



Research Report

Young people's work readiness and the construction industry

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1 Executive summary

The research

This study focuses on the meaning of work readiness for construction sector employers, the extent to which their expectations in respect of work readiness are met, and on possible methods by which the supply of work ready young people into the industry can be increased.

The study began with a preliminary literature review to provide a context for the study in terms of previous investigations of work readiness, and of the closely related concept of employability, and to guide the design of the study and its research instruments.

In addition, findings for the construction industry from the Employer Perspectives Survey (a national survey of employers sponsored by the Department for Education independently of this research) on issues related to work readiness were analysed.

This was followed by a telephone survey of a structured sample of 304 industry employers, an online survey of 258 young people (either studying construction subjects in Further or Higher Education or newly recruited into the industry), and in-depth interviews with smaller samples of employers and young people.

Literature review

The literature review makes the following points:

- Work readiness and employability are closely related and are often intermingled in the literature.
- The main difference is that employability has a focus not just on entry to a first job but also on performance in jobs and on effectiveness in securing new jobs; whereas work readiness is most usually considered in terms of the preparedness for work of those who have not worked, that is, primarily, young people – or those, such as the long term unemployed or 'returners' to the labour market, who have not worked for some time.
- Consideration of work readiness requires attention to a series of inter-related factors:
 - The knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) of individuals.
 - The social and personal circumstances which may limit the application of those KSAs in job search.
 - The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of generic or transferable or foundational characteristics which confer *general* work readiness – that is, readiness for 'the world of work'.

- The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of specific characteristics demanded by *particular* job roles or *particular* employers.
 - The nature and demands of particular jobs.
 - The requirements set by employers which may be influenced by the idiosyncratic perspectives and values of particular employers (or of particular managers or recruiters within the employer organisation) and by structural characteristics such as the size and sector of recruiting organisations.
 - External forces on the employer at particular points in time, particularly the condition of the local labour market in so far as it offers employers a wider or narrower choice of recruits.
- The actual skills and attributes which constitute generic 'work readiness' (beyond the specific job-relevant skills and qualifications which employers may require) are frequently listed by varied contributors, including commercial websites offering guidance to young people or offering work readiness assessment tools, by varied industry or voluntary organisations, by government agencies, and by academic researchers.
 - The lists, which are broadly similar whether they concern 'work readiness' or 'employability', are of varying length and specificity and use varied language to describe similar items.
 - The lists appear to be somewhat arbitrary in their construction but mainly comprise a mix of generic or soft skills such as communication or team working skills, personal qualities such as integrity or perseverance, and basic competences in literacy, numeracy, and use of IT, though many other items appear with less frequency in longer lists or in those which break 'headline' skills into more specific items.
 - The literature seldom contains guidance as to what level of competence in each of the skills or attributes is required or of which skills or attributes have priority over others in particular contexts.
 - The lists are seldom supported by objective evidence that that possession of the listed skills, in combination or as individual items, is associated with greater likelihood of obtaining sustainable employment.
 - Rather, their validation is mainly that 'this is what employers say they want' or, implicitly, that common sense argues for their importance.
 - There is much activity of very varied kinds and depth to build young people's work readiness in educational institutions at all levels but little consistency as to this activity between institutions in the sense that no systematic 'work readiness curriculum', to be applied at different stages of education using similar pedagogical techniques and learning experiences, is in place.

- Evidence as to the value and effectiveness of activity to improve young people's work readiness is equivocal. Thus, the sheer volume of activity argues for its likely impact but anecdotal and some survey evidence suggests that many young job applicants do not have the generic or soft skills which employers would like them to have.
- Although the evidence on the effectiveness of work readiness development in educational settings is somewhat unclear, there is wide consensus that work experience, providing it offers a genuine facsimile of the real world of work, is the most effective means of preparing young people for that world.

Analysis of the Employer Perspectives Survey

This analysis showed:

- Construction employers place less value in recruitment than other employers on academic qualifications and more value than other employers on vocational qualifications and work experience
- Construction employers are nearly twice as likely to say that work experience has at least significant value in recruitment than to say the same of academic qualifications
- Construction employers frequently, and more frequently than other employers, use informal recruitment methods. Thus, the 'soft skills' and practical elements of work readiness may be given more prominence by construction companies than the possession of qualifications to which formal application methods, at initial application stages, may give more weight
- Construction employers find that many of their young recruits are poorly prepared for work. This judgement applies to nearly half (49%) of school leavers, to 29% of FE leavers, and to 18% of university leavers.
- More employers in construction than in other sectors viewed their young recruits, from all stages of education, as poorly prepared.
- However, while construction employers value work experience more than other employers, they are less likely to offer work experience opportunities to young people in education.
- Very few construction employers offer 'work inspiration' activities while engaging with educational institutions

The employer survey for this research

This survey shows the following:

- Over 4 in 10 construction businesses had recruited a young person aged 24 or under in the 2 years prior to the survey.

- Two-thirds of these had recruited a school or FE college leaver, around 1 in 8 had recruited a university graduate, and one-third had recruited someone who was previously employed in another industry.
- Where a young person was recruited this was most often because the applicant looked suitable and because via training, the skill stock of the business could be increased.
- Where young people were not recruited this was most often because the employer doubted young people's motivations towards work, because the business lacked the time or resources to train, or because of health and safety concerns.
- Spontaneously, employers most often mentioned commitment, and willingness to learn and work hard as the characteristics which applicants should have.
- Offered a list of work-readiness characteristics, employers most frequently rated as being vital those of willingness to accept instruction, trustworthiness, attendance and punctuality, common sense, and willingness to work hard. Possession of qualifications was least often reported as being vital.
- A majority of employers think that school and FE leavers are poorly prepared for work.
- The main reason for this is that many employers see school and FE leavers as unable to manage time effectively, lacking common sense, and as unable to attend work regularly or punctually.
- Only a minority of employers think university leavers are poorly prepared for work.
- This minority most often see the problems as being graduates' lack of common sense, poor problem-solving capability, inflexibility, and their failure to work hard enough
- More than 1 in 4 employers (and a much higher proportion of large employers) provide work experience for young people at school and or in further or higher education.
- They do so most frequently to give experience to young people or because they are asked to by an institution or as a favour to a friend or relative. However, in-depth interviews suggest that this experience is often very short in duration.
- Over 90% of these businesses believe that the work experience improved the work readiness of the young people concerned.
- If they don't offer work experience, it is most often because of health and safety barriers, because the company is too small or because no one has asked them to supply work experience.
- Only a minority of employers believed that schools do a good job of preparing young people for work but majorities believe this of FE Colleges and Universities.

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- At all educational levels, employers who had actually recruited young people were more positive about how young people had been prepared for work than employers who had not.
- Where employers see educational institutions as poor at building work readiness it is most often because of a focus on theory and academic study at the expense of vocational focus, because of insufficient focus on learners' personal skills and attributes, and, in the FE College case, because courses are frequently at too low a level and/or don't sufficiently replicate on-site experiences.

The survey of young people

- Young people studying towards occupations in construction or newly working in construction had often had work experience, often, in the industry itself, and had frequently accessed formal and informal sources of information on the sector before entry to their course or before applying for a job in the industry.
- All groups of young people, FE and He students and young workers, believed a variety of personal characteristics and attitudes were more important to employers than possession of formal qualifications
- Young people were generally confident of their work readiness, giving themselves 'quite good' or, more frequently, 'excellent or very good' ratings on a range of work readiness characteristics
- Most young people studying for a construction-related qualification expected to enter the industry on completion of their course and were confident that they would get the job they wanted.

A comparison of employer and young people survey findings

- Employers have views on aspects on work readiness which distinguish important aspects from less important ones with greater clarity than this the case young people
- There is a statistical congruence between employers' and young peoples' views on which aspects of work readiness are most and least important, but this mainly derives from the fact that both employers and young people place a group of aspects (mainly related to the possession of qualification) as a lower priority.
- Above that, there is only very limited agreement between employers and young people (and between different groups of young people) as to the relative importance of the different characteristics which make up 'work readiness'.

Conclusions

From this research it is concluded that:

- Work readiness, in the sense of possession of a much broader set of attributes, than possession simply of technical skills and/or qualifications is important to employers. Essentially, the deal-breaker for entry to the construction industry is often not technical skills or knowledge but how well the attitudes, personal and social skills, and ambitions of young people coincide with those which employers require.
- However, these latter qualities are often found by employers to be limited or absent in the young people who seek entry to the industry.
- In more detail, the attributes which employers most frequently identify as vital to work readiness are:
 - Ability to accept instructions and respond well to supervision
 - Being dependable and trustworthy
 - Being ready to recognise that good attendance at work and punctuality are important
 - General common sense
 - Being hard working and job-focussed
 - The ability to get on well and appropriately with customers
 - The ability to work effectively in teams with colleagues
- Young people broadly recognise that employers in this industry frequently do not regard possession of qualifications as an essential pre-requisite for entry to the industry and that employers are ready to accept and then train people who have the required mindset and personal qualities even if their qualifications are limited.
- However, young people do not always understand the full significance of ‘non-technical’ attributes to employers, putting priorities among them in a different order and, in many cases, they see particular attributes as much less important than employers see them. Young people may also often over-estimate their level of work readiness in respect of these attributes if employer requirements are taken as the benchmark.
- Employers locate the causes of lack of work readiness in the educational system and, more generally, in family, community, or national cultures.
- The particular problems within education are believed by employers to be that, in respect of graduates, there are problems with university courses – they are too theoretical, don’t match the needs of the industry – and, more generally, universities don’t spend enough time developing the personal qualities of students. In respect of Further Education, a larger minority of employers believe

that problems include the failure of courses to replicate site conditions, lack of attention to learners' personal development, courses at too low a level, and courses directed too much at theoretical knowledge and too little at the development of practical skills.

- However, the most frequent concern is with secondary school education. The main problems perceived by employers are a focus on academic learning at the expense of pupils' development of personal skills and an in-built bias against vocational skills and occupations.
- Thus, employers believe that the clearest solution to work readiness limitations lies in re-balancing academic and vocational elements in educational institutions in favour of the latter, reinforced, at all levels, including in Further and Higher Education, by the extension of practical elements in construction-related courses and by the more general provision of genuine and substantial work experiences.
- However. It is suggested that the industry, too, needs to act. Firstly, by giving greater value to technical qualifications both to meet its own needs as it moves towards the more widespread adoption of sophisticated inputs and processes and to attract more able young people. And, secondly, by improving its comparatively weak performance in the volume and quality of the work experience opportunities it offers.

2 Introduction

1. Work readiness, very broadly, the possession of the attributes necessary to enter a job with a reasonable prospect of performing the job to an acceptable initial standard – has been a growing concern in the economy as a whole but especially in the construction industry. Many industry employers have anecdotally expressed concern that many young people seeking jobs and a career in the industry are not job ready.
2. However, what ‘work readiness’ actually means in practice and in detail is not wholly clear and there is, therefore, no widely agreed definition of what knowledge, skills and attributes can reasonably be expected of ‘day one’ entrants.
3. This research was commissioned to bring more clarity on the issue by questioning a sufficient number of employers to generate, as far as possible, a consensual viewpoint. In addition, the research also investigates how far young people with an interest in working in the sector are aware of what employers expect.
4. The research had a number of stages:
 - First, a review of previously published literature on work readiness was undertaken. This review was also supported by an analysis, focussed on the construction sector, of responses to a national survey (the Employer Perspectives Survey) which was latterly funded by UKCES (the United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills). This preliminary work was used to ensure that the research would avoid replicating previous work but would also build on that previous work, particularly by informing the design of the questionnaires and discussion guides which would be used in the following research stages.
 - Second, two surveys were undertaken, both on work readiness themes. The first of these was a telephone survey of a structured sample of 304 employers spread across all sub-sectors and size sub-groups of the construction industry and across England, Scotland, and Wales. The second was an online survey of 258 young people, either studying in the second and third years of construction-related courses in Further or Higher Education or in their first 2 years of employment in the industry.
 - As a third stage, smaller samples of construction industry employers and young people were interviewed in depth on work readiness issues in a less structured interview than was possible in the larger telephone survey above.
5. The findings of this research work are reported in a series of chapters which follow, whilst a final chapter discusses those findings and draws conclusions.

3 Literature review

Introduction

6. As noted in the introductory chapter of this report, the first input to the research programme is a brief literature review.
7. This review examines a variety of published reports, academic papers, and web material on the theme of work readiness; especially, in so far as material is available, on the concept of work readiness as it applies to the UK construction industry.
8. The main purpose of the review is to assist the design of questionnaires and discussion guides for use in later, primary research, stages of the study by ensuring that the conceptualisation of work readiness which underlies that design is well-informed by previous thinking on the subject.
9. The review was undertaken by internet search, mainly using the search terms 'work readiness', 'employability', and 'soft skills' either generically or more specifically in connection with 'construction industry'.
10. In presenting the review, for simplicity, referencing is by numbers in the text which correspond to numbered sources in the appendix. This approach avoids extensive use of footnotes, particularly when several or many references are made to the same source.

Defining work readiness

11. A first objective of the research was to observe definitions of work readiness in order to gain a picture of the general scope of the term and of what it represents.
12. Formal or clear cut definitions of work readiness are surprisingly thin on the ground. ACT (a not-for-profit American organisation assisting American young people to make the transition into work) offers:

A "work ready" individual possesses the foundational skills needed to be minimally qualified for a specific occupation as determined through a job analysis or occupational profile. (35)
13. Definition of work readiness also meets slightly different terminology. For example, the Work Centre (a Canadian community organisation helping people into work) uses the term 'job readiness' in a very similar way:

Job readiness has a different definition for each job. Generally Job Readiness is based on what employers are looking for – are you ready for the kind of job you are looking for, and would an employer agree with this decision? (40)
14. And a private consultant suggests that:

Employment readiness is defined as being able, with little or no outside help, to find, acquire, and keep an appropriate job as well as to be able to manage transitions to new jobs as needed. (35)
15. These simple assertive statements raise two key points.

16. The first concerns their 'job- specificity'. The question is to what extent work readiness (or its possible alternative terminologies) is in fact, highly specific to particular job roles and to what extent does it comprise the possession of a set of 'core' skills and attributes which are transferable and applicable to all work situations in greater or lesser degree. This review will return to this question in later sections of this review.
17. The second concerns the third definition of 'employment readiness' above. This introduces the idea of 'readiness' being related not just to initial job entry but then to maintaining that employment and subsequently moving into further jobs.

Work readiness and employability

18. This last idea points clearly to the question of the relationship of the concepts (and actuality) of 'work readiness' and of 'employability'.
19. The latter term 'employability' is more fertile ground for definition in the literature.
20. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) stresses the difference between getting a job and subsequent employment performance and progression:

Employers are seeking applicants who can continue to learn and adapt, read, write and compete competently, listen and communicate effectively, think creatively, solve problems independently, manage themselves at work, interact with co-workers, work in teams or groups, handle basic technology, lead effectively as well as follow supervision. These core skills for employability are both important to employers' recruitment and enhance an individual's ability to secure a job, retain employment and move flexibly in the labour market. (26)

21. UKCES also suggests that employability may (but need not absolutely) be concerned with sustainability of employment and career progression:

There is agreement at a very general level that employability relates to the ability to be in employment and, in particular, the set of characteristics that increase the chances of an individual being in work. Sometimes definitions go a step further than simply focussing on the ability to secure employment, and specifically include the ability to sustain employment and to progress within work too. (20)

22. At higher education level, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) also emphasises that employability concerns what happens in employment not only the process of gaining employment:

Employability is taken as a set of achievements – skills, understanding, and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. (24)

23. A similar definition for employability in general was used by the Skills for Business Network (a collaboration of Sector Skills Councils) in 2007:

Employability defines the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours required by individuals to seek, obtain, and sustain employment at all levels in the labour market (45)

24. Generally thus, the basic inter-relationship of 'work readiness' and 'employability' suggested by the literature is that employability has a longer-term perspective concerned with obtaining a job and subsequent progression, perhaps with particular relevance at transition points when people seek to move into new jobs; whereas work readiness has a stronger focus on preparedness for a first job and thus, by inference, on young people at the point where they leave their initial education.
25. Intuitively, however, and as some views quoted above suggest, some positive characteristics which are required both by work readiness and employability are the same, albeit that at later employment stages the characteristics would be expected to be more highly developed. It may be, first, that employability may subsequently require additional skills and attributes beyond those of first employment and, second, that particular skills and attributes acquire greater or lesser salience as working lives progress.
26. This pronounced overlap between work readiness and employability is readily and explicitly apparent in the literature. For example, 'The balance' (a commercial US website offering guidance on life and financial planning) suggests:

Employability skills are sometimes called foundational skills or job-readiness skills.
27. A 2008 report from the Learning and Skills Network on *employability* skills explicitly concerns the *initial* employment of young people and not their subsequent performance in work or progression:

The objective of this research was to develop a clearer understanding of the skills employers expect young people coming into the workforce to hold. (47)
28. A study by Australian academics similarly uses the terms 'employability' and 'work ready' without making a distinction:

The challenge of twenty-first century employability is having a shared understanding of both cognitive and affective skills required in the workplace. Educational programs need to focus on specific industry requirements and prepare students to be work ready. (9)
29. And a research report looking at the *work readiness* of entrants to the UK construction sector undertaken by Pye-Tait on behalf of CITB also took 'work readiness' as being based on *employability* skills, noting, for example that:

The focus of this research is primarily the key qualifications for the construction industry and how employers see them in terms of delivering what they regard as being "work-ready" people. However, whether a person is properly prepared for the world of work is not perceived by employers purely in terms of their qualifications but as being the result of a complex mix of hard and soft skills more widely known under the title of "employability skills". (49)

The complexity of work readiness and employability

30. Beyond providing explicit definitions of work readiness and, more frequently, of employability, the literature also raises other important questions about these phenomena.

31. The first concerns the question of definition itself.
32. Two Belgian academics writing in 2003 in the International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management suggest that, in fact, no clear definition of employability is available:

Although employability became a buzzword in organisational literature, no clear consensus about its specific meaning can be found. Since no clear conceptual model of employability exists, there are as many measurements as researchers of the topic. (19)

33. Similarly, UKCES, though putting forward an overview definition of employability (as in paragraph 16 earlier) also noted varied definitions:

The term 'employability' has been used for many years by policy-makers and researchers in the context of debate about employment and labour markets. It has been defined in different ways with much depending on the group to which it is applied. (20)

34. In one case, one organisation took the view that adopting existing definitions of work readiness or seeking to establish a new one was, in being prescriptive, constraining consideration of what might actually be required in modern and changing working environments. Thus, Junior Achievement (a large American voluntary organisation which seeks to assist young people's successful transition into work) reported from a conference that:

The summit participants acknowledged the multitude of work readiness descriptions and intentionally chose not to craft another definition, concluding that it would be a fool's errand to predict the specific needs of the future workplace. And, they believed, creating yet another definition of work readiness would constrain the development of an innovative, adaptable curriculum that would address the needs of students in the 21st century. (5)

Context-specific versus transferable concepts of work readiness and employability

35. It was noted earlier that some definitions of work readiness and employability assumed that these phenomena were job-specific – that work readiness/employability needed to be related to the particular employment sought or held by the individuals for whom the phenomena were being developed or assessed.
36. This perspective can be expanded somewhat. For example, one writer, from the Centre For Employment Studies Research (CESR) at the University of the West of England, observed:

Lists of employability skills and attributes constitute a narrow concept of employability. (8)

...and:

Even within the same firm, recruitment criteria and the importance attributed to particular aspects of employability can vary according to the preferences of the recruiting manager and even formal selection criteria unevenly applied. (8)

...and that some employability criteria are not explicit:

One company director referred to a desire to recruit “someone I can go for a beer with”. Therefore, even if applicants demonstrate the possession of explicit or reasonably foreseeable generic and context-specific credentials, competences and attributes, then selection decisions can often be made on more nebulous or variable grounds which render the preparation of candidates applying for and securing employment much more problematic. (8)

37. Beyond this proposition, that work readiness or employability is not only relative to the characteristics of particular jobs but to the idiosyncrasies of particular employers, managers, or recruiters, there is a further suggestion of ‘structural’ variation between employers in their expectations of work readiness.

38. Thus, UKCES noted that:

Employability skills could be a particular issue for smaller employers, who may also lack the time and resources to train in generic skills. (20)

...and:

private sector employers were more likely to agree that they have problems recruiting staff due to skills issues than public sector employers.....There are a number of possible reasons for these differences, relating for example to differences in expectations of new recruits. (20)

39. Further to the picture above, in which individuals are considered for their fitness to meet the demands of particular occupations and the varied expectations of employers, there is additional complexity, extending the consideration of work readiness and employability beyond that of the individual-to-job or individual-to-employer fit.

40. A paper from the University of York notes that the labour market may influence employability:

In a tight labour market, an employer may accept (or find employable) someone whom they would not consider in a 'looser' labour market. (21)

41. The same paper also notes that there may be a 'social circumstances' constraint on employability:

The narrow view focussing on an individual's skills and attributes identifies important aspects of the employability equation but omits other important aspects. For instance there may be circumstances where job seekers with strong transferable skills and strategic job seeking will still struggle to find work – their actual 'employability' being limited, for example, by family and caring responsibilities, problems in accessing transport, and/or geographical remoteness. (21)

42. However, whilst the various extracts above suggest that the state of an individual's work readiness and employability needs to be considered in relation to the specific jobs and employers from whom employment is sought, and possibly, in relation to labour market and social contexts, other authors consider work readiness/employability as more simply comprising a set of 'transferable' skills and attitudes. 'The balance' asserts that:

Employability skills are the core skills and traits that are needed in nearly every job. These are general skills that make someone employable. Hiring managers always look for employees with these skills. (18)

43. Similarly, a conference on work readiness organised by the Junior Achievement organisation concluded (despite, as above, avoiding use of a formal definition of work readiness) that:

..... it was possible to identify a broad spectrum of enduring knowledge, skills, and attitudes that good workers have always possessed – and will need in any workplace in the future. (5)

Work readiness: summary

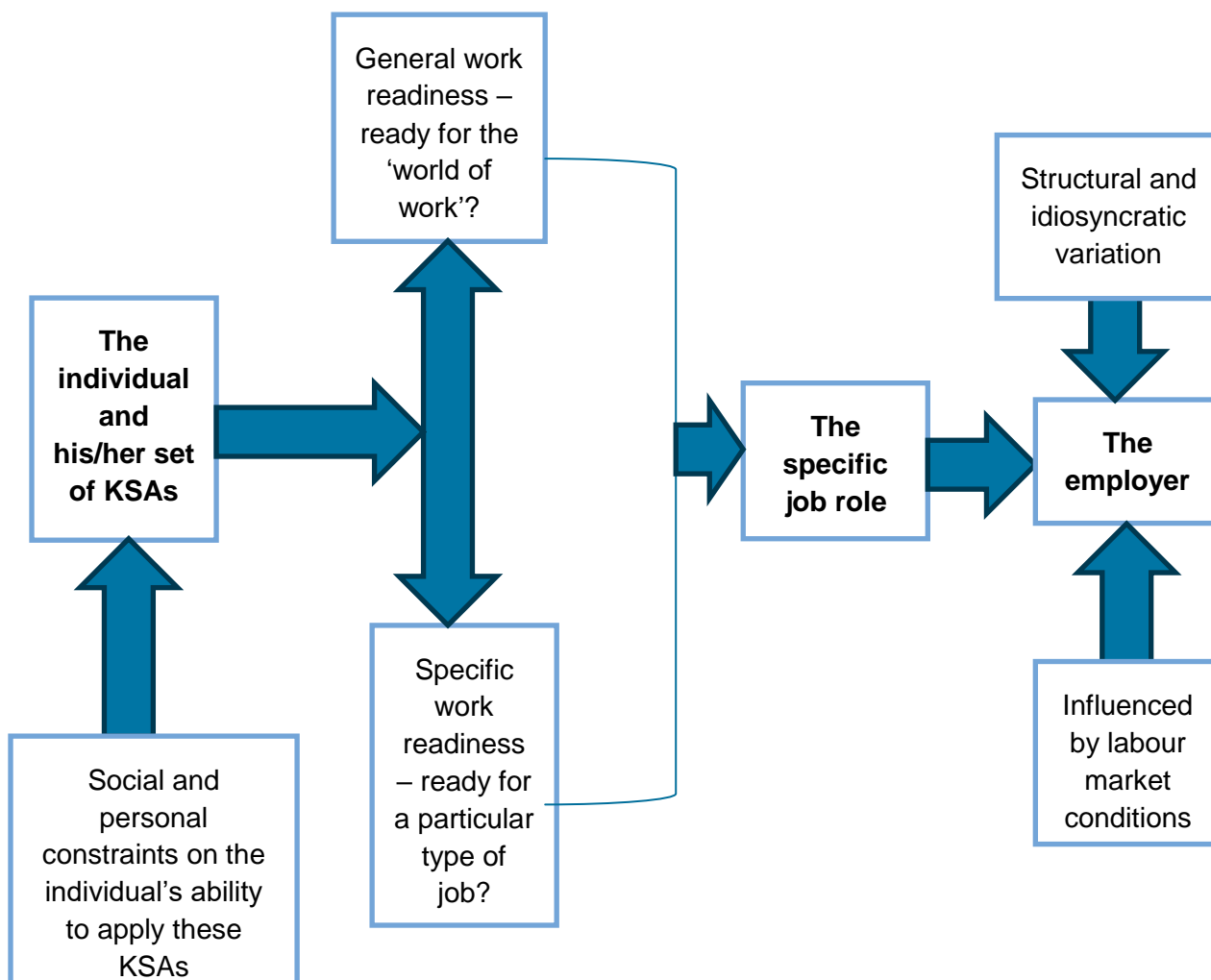
44. In summary of the discussion to this point, it can be seen that consideration of work readiness requires attention to a series of inter-related factors:

- The knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) of individuals.
- The social and personal circumstances which may limit the application of those KSAs in job search.
- The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of generic or transferable or foundational characteristics which confer *general* work readiness – that is, readiness for 'the world of work'.

Young people's work readiness and the construction industry

- The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of specific characteristics demanded by *particular* job roles or *particular* employers.
- The nature and demands of particular jobs.
- The requirements set by employers which may be influenced by the idiosyncratic perspectives and values of particular employers (or of particular managers or recruiters within the employer organisation) and by structural characteristics such as the size and sector of recruiting organisations.
- External forces on the employer at particular points in time, particularly the condition of the local labour market in so far as it offers employers a wider or narrower choice of recruits.

45. These latter factors may be pictured in a simple work readiness model as:



Work readiness skills

46. To this point, this review has mainly been concerned with what work readiness is in general terms. However, much the most common feature of the work readiness/employability literature is that there are many publications which, while not necessarily offering a definition per se, propose a de facto definition in the form of a list of skills and attributes. Examples of this are considered below.

47. 'The balance' (18) identifies as 'foundational skills':

- Communication
- Team work
- Critical thinking
- IT knowledge

....and then goes on to identify a total of around 50 'employability skills' including items such as attention to detail, dependability, honesty, initiative, listening, numeracy, and so on.

48. 'Careers in construction' (an industry- and publicly-funded Canadian organisation which promotes careers in construction) identifies (50) twelve 'essential skills' necessary for careers in construction:

- Continuous learning
- Decision making
- Digital technology
- Document use.
- Job task planning and organising
- Numeracy
- Oral communication
- Problem solving
- Reading text
- Significant use of memory
- Thinking skills
- Working with others

49. Pye-Tait (on behalf of CITB) suggests (49) work readiness skills as including, but not being limited to:

- Work ethic
- Time keeping

- Integrity
 - Self-management
 - Team working
 - Problem solving
 - Oral and verbal communication skills
 - Customer handling skills
 - Numeracy
 - Literacy
 - IT skills
50. UKCES (48) says that it 'takes employability skills' to be structured in a hierarchy with 'positive approach' as a foundation layer, using number, language, and IT effectively as a middle layer, and self-management, thinking, working together and communicating, and understanding the business as a top layer.
51. 'Go Construct' (an industry-supported website in the UK which promotes careers in construction) suggests (43) that 'there is no hard list of employability skills to help in your search for construction jobs' but that these skills can include:
- Communicating well
 - Solving problems
 - Using computers
 - Getting things done on time
 - Understanding instructions
 - Being on time
 - Making decisions
 - Getting on with people
52. An academic paper (42) from the University of Aston in Birmingham used an analysis of job advertisements to identify employability skills required for graduate-level project managers in construction:
- Team working ability
 - Verbal communication
 - Written communication
 - Leadership ability
 - Problem solving skills

- Initiative
 - Commercial and business awareness
 - Time management and meeting deadlines
 - Analytical skills
 - Drive
 - Self-motivation
 - Organisational skills/planning ahead
 - Creativity and innovation
53. Career planet (a not-for-profit careers organisation in South Africa) offers a checklist (27) of 30 questions to allow young people to assess their work readiness. The list is divided into 6 domains: personality; social skills; communication skills; teamwork; education; and transport and childcare.
54. Performwell (a consortium of not-for-profit organisations in the US which seeks to prepare young people for work) provides a work readiness assessment tool (32) which scores individuals on:
- Attendance
 - Punctuality
 - Workplace appearance
 - Taking initiative
 - Quality of work
 - Communication skills
 - Response to supervision
 - Teamwork
 - Problem-solving/critical thinking
 - Workplace culture, policy, and safety
 - Specific technical and industry skills
55. ACT (see paragraph 7 for description) suggests that:
- Work readiness skills include both foundational cognitive skills such as reading for information, applied mathematics, locating information, problem solving and critical thinking and non-cognitive skills, or soft skills, which are defined as personal skills and behavioural characteristics that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects such as adaptability, integrity, co-operation, and work place discipline. (35)

56. Jist Careers Solutions (an American company which provides opportunities for hard-to-reach groups to enter or re-enter work) operates a work readiness inventory (38) which includes a 36-item checklist structured within 6 domains:

- Responsibility
- Flexibility
- Skills
- Communication
- Self view
- Health and safety

57. The University of Kent identifies (10) the 'top ten skills that employers want' as:

- Verbal communication
- Teamwork
- Commercial awareness
- Analysing and investigating
- Initiative/self-motivation
- Drive
- Written communication
- Planning and organising
- Flexibility
- Time management

.....and then lists a further 16 skills identified by employers (in 'a number of surveys on the skills required by graduates undertaken by a number of large organisations'), these including for example, leadership, computing skills, integrity, independence, and creativity.

58. Research by Future Skills Scotland (a skills forecasting product of the Scottish Government) observes (7) that a survey of employers showed that good technical and communication skills were most frequently associated with recruits from universities and FE colleges being regarded by employers as being well prepared for work; whereas poor attitudes and basic skills and lack of common sense were associated with poor preparation.

59. A more complex and reflective study by the University of York (21) proposes a model of employability skills which builds in the personal circumstances and the external economic/labour market factors which were discussed earlier, thus:

Individual factors	Personal circumstances	External factors
<p>Employability skills and attributes</p> <p>Essential attributes (e.g. honesty, reliability, positive attitude)</p> <p>Personal competences (e.g. diligence, initiative)</p> <p>Basic transferable skills (e.g. writing, numeracy)</p> <p>Key transferable skills (e.g. problem solving, team working)</p> <p>High level transferable skills (e.g. commercial awareness, continuous learning; vision)</p> <p>Qualifications (e.g. formal academic and vocational qualifications)</p> <p>Work knowledge base (e.g. work experience, occupational skills)</p>	<p>Household circumstances</p> <p>Direct caring responsibilities</p> <p>Other family responsibilities</p> <p>Other household circumstances</p> <p>Work culture</p> <p>Presence in a family/culture/community in which work is encouraged</p> <p>Access to resources</p> <p>Access to transport, financial resources, and social capital (e.g. family and community networks)</p>	<p>Demand factors</p> <p>Level and type of local occupational demand</p> <p>Macro-economic factors (e.g. affecting business confidence and recruitment levels)</p> <p>Vacancy characteristics (e.g. pay rates, full and part time jobs)</p> <p>Recruitment factors (e.g. employers recruitment channels and selection methods and preferences)</p>

60. The basic proposition of this last analysis is that all of these factors may affect whether an individual – probably a young one in the work readiness case – has employability in the sense that the individual’s own complex set of skills and attributes, inhibited or not by personal and social circumstances, and employment opportunities can mesh together to the point at which their employability is proven by the fact that the individual is actually recruited.
61. Then, beyond the ‘list of skills’ approach and the complex model just presented, other commentators propose somewhat more specialised insights into work readiness/employability.
62. For example, UKCES picks out the idea of ‘aesthetic skills’ as being important:
-aesthetic skills are also crucially important in modern workplaces. Aesthetic skills relate to the way in which individuals present themselves at work, or the need to ‘look good and sound right’. (20)
63. And an academic paper put forward to a conference organised by WACE (an international organisation, based in a group of academic institutions, which promotes work integrated education) proposes (9) the concept of ‘emotional work readiness’ according to which students are encouraged, in relation to each of a number of ‘work skills’ to ask ‘reflective questions’. For example, in relation to the ‘planning and management’ work skill, students are encouraged to ask questions such as ‘How do I

feel working with others towards shared goals?' or 'How well do I meet the needs of others in my planning?'. The underlying principle of the approach is that this process of reflection combines the cognitive and affective aspects of work readiness.

64. A similar approach, that is, the use of a 'reflective' approach, was adopted in research undertaken by Australian academics (44) into the development of work readiness for under-graduates taking courses in construction management.

Work readiness skills: observations

65. Consideration of the various sets of work readiness or employability skills exemplified in the last section suggests a number of summary points.

66. Firstly, few of the lists offered appear to have much empirical evidence for their content, in the sense that possession of the skills they list, either in total or as individual items, has been clearly linked to the acquisition of, or performance in, particular jobs. The Higher Education Academy (24) makes the same observation:

Various lists of skills appear in the literature relating to employment but they seem to have been assembled on an ad hoc basis.

67. Second, therefore, though they cover much the same ground and usually share approximately the same terminology, there is no definitive set of work readiness skills and no particular rationale as to why a list should contain any particular number of items – other, perhaps, than by acknowledging that some items, such as communication skills, problem solving, team working, and so on, appear in virtually all lists whilst others, obviously those that appear in the longer lists, are less frequently mentioned.

68. Third, understandably given the complexity which would be involved, there is virtually no guidance in the various treatments as to what *level of competence* (in each of whatever skills are deemed relevant) is required by particular jobs. Clearly, say, 'written communication skills' as a work readiness skill for a would-be journalist requires a different level of competence than that required by a would-be groundworks operative. Equally, either generally or again in relation to particular acquisitions, there is no visible evidence of the *relative importance* of skills. Are problem solving skills more important than team working skill and in what circumstances? Are communication skills more important than integrity and in what circumstances? The proponents of the various sets of skills give no guidance on such questions.

69. Overall, the underlying position appears to be that, in the absence of specific knowledge of the *levels of skill* required by particular industries, employers and occupations and of the *relative significance* of the skills to particular industries, employers, and occupations, the best that can be done is to make the somewhat obvious or common sense assertion that it's a good thing if young people seeking work have some (unspecified) level of ability to communicate, work with other people, keep time, be hard working, and so on.

70. A final observation on lists of work readiness and employability skills is that it raises two related questions. The first question is whether the skills which are identified can be taught? The second is, whether or not they can be taught, can they be developed through work experience? The significance of these questions is that identification of work readiness skills which can neither be taught nor developed through work experience is a somewhat sterile exercise – if individuals' work readiness cannot in

some aspects be increased, then those aspects for those individuals are what they are, and have to be accommodated both by the individuals concerned and by any jobs market which needs or wants their participation. Next sections of this review consider the two questions above by briefly examining the teaching of work readiness or employability skills and the contribution to their development made by work experience.

Work readiness education

71. The International Labour Organisation advances a number of broad insights (26) into how work readiness skills can be learnt, proposing that:

Key employability skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving depend on deep content knowledge and cannot be taught in isolation. So teaching such skills requires innovative ways of delivering the academic curricula; it's not about developing a core skills curriculum. The question is how best to integrate these skills into core academic content...

72. Other ILO propositions are that other aspects of the learning process can advance the development of work readiness skills including:

- Dialogue with employers to align training programmes with business needs
- Mentoring programmes that link students with professionals or young workers
- Adopting a project based learning approach which sets challenging tasks
- Encouraging elaboration, questioning, and explanation
- Giving entrepreneurial training to provide youth with basic financial and business literacy

73. In more practical terms, and at a higher level, virtually all UK universities pay attention to employability both by asserting that, where possible, employability is embedded in their courses and by providing, usually through their careers departments, a blend of advice, information, and opportunities to develop employability – the package usually offering a blend of assessment (to allow students to measure their work readiness), talks and workshops, employer visits, courses on specific employability skills, advocacy of part-time work, volunteering, CV-enhancing activity, and so on.
74. This clear concern with employability at HE levels has perhaps been reinforced in recent years by the introduction of student fees, which raise concern about value-for-money amongst students and parents, by much discussion about the 'graduate premium' (in a period when approaching half of young people enter university but in which there has not been a corresponding increase in 'graduate' jobs), by frequent publication of post-university employment and pay rates, and, perhaps, by the fact that many university courses are not explicitly vocational in themselves.
75. At Further Education level, emphasis on employability is lesser or at least less overt. Unlike university websites, those of FE colleges mostly do not offer an explicit link to an 'employability' offer. In the FE case, this may be because employability is developed by low level preparatory courses which develop the basic or essential skills need for further study and eventual employment and because, within vocational courses, 'employability' or 'work readiness' elements are embedded.
76. As one example, the Open College Network in the West Midlands provides (41) a qualification which colleges may offer, a Level 2 Certificate in Employability and Development in Building and Construction. This qualification requires 6 credits from a substantial list mainly of trade skill areas (such as 'Build brick and block walls' or 'Common plumbing practices') and 14 credits from a longer list of 'transferable skills' (including, for example, 'Building working relationships with colleagues', 'customer care', 'communicating information' and so on).
77. Other instances of work readiness preparation at FE level are evident from their internet promotion. The Doncaster Skills Academy, for example, offers (36) a set of employability modules leading to BTEC certification which includes 'employability competences', 'online employability platform' (an online personalised employment advice and support service), 'CV, job search, application, and interview support', and 'work experience and internships'.
78. On a wider geographical scale, the Scottish Government supports a Certificate of Work Readiness (CWR) programme (29) for 16-19 year olds. Available in Scottish colleges, this involves the teaching of a variety of employability skills and a work experience element. Evaluation of the programme (30) is largely positive with most participants reporting positive course benefits and/or positive employment or continued education outcomes.
79. Generally, thus, work readiness preparation at HE and FE levels concerns (1) the existence of a greater or lesser vocation-specific element in the underlying subject which the student studies, (2) the 'embedding' into course teaching of 'employability' (in the form of pedagogical methods, such as project work, role playing, and so on, which are believed to improve student's employability skills), (3) the direct teaching of employability skills, as specific modules within courses or as entire courses, mainly at

lower levels, focussed on employability skills, (4) the provision of advice, guidance, encouragement, and opportunities to enhance employability, and (5), encouragement of work experience, from the formal requirement in courses for a substantial work placement to the informal encouragement of part-time or voluntary work.

80. The literature does not suggest that this effort is much co-ordinated or consistent across institutions or has a common curriculum or is pursued with equal intensity by the different agencies or institutions involved – though the main focus of the work appears usually to be focussed on the types of skill which were itemised in previous sections of this review together with some attention to job acquisition techniques such as job search, CV writing, and interview technique; and at public policy level, some consistency is brought by the requirement that most publicly funded courses or apprenticeships should include assessment or teaching such that all learners should have or acquire the two basic employability skills of functional maths and English.
81. The obvious question which arises from this brief overview of work readiness development activity is whether it works, in the sense not just of whether students believe their work readiness has been advanced but whether their prospective and actual employers believe it too.
82. Evidence on this is equivocal (a fact which stimulates this and other continuing research).
83. On one hand, national Employer Skills Surveys (previously sponsored by UKCES, now by the Department For Education) have identified that around 15% to 20% of employers are dissatisfied with the work readiness of their young recruits, with in general, greater dissatisfaction with their 16-year old school leaver recruits (though there are now relatively few of these) than with older college leavers or graduates.
84. These may be regarded as quite low proportions particularly as it may be the case that some 'employability' can only be developed while actually in work. Making this this point, the Higher Education Academy observes (in respect of graduates but with equal applicability to non-graduates):

Much employability-related learning takes place in the workplace and not in an educational institution. (24)

...and:

There comes a point in students' lives when they have to make a step-change: education can take them so far, but they have to deal with the challenges that employment throws up. (24)

... and:

This view implies that there will, in most cases, be a discrepancy between what employers would ideally like and what education can reasonably supply. (24)

85. And those employers who were interviewed in the course of a study by Bristol University (8) were fully aware of this divergence:

Employers were under no illusion that they expected to be recruiting the finished article and that investment of time, effort and money would be required to assist in the development of employees.

86. Overall, these points suggest that employer dissatisfaction with their young recruits is quite limited, that it is, in fact, impossible to produce wholly work ready young people solely from educational processes, and that many employers accept this reality.
87. There is also a 'counterfactual' aspect to these points. As above, much work, however much it lacks coherence and consistency, is underway to promote young peoples' employability. It is reasonable to ask what employers' employability ratings of young recruits would be if this work were not undertaken – the answer to this question, if the ratings were then much lower, perhaps providing an additional validation of the work readiness or employability agendas.
88. However, in contrast, there are more negative perspectives on young people's work readiness.
89. In 2010, UKCES observed (20) that:

There are often reports in the media of employer dissatisfaction with the employability of the workforce.

...and that the problem:

...is often presented in blanket terms, as if the problem is widespread and all-embracing and one that is getting worse.

90. These observations remain true to-day, often with the further embellishment that employers prefer to (or can only) recruit migrant labour because of the lack of work readiness, including the poor attitudes, of native British workers including young people.
91. While, above, it is noted that only a minority of employers reported in surveys that they found their young recruits to be badly prepared for work, these judgements were about the people they actually recruited. There are no corresponding judgements on the many more young people whom they did not recruit, whose preparedness was presumably worse, or on those young people who did not feel even minimally equipped to apply for the opportunities on offer.
92. And a 2014 paper published by 'The Mindset' (which describes itself as 'a group of like-minded FE colleges who are committed to actively changing the perception and reality of the further education sector in preparing students for work') has a broadly negative perspective on the current situation (51). Thus, they report on a survey which finds markedly less positive findings than those of Employer Skills Surveys which were noted above. Looking at results from a recent British Chamber of Commerce survey of 3000 employers:

Over half (57 per cent) said that young people are lacking basic 'soft' skills such as communication and team working, to succeed in the working world.

93. They contextualise this by noting other research which showed that:

Given the choice between someone with the desired mind set who may lack the complete skill set for the job and someone with the complete skill set who

lacks the desired mind set, a total of 96 per cent of employers picked mind set over skill set.

94. And they then raise the question of ‘whether UK colleges are targeted enough in their response to employability’. The general answer to this question is held to be ‘no’ and that:

The vocational offer in the UK colleges needs to be supplemented with the right mind set and behaviours that will ensure (that students) secure employment that will provide a platform able to carry their future career aspirations. The initial target must be to get them that first sustainable job.... This demands that colleges and business work much more closely together than they have to date.

95. The paper’s conclusion is that:

Although there are clearly pockets of excellent practice within the FE college sector, the Mindset believes that colleges still have a way to go before delivering employability where the learners are provided with all the right skills and attributes that they need and that employers want, including the desired soft skills.

The value of work experience

96. Whatever the shortcomings or otherwise of the education system’s capability to induce work readiness in young people, there is a general consensus that work experience before full-time entry to work is the single most valuable medium for raising employability.

97. UKCES notes (20) research which concluded:

This is an issue on which there was almost complete unanimity between employers and young people. Almost without exception, employers felt that young people who had undergone a period of work experience while at school (either through formal programmes or through part-time work) were better equipped than others for the world of work.

98. A review of research on young people entering work undertaken in 2012 for ACAS (2) describes the variety of public policy on work experience in place at that time. This included statutory duties on local authorities to encourage work experience for students aged 16-19 and the then Coalition Government’s pledge to place ‘work experience at the heart of its overall request to the business community, through its ‘Every Business Commits’ initiative.

99. The same publication describes a variety of research on work experience, showing its benefits in respect of developing generic and soft skills, showing young people aspects of employment such as responsibility and autonomy, reducing the ‘culture shock’ of entering work for the first time, increasing young people’s confidence in social interactions, sometimes allowing work experience to lead into direct employment with the work experience provider, strengthening young people’s CVs, providing informal work-relevant networks, helping to refine career choice, and so on.

100. A 2012 report by City and Guilds on how young people view employment (15) observes that:
- It has become clear that young people's contact with employers is one of the most important indicators of their future ability to successfully enter the labour market.
101. Two further UKCES publications (12,14) are dedicated to advocating the benefits of work experience both for young people and for the employers who offer work experience (these, it is argued, including its benefits for company image and community profile, its capacity to bring new insights and market information into the business, its benefits for staff involved in supervising young people on placement, and its use as a 'de-risked' recruitment tool).
102. At higher education level, as noted earlier, advocating work experience forms part of most university's employability programmes and, more formally, substantial work placements have been a formal part of 'sandwich degree' and other courses for decades.
103. Generally, therefore, there is a strong, widespread, and perhaps strengthening belief in the value of work experience in helping to produce young people who are more cognisant of the nature of modern and changing workplaces and of their demands.
104. Any downside to this belief is that expressed by young people who have found their work experience to be of low quality (see reference 2, page 29/30), offering low status 'make work', and repetitive tasks – these being a critique of the particular experiences more than of the concept of work experience itself.

Summary: Key points from the review

105. Key points from this review of literature are:
- Work readiness and employability are closely related and are often intermingled in the literature.
 - The main difference is that employability has a focus not just on entry to a first job but also on performance in jobs and on effectiveness in securing new jobs; whereas work readiness is most usually considered in terms of the preparedness for work of those who have not worked, that is, primarily, young people – or those, such as the long term unemployed or 'returners' to the labour market, who have not worked for some time.
 - Consideration of work readiness requires attention to a series of inter-related factors:
 - The knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) of individuals.
 - The social and personal circumstances which may limit the application of those KSAs in job search.
 - The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of generic or transferable or foundational characteristics which confer *general* work readiness – that is, readiness for 'the world of work'.

- The extent to which individuals' KSAs constitute a set of specific characteristics demanded by *particular* job roles or *particular* employers.
 - The nature and demands of particular jobs.
 - The requirements set by employers which may be influenced by the idiosyncratic perspectives and values of particular employers (or of particular managers or recruiters within the employer organisation) and by structural characteristics such as the size and sector of recruiting organisations.
 - External forces on the employer at particular points in time, particularly the condition of the local labour market in so far as it offers employers a wider or narrower choice of recruits.
- The actual skills and attributes which constitute generic 'work readiness' (beyond the specific job-relevant skills and qualifications which employers may require) are frequently listed by varied contributors, including commercial websites offering guidance to young people or offering work readiness assessment tools, by varied industry or voluntary organisations, by government agencies, and by academic researchers.
 - The lists, which are broadly similar whether they concern 'work readiness' or 'employability', are of varying length and specificity and use varied language to describe similar items.
 - The lists appear to be somewhat arbitrary in their construction but mainly comprise a mix of generic or soft skills such as communication or team working skills, personal qualities such as integrity or perseverance, and basic competences in literacy, numeracy, and use of IT, though many other items appear with less frequency in longer lists or in those which break 'headline' skills into more specific items.
 - The literature seldom contains guidance as to what level of competence in each of the skills or attributes is required or of which skills or attributes have priority over others in particular contexts.
 - The lists are seldom supported by objective evidence that that possession of the listed skills, in combination or as individual items, is associated with greater likelihood of obtaining sustainable employment.
 - Rather, their validation is mainly that 'this is what employers say they want' or, implicitly, that common sense argues for their importance.
 - There is much activity of very varied kinds and depth to build young people's work readiness in educational institutions at all levels but little consistency as to this activity between institutions in the sense that no systematic 'work readiness curriculum', to be applied at different stages of education using similar pedagogical techniques and learning experiences, is in place.

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- Evidence as to the value and effectiveness of activity to improve young people's work readiness is equivocal. Thus, the sheer volume of activity argues for its likely impact but anecdotal and some survey evidence suggests that many young job applicants do not have the generic or soft skills which employers would like them to have.
- Although the evidence on the effectiveness of work readiness development in educational settings is somewhat unclear, there is wide consensus that work experience, providing it offers a genuine facsimile of the real world of work, is the most effective means of preparing young people for that world.

4 Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS) analysis

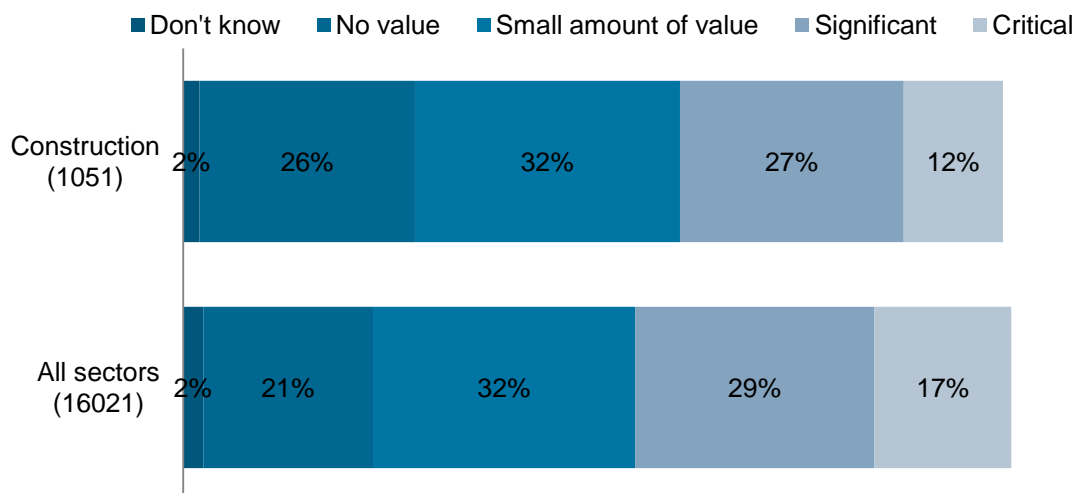
Introduction

106. The Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS) is a biennial study, running in its current guise since 2010. The 2016 survey, conducted between May and August 2016, captured the views of over 18,000 employers across the United Kingdom. Interviews were conducted at an establishment level, with the most senior person at the site with responsibility for human resources. The study predominantly focussed on what drives employers' decisions around recruitment and people development. There is also a substantial focus on establishments' engagement with apprenticeships, which has become a key focus in recent times for national governments in the UK governments.
107. The Survey includes a variety of questions which address the work readiness issue, from the employer perspective, in various ways: and, because of the size of the survey, it is possible to generate a statistically reliable sub-sample of employers from the construction sector.
108. This chapter uses this capacity to generate insights into work readiness issues, mainly by comparing findings, at a national level, for the construction industry with those for the British economy as a whole.

The importance of qualifications and work experience in recruitment

109. A first set of analyses show the importance which employers give to different factors when they are recruiting.
110. It can be seen, firstly, that employers in the construction sector are somewhat less likely than other employers to see **academic** qualifications as valuable when recruiting and are particularly less likely to see them as critical (see Figure 1):

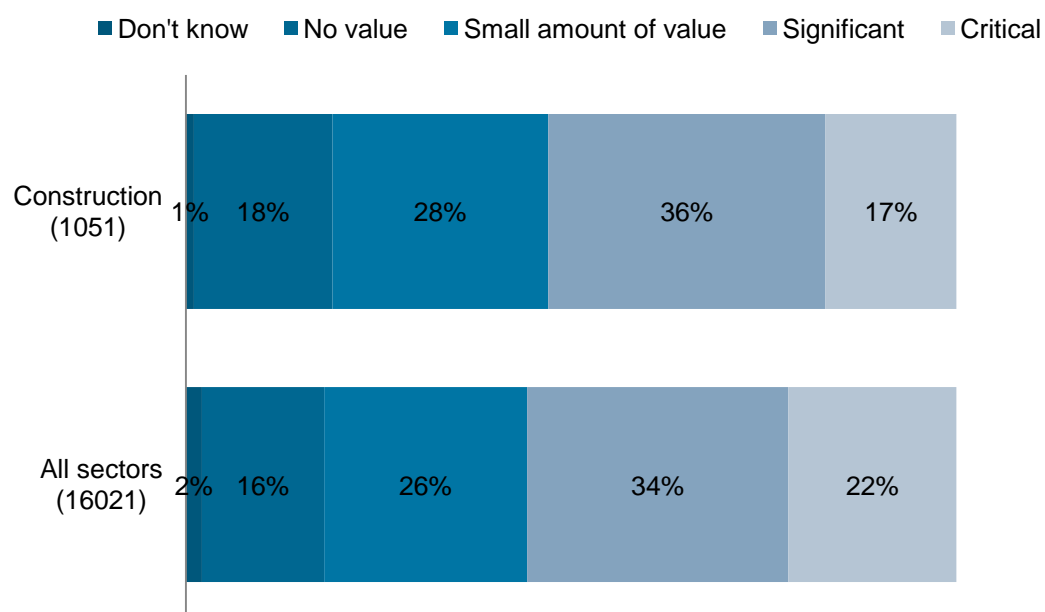
Figure 1: Importance of qualifications when recruiting: Particular academic qualifications (e.g. GCSEs, A levels or degree) (all establishments)



Questions C5
Unweighted bases in parentheses

111. However, in respect of particular academic qualifications, in **Maths and English**, construction employers are more similar to the all-sectors average (see Figure 2). Thus, though fewer construction employers see these as critical, the combined proportion saying they are critical or of significant value for the construction sector (53%) is not greatly different from the combined proportion (56%) for all sectors:

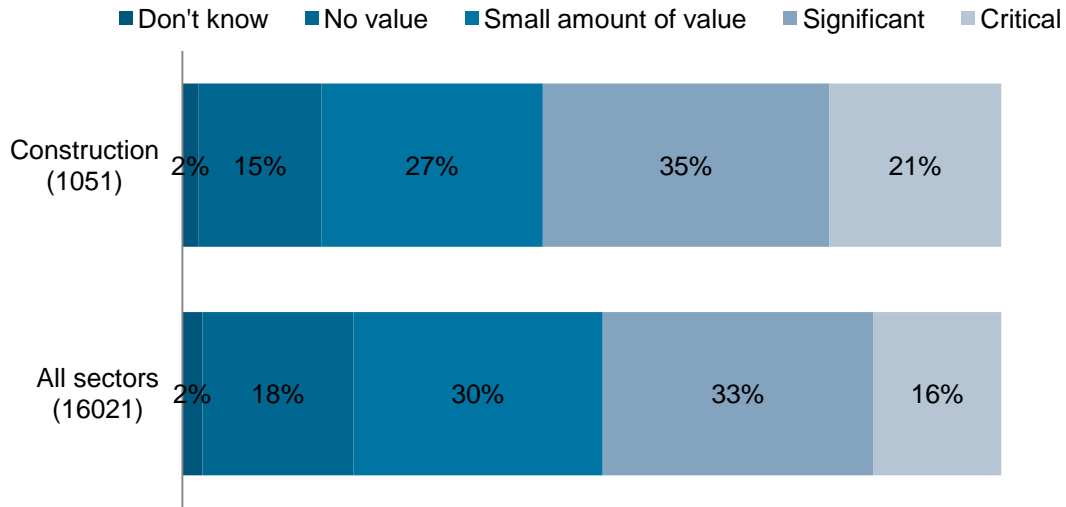
Figure 2: Importance of qualifications when recruiting: Maths and English to at least Level 2 or GCSE A*-C (all establishments)



Questions C5
Unweighted bases in parentheses

112. In the case of **vocational** qualifications (see Figure 3), a comparison shows the reverse of findings for academic qualifications. In this case, construction employers are considerably more likely to value vocational qualifications, 56% saying they are of significant value or are critical compared with 49% of employers in general who say this.

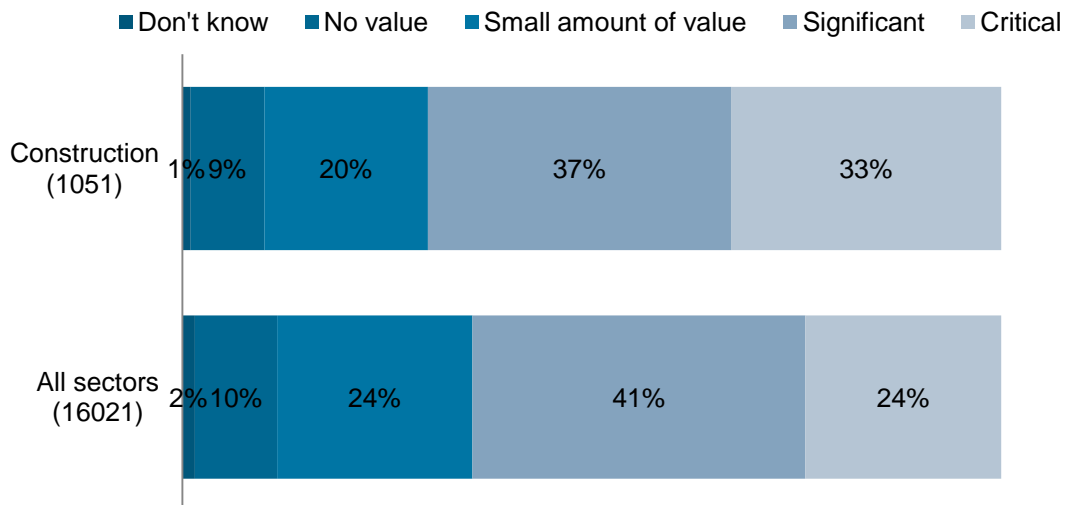
Figure 3: Importance of qualifications when recruiting: Relevant vocational qualification (all establishments)



Questions C5
Unweighted bases in parentheses

- 113. Similarly, construction employers are more likely to value **prior work experience** when recruiting, 70% saying this is of significant value or is critical, compared with 65% of other employers making this judgement (see Figure 4) and the difference between the 'critical' proportions, at 9%, is even greater.
- 114. Correspondingly, thus, the proportion of construction employers saying work experience is at least of significant value (70%) is much higher than the proportion (39%) saying academic qualifications are of significant value – this margin, 31% for construction employers being considerably higher than the equivalent margin, 21%, for all employers.

Figure 4: Importance of work experience when recruiting (all establishments)

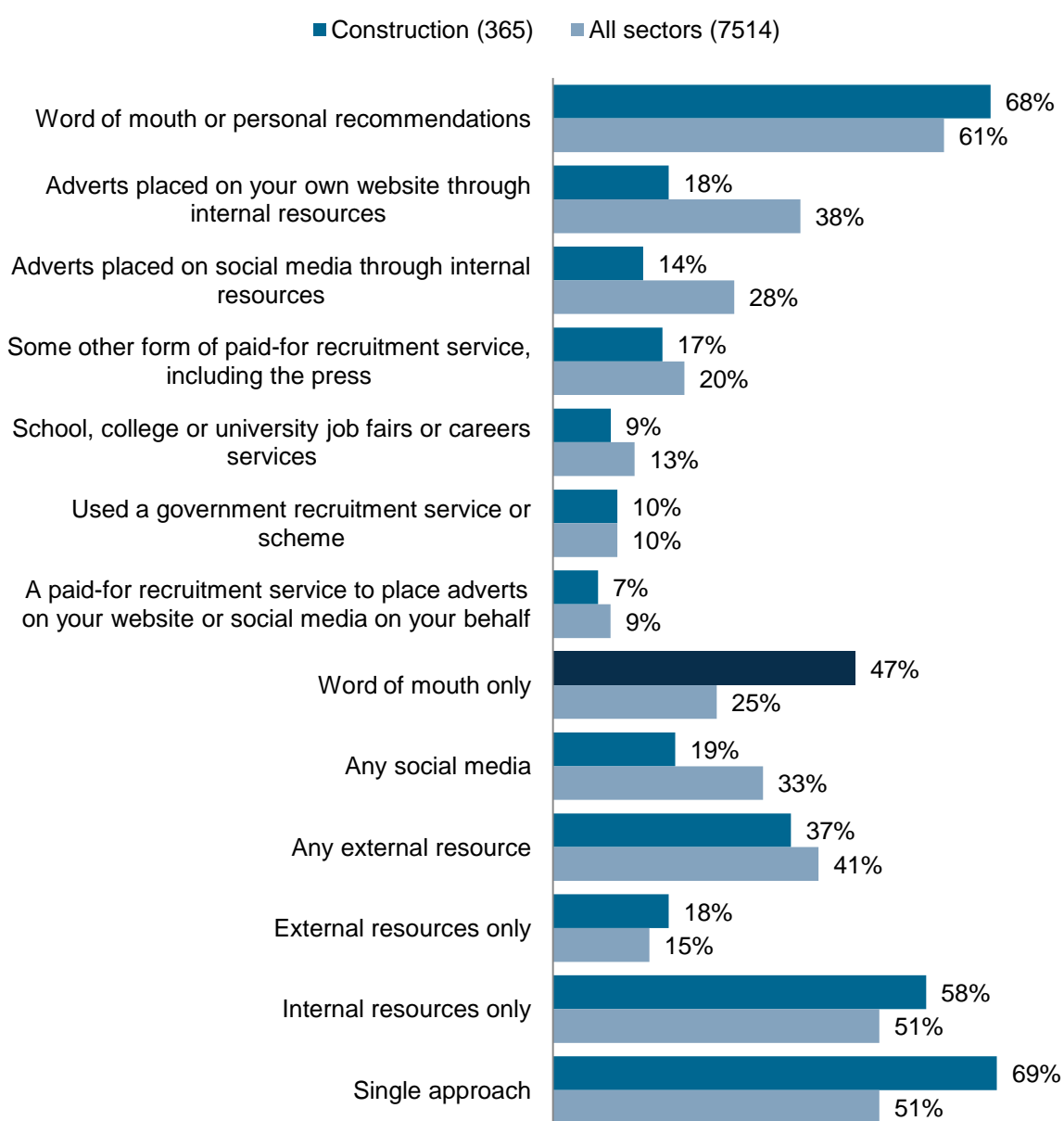


Questions C5
Unweighted bases in parentheses

Recruitment channels

115. Work readiness in the form of a set of personal characteristics and attributes, rather than as a formal CV supported by qualifications, may be particularly important in the construction industry. Figures on recruitment methods show that informal word-of-mouth recruitment – when these personal factors may be dominant in employers' selection decisions – is more often used by construction employers than by other employers. Formal methods, using various electronic or other media, which may include an initial sift of candidates' CVs and qualification profiles are less often used in the construction industry (see Figure 5):

Figure 5: Channels used to recruit young people (where recruited young people)



Questions C10NW
Unweighted bases in parentheses

Work readiness

116. Moving directly to the question of work readiness, the Employer Perspectives Survey asked employers how prepared for work were young people who had left education at different stages.
117. Figures from the survey for England and Wales show that at all stages, from 16 year old school leavers to university leavers, construction employers (bottom row of data in Table 1) were more likely to say young people were poorly or very poorly prepared.
118. The figures also show, however, that construction employers, at all stages except that for university leavers, were also a little more likely to say that their young recruits were 'very well prepared'. There is, apparently, a somewhat more polarised position in the construction sector such that, when employers get the right young people, they are very satisfied with their recruits but, more often than in other sectors, they don't get the recruits they want and are dissatisfied:

Table 1: Preparedness for work of education leavers (where recruited into first job since full time education in the last 2 to 3 years) – England and Wales

	16 year old school leavers		17-18 year olds recruited to first job from school		17-18 year olds recruited to first job from FE		University or higher education leavers	
	Construction	All sectors	Construction	All sectors	Construction	All sectors	Construction	All sectors
Very well prepared	10%	8%	8%	7%	12%	10%	12%	19%
Well prepared	37%	43%	39%	50%	55%	57%	69%	60%
Poorly prepared	39%	32%	41%	29%	21%	23%	13%	13%
Very poorly prepared	10%	12%	8%	8%	8%	5%	5%	2%
Varies too much to say	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%
Very well/well prepared	48%	51%	47%	58%	67%	68%	81%	80%
Poorly/very poorly prepared	49%	44%	49%	37%	29%	27%	18%	16%
<i>Unweighted row</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>1592</i>	<i>149</i>	<i>2293</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>2262</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>2691</i>

Questions C10C

119. In Scotland (Table 2), a similar picture was found, such that construction employers were both more likely to say both that more young recruits were poorly prepared but also marginally more likely (except in the university case) to say that they were 'very well prepared'.

Table 2: Preparedness for work of education leavers (where recruited into first job since full time education in the last 2 to 3 years) – GB (including Scotland)

	16 year old school leavers		17-18 year olds recruited to first job from FE		University or higher education leavers	
	Construction	All sectors	Construction	All sectors	Construction	All sectors
Very well prepared	11%	9%	13%	11%	13%	20%
Well prepared	39%	45%	55%	58%	69%	60%
Poorly prepared	38%	31%	21%	22%	12%	13%
Very poorly prepared	10%	11%	8%	5%	5%	2%
Varies too much to say	3%	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%
Very well/well prepared	50%	53%	67%	68%	81%	80%
Poorly/very poorly prepared	47%	42%	28%	26%	18%	15%
<i>Unweighted row</i>	<i>222</i>	<i>2644</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>2969</i>	<i>112</i>	<i>3518</i>

Questions C10C

Provision of work placements

120. However, while construction employers tend to be less satisfied than other employers with their young recruits and, as seen earlier in Figure 4, are more likely to value prior work experience, they are also significantly less likely to offer work placements which allow learners in educational establishments (at all levels) to gain work experience. Overall, only 23% of construction employers, compared with an average of 38% across the economy, offered any type of work placement (see Figure 6).

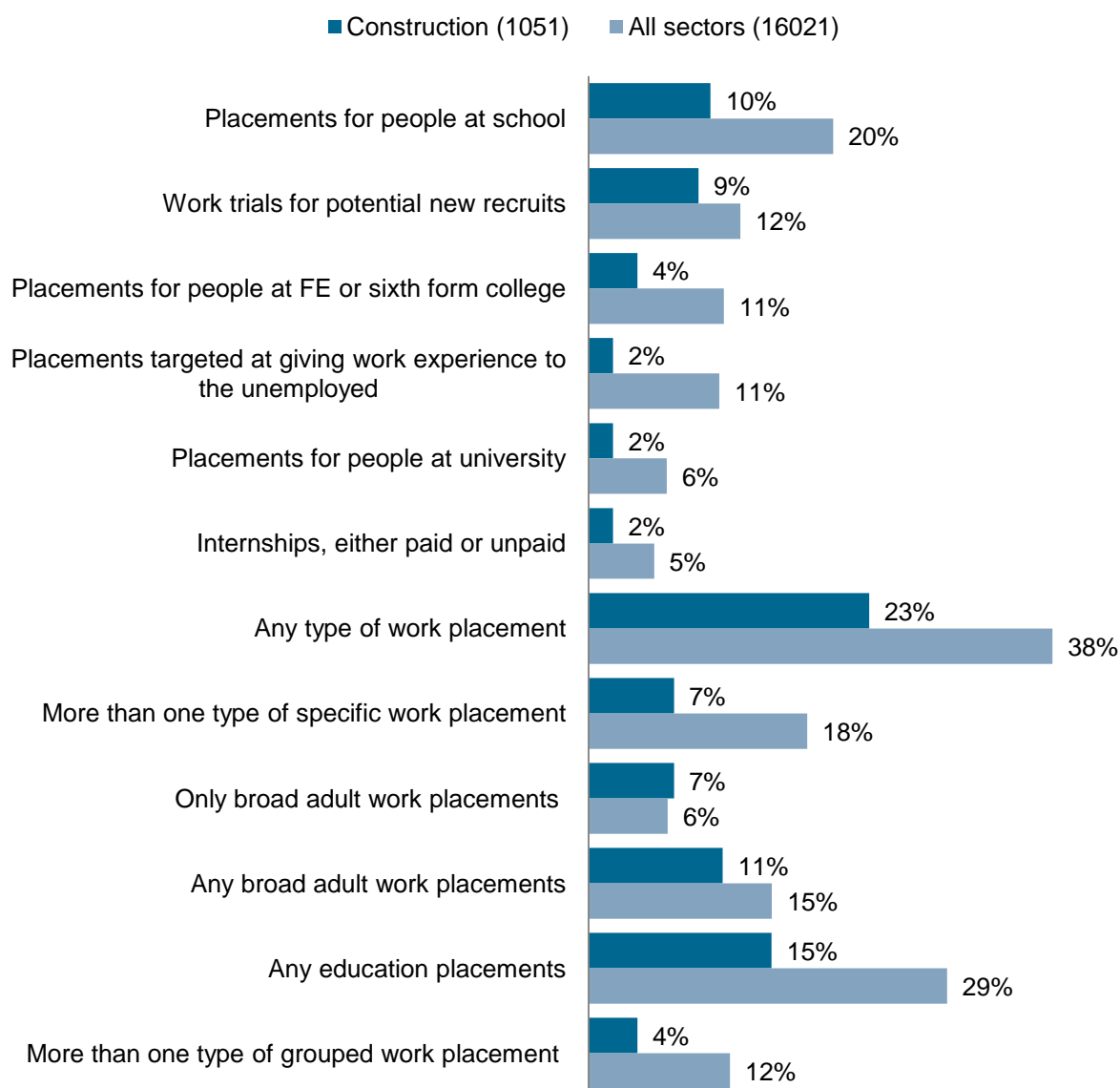
Figure 6: Provision of work placements (all respondents)

Table 53: Questions C17
Unweighted bases in parentheses

121. Possibly related to the frequent small size of construction companies, construction employers which offered placements offered a lower number of placements – more frequently only one placement and, on average, only 2.6 placements per company; less than half the 5.7 average for all sectors (see Figure 7):

Figure 7: Average number of work placements (where provided)

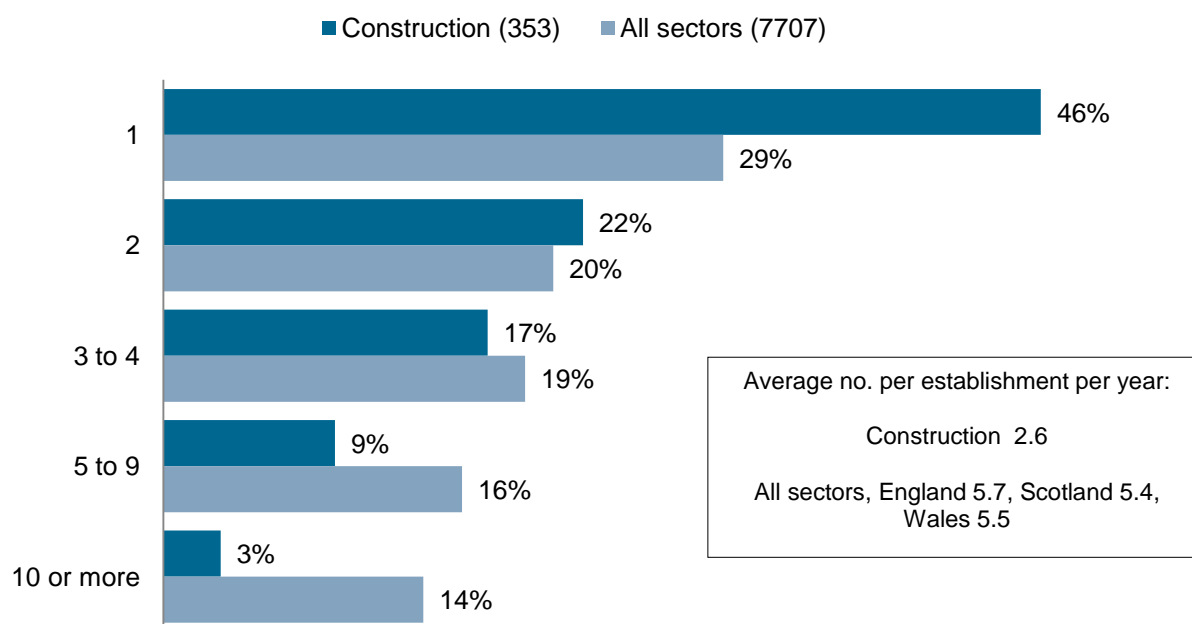


Table 54: Questions C18
Unweighted bases in parentheses

122. When placements were offered by construction companies they were more likely to be offered to benefit the company – as a recruitment source or work trial – and less often as an altruistic act to benefit the community than is the case for the generality of employers (see Figure 8):

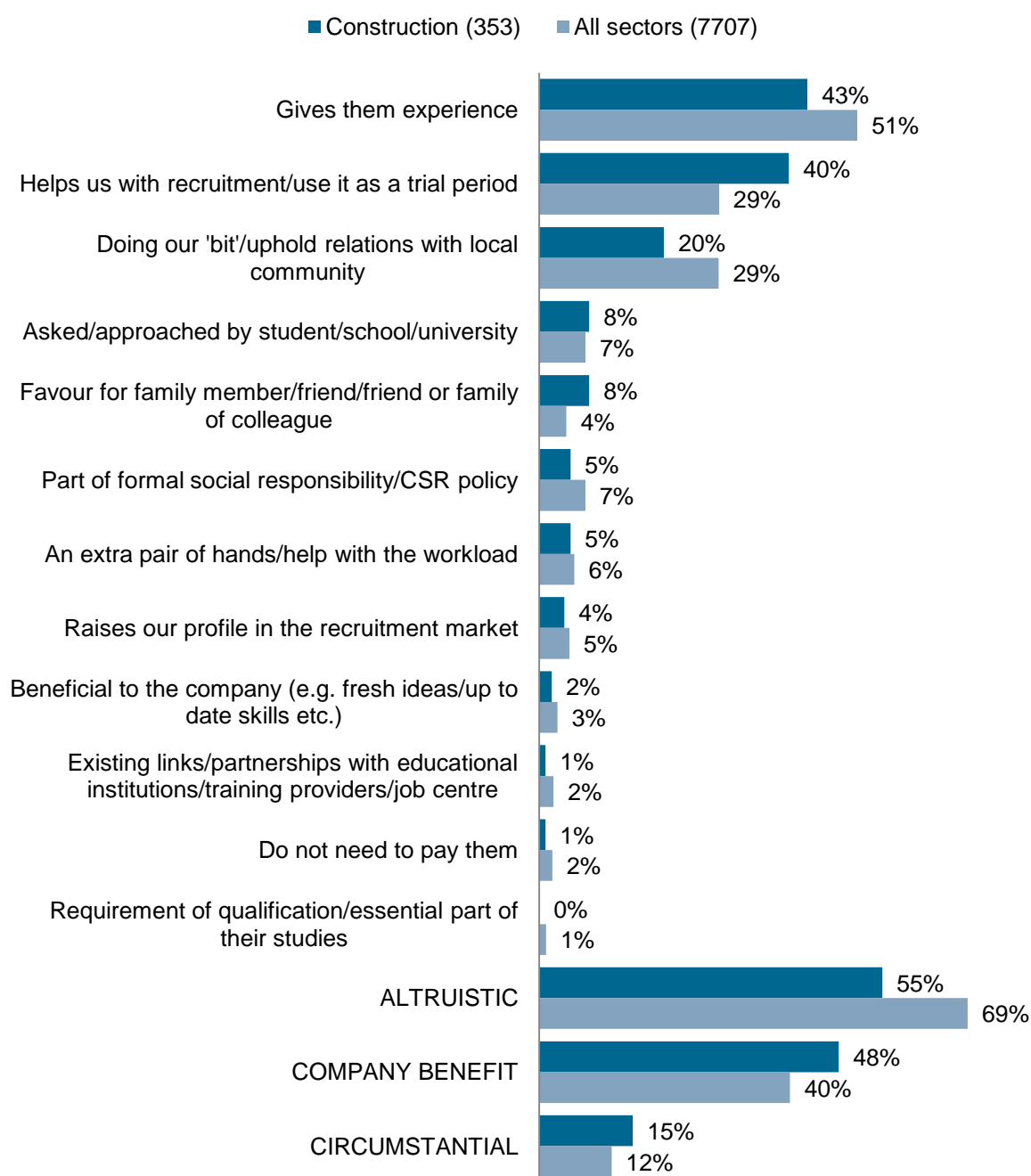
Figure 8: Reasons for offering work placements (where provide)

Table 78: Questions C20
Unweighted bases in parentheses

123. Construction employers' reasons for **not** offering work placements were more similar to those of employers in other sectors but lack of suitable roles and of time and resource, perhaps again related to the small size of many construction businesses, were somewhat more frequently given as a reason (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Reasons for not offering work placements (where do not provide)

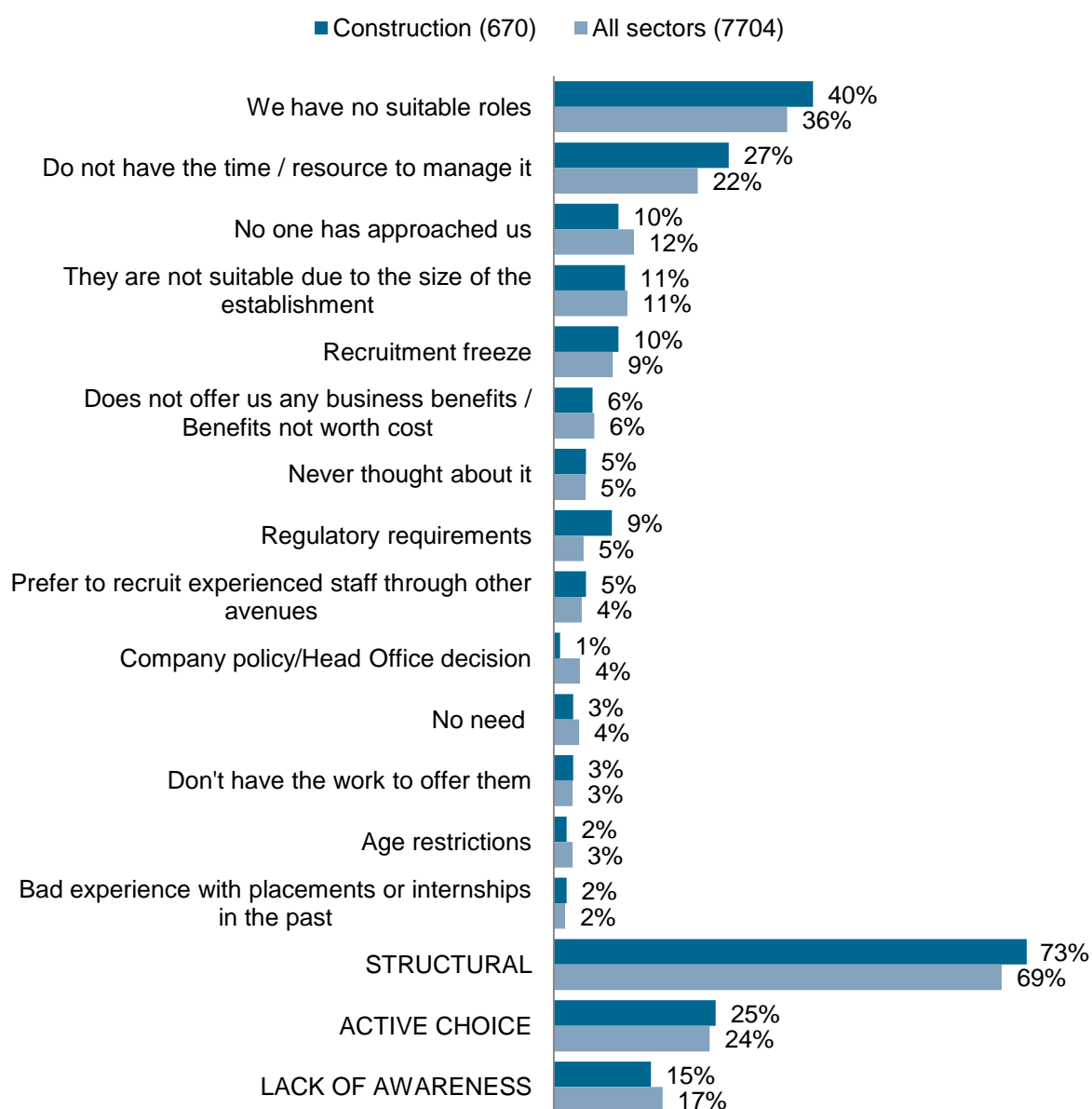


Table 82: Questions C27
Unweighted bases in parentheses

124. However, while construction employers were more likely (as in Figure 8 earlier) to say they used work placements as a recruitment tool, they were not more likely to actually recruit in this way. Figure 10 (following) shows that the proportions of employers generally saying that placements led to employment were equal for construction employers and other employers; and in the case of *young people in education* offered a work placement, construction employers were marginally less likely to have recruited from those placements.

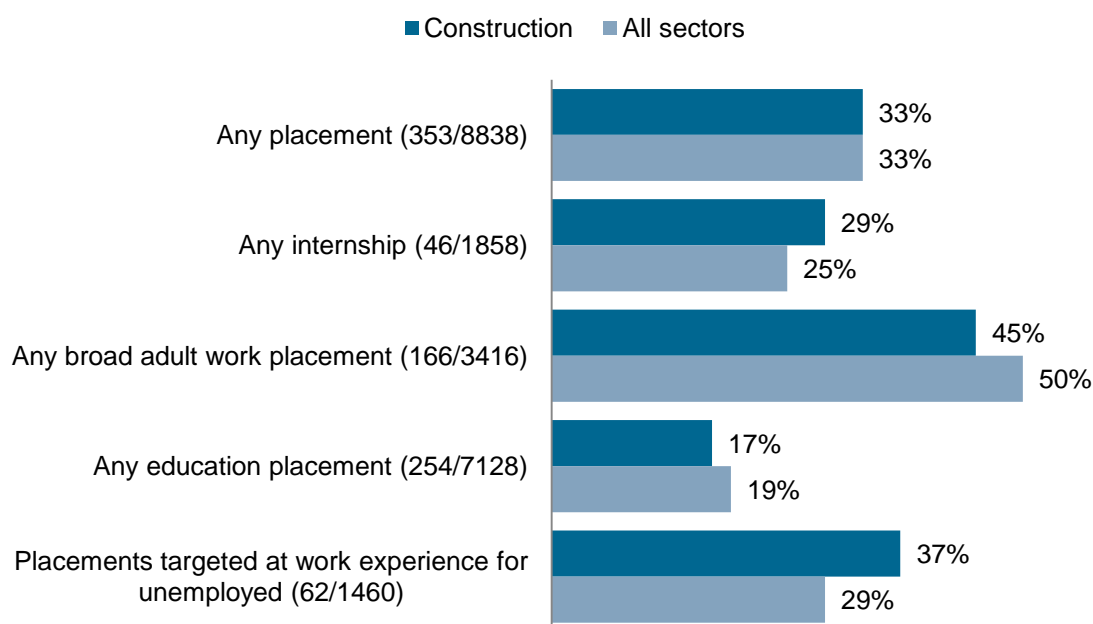
Figure 10: Work placements resulting in employment (where provide)

Table 75: Questions C19C

Unweighted bases in parentheses (construction/all sectors)

Engaging with educational institutions

125. As well as being less likely than average to offer work placements to young people, construction employers are less likely to engage with educational institutions to offer 'work inspiration' activities (5%, compared with 10% across all sectors). Two per cent of construction employers only offer these 'work inspiration activities, while 3% offer them along side work placements.
126. When 'work inspiration' was offered by construction companies it was most likely to be offered for altruistic reasons – doing 'their bit'/upholding relations with the local community (60%), to give young people experience (28%), as well as being part of their formal social responsibility/CSR policy (16%). Overall, 81% of employers offering 'work inspiration' activities in conjunction with educational institutions do so for altruistic reasons. Far fewer (29%) offer these activities for the company's benefit, mainly to raise their profile in the recruitment market (15%). For a minority, these activities are 'circumstantial' (9%), such as a favour for someone or as an extra pair of hands (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Reasons for engaging with educational institutions to offer 'work inspiration' activities (where provide)

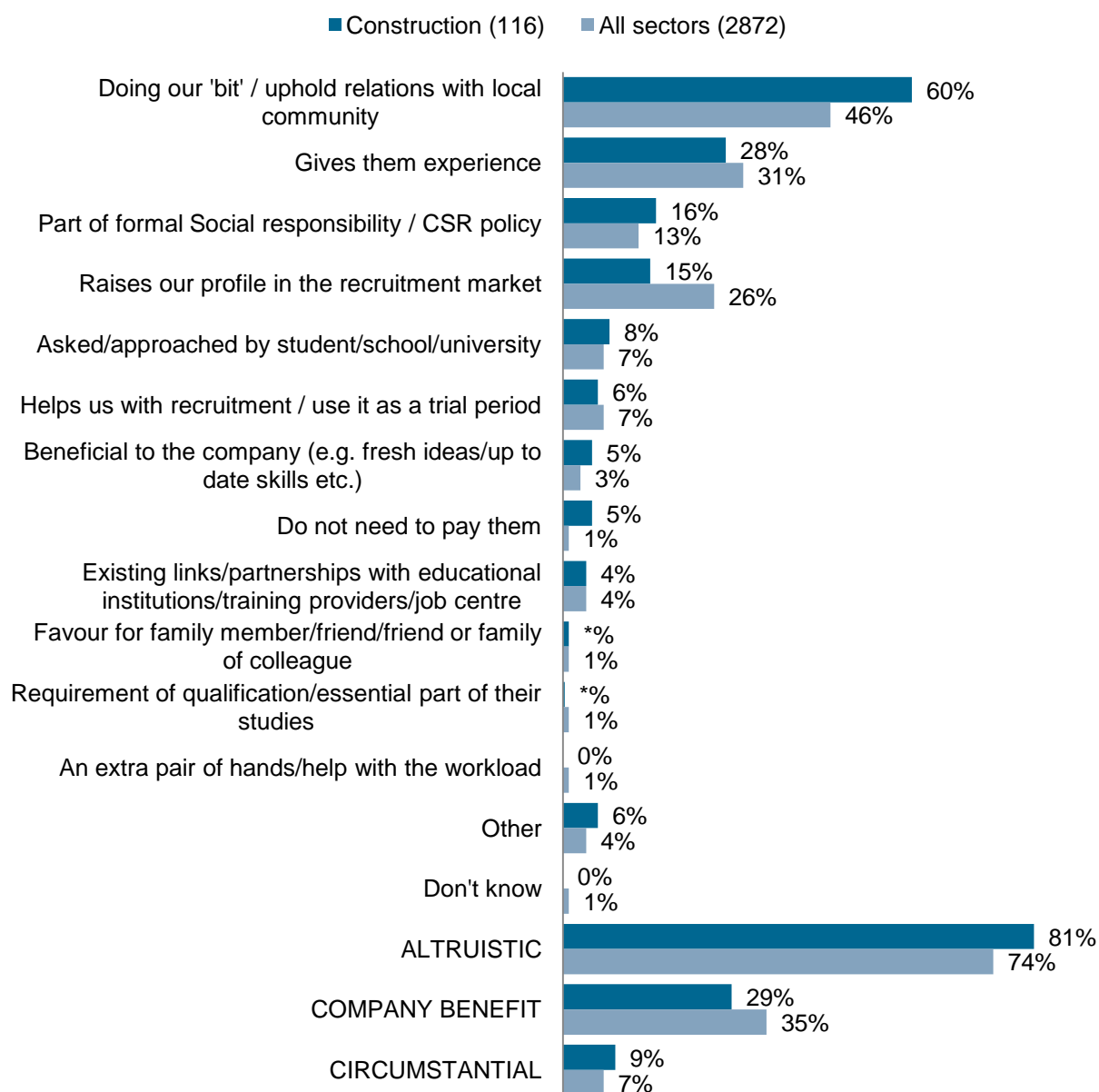


Table 81: Questions C23A

Unweighted bases in parentheses (construction/all sectors)

Summary

127. Findings from an analysis of the Employer Perspectives Survey show:

- Construction employers place less value in recruitment than other employers on academic qualifications and more value than other employers on vocational qualifications and work experience
- Construction employers are nearly twice as likely to say that work experience has at least significant value in recruitment than to say the same of academic qualifications
- Construction employers frequently, and more frequently than other employers, use informal recruitment methods. Thus, the 'soft skills' and practical elements of work readiness may be given more prominence by construction companies than the possession of qualifications to which formal application methods, at initial application stages, may give more weight
- Construction employers find that many of their young recruits are poorly prepared for work. This judgement applies to nearly half (49%) of school leavers, to 29% of FE leavers, and to 18% of university leavers.
- More employers in construction than in other sectors viewed their young recruits, from all stages of education, as poorly prepared.
- However, while construction employers value work experience more than other employers, they are less likely to offer work experience opportunities to young people in education.
- Very few construction employers offer 'work inspiration' activities while engaging with educational institutions but those that do, do so for mainly altruistic reasons. Hence, convincing employers of the benefits to them of giving young people a chance to experience work within the construction sector while still in education is that much more difficult.

5 Work readiness: the employer perspective

A survey sample

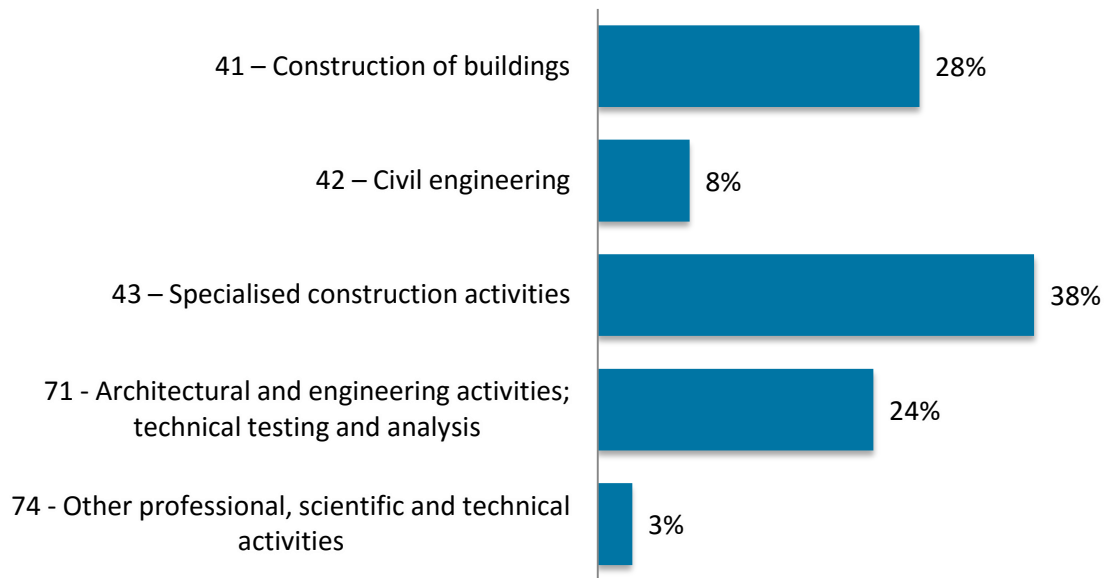
128. As noted in our introduction, a telephone survey was undertaken of a sample of 304 industry employers on work readiness themes and issues. The characteristics of that sample are described below.
129. Firstly, the distribution of the 304 interviews according to the size and sub-sector of respondents' business is shown below (Table 3). Smaller businesses, as in the industry at large, predominate and both construction and related professional services were included:

Table 3: Sector and size of employers surveyed; interviews achieved

SIC code	Number of employees				Total
	2-9	10-24	25-99	100+	
Construction	81	60	4	19	205
41 – Construction of buildings	36	18	19	7	80
42 – Civil engineering	10	5	4	6	25
43 – Specialised construction activities	35	37	22	6	100
Professional Services	47	30	9	13	99
71 - Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis	43	25	8	13	89
74 - Other professional, scientific and technical activities	4	5	1	0	10
Total	128	90	54	32	304

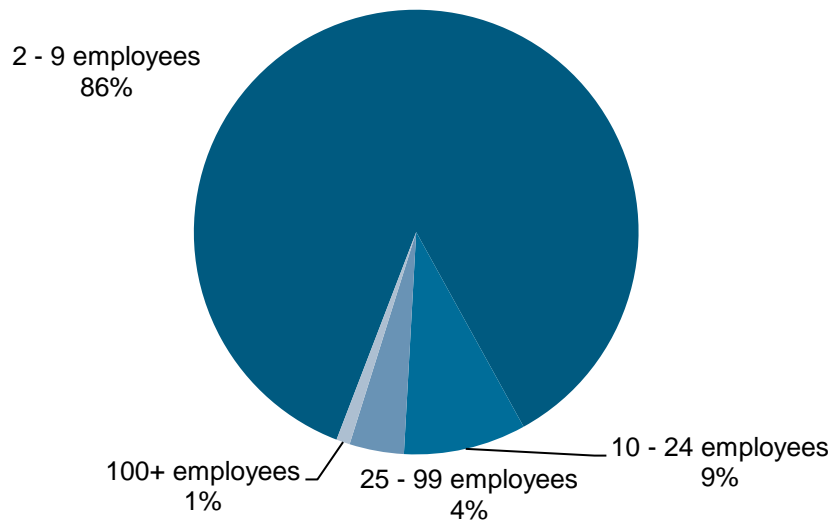
130. This pattern of response was then weighted so that it reflected that true distribution of businesses in the industry as a whole. The effect of weighting is to slightly adjust the proportions of businesses in the sample and to increase further the predominance of small firms (see Figures 12 and 13):

Figure 12: Industry sector in which businesses operate – SIC 2007 2-digit (all respondents)



Q2

Figure 13: Number of employees at that site (all respondents)



Q3

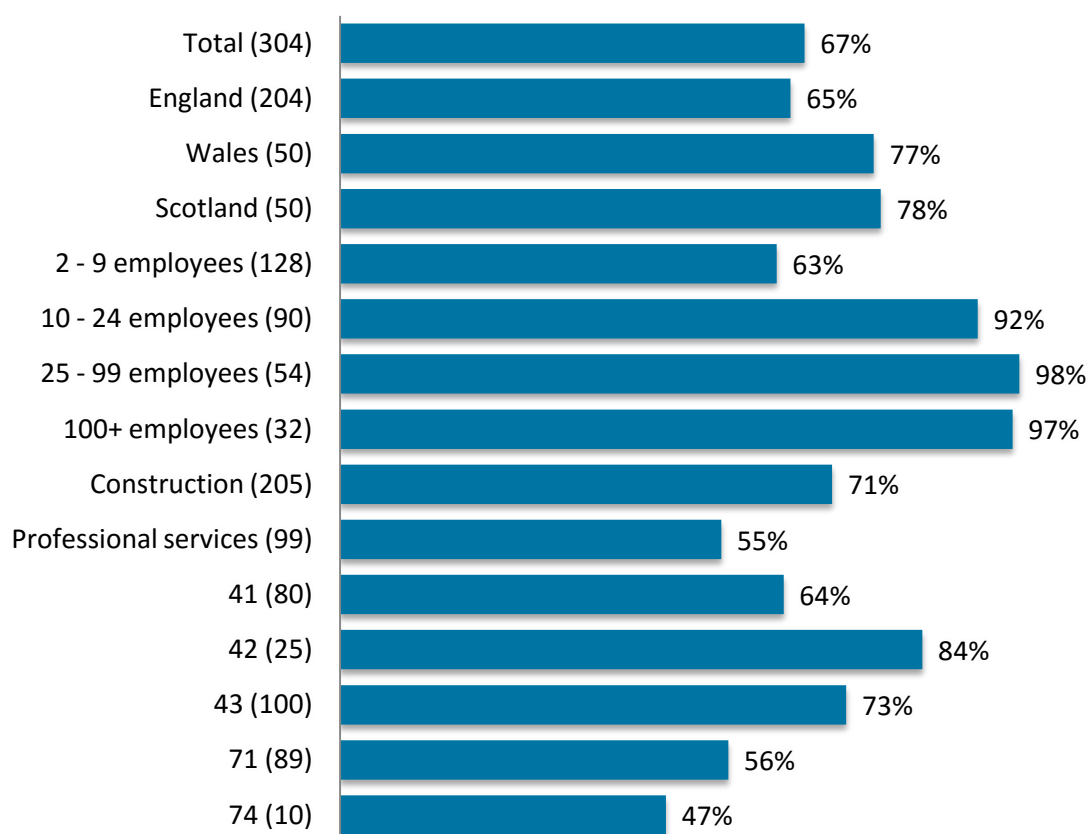
131. The survey also achieved coverage of the three nations of Great Britain. In the un-weighted sample, 204 interviews took place with businesses in England, and 50 interviews with businesses in each of Scotland and Wales (304 interviews in total).

132. Generally, thus, it can be assumed that results based on analysis of data from the weighted sample of respondents are a true and fair representation of the views of industry employers as a whole.

Recruitment of young people

133. As context for asking about employers' views on the work readiness of young people, respondents were asked about their recent recruitment activity. Figure 14 shows that two-thirds of employers had recruited any member of staff in the last 2 years, with recruitment levels, as would be expected being higher in larger businesses and in sub-sector SIC 42 (civil engineering) in which businesses are, on average, larger than in other sub-sectors:

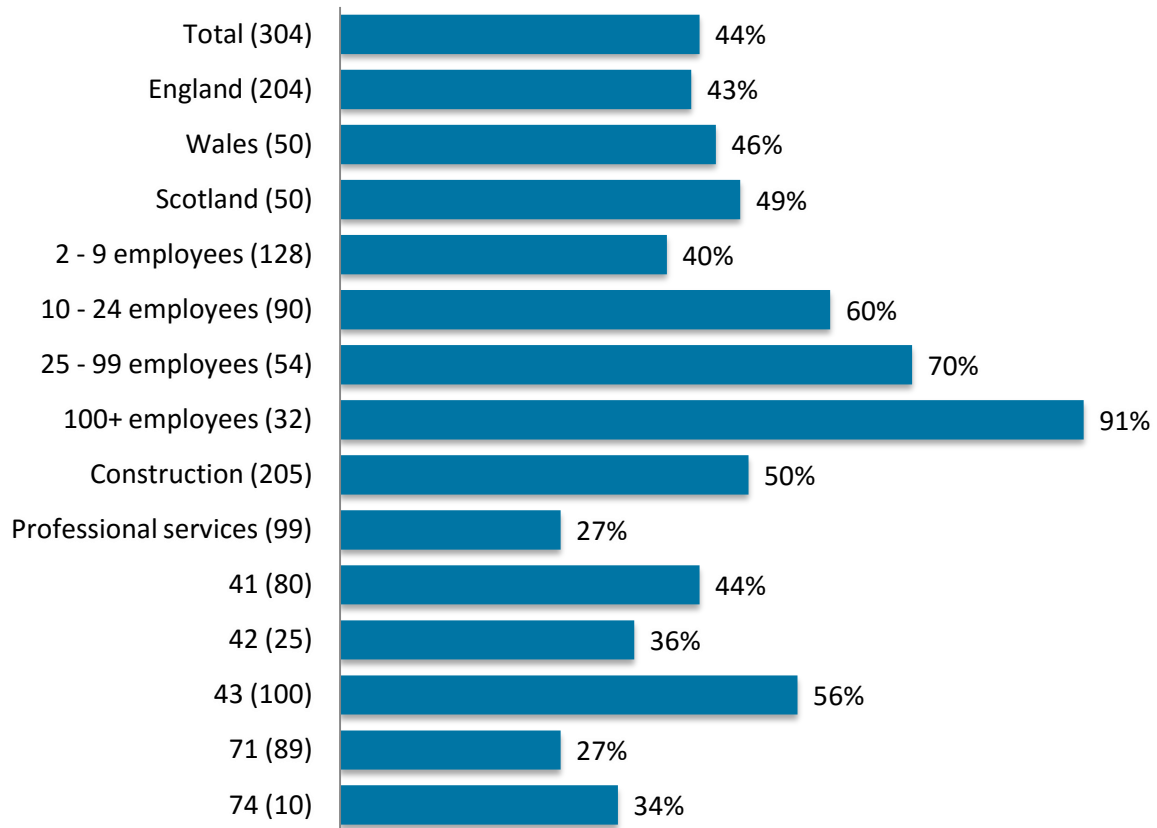
Figure 14: Proportion of businesses that have recruited someone in the last 2 years, by nation, size and sector (all respondents)



Q4

134. More specifically, 44% of businesses had recruited one or more apprentices or trainees (of any age) in the last 2 years, the proportion again rising with size of business but in this case, being highest in sub-sector SIC 43 (specialised construction activities) in which particular industry trades are often located (see Figure 15).

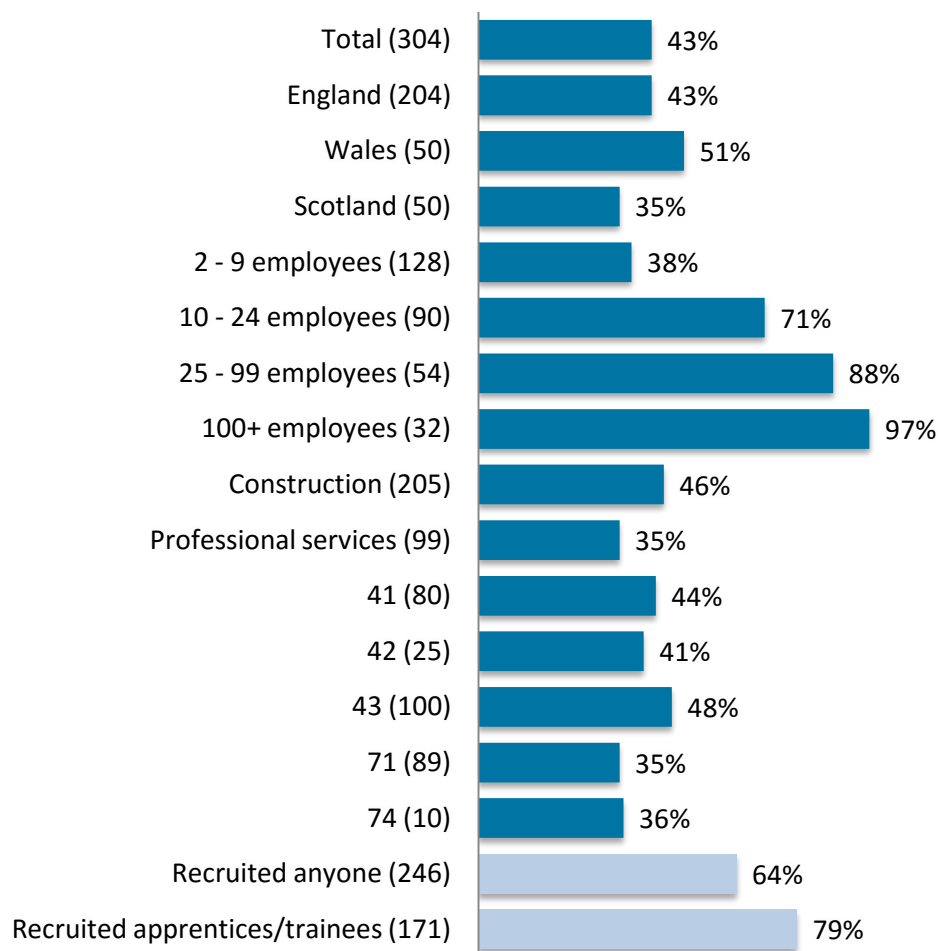
Figure 15: Proportion of businesses that have recruited apprentices or trainees in the last 2 years, by nation, size and sector (all respondents)



Q5

135. More specifically too, a similar proportion (43%) had recruited a *young* person, someone aged 24 or under in the last two years, with the main variation being the size of the business, such that larger business, which are more generally likely to recruit, were by extension, more likely to have had 'young recruits (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Proportion of businesses that have recruited a young person aged 24 or under who was entering the construction industry for the first time in the last 2 years, by nation, size, sector and by whether recruited at all or recruited apprentices/trainees (all respondents)



Q6

136. Where young people had been taken on, their most frequent prior status was education in a Further Education College but school leavers and people working in a non-construction job were also recruited in substantial proportions. The main variation by sub-sector was that the 'professional' sub-sectors (SIC 71 and SIC 74) were less likely to take on school leavers and much more likely to take on graduate(s) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Situations of young people prior to recruitment – prompted, multiple response, by sector and size (where recruited a young person under the age of 25)

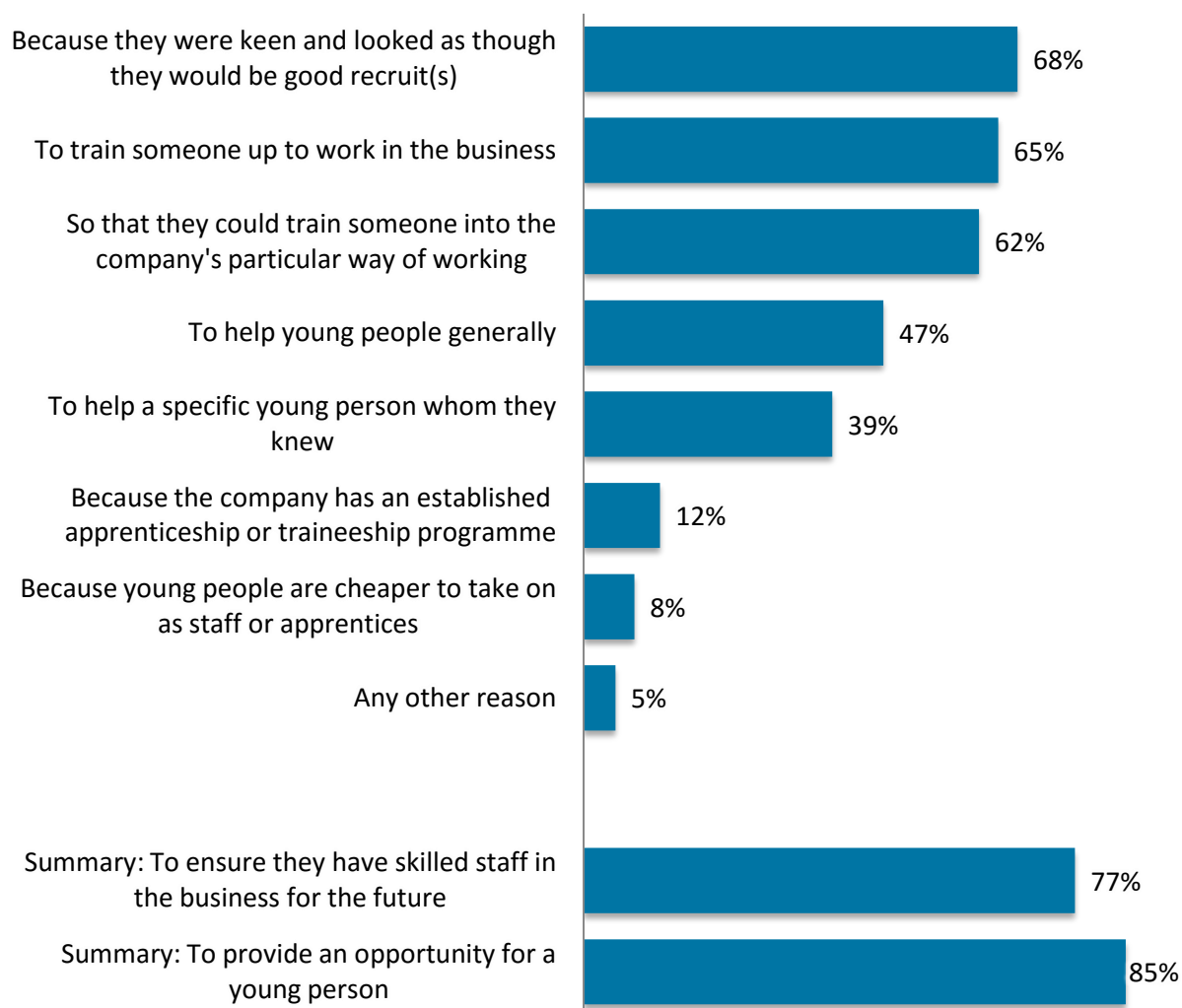
	Industry Group			Industry (SIC 2007)				
	Total	Construction	Professional services	41	42	43	71	74
At school	32%	37%	14%	37%	42%	36%	14%	7%
At further education college	36%	40%	21%	51%	43%	31%	23%	6%
At university	13%	6%	41%	9%	18%	1%	43%	17%
In a job but not in construction	30%	32%	26%	17%	10%	45%	21%	73%
Summary: At school/FE college	62%	70%	32%	76%	82%	64%	34%	14%
Unweighted bases	187	131	56	47	15	69	50	6

	No. Of Employees (Site Based)				
	Total	employees 2 - 9	employees 10 - 24	employees 25 - 99	employees 100+
At school	32%	27%	48%	45%	58%
At further education college	36%	38%	20%	29%	78%
At university	13%	11%	20%	20%	42%
In a job but not in construction	30%	30%	32%	31%	42%
Summary: At school/FE college	62%	63%	58%	57%	90%
Unweighted bases	187	45	65	46	31

Q7

137. Those employers who had taken on young people without their having had previous experience in construction were asked their reasons for doing so. The main reasons were the apparent keenness of the young people selected and the opportunity to train someone to work in the business or, more specifically, to train someone into the company's particular way of working. However, the desire to help young people generally or specific individuals known to the business was also a factor for a significant proportion of businesses (see Figure 17).

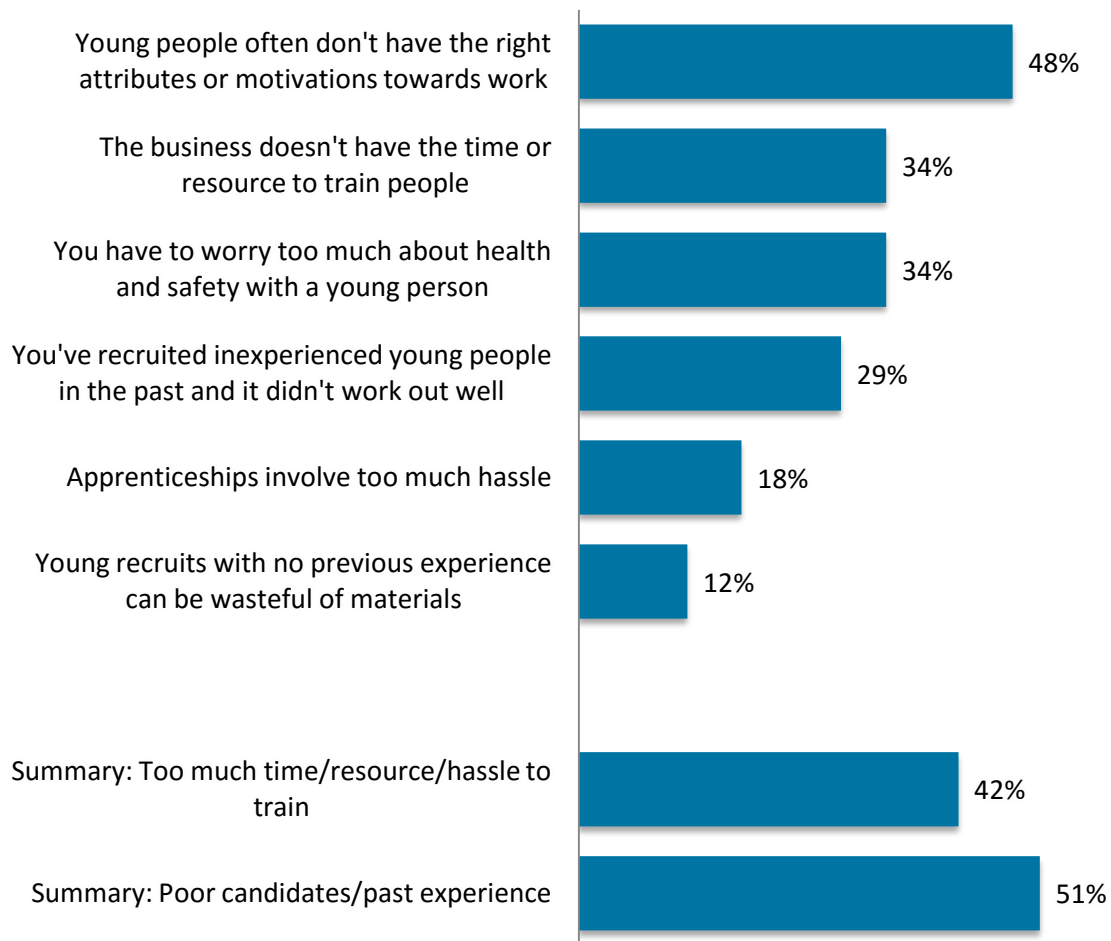
Figure 17: Reasons for taking on young people with no previous experience working in construction – prompted, multiple response (where recruited a young person under the age of 25)



Q8 Unweighted sample base = 187

138. Employers who had recruited but had *not* recruited young people, were asked why they had made that choice. In this case, the reasons concerned a mix of doubt about the quality of young recruits (that they have a poor work ethic or had proved to be poor recruits in the past) and about limits on the business's capacity to manage the implications of recruiting young, inexperienced people (lack of training capacity or health and safety concerns) (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: Reasons for not taking on young people without previous experience in construction – prompted, multiple response (where have recruited but not a young person under the age of 25)

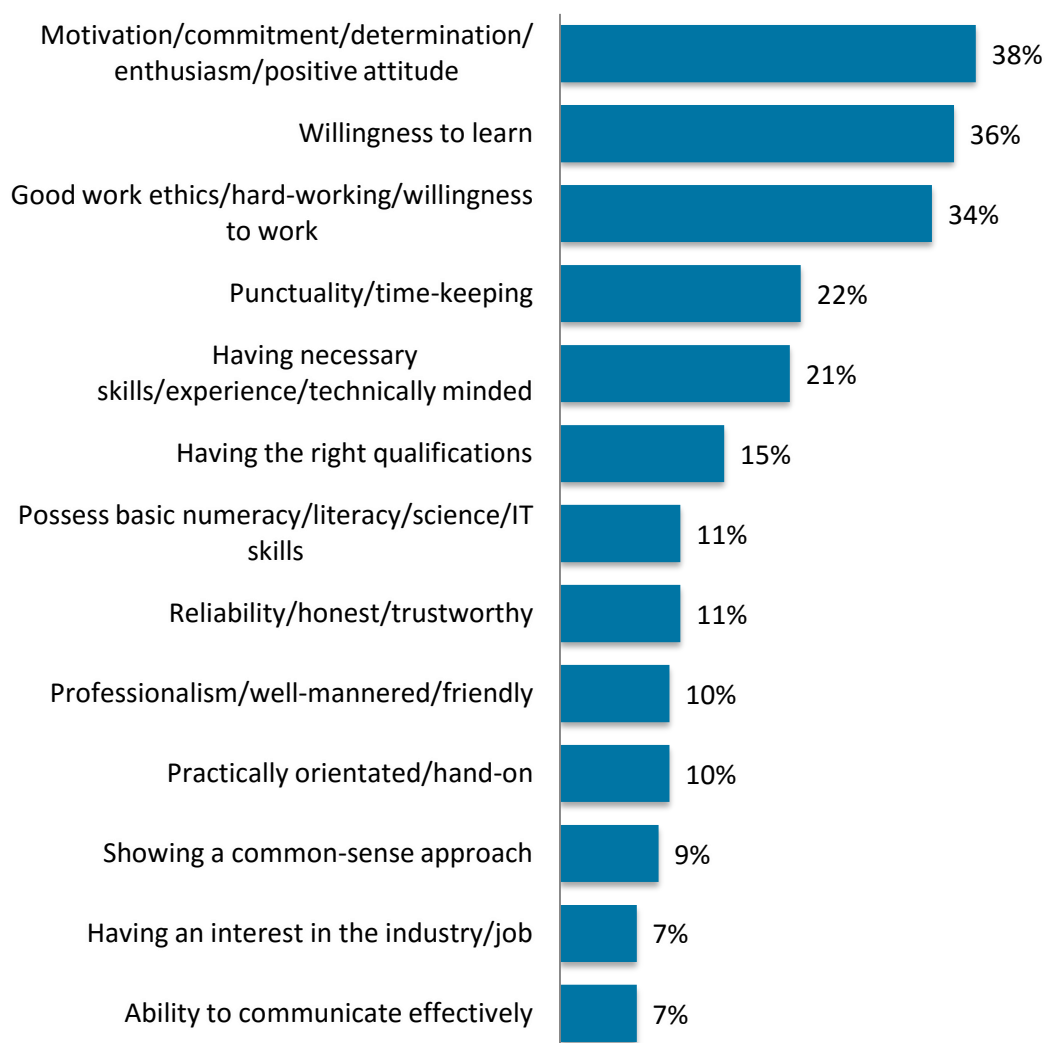


Q9 Unweighted sample base = 53

Employer perspectives on work readiness

139. Asked an open questions as to the characteristics which young people entering the industry from *school or FE college* should have, the most frequent responses concerned motivations, attitudes, work ethic punctuality, and willingness to learn. 'Technical' requirements, such as qualifications or possession of numeracy, literacy, or IT skills were less frequently mentioned (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Main characteristics that school and FE leavers should have to make them suitable for employment in construction – unprompted, multiple response (all respondents)



Q11 Unweighted sample base = 304

140. The same open question was asked in respect of employers' expectations of recruits from *university*. In this case, employers more frequently expected them to have industry-specific skills or qualifications, but attitudinal factors were still often mentioned (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Main characteristics that university and HE leavers should have to make them suitable for employment in construction – unprompted, multiple response (all respondents)

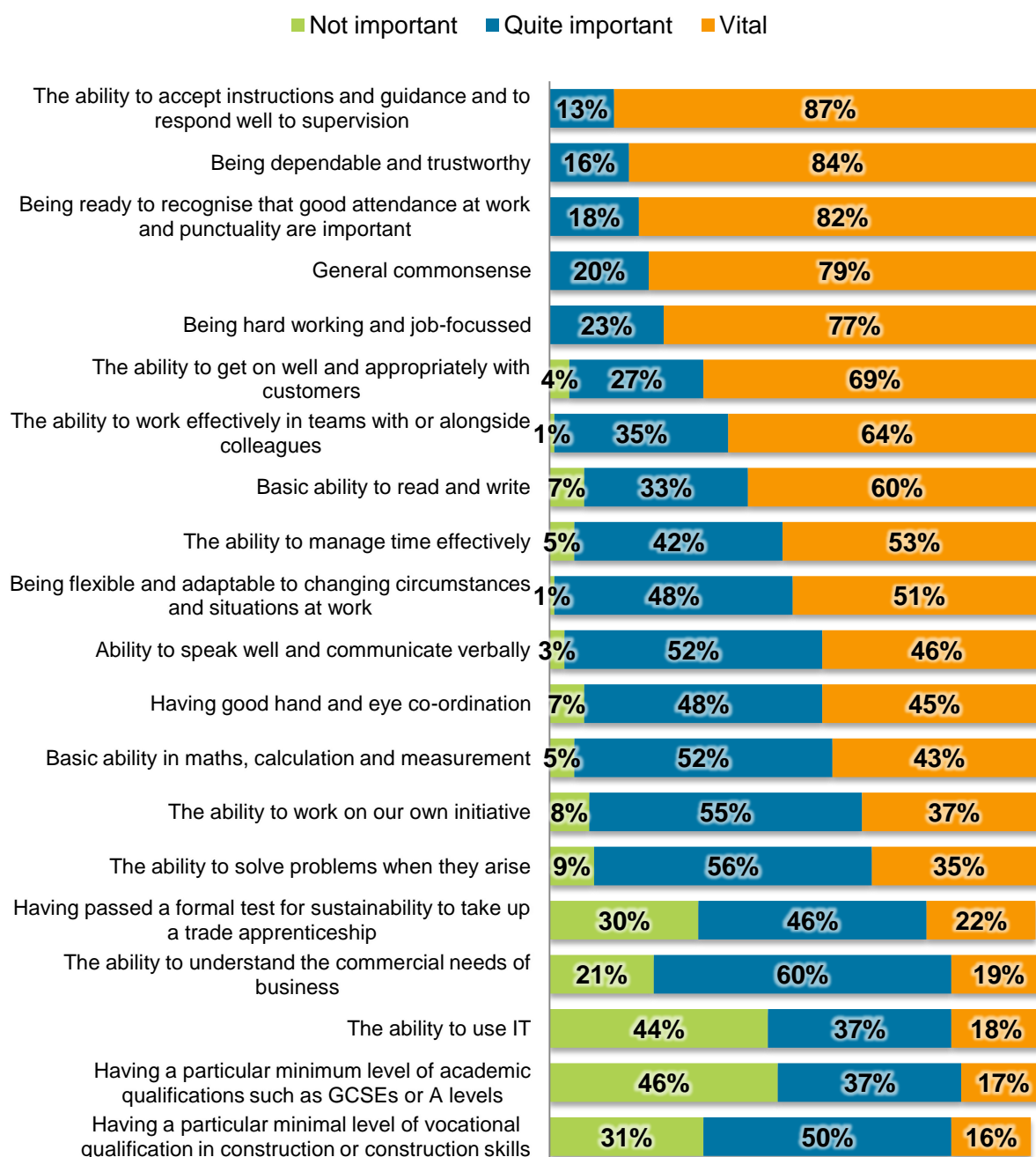


Q12 Unweighted sample base = 304

141. Following these open questions to which employers gave spontaneous responses, respondents were offered a series of options as to the skills, abilities, and qualities which are important for young people entering the industry to possess. (Note: these options were those which the literature on work readiness, reviewed earlier, widely identified as factors likely to contribute to work readiness).

142. In response, employers again stressed personal qualities and behaviours – acceptance of instruction, dependability, attendance and punctuality, common sense, and focus on work – as being the most critical factors. ‘Technical’ attributes such as academic or vocational qualifications, IT skills, or commercial awareness were frequently seen as ‘quite important’ but as essential only in a minority of cases (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Extent to which skills, abilities and qualities are considered important for young people to have when entering the construction industry (all respondents)



Q13 Unweighted sample base = 304

143. Key differences by industry sub-sector in these proportions were that businesses in the professional sub-sectors were much more likely than those in construction ('hands-on') sub-sectors to require technical skills and qualifications and somewhat less concerned (though still substantially so) with attitudinal and personal qualities. For example 'professional' businesses more frequently saw basic maths ability (50% vs. 40%), the ability to use IT (44% vs. 9%), minimum academic qualifications (32% vs. 12%), and minimum vocational qualifications (33% vs. 10%) as 'vital' than did businesses in the construction sub-sectors.
144. Variations by business size were mainly not large and, therefore, not statistically significant. However, some differences were:
- Small businesses with between 2 and 9 employees more frequently saw it as vital that young recruits should get on well with customers (perhaps because smaller or domestic contracts more often require this) and should be able to act on their own initiative and solve problems (perhaps these are qualities required in less formally structures working environments).
 - The proportions of businesses seeing academic and vocational qualifications as vital rose in line with the size of firms.
145. Where respondents said that they required a minimum level of academic qualification that minimum level was: an unspecified number or type of GCSE passes (48% of cases); a specific number of GCSE passes (21%); or passes in specific GCSE subjects (33%).
146. Where a specific number was required, that number was usually 2 passes (32%) or 3 passes (44%) with the remaining respondents required 4 or a higher number of passes.
147. Where specific subjects were required these almost always maths (99% of these cases) and English (94%).

Employer perspectives on work readiness: in-depth interviews

148. Fifteen industry managers were interviewed in depth. The companies managed by these managers included two architects' practices, three electrical contractors of varied sizes, a thatcher, a large multi-national construction and engineering consultancy, a painting and decorating business, a ground works contractor, an off-site manufacturer of engineered parts for construction, a buildings surveyor, and four builders of houses or commercial buildings. Eleven of the businesses had recruited young people in the recent past of which nine had recruited one or more apprentices and two had recruited graduates.
149. Asked what qualities and attributes were required of young recruits, a wide variety of characteristics were observed.
150. In respect of **qualifications**, demands were mostly not high. For example:
- I'm not looking for qualifications, I'm not looking for anyone with straight As or anything like that, just a genuine interest in buildings. We prefer to feed them the way we do things here, the way we survey, the way we draw, you know, all these sorts of things.*

They only need basic academic knowledge. A basic understanding of life in the real world is really more important, I think. The school seems to focus, these days, on the academic side, rather than the practical side.

On the groundwork side, academic skills aren't really necessary.

Qualifications aren't that important. As long as they can pass the basic aptitude test required for the apprenticeship that's enough. Not all young people do well at school, academically, but that doesn't mean to say that they won't learn, it's just that some people learn in a different way from others.

151. However, there were instances, where young people entered or were expected to progress into a higher level or technical occupation, where possession of qualifications had a somewhat higher profile, for example:

For school leavers Maths and English at grade B. Particularly strong Maths. To progress into being a chartered engineer a degree is needed, so having the basics of Maths and English helps lay the foundation for getting a degree.

It's dependent on the role, but as a graduate building surveyor we'd expect them to have a degree.

152. Having had previous **work experience** was generally seen as valuable:

Previous retail experience is use in terms of having dealt with members of the public in terms of having social skills.

I like to see work experience on a CV. This could be something as little as Saturday job or weekend job, as it shows the person can manage their time being able to get in a routine for work.

Work experience is very valuable particularly if it's within health and safety and the construction sector.

It is useful if they can have had some experience of working on a building site. It's very important to know what construction means in terms of people putting one concrete block on top of another, or a piece of wooden joist on top of a concrete block, or whatever it happens to be.

Work experience is useful as it speeds up adaptation into the industry

I think you're in a totally different environment to being at school or college, and so I don't think you can underestimate how important some work experience would be... If you could see that on a CV against someone that didn't have it,,it shows that they're happy to get out there and work.

153. Although one respondent recognised that work experience has to be provided by one employer in the first place:

I don't really look for work experience, because someone has to be the first to offer it. If somebody's come to you for the first time, and they haven't got any work experience, how are they going to get the work experience to get the job? It's a chicken and egg thing... everybody's got to have a chance

154. Similarly, **literacy and numeracy** at a basic level were also often seen as important:

Maths skills are essential and basic literacy. They've got to be able to add or take away, etc. So, maths skills are essential, especially for our job.

You have to have the basics of multiplication and adding up, and know computers for ordering stuff. It's all computerised, so you do need some skills

Literacy and numeracy are valuable when you're trying to expand because staff have to be able to do it themselves and get on with things that are written and they understand

Basic literacy skills so they can record notes

- Views on the possession of **IT skills** were mixed being essential in some cases but 'nice to have' or taken for granted in others:

It is nice but I think it's a secondary really

IT skills are just so essential. Everything we do is electronic, everything is IT based

These days, computer skills never go amiss, but most kids can do it anyway.

IT skills are important because a lot of the drawings used in construction are done on Computer Aided Design (CAD)

- Beyond these factors, a wide range of **personal and attitudinal** factors were valued, including:

Motivation is very valuable as it ties into asking more questions leading to a better understanding of what we are trying to do

I like to see something on their CV that shows personal drive and commitment. Duke of Edinburgh, that sort of thing, that would always help someone's CV stand out from the rest. We also want enthusiasm, willingness to learn, be able to work in part of a team, a good attitude, commitment and communication skills

We want them to be keen to work. Volunteering is something that shows they can demonstrate their commitment and drive

They need willingness to learn, teamwork, common sense, reliability and having a good character generally

Punctuality is important. Turning up at the times they've said and just staying and going that extra bit if needed or required

People should be inquisitive and eager to learn. You can get lots of people who've left school at sixteen who may be far more capable and competent than someone who's done a university degree who's not interested

We're looking for people who are wanting to progress and have got the right communication skills... Someone that you can put in front of clients

What's needed is willingness to do whatever is required, not just fit the job description. Often I'll put together a job description and then I'll put at the bottom

'and anything else that may be required' because there are so many different things they could be asked to do, and they've got to be willing

They need to be able to present themselves well. Appearance goes a long way. This industry's customer faced

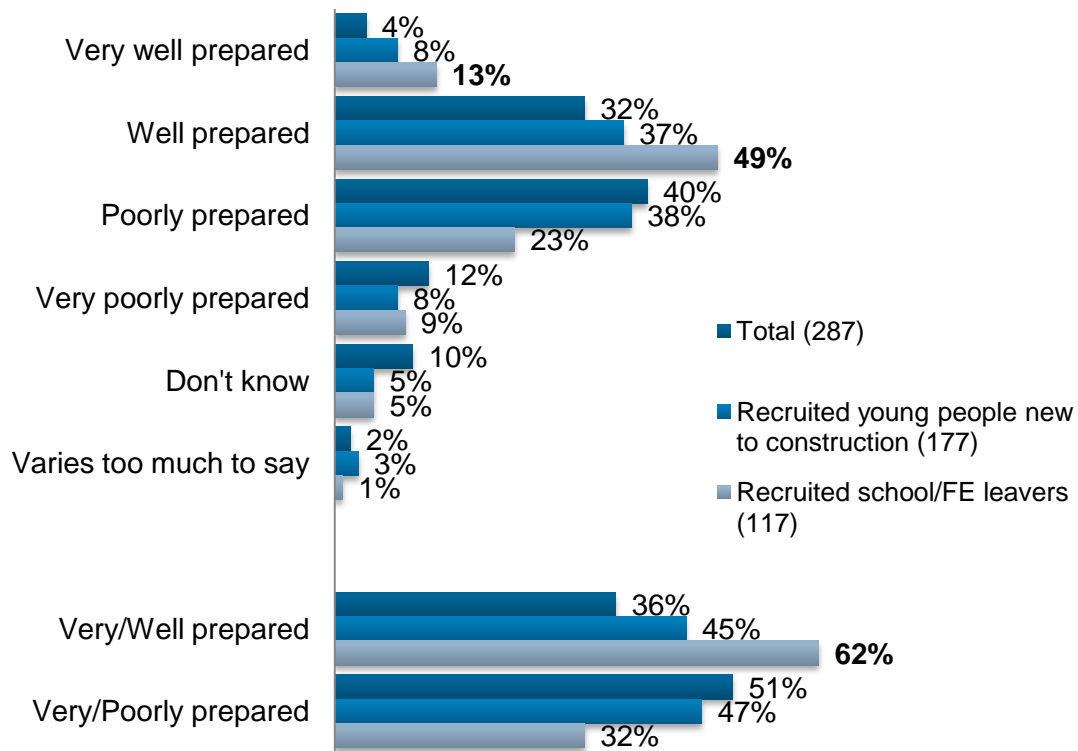
People skills so if they can communicate with the customer. That's always really handy

How work ready are young people?

155. Overall, there was considerable scepticism as to the degree to which *school and FE college leavers* are well-prepared for work. Only 36% of employers saw them as well-prepared compared with 51% who saw them as poorly-prepared. However, negativity was less frequent (see Figure 22) amongst those who had actually recruited young people and considerably less frequent amongst those who had, particularly, recruited school and college leavers. The interpretation of this variation is somewhat speculative but could include:

- Some employers had been more able than others to attract higher quality candidates and, hence, had a more favourable view.
- Employers who had not recruited young people were expressing a widespread negative view of young people which is not shared by employers who have more substantial contact with young people (by employing them).
- Employers have different levels of expectation of what young people should be able to offer.

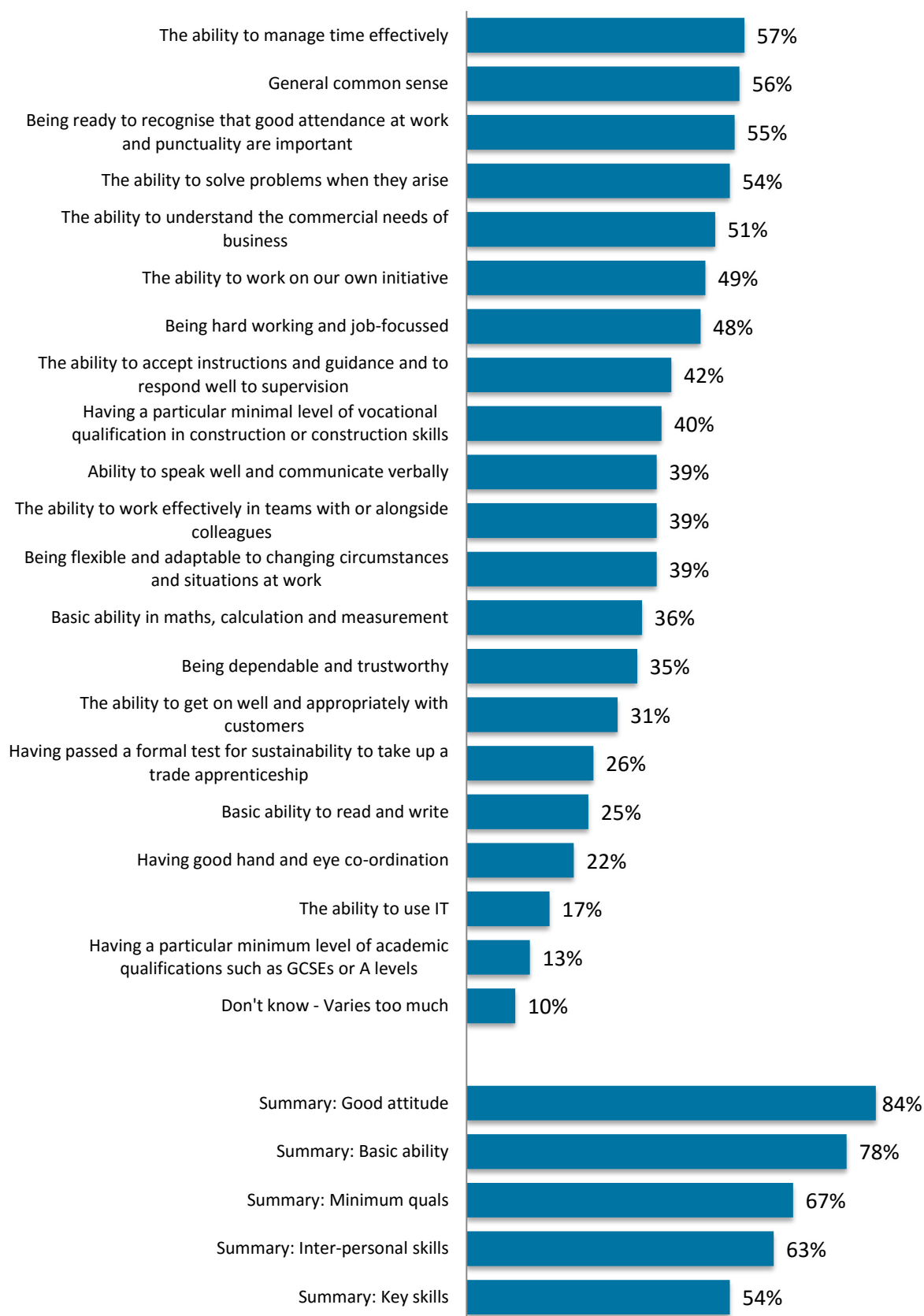
Figure 22: Extent to which businesses consider school/FE leavers prepared for work, by whether recruited (all respondents)



Q16a Unweighted sample bases in parentheses (question introduced after the pilot – hence reduced base)

156. Employers who believed that school and FE leavers were poorly prepared for work most frequently believed that their deficiencies lay in poor time management, lack of common sense, poor attendance and punctuality, inability to solve problems as they arise, and in other personal characteristics rather than, at the other end of the scale, in inadequate academic qualifications or IT skills (see Figure 23).

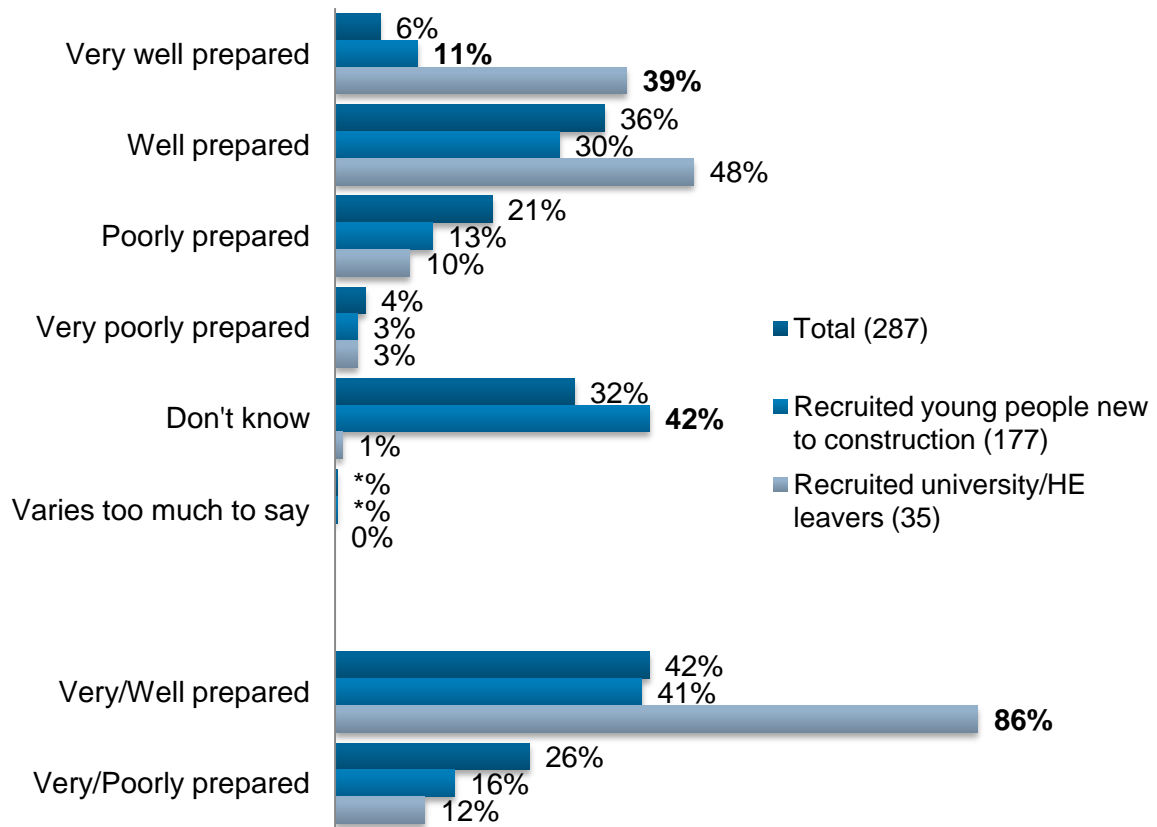
Figure 23: Characteristics, skills and abilities that are perceived as lacking among school and FE leavers (where consider them poorly prepared for work)



Q17 Unweighted sample base = 161

157. Employers' judgements on the preparedness for work of new university graduate were rather more favourable, with *more* seeing them as well prepared than seeing them as poorly prepared (42% vs. 26%). Again employers who recruited graduates were much more likely than average to see them as well prepared (see Figure 24).

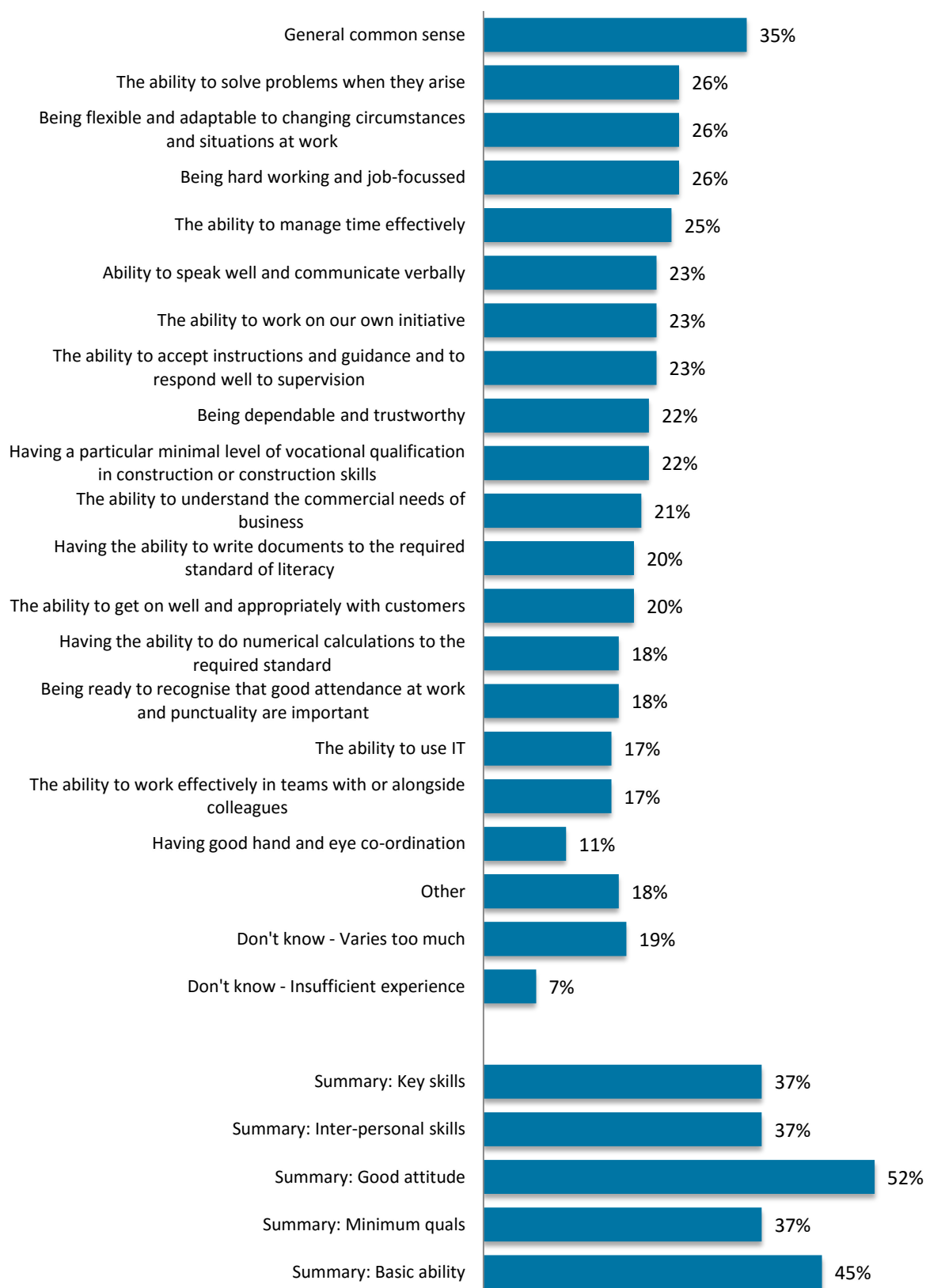
Figure 24: Extent to which businesses consider university/HE leavers prepared for work, by whether recruited (all respondents)



Q16b Unweighted sample bases in parentheses (question introduced after the pilot – hence reduced base)

158. And again, where employers saw graduates as poorly prepared, the main deficiencies they perceived were more often related to personal characteristics and attitudes (see Figure 25) than to their technical abilities and qualifications.

Figure 25: Characteristics, skills and abilities that are perceived as lacking among university/HE leavers (where consider them poorly prepared for work)



Q17 Unweighted sample base = 100

Perceptions of young people's work readiness: in-depth interviews

159. Respondents in in-depth interviews were also asked if young people seeking to enter the industry tended to lack any particular attributes which were important to the employers seeking new recruits.
160. Some respondents had few problems with the abilities of young people or made allowances for their inexperience or recognised that there was variety in young people's work readiness. For example:

They seem to me to be quite ready ... They all seem to me to be pretty seriously getting on with things

There's a mixture. Some people want to learn, but some people just don't want to learn

The main problem is lack of work experience but it isn't a major issue as training is given.

There's a lack of practical experience or work experience. They can be slightly immature, but this isn't something you can teach. You give them the maturity. Only by giving them responsibility, will they mature.

Some are just not ready for work. That's not being nasty or anything like that, it's just how they are

161. However, other respondents saw particular issues, including lack of work experience...:

Lack of work experience is a big one. I just don't think you can really underestimate how valuable it is. If you've never been in a work environment, they find it a massive shock

..... lack of motivation and ability to accept the work environment:

Lack of motivation can be an issue I've dealt with a few people that have been like that and it's hard to turn them around

They struggle to handle working outside after being in school for such a long time. It's a bit of a shock. They struggle with the labour-intensive nature of the work

They can struggle with boring, repetitive tasks in uncomfortable conditions. It's a test of enthusiasm.

I think a lot of them have problems with accepting authority, being told what to do. I think that a lot of them have problems with attending college, they think that it's optional I think there are a lot of problems now that weren't there twenty years ago"

..... overemphasis on academic education at the expense of basic or personal skills:

It's all very well being able to work the computer but you have to know what you're doing in terms of the drawing. Sometimes you do have to just go back to the basics with the pen and pencil to explain things, how something goes together, before you can actually put it down on computer.

There's a lack of soft skills, skills like communication, talking on the phone etc because schools just push the academic side of things

Everything is just about academics, which is great if you're an academic, but I think our problem, from an employment point of view, is that you need someone to actually be able to speak nicely and clearly and be confident.

Life skills should be taught across the board. It doesn't matter how academic you are, everybody needs it because that's what makes you employable.

.....and one respondent recognised the competitive situation which young people are in:

You've got people who have been doing the job for years, and you can just say, 'Yes, do that,' and they'll get it done with no problems at all, or you can pick a new graduate, and say, 'Yes, I want you to do that.' They say, 'How do you do it?' Then you have to tell them how to do it. You're working on tight margins and this is expensive. The point is that there's so much surplus at the moment... you've got people coming out of schools trying to get jobs and there's nothing there for them

162. Asked to identify possible **reasons** for any observed deficiencies, these employers offered a variety of reasons which included:

Lack of work experience:

There's a shock in the change from school life to working life. They've got to work harder than what they have been used to

No work experience at university. A placement year might get your foot in the door somewhere but I don't think a year is that long, and doesn't always guarantee a job. You come out, you're fresh, you've got qualifications, but obviously you've not worked for anybody.

Over-academic focus in education:

Schools are too focussed on academic learning. They aren't balanced enough. The balance isn't there at the moment. Totally in the wrong direction..Study should be more practical-based. Get them outside doing things, rather than sitting inside all the time.

"There's a need for all different types of people and the schools don't recognise it because they're all academic people trying to teach kids that aren't always academic.

Mostly because of the focus on academic subjects in schools

Attitudes and cultural factors which militate against young people fitting well into the industry:

Kids nowadays are far more confident than they used to be, back in our day. That confidence can sometimes come through as an arrogance. I'm looking for that quality that somebody really wants this job, really wants to learn it.

Drink and drugs problems

There's a range of possible factors such as society and their parentage. Ultimately I just think a lot of it has to come back to the way they've been brought up

- difficulties gaining work experience because of site regulations. Just with site procedures, I mean, I'm just thinking, even if you've got someone under eighteen, there are additional procedures that you have to go through and make sure that the site's aware that there's a young person there.

Societal problem where children are sheltered too much and not allowed to develop through healthy competition. Consequences also of living in an instant society. They expect things rather than working for them. Competition is rife, everywhere, and it always has been, and it always will be. I think that, through society, I use the word 'mollycoddle'. Children, as they've grown up, have not been exposed to what life out of school is like.

Culturally society is too kind to young people and it has created a culture of entitlement. To be blunt, I think because we've been far too soft on young people.

There are social factors such as the rise in single parent families which leaves children without a strong male role model. A lot of young men in particular don't have a particularly good male role model in their lives and I think that can be difficult. They're coming into a work environment where it's predominantly male, and they find it difficult to accept that they're being told what to do. The other thing is a lot of young people are coming from families where their father has never worked or has rarely worked. So, they don't have a good work ethic in the respect of the discipline of getting up in the morning and getting yourself to work.

Misunderstanding of what the industry is like:

Sometimes young people aren't taught the wider context of the industry. Sometimes construction doesn't let people know about the exciting role that it has to play in society

Our job is to provide houses for people to live in, or our job is to rebuild city centres, or our job is to provide offices for people to operate out of, or whatever it happens to be, then that becomes an that becomes a big and important thing that you're part of. If you are told that your job is just to mix this cement, or take delivery of this cement, and then put it in a wheelbarrow and take it from A to B, or pump it from A to B or whatever it is, then you think, 'God, this is a really tedious piece of manual labour, isn't it?' So, actually, allowing people to dream about the bigger picture, and what they're part of, is an important part of any industry"

Or restrictions posed by Health and Safety or site regulations:

Health and safety is critical and problems what insurance. Health and Safety has shot us in the foot really because they've stopped allowing people to do it. Insurance doesn't cover you to have someone for work experience if they're under sixteen. So, how do they get any work experience? They can't.

There are difficulties gaining work experience because of site regulations. If you've got someone under eighteen, there are additional procedures that you have to go through and make sure that the site's aware that there's a young person there.

Provision of work experience

163. As the review of literature set out earlier observes, work experience is generally regarded as one of most effective ways in which young people can develop an understanding of what employment demands in terms of those personal qualities and attitudes which, as above, are perceived by many employers to be important but also to be absent in many potential entrants to the industry.
164. However, the survey revealed that fewer than half of industry employers provide work experience – though the proportion rises to three quarters or more of businesses with 25 or more employees (see Table 5).

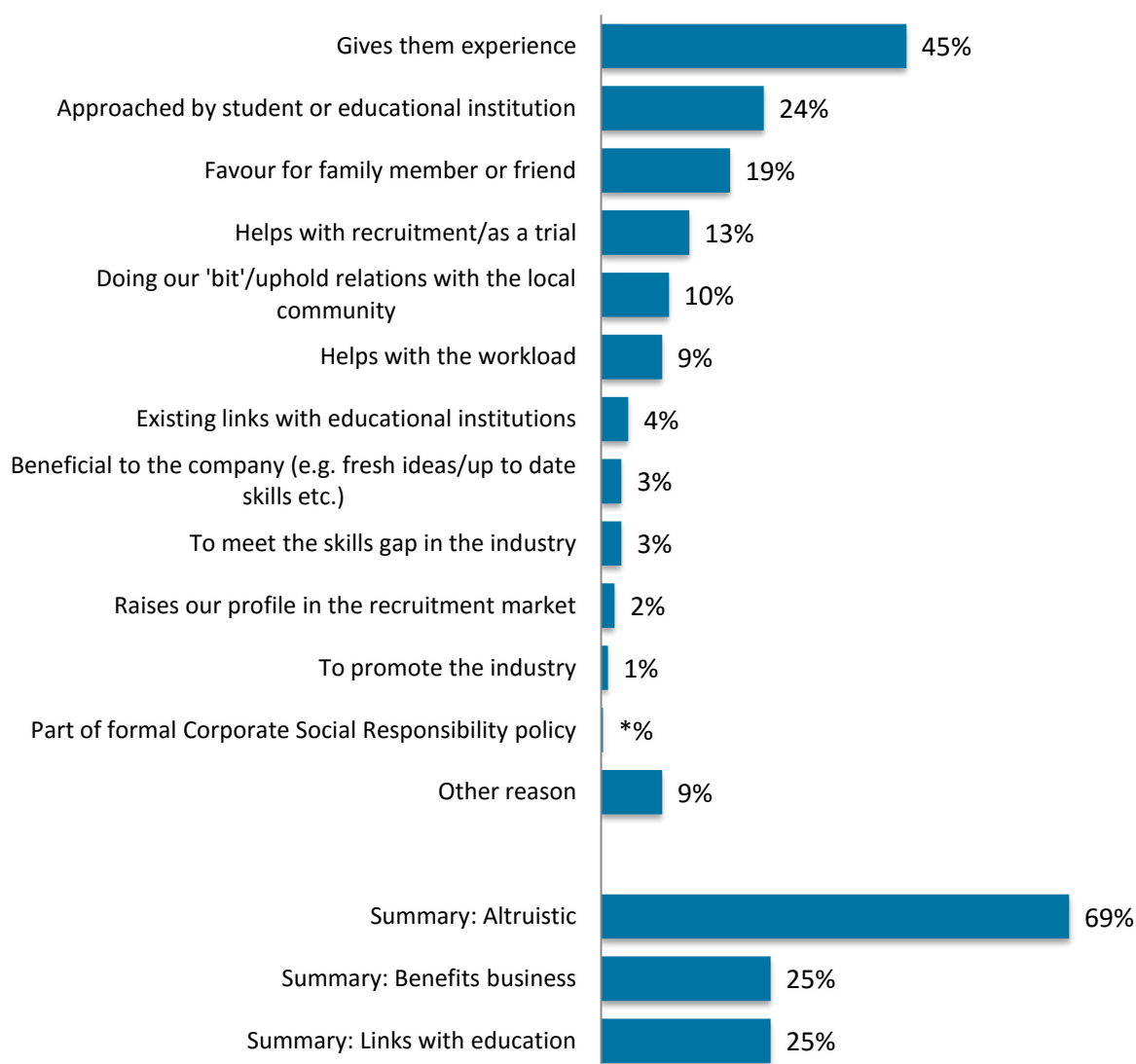
Table 5: Provision of work experience by sector and size (all respondents)

	Total	Industry Group		Industry (SIC 2007)				
		Construction	Professional services	41	42	43	71	74
Provided construction work experience for someone at school - excluding office functions	27%	26%	31%	30%	33%	22%	33%	15%
Provided construction work experience for someone at FE college – excluding office functions	23%	23%	23%	19%	22%	25%	24%	7%
Had a university student on a work placement as part of their course	13%	-7%	+29%	7%	11%	-7%	+29%	+35%
Provided any work experience	43%	41%	49%	40%	46%	41%	50%	45%
Unweighted bases	304	205	99	80	25	100	89	10
No. Of Employees (Site Based)								
	Total	2 - 9 employees	10 - 24 employees	25 - 99 employees	100+ employees			
Provided construction work experience for someone at school - excluding office functions	27%	-24%	+42%	+58%	+71%			
Provided construction work experience for someone at FE college - excluding office functions	23%	-21%	27%	+43%	+54%			
Had a university student on a work placement as part of their course	13%	-11%	+25%	+36%	+59%			
Provided any work experience	43%	-41%	51%	+73%	+80%			
Unweighted bases	304	128	90	54	32			

Q18

165. The main reason given for supplying work experience was the tautological one of 'to supply work experience' but being asked to do so by a student, an educational institution, or a family member or friend of the employer also occurred with some frequency. Fewer employers used work experience as an aid to recruitment, as a way of building a community presence, or to keep up with workload (see Figure 26).

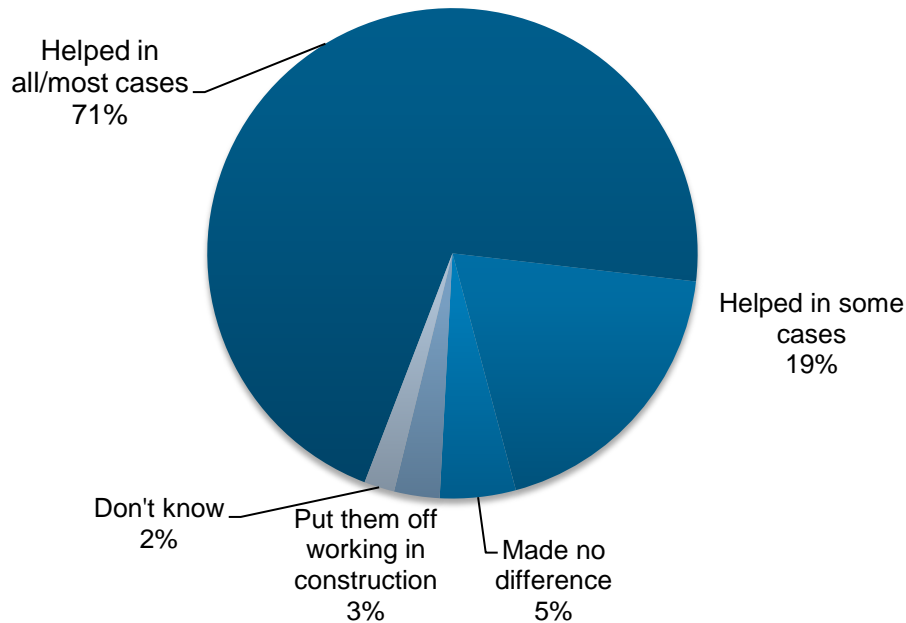
Figure 26: Reasons for providing work experience opportunities – unprompted, multiple response (where provide work experience)



Q20 Unweighted sample base = 163 * denotes less than 0.5

166. Employers who supplied work experience widely believed that it helped to better prepare young people to work in the industry (see Figure 27).

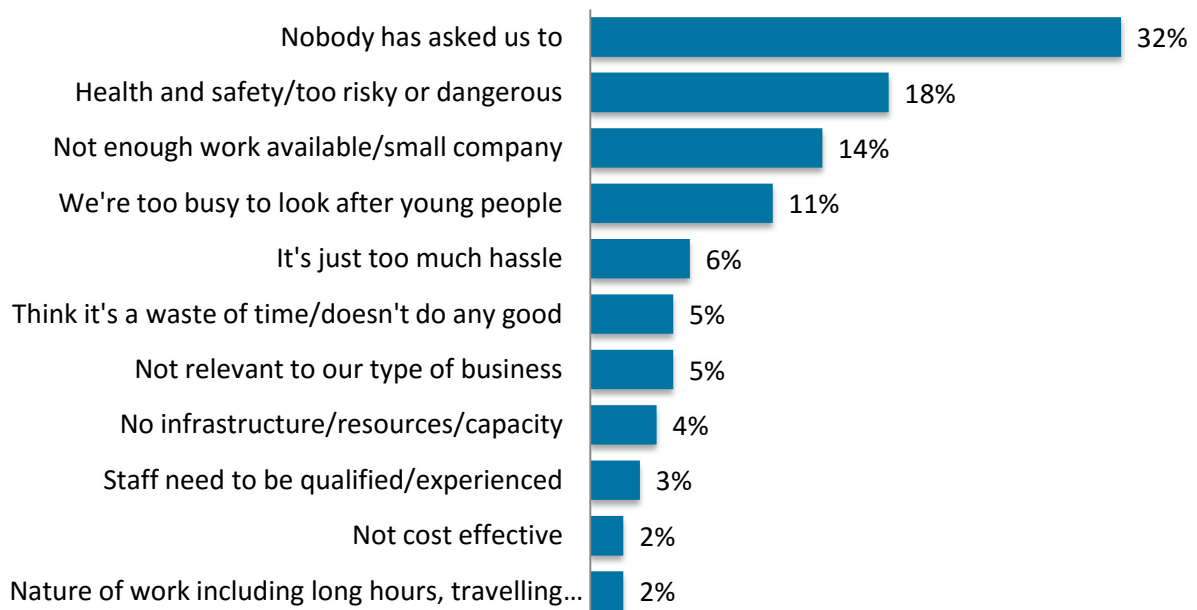
Figure 27: Whether work experience helped young people to be better prepared to work in construction (where provide work experience)



Q21 Unweighted sample base = 163

167. Where employers did *not* supply work experience, the main reasons were an absence of requests to do so, the health and safety barrier, the sense that the company was too small to do so, or that the company did not have sufficient time to manage and organise the experience (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: Reasons for not providing work experience opportunities – unprompted, multiple response (where do not provide work experience)



Q23 Unweighted sample base = 140

Employer perspectives on work experience: in-depth interviews

168. Around half of respondents in in-depth interviews had offered work experience to young people in education. Its character varied according to the nature of the business but experiences were generally short – of 2 or 3 weeks or less:

We encouraged learners to draw house plans, and then held a discussion at the end of the task. The discussion involved critiquing the plans and exposing young people to new ideas. By the end of the week, the young person should be able to draw out a house with elevations and projections through support and guidance.

Fitting alarm systems, wiring a spur, clipping cables in a straight line, first fixes and chasing walls.

They did Health and Safety, housekeeping, as well as menial jobs over the summer time. If the school leaver showed an interest they would start doing a little bit more semi-skilled work

They had between one week and three weeks experience. They shadow experienced practitioners, take them to meet clients, visit to building sites. You can give them a cross-section of everything that's being done, design work and all the rest of it.

It was engineering-based experience. One or two days a week over a 6/7 week period to show them how to use different machines, etc. 70-80 hours in total.

They had fortnight of experience, shadowing on admin tasks etc. and then, also, that's interspersed with going out on to site, and watching the site staff work, and talking to the site staff, to give them a flavour of what it is

It's similar to what an apprentice would do. They go out with one of the tradesman and they just work with them. I mean, it's usually pretty basic, you know, sort of loading and unloading the van and that kind of thing and just helping labour, basically, you know, in a job. It usually lasts around a week but can last for two at the young person's request

169. Generally, work experience was seen as helpful to young people in clarifying whether or not the construction industry would be a good career choice for them:

The learners are very appreciative and positive at the end of it. The experience helps figure out if they want to stay in the industry. It also helps develop their communication skills when getting involved in supervision.

The work experience helped with giving the school leavers an idea of what they would want to do within the sector and getting them into a routine of working.

I hope it was interesting and helped give them an insight into whether they wanted to pursue construction

I think it was beneficial. Gives them actual experience of what something's like and whether they enjoy it. It's quite important because they get experience. Until you've done it, you don't know if that's what you want to do.

It was helpful for the young people to get a real insight into what the industry is like. Even for the one that just turned around and said, 'There's no way on earth am I going to work in construction' It put them off construction. They weren't

suited for construction, and they spotted it, and that was brilliant, because, if they'd come into construction, or certainly our environment in terms of contracting, they wouldn't have been happy.

Its effective in that it gives them a taste of what a full day's work is like - it's not necessarily about introducing them to a career that they're going to stick with. I don't think it's necessarily about going and finding your career choice when you do work experience. I think to be in a working environment, where you're working with other people, I think it's a really good thing.

170. In one case, a young person on work experience had moved into the industry:

They gained knowledge and picked up aspects of the construction industry and were given a job at the end of the work experience.

171. One respondent recognised a particular benefit for the business and the community:

We get kudos from the council. I'm a great believer in if you're getting something out of the community you try and put something back in, and it's not always easy to do something financially. So, if you can give some of the kids locally the chance to come in it's good.

172. Only two respondents noted that the value of work experience was limited by health and safety constraints:

Not very effective for the young person as it was only a week's work and much couldn't be done due to health and safety.

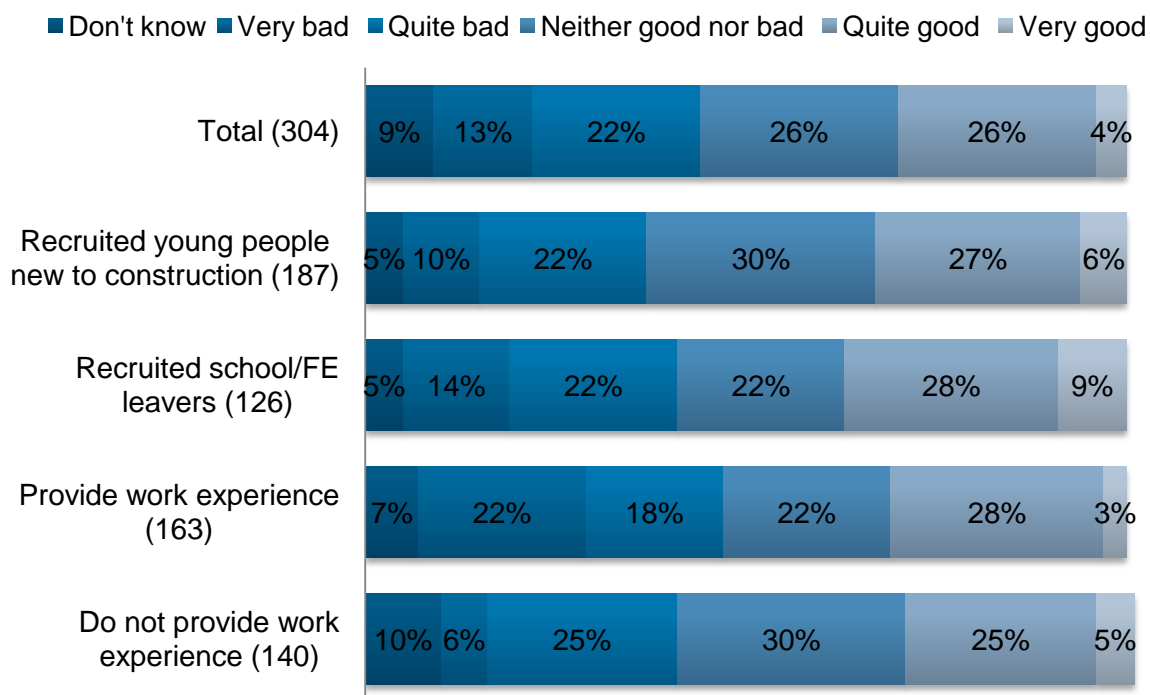
Due to health and safety restrictions the young person couldn't learn much "He wasn't allowed near this, he wasn't allowed near that. So, he couldn't get a feel for it, could he?"

Educational institutions' ability to prepare young people for work

Schools

173. Corresponding to frequent perceptions that young people are poorly prepared for work, only a minority of employers (30%) believed that schools do a good job in preparing their learners for work. In this case, even those employers who actively recruit school leavers are not any more positive than the generality of employers (see Figure 29).

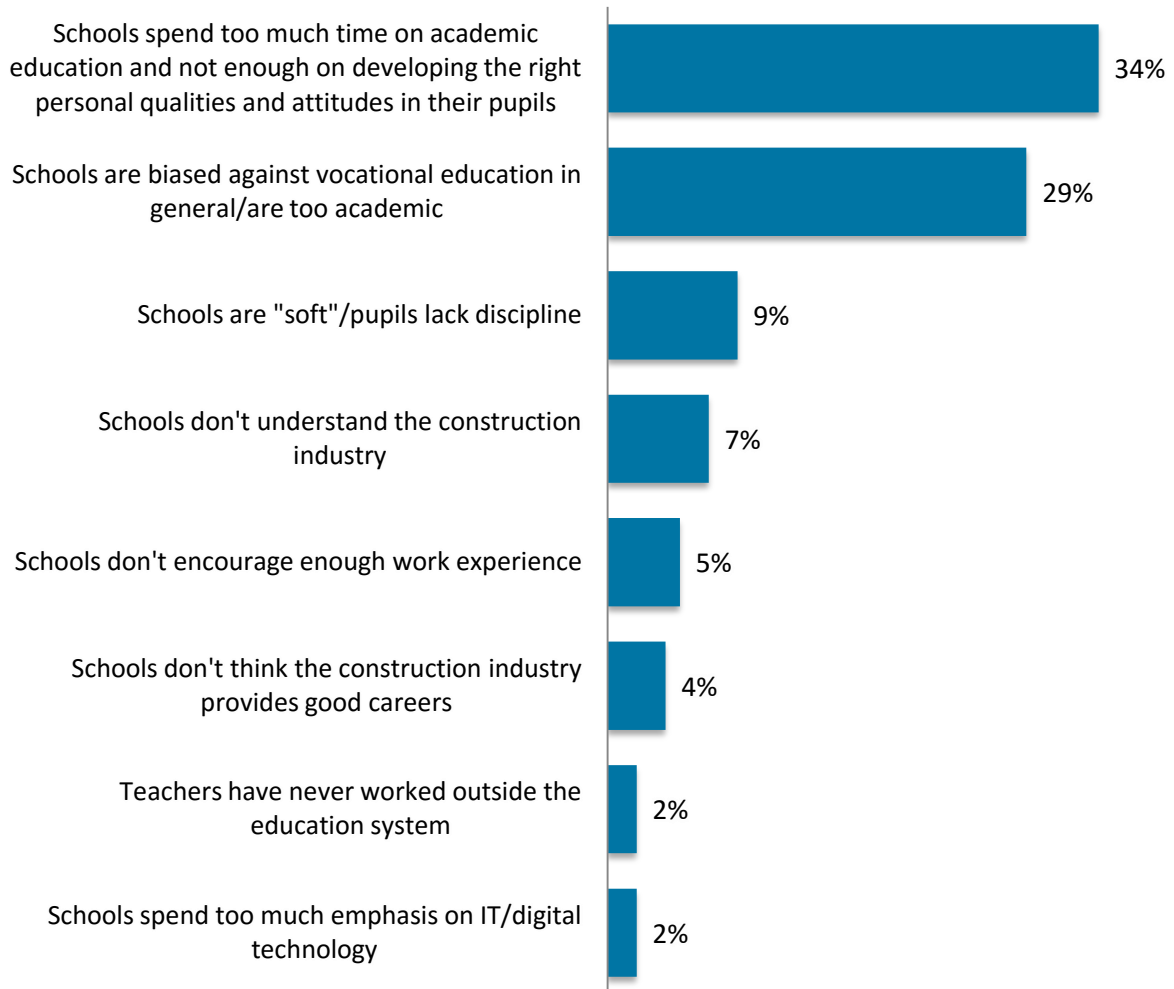
Figure 29: How good or bad a job businesses think secondary schools do at preparing young people for work, by recruitment and provision of work experience (all respondents)



Q24 Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

174. The general perception (of those employers with a negative view) is that schools focus strongly on academic education at the expense of students' personal development and of vocational education (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: Perceived problems with schools in preparing young people for work – unprompted, multiple response (where consider them poor in preparing them for work)

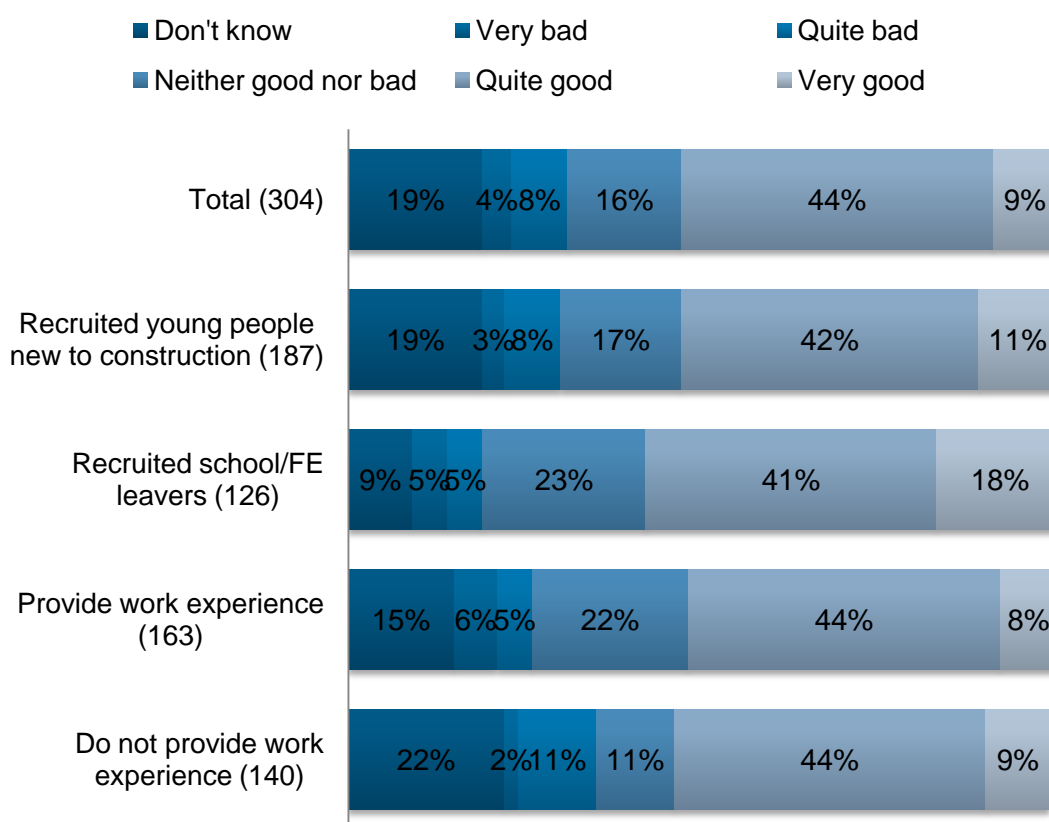


Q25 Unweighted sample base = 180

FE Colleges

175. Employers have more positive views of the ability of FE colleges to prepare young people for work, with 53% believing that colleges do a good job (see Figure 31).

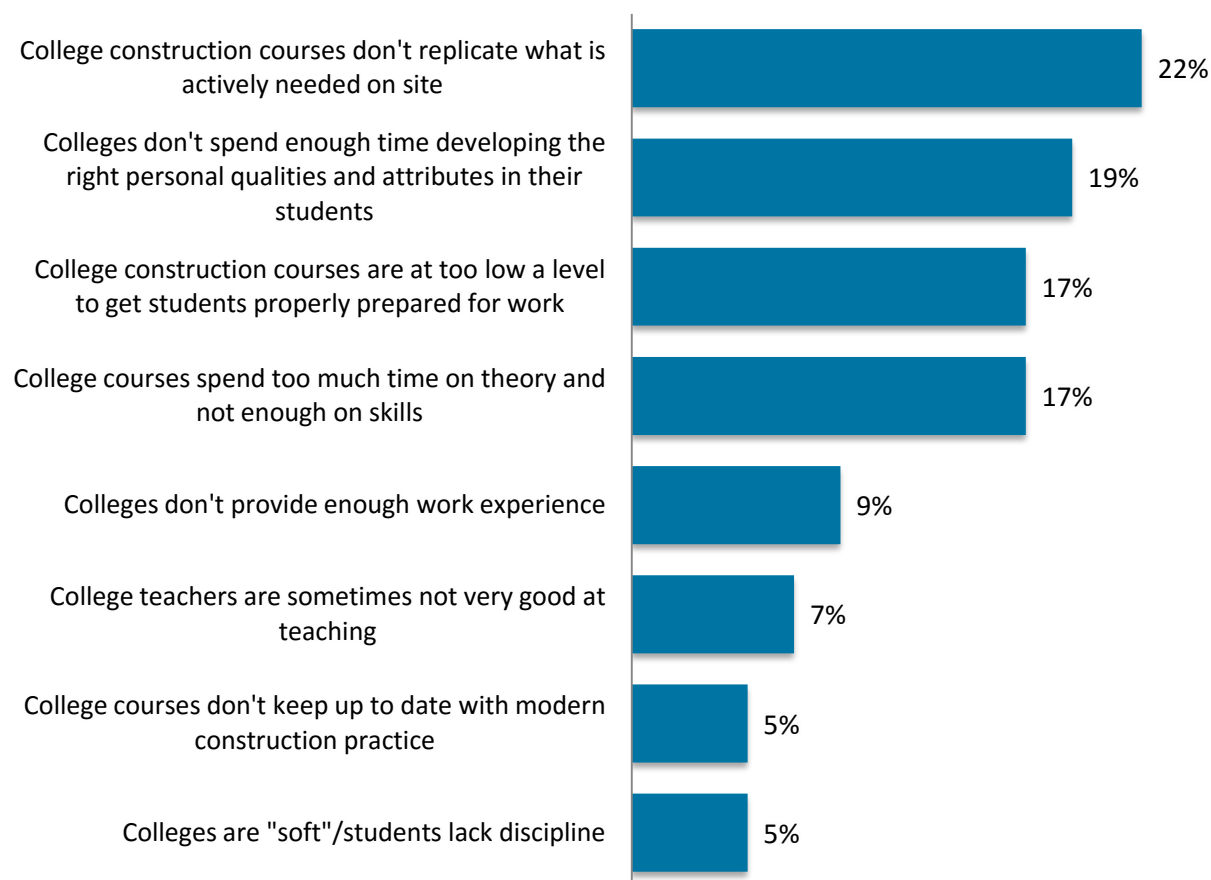
Figure 31: How good or bad a job businesses think FE colleges do at preparing young people for work, by recruitment and provision of work experience (all respondents)



Q26 Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

176. Where employers held a negative view on colleges' ability to prepare young people for the industry, there were again concerns about over-reliance on theory and insufficient focus on student's personal qualities and vocational skills but, additionally, there were frequent views that a college experience isn't close enough to real site conditions and that college courses are often at too low a level (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: Perceived problems with FE colleges in preparing young people for work – unprompted, multiple response (where consider them poor in preparing them for work)

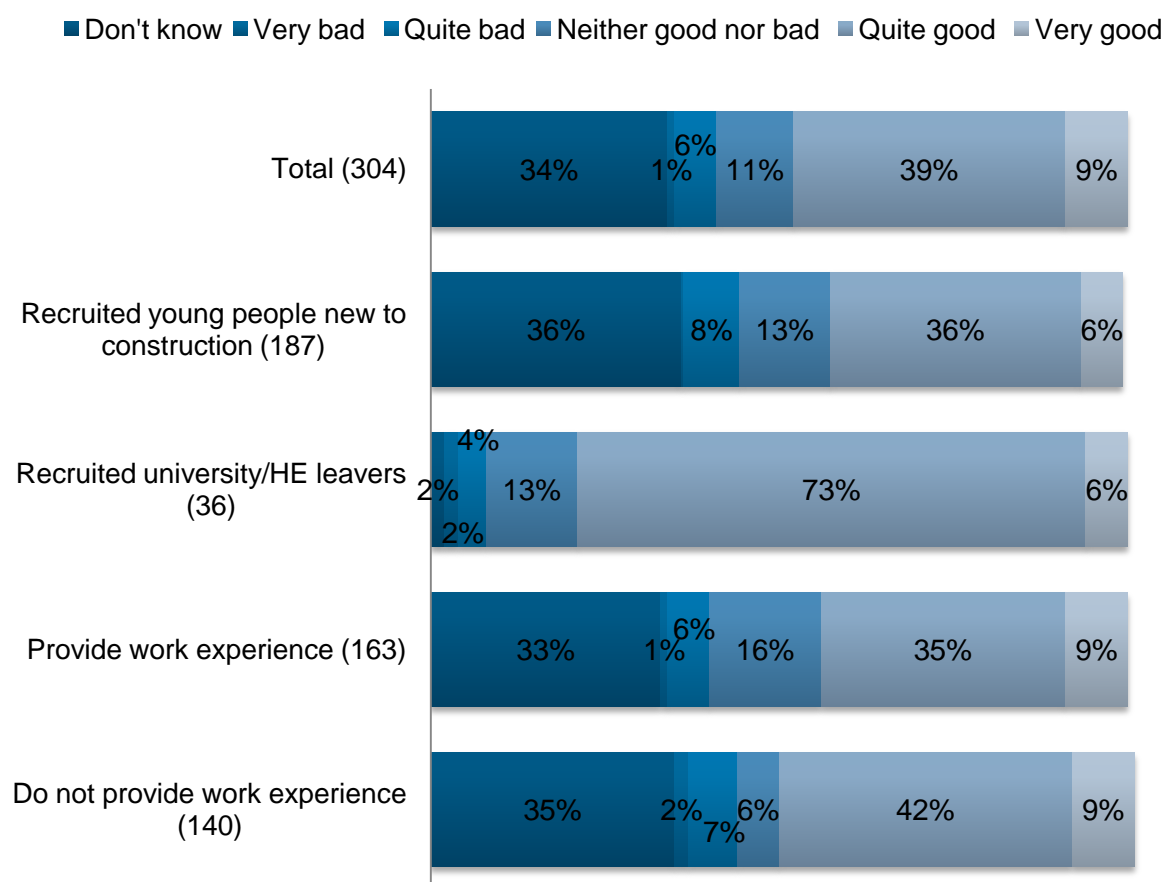


Q27 Unweighted sample base = 81

Universities

177. In the case of universities (see Figure 33) only a minority of employers (48%) saw their preparation of students for work as good. However, firstly, this proportion, at 79%, was much higher for employers who actually recruited new graduates. And secondly, corresponding to the relatively few employers who recruited graduates, there was a relatively high proportion of 'don't know' responses to this question. If the figures are calculated without the 'don't knows' then the proportion of employers believing universities do a good job (see Figure 34 later) rises to 73%.

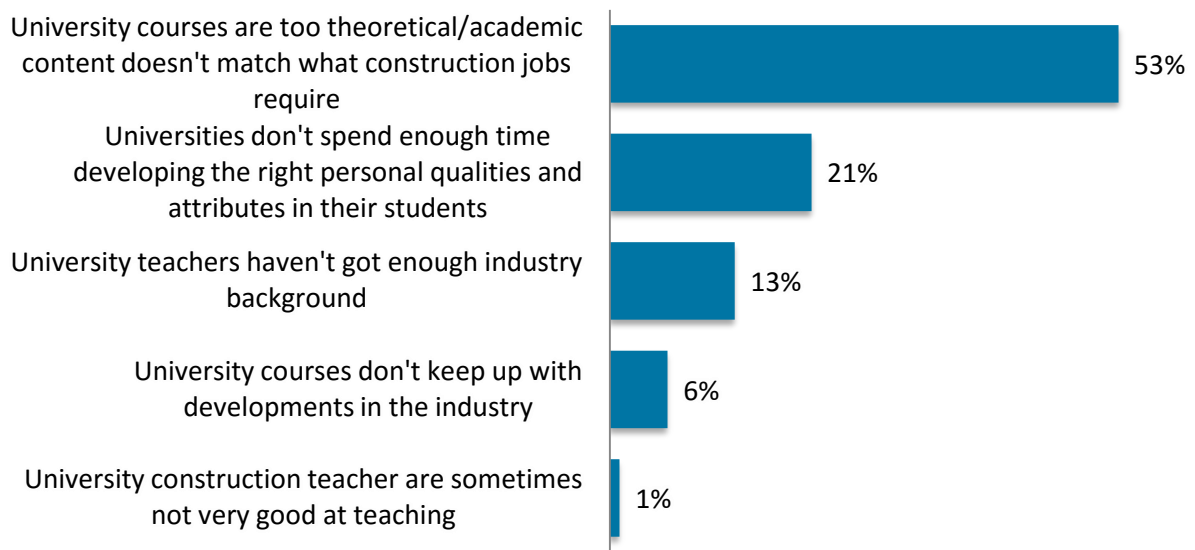
Figure 33: How good or bad a job businesses think universities do at preparing young people for work, by recruitment and provision of work experience (all respondents)



Q28 Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

178. And again, the main reasons for believing universities do not do a good job in preparing students for work in the construction industry were an over-reliance on theory and lack of attention to students' personal qualities (see Figure 34).

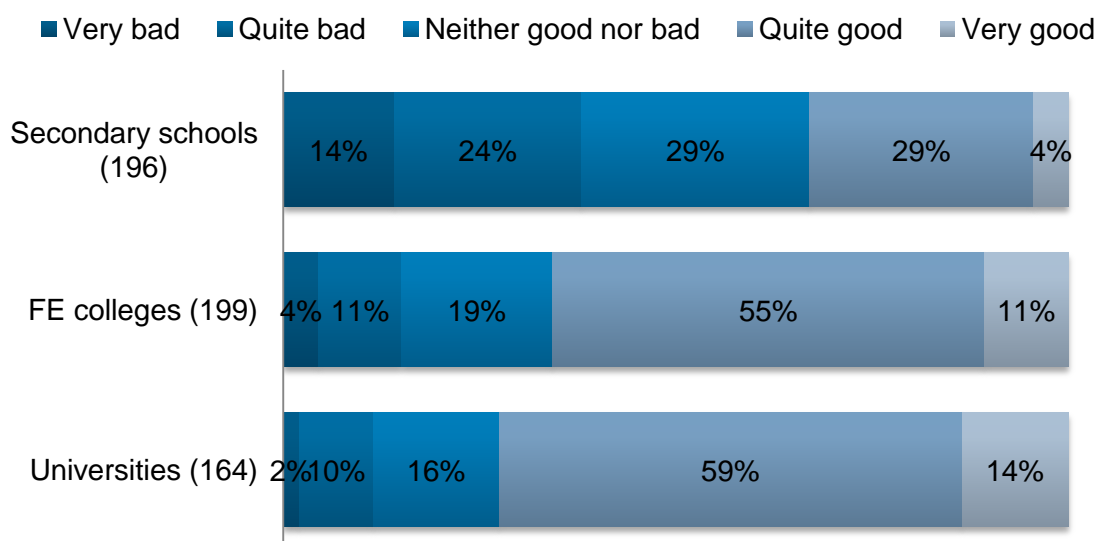
Figure 34: Perceived problems with universities in preparing young people for work – unprompted, multiple response (where consider them poor in preparing them for work)



Q29 Unweighted sample base = 64

179. Removing 'don't know' responses from employers judgments on schools, colleges, and universities, many emphasizes that employers' main concerns are much less often with the education and training offered in colleges and universities (though, as noted above, there is some significant minority concern with this) but with schools' ability to prepare young people for work (see Figure 35).

Figure 35: How good or bad a job employers think educational establishments are at preparing young people for work (where provided a response – don't knows excluded)



Q24/Q26/28 Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

Employer views on educational institutions: in-depth interviews

180. Employers interviewed in depth were also asked to give their views on the effectiveness of schools, colleges, and universities in preparing young people for work.

181. There was a fairly widespread view that institutions don't provide enough work or 'real world' experience and are overly focussed on academic study:

There is an underlying fault at college level with teaching staff. Teaching staff are not aware of the drafting side of architecture or what a drawing office involves on a day to day basis.

Young people all have the same issue coming out of college with an academic understanding but no practical experience. It's because they try and get people to concentrate on the academic side more than the practical side. It's all very well knowing how to do the job, but if you can't put it into practice, then there's no point having the qualification

No - they don't have experience in dealing with the real world and hard work.

They don't do anything as far as I'm concerned. There should be practical training at school and regional centres where pupils can go and practice a trade alongside their education

They don't send enough pupils for work experience in construction. It would be nice to have a relationship with a school where every year a couple of people were sent to us for some work experience. They don't send enough people out for work experience into construction

There is not enough practical work in school and colleges. All the colleges now haven't got the workshops that I had when I went to college

Schools are too focussed on just passing exams. There's not enough focus on the ones that aren't good academically, they should be getting some help and some encouragement. You know, to say, 'There are still jobs out there that you can do, even if you're dyslexic and whatever, it doesn't mean to say that you can't work'.

They're certainly not giving them opportunities to do work experience. They only get one week... Some people don't even get that opportunity and I think that's very, very poor. I do think they need to encourage them to get out there into the workplace for a longer period of time, and even more so when they get to college level, when they're that bit older.

182. One respondent noted the difficulty in keeping up with modern industry practice:

Colleges and universities keep up as best they can but due to changes within computer applications, management systems, and technological change it is hard for them to keep up to speed. And Universities can put too much coursework on students when the time could be better used practising skills.

183. Other respondents observed a failure to motivate young people or to build personal skills:

Educators should ask themselves all day, every day, What is going to result in a enthusiastic, committed dedicated workforce that is enjoying what they're doing? That high-level sense of purpose is an important part

I don't actually think they do a good enough job in preparing young people for work, full stop. There's a lack of consequences in school They're so used to taking a day off of school and nothing happened, and I think that schools have to prepare these young people better for the realities of life.

I think that there should be more focus on subjects like sports and drama, because they help with teamwork and confidence. Things like sports or drama... I think are very important in building up working as a team. I think there's a heck of a lot that can be learnt in terms of confidence if they're going out and doing competitive sports.... There has to be a balance, and I think the balance is off at the moment.

Employer suggestions as to how young people's work readiness could be improved

184. As a final question in the employer survey, employers were asked for suggestions as to actions which could improve young people's work readiness. 129 employers made one or more suggestions. Overwhelmingly these focussed on:

- Extended provision of work experience and work placements.
- Better vocational education in educational institutions and increased volume of apprenticeships.
- Teaching basic and life skills to young people.

Summary of key points

185. Key points of the analysis in this chapter are:

- Over 4 in 10 construction businesses had recruited a young person aged 24 or under in the 2 years prior to the survey.
- Two-thirds of these had recruited a school or FE college leaver, around 1 in 8 had recruited a university graduate, and one-third had recruited someone who was previously employed in another industry.
- Where a young person was recruited this was most often because the applicant looked suitable and because via training, the skill stock of the business could be increased.
- Where young people were not recruited this was most often because the employer doubted young people's motivations towards work, because the business lacked the time or resources to train, or because of health and safety concerns.
- Spontaneously, employers most often mentioned commitment, and willingness to learn and work hard as the characteristics which applicants should have.

Young people's work readiness and the construction industry

- Offered a list of work-readiness characteristics, employers most frequently rated as being vital those of willingness to accept instruction, trustworthiness, attendance and punctuality, common sense, and willingness to work hard. Possession of qualifications was least often reported as being vital.
- A majority of employers think that school and FE leavers are poorly prepared for work.
- The main reason for this is that many employers see school and FE leavers as unable to manage time effectively, lacking common sense, and as unable to attend work regularly or punctually.
- Only a minority of employers think university leavers are poorly prepared for work.
- This minority most often see the problems as being graduates' lack of common sense, poor problem-solving capability, inflexibility, and their failure to work hard enough
- More than 1 in 4 employers (and a much higher proportion of large employers) provide work experience for young people at school and or in further or higher education.
- They do so most frequently to give experience to young people or because they are asked to by an institution or as a favour to a friend or relative.
- Over 90% of these businesses believe that the work experience improved the work readiness of the young people concerned.
- If they don't offer work experience, it is most often because of health and safety barriers, because the company is too small or because no one has asked them to supply work experience.
- Only a minority of employers believed that schools do a good job of preparing young people for work but majorities believe this of FE Colleges and Universities.
- At all educational levels, employers who had actually recruited young people were more positive about how young people had been prepared for work than employers who had not.
- Where employers see educational institutions as poor at building work readiness it is most often because of a focus on theory and academic study at the expense of vocational focus, because of insufficient focus on learners' personal skills and attributes, and, in the FE College case, because courses are frequently at too low a level and/or don't sufficiently replicate on-site experiences.

6 Work readiness: the young person's perspective

A survey sample

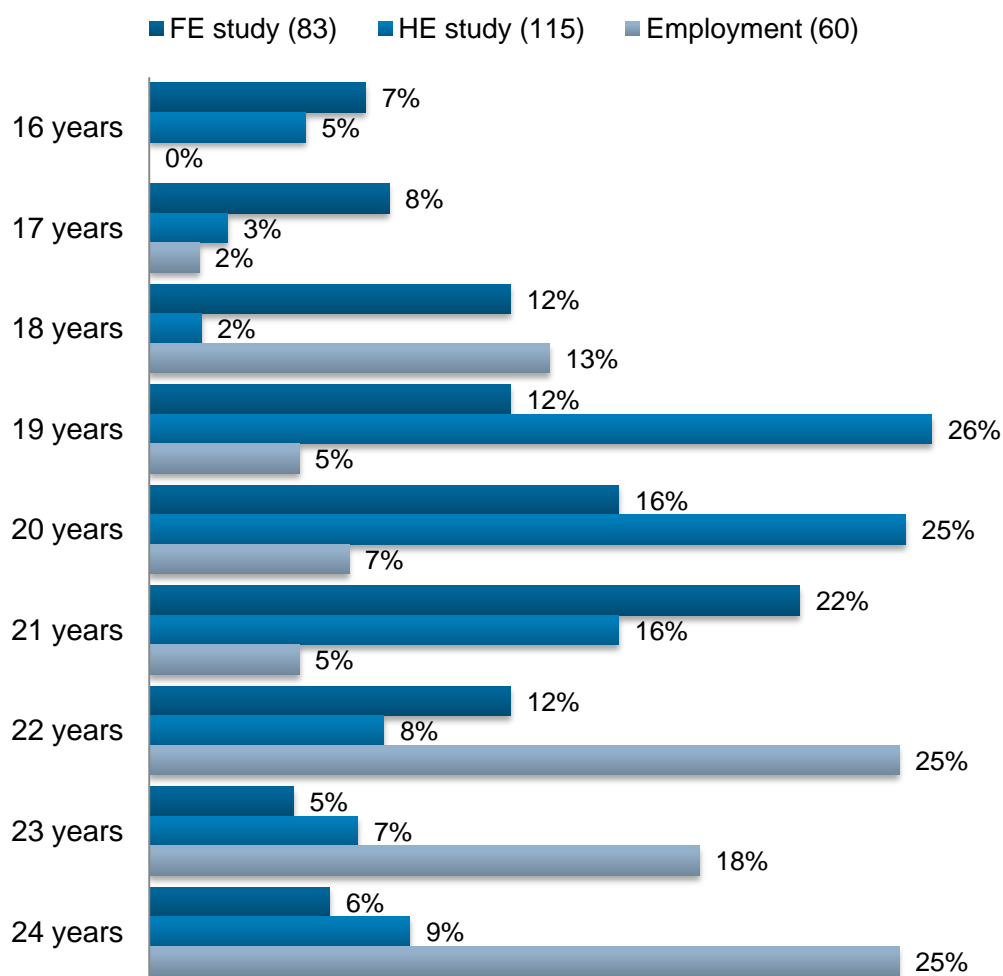
186. In addition to surveying employers, the study also investigated the perceptions of young people (those studying to enter the industry in Further or Higher Education or in their early years of employment in the industry) as to their understanding of work readiness – the essential purpose being to understand how well such young people are attuned to what employers actually expect of them.
187. In total, 258 responses were obtained in an on-line survey. Of these, 83 were obtained from FE students and 115 from students in universities or equivalent institutions. In both these cases, the students were in the later years of their courses. 60 responses were obtained from industry workers in the first 2 years of their employment in construction (see Table 6).

Table 6: Current situation of young people taking part in the survey; completed interviews

	Total
Currently studying or training on a course related to employment in the construction industry at a Further Education college or equivalent institution - not in first year	83
Currently studying or training on a course related to employment in the construction industry at a University or equivalent institution - not in first year	115
Currently in paid employment in the in construction industry - in first 2 years	60
Total	258

188. All respondents were aged 24 or under with those in FE mainly being the younger respondents and those in employment being the older respondents (see Figure 36).

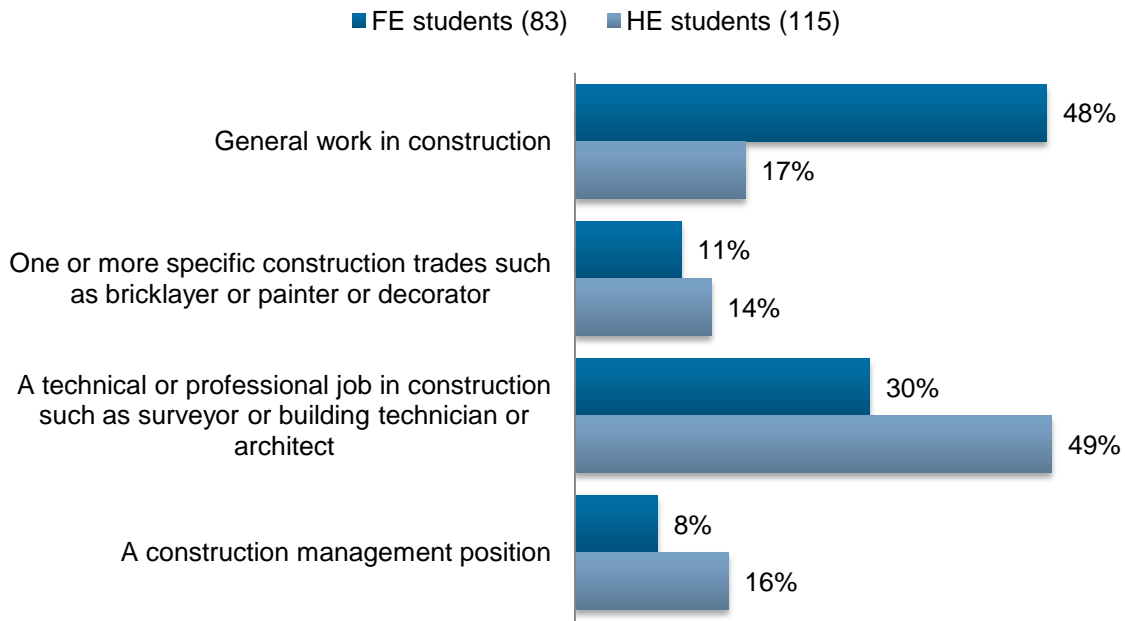
Figure 36: Age of respondent (all respondents)



Q1 Unweighted bases in parentheses

189. Amongst students, those in FE were more likely to be studying with a view to entry to general construction work or a specific trade whilst those in HE were more likely to be aiming for higher level technical, professional, or managerial jobs in the industry, but the distinction was not an absolute one (see Figure 37).

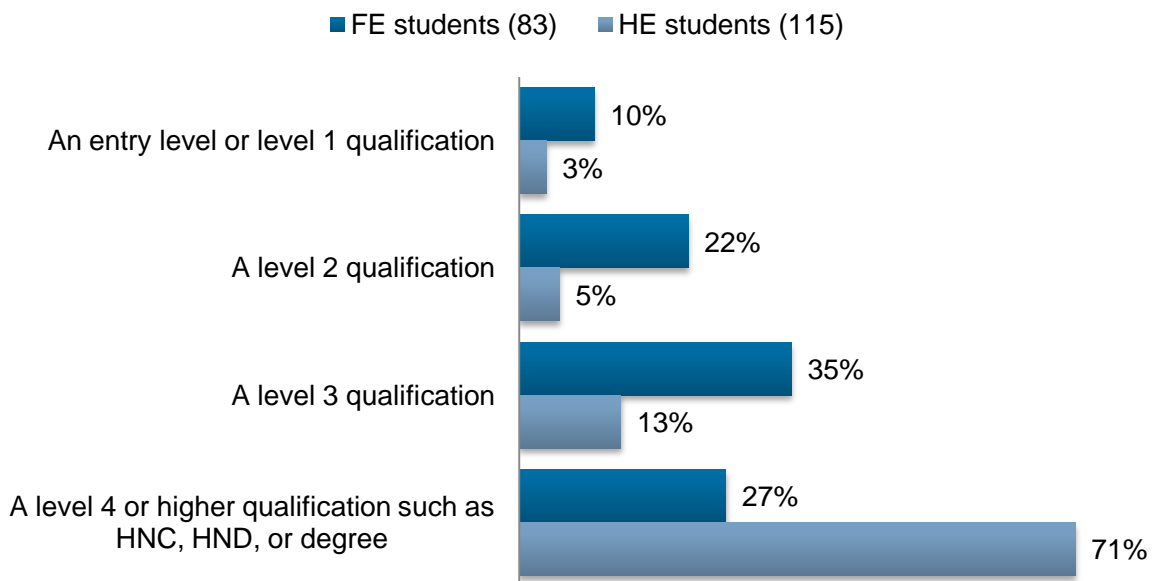
Figure 37: Type of work that course is preparing students for (FE/HE students)



Q4 Sample bases in parentheses

190. Correspondingly, the qualification levels which FE students were staging towards were generally lower, mostly spread from entry level to level 3, whilst HE students mostly studied towards level 3 and level 4 qualifications (see Figure 38).

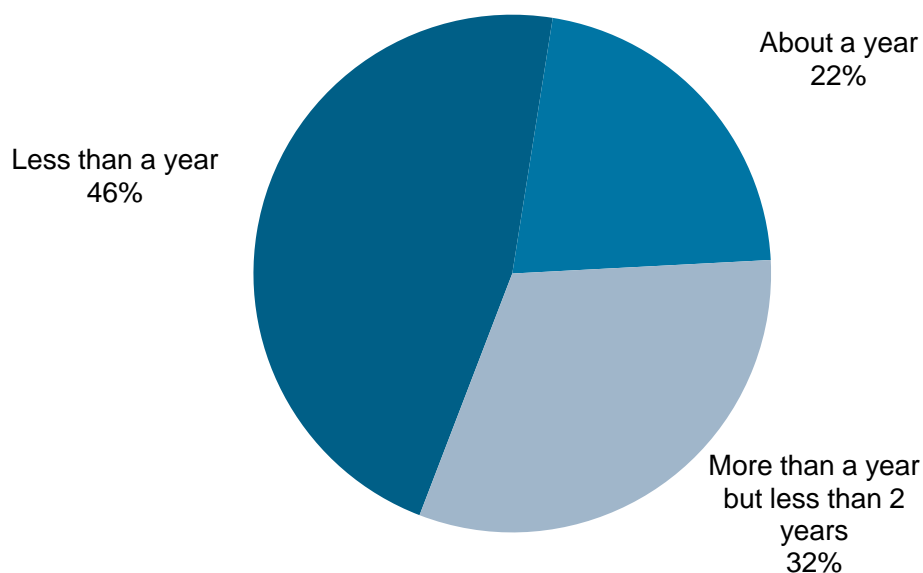
Figure 38: Level of construction-related qualifications students are studying for (FE/HE students)



Q7 Sample bases in parentheses

191. In the case of *young workers*, two-thirds had worked in the industry for a year or less whilst one-third was in their second year of working in construction (see Figure 39).

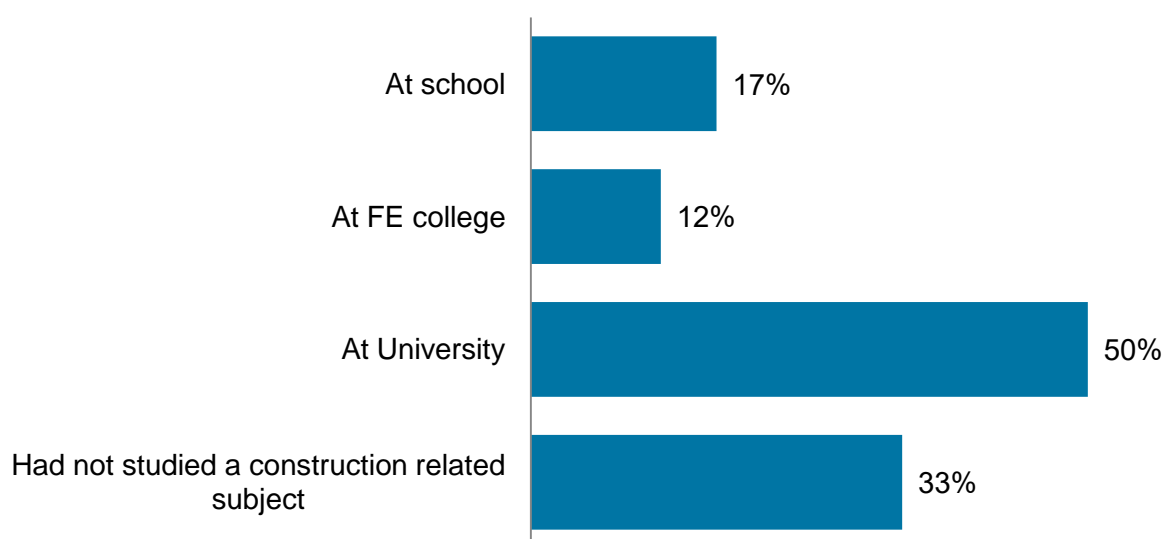
Figure 39: Length of time employed in construction in total (young workers)



Q10 Sample base = 60

192. These workers, before entry to this sector, earlier studied a construction-related subject at school (17%), at FE College (12%), or at university (50%) and/or had entered the industry without any previous construction-related training or education (33%) (see Figure 40).

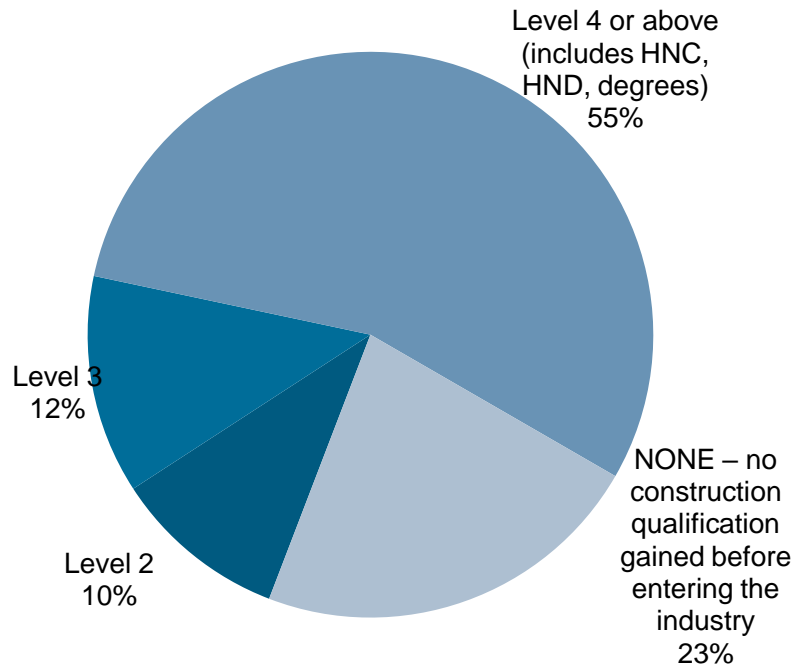
Figure 40: Previous study or training in a construction-related subject (young workers)



Q12 Sample base = 60

193. The sample of young workers was approximately equally divided between those who had a higher level construction qualification prior to entry (HNC, HND, degree) or those with lower or no construction-related qualifications (see Figure 41).

Figure 41: Previous study or training in a construction-related subject (young workers)



Q13 Sample base = 40

194. All groups of respondents were asked about their experiences prior to entry into their present status.
195. The definition of the sample of young workers (as being new to the industry) ensured that none of these had previously had paid work in the industry. However, many HE students and, particularly, FE students had already had paid or unpaid work experience in construction, often through a family connection. Some paid work experience in another industry was also frequent.
196. In respect of other influences, substantial majorities of respondents had taken part in activities which informed them of the nature of work in the industry – including presentations and events, careers guidance, discussion with people with construction experience, or simply reading about construction work (see Table 7). Notably, the proportion of young people reporting taking part in these work inspirational activities is considerably higher than the proportion ,5%, of construction employers reporting (in the Employer Perspectives Survey, see paragraph 124 earlier) that they supplied these opportunities. The inference may be that a relatively small number of construction businesses are supplying the greater part of this work inspirational activity.

Table 7: Previous experience and activities – prompted, multiple response (all respondents)

	FE students	HE students	Young workers
Worked as a paid employee in the construction industry	54%	30%	0%
Worked as a paid employee in another industry	70%	58%	63%
Had unpaid work experience in the construction industry	53%	35%	27%
Had unpaid work experience in another industry	51%	57%	30%
Worked, paid or unpaid, in the construction industry on behalf of a family member or relative	49%	27%	0%
Attended one or more presentations or events which described what working in the construction industry was like	64%	50%	47%
Had careers guidance, for example at school, college, or university in which working in the construction industry was discussed	69%	72%	62%
Discussed working in the construction industry with a relative or friend who works or worked in the construction industry	65%	58%	58%
Read information on-line or on paper about working in the construction industry	69%	70%	63%
Sample bases	83	115	60

Q15

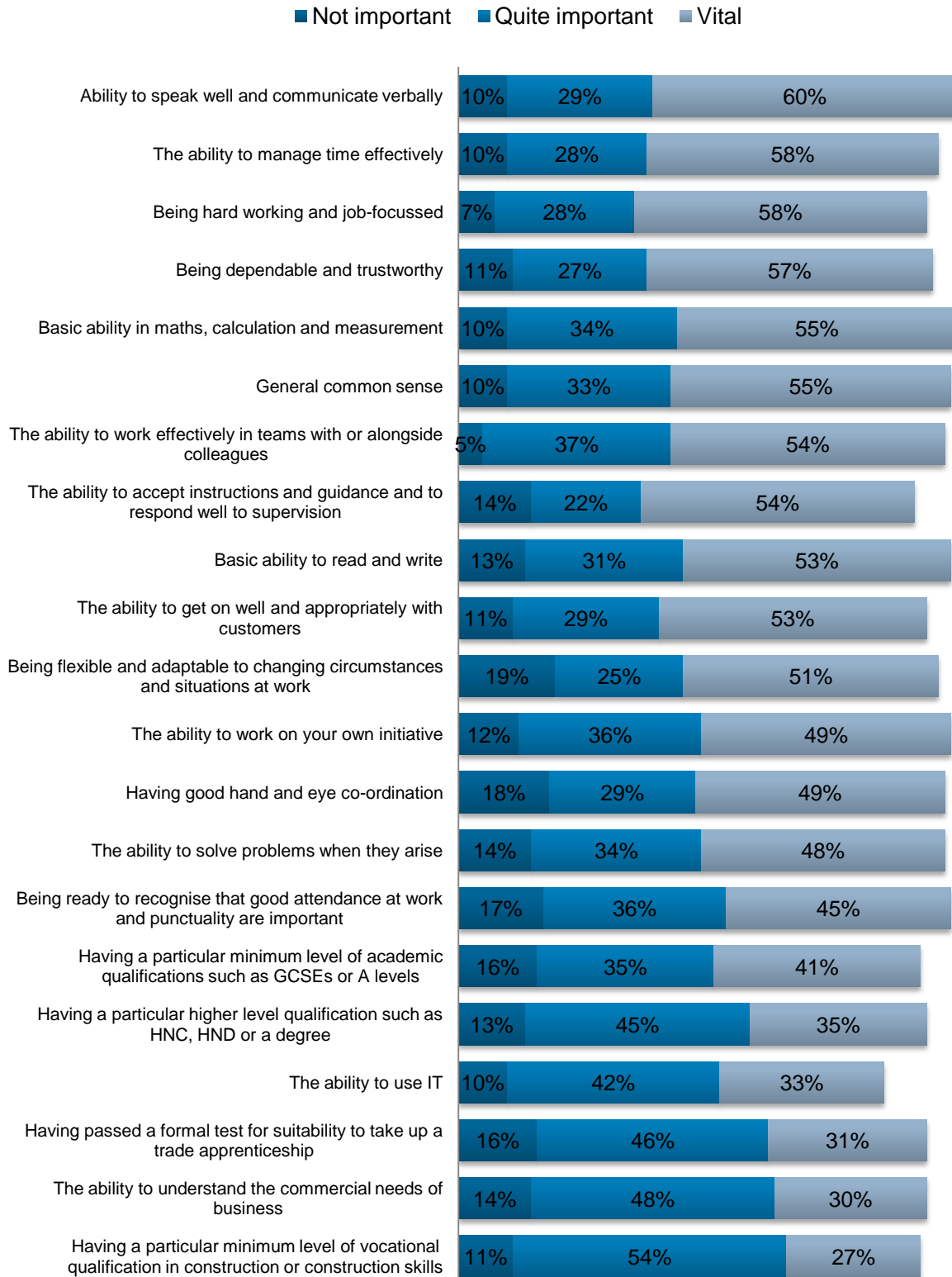
Perceptions of work-readiness characteristics

197. In principle, therefore, all three groups of young people – FE students, HE students, and young workers – should have had a reasonably clear perception of what characteristics employers would expect of people entering the industry. FE and HE students were asked to say how important they thought each of a range of characteristics would be to their ability to enter the industry when they finished their courses. Young workers were asked to think back to the point before they entered the industry and to say, at that point, how important they thought the characteristics would be to prospective employers.

FE Students

198. In the FE student case, these students most frequently think that communication and time management skills, being hard working and dependable, and having good basic maths will be vital. The characteristics they least frequently believed would be vital were commercial awareness and the possession of various types of qualification. Contrasting markedly with the 82% of employers who saw attendance and punctuality as vital, only 45% of FE students believe that good attendance at work and punctuality will be vital (see Figure 42 overleaf).

Figure 42: Perceived importance of skills, abilities and characteristics to employers - prompted (FE students)

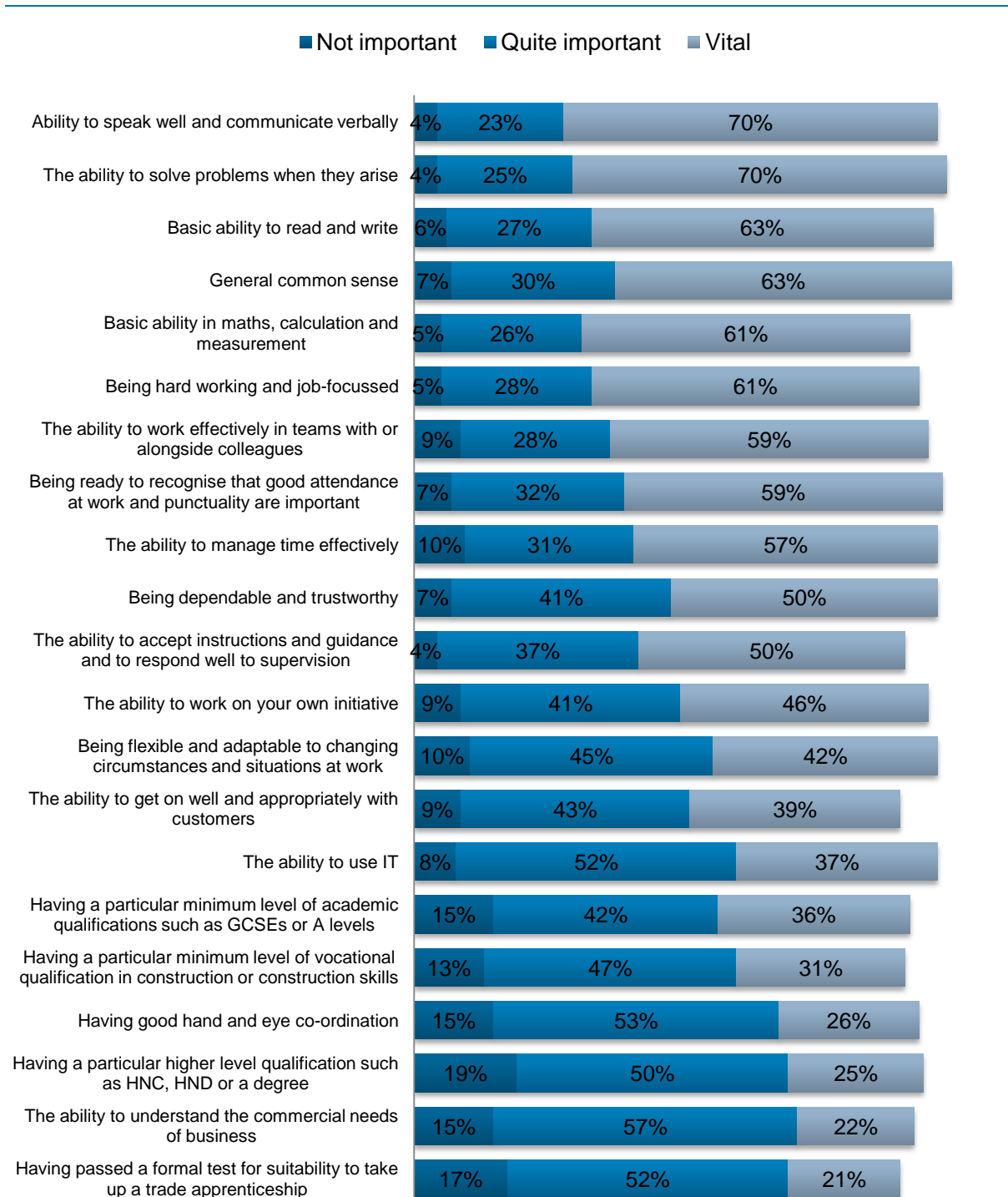


Q17 Sample base = 83

HE students

199. HE students most frequently see communication and problem-solving skills, basic literacy, common sense, basic maths skills, and being hard working as vital. As with FE students, they least frequently believe that commercial awareness and possession of qualifications will be vital (see Figure 43).

Figure 43: Perceived importance of skills, abilities and characteristics to employers - prompted (HE students)

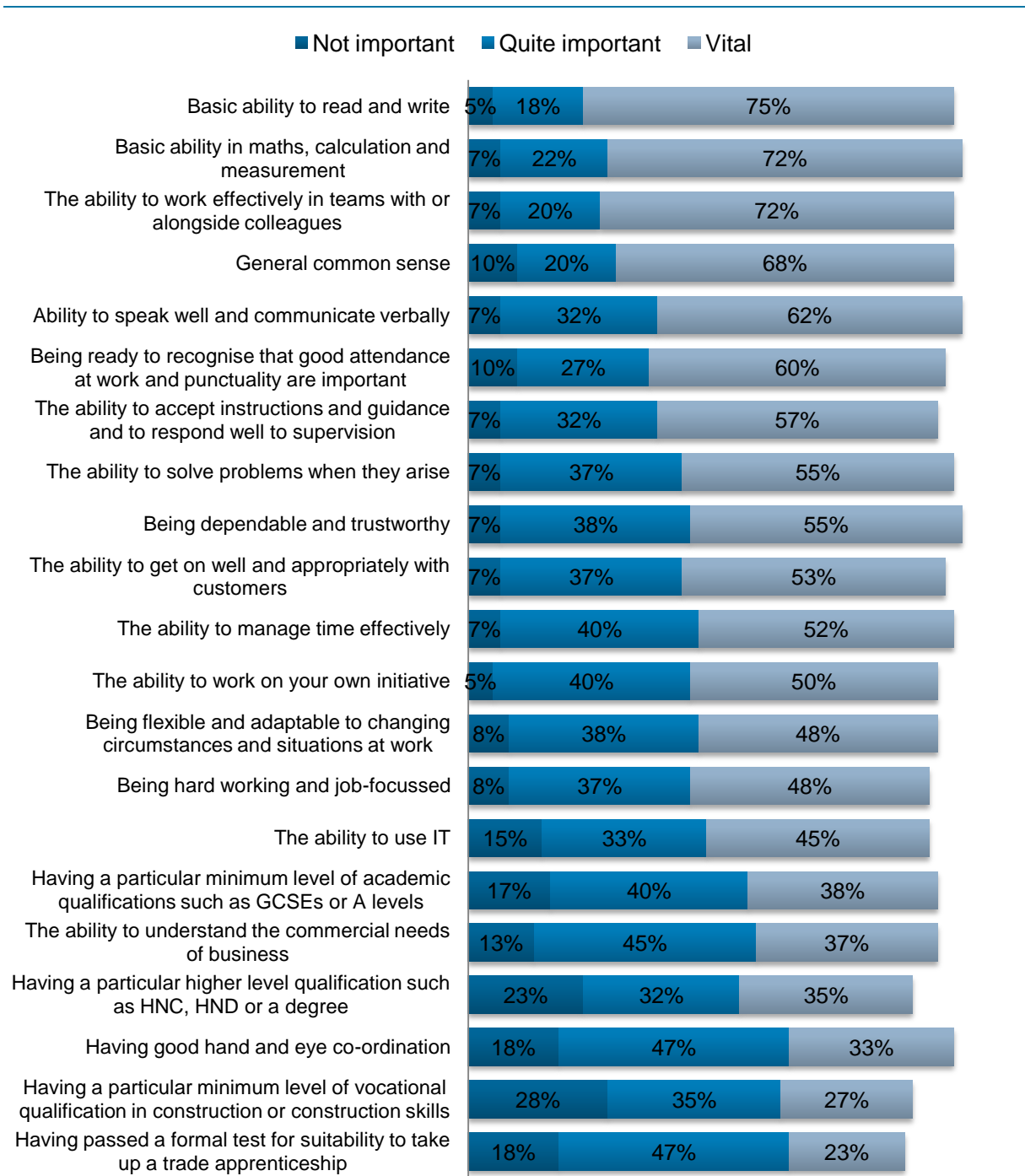


Q17 Sample base = 115

Young workers

200. Thinking retrospectively (and possibly with the benefit of hindsight) young workers say that they thought (prior to entry to the industry) that basic literacy and numeracy, team working skills, general common sense, and communication skills would most frequently be vital. Again, possession of qualifications was least frequently expected to be vital (see Figure 44).

Figure 44: Perceived importance of skills, abilities and characteristics to employers - prompted (young workers)



Q17 Sample base = 60

The three groups compared

201. A comparison of the three groups' views is shown in Table 8 (following). This table shows the ranking of the 'vital' proportions which each group gave to the question of how important each of a range of work readiness characteristics will be to prospective employers (in the student case) or, thinking retrospectively, how important they thought the characteristics would be prior to industry entry (in the young worker case).
202. Although there are some obvious discrepancies between the groups as to the relative importance of some particular characteristics, for most items there is broad correlation between the groups such that personality and attitudinal characteristics and basic literacy and numeracy gain 'single digit' rankings whilst other characteristics often concerned with qualifications are ranked in the high teens or twenties positions.

Table 8: Young people's rankings, prior to their entry to the industry, of the importance of work readiness characteristics to employers

	FE students	HE students	Young workers
Ability to speak well and communicate verbally	1	1	5
The ability to manage time effectively	2	9	11
Being hard working and job-focussed	3	6	14
Being dependable and trustworthy	4	10	9
Basic ability in maths, calculation and measurement	5	5	2
General common sense	6	4	4
The ability to work effectively in teams with or alongside colleagues	7	7	3
The ability to accept instructions and guidance and to respond well to supervision	8	11	7
Basic ability to read and write	9	3	1
The ability to get on well and appropriately with customers	10	14	10
Being flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and situations at work	11	13	13
The ability to work on your own initiative	12	12	12
Having good hand and eye co-ordination	13	18	19
The ability to solve problems when they arise	14	2	8
Being ready to recognise that good attendance at work and punctuality are important	15	8	6
Having a particular minimum level of academic qualifications such as GCSEs or A levels	16	16	16
Having a particular higher level qualification such as HNC, HND or a degree	17	19	18
The ability to use IT	18	15	15

	FE students	HE students	Young workers
Having passed a formal test for suitability to take up a trade apprenticeship	19	21	21
The ability to understand the commercial needs of business	20	20	17
Having a particular minimum level of vocational qualification in construction or construction skills	21	17	20

Rankings are from 1 to 21, with 1 being the highest and 21 being the lowest.

Perceptions of work readiness characteristics: in-depth interviews

203. In addition to the quantitative survey, a number of young people were engaged in in-depth interviews designed to probe work readiness issues. These young people included:

- 8 University students studying for degrees in construction-related subjects. All of these were at later stages of their study and hoped to find professional level jobs in construction or related sectors or, in two cases, to progress to higher level study. Most of the students had had some, work experience, though this was not usually in the construction sector and generally believed this was beneficial in gaining work-related soft skills, demonstrating commitment, and developing understanding of work environments.
- 3 students in Further Education studying construction-relevant courses and intending to go into construction or related employment. All had had some work experience (but in each case, in retail rather than construction) and believed this was valuable in helping them understand the workplace and in generating customer relationship skills
- 5 young workers in the first 2 years of their employment. Of these, 3 worked in major national construction firms, 1 worked for a national builders' merchant, and 1 for a social enterprise delivering housing projects. All were in trainee or development roles with ambitions to progress to management or professional levels in the industry.

204. The young people in education were asked what qualities they thought employers would value when they sought work on completion of their courses. The young workers were asked to think retrospectively and to say, before they entered, the industry what qualities they expected employers to value.

205. Collectively, all these groups of young people recognised the basic elements of work-readiness, including:

Having had some **work experience**:

Work experience is something employers are very keen on as it shows that you know what your role involves. Working well in a team as well as alone is important

Work experience is extremely valuable, even if it is along the lines of an internship or placement

Having **basic skills**:

A good basis of Maths, English and IT is needed. Being able to read and write, and do things like that. Maths is particularly valued in regards to working in the construction industry.

Basic IT is a very valued skill because everything, nowadays, is technology-based. It's a necessary skill to have.

Especially to do with construction, if you're in the area of designing the different things and you don't have basic skills and maths, then it's going to be very difficult

Having a **good work ethic**:

Good work ethics, respect for people around you and communication skills due to people relying on you to get things done, communication plays an important part.

They'll value an independent work ethic and to be able to be on time... It's the general reliability and also the ability to solve problems. It's a massive thing when it comes to construction to be able to troubleshoot things.

Having **drive, motivation, and enthusiasm**:

A valued quality would also be determination and optimism because things don't always go right.

Being self-motivated is a key aspect as you need to be able to motivate people around you from a managerial aspect.

Other qualities that are looked for are organisation, commitment, and passion, as well. Attendance is checked to see whether people are laid back, or whether they're focused. If the passion is not there, then the work won't get done, and it's all about efficiency, so people who are more passionate are usually more efficient.

They don't want someone who just wants to sit there. They want someone who wants to be able to develop within themselves and the company.

Being **willing to learn**:

You have to be motivated and wanting to learn and be able to increase your standing in the company

They'll want you to be able to follow instructions really well which would be key in the construction industry especially... Good communication skills is important in any job, especially in construction if there are safety issues.

Having **teamwork and communication** skills:

Team working skills, communication, both orally and written, time keeping and meeting deadlines

Team work, communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

From my own research, I realise that communication, teamwork, and organisational skills are the most important qualities needed. Rarely, on a construction site, do people work alone, so communications are critical. This is what companies actively look for.

I think that it's as much value for an employer to see that you're capable of working in a team as well as by yourself.

Having **confidence and initiative**:

Confidence - if you come across as more confident, you're more likely to, get the job you're looking for. A good attitude, being able to resolve problems quickly and effectively.

I feel that initiative is important for employers, along with a good deal of common sense. There needs to be some prior knowledge of the construction sector, as well as people having a passion to join this industry.

Student's perceptions of their courses: in-depth interviews

206. HE and FE students interviewed in in-depth interviews were also asked how well their courses were preparing them for work in the industry.
207. Basically, the main finding was that the practical aspects of courses were valued rather more than the academic elements:

The course couldn't have done anymore but it wasn't what I was expecting it to be. Theory exams aren't great because it's just a form of measurement in terms of how your memory works, and I don't really have a good memory, but I can work with people really well. Coursework is more useful as it helps develop your skills.

The main strengths of the course, and of the university in general, is the careers service. There's a lot of support available for getting placements. It's not obligatory that you use it, but the fact that it is there means a lot of people leave with those employability skills."

I feel that it's preparing me quite well, and the practical work is useful but the quality of teaching is sometimes a bit lacking.

It's very useful. This year we've done site visits and got to talk to people working in the industry which I found really, really helpful and interesting

It's preparing me very well for work in the industry. It gives a good glimpse into what it would be like working in construction. It teaches you about time management and working with people you don't know and has useful project work. So I think it is really preparing me.

208. And, if practical elements were absent or believed to be insufficient, students expressed dissatisfaction:

The course helps prepare fundamental principles. Also the college has a careers department that helps with preparing for interviews. The course helps motivation because you're expected to motivate yourself in completing work. However, the course hasn't helped in regards to personal skills. All those secondary skills, I don't think are specifically developed.

I don't think that I'm getting value for money in terms of preparedness. I don't think my course is as useful as what £9,000 should get you. I believe civil engineering is a hands-on vocation, and we simply don't do enough lab experiments, and we simply don't go out of the classroom enough for us to actually experience and see what it would be like on a day-to-day basis. I think we do learn the theory behind it, we do learn the numbers behind it, but we don't understand. There is too much classroom focus and not enough practical elements in a course that costs so much.

There's not enough focus on practical work. I think, in terms of work experience, it's not really helping me. In terms of theoretical knowledge it's really good. Last year I did level 2 and there was way more practical involvement in that, whereas in my level 3, there's hardly any.

209. Correspondingly, when asked what their courses could do better, the main demands were for more practical work, activity to give better insight into working in the industry, and assistance with obtaining work experience:

More explanation and information about what is expected of you in work and what would happen

Too much of the course is exam based, more practical coursework would be ideal.

I would like more lab-based experiments, more hands-on, and field trips, where we would go out and actually analyse structures, grounds etc.

You have to go and find your placement on your own, and there's no support from the course directors... You have no idea, you're just having a wild guess... I know at some unis there is a full support set up for when you're looking for things like that, but here there's literally nothing here.

Right now I think it is getting the baseline theory down and then I'm hoping that later on in the degree, that's when they'll start to be more geared towards helping you in the workplace. Right now it's pretty much just theory, constantly. I'd just like to know more about the industry and know more about what are the sort of jobs available for graduates like me... Just some sort of insight into real life applications of what I'm learning

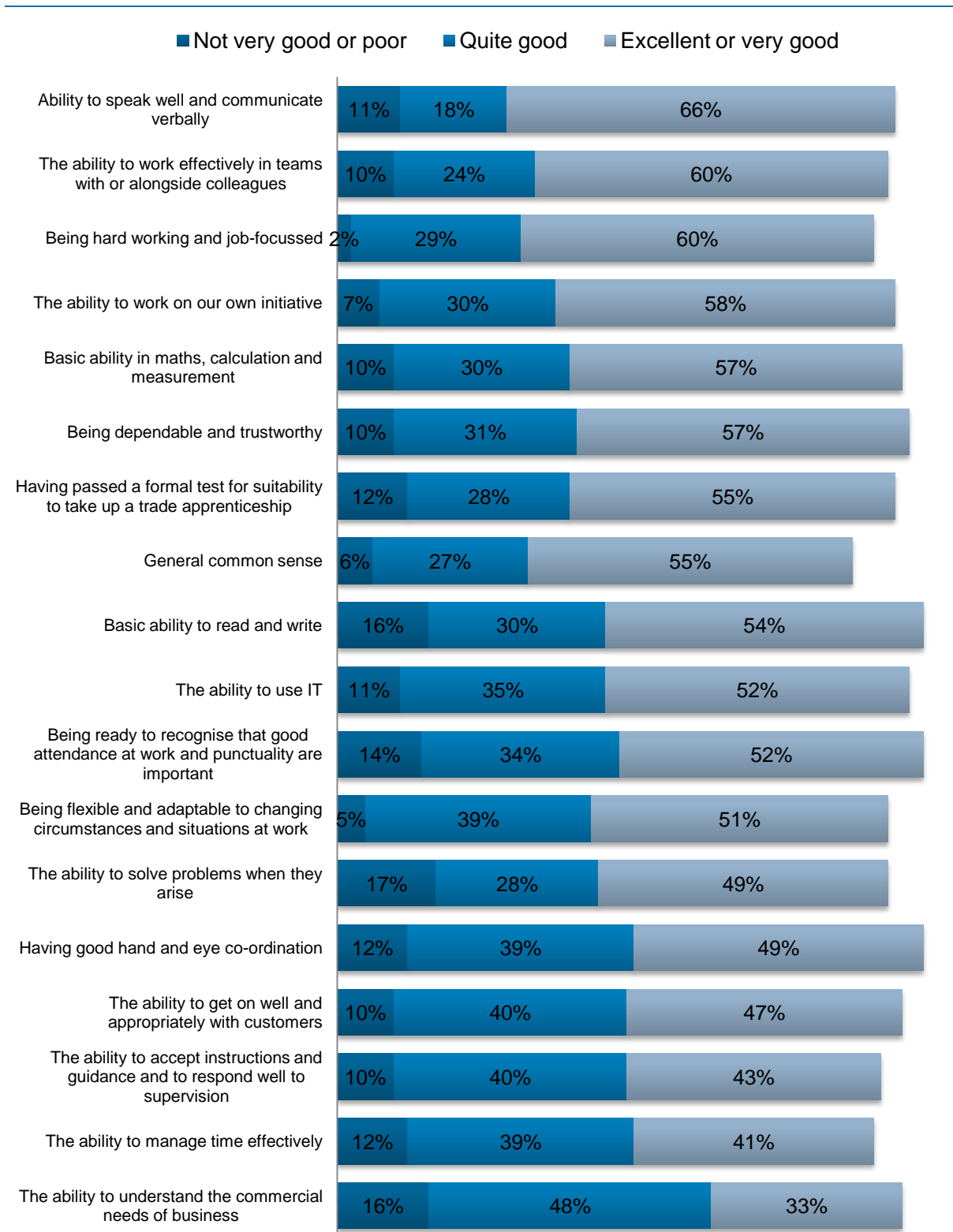
Young people's perception of their work readiness

210. Young people in the survey were also asked to rate *their own level or ability* in respect of work readiness characteristics – at the present time in the case of FE and HE students and, retrospectively, at the point where they first entered the construction industry in the case of young workers.

FE students

211. FE students were most confident of their communication and team working skills, of their ability to work hard and on their own initiative. They were least confident of their commercial awareness, time management skills, responsiveness to instructions, and ability to get on well with customers (see Figure 45 overleaf).

Figure 45: Respondents' perceived level of ability in specified areas - prompted (FE students)

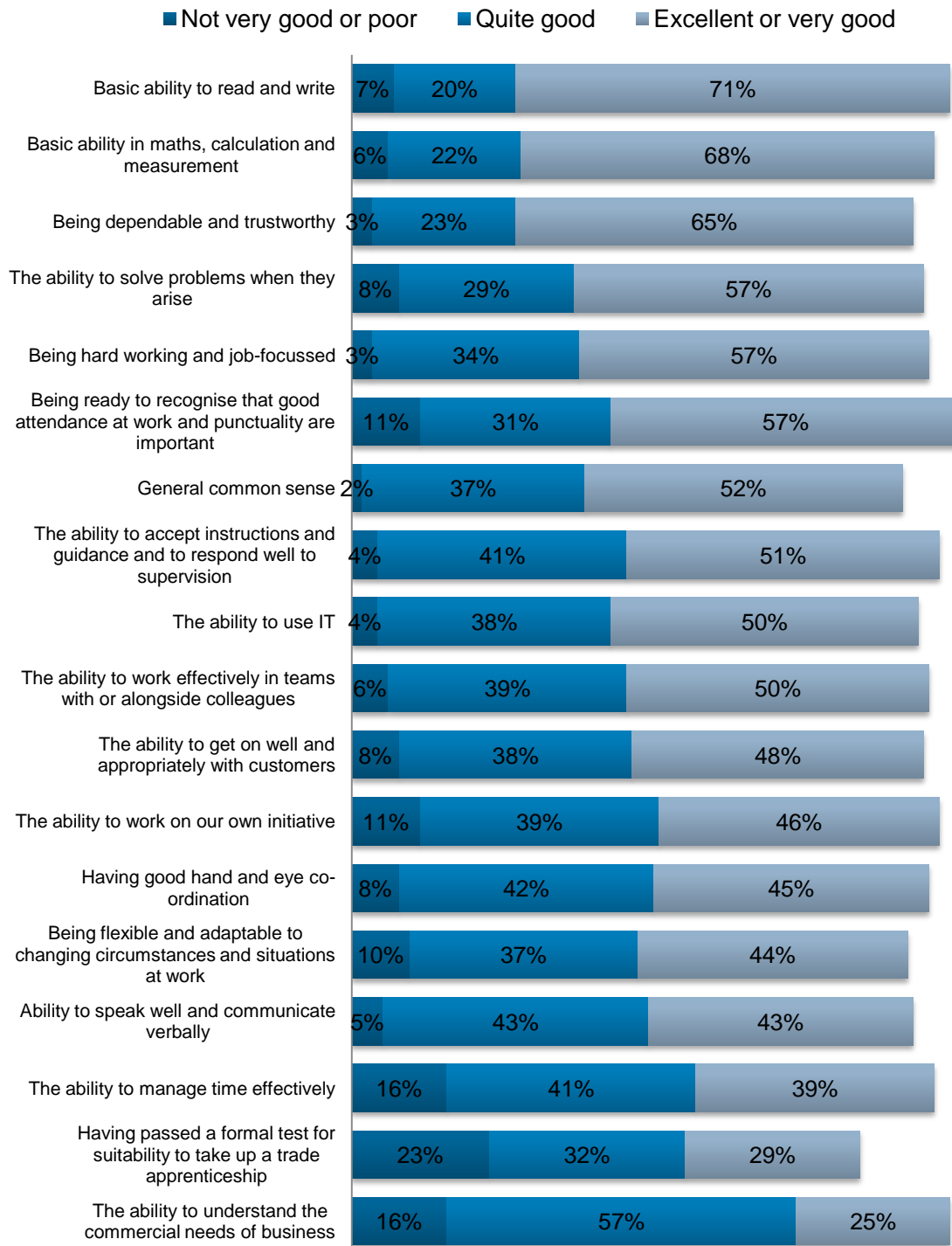


Q18 Sample base = 83

HE students

212. HE students were confident about their basic literacy and numeracy, their dependability, and their abilities to solve problems and work hard. They were least confident about their commercial awareness, and their time management and communication skills (see Figure 46).

Figure 46: Respondents' perceived level of ability in specified areas – prompted (HE students)

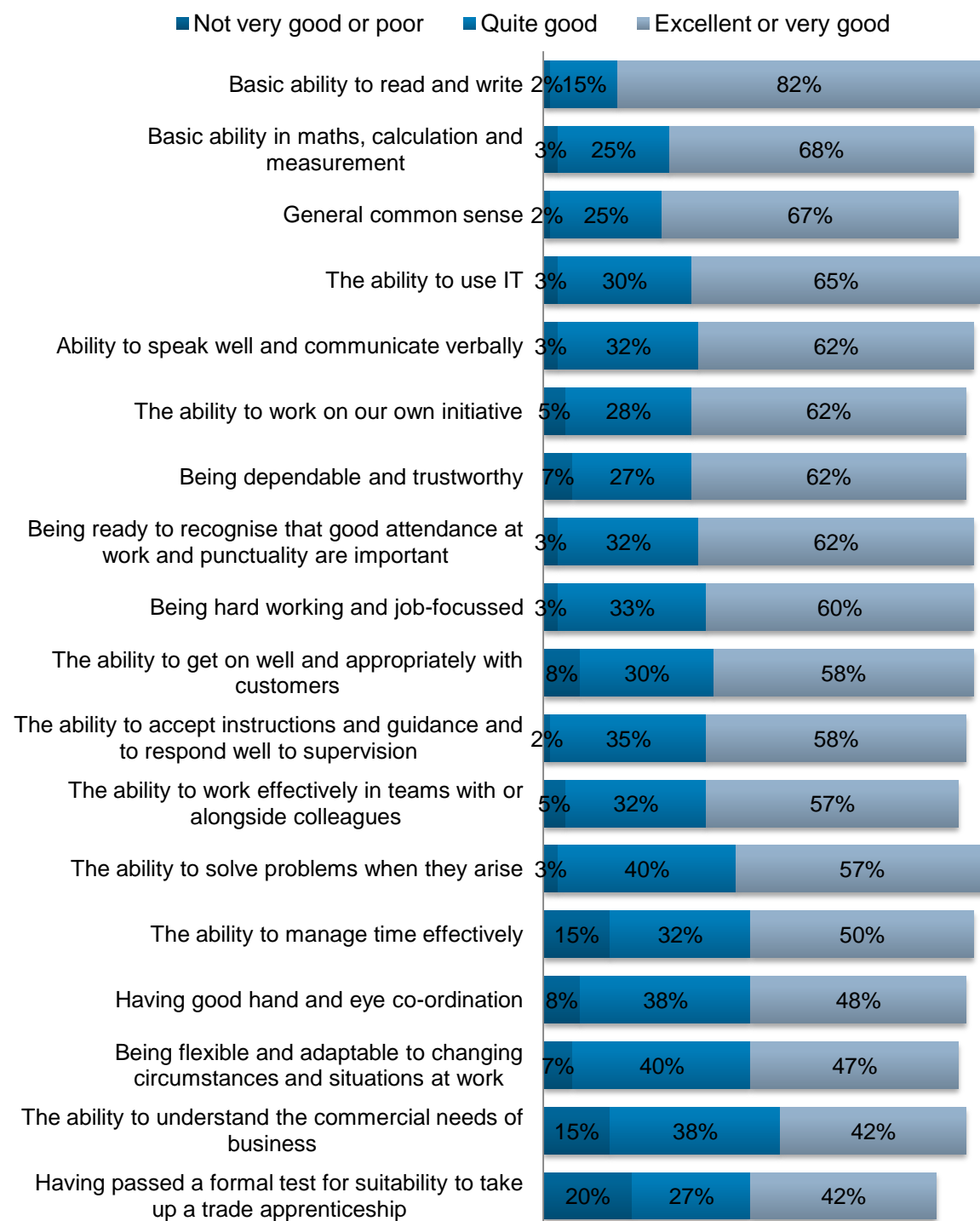


Q18 Sample base = 115

Young workers

213. Young workers were most confident about their basic literacy and numeracy, their general common sense, their IT skills, and their communication skills. They were least confident about their commercial awareness, their flexibility, their 'hand and eye' skills, and their time management (see Figure 47).

Figure 47: Respondents' perceived level of ability in specified areas - prompted (young workers)



Q18 Sample base = 60

Young people's perception of their work readiness: in-depth interviews

214. Young people were also asked in in-depth interviews to assess their current level of work readiness or, in the young workers case, their work readiness at the point when they had entered the industry.
215. Their perception of their strengths and weaknesses are summarised in a schedule which follows. It can be seen that strengths are mainly seen as possession of academic ability and/or good personal skills whereas the most consistently perceived weakness is lack of direct experience of the industry itself:

What HE Students perceive as their own strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Maths, confidence, determination, problem resolution	Taking on too much work
Speaking well, communication skills, placement experience	Time management
Problem solving, team work, communication	Lack of work experience
Maths, IT skills	Introversion, difficulty communicating with people
Academic ability, good soft skills (teamwork, communication)	Technical skills and job specific knowledge
Academic ability	Lack of work experience in construction
IT skills	Lack of confidence in male environments (a female student)
Maths, English, project management	IT skills, lack of experience

What FE students perceive as their own strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Hard worker, communication skills	Lack of work experience
Practical skills and attitude, problem solving	Lack of work experience
Good motivation, team working	Lack of work experience

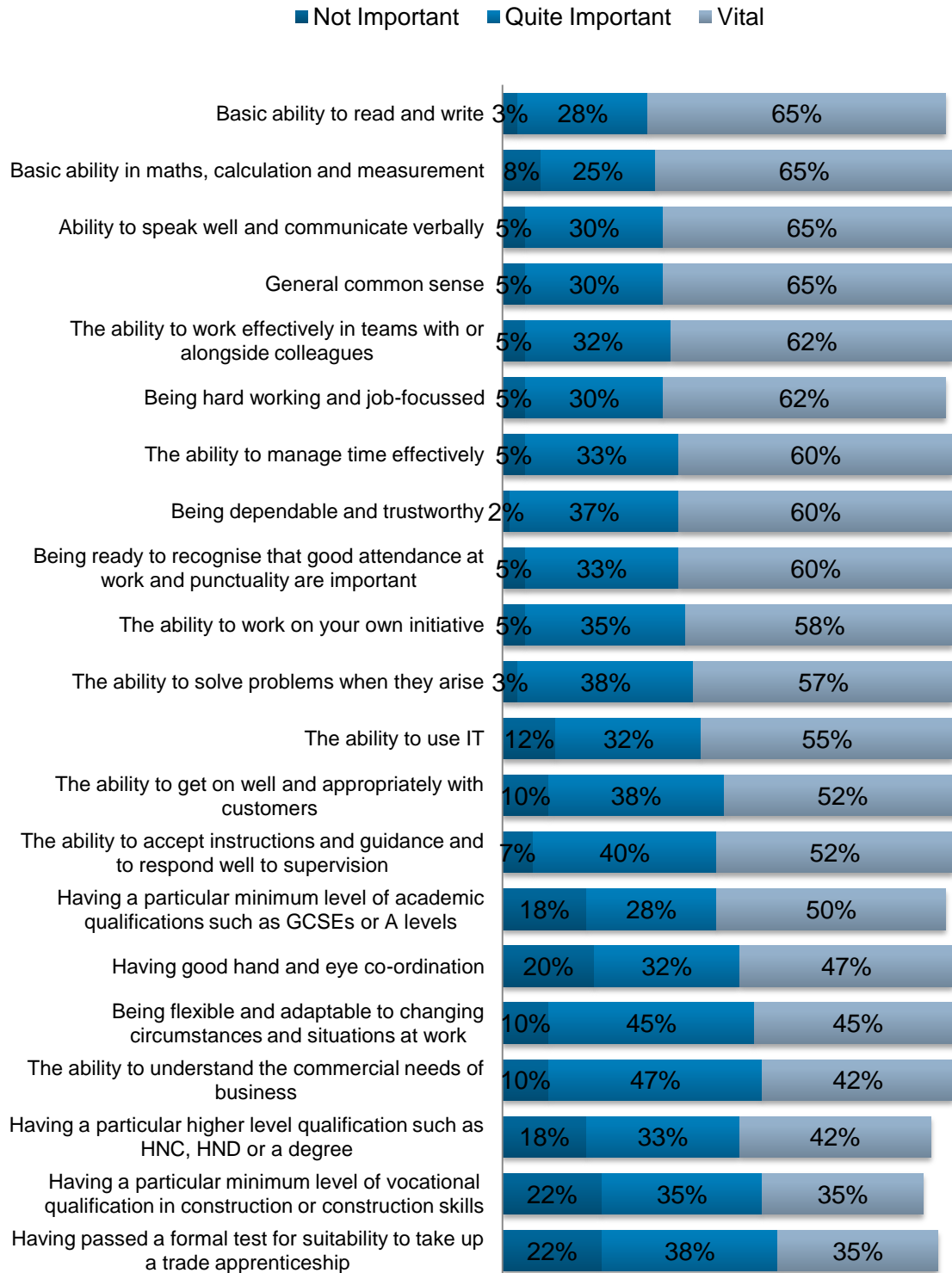
What young workers see as their own strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good GCSEs, good speaking, ability to calculate	Not having gone on a construction course before entry
Being IT literate, confidence willingness to learn	None identified
Good literacy and numeracy, eagerness to learn, enthusiasm	None identified
Ability to manage time and perform mental calculations	Poor speaking skills
Academic ability	Lack of prior work experience

Young workers: the actual importance of work readiness skills at work

216. Young workers, now with some work experience in the industry, were also asked how important the various work readiness skills were to their performance in their current jobs. In this case, basic literacy and numeracy, communication skills, general common sense, and team working were more frequently rated as vital.
217. These are broadly the same attributes which young workers, looking back, said they believed to be important to employers before they entered the industry. This may suggest that young workers were aware of employer expectations at that point and have had their expectations confirmed, but it is also possible that young workers' retrospective perceptions are coloured by their experiences since and by their present perspectives. Less important attributes mainly relate to the possession of qualifications of various kinds and of commercial awareness (see Figure 48).

Figure 48: Perceived importance of skills, abilities and characteristics to young workers' performance in their present job within the industry (young workers)



Q20 Sample base = 60

Looking to the future

218. Students in Further and Higher Education were asked how certain it was that they would seek employment in the construction industry on completion of their course. A substantial majority expected to do so (see Table 9).

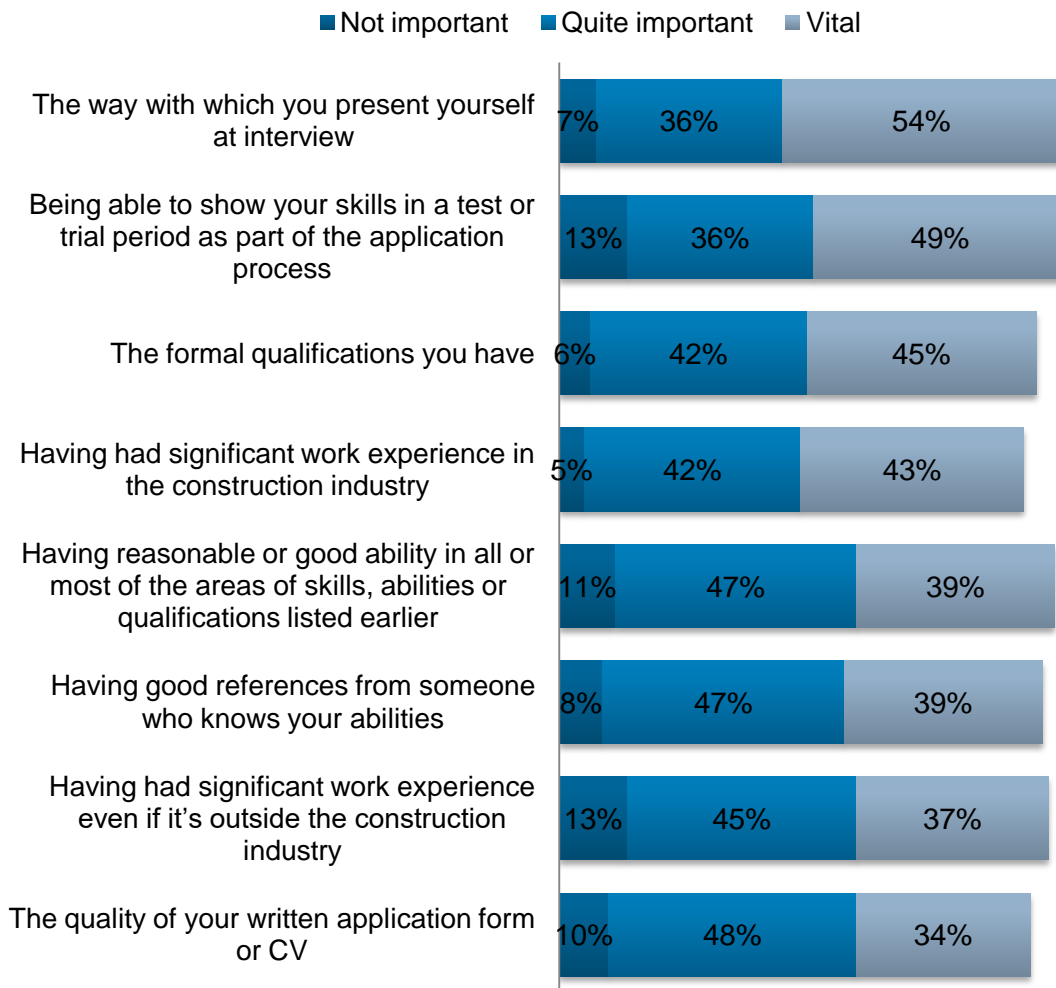
Table 9: Extent to which FE and HE students are certain they will seek a job in the construction industry (all FE and HE students)

	FE students	HE students
Totally certain	25%	20%
Fairly certain	37%	36%
Uncertain either way	22%	26%
Probably won't	10%	16%
Definitely won't	6%	3%
Summary: Certain	63%	56%
Summary: Probably/definitely won't	16%	18%
Sample bases	83	115

Q21

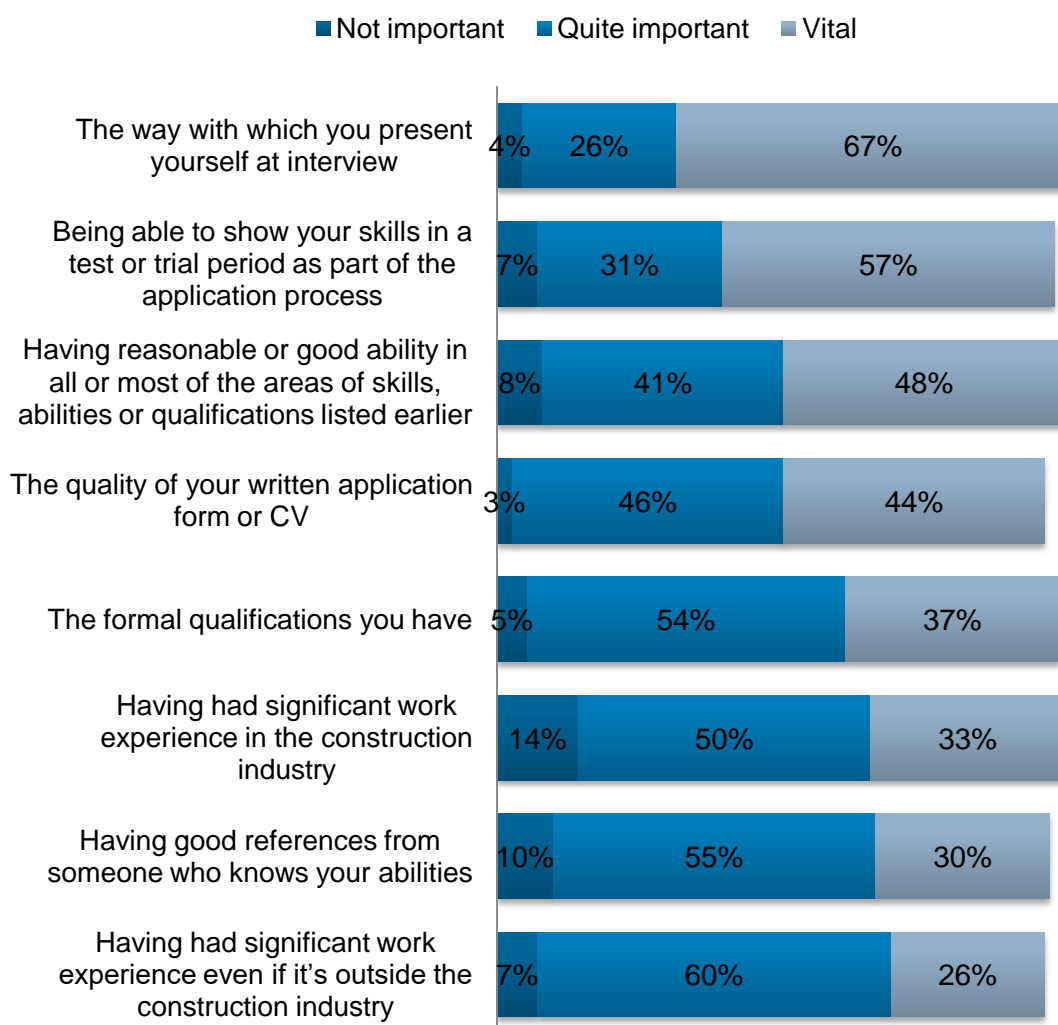
219. They were then asked to rate the importance of each of a number of factors in obtaining a job at that point. Both FE and HE students rated good presentation at interview and the ability to demonstrate possession of skills most highly (see Figures 49 and 50).

Figure 49: Perceived importance of specified aspect to employers amongst FE students - prompted (FE students)



Q23 Sample base = 83

Figure 50: Perceived importance of specified aspect to employers amongst HE students - prompted (HE students)



Q23 Sample base = 115

220. There was a high degree of confidence, especially against FE students, that they would obtain the construction job they wanted at the end of their courses (see Table 10).

Table 10: Extent to which FE and HE students are confident that they will be able to get the construction job they want when they have completed their course (all FE and HE students)

	FE students	HE students
Totally confident – you already have a job offer	18%	10%
Don't have a job offer but totally confident	22%	20%
Reasonably confident	40%	50%
Not very confident	18%	11%
Not at all confident	0%	0%
Summary: Totally confident (whether have a job offer or not)	40%	30%
Summary: Confident (including reasonably confident)	80%	80%
Sample bases	83	115

Q24

Summary of key points

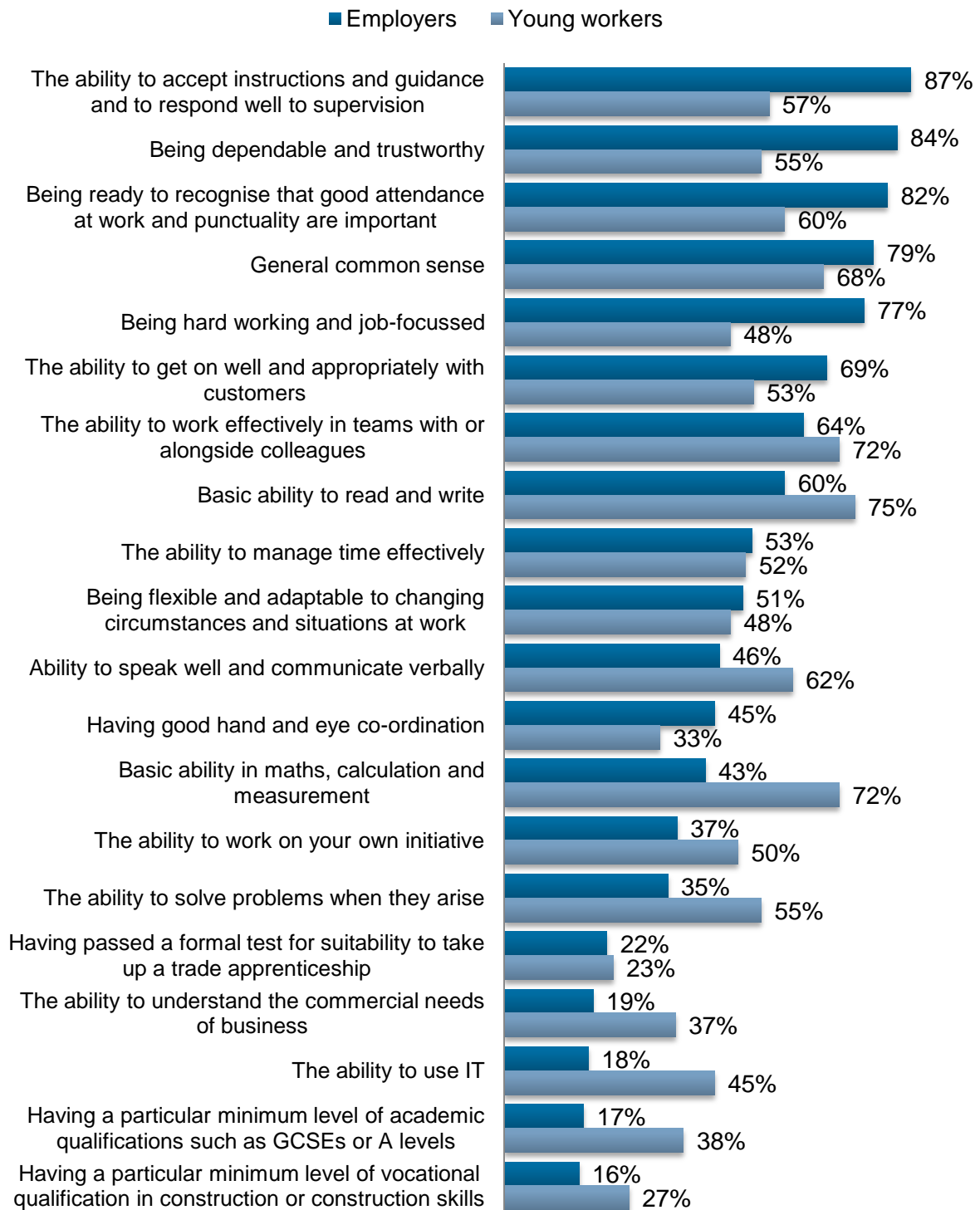
221. Key points of the analysis contained in this chapter are:

- Young people studying towards occupations in construction or newly working in construction had often had work experience, often, in the industry itself, and had frequently accessed formal and informal sources of information on the sector before entry to their course or before applying for a job in the industry.
- All groups of young people, FE and HE students and young workers, believed a variety of personal characteristics and attitudes were more important to employers than possession of formal qualifications
- Young people were generally confident of their work readiness, giving themselves 'quite good' or, more frequently, 'excellent or very good' ratings on a range of work readiness characteristics
- Most young people studying for a construction-related qualification expected to enter the industry on completion of their course and were confident that they would get the job they wanted.

7 A comparison of employers' and young peoples' perceptive of work readiness

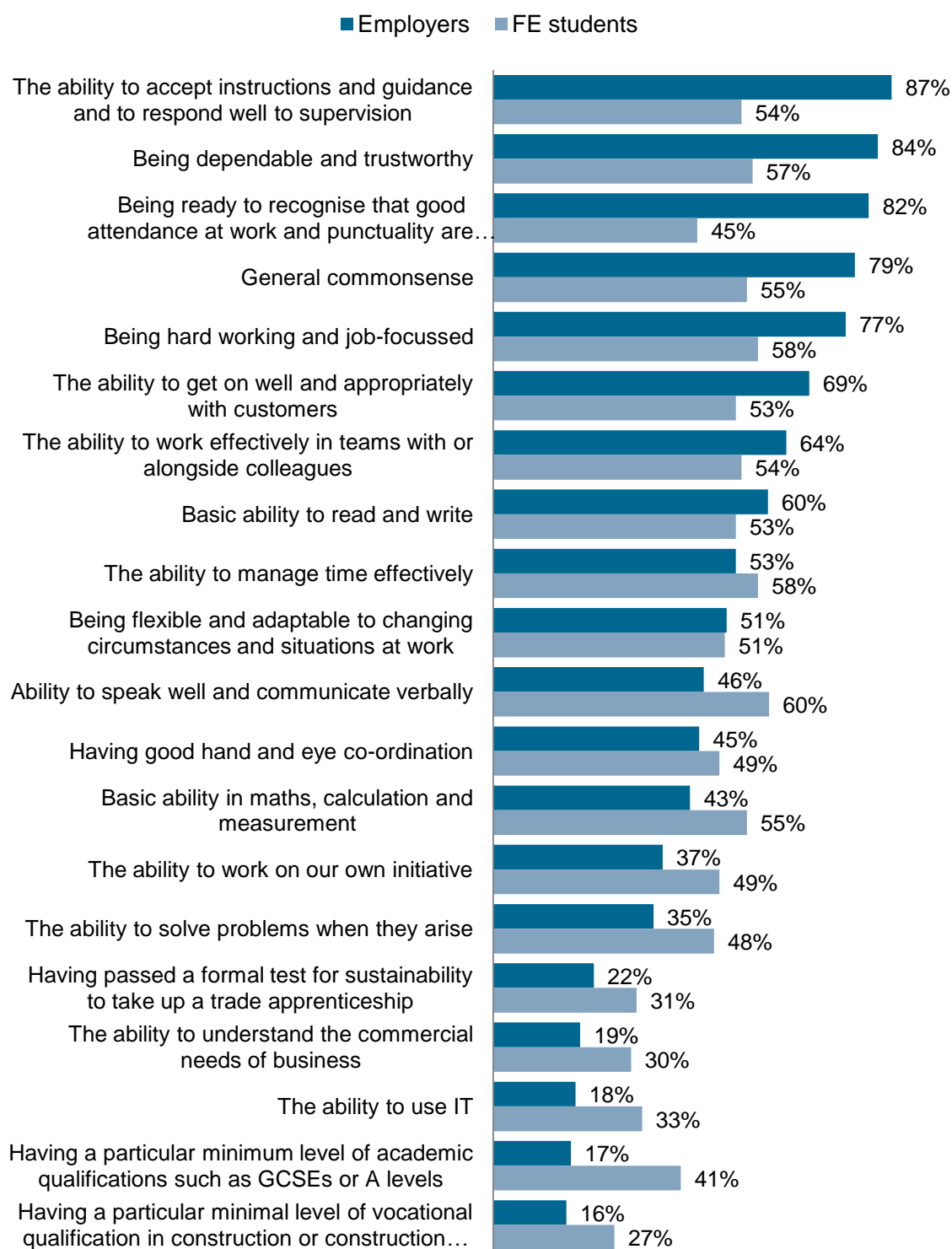
222. Employers' and young peoples' perceptions of the importance of different aspects of work readiness can be seen in the sequence of four Figures which follow (Figures 51-54).
223. These Figures show the percentages of employers and of young people who said that each of the different aspects was 'vital' to gaining employment in the sector. The figures compare employer ratings with, respectively, those of young workers, FE students, HE students, and all three groups combined. It can be seen that:
- There is a broad correspondence between employers and groups of young people in the sense that all groups of respondents, employers included, placed 'qualifications' factors at the least important end of the scale
 - Employers tend to have more discrimination between items in the sense that they have a wider range of 'vital' rating – higher 'top' ratings and lower 'bottom' ratings – than do young people whose 'vital' percentages are expressed within a narrower range.

Figure 51: Perceived importance of specified aspects to employers and young workers - prompted (employers and young workers)



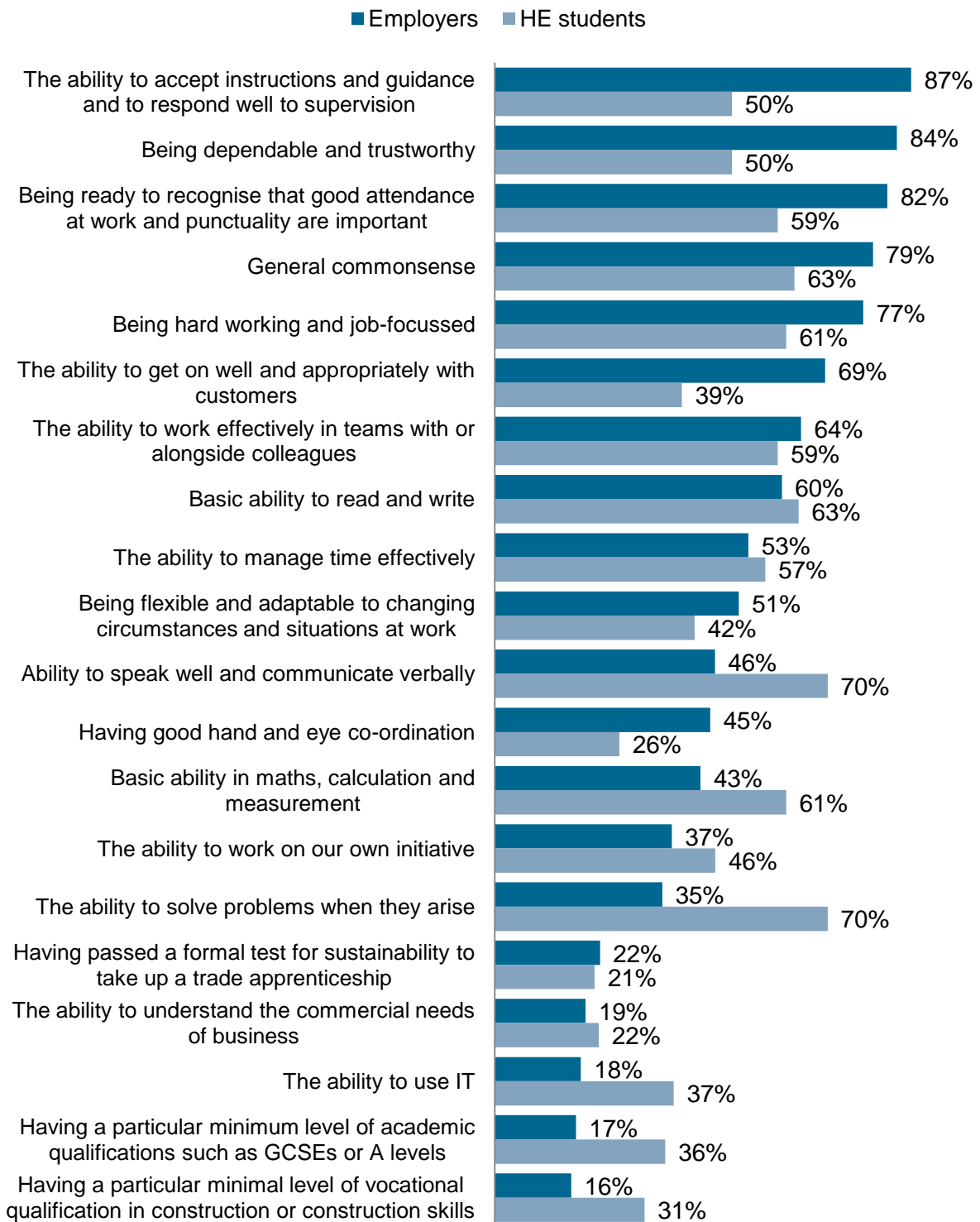
Employers: Q13 Sample base = 304; Young workers: Q17 Sample base = 60

Figure 52: Perceived importance of specified aspects to employers and FE students - prompted (employers and FE students)



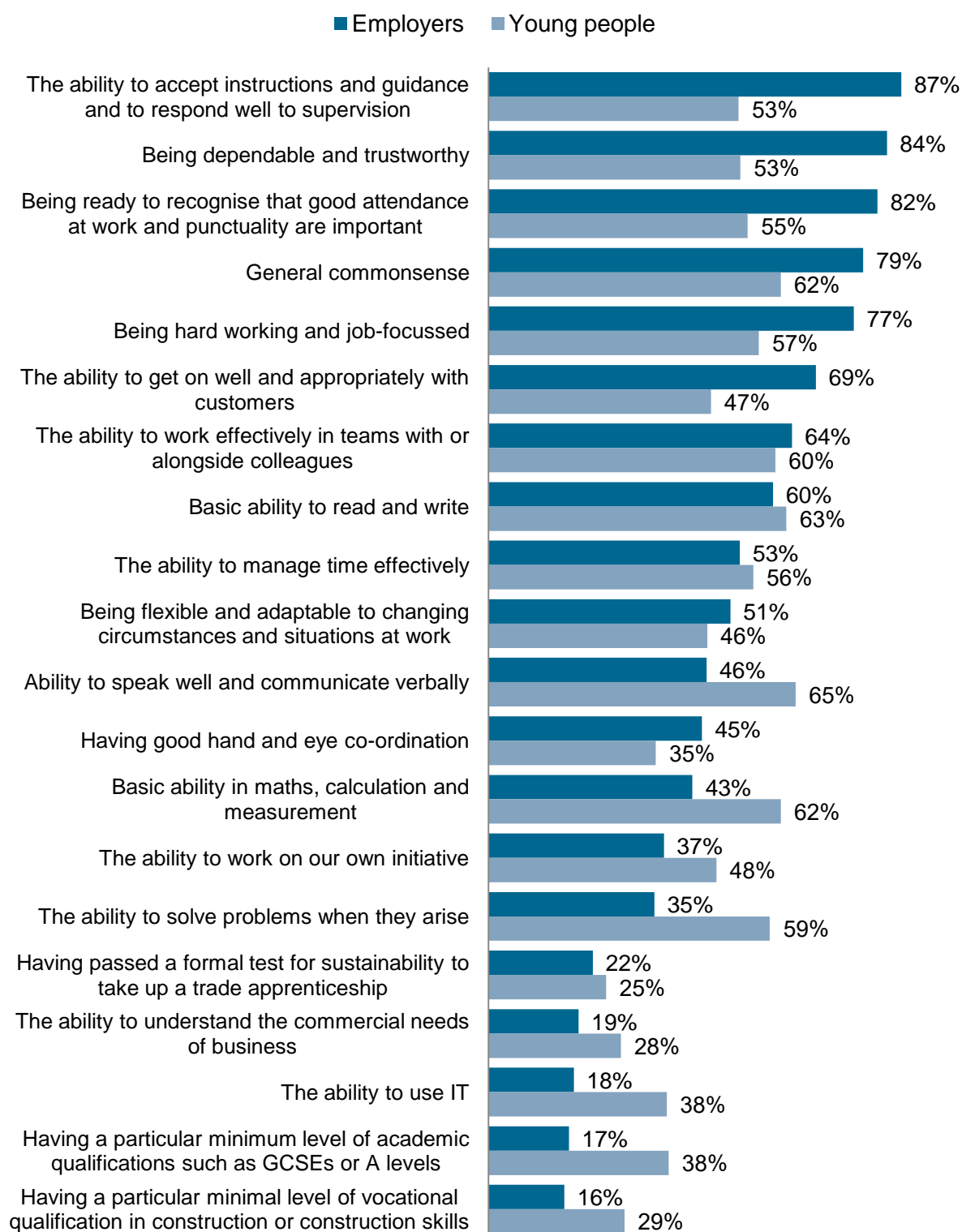
Employers: Q13 Sample base = 304; FE students: Q17 Sample base = 84

Figure 53: Perceived importance of specified aspects to employers and HE students - prompted (employers and HE students)



Employers: Q13 Sample base = 304; HE students: Q17 Sample base = 115

Figure 54: Perceived importance of specified aspects to employers and young people - prompted (employers and young people)



Employers: Q13 Sample base = 304; Young people: Q17 Sample base = 258

224. The data in Figures 50 to 53 can be considered in a different way – by converting the percentages in the figures to ranks, from aspects most frequently regarded as vital (rank 1) to aspects least frequently regarded as vital (rank 20). This alternative presentation of the figures is set out in Table 11.

Table 11: Perceived importance of specified aspects: Rankings

	Employers	Young workers	FE students	HE students	All young people
The ability to accept instructions and guidance and to respond well to supervision	1	7	7	10	10
Being dependable and trustworthy	2	8	4	11	11
Being ready to recognise that good attendance at work and punctuality are important	3	6	15	7	9
General common sense	4	4	5	3	3
Being hard working and job-focussed	5	13	2	5	7
The ability to get on well and appropriately with customers	6	10	9	15	13
The ability to work effectively in teams with or alongside colleagues	7	2	8	8	5
Basic ability to read and write	8	1	10	4	2
The ability to manage time effectively	9	11	3	9	8
Being flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and situations at work	10	14	11	14	14
Ability to speak well and communicate verbally	11	5	1	1	1
Having good hand and eye co-ordination	12	18	12	13	17
Basic ability in maths, calculation and measurement	13	3	6	6	4
The ability to work on your own initiative	14	12	13	12	12
The ability to solve problems when they arise	15	9	14	2	6
Having passed a formal test for suitability to take up a trade apprenticeship	16	20	18	20	20
The ability to understand the commercial needs of business	17	17	19	19	19
The ability to use IT	18	15	17	16	15
Having a particular minimum level of academic qualifications such as GCSEs or A levels	19	16	16	17	16
Having a particular minimum level of vocational qualification in construction or construction skills	20	19	20	18	18
Correlation with employer rankings (Spearman correlation co-efficient)		0.623	0.689	0.513	0.517

Q21

225. Statistically, correlations can be calculated (Spearman Rank Order correlation coefficients) between the employer rankings and young people's rankings. These coefficients are:
- Employers with young workers = 0.623
 - Employers with FE students = 0.689
 - Employers with HE students = 0.513
 - Employers with all young people = 0.517
226. It can be seen from this that there is somewhat more agreement between employers and young workers, and employers and FE students than between employers and HE students.
227. All these co-efficient values are statistically highly significant. However, looking at the rankings of factors in Table 11 above, it can also be seen that there is no obvious convergence between employer rankings and rankings by group of young people, except that both employers and young people place 'qualifications' less frequently at the 'vital' end of the scale – this factor being the main cause for the statistical significance which is observed.

Summary of key points

228. A comparison of employers' and young people's views on which aspects of work readiness are vital suggests:
- Employers have views on aspects on work readiness which distinguish important aspects from less important ones with greater clarity than this the case young people
 - There is a statistical congruence between employers' and young peoples' views on which aspects of work readiness are most and least important, but this mainly derives from the fact that both employers and young people place a group of aspects (mainly related to the possession of qualification) as a lower priority.
 - Above that, there is only very limited agreement between employers and young people (and between different groups of young people) as to the relative importance of the different characteristics which make up 'work readiness'.

8 Conclusions

Defining and measuring work readiness

229. The review of literature review suggests two very general points. Firstly, work readiness can be considered as a quality which is related, firstly, to fitness to enter the world of work in general and, secondly, to fitness to enter a particular job or to embark on a particular career path. The literature recognises the second, more refined and detailed, conceptualisation of work readiness but is more likely to specify work readiness characteristics which are related to the world of work in general. The reason for this is that the primary focus of work readiness research is on the basic preparation of young people for work of which ever form they seek and on approaches to the development of work readiness which are widely transferable rather than constrained to particular occupations.
230. The second general characteristic of the work readiness literature is that it proposes varied but broadly overlapping sets of characteristics which comprise work readiness. These characteristics include attitudes and motivations (such as drive, common sense, willingness to work hard, trustworthiness, commitment to the organisation, and so on), personal and social skills and qualities (such as time management, communication skills, punctuality, and ability to work well with colleagues and customers), and basic skills (such as adequate literacy, basic mathematics, and IT competence).
231. In terms of the first point above, concerning the specificity of work readiness research, the research reported here has an intermediate focus – not on work readiness in general nor (except in distinguishing at some points between graduate and lower level recruitment) on readiness for a particular occupation, but on readiness to enter a particular industry, that of construction.
232. In terms of the second point above, that the literature generally proposes work readiness as comprising a basket of attributes, this research broadly followed this approach whilst also (by asking employers in a survey to give an unprompted description of their views on key work readiness attributes and by including some ‘qualitative’ discussions with employers) allowing any important work readiness characteristics which were not prescribed by the literature to emerge.

Work readiness matters to the industry but is often deficient

233. But, before identifying, the nature of work readiness in the construction industry, two further questions were asked.
234. The first of these is whether ‘work readiness’, in the sense of having a set of attributes broader than technical skills or qualifications, is actually important to employers. The survey statistics suggest that it is. Thus, when asked why they recruited particular young people into the industry, the most frequent reason, given by more than two-thirds of employers, was because the person was ‘keen and looked as though they would be a good recruit’. When employers who don’t recruit young people were asked the reason for this, the most common reason, given by half of these employers, was that ‘young people often don’t have the right attitudes or motivations towards work’.

Essentially, the deal-breaker for entry to the construction industry is often not technical skills or knowledge but how well the attitudes and ambitions of young people coincide with those which employers require.

235. The second preliminary question, if work readiness is important, is how widely is it to be found?
236. Analysis of Employer Perspectives Survey data (chapter 3) shows significant levels of construction employer dissatisfaction with the preparedness of work of school leavers (49% say they are poorly prepared) and lesser dissatisfaction with FE college leavers (27% say poorly prepared) and new graduates (18% say poorly prepared).
237. In the survey for this study, overall figures were slightly more negative: 51% said school and FE leavers were poorly prepared and 26% said graduates were poorly prepared, (though those negative proportions were lower, 32% and 13% respectively saying school/FE leavers and graduates were poorly prepared, if the employer had actually recruited from these groups. Overall, however, data from either source suggests that lack of work readiness is a significant issue affecting the intake of new entrants to the industry.
238. Thus, if work readiness is both important to employers and is deficient in many cases, what is the work readiness which employers actually seek?
239. As noted above, the survey of employers looked at this in two ways. First, by asking employers, without prompting, to identify the things they looked for in young recruits. The most frequently mentioned characteristics for young recruits in general were motivation, drive and commitment; willingness to learn; a good work ethic; and punctuality and regular attendance at work. In respect of graduate recruits, however, there was a higher expectation of possession of directly job-related ability in that the most frequent responses here concerned the skills, experience, 'technical mindedness' and qualifications of applicants – but even for this group, willingness to learn, motivation, commitment, a positive attitude, and a good work ethic were still frequently mentioned.
240. In a second question, employers were then asked to rate the importance of a prepared list of characteristics which were identified from the background literature as being widely believed to be components of work readiness. In this case, the characteristics most frequently rated as vital, were, in order:
 - Ability to accept instructions and respond well to supervision
 - Being dependable and trustworthy
 - Being ready to recognise that good attendance at work and punctuality are important
 - General common sense
 - Being hard working and job-focussed
 - The ability to get on well and appropriately with customers
 - The ability to work effectively in teams with colleagues

241. In these cases, virtually all employers said these were at least 'quite important' and over 60% in each case said these attributes were 'vital'
242. Below these items, in terms of their 'vital' rankings, were a range of social and personal skills including time management, flexibility, verbal communications, and ability to work on own initiative, and basic skills in reading, writing, and maths.
243. At the bottom of the scale, having a minimum level of vocational skills in construction and having a minimum level of academic qualifications were given 'vital' ratings only by 16% and 17% of employers respectively.
244. Essentially, thus, the survey shows that what industry employers primarily want are committed, disciplined, reliable young people with common sense and the ability to get on well with other people. Beyond that a range of other personal characteristics, skills, and qualifications are valuable but are much less often seen as critical to recruitment – if the applicant measures up 'as a person', then employers may be willing to develop or forego other characteristics and attributes

Young people broadly understand employer expectations but not always with great precision

245. If this is what employers want, do young people who want to enter the industry realise it? in general terms, they do so in that they think, correctly, that employers less often see possession of qualifications as vital
246. However, they have a lesser discrimination than employers between various characteristics as to their importance. For example, the characteristic most frequently seen as 'vital' by employers (ability to accept instructions) was seen as such by 87% of employers and the item least frequently seen as 'vital' (possession of vocational qualifications) by 16% of employers. For FE students, the most frequent 'vital' characteristic (verbal communications skills in this case) was seen as vital by 60% and the least frequent 'vital' characteristic (possession of vocational qualifications, as with employers) was seen as vital by 37%. This compression of scores into a narrower range by young people may suggest that young people do not, collectively, have a clear cut or precise understanding of what employers expect or of the importance which employers give to some critical characteristics.
247. And, excluding possession of qualifications, on which employers and young people broadly agree, there is a degree of misjudgement by young people of the relative significance of work readiness characteristics to employers. Of the 5 characteristics most often noted as vital for recruitment (ability to accept instructions, being dependable, good attendance and punctuality, common sense, and being hard working), young people placed only one (common sense) in their top '5' most vital items. And there are some particularly substantial misjudgements. For example, only 45% of FE students of construction subjects saw good attendance and punctuality as vital compared with the 82% of employers who gave this a 'vital' rating.

Young people may overestimate their work readiness

248. It also appears that young people may also tend to over-estimate their abilities. Thus, employers were asked about the deficiencies they saw in young people's work readiness characteristics, whilst FE and HE students were asked to rate their own abilities on the same characteristics. In respect of many characteristics, young people were less inclined than employers to see weakness. For example, the proportions of employers seeing school and FE leavers as lacking in their ability to attend work and be punctual, to work hard, and to communicate well were 27%, 24%, and 20% respectively. The proportions of current FE students rating themselves as 'not very good or poor' on these characteristics were much lower at 14%, 2%, and 11%. Of course, there are likely to be misperceptions and poor judgement lying behind sets of assessments as well as definitional differences as to what constitutes a 'good' or 'poor' level of ability and performance in each of them. However, again, there is a sense in the comparative data that employers' and young people's perceptions of industry needs do not wholly coincide.

Employers locate lack of work readiness in the educational system and, more broadly, in the wider culture

249. If then, the general issue is that a significant proportion of young people lack work readiness characteristics and, additionally, may not fully realise this, what is the cause and how can the situation be improved?
250. The survey of employers suggests that, from the employer view, one cause lies in the mainstream educational system. A minority of employers suggest that, in respect of graduates, there are problems with university courses – they are too theoretical, don't match the needs of the industry – and, more generally, universities don't spend enough time developing the personal qualities of students. In respect of Further Education, a larger minority of employers believe that problems include the failure of courses to replicate site conditions, lack of attention to learners' personal development, courses at too low a level, and courses directed too much at theoretical knowledge and too little at the development of practical skills.
251. However, the most frequent concern is with secondary school education. Only 30% of employers believe secondary schools do a good job of preparing young people for work. The main problems perceived by employers are a focus on academic learning at the expense of pupils' development of personal skills and an in-built bias against vocational skills and occupations.
252. These various perceptions were backed up in in-depth interviews with FE and HE students who frequently complained of the overly - theoretical nature of their courses, their low level provision of practical work, and the absence of opportunity to experience working environments.
253. In-depth interviews with employers also allowed other sources of causation to be added to those concerning educational processes. The main point was that underlying cultures, at national, community, and family levels, may no longer, in many cases, be wholly aligned with the culture of the industry, in so far as that is shaped, to a significant degree, by the rigorous and sometimes physically arduous work which remains a major factor in the industry's processes.

Increasing work readiness depends on up-valuing vocational skills in the education system; and on reflecting that change by strengthening the practical elements of courses and by the wider provision of meaningful work experience

254. How then can the gap between the expectations and values of employers and young people at the point of entry to the industry be reduced?
255. On one hand, from the industry's point of view, the balance between academic and vocational values in educational institutions, particularly in secondary schools where young people's values and ambitions are established, needs to be adjusted in favour of the latter. This needs to be reinforced, at all levels, including in Further and Higher Education, by the extension of practical elements in construction-related courses and by the more general provision of genuine and substantial work experiences.
256. Other research reviewed earlier in this report, makes the case that work experience is the most potent means by which the demands of employment and the work place can be made clear to young people. In this research, both employers and young people pursuing construction courses saw practical course work and work experience as important if not critical elements in developing young people's recognition of what work situations in the industry demand of them – and young people (in qualitative discussions) revealed that these elements are actually the ones that they most enjoy and most motivate them to progress into the industry.

The industry, too, needs to act

257. On the other hand, the industry itself needs to help close the gap
258. Firstly, it needs to continue to 'professionalise' its occupations. This research, both in its analysis of Employer Perspectives Survey data and in its own survey, confirms much other research on the industry which shows that construction employers (apart from the larger businesses in the sector) often continue to see possession of qualifications as a bonus rather than as a requirement in selecting people for employment. While educational institutions may need, as above, to adjust their ethos in a vocational direction, the industry itself may need, while still maintaining its intensely practical orientation, to move in the other direction, underpinning its increasingly sophisticated use of products, processes, and systems by greater recognition of the need for theoretical and technical training and education and the certification of this.
259. Secondly, if, as above, work experience is the major mechanism by which young people's work readiness can be increased, then the industry (despite barriers presented by safety issues and the somewhat fragmented and 'small firm' character of the industry) needs to become a more frequent supplier of significant work experience opportunities. The Employer Perspective Survey shows that 23% of construction employers provided work placements compared with an average of 38% of employers in all UK sectors. The survey undertaken as part of this study shows a higher figure of 43% of industry employers offering the somewhat more widely-defined 'work experience' (rather than formal 'work placements') but in-depth discussions reveal that such experiences were generally short, often only for one week, and the content of the experience was often informal and undemanding. Essentially, if employers are

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concerned to improve young people's readiness to work in the industry, they need to work more closely with the educational sectors, to provide the opportunities for young people to recognise and develop that readiness.

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