



Hertfordshire Employers' Skills Framework Survey Executive Summary



University of
Hertfordshire **UH**

Hertfordshire
Local Enterprise Partnership

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Foreword

The Hertfordshire Employers' Skills Framework Survey (HESF) is a research study by University of Hertfordshire Business School commissioned by Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Hertfordshire County Council (via YC Hertfordshire).

The study aims to set out the skills employers look for in young people, aged 16-24, across key sectors within the county. For the purpose of this survey and its findings, employability skills are defined as:

'A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that enables individuals to be effective in today's changing work contexts.'

City and Guilds, Learning to be Employable, 2017

The results have been used to produce the **Hertfordshire Skills Framework**. The findings highlight the importance that employers from a range of sectors place on the 12 skills identified in the framework, and their perceptions of the 'work readiness' of school, college, other education and university leavers.

The 12 skills are grouped under two main headings: **'people and personal'** and **'technical and practical'**.

An **Individual Skills Metric Framework** has also been produced, by which a student's proficiency in each of the 12 employability skills can be assessed against examples of good practice on a grading scale from bronze to platinum.

Based on this research, Hertfordshire LEP and YC Hertfordshire have developed a set of printable and online resources for use in schools. This includes a series of questionnaires to help pupils identify and evidence their current skills; posters tailored by subject to help them identify the skills developed during study; the full Hertfordshire Employers' Skills Framework Survey report; and a supplementary report containing feedback from schools. All are available on Hertfordshire LEP's website: www.hertfordshirelep.co.uk.

We hope you will find this framework and the accompanying toolkit invaluable in helping prepare young people to enter and progress in the workplace.



“This framework looks beyond traditional measures of academic success to focus on the development of skills that Hertfordshire employers have told us they look for. This is vital if we want to improve the long term employment chances of our young people. Our schools, training providers and colleges have a responsibility both to nurture a lifelong love of learning and help prepare our young people to enter and succeed in the workplace. The Hertfordshire Skills Framework can be used by teachers, education providers, students, employers and all those who have a vested interest in ensuring that our young people fulfil their potential.”

**Mark Bretton,
Chair, Hertfordshire LEP**



“The employability of our young people is vital to our future prosperity. In the feedback from schools on the survey findings, we learnt that not enough emphasis was given to the soft or cognitive skills needed to thrive in the workplace. This framework clearly roots employability to a set of learned behaviours that can help shape our young people and set them on the path to productive employment. I am delighted to endorse this research which speaks directly to our schools, colleges and training providers and considers how the results of this survey can be directly applied to improve our young people’s employment prospects.”

**Cllr David Williams,
Leader, Hertfordshire
County Council**

Background

Hertfordshire continues to predict strong economic and jobs growth in its key sector areas but are we equipping our young people to meet this demand?

In the last fifteen years, the following five sectors have exhibited the highest employment growth in Hertfordshire:

- Professional, scientific and technical services (+21,400)
- Administrative and support services (+20,500)
- Information and communication technologies (+9,800)
- Construction (+9,500)
- Accommodation and food services (+4,900)

Hertfordshire ranked fourth in a 2012 LEP Network Report assessing the growth of economic output between 1998 – 2008, just behind London, Thames Valley Berkshire and Enterprise M3. The analysis highlighted that those highest performing and significantly improving LEP areas shared the following characteristics:

- Growing workforces and higher levels of employment
- A more skilled workforce than the national average
- Higher levels of innovation, knowledge and technology-based employment
- Higher levels of entrepreneurship

Hertfordshire has achieved this 'top 4' ranking by maintaining a higher level of business performance and with it, higher levels of employment for the county and the East of England.

A significant driving factor in this achievement is the 58.8% who are employed in highly skilled jobs, typically requiring Level 3 and 4 qualifications. Hertfordshire is in a strong position to carry forward this growth into the future; the Government's UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) predicts that from 2012 – 2022, there will be 51,000 additional jobs generated in Hertfordshire in:

- Financial and professional services (+13,000)
- Construction (+12,000)
- Information and communication technology (+7,000)
- Retail and wholesale (+7,000)

The projection of jobs growth is focused around an additional 56,000 high level jobs (for managers, professionals and associate professionals), at a cost of 12,000 fewer jobs in middle-level administrative, secretarial and skilled trade occupations, and an additional 12,000 jobs in the caring and leisure services. With the annual growth rate of jobs in Hertfordshire reaching 2.4% from 2010 – 2015, the prediction is that there will be over 800,000 jobs by 2024. Overall, Hertfordshire continues to predict strong economic growth in:

- Life sciences
- Advanced engineering and manufacturing
- Digital technologies
- Film and media
- High end logistics
- Professional services

There will also be secondary growth in health, care and welfare, and construction.

Hertfordshire is also one of the top three Local Enterprise Partnership areas with the highest qualified resident population, with nearly 43% of Hertfordshire residents attaining HND, Degree or Higher Degree level qualifications.

With more than 50% of young people progressing straight on from school/college to university, and a growing number taking the alternative higher apprenticeship pathway, the expectation is that young people have the relevant 'people and personal' and 'technical and practical' skills on which employers are dependent. However, 69% of Hertfordshire employers say they are not confident that sufficient numbers of young people are equipped for higher-skilled roles.

Aims and principles

The principle aim of the Hertfordshire Employers' Skills Framework Survey (HESF) was to research, develop and pilot the development of the Hertfordshire Skills Framework. The creation of the framework originated from work carried out by Hertfordshire County Council (via YC Hertfordshire) and the National Careers Service, with consultation and collaboration from various local authorities, schools and school partners.

The study looked to identify the skills needs of Hertfordshire employers and the perceived skills gaps that currently exist in young people leaving our schools, colleges and universities.

The study evaluates existing employability skills research, conducted by both national and regional bodies, focusing on the perceptions employers have about young people's knowledge, skills and experience and their readiness to transition into work. Over 120 employers completed the survey over a six-week period during the summer of 2017.

Key to any young person making a successful transition to work from their school, college or university is the importance of gaining the appropriate qualifications and most importantly, developing appropriate character traits, or, as employers like to call it, 'ready-to-work capabilities'. Significant research has been undertaken to quantify the range of young people's skills, and the qualities that would make them more 'employable'. Most research suggests these all loosely fall into three groups: leadership, teamwork and communication skills.

The core skills identified as vital to success in life and work are:

- Communication and literacy
- Numeracy
- Understanding of IT and broad digital skills

Increasingly, employers are concerned that young people are starting work without these core skills, with some sectors perceiving this to be more of a problem than others:

- Public sector (84%)
- Construction (76%)
- Retail, hospitality and other services (73%)
- Manufacturing (69%)
- Engineering, hi-tech, IT & sciences (48%)
- Professional services (47%)

After core skills, employers are demanding that school and college leavers should show the right attitudes and attributes, evidencing a general move away from just academic ability and qualifications to:

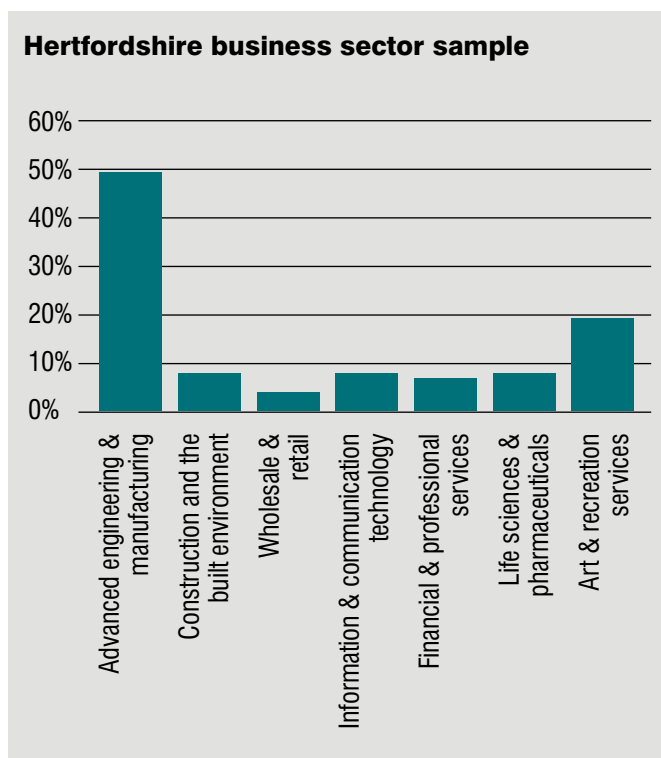
- Attitude towards work
- Aptitude for work
- Qualification obtained
- Relevant work experience
- Business awareness
- Team-working
- Complex problem solving
- Analytical skills
- Business and customer awareness

These core skills, attitudes and behavioural traits have been identified as importance and valuable by employers. For the purpose of this survey, researchers re-grouped these skills and attributes into more general core skills. These were presented to the employers taking part in this survey and formed the initial draft of the skills framework.

Sample model

The survey questions attempted to extract employers' perceptions linked to young people's employability skills and opportunity for future recruitment in their chosen career path.

The 120 Hertfordshire employers participating in the HESF study were representative of most business types (small to large businesses), and sectors in Hertfordshire. One-to-one interviews were conducted with employers operating in the following seven sectors:



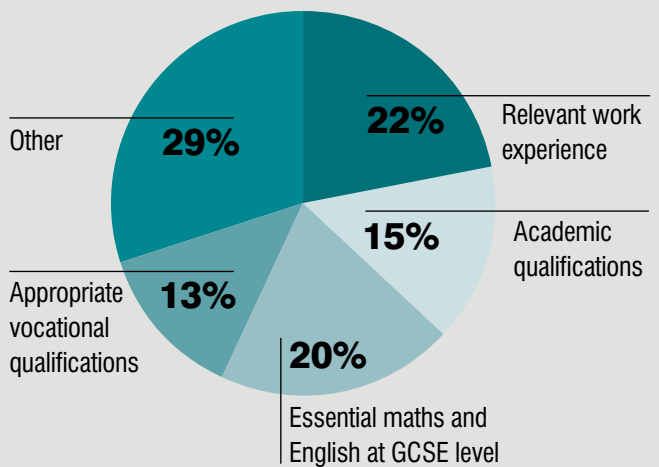
Key skills groups

Two key skills groups have been identified from national skills and employment surveys: **'people and personal'** skills and **'technical and practical'** skills.

'People and personal' skills include the ability to perform the job and time management skills (47%); persuading and influencing others (31%); managing and motivating other staff (team-working, 30%) and setting objectives and planning resources (22%). In the area of 'technical and practical' skills, employers highlighted a lack of knowledge needed to perform the role (64%); inability to solve complex problems (39%) and the lack of numerical and statistical skills (29%).

In the HESF survey, we asked Hertfordshire employers to define the general criteria used to shortlist potential applicants. These are identified to the right.

Hertfordshire businesses: key criteria for employing young people



Sector-based essential employability knowledge, skills and experience

	Advanced engineering & manufacturing	Construction and the built environment	Wholesale & retail	Information & communication technology	Financial & professional services	Life sciences & pharmaceuticals	Art & recreation services
People & personal skills							
Motivation and ambition			1	2		1	
Confidence							1
Respect and good manners	1	2	3	1	2	3	4
Determination and resilience	3				1		
Adaptability		1				2	
Technical & practical skills							
Numeracy	2	4	4	3	3		
Literacy		3	4	4			
Business and customer awareness							3
Teamwork	4	4	2	4	4	4	2
Analytical and problem solving					4	4	4
Digital skills							
Relevant qualifications	4						
Rank key	1	2	3	4	5		

Key findings

We then asked employers to categorise the knowledge, skills and experiences by **essential, valuable to the business** and **desirable for the role**, ranking each one by their importance. The table, left, shows those identified as essential and their ranking, broken down into the seven sectors.

These **essential** knowledge, skills and experiences are most likely based on Hertfordshire employers' previous experience of recruiting young people. Several interesting observations can be made from this information. The first is that in nearly all the sectors, 'people and personal' skills ranked in the top three. Secondly, in nearly all cases, the two most important 'people and personal' skills are 'motivation and ambition' and 'respect and good manners'. Hertfordshire employers are consistent in their determination to recruit young people that will both fit into their existing culture and who can be trained up. The right attitude is more important than some of the 'technical and practical' skills often regarded as essential, hence they rank lower than the 'people and personal' skills.

When we repeated the process for **most valuable skills to the business**, noticeable differences appeared across the different sectors. Employers from the advanced manufacturing and ICT sectors ranked adaptability, business and customer awareness and practical problem-solving skills higher, whereas service orientated firms focused on digital skills and business and customer awareness.

Finally, when we asked employers what **desired, but non-essential** knowledge, skills and experiences they would like exhibited by young applicants, there was a clear focus on 'technical and practical' skills.

Employers are clearly signalling a need for school, college and university leavers to transition into the workforce with more relevant knowledge, skills and experience. The skills gaps identified also reflects areas that employers are looking to develop to improve the competitiveness of their business.

▶ 'People and personal' skills around time and task management, working well in teams and respect and good manners were below expectations, especially in young people.

▶ Equally, 'technical and practical' skills around overall business and customer awareness, complex analytical skills and adaptability were especially lacking in those young people going for management and professional occupations.

▶ In all, over 60% of the Hertfordshire employers surveyed highlighted that 'technical and practical' skills gaps in young people significantly impact on their ability to perform the job role.

▶ Employers have also repeatedly fed back to schools, colleges and universities that leavers are still transitioning into the workplace without some of the key 'people and personal' and 'technical and practical' skills required to make them work ready.

▶ Every employer approached also expressed the vital role that work experience plays in helping young people transition from education into work.

Sector specific skills needs

Here researchers focused on the specific challenges and issues facing employers in each of these sectors and the employability skills they most value in young people.

Advanced engineering & manufacturing

The HESF study findings highlight that the manufacturing industry still demands high levels of 'people and personal' skills, particularly around motivation and adaptability. Manufacturing employers are keen that the 'technical and practical' skills are addressed, in addition to the expected leadership, management and business and customer management skills.

Construction and the built environment

The HESF study findings suggest that the construction sector places more value on 'people and personal' skills rather than traditional 'technical and practical' skills. Less than 15% of the construction workforce is in the 18 – 24 year old bracket. This is being addressed partly by expanding apprenticeship recruitment into levels 4 & 5 and improving work placement opportunities for both college and university students.

Wholesale & retail

The HESF study found that the skills considered essential and valuable by employers were weighted equally between 'people and personal' skills and 'technical and practical' skills. The increasing use of technology-based services to satisfy consumer demand for quality, price and speed of delivery is having a profound impact.

Information & communication technologies

The increasing reliance on graduate recruitment to satisfy the demand for digital services has surfaced a growing problem around employers' concerns over the 'work readiness of young people' – particularly around relevant 'technical and practical' skills.

Financial & professional services

Hertfordshire financial and professional services employers are demanding that young people show motivation,

determination and adaptability and at least some analytical skills at the time of employment, to then be trained up on the job. However what they really desire is that young people exit education with more business and customer awareness, digital skills and relevant qualifications relating to their career paths within this sector.

Life sciences & pharmaceuticals

The HESF study findings reflect the challenges the sector is facing in terms of looking after an increasingly ageing population with multiple chronic conditions. This explains its focus on 'people and personal' skills, backed up by the ability to adopt and adapt to new technologies to improve the delivery of care.

Art and recreation services

The HESF study findings suggests that 'people and personal' skills rank higher for this sector's employers, than 'technical and practical' skills. This is likely to change in the longer-term as more roles will develop for digitally skilled professionals.

Summary



What is consistent throughout is the overall desire that school, college and university leavers possess a set of core knowledge, skills and experience traits. These employability skills are more important than the degree subject and class of degree, and is supported by over 81% of the Hertfordshire employers surveyed in this study.

Hertfordshire Skills Framework

People & personal skills

The skills that Hertfordshire employers value

Motivation and ambition

- Actively participate • Show enthusiasm • Knowledge of the sector
- Pursue aspirations and goals

Confidence

- Willing to meet new people • Able to hold conversations with peers, managers and customers • Recognise own strengths and able to present these

Respect and good manners

- Listen and learn • Recognise the feelings of others • Be polite • Remain calm

Determination and resilience

- Commitment to get things done • Learn from mistakes and accept criticism
- Resist distractions • Adapt to change

Adaptability

- Cope with changing demands
- Able to apply knowledge to different situations

Teamwork

- Cooperate with others • Recognise skills in others • Value contribution from others

Technical & practical skills

The skills that Hertfordshire employers value

Numeracy

- Apply simple mathematical concepts • Understand simple arithmetic
- Understand costs and expenditure

Literacy

- Able to express yourself in writing • Understand verbal and written business etiquette • Able to explain yourself verbally

Business and customer awareness

- Understand commercial realities • Able to professionally communicate with customers • Manage time effectively

Analytical and problem-solving skills

- Investigate systematically • Identify problems
- Look for better ways and suggest solutions • Plan and organize tasks

Digital technology

- Understand the development in technology for business • Basic knowledge of IT

Qualifications

- Achieve qualifications valued by employers

