

WORK READY GRADUATES: Building employability skills for a hybrid world

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In 2020, the higher education (HE) sector responded brilliantly to support learners through a period of extreme uncertainty and stress. But the challenges of the pandemic also made the question of student outcomes and value for money more stark – particularly in the mind of the prospective learner.

Against the backdrop of a variable graduate jobs market, and a different university experience to what has been offered before, higher education institutions (HEIs) are going to have to do more than ever to demonstrate that their courses give learners the tools they need to forge a successful career. This research sets out what this offer should look like and how it could be delivered.

This report sheds new light in several key areas:

- The skills that today's businesses want to see on a learner's CV. Has this candidate got what it takes to excel in the job?

- The new behaviours that the rapid digitalisation of our workplaces have made critical to securing and progressing in a first role. We certainly weren't talking about students learning how to make themselves visible whilst remote-working in 2019!
- And the career-management skills that learners will need to get their foot in the door. These range from knowing where to look for jobs to how to create a confident CV. This is an area we find HEIs have a real opportunity to respond in more depth to learner needs.

Since CMI published its landmark 21st Century Leaders report in 2018, HEIs have shown how innovative they can be when it comes to teaching delivery. The next step is to apply this mindset to the delivery of employability skills. This report argues that more and more courses need to embrace and embed the most relevant employability skills as we move into a fully digital and hybrid era. Everyone – institutions, employers, learners and the wider economy – will benefit if they do.



Matt Swarbrick Director of Partnership Sales

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have faced 18 months of unparalleled disruption during the pandemic. As we emerge into a post-vaccination era, HEIs find themselves operating in an increasingly competitive and uncertain environment. They face the prospect of imminent, far-reaching changes to funding via the Augar Review, and a government that's increasingly focused on technical skills in post-18 education.

But while the pitch may have changed, the rules haven't. Teaching quality and employability remain at the heart of HEIs' obligations under the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). This new CMI research – including specially commissioned data alongside insights from HEIs, employers and students – is designed to help HEIs navigate these multiple challenges.

We discover that:

- Many employers still believe that graduates lack the 'basic' work-ready competencies that make up employability skills.
- This skills gap is only going to become more apparent in a hybrid/digital world.
- Embedding these skills from the very start of a course helps students to identify and sell these skills to prospective employers – a truly successful outcome for all parties.
- This isn't just about business students. Whether you're teaching fashion designers, video game developers or wind turbine technicians, every graduate needs the skills to navigate the job market. And once they secure a role, they're soon going to need those core skills of critical-thinking, team-working and communication.

CMI is proud to work with many of the world's leading HEIs to help deliver what today's students need to prosper. As the world's largest network of managers and leaders, CMI understands the management skills and behaviours that are relevant in the modern workplace. We believe we can help HEIs connect what they offer students with the needs of a changing labour market.

Our research shows that nearly two-thirds of graduates with CMI-accredited business degrees are employed in highly skilled roles at 15 months, compared to just over half of graduates with non-accredited business degrees; the average salary was £27k for those on CMI-accredited degrees, compared to £25k for those on non-accredited business degrees.

Whether you work with CMI or not, I hope you find this research useful. The truth is, every student faces a different experience. Some will be snapped up immediately, while others struggle to get noticed and advance. All of us have a responsibility to help students across all courses achieve positive outcomes. That starts with providing them with the core employability skills that they'll need to get their foot on the ladder.



A QUICK WORD ABOUT PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This CMI research, *Work-ready Graduates: Building Employability Skills for a Hybrid World* aims to shed new light on the current landscape of employability skills for students and graduates from UK universities. Uniquely, it brings together feedback from academics in higher education institutions (HEIs), HR decision-makers within UK-based businesses, as well as undergraduate students.

The research was conducted between December 2020 and August 2021 and it explores: changes to employability skills within the context of the pandemic; how employers can help shape employability programmes in HEIs; and, indeed, the optimal shape of employability programmes offered by HEIs in future. As employers' expectations change post-pandemic, and students face an increasingly challenging job market, we hope this research will help HEIs to develop the courses and overall student offering that a new generation of learners need for a hybrid world.

UK HEIS

We interviewed 17 HEI senior representatives including deans, heads of school and principals, including Russell Group universities and post-1992 universities. HEIs were located throughout the English regions, and in all devolved nations.

UK EMPLOYERS

We interviewed 16 individuals responsible for learning and development within their organisation across the private, public and third sector. We also polled 528 HR decision-makers within UK-based businesses.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UK

We undertook six focus groups with second, third, and fourth-year undergraduate students, and polled 300 CMI business students and 300 undergraduates who were not on CMI-accredited courses.





Employability skills are as important as ever. Nearly **80%** of employers believe that current graduates do not arrive fully equipped with the skills they need to be work-ready. Self-management and motivation, digital communication, creating a digital brand/profile, and networking effectively in a digital world are the skills most in demand by employers.



Students have to be able to stand out in a digital and hybrid world.

Employers increasingly look for skills that work in a hybrid work environment. Unfortunately, many students seem unaware of how to demonstrate their employability skills in a digital world: only **41%** of non-business students have a LinkedIn account and only **29%** of students are interested in the introduction of digital badging.



Employability skills should be embedded in courses from the start – and performance against them tracked – so that students are fully aware of the importance of these skills, and promote them to prospective employers.

At the moment, HEIs believe that embedding employability is a good mechanism to ensure all students get employability skills, but just one in four students (**27%**) are completely confident they can demonstrate these skills.



Just demonstrating employability skills is not enough; these skills must be underpinned with general career management support (which appears to be lacking). Right now, only **28%** of students are completely confident about how to search for jobs; only **25%** are completely confident about applying for a job; and only **18%** are completely confident about how to write a CV. Just under one-third (**29%**) of students do not believe their university offers support in developing career management skills.



It's not just business students who need employability skills. Non-business students need to develop employability and career management skills too, but right now these students believe their university experience only equips them with two of the 11 key employability skills.



Higher education institutions (HEIs) understand how much employers can contribute to students gaining employability skills. As well as embedding these skills in course content, some HEIs offer students specific employability modules; involvement in real-life consultancy projects; placements or work experience.



But more needs to be done to connect students with employers. Almost half of students (48%) either did not know a prospective employer, or their university had only connected them with future employers to a small extent.



It needs to be easier for employers to engage with an HEI. While 57% of employers report that they have been actively involved in shaping HE employability skills since July 2019, only 37% reported it had been very easy to get involved with their chosen HEI.



This disconnect deters many employers from getting involved with HEIs: 61% of employers who are not currently involved in shaping employability skills with HEIs would like to get involved, but only 11% of this group know how they would go about doing so. Although there are agencies (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships) tasked with making these connections, almost all (92%) employers thought that it would be helpful if there was an organisation that could connect decision-makers in their organisation with HEIs to shape employability.

Most employers believe that graduates arrive in the labour market not fully equipped with the complete set of employability skills.

22%



Only **22%** of employers think that graduates are equipped with the key employability skills

97%



Nearly all employers (**97%**) agreed that CMI's employability framework, which contains many of the key skills that develop future managers and leaders, would equip graduates with the skills to get on in the workplace.

89%



89% of students wanted an 'employability bootcamp' to equip them with the key skills for the workplace



The areas where students most need training, according to employers, are: **team-working (58%); critical thinking and problem-solving (54%); and communication (52%)**. This is similar to the findings in CMI's 2018 21st Century leaders research.



There is an opportunity for innovation in how HEIs support students' employability requirements. Some 89% of students thought it would be useful to take – or wanted to find out more about – an 'employability bootcamp' that would equip them with the skills needed for the workplace. And 95% of employers favour the introduction of a new training programme to ensure graduates are work-ready when they come into the workplace.

- **The top three skills identified as being critical to employability are: Team-working, Critical thinking and problem-solving, Communication**

The full list is as follows:

- Team-working
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Communication
- Self management
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative and self-direction
- Digital skills
- Resilience
- Emotional intelligence
- Innovation and creativity
- Entrepreneurial skills

- **Employers want tools to help them assess a graduate's employability.** In particular, they favour accreditation, workplace learning and bitesize training. The three most popular approaches to assessing a graduate's employability (with more than **50%** of employers agreeing) were:
 - Completion of an accredited training course or qualification (**55%**)
 - Completion of internships, placements/or work-based learning (**55%**)
 - Completion of short, bitesize employability skills training programme (**51%**)

RECOMMENDATIONS

HEIs are at a crossroads. Under severe funding pressure, they must continue to deliver learner aspirations, employer needs and the government's ambitions to 'Build Back Better'.

Many are rising to these challenges. They're working hard to improve their understanding of local and regional skills requirements and, where these skills aren't currently embedded in their course content and/or university life, they're building them in. This, in turn, is helping to drive local economic growth.

This CMI research is designed to help HEIs provide their students with the employability skills that are most relevant to their chosen job market. Drawing on this year's findings, we make the following key recommendations for HEIs.



Embed accredited employability skills in course modules where possible. Otherwise ensure all students have access to accredited standalone employability modules.



Take a whole-university approach to employability from the outset of courses. All students need access to employability skills regardless of the degree course that they are taking.



Make sure students are aware of their employability skills and are able to measure and track their employability skills gain.



Support students to articulate and convey their skills and be able to demonstrate they are work-ready in an increasingly digital workplace.



Use existing and emerging national and regional networks to connect with employers to better understand the skills needed for the workplace. This could be a local Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnership or professional body.



Create networking opportunities for students to connect with local employers to provide real-life work-based assignments, mentoring opportunities and career pathways.

STRONG EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS WILL CONTINUE TO BE CENTRAL TO STUDENT SUCCESS



1

The question of whether graduates possess the full range of skills to thrive in a job (the so-called 'employability' or 'core' skills) is now centre stage in public debate and government thinking.

There are a number of reasons for this. First, government plans to 'Build Back Better' rely on a workforce with high-quality skills to increase UK productivity. Similarly, employers – bruised by the impacts of the pandemic – cannot afford a workforce that isn't ready for post-Covid economic

challenges. Where employers have skills gap vacancies in their organisation, **94%** said that these skills gaps had a negative impact on business performance.

And students themselves are more insistent than ever that the courses they undertake will genuinely equip them for their future career. This is the context for UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The pressure really is on for HEIs to demonstrate they deliver positive outcomes for students and the local economies in which they are based.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS REMAIN ESSENTIAL IN TOUGH LABOUR MARKETS

While there are signs of labour market recovery, it's still a tough job market; labour market participation for young people remains below pre-pandemic levels.

In particular, graduates find it hard to find jobs with real prospects and where they can develop themselves. Yes, there are vacancies, but large numbers of undergraduates (**31%** according to graduate outcomes data in 2018/19) still leave university and enter into medium and low-skill jobs.

Employability skills can unlock this puzzle. These are the suite of behaviours and skills that make individuals more likely to gain high-skilled employment and be successful there – with all the benefits that brings to the wider economy.

These are also the skills that employers want. Personal effectiveness, self-management and communication skills (in other words, core professional management skills) are frequently mentioned as the skills that would be valuable to employers by new graduates. Students acquiring employability skills will be in a good position not only to gain their first job, but also to get onto the path to become future managers and leaders in their chosen professions.

Unfortunately of the 1.7 million first degree undergraduates in UK higher education in 2019-20, many will have left university without the skills employers require.

“
They are still going to want to employ someone that organises their time well, is motivated, is probably quite passionate about what they're doing. I don't think that's really going to change now [as a result of the pandemic]

Third-year student,
University of the West of England

”

NEW EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR A DIGITAL WORKPLACE

Employability skills were important before the pandemic, and they remain so now. Employers want to take on graduates with – primarily – communication skills, agility and adaptability.

But there is a new emphasis on ensuring students can obtain these skills through digital learning; and deploy these skills in a digital workplace.

Interestingly, many HEIs feel that the move to online has inadvertently supported the development of new skills – and not just how to use Zoom and Microsoft Teams! Students have learned skills such as online project management or effective communication in a digital environment. One university has even worked with students specifically to look at developing online skills to tackle social disadvantage.

Awareness of digital access also brought about other learning opportunities for students. In particular, students' digital skills have been developed and shared through a student-led community-focused 'buddies' project located in the business school called 'DigiGallus Connect' that speaks to the university's civic mission. This saw students being paired with older individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (who were given a device and internet access) and supported virtually by student mentors to establish and improve their digital skills. This has been great for students' intergenerational communication and problem-solving skills, as well as creating an awareness of digital inequality and exclusion

Third-year student,
University of the West of England

I think organisational skills are very important now, because now we need to watch lectures before the seminars, without anyone reminding us, usually we have the lecturer telling us, oh, tomorrow you have this. But now I think it's really important to keep track of everything

Third-year student, Anglia Ruskin University

Students also felt they had developed important new skills – they reported improvements in flexibility and adaptability, as a result of having to deal with the change in course delivery methods. The ability to problem-solve and manage time effectively has grown in importance for students: 52% of business students told us they found it challenging to manage their own time during the pandemic - which aligned with students telling us they felt a need to step up to manage their own workloads where there was less face-to-face time with lecturers.

Digital transformation may be here, but many students aren't yet sure how to stand out in a digital world. Our research finds that only 41% of non-business students had a LinkedIn account (vs 73% for business students). Strikingly, only 29% of all students were interested in the introduction of digital badging (the online equivalent of a certificate or post-nominals) to evidence their skills.

THE EMPLOYERS' VIEW

Employers agree that graduates need new skills to work in a digital environment. In interviews, they highlighted these key aptitudes for new graduates:

- Ability to build bonds with colleagues in digital environments from the start of a career
- Awareness of how to become more 'visible' in organisations, in a context of remote working
- Motivating themselves to work remotely, rather than among people.

In a hybrid working world it will be important for students to work effectively in environments where they may not have regular face-to-face time with a line manager. And indeed they'll have to become more adept at standing out and demonstrating their skills in interviews with potential employers.



“

I haven't been shown anything by my university concerning future employability, all the information I've found about employability skills have been found by myself

Second-year student, University of Birmingham

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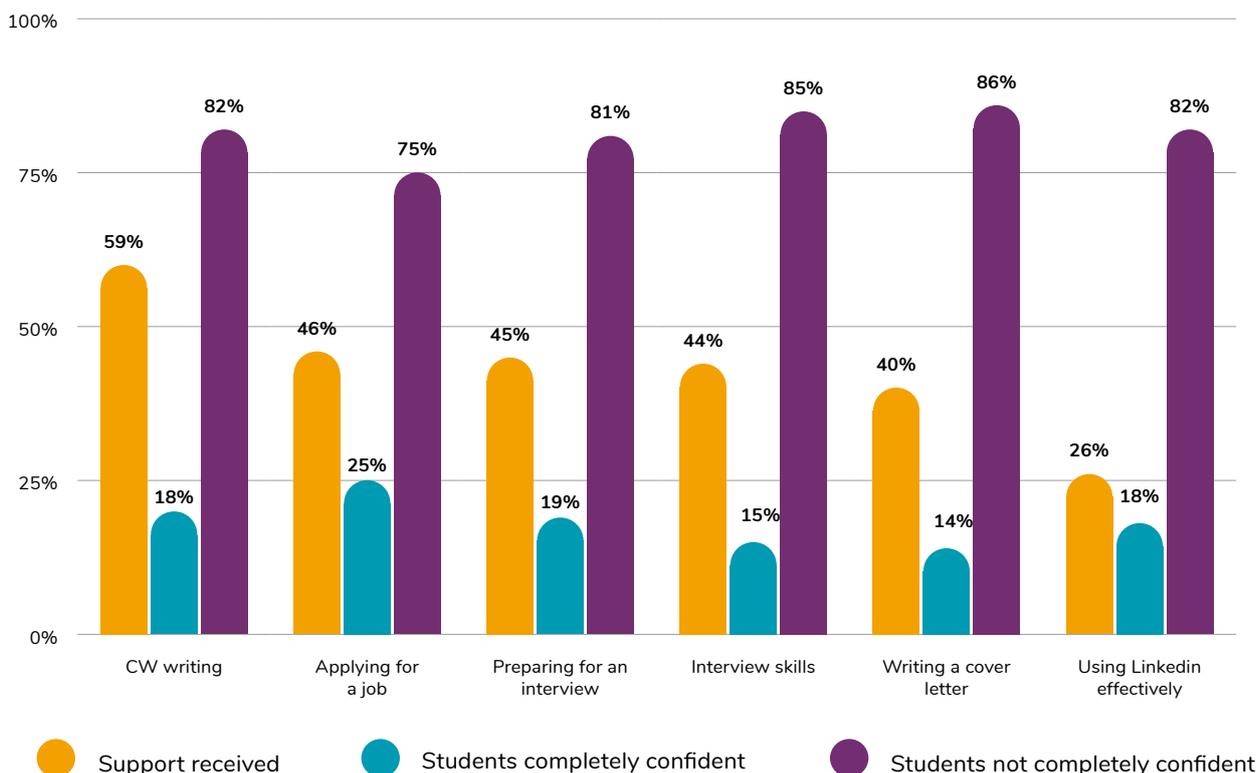
STUDENTS NEED TO BE BETTER ABLE TO EVIDENCE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

According to CMI's research, many students feel that, while they have some skills that employers want, they do not always have clarity on which skills will get them ahead in the workplace – or how to evidence these.

There are some important messages for HEIs here. Almost a third (29%) of students did not know, or did not believe, that their university offered support with the practical skills to help graduates get jobs. For the majority (71%) who reported that their university did offer this support, most felt this support was mainly in CV-writing (54% of students).

It's also clear that students need support with the career management skills to acquire a job. Only just over a quarter (28%) of students are completely confident about how to search for jobs; 25% are completely confident about applying for a job; and 18% are completely confident about how to write a CV.

Fig 1: Students reporting their university supports career managements skills against students who say they are completely confident that they have the skills required to get a job



Base: all students, 621

As table 1 vividly shows, business students are more likely to be completely confident across the full range of career management skills compared to students on a non-business course/. However, even business students need more support to develop these career management skills through the whole university experience. This represents an opportunity for HEIs and the organisations that work with them.

Table 1: Complete confidence levels with career management skills by business and non-business students

	Business Students	Non-busienss students	% difference
CV writing	24%	13%	+12%
Writing a cover letter	18%	10%	+8%
Applying for jobs	32%	19%	+13%
Preparing for an interview	23%	14%	+10%
Interview skills	20%	10%	+10%
Using LinkedIn effectively	24%	11%	+13%

Base: all business students, 304; all non-business students, 317

Base for using LinkedIn effectively: business students, 221, non-business students, 130

Many of the business departments we spoke to embed employability skills into course content, but few have formal processes for measuring the impact (beyond factoring in TEF outcomes). Some HEIs report that providing practical support – such as writing CVs and undertaking interviews – is considered as important to students as the core employability skills.

Students also value employability skills gained through extra-curricular activities (e.g. student societies and employer-organised competitions) and would welcome ways to evidence these to employers.

This university utilises, as do many others, a wide range of approaches to defining employability skills. These are identified at university level and are described as ‘hardwired’ into all of the validated programmes. There is some degree of course-specific flexibility, so that employer-led views on employability skills are incorporated into teaching and learning. All of the validated modules have clear rubrics concerning employability skills and these are backed up by learning outcomes that are formally assessed

Sarah Jones, subject leader, international strategy and business, University of Northampton

Reed Smith is a global dynamic law firm.

WORKING WITH UNIVERSITIES

Reed Smith recruits approximately 25 graduates each year into legal trainee roles in the London office. When recruiting trainee lawyers, the firm welcomes not only law graduates but also those from other disciplines – in 2021, 55% of training contract offers were to nonlaw students. In recent years, Reed Smith has co-created undergraduate placement programmes which offer an academic year of immersive work experience within the legal profession. The first LLB placement collaboration was with Queen Mary University of London, now expanded to Exeter University and University of Southampton, with a particular focus on legal innovation and the future of law.



ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR GRADUATES

Reed Smith aims to be a continuous learning environment: building upon the experiences and talents that new entrants bring – and guiding them through the next steps in their career journey.

The skills required of the legal team of the future are constantly evolving, so the most important attributes for graduates joining Reed Smith are:

- A growth mind-set
- Robustness and resilience
- Critical thinking
- Flexibility and adaptability

Since new skills and expertise are honed in the flow of work and built via day-to-day interactions, the ways in which recruits interact with others and go about their work are crucial to their development. To support this, Reed Smith encourages graduates to engage actively with the culture of the firm, and the interpersonal working relationships within their teams.

During the Covid pandemic, working and meeting remotely quickly became the norm for Reed Smith. In this environment, new recruits needed to think about how to present themselves on screen and be effective using new technology, having to be more agile and learning to communicate in different ways. As the firm evolves into a hybrid working environment it will be important learning to switch effectively between 'physical' and 'virtual' environments.

Alongside these changes, the legal industry is embracing greater technological innovation. Graduates, therefore, need to be ready to be part of that shift.

Digital skills within our industry have changed fundamentally and that will continue at a pace.

EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT
IS CRUCIAL TO EMBEDDING
EMPLOYABILITY BUT
STUDENTS, UNIVERSITIES
AND EMPLOYERS FIND IT
HARD TO CONNECT



2

STUDENTS HAVE LIMITED OPPORTUNITY TO GET REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE. OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS NEED TO BE FACILITATED

Work experience is a great way for students to boost their employability. But relatively few students take up opportunities to gain work experience as part of their university course. HESA reported that in 2019/20 only 7% of students were on a sandwich course.

CMI's research shows that 51% of students would like their HEIs to provide greater promotion of internships and placement; and 45% of students would like greater access to local employers. Students told us that work placements gave them the best opportunity to connect with potential employers.

Although universities can, and do, facilitate connections with employers, students often don't know about these opportunities – and indeed their value. According to our research, 48% of students either did not know if their university experience had connected them with future employers, or only thought this had happened to a small extent.

Careers fairs are still a common route into the job market; and 68% of students told us that their university provided this opportunity. But students tell us that the pandemic has adversely affected the quality of this engagement and made it more challenging to build direct relationships with employers. In a similar vein, two-fifths of employers who attended virtual careers fairs during the pandemic described them as “not very successful”.

In my first two years, our university provided us quite a lot of events to attend to hear from employers and companies popular with Leeds graduates, however, most of these were optional and more extra-curricular rather than during compulsory formal teaching hours.

We were prepared well in our first year for internships and placements, which helped me get my year in industry at L'Oreal during my third year. Unis should remind students right from first year to start researching companies and jobs, and think about potential internship/ placement/spring week opportunities as it helps to be aware of these from the outset of your uni experience

Fourth-year student, University of Leeds

Employability sessions were held virtually, providing some exposure to potential employers... However, usually sessions would be held in small groups or there would be in-person career fairs. These would not only expose us to potential employers but would give us good insights into company culture/attitudes through company representatives – having spoken to them in-person

Fourth-year student, Aston University

HEIS NEED EMPLOYER INPUT TO DEVELOP THE MOST RELEVANT SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS

HEIs work closely with employers to understand which employability skills are required in the workplace; and they rely on employer feedback when reviewing employability skills in the curriculum. HEIs report that, to understand employer skills gaps, they either work directly with employers or make connections via trade bodies and employer associations.

Many HEIs already include a significant element of employer input in their teaching and learning; some involve employers directly in assessment of workplace projects. Some university employees regularly refresh their workplace experience by working directly with employers.

We found that employability skills are generally directly embedded in course content, though some universities offer specific employability modules; access to real-life consultancy projects; and placements or work experience.

Our research shows that HEIs believe the pandemic offers opportunities to improve links between students, employers,

and to forge stronger connections with their university careers services. Teesside University and Arden University have used the pandemic as an opportunity to work with businesses outside the local area.

One of the key findings in this year's study is that students often don't realise that employers are involved in course design – only **43%** of students realise this. The consequence is that they are less likely to appreciate that they do have the work-ready skills that employers are looking for.

Where there is awareness, **31%** of students discovered this involvement through webinars; **24%** through work experience; and **19%** through internships. Only **19%** of students thought that employers were directly involved in teaching; one in ten (**10%**) in assessment in assessment; and **6%** in consultancy projects.

Whether employability skills are embedded within the curriculum or acquired through direct workplace/development experiences, there's one crucial point: universities must measure and track the acquisition of these skills so that students realise that they've actually acquired them!



We work closely with employers to ensure graduate outcomes are industry-relevant. Employers are involved in validation, assessment, and case studies

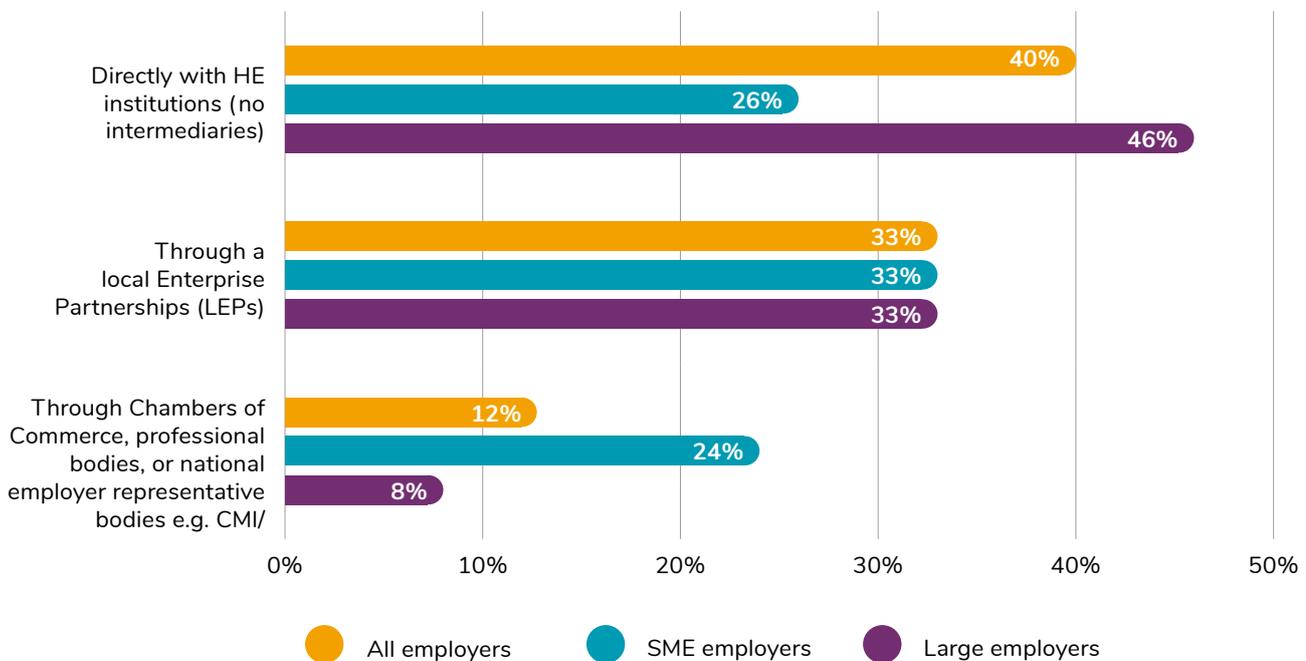
Sarah Jones, subject leader, international strategy and business, University Of Northampton

BUT EMPLOYERS WOULD VALUE HELP TO CONNECT WITH HEIS

Employers told us that their relationships with universities vary. They range from collaborating on apprenticeships and offering placements to undergraduates, to delivering presentations to students to discuss requirements for graduate careers.

Currently, **57%** of employers report that they have been actively involved in shaping HE employability skills since July 2019. Where employers did engage, the most common approach was to go directly to the HEI (**40%** of employers), followed by engaging via their Local Enterprise Partnership (**33%**).

Fig 4: Employers routes to engaging with HEIs, split by SME and large businesses



Base: All employers who have been involved with HEs in the last 2 years, 300

SME employers who have been involved with HEs in the last 2 years, 82

Large employers who have been involved with HEs in the last 2 years, 218 organisation, 218

Only **37%** of employers say it was very easy to get involved with their chosen HEI. Large businesses are much more likely to be working with HEIs to shape employability skills (**62%** vs **46%** of SMEs). Almost two-thirds (**61%**) of employers who are not currently involved in shaping employability skills with HEIs would like to get involved. Only **11%** of this group know how they would go about doing so.

Almost all employers (**92%**) say it would be helpful if there was an organisation that could connect business decision-makers with HEIs so that they can shape employability for graduates and new workplace starters.

The proportion of SMEs and large employers stating this was pretty much the same (**92%** of SMEs vs **91%** of large employers).

Notably only **12%** of employers used professional bodies, chambers of commerce or national employer representatives to connect with HEIs: these agencies have strong networks that are currently being under-used. A quarter (**24%**) of SMEs connected with HEIs through these routes – broadly the same number as connected with the HEI directly.

Turn2us is a small national charity, providing practical help to people in financial hardship.

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR GRADUATES

Since the start of 2019, Turn2us has recruited three staff who were new or recent graduates. In the past five years or so, a few other staff have joined as new graduates, with a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

As an anti-poverty charity, Turn2us aims to provide opportunities for people whose access to the economy is limited – and this includes access to higher education. When recruiting, therefore, it appoints people from diverse backgrounds – in terms of education and other characteristics.

Beyond job-specific skills, the qualities that the charity looks for in new recruits are:

- Listening and communicating well
- A readiness for self-reflection and self-curiosity
- Strong commitment to the purpose of the organisation
- A sense of accountability.

Emotional intelligence is also important in employability, but Turn2us is determined that this should not exclude potential staff who are on the autism spectrum. It is conscious that they may process and display emotions in different ways from other staff, while being just as effective in their roles.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, essential skills have included being able to use – or having a hunger to learn about – digital communication and collaboration tools such as Zoom and Slack. Working at home also means that new recruits need to be able to manage their motivation and performance despite perhaps being physically isolated.

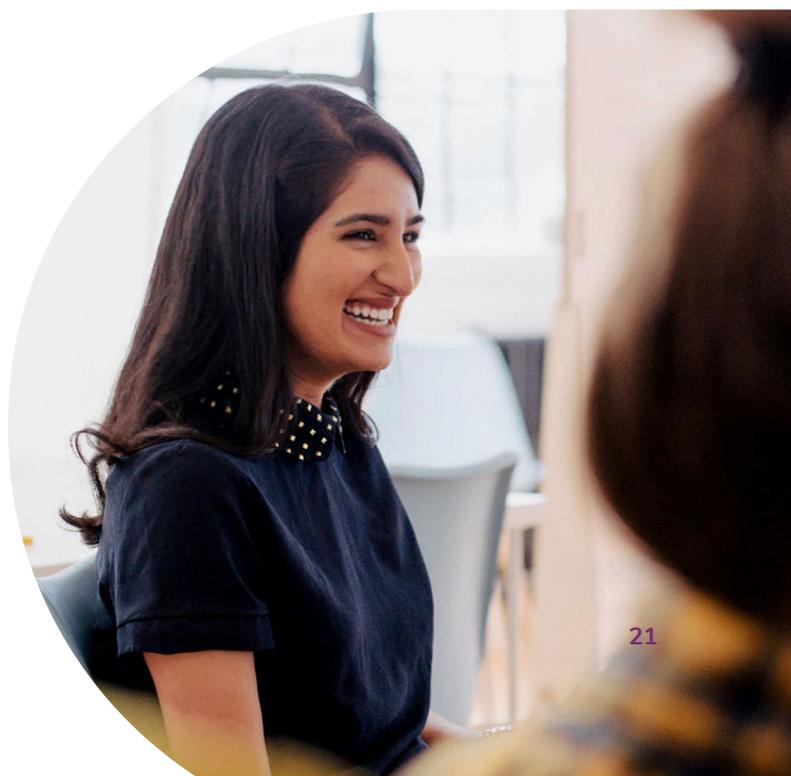
WORKING WITH HEIS

Its relatively small graduate intake means that Turn2us has no direct relationships with universities to develop students' employability skills and does not offer student placements or degree apprenticeships.

While it is open to new ways of attracting and recruiting talent, this must be in a context of equity, diversity and inclusion. To focus on graduates or postgraduates – more than on other educational, social and employment backgrounds – would not meet that objective.

A relationship with a university that could widen participation, including with specific aspects of diversity – such as disability, LGBTQ, race or class – however, might be attractive.

Turn2us would also be interested to explore working with the further education sector – e.g. a local FE college – especially if the objectives of the relationship could be developed jointly.



THERE NEEDS TO BE
A CLEARER FRAMEWORK
FOR EMPLOYABILITY
AND TO METHODS TO
ASSESS EMPLOYABILITY
SKILLS GAIN



3

ADDRESSING EMPLOYERS' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

We've seen that students aren't clear about which employability skills employers need; so it's hard for them to work out which skills they should develop. CMI has developed a framework of the 11 employability skills that we believe are central to future workplace success. The skills, which were most commonly referenced in this year's research, are:



According to our poll, 97% of employers agreed that CMI's employability framework of 11 skills would equip graduates with the skills to get on in the workplace. However, 78% of employers believe graduates do not arrive in the work-place fully equipped with the skills they need to be work-ready. This is an important finding and highlights the need for students and HEIs to step up to the employability challenge.

The top five core employability skills where employers believe further training is required are:

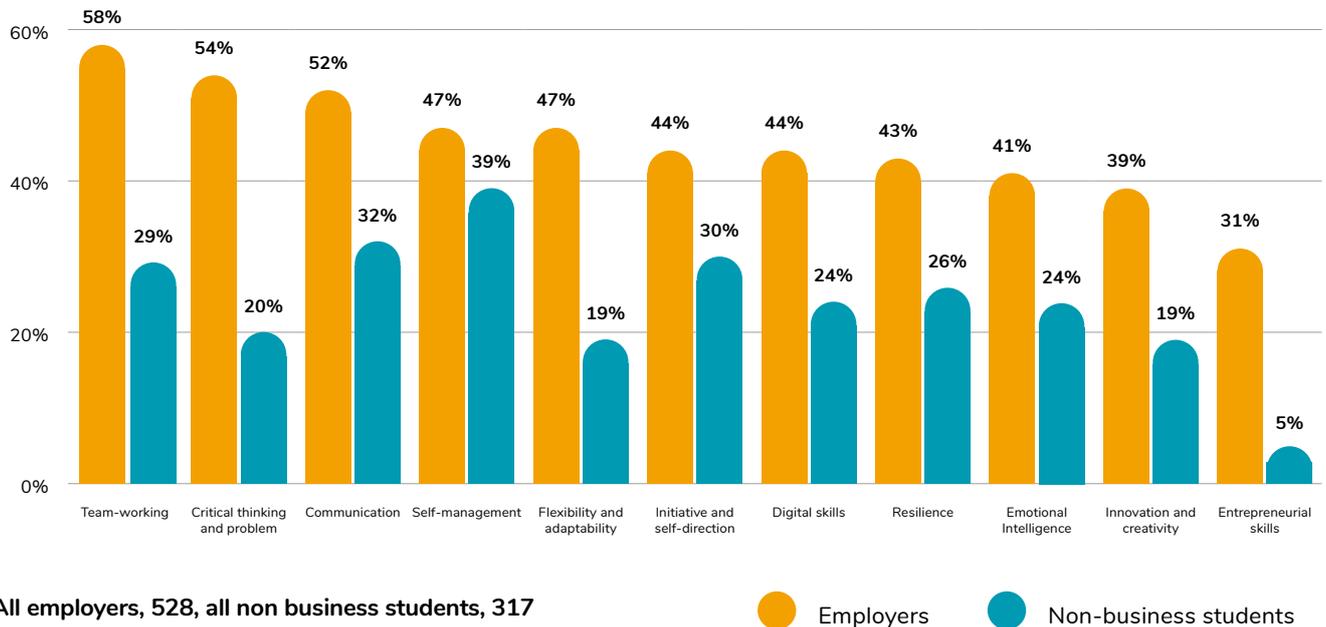
1. Team-working (58%)
2. Critical thinking and problem-solving (54%)
3. Communication (52%)
4. Self-management (47%)
5. Flexibility and adaptability (47%)

Students need support to identify how well they are doing against these core skills. They're looking for clear interventions as to how they can develop the areas they are weaker in.

Non-business students in particular need to develop these crucial work-ready skills. In our poll, this cohort said that their university studies and experience had only enabled them to develop an average two out of 11 employability skills. The top five skills they felt they were completely confident they had developed were:

1. Self-management skills (39%)
2. Communication skills (32%)
3. Initiative and self-direction (30%)
4. Team-working (29%)
5. Critical thinking and problem-solving (29%)

Fig 5: Employers' prioritisation of employability skills for HEI students mapped against the skills that non-business students believe they are completely confident in



TRAINING THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND STUDENTS

There was universal agreement from both employers and current students that a new employability skills training programme would complement existing programmes and help to ensure graduates are work-ready:



- 95% of employers believe it would be beneficial for a new training programme to be introduced to make sure that graduates come to the workplace with these employability skills already developed.



- 89% of students thought it would be useful to take – or wanted to find out more about – an ‘employability bootcamp’ that would equip them with the skills to thrive in the workplace.

This could be really useful as this is what employers nowadays are looking for. It is hard to get a job or even a meeting with an employer if you do not have key skills

Second-year student, Arden University

EMPLOYERS NEED TOOLS TO ASSESS WORKPLACE SKILLS

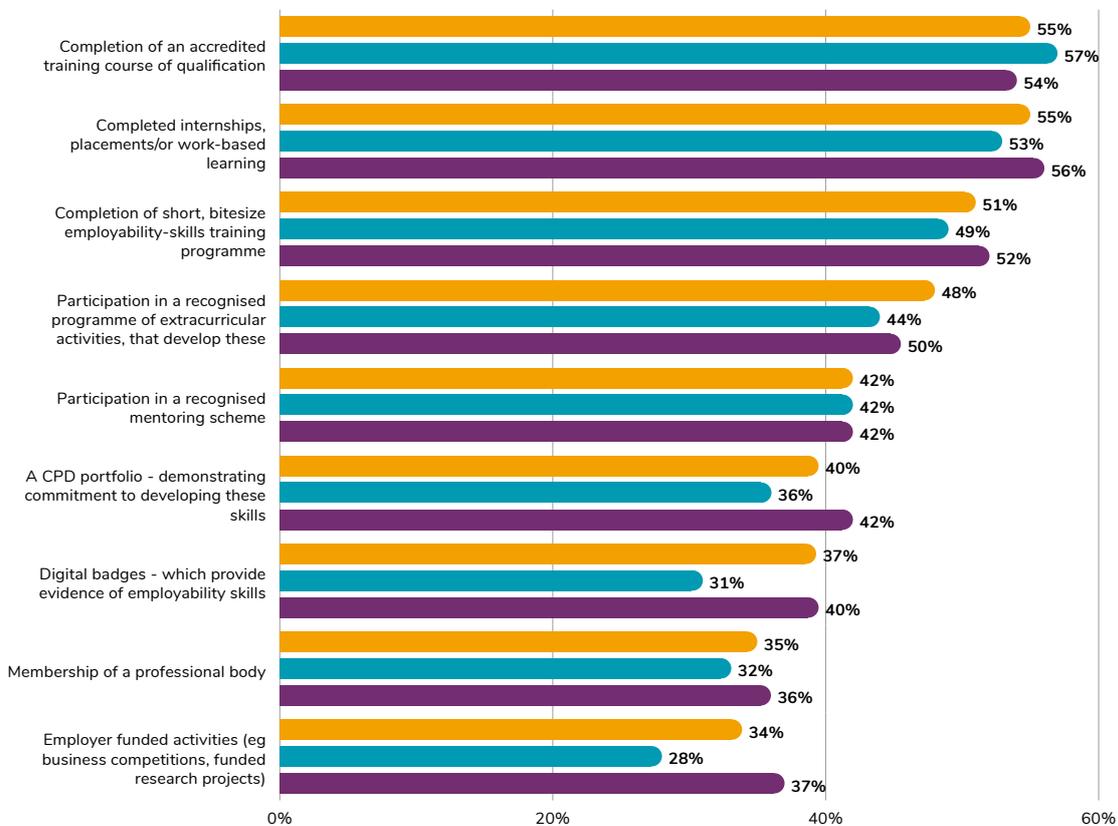
Our research shows employers using a number of methods to assess employability skills in new graduates. The top three were:

- Completion of an accredited training course or qualification (used by 55% of employers)
- Completion of internships, placements/or work-based learning (55%)
- Completion of short, bitesize employability skills training programme (51%)

The tools used were broadly the same in SMEs and large businesses, although large businesses were more likely to favour students who had participated in a recognised programme of extra-curricular activities that develop these skills, and digital badging.

Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all tool or method that employers use to assess graduates' work-ready skills. To illustrate the point, nearly half of employers (48%) were looking for participation in a programme of recognised activities that accredit these skills, while 40% were looking for students to have a student equivalent to a CPD portfolio demonstrating how they were acquiring employability skills.

Fig 6: Tools that employers believe would enable them to assess a graduate's employability skills split by business size



All employers, 528, SME employers, 177, large employers, 351



All employers



SME employers



Large employers

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RESEARCH

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