A The CBI recently conducted a survey into education and skills. Responses were received from 581 employers, collectively employing over 2.5 million people, or 8% of the total UK workforce. These firms came from a wide range of organizations, covering all sectors of the economy, including the public and private sector. The survey was completed by senior executives: in small and medium-sized companies, this tended to be the managing director, chief executive or chairman, while in larger firms it was usually the human resources director or equivalent.

B The survey comes at a time when firms are facing tough economic conditions and provides an authoritative barometer of business opinion on key education and skills issues. Findings from the survey confirmed that businesses in the UK have strong relationships with universities. The majority (84%) of larger firms, with 5,000+ employees, have links with universities – and 10% plan to develop links in the future.

C Three quarters (74%) of companies who have university links do so to provide work experience placements for graduates – this is more important for companies in certain sectors (eg construction) where the practical nature of the workplace makes work experience very important. It is encouraging to see business playing its part to help graduates develop the skills which are the focus of this report. Businesses see a number of benefits from engaging with universities, the main one being the ability to attract high quality graduates and post-graduates.

D The survey also suggests that small businesses are struggling to make links with universities. There are 4.3 million SMEs in the UK accounting for almost three fifths (59%) of employment. Findings suggest that a smaller proportion of these businesses currently have links with universities – only half of businesses with between 50 and 199 employees have university links, compared to 84% of the largest employers which responded.

E When senior executives were asked to rank the most important factors they consider when recruiting graduates, employability skills came out on top. Students and universities should be aware that employers place a huge value on these skills, which will help graduates secure jobs after graduation, where competition is now higher than ever due to the economic downturn. The survey results also confirmed the understanding that underpinning all of these skills, businesses also value a positive attitude: a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part and contribute, openness to new ideas and a drive to make those ideas happen. These findings are consistent with findings from the previous year – businesses rank employability skills and a positive attitude at the top of their list.

F Employers are very happy with the IT skills among graduates entering the workplace. It is also encouraging to see that businesses are generally satisfied with the degree to which graduates have acquired the majority of the other employability skills. But satisfactory should not be seen as good enough. There is no room for complacency when relatively small proportions express a high degree of approval. There is also some dissatisfaction (35%) in terms of graduates' awareness of business and customer issues (only 8% rate themselves as being highly satisfied) and also in relation to the level of self-management skills graduates possess (20% not satisfied), suggesting a need for improvement.

G It is not surprising that businesses think universities should focus on developing these employability skills within the student population as a priority. When asked what three things they thought universities should prioritize, 82% of employers thought this was far more important than increasing the number of students graduating from university each year. It is also positive to note that businesses think universities should focus on working with them to provide more work experience placements, so if universities want to improve their engagement with businesses a good place to start would be in relation to arranging work experience. The potential to improve engagement in the small and medium-sized firms may be greatest, where 45% of medium firms currently have no links with universities.

Labelling a diagram

Questions 7–13

Re-read paragraphs E–G and complete the labels on diagrams 1-3 below. Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS OR A NUMBER from the text for each answer.

Figure 1: 7 ..... considered when recruiting graduates (%)

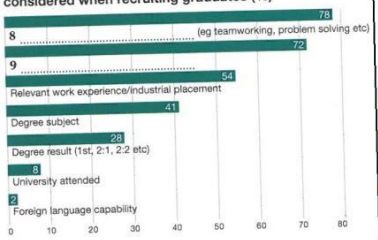


Figure 2: The level to which graduates are equipped with employability skills (%)

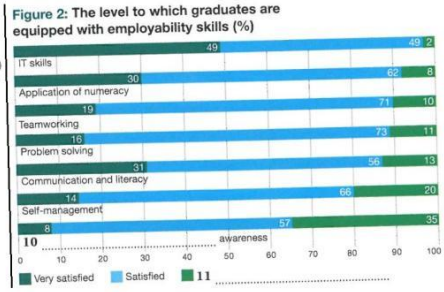
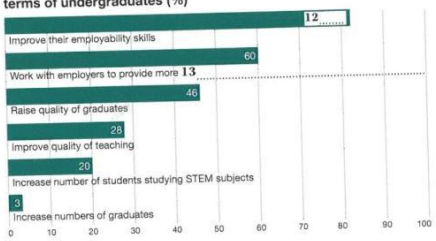


Figure 3: What should universities prioritise in terms of undergraduates (%)



Vocabulary

Describing skills and qualities

1 The adjectives in the box are all qualities that employers look for in job applicants. Match them to the statements above.

Read the statements. Which of the following apply to you?

1 I believe that good things will happen. .....
2 I'm determined and willing to do things. .....
3 I'm willing to do what others ask me to do and work with others. .....
4 I want to know a lot about different things. .....
5 I'm good at finding ways to deal with problems and different situations. .....
6 I do things carefully and in an organized way. .....
7 I'm able to deal with people in a sensitive way that does not upset them. .....
8 I work hard. .....
9 I'm usually interested in and keen to do things. .....

conscientious	co-operative	diplomatic	enthusiastic	inquisitive
methodical	motivated	positive	resourceful	

3 Now match the nouns in the box with the appropriate descriptions below.

a communicator	an initiator	a planner	a quick thinker
a relationship builder	a risk-taker		

What type of person are you if:

1 you don't mind a bit of danger? .....
2 you are good at getting activities started? .....
3 you prepare things carefully? .....
4 you speak or write clearly and effectively? .....
5 you don't need a lot of time to make up your mind? .....
6 you are good at creating and organizing teams? .....

LIVEWORKSHEETS