

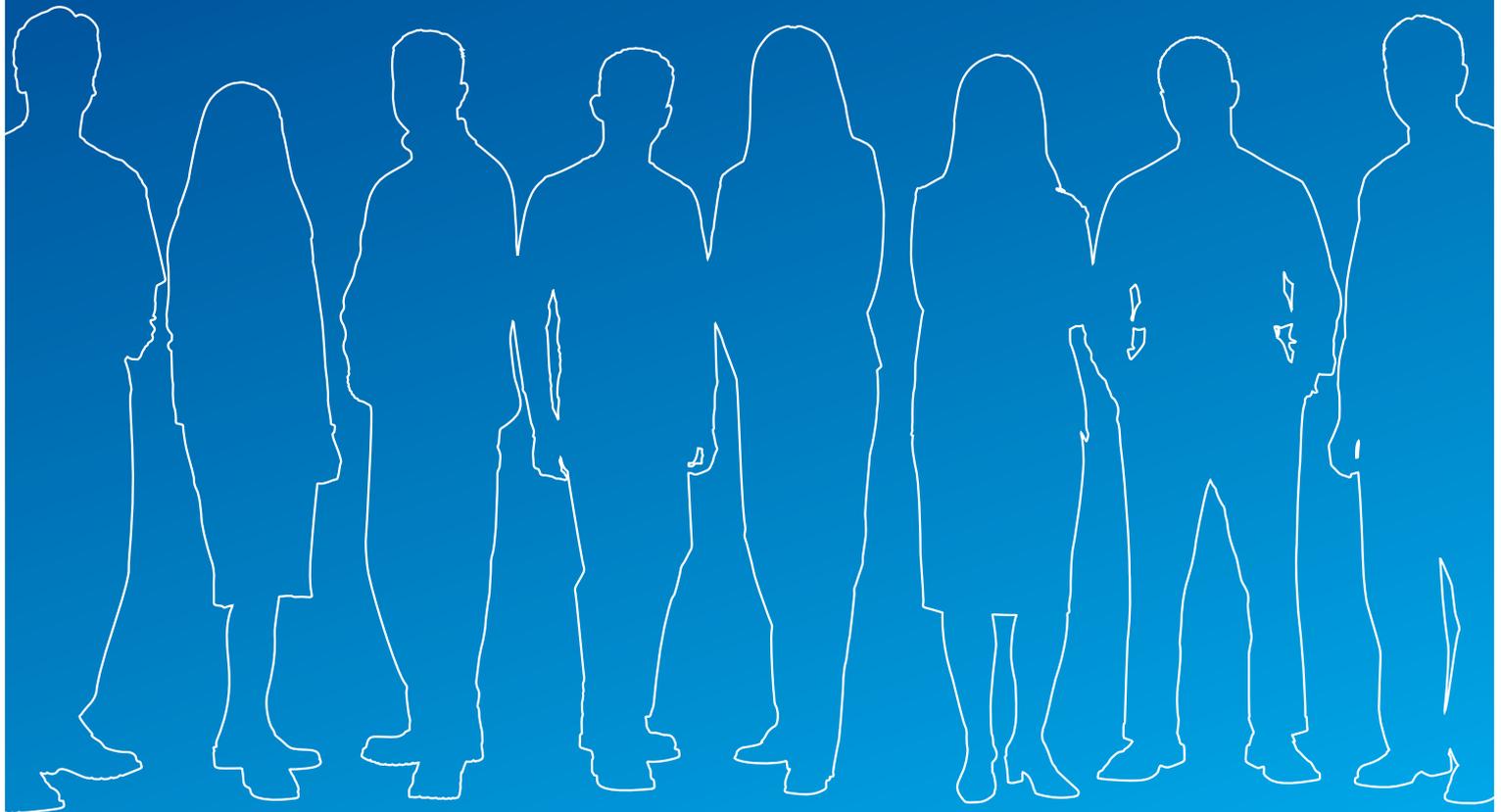
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Work ready? Get fit for the job



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Work ready? Get fit for the job

Executive summary

With unemployment at its highest level since 1995, and up to 20 individuals chasing every job vacancy in parts of the UK¹, jobseekers need to know the skills employers want. Businesses repeatedly tell us they struggle to recruit the right candidates because of poor or unsuitable skills, especially young people leaving school without the basics needed to hold down a job.

If jobseekers are to maximise their chances of success when the economic upturn comes, they need to know what employers are looking for. In 2011/12 **learndirect** is running a year long campaign to highlight the challenges facing today's jobseekers. As part of this campaign, we have investigated the impact a lack of the right skills and qualifications can have on getting a job. We published our findings in September 2011 in *'The Work Confident Report: making learning count'*².

We found the majority of jobseekers – whether already employed or not – admit they don't have the right skills to get the jobs they want or to progress within their current organisation. The job hunt can be a hugely disheartening experience for many unemployed people. Confidence about job prospects is directly linked to qualification levels, with those who have no formal qualifications the least confident they have the right skills to get work.

Taking this a step further, we have undertaken more research to determine what both jobseekers and employers think are the essential skills required to get a job.

Jobseekers remain confused about the skills and qualities employers want. Our research shows there is a clear perception gap between what jobseekers and employers think are the key skills required to get a job. For example, just one in ten jobseekers think workplace skills such as knowing how to talk to co-workers appropriately and presenting yourself well, are important, whilst 88% of employers say they are a top priority. We also found many jobseekers struggle to come across well at interviews, reflected in the fact four in ten employers say the majority of interviewees fail to impress.

The perception gap comes at a cost. The Labour Market Statistics released by the Office for National Statistics in April 2012 show there are currently 464,000 job vacancies in the UK. The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts there will be one million more jobs created over the next five years. The cost of filling the current vacancies will be around £1.16bn (see page 10) – assuming each post is filled successfully first time around. However, this is not always the case. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills³ reports 23% of vacancies are 'hard to fill' due to a lack of skills, work experience and qualifications.

The formal education system is not preparing young people for the workplace. Too many young people are leaving school or college with skills gaps which impact on their job prospects and choices. More than a third of jobseekers surveyed think their school could have done more to help prepare them for the job market. Many young people are not getting advice on the full range of education, training and employment options available to them.

Based on the findings of our research, together with our work over the last 12 years helping millions of people gain skills and qualifications, we are making ten recommendations to help ensure jobseekers get the full range of skills employers are looking for. Regional analysis of the research findings can be found by visiting www.learndirect.co.uk/workready



Recommendations

The maths and English skills of adults need to improve to keep pace with our international competitors

1. Government to bring forward its plans for a national maths campaign as announced in *'New Challenges, New Chances'* in December 2011
2. Young people aged 16-19 should be offered an alternative to traditional classroom-taught maths and English, including the option to study these subjects online
3. Government must remain committed to fully funding basic maths and English for young people and adults who have a diagnosed need

Jobseekers need more employability support to increase their chances of success

4. More targeted online employability support is urgently needed to help recently unemployed jobseekers with job search, applications and interviews

Action needs to be taken to minimise wastage and inefficiency in the recruitment process

5. Employers need to be clearer about their expectations of candidates in advertisements and job specifications
6. Organisations involved in helping jobseekers including Jobcentre Plus, Careers Services, and Work Programme and learning providers should play a greater role in helping jobseekers focus their efforts on the most suitable vacancies
7. Employers should be encouraged to make better use of online recruitment to drive down costs and make the recruitment process more efficient

Young people must be better prepared for the workplace and be well informed on education, training and employment options post 16

8. We urge the government to start a national debate about the role of schools in preparing young people for the workforce and the implications this would have on the curriculum and assessment
9. Employers should be encouraged to get more involved in careers advice at a national and local labour market level to ensure it is always relevant and up to date, with links to more work experience and job opportunities for young people
10. The sector should maximise the potential of technology to create a 'virtual' work experience in a range of work settings

The perception gap

learndirect surveyed, across England and Wales, almost 3,000 jobseekers with qualifications below Level 2 (the equivalent of five GCSEs grade A*-C) to find out what they think employers want from employees. We also surveyed 462 employers to find out what skills they think potential recruits should have. The findings, which are worrying, show a clear mismatch between what jobseekers think employers want and what employers actually say they are looking for when recruiting.



- **88%** of employers rate workplace skills as a top priority, yet only 10% of jobseekers consider them important
- **24%** of unemployed jobseekers say they don't know how to create a good impression in interviews and **42%** of employers say the majority of interviewees fail to impress
- **38%** of jobseekers feel let down by the formal education system as it did not prepare them for the job market

Maths and English

Despite significant investment over the last decade, everyone agrees it is unacceptable there are still so many adults in the UK with poor maths and English skills. According to the World Literacy Foundation, in comparison to our European competitors, only Italy and Ireland have worse literacy rates than the UK.

The 2011 Skills for Life survey shows, whilst there has been a large improvement in Level 2 literacy since 2003, there has been no improvement in lower level literacy and, more worryingly, a decline in the nation's numeracy skills. Twenty four per cent of adults now lack functional maths skills and 15% lack functional English skills. These figures were highlighted by National Numeracy, the new charity set up to do for numeracy what the National Literacy Trust has done for literacy over the last 20 years. According to the charity, adults who struggle with maths are twice as likely to be unemployed as those who are competent. **learndirect** will work with National Numeracy to raise awareness of the opportunities lost to jobseekers who do not have the basics.

To further raise awareness of this issue we urge the government to bring forward its plans for a national maths campaign as announced in 'New Challenges, New Chances' in December 2011.

Our research with jobseekers reflects these findings:



- **22%** find percentages hard
- **40%** say poor spelling is top of the list of areas they have been criticised for in previous jobs
- **14%** have been given feedback from previous employers or when applying for jobs on the need to improve their maths and English skills

Jobseekers know maths and English skills are crucial for employment, but some struggle with the basics. Thirty per cent of jobseekers think the most important thing employers look for in prospective employees is good maths and English. However when questioned about how confident they feel about specific maths and English skills, many jobseekers admitted to struggling with the basics.

Almost half of employers report problems with maths and English skills in the workforce⁴ and this has increased over the last four years. We welcome plans by the Department for Education to ensure anyone who does not get Grade A*-C in maths and English at age 16 continues to study these subjects until the age of 19.

We believe young people aged 16-19 should be offered an alternative to traditional classroom-taught maths and English, including the option to study these subjects online.

Supported online learning improves engagement and participation by young people, particularly those at risk of disengaging from learning, as well as improving progression into adult vocational education, including apprenticeships.



The shift to Functional Skills is a welcome step in the right direction. Functional Skills will replace Key Skills and Adult Basic Skills, within apprenticeship frameworks and as stand alone qualifications, from autumn 2012. Developed to address employers' concerns young people and adults are not achieving a firm enough grounding in the basics, these new qualifications will give people the practical maths, English and ICT skills they need for work and everyday life.

To ensure every adult has the opportunity to get the basic skills needed for work, the government must remain committed to fully funding basic maths and English for young people and adults who have a diagnosed need.



The perception gap – *continued*

Employability skills

When it comes to job applications and getting a foot in the door, many jobseekers are failing to impress prospective employers.



- **44%** admit they find it hard to create a CV
- **24%** of people admit they don't know how to create a good impression in a job interview
- **36%** admit they struggle to complete application forms

Jobseekers admit they don't know the basics of how to construct a CV. For more than a third this is because they don't know how to talk about their skills and experience or give examples of when they have used their skills in a work environment. Similarly, 18% of jobseekers interviewed say they don't understand what information they need to include in the application forms and struggle to ensure their submissions are correctly spelt and grammar is used in the right way.

When interviewed, only one in ten jobseekers considered skills for the workplace to be the most important area employers look at when seeking candidates. However when jobseekers were asked what they would struggle with if they got a job, workplace skills were what they worried most about.



- **22%** struggle to talk to people in a confident way
- **12%** believe they don't have a good telephone manner
- **34%** have been criticised by employers for their poor time management



As part of **learndirect**'s campaign to get people thinking about the skills they need to help them get a job or succeed at work, we are taking to the streets in the hearts of communities to get our message across. We are providing practical advice and tips, such as how to write a CV and how to prepare for an interview, as well as signposting people to the wide range of courses and qualifications on offer at **learndirect**.

Whilst tailored help and support is available for the long-term unemployed through the Work Programme, there is limited support available for people who have recently become unemployed. For many it can be the first time they have been out of work after years in employment. During this time the jobseeking process has changed, mainly due to advances in technology.

These jobseekers are more likely to feel daunted by the process of looking for work; for example more employers are using online applications and competency-based interviews. Having the skills to learn and work confidently in an increasingly digital world will be vital.

More targeted online employability support is urgently needed to help recently unemployed jobseekers with job search, applications and interviews.



learndirect SUCCESS STORY

Dawn Stoddard, who has recently been awarded an MBE for her commitment to adult learning, wanted to get back into work after 12 years out of the job market.

She said: "I knew my IT skills would hold me back from getting the sort of job I wanted. So I went to **learndirect**, did some courses and got qualified. The qualification gave me the confidence to apply for jobs and to present myself well at interview. I now work as a tutor and assessor helping other people to learn and I use IT all the time. I would urge anyone to really think about what they need to get a job and stay in a job – it definitely worked for me!"

The impact of the perception gap on recruitment

The impact of the perception gap is millions of pounds of wasted recruitment costs. A recent recruitment trends survey⁵ found 95% of employers who faced recruitment problems over the last year cited the low quality of candidates applying for posts as a barrier to recruitment. To fill the current vacancies would cost the country around £1.16bn⁶ – assuming each post is filled first time around. This is not always the case with many employers struggling to fill vacancies in one recruitment round due to lack of skills, work experience and qualifications. We suggest three ways to help reduce the wastage caused by failed recruitment.

Better matching of jobseekers to vacancies

More needs to be done to make sure employers get the right candidates for the job first time. Jobseekers and employers need to take responsibility. Advertisements are often too job-specific focusing too much on qualifications and experience rather than transferrable skills such as time management, people skills and problem solving.

Employers need to be clearer about their expectations of candidates in these areas in advertisements and job specifications.

Jobseekers need to be confident they meet the requirements for the job. This may mean investing in new skills or brushing up on their maths and English. In fact, our research shows 64% of unemployed people believe learning extra skills and getting qualifications would make them feel more confident in their abilities.

We must not forget the jobseeking process has a cost to the individual. Training courses, suitable interview clothing and travel costs – the list goes on. There is a danger some jobseekers can waste valuable time and money on job search activities and applications for posts which are unsuitable because they are not clear about the requirements of the job.

Organisations involved in helping jobseekers, including Jobcentre Plus, Careers Services, and Work Programme and learning providers should play a greater role in helping jobseekers focus their efforts on the most suitable vacancies.

Greater use of online recruitment

According to a report for Totaljobs.com⁷, expanding the use of online recruitment can make the recruitment process more cost effective. When recruiting online, public sector managers say they save an average of 40% on the total cost of hiring compared with the use of traditional methods⁷. The greater reach of the internet and the potential to be proactive in attracting jobseekers with skills which match a particular person specification can also increase the quality of job applications and lead, over time, to a higher quality and more productive workforce.

The full benefits of online recruitment will only be fully realised if it can be introduced in an inclusive way. Whilst there are some groups of society who remain digitally excluded, Totaljobs.com reports the internet is still the most inclusive advertising medium compared to other recruitment channels⁷. Jobcentre Plus Digital Champions play an important role in ensuring everyone develops the basic IT skills and confidence to take advantage of the increasing number of jobs which are advertised online.

With many organisations reporting they mainly use online recruitment for professional roles, there is scope for growth in the use of online recruitment in lower skilled occupations.

According to the CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning 2011 report, the median cost of filling a typical vacancy has fallen from £2,930 in 2010 to £2,500 in 2011. We would argue this demonstrates the value of online recruitment.

Nurturing talent

Whilst external recruitment brings new skills and attitudes into a business, employers should also look closer to home when filling vacancies. In times when organisations are looking to do more with less, employers should look more closely at the benefits of developing their own talent. Work we did with Cranfield School of Management⁸ found the

learndirect has long argued for better use of technology in teaching and learning to meet the needs of today's learners, and the same principles apply to online recruitment. **learndirect's** research shows: more than 85% of **learndirect's** Level 1 target audience have access to a computer and the internet; and 27% would use mobile phones or devices including Blackberry, iPod and iPhone to access learning. The number of people using a mobile device to visit the **learndirect** website is doubling every year. Technology and social media have a key role to play not just in the employment and skills sector, but recruitment too.

Employers should be encouraged to make better use of online recruitment to drive down costs and make the recruitment process more efficient.



majority of employers (78%) believe internal development of employees has greater benefit to the organisation than external recruitment. Employers told us nurturing talent is an efficient way to solve skills gaps, particularly in a tough economic climate - 44% agreed they had saved money by growing their own talent.

The role of formal education in preparing young people for the workplace

There is still a long way to go before we have a simple, integrated system of education and skills for young people and adults which gives employers the skilled workforce they need to compete globally. Jobseekers tell us they feel they are not leaving school or college with the skills required for today's competitive job market.



- **38%** think their school could have done more to help prepare them for the job market
- **52%** feel there wasn't enough focus on explaining how to apply for jobs
- **25%** state there wasn't enough time spent on IT and computer skills

The role of the schools system

The purpose of the formal education system in England is not clear. We agree with employers the schools system should play a greater role in giving young people essential work skills as well as the qualifications needed to demonstrate levels of attainment and progression to further and higher education. Business leaders are right to say they should not be expected to pick up the bill for remedial maths and English due to failure in schools. Employers should be free to focus investment on job-specific training, such as apprenticeships, which gives them a greater return on investment.

The wider social impact of this failure has been debated in the aftermath of the August 2011 riots. The final report of the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel⁹ recommends provision to be made for every pupil to be able to develop appropriate employability skills and attributes. Other recommendations include more employer involvement in schools and a Careers Support Guarantee setting out what

Employers continue to tell us the formal education system doesn't adequately prepare young people for the world of work. The CBI reports 70% of employers want to see employability skills as a top priority with a particular focus on embedding these skills in the curriculum⁴.

a child can expect to receive in terms of advice, guidance, contact with businesses and work experience options.

Given the current review of the National Curriculum for primary and secondary schools in England, now is the time to consider the role schools play in preparing young people for the workforce. The employer voice is being heard loud and clear but should policy be shaped by the view of businesses alone? And, if it is agreed schools should play a more formal role in getting young people ready for the world of work, what does this mean for the curriculum and assessment?

We believe the time is right for the government to start a national debate about the role of schools in preparing young people for the workforce and the implications this would have on the curriculum and assessment.

Careers advice

Good quality, impartial careers advice is vitally important to the choices young people make, whether this is continuing their education or moving into employment. As part of its inquiry into apprenticeships, the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee heard from a group of young apprentices about the lack of information given to them about their options post 16¹⁰. The over-emphasis on academic routes was also highlighted in a survey by the Association of Colleges¹¹ which found half of schools with their own sixth forms are providing GCSE pupils with limited or no access to information about courses available in their local FE College. This is unacceptable.

If the government's flagship apprenticeship programme is to achieve its ambition to create real jobs for young people then young people need to know the value of an apprenticeship and the range of sectors offering apprenticeship programmes.

Work experience

Work experience in school is often the only exposure of work a young person will get before they make their choices at 16. However, the quality and value of these placements is generally known to be patchy. Students will go where they can find a placement rather than try out a job they are interested in, often resulting in a negative experience for the employer and the young person.

Technology has the potential to add value to work experience in the same way it has enhanced the learning experience.

Changes in legislation from September this year will see schools required by law to access independent careers advice for their students. However, despite these changes, there remains widespread concern about how the new arrangements for purchasing face-to-face careers advice services will be implemented and enforced.

Employers should be encouraged to get more involved in careers advice at a national and local labour market level to ensure it is always relevant and up to date, with links to more work experience and job opportunities for young people.



There is an opportunity to exploit the rapid development of technology and infrastructure to create a 'virtual' work experience in a range of work settings.

The scale and efficiencies of technology means pupils could try out a range of different jobs and work settings to find out what skills and qualities are required to succeed in different sectors. This could help inform the choices pupils make in the future.

Conclusion

We believe our ten recommendations will help ensure every jobseeker has the right skills to succeed in the modern workplace. Technology has the potential to be the enabler.

Jobseekers, employers and the sector as a whole all have a role to play. The way people live their lives is evolving fast due to technological advances. By harnessing the boom in technologies like mobile phones, the internet and social networking, **learndirect** has given people a new way to learn which meets their needs and reflects their IT savvy lifestyle. From our research we know people like the flexibility of being able to learn online – where they are not restricted by location, term time or time of day. Technology has the

potential to transform the jobseeking and vacancy matching process in the same way, with benefits for jobseekers, employers and ultimately the state in terms of reducing the welfare bill.

We urge you to think about the role you can play to ensure jobseekers get the skills employers need in the future.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Totaljobs.com for providing data and analysis relating to recruitment trends

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