

HOW TO RECOGNISE AND DEVELOP ESSENTIAL SKILLS

A practical guide for businesses,
educators and support organisations



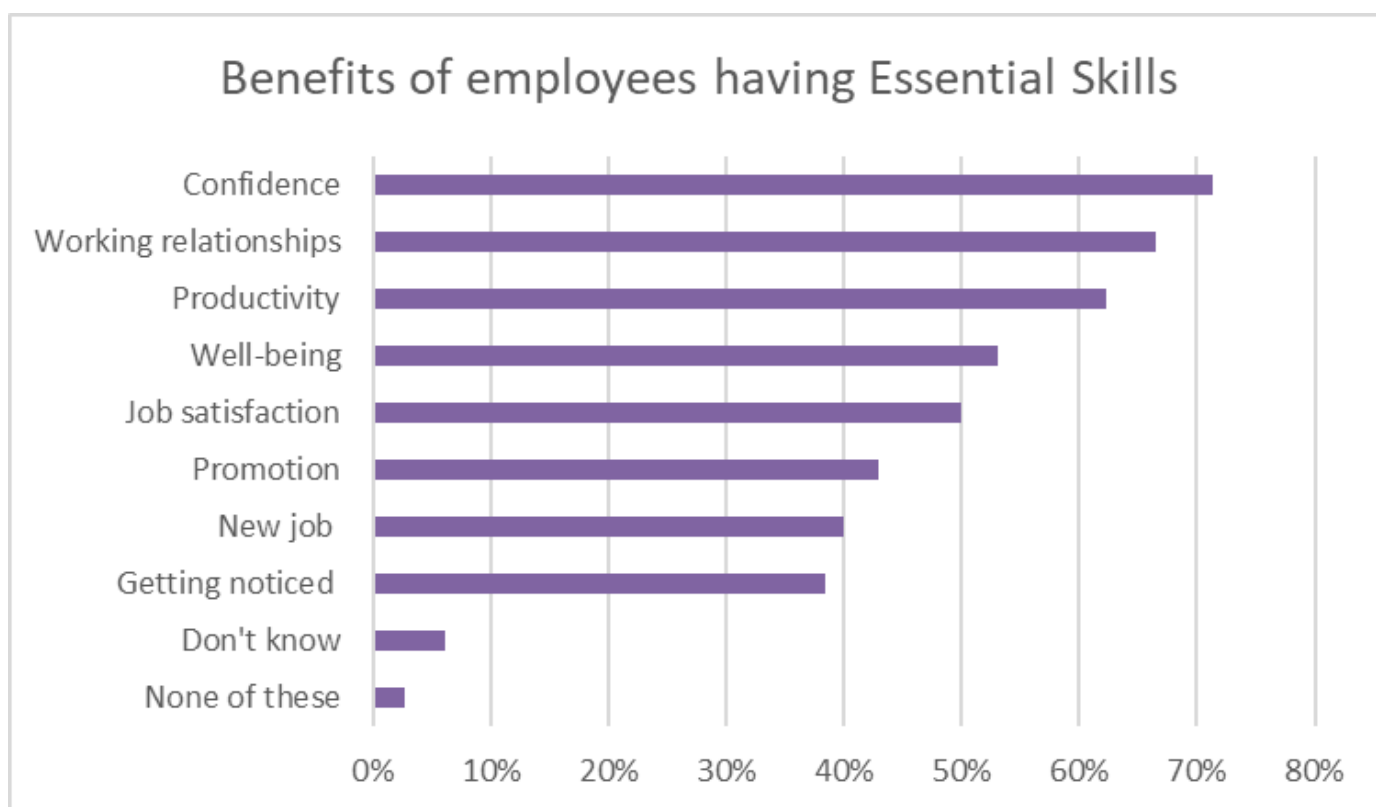
Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Amid huge uncertainty, businesses are not only trying to survive the COVID-19 crisis and its immediate economic impact but to plan for recovery. It's clear that 'business as usual' will not be the same again and companies are looking at how their operations will need to be reshaped and adapted over the coming months and years.

Even before the crisis, businesses were clear that young people were not leaving school with the essential skills that they need such as listening, problem-solving and teamwork. These skills are now even more important.

Business in the Community's research in 2019 showed that 86% of people agree that Essential Skills are important for them in life and work and 68% agreed that their workplace sees them as important. It also identified the main benefits of employees having Essential Skills as confidence, improved working relationships and improved productivity.



Business in the Community has been working alongside businesses for nearly 40 years and we have seen the direct and vital role they can play in increasing diversity, including socioeconomic diversity. Core to achieving this is businesses' ability to develop skills and confidence through its education and pre-employment programmes, recruitment and learning and development. Businesses now recognise that diversity and social mobility are essential for increasing creative thinking, innovating and boosting



productivity. With the impact of COVID-19 already hitting the most disadvantaged in our communities the hardest and changing the nature of work and education overnight, we need organisations to act now to ensure we do not widen the disadvantage gap.

The Skills Builder Universal Framework is a structural solution that, when widely adopted to recognise and develop essential skills, will enable us to create a skilled, inclusive workforce today and for the future.

About this guide

This guide sets out how businesses can take a strategic approach to recognising and developing essential skills using the **Skills Builder Universal Framework**, available at www.skillsbuilder.org.

It draws on and complements our factsheet *Essential Skills and why we need them now*, which can be downloaded at www.bitc.org.uk/essential-skills and our member guide on Inclusive employment: how to inspire, hire and grow diverse talent.

Following Business in the Community's Inspire, Hire, Grow employment framework and providing examples of how Skills Builder Trailblazers are already using the framework, it supports organisations to embed the eight essential skills in all their pre-employment, recruitment and learning and development activities.

Essential Skills and the Skills Builder Universal Framework

Essential skills are the skills we all need to thrive in education, work and life and are proving to be heavily required in a time of crisis.ⁱⁱ They are highly transferable skills like communication, problem solving and teamwork. They are not innate, can be developed throughout our lives and can't be automated out.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Skills Builder Universal Framework, developed by the Essential Skills Taskforce^{iv}, is a clear, measurable and authoritative framework for essential skills that sets out how they can be identified in practice. It provides a common language that can be easily understood and adopted from the classroom to the boardroom. The universal framework defines the essential skills as: listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork. Hundreds of schools are already using the framework^v and it is now being adopted by trailblazing employers including Boots, KPMG, Jacobs and Tideway (see pages 6-12 for details).

Beyond defining the set of skills, the Skills Builder Universal Framework is a tool which is designed to enable individuals to build these skills in incremental steps. Each of the eight skills are broken down into 16 steps, arranged in a logical order from Step 0 through to Step 15. Individuals can work to achieve the steps sequentially and/or use the framework to understand where they may have missed some steps and need to develop those behaviours to fill in the gaps.



INSPIRE, HIRE, GROW: EMBEDDING ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Business in the Community members may already be familiar with the BITC Employment Framework, which supports organisations to develop a strategic approach to inclusive employment.

This framework was initially developed to support our work around youth employment and has now been broadened out to support inclusive employment across the full range of excluded groups. The stages can be described as:

- **Inspire:** pre-employment support
- **Hire:** removing barriers in recruitment processes
- **Grow:** in-work support



It now offers a strategic approach for embedding the Skills Builder Universal Framework across education and employment.

We recommend following the experience of our Skills Builder trailblazers and initially choosing one area of your organisation to begin using the universal framework. For example, you may choose to start with your pre-employment programmes in education or the community, with your apprenticeship programme or with employees making the transition from an operation role to a managerial one. Once you have made the business case internally, with activity and impact in one area, you can take this to other parts of the organisation.

Our ambition is for businesses to embed it across their organisations and to share it with their partners in education and community initiatives. For educators and the skills community, we see it as a foundation for building knowledge as well as technical and job-specific skills, including digital, and a powerful tool for increasing employability.

Ultimately, the Skills Builder Universal Framework will provide a thread for essential skills support and development, from the classroom to the boardroom, throughout people's learning lives.

INSPIRE

Whether you're looking to inspire school students to choose STEM subjects, graduates to join your programme or unemployed candidates to consider their career options, the Skills Builder Universal Framework can support you to have meaningful conversations about essential skills. It will enable you to ensure that your future workforce is equipped with the skills you need.

Activity	How it can be used
Partner with a school and embed essential skills within your education activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework for discussing the essential skills needed for a particular subject or career - A common language to enable young people to understand the value of skills learnt and developed outside the classroom, for example, through volunteering in their communities - A way to measure skills gained and structure learning activities, for example through teamwork, presentations or scenarios - Supporting students to assess where they are now and where they want to be in the steps for each skill and planning activities to support their learning and development
Careers information, attending careers fairs, presenting at schools or to community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A common language to help learners see how their experiences are building transferable skills for the workplace - A way to break down the skills your organisation is looking for - An activity (such as a game or quiz) to highlight components of different essential skills
CV workshops and assisted job search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A way to map a candidate's existing skills to skills asked for in job descriptions - A language for describing a candidate's skills
Work placements and work taster days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework for measuring skills levels and the start and end of a placement - A language and examples for conversations about what's going well and where candidates can improve - A tool for self-development and reflection
Interview techniques training and improving English language skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework for measuring candidates' performance against different essential skills - A way to provide clear feedback and identify areas for improvement
Improving digital skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework for measuring the 'soft' components of digital skills development - A foundation for digital skills training



*With social mobility as an integral part of the future of their business, **KPMG** has adopted the Skills Builder Universal Framework across its outreach and employability programmes. It has found that the framework provides a structured and measurable way to build Essential Skills like creativity, problem solving and teamwork with young people from the UK's most disadvantaged areas. The eight skills also align with key competencies KPMG looks for in its apprentices and graduates. It is trialling the framework with their Level 3 Business Administration apprentices through a series of workshops to support apprentices to achieve their end-point assessment standards. One of the key benefits KPMG has seen so far is an emerging consensus around a common language for talking about Essential Skills, with potential to deliver real impact for young people both inside and outside the organisation.*

***bp** is passionate about supporting young people to develop the skills they need to enable them to succeed in the workplace. The Skills Builder Universal Framework neatly complements the skills that **bp** seeks in its employees, providing clarity on how to practise and develop them.*

***bp** is mapping its Educational Service (**bpES**) teaching resources against the framework, making it clear for teachers and careers leads which materials can be used to develop skills and particular skill levels. These resources are used in almost a third of primary schools and 55% of secondary schools across the UK. April saw over 20,000 downloads of **bpES** resources.*

*Through its existing team-based events such as the **bp** Ultimate STEM Challenge and outreach activities delivered in schools and on company premises (which are being run online, where possible, during the COVID-19 outbreak), **bp** provides opportunities for pupils to develop their skill levels across the full range of essential skills. It is important that young people have been able to practise these skills in a variety of ways before going on to demonstrate them when they enter the workplace.*

*Going forward, **bp** is looking to further integrate the framework in its **bpES** resources to support teachers to embed the essential skills across the wider curriculum. Through this work **bp** hopes to increase recognition of the importance of the essential skills and foster their development among young people early on. The clarity of the essential skills framework is helpful in contributing to build a happier, more collaborative and effective future talent pool.*





***The East London Business Alliance (ELBA)** is embedding the Skills Builder framework across the organisation, demonstrating the skills that both beneficiaries and volunteers can develop through BITC's programmes. Its Education programme will use the framework to help students identify and work towards development goals, providing a clear structure to aid progression. Job seekers accessing support through its Employment programme will use the framework to reflect on, develop and communicate their skills on their journey to finding work. For the beneficiaries of the charities supported through its Community programme, the essential skills will provide a common language and understanding of how to develop employability and life skills. Alongside this, the volunteers that support all areas of work will be encouraged to reflect on their skill development. By highlighting the key skills that different opportunities require, volunteers will be able to choose opportunities that align with their professional development goals and reflect on their learning and development.*



HIRE

Whether you're rapidly hiring new employees to meet community need, undertaking graduate recruitment or moving employees from one role or business unit into another, the Skills Builder Universal Framework can support your conversations with candidates and your measurement of their essential skills needed for the role.

Activity	How it can be used
Job advertisements, careers websites and application packs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A common language to help jobseekers understand how their skills apply your roles - A way to help candidates think through their skills and build them ahead of applications and interviews
Shortlisting, assessment days and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework to measure candidate applications and performance at interview against clearly communicated essential skills - A tool for providing feedback to candidates with measurable, tangible examples
Employment programmes for diverse or excluded groups and graduate programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A way to support candidates to assess their essential skills - A framework for setting goals and building essential skills throughout the process - A tool for providing feedback with measurable, tangible examples

Boots is are using the Skills Builder Framework to make its recruitment journey simpler, easier and quicker. Using simple language from the Framework about the essential skills required for a role, Boots has updated its Early Career Programme job adverts, interview packs for candidates and hiring managers, and adapted the language used when offering hints and tips for interviews.

Learning continues for all colleagues at Boots so the company has used the Skills Builder Universal Framework to design a range of bitesize learning aligned to core, advanced and mastery skills that will meet the needs of different levels of skill development.

Potential candidates, their parents, teachers and carers, and all colleagues can view more information about the partnership and the importance of these skills on the Apprenticeship Information Hub on www.boots.jobs.



*Skills Builder Partnership and **Clarion Housing Group** have been working together to support essential skills development in schools since 2016. Together, they have delivered inspirational student visits to Clarion's head office in London and widened the reach and impact of Skills Builder school programmes in Bromley and Merton, supporting over 2,000 primary students.*

Clarion Housing Group is now using the Universal Skills Framework to help develop essential skills within the business. The Universal Skills framework has been used to design a programme to help five new apprentices, who are working towards a Level 3 Apprenticeship in Business Administration, to explore their essential skills and pass their end-point assessment. Across a series of three online workshops, apprentices will explore how they use their essential skills in their work and take part in exercises to build the essential skills of teamwork and creativity.

The programme will also support apprentices, over a period of three months, to find opportunities for deliberate practice and reflection on all eight of the essential skills.



GROW

Employers say they need essential skills in their businesses but there is a mismatch between this desire and the action that business takes in order to ensure all individuals can recognise and develop their essential skills. Our 2019 survey showed that only 33% of employees were asked about their essential skills at appraisal and only 43% at their latest job interview. The Skills Builder Universal Framework supports employers to develop essential skills within their workforce.

Activity	How it can be used
Appraisals, development reviews and mid-career reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A framework for measuring essential skills and setting goals for attainment of desired steps - A common language for discussing behaviour and demonstrations of essential skills - A tool for self-reflection and self-directed learning
Training, secondments and stretch activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A way to measure essential skills gained through learning and development activities - A framework on which to build learning and development interventions - A way to structure signposting to learning and development opportunities
Employee volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A way to link volunteering with learning and development outcomes - A framework for measuring essential skills before, during and after volunteering - A tool for employees to choose volunteering activities based on which essential skills they'll develop
Reskilling in preparation for business changes and digital disruptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A foundation for technical and job-specific retraining - The 'soft skills' element of employee support for business transformation - Support for employees to map their existing skills and strengths to new career opportunities



***Tideway** was already using Skills Builder with young participants on its STEM Engagement Programme in schools and could see participants building skills like problem solving and aiming high within a short timeframe. Tideway was also trying to find a way to track development within its employees who were volunteering on the programme and the Skills Builder Universal Framework offered the perfect opportunity.*

Key volunteering ambassadors will use a skills matrix developed with the eight essential skills and 16 steps to map out their own skills development journey. Surveys at the beginning, middle and end of the volunteering will capture changes in skill levels. Tideway will use this to identify skills their volunteers may wish to be developed and match them to opportunities that support this.

They hope that by focusing on volunteering they'll be able to build the business case for other organisations for both the Skills Builder Universal Framework and employee volunteering.

***City Year UK** has integrated Skills Builder into its personal development planning cycle (PDP), starting with a baseline assessment at the beginning of the programme and several reviews throughout the year, using resources and tools from the Skills Builder Hub to support the development of the mentors.*

The mentors now recognise the importance of the eight essential skills and focus on developing each one to be the best it can be. This approach has been well received by the mentors. They are in the process of reviewing their PDP programme to integrate the new universal framework as part of their continuous improvement agenda and look forward to a long and fruitful partnership with the great team at Skills Builder.





City and Guilds has long since recognised the need to develop and measure a broader range of essential workplace skills that complement the specific technical skills required across all occupations. It remains committed to embedding these skills across its entire workforce and linking them to personal and career-progression opportunities. The Universal Framework provides an opportunity to consolidate that work and align with a common reference point to aid transferability and recognition of skills in multiple contexts and across multiple career pathways.

City and Guilds will be using the Universal Framework to review its current range of essential skills and digital credential programmes to enhance what it already offers its employees. It will also be integrated into the organisation's existing suite of employability skills accreditation programmes and linked into its wider digital credentials services which are available to all educational providers and businesses.

This initiative builds on the work it addressed in the report 'Learning to be Employable' and will, at long last, bring the clarity and consistency that wider adoption of these essential skills requires. This will form a vital link between periods of education and employment across a lifetime of learning and development. City and Guilds believes that such a focus has never been as important as it will be in the next few months and years.



Five steps to get started

1

Get buy-in

Make sure you have senior-level support for embedding essential skills in your business, as well as champions to take it forward operationally.

2

Decide what area of your business to make a start

Consider how essential skills and the Skills Builder Universal Framework can support you to achieve existing strategic goals within the business. Start small and build from there.

3

Embed and expand

Work across teams to communicate and implement changes across the business.

4

Know what success looks like

Establish where you are, where you want to be, and how you will know when you get there.

5

Spread the word

The success of a common language on skills depends on everybody using it. Talk about essential skills widely and share the Skills Builder Universal Framework with your partners and stakeholders.



SKILLS BUILDER TRAILBLAZERS

Boots UK

“At Boots, we understand the importance of developing essential skills for individuals to thrive in education and set them up for success when transitioning into employment. This has never been more important than now. We also understand the value of using simple language in our recruitment process every step of the way from our job adverts and the interview process, to empowering colleagues to continue to develop these skills throughout their career.”

Nathan Clements, HR Director, Boots UK

City and Guilds

“It’s often easier to define the technical skills needed for a particular role but those essential or workplace skills are often much less easy to define, yet no less important to support progression into work and throughout our working lives. The current crisis has shown just how vital it is to possess these skills, which include leadership, teamwork, problem solving and staying positive. The Skills Builder Universal Framework now provides the basis for a consistent, measurable and authoritative set of essential skills’ definitions for employers and educators to use and embed within learning and development programmes and we welcome the chance to get behind one common framework and language that can be adopted by businesses, educators and learners and their achievement recognised by all.”

Kirstie Donnelly, CEO, City and Guilds Group

City Year UK

“City Year UK is really pleased to be part of the Skills Builder trailblazer. As a leading youth and education charity, we recruit young adults to join our year-long leadership development programme and tackle educational inequality, while accelerating their own career prospects by becoming volunteer mentors and role models to pupils from disadvantaged communities. Key elements of our leadership development programme are the development of a personal growth mindset, professional skills and employability skills. I was keen to use a framework that had a track record, external credibility and that would add value to the programme. This is where Skills Builder came in.”

Simon Hepburn, UK Director of Programmes, City Year UK

Clarion Housing Group

“We develop hundreds of apprentices each year through our mentoring programme. We recognise that it is vital that our apprentices build essential skills in conjunction with technical ability. By partnering with Skills Builder, we are confident that our apprentices can become the well-rounded team members that we need.”

Alex Dean, Apprenticeship Development Manager, Clarion Housing Group





ELBA

"ELBA's role is to work with our business partners to promote social mobility, address inequality and reduce poverty. In doing this we work with pupils and students at all stages of education, job seekers, employees and residents to give them the essential skills they need so that they can get into good jobs and careers based on their competence, drive and abilities - not on their family background. The Skills Builder Universal Framework will take us to the next level in equipping people to succeed by giving them a language they can use to talk about their skills and a profile to show potential employers. It will help them see the progress they are making and to give them confidence."

Ian Parkes, CEO, ELBA

Jacobs

"As the world of work becomes seemingly more complex, as new roles are created with new terminology to follow, it is essential that we distil our needs back to clear requirements such as those in the Skills Builder Framework, particularly at the entry level. This allows us to attract a diverse and broad spectrum of talent. Ironically, as work complexity increases, the skills of the future are more likely to be 'softer'. The behaviours and attitudes that act as a foundation, allowing our people to be successful, are closely linked to the Skills Builder Framework."

Donald Morrison, SVP, General Manager, People & Places Solutions, EMEA, Jacobs

KPMG

"Social mobility - with the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives it brings - is an integral part of the future of business in the UK. At KPMG, we're clear that Essential Skills are key to building business resilience and supporting our communities to thrive. The Skills Builder Universal Framework offers a structured, measurable way to develop them and a common language we can all get behind."

Claire Warnes, Partner and Head of Education, Skills and Productivity, KPMG UK

Tideway

"The Skills Builder Universal Framework will provide our colleagues at Tideway with guidance on essential skills to support both their personal and professional development."

Darren White, Head of Sustainability, Tideway

Ricoh

"At Ricoh we know our strength is in our people. Recruiting and developing for essential skills, as set out in the Skills Builder Universal Framework, will help us ensure we build a more diverse workforce with the skills we need for the future."

Rebekah Wallis, Director of People and CR, Ricoh





- i BITC YouGov Poll on Essential Skills 2019
- ii Michelson, J (2020) *What's the surprising leadership lesson in the COVID-19 crisis*, Forbes
- iii Bakhshi, H., Downing, J.M., Osborne, M.A. & Schneider, P. (2017) *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*, London: Pearson and Nesta
- iv The Essential Skills Taskforce is made up of leading organisations from the education and employment sectors (Business in the Community, The Careers & Enterprise Company, CBI, CIPD, EY Foundation, Gatsby Foundation and the Skills Builder Partnership).
Ravenscroft, T.M. & Baker, L. (2019) *Towards a Universal Framework of Essential Skills*, London: Essential Skills Taskforce
- v Ravenscroft, T.M. (2017) *The Missing Piece: The Essential Skills that Education Forgot*, Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Publishing

