



Ofsted research into the relevance of education for the workplace

Summary report

1. Background

Ofsted commissioned Continental Research to conduct research amongst 20 to 30 year old working people to obtain their views on how well their education prepared them for working life. In-street interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 20-30 year old working people in England. Quotas were set by gender and industry type in line with data from the Labour Force Survey. The fieldwork took place between 20th and 26th May 2005. In total 544 interviews were conducted.

2. Respondent profile

Just over half of respondents were male (53%). A spread of ages was interviewed, half aged 20-24 and half 25 years or older. As the sample comprises working people, the ABC1 bias is not surprising - just over three fifths (62%) were classified as ABC1s.

Over half worked in the Service sector (52%), over one quarter (27%) in Distribution and one fifth (20%) in Manufacturing. The sample comprises those working for a range of company sizes – one third (33%) work in companies with up to 49 employees and the remainder in larger companies.

The majority of respondents were working full time with less than one fifth (18%) of respondents employed on a part time basis.

Two fifths (41%) left school aged 16 or 17, one quarter (24%) when they were 18 or 19 and the remainder at age 20 or older. In terms of level of education on starting work, three in ten (30%) went straight into work after leaving education at 16, one quarter (24%) had A levels, over one fifth (22%) a degree and a similar proportion (18%) had undertaken a vocational course. Over half of respondents (55%) said they had professional qualifications that related to their work.

3. Extent to which, and ways in which, education prepared people for working life

Most respondents (91%) felt that education should prepare them somewhat for their working life. More than half (53%) said that some of what you learn at school or college should be relevant and useful in your working life and nearly two fifths (38%) felt that education should fully prepare you for working life.

Respondents were asked how well *their* education prepared them for their first job and more generally for their working life.

	How well prepared	
	First job	General working life
Very well	17%	17%
Fairly well	36%	43%
Not very well	28%	25%
Not at all well	17%	13%
Don't know	2%	2%
<i>Base: All</i>	<i>544</i>	<i>544</i>

Views were fairly evenly split in terms of how respondents perceived their education to have prepared them for their first job, with just over half (53%) saying they were well prepared and under half (45%) saying they were not well prepared. Results were marginally more positive in terms of the preparation provided by education for general working life. Three fifths (60%) said they were well prepared and less than two fifths felt they were not well prepared. Those who stayed in education until they were at least 22 were significantly more positive on both measures than those who left between 16 and 21.

Respondents who felt their education had prepared them well for working life were asked for their reasons. The main spontaneous mentions given by at least one tenth included taking job related courses or subjects, people skills or team work, more generally having had a good education that provided general skills, being qualified with GCSEs, A levels or degrees and learning about the workplace or knowing what to expect.

All respondents were asked what would have helped better prepare them for working life. Over one third were not able to give a specific reason with under one fifth (17%) saying there was nothing that could have been done or that they were happy with their education, and the same proportion saying they were not able to think of anything. The main suggested

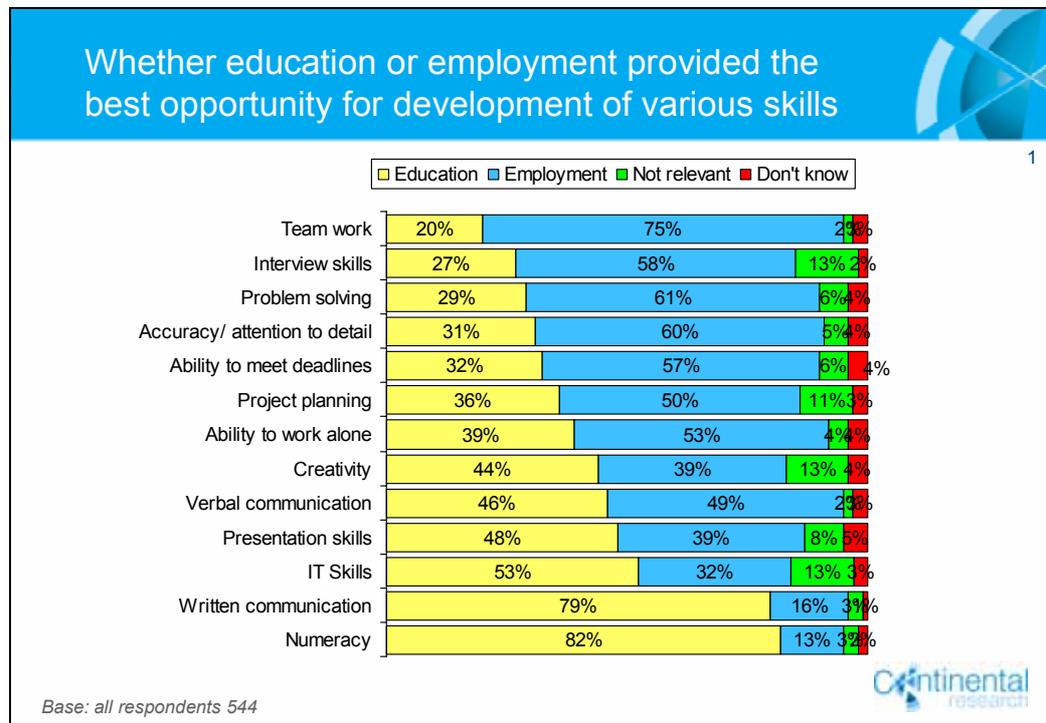
improvement was having work experience or more work experience (23%), followed by more vocational training (8%), more practical lessons or less theory (7%) and better careers advice (7%).

4. Education versus employment in terms of providing specific workplace skills and support

Generally speaking, the gaps in knowledge people have when they start work are addressed by their employers. Only one in ten (11%) respondents said employers did not help address any gaps. However, this increased to nearly one fifth (17%) amongst small companies with up to 19 employees. In terms of the types of help provided, half of respondents (49%) said they attended training provided by their employer, more than two fifths (44%) had on the job learning, three in ten were supported by colleagues and over one fifth (22%) were sent on a formal external training course.

When asked whether respondents had taken any steps themselves to address gaps, over half (55%) said they had. The main action taken by two fifths (42%) was self teaching or through reading with only 15% saying they funded themselves on a training course.

Respondents were read a list of 13 skills and they were asked whether their education or employment provided the best opportunity for the development of each.



There were some distinct differences: the majority of respondents (75%) felt their employment provided the best opportunity for development of teamwork, whereas most felt that written communication and numeracy were best developed via their education (79% and 82% respectively). On balance a higher proportion of respondents also felt that employment was the best development ground for accuracy or attention to detail, ability to meet deadlines, project planning and the ability to work alone. Conversely, a higher proportion rated education as best at developing IT skills. Skills where the lines of ownership are less clear include creativity, verbal communication and presentation skills.

Respondents who were in education until they were at least 22 were more likely to say their education was responsible for IT skills, presentation skills, the ability to work alone, project planning, the ability to meet deadlines and accuracy or attention to detail than those who were younger when they left education.

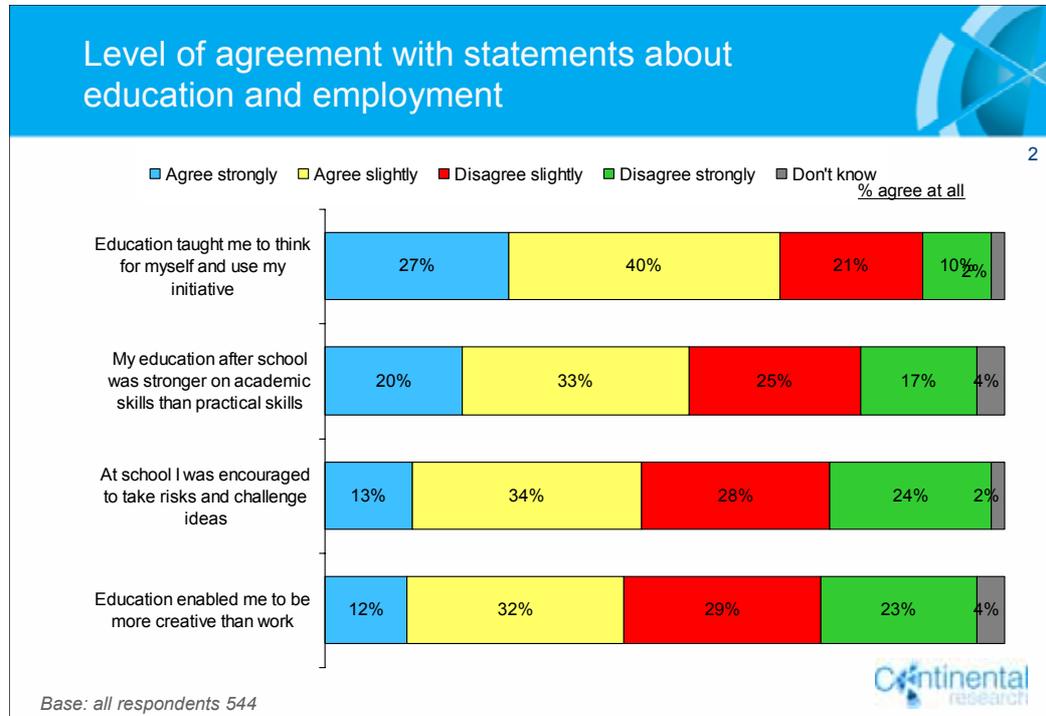
Respondents were asked to rate both their education and employment in terms of providing the necessary support and training required to do their job.

	Rating of necessary support and training required to do their job	
	Education	Current employer
Excellent	6%	20%
Very good	22%	36%
Good	32%	30%
Fair	22%	9%
Poor	17%	3%
Don't know	1%	1%
<i>Base: All</i>	<i>544</i>	<i>544</i>

Unsurprisingly perhaps, a higher proportion of respondents, 86%, rated their employer as either excellent, very good or good in terms of providing the necessary support and training required to do their job compared to 60% of respondents who gave this rating for their education. That said, those who stayed in education until they were at least 22 years old were significantly more likely to rate their education as excellent, very good or good than those who left between the ages of 16 and 21 (76% compared to 56%). No significant differences between these two groups were seen in the ratings given for their employer.

5. Attitudes to education and employment

To understand further respondents' views on how their education prepared them for working life, they were read a series of attitude statements and asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each.



Respondents were fairly positive about their education in terms of it teaching them to think for themselves and use their initiative (67% agreed with this). However, education was not typically seen to encourage people to take risks or challenge ideas or be creative (less than half agreed with each of these statements). On all these aspects those who stayed in education until they were at least 22 years of age were more positive about their education than those who left before then.