



The Youth Employment UK Employability Review

A review of frameworks, common terms and research currently being used to define and determine employability skills in the UK.

Details: To determine how existing frameworks and literature refer to vital employability skills, a review was conducted to source commonalities and consider areas for improvement. Following initial investigation, it was determined that a unified approach would prove effective in supporting young people to better understand the skills they need to develop for their futures.

Process: Eighteen existing frameworks and eighty-six reports were studied and compared. A series of youth-led focus groups, roundtables and surveys was conducted to determine key employability skills and effective terminology relating to them, and consider how the narrative around employability skills could be made more effective.

With youth input, a foundation framework of employability skills was proposed to:

- Enable young people to access and understand the narrative around skills
- Create a unified, streamlined framework that employers can engage with
- Create a common language around skills for young people that can be embedded in education and programmes.

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Executive Summary

Employability skills have become an increasingly hot topic, with many working on the principle that if we can improve the employability skills of young people, they are more likely to progress. Yet we have found that despite this focus young people today still struggle to identify what employability skills are and how they might develop and identify these skills.

Young people as a group are four times more likely to be unemployed than older groups, many struggling with the transition between education and employment. Employers regularly voice concerns over the lack of work-readiness of young people and young people themselves have told Youth Employment UK that the gaps between education and employment are daunting. In terms of social mobility, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed, without the skills they need to achieve the same outcomes as their peers. This is not a new challenge but one that has been recognised for many years and the current approaches to solving this problem do not seem to be working, at least not universally so that all young people can benefit.

It is accepted that employability skills form part of the answer in supporting young people into employment. For years they have taken precedence in reports published by bodies ranging from employer partners to youth organisations. Skills are difficult to quantify, and this challenge in measuring the impact of skills could be why the UK has seen a succession of new reports and frameworks over time. This leads to an increasingly complex narrative which is difficult for young people to navigate. In the last couple of years alone, the term 'resilience' has been updated to 'grit' and then 'mental toughness' in the hope that alternative labels might increase understanding.

This review investigated numerous published reports, recommendations and frameworks exploring employability skills. The review's aim was to understand how young people could be better supported to take ownership of their own skill development and determine whether a common framework and unified view of employability skills might prove more effective.

Across the numerous reports and frameworks reviewed twenty-seven different employability skills were highlighted and recommended. Young people, education and employment representatives reviewed the list and were asked to prioritise the skills via focus groups, roundtables and online surveys. This exercise demonstrated how challenging it is to navigate the current landscape particularly given the high volume of unfamiliar terms.

If we want young people to be able to take ownership of their skill development then there is a demonstrable need to create a standard and simplified framework. A framework that can be used by schools, colleges, youth organisations and job seeking services so that a consistent approach can be taken. This will allow young people to build confidence in themselves and manage their skills as they transition and grow.

Following initial investigation, Youth Employment UK worked with key stakeholders to identify a recommended core set of employability skills that could be used to build a national framework.

Communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-management and **self-belief** were the top skills to come out from this work.

It is recognised within this report that any framework produced would need to be adapted to the needs of the individuals it was developed for. This report recommends further work to develop comprehensive frameworks. As part of its recommendations it strongly suggests that young people are part of the

development of any frameworks, tools or resources and that young people are given the opportunity to lead on their own skill development.

1. Introduction

This review investigated the frameworks, common terminology and research currently being used to determine and characterize employability skills. The review placed a primary focus on UK research, though international studies were also inspected to provide further context.

Definitions and requirements were explored for the following skill sets:

- Employability skills
- Transferable skills
- Technical skills
- Productivity skills

Investigation indicated that widespread variation in definitions and accepted translations of ‘employability skills’ may have resulted in numerous reports and recommendations being put forward by interested and invested parties for many years, providing multiple and sometimes conflicting solutions to core issues which still need to be addressed.

The review also set out to explore how “character”, soft skills and non-cognitive skills are often used interchangeably within employability skills frameworks.

Following investigation into the current approach to frameworks and terminology for employability skills, which was proved to be disparate, the review explored the potential merit and possibility of putting forward a recommendation for a widely agreed set of employability skills.

The approach was taken that any resulting recommendation would need to be a framework of guiding principles framed around a common language. Any suggested framework would be most readily adopted by young people if its creation could be shaped and informed by them. Having active input into the foundations of the framework would motivate young people to take ownership of the concepts behind the framework. It would help them understand the narrative, embrace the terminology and consider how they would actively build skills. The aim of a recommended unified framework would be to embed a clear language regarding skills that young people could grow with. Whilst engaging business, youth organisations and education, the ambition would be to produce a guiding set of skills lying in the hands of young people.

Research revealed a plethora of reports, guides and policies written by employers as well as invested partners. It demonstrated that information regarding skills is widely available, but there is a real lack of clarity and common language. It also indicated that any recommended framework would need to focus on young people being able to access, translate and recognise the information.

Investigation indicated that an agreed common language can:

1. Help young people become agents of change in this conversation
2. Better engage parents, teachers, youth workers and employers in the language they use around employability

3. Better manage and evaluate the way in which programmes are run.

2. Employability Skills: why are they important?

It is generally accepted that there is a mix of skills which are useful in employment and when young people transition from school to further study. What these skills are - and how they are labelled - has long been discussed. Both in literature and anecdotally, there is a lack a of clarity.

The government's *Industrial Strategy Green Paper (2017)* references the need for our young people to be able to develop skills required for the highly paid, highly skilled jobs of the future. Skills form one of the strategy's ten pillars for growth, with the paper recognising a mismatch between what young people are being taught and the skills which employers are seeking in candidates. As the future of jobs will evolve and the employment landscape will change, the paper recognises that addressing this mismatch is more important than ever.

There is a recognition that the challenges facing young people today are complicated, with no 'magic' answers and differing levels of support and needs required (*Industrial Strategy Green Paper (2017)*). Although youth unemployment figures appear to have decreased, they remain proportionally higher than any other age demographic (*Office for National Statistics, 2017*). The latest report by the Social Mobility Commission (*2017*) highlights that the gaps between young people from disadvantaged groups are still too wide, these young people are not able to progress at the same rate as their peers. Jackson (2014) argues that one of the areas in which social mobility is frustrated is the transition that students make to the workplace. Without the knowledge or acquisition of skills, young people tend to find themselves in less advantageous work environments. A general increase in youth unhappiness and an increase in young people presenting with mental health issues has also been documented (*The Prince's Trust, 2017*). Across a range of sectors there is a sense that any employability activity needs to focus on enabling people to increase their skills and find meaningful employment, and a simplistic approach to 'getting people working' will not provide a strong foundation for a growing and sustainable future employment landscape.

The changing nature of careers means that it is vital that all workers are adaptable. It is reported that young people today will have ten to fourteen jobs by the time they are 38 years old, with the top ten jobs in 2010 not existing in 2004 (*Fisch, K, 2017*). Whilst this data comes from America - and this has to be reflected in any recommendations moving forward - it is commonly agreed that young people today are being prepared to enter a workforce whose nature isn't clearly defined or predicted yet. An effective employability skills framework needs to ensure that young people are prepared with skills but also, importantly, understand how those skills can be defined and developed as young people grow and transition.

If young people are to be prepared for meaningful jobs and ready to transition from education to employment, a common understanding of what skills are needed and what these skills mean in the world of work and how to develop them is required.

3. Parameters

Young people require different levels of support that is tailored to specific needs – a 'one-size' approach will not fit all.

Over the course of our review we encountered employability frameworks and reports which placed a focus on specific age ranges, educational attainment or ability levels. The scope of this project cannot fully

explore every group, age and educational ability. This review has placed a focus on the skills needed for an average 16-year-old with no additional needs to transition to their next steps. To be able to explore this fully, we have engaged with those frameworks which have been highlighted for those in education, graduates and those further from the labour market to fully understand the journey of skills needed at 16 to progress.

We also recognise that youth employment is complex, with under-developed skills being just one of the reasons a young person might not be able to access opportunities. This report recognises that further investigation and understanding will be required for those with additional needs.

4. Definitions

The act of defining employability skills is referenced across many reports as being the very first hurdle to overcome. Knight and Yorke define employability skills as "a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations". Knight, P., Yorke, M (2006). Knight and Yorke's definition includes the key concept that building employability is a work in progress conducted over a lifetime. This sense of lifelong learning and the continuation of skill development over time sits well with predictions that UK careers will adapt and change over the coming years.

A second challenge revealed by this review's investigation into numerous reports lies in overcoming the interchangeability of terms: employability skills, transferable skills, technical skills, productivity skills, capabilities and traits are all used to describe skills and personal assets related to employability. How they are interlinked and what skills fall under which remit is rarely addressed or considered. In the 2016 University of Derby report on "*Understanding Career Management Skills: Findings from the First Phase of the CMS Leader Project*", it is noted that those who don't fall into the sphere of or might be defined as 'employable' would find it even more challenging to recognise, understand and adopt the terminology around skills.

Artess et al (2016) argues that, with this interchangeability in terminology being so prevalent, practitioners and educators should be moving away from the skills and attributes which currently have such a strong emphasis placed on them, and to focus more on identity. Shifting the focus to identity makes it clear that there is universal benefit to supporting the transition from 'student' to 'employee' and not just the acquisition of skills. Recognition of the value of identity allows for some of the difficulties surrounding interchangeable terminology to be addressed more effectively.

Artess et al (2016) focused on graduates. However, Youth Employment UK's own review revealed that the issues surrounding transition from education to the workplace were just as relevant to school-leavers. The struggle of younger people in the Youth Employment UK network for employment was further obstructed by the removal of school support and networks. Young people's identity in the world is changing and they are not sure how to identify with the next stage of development.

Criticism of existing employability frameworks appears to challenge its focus on policy and employers in defining and designing programmes. The most vocal critics of employability frameworks note the lack of solid definitions, which provides an unwelcome space for 'buzzwords' to creep in.

Little of the research encountered was written for young people; with little or no explanations for skills that young people could understand. Whilst it should be recognised that some frameworks are specifically

designed for youth workers or education professionals, there was minimal guidance on how to engage and embed frameworks for young people to take ownership.

A shortage of evidence-based research into the effectiveness of work readying programmes makes it difficult to assess which employability skills are proving most beneficial to young people today. There is a recognisable difference between getting a job and gaining meaningful employment, just as there is a recognisable difference between being employable and being employed. Recommendations for (and student research into) employability skills can begin to be addressed at primary school. Embedding employability skills at this stage could help young people adapt and develop into being employable in the future – however, with no common framework or measurement, this is difficult to measure.

5. Methodology

The review conducted an investigation into currently available literature exploring frameworks for employability skills. Through examination of literature and library searches, Youth Employment UK identified a wide range of sources exploring the issues behind employability skills. Interview calls were also held with Tristram Hooley from The Careers and Enterprise Company and Kelwyn Looi from the CBI. In all, 86 reports were considered, with 18 frameworks considered for focus groups.

The review also surveyed young professional members of Youth Employment UK, young people aged 16-24 from around the UK. The survey aimed to understand what young people understood about employability skills, if they had support to develop these skills and if they felt confident in their own skill level.

Focus Groups

Following a comprehensive review of the literature available, Youth Employment UK pulled together the skills referenced in 18 frameworks. Any duplicate skills appearing in multiple frameworks were removed to retain one instance of each. A final list of 27 unique skills was compiled. The list of all 18 frameworks referenced and the final list of 27 skills can be found in Appendices A and B.

These skills were presented to three focus groups. All groups included representatives from business, education, policy, and the youth sector. Young people also attended each group session to offer their personal contributions and insights. This three-stage approach was taken to ensure that as many organisations could contribute as possible. All three groups were presented with the same aim and tasks:

Aim

Short-term aim:

1. Create a ground/base set of skills which partners across the sector can engage with.
2. Create a common language around skills for young people - one that young people can take ownership of, grow and develop through education, programmes and beyond.

Medium to long-term aim:

1. Enable young people to have increased awareness of their skills, strengths, achievements, and what they are aiming for

2. Enable young people to access and understand the narrative around skills.

The Task

1. Condense the 26 skills listed, considering what can be combined or deleted (10 mins)
2. Prioritise 5 key skills (20 mins)

This part of the process received assistance and contributions from: The Careers and Enterprise Company, Youth Impact, City and Guilds, The Princess Trust, The Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, World Skills, Centrepont, the National Citizen Service, the Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP), Institute for Employability Professionals, The Careers Development Institute, Clarion Housing Group, London Councils, Costain, Catch 22, Impetus PEF, The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust and Youth Employment UK Youth Ambassadors.

Task 1: It is worth noting that every participant found this task difficult. Participants instantly sought to confirm further clarification around the age, level, and ability of the young person they would be designing a skill list for. We would like to highlight that a young person, parent or teacher researching employability skills would be faced with a very similar problem. There was also charged discussion around what 'skills' meant to individuals in the room; in many instances, the ways in which people defined certain skills was personal and subjective. As a result, definitions for skills varied substantially.

Task 2: Each group was asked to pick just five skills from the list. They were tasked with choosing skills that a 16-year-old without specific or additional needs would be able to both recognise and adopt. Very few existing reports define the skills they list, so while some of the listed skills appeared to be closely related to others on the grid, they were not merged prior to group work, in order to retain this review's impartiality.

Self-learning and emotional awareness were highlighted by the groups, who were strongly inclined to merge and define these characteristics, and debate them at length. The following elements were also valued and discussed: self-management, recognition of consequences and actions, situational awareness, thinking skills, accountability, and self-awareness.

The roundtables raised questions: are the skills asked for by employers the same skills that correlate with employment? Do they also correlate to successful programme completion? Is skills learning and development more related to helping a young person know or "feel" it?

It was strongly suggested that the process would benefit from looking at skills in "buckets". It was discussed whether young people would respond better to the division of skills into capabilities, behaviours and skills. Whilst not everybody in the room agreed on everything it was evidently clear that any skills referred to need definitions, and both the definitions and framework of skills needed further consideration.

Young people's views

Youth Employment UK surveyed 16 to 24-year-old members on their views of employability skills and the transition between education and employment. It was patently clear from the responses that young people have varying experiences and awareness of employability skills. This variance does not seem to link to geography, age or attainment level, but comes down to a young person's experience in schools and/or support from parents.

Survey respondents overview:

51% male

81% with no learning needs and/or disabilities

45% Level 3 qualification

36% Level 2 qualification

19% Level 4 qualification or higher

59% had previous experience of a careers interview within school

- When asked if they had received advice or support on developing skills for work while in school, only 22.22% of respondents said that they had received support of this nature.
- When respondents were asked where they would seek advice, the top answers were:
 - Internet
 - Parent or family member
 - An employer already known to the respondent
- 83% of respondents had undertaken work experience in school
- 35% of respondents had experienced employers coming into their school
- 76% of respondents said that they did not feel they had the knowledge and skills for work when they left school, with 39% of that group saying they would have benefitted from more work skill development.

We asked the respondents what they thought the biggest challenges were for young people leaving education and looking for employment. The responses strongly indicated that many young people find the difference between education and employment overwhelming and feel insufficiently prepared for the transition. Some quotes from some of the respondents:

“Young people are not made aware of the skills most employers desire”

“The biggest challenge for young people is not having the confidence in employability skills”

“The workplace is very different to the school environment. You don't realize that there will be big expectations of you & you don't really know how to act/conduct yourself. Suddenly you're in a very different environment with industry professional and that can be scary.”

What can be done?

When survey respondents were asked what could be done to improve their transition from education to work, the suggestions most frequently put forward were:

- Make work experience compulsory
- Make the syllabus in schools more tailored to the workplace and workplace skills.

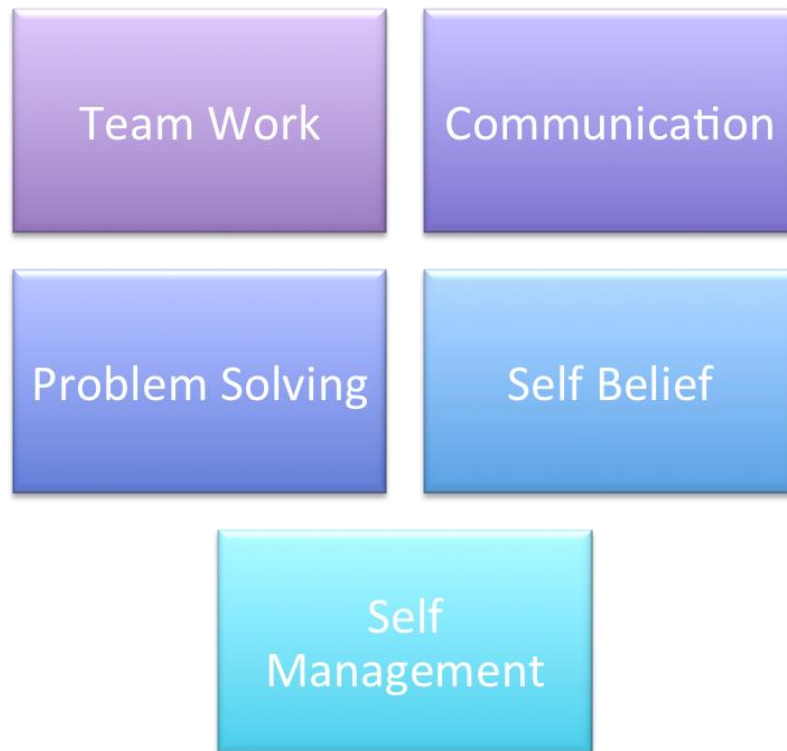
It was very clear that respondents felt they needed better information and teaching around employability skills.

Talking to Youth Ambassadors

In our work with our Ambassador network, we found that young people were unclear about what skills employers are looking for. They found it hard to pin down a selection of the most important skills. They felt that this was not an area they had much control over, and they could not identify trusted resources to gain further information or learning.

The chosen skills

Following engagement from all stakeholders it was possible to decide a definitive set of five skills:



6. Key findings from literature review

In 2017 the IGD announced the eight essential employability skills of the future. This announcement was the result of their own review of literature available, along with the conduction of surveys and interviews with their members. The essential employability skills the IGD identified were named as: entrepreneurial, creativity, teamwork, communication, leadership, digital, practical, and analytical skills. The IGD have explained how these skills are useful within the industry and will be embedding this learning into their schools programme. The comprehensive explanations of the skills have also been written to be accessible for young people. However, content has been designed to inspire and educate young people about jobs in a specific sector, with limited consideration to how the skills could be relevant to every young person, regardless of their career journey. Embedding a framework that is so specific to one sector in a school might inspire young people to explore a food and grocery career, but might not help a young person understand how a skill such as 'leadership' can apply to other careers and life and employment in general.

The D2N2 framework was designed to improve employability and life skills, regardless of academic or career pathways. (Hutchinson et al, 2015)

The D2N2 framework was designed to provide adults and young people with the skills to find work, make a positive contribution once employed, and develop throughout their career. This framework aims to prepare people for lifelong learning, rather than matching them to jobs. This approach is echoed by the *Institute of Directors Lifelong Learning report (2016)*. At its core is the concept that all young people should engage

with employers, learn about work and develop their employability skills with the aim to develop effective career self-management.

Many young people find the transition from education to employment one of the hardest bridges to cross in their life and career. As a result, they need support to navigate their decisions. The work of D2N2 recognises the need for:

1. A common framework to embed a common understanding
2. A curriculum shaped by skills highlighted in the common framework.

D2N2 examined industry across their geographic regions and looked for relevant skills. Whilst useful, the work needed further consideration of the impact on working so regionally, with regards to how young people might be prepared for the future needs of the workforce, and how a regional shift in industry might impact social mobility. The work and approach by D2N2 was similar to the work undertaken in this report. While the D2N2 work was centred around employer-led employability skills, the Youth Employment UK review has explored creating a common language for young people to own and adopt.

The University of Kent (2017) has also discussed a number of different skills needed, with a focus on graduate skill development. Some commonly used skills were referenced by the university, with additional skills outlined which could take graduates into sector-based recruitment options. The University of Kent referred to eight employability skills in a number of areas, namely written communication, negotiating and persuading, verbal communication, co-operating or group working, negotiating and persuading, leadership, planning and organising, and numeracy. The university then went on to name the top ten skills employers are looking for as: verbal communication, teamwork, commercial awareness, analysing and investigating, initiative/self-esteem and motivation, drive, written communication, planning and organising, flexibility, and time management.

Within its own work pages, the University of Kent referenced employability skills in many different ways and guises. It had created a useful base for graduates to explore skills, but a clear set of guidelines defining the terms would have been useful to make full sense of the activity taking place.

Upon examination, it was evident that the University of Kent had taken steps to actively engage young people with skills through the implementation of quizzes and practical examples. It had also taken positive steps to relate skills to different sectors. In addition, an employability rewards scheme was featured which served to relate skills to young people undertaking work experience. A system for recognising these skills would be an interesting next step to take beyond the scope of this project.

Impetus PEF put forward their highly regarded *Ready for Work* (2014) guide as a means to support teachers, youth workers and those preparing young people for the world of the work. This report placed a focus on what makes young people ready for work and considered what can make the biggest difference to their work readiness.

Impetus PEF argued that the traditional 'employability skills' are secondary factors and outcomes. The *Ready for Work* report outlined six capabilities to help people prepare for, get and keep work. The six capabilities were: self-aware, receptive, driven, self-assured, resilient and informed. While each skill is important, research found that all the skills listed were required by an individual, having plenty of one and little of another would not suffice. It must also be noted that this report has stressed that other needs like stable personal circumstances and qualifications of an appropriate level might also need to be addressed,

in addition to skills, for a young person to gain employment. Impetus PEF view their research as a source of support for all young people, but primarily those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within the research, five out of the six traits are described by Impetus as soft skills, with 'being informed' an important but hard-to-define characteristic. Within the research, 'informed' covers a variety of activities related to knowing one's options and pathways, as well as knowing how to look for work and how to present oneself and communicate in working and interview environments.

The *Make NEETS History* analysis previously conducted by Impetus PEF in 2014 highlighted the importance of schools being accountable and actively engaged in preparing young people for employability. In the *Ready for Work* report, PEF emphasised a need for their six capabilities to be used as a common language in recruitment, interviews and training.

The research from Impetus PEF is a great benchmark for youth workers and teachers to use with young people, and recognises the stages young people will go through in recognising, developing and establishing skills. The research has been designed to provide a cohesive set of 'ready to work' capabilities, as well as identify which behaviours employers look for to amass evidence that young people have the skills in question. These capabilities are designed for both skilled and unskilled work, and are therefore applicable to young people from all backgrounds.

One of the most referenced and respected frameworks by Youth Employment UK partners is the JET framework covering the *Journey to Employment*. The JET report was designed to help charities consider how their work contributes to young people's employability, and plan approaches to evaluation. Using existing sources, the framework showcased indicators and tools which can be used to support the seven groups of factors which they believe contribute to successful outcomes for young people: personal circumstances, emotional capabilities, attitudes to work, employability skills, experience and involvement, career management skills, and qualifications, education and training (Kail et al, 2012).

The *Right Combination* (2016) report, produced by CBI/Pearson, was a comprehensive survey of employers which - among other important factors - explored which skills employers looked for in school/college leavers and graduates. The report indicated that the most important factors influencing the employability of school/college leavers were: attitudes to work/character, aptitude for work, basic literacy and numeracy, qualification obtained, academic results, relevant work experience and business awareness. The skills for graduates were assessed slightly differently, but it was noted that attitudes and aptitudes for work topped the graduate employability charts too.

The CBI research strongly indicated that unity is needed between education and business for a skills strategy to be successful. In their additional *First Steps* research, CBI urged the employment community to clearly state what skills it wants schools to encourage young people to develop and why.

The CBI surveyed the skills, characteristics, values and habits which employers thought the school system should be instilling. The CBI compiled these into three areas: determined (grit, self-control and curiosity), optimistic (enthusiasm, gratitude, confidence and creativity) and emotional intelligence (humility, respect and sensitivity to global concerns).

The CBI discussed the concept of young people needing to initially master a range of core subjects including English and maths, then develop 'enabling subjects' – skills which the report referred to as a social currency and said were too often neglected. The business input into the definition of these skills was acknowledged, and very clear recommendations were given to enable schools to deliver clearly-delineated

skills learning with a widely accepted set of outcomes. The CBI cited good examples of this outcome-focused approach from Singapore, Finland and leading areas of the UK.

Learning to be Employable (2016), a piece of research carried out by the City & Guilds Alliance, concentrated its research on 14 to 19-year-olds. The report placed a focus on the education sector and gave guidance to those in schools, colleges, FE and HE environments. It recommended referring to skills as employability habits and transferable skills. This report considered how character was developed in schools. It went on to reflect on how this might be adopted for the target age range. City and Guilds referred to eight 'habits of mind', namely: self-belief, self-control, perseverance, resilience, curiosity, empathy, creativity, and craftsmanship. These habits of mind were described as learnable, with a note to educators that they could take some time to develop in a range of contexts before they become embedded as a habit. The report also listed six transferable skills, which - according to the report - could be learned in one context and readily applied and used in another. The six transferable skills were: communication, time management, self-management, problem solving, team-working, and being able to give and receive feedback.

Learning to be Employable takes a committed approach to considering how skills can be embedded and developed over time. It gives practical steps on how this might be achieved in different settings, and how skills might be developed in different contexts. This report is designed to support those working with young people 14-19, rather than young people themselves. Nevertheless, a review of Learning to be Employable has raised questions related to how accessible the language surrounding mind habits and transferable skills would be to the individual learner.

7. A Unified View

It will best serve the UK's current and future employment landscape to encourage a process whereby young people are familiar with the core skills required of them, why they need them and how to develop them. An effective process will require all stakeholders to use the same language, allowing those skills to resonate and grow with young people over time. Hooley's work references a unified approach to presenting skills to young people, and the benefits that can bring. In particular, Hooley highlights the benefits of making better career decisions, speaking a common language, equipping young people to manage change and enabling them to continue to have confidence in their approach. (*Artess et al, 2016*).

Research, frameworks and literature encourage employers, schools and youth workers to work together in the development of skills. There is a general desire for reciprocal learning and interdisciplinary learning, with proven examples of both learning types. However, there are instances of frameworks being commissioned and created for each individual group, resulting in a non-universal and fragmented approach to skills learning and development. It's acknowledged that employability skills do belong with the employer, but there appears to be a lack of follow-up in ensuring young people are engaged with these skills. The work of employers in this area often appears to be shaped by first-mover advantage (FMA) strategies and exclusivity rather than a cohesive and universal approach to skills.

8. Recommendations

Following a comprehensive review of existing literature on employability skills, we recommend:

- Adopting the five following agreed core employability skills: **communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-management** and **self-belief**

- Creating a framework for employability skills. This framework can be agreed by stakeholders but should be designed by and for young people. Youth Employment UK recommends that reflection play a part in this process.
- The design of a viable framework will need to incorporate young people recognising, assessing and taking ownership of the agreed skills.

Viability Framework

For employability skills to be accessible, understood and developed we need to ensure that:

- We are speaking the same language
- Young people in our schools and colleges are hearing and understanding these skills in their lessons
- Programmes outside school are using these same terms and allowing young people to reflect on them
- Young people seeking support from job centres, work access courses or programmes are continuing to hear the familiar narrative.

Our young people don't need another buzzword. They need to:

- Know the skills that will help them develop
- Have clear information on the skills needed
- Be given the tools to support and develop that skillset through life.

Young people need to be able to understand a skill like team-working in all contexts. A viable framework needs to actively recognise that the level of skill needed to effectively work in a team will be different as a young person progresses through life.

Establishing at what stage employability skills are required and to which level is not an easy task. Further research will be required to answer the example following questions: should there be a framework in place that says "by Year 10 you should have this skill and be able to demonstrate it in measurable ways"? By leaving HE should a young person be able to/recognise this?

There needs to be a sense of what employability skills look like in schools, what they look like in FE and in HE and what they look like if a young person leaves the education sector at each of these stages. Youth Employment UK recommends that the actionable insights in this review be evolved and extended to implement a unified and inclusive understanding of employability skills across the employment and education community.

This review takes into account that guiding principles will be just that. There are – and always will be - some sectors and roles where very specific skills will be required. The aim of guiding principles will be to ensure that young people know what employability skills are, have a glossary of those terms and can recognise them in themselves and in their personal experience of life, study and work.

9. Future Actions

Further study will need to occur in order to explore if and how these skills will be adapted for young people with additional learning needs. This framework may still pose some aspirational starting points for certain

groups of learners. Youth Employment UK recommends that, for those with learning needs or additional barriers, the work of Impetus PEF is more closely investigated. Any activity in this area of focus would require more learning and research.

Work needs to continue into the study of measuring the efficacy of employability skills and their uptake. The lack of measurability is a common criticism of these types of frameworks. Further investigation may support the identification and creation of a universal method of measuring skills. Research will determine how this process might build into the universal acceptance of this framework in the future.

For Teachers and Youth Workers

The HEA report emphasises the importance of embedding employability into the curriculum, encouraging reflective narrative and understanding.

By adopting the five skills in this report schools, colleges and youth organisations can focus on supporting young people to develop these skills and take ownership of their own journey to employment. Practitioners should be supported to help young people identify where they are using and developing these skills in learning or social environments so that young people begin to build confidence that they could demonstrate these skills to future employers.

For Employers

General recommendations for employers:

1. Use common language and ensure that your application forms and interview processes are adapted to ensure that you are using the same language throughout your communication.
2. In instances where your organisation and sector look for additional skills, be clear about what they are and clarify your process for imparting this information to young people.
3. Think about your own skills and experiences. Next, really think about the level you expect young people to be at when they join you. Is there room for additional training?

For a unified, clearly defined framework to be viable, we must all be able to define, share, and guide young people to take ownership of these skills and treat them as their own goals to achieve, not goals set by a third party. We need the sector to recognise that some skills are learnt through work, not self-reflection and study. When designing a job specification or looking at values, it is important that new terms and 'buzzword' phrases aren't added for the sake of it.

A list of preferred and required skills for a role can be seen as a shopping list. If, as an employer, you believe a skill should be known that isn't included, Youth Employment UK would recommend that the proposed skill is clearly defined and explained.

10. Conclusion

It is clear to see that many organisations are invested in helping young people to progress and develop the skills for work. It's equally evident that there is no simple answer, and this is likely to continue to be the case as the world of work and education evolve. What Youth Employment UK has identified is that the complexity of this space is not helping the young people which this work particularly aims to support. Young people today do not feel any more confident about their skills for work. If anything, our research - and that of other organisations - has shown that young people feel anxious about their futures.

If, as we recommend in this report, organisations which support young people are able to agree and work to a common framework, we believe that more young people will be able to access the tools and support that they need in this area.

As part of our recommendations we strongly argue that young people should be a core part of any development work around employability skills, frameworks and supporting resources. It is clear that all young people should be able to progress so therefore we must ensure that the tools created to enable that are accessible and wherever possible universal, leaving no one left behind.

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Appendix 1

City and Guilds	Higher Education Academy	Learning to Leap	D2N2	CBI	Impetus PEF	Affinity Sutton	Dame Kelly Holmes Trust	Youth Employment UK	CDI	IGD	USAID/ Childtrends	NCP JET Framework	University of Kent	Department for Education (Character Traits)	PIXL	Vinspired (Social action outcomes)	The Princes Trust (Get Into)	
Self belief	Confidence, resilience and adaptability	Professionalism	Self motivated	Self management	Self aware	Leadership	Focus	Organisation	Self management	Entrepreneurial	Communication	Communication	Teamwork	Focus, conscientiousness & curiosity	Logic	Communication	Communication	
Self control	Experience and networks	Critical thinking	Self assured					Leadership			Creativity		Problem solving				Working with others	
Perseverance	Attributes and capabilities	Problem solving	Aspirational	Team working	Receptive	Professional	Resilience	Communication			Teamwork	Higher order thinking skills	Self esteem	Communication			Teamwork	Setting and achieving goals
Resilience	Specialist technical and transferable skills	Commercial awareness	Informed	Business and customer awareness	Driven	Personal development		Teamwork			Communication		Grit, determination, self control	Commercial awareness	Resilience	Organisation		
Curiosity	Knowledge and application	Self awareness	Experienced	Problem solving			Motivation	People skills			Leadership	Positive Self confidence	Self management	Analysing and investigating			Problem solving	Managing feelings
Empathy	Behaviors, qualities and values	Digital literacy	Achieving		Self assured	Teamwork		Resilience	Self determination	Digital		Autonomy	Initiative/ self motivation	Motivation, drive and ambition	Resilience		Confidence	
Creativity	Enterprise and entrepreneurship	Global and cultural awareness	Accountable	Communication and literacy			Confidence	Initiative			Practical	Self control	Team work	Planning and organising			Creativity	Reliability
Craftsmanship	Career guidance and management	Collaboration	Resilient	Application of numeracy	Resilient	Personal behavior		Attitude			Leadership		Empathy	Flexibility	Confidence and optimism	Initiative		Confidence
Communication	Self management	Positive attitude	Entrepreneurial	Application of numeracy				Presentation			Leadership	Self control	Team work	Planning and organising			Confidence	Job search skills
Time management	Problem solving	Self Management	Co-operative		Informed	Problem solving		Self development			Leadership	Social skills	Empathy	Flexibility				Skills for your sector
Self management	Self, social and cultural awareness	Numeracy		Application of IT			Determination	Technical skills	Self improvement	Analytical		Autonomy	Time management	Perseverance & grit	Communication	Independence		
Problem solving	Reflection and articulation	Team working											Empathy	Time management				
Teamwork		Communication											Empathy	Time management				
Giving and receiving feedback													Empathy	Time management				
													Empathy	Time management				

Appendix 2

1. Reduce the list – what can be combined/deleted
2. Prioritise 5 skills – please pick the top 5 skills you would expect a 16 year old to have

Self belief/ Positive attitude/ Self assured/ Attitude/ Self esteem	
Self control/ Self Aware/ Personal Behaviour/ Self development/ Self improvement	
Perseverance/ Drive/Initiative	
Resilience/ Receptive/ Determination/grit/ Giving and receiving feedback	
Empathy	
Creativity	
Communication Communication and literacy Professional communication	
Time Management	
Self management/ Self Motivated/ Personal Development	
Team working / Collaboration/ Cooperative/ Leadership	
Professionalism	
Higher order thinking skills: Critical thinking/Problem Solving/Curiosity/ Logic/ Analytical / Investigation	

Commercial Awareness/ Informed/ Business and Customer Awareness Global/Cultural awareness	
Digital literacy	
Numeracy	
Aspirational	
Experienced	
Accountable	
Entrepreneurial	
Organisation Planning and organisation	
People Skills	
Presentation skills	
Enterprise – For lord young this encompasses entrepreneurial positive attitude, outlook, resilience, risk taking drive	
Practical	

Autonomy and control	
Career management	
Flexibility	