

Employability Skills

What do employers want?

Employers are looking to recruit graduates with a broad range of experience, and the ability to demonstrate the wide range of skills that they have developed through academic study, work experience, and extra-curricular activities.

There is no definitive list of the skills that every employer will want you to possess, but the main employability skills that you should try to develop whilst at university are:

Numeracy /IT skills

Numeracy: the ability to understand, interpret and reason with numbers and other mathematical concepts. Involves a wide range of knowledge and skills including the ability to calculate and to give meaning to numbers; short term memory; spatial and measurement skills, and the ability to think logically. A high level of numeracy is essential in a range of occupations and is a key requirement of many employers.

Also known as “computer literacy”, IT skills can cover beginner usage to programming and advanced problem solving. Be specific – if you have good knowledge of Microsoft Office, say so! Do you have excellent Excel skills, a moderate Access user or are you an advanced C++ programmer?

Communication skills

One definition of communication is 'to communicate by talking' since this implies a two way interaction that emphasises the communication aspect rather than the simple act of articulation.

Speaking and listening are by far the most widespread forms of communication. In most jobs, people spend much more time speaking, listening and discussing than reading or writing.

Talk is an important medium for getting things done, but equally important is the ability to listen carefully and to both act and reflect on what is heard.

Team-working skills

Characterised by effective communication, coordination of activities, balance of contributions, mutual support, effort and cohesion.

Teams come in all shapes and sizes: families, seminar groups, office groups and colleagues at work.

Teams need a basic understanding of individual responsibilities; they need cooperation, sharing, direction and leadership.

Research/critical thinking skills

The ability to source materials, read and digest them, and to create detailed reports.

Taking others' work and critiquing it.

Sifting through large amounts of information or data.

Creativity/problem-solving skills

The ability to solve challenges by identifying and systematically analysing relevant information and factors to infer a logical and effective solution

The ability to think both creatively and logically to improve performance, to troubleshoot problematic procedures or equipment, and to complete research tasks

Adapting to novel situations or dynamic and changing situations frequently requires finding a solution for new and unfamiliar problems.

A creative approach is best to solve the atypical, ill-defined and complex problems that confront today's work situations and organisations

Organisational skills

Employers need you to have planning skills because they need to be able to let you break down the tasks they give you into manageable chunks.

Being able to organise a task is vital at all levels of employment. The better your ability to plan and organise, the more likely you are to be hired.

Commercial awareness

Having an interest in business or relevant work sectors and an understanding of the wider environment in which organisations operate

Encompasses an appreciation of organisational culture, policies and processes, including awareness of the need for professionalism, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, customer care and knowledge of the market place/sector in which the organisation operates (current economic climate and major competitors, for example)

Having solid information, whether this is on finance, markets, customers, competitors, communities, technologies, or anything else relevant to the organisation and the role and having the ability to research new information and use it

These are often known as transferable skills, as they are generic and can be used equally well in all areas of work.