

Work-readiness – Employability

A report for the Lincolnshire & Rutland Employment and Skills Board (June 2011)

1. Introduction and Background

Work-readiness, often described as ‘employability’, is about being capable of getting and keeping work.

A concern raised by Members of the Board and partners is the current effectiveness of support and provision to prepare local people for work.

According to a significant number of employers questioned through the National Employers Skills Survey 2010, a proportion of school leavers at both 16 and 18 are poorly prepared for work. Issues such as lack of work and life experience, poor attitude, personality or lack of motivation as highlighted as opposed to any technical skills.

An informal joint study with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), CfBT, Learning Communities, Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), Rutland County Council (RCC) has sought to gain local insight into the issue. This informal study has not taken the form of commissioned research, but rather, on a ‘no cost’ basis, involved local partners with expertise in this field working together to provide ‘360 degree’ local intelligence as a starting point.

A range of survey approaches have been used.

- Face-to-face interviews with regular recruiting employers and small business representative groups (JCP)
- Questionnaire responses of young people (14 - 19) and graduates (CfBT)
- Discussions with community adult learning / employment support providers (Learning Communities)
- Economic Snapshot e-survey of local small employers (UoL & ESB)

This report provides a description of the components of employability, results of local surveys, a summary of support currently available and suggested priorities for local action.

Whilst the interview and survey sample sizes are too small to be statistically representative of the overall views of the Lincolnshire and Rutland business and learner population, the results suggest that more could be done to prepare people for work.

2. Employability

Employability, being capable of getting and keeping a job, can be split into four components, listed below.

A. Assets

Knowledge: what you know.

Skills: what you do with what you know.

Attitudes: how you do it.

Assets include basic skills, occupational specific skills, essential personal attributes (such as reliability, integrity, motivation and initiative), generic skills (such as communication and problem solving) and skills which help contribute to organisational performance (such as team working, self management and commercial awareness).

B. Deployment

Career management skills: opportunity awareness and labour market knowledge.

Job search skills.

Strategic approach: being adaptable, mobile and realistic.

C. Presentation

Being able to get a job when one is identified i.e. being able to demonstrate 'employability'.

This includes:

The presentation of CV's and Records of Achievement and the qualifications individuals possess, both academic and vocational;

References and testimonies;

Interview technique;

Work experience/track record.

D. Personal circumstances and the labour market

The ability to realise 'employability' assets depends on the individual's personal and external circumstances. Personal circumstances, for example caring responsibilities, disabilities, and household status, can affect ability to seek different opportunities and will vary during an individual's life cycle. External factors will also affect the ability to secure a job: macro-economic demand, the pattern and level of job openings in the labour market, labour market regulation, benefit rules and employer recruitment and selection behaviour.

3. Overview of Information and Support on Employability

There is a large amount of information available to young and adult job seekers to assist with some of the elements listed in the previous section.

For those able to access the internet there is no shortage of websites offering free CV templates, job search facilities, interview techniques and presentation tips. The Government website www.direct.gov.uk dedicates an entire section providing support on many of the components of employability. The Connexions Direct helpline, which up until April 2011 offered information, advice and support on careers to young people, has now become part of the direct.gov online offering. Telephone support is still available.

Career information and advice for both young people and adults is available from the Next Step service. <https://nextstep.direct.gov.uk> This site offers over 750 detailed job profiles providing useful national information about skills requirements, expected earnings and links to sector and training related schemes and organisations.

Much of the national support provides information to the employee about their rights at work and there is an expectation that a new employer will provide a good induction about the job.

Locally, Teenage Services, (the name for all services delivered to young people aged between 13 and 19 years old and up to age 25 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Lincolnshire, by staff from Children's Services of Lincolnshire County Council, incorporating Connexions and the Youth Service) provides job vacancy details and career information at www.c4yp.co.uk. This site also provides useful information on what it is like to start work and what to expect.

Information is available for Career advisors and teachers at <http://www.guidancenetwork.info/>

In comparison to the wealth of information available on CV writing, interview techniques, job searching and skills requirements, there is very little support available for a first-time worker that would help them understand the type of behaviour and attitude that an employer would expect within the workplace. In fact national site www.direct.gov.uk does not cover this at all despite comprehensively covering many other aspects of employment.

The Training Foundation, Warwick University, has a "Ready-to-Work" online employability learning programme that is free to everyone in full time education. This programme has two modules that cover behaviour and attitude: 'Showing Respect at Work' and 'Be a Responsible Employee'.

An Employability Soft Skills checklist developed by Northamptonshire County Council that was found online looks at performance within each of the following categories: timekeeping, attendance, organisational skills, appearance & personal hygiene, relationship with others in

the workplace and attitude to health & safety. This is useful to support someone who is already in the workplace but could be used to support learners in advance.

Information to help local learners and job seekers understand the local labour market is limited. Whilst LCC have recently produced a report on the 'future jobs outlook' which can be found at www.c4yp.co.uk, information about local sectors (large and small) and the variety of jobs and careers within them is not available.

Some Labour Market Information for career teachers is available www.guidancenetwork.info/

4. Results of Research

Economic Snapshot Survey November 2010

This survey was the third Snapshot to be undertaken by the University of Lincoln on behalf of the Employment and Skills Board. It included a question on employability and responses were received from 110 businesses across Lincolnshire and Rutland. See Appendix 1 for full details.

Businesses were asked to select, from a list of attributes, the three they considered most important when recruiting new staff.

The list of attributes were: Work Ethic, Enthusiasm, Experience in a Similar Job, Qualifications, Ability to get on with Colleagues, General Work Experience, Basic reading and Writing Skills, Computer Skills, Flexibility and Smart Personal Appearance.

Work Ethic, Enthusiasm and Ability to get on with Colleagues were the most frequently selected first, second and third choices respectively.

When asked to consider the relative importance of Skills and Qualifications compared to Work Ethic and Attitude, just over half of businesses (54%) consider them to be equally important. However, Work Ethic and Attitude alone are considered the most important by over a third (39%) of respondents, while just 7% select Skills and Qualifications alone.

Employer Consultation

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) met with ten employers across a range of sectors during December 2010 to gauge their views. Each employer was asked how job applicants can demonstrate that they are ready for work and employable. The information below summarises the key points raised by employers. For full detail please see Appendix 2.

Job Applicants should ensure they use every opportunity to explain 'how' they are a good candidate, providing real examples rather than using stock phrases. As long as examples are relevant they can be drawn from paid and non-paid work experience or hobbies.

Employers see many CVs that look the same: the same templates and the same standard phrases. Rather than using the same wording each time, the applicant should tailor their CV to each job application and avoid using jargon or wording copied from websites.

Many employers use the term Work Ethic to describe what they are looking in an employee. When they use this term they are describing a range of personal qualities; they expect employees to be accountable for their time (dependable and punctual) and have the right attitude to work (conscientious, motivated, positive and honest). Taking pride in the work that is done, regardless of the level of task, is important to an employer and it is expected that an employee will behave in a business-like, professional manner and be customer orientated. Overall the employers that were interviewed felt that if the job applicant has the right mix of qualities then specific skill training for the job can be provided.

In regard to skills, employers expect job candidates to have good communication skills, particularly listening and interpersonal skills. The ability to solve problems and organise were highlighted as was the desire to learn new skills. Good written and verbal skills, basic maths and computer literacy are all important

Employers would like their new employees to have a better understanding of what is expected of them at work: the requirement to have a bank account, the importance of time-keeping and accounting for their time and taking responsibility for their own actions.

Learner Surveys

The learner survey and results can be found at Appendix 3.

70 surveys were completed which equates to a 43% response rate; 49 female and 21 male. Responses for each group were: Schools = 19; Work Based Learning = 8; College/FE = 24 (all female) and University = 19.

Overall respondents were not clear on the difference between skills and qualities. Is this a problem? Perhaps yes if learners believe they will gain qualities in the classroom in the way they might gain a skill, and are not in a learning environment where these qualities are promoted.

When rating the skills and qualities that an employer would look for in an employee all groups of learners who responded to the survey rated communication within the top 5

The breakdown of learner other top 5 choices are as follows:

Schools – Organisation, Determination, Team Work, Co-operation & Punctuality

WBL – Punctuality, Organisation, Team Work, Work Ethic

Colleges/FE – Maturity, Loyalty, Appearance, Motivation

University – Punctuality, Motivation, Team Work, Organisation

When asked about behaviour that might result in a Disciplinary Action it is not known whether respondents were rating on the basis of a one-off behaviour or persistent behaviour.

40 of the 70 learners believe that dishonesty is regarded as a disciplinary activity by an employer. No learners thought this was 'not serious'. Likewise, no learners thought that poor attendance and lack of respect for co-workers was 'not serious'.

Interestingly the use of texting and social networking sites during the working day was regarded far as less of an issue. 18 (25%) respondents think that employers would not regard texting during the working day as serious (10 University, 4 Colleges, 2 WBL, 2 Schools) and 13 respondents think that employers would not regard using social networking sites during the working day as serious. (5 University, 2 Colleges, 2 WBL, 4 Schools).

Whilst the following activities were rated by many as quite serious and very serious, far fewer learners rated them as Disciplinary activities: arriving late in the morning; inappropriate dress; poor telephone manner; lack of good manners and disorganisation.

5. Key Findings presented to the Skills Board

Local Study Key Findings

39% of employers consider 'Work Ethic and Attitude' more important than 'Qualifications and Skills' when recruiting new staff. (*Local Economic Snapshot Survey, November 2010*)

Employers use the term 'Work Ethic' when describing a set of attributes or personal qualities they would like their employees to possess. Qualities said to be particularly important include: a positive attitude, commitment, motivation, punctuality and pride in tasks undertaken. (*Employer Interviews, JCP, Jan 2011*)

There are challenges around the term 'Work Ethic'. Some providers have concerns that it represents long working hours and low pay (*Adult Learning Stakeholders Group, Dec 2011*)

Local learners recognise that employers look for qualities such as team work, motivation and punctuality so there is no mismatch in expectations (*Learner Survey, CBfT, Jan 2011*)

Learners, and to some extent employers, are not clear on the difference between 'Skills' (the ability to do something) and 'Qualities' (characteristics or attributes). The language used around employability issues should be clear and precise. (*Employer Interviews, JCP, Jan 2011*)

Where learners mistakenly identify qualities as skills there may be an expectation that they will learn these qualities within the education system (*Learner Survey, CBfT, Jan 2011*)

Employers would like new recruits to have a better understanding of what is expected within the workplace; for example the requirement to have a bank account; general health and safety responsibilities; what constitutes appropriate dress and appropriate behaviour; being accountable for their time and work duties (*Employer Interviews, JCP, Jan 2011*)

There are some issues that can only the employer can provide guidance on. What constitutes a good job? What is acceptable in the eyes of the employer?

Many young job applicants are using the same model or template CV with no tailoring to the specific job role or the individual. Application forms and CV's lack examples of competence and overuse stock phrases without accompanying insight. (*Employer Interviews, JCP, Jan 2011*)

People want interesting jobs. This mirrors national research that suggests young people are not interested in doing tasks that, although important, they regard as menial. (*Adult Learning Stakeholders Group, Dec 2011*)

Early Conclusions

- Employers tell us that a proportion of young people and adults are unprepared for work.
- Local pre-employment support and provision requires updating and enhancing.
- The personal qualities of a job applicant are a significant factor in employability.

6. Priorities for Local Action

Support for those entering the labour market can be split into 3 areas:

Labour market entrants (i.e. school/college leavers)

Labour market re-entrants (i.e. short term unemployed)

Disadvantaged groups (i.e. long term unemployed)

The actions below are aimed at labour market entrants.

Ensuring that school and college leavers have the right attitude to work requires the development of a local solution perhaps drawing on resources such as The Training Foundation free e-learning programme and working with local employers to provide insights into what is expected within the workplace.

Ensuring that school and college leavers have the right qualifications to obtain local jobs relies on learners, parents and teachers having good information about the local labour market, matching learning to the local job market and at the very least managing learner expectations. Information should be updated regularly and further work is needed to ensure that information about our sectors is accessible.

Note: in the course of reviewing information for this report and involvement in other Board sub-groups, it is apparent that labour market and skills information is used and sourced from a variety of different places. It would be of benefit to understand these different sources and explore how information can be shared and a review of these is put forward here as an action.

Ensuring that school and college learners can sell their employability skills through their CVs. According to what local employers are telling us there is a requirement for additional or refocused support in this area. Helping learners understand the qualities that employees seek and enabling them to sell these qualities through the job application process is vital to their success in gaining employment.

Ensuring that local employers realise there is an expectation they will carry out an induction for new employees. National guidance tells learners to expect an induction upon starting work. Whilst larger employers may carry out inductions, many small businesses do not due to time and resource restrictions. Some may not have written policies. Supporting local businesses to do this would benefit both new workers and the business alike.

The very existence of this report means that the views of local employers are being shared with appropriate partners and stakeholders and will inform developments as the provision of Career support changes during the next 12 months.

Appendix 1 Snapshot Survey Results

Employability

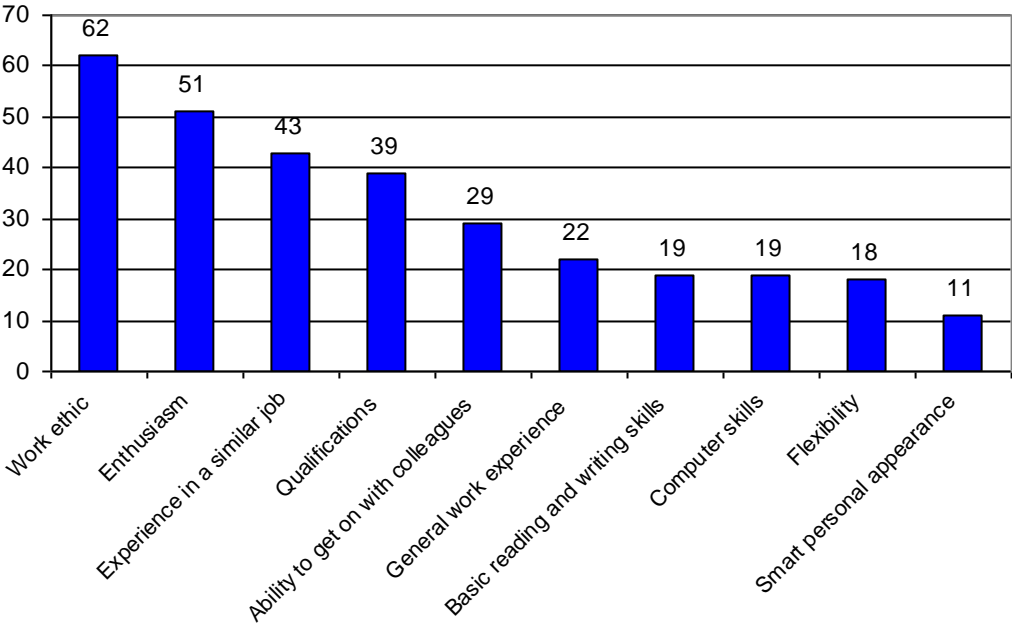
Businesses were asked to select, from a list of attributes, the three they considered most important when recruiting new staff. Table 1 shows the top first, second and third choices. Work ethic, enthusiasm and ability to get on with colleagues were the most frequently selected first, second and third choices respectively. This suggests that ‘softer’ skills – such as commitment to work and a positive attitude – are perhaps more highly valued by employers than conventional attributes such as qualifications and basic skills.

Table 1 – Top First, Second and Third Choice of Attributes of Potential Employees

Top First Choice	Top Second Choice	Top Third Choice
Work Ethic (28%)	Enthusiasm (22%)	Ability to get on with Colleagues (21%)

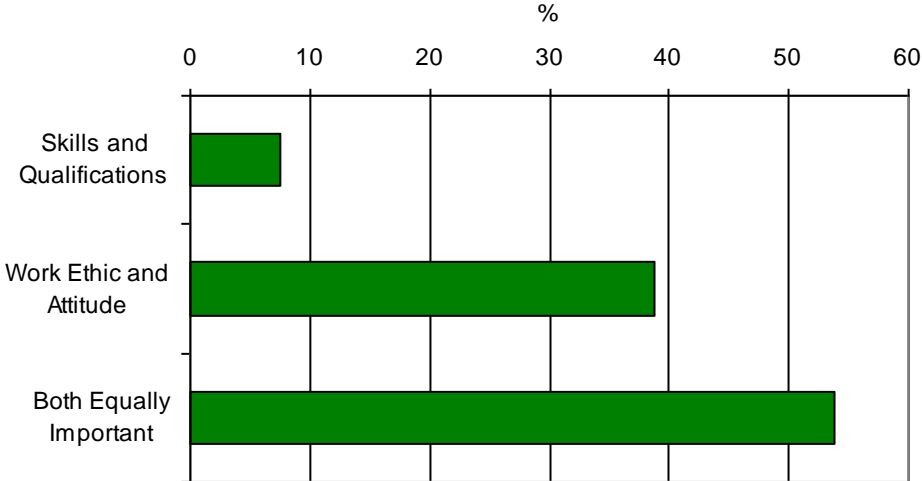
This is a finding that is also reflected in Graph 2, which shows the number of times each attribute was selected, regardless of whether it was first, second or third choice. Work ethic is most frequently cited (62 respondents), followed by enthusiasm (52). Experience in a similar job is also considered an important attribute, cited by just under half (43) respondents. Reading, writing and computer skills are considered important by fewer, just 19, respondents. Smart personal appearance is identified as the lowest priority, with just 11 respondents selecting this attribute.

Graph 2 – Most Selected Attributes



When asked to consider the relative importance of skills and qualifications compared to work ethic and attitude, just over half of businesses (54%) consider them to be equally important. However, work ethic and attitude alone are considered the most important by over a third (39%) of respondents, while just 7% select skills and qualifications alone.

Graph 3 – Most Important Attributes of Potential Employees



Appendix 3 Employer Insights Survey

What do we mean by 'employability'? What is 'job readiness'?

To answer these questions we could refer to the many documents, books and guidelines that have been produced around 'what employers want'. We need more meaningful relevant information.

If we are to influence local provision, whether it be for school leavers, graduates or unemployed jobseekers then we need to gauge current views from local employers. They are actually making these judgements in their local recruitment campaigns. They are the people who will decide who is job ready, employable and will fit in with the ethos and work practices of their individual company.

So how can job applicants demonstrate that they are job ready and employable?

A person needs to be able to provide evidence that they are an ideal candidate for a particular job role through their application form, their CV, their interview and demonstration of their skills and qualities.

To gather this insight information I have visited ten local employers across a range of sectors. I have recorded their advice and pulled together the most frequently raised hints and comments.

A list of employers who have participated in the study can be found at the end of this section.

Application Forms

- fully and correctly completed, follow instructions carefully, errors may get the form sifted out
- must supply references
- neat, legible, check spelling and grammar
- if form allows give information and examples which show suitability for the position, show how you are a good candidate
- hobbies and voluntary work can support application particularly if there is a link to skills but no waffle
- be honest, you could get further questions at interview

CVs

- two pages, clear font such as Arial, good quality white paper
- education history, employment history - last job given first
- proportion of space/detail given to education history will diminish the further you get in time away from school and as your work history grows
- personal details, contact information (address, phone and email)
- driving licence
- relevant personal qualities, major achievements, personal statement

- no jargon or phrases copied from websites
- model CV to the job specification, make CV relevant to the job
- provide examples of competence don't just put stock phrases
- ensure references have given their permission as they will be contacted
- any gaps in employment history need to be explained
- can use bullet points – easier for employer to skim read

Skills required by employers

- ability to problem solve and suggest solutions
- customer orientated
- desire and ability to learn and gain new skills
- professional behaviour, businesslike
- good communication skills (verbal, written, listening)
- interpersonal skills
- computer/technical literacy (outlook and word, excel)
- organisational skills
- basic maths (able to complete time sheets etc)

Qualities required by employers

- honesty and integrity
- self-confident
- dedication, conscientious, commitment
- adaptability
- punctuality
- dependable
- strong work ethic, employers expect you to be accountable for your time
- positive attitude, initiative, motivation, energy and passion
- pride in your work and company loyalty

General Summary

Interview Tips

- they expected the candidate to have prepared for the interview including some research about the company
- eye contact at interview – important
- at interview might be asked what would your colleagues say are your strengths/weaknesses

- all employers expected the candidate to be appropriately dressed in line with the position both for interview and for work
- more use of competence based questions - 'give an example of how you gave good customer service'

General Tips

- applicants need to understand about expectations within the workplace e.g. have a bank account, time keeping, general health and safety, work responsibilities
- employers found 'qualities' easier to define than 'skills'
- if a person had the desired qualities then employers felt they could provide skill and company specific training
- employers were clear on the level of skills they required in line with the demands of a specific job
- smart and clean personal appearance
- if an application form/CV does not meet the employer's standards then it would be sifted out unless there is a 'weak field'
- text talk is a big NO
- the employer would check that the signature matches the writing – has someone else completed the application?
- covering letters need to be used to show why an applicant is suitable and the best candidate for that position, draw out the best fit points
- whilst there is no need to put date of birth or marital status some employers did feel this information may be needed for flexibility around hours and operation of machinery or selling of alcohol
- school leavers and graduates should be prepared for what is generally expected of them in the world of work and know they will be accountable for their time/activity
- some employers commented on the 'sameness' of CVs and felt they had been mass produced, this gave a negative impression
- some employers did feel the general standard of applications was improving

On-line Tips

- employers can search on Facebook too!
- be careful about the use of unusual email addresses, have one personal and one more business like
- more use of on-line applications, these can take some time and need preparation in the way of information needed and possible replies to questions posed
- emails and CVs sent over the internet need to be in a clear font and a standard word processing package
- company websites good source of information for interview preparation

List of employers participating in the survey

Company	Sector	Contact	Position
Wilkinsons, Gainsborough	National - Retail	Nick Brown	Store Manager
FSB	Employer Organisation	Michael Self	Regional Organiser
Lincolnshire Co- operative	Local - Retail	Kathryn McFee	HR Adviser
Barker Ross	Recruitment Agency	Rachel Jones	Section Manager
Branston Potatoes	Food Manufacturing	Nicola Gilbert	HR Manager
Spaldings Holdings	Wholesale Distribution	Dave Fox	Chief Executive Officer
Battles	Manufacturing/Wholesale	Rachel Scott	PA to Managing Director
Hemswell Court	Hospitality	Shaun Lees	Managing Director
Walnut Care	Care	Melanie Weatherley	Director
Gelders	Construction	Mike Johnson	Group Training Manager

Appendix 4 Employability Skills Learner Questionnaire

Employability Skills Questionnaire

Employers are very interested in knowing what new employees understand about the skills and qualities they need when entering work for the first time. This questionnaire aims to discover the answer to this question.

Some questions about you:

Institution:

Gender: Male / Female

Level of Study: Entry / Level 1 / Level 2 / Level 3 / Degree

Other (please specify.....)

Studying for / studied a Preparation for Employment qualification: Yes / No

Do you have a part-time job? Yes / No

Now please answer the following questions:

- 1. Which of the following are skills and which are qualities? Where can you gain these skills or qualities? Inside the classroom or outside, e.g. either at work or home? Please tick the relevant boxes.**

Characteristic	Skill	Quality	Where will you gain them?		
			Education	Outside	Both
Organisation					
Co-operation					
Motivation					
Punctuality					
Appearance					
Team Work					

Leadership					
Determination					
Creativity					
Loyalty					
Energy					
Communication					
Maturity					
Work Ethic					
Courtesy					

2. If you were an employer, name three SKILLS you would be looking for in a new employee:

a) b) c)

3. If you were an employer, name three QUALITIES you would be looking for in a new employee

a) b) c)

4. Which of these would an employer be looking for? Please tick.

Skills:..... Qualities: Knowledge: None:

5. Tick the statement you think is most relevant.

Employers look for skills developed inside the classroom along with qualifications

Employers look for skills developed outside the classroom

Employers look for skills developed inside the classroom

Employers only look for qualifications

Employers look for skills developed both inside and outside the classroom together with qualifications

6. Using the scale of 1 – 4, where 1 is the least important and 4 is the most important, if you were an employer, how would you rate the skills and qualities listed below (Tick the appropriate number)

	How important is this skill/quality?			
	1 Not at all important	2 Quite unimportant	3 Quite important	4 Extremely important
Organisation				
Co-operation				
Motivation				
Punctuality				
Appearance				
Team Work				
Leadership				
Determination				
Creativity				
Loyalty				
Energy				
Communication				
Maturity				
Work Ethic				
Courtesy				

7. Using a scale of 1 – 4, where 1 is the least serious and 4 is the most serious, if you were an employer, how would you rate the following activities in the workplace?

ACTIVITY	Level of Seriousness			
	1 Not at all serious	2 Quite serious	3 Very Serious	4 Disciplinary Offence
Arriving late in the morning				
Using text messaging in the working day				
Inappropriate dress/appearance				
Attitude				
Dishonesty				
Lack of respect for co-workers				
Disorganisation				
Poor telephone manner				
Using social network sites				
Poor attendance				
Lack of reliability				
Lack of good manners				

And finally:

What do you think is the best way of gaining the skills and qualities needed to be a good employee?

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 5 - Qualities versus skills

A personal skill is the ability to do something

- analyse information
- play a sport
- read a map
- communicate
- design / make
- recall facts
- care for others
- repair machines
- give first aid
- draw and paint
- sing
- solve problems
- estimate
- gather evidence
- speak another language
- take photographs
- use ICT skills
- manage money
- mental arithmetic
- plan own work
- play a musical instrument

A personal quality is a characteristic

- calm
- confident
- sensitive
- punctual
- responsible
- conscientious
- strong minded
- team worker
- determined
- hard-working
- trustworthy
- well organised
- enterprising
- friendly
- good leader
- enthusiastic
- adaptable
- patient
- considerate
- polite
- imaginative

Qualities are the aspects of your personality which enable you to use your skills effectively - consider the following positive attributes:

- adaptable (new environments, situations, people, new challenges)
- assertive (when necessary, standing your ground, being bold)
- calm (under pressure, reacting in a balanced way to potentially stressful situations)
- careful (attention to detail, making sure you get things right, being prudent)
- caring (understanding and sensitive to the needs of others, lessening their hurt or worries)
- competitive (enjoying the buzz and pressure of striving to be at the front)
- confident (an innate knowledge that you will succeed without necessarily knowing how)
- co-operative (working closely with others, negotiating solutions or outcomes)
- creative (introducing new and imaginative ideas, new ways of looking at situations)
- decisive (being clear in your judgements and sticking to them)
- energetic (having physical or mental strengths to achieve demanding tasks)
- logical (deducing or predicting outcomes from facts or events)
- methodical (being orderly (when required), systematic about undertaking tasks)
- perceptive (being observant and having insight into the ways people behave)
- reliable (being able to be depended upon to do something well)
- resilient (the ability to bounce back from misfortune, ready to tackle things anew)
- sympathetic (being friendly, compassionate, sensitive to other people's emotions)
- tactful (knowing what to say to maintain good relations and avoid giving offence)
- tenacious (the ability to stick to your beliefs or things held to be of value)

Setting Standards within the Workplace – Defining what a Good Job Looks Like

Paragraph below taken from:

<http://coach4growth.com/coaching-skills/coaching-quality-feedback-training-measuring-success-and-coaching-feedback-sessions>

The first step in ensuring you produce a quality product or provide a quality service is to define what you expect. Do you think it's a fluke that all sweaters are folded the same way and at the same size on the sweater display? Are you amazed when your hair cut looks exactly like the one in the magazine? Or when it doesn't? Setting standards or expectations for performance are key in achieving your desired outcome.

You can communicate the standards all day long, but if the employee doesn't know how to do the job, it doesn't matter. Some jobs require training and others simply need to be communicated. In any event, let the employee know what a good job looks like. When coaching quality if possible, always give the employee a visual of what the end result should be. This can be in the form of peers as examples, training, final products, or by watching you.