who took part in the survey (76%) indicated that they don't work with their local college. Second, the survey explored whether employers had worked with a government-funded Skills Broker. With less than 6% of employers saying yes, the result reinforced the view that employers are failing to engage with the FE system in the way government policy intends.

2 Introduction

To meet the challenges of an increasingly global market, the UK is in the midst of wide-scale reform of education and learning.² These reforms embrace learning in schools, colleges, the workplace and the community, and have an impact on the development of skills and knowledge to support both economic growth and social justice. Within these reforms *employability skills* is a term used frequently by employers, agencies and providers of education and learning. It's a term used in different ways and in different contexts. Given the importance placed on this term and the frequency of its use, this begs two questions.

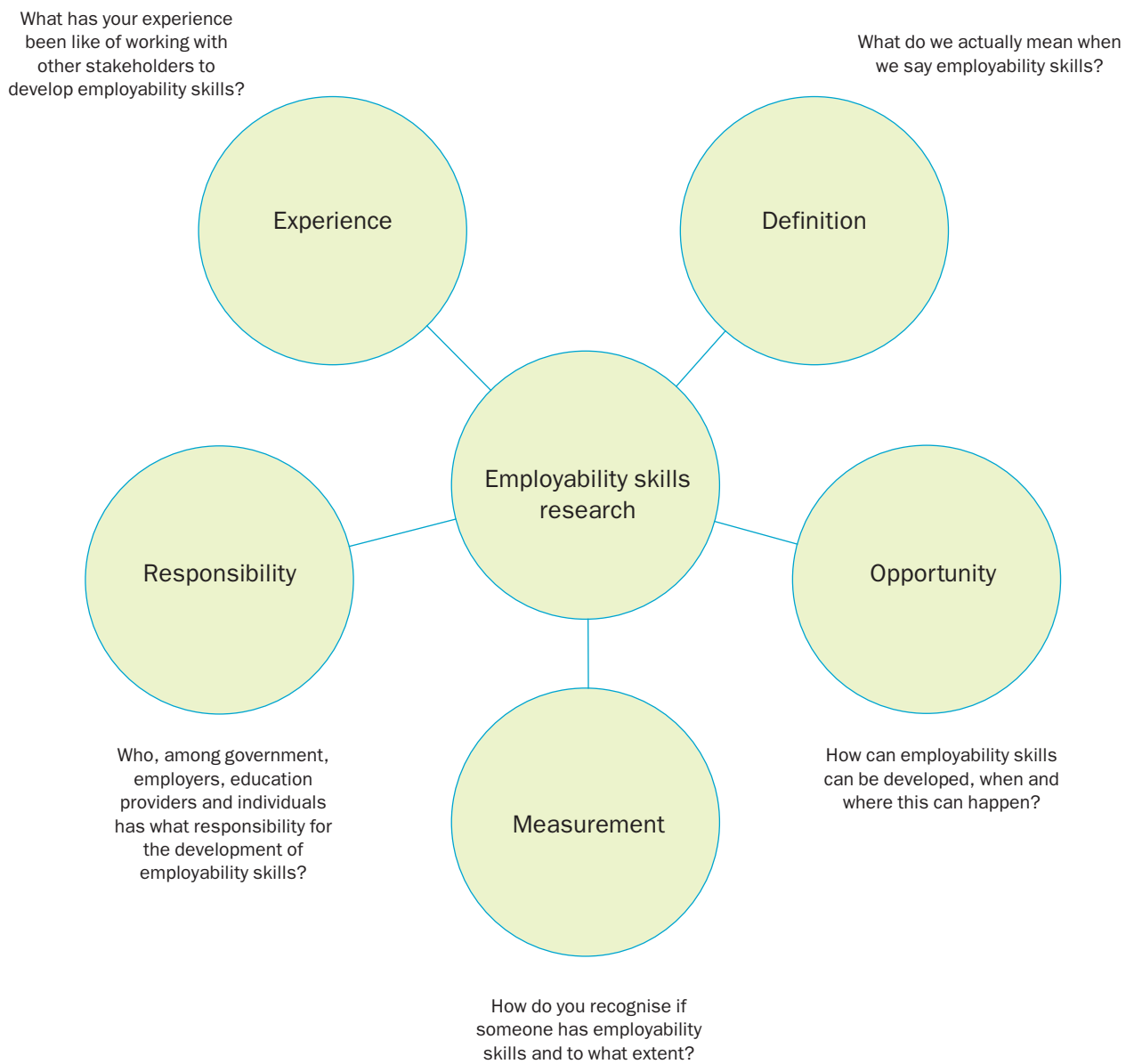
- What exactly do we mean by *employability skills*?
- Can we agree a definition of *employability skills* that will help take forward our future work in this area?

This report presents the findings from research by LSN into the definition of employability skills, exploring different views and perceptions. It does this in two parts.

- **Part 1** explores the views of stakeholders in post-16 education, and shares the findings from a discussion paper and seminar.
- **Part 2** considers the views of employers across the UK, sharing the findings from a national opinion survey.

To help focus the research, an initial review of the different ways and contexts the term *employability skills* is used by providers and employers was undertaken. The results of this research highlighted five broad areas that contribute to making the definition and development of employability skills a complex issue. These five areas were used to form a framework to collate and compare stakeholder feedback in this research, with the results presented in parts 1 and 2.

² Reforms include Key stages 3 and 4 in schools, Diplomas, functional skills, accreditation of learning including learning in the workplace through the Qualification and Credit Framework as part of the Vocational Qualification Reform Programme and Sector Qualification Strategies

Figure 1 The five broad areas explored through the research

The research concludes by comparing the understanding of and approach to employability skills of stakeholders in post-16 education with that from employers. It highlights where there is common ground and where there is clear water between these groups. This report further considers the implications of any differences and similarities as both opportunities and barriers to taking forward future work, and how this relates to present and future education provision.

3 Background

3.1 Why look at employability skills?

In 2006, the Leitch Review of Skills³ painted a stark landscape of skills and their impact on the UK economy and society.

In the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential. The prize for our country will be enormous – higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice. The alternative? Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all. The case for action is compelling and urgent. Becoming a world leader in skills will enable the UK to compete with the best in the world.

Today, more than one third of adults do not hold the equivalent of a basic school-leaving qualification. Almost one half of adults (17 million) have difficulty with numbers and one seventh (5 million) are not functionally literate. This is worse than our principal comparators. Continuing to improve our schools will not be enough to solve these problems. Today, over 70 per cent of our 2020 workforce have already completed their compulsory education.

As Leitch states, ‘the case for action is compelling’, but to ensure actions are effective to help people get their foot on a career ladder, remain employable and progress in work and life – we need to be clear what skills we mean.

3.2 Defining employability skills

Definitions of employability skills range from a vague notion of having something to do with preparing for a first job, through to very precise lists of specific skills, and on to employability being seen as a learning process. The range of different definitions and the contexts in which they are used ultimately lead to confusion.

³ HM Treasury (2006). *Leitch Review of Skills, Prosperity for all in the global economy – world-class skills*,

To illustrate this point, the following are example definitions of employability skills:

Young people also need to develop their personal skills and a set of thinking and learning skills. These skills and attitudes are fundamental to improving young people's employability as well as their learning.

Employability means what it says – it's about having the skills needed to perform well at work.⁵

Employability development has three aspects:⁶

- The development of employability attributes
- The development of self-promotional and career management skills
- A willingness to learn and reflect on learning.³

Employability is a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy. There are eight top employability skills:⁷

- Self management
- Team working
- Problem solving
- Communication – application of literacy
- Business awareness
- Customer care
- Application of numeracy
- Application of ICT.⁴

It is right that we take time to consider how best to present those results so that employers and others can recognise the full range of student achievement.⁸

We have compiled a list of which employability skills are the most important to recruiters:

- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Teamworking
- Oral communication
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative / proactivity
- Ongoing development
- Employability skills – qualities not qualifications.^{9, 10}

4 DfES (2005). *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*

5 DfES (2006). *Employability: An introduction for Subject Learning Coaches*

6 Universities UK (2002). *Enhancing employability, recognising diversity*

7 Confederation of British Industry (2007). *Shaping up for the future: the business vision for education and skills*

8 Universities UK (2007). *Beyond the honours degree classification: The Burgess Group final report*

9 NUS-online (2007). *Employability skills: what do employers want*

10 McDonalds (2006). *Progressiveness: The way we work*

From these examples, it can be seen that the different ways and contexts the term employability skills is used, contribute to making the definition of employability skills a complex issue.

3.3 Post-16 education initiatives in the UK

Many of the recommendations in the Leitch Review are reflected in subsequent government policy on education, for example, the Green Paper *Raising expectations*.¹¹ Within the proposal to raise the minimum age of young people leaving compulsory education, the government has promised that it will help ensure employers are provided with the sort of skilled workforce that will ensure they are able to compete in an ever more competitive global market.

Although there are critics of the proposal, there is general agreement that school, college and structured on-the-job training must provide effective opportunities to further develop employability skills. This places further emphasis on the need for clarity in defining which skills are necessary and using this to inform how, where and when these skills are best developed.

The range of current pilots, tests and trials in post-16 education offer opportunities to further explore not only which skills contribute to supporting someone to get a job and remain employable, but also to explore mechanisms of how these skills might be developed and measured. The present range of pilots, test and trials that affect preparing young people for work include:

- functional skills ¹²
- Diplomas ¹³
- Qualification and Credit Framework ¹⁴
- Foundation Learning Tier. ¹⁵

These initiatives are in addition to the present opportunities of developing skills through GCSEs, A-levels, NVQs, vocational qualifications and apprenticeships.

A selection of schools, colleges, providers and employers across the UK are currently involved in working through the detail of these initiatives, gathering an enhanced understanding of how each initiative can contribute to the aim of a skilled workforce to compete in a competitive global market. Linking back to the recommendations from the Leitch Review, literacy and numeracy skills are an important part of these reforms, represented as functional skills and their relationship with Diplomas and GCSEs. Delivery models being trialled include learning and assessment in the classroom and in the workplace.

11 DfES (2007). *Raising expectations: staying in education and training post-16*. HMSO

12 Information on functional skills can be found at www.qca.org.uk/qca_6062.aspx and <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=126564>

13 Information on Diplomas can be found at www.qca.org.uk/qca_5396.aspx

14 Information on the Qualification and Credit Framework can be found at www.qca.org.uk/qca_8150.aspx and www.qrsp.org.uk

15 Information on the Foundation Learning Tier can be found at www.foundationlearningtier.org.uk

To accompany these developments, Sector Skills Councils¹⁶ are currently working to develop Sector Qualification Strategies to capture and articulate the skills' needs of employers which will be used to ensure that the content of future qualifications responds to priority needs identified in industry.

Given the importance placed on developing skills to support people to prepare for and function in work and life, the need for clarity is paramount.

¹⁶ From 1 April the Sector Skills Development Agency closes and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills is launched. Information is available at www.ssda.org.uk and www.ukces.org.uk

4 Part 1: What are employability skills?

4.1 Introduction

This section of the LSN employability study focuses on the views and perceptions from organisations in post-16 education, particularly those that have expertise in this area and were willing to share their views about the employability that the UK needs to deliver the agenda contained in the Leitch Review of Skills.

The desktop research of references to employability skills identified a number of key issues that had an impact on how the term *employability* was being used.

Measurement:	Individuals, employers, education providers and funding bodies wish to know if we are moving in the right direction. How do we measure the development of employability skills in individuals?
Generic v. sector specific:	Is there a set of identifiable skills and qualities that supports people to get and keep a job in all sectors?
Threshold and sustainable:	Are there different skills needed to get a job, as opposed to maintaining employment and progressing through a career?
Responsibility and opportunity:	What responsibilities and opportunities does each party have in the development of employability skills?

To move beyond the desktop research, LSN hosted a seminar on employability skills with representation from Sector Skills Councils, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), further education, work-based providers, employer providers and higher education. In preparation for the seminar, a discussion paper was created to stimulate the debate.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Discussion paper

The discussion paper was created by LSN and sent to participants to set the scene for the seminar, using the key issues from the desktop research as a starting point to share views and perspectives. Additional information included in the paper gave a background on the interest in employability skills, some of the key drivers that make this an important area of work, and an awareness of current government initiatives and potential future steps.

To capture the range of different views and perspectives, the discussion paper posed a key question for participants to consider:

Can we agree a definition of 'employability skills' that will help take forward our future work in this area?

Seminar

In November 2007, representatives from stakeholders including Sector Skills Councils, QCA, further education, work-based learning providers, employer providers and higher education attended an employability skills seminar in London.

The event started with presentations from different stakeholders, following on from the discussion paper, and then an open discussion to allow participants to contribute freely. It closed with a final summary around the key question in the discussion paper.

The outcomes of the seminar are synthesised in the following section.

4.3 Results and analysis

This section sets out the outcomes from the LSN employability seminar. The discussion paper and seminar produced a lively debate on how different stakeholders in post-16 education saw employability skills, what they felt these skills were and how they should be developed.

4.3.1 Definition

It was recognised and agreed by all participants that there are many factors that can influence the definition of employability skills, including:

- market trends – regional, national and international
- sector-specific skills
- job-specific skills – the type of job
- stage of career – first job, promotion, change of job
- a multicultural population
- changes in working practice and developments in technology
- the perception of 'employability skills' from different stakeholders.

In recognition of the different factors, no single set of skills was offered as universally applicable to all settings. However, there were common features within all definitions offered, which made reference to a mix of **skills, attributes** and **behaviours** needed to seek, obtain and sustain employment.

It was notable that all the stakeholders specifically identified literacy and numeracy as critical to employability and all levels of functioning.

4.3.2 Drivers

Participants noted that this is not a new area of work, sharing examples of pockets of development.¹⁷ Overall, they voiced frustration at the lack of progress across the UK over the past 20 years. It was noted that the issue has been brought into focus by the Leitch Review of Skills and the challenges the UK faces to maintain and improve its competitiveness in a global economy – the timescales and targets recommended by Leitch highlight the necessity to act now.

In addition to employability skills being seen as important for UK competitiveness (referred to as economically valuable skills), participants highlighted the positive benefits of developing these skills for both society and individuals. A phrase used in the seminar was ‘skills for work and life’.

4.3.3 Opportunity

The development of employability skills was seen as a continuum of learning, equally important when getting a job as when progressing and when changing job. It was felt to be unhelpful in presenting a positive message about these skills to concentrate solely on the lower level skills associated with getting on the career ladder.

Discussion recognised the important contribution made by schools, work experience, employers and further and higher education, identifying all opportunities as making a relevant contribution. Models of learning that were felt to be successful included both embedded and discrete approaches to developing employability skills. It was suggested that there needs to be far more creative and innovative ways to embed employability skills within compulsory and post-16 education.

Participants were mindful of the findings of the Leitch Review that 70% of the workforce in 2020 will have already left compulsory education and the corollary that adults will need opportunities to develop their skills so they remain employable and progress in their career.

¹⁷ Examples included projects and research by the Sector Skills Development Agency and Skills4industry by Deloitte and Touche

4.3.4 Measurement

Discussion focused on the need for individuals and businesses to be able to recognise the level and extent of employability skills. Qualifications were suggested as a vehicle to support individuals in applying for and moving jobs, and for employers to help manage a skilled workforce.

It was identified that other, less numeric, indicators of employability skills are needed to paint a complete and accurate picture of an individual's ability. There was a strong view among participants that this should focus on a 'positive' approach to capturing and building on individuals' skills, rather than a deficit model of what a person cannot do.

4.3.5 Responsibility

Debate on the level¹⁸ of skills highlighted the need for a sound foundation at Entry to Level 1, on which to build towards Level 2 and beyond to meet the challenges of Leitch. There was recognition that the number of lower skilled jobs in the UK is expected to decline so the general level of attainment needs to continue to rise. For this to be successful, it was felt that a culture change towards learning, education and skills was necessary.

Discussion on who is responsible for developing employability skills explored the role of government, employers and individuals. There was general agreement about government responsibility to support learning up to and including Level 2 – especially in literacy and numeracy. It was further recognised that higher levels of learning required a shared responsibility between the individual, their employer and the government. Participants acknowledged the initiatives being introduced by government, the obligation of employers and the personal responsibility of individuals.

4.4 Summary

In response to the key question posed in the seminar: *Can we agree a definition of employability skills that will help take forward our future work in this area?* – no single set of skills was offered or agreed as universally applicable.

Skills have enhanced or decreased relevance to employability depending on the job type, time, location, market, sector and stage of career. Consequently, this prevented any chance of defining a universal set of employability skills in any level of specific detail. However, there was strong agreement among the stakeholders in post-16 education that a generic set of skills, attributes and behaviours would be welcomed. The benefits of this were seen as a clearer and shared understanding among learners, employers and providers and a starting point for defining more specific employability skills for different contexts.

Throughout the seminar, stakeholders in post-16 education spoke with a shared passion about the need to effectively support individuals develop employability skills throughout their career.

5 Part 2: Employers' views on employability skills

5.1 Introduction

Part 1 of the LSN study into employability assessed the views of stakeholders in post-16 education and training but what of the employers themselves – how do they view employability skills? Part 2 of this study sets out the findings from an opinion survey of 1137 employers across England. The survey, conducted on LSN's behalf by YouGov, was developed and analysed by the project team at LSN.

The overarching objective of the survey was to explore the views of employers on what skills made people employable – particularly recent school or college leavers, as they are the 'outputs' of the education system. It examined five broad areas as outlined below.

The employability skills that count: How developed do various employability skills need to be for a recent school or college leaver to be employable? Which skills are important? Which are the 'deal-breakers' – skills that if not present rule out employment in the minds of employers? How does this picture change later on in careers?

Who is responsible and who pays?: Where does the balance of responsibility for developing different types of employability skills lie between the individual, the state and the employer?

The employers' direct experience: How have employers fared when trying to recruit recent school or college leavers? If they tried to recruit but were unsuccessful, what stopped them?

Trade-offs between groups: When compared to different groups, such as older or migrant workers, how do recent school or college leavers fare in terms of their employability?

Employers' experience of further education: In the development of their staff, had employers much contact with the FE system, considering its role in developing employability skills?

A secondary objective was to identify how the views of employers differed between different sizes of organisations, different industry sectors, the age or role of the respondent and whether they had occasional or frequent responsibility for recruiting staff.

This section sets out the methodology for designing, distributing and analysing the survey, before presenting the results under each of the five dimensions outlined above.

5.2 Methodology

LSN carried out this piece of research to gain an insight into the skills and qualities employers look for when recruiting young people into their workforce, applying the method set out below.

5.2.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed by the LSN project team and consisted of multiple-choice, grid-format and rank-item questions. Text response questions were also included to allow respondents to provide commentary that gave further insights into their answers. In total, there were 18 questions, five of which aimed to gather information about the respondent and their organisation. Most respondents were able to complete the survey in 5–10 minutes.

See Appendix 1 for the text of the questionnaire.

5.2.3 Questionnaire distribution

An online questionnaire was distributed by YouGov¹⁹ by e-mail to approximately 3000 contacts. The target group was people working in the private sector in middle management or above with responsibility for any part of the recruitment process. Relevant contacts were emailed on 24 January 2008 and were given until 29 January to complete the survey.

Respondents accessed the survey via a link and with the use of a personal password. This restricted responses to the intended audience only and ensure that it was not possible for the questionnaire to be distributed further.

Overall, there was a high response rate to the Employability Survey: 1137 surveys were submitted before the completion date giving a response rate of 38%. The sample size is large enough to ensure the results represent the views of employers in England.

5.2.4 Sample characteristics

The general characteristics of the 1137 respondents varied in terms of demographics such as age, gender and region. This allowed for an unbiased sample population to be gathered and analysed with minimal chance for error among the overall results.

Gender: The majority of respondents (75%) were male, and 25% were female. According to a 2006 Labour Force survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics these proportions are similar to the gender breakdown of persons in the UK workforce employed in a 'higher managerial and professional' occupation; this being 70% male and 30% female. Therefore the sample does not over-represent males but follows the general pattern for the wider population.

Age: Twenty-two per cent of respondents were aged 25–34, 29% were aged 35–44, 22% were 45–54, and 25% were above 55 years of age.

¹⁹ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1137 private sector middle managers and above with responsibility for recruitment. Fieldwork was undertaken between 24–29 January 2008. The survey was carried out online. The figures have not been weighted. YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council.

There was even participation among all age groups above but only 2% of respondents fell into the 18–24 category, probably because very few people in this age group would have a primary or secondary role in the recruitment process in their organisation.

Region: Three per cent of respondents were from the North East, 9% from the North West, 7% from Yorkshire and The Humber, 8% from the East Midlands, 9% from the West Midlands, 11% from the East of England, 17% from London and 11% from the South West.

Responses were received from all nine Government Office regions within England in relative proportion to the general population distribution in the country. The only region that was notably out of step was the South East which accounted for 25% of survey responses – although approximately 16% of England's population live in this particular region (2001 Census data).

Job role: The majority of respondents identified themselves as being either an owner/founder/proprietor (33%) or middle manager (33%) within their organisation. Seventeen percent of respondents were from a senior manager/director below board level position, 8% were at directorial/board level, 5% were at junior management/team leader/supervisory level and 4% were the chairman/CEO/managing director of their organisation.

Industry: There was widespread participation from respondents working in the private sector's many industries. Industries with the largest input in the survey included finance/insurance/real estate (12% of respondents), computers/electronics (11%), retail (9%), service (9%) and media/publishing/entertainment (8%).

Figures for all industries are available in Appendix 2.

Organisation size: There was greater participation in the survey from small organisations: 42% of respondents came from organisations with fewer than 10 employees, 15% had 10–49 employees, 15% had 50–249 employees and 28% had 250 or more employees.

5.3 Survey results and analysis

This section sets out the results of the survey, exploring the opinions of employers on the importance of specific employability skills, plus a range of related issues. The results for each question are mainly presented as overall totals for the sample. Further detail is presented where there were statistically relevant differences between the views of different sub-groups – such as the size of the organisation, different industry sectors, the age or role of the respondent and whether they had occasional or frequent responsibility for recruiting staff.

The results are presented in five themes:

- what are the employability skills that count?
- who is responsible and who pays?
- the employers' direct experience
- trade-offs between groups
- the employers' experience of FE.

The complete set of responses to the survey is presented in Appendix 3.

5.3.1 What are the employability skills that count?

This section of the survey explored employers' views on specific employability skills. How developed do various employability skills need to be for a recent school or college leaver to be employable? Which skills are important? Which are the 'deal-breakers' – skills that if not present rule out employment in the minds of employers? How does this picture change later on in careers? This section of the survey focused on 14 skills, qualities and behaviours.

- communication skills
- team-working skills
- problem-solving skills
- literacy skills
- numeracy skills
- general IT skills
- timekeeping
- business awareness
- customer care skills
- personal presentation
- enthusiasm/commitment
- enterprising
- vocational job-specific skills
- advanced vocational job-specific skills.

Employers were also encouraged to add their own thoughts on the skills, qualities and behaviours that they believe are important to their business.

Q1 To what extent do candidates need different employability skills?

Few would expect a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training to be the 'finished article' in all areas of their personal or professional development. However, there may be some areas where complete development would simply be expected. The first question of the survey aimed to explore with employers the extent to which a candidate would need to have developed certain skills, attributes and behaviours. The full results are shown in Figure 2. The survey asked:

Think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business. To what extent would you expect that candidate to have the following skills in order to be employable?

The results suggest that in the minds of employers, a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training should have developed four particular skills, these are:

- timekeeping (80% of respondents)
- literacy skills (79% of respondents)
- numeracy skills (77.7% of respondents)
- enthusiasm/commitment (75.3% of respondents).

In addition, just over half the employers surveyed (53.3%) believed that personal presentation needed to be fully developed in candidates for them to be employable, while 41.6% of respondents indicated that communication skills needed to be fully developed.

Fewer employers expected skills that are specific to the workplace to be fully developed, with 11.2% expecting fully developed business awareness, 20.8% expecting customer-care skills and 8.6% expecting fully developed advanced vocational job-specific skills.

The fact that many employers do not expect all skills to be fully developed does not mean that they have no expectation of these skills at all in candidates. With the exception of advanced vocational job-specific skills the clear majority of employers expect all of the identified skills to be at least partially developed in a candidate for them to be employable. For certain skills, employers were close to unanimous on the need for them to be at least partially developed (enthusiasm/commitment: 97.9%; literacy skills: 97.7%; numeracy skills: 97.6%; timekeeping: 97.3%; communication skills: 96.5%; personal presentation: 94.5%).

Employers also had the opportunity to indicate if they believed any of the skills listed were not important for employability. Less than 1.5% of respondents indicated that enthusiasm/commitment, timekeeping, communication skills, problem-solving skills, personal presentation, literacy skills, team-working skills and numeracy skills were not important. Arguably this indicates that the list of skills presented in the survey is a reasonably accurate picture of the most important skills.

The survey went on to ask respondents to add their own additional employability skills if they felt that issues important to them had not been covered and 5.5% of respondents added an additional skill using a free text box. Although responses varied widely, the most common employability skills added included:

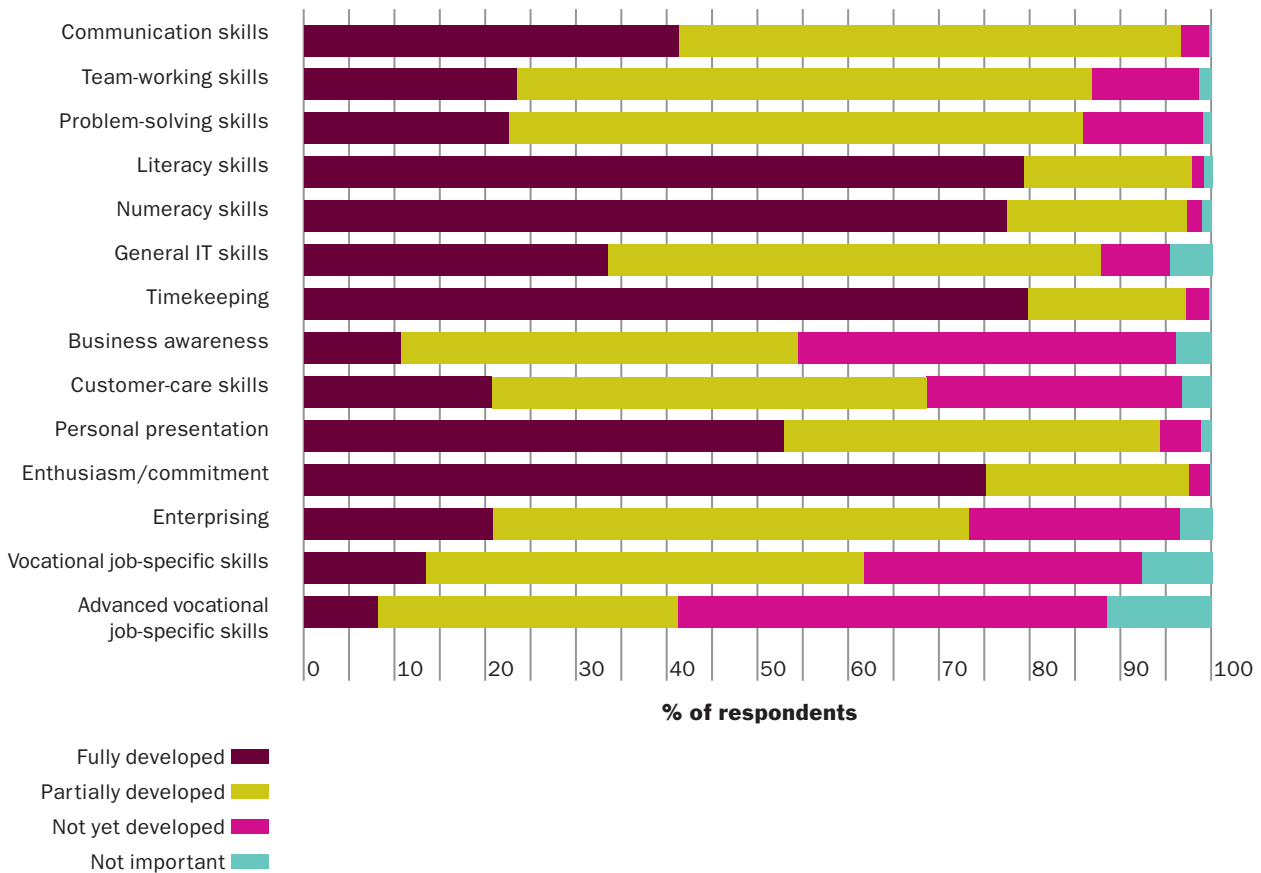
- job-role specific vocational skills (nine respondents)
- skills around working on own initiative/self-sufficiency (seven respondents)
- common sense (six respondents)
- courtesy/respect (four respondents)
- honesty (four respondents)
- willingness to learn (four respondents).

The expectation that certain skills would need to be fully developed for a recent school, college or full-time training leaver appear to be related to the size of the organisation. For example, very small organisations (1–9 employees) have a higher expectation (48.8%) that communication skills will need to be fully developed than medium-sized organisations of 10–249 employees (36.8%), who in turn have a higher expectation than organisations employing 250+ people (35.9%). This pattern is repeated for problem-solving skills. Only 17.8% of large organisations expect problem solving skills to be fully developed, compared to 18.4% of medium organisations and 29% of very small organisations. This perhaps indicates that small organisations need more highly skilled candidates than their larger counterparts.

There were few differences in the responses between service industries and manufacturing. The key exception was general IT skills, where 41.6% of those in manufacturing believed that general IT skills needed to be fully developed as opposed to 29.9% in service industries.

Figure 2 To what extent would candidates need different employability skills?

What are the skills that people need to be employable: Think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full time training and is applying for an entry level job at your business. To what extent would you expect that candidate to have the following skills in order to be employable?



Q2 Establishing priorities – which of the different employability skills is the most important?

The results for the first question demonstrated the extent of development expected by employers for specific skills, attributes and behaviours needed for employability. However, the level of expected development for a skill is not an indicator of its importance. To gain a clear insight into the relative importance of different employability skills, the survey then asked the following question:

Think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business. Which of these skills would you consider the most critical? Place each skill according to your order of priority from 1 to 14. Mark the highest priority 1, the next 2, and so on.

When the mean score for each particular skill is calculated, it is possible to see a clear ranking in terms of their priority for a candidate's employability. The full results, including mean scores, are shown in Figure 3.

The most critical skill for employability by this measure is communication – even though, as highlighted in Question 1, there is less expectation that it will be fully developed. Literacy skills came a close second, numeracy ranked third and enthusiasm/commitment ranked fourth. Teamwork came fifth in the ranking.

Considered alongside the results from question one, a picture begins to emerge of employers' expectations and the importance they place on particular skills. The survey suggests that employers both think the following skills are important and expect to see them fully developed in job candidates:

- literacy skills
- numeracy skills
- enthusiasm and commitment.

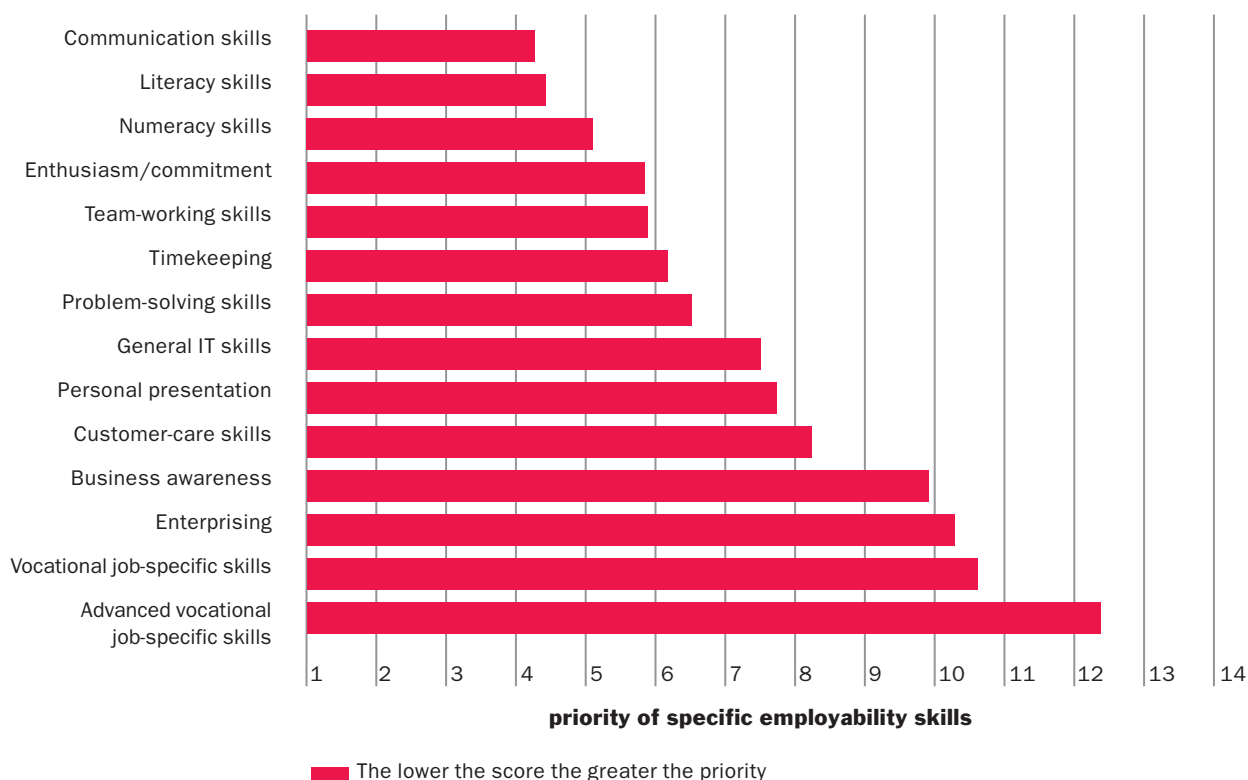
Timekeeping, the skill most expected to be fully developed in a candidate by employers, is ranked the sixth most important, perhaps indicating that it is a 'hygiene factor' for employability. Again, fewer employers ranked skills that could be described as specific to the workplace as important, with customer-care skills (tenth), business awareness (eleventh), enterprising (twelfth), vocational job-specific skills (thirteenth) and advanced vocational job-specific skills (fourteenth) ranking as the least important.

There were several key differences in the responses between service industries and manufacturing. Rather than placing communication skills first, manufacturing employers placed literacy as the most important, followed closely by numeracy, with communication skills third. General IT skills also provided a point of difference. They were ranked eighth by manufacturing while service industries ranked them tenth, placing personal presentation and customer-care skills ahead of them.

There were few differences between the rankings provided by employers of different sizes – except for the increasing importance of team-working skills with size. Organisations with 1–9 employees ranked team-working skills sixth, jumping to fourth for organisations with 10–249 employees. Organisations with 250+ employees also ranked team-working fourth, but with a higher mean score.

Figure 3 Which of the different employability skills is the most important?

Again, think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business: Which of these skills would you consider the most critical? Place each skill according to your order of priority from 1 to 14. You can only use each score once. Mark the highest priority 1, the next 2, and so on.



Q3 The 'deal-breakers'

Although employers may expect to see certain skills already present in a candidate and some skills may be more important than others, there are often trade-offs in the recruitment process. The next question aimed to establish with employers where the lack of a particular skill, quality or behaviour would actively prevent a candidate being employed in their organisation – the 'deal-breakers'. The survey asked:

Which of the following skills would you consider to be 'deal-breakers' for the candidate not to have? (Please tick all that apply)

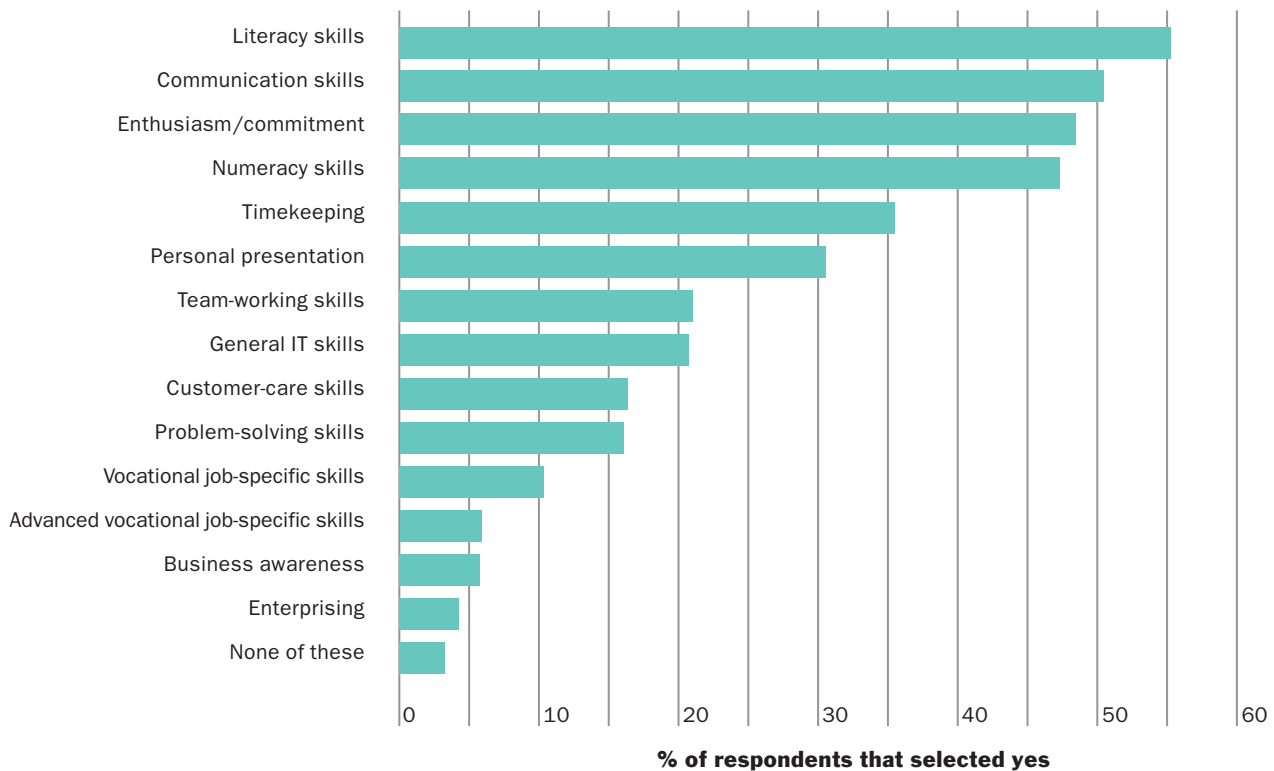
The most common 'deal-breaker' cited by employers is literacy skills, with 55.1% of respondents including this in their choices. Communication skills are the next most common with 51.2% indicating that they are a deal breaker, followed by enthusiasm/commitment (48.8%) and numeracy skills (47.1%). On average, each respondent selected approximately 4 (3.7) skills as 'deal-breakers' highlighting the importance of this group of skills to employers. The full results are set out in Figure 4.

The next most common 'deal-breakers' are timekeeping (35.4% of employers) and personal presentation (31.0%). A smaller proportion of employers (21.4%) consider teamworking skills to be a 'deal breaker', with a similar proportion including general IT skills (20.9%). Few employers considered a lack of advanced vocational job-specific skills (5.8%), business awareness (5.6%), and enterprise (4.5%) to be deal breakers for a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training.

Service industries and manufacturing had slightly different views on the skills that are the 'deal-breakers' if not present in a candidate. Although both groups had the same skills in the top four, more manufacturing respondents (51.7%) considered a lack of numeracy to be a 'deal-breaker' than service industry respondents (44.9%). For manufacturing respondents, it was the second most commonly cited 'deal-breaker' after literacy skills.

Figure 4 The 'deal-breakers'

Which of the following skills would you consider to be 'deal-breakers' for the candidate not to have? (Please tick all that apply).



Q4 Employability skills later on

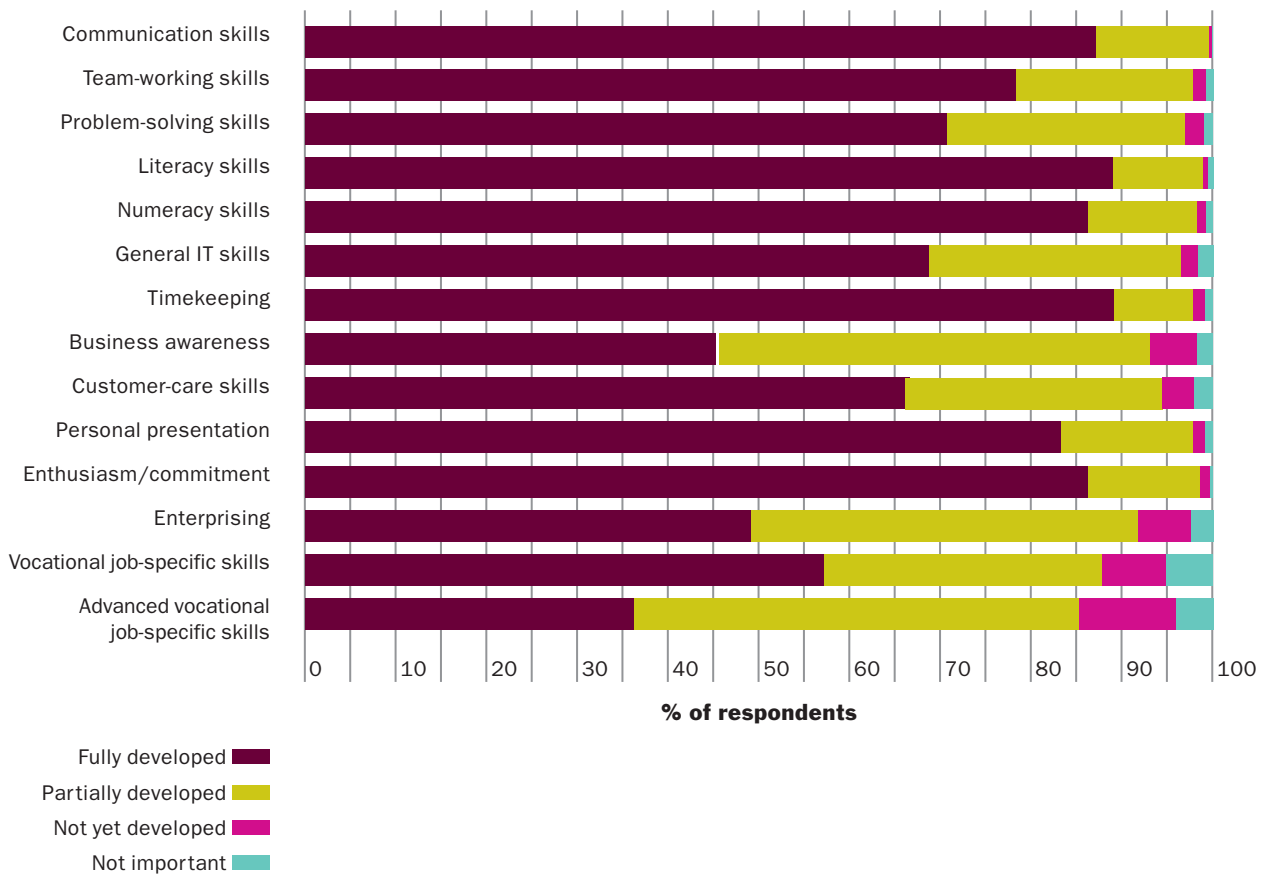
The responses to question 1 show that employers do not expect a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training to be the 'finished article' across all types of employability skills. But what about later on? How developed would an employer expect specific skills, attributes and behaviours to be for employability after five years of work and professional development? The survey asked:

What are the skills for employability later on? Think about a candidate for a job that requires five years' post-education experience at your organisation. In addition to work experience, which of the following skills would you expect that candidate to have in order to be employable?

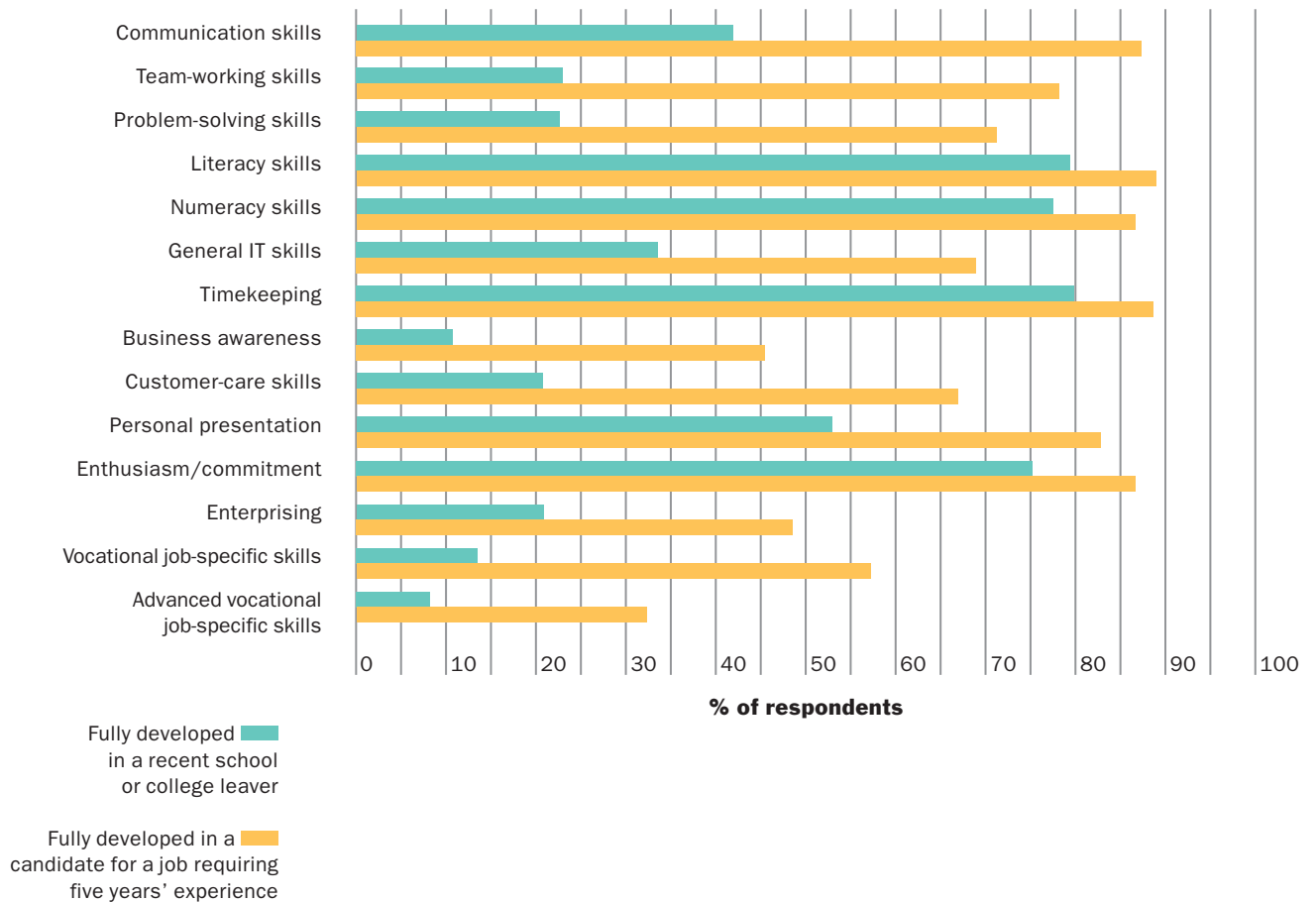
The results show that employers expect candidates seeking a job that requires five years' experience to have much more fully developed employability skills. Over 80% of respondents believe that by this stage literacy skills (89.1%), timekeeping (88.7%), communication skills (87.3%), enthusiasm/commitment (86.5%), numeracy skills (86.5%) and personal presentation (82.8%) should be fully developed. Over 90% of employers expect the full range of employability skills to be at least partially developed – with the exception of vocational job-specific skills (87.8%) and advanced vocational job-specific skills (80.7%). The full results are set out in figure 5.

Figure 5 Employability skills later on

What are the skills for employability later on: Think about a candidate for a job that requires 5 years post-education experience at your organisation. In addition to work experience, which of the following skills you would expect that candidate to have in order to be employable?



Employers expect candidates who have recently left school, college or full-time training to have different skill levels to more established employees. Compared to the responses for question one, there is a clear jump in the proportion of employers who expect skills to be fully developed. The difference is at its greatest for skills that might be described as specific to the workplace. The proportion of employers expecting team-working skills to be fully developed jumps by 54.3% to 77.9%; for problem-solving skills it jumps 48.3% to 71.0%; for customer-care skills it jumps 46.0% to 66.8%. Results for communication skills also begin to reflect their overall importance to employers, with expectations that they will be fully developed increasing by 45.7% to 87.3%. Figure 6 compares in full results for a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and a candidate applying for a job needing five years' experience.

Figure 6 Levels of employability skills compared

Summary

Although employers do not expect a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training to be the 'finished article', they do expect candidates to at least be enthusiastic, literate, numerate and able to turn up on time. They do not expect these candidates to have fully developed skills that could be described as specific to the workplace, but rather partially developed levels of these skills. Literacy, communication skills, numeracy and enthusiasm are the most important employability skills in the view of respondents, and a lack of them in a candidate is a 'deal-breaker' for many employers.

For a job that requires five years' experience, most employers believe that the most employability skills should be fully developed. Almost all employers believe that almost all the employability skills should be at least partially developed in such a candidate, with a significant increase in employers indicating they expect them when compared to a recent school, college or full-time training leaver.

5.3.2 Who is responsible and who pays?

This section explores the responsibilities of respective parties for the development of employability skills, asking how the costs of their development should be shared. It also sets out the survey findings which reveal employers' views on who is responsible for funding the development of different types of employee.

Q5 Who pays for employability skills?

Section 5.3.1 showed how employers expect to see a step-change in the development of employability skills when comparing candidates who have recently left school, college or full-time training with those applying for a job that requires five years' experience. Although this may seem unsurprising, it does beg the question about who is responsible for paying for this development. The survey aimed to explore this issue by asking:

Who is responsible for development? As that employee develops over the next five years within your company, who is responsible for FUNDING the development of the following types of skills? For each skill, you can tick more than one if the responsibility should be shared. (Please tick all that apply).

Responses to this question were closely linked to the expectations of skill development outlined in question 1 and fell into four broad patterns. The full results are set out in Figures 7a to 7n.

Skills relating to personal attributes or behaviours: Respondents reacted to skills that related to personal attributes or behaviours in broadly the same way – they were overwhelmingly the responsibility of the individual. Between 71 and 72% of respondents indicated that timekeeping, personal presentation and enthusiasm/commitment were solely an individual's responsibility.

A minority of 9–13% of respondents believed that developing these three skills was a shared responsibility between the individual and the company. Between 12 and 15% of employers believed it was specifically the company's responsibility. Very few respondents suggested that the state had any ongoing financial responsibility for the development of these skills.

Figure 7 Who pays for employability skills?

Who is responsible for development: As that employee develops over the next five years within your company, who is responsible for funding the development of the following types of skills? For each skill, you can tick more than one if the responsibility should be shared (Please tick all that apply)

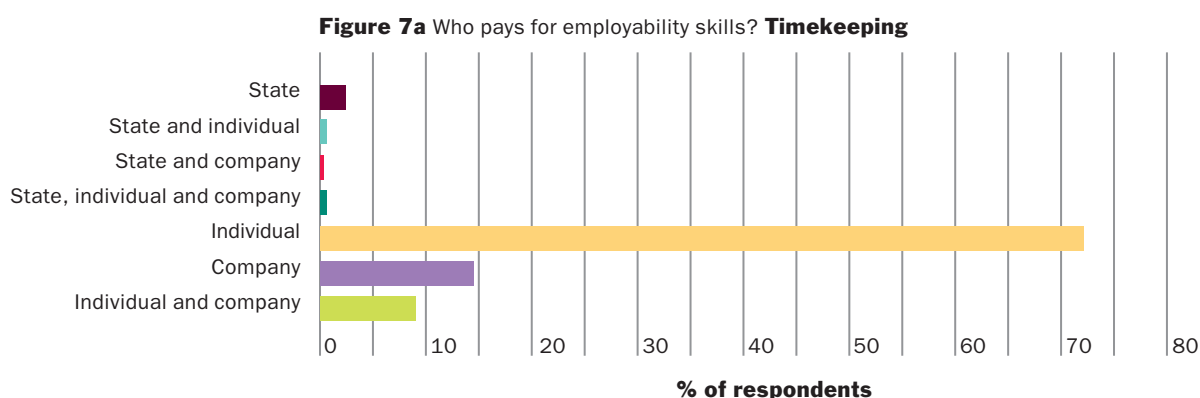


Figure 7b Who pays for employability skills? **Personal presentation**

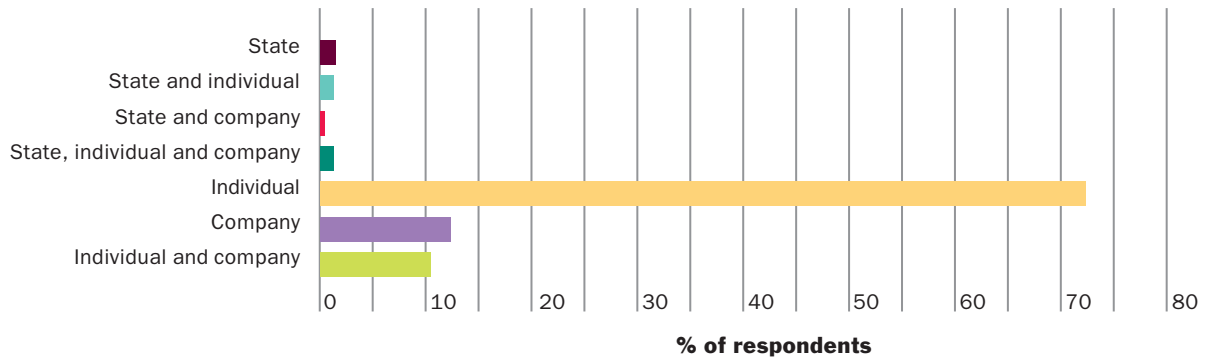
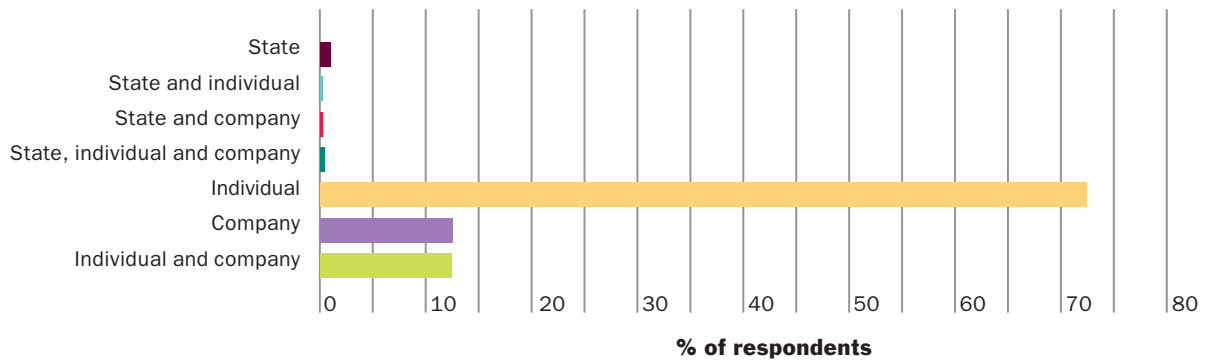


Figure 7c Who pays for employability skills? **Enthusiasm/commitment**



Skills that employers had expected to be partially developed:

Respondents treated funding for those skills that they had previously expected to be partially developed in broadly the same way. Funding to help employees develop skills that could be described as generic, but related to the workplace, were seen principally as the responsibility of the company: team-working skills: 47.3%; problem-solving skills: 38.8%; business awareness: 51.6%; customer-care skills: 50.5%.

Figure 7d Who pays for employability skills? **Team working skills**

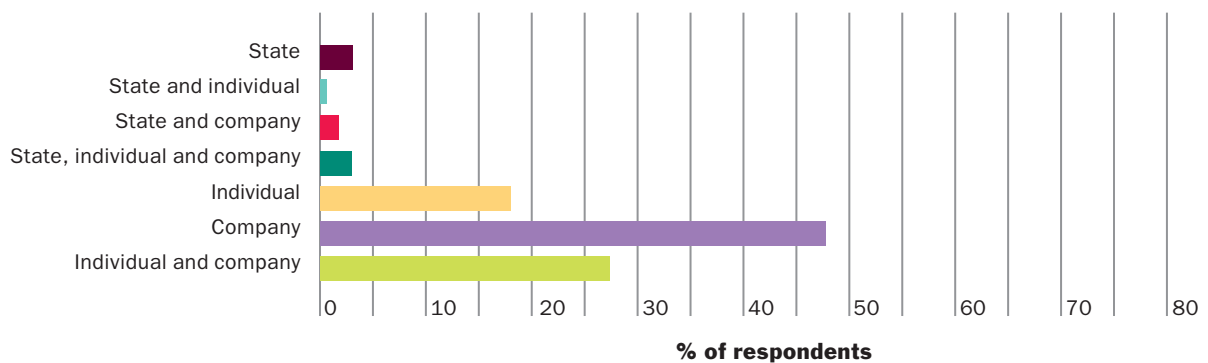


Figure 7e Who pays for employability skills? **Business awareness**

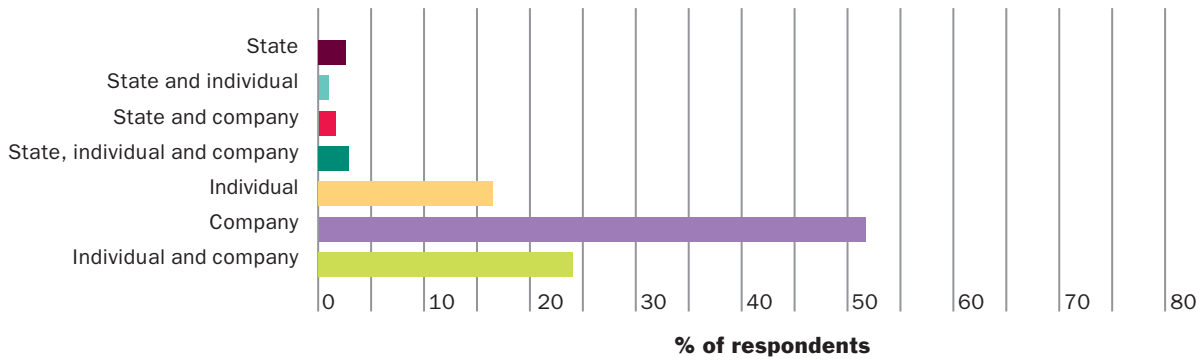


Figure 7f Who pays for employability skills? **Customer-care skills**

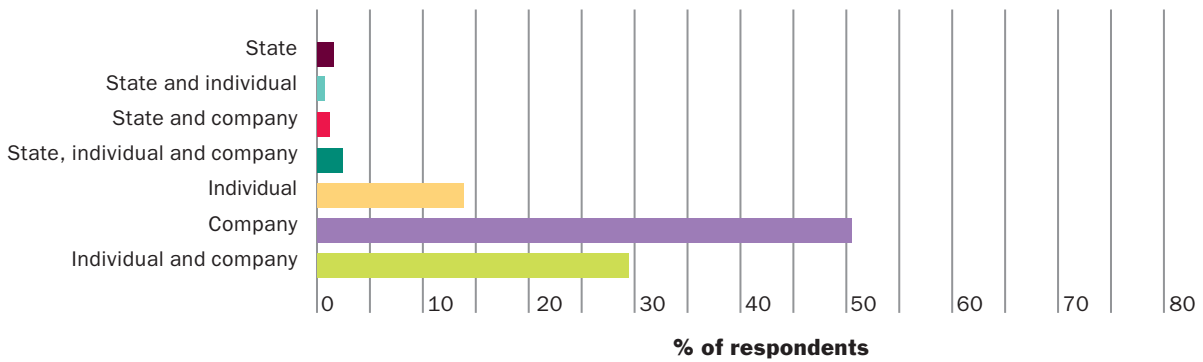
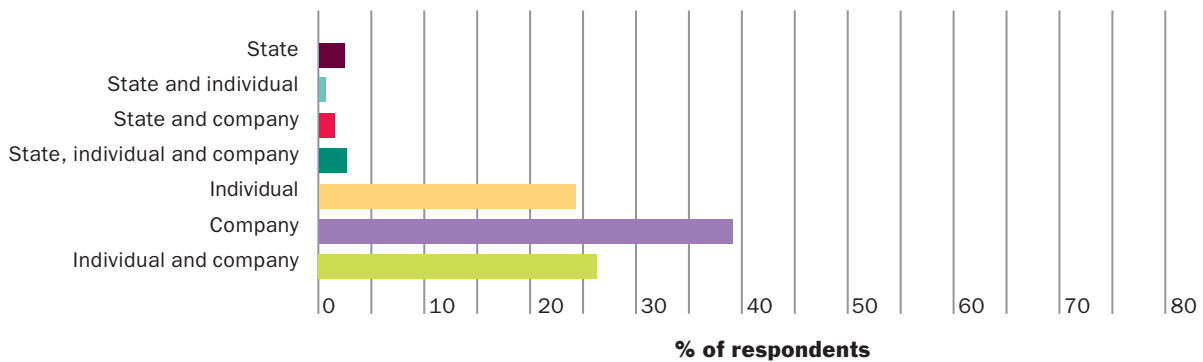


Figure 7g Who pays for employability skills? **Problem solving skills**



Between 24 and 29% of employers believed that responsibility was shared for developing these four skills between the company and the individual. The individual was the next most cited as responsible for the four skills, again, in broadly similar proportions. Very few respondents thought the state had a role.

Literacy and numeracy: Both literacy and numeracy were treated in almost exactly the same way by employers: 37.2 % and 36.1% of respondents believed the individual was most responsible for funding the development of literacy and numeracy respectively. Approximately 22% believed the state was responsible; 15.1% believed the responsibility was shared between the state and the individual.

Figure 7h Who pays for employability skills? **Literacy skills**

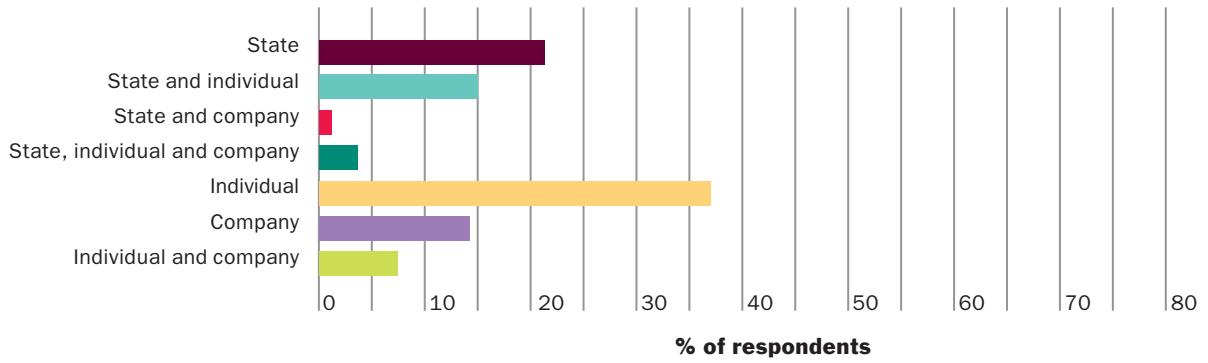
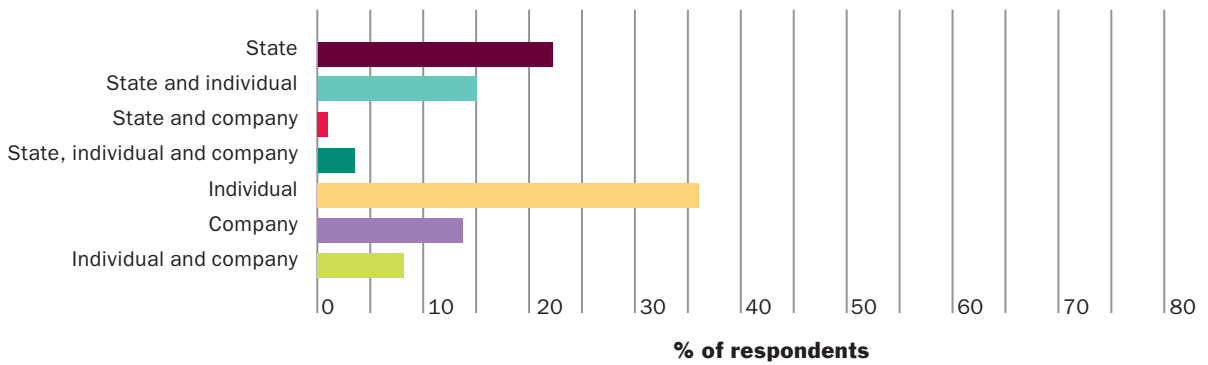


Figure 7i Who pays for employability skills? **Numeracy skills**



Vocational skills: Vocational job-specific skills and advanced vocational job-specific skills were also treated in similar ways by respondents. Approximately 40% of employers believed it was their responsibility to fund the development of these skills, but over a third of employers preferred some form of shared responsibility model for developing vocational and advanced vocational job-specific skills.

An employer’s view on who is responsible for funding skills development is linked to organisation size. Overall, the average preference for state funding for the development of any given skill is greatest among the smallest organisations of 1–9 employees (20.2%). This drops to 14.8% for organisations with 10–249 employees and 14% for organisations with more than 250 employees.

Larger organisations of more than 250 employees are the most likely to accept that responsibility for funding the development of any given skill rests with them, with an average of 61.7%. This figure drops to 54.3% for organisations of 10–249 employees and further still to 48.7% of organisations with 1–9 employees.

Figure 7j Who pays for employability skills? **Vocational job-specific skills**

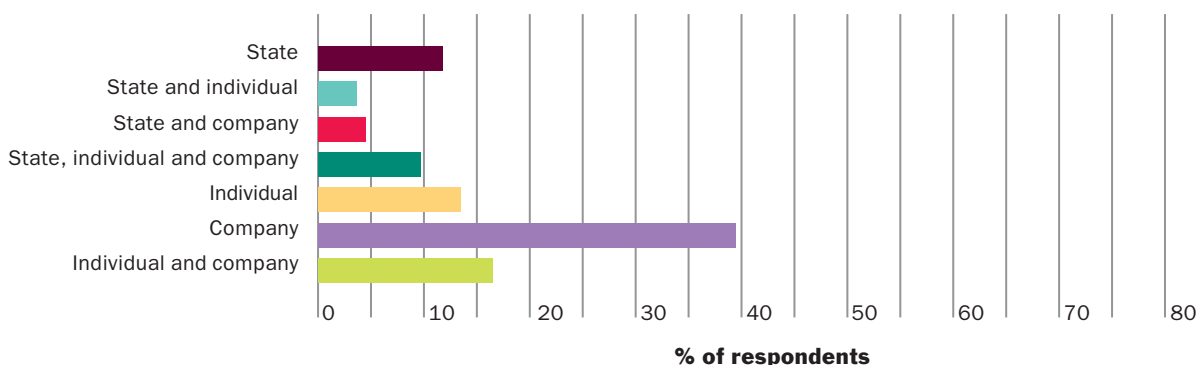


Figure 7k Who pays for employability skills? **Advanced vocational job-specific skills**

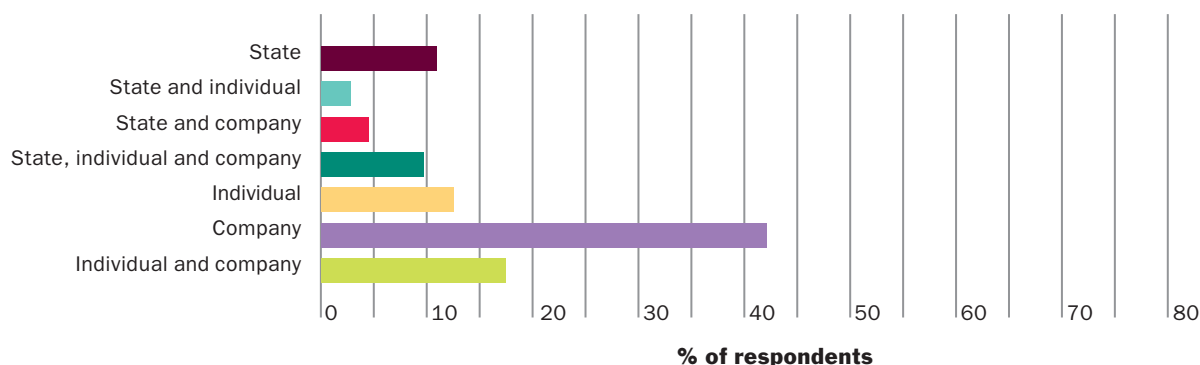


Figure 7l Who pays for employability skills? **General IT skills**

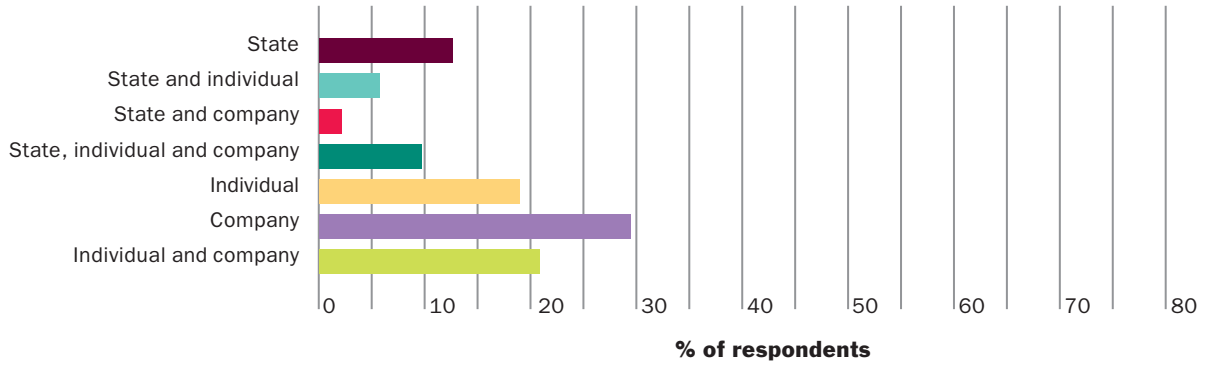


Figure 7m Who pays for employability skills? **Communication skills**

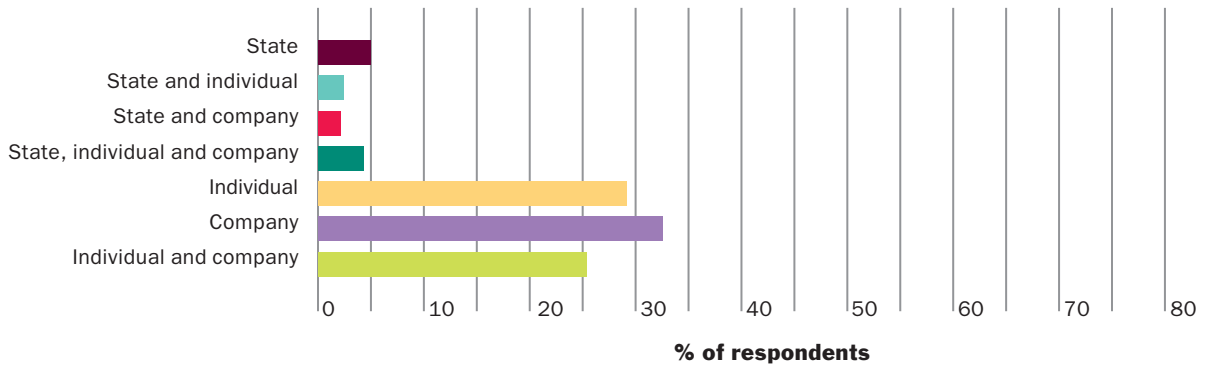
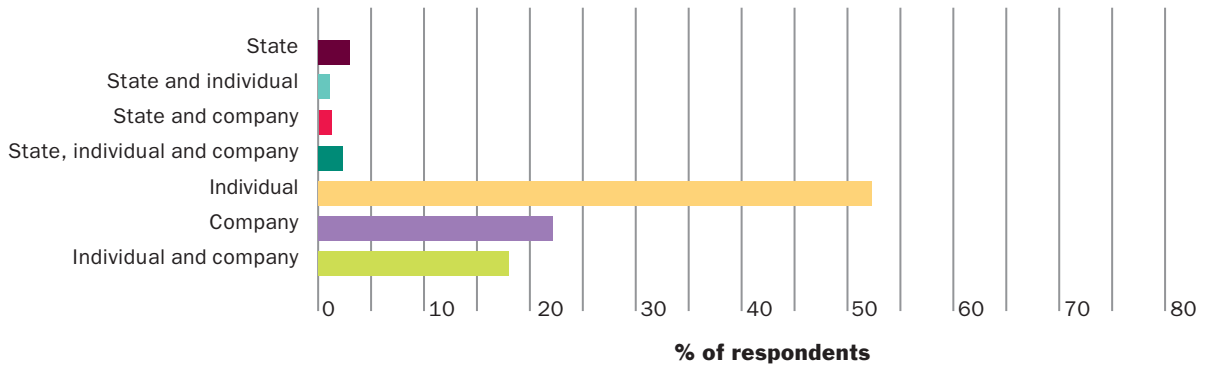


Figure 7n Who pays for employability skills? **Enterprising**



Q6 Who pays for qualifications and training for different groups?

To explore the issue of funding further, the survey went on to ask employers about the respective responsibilities for funding qualifications and ongoing professional development:

Funding training and development: who should be responsible for providing funding to support skills development for groups of people? For each type of training, you can tick more than one party if the responsibility should be shared.

16–19 year olds in education or training: Perhaps unsurprisingly, the clear majority of employers (60.9%) believe the state should be responsible for funding the 16–19 phase of education, with a proportion (12.5%) believing that responsibility should be shared between the state and the individual. However, employer involvement in funding was not ruled out by all, with 17.4% of respondents indicating that they support some form of shared responsibility model including the state, or the state, company and individual.

Students studying job-related vocational skills qualifications:

Although the state is still clearly believed to be the principal funder by many (29.4%) for job-related vocational qualifications, many employers also believe in a more even split of responsibilities, with 31.8% of respondents indicating that they support some form of shared responsibility model including employers and the state, or the state, company and individual.

Students studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications:

The trend towards a greater sharing in responsibilities for funding increases with the level of qualification studied. There is a reasonably even spread in the views of who is responsible for funding these qualifications with a majority (56.6%) of employers favouring some form of responsibility sharing and 59.1% favouring some form of financial contribution from employers.

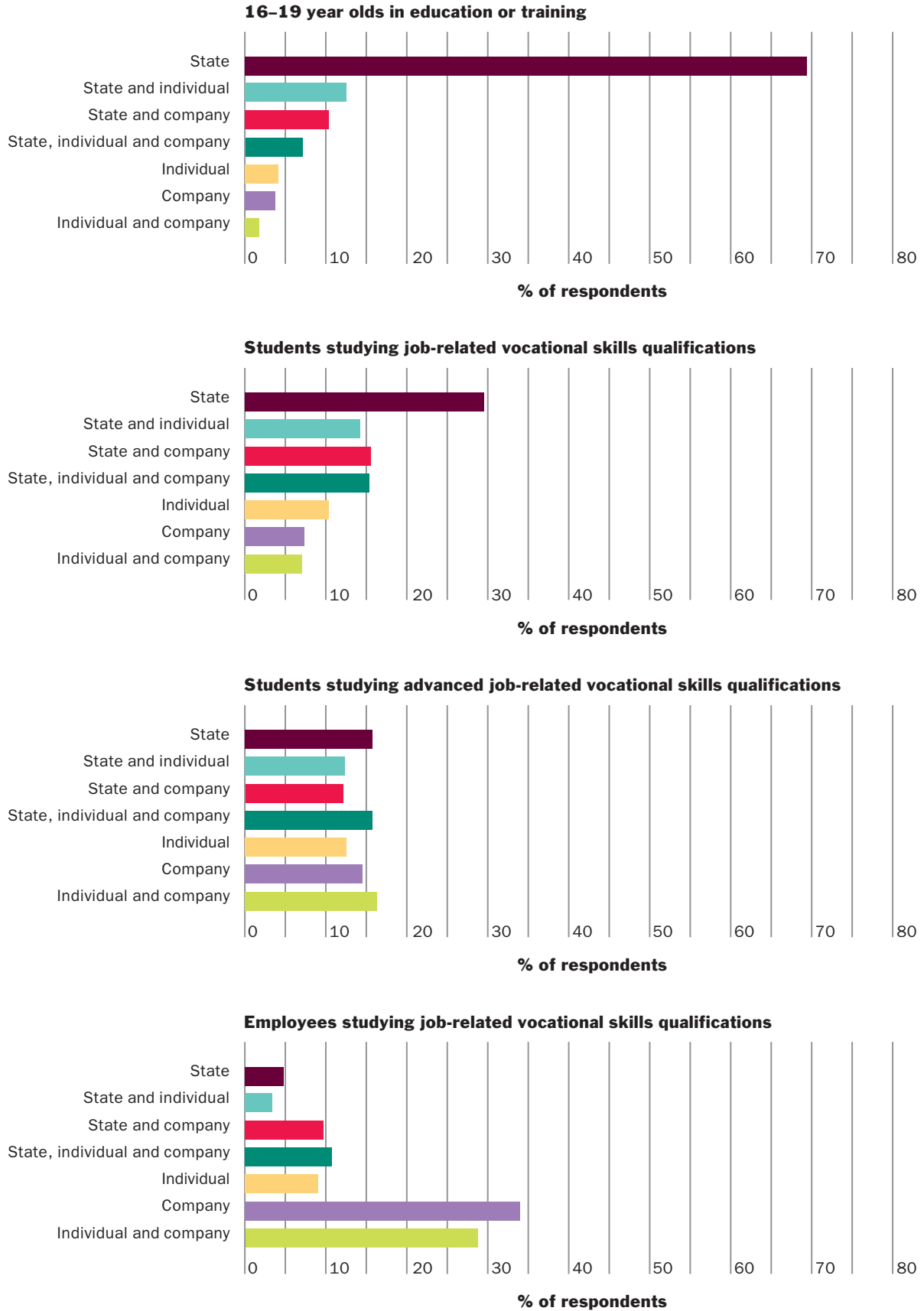
Employees studying job-related vocational skills qualifications:

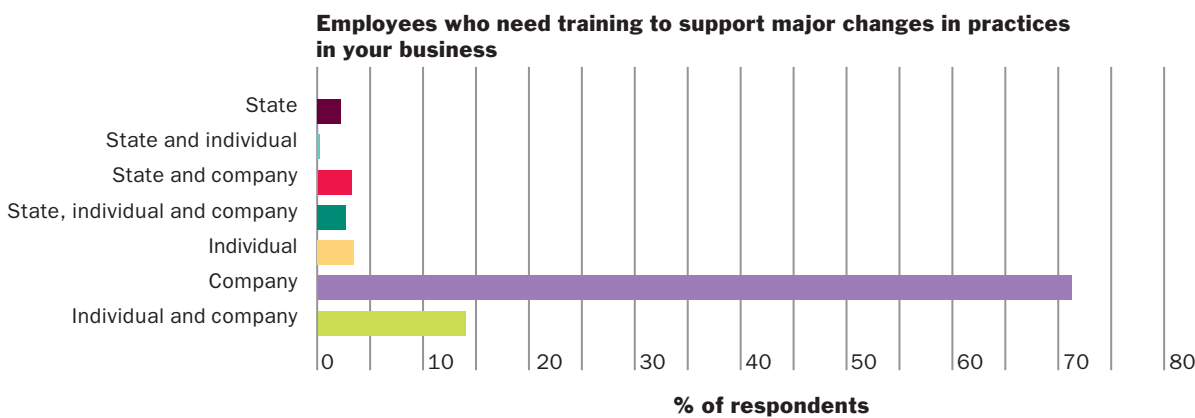
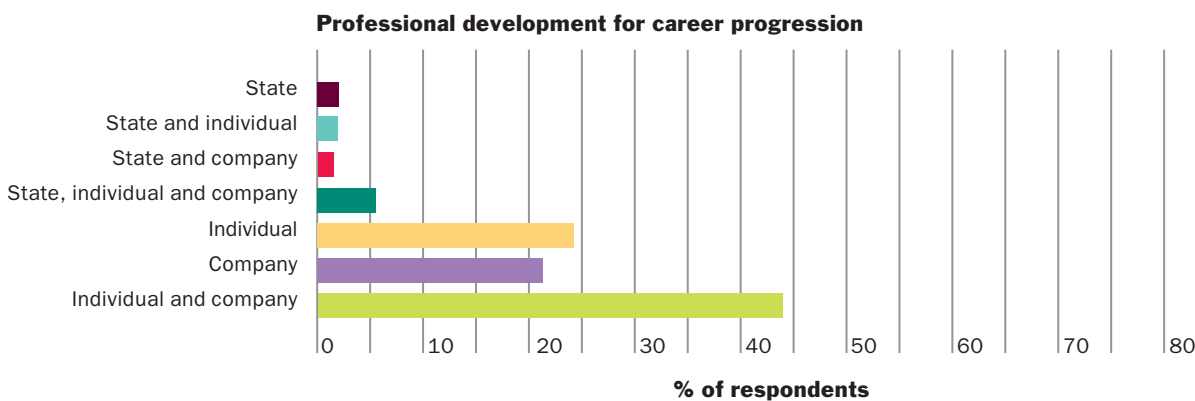
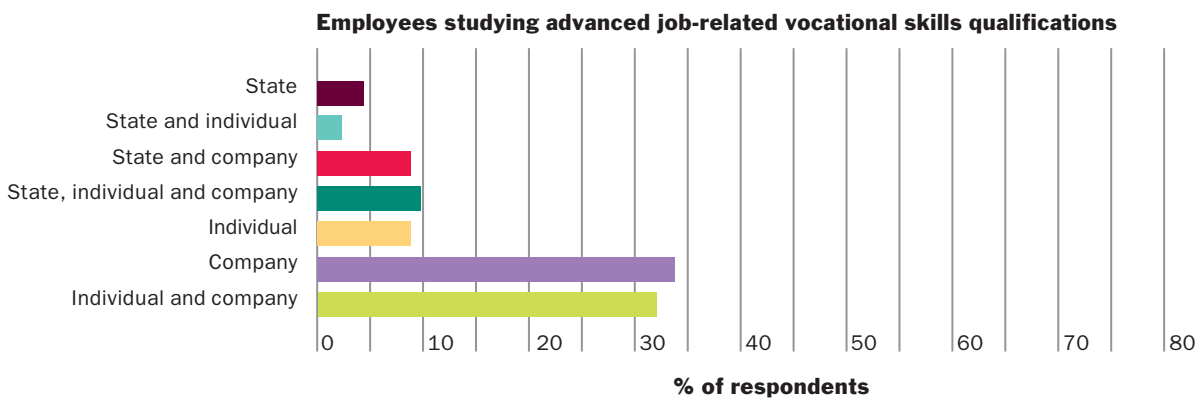
In the views of employers, the state has a smaller role to play in funding job-related vocational skills qualifications for their employees, with only 29% of respondents indicating that the state has responsibility, including shared responsibility. For many (62.4%) employers, it becomes either their responsibility or one they share with the individual. These proportions remain broadly similar for employees studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications.

Professional development for career progression: Nearly two-thirds of employers indicated that they have either a shared responsibility (43.3%) or singular responsibility (21.5%) for funding professional development for career progression for their employees. One quarter believe that it should be the sole responsibility of the individual. One in ten believes there should be some form of state involvement in funding, mainly in joint responsibility with others.

Training to support major business change: The clear majority (71.4%) of employers believe that they have full responsibility for this form of training, although 14.5% believe that the individual shares some responsibility.

Figure 8 Who pays for qualifications and training for different groups?
 Funding training and development: Who should be responsible for providing funding to support skills development for groups of people?
 For each type of training, you can tick more than one party if the responsibility should be shared.





Summary

Few employees are prepared to fund development activity for school or college leavers that will help them develop those skills that they believe should have been fully developed already in a candidate for an entry-level job.

For skills that are personal attributes or behaviours, they believed it was almost exclusively the role of the individual to fund development. For literacy and numeracy, many believed that the state should play a role. However, for skills that employers had, in the main, not expected to be fully developed in an entry-level job candidate, such as team-working or business awareness, many were happy to take responsibility for funding their development.

On the topic of paying for qualifications and training for different groups, employers believed that the state and the individual bore the responsibility for funding people who were not their employees. However, employers were increasingly open to more responsibility in proportion to the relevance of the skills being developed. For developing employees, many employers preferred to take this responsibility, often shared with the individual, with a diminished role for the state.

5.3.2 Employers' direct experience

The previous six questions explored employers' views in the abstract – what skills they would expect to see fully developed, what they believed that they should be responsible for funding, etc. The next series of questions aimed to understand how that had been experienced in practice when trying to recruit recent school or college leavers. All the survey respondents had indicated that they were either sometimes or frequently responsible for recruitment in their organisation.

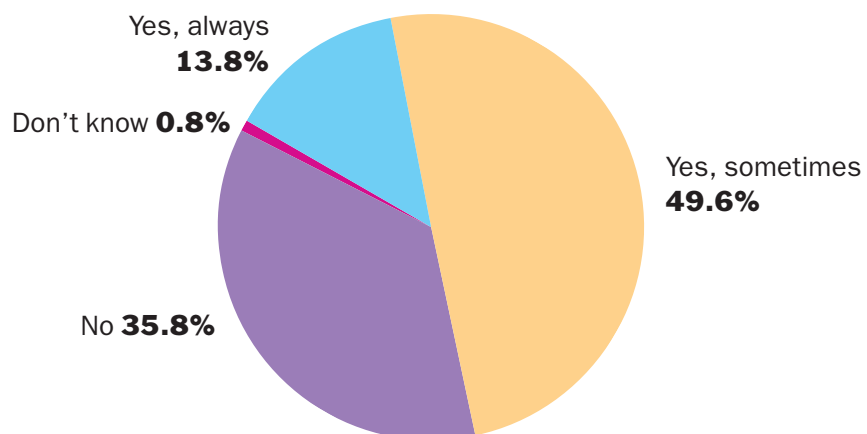
Q7 Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers with the right skills?

The next survey question aimed to establish the proportion of those in the survey group who had tried to recruit a recent school or college leaver and of those, explore whether they had been able to recruit candidates with the right skills for their organisation. The survey asked:

Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers that have the right skills for your organisation in the past 12 months?

Precisely half the survey respondents had tried to recruit a recent school or college leaver in the last 12 months. As presented in Figure 9, of these, only 13.8% indicated that yes, they had always been able to recruit school or college leavers with the right skills for their organisation. Close to 50% said that they had sometimes been able to recruit, with 35.8% unable to recruit.

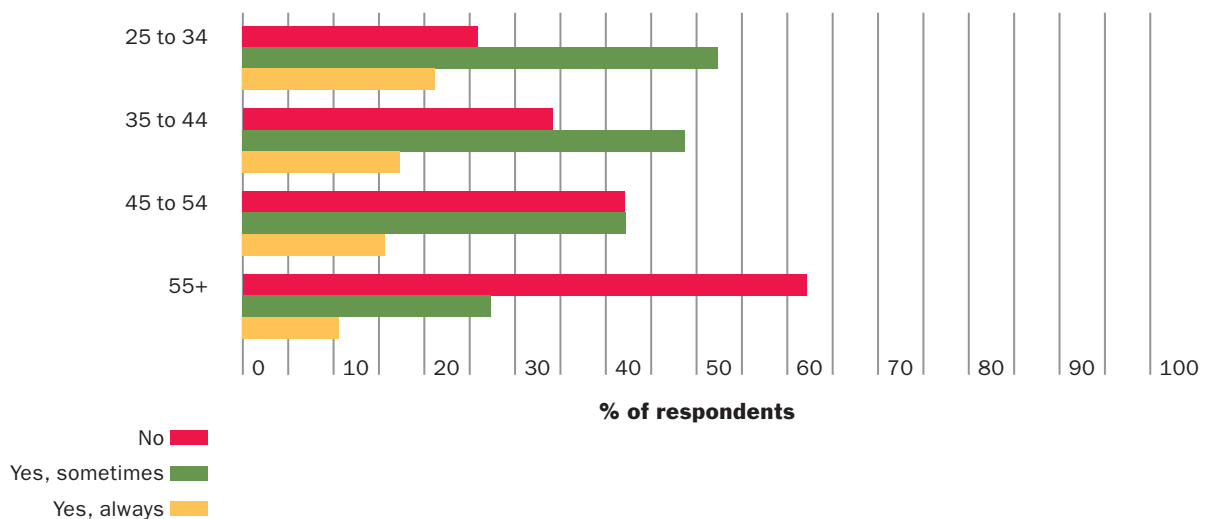
Figure 9 Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers with the right skills?



This figure is clearly troubling but is it safe to assume that the skills of recent school leavers are the only factors? A detailed examination of the sample data revealed an interesting relationship set out in Figure 10. Of those in the sample who sought to recruit a school or college leaver in the last 12 months, and frequently held responsibility for recruitment, the likelihood of not being able to successfully recruit increases in line with the age of the respondent – put simply, the older you are, the markedly less likely you are to find a school or college leaver that you believe has appropriate skills.

Figure 10 Successful recruitment by age of respondent

Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers that have the right skills for your organisation in the past 12 months? By age of respondent and only those who identified themselves as ‘Yes I often have responsibility for recruitment’.



This finding may indicate something of a generational divide - where older staff with frequent responsibility for recruitment do not believe that the skill set of younger people meets the needs of their organisation. However, younger staff with the same responsibility face no such difficulty as they recruit. However, this finding needs to be treated with an element of caution as the sample sizes for individual age bands in the selection are too small to be definitive.

Q8 If you couldn't recruit, what skills were they lacking?

To explore why employers could not recruit school or college leavers effectively, the survey added a free text box asking:

If you couldn't recruit school or college leavers with the right skills, what skills were they lacking? (Optional)

This also acted as a cross-reference to responses in section 5.3.1 around 'deal-breakers' and most important employability skills.

There were 303 separate reasons for being unable to recruit provided. The top four reasons largely reflected the previous findings: 19% involved literacy, 18% involved numeracy. When all broadly attitudinal responses such as 'attitude' 'motivation' and 'work ethic' were included in commitment/enthusiasm, this totalled 16% of reasons not to recruit. A lack of communication skills accounted for 12% of cited reasons. Thus the 'top 4' accounted for 65% of all reasons for non-recruitment.

The fifth most cited reason for non-recruitment was sectorally or even organisationally specific vocational skills with 8%. A lack of experience accounted for 6% of reasons, with personal presentation and timekeeping accounting for 5% and 4% of reasons respectively. General IT skills (3%), business awareness (2%), team-working skills (1%), problem-solving skills (1%) and customer-care skills (1%), were also occasionally given as reasons.

Summary

Of those that tried, only a small proportion of employers could always find a recent school or college leaver with the right skills, over a third could not find one with the right skills. There is also a concern that the age of the person recruiting could be a strongly influential factor, with the ability to find the right young person diminishing with the age of the decision-maker, hinting at a possible generational divide.

Asked why, in practice, they had been unable to recruit, respondents indicated that literacy, numeracy, motivation/enthusiasm and communication skills were overwhelmingly the most important factors, with other employability skills mentioned, but not as strongly.

5.3.3 Trade-offs between groups

The next section of the survey explored two of the potential trade-offs an employer might face when considering hiring a recent school or college leaver. These focused on the issues of migrant workers and older workers.

Q9 Migrant workers

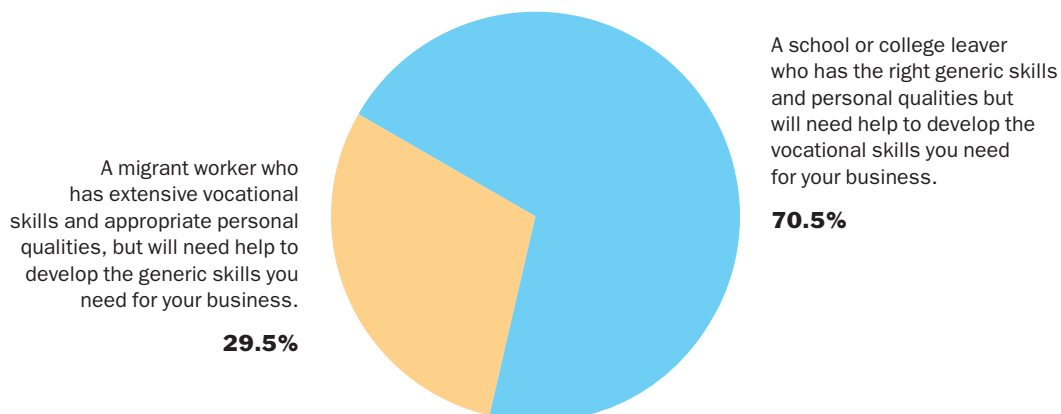
Over the past several years there have been frequent media reports²⁰ around highly skilled migrant workers from EU accession states taking work in England that might have been appropriate for recent school or college leavers. The survey took the opportunity to explore this issue with employers, identifying whether they would prefer, all other issues being even, to trade off stronger vocational skills for generic skills. It asked:

If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

- 1 *A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.*
- 2 *A migrant worker who has extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.*

As shown in Figure 11, the clear majority (70.5%) would select the school leaver, with 29.5% recruiting the migrant worker with stronger vocational skills. This is arguably in line with the lower priorities given to vocational skills in the preceding sections of this survey.

20 See for example www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/mar/09/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices or news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/5080924.stm

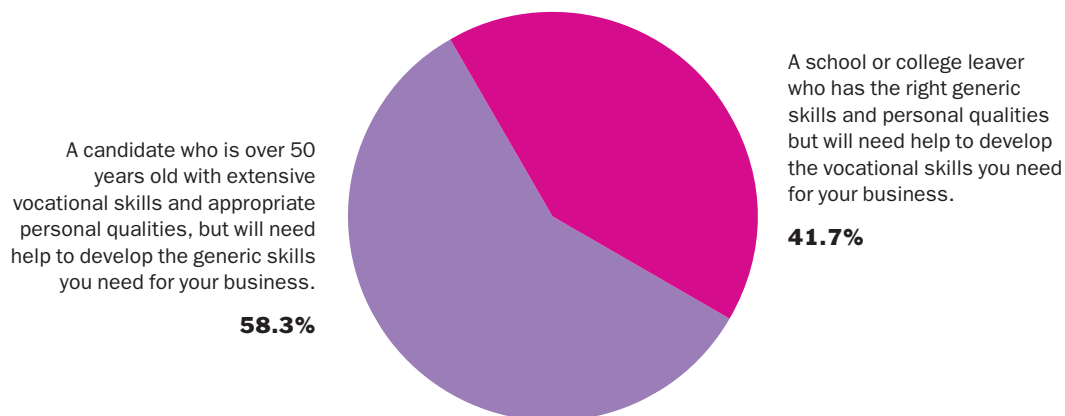
Figure 11 Migrant workers**Q10 Older workers**

The survey then took the opportunity to compare employers' views on the trade-offs between experience and vocational skills, comparing a worker over 50 who lacks generic skills (such as IT) and a more inexperienced recent school or college leaver. The survey asked:

If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

- 1 *A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.*
- 2 *A candidate who is over 50 years old with extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.*

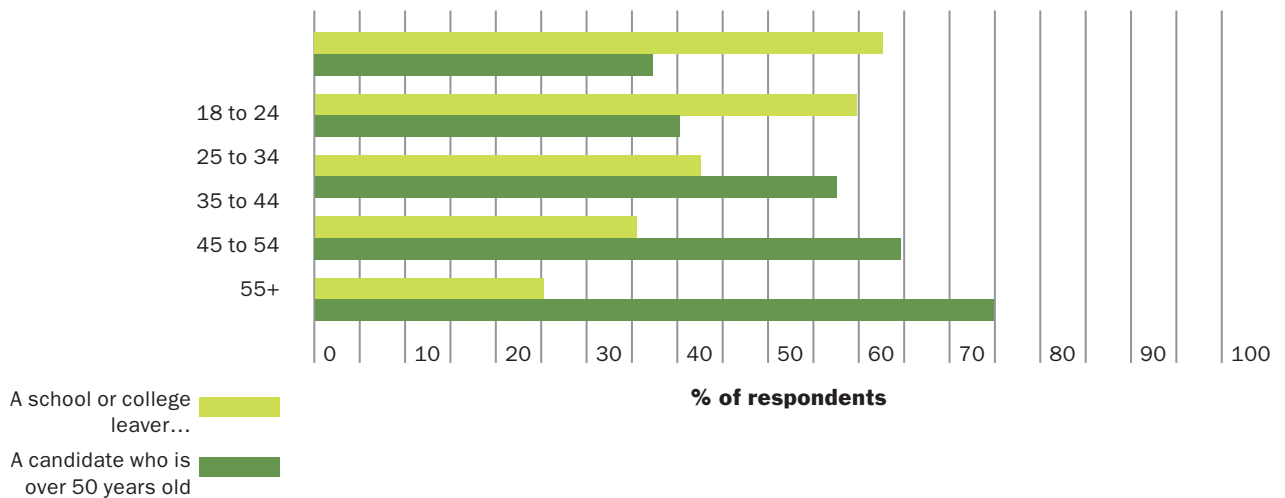
As shown in Figure 12, responses for the survey as a whole indicates that employers do value the experience of older workers, with a majority (58.3%) opting to hire the worker who was over 50.

Figure 12 Older workers

However, the picture is complicated when the age of the respondent is considered. Among those respondents who indicated that they have frequent responsibility for recruitment, there appears to be a relationship between age and the candidate picked – the younger the respondent, the more likely they are to recruit the school or college leaver. The older the respondent, the more likely they are to recruit the older worker. This possibly indicates a further generational divide – one that ‘cuts both ways’. The results of this analysis are set out in figure 13.

Figure 13 Older workers and the impact of the age of the recruiter

If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?, Figures broken down by respondent age for the group that indicated they have frequent responsibility for recruitment.



Summary

The employers surveyed would select a recent school or college leaver with the right generic skills over a migrant worker with extensive vocational skills but weaker generic skills. Employers would recruit an older worker over a recent school or college leaver, valuing experience above generic skills. However, there is evidence of a generational divide in the hiring of older people – the older the recruiter, the more likely they are to hire the older person and vice versa.

5.1.5 Employers' experience of further education

The Leitch Review re-focused the mission of further education (FE) colleges increasingly on the needs of employers, the economy and skills. The survey provided an opportunity to briefly canvas the current state of relationships between employers and colleges. This section explores the extent to which employers are using their local colleges, whether they have encountered the Learning and Skills Council's skills brokerage system and, if so, how they rated that experience.

Q11 Is your business involved with your local FE college?

This question aimed to explore whether the respondents’ organisations had a relationship with their local college and, if so, what that relationship was. The survey asked:

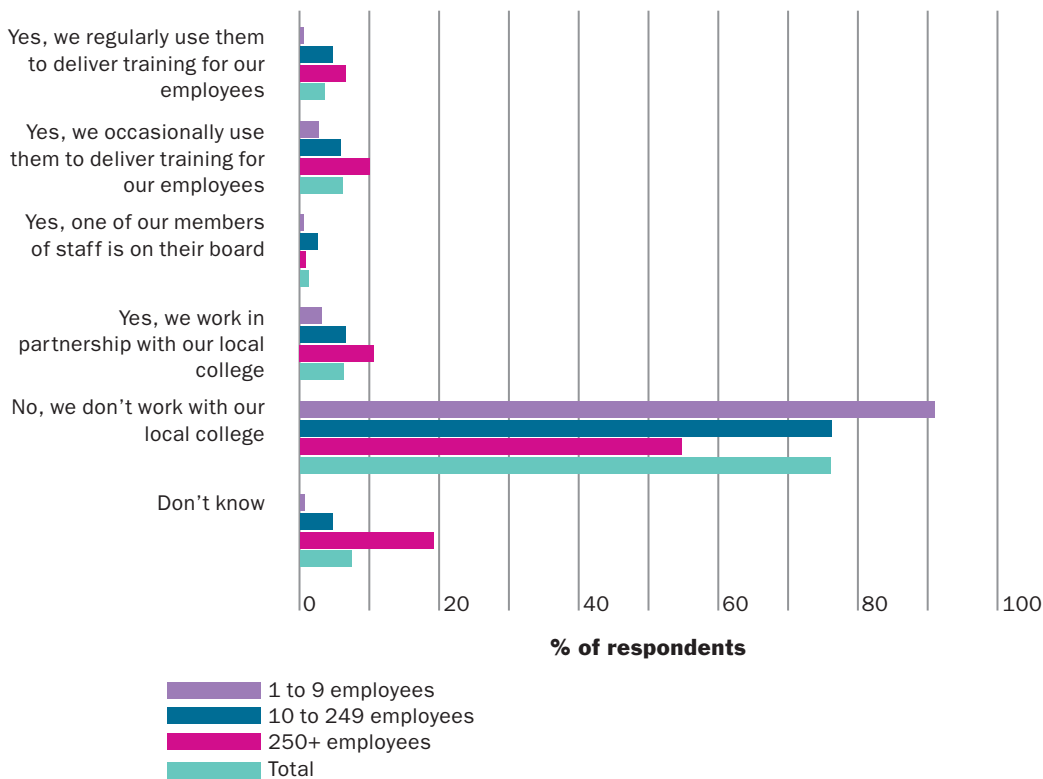
Is your business involved with your local further education college?

The clear majority (76.7%) of employers indicated that no, they don’t work with their local college. Of those that do, their relationship is as equally likely to be close as not – employers are just as likely to say they work in partnership with their college (6.5%) than use them on an ad-hoc basis (6.1%).

Although this result may be disappointing for colleges, its dynamics become clearer when organisational size is taken into account. Almost every very small business (1–9 employees) does not work with their local college (91.7%). The situation for medium-sized organisations broadly reflects the survey average. Colleges have marginally better relationships with larger organisations, with approximately three in ten having some form of relationship. The relationship between colleges and larger organisations is also likely to be understated, as 19% of respondents did not know if there was a relationship. The full results are set out in Figure 14.

Figure 14 Is your business involved with your local FE college?

Is your business involved with your local Further Education college?



Q12 Have you ever worked with a government-funded Skills Broker?

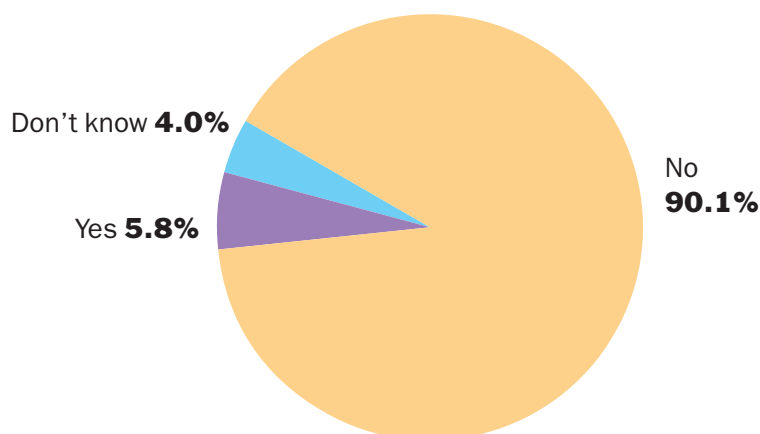
To boost relationships between the FE sector and employers, the Learning and Skills Council has developed a network of Skills Brokers as a part of the major Train to Gain initiative. Skills Brokers are specialist advisers who aim to help employers diagnose skills needs and broker skills provision from local providers, providing access to government funding if available. This is supported by a high-profile campaign encouraging employers to sign the Skills Pledge – a voluntary, public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2.

The survey took the opportunity to explore with employers whether they had ever worked with a Skills Broker, asking the question:

Have you ever worked with a government-funded Skills Broker?

As shown in Figure 15, less than 6% of respondents had worked with a Skills Broker; 90% of respondents could confirm that they had not and 4% did not know.²¹

Figure 15 Have you ever worked with a government-funded Skills Broker?



Summary

On the results of this survey, FE colleges have a long way to go before they can be said to have realised the government's employer-focused ambitions. Few employers say that they have a relationship with their local college, with very small businesses least likely to be working with them. Despite a major national campaign, few employers say they have worked with a government-funded Skills Broker.

²¹ As a consequence of the low number of respondents that could answer affirmatively to 'Have you ever worked with a government-funded Skills Broker?' there were too few respondents in a position to answer question 13: 'How would you rate the experience?' on a scale that would be statistically meaningful. Consequently they are not presented here.

6 Conclusions

With an increasing shift towards ‘demand-led’ provision in vocational education, the voice of the employer has increasing importance. This is highlighted by the introduction of Sector Qualification Strategies²² and the recently launched Training Quality Standard.²³ This research brings together the views of two different groups – stakeholders in post-16 education and employers. The stakeholders in post-16 education had a predominant focus on ‘delivery issues’ in part 1 of this research, whereas the employer response in part 2 provides an insight into the demand view, with a focus on the practical application of skills in the workplace. With two distinct perspectives on employability skills, the research has identified a number of areas where there is common ground and where there are differences.

Feedback from both groups confirms that no single set of skills is seen as the definite requirement for someone to be, and remain, employable. Employers and stakeholders in post-16 education viewed employability as a mix of skills, attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, groups were comfortable about and able to articulate their views by differentiating the ‘skills’ aspect into generic and vocationally specific skills.

Literacy and numeracy skills were seen as generic requirements, and work-related skills as vocationally specific. Both groups highlighted the importance of having functionality in literacy and numeracy skills at the time of securing a first job. Vocationally specific skills tended to be seen as only requiring a basic grasp on entering employment, and something that employers felt comfortable to develop through the workplace. This emphasises the need for school leavers to acquire a functional level of literacy and numeracy, with employers reporting they are not prepared to have financial responsibility for skills they think should be in place when entering employment.

The extent to which employers view the current provision in school as satisfactory was reported as low, with one in three employers reporting they found difficulty in recruiting a school leaver with the right employability skills. Furthermore, opportunities to enhance generic skills and develop vocationally specific skills need to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate the workplace as a place for learning.

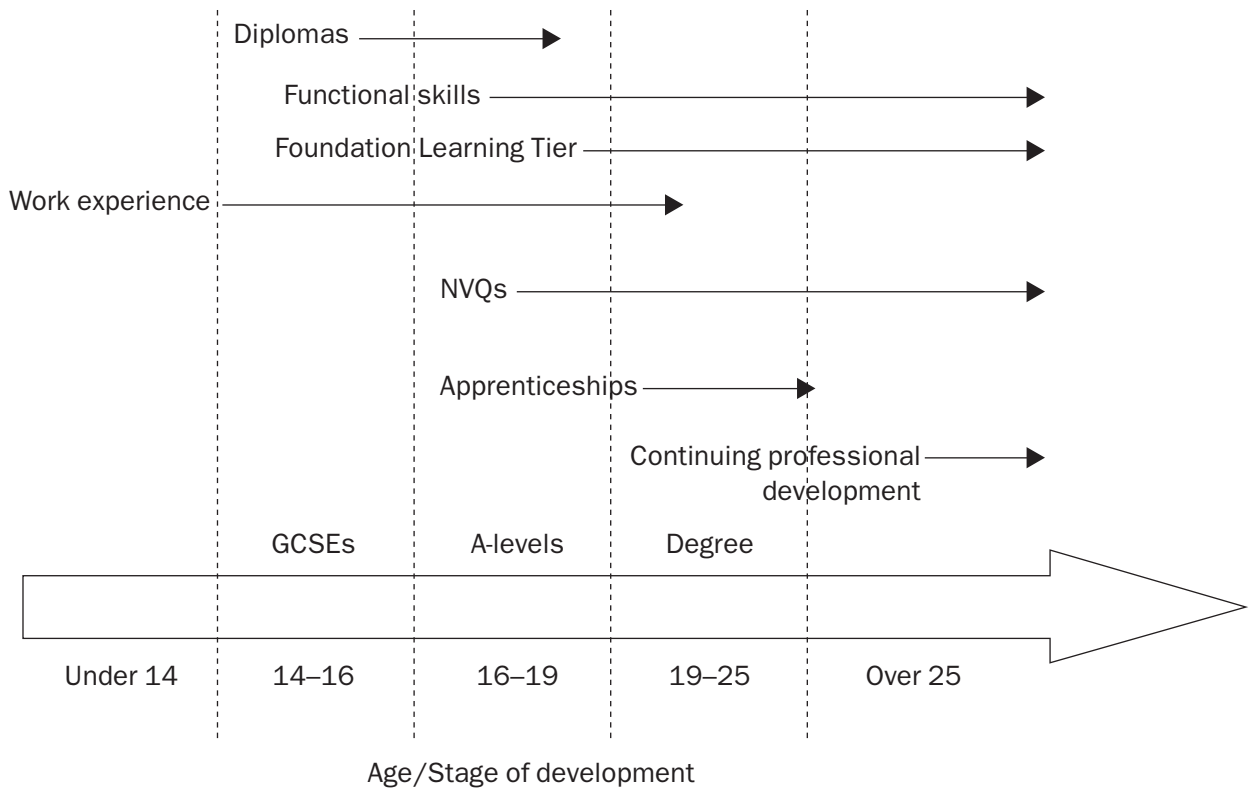
²² www.ukces.org.uk

²³ www.newstandard.co.uk

Both groups identified developing employability as a shared responsibility between the schools and colleges, the employer and, particularly, the individual. The degree of responsibility varied with type of skill and level of ability, but both employers and stakeholders in post-16 education were clear that individuals had a clear responsibility for and contribution to make in the development of their employability.

Examples of the successful development of employability skills have characteristics echoed in the feedback given by employers and stakeholders in post-16 education. They occur where each stage of an individual’s learning experience has contributed to enhancing their functionality in work and life, including pre-employment and during employment as continuing professional development. Figure 16 represents the current and proposed opportunities for individuals, employers and providers to consider how each stage of learning contributes to developing employability skills.

Figure 16 Mapping opportunities to develop employability skills



A number of questions fall out from the findings of this research; the following three are presented for consideration.

- Given the expectation by employers for school leavers to have the basics in the 'generic' side of employability skills, what will be necessary to ensure that future initiatives hit the mark to reverse the trend where one in three employers reported they struggled to find a school leaver with the right employability skills?
- How will functional skills and Diplomas be introduced to ensure the 'mix' of employability skills that employers report they require?
- Given that 70% of the 2020 workforce will already have completed compulsory education, what will colleges do differently to engage with employers and support their staff to develop and enhance employability skills in a demand-led system where nearly 77% of employers reported they do not work with colleges at present (nearly 92% of very small businesses)?

These questions may only be able to be answered through future feedback from employers and stakeholders. However, the answers will depend on what steps each group takes next, and how they work in collaboration to realise the targets proposed in the Leitch Review.

Recommendations

With the aim of supporting this area of important work, this report makes four recommendations as potential next steps:

- the provision of clear information, advice and guidance to raise the aspirations of people entering employment and in employment towards learning and skills
- the development of a single generic employability framework that addresses generic transferable employability skills between sectors, jobs, markets and regions
- the adoption of a 'talent' agenda that builds on positive, rather than deficit, models of initial, formative and summative assessment
- approach the current vocational reform as an opportunity to develop innovative and creative approaches to embedding and measuring 'employability skills' and reconnect employers, individuals and education providers.

Appendix 1 The survey questionnaire

Which of the following BEST describes your position at work?

1. Owner/ founder/ proprietor
2. Chairman/ CEO/ managing director
3. At directorial/ board level
4. At senior manager/ director below board level
5. Middle management
6. Junior management/ team leader/ supervisory level

Which one of the following best describes the organisation that you work for?

1. Self-employed
2. Private-sector firm or company (eg limited companies and plcs)

We would like you to think about recruitment in your organisation. Do you personally have any responsibility for ANY part of the recruitment process? (such as reviewing CVs/ applications, short-listing, interviewing or deciding which candidate to recruit).

1. Yes, I often have responsibility for recruitment
2. Yes, I occasionally have responsibility for recruitment

Which of the following sectors best describes your industry?

1. Advertising/marketing/PR
2. Aerospace
3. Agriculture/chemicals/forest products
4. Automotive
5. Computers/electronics
6. Construction
7. Consumer goods
8. Education
9. Energy/mining
10. Finance/insurance/real estate
11. Government/military/public service
12. Hospitality/recreation
13. Media/publishing/entertainment
14. Medical/health services
15. Pharmaceuticals

16. Retail
17. Service
18. Telecommunications/networking
19. Travel/transportation
20. Other

Including yourself, approximately how many full-time employees are employed by your organisation in total in the UK?

1. 1–9
2. 10–49
3. 50–249
4. 250 plus

Q1: What are the skills that people need to be employable: Think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business.

To what extent would you expect that candidate to have the following skills in order to be employable? (Grid question)

1. Communication skills
2. Team-working skills
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Literacy skills
5. Numeracy skills
6. General IT skills
7. Timekeeping
8. Business awareness
9. Customer-care skills
10. Personal presentation
11. Enthusiasm/commitment
12. Enterprising
13. Vocational job-specific skills
14. Advanced vocational job-specific skills

Options

1. Fully developed
2. Partially developed
3. Not yet developed
4. Not important

Please type in any other skills (Optional)

Q2: Again think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business: Which of these skills would you consider the most critical? Place each skill according to your order of priority from 1 to 14. YOU CAN ONLY USE EACH SCORE ONCE. Mark the highest priority 1, the next 2, and so on.

(Grid question)

1. Communication skills
2. Team-working skills
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Literacy skills
5. Numeracy skills
6. General IT skills
7. Timekeeping
8. Business awareness
9. Customer-care skills
10. Personal presentation
11. Enthusiasm/commitment
12. Enterprising
13. Vocational job-specific skills
14. Advanced vocational job-specific skills

Highest priority 1

Lowest priority 14

Q3: Which of the following skills would you consider to be 'deal-breakers' for the candidate NOT to have? (Please tick all that apply).

1. Communication skills
2. Team-working skills
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Literacy skills
5. Numeracy skills
6. General IT skills
7. Timekeeping
8. Business awareness
9. Customer-care skills
10. Personal presentation
11. Enthusiasm/commitment

12. Enterprising
13. Vocational job-specific skills
14. Advanced vocational job-specific skills
15. None of these

Q4: What are the skills for employability later on: Think about a candidate for a job that requires five years' post-education experience at your organisation. In addition to work experience, which of the following skills you would expect that candidate to have in order to be employable?

(Grid question)

1. Communication skills
2. Team-working skills
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Literacy skills
5. Numeracy skills
6. General IT skills
7. Timekeeping
8. Business awareness
9. Customer-care skills
10. Personal presentation
11. Enthusiasm/commitment
12. Enterprising
13. Vocational job-specific skills
14. Advanced vocational job-specific skills

Options

1. Fully developed
2. Partially developed
3. Not yet developed
4. Not important

Please type in any other skills (Optional)

Q5: Who is responsible for development: As that employee develops over the next five years within your company, who is responsible for FUNDING the development of the following types of skills? For each skill, you can tick more than one if the responsibility should be shared (Please tick all that apply).

(Grid question)

1. Communication skills
2. Team-working skills
3. Problem-solving skills
4. Literacy skills
5. Numeracy skills
6. General IT skills
7. Timekeeping
8. Business awareness
9. Customer-care skills
10. Personal presentation
11. Enthusiasm/commitment
12. Enterprising
13. Vocational job-specific skills
14. Advanced vocational job-specific skills

Options

1. The state, via funded training
2. The individual
3. The company

Q6: Funding training and development: Who should be responsible for providing funding to support skills development for groups of people? For each type of training, you can tick more than one party if the responsibility should be shared.

(Grid question)

1. 16–19 year olds in education or training
2. Students studying job-related vocational skills qualifications
3. Students studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications
4. Employees studying job-related vocational skills qualifications
5. Employees studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications
6. Professional development for career progression
7. Employees who need training to support major changes in practices in your business

Options

1. The state
2. The individual
3. The company

Q7: Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers that have the right skills for your organisation in the past 12 months?

1. Yes, always
2. Yes, sometimes
3. No
4. Have not tried to recruit school or college leavers in the last 12 months
5. Don't know

Q8: If you couldn't recruit school or college leavers with the right skills, what skills were they lacking? (Optional) (Text question)

Q9: If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

1. A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.
2. A migrant worker who has extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.

Q10: If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

1. A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.
2. A candidate who is over 50 years old with extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.

Q11: Is your business involved with your local further education college?

1. Yes, we regularly use them to deliver training for our employees
2. Yes, we occasionally use them to deliver training for our employees
3. Yes, one of our members of staff is on their board
4. Yes, we work in partnership with our local college
5. No, we don't work with are local college
6. Don't know

Please type in any comments you may have on your business experiences with further education colleges (Optional)

(Text question)

Q12: Have you ever worked with a government-funded Skills Broker?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Q13: How would you rate the experience?

1. Very positive
2. Somewhat positive
3. Neither positive nor negative
4. Somewhat negative
5. Very negative

Appendix 2 Sample breakdown

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	857	75%
Female	280	25%
Total	1137	100%

Age	Frequency	%
18 to 24	20	2%
25 to 34	253	22%
35 to 44	331	29%
45 to 54	247	22%
55 +	286	25%
Total	1137	100%

Region	Frequency	%
North East	32	3%
North West	104	9%
Yorkshire and The Humber	84	7%
East Midlands	87	8%
West Midlands	102	9%
East of England	129	11%
London	196	17%
South East	279	25%
South West	124	11%
Total	1137	100%

Job role	Frequency	%
Owner/founder/proprietor	378	33.2%
Chairman/CEO/managing director	49	4.3%
At directorial/board level	85	7.5%
At senior manager/director below board level	193	17.0%
Middle management	376	33.1%
Junior management/team leader/supervisory level	56	4.9%
Total	1137	100.0%

Type of organisation	Frequency	%
Self-employed	262	23%
Private sector firm or company (eg limited companies and plcs)	875	77%
Total	1137	100.0%

We would like you to think about recruitment in your organisation. Do you personally have any responsibility for ANY part of the recruitment process? (such as reviewing CVs/applications, short-listing, interviewing or deciding which candidate to recruit).

	Frequency	%
Yes, I often have responsibility for recruitment	571	50.2%
Yes, I occasionally have responsibility for recruitment	566	49.8%
No, I never have responsibility for recruitment	0	0.0%
Total	1137	100.0%

Sector		
Other	177	15.6%
Finance/insurance/real estate	138	12.1%
Computers/electronics	127	11.2%
Retail	103	9.1%
Service	99	8.7%
Media/publishing/entertainment	92	8.1%
Construction	67	5.9%
Travel/transportation	49	4.3%
Education	48	4.2%
Advertising/marketing/PR	41	3.6%
Consumer goods	32	2.8%
Hospitality/recreation	31	2.7%
Medical/health services	28	2.5%
Telcommunications/networking	23	2.0%
Agriculture/chemicals/forest products	18	1.6%
Pharmaceuticals	18	1.6%
Energy/mining	17	1.5%
Automotive	16	1.4%
Aerospace	9	0.8%
Government/military/public service	4	0.4%
Total	1137	100.0%

	Frequency	%
Organisation size		
1-9	480	42.2%
10-49	171	15.0%
50-249	166	14.6%
250 plus	320	28.1%
Total	1137	100.0%

Appendix 3 Survey responses – summary

Q1: What are the skills that people need to be employable: Think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry level job at your business.

To what extent would you expect that candidate to have the following skills in order to be employable?

	Fully developed	
	Count	%
Communication skills	473	41.6%
Team-working skills	268	23.6%
Problem-solving skills	258	22.7%
Literacy skills	898	79.0%
Numeracy skills	883	77.7%
General IT skills	382	33.6%
Timekeeping	910	80.0%
Business awareness	127	11.2%
Customer-care skills	236	20.8%
Personal presentation	606	53.3%
Enthusiasm/commitment	856	75.3%
Enterprising	242	21.3%
Vocational job-specific skills	158	13.9%
Advanced vocational job-specific skills	98	8.6%

Partially developed		Not yet developed		Not important	
Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
624	54.9%	33	2.9%	7	0.6%
721	63.4%	132	11.6%	16	1.4%
721	63.4%	147	12.9%	11	1.0%
213	18.7%	12	1.1%	14	1.2%
227	20.0%	11	1.0%	16	1.4%
623	54.8%	79	6.9%	53	4.7%
196	17.2%	25	2.2%	6	0.5%
489	43.0%	471	41.4%	50	4.4%
545	47.9%	328	28.8%	28	2.5%
469	41.2%	49	4.3%	13	1.1%
257	22.6%	19	1.7%	5	0.4%
589	51.8%	265	23.3%	41	3.6%
547	48.1%	343	30.2%	89	7.8%
378	33.2%	526	46.3%	135	11.9%

Q2: Again think about a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training and is applying for an entry-level job at your business: Which of these skills would you consider the most critical? Place each skill according to your order of priority from 1 to 14. YOU CAN ONLY USE EACH SCORE ONCE. Mark the highest priority 1, the next 2, and so on.

	Highest 1		2		3		4		5		6	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Advanced vocational job-specific skills	25	2.2	18	1.6	4	0.4	12	1.1	15	1.3	15	1.3
Vocational job-specific skills	45	4.0	34	3.0	16	1.4	23	2.0	18	1.6	23	2.0
Enterprising	11	1.0	23	2.0	23	2.0	25	2.2	18	1.6	35	3.1
Business awareness	9	0.8	14	1.2	18	1.6	12	1.1	31	2.7	41	3.6
Customer-care skills	50	4.4	44	3.9	46	4.0	52	4.6	59	5.2	71	6.2
Personal presentation	23	2.0	63	5.5	63	5.5	71	6.2	98	8.6	82	7.2
General IT skills	39	3.4	30	2.6	78	6.9	90	7.9	99	8.7	141	12.4
Problem-solving skills	38	3.3	66	5.8	124	10.9	115	10.1	115	10.1	122	10.7
Timekeeping	75	6.6	90	7.9	113	9.9	117	10.3	111	9.8	115	10.1
Team-working skills	43	3.8	132	11.6	123	10.8	127	11.2	141	12.4	117	10.3
Enthusiasm /commitment	235	20.7	79	6.9	94	8.3	75	6.6	81	7.1	81	7.1
Numeracy skills	70	6.2	222	19.5	140	12.3	138	12.1	140	12.3	102	9.0
Literacy skills	214	18.8	174	15.3	142	12.5	157	13.8	106	9.3	94	8.3
Communication skills	260	22.9	148	13.0	153	13.5	123	10.8	105	9.2	98	8.6

7		8		9		10		11		12		13		14 Lowest	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
10	0.9	19	1.7	30	2.6	35	3.1	47	4.1	75	6.6	176	15.5	656	57.7
33	2.9	41	3.6	55	4.8	65	5.7	74	6.5	179	15.7	471	41.4	60	5.3
49	4.3	57	5.0	94	8.3	109	9.6	172	15.1	315	27.7	116	10.2	90	7.9
68	6.0	158	13.9	101	8.9	144	12.7	187	16.4	143	12.6	106	9.3	105	9.2
83	7.3	113	9.9	190	16.7	133	11.7	101	8.9	92	8.1	54	4.7	49	4.3
73	6.4	107	9.4	122	10.7	169	14.9	105	9.2	80	7.0	45	4.0	36	3.2
121	10.6	114	10.0	98	8.6	96	8.4	86	7.6	65	5.7	40	3.5	40	3.5
119	10.5	100	8.8	110	9.7	101	8.9	60	5.3	34	3.0	22	1.9	11	1.0
161	14.2	82	7.2	80	7.0	41	3.6	57	5.0	38	3.3	31	2.7	26	2.3
113	9.9	95	8.4	74	6.5	57	5.0	42	3.7	34	3.0	19	1.7	20	1.8
72	6.3	66	5.8	68	6.0	82	7.2	134	11.8	35	3.1	21	1.8	14	1.2
87	7.7	61	5.4	55	4.8	41	3.6	32	2.8	21	1.8	15	1.3	13	1.1
59	5.2	65	5.7	35	3.1	33	2.9	22	1.9	19	1.7	11	1.0	6	0.5
89	7.8	59	5.2	25	2.2	31	2.7	18	1.6	7	0.6	10	0.9	11	1.0

Q3: Which of the following skills would you consider to be 'deal-breakers' for the candidate NOT to have? (Please tick all that apply).

	True Count	%
Literacy skills	627	55.1%
Communication skills	582	51.2%
Enthusiasm/commitment	555	48.8%
Numeracy skills	535	47.1%
Timekeeping	403	35.4%
Personal presentation	353	31.0%
Team-working skills	243	21.4%
General IT skills	238	20.9%
Customer-care skills	182	16.0%
Problem-solving skills	179	15.7%
Vocational job-specific skills	115	10.1%
Advanced vocational job-specific skills	66	5.8%
Business awareness	64	5.6%
Enterprising	51	4.5%
None of these	36	3.2%

Q4: What are the skills for employability later on: Think about a candidate for a job that requires five years' post-education experience at your organisation. In addition to work experience, which of the following skills you would expect that candidate to have in order to be employable?

	Fully developed		Partially developed		Not yet developed		Not important	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Communication skills	993	87.3%	139	12.2%	2	0.2%	3	0.3%
Team-working skills	886	77.9%	224	19.7%	17	1.5%	10	0.9%
Problem-solving skills	807	71.0%	305	26.8%	21	1.8%	4	0.4%
Literacy skills	1013	89.1%	110	9.7%	7	0.6%	7	0.6%
Numeracy skills	984	86.5%	132	11.6%	10	0.9%	11	1.0%
General IT skills	774	68.1%	313	27.5%	26	2.3%	24	2.1%
Timekeeping	1008	88.7%	108	9.5%	14	1.2%	7	0.6%
Business awareness	515	45.3%	544	47.8%	58	5.1%	20	1.8%
Customer-care skills	760	66.8%	324	28.5%	38	3.3%	15	1.3%
Personal presentation	941	82.8%	169	14.9%	10	0.9%	17	1.5%
Enthusiasm/commitment	983	86.5%	141	12.4%	7	0.6%	6	0.5%
Enterprising	549	48.3%	493	43.4%	71	6.2%	24	2.1%
Vocational job-specific skills	650	57.2%	348	30.6%	76	6.7%	63	5.5%
Advanced vocational job-specific skills	364	32.0%	554	48.7%	139	12.2%	80	7.0%

Q5: Who is responsible for development: As that employee develops over the next five years within your company, who is responsible for FUNDING the development of the following types of skills? For each skill, you can tick more than one if the responsibility should be shared (Please tick all that apply).

	The state via funded training		The individual		The company	
Communication skills	152	13.4%	689	60.6%	725	63.8%
Team-working skills	85	7.5%	552	48.5%	895	78.7%
Problem-solving skills	116	10.2%	623	54.8%	792	69.7%
Literacy skills	472	41.5%	721	63.4%	301	26.5%
Numeracy skills	478	42.0%	717	63.1%	302	26.6%
General IT skills	342	30.1%	628	55.2%	710	62.4%
Timekeeping	48	4.2%	940	82.7%	285	25.1%
Business awareness	89	7.8%	502	44.2%	912	80.2%
Customer-care skills	64	5.6%	533	46.9%	950	83.6%
Personal presentation	63	5.5%	974	85.7%	279	24.5%
Enthusiasm/commitment	28	2.5%	976	85.8%	300	26.4%
Enterprising	77	6.8%	845	74.3%	504	44.3%
Vocational job-specific skills	343	30.2%	501	44.1%	808	71.1%
Advanced vocational job-specific skills	327	28.8%	481	42.3%	838	73.7%

Q6: Funding training and development: Who should be responsible for providing funding to support skills development for groups of people? For each type of training, you can tick more than one party if the responsibility should be shared.

	The state		The individual		The company	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
16–19 year olds in education or training	1032	90.8%	283	24.9%	257	22.6%
Students studying job-related vocational skills qualifications	861	75.7%	541	47.6%	520	45.7%
Students studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications	640	56.3%	648	57.0%	672	59.1%
Employees studying job-related vocational skills qualifications	333	29.3%	588	51.7%	944	83.0%
Employees studying advanced job-related vocational skills qualifications	289	25.4%	600	52.8%	959	84.3%
Professional development for career progression	122	10.7%	855	75.2%	816	71.8%
Employees who need training to support major changes in practices in your business	115	10.1%	254	22.3%	1058	93.1%

Q7: Have you been able to recruit school or college leavers that have the right skills for your organisation in the past 12 months?

	Frequency	%
Yes, always	78	6.9%
Yes, sometimes	282	24.8%
No	204	17.9%
Have not tried to recruit school or college leavers in the last 12 months	569	50.0%
Don't know	4	0.4%
Total	1137	100.0%

Q8: Text question

Q9: Do you anticipate that you will be able to recruit school or college leavers that have the right skills for your organisation in the next 12 months?

	Frequency	%
Yes, easily	71	6.2%
Yes, to a degree	416	36.6%
No	480	42.2%
Don't know	170	15.0%
Total	1137	100.0%

Q10: If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

	Frequency	%
A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.	802	70.5%
A migrant worker who has extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.	335	29.5%
Total	1137	100.0%

Q11: If you had a choice of two candidates who would you recruit (with all other factors being equal)?

	Frequency	%
A school or college leaver who has the right generic skills and personal qualities but will need help to develop the vocational skills you need for your business.	474	41.7%
A candidate who is over 50 years old with extensive vocational skills and appropriate personal qualities, but will need help to develop the generic skills you need for your business.	663	58.3%
Total	1137	100.0%

Q12: Is your business involved with your local further education college? (Please tick all that apply).

	True count	%
Yes, we regularly use them to deliver training for our employees	44	3.9%
Yes, we occasionally use them to deliver training for our employees	69	6.1%
Yes, one of our members of staff is on their board	16	1.4%
Yes, we work in partnership with our local college	74	6.5%
No, we don't work with our local college	872	76.7%
Don't know	83	7.3%

Q13: Have you ever worked with a government funded Skills Broker?

	Frequency	%
Yes	66	5.8%
No	1025	90.1%
Don't know	46	4.0%
Total	1137	100.0%

Employability skills explored

To meet the challenges of an increasingly global market, the UK is in the midst of wide-scale reform of education and learning. In the context of these reforms, employability skills is a term used frequently by employers, agencies and providers of education and learning. It's a term used in different ways in different contexts. This begs the question: what exactly do we mean by 'employability skills'?

This report presents the findings of research by LSN that explores the different views and perceptions. It does this in two parts. Part 1 explores the views of stakeholders in post-16 education, and shares the findings from a discussion paper and expert seminar. Part 2 considers the views of employers across the UK, sharing the findings from a national opinion survey.

