

Understanding Key Competences for Employability
INTERNATIONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS REPORT

England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Turkey,

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1. INTRODUCTION

The EMPLOY International Needs Analysis Report aims to share and analyse findings from desk and field research conducted in Spain, England, The Netherlands, Poland, Italy, and Turkey as to the key transversal competences necessary for jobseekers to gain employment in the modern workplace.

The report is divided into four sections. There is a brief description of the project followed by general findings from desk research carried out in the partner countries. Combined data from recent field research conducted in partner countries are then presented in detail and conclusions and recommendations made.

1.1. The EMPLOY Project

The aim of the EMPLOY project is to improve the employability of job applicants by addressing competence development. Using findings from existing research and the EMPLOY survey carried out in ITALY, the NETHERLANDS, POLAND, SPAIN, TURKEY and the UK as to the key competences most required by employers, the EMPLOY partners will create a Methodology based on DESIGN THINKING principles and LIFE Skills¹, providing creative activities to enable targets to plan, practice and present a confident and practical competence portfolio to future employers in their local area or overseas. The methodology created will help students and job seekers improve their chances of gaining employment. A training workshop will be available for all training staff or careers agents who wish to implement the Methodology.

As a collateral part of the project, research will be carried out on the credit allocation systems in vocational education training (VET) in each partner country. Attempts will be made to allocate EQF type credits to competences gained in the future project program, further promoting the capacity of competing for jobs internationally.

For further information, visit the website: <http://www.employ-project.com/>

¹ The Employ Project is transferring relevant parts of the philosophy and activities from DESIGN THINKING (see: <http://designthinking.ideo.com/>) and the Life Skills Leonardo TOI Project (see <http://www.life-2.eu/>)

2. Desk Research: Findings Gathered from Existing Research in IT, NL, PL, ESP, TR, UK

The 21st Century Labour Market and Employer Needs:

In recent years, there has been enormous and ever faster transmission of information and innovations all over the world. Globalization has led to many changes in the labour market and companies. Many companies have become globalized and have an international component that requires workers to be able to adjust to changes and to follow the new advances in their area. In all National Needs Analysis Reports it was found that *job applicants, especially young job seekers, should have a set of competences besides their technical knowledge*. They need technical knowledge and competence as well as “*understanding of a company’s organization, capacity for self learning, cooperative and entrepreneurial attitudes, predisposition to learning new skills, adaptability and conflict resolution skills ...*”² Employers are universally looking for applicants who are flexible, adaptable, good at working in teams and able to access information.

This is borne out by Polish sources. In a recent article published by TRECO³, the author stresses that getting a job depends 70% on one’s professional skills, while as much as 30% depends on so called soft skills. Interestingly, the same author affirms that retaining a job depends on these soft or interpersonal skills and companies are investing in training courses for staff in these areas.

The National Needs Analysis Reports also highlight that youth unemployment rates are increasing all over Europe, dramatically in some countries. The OECD 2010 figures report that young people have been badly affected by the recent economic crisis with 15 million young people (15-24 year olds) in the OECD area unemployed in 2010⁴. Figures have risen to 50% of young people in Spain in 2012. With the transition from education to work ever more difficult the same report stresses the need for young people to gain in skills and work experience.

² See Tirado, V. (2010) Cuaderno de Pedagogía No. 370 (July 2010) p. 29. Referenced in the National Needs Analysis Report Spain

³ See Popyt na kwalifikacje i umiejetnosci zawodowe na wojewódzkim rynku pracy: “More than Qualifications. Soft Skills” (2012)

⁴ Scarpetta, S. Sonnet, A. And Manfredi, T. (2010) OECD Social, Employment and Migration Papers, no. 106. Rising Youth Unemployment During the Crisis: How to Prevent Negative Long-term Consequences on a Generation? Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/employment/youthforum/44986030.pdf>

In Italy, recent reports (Istud and ISFOL)⁵ attempt to address this difficulty for young people by outlining the core and personal skills which are necessary to improve youth employability. These reports state that apart from core I.T., media and language skills, employers seek workers who are *open minded, ethical, good team workers, loyal and committed, adaptable and with good social skills*. The same reports indicate that employers perceive young job seekers to be currently lacking adequate competence in English, social abilities, planning, motivation, pragmatism and pro-activity.

Employers, educationalists and HR agencies are also increasingly clear as to what competences a successful candidate should ideally have for the job market. Iberestudios.com, a Spanish platform for learning and knowledge sharing in post obligatory education, they list that the most wanted key competences by companies are team work, flexibility, decision making capacity, entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to work under pressure.⁶ A Turkish website for jobseekers, kariyer.net, lists the need for job seekers to have good foreign language skill, experience, to be active and enterprising, ability to learn new skills, problem solving, discipline, cooperation and technical knowledge. For service sector jobs empathy, a good appearance, commitment responsibility and respect are listed.⁷

In the Netherlands, the KBB Competentiemodel for Education⁸ has outlined 25 competences to be developed by students based on studies of 1,000 jobs worldwide. All studies are now based on the progressive acquisition of these competences. They are grouped into 7 areas:

- Leadership and Decision making
- Supporting and Collaborating
- Interacting, influencing and presenting
- Analysing and Interpreting
- Organizing and Executing

⁵ Fondazione Istud (2012) "Giovani e Lavoro: dall'Università al mondo, I giovani nelle aziende senza confini", Milano

ISFOL (2012) "I Giovani che non lavorano e non studiano. I numeri, i percorsi e la ragioni", Studi per il Consiglio, No. 9/2012, Firenze.

⁶ <http://noticias.iberestudios.com/las-habilidades-y-competencias-mas-buscadas-por-las-empresas/>

⁷ <http://www.kariyer.net/website/index.aspx>

⁸ Available in Dutch at: <http://www.kwalificatiesmbo.nl/competenties.html>. The Model has been translated in the Dutch National Needs Analysis Report available on the Employ website: www.employ-project.com

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- Adapting and Coping
- Enterprising and Performing

All reports point to the conclusion that jobseekers need to be more competitive and better prepared for the world or work. They need to gain experience and demonstrate key non technical competences as well as excellent technical and academic skill. The Delors report highlighted more than a decade ago that educators should promote this dual development more consciously and deliberately.⁹

The transversal competences most sought after could be described in two larger groups: **information and organisational based competence** and **personal or psycho-social skills**. In terms of information-based competences, young people are expected to have *competence in at least one foreign language, have some experience in the field, I.T. skills and knowledge of new media and the ability to organize and plan*. The reports mention that young people or job seekers should also have good *learning skills in order to increase their knowledge throughout their working life and constantly update skills*.

In terms of personal characteristics, employers are looking for *open-minded, adaptable, autonomous, enthusiastic, creative, sociable, cooperative people who show initiative, commitment and respect for the company and co workers*. Another important competence, suggested by university research in Turkey, is the ability to *deal with information in an accurate and efficient way*. The reports mention that young people or job seekers should know how to *access, manage, and adapt information*, and should be *open to learning in order to increase their knowledge, keep learning throughout their work life and constantly update skills*.

⁹ Delors Report (1999) "Learning, The Treasure Within" – Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century.

3. The EMPLOY SURVEY (2012-2013)

The EMPLOY survey was carried out with a minimum of 20 employers in key sectors in each partner region between December 2012 and February 2013. Many of the surveys were conducted as personal interviews from which a direct insight was gained. The competences most valued by employers from the different countries and different sectors are compared below.

3.1 SECTORS

Figure 1 presents the sectors surveyed. In order to be able to compare the sectors across countries, 7 main sectors have been defined: Education (public or private schools), Science and Research (research institutions on neuroscience, biotechnology, or nanotechnology), Health (hospitals, or health care institutions), Business & Trading (banking, insurance or retail trade), Telecommunications (IT software & consultancy), Construction (building and construction companies), and the Private Sector (travel, sports, culture, translation offices, security services, hairdressing, catering, etc.)

Table 1: Sectors Surveyed

Sectors	ESP	UK	PL	NL	IT	TR
Education	1	3	3	2	2	7
Science & Research	10					
Health	1		2	1		3
Business & Trading		2	11	7	2	
Telecommunications	7	3	3		4	
Construction		2			1	3
Private	13	12	12	10	11	5
Total	34	22	31	20	20	20

3.2 COMPETENCE RATING

The first section of the National Needs Analysis Survey asked employers or HR managers to rate (from 1 - 5) 13 provided key competences that would be important for them while hiring a job applicant. The average response to the individual competences in each country is provided in Figure 2.

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Figure 2: Averages of Key Competences

Skills	ESP	UK	PL	NL	IT	TR
Leadership	3,55	1,95	2,58	2,5	2,75	4
Discipline	3,44	3,36	4,45	4,1	4,5	4,65
Strong communication skills	3,76	4,09	4,61	4,3	4,05	4,5
Time management	4	4,09	4,25	3,8	3,85	4,1
Finding and managing information	3,94	3,09	4,29	3,4	3,35	4,25
Networking skills	3,67	2,63	4,09	3,2	2,95	4
Problem-Solving	4,26	3,63	4,41	4,1	4,45	4,5
Learning to learn	4,44	3,45	4,45	3,5	4,45	4,15
Independence	3,76	2,81	3,35	3,8	3,15	3,5
Positive attitude	4,82	4,36	4,41	4,6	4,7	4,3
Ability to work under pressure	4,20	3,95	4,29	4,1	4	4,5
Entrepreneurial attitude	3,91	2,45	3,54	2,7	1,7	4
Flexibility	4,23	4,13	4,25	4,2	4,1	3,65

Figure 2 shows that Positive Attitude, Learning to Learn, Problem Solving, Communication skills, Ability to work under Pressure and Flexibility are highly demanded throughout all the regions surveyed. Time Management ability and Discipline are also widely demanded.

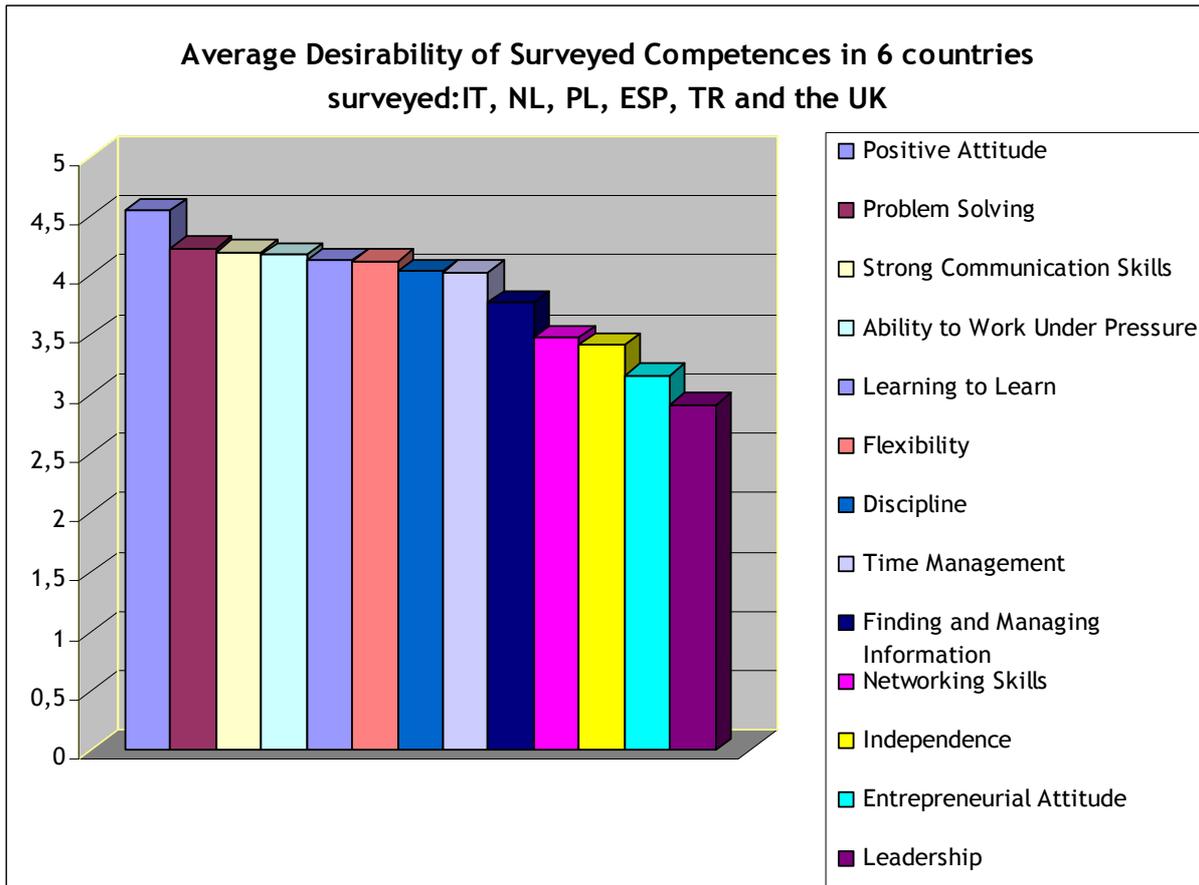
The average from the 6 partner countries is presented in figure 3 and visually in the graph in Figure 4, showing the Europe wide competences which were most universally sought after by those surveyed.

Figure 3: Averages of Competences from Combined Data

	Competences	Combined Average
1	Positive Attitude	4,55
2	Problem Solving	4,23
3	Strong Communication Skills	4,20
4	Ability to Work Under Pressure	4,18
5	Learning to Learn	4,13
6	Flexibility	4,12
7	Discipline	4,04
8	Time Management	4,03
9	Finding and Managing Information	3,77
10	Networking Skills	3,48
11	Independence	3,42
12	Entrepreneurial Attitude	3,16
13	Leadership	2,91

Figure 4: Graph - Desirability of surveyed competences at EU level.

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Figure 5 details the top 5 most desired competences from each National Needs Analysis.

Figure 5: Top 5 Ranking Competences across Countries

	ESP	UK	PL	NL	IT	TR
1	Positive attitude	Positive attitude	Strong Communication Skills	Positive attitude	Positive attitude	Discipline
2	Learning to learn	Flexibility	Discipline	Strong communication skills	Discipline	Problem Solving
3	Problem Solving	Strong communication skills	Learning to learn	Flexibility	Problem Solving	Ability to work under pressure
4	Flexibility	Time management	Problem Solving	Discipline	Learning to learn	Strong communication skills
5	Ability to work under pressure	Ability to work under pressure	Positive attitude	Problem Solving	Flexibility	Positive attitude

It is immediately evident that most of the top 5 competences are mentioned consistently in the different countries. POSITIVE ATTITUDE is the Top competence required by the employers in Spain, UK, the Netherlands and Italy. Although positive attitude is not at the top of the list in Poland and Turkey, this competence is listed among the top 5 most important competences. The other two most important competences are STRONG COMMUNICATION SKILLS and DISCIPLINE in Poland and Turkey respectively and they are ranked in the Top 5 by 4 of the other countries. PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS are considered so essential that most of the employers in various countries demand it. FLEXIBILITY, placed in different rankings in the Top 5 list, is also among the most mentioned competences. It is rated as important by 4 of the partner countries. ABILITY TO WORK UNDER STRESS and LEARNING TO LEARN are placed 3 times in the Top 5 list preceding the TIME MANAGEMENT skills, which is in the Top 5 list only once, in the English desk research.

3.3 EMPLOYERS' RESPONSES

Employers were further asked to list freely the top five competences they most desire from job candidates in their companies. The National Reports provide invaluable lists of these competences and are a useful resource for future research and educational policy makers. Some employers also added other comments.

These lists of individual competences and comments have been grouped into three grouped lists: Information Management, Work Skills/Attitudes and Personal/Psycho-Social Skills or values (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Meta-competences and Skills sought by Employers

Information Management	Work Skills	Psycho-Social Personal Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to find and manage information • Openness to share knowledge with others • Openness to ask questions/consult experienced workers • Ability to learn from mistakes • Ability to follow procedures, rules, regulations and developments in the field • Ability and openness to keep updated and learning skills • Understanding that formal education is only the beginning of learning • Competence in a foreign language • Knowledge of new media • Literacy and numerical skills • Accuracy • Technical skills at necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to work well in a team • Collaboration • Good communication/ presentation skills • Discipline • Attention to detail • Efficiency • Initiative • Pro-activity • Results oriented • Commitment • Perseverance/ persistence • Ability to work under pressure/ stress management • Time management/ punctuality/ deadlines • Customer focus • Organization skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Emotional Intelligence • Conscientiousness • Discretion • Trustworthiness Honesty • Openness • Flexibility/Adaptability • Creativity/ imagination • Good mannered (humble, kind courteous ...) • Autonomous • Responsibility/ • Committed • Passionate, enthusiastic • Good-observer, Curious • Assertiveness • Good Communication, self-

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level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning, Ability to prioritize • Networking • Ethics & values • Interaction with colleagues, other departments etc. • Understanding and contributing to company spirit and values • Entrepreneurial attitude/ Contribution to innovation • Leadership • Problem solving skills • Intercultural competence • Ability to think ahead, global vision • Ability to think analytically, strategically • Willingness 	<p>expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience • Resilience • Desire for self-improvement • Openness to innovation • Good appearance • Motivation, self-motivation • Maturity • Sociable • Self- confidence • Positive attitude
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Irrespective of the sector, the same competences, skills and attitudes were mentioned in different ways but consistently in the 6 National Surveys carried out.

Employers Comments

Written comments made by employers from each country included the following:

- “The young person should also have the attitude where they are **willing to listen and learn**” and show a “**genuine interest and enthusiasm and willingness to learn.**” **ENGLAND**

- *“Young people should be taught that, in order to be competitive, nowadays one can never stop learning. One of the fundamental attitudes at work is **being active and showing interest in what one is doing**. The willingness to learn comes together with the possibility to make errors but this is never seen as a serious problem by employers who consider the employee’s **humility** and his capacity to **ask for help** when necessary as key aspects of a new worker”* **ITALY**
- Young jobseekers need to:
*“Make sure they understand the job and the competences required, in order to be able to perform well in it.
“Be prepared for a **flexible** and international working life.”
“Be **self confident**.”* **NETHERLANDS**
- *“Young people should be prepared to **adapt to frequent changes** at work and be able to implement them instantly, so **learning to learn** is a top priority here.”
“Young adults lack **social skills**. They should be taught **independence, creativity, finding and managing information**, so that they will be able to handle difficult situations both in group and individually. They need training in **assertiveness**”* **POLAND**
- *“Young people and jobseekers should train **collaboration and working in teams**”
“They need to **accept responsibility and integrate setbacks**”
“An employee should **have resilience, enthusiasm, flexibility, and curiosity**; be willing to learn and show respect”* **SPAIN**

4. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

As the field analysis results obtained from the partner countries indicate, the most important competence required by employers is **Positive Attitude**. Other competences strongly demanded are **Strong Communication Skills, Ability to Work under Pressure, Flexibility, Learning Skills, Problem Solving and Time Management**. Job seekers need to identify their competence in these areas especially and develop the competences they may be lacking. Employers and HR managers are also looking for *highly motivated* and *enthusiastic* people with *good social skills*. For job seekers to gain employment in the modern and competitive job market it is essential to demonstrate a *positive attitude* and above all else *willingness* to learn and collaborate.

Employers need workers with excellent *information management* and *foreign language or communication skills*. They also however, need people who have a good level of personal and *interpersonal management*. Companies desire employees who can *learn* but most importantly who are *open to learning* and *taking responsibility*; who are *enthusiastic* and *committed* to the goals of the company and the needs of clients or co workers. *Problem solving ability* and being able to *handle pressure* are also related to being *adaptable* and *flexible* to the many situations which arise in life as well as the workplace. Therefore a relevant degree of *maturity* (depending on the age of the applicant) is demanded and the capacity to have reflected on ones goals and development. Someone who desires to *grow* and *develop personally* is an asset to the company.

A person acquires these competences progressively throughout life; the process is never ending. However, it could be recommended that young graduates or job seekers who need to get on the job ladder should receive some specific training and support towards recognizing which are the necessary competences they should have and planning how to develop them. Study, careers or work preparation courses should provide activities whereby jobseekers can reflect on what their current level of competence is and how they can work towards gaining the necessary competences to meet employer needs.

The Employ Methodology will seek to address the needs presented in this report by providing activities that allow jobseekers to design, develop and demonstrate the competences required in the modern workplace, taking into account the specific sector a jobseeker wishes to enter.

For full details of all research carried out in Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK, the National Needs Analysis Reports can be found and downloaded from the Employ website: www.employ-project.com

5. References

Delors Report (1999) “Learning, The Treasure Within” - Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century.

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