

Background

The term “employability” embraces a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal qualities which are valued by employers. The term is widely used but rarely defined in detail in official literature. The “employability” of school and college leavers has been an issue for educationalists and employers for decades but the concept of generic, transferable skills has gained a foothold in education in the last few years and perhaps the time is ripe now for further agreement. In their summer 2007 document “Time well spent:- Embedding employability in work experience”, the CBI have outlined in some detail their viewpoint on the meaning of employability. Schools and colleges should find that the CBI’s definition and details are within their compass.

The CBI introduce “employability skills” as being “the necessary precondition for the effective development and use of other, more specialist or technical skills.”

They go on to say that:

“Employability is not solely concerned with the possession of a certain set of skills. Personal attributes that can be summed up as a “positive attitude” are critical to being employable. A positive attitude encapsulates such enterprising characteristics as willingness to take part and openness to new activities and ideas.”

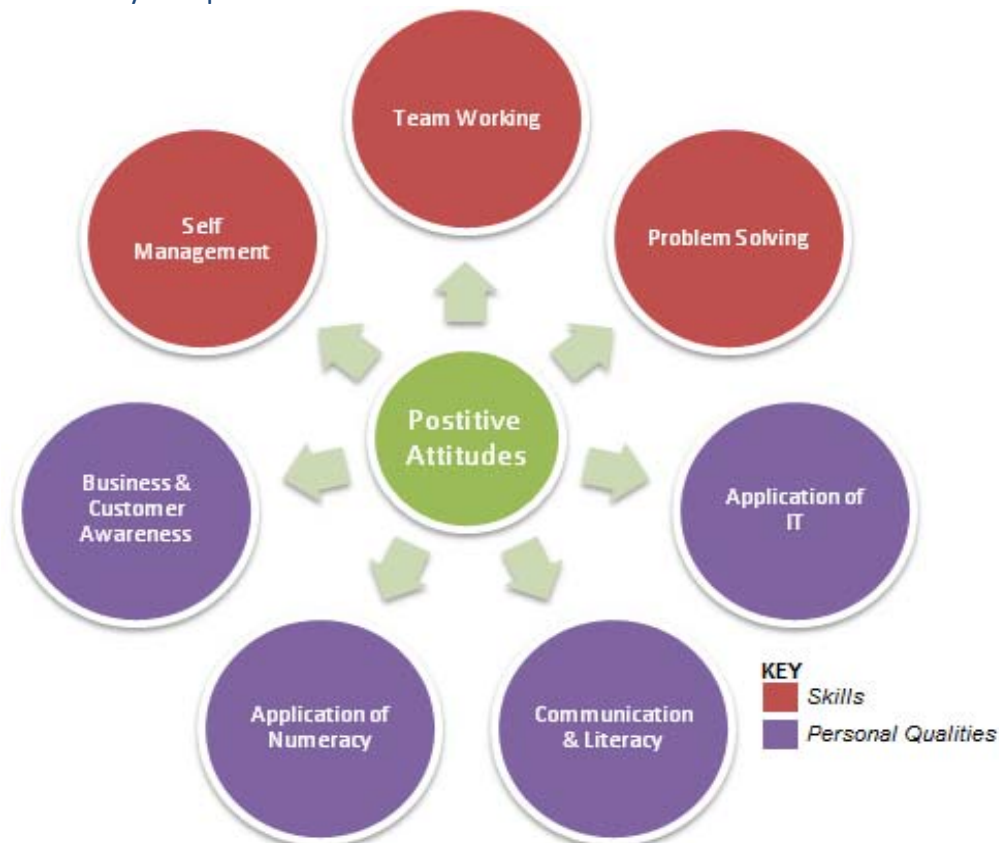
I’m sure we would all agree with this!

They also suggest that employability has a “knowledge “ factor, for instance an awareness of the functioning world of business and the importance of customer care at work.

The CBI sum it up by saying:

“Employability means a set of attributes, skills and knowledge needed by all Labour Market participants to ensure that they have the capacity of being effective in the workplace, to the benefit of themselves, their employers and the wider economy.”

Later on in the same document the CBI offer a checklist of what they see as the essential **8 components of employability**. These 8 key competencies are below.



These competencies cover all 6 of the established national key skills and introduce two other competencies that are not directly related to transferable skills, namely “Business and Customer Awareness” and “Positive Attitude”.

The 3 “hard” key skills (and the three Functional skills when they come on board) are linked quite closely to the CBI headings above “Application of Numeracy”, “Communication and Literacy” and “Application of IT”.

The 3 wider key skills are evident in the 3 competencies which the CBI relates to “Personal qualities”, namely:- “Self-management” (IoLP), “Team working” (WO) and “Problem solving” (sic).

QCA’s new Personal Learning and Thinking skills will also link well with this particular CBI sub-set of competencies. These are:-

Team Workers
Self Managers
Effective Participators
Independent Enquirers
Creative Thinkers
Reflective learners

The central component in this CBI chart refers to the range of personal qualities and attributes that encompass a “positive attitude” in the employee (CBI have their own suggestions for these), so we will also include evidence of that in our planned recording of student employability outcomes from their work experience.










The other heading in the above chart relates to the “knowledge” aspect of employability and requires competency in “Business and customer awareness”.

This should be a natural consequence of a good work-related learning programme and we should refer, in our planning and guidance, to the 9 elements in QCA’s new (2008) framework for students’ “Economic Well-being 11-19”, namely:-

1. Recognise, develop and apply their skills for enterprise and employability.
2. Relate their own abilities, attributes and achievements to career intentions and make informed choices based on an understanding of available options.
3. Develop awareness of the extent and diversity of opportunities in learning and work.
4. Use their experiences of work to extend their understanding of careers and work.
5. Learn from contact with people who work.
6. Learn about how and why businesses operate.
7. Learn about working practices and environments.
8. Undertake tasks and activities set in work contexts.
9. Engage with ideas, challenges and applications from the business world.

Disciples of the original 2004 QCA Framework of “WRL for all at Key Stage 4” will recognise most of these element headings, albeit in a slightly different order, and will note with pleasure that the framework now covers key stages 3 and 5 as well.

A post-16 strategy for Improving Employability in London South was developed during 2006-07, funded by BELS and led by John Allen. This pulled together ideas from the emerging 14-19 curriculum and local employers' perceptions of good employability. The document with the strategy and findings is entitled "Improving the employability of 16 to 19 year-olds" and it has added to the useful background information for this later project. Included in the BELS strategy document was the Central London Employability Skills Framework, which helped schools and colleges in central London to identify appropriate learning outcomes for activities with their students. The principal learning outcomes were:

-  Apply basic knowledge and skills
-  Apply academic / vocational knowledge and skills
-  Apply career and work-related knowledge and skills
-  Manage themselves
-  Manage their work
-  Manage their contribution to their team
-  Develop their personal reputation
-  Develop their networks
-  Develop their capability

Several of these outcomes may be strongly in evidence during a student's work experience, especially the first, fourth, fifth and sixth outcomes.

The 2008 Employability Skills project

It is important that we make every effort to enable our students to recognise and record examples when they have shown particular employability skills during their work-related activities, so that they can build up a skills "Passport" which will serve them well in interviews, CVs, job and university applications and career planning. Work experience is an obvious place to start this recording and this project aims to record such skills shown on work experience.

The employability skills checklist for this project has been drawn up with close reference to the CBI work competencies mentioned above. Each competency has been split into its component parts ("sub-skills") and the descriptors in each box section have been made as simple and clear as possible, so that students should have no difficulty in understanding what skill is being assessed or recognised.

A small additional space has been allocated to Practical / technical skills, which are not specifically highlighted in the CBI list but which can play a significant part in some people's employability profiles. The skills checklist covers 4 sides of A4 and is designed to fit neatly, with a little introduction, into the college work experience diary. It is shown as Appendix 1 below.

For this recording process to be effective, the students need to be well prepared for the task of skills recording. A number of suggested preparation activities for classroom use are shown in Appendix 2. These will help to familiarise students with the process of recognising their own transferable skills in various settings and of some of the detail and distinctions between one sub-skills and another.

It is also helpful to raise the awareness of the work experience providers about the skills that students are trying to identify during their placements. For this purpose an explanation of the process been written for distribution to each work experience employer. This is shown in Appendix 3.