

What Employers Want



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Careers and
Employability Centre
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What Employers Want

In order to secure work it is vital that candidates are able to show the employer that they can do the job they are applying for, and that they will fit in well with the organisation. Typically this means that you must have the skills and attributes an employer is looking for.

'Skills' are things that you can do.

'Attributes' are personality traits, they represent what kind of person you are.

Although different jobs may require different skills and attributes, there are some skills and attributes that are common to almost all kinds of jobs. These are sometimes referred to as 'transferrable skills' or 'employability skills and attributes'. In the sections below we consider what these skills and attributes may be.

Employability Skills

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has drawn together a list of seven common "Employability Skills" that employers look for:

- **Self management**
- **Team-working**
- **Business and customer awareness**
- **Problem solving**
- **Communication and literacy**
- **Application of numeracy**
- **Application of information technology**

The CBI also suggests that all of these skills are underpinned by a positive attitude.



Attributes

When it comes to attributes that employers are looking for, a good reference point are the 'graduate attributes' drawn up by the University of the Highlands and Islands. These are five broad attributes that the university aims to help students develop in order to help them achieve success after graduation.

1. Active

- a. Challenging and enquiring
- b. Analytically critical in approaches to learning and work
- c. Seeking out opportunities for life-long learning and CPD

2. Responsive and Adaptive

- a. Able to anticipate a need for change
- b. Able to recognize what is required in diverse situations and to use knowledge and skills appropriately
- c. Able to identify and employ IT and web-based tools
- d. Able to use initiative and react to changing environmental, societal or employment-related demands
- e. Able to recognise and respond appropriately to strengths and weaknesses in others
- f. Able to work collaboratively

3. Reflective

- a. Reflect on demands, knowledge and skills
- b. Reflect on personal track-record of achievement
- c. Able to identify own strengths to be capitalized on, own weaknesses to be addressed and opportunities to be taken

4. Confident

- a. Self-confident and articulate
- b. Aware of own strengths and weaknesses and able to view weaknesses as an opportunity for further development rather than a mark of failure
- c. Able to recognise and promote personal achievements, learning outcomes and skills acquired
- d. Capable of informed risk-taking

5. Rigorous

- a. Set high standards for themselves and other
- b. Routinely employ evidence-based decision making



Using the Skills and Attributes lists

Lists of employability skills and attributes can provide a useful reflective tool – by thinking about how far you possess each skill or attribute, you can identify your strengths and areas for development.

Because in lots of recruitment processes candidates are shortlisted on the basis of how far they can *demonstrate* relevant skills (which normally involves giving examples of when you have shown these skills or attributes in your previous work experience or in your studies), thinking about what *examples* you have of your abilities can be particularly useful

If there are skills or attributes you feel you are relatively weak areas, *or* where you don't think you have very good examples of your abilities, considering how you could develop your experience is very useful. You may develop your skills through things like:

- Work experience
- Extra-curricular activities (e.g. sports, music, interest groups)
- Classroom activities (e.g. group projects)
- College / university based activities (e.g. students associations, college projects)

Exercise: My employability skills and graduate attributes

- 1) Using the employability skills and attributes listed on the worksheet below, reflect on each of the listed skills and attributes.
- 2) Identify one example of a time when you have demonstrated this skill or attribute. Record the details in the second column of the worksheet. When writing your example, try to use the 'STAR' approach to structure your answer, making sure that you give details of:

S – Situation: describe the background to your example. This may involve talking about your job or your role, and / or outlining the situation or the problem you faced.

T – Task: describe what your task was. This may involve talking about your duties in your job, and / or outlining how you understood the problem you faced, what you decided were the tasks you needed to undertake and how you planned them.

A – Action: describe what you did. This may involve talking about a sequence of activities or steps.

R – Result: describe the outcome. This should always be positive, and ideally would be backed up by evidence.



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Exercise: My employability skills and graduate attributes cont.

- 3) In the third column rank the skill or attribute according to your level of confidence.
- 4) Once the table is complete look at the items you scored lowest, and consider, what could you do to build your skills in this area? Identify two to three actions you will take to address these areas. Record these thoughts at the bottom of the table.
- 5) Remember that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. It is important to recognise (and celebrate!) those areas where you are really strong, as well as to recognise and start to address your weaker areas.

Further Help and Resources

Information on this and other careers and employability topics can be found on the Careers and Employability Centre website: www.uhi.ac.uk/careers. You can also follow the centre on Facebook: www.facebook.com/UHICareers, and on Twitter: twitter.com/UHICareers

Free confidential advice is available to all students on an HNC course or above via telephone, videoconference or email. Contact our advisers by clicking on 'speak to an adviser' on our website. This service is also available to graduates within two years of graduating from an HNC course or higher.



Worksheet: What Employers Want

Below you will find each of the skills and attributes listed in a table. Your task is to complete the 'Evidence' and 'Confidence' boxes, an example of how to complete these boxes is given below.

Skill	Evidence	Confidence
	<p>Include in this box:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A statement about whether you feel you have this skill b) The best example you can think of when you have demonstrated this skill. Try to write this example using the STAR approach: S – the situation: background to the example T – the task: what you had to do A – the actions: what you did R – the result of your actions: the outcome 	<p>Include in this box: a number from 1-4 in terms of your confidence in your abilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – not confident 2 – think I could do better 3 – quite confident 4 - totally confident
Self-management	<p><i>I have good self management skills.</i></p> <p><i>At the moment I work part time in a local bakery as well as studying for my degree. In order to manage my time I maintain a diary with records of lecture times and assignment dates and working times. When I have an assignment due I make sure I have the details well in advance of the due date, draw up a plan of the key tasks I need to undertake to complete the assignment (e.g. research, writing up) and then allocate time in my diary to do this. As a result of my good planning skills I have never handed in an assignment late.</i></p>	3



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Skill	Evidence	Confidence
Self management		
Team-working		
Business and customer awareness		
Problem Solving		



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Communication and Literacy		
Application of Numeracy		
Application of IT		
Attributes	Evidence	Confidence
Active		



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Responsive and Adaptive		
Reflective		
Confident		
Rigorous		



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Three areas I could improve:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Three actions I could take to improve these areas:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.