City & Guilds ALLIANCE

LEARNING TO BE EMPLOYABLE

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM RESEARCH INTO DEVELOPING CHARACTER

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THE CITY & GUILDS ALLIANCE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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Remaking Apprenticeships: powerful learning for work and life (2015). London: City & Guilds

Thinking like an Engineer: implications for the education system (2014). London: Royal Academy of Engineering

Expansive Education: teaching learners for the real world (2013). Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research

Teaching vocational education: a theory of vocational pedagogy (2012). London: City & Guilds

www.winchester.ac.uk/realworldlearning
www.expansiveeducation.net

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

AELP	Association of Employment and Learning Providers
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility
ASDAN	The curriculum development organisation and awarding body (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network)
ATC21S	Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills project
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council – awarding body for BTEC awards now awarded by the Edexcel exam board
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (From 1994–2000 known as Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning)
CAVTL	Commission on Adult and Vocational Teaching and Learning
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEP	Character Education Partnership
CIF	Common Inspection Framework
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CRL	Centre for Real-World Learning, University of Winchester
Co-curriculum	Any activity which falls outside the 'academic curriculum'
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSV	Community Service Volunteers
CV	Curriculum vitae
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DofE	Duke of Edinburgh's Award
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EEF	Education Endowment Fund
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
IAC	Industry Apprentice Council
ICT	Information and communication technology
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCS	Non-cognitive skills
NCF	Non-cognitive factors
NCFE	Northern Council for Further Education – awarding body
NCUB	National Centre for Universities and Business
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (known as Nesta from 2012)
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OCR	Oxford, Cambridge and RSA – awarding body
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Inspectorate
157 Group	One Five Seven – a membership organisation for Further Education colleges in England
PATHS	Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
PLTS	Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills
PSHE	Personal, social, health and economic education
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Strategy
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise with fewer than 250 employees
SSAT	Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
Studio School	Schools for 14–19 year olds working closely with local employers offering academic and vocational qualifications as well as paid work placements
TechBac	Technical Baccalaureate
UKCES	UK Commission on Employment and Skills
UTC	University Technical College

Foreword

The employability of our young people on leaving education is one of the most important success factors of an education system yet we often seem to fall down in this country, leaving large numbers of young people without the skills and attributes that employers are looking for. We hear time and again from employers that young people just aren't ready for work when they leave education. So what is the solution?

While general employment figures have been rising since the middle of 2015, youth unemployment is still a cause for concern, with a figure hovering at almost three times that of all adults. The education system has a big part to play in reducing this number by listening to employers and changing its focus to better meet their needs. There must also be a recognition from Government that it's not enough simply to focus on academic qualifications as the sum total of a young person's education; they need to be taught about the workplace and how to operate in it to give each person the best chance of contributing positively to society.

However, it is easy to talk about the need for change and much harder to actually implement. The notion of and need for employability skills is brought up time and again but what do we actually mean by employability skills? Can these aptitudes and characteristics be taught and are they a defined set of skills or something more intangible and changeable depending on the industry or specific employer?

I am delighted that the City & Guilds Alliance, including representation from the 157 Group, AELP and the Centre for Real-World Learning, has once again commissioned acclaimed researchers Bill Lucas and Janet Hanson to investigate this vital issue. Their report brings together many pieces of research looking at different characteristics and habits that best contribute to a person's employability. Crucially, it gives very practical advice for how lessons learnt on developing character in school can be re-applied to the 14–19 age group.

At City & Guilds we are always interested in how skills attained through learning can be measured and then used to help someone progress through life. This important research looks at how to measure attainment of employability skills as well as providing 10 different approaches for developing employability in learners.

To truly bring about a change in the education system and improve the employment chances of young people, we need to look beyond traditional measures of academic success and collectively place a much greater emphasis and recognition on the development of skills for the workplace. This report provides a helpful tool for those working in education as we try to re-align the education system to be one that, alongside fostering a love of learning, prepares young people to both enter and thrive in the workplace.

Kirstie Donnelly MBE – MD, City & Guilds UK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The employability of young people in the UK is important to both our economic and social prosperity. Yet employers and Ofsted tell us that young people are still not ready for work when they emerge from the education system. Schools, colleges, training providers and universities all have contributions to make in developing an employable workforce and the Further Education (FE) sector – colleges and providers – has a particularly important role to play given that many of its students are already technically employed (apprentices) or progress straight into employment of some kind.

Recently it has been recognised in schools that character, as well as examination results, has a significant role to play in shaping young people's life chances. By character we mean those attributes often called 'soft skills', 'non-cognitive skills' or '21st-century skills', increasingly referred to as 'performance character'. Interestingly, these character 'skills' are much sought after by employers if not always valued in formal assessment processes.

Learning to Be Employable takes stock of research and practices in developing character at school and considers how these can be applied to young people in the 14–19 age range. It speaks directly to colleges and training providers but also to schools. It takes the opportunity to learn from approaches to the teaching of employability in higher education (HE), where developing employability has become more explicit of late.

The report brings together thinking about character and about employability to propose a set of habits of mind for employability along with a set of core transferable skills.

The employability habits are:

- self-belief
- self-control
- perseverance
- resilience
- curiosity
- empathy
- creativity
- craftsmanship.

The suggested transferable skills are:

- communication
- time management
- self-management
- problem-solving
- teamworking
- giving and receiving feedback.

It goes on to review approaches to developing employability within the broader FE sector, proposing a number of practically useful methods to cultivate habits for employability and to develop transferable skills.

NEXT STEPS

Learning to Be Employable makes some suggestions for taking forward the ideas in this report, including:

- ✓ implementing recommendations made by other organisations with regard to character in education and acknowledging the contribution of habits of mind for employability to performance at school, in the workplace and in life;
- ✓ explicitly extending the debate about character to FE;
- ✓ developing a better understanding of pedagogies for developing employability within the FE sector and in upper secondary education;
- ✓ gathering exemplars of promising practices;
- ✓ seizing the opportunities for employability presented by the National Citizen Service and the Careers and Enterprise Company for schools.

1. CONTEXT

'In an increasingly competitive employment market, employers are looking beyond simple academic achievement when considering applicants for a job…'

CBI (2015)

Employability is critically important to the UK, both economically and socially. In a digital age with ever more fluid and flexible patterns of living and working, what it means to be employable is necessarily evolving. Where once a relatively static set of technical and job-related skills for employment might have been required, today's individuals need much more than qualifications to thrive. We need people who are well equipped to work in one or more occupations and those who are entrepreneurially driven to create opportunities for themselves and others, often in small enterprises.

1.1 Thinking about character

At the same time as our thinking about employability has been evolving, so have our ideas about education and learning. In schools in the last decade this has involved a focus on character as well as on academic results. Character, like employability, has many meanings, on a spectrum from virtuous behaviour to performance in learning. Currently the character agenda is also being explored in terms of phrases and words such as 'non-cognitive skills', 'soft skills', '21st-century skills' and, more specifically, 'resilience'. (Each of these words has importantly different emphases which we explore on page 10.)

That character is important for success in life has long been acknowledged. As Theodore Roosevelt put it more than a century ago when comparing the role of academic life and character:

> *Of course, if, as a result of his high-school, academy, or college experience, he gets to thinking that the only kind of learning is that to be found in books, he will do very little; but if he keeps his mental balance – that is, if he shows character – he will understand both what learning can do and what it cannot, and he will be all the better the more he can get.* (Roosevelt, 1900)

There are many other sources on which we could draw to make this connection, from the scouts to the army, from sporting organisations to charitable bodies. Character is important in life not just for work, but also socially. As the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility (APPG, 2012; p. 10) noted, social mobility and emotional well-being are also at risk if underlying employability issues are not addressed. The Group focused on what it termed 'character' and 'resilience' to describe the range of social and emotional skills needed to get on in life.

Recently the Department for Education (DfE) has recognised the importance of developing character in schools:

> *We are committed to helping schools ensure that more children develop a set of character traits, attributes and behaviours that underpin success in education and work, such as:*
>
> - *perseverance, resilience and grit;*
> - *confidence and optimism;*
> - *motivation, drive and ambition;*
> - *neighbourliness and community spirit;*
> - *tolerance and respect;*
> - *honesty, integrity and dignity;*
> - *conscientiousness, curiosity and focus.* (DfE, 2015a).

From this list of attributes it is immediately obvious that the word 'character' can be very broad, and in this report we will want to be more focused.

Further Education (FE) has long had a role in creating employable students, both through apprenticeships, in working with unemployed young people and in its explicit focus on vocational education. With high levels of interest in expanding apprenticeships and in ensuring that more students taking vocational courses progress from school to college and, potentially, to university, we take the opportunity to re-examine ideas of employability and explore ways in which recent thinking about character, largely in schools, might contribute to thinking more fundamentally in FE. As we do so, we will want to see what we can learn from employers about employability, and what the research into character tells us; for it seems likely that aspects of character are critically important in ensuring that young people become more employable, and that we will want to think about the implications for pedagogy.

1.2 Concerns about the employability of young people

Employers, parents, government, not-for-profit groups and providers have all expressed concerns as to whether the current education system adequately prepares young people for work. In a period of global economic uncertainty, albeit with the UK performing better than its European competitors, understanding what really makes young people employable and how this can best be developed is of critical importance.

In 2009 the UK Commission for Employability and Skills (UKCES) highlighted the lack of employability skills without which, it argued, it would be more challenging for the UK economy to achieve its productivity goals, harder for individuals to find and progress in rewarding work, and unlikely that several important strands in UK employment and skills policy would be achievable. In 2012 the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) argued that, in addition to performing well in literacy, numeracy, science etc., the UK needs to agree on a clear, widely-owned and stable statement of the outcomes that all schools are asked to deliver beyond the merely academic, that is:

> *…the behaviours and attitudes schools should foster in everything they do. It [this] should be the basis on which we judge all new policy ideas, schools and the structures we set up to monitor them.* (CBI, 2012; p. 8)

In a recent 'end of year report' (2013), the CBI was critical of the lack of progress made in policy and practice towards these ends. In 2014 City & Guilds found that 66% of parents don't think that the current education system prepares children for work (City & Guilds, 2014a). In the light of these criticisms, the enhanced references to the development of employability skills in the revised Ofsted inspection criteria for schools and colleges (Ofsted, 2015a) are to be welcomed.

The concern about a lack of employability skills is not confined to school leavers but is found at all levels of education. The Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2015) has sought to define employability at higher levels and develop case studies and approaches to pedagogy which promote employability in higher education, while the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB, 2015) undertakes research to find out how business and universities can collaborate more effectively to secure greater graduate employability, and how job applicants can become more attuned to the generic attributes that really matter to employers when hiring graduates, in addition to their subject-specific knowledge.

One of the problems across all the different interested bodies, as suggested by the National Children's Bureau (Blades et al., 2012), may be a lack of understanding of what employability skills actually are and how to measure them. Initiatives such as the Industry Skills Board, created by City & Guilds in 2014 with an explicit focus on bridging the gap that exists between education and employment and giving employers a collective voice to advise on future direction of the education system, suggest that it is timely to explore what skills employers say they need, which ones they believe are lacking in young people and how education might best deliver them (City & Guilds, 2014b). The City & Guilds TechBac curriculum, being developed now, provides an excellent opportunity to test-bed approaches to employability based on this enhanced understanding of employer needs.

In *How to Teach Vocational Education* (Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, 2012) we suggested that two of the six desirable outcomes of vocational education are 'wider skills for growth' and 'business-like attitudes'. We argued that, in addition to having high-level functional skills and technical expertise, young people need to be competent teamworkers, problem-solvers, resilient and entrepreneurial in order to flourish in the fluctuating job markets of the future.

1.3 Our approach to employability and character

In this report we will explore the particular contribution of character to employability. In undertaking this research we have examined definitions of employability skills and the language associated with character with the aim of distinguishing attributes that are dispositional, and are therefore capable of being developed. Although it is important, we have specifically not focused on the socio-economic background of young people and its impact on employability. We reviewed the evidence base for the impact of dispositional employability skills on young people, both for employment and for academic attainment. Having identified an alignment between 'performance character' skills and employability, we drew on research into learning and teaching methods most suited to the development of such skills and identified examples of promising practice that might be applied in FE.

1.4 Some definitions

Before we go any further, we offer some headline definitions of the terms we will be using. There is considerable overlap in meaning between many of them.

Character	A set of dispositions that are valuable to individuals for success in learning, work and life. The aspect of character on which we focus is 'performance', but we recognise that when the term 'character' is used, there can be an implied moral dimension at the individual or societal level.
Employability skills	A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that enable individuals to be effective in today's changing work contexts. For a more detailed description, see page 14.
Non-cognitive skills	Often used as a synonym for character, non-cognitive skills (NCS) are a set of useful behaviours, characteristics and attitudes which are important in education, work and life. These are 'non-cognitive' in contrast to the subject-based 'academic' cognitive skills, such as literacy and numeracy. For a more detailed description, see page 26. Many would include perseverance and resilience in a definition of NCS.
Perseverance	A set of attributes which include effort, persistence, attention, focus, grit and a commitment to long-term goals.
Resilience	The ability to adapt to challenges and seek growth in them, as well as the idea of being able to bounce back from setbacks.
Social and emotional learning	Learning, working and living all have social and emotional aspects. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which individuals develop competence in managing the feelings of working collaboratively, forming relationships and managing impulsivity – the development of emotional and social intelligence.
Soft skills	Sometimes used as a synonym for non-cognitive skills, soft skills are a set of useful personal and social attributes such as problem-solving, communicating, collaborating and so on. These are 'soft' in contrast to 'hard' technical skills, such as operating specialist equipment. For a more detailed description, see page 14.
Twenty-first century skills	The new century offered an opportunity for re-labelling the skills required for success in the modern world. Twenty-first century skills are often associated with using the information and communication technologies needed in the internet era, and also tend to include skills such as communication, collaboration and 'creativity'.

It is clear from these definitions that there is substantial overlap between the terms. Indeed Angela Duckworth, one of the foremost experts on this subject, has recently surveyed the pros and cons of the many terms beyond the 'academic' used to describe those human attributes which play a role in helping people do well in life (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). She concludes that they all have their deficiencies, yet are still useful to us. She chooses – as we do in this report – to explore those aspects of character which do not imply moral connotations: what has been referred to as 'performance character' (Reeves et al., 2014). We also choose not to address mindfulness in our report since its focus is primarily on mental health, although we are aware that its role in education is actively being discussed in Parliament (Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group, 2015).

1.5 Changing views of employability

Employability is a complex construct. A noun derived from the adjective 'employable', describing someone who is 'suitable for paid work' (*Oxford English Dictionary,* 2014), it has only emerged as a term relatively recently, although its underpinning concepts have been around for a long time. We have come a long way since William Beveridge's celebrated treatment of the topic in *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (Beveridge, 1910), which sought to understand who was able-bodied and well (and so employable) and who was not (and therefore needed welfare support).

Concern about 'employability' and the ability of individuals to become and remain employable has been a matter of national concern since the 1950s, but the focus on employability has changed in each decade. In the 1950s, government schemes focused on helping the 'underprivileged unemployed' take their place within the workforce; full employment was the norm, so it was a matter of stimulating attitudes to work and self-image to develop employability.

With the change in the economic situation in the 1970s the emphasis shifted more to the skills and knowledge that employers needed, with individuals being responsible for developing and maintaining their ability to be as employable as possible. In the 1980s employers began to talk of the need to develop a flexible workforce capable of adapting to change in order to maintain the financial position of the organisation.

Since the 1990s and into the 2000s the focus of employability has moved back to the individual, but definitions are being driven from the perspective of employers concerned about matching labour supply and demand (Forrier and Sels, 2003). In the last two decades we have seen a shift in our understanding of what it is to be employable on account of two specific technological changes:

- the growth of the service economy with a parallel decline in manufacturing;
- the development of the internet and its accompanying impact on working practices, including home and part-time working as well as web-based micro-businesses.

In parallel to these there have been social changes:

- a growing emphasis on lifelong learning and an individual's responsibility to remain flexibly adaptable;
- an interesting shift in attitudes which has brought political parties of the left and right into agreement about the role of education and work in reducing poverty and increasing social mobility.

With contributions from, for example, psychology and from the learning sciences, we have begun to understand more about the contribution to success in work and life of factors other than those associated with examination results. As Lee Harvey and learning colleagues put it:

> *Employability is, at heart, a process of learning.* (Harvey et al., 2002; p. 16)

Since employability is the concern of multiple stakeholders, including policy-makers, employers, educators and individuals, what it means for a young person to be employable will inevitably have a range of different emphases. At the individual level employability is a complex amalgam of three elements: personal attributes and skills, life circumstances, and external factors. While we recognise the potency of the second and third, it is on the first of these that we focus in this report.

Throughout this period FE has played a significant role in creating employable individuals through the provision of vocational education and, with training providers, with regard to specific routes to employment such as apprenticeships. But a consortium of FE colleges known as The Mindset, focused on promoting employability, recently posed a core question related to the role of FE today, asking whether UK colleges are targeted enough in their approach to employability:

> *Is there great correlation between the courses and development programmes and soft skills development on offer vis-à-vis the current and future demands of the local economy and associated jobs required?* (Vincent, 2014; p. 4)

While keeping wider questions like this in mind, we want more particularly to understand more about employability at the level of personal attributes. Specifically, we want to explore the ways in which the debate about character, especially performance character, might have some insights to offer.

1.6 Employability challenges for young people today

Even in a digital age, a threshold requirement for employability is, of course, adequate mastery of English and maths, typically described as being at Level 2 or above. While we do not dwell on this in our report, it is important to remind ourselves that in the academic year 2013/14, 37% of learners aged 16–18 did not achieve grades A*–C in both of these subjects (Education & Training Foundation, 2014). Employers consistently say that they need people with good skills in English and maths as a minimum requirement of employment.

A particular obstacle to young people getting new jobs is competition with older, more employment-ready workers also in the labour market. A UKCES survey (UKCES, 2014; p. 78) found that half of recruiting employers who had not recruited young job applicants had opted instead for older candidates (over the age of 25) to fill the role, despite the possibility that the young people who applied for these jobs were suitable. Where young applicants were not considered to meet the requirements of the role, the main reasons cited were lack of skills or lack of experience, and sometimes both. Enhanced competition for jobs means employers are in a position to be able to select from a wider pool of candidates, including those education-leavers who have secured additional work experience. There are also an increasing number of graduates looking for jobs that would traditionally have been taken by school leavers (Skills Commission, 2014).

Another issue is the lack of opportunity for work experience while at school. From 2013, the statutory duty on schools in England to provide every pupil at Key Stage 4 with work-related learning was abolished. Such work experience used to give young people their first taste of workplace life and the chance to reflect on the lessons of it. The CBI reported this decision to be 'a matter of regret' and urged Ofsted to give heightened prominence to young people's attributes and competencies. The CBI has also encouraged primary schools to help children develop appropriate self-management and personal behaviour (CBI/Pearson, 2014). This aligns with the recommendations from Demos that Ofsted should develop criteria for measuring and assessing character development (Birdwell et al., 2015) and from Impetus (2015) that every pupil should have at least five experiences of work or enterprise by the time they complete their GCSEs or equivalent.

A vital connection between work and school or college is the careers service. But the quality of careers advice that young people receive to help them make informed decisions about future options for education and for work is regarded by employers, and by many in schools and colleges, as inadequate. Young people are not given enough information about the different qualifications they might pursue, nor how their choice of qualification might influence their future career options. These weaknesses in careers advice are reported by a large majority of businesses in every part of the UK (CBI/Pearson, 2014). This comment from Chris Jones, Director General of City & Guilds, is indicative of such dissatisfaction:

> *Careers advice in schools is simply not good enough. Young people and their parents are clear that they are not being given the right guidance.* (Chris Jones, 2014)

The inadequacy of careers guidance, particularly in terms of encouragement to pursue a vocational pathway, is also emphasised by apprentices themselves, who reported that fewer than 'one in five received encouragement from their school or college when they chose the vocational pathway' (Industry Apprentice Council, 2015; p. 3).

In December 2014, as a consequence of these high levels of concern, a new Careers & Enterprise Company for schools was announced by the DfE, tasked with ensuring that young people aged 12–18 are able to access high-quality and inspirational careers advice (DfE, 2014). The company will act in a brokering role, linking employers, schools and colleges, to ensure that learners are able to talk directly with employers about opportunities available and make informed choices about courses and careers (Careers & Enterprise Company, 2015).

2. WHAT ARE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS?

'You might have a degree, perhaps a technical qualification and a bit of work experience on your CV but have you promoted your soft skills? Do you even know what they are?'

Lisa Bachelor in The Guardian (2012)

In Section 1 we began to look at the idea of employability. Here we look in more detail at the different listings and taxonomies of skills which go to make up this complex concept, which, as the quotation above suggests, are increasingly required by employers.

2.1 Soft skills

Many lists of employability skills have been developed that are described by employers as 'soft' skills. These are distinguished from 'hard' skills, which are the specific skills and qualifications needed to do a particular job. Soft skills include personal characteristics, goals, motivations and attitudes that are valued by employers. They enhance an individual's career prospects and job performance and are broadly applicable across job titles and industries. They predict success in later life and are partly responsible for that success (Heckman and Kautz, 2012; p. 2).

Since soft skills can be associated with an individual's personality rather than their technical abilities, they have been considered more difficult to develop and measure than hard skills. Over the last few decades various researchers have sought to define soft skills more precisely. One such taxonomy, published in the 1998 ECOTEC study on soft outcomes for the European Social Fund Employment initiative, groups skills under three categories: attitudinal skills, life skills, and transferable skills (Table 1).

ATTITUDINAL SKILLS	LIFE SKILLS	TRANSFERABLE SKILLS
Self-esteem	Social skills	Working in groups/teams
Positive regard for others	Attendance	Problem-solving
Taking responsibility for own lives	Time-keeping	Questioning
Confidence	Personal presentation	Evaluating
Motivation	Personal hygiene	Initiative
Attitude	Relevant conversation	Language skills
Self-awareness		Communication
Reduced depression/anxiety		
Aspirations		

TABLE 1 ECOTEC LIST OF SOFT SKILLS (BLADES AND COLLEAGUES, 2012; P. 9)

These three categories were redefined and expanded by Sara Dewson and colleagues for the Department for Education and Employment and the Institute for Employment Studies to incorporate key work skills, attitudinal skills, and personal and practical skills. 'Soft outcomes' may include achievements relating to:

- Interpersonal skills (for example, social skills and coping with authority);
- Organisational skills (for example, personal organisation and the ability to order and prioritise);
- Analytical skills (for example, the ability to exercise judgement, time management or problem-solving);
- Personal skills (for example, insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and health awareness) (Dewson et al., 2000).

Despite the apparent clarity of these three lists, Dewson concluded that it was impossible to define a universal set of soft skills outcomes because the stakeholders were so diverse. This perception that no generic model of employability skills could be fit for purpose was prevalent until the late 2000s. It was claimed that skills were either specific to the industry sector, or were characteristics relating to the learner group (Blades et al., 2012; p. 9). Even as recently as 2009, UKCES identified at least twenty definitions of employability defined by a skills taxonomy (UKCES, 2009; p. 70).

Nevertheless, in response to employers' ongoing expressions of dissatisfaction with the lack of employability skills of school leavers and graduates, organisations such as UKCES and the CBI continued to define employability in terms of skills. However, the term 'soft skills' was replaced by 'employability skills', and there was growing recognition that gaining and sustaining employment required more than competence – it also required personal attributes and knowledge.

Nearly a decade ago the CBI defined employability as:

> *A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.* (CBI, March 2007; p. 11)

The personal qualities, skills and knowledge were presented as a seven-point framework in which they were underpinned by a 'positive attitude', which is a 'can-do' approach and openness to new ideas (Figure 1). Skills included business and customer awareness, application of numeracy, communication and literacy and application of IT. Personal qualities included self-management, teamworking, and problem-solving. The implication of the thinking is that such skills are transferable across different contexts.

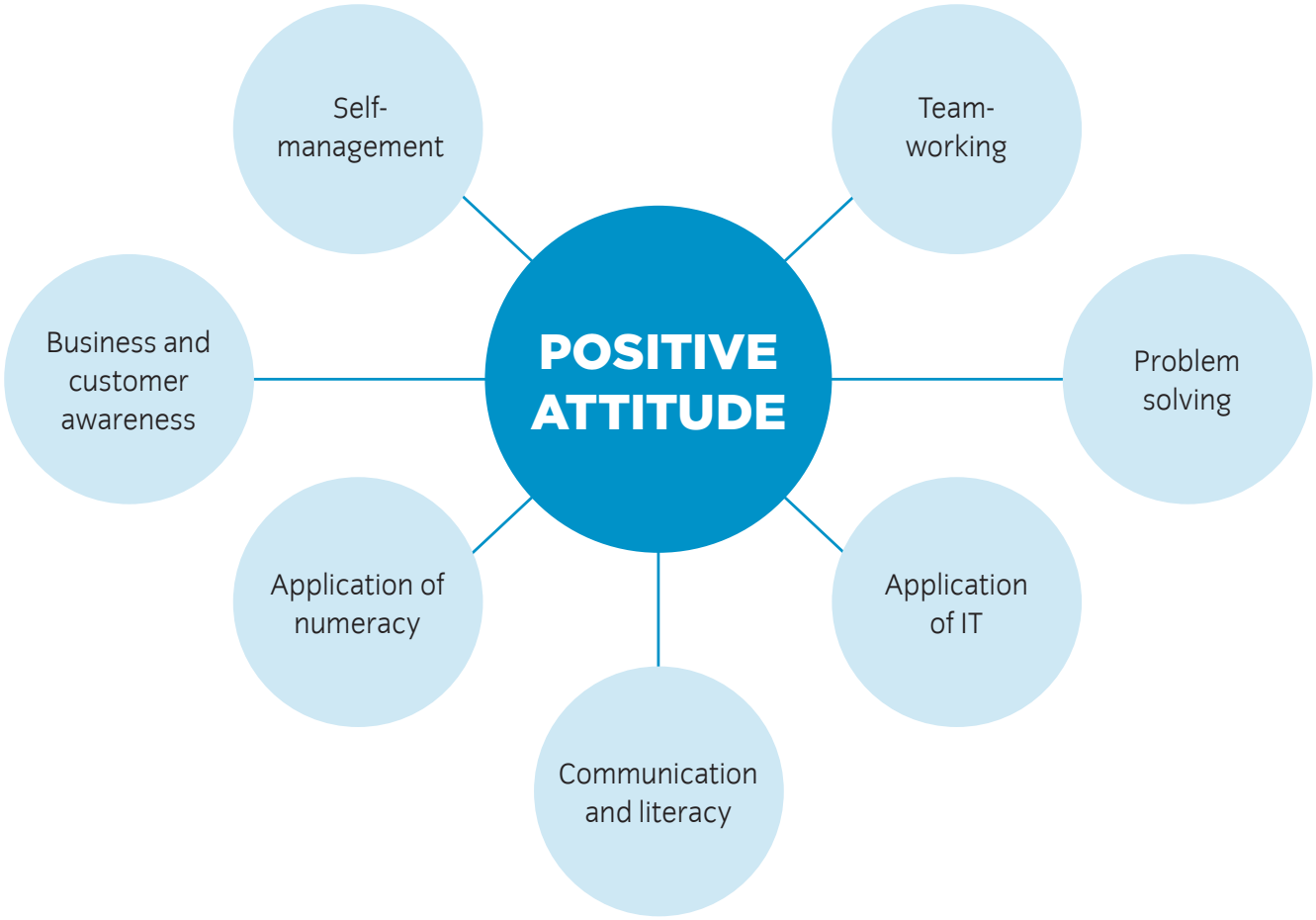


FIGURE 1 EMPLOYABILITY ATTRIBUTES, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE. SOURCE: CBI (2007; P. 12)

UKCES (2009) defined employability skills very broadly as 'the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job'. These include having a 'Positive Approach' which involves being ready to participate, make suggestions, accept new ideas and constructive criticism, and take responsibility for outcomes. This provides the foundation supporting three 'Functional Skills': using numbers, using language and using IT. These three skills are exercised in the context of four 'Personal Skills': self-management, problem-solving, working together and understanding the business (Figure 2).

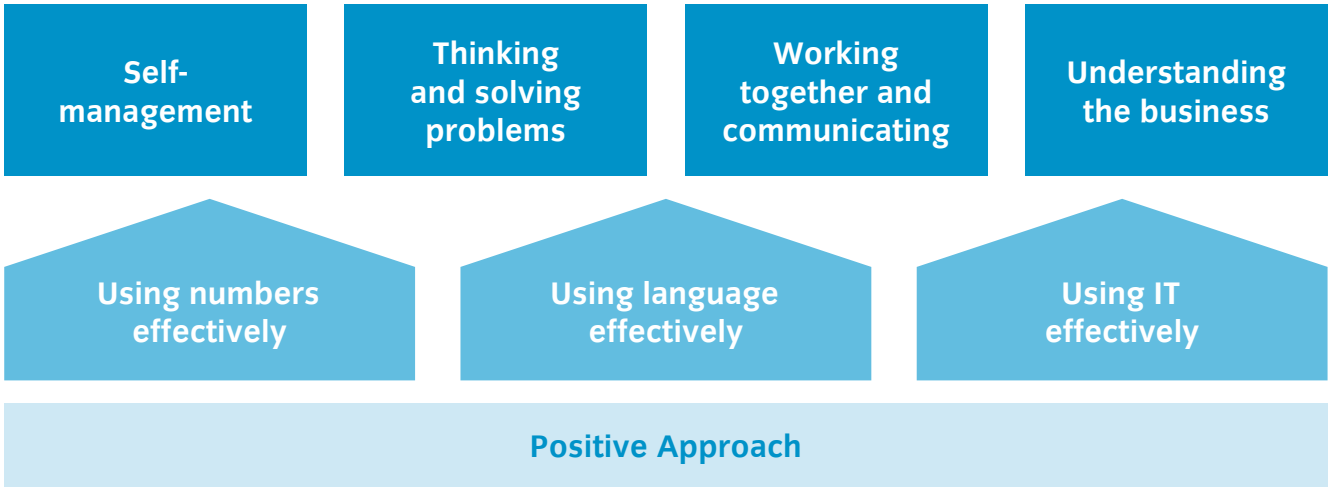


FIGURE 2 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS. SOURCE: UKCES (2009; P. 10)

Rachel Blades and colleagues (2012), on behalf of the National Children's Bureau, reviewed four employability skills lists and from them distilled a common set of skills applicable to a range of jobs. Their definition of employability skills, despite acknowledging a longer-term perspective, still suggests that the acquisition of employability skills is a singular experience happening at the start of a career:

> *Employability skills focus on the personal, social and transferable skills seen as relevant to all jobs, as opposed to job-specific technical skills or qualifications. The acquisition of employability skills may be seen as a necessary first step in [a] path towards long-term employment.* (Blades et al., 2012; p. 3)

They excluded skills such as ICT, literacy and numeracy, which they claim are on the hard side of soft and could be easily assessed using standardised tests. Furthermore, they also removed skills such as 'knowledge of the business' and 'customer awareness' because these could be classed as job-specific. They then specified fifteen soft employability skills and attributes, grouped under four categories: Personal, Interpersonal, Self-management, and Initiative and Delivery (Table 2).

PERSONAL	INTERPERSONAL	SELF-MANAGEMENT	INITIATIVE AND DELIVERY
Confidence	Social/Interpersonal skills	Self-control	Planning
Self-esteem	Communication skills	Reliability	Problem-solving
Motivation	Teamwork	Positive attitude	Prioritising
Self-efficacy	Assertiveness	Presentation	

TABLE 2 COMMON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS APPLICABLE TO A RANGE OF JOBS (BLADES AND COLLEAGUES, 2012; P. 12)

Although written for a mainly Higher Education (HE) audience, the USEM account of employability developed by Mantz Yorke and Peter Knight in *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum* (2006) offers another view of the different elements:

USEM stands for:

Understanding

Skills

Efficacy beliefs (students' self-theories and personal qualities)

Metacognition.

The relationships between these four key elements are shown graphically in Figure 3.

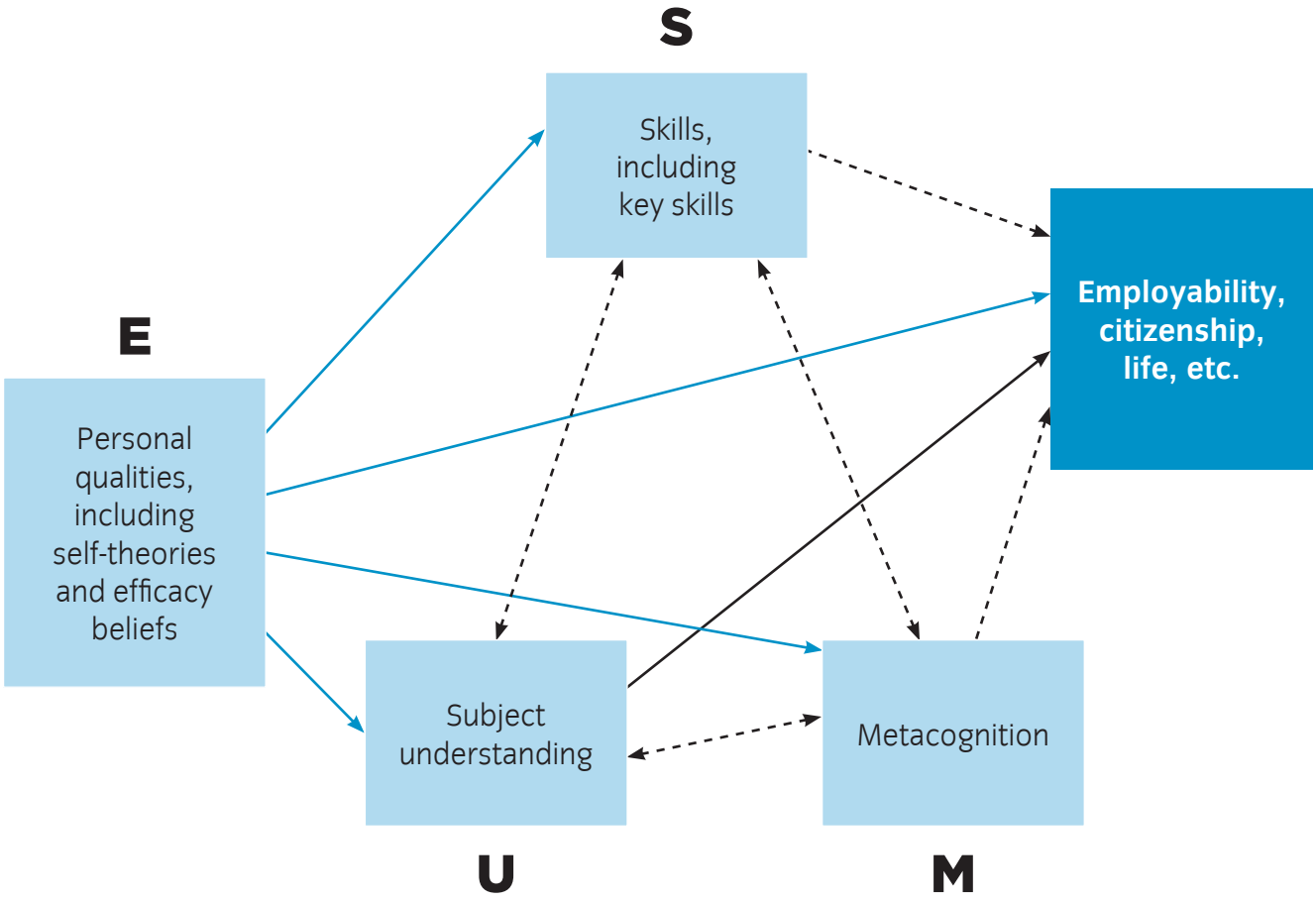


FIGURE 3 THE USEM ACCOUNT OF EMPLOYABILITY. SOURCE: YORKE AND KNIGHT (2006; P. 5)

With employability – just as, we are about to see, with character – there are many different lists and many different ways of grouping or categorising the different elements!

2.2 Character

During the past decade various organisations have promoted the idea of character. In the USA much of the thinking about character has been led by the Character Education Partnership (CEP, 2015). Two other examples are The Center for Character and Citizenship, which produces the *Journal of Character Education,* and the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, which has a focus on character.

In the UK the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham (Jubilee Centre) is a major interdisciplinary centre working with the DfE and behind a new Association for Character Education, launched in 2015. Following its Character Inquiry (Demos, 2011), Demos has been influential in what it means to think about character across the nation. Character Scotland (2015) promotes the cultivation and recognition of character attributes in Scotland.

Where once the development of character was associated with the public school tradition, politicians, employers and researchers are keen to encourage all schools to take up the challenge. The evidence presented in this report is, we believe, of particular interest to those working with the broad range of students in FE, for it is increasingly clear that character capabilities such as resilience and persistence are crucial for success in life whatever your background (Lexmond and Reeves 2009). The capabilities making up character can help young people cope with a disadvantaged home background, maintain a sense of well-being and positive mental attitude and support their successful entry to the workplace.

The DfE, together with the Jubilee Centre, defines character as:

> *a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct.* (Jubilee Centre, 2013)

The Centre points out that 'moral' in this context is not the promotion of any specific moral system or set of moral beliefs, but the promotion of a core set of universally acknowledged cosmopolitan virtues. Furthermore, virtues are those 'character traits that enable human beings to respond appropriately to situations in any area of experience' (Jubilee Centre, 2013). Virtues can be divided into three categories: Civic, Moral and Performance Character Virtues, the use of which enable the individual to live with 'good sense'. 'Resilience' and 'determination' fall within the section described as 'Performance Character Virtues', which enable individuals to put character habits into practice (Figure 4).

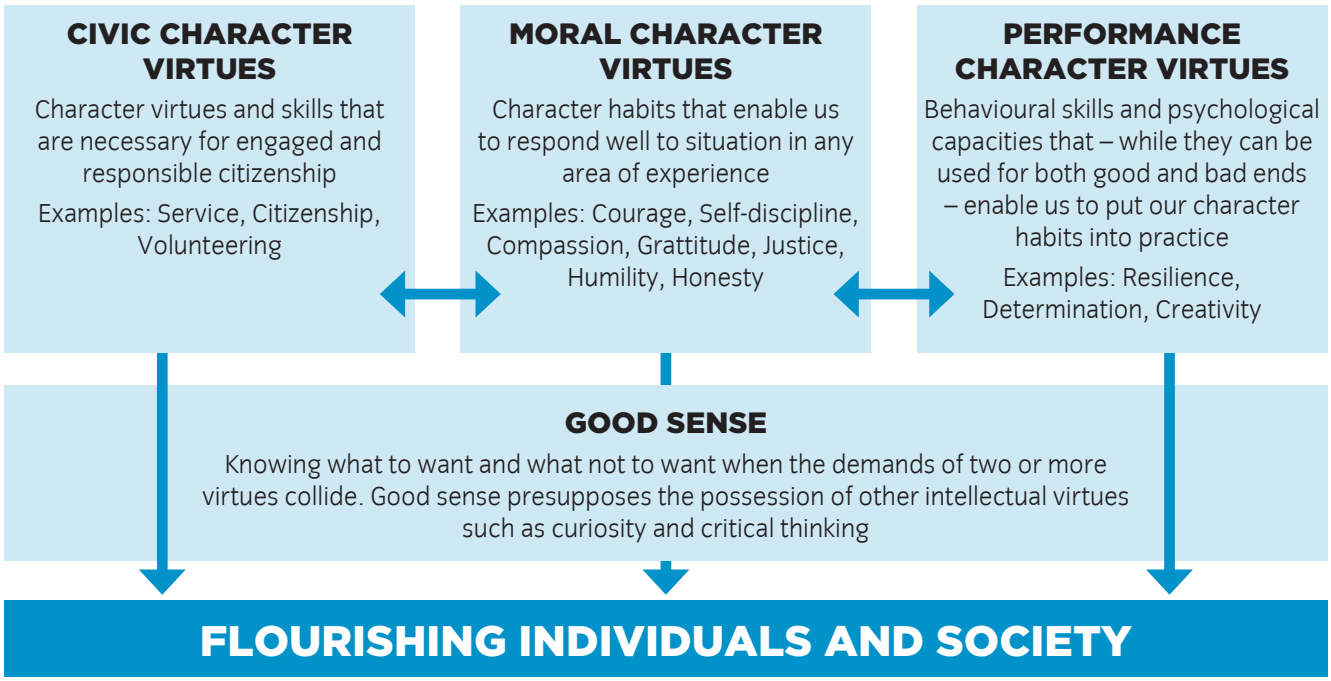


FIGURE 4 CATEGORIES OF CHARACTER VIRTUES.
SOURCE: JUBILEE CENTRE FOR CHARACTER AND VIRTUES (2013)

In *The Character Factor: Measures and Impact of Drive and Performance* (2014), Richard Reeves and colleagues use the distinction made by CEP in the USA to separate 'performance character' from 'moral character'. By performance character he and CEP mean 'those qualities needed to realise one's potential for excellence – to develop one's talents, work hard and achieve goals' rather than the broader ethical dimensions introduced by moral character. The two chosen performance skills on which they focus are 'drive' (or perseverance) and 'prudence' (or delayed gratification). We find this distinction between performance and moral character a helpful one, and return to the subject of perseverance on page 21.

Researchers James Heckman and Tim Kautz (2013) at the University of Chicago define character in terms of a set of skills that are generally valued across all societies and cultures. Their eleven character skills include the two we are interested in, resilience and perseverance (Table 3).

CHARACTER SKILLS
Perseverance ('grit')
Self-control
Trust
Attentiveness
Self-esteem and self-efficacy
Resilience to adversity
Openness to experience
Empathy
Humility
Tolerance of diverse opinions
Engaging productively in society

TABLE 3 CHARACTER SKILLS (HECKMAN AND KAUTZ, 2013)

Of the various approaches we have touched on so far, we see the performance character 'virtues' as being the most fruitful on which to focus at FE level where for many educators mixing morality and performance may be unhelpful. In Section 2.7 we suggest how these ideas can best be combined with employability.

In general we suggest that the use of the word 'trait' as used by the Jubilee Centre is unhelpful, suggesting as it does a characteristic which is fixed and potentially inherited. Nevertheless its *Teaching Character: Through and Within Subjects* project, currently developing resources for teaching character in schools, may well be adaptable for use in FE colleges.

Two concepts in the character mix which we believe deserve more attention within employability are resilience and perseverance.

Resilience is most frequently defined as the ability to bounce back from failure or disappointment:

> *It is a person's ability to remain steady or to bounce back in spite of adversity.* (Thomsen, 2002; p. 9)

However, Lisa Meredith and colleagues (2011) found a wide number of different definitions for resilience, which they clustered into three groups; those that define it as a process of adjustment, as above; those that define it as adaptation (coping); and those that define it as growth (coping and more). We can see all three represented in the definitions that follow.

Resilient individuals are able to adapt to changing circumstances and deal effectively with adverse circumstances or challenging life situations as they engage in:

> *The process of managing and adapting to sources of stress or adversity.* (Ecclestone and Lewis, 2014; p. 196)

In addition, the way in which an individual deals with the element of risk attached to situations is also key to fully understanding resilience. Resilient individuals do not just react to events; they are also proactive – either taking action to avoid risky situations or finding new ways of avoiding the risk altogether, perhaps by drawing on relationships with family and community, as they engage in:

> *…positive adaptation despite the presence of risk.* (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; p. 27)

Resilient individuals also have the ability to apply themselves, to thrive, to grow and to find new meanings in life:

> *Resiliency is positively linked with the ability to recover from setbacks, failure, disappointment and stress, as well as the ability to reach out and seek new opportunities for growth.* (Reivich and Shatte, 2002, cited in Waters, 2011; p. 81)

It is not surprising then that resilient individuals display capacities such as having an easy temperament, being socially competent, having empathy towards others and having a sense of purpose. They are also good at communicating, problem-solving and acting independently (Hart and Heaver 2013; p. 42). Other more specific resilience behaviours include:

- detecting potential risks and disruptive challenges;
- exercising coping skills;
- regulating emotion and being in control of one's emotions;
- being optimistic following disappointment;
- seeking new opportunities for growth.

Resilience has a dynamic quality, since an individual's resilience is achieved through a complex balance of ingredients including their personal characteristics, family, school and community settings. A change within any one of these elements – for example, loss of a parent, changing school, or a supportive teacher moving on – may result in decline or loss of resilience. This complexity associated with resilience may be accounted for by the suggestion by Alissa Goodman and colleagues (2015) that:

> *…resilience is not so much an aspect of character as a developmental process, capturing the ability to summon strength and resources when needed and 'beat the odds' of adversity.* (2015; p. 37)

Therefore they noted that there is no direct measure of resilience available in longitudinal studies.

Goodman et al. (2015) conclude that:

> *Evidence is currently lacking on whether resilience demonstrated in childhood results in longer term benefits, but given how it is generally defined – as 'beating the odds' from adversity within the timeframe of childhood – it would seem likely to be the case that the effects of this could be long-lasting. We have also not found much evidence, to date, linking childhood motivation (defined in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations) to later life outcomes other than educational attainment.* (2015; p. 87)

At the Jubilee Centre the many conceptualisations of resilience and how it might be embedded in schools have been studied, noting how it is both a property of the individual and a process and that it transfers poorly between different spheres of life (Walker, 2014; p. 12). It is not surprising that schools have developed processes for supporting the transition of children between primary and secondary school, nor that universities are putting significant resources into supporting the transition of young adults into the first year of higher education study.

Perseverance is often associated with resilience, and sometimes confused with it, but it is a separate factor affecting educational outcomes and success in life. Gutman and Schoon define perseverance as:

> *…steadfastness on mastering a skill or completing a task.* (Gutman and Schoon, 2013; p. 17)

They also identify two characteristics associated with perseverance: engagement and 'grit'. Engagement is related to a learner's participation in school and the extent to which they are committed to learning, as evidenced by behaviours such as being attentive, asking questions and showing interest. Grit is an additional factor contributing to perseverance and relates to an individual's passion for a long-term goal which, in turn, influences their ability to work steadfastly on one task over a prolonged period.

'Grit' has been the subject of a significant amount of research conducted by Angela Duckworth and her colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania. It is defined as:

> *…perseverance and passion for long term goals.* (Duckworth et al., 2007; p.1087)

These researchers also associate grit with self-control, which is:

> *…the voluntary regulation of behavioral, emotional, and attentional impulses in the presence of momentarily gratifying temptations or diversions.* (Duckworth Lab, 2015)

Examples of how students might exhibit self-control in school-related situations include engaging in behaviours such as:

> *…reading test instructions before proceeding to the questions, paying attention to a teacher rather than daydreaming …choosing homework over TV, and persisting on long-term assignments despite boredom and frustration.* (Duckworth and Seligman, 2006; p. 199)

They also suggest that, on average, individuals who are gritty are more self-controlled, but that may not always be the case. Some individuals are paragons of grit but not self-control, and some exceptionally well-regulated individuals are not especially gritty (Duckworth et al., 2014).

Character has gained a prominent place in the national debate about social mobility. Social mobility in the UK is low by international standards and does not appear to be improving, so the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility was formed in 2011 to discuss and promote the cause of social mobility.

When reviewing policies aimed at enhancing social mobility in its interim report, the APPG suggested that 'personal resilience and emotional wellbeing are the missing link in the chain'. It noted that:

> *…developing the social and emotional skills which give young people the resilience, persistence and motivation to deal with the stresses and the rebuffs of everyday life, are key to being able to move up the social ladder.* (APPG, 2012; p. 30)

However, it claimed that insufficient notice was being taken by policy-makers of evidence that skills such as resilience, self-belief and persistence both underpin academic success and can be taught. The group therefore proposed that, in addition to policy interventions to develop character focused on Early Years, schools should put in place programmes to develop character. These should also include what happens 'outside the school gates' or 'after the school bell rings', for example, providing careers guidance, summer schools, extra lessons, extra-curricular activities and support for university entrance.

The APPG linked character traits, or what it also referred to as non-cognitive skills, to employability, claiming that:

> *…later development of 'non-cognitive skills' or character traits can be very productive because skills such as confidence, leadership, and time-management are highly valued by employers, and have a significant impact on future earnings.* (APPG, 2012; p. 28)

The Group also acknowledged that these non-cognitive skills underpin and interact directly with cognitive skills, since a child or adult lacking the former will not be in a position to fully access the education required to develop the latter. (The APPG is not alone in using the word 'trait' in considering non-cognitive skills, but the word is problematic for many because of the implication it brings of fixity rather than learnability.)

In addition to suggesting that the exams-driven culture in schools had reduced opportunities for extra-curricular activities which are so important for developing character, it also believed that employers have an important role in developing character since 'people are hired for their skills and fired for their attitude' (APPG, 2013; p. 11).

In 2014 the APPG published its *Character and Resilience Manifesto,* summarising its belief in the importance of developing character for social mobility and making specific recommendations to government and employers about measures to support the development of character and resilience. Those referring to measures in schools and in the transition to work are noted below (Table 4) (Peterson et al., 2014; p. 9).

APPG RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT ON DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND RESILIENCE IN SCHOOLS	
1.	Ask Ofsted to determine how to factor Character and Resilience and 'extra'-curricular activities more explicitly into the inspection framework
2.	Make participation in 'extra'-curricular activities a formal aspect of teachers' contracts of employment
3.	Create a respected, official 'School Leaving Certificate' that reflects a child's achievement across a broad range of activities rather than just exam outcomes
4.	Incorporate Character and Resilience into initial teacher training and CPD programmes
5.	Support development of a best practice toolkit for interventions that aid Character and Resilience for specific use in conjunction with the Pupil Premium
6.	Encourage all private schools to share their professional expertise and facilities that promote Character and Resilience with schools in the state sector, in keeping with private schools' charitable status
APPG RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT ON DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND RESILIENCE IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND EMPLOYMENT	
1.	Encourage the growth of the National Citizen Service and ensure that this has the explicit purpose of building Character and Resilience at its heart
2.	Establish an officially recognised and valued National Volunteering Award Scheme to give adult volunteers formal recognition of their contribution to the lives of young people
3.	Seize the opportunity of the raising education participation age to use Character and Resilience programmes to re-engage the most disengaged 16 and 17 year olds back into learning
4.	Make Character and Resilience a key focus of the National Careers Service
APPG RECOMMENDATIONS TO EMPLOYERS	
1.	Actively encourage staff to participate in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities that develop Character and Resilience in young people
2.	Implement internal training programmes that help develop the Character and Resilience capabilities of staff
3.	Develop alternative routes into advanced professional positions that reflect the importance of Character and Resilience skills rather than raw academic achievements

TABLE 4 APPG'S CHARACTER AND RESILIENCE MANIFESTO RECOMMENDATIONS (PETERSON ET AL., 2014; PP. 8–9)

Already it is clear to see that the language of character easily shifts into becoming the language of resilience. We will look at the potential nuances of the meanings of different words associated with character later in Section 3 of this report, as we seek also to connect these to employability.

There are paradoxes, too, in an education system which remains so focused on examination success. David Chandler (2014) notes that the focus in schools on achieving exam success and the acquisition of knowledge is not enhancing children's capacity to develop resilience and character, because they become unaccustomed to dealing positively with failure. They need to experience failure to enable progress.

The OECD (2012) has suggested that that if vocational education and training are to serve the needs of the 21st century, then, among other skills, character traits – both performance-related (adaptability, persistence, resilience) and moral (integrity, justice, empathy and ethics) – need to be shaped both at school and in the workplace to help individuals to be active and responsible citizens.

In December 2014, the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, announced funding to make England a global leader in teaching character, resilience and grit to pupils. Fourteen projects are receiving funding through the DfE's £3.5 million Character Grants scheme. The grants are designed to expand initiatives that successfully improve the character of young people and include the use of rugby coaches from Premiership clubs, who will be drafted into schools with the intention of instilling character and resilience in disaffected children (DfE, 2015b). In February, the winners of the DfE's 2015 Character Education Awards (DfE, 2015c) were announced: Emmanuel College in Gateshead was singled out for its 'character first' ethos.

Jonathan Birdwell and colleagues (2015) suggest that a focus on character education is likely to be prominent in the DfE's policy until 2020. Despite some opposition from teachers and head teachers whom it consulted, Demos adopted the definition of character offered by the Jubilee Centre, 'a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct' which identifies four main categories of good character:

- *moral virtues such as courage, honesty, humility, empathy and gratitude;*
- *intellectual virtues such as curiosity and critical thinking;*
- *performance virtues such as resilience, application and self-regulation;*
- *civic virtues such as acts of service and volunteering.* (Birdwell et al., 2015; p. 10).

Many educators are uncomfortable about the inclusion of both moral and learning performance attributes. They are very different, and lumping them together may make it more difficult to consider how best they can be developed in young people. We have tried (Claxton and Lucas, 2013) to distinguish two groups: 'prosocial' and 'epistemic' (Table 5):

PROSOCIAL	EPISTEMIC
Kind	Inquisitive
Generous	Resilient
Forgiving	Imaginative
Tolerant	Craftsmanlike
Trustworthy	Sceptical
Morally brave	Collaborative
Convivial	Thoughtful
Ecological	Practical

TABLE 5 TWO KINDS OF CHARACTER 'SKILLS' (CLAXTON AND LUCAS, 2013; P. 9)

Prosocial skills are those attitudes that are needed for cultivating positive relationships with others, for example, as a friend, neighbour or citizen. Epistemic skills are qualities of mind exhibited by powerful learners who meet and overcome challenges, show determination to finish tasks and exercise imagination and creativity in learning. But whatever list we come up with, it needs to be accessible and appealing to those people who will be working with it: teachers, students, parents, employers and the wider world. The epistemic list is very close to what we have earlier called 'performance character'.

Most recently, in *Educating Ruby: What Our Children Really Need to Learn* (Claxton and Lucas, 2015), we have sought to initiate a wider campaign with parents about the nature of these useful soft or non-cognitive skills which all young people need. For ease of recall, each of our suggested attributes begins with the letter 'C' – confidence, curiosity, collaboration, communication, creativity, commitment and craftsmanship. Each has a strong research basis for its inclusion.

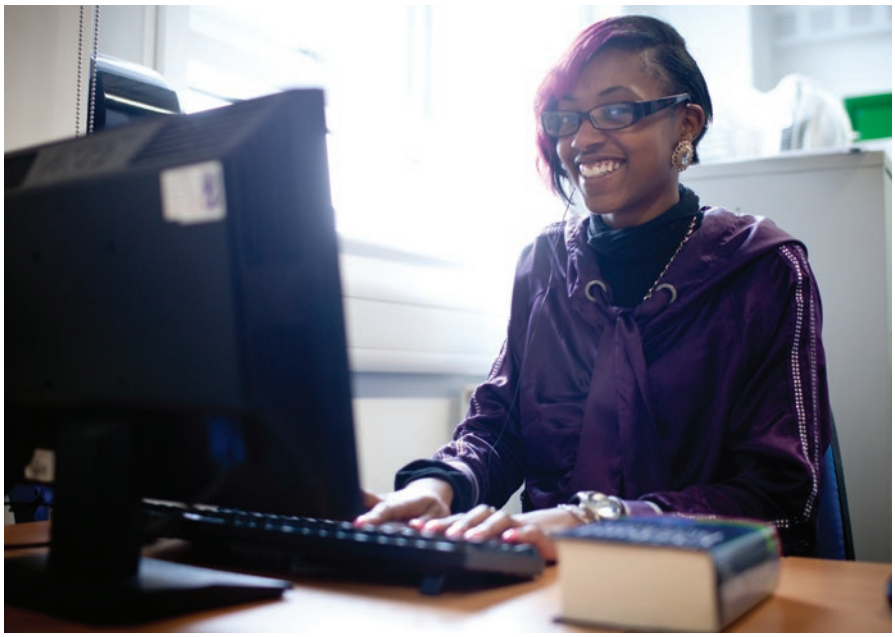
Employers have now started to use similar language to policy-makers and researchers like us when discussing how education should be developing the capacity of children and young people to be employable. The CBI has moved away from its original position on employability skills and now expresses employability as a longer-term process of developing characteristics, values and habits for maintaining employability (Figure 5). This approach is most apparent when they directly address education, suggesting that:

> *This [skills] terminology was misleading, giving the impression that they could be taught separately in the curriculum. That is not the case – the curriculum is the space in which we deliver core knowledge and enabling subjects. Behaviours can only be developed over time, through the entire path of a young person's life and their progress through the school system. Everything that happens in a school should embed the key behaviours and attitudes.* (CBI, 2012; p. 32)

CHARACTERISTICS, VALUES AND HABITS THAT LAST A LIFETIME	
The system should encourage young people to be	**This means helping to instil the following attributes**
Determined	**Grit, resilience, tenacity**
	Self-control
	Curiosity
Optimistic	**Enthusiasm and zest**
	Gratitude
	Confidence and ambition
	Creativity
Emotionally intelligent	**Humility**
	Respect and good manners
	Sensitivity to global concerns

FIGURE 5 CHARACTERISTICS, VALUES AND HABITS THAT LAST A LIFETIME. SOURCE: CBI (2012; P. 33)

Behaviours can, in fact, be developed in a range of ways, including as part of the formal curriculum, and we need to be careful about making dogmatic statements about pedagogy, a topic to which we return in Section 4.



2.3 Non-cognitive skills

As we have already seen, skills such as resilience, perseverance and self-control are often referred to by psychologists as 'non-cognitive' skills (NCS), to distinguish them from cognitive skills, which are the thinking skills needed to process new information.

We share with many others the belief that the term 'non-cognitive' is ultimately unhelpful because it implies that these skills are not connected to mental processes, whereas every skill involves processing information of some kind in order to deploy it. Furthermore, by defining what it is not, the term lacks precision and is therefore not helpful for those who want to understand young people's needs in this area and develop them appropriately. However, it is a term we use here because it is referred to by many policy-makers, researchers and educationalists involved in the employability debate.

In a large-scale review of the literature relating to the evidence for NCS having an impact on outcomes for young people, researchers Leslie Gutman and Ingrid Schoon (2013) identified eight NCS that were particularly associated with positive outcomes for young people (Table 6).

NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS	
1.	Self-perception – an individual's belief about whether or not they can accomplish a task – includes self-efficacy, which relates to how they feel about past performance, and expectations about performing specific tasks in the future
2.	Motivation – why individuals think and behave as they do
3.	Perseverance – steadfastness on mastering a skill or completing a task (it includes engagement, ie: how committed students are to academic tasks, and grit, ie: perseverance and passion for long-term goals)
4.	Self-control – the ability to forgo short-term temptations, appetites, and impulses in order to prioritise a higher pursuit
5.	Metacognitive strategies – consciously focusing on thinking, selecting, monitoring and planning strategies that are most conducive to learning
6.	Social competencies – social interactions and relationships with others, including leadership and social skills
7.	Resilience and coping – resilience is adapting positively to challenges despite the presence of risk; coping involves using skills when faced with specific difficulties, and this process of coping leads to resilience
8.	Creativity – the production of novel and useful ideas

TABLE 6 NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE OUTCOMES (GUTMAN AND SCHOON, 2013)

They also reviewed the extent to which NCS are capable of being developed, or as they described it, 'malleable'. They suggest there is a spectrum ranging from context-specific factors (such as motivation), through malleable skills (such as self-control), to personality traits (like grit or creativity), which, the authors suggest, are the most difficult to alter. Cultivating employability skills is complex, and we would guard against such clear-cut assertions as these.

2.4 Social and emotional learning

Closely connected to both character and non-cognitive skills are a number of approaches which focus on social and emotional aspects of learning (SEL). Schools in England have been using positive psychology programmes to enhance well-being and resilience in children for some time. One of the most widely implemented programmes in English primary and secondary schools was the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Strategy for Schools (SEAL) programme. It was a whole-school approach that included five skills:

- self-awareness;
- self-regulation (managing feelings);
- motivation;
- empathy;
- social skills.

The UK Resilience Programme was the UK implementation of the Penn Resiliency Programme designed to improve children's psychological well-being by building resilience and promoting accurate thinking. The Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) programme, also of American origin, was aimed at primary schools as a whole-school intervention and comprised a curriculum developed over five years and divided into three units focusing on readiness and self-control, relationships and feelings, and interpersonal cognitive problem-solving. Some small-scale evaluations (for example, Honess and Hunter, 2014) suggested that results from these programmes could be positive for social and emotional outcomes, but many evaluations demonstrated that they had mixed results, particularly at secondary-school level, often revealing little or no impact on student outcomes, either behavioural or academic. This eventually resulted in government endorsement being withdrawn for some of them (Humphrey et al., 2010). Even the most recent evaluation of a large-scale two-year-long trial of PATHS funded by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) reported no positive impact on academic attainment at primary level. The outcomes relating to social and emotional well-being are still to be published (Education Endowment Fund, 2015).

However, other studies have shown that in the longer term SEL can have a significant impact on adult life. In the most recent longitudinal study into the impact of social and emotional learning, Alissa Goodman and colleagues (2015) identified five groups of social and emotional skills that showed promise through these programmes:

- Self-perception and self-awareness: self-knowledge, perception of themselves and own value, confidence and self-efficacy.
- Motivation: the belief that effort leads to achievement.
- Self-control and self-regulation: managing and expressing emotions, overcoming short-term impulsivity to prioritise longer term goals.
- Social skills: the ability to interact with others, forge and maintain relationships.
- Resilience and coping: the ability to adapt positively and purposefully in the face of stress and otherwise difficult circumstances. Resilience is not so much an aspect of character as a developmental process – the ability to summon strength when needed and 'beat the odds' of adversity.

Furthermore, findings indicate that there can be a significant impact on employability and well-being for individuals in the longer term by engaging with SEL (Clarke et al., 2015) and also that SEL has a long-term economic value, with benefits being equal to or exceeding costs (Belfield et al., 2015).

Schools are also required to address personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and Citizenship education, but a number of reviews by Ofsted (2013a; 2013b) and others (for example, Weare, 2014) have concluded that in both these areas, schools are failing to deliver effective education that has an impact on outcomes.

Many schools still use the Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) framework once promoted by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (National Archives, 2011). This includes six groups of skills:

- independent enquirers;
- creative thinkers;
- reflective learners;
- teamworkers;
- self-managers;
- effective participants.

These PLTS overlap with elements of social and emotional learning as well as with many of the skills we have been describing in Sections 2.1., 2.2 and 2.3. PLTS are still a required aspect of apprenticeships, even if not explicitly part of general education in schools.

2.5 Twenty-first century skills

The new millennium prompted a host of attempts to define what skills would be needed to live and work in a more global environment influenced by the rapid development of ICT, including an early White Paper published by the Labour Government in 2003 (DfES, 2003) which introduced free courses in basic ICT. The potential for ICT to change the nature of jobs and employment – for example, with more routine tasks being taken over by technology and greater information literacy needed to engage with jobs in the 'knowledge society' – gave rise to a large number of 21st-century skills frameworks with which education systems were encouraged to engage.

Not surprisingly, ICT-related competencies and information literacy can be found at the core of most of these frameworks, such as the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) framework, developed in partnership between the University of Melbourne and employers Cisco, Intel and Microsoft (Griffin et al., 2012); its four categories of 21st-century skills (ATC21S, 2009–12) are:

1 Ways of thinking:
  – Creativity and innovation
  – Critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making
  – Learning to learn/metacognition (knowledge about cognitive processes).

2 Ways of working:
  – Communication
  – Collaboration (teamwork).

3 Tools for working:
  – Information literacy
  – Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy.

4 Ways of living in the world:
  – Citizenship – local and global
  – Life and career
  – Personal and social responsibility, including cultural awareness and competence.

Many of these competencies would probably be described as transferable skills rather than performance character skills and were, as Joke Voogt and her colleague point out, being promoted long before the millennium (Voogt and Roblin, 2012; p. 316). However, ATC21S researchers Marilyn Binkley and her colleagues argue that both work and social contexts, and consequently the demands on all young people, have changed so much that:

> *whether a technician or professional person, success lies in being able to communicate, share and use information to solve complex problems, in being able to adapt and innovate in response to new demands and changing circumstances, in being able to marshal and expand the power of technology to create new knowledge, and in expanding human capacity and productivity.* (Binkley et al., 2012; p. 17)

The definitions, tools and approaches to teaching and assessing 21st-century skills identified by the ATC21S project were trialled internationally, and have been adopted by the Singapore Ministry of Education in its framework for 21st-century competencies and desired student outcomes; but the Singapore model also includes six core values that are more aligned with character habits and virtues: respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience and harmony (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2010). The outcomes from research into teaching and assessing collaborative problem-solving undertaken for the project in the UK by World Class Arena are available on its website (World Class Arena, 2015).

2.6 What's in a name?

It is clear from even our brief overview that there is much overlap and some confusion in the broad area of employability skills. The language we use to talk about them quickly goes beyond skills to include attributes, dispositions, habits of mind, characteristics, capabilities and traits (to use just a few of their labels). There are many overlapping lists, frameworks, groupings and taxonomies – some drawing on empirical or theoretical research, others more pragmatically rooted in employer need.

Does it matter what we call employability skills? Could this ongoing uncertainty about the naming of skills and attributes that are required to gain employment and remain employable contribute to the inability of education to develop them, and employers to notice them? Would an agreed national list or framework with measurable outcomes be beneficial? The CBI claims that for schools it would be helpful:

> *We need a clear statement of outcomes which incorporates the behaviours and attitudes that the school system should develop in young people. We also need an accountability framework and inspection regime which incentivises schools to deliver these agreed outcomes.* (CBI, 2013; n.p.)

The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) (Ofsted, 2015a) goes some way towards meeting the CBI's call for an inspection regime which addresses the development of employability skills in the education system, since it empowers Ofsted inspectors to make judgements on the extent to which educational provision promotes learners' employability skills. However, the inspection criteria and grade descriptors for this aspect of education are primarily confined to the guidance for the FE and Skills sector, rather than being included for schools also. Furthermore, even the references in the FE sector could be more explicit if they are to meet the CBI's demands. For example, within the section on *Personal development, behaviour and welfare,* one of the grade descriptors for outstanding provision ensures that:

> *Learners understand how their education and training equip them with the behaviours and attitudes necessary for success in the future as reflected by the excellent employability skills they acquire and the achievement of relevant additional qualifications.* (Ofsted, 2015b; p. 47)

However, further specificity might possibly be achieved by referring to our employability habits of mind such as resilience and perseverance, since some of the other habits that we defined are discernible in terms such as 'taking pride in work', 'self-confidence' and 'curiosity', which are used elsewhere as grade descriptors in this document.

McDonald's UK (2015a) agrees that young people are at a disadvantage without having a shared language for talking about their soft skills. The employer is campaigning for a unifying framework for recognising, developing and measuring soft skills, and is coordinating a like-minded group of companies committed to this action.

At undergraduate level, agreement on detailed definitions appears to be less important than ensuring that appropriate approaches are used to develop relevant attributes:

> *It is arguable that specific definitions are less important than an agreed focus on approaches to promote such transferable skills and fostering attributes that will enable graduates to find appropriate employment.* (Lowden et al., 2011; p. 24)

Most researchers agree that measurement is important (otherwise, definitions are just left open to individual interpretation) but disagree that finding agreed terminology is necessary or even possible. Each community of practice espousing such skills, attributes or character traits will want to have its own 'motivating umbrella term' to ensure that everyone involved is 'marching under the same flag' (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015; p. 239).

A recent report outlining proposals for character development in schools in England also demonstrates how difficult it is to agree terminology. Teachers consulted by the Demos researchers resisted the language of 'moral virtues' and 'character building' or 'moral education', preferring to use terms such as 'life skills' or 'skills for life and work' (Birdwell et al., 2015). Furthermore, the Jubilee Centre report into the moral character development of young people in the UK found that there was no correlation between whether a school had a strong approach to character and the percentage of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C. According to Demos:

> *This perhaps demonstrates that the current methods for assessing school quality are not sufficiently capturing the extent of character education in the school.* (Birdwell et al., 2015; p. 29)

2.7 Bringing employability and character together

By way of summarising Section 2, and at the risk of further proliferating the list-making tendencies demonstrated by everyone who approaches this topic, we offer our own suggested framework (Table 7). In it we explicitly focus on what has been called 'performance character': the soft, non-cognitive skills for which there is evidence of impact at work and in learning. The criteria for our selection are:

- Moral neutrality (we suggest that, while virtuous behaviour is clearly part of what schools, colleges and providers aim to encourage, the field is too subjective and unconnected to impact).
- Evidence of employer demand.
- Evidence of positive impact on performance.
- Face validity – simple enough to be intelligible to employers, employees *and* educators without much further explanation.

By choosing the expression 'habits of mind' as our first category, we are explicitly suggesting that these capabilities are learnable. We are also reminding educators that it takes time for these habits of mind to develop in a range of contexts before they become habits which an individual is disposed to use. The second category is a set of skills for which there is growing evidence that they can be learned in one context and applied and used in others, hence our preference for the term 'transferable' to describe these skills rather than alternatives such as 'core' or 'generic'.

HABITS OF MIND	TRANSFERABLE SKILLS
Self-belief	Communication
Self-control	Time management
Perseverance	Self-management
Resilience	Problem-solving
Curiosity	Teamworking
Empathy	Giving and receiving feedback
Creativity	
Craftsmanship	

TABLE 7 CRL'S HABITS OF MIND AND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FOR EMPLOYABILITY

We would also want to mention other useful work-related knowledge and technical skills, such as:

- personal organisation and presentation;
- customer awareness;
- applied literacy and numeracy;
- IT and graphical literacy;
- business processes;
- ethical behaviour.

These, however, have generally been well described, even if they are not always reliably taught at school or within FE.

3. WHICH EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

'To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure.'

Peter Hawkins (1999)

How we answer the question in the title of this section depends, of course, on our perspective. Using the available research and survey data, we look at two perspectives – employers' (to understand the market) and employees' (to stay close to individual learners).

3.1 Employers' perspectives

To help us calibrate employers' views of importance, we will start by looking at the skills they say they value and then focus on those they consider to be most lacking in young people.

3.1.1 Skills most wanted by employers

The first priority for employers when recruiting is to find individuals with the 'right attitude'. This they describe as 'willingness to work, a desire to learn, punctuality, honesty and appropriate personal behaviour and presentation'. These attributes are followed by 'basic skills' including literacy and numeracy, teamwork, communication skills, problem-solving and the ability to use equipment and technology. Finally, an awareness of the 'profit' needs of a business is sought (Taylor, 2005).

Impetus (2014) claimed that the lack of a common skills language across all stakeholders makes it difficult for employers to communicate to young people what they are looking for when recruiting. In order to develop a shared understanding and to find out more about employers' requirements, they held interviews with twenty UK employers and organised three focus group meetings. From this research Impetus identified 'six essential capabilities' that are needed by young people to be ready for work by the time they leave education and that are typically expected by employers of all employees. In order to be ready for work, young people should be: self-aware, receptive, driven, self-assured, resilient and informed (Impetus, 2014; p. 8). Within the report they also refer to their six essential capabilities as 'vital capabilities', 'character traits' and 'first-order capabilities'. They also note that the capability 'informed' stands out as being different to the others, but was very important to employers.

Impetus also noted that many lists of 'employability skills' are essentially outcomes, or second-order factors of these primary 'vital capabilities', such as leadership, teamwork, problem-solving and communication, so they did not include them in their list. However, when examining their expanded list of behaviours that might be exercised when demonstrating each primary capability (Table 8), there are some highly specific examples derived from employers, which might not be evident to young people unless they have already had some experience of the workplace. The Impetus model recognises this by proposing that young people need to understand that although these capabilities are essential for gaining a job, they also have to be developed further to maintain and develop one's self in the job. Furthermore, Impetus concluded that no one capability contains the answer to gaining sustained employment, all six are needed.

SELF-AWARE	RECEPTIVE	DRIVEN
Recognises own strengths and weaknesses, exhibits self-control, takes responsibility for themselves (and others), relates to others as adults rather than as in a child/parent role, able to communicate and explain their strengths and weaknesses to others, does not shift blame, is accountable, sets realistic goals, recognises their limits, has the ability to control emotions and desires in difficult situations	Willing to learn, open-minded, patient, flexible, happy to consider travel and/or relocate, displays humility, shows respect for other people, appreciates the views of others, works well with others, recognises the importance of compromise, can identify people to ask/learn from, engages in informal networking, learns from different people and situations, willing to tackle their own weaknesses, open to working in different ways, takes on feedback and advice	Determined, diligent, hard-working, shows care and conscientiousness in their work, displays a positive attitude, keen, enthusiastic about all tasks, motivated, punctual, proves themselves quickly, works carefully, does background research, goes the extra mile, well organised, persistent, in the right place at the right time, reliable, applies themselves consistently
SELF-ASSURED	**RESILIENT**	**INFORMED**
Quietly confident, displays self-belief, has good levels of self-esteem, believes they can reach goals, influences future outcomes and shapes their life, independent thinker, makes eye contact, exhibits good posture, has a firm handshake, displays trust in other people, willing to ask questions and seek more information, able to work alone without clear direction	Copes with rejection and set-backs, does not take things personally, learns from mistakes, does not panic, adaptable in new or difficult situations, open to constructive criticism, bounces back, looks on the positive/bright side, overcomes adversity, can handle uncertainty, perseveres, emotionally strong, displays grit	Understands job market, aware of options, can identify pathways into work, direct contact with employers, capable of searching for job vacancies, can uncover background information about sectors/companies/roles, will interact with job centres/recruitment firms/HR, has representative CV, understands office etiquette, punctual and well presented, can effectively describe themselves and their achievements verbally, proactively seeks advice from people in work, understands impact of education and training levels on employment

TABLE 8 SIX VITAL CAPABILITIES TO BE READY FOR WORK (IMPETUS, 2014; PP. 17–22)

The second half of their report contains an analysis of programmes and interventions aimed at supporting young people into work and evaluates the extent to which they developed the six vital capabilities. They found an overwhelming emphasis placed on informing young people about the world of work, for example through teaching job-search skills and by providing guidance and advice or work experience. Very few interventions, however, focused on developing the social skills that formed the backbone to the remaining five capabilities. Those that did tended to be more successful (Impetus, 2014; p. 31).

Based on their latest two education and skills surveys of around 300 employers, CBI/Pearson reported that the three most important factors that employers look for when recruiting school and college leavers are their attitudes to work/character, their general aptitudes for work, and basic literacy and numeracy. These were considered far more important than formal academic results (CBI/Pearson, 2014; 2015).

This was true of graduates as well as school leavers. It confirms earlier research by Kevin Lowden and colleagues (2011), who found that although employers sought specific skills and knowledge from graduates for specific roles, they also valued a range of transferable skills including:

- teamworking;
- problem-solving;
- self-management;
- knowledge of the business;
- literacy and numeracy relevant to the post;
- ICT knowledge;
- good interpersonal and communication skills;
- ability to use own initiative but also to follow instructions;
- leadership skills where necessary.

They also sought attitudes such as motivation, tenacity and commitment, and 'life skills' more often found in mature graduates.

Once individuals are in employment, employers such as McDonald's UK report that soft skills are also needed to succeed at work because they enable individuals to participate and progress in the workplace.

> *The skills, attitudes and experiences possessed by individuals that enable participation and progression in the workplace [enable the] qualities and attributes needed to succeed in the workplace.* (McDonald's UK, 2015b; p. 7)

This employer identified five groups of linked soft skill sets:

- communication and interpersonal skills;
- teamwork;
- time and self-management skills;
- decision-making and initiative-taking;
- taking responsibility.

They also recognised that soft skills are important not only for securing and maintaining employability, but also for success in family and community life.

3.1.2 Employability skills employers think are most lacking

In the UK it has been noted from 1998 onwards that employers have been reporting lack of communication, teamwork, other technical and practical skills, customer handling, and problem-solving skills when they recruit to the workforce. There is also similar evidence from employers in USA from 1991 onwards showing that personal skills – for example, personal qualities including responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, and honesty – were desirable, but that it was hard to recruit workers with these skills (Kautz et al., 2014).

The UKCES *Employer Skills Survey 2013* explores the challenges that employers face in recruiting new employees, in terms of skills, and also asks about the skills challenges they face with their existing workforce. Employers who reported having vacancies that were difficult to fill because of skill shortages were asked, for each occupation in which they reported skill-shortage vacancies, which skills were lacking. Almost two-thirds of all skill-shortage vacancies were ascribed to a lack of technical, practical or job-specific skills. Generic or 'softer' skills such as planning and organisation, customer handling, problem-solving and teamworking were also cited in connection with between one-third and two-fifths of skill-shortage vacancies (UKCES, 2104).

The report notes that this is a broadly similar pattern to 2011, although it shows an increase in the proportion of skill-shortage vacancies resulting from a lack of communication skills, particularly oral communication. Literacy and numeracy skills were also noted as lacking more frequently in the latest report (UKCES, 2014; p. 9).

Most employers found the education leavers they took on to be either well or very well prepared for work, although around 36% of employers taking on school leavers at 16 from schools in England, Northern Ireland or Wales described the recruits as poorly prepared. These perceptions about the 'work-readiness' of education leavers are similar to those reported in 2011 (UKCES 2014, p. 86). City & Guilds (2013) also found that employers find young people less well equipped for the workplace now than in the past.

In 2011 a clear pattern had emerged: smaller employers were less likely than larger employers to find education leavers, at each level, to be well prepared. Although less marked, this pattern persisted in 2013 in respect of HE leavers (75% of employers with two to four employees said their recruits from HE were well or very well prepared, but this figure rose to 86% amongst employers with more than 250 staff). However, it was not replicated amongst school leavers, where there was little difference in perceptions of preparedness by size band of employer. The lack of soft skills is more evident in the case of school leavers than FE college leavers or university graduates.

Employers cited lack of experience of the working world, or even lack of experience of life in general, as being the most common reason that education leavers were poorly prepared for work (City & Guilds, 2013; p. 4; UKCES, 2014; p. 89). This was mentioned more frequently by those recruiting school/college leavers than those recruiting leavers from higher education. This supports findings on youth unemployment which found that employers were generally satisfied with the competence level of school leavers but were least satisfied with their experience of the world of work (UKCES, 2015). In fact, over three-quarters of employers surveyed by City & Guilds agreed that relevant work experience 'is essential to ensure young people are ready for work' (City & Guilds, 2013; p. 5).

The second area employers highlighted most frequently when they described education leavers as poorly prepared was a lack of motivation and/or a poor attitude to work in general. This was the case for almost one in five employers who had recruited a school leaver and for one in ten establishments who had recruited an FE college leaver, whereas lack of motivation or poor attitude among HE graduates was reported by a much lower number of recruiters (UKCES, 2014; p. 89).

The CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey (2014) noted that more than half of the employers they surveyed were aware of weaknesses in the core competencies of literacy, numeracy and IT skills in at least some of their employees. This was of concern because they reported that they expected the demand for employees with higher-level skills to increase in the next three to five years. In this survey, employers expressed particular concern at the shortage of STEM skills and knowledge, but when considering the skills of school leavers, many businesses were not satisfied with the attitudes and skills of this group in important areas including attitudes to work, teamwork, basic numeracy, problem-solving, and communication skills. More than half of businesses surveyed thought that schools and colleges should be developing awareness of working life as a top priority since this appears to be the 'single most important consideration when young people are seeking that critical first job opening' (CBI/Pearson, 2014, p. 48).

The employer emphasis on the value of certain attitudes and aptitudes for success in the workplace also extends to graduates, with the majority of employers valuing these aptitudes above the degree subject, although employers did report that a degree in a STEM subject gives a graduate an advantage in the job market. However, when recruiting STEM graduates, employers were dissatisfied not only with the lack of relevance of the STEM qualification to their business needs, but also with the lack of general workplace experience among applicants and weaknesses in the attitudes and aptitudes for working life among candidates (CBI/Pearson, 2014, p. 28).

When Australian researchers looked at what employers really meant by lack of 'work readiness' in young people, they found that that this meant having difficulty adjusting to the work environment, difficulty considering work not as a social occasion, an unwillingness to take a job seriously, a reluctance to ask about something if they were uncertain, and a lack of understanding of the poor impressions they created at work through this behaviour. However, when young people were asked what they thought employers are looking for, they thought that it was the old-fashioned work ethic and they had a high awareness of the role of personal attributes and demeanour in obtaining and maintaining employment. According to the author, this possibly suggests that the view held of a widespread lack of work readiness in young people was being exaggerated at that point in time (Taylor, 2005).

Similar findings were reported by Nick Wilton (2014), who reviewed employers' perspectives of undergraduates' employability skills when recruiting students for work placements. When interviewing managers responsible for the recruitment and selection of work placement students in a wide range of organisational settings, Wilton found that the baseline requirement was for a strong work ethic, computer literacy, a willingness and ability to learn and ask questions, confidence, being pro-active, problem-solving, time management and communication skills. However, more vague attributes were also sought, mostly related to agreeableness; for example, one manager would be looking for 'someone I can go for a beer with'. Other, more context-specific attributes, such as being able to deal with pressure and person-organisation fit, were sought.

Wilton suggests that these findings highlight multiple facets of employability that are in play during recruitment and illustrate the often subjective, unknowable and shifting criteria used to select among similar candidates for employment. Although this more nuanced understanding of how employers select among applicants could enable more effective student preparation for the labour market, Wilton argues that such a focus has the potential to be discriminatory and would be difficult to prepare graduates for.

So, although numerous reports claim that precise definitions of employability skills are not essential for progress in developing the employability of young people, there may be risks in not having such specifications.

3.1.3 Impact of 'character' skills on employability and economic well-being

It is suggested that the economy is suffering through a shortfall of soft skills. McDonald's UK analysed the importance of 'soft skills' to the UK economy and estimated that they underpin around 6.5% of the economy as a whole (McDonald's UK, 2015b). They make a particularly important contribution to finance and business services, retail, public services, education and health – areas that have grown significantly in the UK economy in recent years – so it is vital that teachers and young people understand their importance when it comes to obtaining employment. McDonald's UK also estimated that over half a million UK workers will be significantly held back by soft skills deficits by 2020, with the most affected sectors of the economy being in the sectors relating to accommodation and food services, retail, and health and social work. This employer claims that communication skills and the ability to work with a team are in the top three skills currently looked for by employers.

Problems caused by lack of soft skills, apart from finding it difficult to fill vacancies, include increased operating costs and barriers to introducing new working practices. Soft skills are important for productivity because they make people more flexible and adaptable to change, and more positive learning takes places between co-workers (including management).

James Heckman and his colleagues (2006) have shown that soft skills, or non-cognitive skills, are hugely influential in shaping life outcomes. Non-cognitive skills strongly influence schooling decisions and also affect wages, given schooling decisions. Schooling, employment, work experience, and choice of occupation are all affected by latent non-cognitive and cognitive skills.

Clive Belfield and colleagues (2015) evaluated six SEL programmes, five in USA and one in Sweden, with the focus on establishing whether the available measures of benefits for each were equal to or exceeded the costs for each programme. They reported that:

> *The most important empirical finding is that each of the six interventions for improving SEL shows measurable benefits that exceed its costs, often by considerable amounts. There is a positive return on investments for all of these educational reforms on social and emotional learning. And the aggregate result also shows considerable benefits relative to costs, with an average benefit-cost ratio of about 11 to 1 among the six interventions. This means that, on average, for every dollar invested equally across the six SEL interventions, there is a return of eleven dollars, a substantial economic return.* (Belfield et al., 2015; p. 5)

They suggest that this implies that policy-makers should pay as much attention to emphasising accountability for SEL gains as they do to emphasising accountability for cognitive gains identified by testing.

The most recent research into the long-term impact of SEL in the UK (Goodman et al., 2015; p. 12) also concluded that 'substantial benefits' accrued to individuals in the longer term as a result of effective interventions to enhance SEL in school, including benefits to their physical and mental health, employment and adult life satisfaction. Self-control, self-regulation and social skills were particularly linked to labour-market outcomes. However, they found that there is little evidence to date on the importance in later life of resilience and coping demonstrated in childhood.

3.2 Employees' perspectives

3.2.1 Employability skills that impact on educational outcomes

Having good employability skills is of obvious benefit to the employment prospects of individuals who can demonstrate them to an employer. But these same skills or habits of mind can also demonstrably improve educational outcomes (making it even more likely that an employer would want to consider employing an individual in their organisation).

In Section 2 we outlined in some detail what employability skills might look like were character to be included. Here we summarise the direct advantages of these wider employability skills to improving educational outcomes.

There is now a considerable body of research to suggest that school performance is not just the result of academic knowledge and raw intelligence, but that many non-cognitive factors also contribute significantly to educational achievement. In fact, some researchers such as Angela Duckworth now claim that measures of self-control are far more predictive of educational achievement in the longer term than IQ tests. Duckworth and her colleague Martin Seligman analysed students' self-reports on their self-control as well as using similar reports from parents and teachers, and when mapped against students' achievement tests, they found that self-control was far more predictive of higher scores than IQ. Students with high self-control also had fewer absences from school, spent more time studying and less time watching television (Duckworth and Seligman, 2005).

Camille Farrington and her colleagues also found, like Duckworth, that perseverance leads to effective academic behaviours such as attending class, doing homework, engaging in classroom activities and studying, and it was these behaviours that appeared to be most closely related to academic success. They proposed that the most effective way of increasing academic perseverance was to support the development of an 'academic mindset' (Farrington et al., 2012).

Their framework for an effective academic mindset is composed of five interrelated categories of non-cognitive factors (NCF) (Figure 6).

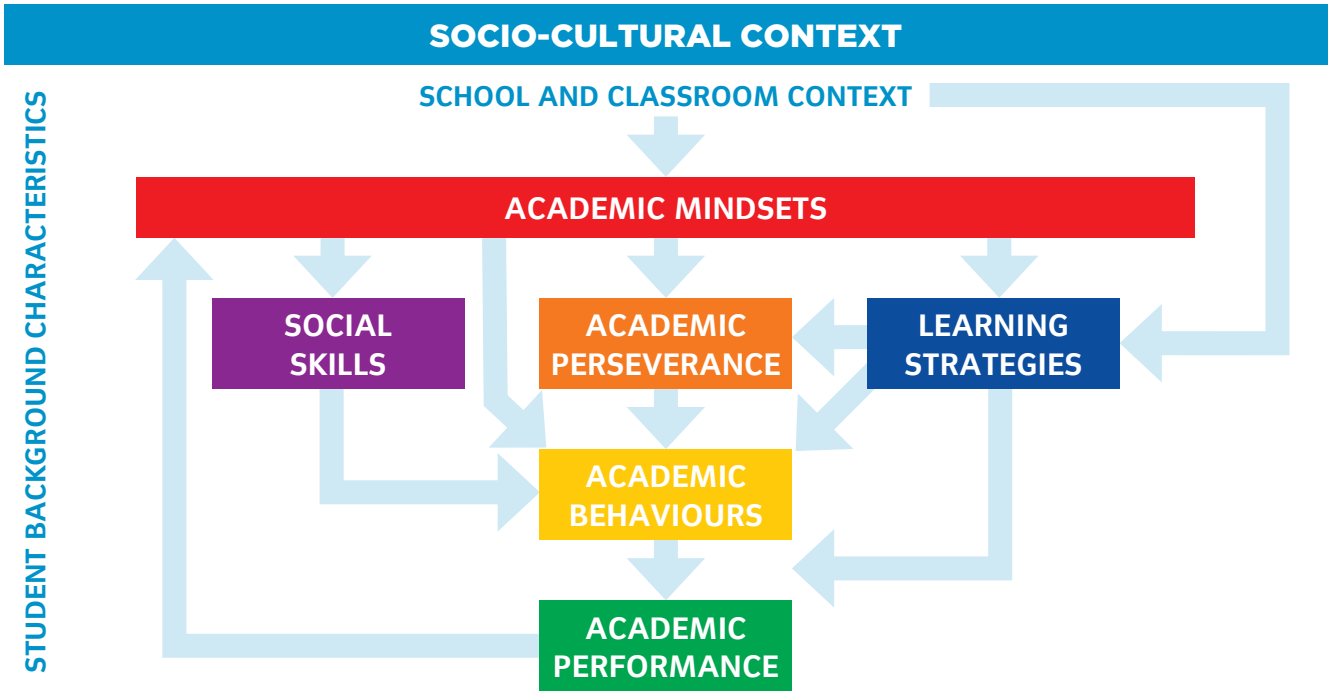


FIGURE 6 A HYPOTHESISED MODEL OF HOW FIVE NON-COGNITIVE FACTORS AFFECT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE. SOURCE: FARRINGTON AND COLLEAGUES (2012; P. 12)

The factors having the most immediate impact on academic performance are the academic behaviours associated with being a 'good student'. These visible signs, such as attending class, completing homework, being organised, participating in class and studying, demonstrate that a student is engaged. Nearly all other factors work through these behaviours to affect performance. Academic behaviours are the product of academic perseverance, which includes factors such as 'grit', tenacity, delayed gratification, self-discipline and self-control. While it is obvious that perseverance is necessary for the achievement of long-term goals, there is some doubt as to its influence on educational attainment and its generalisability to all types of student.

Perseverance is increased when students have a positive academic mindset. Farrington and her colleagues identify four academic mindsets, expressed in the form of beliefs that a learner should have:

1 I belong in this academic community.

2 My ability and competence grow with my effort.

3 I can succeed at this.

4 This work has value for me.

The final two groups of NCFs (academic behaviours and academic performance) influence the previous three groups. Learning strategies, such as study skills and metacognitive strategies, are used to enhance academic behaviours; and social skills, such as showing empathy, being cooperative, assertive and responsible, are behaviours that improve social interactions – for example, between learner and teacher, or between learning peers. Although there has been limited evidence of social skills having a positive impact on academic outcomes to date, it has frequently been suggested that social skills are important for future work and life outcomes. Farrington et al. suggest that the limited evidence of a relationship between social skills and academic outcomes could be the result of teaching and assessment methods – for example, passive lecturing or teaching from the front of the class, and individual assessments that do not require social skills for success. These five sets of NCFs are, in turn, affected by the context of the classroom and the school, individual learner characteristics and the wider social-cultural context of the education system.

Carol Dweck and her colleagues have demonstrated that students with high IQ scores are not always the ones who are most successful in the long term. She has long promoted the value of developing a growth mindset – the belief that ability can be improved through effort or by trying new approaches in order to increase students' academic achievement – and she now suggests that the non-cognitive factors that promote long-term learning and achievement can be brought together under the label 'academic tenacity' (Dweck et al., 2014). She groups the non-cognitive skills required for academic success under the label 'academic tenacity'. She suggests that academically tenacious students demonstrate four key characteristics (Table 9).

CHARACTERISTICS OF TENACIOUS STUDENTS
1 They believe that they belong in school academically and socially. School is part of who they are and is seen as a route to future goals
2 They are engaged in learning, view effort positively, and can forgo immediate pleasures for the sake of schoolwork. For example, they seek challenging tasks that will help them learn new things, rather than tasks in their comfort zone that require little effort, but also provide little opportunity to learn.
3 They are not derailed by difficulty, be it intellectual or social. They see a setback as an opportunity for learning or a problem to be solved rather than as a humiliation, a condemnation of their ability or worth, a symbol of future failures, or a confirmation that they do not belong.
4 They know how to remain engaged over the long haul and how to deploy new strategies for moving forward effectively

TABLE 9 CHARACTERISTICS OF TENACIOUS STUDENTS (DWECK AND COLLEAGUES, 2014; P. 4)

A fascinating insight into the formation of character in UK adolescents is provided by the research undertaken by James Arthur and colleagues (2015) exploring the state of character education in UK schools. They found that schools do place high priority on developing the 'whole child', but that teachers believe that the current assessment system hinders them in achieving this aim. Students in Year 10 who completed a series of moral dilemma tests appeared to approach their decision-making from the point of view of self-interest and struggled to justify why they would take a particular action. In a self-report survey where students had to indicate how strongly they exhibited each of twenty-four character strengths, of the performance character strengths which we suggest are important for employability, only curiosity featured in the top ten, in tenth place out of twenty-four. Others, such as perseverance/persistence, self-regulation and appreciation of beauty/excellence (ie craftsmanship), were lower down the list, and when using the same survey to evaluate their students, teachers also were more likely to suggest that performance-related virtues such as persistence and self-discipline were lacking in their students. James Arthur and his colleagues suggested that this teacher emphasis may reflect the dominance of testing and assessment in many UK schools (Arthur et al., 2015; p. 22).

So far we have explored the evolution of thinking about employability and reviewed some of the thinking associated with character, largely in the context of schools. We have also looked at employers' views of what is needed (and also what is too often lacking) in young people. Along the way, we have suggested how these two strands of thinking could be combined and focused on the FE sector. In the final section we consider how best such an expanded conception of employability might be taught, learned and assessed.

4. THE PEDAGOGY OF EMPLOYABILITY

'There is a lack of research and evaluation, particularly involving detailed case studies, that identifies good practice in delivering employability skills programmes.'

UKCES (2010; p. 46)

We have seen that, while there is a wide variety of views as to what employability skills are, there is a growing consensus that those associated with 'performance character' are particularly useful. Thus far it is in schools that there has been a new emphasis on character, and in universities where the necessity of demonstrating impact and the rating of courses according to the employability of their graduates has made employability a key topic. But it is in providers that employability in a broad sense has been, and is going to be, particularly important for the UK economy – for it is here that we will need major growth in employment. There are many outstanding examples of employability in colleges and training providers, some of which we touch on in this section. Indeed, the FE and skills sector has a long track record of helping to make young people employable.

But, notwithstanding the obviously vocational flavour of much that is done in FE, employability as a core concept can sometimes exist more at the level of various occupational pathways than as an embedded concept. We believe that learning for employability could be enhanced if performance character were seen as a key component of a more strategic approach to developing employability in all learners.

Lee Harvey summarises three important aspects of teaching for employability:

> *Three core processes impact on employability, first the pedagogic process that encourages development, second, self-reflection by the student and, third, articulation of experiences and abilities.* (Harvey, 2002; p. 5)

He also reminds us that, while opportunities for employability are influenced by the nature of the subject and its degree of vocationalism, 'vocational' does not necessarily equate with 'employable'.

4.1 Teaching employability

How do you teach something as complex as employability? Five years ago, when UKCES looked at programmes which sought to do so, it found only limited evidence of good practices. In our earlier sections we have heard the voices of many employers casting doubt on the readiness of some young people when they leave college or school. Yet as we will see, Ofsted has celebrated many excellent examples of practice in both colleges and training providers, and we are increasingly clear about the features of excellent practice.

Mantz Yorke (2006) helpfully summarises the complexity of cultivating employability:

> *Employability is taken to be a more complex construct than those of 'core' or 'key' skills. It connects with a range of discourses and has many facets which range from understanding of one or more subject disciplines to 'soft skills' (such as working effectively with others). It also encompasses both academic intelligence and 'practical' intelligence.* (Yorke, 2006; p. 2)

In this last section we bring together some of what is known about the teaching and learning of employability and character, in the sense we have defined it, and offer a brief overview.

Before we start it is worth mentioning that there are some specific qualifications with 'employability' in their title. One curriculum development organisation, ASDAN, for example, has developed a useful range of employability materials and awards which straddle school and college (ASDAN, no date) and City & Guilds (2015a), OCR (2015) and NCFE (no date) all offer qualifications in employability skills.

Useful as these are, we are not talking about such standalone options but about more fundamental approaches to cultivating employability in students across a whole institution or provider. For employability, like citizenship, creativity, health, global awareness and environmental responsibility, is a concept that transcends disciplines and subjects. This breadth and ubiquity present particular challenges in colleges and schools where teachers are, by and large, subject specialists and the curriculum is mainly organised by subject.

Jonathan Birdwell and colleagues (2015) found that schools who were winners of the 2015 Character Awards had the following features in common:

- a whole-school ethos;
- student-led recording evidence of personal development, accompanying school-led approaches to measure character;
- use of reward or award systems schemes;
- structured reflection periods;
- personal tutors or coaches;
- older students working with younger students;
- opportunities to take part in voluntary programmes and social action in school and in the local community;
- consideration of moral issues in a cross-curricular manner;
- involvement of parents, guardians and families;
- classes in public speaking, philosophy and ethics lessons.

While some of these features are clearly school-specific, ideas such as structured reflection and participation in voluntary activities clearly translate to a FE context. A more extensive review of thirty-nine school-based SEL programmes (Clarke et al., 2015) found that the following features were important factors in effective interventions:

- focus on teaching skills, in particular the cognitive, affective and behavioural skills and competencies as outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL);
- use of competence enhancement and empowering approaches;
- use of interactive teaching methods including role play, games and group work to teach skills;
- well-defined goals and use of a coordinated set of activities to achieve objectives;
- provision of explicit teacher guidelines through teacher training and programme materials.

Similarly, a focus on affective and behavioural skills and on interactive teaching methods would work equally in a college as in a school. Demos has suggested that the kind of holistic framework approach evident in the baccalaureate approach to education is the most effective for developing character skills (Birdwell et al., 2015; p. 44). But Demos is referring to the approaches promoted by the International Baccalaureate, not the more constraining EBacc (DfE, 2015d) currently being implemented in schools in England.

In 2013 Ofsted reviewed provision by Halton Borough Council for the development of employability skills and noted five important key steps involved in the cultivation of employability skills, summarised below:

1. A dedicated employer engagement team linking closely with prospective employers to identify current and future employment opportunities.
2. Discussions with employers on programme design focusing on the specific vocational skills and more generic employability skills that employers regard to be critical for the recruitment process and for sustaining employment.
3. The National Careers Service team providing information, advice and guidance to learners on an ongoing basis to help them identify their career and employment goals and the steps needed to achieve them.
4. Tutors using a combination of information on learners' employment goals, initial interviews and initial assessments to identify personal barriers to employment and prioritise personal learning targets.
5. The team of tutors delivering learning programmes that develop essential sector-specific vocational and generic employability skills, including:
   - the development of computer skills and work-related English and maths skills linked to specific vocational areas;
   - work experience and work tasters;
   - workshops to support learners to complete job applications;
   - individual support to assist learners in accessing internet-based job searches and job application processes such as Universal Job Match to search and apply for jobs;
   - additional support in developing skills in managing a bank account, moving to a monthly personal or household budget, time management and journey planning for learners who make the transition from benefits to paid employment (Ofsted, 2013c).

These recommendations are all very sensible and describe, at an intermediate level, some of the organisational and structural conditions which need to be in place. There are similar Ofsted examples of good practice from colleges (Ofsted, 2013d), schools and training providers (Ofsted, 2012). Yet in September 2014, Sir Michael Wilshaw was trenchant in his criticism of the performance of colleges and schools in teaching employability:

> *Many employers complain that far too many young people looking for work have not been taught the skills, attitudes and behaviours they need to be successful. It means they have a sloppy attitude to punctuality. It means they are far too relaxed in terms of meeting deadlines. It means that far too many young people are lackadaisical in the way they present themselves for work. If they dress inappropriately, speak inappropriately and have poor social skills, they are not going to get a job.* (Wilshaw, 2014)

It is immediately clear that what the Chief Inspector has in mind is a much narrower view of employability than, for example, what the CBI wants (see page 24). He is not alone in this kind of thinking. Precisely because employability is complex, it is all too easy to default to an over-simplified view of what it is and focus on a small number of indicators, such as appropriate dress. Suppliers of employability services to colleges, providers and schools also tend to focus on these discrete elements. The following example, CVMinder (no date), is illustrative. Under the banner of employability skills, it provides:

- easy employability skills definitions;
- simple employability skills assessment;
- clear view of distance travelled.

It helps colleges to create an employability framework, with measurements for any or all of the following skill types:

- CV;
- personal statement;
- mock interview;
- general;
- course-related.

Each of these elements may well help young people to progress into employment or to be more employable. But they are not likely to change the culture of an organisation in and of themselves.

Within FE there have been a number of initiatives seeking specifically to promote employability. Two examples give a flavour of this. Formed in 2011, the Gazelle Group of colleges was created to promote employability. The Gazelle Group has adopted two approaches to teaching employability from the USA: Design Thinking, a problem-solving approach developed by ExperiencePoint (Gazelle Group, 2015), and Ice House (Gazelle Group, 2015), developed by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative, focusing on the development of mindsets for employability.

The Deloitte Employability Initiative (Deloitte, 2012) has developed a network of more than thirty colleges and, as well as providing funding and support directly to colleges, has also developed a 'train the trainer' residential course for FE teachers.

4.2 Some approaches to building employability in learners

So the questions remain: how do you actually teach students to be more employable? How do you learn to be employable? What is it that leaders and managers do differently? What do teachers, trainers, coaches, lecturers and facilitators do that it is different in the classroom, lecture hall, studio, workshop, training restaurant, etc.? Which learning methods seem to work best? Here we list and exemplify the kinds of approaches which seem to hold promise in developing employability skills and which have the broader focus on performance character that we explored in Section 2.2.

Earlier in this report we proposed two categories of employability 'skills' that we believe may be helpful for FE to focus on (see Table 7, p. 31). The first we are calling 'employability habits of mind'. The second is a list of transferable skills which are both useful in the workplace, according to employers, and helpful in performance in learning and at work (see Table 7, p. 31).

In this section, we focus on these employability habits of mind and transferable skills. This does not imply that moral attributes and other skills are not important; just that the two groups we have selected specifically seem to bring learning from character into the employability debate.

4.2.1 Be clear about what is meant by employability habits

The various approaches to both employability and character can be grouped in different ways including:

- attitude (such as taking responsibility);
- life skills (such as social skills);
- work skills (such as dealing with customers);
- transferable skills (such as problem-solving);
- technical skills (using specific equipment).

The first four of these overlap considerably with the areas we have also referred to as NCS and soft skills, themselves also components of the wider field of character. From thinking about character we have taken those aspects which specifically enhance performance and we have also deliberately then focused on the 16–19 age group and the FE sector, as many of this group will go from college or training provider directly into work.

While most employers, colleges and training providers tend to use a language of skills – employability skills, soft skills, NCS, for example – it is important to see the bigger picture. The CBI has clearly grasped this in its various educational initiatives, and we suggest that we follow its lead by using the word 'habit' to elevate this debate to an institutional level rather than allowing it to sit within discussions about individual courses. The evolution of thinking about employability exemplified by the CBI also has the benefit of focusing on 'employability habits', skills which have become so much second nature that they are also habitually used.

Before colleges and providers can develop employability habits, it is important that there is a common understanding among staff and students. Taking our list as a starting point, this would include self-belief, self-control, perseverance, resilience, curiosity, empathy, creativity and craftsmanship. Here are our working definitions of these concepts:

Self-belief	Confidence in oneself and one's capability, arising from past experiences
Self-control	Ability to forgo, voluntarily, short-term temptations, impulses or diversions in order to prioritise higher goals and activities
Perseverance	A set of attributes including effort, persistence, attention, focus, grit and a commitment to long-term goals
Resilience	The ability to adapt to challenges and seek growth in them, as well as the idea of being able to bounce back from setbacks
Curiosity	A strong desire to know and learn, coupled with an openness to new experiences
Empathy	Being able to 'walk in another's shoes', identifying with and understanding their feelings and views
Creativity	The production and development of new and useful ideas, often collaboratively
Craftsmanship	Pride in a job well done, along with an ethic of excellence

Once staff are clear about the nature of the habit, then they can begin to think how best to embed it into all curricular and co-curricular experiences for students.

4.2.2 Recognise that employability is largely a state of mind

People of 'good character' – however you choose to define character – behave in certain ways which distinguish them from those who, according to your definition, have not acquired these habits thus far. That becoming employable is at least as much about acquiring certain habits – state of mind – as it is about knowledge or skill is, we believe, a contribution to thinking about employability from the literature of character.

Habits are learned or acquired or changed through a combination of factors. Culture is important – what is valued, role-modelled, talked about and rewarded. Opportunities to learn, practise in different contexts and receive feedback are essential. Choice of pedagogies will be critically significant. So, for example, if you want someone to learn self-control, then you will want to choose teaching and learning methods which give opportunities for this to be learned and practised. This might involve deliberately creating an activity which is just beyond the current competence of the learner and then providing structured feedback and self-reflection. (See more on this in Section 4.2.5.)

As well as our list of suggested habits there is a 'super-habit' for which there is growing evidence of impact. Employers might refer to it as having a 'can-do' mindset, or talk about 'get up and go'. Stanford researcher Carol Dweck created the term 'growth mindset' (2006) to describe it. It is at the heart of what it is to have an employability mindset. Essentially it is a combination of self-belief, a willingness to give things a go, seeing mistakes as an inevitable part of making progress, being willing and able to take and learn from feedback, being pre-disposed to share emerging ideas with others and look for their input, valuing hard work and effort, and seeing perseverance as an essential part of human activity. Dweck's research has shown how important these elements are for achieving educational success, and how best they can be developed. Earlier in this report we saw many specific examples of the benefits of these particular attributes.

4.2.3 Stress that employability habits are learnable

Although it is a common belief among teachers that that character virtues are 'caught' rather than 'taught' (Birdwell, Scott and Reynolds, 2015; p. 20; Arthur et al., 2015; p. 20), it has been clearly demonstrated that employability habits can be developed. In their review of interventions that promoted the development of character, James Heckman and Tim Kautz (2013) found that adolescence is a good time to develop certain aspects of character. As we do in this report, they argue that character is not a trait but a set of skills that include perseverance ('grit'), self-control, trust, attentiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, resilience to adversity, openness to experience, empathy, humility, tolerance of diverse opinions, and the ability to engage productively in society (p. 19).

During the early years, both cognitive and non-cognitive skills are highly malleable but during the adolescent years, non-cognitive skills are more malleable than cognitive skills:

> *Greater malleability of character skills is found over longer stretches of the life cycle than for cognitive skills. This occurs in part because new aspects of character emerge with maturity and can be influenced... If the early years have been compromised, it is more effective in the adolescent years to focus on developing character skills rather than on cognitive skills.* (Heckman and Kautz, 2013; p. 85)

This differential plasticity of different skills by age has important implications for the design of effective policies, so although early childhood interventions have a higher rate of economic return, workplace-based non-cognitive skills programmes for adolescents appear to be effective remedial interventions (Kautz et al., 2014). In particular, this group of researchers claims that workplace-based interventions that teach character skills show promise.

Throughout this report we have stressed the value of two clusters of 'skills' – self-regulation/self-control, and resilience/persistence. Alissa Goodman and colleagues (2015; p. 63) suggest that at age ten, the skills of self-control and self-regulation are significantly related to chances of being employed at age forty-two, and are also related to health and family-related outcomes:

> *...well-evidenced interventions that support parents, schools and communities to develop children's emotional wellbeing, self-regulation, and young people's sense of their own efficacy in the world, alongside their cognitive development, are likely to be very beneficial in the long-term.* (Goodman et al., 2015; p. 75)

For this reason it is essential that we ensure that all young children have acquired the basics of self-control at primary school as, without it, is it is very difficult for them to access the curriculum. By contrast, it is axiomatic that we continue to adapt and learn throughout our lives. During the period between the age of fourteen and the early twenties, the degree to which an individual can be resilient is significantly important with regard to their employability. (If they have not learned significant self-control they are unlikely to be employable.) For these reasons we focus more on resilience/perseverance, though both are clearly important and they also feed each other.

A common feature of all successful programmes is that they promote attachment and provide a secure base for exploration and leaning. For adolescents, programmes that emulate mentoring or effective family attachment are more successful. As well as noting the importance of non-cognitive skills to academic performance, Camille Farrington and colleagues (2012) also found that adolescence is a good time to learn new non-cognitive strategies. However, this opportunity for growth is often missed because there is a mismatch between adolescent cognitive needs and the classroom environment, teaching methods and assessment.

Earlier we stressed the aspect of character referred to as performance character which typically stresses resilience and perseverance along with self-control and self-regulation. Of these two groups of attributes we suggest that much of the necessary work on self-regulation and self-control needs to have happened much earlier (at primary school), whereas developing the habits of perseverance and resilience is particularly relevant for the teenage years and the FE sector.

4.2.4 Create an ecology for employability

In understanding the power of culture, it is helpful to remember an important truth first articulated by Argyris and Schön (1974). In developing thinking about organisational learning he distinguished between what he calls 'theory in use' and 'espoused theory'. Espoused theory is what we say we believe, and theory in use is what we actually do. This is particularly important when it comes to creating what we are calling an 'ecology for employability' including culture, relationships, design principles, rewards and language. It is, for example, possible to be providing apprenticeships and high-quality vocational education in one part of the institution, with courses co-designed and partly delivered by employers where the kinds of employability habits we have described are fully embedded and integrated, while elsewhere, also experienced by the same students, a subject is taught in ways that speak only of an educational classroom and not of a possible workplace. Theory in use will always trump espoused theory!

In creating an ecology which is hospitable to the development of employability habits, the presence and influence of active role models will be important – people whose own habits are consonant with those we have suggested. This role-modelling needs to be college-wide, with examples in the senior leadership team, in every subject or vocational area, through actively engaged employers and across the student body (active engagement of employers in specification of apprenticeship standards as part of the Trailblazer process (BIS, 2015) is one example) and, where possible, in co-design of curriculum.

It is worth reminding ourselves that some 99% of all private sector business in the UK are SMEs, and it can be particularly challenging for colleges to engage these employers in partnering with them to develop courses with outcomes relevant to running small businesses and to cultivate entrepreneurship skills in young people. This challenge is being met by an innovative partnership between the Peter Jones Foundation, FE colleges and Pearson that is facilitating the provision of BTEC Level 2 and 3 courses in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship and Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships across the UK through a network of Peter Jones Academies located in FE colleges like Kirklees College in Huddersfield (Kirklees College, 2015).

University Technical College Reading (UTCR) works with employers in the engineering and computing industries as partners to enhance its curriculum (NFER, 2015). The UTC specifically works with SMEs by encouraging employers to sponsor BTEC units of study. In order to ensure that the UTC is meeting the employers' business needs, it aims to align an employer to a unit most relevant to its business. The SME then attends the launch of the unit, attends sessions to assess it and supports students through mentoring or by providing work experience opportunities as a prize for outstanding assessments (p. 19).

Crewe Engineering and Design UTC partners with companies such as Bentley Motors, Bosch and Siemens, which have developed projects relevant to their industries that are aligned to the curriculum in Years 10 to 12. Learners will work in project teams on real-life engineering design problems and present solutions to employers (Crewe UTC, 2015).

Ron Berger (2003) has shown how particularly effective it is when you invite real employers to hear students present their work and then offer them feedback. Indeed, one of the transferable skills on which we focus is the giving and receiving of feedback, and Berger has helpful advice on how this can best be done so that it becomes part of the ecology of the classroom just as it is in effective workplaces.

One of the most significant differences between older (Baby Boomer) and younger (GenY) workers is that younger workers look for more immediate feedback and recognition from managers than older workers; a factor attributed to their exposure to instant communication and feedback via internet access and social media. The implication of this finding is that colleges and providers may wish to identify ways of providing more mentoring or other practices that support immediate feedback – for example by using an online 'Feedback Zone' to request feedback at any time, such as that provided by Ernst & Young (Hite, 2008, cited in Mencl and Lester, 2014).

Within this ecology it is important to have a reward system which actively recognises the employability habits we have described. This can be achieved in a number of ways. South Dartmoor Community College (2016) has created its own employability award, supported and accredited by the Devon and Cornwall Business Council to enhance the employability of South Dartmoor Community College Sixth Form students by providing official recognition and evidence of extra-curricular activities and achievements. Similar pioneering initiatives exist in Northern Ireland (no date), with its Education for Employability work and its explicit outreach into local communities.

Throughout a college or a training provider, employability has to permeate the organisation and be highly visible; otherwise, work to promote employability, however good, will remain distributed in pockets rather than spread throughout. Thomas Tallis School (no date) has used CRL's work on five creative habits of mind which link closely to those we have emphasised for employability to develop posters, apps and teaching materials. The five habits are: inquisitive, collaborative, persistent, disciplined and imaginative. This approach could easily be adapted within a college.

4.2.5 Use signature pedagogies of employability in the curriculum

Lee Shulman has coined a concept which may be useful here, 'signature pedagogy'. It refers to 'the types of teaching that organise the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions'. But we think it is a helpful way of thinking more generally about the kinds of teaching and learning we need for employability:

> *Signature pedagogies make a difference. They form habits of the mind, habits of the heart and habits of the hand. As Erikson observed in the context of nurseries, signature pedagogies prefigure the culture of professional work and provide the early socialisation into the practices and values of a field. Whether in a lecture hall or a lab, in a design studio or a clinical setting, the way we teach will shape how professionals behave…* (Shulman, 2005; p. 59)

Shulman is essentially arguing that if you want to shape the way people behave (their habits), you need to think carefully about the learning methods you select. This operates at two levels. First, there are some general principles, and then it is possible to identify methods which are associated with the development of specific habits.

Although there has been some research about which teaching and learning methods work best for employability at the HE level, there is remarkably little in FE. This was why we produced *Teaching Vocational Education: A Theory of Vocational Pedagogy* in 2013, and why the CAVTL enquiry led by Frank McLoughlin was so necessary. CAVTL concluded that:

> *We need to strengthen and make more visible the distinctive pedagogies of vocational teaching and learning.* (McLoughlin, 2013; p. 15)

From the CAVTL review of available research, eight principles of effective pedagogy were distilled. These include phrases like 'sustained practice', 'practical problem-solving and critical reflection on experience', 'learning from mistakes in real and simulated settings', 'collaborative and contextualised', 'range of assessment and feedback methods', and 'benefits from operating across more than one setting' (p. 9).

Whether thinking more generally about teaching and learning in vocational education (which by implication is designed for employability) or specifically with employability in mind, these kinds of approaches tend to be favoured. While we note a lack of detailed evidence of the effectiveness of particular methods, we also suggest that the common-sense nature of the first elements is strong.

Effective vocational pedagogy tends to be experiential. Learning by doing things is at the heart of the NVQ system, of apprenticeships, of work experience and of internships. It places a value on authenticity. It is often enquiry and problem-based. Like all good learning it is feedback-rich, with an emphasis both on expert feedback from coaches and skilled workers as well as from peers.

Given the sometimes fragmented organisation of colleges (with subject and occupational timetables), approaches which involve the development and use of case studies and extended projects are often suggested.

Preston's College has used its work on its TechBac pilot to act as a catalyst with employers to explore the best ways of putting the qualifications together to deliver the range of employability skills wanted by employers (City & Guilds, no date).

In considering pedagogies for employability it is important to recognise that much of value in terms of teaching and learning is informal and exists in the 'co-curriculum'. The term 'co-curriculum' is widely used in HE, where it describes any activity which falls outside the 'academic curriculum'. Curiously, in FE the idea is underdeveloped, something we explore in Section 4.2.6.

In terms of teaching and learning methods which specifically cultivate the kinds of employability habits we have identified, there is a stronger evidence base, and we offer a few examples here.

Let's return to what we termed our 'super-habit' – the growth mindset – and summarise some of the learning methods that work. At a practical level within FE, this could mean:

- helping students assume greater responsibility for their own learning and develop expertise in goal setting and decision-making (Alfassi, 2004);
- providing challenging learning experiences to foster tenacity and have high expectations of learners (Dweck et al., 2014; p. 23);
- breaking tasks down into their different levels and then guiding students through step-by-step planning and goal-setting activities to ensure they stretch themselves, providing motivational scaffolding (Morisano et al., 2010);
- developing the motivation to achieve mastery by enabling students to take and retake tests until they achieve mastery (Dweck et al., 2014; p. 26);
- specifically praising the process and products of learning, rather than the individual (Downey, 2008; Mueller and Dweck, 1998; Blackwell et al., 2007);
- as a teacher, modelling the 'struggle' all learners experience in the real world and providing tools and strategies for getting 'unstuck' (Doll et al., 2014; p. 112);
- providing simple tools such as 'ask three before me', which require students to use the resources of their peers first;
- making learning as authentic as possible – students are much more likely to persevere at learning something that has relevance to them and their lives;
- encouraging a positive classroom climate through peer learning (Morrison and Allen, 2009; Berkowitz, 2011).

At the level of specific habits for employability, methods might include:

- Self-belief: Establishing specific, short-term goals that will challenge the students, yet are still viewed as attainable, as in the examples suggested by curriculum developers at Carlton College in the USA (Kirk, 2015).
- Self-control: Learning self-control requires the checking of progress and setting of clear goals or standards, coupled with the inner strength or energy to do these two things. A helpful video explains more (Worth Publishers, 2014).
- Perseverance: At the core of learning about perseverance is the idea that being stuck is not necessarily a bad thing. You can be productively stuck and relish the challenge. Most importantly, learners need to develop their own set of useful strategies for getting themselves unstuck. In the television quiz show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* these include 'phoning a friend', 'going fifty-fifty' or 'narrowing the odds', all helpful things to do.
- Resilience: The Resilience Doughnut (Figure 7) is an approach widely used with adolescents in Australia (Worsley and Fordyce, no date; Worsley, 2014). Its seven dimensions suggest the areas on which teaching and learning will need to focus.
- Curiosity: One way of engaging students is to start by identifying their passions. The act of enabling these to be shared with others in the group almost always models the kind of engagement that stimulates curiosity. Teachers can do similarly and employers, too, can be asked to talk about what really matters to them.
- Empathy: Classic approaches to the teaching of empathy involve role-play and the use of stories, case studies and the daily news, where students are required to see things from other perspectives.
- Creativity: Active, student-engaging, problem-focused, non-hierarchical teaching styles would seem to be helpful (Tsai, 2012).
- Craftsmanship: Routinely inviting students to critique each other's work in progress and, in so doing, building a culture of commitment to excellence where second-rate work is never tolerated.

The examples above are illustrative only. There are many other ways in which these kinds of habits for employability can be cultivated. In isolation they count for little. But if, in line with Argyris' (1974) 'theory in use', they are routinely and consistently developed, then it seems more likely that students will be able to exhibit such habits.

FIGURE 7 THE RESILIENCE DOUGHNUT. SOURCE: WORSLEY AND FORDYCE (NO DATE)

In Table 7 we also listed some key transferable skills – communication, time management, self-management, problem-solving, teamworking, and giving and receiving feedback. We know, from the work of David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon (1988), some of the conditions that promote the development of learning transfer. These include:

- extensive practice in different contexts;
- the provision of clear models, explanations and mental models at the point of first learning a new skill;
- specifically encouraging learners to consider how they might use what they are learning in other contexts at the point when they first learn something;
- making as many connections as possible to the learner's *existing* knowledge.

In a workplace context, Rebecca Grossman and Eduardo Salas (2011) have shown some of the other factors at play by disentangling characteristics of learners, pedagogy and culture (Figure 8).

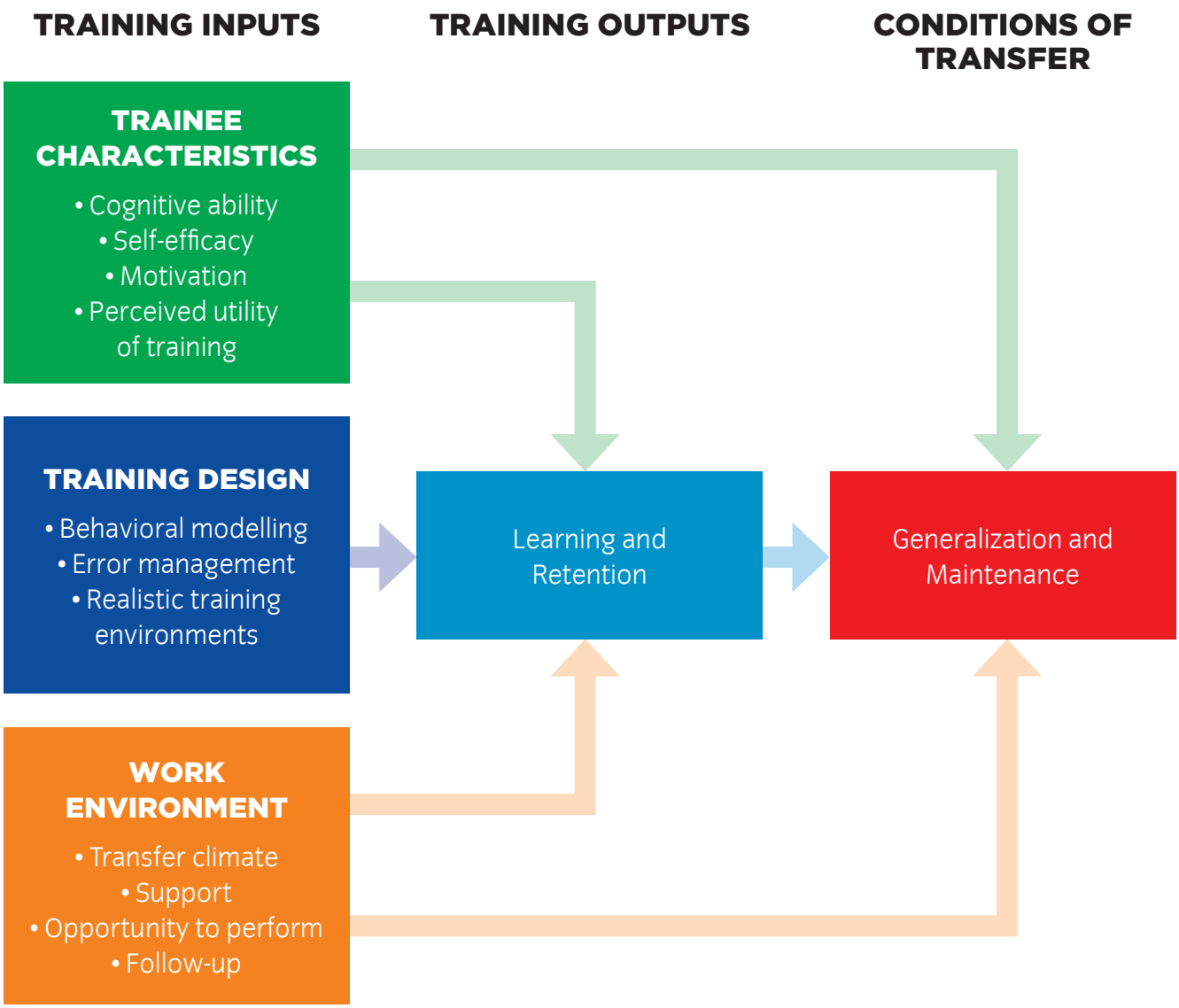


FIGURE 8 THE PROCESS OF LEARNING TRANSFER. SOURCE: GROSSMAN AND SALAS (2011; P. 106)

4.2.6 Develop co-curricular opportunities

There are a number of dimensions of co-curriculum at colleges (or through training providers) – activities, opportunities, projects, experiences which complement the curriculum. Some useful examples include:

- work experience;
- working with a mentor;
- volunteering;
- specific programmes;
- residential opportunities.

Work experience

The most obvious and powerful kind of work experience is, of course, apprenticeship, something we have explored at length in *Remaking Apprenticeships* (Lucas and Spencer, 2015) and consequently mention only in passing in this report.

For others, work experience takes many forms, of which work shadowing, internship and the creation and running of learning companies are just three examples. As we noted in Section 3.1.2., one of the factors that most inhibits employers from recruiting young people is their lack of work experience. CBI called the decision to end the statutory duty on schools in England to provide a period of work experience a 'mistake' (CBI/Pearson, 2015; p. 38) and encourages employers to engage with schools and colleges not only to offer opportunities, but to widen the definition of work experience and develop worthwhile experiences, giving a taste of the workplace. Many employers still offer short work placements and many more offer longer internships, with a chance to work on a specific project, or a simulated exercise. Nevertheless, City & Guilds found that despite the majority of employers demanding mandatory work experience for 16–18 year olds, fewer than half of those surveyed said that they actually did work with schools and colleges to support the recruitment of young people (City & Guilds, 2013; p. 6).

Clearly, the size of the employer may influence the extent of their engagement with schools and colleges, but even SMEs can provide very worthwhile experiences for young people. For example, K&M McLoughlin Decorating Ltd, a family-owned firm, has established a five-week pre-apprenticeship programme in partnership with City and Islington College. The programme instils a strong work ethic, emphasising punctuality, teamwork and commitment, in addition to developing painting and decorating skills (NFER, 2015; p. 8).

For college (or university) students, the opportunity of an internship, a properly contracted and paid period of extended work experience, is much sought after. For employers, an intern tends to be a more attractive potential employee than someone who has not had such experiences. The CIPD (2015) produces many useful expert guides on aspects of work experience, including internships, which also describe their essential features in terms of learning.

Learning Companies are increasingly being offered as part of the co-curriculum. A Learning Company is a real business enabling learners to put new skills into practice, learn from the experience and so gain a better understanding of the skills and attitudes that employers value. Examples from the Activate Group of colleges include:

- Francesco's Salon – the award-winning Francesco Group is one of the biggest names in hairdressing in the country;
- The Kitchen – students help to run the catering outlets at the College;
- The Shop – a campus-based shop run by students (Reading College, 2015).

Working with a mentor

The engagement of students in community activities with the aim of serving others has long been a major component of character education in the USA, where it has been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement as well as building character (Berkowitz, 2011).

There are hundreds of mentoring opportunities for young people to spend time with more experienced individuals at work or in the community. Typically these involve colleges recruiting and training mentors for specific purposes, and creating relationships with employers who are prepared to offer some of their staff in this role. Many see benefits for both the mentor and the mentee.

Mentoring programmes often target specific groups, as with the example for the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust (2015). We know that mentorship programmes outside the immediate working environment also support the development of resilience in workers such as nursing (Jackson et al., 2007), and it is reasonable to conjecture that similar effects can be seen within a college setting.

Volunteering

When Ofsted (2011) reviewed volunteering practices being undertaken in schools and colleges, it found no common pattern of activity but noted that in the best settings there was a close collaboration between the school or college and community groups and businesses. Most young people they spoke to felt that volunteering offered an important opportunity to enhance employment prospects and provided them with important employability skills such as teamworking, resilience and advocacy. Young people welcomed opportunities where they could participate in shaping the activity and where they experienced an element of risk and challenge – all features of a learning environment that maximises the enhancement of a growth mindset, as we noted in section 4.2.2.

Interestingly, the young respondents were less concerned about gaining a certificate, although this was often a major concern for the provider as a way of demonstrating the value of the activity. Volunteering took place on three different levels: as activities embedded with the curriculum, for example, within GCSE Citizenship, the International Baccalaureate, or a health and social care qualification, as at North East Worcestershire College; through in-house volunteering opportunities, such as peer mentoring, as at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College, or helping with school clubs and societies; and through working with external partners, including Envision, the Prince's Trust, 'V', and Changemakers.

The Ofsted (2011) report suggested that volunteering providers could give more attention to recording learning outcomes from their programmes, in addition to recording participation. The most important benefit by a long way, as noted by young people, was 'good feeling/the knowledge you have helped' and although 'new skills', 'being more confident', and 'being better with people' were also recorded as benefits, they did not register nearly as highly as the first one, suggesting that there is scope to give greater emphasis to the learning of character performance skills for employability by schools and colleges through volunteering, as in the case of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE). The Quality Principles for social action programmes, developed by Generation Change (no date) illustrate how greater emphasis on learning outcomes involving self-direction, goal setting and challenge might be achieved.

The role of volunteering, or participating in meaningful social action, as a positive influence for the benefit of young people and the nation was given a boost in the years following the London Olympic Games through the launch in 2013 of the #iwill (no date) campaign by the charity Step Up To Serve. The initiative aimed to make participation in meaningful youth social action the norm for 10 to 20-year-olds across the UK. This could involve activities such as caring for someone in the community, offering peer support online or volunteering for a charity. The #iwill campaign claims that volunteering has the potential to enhance academic outcomes and boost employability skills, and is coordinating the efforts to increase access to opportunities for young people.

The DofE works with a more than a quarter of a million young people aged 14 to 24 every year. On its website, the DofE explicitly makes links between the components of its awards and the employability skills they help to develop. For example:

EXPEDITION

Skills developed:

The ability to work as part of a team, make decisions under pressure, problem-solve and demonstrate leadership.

Example:

'While on my expedition for my Silver DofE, we lost our way in torrential rain. One girl in my group got upset and morale within the group was low. I calmed my team mates down and, along with one of the boys, I managed to navigate our way back to camp using the skills I'd learnt in training. Eventually we saw the funny side of it and we became closer as friends as a result of working together.'

RESIDENTIAL

Skills developed:

Working as part of a team, communication, self-management, confidence.

Example:

'I spent my Gold DofE residential section volunteering at an elephant sanctuary in Thailand, which was something I'd always dreamed of doing. When I arrived, I was put with nine others who were to become my team mates for the week. They were from all over the world so it was interesting getting to know them and hear about their backgrounds. As a result, I've become a confident communicator which I feel will really help me in later life as it means I can build relationships with people quickly.'

(Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2015)

Lesley Gutman and Ingrid Schoon (2013; p. 43) concluded that service learning of the kind we have been describing offers a powerful intervention for developing non-cognitive skills, providing it is aligned to what takes place in the curriculum, requires young people to reflect on their experience, and enables both young people and the community to have a voice in planning and implementing the programme. Aleisha Clarke and colleagues (2015; p. 9) also suggested that social action interventions held potential for having a significant impact on young people's confidence and sense of worth, but recommended that evaluation studies of such interventions need to be more robustly designed in future to ensure outcomes could be validated.

Ofsted (2011) found that some of the barriers to participating in volunteering included not knowing how to get involved and not having friends who do it, and that family encouragement was also key to participating. One of the barriers to participating in volunteering according to the young people interviewed by Ofsted was that volunteering was not seen as 'cool'; it remains to be seen if re-badging it as 'social action' will be a more enticing name.

There are two further initiatives that are likely to influence the availability and take-up of volunteering by young people. The new Careers & Enterprise Company for schools will have a responsibility for developing the Enterprise Passport recommended by Lord Young (BIS, 2014a), which will be a digital record of all extra-curricular and enterprise-related activities in which students take part while in education; while the new National Citizen Service for 15–17 year olds will increasingly provide informal, out of school and college opportunities to develop character through improving teamwork, communication and leadership; facilitating transition to adulthood; improving social mixing; and encouraging community involvement (National Citizen Service, 2015).

A further positive feature of the Ofsted CIF is recognition that many experiences outside the formal learning context play an important role in developing employability skills. FE and Skills providers are expected to ensure that learners have access to appropriate non-qualification (extra-curricular) experiences, work experience and high quality careers advice, in order to develop employability skills (Ofsted, 2015b).

Specific programmes

There are many programmes designed to boost aspects of employability. Some are local, some national and a few, such the Ice House Entrepreneurship Program from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation promoted by the Gazelle Group (2015), are international.

Residential opportunities

A few residential courses exist. These range from Chelsea Football Club's work (Chelsea Foundation, no date) and university summer schools to more specialist engineering courses run by organisations like the Smallpeice Trust (no date).

4.2.7 Focus on transition points

There is a growing realisation that the transition between education/training and work is as important as the transition between education levels, and that more should be done to support young people to develop the skills to effectively negotiate the education-to-work transition. More robust careers education is seen as the first step in improving this situation with regard to schools:

> *Nowhere is the need for improvement more important than in the transition from school to work… Arrangements to help younger people into work that may have been adequate in the past in a simpler, slower-changing economy are no longer fit for purpose. If in future we are to make the most of people's talents and ambitions, we need a radically different approach.* (CBI/Pearson, 2014; p. 62)

However, it is also important to acknowledge that employability skills, particularly resilience, can be difficult to transfer from one situation to another; so individuals exercising resilience in one situation, and appearing to have appropriate internal protective factors such as positive self-concept and good communication skills, can find that these protective factors turn into risk factors in a different situation.

For example, self-concept can be undermined by negative stereotyping, and desire to contribute can be undermined by an employer with no interest in encouraging a growth mindset (Brahm et al., 2014; Duckworth and Yeager, 2015).

During the middle years of schooling, adolescents begin to equate having to work hard with lack of ability, since ability is rewarded by teachers but hard work is not, and school engagement declines as a consequence. Students are developmentally ready for greater cognitive challenges, but the classroom environment rarely provides this. This disconnect between adolescent learning needs and actual learning environments is noticed in particular in the transition of American students to high school: significant failure in ninth grade is evident, but this failure is not solely the result of lack of academic skills that they bring in to this grade. It is more about declining academic behaviour, attendance, and completing homework.

Jacquelynne Eccles and her colleagues (1991), who first began researching this phenomenon in the USA in the 1980s, referred to this problem as a 'stage–environment' mismatch. Teachers know it is an important learning stage but they decrease support in order to, as they believe, develop greater independent learning. However, students need more support at this time or they experience failure, and once this happens further failure ensues, which becomes a vicious cycle. So in reality, teachers' strategies actually undermine successful development. In order to develop successful non-cognitive skills at this stage, they need to monitor attendance, expect high achievement, and create opportunities to fail in order to increase resilience. Transition management is an important factor in success at all levels of education.

Echoing the CBI/Pearson comment about employability support solutions developed during a slower-changing economy no longer being suitable today, Karin Du Plessis and colleagues (2012) suggested that the transition-to-work period is a time when young people are particularly vulnerable to risk, and although they need to exercise resilience, they do not have access to the relevant protective factors in a situation that has become an increasingly fragmented, complex and protracted experience for many. These authors also noted the importance of supportive relationships in developing resilience, and that all stakeholders, including teachers, trainers, career counsellors, employers, parents and family members, had a role to play in supporting successful education-to-work transitions.

Similar characteristics to resilience are described by Jessie Koen and colleagues (2012) as 'career adaptability', a mindset which has been shown to support adolescents to transition successfully from education to work, particularly in economically challenging times. The concept 'career adaptability' consists of four competencies:

1 Looking ahead to one's future and engaging in career planning (concern).

2 Knowing what career to pursue, being conscientious in making career-related decisions (control).

3 Looking around at options, thinking about the fit between one's self and opportunities available (curiosity).

4 Having the self-efficacy to undertake activities needed to achieve career goals (confidence).

When high school students were interviewed to find out more about their readiness for the transition from education to work, it was noted that prior experience of work-based learning and curiosity to explore specific career choices might be useful in promoting readiness. However, it was also clear that active support from adults and the adolescent's orientation to the adult world, evidenced, for example, by seeking guidance from adults rather than friends, were also critical enabling factors supporting readiness for the transition. Although this was a small-scale qualitative study, the researchers claimed that:

> *A 'ready' high school junior—at least in terms of work-related skills and plans—conveys a complex set of relations involving an active and agentic posture nested within a supportive and instrumentally helpful environment.* (Phillips et al., 2002; p. 213)

From such research, it might be concluded that successful transition to work is the result of a complex set of elements in the three main factors proposed by Impetus in their study: stable personal circumstances, appropriate level qualifications and character traits of ready-to-work capabilities (Impetus, 2014; p. 13). However, as far as policy is concerned, Impetus do point out that no one government department is responsible for the transition between education and work. They note that:

> *The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for policy and funding for young people while they have to be in fulltime education (this used to be until 16, but is rising to 18 in 2015). Responsibility then passes to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) if the person is in work or training and to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) if the person is not.* (Impetus, 2015; p. 8)

A significant minority of young job-seekers remain unemployed for many months, and are at risk of developing depression. Both empirical studies and theoretical models suggest that cognitive, behavioural and social isolation factors interact to increase this risk. Thus, interventions that reduce or prevent depression in young, unemployed job-seekers by boosting their resilience are likely to be helpful. One such approach has been to use mobile phones to deliver resilience-boosting support to young unemployed people by sending SMS messages to interrupt the feedback loop of depression and social isolation.

Three focus groups were conducted to explore young, unemployed job-seekers' attitudes to receiving and requesting regular SMS messages that would help them to feel supported and motivated while job-seeking. Participants reacted favourably to this proposal, and thought that it would be useful to continue to receive and request SMS messages for a few months after commencing employment as well (Orr et al., 2013).

While the school/college or provider to work transition point is critically important, if advice and support are simply left to this moment, that is far too late. The 157 Group (Fletcher, 2012) has explored the significant creative roles colleges can play in supporting the transition to work from schools by acting as brokers with employers, providing more engaging curricula, teaching soft skills, running seminars, offering internships, creating employment agencies and supporting new kinds of schools, such as UTCs and Studio Schools.

It is important to consider the precise kinds of advice, guidance and teaching needed at all relevant transition points in a learner's educational journey, certainly including primary-secondary, Key Stage 3 to 4, 16+, 17+ and beyond. One conclusion of a study into widening participation was that:

> *The most successful programmes of IAG interventions for under-represented groups appear to be those which start early, are personalised, integrated into outreach and other support, and address priority information needs.* (Moore et al., 2013; p. 28)

We wonder if the same might be true with respect to learning about employability in FE.

4.2.8 Build workforce capability

In the BIS Further Education Workforce Strategy (2014b), two key workforce priorities identified were to 'improve quality, quantity and professionalism of teachers' and 'ensure the sector understands the importance of being responsive to employer needs'. But FE needs more than this, we suggest.

Capability-building for employability will also involve:

- leadership development in all aspects of promoting employability and character;
- leadership development in all aspects of developing co-curricular opportunities for employability;
- building understanding among staff of what employability habits are;
- building understanding and capability in the teaching of employability habits;
- building understanding and capability in the teaching of transferable skills.

All this will be taking place when the function and form of FE is under particular scrutiny.

4.2.9 Recognise the role of parents and families

Parents are critically important in the development of character, as earlier research by Jen Lexmond and Richard Reeves for Demos has shown. Their research emphasised the importance of parenting in developing character, identifying that a 'tough love' approach involving consistent enforcement of discipline with high levels of emotional warmth was the most effective approach in developing the kinds of capabilities we have seen lead to employability (Lexmond and Reeves, 2009).

In its *Commission on Apprenticeships,* Demos memorably reminded us that:

> *…apprenticeships policy will have succeeded when most parents want their children to consider choosing an apprenticeship.* (O'Leary and Wybron, 2015; p. 9)

Arguably, employability policy will only have succeeded when parents and families have a much broader conception of the role of character in helping their children to become employable. Parents will also need to understand how, at every step of the way, they can access advice and guidance to help their offspring make choices about schools and colleges and about academic and vocational courses.

Many of the habits of employability we have been exploring in this section can be well (and sometimes better) learned at and from home. There is a powerful informal pedagogy of character and employability. This could be by encouraging children to enrol in organisations like scouts or guides, or supporting them to undertake some kind of volunteering. Or it could be by suggesting ways in which they can develop hobbies and interests which are beyond school and college.

Most importantly, it will involve parents and carers at home modelling the kinds of employability habits and transferable skills we have been exploring in this report.

4.2.10 Keep an open dialogue with employers

Writing in the *Times Educational Supplement* in March 2015, Simon Cusworth, Head of Careers and Employability at Croydon College, called on colleges to develop an employability mindset to help students find jobs (Cusworth, 2015). He's right. Colleges and training providers, like their students and staff, need to develop the kinds of habits which fit them for employability. We have suggested some. Others will have their own list.

Most importantly, we suggest that an open door and an open ear are kept to initiate and actively facilitate dialogue with employers, as the best providers are already doing. Language is important, as Jill Lanning and colleagues remind us:

> *Finding a detailed definition is worth the angst when it involves collaborating with employers and focusing specifically on the needs of their business and staff – and then it's not your definition but theirs that counts.* (Lanning et al., 2008; p. 1)

For the more we can develop a joint vocabulary, understood by all involved, the better the situation for the employability of all those in the FE sector will be.

4.3 Measuring and assessing employability – why try?

In the previous sections we have discussed how employability habits might be taught and developed, but the value of these activities only becomes evident when the outcomes are clearly visible. By visible outcomes, we do not just mean that more young people have completed employability programmes, or participated in social action volunteering, or even got jobs, all of which are positive outcomes – but we suggest that until employability habits are overtly assessed, measured and tracked while they are being developed during the education process and not just at the end, to enable young people to understand how they are progressing, they will not be fully valued or embedded into the education process. As Patricia Broadfoot (2007) argues, assessment at all levels of education has become the arbiter by which the quality of achievement is benchmarked, both nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, if the assessment of employability skills leads to greater clarity about their composition, it becomes easier to improve their teaching, and easier to engage stakeholders such as employers in dialogue about their development. Finally, some researchers maintain that since the outcomes of the measurement of cognitive skills have had an important influence on policy, it is therefore important to develop similarly valid measures for testing non-cognitive skills, to ensure that policy in this area is advanced on a reliable basis (Reeves et al., 2014).

4.3.1 Issues in assessing employability

We have already noted that teaching employability and developing performance character habits are complex processes, so on the surface it might appear that attempts to assess them would be fraught with difficulties; the lack of universally agreed definitions and progression indicators, the subjective nature of judgements, or 'being in the eye of the beholder' (Wilton, 2014), multiple stakeholders, and the lack of confidence by teachers in their ability to assess what they may perceive to be highly personal attributes of young people, all suggest that developing valid and reliable assessment measures could be difficult.

It is also worth noting that the 'high stakes' assessment of so-called 'core subjects' has become an overriding feature of education today, partly in order to assist policy-makers and politicians to decide where to make reforms. This makes it less likely that the assessment of personal skills and attributes will be given the priority it deserves. However, if we examine the purposes of and approaches to assessment more closely, and identify some examples where schools, colleges and universities have begun to track and assess employability habits, we can build up a picture of some principles that might help us design appropriate assessment methods. As Reeves and his colleagues note:

> *…our claim is not that everything that counts can be counted or that everything that can be counted counts. Rather, we argue that the field urgently requires much greater clarity about how well, at present, it is able to count some of the things that count.* (Reeves et al., 2014:p. 237)

4.3.2 Tension between assessment of learning and assessment for learning

The key question to ask when considering assessment is 'assessment for what?' Educational assessment is concerned with making judgements about learners and serves multiple purposes, including grading, certification, selection and evaluation, in addition to supporting learning. Assessment is often discussed with reference to summative and formative modes: a summative approach is used when it is important to monitor learners' achievements against externally agreed standards, to determine students' routes on to their next level of the education system, or to provide information for accountability or programme evaluation. Formative assessment provides feedback to learners and develops their understanding of their achievements. It helps them to understand the gap between their current and desired levels of performance, and how they can improve towards the desired level in order to close the gap. The difference between the two is often expressed as assessment of learning and assessment for learning (Wiliam, 2011).

4.3.3 Difficulty in tracking progression

We have already seen that there are multiple employability frameworks and lists of employability skills and once an attempt is made to assign levels to each of the individual skills in order to assess progression, it quickly becomes obvious that the size of the framework is likely to lead to confusion and disengagement by teachers and learners and be meaningless to employers. When considering the process by which progress might be measured in PLTS, Keri Facer and Jessica Pykett (2007) demonstrated that if levels were assigned to each of the descriptors, over 100 individual descriptors would have to be accounted for, resulting in an unwieldy and reductive list which would be difficult for teachers and learners to use meaningfully. They suggested that adding key questions to the smaller number of focus statements for learners and teachers to explore and including descriptive examples would be more valuable, since a more holistic view of the competencies would be retained. Prompts for assessing progress could be supplied by considering depth and range in the use of each skill. Depth refers to the quality of the contribution, and range refers to the diversity of contexts in which the skill is used. Guy Claxton and colleagues used similar terms to describe dimensions of progress in assessing learning power, although for range, they used breadth, and they also added a third dimension, strength, or using the skill more frequently (Claxton et al., 2011; p. 151).

Rather than developing single dimensional ladders to show progression, Facer and Pykett (2007) suggested that a PLTS wheel could be created for learners to produce a visual representation of strengths and weaknesses and compare growth over time, with evidence provided through a portfolio. The use of a wheel for profiling skills progression was further developed by Bill Lucas and his colleagues (2013) to track the development of creativity.

4.3.4 Need for authentic assessment

The use of sophisticated tools for tracking progress in the development of employability and performance character requires the assessment task to be valid, ie actually assess the skills it purports to assess. There is a tradition of referring to this issue as 'authentic assessment' in vocational and higher education. Interest in authentic assessment has grown in these education sectors as the requirement to enable students to demonstrate their skills, as well as their knowledge, to potential employers in preparation to gain work after graduation, has increased. Judith Gulikers and her colleagues defined authentic assessment as assessment that:

> …*should require students to use and demonstrate the same (kind of) competencies, or combinations of knowledge, skills and attitudes, that are applied in this situation in professional life*. (Gulikers et al., 2006; p. 341)

They also recognised that an assessment task could be more or less authentic, depending on how closely it resembled the workplace task. They identified five dimensions of assessment:

- the assessment task(s);
- the physical context in which the assessment takes place;
- the social context of the assessment;
- the result or form that defines the output of the assessment;
- the assessment criteria.

Kevin Ashford-Rowe and colleagues expanded on Gulikers' research to develop eight questions that could be used to guide the design and development of authentic assessment tasks that were relevant to the workplace (Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014):

1. To what extent does the assessment activity challenge the assessed student?
2. Is a performance, or product, required as a final assessment outcome?
3. Does the assessment activity require that transfer of learning has occurred, by means of demonstration of skill?
4. Does the assessment activity require that metacognition is demonstrated, by means of critical reflection, self-assessment or evaluation?
5. Does the assessment require a product or performance that could be recognised as authentic by a client or stakeholder?
6. Is fidelity required in the assessment environment? And the assessment tools (actual or simulated)?
7. Does the assessment activity require discussion and feedback?
8. Does the assessment activity require that students collaborate?

There is no single best approach to assessing employability habits, and many of the most authentic methods may well be too expensive or burdensome for teachers to use, which is why a report for the Australian Government recommended integrating employability habits within the curriculum and encouraging students to take responsibility for explaining and demonstrating their capabilities to employers (Precision Consulting, 2007).

4.3.5 Lessons learned from the measurement of non-cognitive skills

As we have noted, employability habits and performance character skills such as self-control, resilience, perseverance and self-belief overlap with non-cognitive skills, for which there is an extensive tradition of measurement within the field of psychology. Leslie Gutman and Ingrid Schoon (2013) provide a comprehensive list of measures for each of the non-cognitive skills they examined – for example, the grit scale for perseverance developed by Angela Duckworth and colleagues (Duckworth et al., 2007). However, it is worth making a distinction between measurement and assessment.

The tools used by psychologists for measuring what are called the 'Big Five' personality traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion, or character habits such as perseverance and resilience, include self-report surveys, teacher-report surveys and performance tasks. They are used for multiple purposes, including the evaluation of specific programmes of character development and for gathering data to make comparisons between the relative character strengths of different schools or education authorities. They are also used for assessing the character strengths and weaknesses of individuals, often used as pre- and post-intervention surveys, or in research projects aimed at investigating the links between specific character strengths and life events, such as accessing college, getting a job, or engaging in criminal behaviour. But when the same tools are used in schools to assess a learner's character strengths or to identify gaps between current and desired performance in order to improve practice within a character education programme, some issues emerge.

Angela Duckworth and David Yeager (2015) explored the value of each type of measure and suggested a number of ways in which they might be enhanced for educational use, in particular when used to support improvement in individual practice. Surveys, whether self-report surveys answered directly by learners or teacher-report questionnaires in which teachers report their opinions about learners, are easy to administer and in most cases it has been found that individuals are willing to provide true opinions in response to questions. However, some types of question can lead respondents to give what they think are socially acceptable responses.

Another well-documented issue with self-report surveys is the phenomenon known as 'reference bias'. An individual's judgement about the extent to which they possess a character strength or employability habit – for example, perseverance – depends on their frame of reference, such as the context in which they have been developing the habit, their depth of their understanding of it, or other people with whom they are comparing themselves. So, for example, students who attended charter schools in the USA reported spending more time on homework each evening and actually achieved higher test scores than students in matched open-enrolment schools, but rated themselves no higher on questions relating to grit or self-control than students in those other schools (West, 2014).

Furthermore, with reference to skills surveys taken in pre- and post-intervention situations, Justin Kruger and David Dunning (1999) observed that the results on the second occasion can appear to be worse than on the first occasion the students completed the survey, suggesting that skills have deteriorated. This manifestation of 'reference bias' is thought to happen because the more competent an individual is, the more harshly they tend to rate themselves, so students who have been introduced to the skill or habit of mind are more critical of their skill level when they know more about it.

The challenges associated with surveys may be mitigated by setting learners tasks or tests to undertake, with the results used to infer judgements about the strength of the individual's habit or disposition. Mischel's marshmallow test is one of the most well-known examples of these, used in psychological testing for assessing self-control. Walter Mischel tested the ability of four-year-olds to resist eating a marshmallow, with the promise of receiving an extra one if they waited until the researcher came back into the room. The longer they waited, the greater their ability to delay gratification. A longitudinal study of those involved in the original study found that those who were able to delay gratification longer had higher earnings in later life. Mischel conducted his original experiment in the 1960s, but it has been the subject of continual adjustment and updating (Mischel, 2014). Nevertheless, the extent to which such tests might authentically assess performance on workplace tasks is questionable.

The possibility of variable interpretations of character virtues, bias in self-reports and social desirability responses was acknowledged by James Arthur and colleagues (2015; p. 13) in their research exploring the character development of UK schoolchildren. They attempted to mitigate these potential sources of bias by triangulating data gathered from three types of method including the Virtues in Action self-report survey with students, students' scores on a moral dilemma test and teachers' reports of the Year Group.

If measures developed for use in psychological measurement are to be used to support the improvement of individual practice and enable individuals to learn how to strengthen their habits and dispositions, Duckworth and Yeager suggest they may need to be adapted to fulfil the requirements of effective assessment for learning approaches. For example, the original surveys are frequently very long; they may be written in language that is inappropriate to the target audience, or contain references that do not align with the cultural norms of the context in which the survey is being conducted. If data is not easily interpreted nor quickly reported back to the learners, the opportunity to learn from rapid feedback is lost, so a number of adaptations to these existing measures can be made. To reduce reference bias, 'anchoring vignettes' can be added to questionnaires to describe hypothetical individuals against which answers can be calibrated; to reduce teacher bias, students can be asked to observe their peers; and by recording and analysing thirty-second audio snippets of conversation during the day, the everyday context of completing a task can be accounted for, rather than performance under controlled conditions. Many of these suggestions will make sense to busy teachers.

4.3.6 Assessment methods

Insight into the wide range of assessment methods that might be used to record and track progress in employability and performance character habits can be gathered from many earlier initiatives that sought to develop skills and dispositions in individual learners and faced the challenge of devising methods to assess them. Facer and Pykett (2007) mapped more than twenty initiatives promoting the development of personal skills and competencies against the National Curriculum Aims and PLTS framework, with the aim of developing a shared language for explicitly valuing these skills and competencies in order to help teachers recognise them when they saw them, and move from a situation where the skills were implicitly nurtured to one where they were overtly recognised and discussed with learners. Having listed the skills, rather than develop yet another framework, they explored how they might be better aligned with the National Curriculum at that time. They identified ten principles that were important in assessing personal skills. Assessment should:

- be integrated into learning processes;
- be sensitive to context and complexity;
- promote self-worth and development;
- be meaningful to and owned by learners;
- act as a bridge and currency between learners and diverse communities;
- enable multiple comparisons and lenses;
- recognise collaboration;
- be flexible and evolutionary;
- be responsive to changing context/knowledge and subject domains;
- be manageable by students and teachers.

When we consider the assessment of employability, their advice about the most appropriate methods to use for assessing skills in 2007 is still relevant today:

> *What is clear is that the acquisition of skills and competencies was often seen to require new relationships between teachers and students, a greater focus upon personal development and progress against individual goals, and an increased emphasis upon formative, personalised and ipsative assessment practices.* (Facer and Pykett, 2007; p. 11)

An extensive list of specific assessment methods appropriate for assessing wider skills for learning in individual students was offered by Lucas and Claxton (2009) in their review of skills frameworks for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). Methods included:

- self-report questionnaires;
- evaluation of students' learning portfolios or diaries, or other written reflections;
- structured teacher observation in terms of quasi-objective 'ladders of progression' for each of the wider skills;
- 'learning stories': short vignettes and digital photos or videos that capture a series of increasingly accomplished 'leading edge moments' in individual students' learning careers;
- periodic 360-degree assessments of student progress drawing on testimony from parents, friends, teachers and coaches, as well as documentary evidence of various kinds;
- dynamic assessment of young people's performance in novel, demanding learning situations.

However, Paul Cappon (2015; p. 51) noted that courses – for example, vocational BTEC courses – that do include assessment methods such as coursework and portfolios are perceived to have limited value in league tables, and therefore may not be offered by schools.

The use of technology to support the recording and assessing of employability skills offers exciting possibilities that merge the delivery and teaching of the skills with tracking progression, sharing evidence and grading achievements. Technology can also provide more authentic methods for gaining a real-world picture of student performance; for example, by reviewing students' online communication behaviour, or mining their actual usage of Twitter or other online databases (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015). The exceptional level of detail that can be achieved in assessing and tracking skills progression using digital technology has been illustrated by the ATC21S project in the assessment of collaborative problem-solving (Care et al., 2015).

In response to the call from employers to make the employability skills of students more visible, many colleges and universities are turning to e-portfolios to encourage students to gather evidence of and reflect on their employability skills. Researchers suggest that using e-portfolios is likely to increase transfer of learning through the integration of employability skills within the curriculum (Kehoe and Goudzwaard, 2015; Simatele, 2015). Shephard (2009) also observes that e-portfolios and wikis have the potential to accommodate ipsative assessment processes more readily within higher education.

Games and simulations have offered teachers and trainers opportunities to develop and assess learning in situations where the real-world equivalent is too expensive, too dangerous, or too difficult to access, as in the case, for example, of flight simulators or disaster emergency procedures. The virtual-reality equivalents of these methods not only offer comparable real-world learning opportunities, but also some sophisticated assessment methods. Melinda Bier and Bob Coulter (no date) explore the promise and potential pitfalls of video games for developing and assessing character. They admit that many reservations may be expressed about video games – at best they are a waste of time, or at worst, totally opposed to the concept of positive character development – but they maintain that well-crafted games have the potential to develop character strengths such as future-mindedness, diligence and honesty. Furthermore, the construction of the games can offer the opportunity of reviewing actions undertaken by players, their decisions and choices, in order to deliver what they describe as 'stealth-assessment'.

Similarly, virtual-reality simulations can test an individual's reaction under conditions that may be highly dangerous, or even unethical, to enact in real life, or even under laboratory conditions. David Gallardo-Pujol and his colleagues have re-created Milgram's famous shock experiment using virtual-reality simulations which measured individuals' personality traits and intelligence, as well as gaining an understanding of how they might react under conditions where there is great potential for harm to others resulting from their actions (Gallardo-Pujol et al., 2015).

The development of new approaches to the assessment of employability skills and performance character habits is a rapidly expanding field. In the Appendix we have included some examples of promising practices.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

'We were very impressed by the students' positive attitude and their willingness to learn. The employability skills training that they had received at college enabled them to fit into our organisation and workplace culture.'

Frank Byrne, HSBC (Deloitte Foundation, 2007)

From this brief research, we have drawn the following conclusions, on the basis of which we make some suggestions for future action. Some of these apply to colleges and providers, some to employers and some to government. Many may be of interest to all three.

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 Build on earlier research into character

Before making any new suggestions we need to implement the conclusions which others have made in the last five years, and which we summarise here:

- Agree a stable set of desired educational outcomes which explicitly include 'performance character' skills (our habits of mind for employability). These should be explicitly described and students' progression tracked against them using a broad approach to measurement (City & Guilds, CBI, Demos, Jubilee Centre, McDonald's UK, National Children's Bureau).
- Explicitly acknowledge the contribution of 'performance character' skills to success in examinations, the workplace and throughout life. (University of Chicago, Education Endowment Fund, NFER, UKCES).
- Take the recommendations made by the APPG with regard to schools and extend these to FE, as well as explicitly acknowledging the additional pressure on Further Education as the raising of the education participation age is implemented.

5.1.2 Include performance character in learning for employability

As thinking about employability evolves, it is important to include specific aspects of 'performance character' – what we describe in this report as 'employability habits':

- self-belief;
- perseverance;
- resilience;
- curiosity;
- empathy;
- creativity;
- craftsmanship.

These need to be supported by some key transferable skills such as communication, time-management, self-management, problem-solving, teamworking, and giving and receiving feedback. These kinds of attributes are wanted by employers, and increasingly are being shown by researchers to enhance performance and increase life chances. It is particularly important not to shrink our understanding of employability to what is easily measured.

5.1.3 Recognise that the teaching of and learning for employability is complex

Organisations such as colleges and training providers need to be clear about the elements of employability and create a climate in which they can flourish. Focusing on both the co-curriculum and on the formal curriculum will be important. There are many examples of innovative practice, but these are not yet brought together in a coherent way within FE. The suggestions in Section 4.2 offer some initial guidance with respect to developing pedagogy for employability. Teaching and learning for employability needs to be embedded in all aspects of the life of colleges and training providers, rather than located discretely in a particular pathway, course or subject.

5.1.4 Develop realistic approaches to measuring employability skills

If the kinds of employability habits of mind and their accompanying transferable skills are really to be valued, then we need to get better at tracking their development. City & Guilds and other similar bodies are well placed to take a lead on this.

5.1.5 Establish partnerships

Cultivating habits of mind for employability almost always involves many different organisations working together, and colleges, training providers and employers are well-placed to act as proactive catalysts for such collaboration.

5.1.6 Build workforce capability

Many staff in colleges have expertise in specific vocational areas, but not yet in the broader area of employability, and there is an opportunity for learning about effective ways of developing employability across the FE sector.

5.1.7 Respond to new opportunities

The new Careers and Enterprise Company for schools and the National Citizen Service provide immediate openings for the development of a way of thinking about employability which embraces character.

5.2 Next steps

In addition to implementing the conclusions in Sections 5.1.1–5.1.6, we suggest some immediate next steps.

5.2.1 Raise awareness of the benefits of incorporating character into employability

We suggest that the organisations mentioned in Section 5.1.1 may like to look for ways of collaborating to argue for the power of character within employability. The CBI Education campaign might provide a potential mechanism.

5.2.2 Gather examples of promising practices

Bringing together and evaluating case studies would be helpful, and might be something that the City & Guilds Alliance for Research into Vocational Education could coordinate.

5.2.3 Extend National Citizen Service to FE

The National Citizen Service currently covers the ages of 15–17, but could be extended upwards in age by one or two years.

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APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION

In this appendix we illustrate some of the pedagogic strategies discussed in our report by providing examples of promising practice that can be seen in different education sectors. There is much excellent practice to be found in all sectors and our list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to highlight methods of developing and assessing employability skills and performance character habits that align with the key principles we have noted in our report.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ENGLISH EXAMPLES

These examples are drawn from the winners of the DfE Character Awards 2015.

Oakthorpe Primary School, Derbyshire

> *The school's ethos focuses on the traits of reciprocity, reflection, resourcefulness and resilience. The school council has developed a positive behaviour rewards system to help children reach their 'ideal selves', and their whole school approach has led to an increase in pupils' self-reported ability to bounce back from challenges.* (Oakthorpe Primary School, 2015)

Queensbridge School, Birmingham

Queensbridge is committed to developing the whole child by promoting the 5 Rs, relationships, relevance, responsibility, rigour and risk. Pupils participate in residentials and iweeks (intensive weeks) aimed at developing learning skills and character habits in challenging but relevant contexts. Pupils use an 'iMap' – a personal portfolio – to record the evidence of their personal development achieved through these residentials and extra-curricular activities (Queensbridge School, 2015).

Tapton School, Sheffield

The school has developed a system to track students' progress in resilience, reflectiveness, reciprocity, resourcefulness and respect, with Learner Levels in each of these character habits articulated for each year. Students take responsibility for developing their own behaviours, skills and strategies and set improvement goals based on these levels as they progress through school (Tapton School, 2015).

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS – AN INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE

KIPP Charter schools – USA

KIPP public charter schools in the USA, a group of 183 elementary and secondary schools, emphasise the development of character by focusing on seven character strengths: zest, grit, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence and curiosity (KIPP, 2015). Each character strength is defined by a number of behaviours indicative of that strength, so for example, a child demonstrating curiosity:

- was eager to explore new things
- asked questions to help himself/herself learn better
- took an active interest in learning

These behaviours are listed on the Character Growth Card which is used to record and track each student's progress. Students self-assess their own strengths and teachers also score students, both using a seven-point scale ranging from *1: Almost Never* to *7: Almost Always* demonstrates this behaviour. This is followed by discussion between student and teacher to review the student's progress and set further goals for improvement. The Card is available in a pencil and paper version or as an app (KIPP, no date).

FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Croydon College

Croydon College places a 'real focus on employability and making sure our students leave College not only with a top qualification, but work ready and equipped with the skills employers really want'. The College lists the many ways in which it engages with employers to ensure that their views count. It has also won many accolades from education for its strong focus on employability, including commendations from the Quality Assurance Agency for embedding employability in its higher education courses and from Ofsted for fostering employability through volunteering opportunities (Croydon College, 2015). The excellence of its students' services to the community was recognised in 2014 through the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – Croydon was the first college in the country to receive the honour. Students can gain accreditation for the employability skills they develop during their time at the College through a Student Life Open Badge, provided by integrating Mozilla Open Badges with Moodle, the College's VLE (Checkley, 2014). Each student's progress and achievements can be tracked and measured by College staff in the Student Life team, who can then offer the student help to achieve their badge. These staff can also verify that the student has completed all the requirements to a necessary standard before awarding the badge.

City & Guilds TechBac

The City & Guilds TechBac is a new curriculum containing an accredited Technical Qualification. It was designed in partnership with employers and is aimed at giving '14 to 19 year olds the technical and professional skills needed to progress onto an apprenticeship, into university or into the modern jobs market' (City & Guilds, 2015b). Offering UCAS points applying at Level 3 to enable progression to university, the City & Guilds TechBac includes technical qualifications in a range of industry sectors, an independent project, and workplace skills development through the online Skills Zone (City & Guilds, 2015c). Students access the Skills Zone to learn more about the skills employers say are required in the workplace, including:

- Communication
- Digital skills
- Enterprise
- Delivering results
- Innovation
- Self-development
- Workplace literacy
- Personal qualities

Within the online environment of the Skills Zone, students can self-assess their current skill level, learn more about the nature of the skills and practice them, discuss them online with other students and tutors, and apply for accreditation for each skill through an Open Badge. Tutors in the City & Guilds Centres delivering the technical qualifications can access the students' online portfolio and award the Badge if they can see that the student has performed the skill and provided evidence of this according to the designated assessment criteria.

HIGHER EDUCATION – UK EXAMPLES

Graduate employability has been a measure of UK university success for many years. The annual Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey of final year students, undertaken six months after they have graduated, is used in compiling university league tables. The information from this survey relating to graduate employability achievement forms part of the Key Information Set for each university course. This enables prospective applicants to evaluate and compare the career prospects offered by each programme. English universities have also been required to publish Employability Statements since 2010 (Pegg et al., 2012). Consequently, the strategies used by universities to develop students' employability skills are wide-ranging, and include activities embedded within the curriculum, co-curricular opportunities recognised through 'employability awards' and work-based learning, all of which are frequently assessed both formatively and summatively using a variety of innovative methods. Examples below have been selected to illustrate some of these that may be relevant to further education.

De Montfort University, Leicester

De Montfort University (DMU) is one of the top universities for employability and engages with employers in innovative ways to offer its students opportunities to prepare themselves for the world of work. The Employability Mentoring project matches students with industry mentors who help students to understand more about employability skills and the challenges of the world of work. DMU is seeking quality kitemarking for this scheme through accreditation from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (De Montfort University, 2015a). DMU also organises paid internships for its current students and recent graduates. Current students can apply for 'Frontrunner' internships based within the university and recent graduates are offered 'DMU Champions' internships with local and national employers (De Montfort University, 2015b).

University of Lancaster

Before the introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR, 2015), designed to formally recognise students' extra-curricular achievements, many universities developed their own processes to enable students to record and gain recognition for activities they complete outside of their academic study. These 'employability awards' help students recognise that engaging with volunteering, students' union activities, mentoring, and all the other extra-curricular opportunities available at university, can contribute to enhancing their employability skills. The Lancaster Award is an example of one of these, from another top university for employability, which can be achieved at three levels, bronze, silver and gold by participating in volunteering, work experience and other careers-relevant activities (University of Lancaster, 2015).

Coventry University

Some universities embed employability modulus within the curriculum. For example, most of Coventry University's undergraduate students have to take three mandatory modules, one in each year of study, 'which broaden students' knowledge, skills and qualifications within a work focused environment… and facilitate the transition from university to work' (Coventry University, 2015). The modules in this 'Add+vantage' scheme are assessed and provide academic credit towards the student's degree.

University of Leeds

Many university lecturers employ pedagogical approaches within their teaching that are designed to encourage their students' employability skills. This example from the University of Leeds demonstrates how a lecturer used a twelve-week case-based simulation where his public relations students took roles within a PR agency to complete assessed work. The students welcomed the realism of role-play situations as the task deadlines and exercises closely mirrored the real world (Byng, 2012).

UNIVERSITIES – AN INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE

Curtin University, Western Australia

Curtin University has embraced the need to develop authentic assessment for work-integrated learning activities that aim to develop students' employability skills (Curtin University, 2015; Ferns and Zeggward 2014). Employers contributed to assessment design, as well as providing rigorous and constructive feedback to students on their workplace learning. The unpredictable nature of work-integrated learning adds to the complexity of establishing an assessment process that is valid, reliable and meets university quality standards related to student outcomes. The assessment of students by industry practitioners who are not members of the university teaching team is a particular challenge to authentic assessment in the university sector; nevertheless, evaluation of students' workplace performance is a common feature of work placements, since the workplace supervisor is much better placed than academic staff to judge the students' ability to apply their learning to the workplace context over an extended period of time, and under varied circumstances.

The university's definition of graduate attributes was used with an e-portfolio system, called iPortfolio, to enable students to showcase artefacts and objects that demonstrated their skills acquisition in a realistic environment (Oliver, 2013). Students can upload items in multiple text and media formats, and then tag them to associate each item with a graduate attribute. Within the portfolio, a MyRatings tab enables students to self- and peer-assess their progress in demonstrating the attributes, using a ratings system based on the Five-Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus, 2004). The iPortfolio also includes a social networking feature that allows students to showcase their skills and achievements and seek feedback. A report for the Australian Government noted the growing trend in the use of e-portfolios to record and assess graduates' employability skills, but also suggested that more information is needed about employers' needs and preferences so that universities can support students in compiling them (Precision Consulting, 2007).

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