

Press release: Wednesday 20 March 2019

Employers say apprentices need help getting dressed for work

Apprentices need to work a lot harder on developing their professionalism at work compared to graduates, but there are little differences in key skills such as resilience, leadership and dealing with conflict.

[Institute of Student Employers \(ISE\)](#) asked its members about the 76,000 entry-level staff they have hired over the last three years, including graduates, apprentices and school leavers.

The ISE Student Development Survey revealed that employers are almost four times as likely to raise concerns about how apprentices dress for work in comparison to graduates.

Employers are also twice as likely to report that apprentices lack presentation, analysis, IT, writing, problem solving and interpersonal skills.

However, there are few differences between graduates and apprentices in relation to resilience, managing up, leadership, dealing with conflict, self-awareness, career management and emotional intelligence.

This may go some way to explain why more than half (56%) of employers have started to develop apprentices to do work that would have previously been done by graduates.

The importance of work experience in the early stages of a career was highlighted by the fact that 87% of employers agreed that students who had completed an internship had better skills than those who did not. However, there was much less impact from additional qualification with only 19% of respondents agreeing that students who came with a postgraduate degree had better skills than those who had not.

ISE chief executive Stephen Isherwood said: “Employers are getting a better handle on how to best develop apprentices who they recognise are less experienced than graduates. Apprentices need more basic training in areas like presentation skills and how to dress for work.

“Graduates generally arrive more polished with a better array of both technical and interpersonal skills and some cultural capital, but employers are less convinced that they outperform apprentices in more fundamental attributes. As apprentices acquire more skills and experience they may well catch up and outperform those who have been through the graduate route.”

Gemma Donnelly, Future Talent Manager at IG said: “Apprentices are a lot more work in terms of developing their professionalism and attitude. We have a lot more issues with things like time keeping, correctly reporting absences with apprentices and these take up time.”

Advice

It is important to recognise that this is not a question about who is the snappiest dresser. Employers are (generally) not fashion experts and so the question is not about whether you are bang on trend, but rather about whether you fit in, represent the company appropriately, look professional and send out the right messages. The problem for young people, or for people moving into a new environment is that a lot of what may seem obvious to the employer is completely new to the new employee.

The following tips are designed to help to address this kind of mismatch of expectation.

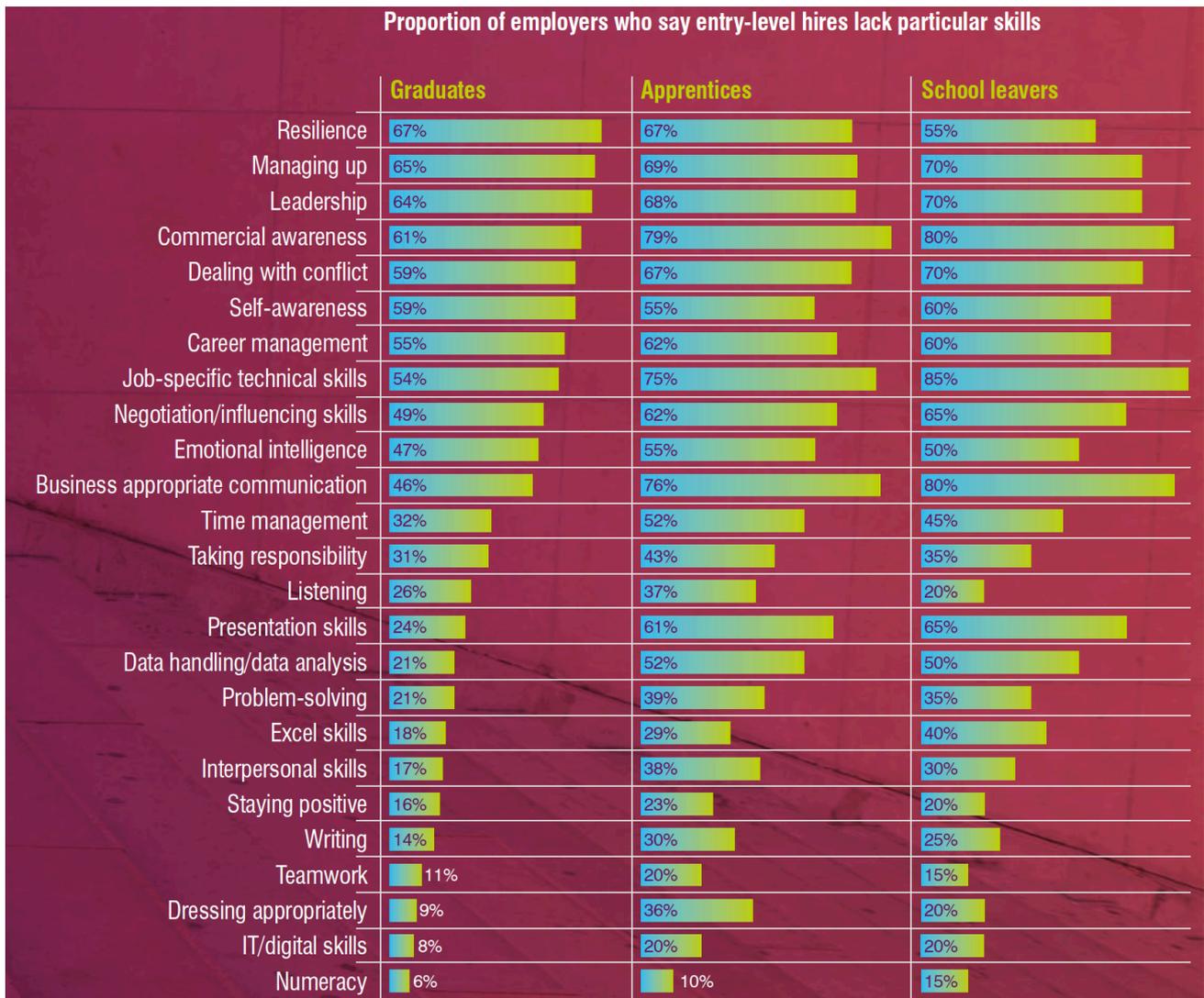
For students

1. **Remember that how you dress communicates something about who you are and how you want others to see you.** Spend time before you go to work thinking about how you are dressed and what messages that you are projecting.
2. **Look at how other people in your workplace dress.** Workplaces are full of unspoken rules, sometimes you can only figure them out by looking at how other people dress and behave.
3. **Start more conservatively; you can always push the boundaries later on.** Dressing too boringly is rarely a problem. As you understand what is expected you will be able to work out where you can show off more of your personality without being seen as outrageous.
4. **Ask for feedback.** Find someone you trust, and ideally whose sense of style you admire. Ask them for their feedback and advice.
5. **Don't do anything that you feel uncomfortable doing.** Not all employers have appropriate or legitimate dress codes. If you feel that you are being asked to wear something that makes you uncomfortable, or which you think is discriminatory, be prepared to speak up or talk to human resources.

For employers

1. **Be transparent.** If it is important that your employees dress a certain way then make sure that you tell them. Something that seems obvious to you, may not be obvious to someone from a different background or generation. It may even be helpful to have a formal dress code.
2. **Give constructive feedback.** If you are not happy with the way that someone is dressing in your firm, try and give them supportive, developmental feedback and explain why this matters to you.
3. **Lead by example.** The CEO and senior management team help to define the culture of an organisation. More junior staff will look at how you dress and draw conclusions from it. It generally isn't good for there to be one rule for you and another one for the rest of the organisation.
4. **Think carefully about how dress contributes to your culture.** Many firms have a 'suit and tie' culture by default. Is that the culture you want to create and the image that you want to portray? Many highly successful firms have moved away from this, so this may be something that you should consider.
5. **Be careful.** How people dress is important to them and their identity. It is also often bound up with equality strands (age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability etc.). If you make rules, give advice and discipline staff about how they dress you need to be sure that you have good reasons for what you are doing and that you are aware of unconscious bias.

Ends



Media enquiries, preview copy of the report and interviews:

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Notes to editors

ISE Student Development Survey 2019

ISE Student Development Survey report focuses on how firms support entry-level hires to develop their skills and careers in the first few years of employment. It reports on a survey of 156 employer ISE members conducted between November 2018 and January 2019. The survey includes detailed data on the 76,000 entry-level hires that respondents have brought into their businesses over the last three years. This includes graduates, apprentices and school leavers.

Institute of Student Employers

The Institute of Student Employers (ISE), [formerly the Association of Graduate Recruiters \(AGR\)](#), is an independent, not-for-profit member organisation that was established in 1968.

As the UK's leading independent voice for student employers, the ISE's vision is that every businesses success is maximised by full access to student talent.

The ISE achieves this by bringing together employers, the education sector and supplier partners, providing leadership and support in all aspects of student recruitment and development.

ISE activities include:

- Promoting excellence and innovation in the resourcing, assessment and development of emerging talent including school leavers, apprentices and graduates
- Providing expert information and insight to ISE member organisations, creating engaged communities for professional networking and sharing of best practice
- Delivering comprehensive research on a range of issues affecting graduate, intern and apprenticeship recruitment and development, including current and future trends and benchmarking data
- Investing in the professional development of members to enhance their skills and knowledge, maximising their career opportunities within the profession
- Influencing key policy areas affecting student employment and the education sector
- Building a strong professional organisation with the right structure and team capabilities to deliver the services and support members require to fulfil their objectives

For further information:

- www.ise.org.uk
- Follow us @IoSEorg
- Connect with us on [LinkedIn/company/Institute of Student Employers](https://www.linkedin.com/company/institute-of-student-employers/)