

A word cloud is positioned over a semi-transparent red-tinted photograph of a young woman's face. The words are in various sizes and orientations, with "Employability", "skills", "United Kingdom", and "development" being the most prominent. Other visible words include "United Kingdom", "skills", "Employability", "development", "United Kingdom", "skills", "Employability", "development", "United Kingdom", "skills", "Employability", "development".

Employability  
skills  
United Kingdom  
Employability  
skills  
United Kingdom  
development  
Employability  
skills  
development

# Employability skills development in the United Kingdom

*Dave Turner*

**Editor's note:** This report was written mid-to-late 2001. An update has been commissioned for 2002.

© **Australian National Training Authority, 2002**

This work has been produced by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) with the assistance of funding provided by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). It is published by NCVER under licence from ANTA. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this publication may be reported by any process without the written permission of NCVER Ltd. Requests should be made in writing to NCVER Ltd.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian National Training Authority.

ISBN 1 74096 046 7 web edition  
TD/TNC 69.10

Published by NCVER  
ABN 87 007 967 311  
252 Kensington Road, Leabrook SA 5068  
PO Box 115, Kensington Park SA 5068, Australia  
[www.ncver.edu.au](http://www.ncver.edu.au)

# Contents

---

1	Introduction	4
2	Key Skills Development Movement	5
3	The Enterprising Skills Development/Education Movement	7
	The entrepreneurial workforce	8
4	A brief history of employer involvement and government partnership initiatives regarding employability (last 15 years)	9
	Late 1980s to early 1990s	9
	Mid-to-late 1990s	10
	2000 and beyond	12
5	The emerging picture (2001 onwards)	15
	Future development—key skills in vocational education	15
	Modern Apprenticeships	16
	GNVQs & NVQs	16
	New Deal	17
	Hurdles facing wider key skills	17
6	Future development—enterprise skills in vocational education	18
7	Conclusion	20

# 1 Introduction

---

The following report was commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and produced by Dave Turner. Dave is a consultant who has recently returned to Australia, having worked in the United Kingdom for 15 years on matters relating to education–industry links and enterprise education.

For the last 15 years there has been a series of policy initiatives that have advocated for the development of employability skills by young and unemployed people in the United Kingdom. These policy initiatives have sought to incorporate such skills into both academic and general education (secondary and tertiary) and vocational education and training. Although one cannot over-generalise, the call for these employability skills has been championed by two distinct but related movements:

- Key Skills Development Movement
- Enterprising Skills Development/Education Movement

## 2 Key Skills Development Movement

---

The call for the value and relevance of these skills has been heralded by both employer organisations and relevant government officers/civil servants in the Department for Education and Employment, now renamed the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Their collaboration led to the recent Secretary of State for Education and Employment (David Blunkett) introducing a ‘Key Skills National Qualification’ that focussed upon:

- effective communication—including written skills
- application of numbers—the ability to work with numbers
- the use of information technology

In addition to the promotion of these three skills, recent British Government policy papers, such as the lifelong learning green paper, have stated their enthusiasm for young people and adults to develop certain skills at school, in the workplace or in life that will help individuals to develop and maintain their employability. These skills are now defined as the ‘wider key skills’. They are:

- working with others—how you work with others when planning and carrying out activities to get things done and achieve shared objectives
- improve own learning and performance—how you manage your own personal learning and career development
- problem solving—about recognising problems and doing something about them

Each key skill is described in a unit, which helps the learner to develop the skill, collect evidence and record achievements. These units are at five levels and there is progression in terms of:

- the degree of responsibility of the learner for using the skill
- more complex and demanding tasks, problems and situations

Whilst the first three key skills represent a qualification that requires the learner to produce a portfolio of evidence and undertake external assessment (tests), the wider key skills are not a nationally recognised qualification and only demand a portfolio of evidence from the learner which can include a report arising from a ‘witnessed’ verbal presentation—that is, at the conclusion of an individual or team exercise.

Government literature that describes the key skills values the relevance of these six skills to learning, careers and personal life, but there is always a strong emphasis

upon their relationship to employability. The DfES/Key Skills Support Program fact sheet states that *key skills are increasingly essential in work because employers want people who are:*

- *computer literate*
- *able to relate well to customers*
- *good team workers*
- *flexible in their job functions*
- *able to organise their work activities*
- *decision makers and problem solvers*
- *able to communicate effectively*

## 3 The Enterprising Skills Development/Education Movement

---

Once again, both employer organisations and civil servants from both DfES and DTI have worked together to promote the value of enterprise skills, education and learning. The two departments have now joined the Treasury in launching and supporting the Davies Inquiry (Howard Davies is a previous head of the Confederation of British Industry [CBI] and the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of England) which will review the role of ‘enterprise and business’ in education in order to promote an enterprise culture.

*It's term of reference will be to consider how to promote a better understanding of business, the economy and enterprise throughout the school and further education system. (Enterprise for all—the challenge for the next parliament—a statement by Treasury, and the Departments of Trade and Industry and Education and Skills)*

Although Treasury is expected to focus its attention upon economic matters, the other two departments are likely to take a broader view of enterprise which not only includes matters relating to entrepreneurship, but also explores the relevance of enterprise to transferable skills, social enterprise, community regeneration and enterprise learning. DTI and DfES are also keen to make the connection between enterprise and a productive workforce in the emerging knowledge-based economy—that is, relating enterprise to the issues of employability.

The DTI commissioned the Centre for Education and Industry (CEI: Warwick University) to undertake an independent research exercise into learning for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. Their early research has identified a set of attributes, skills and behaviours that they see as essential to the development of an entrepreneurial workforce. The research is being overseen by a steering group of various partner organisations, including DfES, Treasury, Learning and Skills Council, Enterprise Insight, The Small Business Service and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. It is important to note that this steering group includes many key officers who are supporting the Davies Review. Enterprise Insight (a program/entity supported by the DTI Future and Innovation Unit) will offer a business/employer perspective.

The list of attributes, skills and behaviours identified by CEI is as follows.

# The entrepreneurial workforce

## Attributes

- self confident
- autonomous
- achievement orientated
- versatile
- dynamic
- resourceful

## Skills

- problem solving
- creativity
- persuasiveness
- planning
- negotiating
- decision taking

## Behaviours

- acting independently
- actively seeking to achieve goals
- flexibly responding to challenges
- coping with and enjoying uncertainty
- taking risky actions in uncertain environments
- persuading others
- commitment to make things happen
- opportunity seeking
- solving problems/conflicts creatively

There is little doubt about the connection between these qualities and employability, especially with reference to a knowledge-based economy that demands a pro-active and enterprising workforce.



# 4 A brief history of employer involvement and government partnership initiatives regarding employability (last 15 years)

---

## **Late 1980s to early 1990s**

### **Warwick University (Centre for Education and Industry)**

Warwick University Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) promoted and/or hosted a number of conferences and workshops that brought together key representatives from businesses (generally blue chip) and education. The workshops were held on an annual basis and enabled a relatively small number of key people to reflect upon practice and identify emerging issues and trends. It had a strong focus upon innovation and networking. Other key broker bodies such as Business in the Community were also present. At one of these workshops, Christopher Ball from the Royal Society of the Arts (RSA) raised the issue of employability and this concept was fully developed by a number of employer bodies (CBI and Industry in Education) and educators who were present at the conference.

### **Warwick University and Durham University Enterprise Education Programs**

Programs which were funded by Trade and Industry, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and Department of Education (British Government) included:

- Mini Enterprise in Schools Project
- Durham University Business School: Enterprise Education Resource Packs
- Young Enterprise

These programs identified a set of enterprising skills that young people in secondary schools could develop by being involved in designing and managing a real project (generally a business–economic or trading project). Secondees from the private sector would help students form teams, develop and market a product and review their learning: companies (large and small) across the nation were committed (and still are in the case of Young Enterprise) to such programs. They supported such programs because:

- students were developing the kind of common sense skills employers wanted from employees
- the spirit or culture of enterprise was seen as integral to the future of the nation and its economic competitiveness

- secondees from business were working with teachers, forming relationships and communicating their needs and aspirations regarding recruitment, employability etc.
- secondees were developing their own skills of facilitation and supervision

## **Vocational education and training (16–18 years); Youth Training Scheme (YTS)**

Funded by government (MSC) this national program of vocational education and training integrated a strand of enterprise education activity into its fabric. Young people were supported to develop their ‘personal effectiveness’ by being involved in personal development and enterprise education projects, whilst they were being trained in the workplace (companies acting as training providers) or at a further education college or in a community-based agency).

Trainers were offered facilitation training by such bodies as ENTRAIN, Young Enterprise and Durham University. Youth trainees were encouraged to lead real projects of value to the organisation/company in which they were training or to the wider community. This was all funded by MSC because employers and government believed that these skills would improve the productivity of young people at work, and in some cases assist a young person to become self-employed. The personal effectiveness and enterprise education strand of YTS was an investment by employers and government in both employability (more generally referred to as personal effectiveness in the 1980s and early 1990s) and entrepreneurship.

## **The EHE Initiative**

Universities were encouraged by the Department of Employment to develop the competencies and aptitudes of tertiary students relevant to enterprise. The Enterprise in Higher Education EHE (1987–93) initiative funded universities (£1 000 000 over five years) to develop the entrepreneurship, personal effectiveness and transferable skills of tertiary students. Universities were encouraged to partner with business and community organisations and to develop programs which would better prepare students for their professional and working lives. Enterprise was viewed by government and universities as being about both entrepreneurship and employability.

Active learning models, the brokering of community and work-based project work and the professional development of lecturers/tutors as facilitators of learning were common features of EHE initiatives.

## **Mid-to-late 1990s**

The continued work of such bodies as CEI (Warwick University) and Durham University Business School led to the publication of articles and newsletters that advocated for the further development and integration of employability skills in the secondary and even the tertiary curriculum (EHE). However, their efforts were supported by a range of bodies, events and publications, such as:

### **‘Are the 3Rs enough?’—*Headway Magazine* (1998)**

The Human Resources Director of Bass Breweries called for schools, colleges and universities to focus upon such skills as drive for results, courage and conviction, strategic thinking, impact and influencing, interpreting people, understanding organisations, curiosity and building capability—‘Lifelong learning equals lifelong earning’.

### **‘Towards employability’—*Industry in Education 1998***

This report presented the findings of research that went beyond narrow subject or job-related knowledge. The research explored the processes by which young people’s attitudes, behaviour, group and organisational relationships are formed and how the content and management of education can effect the realisation of these qualities in the workplace.

Employers put high value on such qualities as initiative, determination, enthusiasm, the work ethic, reliability, self-discipline, confidence and consideration when dealing with people. The report advocated that schools, communities and employers should collaborate in order to promote the value of behavioural qualities for students and the need for spiritual and values education in schools that then makes a connection to personal, community and working issues for students. The report states that there is evidence that many youth action/community-learning projects benefit students by demonstrating the impact personal qualities rather than academic ability can have on the outside world.

### **‘In search of employability’—*Confederation of British Industry (CBI) publication* (1998)**

This publication defines employability as qualities and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby realise one’s aspirations and potential. CBI viewed the skills as being about adding value to the business and highlighted the need for:

- basic literacy and numeracy skills
- the six key skills
- adaptability
- career management skills
- lifelong learning

CBI considered that employability could only be developed through a partnership of individual learners, employers, government, education and training providers and supporting bodies—for example, unions, trade associations and the voluntary sector. CBI saw the key responsibilities for employers and education and training providers regarding employability as:

- employers:
  - provide broader personal and career development
  - become a learning organisation
  - develop employee involvement
  - train and develop staff

- providers:
  - raise standards but also focus upon qualities and personal competencies
  - provide high quality and important careers education and advice for all
  - learning delivery to be flexible and considerations of equal opportunity to be fully explored

## **‘Attributes of Youth Report’ (Andersons Consultancy) 1998**

This report analysed the nature of a ‘passport to employment’ for young people. This report lists a number of attributes that employers actively look for:

- enthusiasm
- initiative
- honesty
- commitment
- positive attitude
- adaptability
- flexibility
- willingness to work

Whilst 9% of employers saw qualifications as the most important attribute, more than 33% spontaneously mentioned communication and interpersonal skills as top priority.

## **DTI Futures and Innovation Unit**

In 1997 the DTI Futures and Innovation Unit published the findings of extensive research that looked at best practice in firms across the United Kingdom with reference to the role of people in enhancing business performance. The report was titled ‘Partnerships with people’ and it came to the following conclusions:

- Employees need to be creative, network laterally, be good at teamwork and be lifelong learners who can use their initiative.
- Employers need to reduce layers of supervision, enable employees to take greater responsibility and improve flows of communication.

## **2000 and beyond**

### **Demos**

Recent work by the London-based think tank, Demos on the Creative Age has redefined employability, in the sense that they propose a blurring of boundaries between work and learning in a knowledge-based economy.

Learners and workers must draw on their entire spectrum of learning experiences and apply what they have learned in new and creative ways and different settings. Demos defines the key future skills as being about a clustering of skills/attributes—for example:

- information management—range of sources
- self-organisation—time, priorities

- inter-disciplinary—interface between different traditions, horizontal networking
- personal and interpersonal—communication
- reflection and evaluation—the reflective learner and interactive learning
- risk—managing risk, handling stress
- creativity—define own goals, problems, challenges, transfer learning, learn from mistakes, focus and not be diverted

### **Demos work supported by Reed Executive (Recruitment Agency) on enterprise learning**

This work is documented in both an article of *The Times Education Supplement* quoting Alec Reed called ‘We’ve got it all wrong’ and in a Demos publication ‘Enterprise learning’. Reed, whose recruitment business also runs many government-funded vocational training and employment programs such as New Deal, argues that the new age requires a new curriculum for schools and colleges. He highlights the need for enterprise, which he defines as:

- problem solving and communication skills
- think and act creatively
- taking the initiative
- confidence

The Demos publication ‘Enterprise learning’ (the proceeding development work was supported by Reed Executive) calls for a commitment to develop enterprising people, not just entrepreneurs. The key elements of enterprise learning are:

- The individual takes ownership over their work and learning; there is a substantial level of choice and decision making for learners.
- The learner experiences the process of designing, managing and reviewing a project.

- The learner develops the following skills:
  - interpersonal skills—communication, negotiations
  - decision-making skills—information handling
  - organisational skills—planning, deadlines
  - personal responsibility skills—rely upon oneself and rely on others
  - creativity skills—apply knowledge in new ways
  - evaluative skills—learn from failure, review

## 5 The emerging picture (2001 onwards)

---

The work of various employer organisations, government departments (Education, Training, Employment Trade/Industry and Treasury) and various university bodies and brokers between education and industry has kept the issue of ‘employability skills’ on the agenda for 15 years. As stated earlier there have been two separate yet related strands, (even traditions) of activity:

- key skills
- enterprise education/learning

### **Future development— key skills in vocational education**

Employers, when surveyed by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority, indicate that they value the key skills in the following order:

- communication
- working with others
- problem solving
- improve our own learning
- application of numbers
- information technology

After communication skills, the next most popular key skills are ‘three wider key skills’ that are not yet (and nor are they likely to become) a qualification that requires an external assessment. Employers seem keen to develop the wider key skills on the job. They are popular with employers, as long as the learning is contextualised—that is, related to some real task or project that has some relevance to the workplace and wellbeing of the business. Some employers are keen to help trainees to either undertake a real project (such as quality circles) at work or engage in project activity at college, and to then map the development of their wider key skills against previous on-the-job or even community-based learning activity.

One of the major challenges facing the development of the wider key skills in vocational education and training is the unsatisfactory experience of both educators and employers regarding the assessment of the three basic key skills as they were developed into a national qualification. Testing procedures became too complicated

and there is real concern that assessment and not learning dominated. Key skills have also been seen as part of a bigger problem of a crammed and over-examined A Level. In mid-July, the new Secretary of State for Education and Skills scrapped key skills as being mandatory for all A Level students and removed financial inducements for colleges and schools to develop the three initial key skills.

## **Modern Apprenticeships**

Modern Apprenticeships (MA) is the one form of vocational education and training that requires the trainee to undertake key skills if they are to receive their overall qualification. For example, a Modern Apprenticeship (Advanced Level) is expected to do a Level 3 NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) plus two of the basic key skills (Communication and Application of Numbers) at Level 2 or beyond and the wider key skills. This is because an MA is seen as an early career step that is broader than an NVQ. The transferability and generic nature of the six key skills is therefore highly valued—that is, to help avoid any concerns about the MA being a limiting vocational education experience.

Employers are keen to see MAs develop key skills through a real (contextualised) project. Some companies are keen to use this situation as a professional development exercise for their supervisor—that is, the supervisor learning to facilitate. This is particularly true of the blue chip and larger corporations which have a tradition of using project-based learning as a strategy of professional development. However, some smaller firms are less enthusiastic, expecting their apprentices to have already developed these valued skills at secondary school.

## **GNVQs & NVQs**

The wider key skills and enterprise skills are not a requirement of either general or specific national vocational qualifications. Please note that both sets of vocational qualifications are presently under review and a new framework is to be announced later this year. Employers and government indicate that they remain keen to integrate the wider key skills into the learning experience of trainees. However, they will seek to do this through an activity that contextualises the skills—for example, project-based learning and/or mapping the wider key skills against normal ‘on-the-job’ responsibilities. There is a general feeling that employers and educators are not keen to see the wider key skills become examinable.

The DfES has just commissioned Learning for Work, a consortia of consultants to promote the wider key skills to vocational education providers. These consultants will:

- build upon past efforts by national training organisations to map or signpost opportunities for developing wider key skills within their normal NVQ modules
- spot contexts and options for project-based learning ‘on the job’
- promote a culture of assessment for learning that seeks to regain the vision of active and experimental learning
- liaise with the ‘new economy’ sectors which are particularly keen about the wider key skills—for example, IT design, media etc.



## **New Deal**

Unemployed adults (18 plus) participate in a training and support program that incorporates assessment, careers counselling, skills training and placement. Many of the providers of the New Deal are particularly keen to develop the wider and basic key skills of the unemployed participants. Their role is to develop the employability of their participants. Many of these providers are community based and feel strongly about the contribution that community projects can make to both active and experimental learning and to the personal development of the individual. The idea of mapping the key skills against the work-based or community-based learning of a New Deal participant involved in a work placement or the Environment Task Force is both feasible and attractive to both the provider and learner. There is a clear context for developing these skills and relating them to employability.

## **Hurdles facing wider key skills**

Although there is significant enthusiasm for the wider key skills in vocational education and training, one must recognise the significant hurdles facing their development. They include:

- the reaction to the complex testing arrangements of the three basic key skills national qualification—recently axed as mandatory for all academic students 16 plus
- the current uncertainty in schools and colleges about new post-16 exams—for example, the AS Level and A Level vocational qualification that replaced GNVQs and all the recent changes
- the proposed review of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme
- the high value placed upon the wider key skills by employers, but there is some hesitancy to place great store on a ‘certificate’ or even a portfolio of evidence as the proof of ‘having these skills’. Employers value the skills and they want recruits and workers to articulate the skills and to then apply them to the goals of adding value to their workplace; that is, meeting the needs of customers, and improving productivity etc.

## 6 Future development— enterprise skills in vocational education

---

After a quiet period, the concept of enterprise education/learning is making a significant comeback in England and Wales. Although it has remained a strong strand of activity in Scotland, enterprise learning seemed to lose favour under the New Labour Government and both DTI and DfES (formerly DFEE) were ‘cool’ to the tradition. The recent re-emergence is particularly due to a growing interest in exploring the demands of a knowledge-based economy for firms and individuals and then making the connection between a culture and spirit of enterprise with the development of creativity, innovation and competitiveness. It is about redefining employability in a new economy by linking ‘learning and working’ and highlighting the value of such qualities as lateral thinking, horizontal networking, reflective learning, problem solving, self-management and multi-disciplinary teamwork.

Although enterprise skills are not presently specified and integrated into general or vocational education and training programs, this may change for the following reasons:

- Howard Davies Review—reporting to three powerful ministers (Treasury, Trade/Industry, Education) is likely to argue for a broad-based strategy of enterprise education that is about young people and trainers learning to be more enterprising, more creative and more proactive. This will be seen as an appropriate foundation to processes of entrepreneurial education for young and older adults.
- The work of the ‘Social Exclusion Unit’ and the focus upon social inclusion in the most disadvantaged communities has led to a plethora of community regeneration schemes being developed in these targeted areas. Nearly all these holistic strategies of development (which by logic incorporate programs of vocational preparation etc.) revolve around a ‘partnership approach’ that includes and therefore engages local residents. The social inclusion strategy is dependent upon residents of disadvantaged communities being enterprising and proactive. There is a policy/program awareness that the wider employability/personal skills need to be developed. That agenda will remain on the priorities of the three ministers who receive the Davies Review. Government agencies and programs such as New Deal, Connexions, MAs, NVQs etc. will also operate within the parameter of that partnership approach in these disadvantaged communities.

- Employers, both by instinct and as a result of considered research, value wider key skills. These skills, especially ‘working with others’ and ‘problem solving’ reflect the process of enterprise learning. Employers may not really want or need a formal assessment of employability skills. They want the skills in their current and future employees but they do not necessarily desire the rigorous, complex and perhaps undermining process of formal and external assessment. Enterprise is a label that can be placed upon a more flexible approach to learning which may not need to be constrained by formal accreditation.
- Vocational education for a knowledge-based economy should enable trainees to be creative and enterprising. Universities and further education colleges, as well as schools and vocational training providers, will be encouraged to:
  - promote and facilitate student-led project work that links various sectors of the economy—that is, projects supported by education, business and community
  - ensure that trainees can reflect upon experiences and capture the learning through peer and self-appraisal
  - use various forms of media and technology in their learning
  - increasingly learn and work globally

## 7 Conclusion

---

There is one set of six key skills that is used across academic/general and vocational education. They have emerged as the result of the work of employers and government committed to the agenda of employability over the last 15 years.

There is not one commonly used list of enterprise skills, for schools, colleges etc., although there is a great deal of agreement between employers and government about their nature and relevance to a participation in a knowledge-based economy. Key words include creativity, project management, independent/interdependent action, reflection, flexibility, networking (horizontal and vertical) and self-management.

Action research and advocacy work regarding employability has been championed by organisations which have brokered and then supported collaboration between business and education. These organisations, CEI (Warwick University), Durham Business School, Business in the Community, Industry in Education and even CBI, have been able to allocate some of their own resources to this objective. However, they have also acquired contracts with government to champion such related movements as education— industry links, enterprise education and employability skills. This has been made possible by a previous and now re-emerging alliance between Departments of Trade and Industry and Education and Skills—now reinforced by the strong interest of Treasury. This alliance has supported innovation as well as the ‘drive for partnership’ between various economic sectors and agencies; for purposes of international competitiveness, raising standards and social inclusion.

The future of employability skills in vocational education for young people and unemployed adults (New Deal) is bright because the integration of the wider key skills and a culture of enterprise are seen as equally relevant to employability (and competitiveness) and community regeneration (social inclusion) by various key ministers and departments.

The future for these skills will be even brighter if the United Kingdom does not ‘go overboard’ on rigorous assessment and external testing. A turn-around has already occurred on the insistence that the national ‘key skills’ qualification is a requirement of all A Level students (both academic and vocational).

# Employability skills development in the United Kingdom—appendix

## Introduction

This paper updates the content of *Employability skills development in the United Kingdom* which was prepared in late 2001 and published in 2002. Undertaken by the same researcher, this update concentrates upon recent developments in the two areas of:

- the wider key skills programs
- enterprise skills/education.

The initial report paid particular attention to their definition and to their contribution to secondary and more specifically, vocational education and training. This update concentrates upon matters relating to both their development by young people and to their assessment.

This update should be considered in the context of wider key skills and enterprise education (and their contribution to employability) and the very recent British Government Green Paper, *14–19: Extending opportunities, raising standards*.<sup>1</sup> This Department for Education and Skills Green Paper sets out ‘an evolving vision for greater coherence in the 14–19 phase of education and training in England and the challenges and opportunities it presents to all those with a stake in the changes we propose’. The ambitions of the British Government with respect to 14–19 provision are:

- higher levels of participation and standards of attainment
- a commitment to lifelong learning
- increased employability for all young people
- more rounded students in terms of both citizenship and contributing to a productive economy
- reduced numbers of truants and drop-outs
- a greatly improved 14–19 system.

The Green Paper indicates a strong desire by the government to widen the curriculum for those aged 14–19 and offer young people a range of pathways.

## Update on wider key skills, their development and their assessment

### Introduction

Key skills are defined in Britain as the generic and transferable skills that all people need to succeed in education and training and in work and life in general. The key skills are available to learners at five study levels. With each progressive level, candidates will draw on more complex and a wider range of techniques, take increasing responsibility for deciding how they will apply the key skills and become more aware of factors that affect their performance. Levels 1–3 are the most likely to be used in schools and colleges (linking to national vocational qualifications [NVQ] levels and vocational academic levels, while level 4 equals a degree level). The six key skills are:

---

<sup>1</sup> 14–19: *Extending opportunities, raising standards*, Department for Education and Skills, London, 2002.

Communication	}	Three main key skills leading to the key skills qualification
Application of numbers		
Information technology		
Working with others	}	Wider key skills
Improving own learning and performance		
Problem-solving		

The three wider key skills lead to a certificate of achievement award from accrediting bodies such as City and Guilds. Unlike the three main key skills, they are not a part of the national qualifications framework and as such, candidates do not have to undertake an external test. Assessment is undertaken through the verification of portfolios of evidence generated by the candidate. This means that the certificate does not guarantee the same rigour, consistency and standardisation associated with the three main skills qualification, which are a stand-alone national qualification.

The tests for the three main skills consist of a half-hour test of multiple-choice questions (40) for levels 1 and 2. At level 3, the test lasts for one-and-a-half hours and the questions are more complex. Levels 2, 3 and 4, that is the intermediate, advanced and higher levels are linked to levels NVQ 2, 3 and 4 respectively, and are accredited with 10, 20 and 30 UCAS (university entrance) points each.

### **Wider key skills in vocational education and teaching**

Funding for the Modern Apprenticeship Program (funded through the newly formed Learning Skills Council) requires that training providers deliver on key skills. New advanced Modern Apprentices must achieve, as a minimum, the key skills qualification in both ‘communication’ and ‘application of numbers’ at level 2. For foundation Modern Apprenticeships, it has been recommended that level 1 should be a minimum requirement.

The government and the Learning Skills Council have decided that national training organisations will specify which of the remaining key skills are required and at what levels. It is at their discretion to decide what is appropriate to both their industry sector and to meeting the needs and abilities of their trainees.

In summary, key skills programs will be offered to all post-16 students if they have not achieved A–C grades in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) English, mathematics or information communications technologies. These students are required to acquire the three main key skills at level 2. The required key skills are the main three key skills only (not the three wider key skills).

### **Are the wider key skills loosing momentum?**

The commitment of the Department for Education and Skills to the wider key skills seems to be a equivocal. The recent Green Paper rarely mentions the wider key skills. Possible reasons for this omission include:

- There was a clear backlash from schools and students over the assessment of the main key skills and this has backfired on the wider key skills. Many students voted with their feet and did not participate in the formal and external assessment of the main key skills.
- There remains no clear proof that developing the wider key skills raises school standards. There is also some doubt as to whether schools and colleges are concerned about helping students to actually develop the skills; rather, they seem to be concentrating their efforts on

mapping them (as if they have already been developed) and focussing upon issues of assessment.

- Teachers feel a sense of ‘initiative overload’ and are reluctant to take on what can be seen as additional work. Some policy-makers in education feel that the wider key skills may create a diversion from the basics and the push on standards.
- Employers repeatedly advocate the importance and value of the wider key skills, but are not necessarily committed to the need for their formal assessment and certification. They remain keen about their relevance to performing in the workplace, but employers do not always make available the skilled coaches and supervisors who can spot on-the-job opportunities for their development. This is particularly true of many small-to-medium enterprises which have not developed any coherent human resources strategy.
- Given that the wider key skills are neither a required or standardised national qualification, schools and colleges seem somewhat reluctant to commit resources to their development. Although there is no general enthusiasm for external and standardised assessment of either main or the wider key skills, the lack of such an expectation seems to devalue the importance of these wider key skills.
- There is little funding for developing the wider key skills in work-based or school-based learning, yet training providers and schools seek additional resources for what they perceive as additional responsibilities.

## **How are the wider key skills developed by young people?**

The Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP), ‘Learning for Work’ supports vocational education and training and work-based learning providers to develop key skills. This initiative is currently producing a best-practice guide on how to develop the wider key skills. However, there is some indication that, due to the reasons provided above, best practice has been difficult to pinpoint and subsequently document. Nevertheless, a number of points of excellence have been identified;

- The Army that has used outdoor education and expeditions as a means of wider key skills development for recruits (at all levels).
- Employer-led vocational education programs that place a high priority on quality improvement, such as the Coca-Cola Skillstart GNVQ (general national vocational qualification) in manufacturing/distribution for young seasonal employees, has concentrated its training activity on developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes of young people. Young trainees are involved in quality circles and improvement teams in the off season, and the trainees are learning to improve their productivity. Coca-Cola believes that not only has this initiative improved performance, but it has also developed the skills base of what was perceived as a low-grade and seasonal employee base. This is an excellent case study of instances where the employer has been able to contextualise the learning of the wider key skills with the demands of the workplace.
- A range of training providers and employees believes that the wider key skills (especially ‘improve your own learning’ and ‘working with others’) may be a good starting point to build the motivation of young people to undertake the main key skills. This judgement may be derived from their concerns about the motivation and confidence of at-risk young people to improve the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The wider key skills may provide an activity base and learning culture that helps to build confidence and the skills to learn. Methods of learning/teaching and skill development that play a key role include:
  - group work and simulations/role plays at college or school
  - sign-posting further opportunities for trainees and supervisors to develop the wider key skills in existing NVQ modules
  - community projects via citizenship/volunteering and other forms of enterprise learning
  - Duke of Edinburgh scheme, drama productions, part-time work.

It is important to note, however, that even some of these endeavours are concerned with the recognition of prior learning and they are not always related to developing new activities which promote teaching and learning activity or processes.

The major single concern expressed during the course of this research by those involved in the development of the wider key skills was the current dominance of an assessment rather than teaching and learning culture. The English situation seems to be strongly characterised by the notion that teachers and trainers can assume that the young person has already developed the skills, attitudes and knowledge linked to employability in another place; for example, a personal, extra-curricular or workplace activity and/or settings. There is an expectation that what teachers and tutors of the wider key skills need to do is simply map and tick competence. Some workplace supervisors and the vast majority of the external verifiers are not close enough to the young trainees to build capability and skills. They are merely giving credit for existing competence. The overall impact of a national vocational qualification regime dedicated to outputs and standards may have over-emphasised assessment and the recognition of prior learning and thus overlooked the need for skill development by young people.

As argued by the Key Skills Support Programme, there is a need for an effective curriculum model that not only connects skills, attitudes and knowledge for employability, but also moves through a process of:

- what students need to know, do and demonstrate
- acquiring basic techniques, practising and building skills
- providing portfolio evidence.

## **The emerging opportunities for the development of wider key skills by young people**

### **Citizenship**

In September 2002, citizenship becomes a mandatory part of the national curriculum for secondary schools and it will be encouraged in 16–19 provision. The British Government's Green Paper specifically refers to the importance of citizenship (education with character) and the value of such skills and attitudes as enterprise, teamwork, innovation and flexibility.

The three strands of citizenship education are:

- social and moral responsibility
- community involvement
- political literacy.

Enterprise activities that engage young people in their community are likely to be a key element of citizenship education, particularly in key stage 4 and beyond. Such activities will enable young people to exercise the wider key skills. If the activities are effectively facilitated by an adult who is skilled in the processes of experiential/reflective and enterprise learning, young people will have every opportunity to design and manage their activities and to both reflect upon their learning and develop the wider key skills. Empowering young people through active citizenship will enable students to explore their sense of social responsibility as well as become involved in the decision-making and power structures of their community. The wider key skills could become 'the core curriculum' of such activity.



## **The Matriculation Diploma**

The Green Paper proposes a new overarching award called the Matriculation Diploma that will recognise young people's achievements. The diploma will be a transcript built around three main components:

- *main qualification strand*: higher, advanced or intermediate award for academic and/or vocational study
- *common strand*: of literacy, numeracy and information communications technology (good GCSE or key skills equivalent [level 2] but this refers only to the main key skills)
- *wider activities*: active citizenship, wider interests (enrichment) and work-related learning.

This proposed nationwide diploma will be able to record the accreditation for the development of wider key skills, even though they are not externally assessed and therefore not part of the national qualifications framework. The availability of this kind of accreditation and the need for schools to help students record their wider activities for graduation may provide incentives for the development and assessment of the wider key skills. Citizenship and work-related learning activities will provide numerous opportunities for students to develop their wider key skills. Reviewing that learning and mapping their competence will be boosted by the fact that students will need to record their achievements for the diploma.

## **Work-based learning**

The Green Paper clearly indicates that the government will continue to widen the 14–19 curriculum in order to offer young people a range of pathways. Space in the crowded national curriculum necessary for such flexibility will be made available by the removal, as no longer mandatory of a foreign language, design and technology and a subject in the humanities/arts. Although schools will be obliged to make them available to key stage 4 students, young people will not be statutorily obliged to study these subjects.

The Green Paper dedicates considerable energy to exploring the potential of work-related learning at all key stages. The government places high value on the contribution of work-related learning to broadening pathways. Such learning includes the following range of activities at school, college, or at the location of a training provider or employer (workplace):

- work and community placement
- part-time jobs
- vocational careers/qualifications
- enterprise activities
- subject learning
- citizenship
- personal, health and social education
- careers education
- work experience.

This emerging emphasis upon work-based learning should create some opportunities for young people to develop their wider key skills and have them assessed/recorded.

Although no formal relationship exists between the recently mandated study of citizenship, enterprise education and wider key skills in terms of curriculum or accreditation, schools, particularly those concerned with the 'pressure of marks' and what they perceive as an overcrowded curriculum, can see possibilities in certain activities of delivering all three.

The government hopes to extend the work-related element of their 14–19 experience so they can pursue genuinely mixed programs of study with equally valued parity. There is a strong desire to develop high-quality courses and qualifications which involve employers, colleges and schools in collaborative activity—for both university entrants and/or progression to a Modern Apprenticeship.

Work-based learning will be a key part of either the main qualification and/or wider activities strands of the new Matriculation Diploma. Work-based learning provides the setting for the experiential learning and student work which can help young people develop the wider key skills. Employers remain enthusiastic about the value of these skills and therefore their collaborative efforts with schools and colleges should raise the profile/flagpost of the wider key skills, especially in key stage 4.

There is considerable attention being paid to the development of a broader range of work-related activities than has previously been the case. Concerns about the limitations of the work experience placement combined with the current dialogue/debate generated by the Davies Review on enterprise learning has promoted such thinking. There is some indication that the scope and scale of student-led project work (mini-companies and community or technology/scientific challenges) are about to be increased. At present only about 15% of KS4 students have experienced these contexts of work-related curriculum, while 85% have undertaken a work experience placement.

Such enterprise activities provide direct and contextualised opportunities for the development and assessment/accreditation of the wider key skills.

### **Social inclusion/commitment regeneration**

The wider key skills are at the very heart of enterprise learning. Working with others, problem-solving and being able to reflect upon experience and improving individual own learning are central to people creating opportunities and to innovation. Community regeneration and social inclusion, as manifested in the numerous regional development and government programs that are targeted to the most disadvantaged of communities, are heavily dependent the enterprise of local residents. The **QUERY HERE** thinking from agencies. Programs such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Surestart and New Deal for Communities and the Local Strategic Partnership which underpins them, need engaged and enterprising citizens and champions.

The wider key skills can be seen to be the basic foundation of learning for those who are socially excluded, yet want to make a difference. The skills can be developed by local residents taking action to meet community needs. Skilled facilitators can use the community and its experiential learning as a ‘classroom with no walls’. There is undoubtedly a strong connection between the wider key skills, enterprise learning and community regeneration and joined-up<sup>2</sup> delivery. What is required is that educators, community workers, tutors and other professionals can work together in order to help residents develop and map their learning.

### **Update on enterprise education**

The push to develop the employability skills of young people in the United Kingdom has resulted from the key skills (in particular wider key skills) and enterprise education movements. Both movements have advocated the importance of developing the generic and transferable skills of young people. The drive for enterprise education seemed to lose momentum in the early years of the current British Government, but it has experienced a remarkable revival over the last few months.

---

<sup>2</sup> Joined-up, a term used to refer to inter-agency collaboration and shared effort to achieve a common goal.

Three government departments provided a secretariat for the Davies Review into ‘enterprise and the economy in education’. The review has recommended the expenditure of 54 million pounds on enterprise education.

## **Remit and rationale of the Davies Review<sup>3</sup> into enterprise and education**

In June 2001 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, asked Howard Davies, Chairman of the Financial Services Authority, to conduct a review of enterprise and the economy in schools and further education, covering the age range 5–19. Under the terms of reference, the committee was to consider how to promote better understanding of business, the economy and enterprise throughout the school and further education systems. The review was required to examine:

- current attitudes towards business, enterprise and the economy amongst students and teachers, and the factors that drive those attitudes
- the level of financial literacy and how this affects attitudes
- the scale and effectiveness of existing activities in education institutions
- the outputs that government should aim to achieve in this area
- international comparisons.

An independent team was drawn from the Financial Services Authority, Department of Trade and Industry (including the Small Business Service), Department for Education and Skills and the Treasury to carry out the review. The review was asked to make specific and costed recommendations to the government on how to achieve the outputs that it proposes.

## **Key findings of the review**

- All young people will need more enterprising skills and attitudes, not just to set up in business, but also to build their own careers and stay employed.
- Education has a responsibility to develop the financial literacy and ability of students to make choices and to manage risk.
- Employability was defined as the knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes and qualities that young people will need to thrive in their future working lives. The Davies Review considers that the aspects of employability directly relevant to their remit of enterprise capability are financial literacy and economic and business undertaking. The importance and relevance of key skills to both enterprise capability and employability was noted.
- Enterprise capability was defined as the capacity to handle uncertainty and respond positively to change, to create and implement new ideas and new ways of doing things, to make reasonable risk/reward assessments and to act upon them in one’s personal and working life. Such capability depends upon the development of:
  - knowledge and understanding of such concepts as organisation, innovation, risk, change

---

<sup>3</sup> For further information see <<http://www.daviesreview.org>>.

- skills—decision-making (particularly under conditions of uncertainty), personal and social, leadership, risk management, presentational
  - attitudes—self-reliance, open-mindedness, respect for evidence, pragmatism, commitment to making a difference
  - qualities—adaptability, perseverance, determination, flexibility, creativeness, improvisation, confidence, initiative, self-confidence, autonomy, action-orientation.
- Financial literacy was defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become a questioning and informed consumer of financial services and the ability to manage one's finances effectively. Financial literacy can be divided into three interrelated themes:
    - knowledge and understanding—familiarity with a range of concepts such as money, credit and investment
    - skills and competence—budgeting, financial planning and personal risk management
    - attitudes—taking responsibility for the wider impact and implications of money and financial decisions on individuals, business and the community.
  - The ideal of economic and business undertaking was conceived of as process of enquiry, focussed on the context of business, central to which is the idea that resources are scarce so that choices have to be made between alternative uses. This includes:
    - knowledge and understanding—familiarity with a range of economic concepts such as the market, competition, price, efficiency and economic growth
    - skills—the ability to take decisions and make judgement on issues with an economic dimension, investigate simple hypotheses and apply theoretical understanding to practical situations
    - attitudes—an interest and concern in economic affairs, responsibility of employers to the community and the environment.
  - The Davies Review gave particular attention to the development of enterprise capability, in relation to the learning opportunities for young people afforded by work-related learning and business–school links. The review defined the experience of taking up such opportunities as enterprise learning. When they take the form of a discrete activity, they are referred to as enterprise activities.
  - The review sought to advance the cause of enterprise learning by improving the opportunities within work-related learning, education–business links and curriculum enhancement for the development of enterprise capability.
  - It was discovered that enterprising activities were only available to a small percentage of students; 84% of 15–18-year-olds (surveyed in the Davies research) had undertaken work experience and 79% had undertaken paid work. The review felt that too little activity was dedicated to developing young people's enterprise capability—estimated as only 15%.
  - Enterprise activities are the key to developing enterprise capability. Such activities will tend to be experiential and student-led. They will offer opportunities for students to manage and evaluate risk. They should involve local business people and be self-contained with clear results and conclusions. The review identifies two types of activity that offer the richest opportunities for learning as:
    - mini-company schemes

- projects that either create a new product or deliver a project in the community (generally with support of a local business/employer).
- The review quoted business people who felt that work experience may be an unused opportunity in terms of developing a real insight into enterprise and the world of work. The review calls for more structured enterprise learning opportunities to be incorporated into work experience. The review also calls for further support to ensure the development of an enterprise experience—at least five days of enterprise learning for each young person (as an entitlement).
- Public resources should be committed to funding brokers, as well as to schools, who will build up the supply of quality enterprise activity which is supported by both teachers and business people. The review believes that business should scale up its contribution, in particular employee time, to help facilitate enterprise activities. Students benefit from such interaction and the activities provide staff development opportunities for business.
- The review calls for a phased approach, perhaps beginning with the development of models with clusters of schools and brokers in disadvantaged communities. However, the review warns that enterprise learning and enterprise activities should not be purely focussed upon the excluded, disaffected or upon high-flyers who are at the other end of the spectrum. It should be a universal entitlement.
- The immediate challenge is to offer a variety of enterprise learning opportunities through a range of courses within the curriculum, rather than provision occurring as an extra-curricular activity. This was highlighted by research undertaken for the Department of Trade and Industry by the Centre for Education and Industry (University of Warwick) to survey qualifications and programs for supporting and accrediting enterprise learning (both in the national curriculum subjects and through qualifications supporting careers education, work education and citizenship).
- The review recognises that schools, colleges, and their teachers are already facing many competing pressures on their time and resources. So businesses and other organisations, such as social enterprises, need to play an important role in helping schools and provide additional support.
- The best of small businesses are often the most enterprising. They are where young people can see the relevance, excitement and challenge of enterprise brought to life. Entrepreneurs have a highly developed set of enterprise skills. Working with education professionals, they can use these skills to inspire, coach and nurture similar abilities in young people. In work-related learning, real business problems can provide ideal opportunities for young people to apply what they have learned within education, often with outstanding results for their development and confidence.
- If all young people are to have access to opportunities for enterprise learning, there will need to be a significant increase in levels of business support. If this access is to be sustained, the level of business support must also be sustained, through the building of quality partnerships between individual schools and businesses.

## **Assessment and accreditation of enterprise learning (Davies Review)**

Schools will need support in order to offer students a variety of enterprise learning opportunities within the curriculum. Schools will need help to survey existing qualifications and programs and identify openings for accrediting enterprise learning.

The Davies Review does not call for a new qualification or separate accreditation for enterprise learning, rather it seeks to gain support for schools (and their business partners) to map this learning against the requirements of existing curriculum and careers—both within the national curriculum and within courses that support careers education and guidance and preparation for working life.

The review recommends that the British Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA) review schemes of work for national curriculum subjects, so it can be clearly shown how and when enterprise learning can be introduced. It also recommends that new teaching and learning materials be developed for enterprise learning and personal finance education.

The review also recommends that the National College of School Leadership incorporate training modules on enterprise learning into their courses and seminars targeted to those individuals who wish to become head teachers.

In April 2001, the Department of Trade and Industry, Strategy and Comprehensiveness Unit commissioned the Centre for Education and Industry at the University of Warwick to undertake independent research into learning for enterprise and entrepreneurship. The steering group for this research involved many of the key partners who were directly supporting the Davies Review, for example, Treasury, Enterprise Insight, Education and Skills. This research both directly and indirectly informed the work of the Davies Review and it is therefore worthy of a special mention. Although the research document is classified as ‘restricted circulation’, it can be accessed on the website of the Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick (<[www.warwick.ac.uk/cei](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/cei)>).

In relation to the assessment and accreditation of enterprise learning, it found that:

Developing further awards [for accreditation] was unnecessary ... The National Curriculum and the National Qualifications Framework are givens within which learning for enterprise and enterprise and entrepreneurship should be accommodated.

Although problems of successful integration should not be underestimated, opportunities exist. They include:

- Key skills is an appropriate focus for enterprise learning. There is clearly overlap with the wider key skills—working with others, problem-solving and improving one’s own learning.
- Enterprise learning is concerned with a pedagogical approach, about a process of learning. Teachers must be supported to develop their enterprise capability so they can use this approach in their teaching.
- The documentation and dissemination of case studies (at school or college level) through the use of a relevant website will be an important resource.
- There is a need to integrate enterprise learning into initial teacher training.

- Brokers such as education–business partnerships have a key role to play in addressing issues of quality and coherence.
- The key national broker (Enterprise Insight) should provide clear guidance for the business community on how they might become involved in enterprise learning.

## Development of enterprise learning in United Kingdom schools

The following list depicts a variety of contexts for the development of enterprise capability by young people. They have been drawn from the range of case studies presented in the Davies Review and the Centre for Education and Industry research.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Microsociety (KS2) <sup>4</sup> —citizenship   | Young people creating their own society within the school, learning about economic concepts and running enterprise activities. |
| 2 | Innovation and enterprise days (KS3)—education/industry                              | Simulated activity designed to enable students to create and market a team product.  |
| 3 | Establish a charity—citizenship (KS4)  | Developing a fund raising social enterprise with the assistance of a major charity.  |
| 4 | Design a website for a local company, mini company—vocational education              | Students produced a website prototype with the support of a local firm.  |
| 5 | Young person-led community projects (Changemakers <sup>5</sup> ) (KS3/4)—Citizenship | Young people design and manage their own community projects.   |
| 6 | Developing enterprise across school management—staff                                 | Developing an enterprise culture: leadership training for head teachers and senior staff.                                      |

---

<sup>4</sup> KS2, 3 and 4 refer to key stages of the national curriculum

<sup>5</sup> A countywide initiative (across school, colleges and youth agencies) has engaged more than 1200 young people in the design and management of (young person-led) community projects. Training for facilitation has been provided across all sectors of education and regional awards for community enterprise have been developed by the education authority.

## **Centre for Education and Industry research: Learning for enterprise and entrepreneurship**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 7 Technology challenge (KS2)               | Students responding to challenges and problems set by local companies.   |
| 8 Construction industry/theatre (KS3)      | A play about the world of work at a construction site and the calculation and application of numbers required on site.   |
| 9 Young enterprise (KS4 +16 plus)          | Extra curricular business projects run by students working with employer/business mentors.   |
| 10 Computing skills—E mentoring            | Produce a genuine commercial service to local industry.  |
| 11 Community Agency (a development agency) | Working with schools, colleges and industry sector organisations located in a particularly disadvantaged regional centre has enabled young people (14–30) to established social and commercial enterprises that provide training and employment to local youth. Eighteen such enterprises have been established. |