

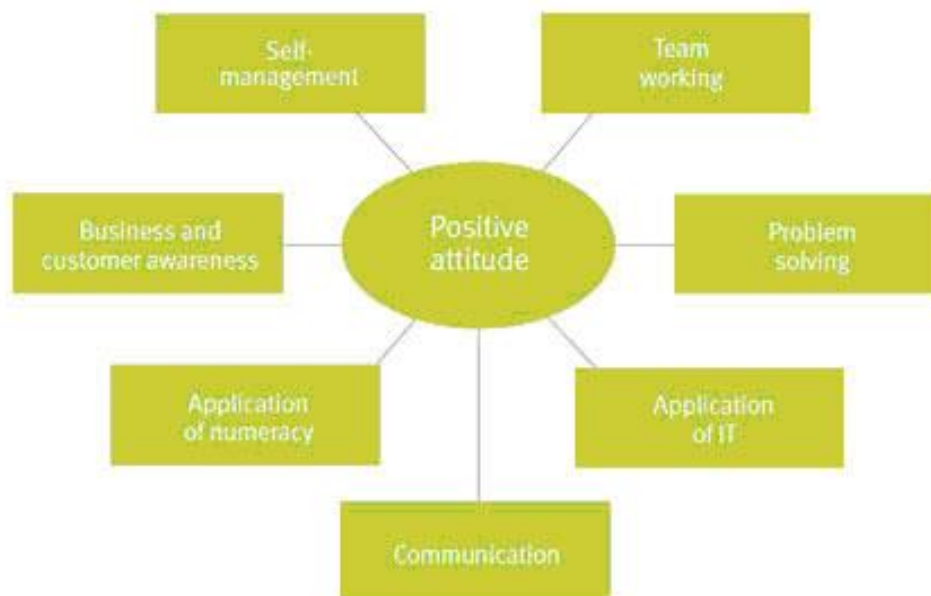
Employability

“21st century graduates need to demonstrate to employers that they can ‘hit the ground running’. In addition to working hard to gain a good degree, students should engage in extracurricular activities and obtain work experience in order to develop skills that will make them better prepared for the world of work. It is also important for students to become self-aware and develop the confidence to market themselves effectively when the time comes to apply for jobs”.

(Carl Gilleard – Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Recruiters)

Employability is...

A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace - to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.



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Employability: Why it matters

“A degree alone is not enough. Employers are looking for more than just technical skills and knowledge of a degree discipline. They particularly value skills such as communication, team working and problem solving. Job applicants who can demonstrate that they have developed these skills will have a real advantage”.

(Digby Jones - Director-General, Confederation of British Industry)

Employability skills are the skills you need to get a job:

They are also the skills that will help you to stay in a job and work your way up to the top. While there will always be some job-specific skills (and knowledge) that an employer is looking for, most employers will also want you to have employability skills. Top skills sought by employers include communication, teamwork, problem-

solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology.

"In an IoD survey conducted in October 2007, 64% of graduate recruiters said that graduates' employability skills were more important to them when recruiting than the specific occupational, technical or academic knowledge and skills associated with the individuals' degree."

Institute of Directors

In a recent report, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) found that "employers want confident, motivated young people with the attitude, knowledge and skills to succeed in life and the world of work." The report went on to say that: "a positive attitude is the key foundation of employability. This can be summed up as a can-do approach, a readiness to take part, openness to new ideas and a drive to make those ideas happen." Seven key employability skills were identified by employers:

1. Self-management
2. Teamworking
3. Business/customer awareness
4. Problem solving
5. Communication and literacy
6. Application of numeracy
7. Application of IT

Develop your employability skills through:

- participation in extra-curricular opportunities such as Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, sports clubs, Music, Drama, Young Dragons, charity events etc
- part-time employment
- work experience & volunteering participation
- work that you do in subject lessons and coursework at school (employability skills and Personal, Learning & Thinking Skills are closely linked!)

Developing essential employability skills alongside a degree

In a 2011 CBI survey, 82% of businesses said that employability skills are the single most important consideration when recruiting graduates.

The CBI and the National Union of Students (NUS) have worked together to produce a guide called "*Working towards your future*", which explains what employers are looking for in new recruits and provides practical tips to help students meet these requirements. The guide explains how employability skills can be developed through university courses, but also by other methods including participation in clubs and societies, volunteering in the community and by gaining work experience.

A spokesman for the NUS said: "New graduates are expected to be increasingly adaptable in today's labour market and this new guide will help students comprehend the array of ways in which they can develop their transferable skills and career prospects at university by combining academic performance with involvement with their students' unions, clubs and societies, as well as by taking volunteering and employment opportunities."

Make Yourself Employable! Join In at University...

Employability expert, Dr Paul Redmond, says that the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that graduates are employable lies with the student: "Universities offer fabulous opportunities for students to develop their skills and experience – all they have to do is join in." To help you gain an idea of exactly how you can 'join in' and develop your employability factor at university, here's a check list of some things you could do (They're categorised under some typical CV headings - aim to get a few from each category)

Extra curricular activities or activities and interests:

- peer mentors, student coordinators.
- Student / faculty liaison officer for your course.
- Active membership of student societies – usually at committee level. Organising events, trips, socials etc.
- Join the J.C.R. or Residents Association at a hall of residence – roles include sports coordinator, chair person etc.
- Sports captains etc. Organising matches and socials.
- Even travelling can count if you are organising the trip for a group, or are working your way round the world. Gain – cultural awareness, languages, an insight into ...

Work experience / Employment:

- Internships / placements (May be part of your course like a year in industry or a semester abroad or you may be able to interrupt your studies for a year).
- Vacation schemes – also referred to as placements. Usually summer though there are a few companies that will do short schemes at Easter or Christmas vacation.
- Vacation Jobs – Could be things like summer play schemes, Camp America or literally any job you do in your vacation – full time or part time.
- Bars on campus – working in a hall of residence bar.
- Sabbatical positions in the students' Union. Usually after you graduate.
- Work shadowing – unpaid usually for a very short period to learn about a job or industry.
- Mini pupillages – legal work experience

- Employer insight days. Usually a 1 day event with a group of other students from all over the country, pretty competitive but an excellent foot in the door to help secure more experience.

Volunteering:

- Working for a charity, charity shops, nightline, conservation work, befriending etc.
- Fundraising – e.g. organising an event for charity.

Skills gained through your studies:

- Group work and projects
- Dissertation research – surveys, analysing data, research skills etc
- Presenting information to groups
- Prizes or awards for academic excellence

University of Kent Employability Skills Link

- <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/skillsintro.htm>

Employability Skills

Communication & Interpersonal Skills: Clearly explaining what you mean, through written and spoken means, listening and relating to other people and acting upon information e.g. 'I presented my findings of a Science coursework project as a report and PowerPoint presentation to the rest of my class' or 'I am a member of a debating club / society which greatly improves my communication and interpersonal skills'. When you are answering a question the interviewer is not just wanting to hear the correct answer but also how well you explain that answer. Furthermore, if your role requires written work you may be asked to complete an exercise of some sorts such as writing a dummy article.

Problem Solving Skills: Understanding a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts, identifying the key issues, implications and possible solutions e.g. 'I build a component for my D&T project but it stopped working, so I worked through all the connections on the circuit until I found the part that was not working' or 'As part of my Duke of Edinburgh Award I had to evaluate the information on a map and the weather forecast to decide the best route to a set checkpoint'. Psychometric tests may be used - they are the measurement for your problem solving skills. Practise on websites that offer free mock psychometric and verbal reasoning tests

Initiative and Self-motivation: Having new ideas of your own which can be made into a reality. Showing a strong personal drive and not waiting to be told to do things e.g. 'For our coursework on electrical circuits I was the only one in class who chose to research how they are used in companies to get a real-life perspective' or 'On my

first morning of a summer temping job my manager was not around so I introduced myself to the other team members and offered to help until my manager arrived'

Working Under Pressure and to Deadlines: Handling stress that comes with deadlines and ensuring that you meet them e.g. 'I planned my revision timetable so that I gave myself enough time for each subject' or 'On a bridge building project in my STEM Club, we ran out of an essential piece of kit 5 minutes before the deadline, but quickly modified the bridge using what was left and finished on time'

Organisational Skills: Being organised and methodical, planning work to meet deadlines and targets and monitoring progress of work to ensure you are on track to meeting a deadline e.g. 'I handed my GCSE Science coursework in 3 days before the deadline as I had planned my time well and finished it to the best of my ability' or 'I was part of the School Leavers' Ball organising committee and devised a project plan so that we could keep on track with planning'

Team Working: Working well with other people from different disciplines, backgrounds, and expertise to accomplish a task or goal e.g. 'In a group project I worked with a team of people with different designated roles. The first job we did was to identify how each of us will have a valuable input to the task in hand' or 'I am part of our after school club that meets every week. We often do activities as teams and I really enjoy it'. Team Working is something you should try to stress on your CV. Working as part of a team is absolutely essential to virtually every graduate job out there so you need to be able to explain, and preferably demonstrate, how capable you are of this.

Ability to Learn & Adapt: Being enthusiastic about your work, and identifying ways to learn from your mistakes for the benefit of both you and your employer e.g. 'I read the comments that my Teacher puts onto my coursework as I know that they will help me to improve my marks and learning. I try to use that advice in my next pieces of coursework' or 'In our STEM Club we had to make rockets fly as high as possible. I couldn't make mine go any higher so asked for help to improve the shape – it went 20 cm higher on the next attempt'

Numeracy: Using data and mathematics to support evidence or demonstrate a point e.g. 'In my Science coursework I used a range of graphs and tables to prove the hypothesis being tested' or 'Our STEM Ambassador guided us through an activity to build a road to help communities in Nigeria. We calculated the road cost per mile and if it didn't reach the next town we had to redesign it to fit the budget'

Valuing Diversity & Difference: Knowing the value of diversity and what it can bring. Understanding and being considerate of the different needs of different individuals e.g. Working with people who may be able to offer different skills or knowledge, and who offer a different perspective to your own for projects /

coursework or Getting involved in activities, which involve people that are different from you in terms of age, gender, nationality, race, disability etc.

Negotiation Skills: Taking on board other people's feelings and express your own requirements in an unemotional clear fashion to achieve a win-win outcome e.g. 'I reached an agreement with a classmate about who would take which role in a class project' or 'I had to present a new invention to a panel of STEM Ambassadors in a Dragon's Den day, and negotiate how much of the company they would own'

Commitment: when you are being interviewed the first thing a graduate recruiter is looking for is your willingness to commit to the role. They are asking themselves, 'Does he/she have the drive?' and 'Will they apply themselves whole heartedly to the role?'

Self-improvement: graduate recruiters want to see how you will be able to learn, adapt and improve as an employee of their company or institution. Your capacity for self-improvement means your results will improve and thus the company will also. For this reason mention something in an interview that you feel is a personal weakness but make sure you flip this into a positive point by saying how keen you are to improve this area. For example, if you are looking for a graduate job say your weakness is that you have little or no experience in a full-time work environment, but that you are highly adaptable and quick to learn.

Leadership: recruiters are looking to see whether you have leadership skills even if they will not be employed at first but at a later date with promotions secured.

Trustworthiness: good ways to demonstrate trustworthiness is with past work experience, for example you may say that you worked in a pub and were left alone whilst the landlord went out or were given large amounts of cash to take up to head office when you worked at a department store.

Autonomy: graduate job positions are much different from past work experience you may have had in that they require you to be autonomous as well as just following orders. Give examples of how creative, analytical and independently minded you are in order to demonstrate your ability to be autonomous.

Politeness: showing good manners in the way you sit, say goodbye and shake hands can make the difference between getting a job and not.

Confidence: be confident in yourself, how you are coming across and how capable you are of fulfilling the graduate job. If you do not believe in yourself then the graduate recruiter definitely will not. Stay calm, smile, if the interviewer has a little joke or chat with you respond in the same manner (although don't go too far!) Remember that confidence is evidence of capability.

What else are employers looking for...

- graduates with a good degree (2.1 or 1st) + work experience + development of own brand + employability skills + high UCAS score + unique extra-curricular involvements
- Innovative thinkers
- Intrapreneurs (people who are able to innovate solutions/ideas WITHIN an organisation)
- Curiosity
- Determination
- people who are 'networked' (who have established lots of contacts)
- Resilience
- Agility
- Pragmatism
- People who can work collaboratively

A good degree won't guarantee you a job, it's a question of attitude, says Ernst & Young

February 2012: With over 22% of 16-24 year olds out of work, graduates will need to build resilience and get out of their comfort zones if they are going to fully realise their potential, according to the findings of a survey released this month by one of the country's leading recruiters, Ernst & Young.

Commenting on the findings, Stephen Isherwood, head of graduate recruitment at Ernst & Young said: "A good degree from a respected university no longer guarantees students' a job. We interview over 3,000 bright graduates every year, but only about 25% have the all-round skill set that we recruit for. The candidates who end up with job offers demonstrate determination and resilience, and are able to work hard and thrive in difficult situations. We need to know that they are going to be able to cope if they are sent half way across the world to work on a client project."

According to the survey, 83% of respondents were optimistic about achieving their career aspirations. However, Isherwood warns graduates against becoming complacent. "Although it's encouraging to see that students remain positive, in a climate of rising unemployment and fierce competition there's absolutely no room for complacency. **To get that first step on the career ladder, students need to be building their CVs with experiences that will help to develop their skills. This process needs to start at secondary school, rather than the last year of university.**"

Ernst & Young's top ten tips:

1. Take some risks and make mistakes - employers are happy to hear about when things go wrong, as long as you have learnt lessons

2. Do something that makes a difference - don't just focus on your studies.
Employers want to see that you've used your drive and initiative to do more than the average
3. Shout about your part-time jobs - if you work on a checkout you are delivering client service, in a business and working in a team
4. Develop your commercial awareness - if you want to work for a commercial organisation you need to show you are interested in business
5. Study hard - your academic results demonstrate your intelligence, work ethic and ability to solve problems
6. Find out what you are good at - different jobs require different strengths and you will be much more motivated and successful if you are playing to your strengths
7. Learn to work to deadlines - we don't live in a perfect world and you will have to deal with time, budget and resource constraints effectively.
8. Develop people skills - rarely does anyone work in a silo, you need to show you can work well with others and deliver results collaboratively
9. Be positive - organisations want people who can deal with setbacks and overcome challenges
10. Become self-aware - if you know what your strengths and weaknesses are, your likes and dislikes, you can grow and develop effectively.

What students need to know...

- Networking is important – who you know matters
- Self-promotion/marketing skills are important to help you secure employment
- Employers want to know more about you (and your personality) so they can see how well you would fit into their organisation. Your 'personal brand is important and they'll be looking at your online contributions so it's important to manage your online presence in terms of Facebook, Twitter, Blogging etc.
 - Good idea to have common usernames for all accounts
 - use LinkedIn for professional use, Facebook for social use
 - Recruiters are requesting to befriend applicants on Facebook (or will ask employees to befriend you) in a bid to access more information about you as a person
- Many lecturers embed social media within programmes e.g. tweeting in lectures, online discussions, remote working (Skype)
- Employers want employees to be able to engage with clients/colleagues through social media and through remote technologies (conference calls on telephone are very common)
- Essential to develop a personal portfolio of work experience and/or volunteering in order to be able to develop and evidence skills and qualities
- Work hard on placements – finish a task and ask 'what's next?'. Always ask for more
- Commercial Awareness
- Your CVs must be written in a professional style – don't compile a CV based upon unqualified advice
 - Prepare your CV early in your student career and use it as a reflective tool throughout university to help you identify skills gaps

- Evidence of team work is crucial – employers are looking for employees who can work in collaborative teams across disciplines
 - More likely to be working on multiple projects with multiple employers
 - Ability to manage multiple projects is important
- Evidence of ability to work virtually is increasingly important – technical competence (use of Skype, VPNs)
- Many opportunities are available within SMEs (Small & Medium sized Enterprises) or through self-employment

Commercial Awareness: What is it and Why do You Need it?

Commercial awareness is having some understanding of the business world. It's about being able to look at situations from a commercial perspective. This can mean understanding what makes a business successful and appreciating the factors that influence success.

Why do you need it? As your career progresses, it's likely that you will become more involved in decisions which directly affect your company or organisation. Even at a student level, employers will usually be looking for you to have some appreciation of commerciality. This is likely to be tested at interview level - you might be asked questions on topical issues or you may be required to apply commercial considerations to a given scenario.

How do you get it? Build it up over time via:

- **Work Experience** : any kind of work experience (voluntary or paid) will enhance your commercial awareness in some way. Consider what you learnt about the company? How were the needs of clients or customers met? How did the organisation market itself?
- **Extra-curricular activities** : Look at extra-curricular activities you've been involved in from a commercial perspective. Did you manage a student society? Did you publicise any events or deal with budgets and cost considerations? How did you attract new members?

How can I improve commercial awareness? Read broadsheet newspapers such as the Guardian, The Times, Financial Times or Telegraph or watch the news on the TV or internet in order to build up your general knowledge of what is going on in the business world. Find out about the specific issues and developments that are influencing your industry of choice.

Taken from: www.allaboutcareers.com/articles/post/retail-sales/commercial-awareness-understand-it-develop-it-use-it-to-your-advantage.htm

Enhancing Your Employability: Advice from The Times Good University Guide 2012

Universities are well aware of the difficulties in the graduate employment market and have been introducing all manner of schemes to try to give their graduates an advantage in the labour market. Many have incorporated specially designed

employability modules into degree courses; some are certificating extra-curricular activities to improve their graduates' CVs; others are stepping up their efforts to provide work experience to complement degrees.

If a university offers extra help towards employment, it is worth considering whether its scheme is likely to work for you. At Liverpool John Moores University for example, the World of Work programme was devised with the help of the CBI, Shell, Sony and Marks and Spencer. Taken by students in all subjects, it offers classes in CV writing, interview skills, finance, entrepreneurship and negotiation skills among many other topics.

Hertfordshire is another university to have demonstrated a sustained focus on its students' job prospects. Employer groups are consulted on the curriculum and often supply guest lecturers on degree courses. Like some other universities, such as Derby, it offers career development support to graduates throughout their working life.

Other universities such as Exeter have taken a different tack and are helping students make the most of their voluntary and extra-curricular activities by certificating them. The Exeter Award gives credit for attendance at skills sessions and training courses, active participation in sporting and musical activities, engagement in work experience and voluntary work.

The York Award is another well-established example of this type of scheme that has the involvement of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The university has found that employers value a combination of academic study, work experience and leisure interests. The scheme offers York students a framework to gain recognition for activities that are not formally recognised through the degree programme. Among the subjects on an extensive list of courses are networking, time management, counselling and understanding different cultures.

The majority of graduate jobs are open to applicants from any discipline. For those general positions, employers tend to be more impressed by a good degree from what they consider a prestigious university than by an apparently relevant qualification. Here numeracy, literacy and communications – the arts needed to function effectively in any organisation – are of vital importance.

Specialist jobs – for example in engineering or design – are a different matter. Employers may be more knowledgeable about the quality of individual courses and less influenced by a university's overall position in league tables when the job relies directly on knowledge and skills acquired as a student. That goes for the likes of medicine and architecture as well as the new vocational areas such as computer games design or environmental management.

In either case, however, work experience has become increasingly important. The High Fliers survey shows that a third of the jobs taken by 2011 graduates will go to people who have already worked in the organisation that employs them, whether in holiday jobs or via placements or sponsored degrees. Sandwich degrees, extended

programmes that include up to a year at work, have always boosted employment prospects. Graduates often end up working where they undertook their placement.

If your chosen course does not include a work placement, you may still want to consider the possibilities for arranging your own part-time or temporary employment. The majority of supposedly full-time students now take jobs during term time as well as in vacations, to make ends meet. But such jobs can also boost your CV – even working in a bar or a shop shows some experience of dealing with the public and coping with the disciplines of the workplace.

Of course, the ultimate work-related degree is one sponsored by an employer or even taken in the workplace – something that Government ministers have encouraged recently. Middlesex University provides tailored programmes for Dell and Marks and Spencer, among other organisations, and has more than 1,000 students taking courses run by its Institute of Work Based Learning.

Whatever type of course you choose, it's sensible to start thinking about your future career early in your time at university. There has been a growing tendency in recent years for students to convince themselves that there would be plenty of time to apply for jobs after graduation, and that they were better off focusing entirely on their degree while at university. In the current employment market, all but the most brilliant graduates need to offer more than just a degree, whether it be work experience, leadership qualities demonstrated through clubs and societies, or commitment to voluntary activities. Many students finish a degree without knowing what they want to do, but a blank CV will not impress a prospective employer.

*Extracts from **The Times Good University Guide 2012.***