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Scotland

The Work-Readiness of Recruits from Colleges and Universities in Scotland

A Research Report Produced for Futureskills Scotland by the
Training and Employment Research Unit (TERU) at the University of Glasgow

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FOREWORD

Futureskills Scotland was launched in November 2002. Amongst its key aims were:

- to improve access to labour market information and intelligence across Scotland; and

- to analyse the Scottish labour market to inform policy-making

Sophisticated web tools have been developed and refined to meet the first of these aims. Free access to labour market information is available through Key Indicators (www.keyindicators.org.uk). Similarly, access to the most comprehensive set of labour market reports and analyses from around the world are made available through Research Online (www.researchonline.org.uk).

Futureskills Scotland also provides a series of core reports on the Scottish labour market. These are regularly updated and are available free from the Futureskills Scotland website (www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk).

In recent years, Futureskills Scotland has commissioned research from experts across the UK to provide informed and objective analysis of key labour market issues. This research sheds light on key issues for Scottish policymakers. It also provides a stimulus for wider debate.

Collating this work into a formal research series will help in bringing the issues and discussion to a wider audience. Futureskills Scotland is committed to disseminating and promoting this research series as widely as possible.

The views expressed in this research series are not necessarily those of Futureskills Scotland.

Futureskills Scotland
November 2008

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

Aims and Objectives

Futureskills Scotland's large-scale survey of Scottish employers in 2006 found that 61 per cent of employers who had recruited someone straight from school thought that the recruit was well-prepared for the world of work. For those that had recruited someone straight from college or straight from university, the respective figures were 75 per cent and 81 per cent.

This case study research undertaken in 2006/2007 looks at the preparedness for work of employees recruited directly from college and universities into their first job. The key objective of this research was to provide more detailed evidence about the views of employers on the preparedness of recruits from colleges and universities, in a way that is of direct and practical relevance to the work of Futureskills Scotland's stakeholders.

Recruitment from Scotland's Colleges and Universities

The research sought to identify the extent to which the case study employers recruit from colleges and universities to fill their vacancies. It found that:

- with the exception of recruitment onto graduate training programmes, in the main employers do not expressly seek to employ leavers directly from colleges or universities *per se* to fill their vacancies. The main issue for employers is '*getting the right person for the job*';

- although the majority of those interviewed understood university provision, often as the result of their own experiences, and have clear perceptions about what it can offer, they are much less well informed about college provision;

- the type and level of jobs that the case study employers fill with recruits directly from colleges and/or universities are as follows:

  - individuals are recruited from universities either into specialist graduate training programmes, into trainee positions for which employers require degree level qualifications (but not always specialist skills), or they compete for positions that are open to non-graduate level candidates;

  - individuals recruited into their first job straight from college tend to secure positions in which the job-related skills that they have learnt in college will be utilised.

- Although in the minority amongst the case studies, some employers recruit individuals from universities specifically for the technical skills that they hope they will bring to the organisations. Most employers take a broader view, seeing a degree as a proxy for achieving a certain level of competence that represents the minimum standard that they are seeking in a new recruit;

- the case study employers use a range of mechanisms to assess the competencies and qualities of recruits from colleges and universities;

- employers use standard interview techniques to recruit individuals from colleges and universities. Their approach is the same as they use with other non-college or non-graduate level recruits; and

- around a third of case study employers with recruits from university have experienced problems in recruiting the numbers they require, but in the main have not experienced problems in terms of quality. Case study employers recruiting individuals from college did not report problems in terms of numbers or quality in the main.

Employer Expectations of Recruits from Colleges and Universities

The research investigated case study employer expectations in relation to recruiting individuals from colleges and universities. It found that:

- in broad terms employers are not especially demanding of either college or university recruits over the short term, expecting them to familiarise themselves with the routines and practices of the organisation and demonstrate a willingness to learn;

- in terms of the size of contribution and pace of development, employers expected more from individuals recruited from university over the longer term than either

those recruited from college or their workforce more generally;

- if deficiencies in new recruits from colleges and/or universities are identified, employers seek to tackle them as soon as possible. Weaknesses in these recruits are dealt with in the same way as any other new recruit to the workplace; and

- the type of training that is available to support recruits from college and university can be grouped into induction training, ongoing *ad hoc* training and specialist graduate training programmes.

Case Study Employers Views on the Preparedness of Recruits from Colleges and Universities

As evidenced by the Employer Skills Survey, employers are generally content that recruits from college and university are well prepared for the world of work. However this qualitative research provided an opportunity to gain a much deeper understanding of what they actually mean when they talk about preparedness for work.

- When employers talk about recruits from both colleges and universities being 'well prepared' for the workplace, their main interests are around technical job-related skills and good communication skills.

- When employers talk about recruits from university being 'poorly prepared' for the workplace, their biggest concerns are poor communication skills and a poor attitude.

- The importance employers place on communication skills is paramount, and

may in part relate to the need for recruits to work effectively with both colleagues and clients from the outset.

- With regard to recruits from college being considered 'poorly prepared' by employers, the biggest problems are around poor basic skills and a lack of common sense.

- The differences between employers views on college and university recruits is likely to reflect the different types of positions these individuals take up within organisations.

- The case study employers struggled to identify changes in the preparedness of recruits from college and university over time. To some degree this reflects the fact that it was difficult to find HR managers involved in this piece of research that had been in post long enough to give meaningful comment.

- The case study employers considered that the level of preparedness for the workplace of college and/or university recruits could have substantial impacts on their organisation. In broad terms college and university recruits are seen as beneficial to the organisation, particularly over the longer term.

Impact of University and College Attendance in the Workplace

There has been an increasing recognition over the past decade of the need to develop the employability of college and university students in order to prepare them for the world of work. In general terms, the case study employers consider that colleges and universities contribute well to the employability agenda, supporting the findings of the Employer Skills Survey. Recent recruits from college and university were also largely positive about their experiences and the contribution that this made to their preparedness for work.

Universities play a key role in preparing students for degree level or other qualification, whilst working to equip them with the skills that they need in the labour market. Approaches include support in career decision-making and jobsearch, development of employability attributes as part of study programmes, work experience and personal development planning.

Within colleges there is strong support for the development of employability skills, ideally supported by employer involvement. Approaches include the provision of stand alone modules, embedded employability elements within other programmes and work experience placements.

Although the case study employers reported only limited direct involvement with colleges and universities, in the main they reported that they were willing to be approached to make a greater contribution to the work-related activities of colleges and universities, particularly if this would provide students with a more accurate reflection of what is required in the workplace.

1: Background to Research

Introduction

Analysis of the Scottish Employer Skills Survey[1] 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006 has consistently shown that employers hold the individuals that they recruit from colleges and universities in high regard in terms of their preparedness for work, with 70-80 per cent reporting that they were 'well prepared' for the workplace. But what does this mean? What do employers really think about the way in which recruits from colleges and universities present to their organisations? What are their expectations of these recruits? What is the impact of their recruitment on the organisation as a whole?

Building on the Employer Skills Survey findings highlighting the predominantly positive experiences that employers have in recruiting university and college recruits, Futureskills Scotland commissioned case study based research. This was conducted with a group of 30 employers who had participated in the Employer Skills Survey. This examines in greater depth the issues relating to the recruitment and preparedness for work of individuals recruited into their first job on leaving a Scottish college or university.

Aims and Objectives

The key objective of the research is to provide more detailed evidence about the views of these employers on the preparedness of recruits from colleges and universities, in a way that is of direct and practical relevance to the work of Futureskills Scotland's stakeholders.

The Study Approach

The research complements the statistical data analysis produced through the Employer Skills Survey, and will help to obtain a better understanding about the issues that concern employers in relation to the recruitment of individuals directly from Scotland's colleges and universities.

The study is based on 30 in-depth employer case studies, split two-thirds employers who cited college and university recruits as 'well-prepared' and one third who cited them 'poorly prepared' for the workplace. In taking this approach we 'oversampled' employers who indicated that they had a negative view of college and/or university leavers. Given the generally positive experiences that employers reported in the Employer Skills Survey, to get the maximum value from the in-depth case studies it was considered important to provide employers with every opportunity to outline the areas in which they had experienced difficulties and subsequent impacts for their organisations. The views of employers expressed in this report are therefore likely to be more negative than those of the employing community as a whole.

There is a spread of employers by size, broad industrial sector and location. In addition there is a mix of those with experience of taking on recruits only from college, only from university and from both. To ensure the case studies were comprehensive, at each site there were

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[1] Since 2002 Futureskills Scotland has regularly surveyed employers to identify the issues that matter to them and help determine the direction of Scotland's labour market **www.futureskillsscotland.org.uk**

interviews carried out with the Human Resource manager (or individual with the recruitment responsibility), line managers and recent recruits.

The case study material is supported throughout by evidence from a short desk based review of the characteristics of Scottish colleges and universities, their approaches to employability and employer perceptions of the value of employing individuals from these institutions.

Using a case study approach provides qualitative information of some depth to complement the quantitative information obtained through the Employers Skill Survey. The case studies also allow a range of people in an organisation to contribute to a case study, whereas the Employers Skill Survey generally obtains information from one respondent.

If those are the strengths of the case study approach, a possible weakness is that the 30 organisations that participated are in no sense 'representative' of employers. This is not a large sample from which statistically robust conclusions can be drawn. Rather, it complements the quantitative work which prompted this more detailed, qualitative research.

It is important to take a balanced approach when assessing this kind of evidence. There is no basis for sweeping conclusions about 'all graduates' or 'all colleges'.

Employers Recruiting from Colleges

Securing interviews with employers who had taken on (or were aware of taking on) recruits directly from college into their first job in the last 2-3 years proved very challenging. There are a number of potential explanations, which are likely to have contributed to this.

Some employers appeared confused about what it means to have 'recruited someone directly from college'. Several of the pool of potential case study employers who reported in the Employer Skills Survey that they had recently recruited individuals into their first job straight from college, were ultimately outwith the scope of the research. When probed in detail it appeared that they had in reality offered contracts to:

• **Modern Apprentices or other individuals on training programmes already employed within the organisation, who had attended college on a day release basis; or**

• **recruits much farther into their careers, but who had recently attended college.**

There is a genuine lack of awareness amongst employers about the detailed past histories of recent recruits. The recruits that were taken on straight from college moved on quickly and were no longer with the organisations.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, interviews were undertaken with seven employers that had recruited individuals directly from college in the last two to three years, two of which had recent experience of recruiting from both colleges and universities.

Employers Recruiting from University

Securing interviews with employers who had taken on (or were aware of taking on) recruits directly from university in the last 2-3 years was relatively straightforward. Interviews were undertaken with 23 employers, two of which had recent experience of recruiting from both universities and colleges.

Appendix 1 provides a detailed account of the study approach and the characteristics of the employers.

Report Structure

The report presents the key findings from these interviews in the context of the Further and Higher education environment in Scotland. The report is organised as follows:

Key Findings from the research;

Chapter One which provides the background to the research;

Chapter Two which examines recruitment from colleges and universities in the case study organisations;

Chapter Three which outlines employers' expectations of recruits from college and universities;

Chapter Four which explores employers' views on the preparedness of recruits from colleges and universities in the case study organisations and the consequent impact on the organisations; and

Chapter Five which highlights employers' views on the impact of college and university attendance on recruits.

2: Recruitment from Scotland's Colleges and Universities

Key Points

This chapter provides an overview of the experiences of the case study employers in recruiting from Scotland's colleges and universities.

- The college and university sectors in Scotland have experienced rapid expansion in terms of student numbers and provision over the course of the last decade or so, associated with demographic changes, steady economic growth and an increased emphasis on lifelong learning.

- Employability has been a key policy priority in recent years and is supported by the roles of colleges and universities to provide learning opportunities and to respond to the needs of employers and the economy.

- The overall picture in terms of provision is becoming increasingly complicated, suggesting that a two-way split between colleges and universities does not fully reflect the complexity of the situation on the ground, and may potentially contribute to employers' confusion around recruits from these institutions.

- With the exception for recruitment onto graduate training programmes, in the main case study employers do not expressly seek to employ leavers directly from colleges or universities *per se* to fill their vacancies.

- Although the majority of those interviewed understood university provision, often as the result of their own experiences, and have clear perceptions about what it can offer, they are much less well informed about college provision

- Individuals are recruited from universities either into specialist graduate training programmes, into trainee positions for which employers require degree level qualifications (but not always specialist skills), or they compete for positions that are open to non-graduate level candidates.

- Most case study employers see a degree as a proxy for achieving a certain level of competence, which represents the minimum standard that they are seeking in a new recruit.

- Individuals recruited into their first job straight from college tend to secure positions in which the job-related skills that they have learnt in college would be utilised.

- The case study employers use a range of mechanisms to assess the competencies and qualities of recruits from colleges and universities, but with the exception of those recruited onto graduate programmes, the majority rely on the standard interview techniques that they use to hire their general workforce.

- Around a third of case study employers with recruits from university have experienced problems in recruiting the numbers they require, but in the main have not experienced problems in terms of quality.

- Case study employers recruiting individuals from college did not report problems in terms of numbers or quality in the main.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the experiences of the case study employers in recruiting from Scotland's colleges and universities. A short review of the college and university sector in Scotland provides the context for the research. More specifically the chapter reports on the:

- extent to which employers seek to recruit from colleges and universities to fill their vacancies;

- type and level of jobs that employers seek to fill with recruits from colleges and universities;

- mechanisms which case study employers use to assess the competencies and qualities of recruits from colleges and universities for the workplace, and how this differs from their treatment of recruits from other sources; and

- recruitment difficulties experienced by case study employers with recruits from colleges and universities.

In responding to the research questions, case study employers were asked to focus primarily on the recruitment of individuals from college and university into jobs for which they normally require this level of education, rather than on individuals who have taken up entry level, temporary and/or part time jobs in competition with all other applicants.

College and University Education in Scotland

The college and university sectors in Scotland have experienced extensive change over the course of the last decade or so, associated with demographic changes, steady economic growth and an increased emphasis on lifelong learning, which has led to a rapid expansion in terms of student numbers and provision.

Through course design and delivery, colleges and universities have roles to play in providing learning opportunities and responding to the needs of employers and the economy. In addition, as institutions, they help to develop individuals' knowledge and skills, form their attitudes and behaviours and help them to make informed choices about their futures. Employability has been a key policy priority in Scotland in recent years, as outlined in *Learning to Work* (2004), which emphasises the need for institutions to move away from thinking about employability as stand alone provision and to see it as something that can be built into the whole of the learning and teaching experience. The Scottish Funding Council Corporate Plan 2006-2009 outlines the aim of increasing the employability of students in colleges and universities. It stresses the importance of developing individuals' skills and attributes and providing students with appropriate careers advice. The Scottish Funding Council recognises the changing nature of the Scottish economy and the subsequent need for adaptable courses to address skill shortages and meet future trends, including changes in technology and changes in occupational and/or industrial sectors.

Research and continual development of courses is carried out to help students to attain the appropriate skills to enhance their employability. A particular emphasis is placed on the development of 'softer' or 'core' skills such as team working, communication and problem solving.

Scotland's colleges and universities cannot be viewed as a homogenous group as there is a lot of variety amongst institutions. Colleges differ by size and by the type of provision they offer. Whilst some are community-based colleges offering a wide variety of local provision, others specialise in particular subject areas. Some colleges are now major providers of both full-time and part-time higher education, as well as their more traditional role of providing post-16 work-based qualifications. Universities too are becoming increasingly differentiated in terms of their provision offering a wide range of continuing professional development, alongside the more traditional Higher National Certificates (HNCs), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), undergraduate and higher degrees, postgraduate diplomas and certificates.

The picture is further complicated because the statistics for the numbers of students attending and graduating from Scottish colleges and universities are collated by type of award they receive e.g. higher education qualifications (defined as Level 7 or above in the Scottish Qualifications Framework) rather than the type of institution that they attend e.g. college. Higher education encompasses the range of provision from HNCs, through HNDs, undergraduate and masters degrees to doctorates. The majority of these courses are

delivered by Higher Education Institutions, which include Scotland's 13 universities, the Open University in Scotland, 1 university college, 2 colleges of higher education, 2 art schools, a conservatoire and the Scottish Agricultural College. These institutions provide the vast majority of higher education, delivering courses to around 4 out of 5 students studying at this level with colleges offering mostly sub-degree level HNC and HND level qualifications.

The most recent data published on students studying for higher education qualifications shows that in 2004-2005, there were 276,705 students in Scottish institutions studying at this level, across universities and colleges. This represents a total increase of 6.7% over the previous 5 years. In terms of their activities:

- 64 per cent were studying on a full-time basis;

- 43 per cent were males and 57 per cent were females. While the number of females increased by 11 per cent between 1999-2000 and 2004-2005, the number of males increased by only 1.4 per cent over the same period;

- 31 per cent were under 21 years of age, 24 per cent were aged between 21 and 24 years, 45 per cent were over 25; and

- 48 per cent were studying at the first-degree level, 21 per cent were studying at the postgraduate level, and 33 per cent were pursuing other higher education qualifications.

Looking at college attendance on its own, in 2004-2005, there were 351,435 students enrolled in courses at Scotland's colleges. Of these students just over three-quarters were

enrolled on further education courses and the remainder undertaking higher education qualifications. Activity is measured in Student Units of Measurement (SUMS) and shows that in 2004-2005:

- full-time courses accounted for about 65 per cent of activity;

- 53 per cent of activity was undertaken by females; and

- 65 per cent of student activity was undertaken by students aged under 25.

In short, the overall picture is becoming increasingly complicated, suggesting that a two-way spilt between colleges and universities does not fully reflect the complexity of the situation on the ground, and may potentially contribute to case study employers' confusion around recruits from these institutions. However, what is clear is that the significant (and increasing) numbers attending colleges and universities means that more and more individuals are engaging in the college or university 'experience'. Potentially the way in which students are prepared for the workplace during their time at college or university has critically important implications for individual employers and for the labour market more generally. This underlines the importance of this research, which aims to provide case study evidence about employers' perceptions of the work-readiness of recruits from universities and colleges.

Recruitment from Colleges and Universities

The case study employers were asked to recall their experiences in relation to recruiting individuals into their first job after leaving college or university. The majority of the employers found it initially challenging to think about their recruits specifically in this context. Notwithstanding the use of specific qualifications such as HNCs or a degree as recruitment criteria, few had previously thought in any depth about the way in which their recruits' experiences at college or university may have contributed to their skill set and attributes *per se*. With the exception of individuals recruited specifically as graduate trainees and/or into graduate training programmes, employers often struggled to differentiate their university leavers from their wider workforce. This observation was even stronger for college leavers, with most employers struggling to see them as a distinct group.

Recruitment Responsibility

The individual(s) responsible for making recruitment decisions is largely determined by the size of an organisation, with larger employers most likely to have a dedicated Human Resource Manager and/or department. Two-thirds of the case study employers have a dedicated Human Resource Department, but the majority of these are based off-site at Head Offices or other branches of the organisations. Although expected to operate within guidelines laid down by Head Office and to seek assistance as and when required, all the employers have local discretion with regards to the recruitment of specific individuals. Recruitment decisions tend to be made by site managers supported by appropriate section heads. The only exceptions to this are schools that are allocated probationary teachers

straight out of university by their local education authority. In organisations without Human Resource managers recruitment decisions are normally made by the Managing Director, Chief Executive or their senior staff.

Recruitment from Colleges

Type of Jobs

In terms of industrial sector, the seven case study employers that had recruited individuals straight from college were operating in retailing, printing, landscaping, leisure and marine rentals, entertainment, and electronics. The types of jobs that recruits from colleges secured were either:

- trainee positions e.g. trainee structural engineers in the marine rental company; or

- positions in which recruits were expected to use the vocational skills that they had gained in college e.g. a graphic designer in the printing company, a horticultural labourer in the landscaping company or the fitness attendant at the leisure centre.

The starting salaries for these jobs were in the range £9,000 to £17,500.

Recruitment Requirements and Assessment

Having a college-based qualification or having attended a college was not a prerequisite for any of the positions secured in the case study organisations by individuals recruited straight from college. However, although not a requirement *per se*, the marine rentals company sometimes uses qualifications as one of a number of desirable characteristics for potential recruits. When recruiting, all of the employers in the case studies considered

experience and track record more important. In terms of the characteristics that employers were looking for in recruits from college the two most frequently cited responses were good communication skills and innovation and problem solving Good communication is the main attribute that recruits from college think employers are looking for.

Although most of the case study employers recruiting college leavers viewed qualifications as desirable, they did not specify college attendance or success as critical criteria for recruitment. Amongst the case study employers, college attendance does not therefore appear to have offered any distinct advantage in the recruitment process. However, this should not be interpreted as employers not valuing college attendance; what it shows is that when recruiting, employers are not prepared to reject candidates that can offer only experience, so word their job specifications accordingly. Given that employers placed such an emphasis on workplace experience, this raises the importance of the inclusion of opportunities for students to undertake work placements and other work-based activities during their course.

All the employers that have recruited individuals from college recruited them through a formal interview process. Interviews are favoured as a means of assessment because they provide an opportunity for candidates to outline their qualifications, skills and experience, but more importantly their ability to communicate with others. The employers taking on individuals from college indicated that an interview approach is their

preferred method for all candidates, although a couple use complementary methods, with one administering a series of practical tests and another a group exercise.

Recruitment Difficulties

Most of the employers could identify no difficulties at all in relation to college recruits, although the limited emphasis that the case study employers placed on college attendance as a recruitment criteria may be a contributing factor here. Two of the case study employers had specific issues:

The high-tech marine rentals company finds it difficult to recruit the numbers they require to fill their vacancies. Given the option, this company favours recruiting individuals from colleges completing HNCs and HNDs, believing them to offer a more hands on approach and greater practical experience than their university counterparts. The employer believes that the recruitment difficulties they face relate directly to a decrease in the numbers of individuals completing college-based HNCs and HNDs in subject areas relevant to their industry.

The printing company uses personal contacts to recruit college leavers and experiences difficulties relating to the quality of applicant. The main problem being that *'college leavers lack the ability to deliver to strict deadlines'*, which he attributes largely to their poor understanding of the commercial environment.

Recruitment from Universities
Type of Jobs
23 of the 30 case study employers reported recently taking on recruits into their first job from university. These organisations were across a wide range of industrial sectors including retail, manufacturing, health and social care, education, hospitality and business and financial services sectors.

Recruitment Requirements and Assessment

Almost half of the case study employers taking on recruits straight from university stipulated that a degree was a requirement for the positions on offer, although some indicated that they would consider individuals with relevant experience in exceptional circumstances, although this was not their preference. As would be expected, the successful completion of a degree programme was a prerequisite for all individuals recruited onto a graduate training programme.

In terms of the characteristics the employers were looking for in recruits the four most frequently cited responses, all mentioned by around half of employers recruiting from universities were:

- good communication skills;
- job-related technical skills;
- being a good team worker; and
- enthusiasm.

When recruits were asked what they thought employers were looking for:

- more than half identified communication as important; and
- around a quarter identified job-related technical skills and knowledge, team working and enthusiasm.

In broad terms this suggests that recruits from university are aware of the types of skills and characteristics that employers seek.

Recruitment Difficulties

Almost half of the case study employers recruiting straight from university indicated that they had experienced problems recruiting the numbers that they wanted. Employers perceive these problems as greatest where they are competing for a small pool of potential graduates; where the employers themselves are not big players so struggle to offer attractive packages to recruits or where the skills they require are highly specialist. These are employers' perceptions and do not necessarily reflect the situation in relation to the actual size of recruit pools (especially given the expansion of student numbers and provision) or skills shortages, nonetheless:

- the cement manufacturing company believes it struggles to attract the numbers because of the need to compete with multi-nationals for a small pool of appropriately qualified graduates;

- the marine rental company considers that there is a *'severe skill shortage'* with regard to university graduates with the appropriate skills and practical experience and those with the skills are invariably lured into the lucrative oil industry;

- the public sector health organisation and the youth initiative think that they find it difficult to attract candidates to very specialist roles e.g. Digital Media Project Worker, because there is only a limited pool of individuals with the right qualifications;

- the microelectronics company believes that engineering is no longer considered an attractive subject to study at university; and

- the secondary school receives very few responses to advertisements for teaching vacancies, *'a handful at most'*. As local authorities are responsible for the placing of advertisements for new recruits the school does not feel that it is in a position to address this issue.

Only three of the employers, a primary school seeking teaching support workers, a supermarket and the marine rental company expressed any concerns about the quality of recruits taken on from universities.

3: Employer Expectations of Recruits from Colleges and Universities

Key Points

This chapter investigates the case study employers' expectations of recruits from colleges and universities and how these differ from their expectations of other recruits.

- In broad terms employers are not especially demanding of either college or university recruits over the short term, expecting them to familiarise themselves with the routines and practices of the organisation and demonstrate a willingness to learn.

- In terms of the size of contribution and pace of development, employers expected more from individuals recruited from university over the longer term than either those recruited from college or their workforce more generally.

- If deficiencies in new recruits from colleges and/or universities are identified, employers seek to tackle them as soon as possible. Weaknesses in these recruits are dealt with in the same way as any other new recruit to the workplace.

- The type of training that is available to support recruits from college and university can be grouped into induction training, ongoing *ad hoc* training and specialist graduate training programmes.

Introduction

This chapter investigates the case study employers' expectations of recruits from colleges and universities and how these differ from their expectations of other recruits. Employers were asked to outline their expectations in relation to recruits from colleges and universities within 3 months of joining the organisation, after 3 years and over the longer term. The chapter then goes on to look at the training opportunities afforded to recruits on induction and on an ongoing basis to help recruits fulfil their potential within the organisations.

Expectations of Recruits from Universities

When asked about their expectations of recruits from university, in broad terms the case study employers do not appear to be especially demanding of recruits from university in their first three months. Around three-quarters expect them to spend this period familiarising themselves with the daily routines and practices and show a willingness to learn about the organisation. This is very much in line with their expectations of any new recruit on joining. Two employers expected new recruits to make a limited contribution with some support but only one employer, a primary school, expected that they would be making a full contribution on leaving university, perhaps indicative of the specific vocational nature of the graduate training course and the expectation that it will produce a recruit who is fully competent at their work from day one.

However, expectations change markedly over time, with most case study employers anticipating that after three years, individuals that they have recruited from university will be fully competent at their job, taking on more responsibilities, progressing within the organisation and being in a position to lead teams and projects. In short, case study employers expect recruits from university to progress rapidly, and see universities as providing recruits with the basis from which they can develop to play a full part in the activities of the organisation.

In terms of longer term expectations, case study employers are divided into those that anticipate that university recruits will be taking up management positions and contributing to organisational development, and those that do not see a long term future for them within the organisation. In the main the latter view was expressed by employers:

- in relatively small organisations with few opportunities for progression e.g. a historic monument and a hotel;

- who had recruited individuals into jobs that they did not view especially challenging over the longer term e.g. financial services, customer services advisers; and

- who had recruited individuals for project-based work with time limited funding e.g. the youth project.

Although these employers did not have specific expectations of their university recruits over the longer term, in the main they indicated that where an individual demonstrated that they wanted to progress they would be supported to do this within the limitations of the opportunities afforded by the organisation.

Although not a representative sample of employers, almost four-fifths of the case study employers with recent recruits from university had higher expectations of them than of their other recruits. This was the case even though the majority of employers recruited them into positions that did not state a degree qualification as a prerequisite of the post, although in the vast majority of cases a university qualification was considered a desirable criterion. As with those recruited from college, the reluctance to rule out individuals without university level qualifications but with relevant experience appears to be a human resource procedure to provide employers with a larger pool of potential recruits to choose from by including non-graduates at the application stage. There is no evidence to suggest that this should be interpreted as employers not valuing university attendance and qualifications. Where employers recruited from universities they expected that these individuals would be able to:

- progress at a faster pace;

- bring more fresh ideas to the organisation;

- take on more responsibilities; and

- progress with less support than other recruits.

These employers clearly have an expectation that those who have attended university will add value to their organisation around efficiency, innovation and management.

The small number of employers that did not appear to have higher expectations of recruits from university fell into two broad categories. The first were employers that rely heavily on training up recruits to their own specification subsequent to them joining the organisation, for example in printing and IT services. These employers use attendance at university as a proxy for attainment of a desired standard, but beyond that they anticipate that they will be responsible for training up the recruits in their own way.

The second were those that had recruited individuals from university into traditionally non-graduate occupations in retail and hospitality. Although there is potential for them to add value, in reality recruits are being taken on for positions that do not require degree level attainment, so expectations do not differ from those of non-graduate level recruits.

Expectations of Recruits from Colleges

Three of the seven case study employers expected new recruits to spend the first three months familiarising themselves with the routines and practices of the organisation, but the others were more demanding, viewing this initial period as probationary and expecting recruits to prove themselves by achieving initial targets.

As with the recruits from university, by the end of three years, most case study employers

expected that recruits from college would be taking on more responsibility and be making some contributions to organisational development. Over the longer term, half of those employing college leavers anticipated that they would be progressing within the company and taking up managerial positions. One employer had no long term expectations of recruits from college and another anticipated that they would not stay with the company over the longer term.

Only one employer, a clothing print company, had higher expectations overall of recruits taken on from college than their workforce generally. This was specifically related to the skills that they brought with them from their college course that would enable them to get to grips with the demands of the job more effectively. The fact that an individual was recruited from a college did not alter the views of the rest of the employers in terms of expectations and they viewed these individuals in the same way as any other new recruit.

Training in the Workplace

Following recruitment, the type of training that is available in the workplace varies by organisation. For some case study employers training builds on the skills that recruits have already picked up at college and university and for others training will provide the opportunity to train them up from scratch in the ways of the organisation. The training that is on offer can be broadly categorised into:

- induction training;
- ongoing training; and
- Graduate Training Programmes.

Induction Training

On recruitment, the majority of case study employers look to provide training for their new college and university recruits that will help to develop them in their new roles. Induction training was provided by two thirds of the employers with university recruits and half of those with college recruits. Induction training is offered to help new recruits settle in to their new positions and to provide them with the basic knowledge to operate within the organisation. It covers a wide range of issues to help individuals to orientate themselves. In most instances induction training represents the bare minimum that new recruits need to know to work within an organisation and typically relates to areas controlled by legislation such as Health and Safety, lifting and handling or equality and diversity training. This may be supplemented by activities to help new recruits settle into their new working environment such as *'tours around the plant'*, *'basic stock and customer service information'* or *'reviews of policies and procedures'*.

Even in some of the organisations that do not provide formal induction training, recent recruits from college and university (in common with other new recruits) will be asked to 'shadow' existing employees or be teamed up with a 'buddy' to help them to settle in.

Ongoing Training

The majority of case study employers that recruited from universities had a strong focus on ongoing formal and informal training. Only two, the restaurant and the hotel cases studies, do not routinely provide ongoing training to their recruits. The recruit at the hotel felt that the demands of the job were such that *'once you learn the job you don't need it'* and at the restaurant training would be given if requested. However, these examples relate to individual employers and cannot be assumed to reflect the behaviour of these sectors as a whole. The majority of case study employers respond to training needs, providing training on an *ad hoc* basis as required. Case study employers appear to see university graduates as a distinct group that are worth an investment in training terms that over time will provide a return to the organisation. Typically the training relates to participation in:

- **formal, structured graduate training programmes (offered by four of the employers);**

- **supervisory or management training e.g. sponsorship for Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) training; and**

- **continuous professional development to further enhance job related skills e.g. SVQ Early Years training for support teaching staff.**

For recruits from college, ongoing training tends to be on an *ad hoc* basis and in the main relates to training courses that can deliver specific skills e.g. learning to use a new piece of equipment or software package that will help an individual do their current job. This appears to support the view that for these employers at least, college leavers are largely indistinct from the wider workforce.

Graduate Training Programmes

Some of the case study employers recruit candidates from universities specifically for

entry into their graduate training programmes. These are formal in nature and involve a period of structured training designed to provide recruits from university with a good grounding in all aspects of the operations of their employer. Graduate training programmes are provided by seven of the case study employers, although the numbers of recruits involved are small in each instance.

The cement manufacturer has a specially designed graduate training programme for mechanical and electrical engineering graduates, chemical engineering graduates and physics graduates, which takes roughly 24 months to complete. Participants are expected to spend their first 6 to 12 months working on various projects and tasks in every aspect of the business. Having done that, they spend 2 weeks away from site, possibly outside the country with other people in similar positions around the world to go over what they have learned and talk through different processes relating to their job. Within the subsequent 12 months, they work on more specific assignments and are given the opportunity to go on training courses run by their technical centre in France, depending on their degree subject and job role. Four or five graduates are recruited through the programme per year across the UK.

The major supermarket chain co-ordinates recruitment onto the graduate training programme in the organisation. Two or three graduates are recruited every year for the whole of the west of Scotland through the graduate training programme. These graduates stay in the branch for about 5 months to be trained, after which they are sent to other stores to work.

The primary and secondary schools employ teaching 'probationers' who are undertaking the compulsory post-university teacher-training year, which involves a structured and supervised learning programme. A similar structured programme exists in the hospital for degree nurses.

The solicitor's case study has launched a new graduate programme that will take on one recruit per annum. Its introduction is a direct response to problems the company has experienced in recruiting graduates. '*This has come more out of necessity than desire. It's not possible in the current market to recruit qualified staff so you have to train your own*'.

The financial investment company has recently reinstated its graduate training programme and this office has taken on three recruits from university over the last year or so. Recruits follow a structured three-year programme ending in formal industry qualifications.

4. Employers' Views on the Preparedness of Recruits from Colleges and Universities

Key Points

This chapter investigates what the case study employers actually mean when they report that recruits from colleges and universities are 'well prepared' or 'poorly prepared' for the workplace and the impacts that their level of preparedness has on the organisations.

- When case study employers talk about recruits from both colleges and universities being 'well prepared' for the workplace, their main interests are around technical job-related skills and good communication skills.

- When case study employers talk about recruits from university being 'poorly prepared' for the workplace, their biggest concerns are poor communication skills and a poor attitude.

- The importance case study employers place on both good and poor communication skills is paramount, and may in part relate to the need for recruits to work effectively with both colleagues and clients from the outset.

- The emphasis case study employers place on communication skills for recruits signals a need for colleges and universities to identify opportunities for the development and enhancement of these skills for students.

- With regard to recruits from college being 'poorly prepared', the biggest problems are around poor basic skills and a lack of common sense.

- The differences between employers views on college and university recruits is likely to reflect the different types of positions these individuals take up within organisations.

- The case study employers struggled to identify changes in the preparedness of recruits from college and university over time.

- The case study employers considered that the level of preparedness for the workplace of college and/or university recruits could potentially have substantial impacts on their organisation. In broad terms university and college recruits are seen as beneficial to the organisation, particularly over the longer term.

Introduction

This chapter investigates what the case study employers mean when they report that recruits from colleges and universities are 'well prepared' or 'poorly prepared' for the workplace and the impacts that their level of preparedness has on the organisations.

To try to get a sense of the breadth of issues that concern the case study employers around preparedness to work, they were first asked unprompted to outline their views on what they understood the terms 'well prepared' and 'poorly prepared' for the workplace to mean. In

interpreting these responses, it is important to remember that these are employers' views on what preparedness means to them and are not necessarily born out of their experiences of dealing with recruits. Following the initial opportunity to respond, to ensure consistency, employers were then shown a flashcard highlighting a list of key elements to 'preparedness for work' with definitions in line with those used in the Employer Skills Survey. They were asked to keep these definitions in mind when responding to subsequent questions and providing detailed examples. The flashcard is shown in Figure 4.1.

Employers' Understanding of 'Well Prepared' for Work

As outlined previously, findings from the Employers Skills Survey showed that 70-80% of employers in Scotland recruiting individuals straight from college or university into their

first job considered that they were 'well prepared' for the workplace. But what do they really mean by this? Do employers make a distinction between recruits from colleges and universities? The next sections are organised around employers' views on the preparedness for the workplace of recruits from universities and colleges. This is followed by a discussion of case study employers' views on the impacts that the level of preparedness of these new recruits can have on their organisations.

Recruits from University

When asked unprompted to outline what they considered 'well prepared' for the workplace means when recruiting from universities, employers offered a range of responses. Figure 4.2 groups these responses under the broad categories of basic skills, core skills, personal attributes, technical skills and other. The most common responses are highlighted.

Figure 4.1: Flashcard

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF RECRUITS	
Basic Skills	• Literacy
	• Numeracy
Personal Attributes	• Motivation
	• Attitude
Core Skills	• Oral communication skills
	• Customer handling skills
	• Ability to solve problems
	• Ability to plan and organise
	• Ability to work with others
Technical Skills	• Skills needed to do the job
Other Core Skills	• Ability to use information technology

Figure 4.2: Employers' Views On Well Preparedness of Recruits from University

Basic Skills	*Good basic skills*
Personal Attributes	A good attitude
	Common sense
	Being enthusiastic
	Good work ethic
	Confidence
	Maturity
Core Skills	The ability to follow instructions
	The ability to learn
	Showing initiative
	Willingness to be flexible
	Team worker
	Good communication skills
	Ability to be innovative/solve problems
	Organisational skills
	Being reliable
Technical Skills	*Good technical/job-related skills*
	Ability to apply theory to practice
Other	Knowledge of the company
	Previous work experience
	Ability to work under pressure
	Show commitment to the job
	Realistic expectations of job
	A career plan

Although wide ranging, there was some consensus, with more than half of employers with recruits from universities mentioning the need for technical job related skills and knowledge and good communication skills. Around a third highlighted the need for basic skills and a good work ethic. It is interesting to note, however that when employers talk about basic skills in relation to recruits from university, they appear to be anticipating a much higher level of skills around literacy and numeracy than would normally be considered basic, and which in reality relate to specific aspects of a job e.g. working with budgets, writing reports etc. This suggests that those working with employers must be careful in making assumptions about what employers mean by terms such as 'basic skills', as there appears to be a difference between the accepted official definition of basic skills as '*The ability to read, write and speak in English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general.*' and the more subjective, contextual definition used by employers. Employers tend to see literacy and numeracy as a set of more complex capabilities. This also shows that employers have expectations of university recruits across a range of competencies including basic, technical and core skills.

To help clarify what they mean by well prepared, employers then outlined some positive experiences in relation to the preparedness of recruits from university for work. These are illustrated with more detailed examples drawn from case studies and show specific work based situations that demand a range of cross-cutting skills.

Examples Showing Where Recruits from Universities Are 'Well Prepared'

Case study 4, a printing company, had a recent HE graduate recruit who introduced a new system to the company enabling customers to check up on and track orders. As soon as a customer has made an order they may track it throughout the printing process right up to delivery. The system has been so successful that large companies with their own tracking system tend to use the case study's system in preference to their own. Not only has this made the company more efficient but has also deterred competitors who would have to fashion a similar innovation.

Case study 5, a cement producer had employed a recent HE graduate who demonstrated that he had the technical skills needed to do his job. He is conversant with the various processes and units of measurement that relate to variables like heat and mass transfer, temperature and atmospheric pressure. This means he is able to take measurements and '*convert them into standard temperature and pressure.*' In terms of the impacts, his line manager said '*it makes the job easier*' and more efficient. When he is given a task he understands what is required, which reduces the amount

of time involved in explaining things. His line manager also said *'he gives you what you are looking for,'* which means minimal supervision is required and there is no need to spend time double-checking figures. This recruit demonstrated an ability to combine his technical skills with critical thinking.

Case study 9, a public sector health organisation, employs a number of recent recruits from university who have excellent communication skills. Review teams in the organisation have to often consult with hospital trusts, which involve putting arguments across, and these arguments have to be factual, clear and concise in order to make an impact. They have one particular recent recruit from university who has good soft skills, particularly, communication and planning and organising skills. This individual has managed to get up to speed very quickly with a complex project she is working on, and she has been able to take over meetings without the project leader being present. In liaising with other departments in the organisation, she has also demonstrated good customer handling skills. The particular project she was working on was a national project with tight deadlines and milestones to meet, and it was essential that the milestones were met. The recruit managed to deliver effectively and apparently effortlessly.

Case study 11, a specialist IT Software Company, had employed a recent HE graduate who was well equipped with the

technical skills needed for his job. This person used a particular software tool to create a type of documentation for a project they were working on. Even though they did not have that particular tool in the company at the time, the graduate suggested they purchase a copy, which they did, and by so doing, they were able to complete the project a lot faster than it would normally have taken. His knowledge of that tool made them more efficient, as it saved them time and it was cost effective. This is viewed as very significant to the company.

Case study 12, a social care organisation, has a recent recruit from university who is well prepared in relation to soft skills. His line manager said *'the fact he is aware of a situation and knows to communicate that to others in the team is very significant. It keeps the organisation running.'* Core skills, especially the softer core skills such as dealing with others and oral communication skills are extremely important to the organisation, and recruits who are skilled in dealing with patients, relatives, doctors and other team members help to retain high standards in the home and ensure patients are getting the treatment they require.

Case study 15, a large supermarket, has employed a recent recruit from university who is very good in the use of IT. When a computer becomes faulty within the organisation he is very good at finding out what the problem is and fixing it. He is

Examples Showing Where Recruits from Universities Are 'Well Prepared' (Cont'd)

viewed as *'an asset'* by other colleagues. This recruit used his initiative to find a solution to a problem that the organisation was unaware that they had.

Case study 16, a large secondary school, has employed a recent recruit from university who is very good at communication, knows how to interact with the children but also how to maintain a degree of discipline. Her line manager said *'She gives clear communication to pupils and the pupils benefit. It's a fundamental of teaching.'* This was viewed as significant owing to the effect on the level of education her pupils received and the reputation of the school overall.

Case study 17, a microelectronics company had a number of recent university recruits who were highly motivated and had the right type of attitude. Some of these individuals have demonstrated this by taking on additional responsibilities, such as organising social functions in the company. In one specific case, when the individual joined the company he was so motivated that he started writing an *'encryption tool'* for a software within 2 days. When a graduate is highly motivated in the company they are able to meet deadlines, encourage others and have a positive influence on their colleagues. This also makes the individual far more productive and it saves the organisation time. This is

considered to be of huge significance to the organisation.

Case study 18, is a medium-sized Primary School, where recruits from university are confident in the use of ICT tools, such as the interactive smart board, in teaching children. This enhances the learning experience for pupils.

Case study 19, a small independent restaurant, has employed a number of recruits from university, all of whom are *'brilliant at technology.'* The director of the company cited the example of a new computerised ordering system, which had been suggested and developed by one of the recruits. The system decreased ordering times and eradicated errors, which had previously occurred due to unclear handwriting or limited communication. Consequently the organisation has become more efficient and customers receive a better service, again encouraging them to return. This innovation is considered to be of huge significance to the organisation.

Case study 25, a large NHS hospital, had a number of recent recruits from university who were very motivated and highly driven. These individuals *'tend to know about different programmes and would ask about what further training they can get.'* Such staff may progress quickly and patients are offered a higher quality of care. This was viewed as significant to the organisation.

Examples Showing Where Recruits from Universities Are 'Well Prepared' (Cont'd)

Case study 24, a large hotel, provided the example of a recent HE graduate recruit who was particularly motivated. This was demonstrated through her desire to learn and develop within her role. This individual had a positive effect on other members of staff as well as increased the efficiency levels within her team. Consequently the hotel benefited from increased profitability, and this is seen as very significant by the general manager of the hotel.

Recruits from Colleges

When asked unprompted to outline what they considered 'well prepared' for the workplace means for recruits from colleges, employers also offered a fairly wide range of responses, although not as extensive as for recruits from university. In part this is likely to reflect the smaller number of respondents recruiting college leavers. These are shown in Figure 4.3. The most common responses are highlighted.

Figure 4.3 Employers' Views On Well Preparedness of Recruits from Colleges

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF RECRUITS	
Basic Skills	Good basic skills
Personal Attributes	*Good work ethic*
	Maturity
Core Skills	The ability to learn
	Showing initiative
	Team worker
	Good communication skills
	IT skills
	Organisational skills
	Being reliable
Technical Skills	*Good technical/job-related skills*
	Ability to apply theory to practice
Other	Previous work experience
	Ability to work under pressure
	Realistic expectations of job

As with recruits from university, good communication skills and job-related skills were considered the most important, but in addition employers stressed the need for a good work ethic. Employers then illustrated some positive experiences in relation to the preparedness for work of recruits from college and outlined the impacts that this had on them as an organisation. As with the recruits from university, these examples show specific work based situations that demand a range of cross-cutting skills.

Examples Showing Where Recruits from Colleges Are 'Well Prepared'

Case study 3, a small clothing print company, has employed a recent college leaver who is good in the use of ICT. The company's director said '*he was able to come in and use the graphics readily'*. Additionally, he goes unto the internet and downloads artwork for them. His ability in ICT '*means he can get jobs done quickly.'* This impact on the organisation is considered to be quite significant. He also came into the company possessing the technical knowledge and skills needed to do his job as the result of his course. When he joined the organisation '*he was technically able right away to do the job'*. The company's director considers this to be extremely useful because there was no need to train him on the basics of the job.

Case study 6, a small landscaping company, has employed a college leaver with good numeracy skills. This individual is able to organise jobs in terms of materials required, quantities etc. This helps to ensure that jobs are completed on time and on budget. This impacts positively on both the efficiency and efficacy of the company and therefore encourages customers to use the firm again. The team of staff do not also have to be concerned over materials. The recruit has also demonstrated a strong ability in the area of soft skills by being able to build customer relationships, bringing the team together and dealing with customer problems or complaints. Because of his skills '*the jobs get done better and the clients are happier.'* More specifically, this individual has strong planning and organising abilities which he uses to decide which team members go on jobs, for how long and to do what. The owner of the company said the recruit successfully mixes staff whilst also giving them clear, concise instructions ensuring that jobs are completed well and on time. They also had a labourer who was de-motivated, which affected the company's level of efficiency and the team ethos, but a recent college recruit in the company used his own high levels of motivation, positive attitude and skills to successfully discuss matters with the individual and enthuse him, resulting in

a more productive worker and team. The recruit's high levels of motivation and positive attitude has also rubbed off on others *'which motivates them to do jobs and creates a good ethos.'*

Case Study 7, a large retailer, has a recent recruit from college who has demonstrated a strong ability in the area of problem solving. On one occasion, some gift vouchers were missing from a till in the store, and the recruit took it upon herself to investigate the matter. She did *'store reconciliations'* for 2 weeks to determine exactly when and what time the vouchers went missing, and by so doing she was able to find out what had happened. Possessing this kind of ability can impact on the store's profits. All their recent recruits from college have demonstrated that they can use all the IT systems in the store effectively. In one particular individual's case, *'he was able to embrace a new technology introduced in the store, and then went on to train all the other colleagues to use it.'* This saved them time.

Case study 10, an electronic company had employed a college leaver who was very highly motivated with a very good attitude. This meant the recruit worked especially hard and successfully built relationships with clients. This is significant as it increases the efficiency of the organisation and ensures clients will return due to the service they have received.

Case study 14, a recreation centre, has employed a recent recruit from college who is very good at calculating membership numbers and class lists, which enables them to adequately staff classes. If such numbers were erroneous then rotas could not be adequately planned in advance and may increase the workload of other staff members. Customers may also suffer as classes would have to be cancelled if there was no staff to supervise them. The overall impact includes providing a good image of the centre.

Case study 21, an entertainment venue, has employed a recent college recruit who is very skilled in her job area, possessing an excellent knowledge of the industry she was to work in before starting the job. She had researched into what the organisation does, which was good preparation, before taking her post. This meant that the recruit could contribute relevant ideas to the organisation plus her understanding of the market helped her to book acts that would be popular with customers, thereby increasing sales. She is also seen as being very enthusiastic and positive. *'Her enthusiasm made a big difference and rubbed off on others.'* Consequently the team she is involved in now works particularly well together and she has successfully introduced new club nights and bands to the organisation. This was viewed as significant to the organisation.

Examples Showing Where Recruits from Colleges Are 'Well Prepared' (Cont'd)

Case study 22, a removals company, has employed a recent recruit from college who is very proficient in communication and customer service skills. This individual is viewed as polite, courteous and friendly which, the owner of the company feels impacts on the organisation's reputation and profitability in a positive way. *'She has a good rapport with customers so they do come back.'*

Employers' Understanding of 'Poorly Prepared' for Work

As shown by the evidence from the Employer Skills Survey, only a minority of employers recruiting from colleges and universities considered that the individuals they hired were 'poorly prepared' for the workplace. But what do they mean by this? And do employers make a distinction between recruits from colleges and universities?

Recruits from Universities

Figure 4.4 groups the unprompted responses of employers when asked what they considered 'poorly prepared' for the workplace meant with regard to recruits from university. The most common responses are highlighted.

Figure 4.4 Employers' Views On Poor Preparedness of Recruits from Universities

Basic Skills	Poor basic skills
Personal Attributes	No common sense
	Poor Attitude
	A lack of confidence
	Lacking in motivation and enthusiasm
	Poor work ethic
Core Skills	A poor team worker
	Unreliable
	Unable to work unsupervised
	Inflexible
	Poor Communication Skills
	Badly organised
	No initiative
	Unwillingness to learn
	Inability to follow instructions
Technical Skills	*No or limited job-related skills*
	Inability to apply theory to practice
Other	*No previous work experience*
	No analytical skills
	Unrealistic expectations
	No knowledge of the company

Poor communication skills, limited or no job-related skills and a poor attitude were the most important factors, raised by almost half of case study employers recruiting from universities. Again employers select factors across the range of technical, core skills, personal attributes and other factors as important. Employers then illustrated some negative experiences in relation to the preparedness for work of recruits from university and outlined the impacts that this had on them as an organisation.

In the small number of cases where employers had considered recruits from university poorly-prepared for work, the main contributory factors were:

• poor communication skills;

• limited or no job related skills; and

• a poor attitude.

Where a recruit was poorly prepared, employers suggested that the impacts on their business could be around:

• organisational reputation;

• organisational efficiency;

• additional management time spent in supervising recruits; and

• impact on morale of other staff.

Recruits from College

Figure 4.5 shows the responses of employers when asked unprompted to outline what they considered 'poorly prepared' for the workplace means for recruits from college. The most common responses are highlighted. It should be noted that the comments in this sections are based on a small number of case studies and are not necessarily applicable to all employers who have recruited a college leaver.

Figure 4.5 Employers' Views On Poor Preparedness of Recruits from Colleges

Basic Skills	*Poor basic skills*
Personal Attributes	*No common sense*
	A lack of confidence
	Poor work ethic
Core Skills	Badly organised
	No initiative
	Poor communication skills
Technical Skills	*No or limited job-related skills*
Other	No careers aspiration
	No driving licence

In the small number of cases where employers had considered recruits from college poorly-prepared for work, the main contributory factors were:

- poor basic skills;

- limited or no job related skills;

- a lack of common sense; and

- a lack of confidence.

With the exception of limited or no job-related skills, these are different to the issues raised by employers recruiting from university, where the focus was on attitude and communication skills. Although some caution needs to be exercised given the small numbers, it would appear that the case study employers recruiting college students are more concerned with personal attributes and basic skills.

Where a recruit was poorly prepared, employers suggested that the impacts on their business could be around:

- organisational efficiency;

- 'knock-on' effects for other workers who rely on the work of the recruit; and

- increased operational costs.

Impact in the Workplace of 'Well Prepared' and 'Poorly Prepared' Recruits from Colleges and Universities

Employers were keen to highlight the impacts that the preparedness or otherwise of recruits can make in the workplace. There was, however, no marked difference in the views of employers who recruited from colleges, those who recruited from universities and those who recruited from both.

Basic Skills

Where individuals have a good grounding in basic skills, the positive impacts on the organisation are around increased efficiency and effectiveness. There are substantial savings in staff time because routine tasks do not have to be checked. Where individuals have poor basic skills this can lead to a lot of wasted staff time internally and can give a very poor showing of the organisation to external clients and stakeholders. However, there is an important issue around what employers mean by basic skills when they are considering recruits from universities and colleges. The examples that employers provide both in relation to 'well prepared' and 'poorly prepared' candidates suggest that what they are anticipating are much higher levels of skills around literacy and numeracy than would normally be considered basic – but which they regard as core aspects of many jobs.

Core Skills

Good quality core skills are very important to organisations because they relate primarily to the way in which employees relate to their colleagues and customers. For customer facing organisations, well prepared recruits from colleges and universities with good core skills are an asset that can ultimately bring in more business to the organisation. Other core skills such as the ability to plan and solve problems raise the overall efficiency of the organisation. Where recruits are deficient in core skills this can lead to significant problems both internally and in handling customers.

Personal Attributes

Recruits that display good personal attributes are very important within any organisation.

Individuals that are motivated and have a good attitude serve to encourage and support those within the organisation and can inspire those beyond it, providing a more efficient and effective service to customers. Conversely, individuals displaying poor personal attributes, that lack motivation and have a bad attitude create difficulties internally with colleagues and serve to provide a bad image of the organisation externally.

Technical Skills

Recruits from college and university with good technical skills are valued by employers because they can 'hit the ground running' and require less training and development. Sometimes these recruits bring new ideas to the workplace based on the things that they have learnt at college or university which can improve the way things are done for the whole organisation. Individuals lacking in technical skills need to be provided with substantial support in terms of training and/or mentoring to enable them to make a full contribution to the organisation.

Changes over Time in Preparedness for Work

Each of the case study employers was asked to comment on any changes that they were aware of in relation to the preparedness of recruits from college and university over time.

Only half of those recruiting from universities were prepared or able to comment on the positive changes that they had seen over time. However, of those that did, an improvement in the level of IT skills was the most frequently cited response. Other improvements were around the level of preparedness for the

interview process itself and a better understanding of what to expect in the workplace as the result of previous work experience.

Only a third of those recruiting from universities were prepared or able to comment on the negative changes that they had seen over time. Poorer literacy skills and a reduced work ethic were mentioned. One employer was concerned that recruits received fewer opportunities to undertake practical work experience at university.

Only half of those recruiting from colleges were prepared or able to comment on the changes that they had seen over time, and none of them could articulate any specifics.

Tackling the Problem of 'Poorly Prepared' College and University Recruits in the Workplace

Where employers find recruits from college and/or university 'poorly prepared' in relation to the workplace, they try to address the problems as soon as possible. Case study evidence suggests that a range of approaches are adopted, including:

- additional support from colleagues;

- one-to-one coaching;

- 'buddying up' with a specific colleague;

- additional training during the probationary period;

- using examples of internal good practice, such as previous written reports, to illustrate the required standards; and

- formal annual appraisals.

In the main these approaches are straightforward and relate to:

- internal or external training as appropriate to address a specific identified issue (discussed more fully in Chapter 3);

- additional mentoring support from more experienced colleagues; and

- the dissemination of examples of good practice to use as a benchmark.

Performance reviews undertaken by line managers are often used as vehicles to identify and then address any deficiencies in new recruits. When deficiencies are addressed quickly damage to the organisation is limited.

5: The Contribution of Colleges and Universities to Employability

Key Points

This chapter provides an overview of the broad approaches that colleges and universities employ to help students prepare for the workplace and examines the case study employers' perceptions of the contribution that attendance at college and university has made on the preparedness of recruits for the workplace.

- There has been an increasing recognition over the past decade of the need to develop the employability of college and university students in order to prepare them for the world of work.

- Recent recruits from college and university were largely positive about their experiences and the contribution that this made to their preparedness for work.

- Universities play a key role in preparing students for degree level or other qualification, whilst working to equip them with the skills that they need in the labour market. Approaches include support in career decision-making and jobsearch, development of employability attribute as part of study programmes, work experience and personal development planning.

- Within colleges there is strong support for the development of employability skills, ideally supported by employer involvement. Approaches include the provision of stand alone modules, embedded employability elements within other programmes and work experience placements.

- In general terms, the case study employers consider that colleges and universities contribute well to the employability agenda, supporting the findings of the Employer Skills Survey, although they found it hard to specify examples, particularly in relation to colleges.

- Employers see the potential for colleges and universities to add value through the inclusion of work experience as an integral part of students' experience, believing this to be the only way that recruits can gain a real insight into what is required in the workplace.

- Although the case study employers reported only a limited involvement with college and universities, in the main they reported that they were willing to be approached to make a greater contribution to the work related activities of colleges and universities.

- Universities and colleges should explore employers' willingness to contribute, consulting with them to design and develop approaches that maximise the potential for students to engage in and learn about the reality of the workplace.

Introduction

This chapter draws initially on desk-based research to provide an overview of the broad approaches that colleges and universities employ to help students prepare for the workplace. It then goes on to examine the case study employers' perceptions of the contribution that attendance at college and university has made on the preparedness of these recruits for the workplace.

Preparing University Students for Work

For universities, preparing students for work is about raising their employability and producing graduates who are capable of securing, sustaining and progressing in employment (Lees, 2002). Employer studies in the 1980s and 1990s showed that although employers considered university attendance beneficial, they had strong doubts as to its effectiveness as a means of preparing individuals for the workplace, particularly for young, full time students who could leave with very little idea of what was required (de la Harpe, Radloff and Wyber, 2000). Over the past decade or so (and particularly within the last five years), there has been increasing recognition of the need to develop the employability of students in order to prepare them for the world of work. Higher Education Institutions have responded to increasing employer expectations that graduates need to be better prepared for the workplace, by developing programmes that help to develop the skills and attributes that they will need to be effective employees (Little and Harvey, 2006).

A recent study commissioned by the SFC defines employability as '*a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations*' (The Quality in Education Centre, 2006). A key role for universities is in preparing students for degree level or other qualifications, equipping them with relevant skills that they can put to use in the labour market. However, in addition, students need to be supported to develop career planning and management skills and to develop the ability to reflect, and more importantly apply what they have learned once they arrive in the workplace. Universities Scotland (2002) summarises the main approaches that are used to help raise the employability of students within universities, although these approaches are commonplace within Scottish colleges too.

Support in Career Decision-Making and Job Search

Career Services based within institutions offer students and recent graduates a range of support, information and resources to help them in their career decision-making and job search activities. These often include:

- advice on careers regarding potential further study;

- information gathering advice and facilities;

- the opportunity to meet employers;

- job search facilities;

- assistance in CV preparation and job applications;

- information and/or practice sessions in interviews and assessment; and

- an employment service for students seeking part-time and/or vacation work.

Apart from being accessible in-house, these types of support and/or facilities can often also be accessed online. Although the majority of recruits from colleges and universities interviewed in the case study organisations were aware of the support on offer to them, take-up had been limited.

Development of Employability Attributes as Part of Study Programmes

Attribute development is about developing transferable skills that raise individuals' employability, and can occur in a variety of ways. Many universities and colleges in Scotland are liaising with employers to develop industry relevant courses, as well as to increase subject-industry knowledge and awareness and research expertise, the purpose of which is to align strategic developments within institutions and industry in a way that will benefit both sectors. A number of courses have been developed at the request of employers within specific industries in order to meet their needs. In some cases also, individuals working within the specific industries participate in the delivery of the courses, for instance, as visiting lecturers.

Work Experience

Work experience is regarded as an important way of enabling students to link their academic studies to the work environment, as well as making them familiar with core employability skills. Different types of activities undertaken by students count as work experience, including placements, project work undertaken within a company and part-time employment.

Universities Scotland (2002) identifies three main categories of work experience:

- organised work experience forming part of a study programme;

- organised work experience external to study programmes – in the form of structured placement programmes of large organisations; and

- work experience that is neither part of study programmes nor structured placements – gained through part-time and vacation work.

It is the colleges and universities themselves that often play a key role in sourcing work experience opportunities for students, particularly in the case of the first category. In addition, employers often liaise with the Careers Services within universities and colleges to recruit students to part-time and vacation posts, as well as placements or places on graduate training programmes.

Recognising Experience and Achievement

Supporting students to reflect on what they have learnt to ensure that they get the most out of it and are in a position to apply this knowledge in the workplace, is becoming an increasingly important element of college and university courses. Progress files are sometimes being used as a way of recording student achievement, a key aspect of which is Personal Development Planning (PDP). PDP is currently undertaken in most universities in Scotland and is a highly structured and supported process designed to enable students to reflect on their learning and to plan their development (Universities Scotland, 2002).

There are a number of other activities to raise employability which include:

- specially tailored projects developed by subject communities and networks that seek to enhance the employability of students e.g. Shell STEP; and

- projects and/or programmes developed to increase students' entrepreneurial skills e.g. through setting up mock businesses.

Employability in Colleges

There is also an increasing emphasis on the need for students to develop employability skills within colleges. The Quality in Education Centre (2006) found that within colleges across Scotland there is strong support for the development of employability skills both as stand alone modules and embedded within courses and strong support at the institutional level to provide resources for students to be able to reflect on employability-related issues.

College students often undertake work experience or placements as part of their course. This is supported by evidence from the Quality in Education Centre study which found that half of the department/faculty heads surveyed indicated that 50% or more of students in their areas participated in work experience placements. The research also showed substantial employer involvement in colleges, including:

- advising on course content and course development;

- providing work experience to students;

- contributing to courses as guest speakers; and occasionally; and

- a close involvement with students in mentoring, target setting and reviews.

Although this suggests that the employability agenda is taken seriously within colleges, the individuals recruited from college into the case study employers had had very limited experience of engagement with careers guidance and support services. This cannot be interpreted as the experience of students as a whole.

Impacts of College and University Attendance

In the light of the increasing emphasis on employability skills in colleges and universities, what do employers see as the impact of attendance on the individuals that they recruit directly from these institutions?

Employers' Views on Recruits from Universities

The employers considered that attendance at university made a positive contribution to the employability of individuals that they have recruited from university. The vast majority of the case study employers see an inherent value in the university experience, stressing its importance in terms providing individuals with the opportunity to learn about themselves.

- 'A time to think and take responsibility'.

- Somewhere to 'broaden their horizons'.

Many of these employers see the completion of a university degree in itself as a proxy for being highly motivated. *'It makes you accountable. You have to get yourself out of bed in the morning. If you get your degree at the end of it you have obviously applied*

yourself!'. They also recognise that the demands of the university environment provide graduates with a number of valuable skills that can help them as individuals and to make a greater contribution to the organisations in which they work including:

- critical thinking;

- the ability to work under pressure and deliver to tight deadlines; and

- confidence. Not least because they *'think of themselves as professionals, rather than just thinking I'm just the student'*.

However, although university attendance provides graduates with an opportunity to develop technical skills, many of the case study employers remain unconvinced that graduates know what to expect when they arrive, stressing that *'they are not streetwise when it comes to the workplace'*. This suggests that there is need for more activities to help provide students with a more 'authentic' experience, yet although employers want recruits from universities to have a better idea of what to expect when they join the workforce, they do not believe that anything that can be provided at university can replicate work.

- *'It's only when you pass your test and have to drive constantly that you learn to drive … You learn most when you get a job'*.

- *'All the theory in the world wouldn't prepare you for going into a workplace'*.

- *'You don't become a nurse in the classroom'*.

To support this point, several of the employers stressed the importance of their recruits' past work experience, particularly in relation to the part-time jobs that they held down whilst at college or university. These jobs were seldom in the same field as the individuals recruited from college and university were now working in (and were usually in retail or hospitality), but provided them with the opportunity to build up soft skills and to develop their personal attributes. They also proved to be ideal opportunities to develop the *'awareness of work'* that is needed to be effective in the workplace and often gave these individuals the edge over other candidates. This view was supported by many of the leavers and graduates because it *'gave you an insight into what would be expected of you'*.

Recent Recruits' Views on University Attendance

Recent recruits were very positive about their experiences at university and the contributions that university made to their preparedness for the workplace. The ways in which attending university benefited graduates can be categorised into:

- improved basic skills through report writing;

- personal development including increased confidence;

- opportunities to develop core skills such as the ability to use their own initiative, take responsibility for their own action, improved communication and presentation skills, team building, IT skills, problem solving skills, the ability to work to strict deadlines, planning and organising skills; and

- technical job-related skills – although this is dependent on the area of study.

Many recruits see a degree level qualification as a way in, a *'step up the ladder'* and the *'bit of paper that says you can learn and you can do'*. University 'teaches you how to learn … it puts you in a state of readiness so you can go *out and teach yourself'*. The experience also *'develops you socially and mentally as a person'*.

The importance of university as an opportunity for individuals to develop and take responsibility for themselves should not be underestimated. As pointed out by one recent graduate *'University is the first place you are by yourself and are not reminded by your Mum or Dad to do your homework!'*

The main criticism raised by the majority of individuals recruited from university was that of a lack of real work experience. As a graduate you are faced with the problem of *'trying to match up the theory with the practical once you leave'.* This view underlines the same point raised by employers, which is that universities do not, and some would argue, cannot provide students with the necessary in-depth work related experience for them to be able to make a seamless transition into the workplace. Although out with the remit of this study, this raises the question of whose role it is to prepare students for the world of work and where the responsibilities lie amongst employers, universities and students themselves.

Employers' Views on Recruits from College

When asked to consider the benefits of college in general terms, most of the employers recruiting individuals from college see the potential benefits relating to the practical aspects of their course, which deliver the job related skills necessary in the workplace. However, just as with recruits from university, employers felt that the opportunity to develop these skills in college does not ensure that recruits *'know how things work in industry'*.

Employers, in the main, felt that college provides students with:

- time management skills and the ability to stick to deadlines;

- maturity and a motivation to progress;

- a grounding in appropriate literacy and numeracy skills;

- the opportunity to develop a work ethic; and

- confidence.

So, in general terms, the case study employers consider that colleges contribute well to the employability agenda, supporting the findings of the Employer Skills Survey. However, the employers in our studies found it difficult to relate specific examples of what colleges may have done to improve the employability of graduates. Given the strong support for the development of employability within colleges and activity in terms of improving course content and resources for students to reflect on employability issues (The Quality in Education Centre, 2006), it may be that there is a need to better communicate this

important element of college course work to employers.

Recent Recruits' Views on College Attendance

Those recruited from college viewed their time there as an opportunity to learn skills, become more responsible, learn to work under pressure, develop and become more mature and learn to focus. However it was the practical aspects of attending college that are those most valued by college leavers, particularly those provided with the opportunity to undertake work placements. *'I saw how it operated, saw what designers do on a day to day basis'.*

Employers' Views on Improvements Needed to Prepare College and University Students for the Workplace

As shown by the Employers Skills Survey, recruits from colleges and universities are generally well prepared for the workplace. Nonetheless, employers were still asked to identify any possible areas for improvement. These suggestions therefore need to be set in the context of making improvements and adding value to a system that in broad terms already delivers what employers are looking for.

The single most important thing that employers consider that university students need (or need more of) as part of their course is a greater exposure to the work environment.

This would provide them with a better sense of what a job requires and would also help graduates to see if they were moving in the direction of a suitable career. The majority of suggestions of how best to achieve this were around a greater involvement of employers in the development and delivery of the curriculum, where *'industry should be more involved in education in terms of the way courses are shaped'.* An increase in the use of employer seminars and talks to students would also be beneficial.

However, when this suggestion is considered in the light of the levels of involvement that the case study employers have with colleges and universities, this highlights a couple of important issues.

First, the very limited connections that exist at present, which are restricted in the main to a few guest lectures and work experience placements;

Second, the willingness, at least in principle, demonstrated by these employers to get involved if approached in the right way with feasible ways to get involved.

Universities and colleges should explore employers' willingness to contribute, consulting with them to design and develop approaches that maximise the potential for students to engage in and learn about the reality of the workplace.

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH APPROACH AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CASE STUDY EMPLOYERS

The Study Approach

The research complements the quantitative analysis produced through the Employer Skills Survey, and will help to obtain a better understanding about the issues that concern employers in relation to the recruitment of individuals straight out of Scotland's colleges and universities. The study comprises two complementary elements:

- 30 in-depth employer case studies; and

- a short desk-based review of the (academic papers and policy papers) concerning the recruitment of college leavers and university graduates to set the context for the study.

Desk-Based Review

The desk-based research focuses on the recruitment of individuals into their first job out of college or university. The review focuses on the characteristics of Scottish colleges and universities, their approaches to employability and employer perceptions of the value of employing individuals from these institutions.

Case Studies with Employers

The Employer Skills Survey is an extensive survey of employers' views on recruitment, training and skills issues. The survey is telephone-based and is quantitative in nature. The case study employers were drawn from the pool of respondents to the Employer Skills Survey who had indicated that they were willing to participate in further research. The

study is based on 30 in-depth employer case studies, split two-thirds employers who cited college and university recruits as 'well prepared' and one third who cited them 'poorly prepared' for the workplace. In taking this approach we 'oversampled' employers who indicated that they had a negative view of college and/or university leavers. Given the generally positive experiences that employers reported in the Employer Skills Survey, it was considered important to provide employers with every opportunity to outline the areas in which they had experienced difficulties and the impacts for their organisations. The views of employers expressed in this report are therefore likely to be more negative than those of the employing community as a whole.

In addition to the split in terms of preparedness of for work, it was important to ensure a spread of employers by size, broad industrial sector and location. Consideration was also given to interviewing employers with experience of recruiting only from colleges, only from universities or both. However, restricted to employers that had indicated they were willing to participate in further research, it proved very difficult to engage with employers who had experience of recruiting college leavers and almost impossible to find employers who had experience of recruiting both university graduates and college leavers. Detailed characteristics of the employers interviewed are contained in Appendix 1.

Using a case study approach provides qualitative information of some depth to complement the quantitative information obtained through the Employers Skill Survey. The case studies also allow a range of people in an organisation to contribute to a case study, whereas the Employers Skill Survey generally obtains information from one respondent in each organisation.

If those are the strengths of the case study approach, a possible weakness is that the 30 organisations that participated are in no sense 'representative' of employers. This is not a large sample from which statistically robust conclusions can be drawn. Rather, it complements the quantitative work which prompted this more detailed, qualitative research.

It is important to take a balanced approach when assessing this kind of evidence. There is no basis for sweeping conclusions about 'all graduates' or 'all colleges'.

Interview Process

At each case study employer a series of detailed face-to-face interviews were carried out using semi-structured interview checklists to provide a comprehensive picture of the organisation from both the employer and recruits perspective. Although employers were categorised as viewing recruits as 'well prepared' or 'poorly prepared' on the basis of their generalised response to the Employer Skills Survey, the same interview checklists were used with all employers to reflect the fact that employers' views are complex and their

range of recruitment experiences broad. At each site interviews were carried out with:

The HR Manager or the individual(s) with recruitment responsibility

Interviewing the HR Manager (in larger organisations) or the individual(s) responsible for recruitment in smaller organisations provides in-depth information about the policies, assessment practices, expectations and experiences of the organisation in relation to recruiting from colleges and universities.

Line Manager(s)

Interviewing the line managers of new recruits from colleges and universities provides an insight into the experiences of those working directly with these individuals on a day-to-day basis and their impact on the workplace.

Recent Recruits

In-depth interviews (or focus groups where numbers permitted) were carried out with recent recruits from colleges or universities. This provides a rich vein of information in relation to their views on:

- the recruitment and assessment practices of employers;

- entering the workplace and working with established colleagues and other new recruits;

- the ways in which individuals had been prepared by colleges and/or universities for the world of work e.g. vocational skills, employability course components, problem solving, team working etc; and

- their previous experience of work.

Figure A1: Employer Case Studies by Size

Number of employees	Number of case studies
1-9	3
10-49	11
50-249	12
250 plus	4

Figure A2: Employer Case Studies by Industrial Sector

Sector	Number of case studies
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1
Manufacturing	4
Transport, Storage and Communication	3
Wholesale and Retail	4
Hotels and Restaurants	3
Real estate, Renting and Business Services	3
Financial Intermediation	2
Health and Social Work	4
Education	3
Public Administration and Defence	2
Other Services	1

Figure A3: Employer Case Studies by Type of Recruit

	Number
Recent Recruits from College Only	5
Recent Recruits from University Only	23
Recent Recruits from College and University	2

Figure A4: Employer Case Studies by Level of Preparedness

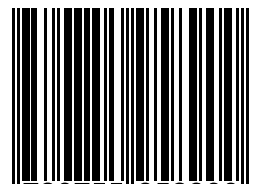| Employer Perception	University	College
Well Prepared	17	5
Poorly Prepared	5	2
Don't Know	1	0

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