

Identifying and Developing your skills for employment

Do you know yourself as well as you think you do? Often, we don't give ourselves credit for skills and qualities we already possess or think they are not relevant to a graduate career. This handout shows you the real value of what you can do already, and how to acquire skills you don't yet have.

This handout covers:

- 1 A look at employability in more detail
- 2 The role of skills and qualities for employability
- 3 How to identify the skills you've got ('establishing your skills set')
- 4 How to acquire/develop new skills
- 5 Articulating your skills in applications, interviews and presentations

1 A look at employability in more detail

Employability is a term that describes your personal value in the workplace, whether you are an employee, a consultant, an academic, a freelancer or an employer. Your own employability will cover many aspects and is unique to you, including:

- your **ethics and values** – these are aligned to organisations, religion, general work ethics and personal standards to name a few. For many graduates, this is the most important factor in choosing a career.
- your **knowledge** – what you've studied academically, but also your knowledge through interests and personal experiences, knowledge about the world of work and the world around you.
- your **intelligence(s)** – your personal intelligence(s) – are you practical, a creative thinker, a logical thinker, good at languages - how quickly do you pick things up?
- your **personality and personal qualities** – do you consider yourself to be introvert or extrovert, or a mixture of the two? Do you think you can change your personal qualities or are they fixed? You might have a predisposition to some characteristics, but these can often be developed to include others.

- your **attitudes** – do you have a ‘can do’ attitude? What is your attitude to your studies? Are you hardworking / realistic / inclusive / flexible / curious / ambitious?
- your **contacts/network** – who you know and how – recognising their value and potential.
- your **self-awareness** – how well you know yourself and what you want? It’s almost impossible to tell someone else what you are like in an application or interview, if you aren’t yourself aware of your strengths.

Employability is not just specific to graduates – people of all ages and all stages need to stay flexible within the workplace, changing roles and transferring their skills to other work sectors. It’s a lifelong process to invest in your employability, to stay employable, reviewing job satisfaction and personal value in the workplace.

2 The role of skills and qualities for employability

Skills and qualities make up a large part of your employability, and they are something that employers are particularly concerned with. For employability, what you can DO is as crucial as what you KNOW. You can become the most knowledgeable person in a subject, but if you lack the skills to put your knowledge to good use, then you won’t be as employable as someone who can.

Think about any ineffective teachers you may have had, and effective teachers – what qualities and/or skills did the effective teachers have that the ineffective teachers didn’t?

Employers are very interested in skills. Recruitment is normally based on identifying key competencies and matching job applicants with them. You will not only be asked to write about and evidence your skills in an application but also to articulate your skills at interviews. Some graduate employers will also assess you through psychometric tests and assessment centres, either online or in person.

The good news is that a skill developed in one context can easily be applied in another – called transferable skills. For example, if you have been involved in a team sport, you could apply your experience from the sports field to the workplace, whether that is being a good team member or leading a team. Employers will be looking closely at your CV, application and interview performance for evidence of your skills and qualities.

Whilst you are involved in study, you invest a lot of your time and efforts investing in your knowledge and expertise – you should not overlook what you’re learning to do. To find out what skills you might have developed whilst studying a specific subject, you can look here: [Prospects - What can I do with my Degree?](#) Choose your degree subject or one that is close to it, and scroll down to Skills for your CV.

3 How to identify the skills you’ve got

Thinking about what job you would like to do in the future is a bit like starting at the finishing line! However, it can provide vital clues as to what appeals to you, so ask yourself what these are: is it the work environment (e.g. the outdoors), using your degree subject knowledge (e.g. history), working with a particular group (e.g. children) that attract you, or is it a combination? Someone who wants to work with children might consider doing that through various job sectors, such as healthcare, charity, social work and education. In this way, you can combine the skills you want to use with the job sector you might have some knowledge about or be able to develop vocational skills to work in a specific area (teacher, social worker). If you start at this level of exploration and research, you will be able to identify the knowledge and skill set required much more easily and think about whether you can begin to develop some of the skills and experience needed for that broad sector.

You might find it useful to establish a baseline of skills you possess already to map onto what you may need. Auditing your skills is something that you should do regularly throughout your working life, to ensure you have the right ‘tools/ingredients’ required for the job that you are doing or for future job market requirements. Skills audits are a standard component of recruitment practices, graduate schemes, staff probation and development reviews, performance reviews and training needs analyses to name a few.

You can complete a *[Graduate Skills Self-Assessment](#)

Skills Terminology and Evidence

It's important to become familiar with the language of skills. Do you know what skills and qualities employers expect of all graduates, and which are in most demand?

Are you able to provide **evidence** of your skills? Think about your activities and experiences and make notes below:

Skill for graduate employability	Evidence from course / education	Evidence from work experience / internship	Evidence from interests & activities
Commercial Awareness			
Communication			
Teamwork			
Leadership			
Ability to work under pressure			
Creative Thinking			
Problem Solving			
Negotiation / Persuasion			
Prioritising / Planning			

4 How to acquire/develop skills

In order to develop and improve skills, you need to essentially do two things: take action and reflect.

Observing / imitating: you can develop skills by observing others; the more people or situations you are involved with, the more observations you can make. If you can recognise skills in others – for example a person who seems to have excellent negotiation skills, you can perhaps adopt the language they use, their body language or how they handle a situation. You will even learn from people who perform poorly or make mistakes.

Taking instruction / demonstration: sometimes a situation will involve someone giving instruction or direction – either formally through a training programme, or informally, such as a more experienced team member showing you the ropes (e.g. in a part time job or society).

Practise / trial and error: the more things that you get involved in, the more you will have the opportunity to practise. You might not get things right first time, but you'll learn through making mistakes, thereby gaining experience and building up your confidence.

Taking yourself out of your comfort zone: you won't always feel like you want to try new things, take on more responsibility or put yourself in a new environment. Only you will know the right balance between progress and what you're comfortable with, but if feels scary but exciting, you've probably got it right!

Reflection is a key component of learning and development, yet we rarely make time for it in our everyday lives. We are hard-wired to think of the next job the next assignment, the next meeting. If you take the time to reflect, you can really boost your skills development and your employability.

If you took the time to properly reflect on this, which skills and qualities have you used and developed?

Reflection and Analysis - example

You take part in a debate event as part of an assignment, researching facts and putting forward arguments and pros and cons. After the experience, you tell your friends what you learned about the debating procedure. You say that you found it an eye opener and a bit stressful.

To identify skills developed through this experience – reflect and analyse:

How were your information gathering skills? Did you manage to put your arguments forward clearly and calmly? How did you find the debating process? Did you feel confident speaking your mind? Were you challenged, and if so, were you able to assert yourself? Did you stay calm throughout? What about influencing others' decisions and making a good argument? Would you do anything different?

The skills potentially used/developed in this scenario are:

evaluation	teamwork	negotiation	emotional intelligence
decision making	influence	conflict resolution	reflectivity
critical analysis	argument	listening	stress tolerance

Reflective practice requires you consider how you ***felt*** about different experiences, as well as what happened and what action you took. This helps you to identify what aspects of an experience you found enjoyable, easy and which you felt challenging. These may be the areas in which you might need further experience and/or training.

You can learn more about reflective practice, and reflect on your experiences here:

*[Introduction to Reflective Practice](#)

*[Reflective Practice Exercise](#)

5 Articulating your skills for applications, interviews and presentations

You need to think about how your skills, experiences and qualifications meet a job advert's criteria at every stage of the application process. This could be through a CV, a covering letter, application form, interview and presentation – and probably all of the above!

Employers are looking for evidence of your transferable skills from a range of experiences and you need to research before applying what the relevant skills and competencies are for the post. You can do this by looking at the information provided with the job advert but this is not always very complete and, if you are making a speculative application, not available at all.

To provide yourself with this information, you need to go to several websites such as [Prospects](#), [Targetjobs](#) – (go into the Advice section of the careers sector) and a professional website for that area of work (such as the British Psychological Society or NHS careers) where they provide descriptions of specific roles. Here you will find a list of skills that are specific to a job role, around which you can base your application and target your CV. You may well have a competency based interview, where you will be asked to give examples of 'a time when you worked as a member of a team' or 'to solve a complex problem'.

Check out our workshops and webinars, or read our handouts on writing applications and attending interviews, to get more information about responding to competency questions fully, perhaps using the STAR technique, if you like the idea of using a model to help you.

Here's an example of giving evidence of your skills on a chronological CV or application form:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Role</i>
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- *Dealing directly with customer enquiries on the telephone, providing advice on products, arranging meetings with advisers and inputting data*

When you are writing or talking about your skills (primarily) in an application, skills-based CV or interview you need to give several instances of developing and using the skill (commercial awareness in this example):

- *Provided and interpreted financial information for my employer during my internship at*
- *Subscribe to and regularly read Marketing Week to maintain current knowledge of the sector*
- *Developed through participating in an enterprise challenge*

Make sure you use words that draw the employers attention to your skills and level of responsibility by using action words, such as 'responsible for ...' and 'experienced in ...', as well as direct phrasing.

Resources

A great way of exploring and assessing your professional skills is to try out online tests, questionnaires, assessments and games used by graduate employers in their recruitment.

As a Bangor University student you can log into an exclusive **Graduates First** account, where you have full access to a wide range of these tools, to help you explore and assess:

- how your personality fits into a 'work style'
- how much of a risk taker you are
- how good you are at making decisions
- your ability and approach to solving problems
- what kind of manager you might be
- how good you are at handling numbers
- how logical you are

These resources not only help you identify your skills, but you'll also be familiarising yourself with graduate recruitment practices and improving your performance at the same time!

Log in with your student ID and password to get started: [Graduates First](#)

There are lots of resources on the *[Employability Hub](#) to help you assess your own skills set, and develop new and emerging skills you're interested in.

Check out these external resources for more information:

[Targetjobs - The top 10 skills that'll get you a job when you graduate](#)

[UCAS – What are employers looking for?](#)

[Prospects – What skills do employers want?](#)

*student access only

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