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Careers Service

Festival of Learning and Teaching 2026

Keynote: Preparing the Class of 2030

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What do employers want?



Recruitment:

- **Can you do the job?**
 - Skills (Tech & Transferable)
- **Will you do the job?**
 - Motivations
- **Will you fit in?**
 - Personality (Values & Behaviours)



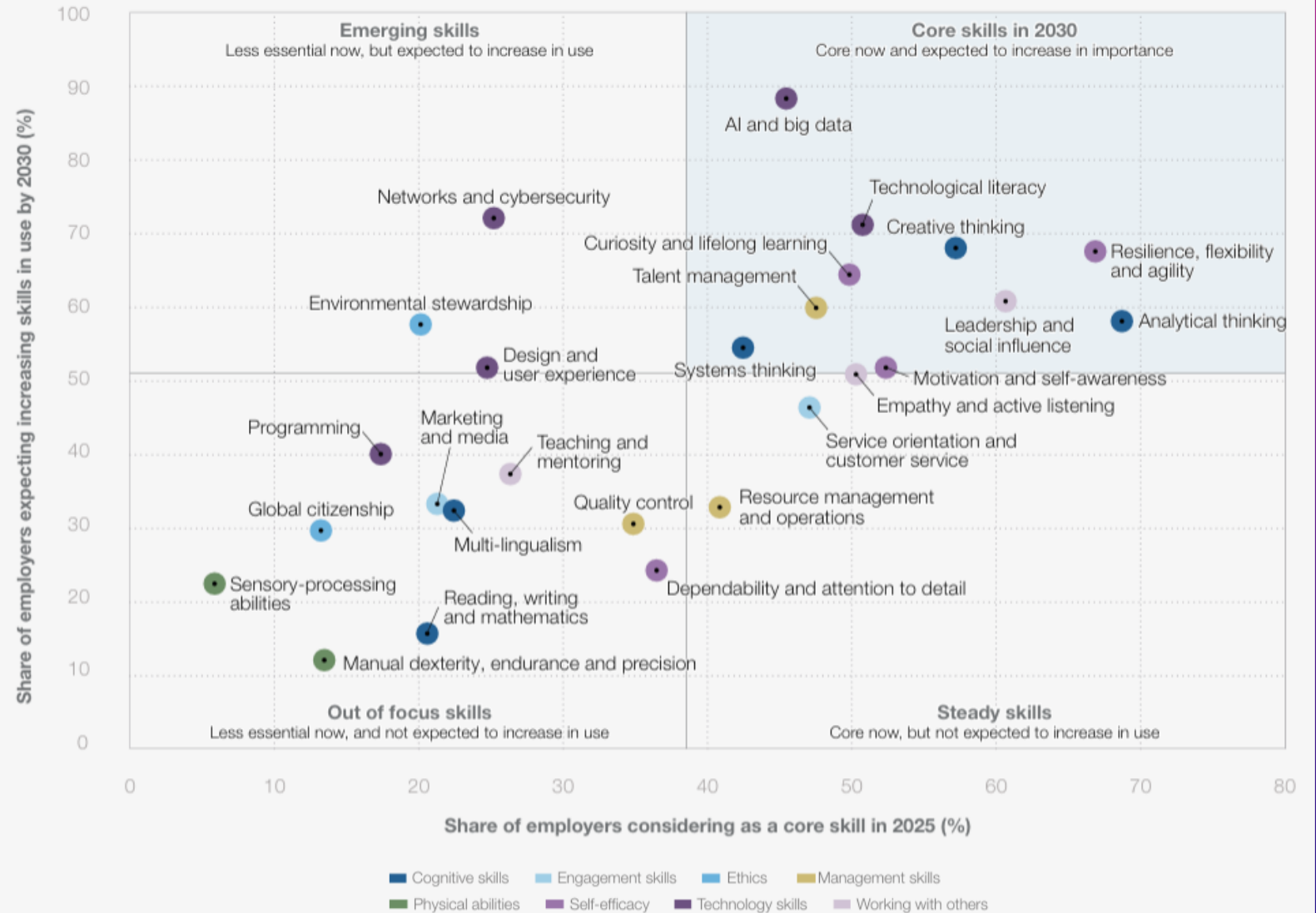
Skills In High Demand:

- Communication
- Team Working
- Integrity
- Intellectual Ability
- Confidence
- Character/Personality
- Planning & Organisation
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Analysis & Decision Making
- Leadership
- Negotiation
- Time Management
- Project Management
- Problem Solving
- Computer Literacy
- Commercial Awareness
- Handling Pressure
- Creativity / Innovation
- Resilience



WEF Skills:

Creative thinking, resilience, flexibility and agility, along with curiosity and lifelong learning, are expected to continue to rise in importance over the 2025-2030 period.





Volatile
Uncertain
Complex
Ambiguous

V
U
C
A

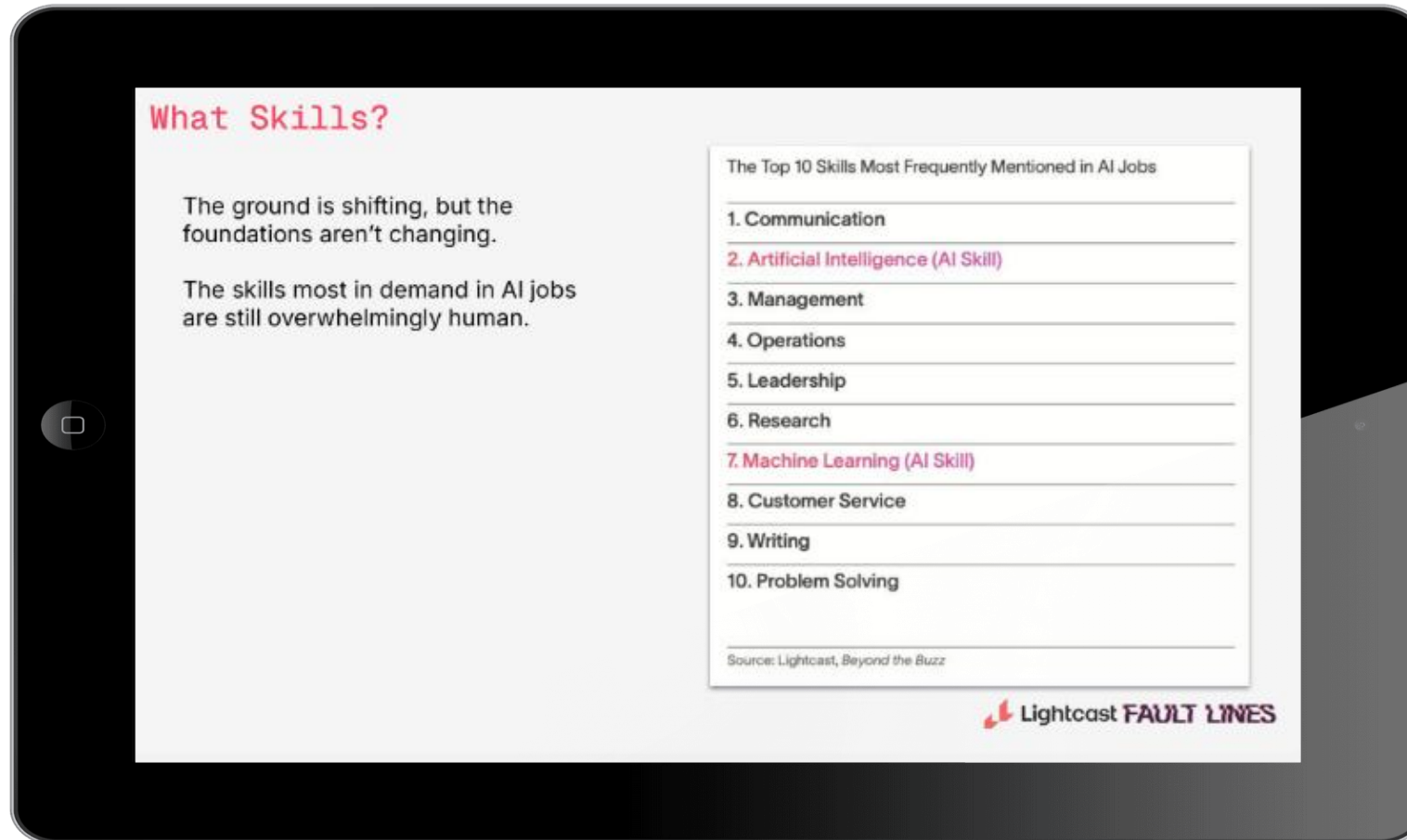


Brittle
Anxious
Nonlinear
Incomprehensible

B
A
N
I

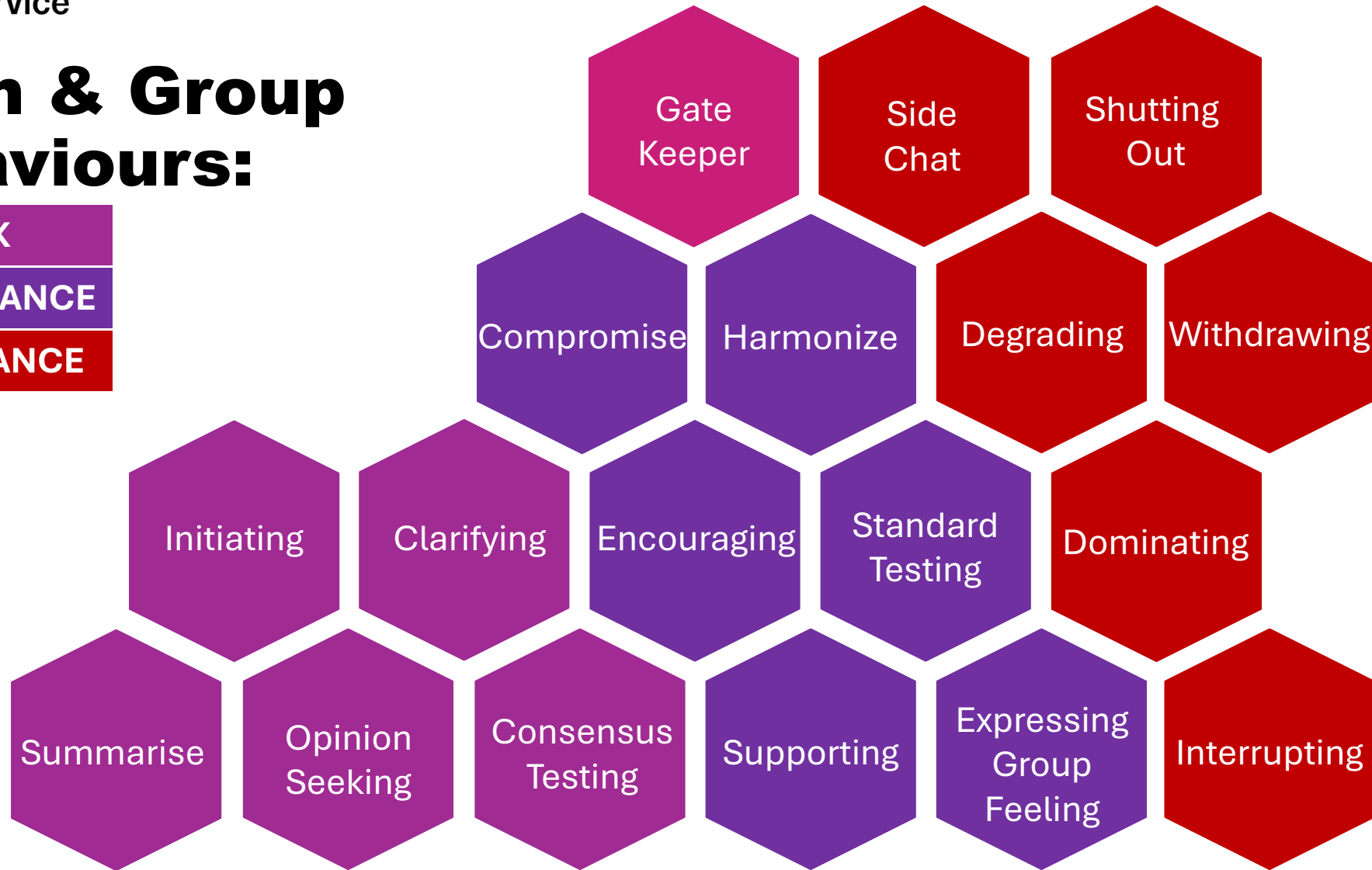


The Skills Are Still Human:



Team & Group Behaviours:

TASK
MAINTENANCE
HINDERANCE



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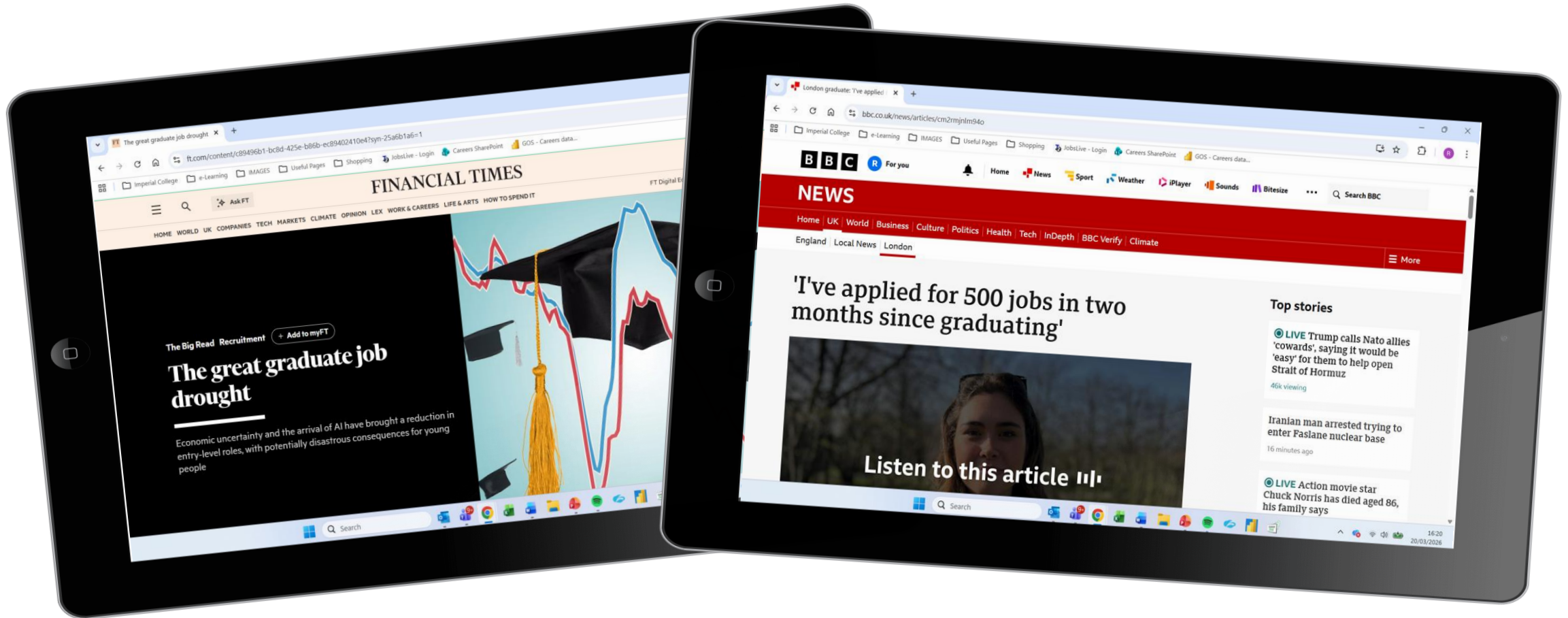
What does recruitment look like?



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Sensational headlines:



Assessment as a Prediction:

“The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. It’s tough to cut candidates from the process, but it must be done.

If a candidate is not evidencing the right characteristics in the hiring process, it’s unlikely they will start showing them if hired.”

Sam Turnpenny

Graduate Recruitment Lead, Accenture



Figure 2.3.3
Organisations' use of selection and assessment activities
(124 organisations)

Activity	Used in 2024/2025	Initial application stage	First stage assessments	Second stage assessments	Final stage assessments
Online application form questions	95%	93%	7%	1%	2%
Academic qualification screening	70%	63%	10%	3%	1%
In person face to face interview	66%	0%	3%	15%	53%
Face to face assessment centre	63%	0%	3%	9%	52%
Group tasks	58%	0%	2%	11%	47%
Online video interview (recorded/asynchronous)	52%	2%	15%	35%	1%
Online live interview	51%	0%	13%	20%	24%
Behaviours, preferences or values assessments	51%	8%	36%	15%	14%
Situational judgement tests	48%	9%	31%	10%	3%
Presentations	45%	0%	2%	10%	36%
Case studies	44%	0%	4%	7%	36%
CV screening	44%	41%	5%	2%	1%
Virtual assessment centre	41%	0%	4%	7%	31%
Numerical reasoning tests	40%	7%	26%	5%	2%
Technical skill tests	36%	3%	15%	11%	13%
Critical thinking tests	32%	7%	16%	7%	8%
Strengths based aptitude test	27%	4%	18%	8%	7%
Data analysis exercises	26%	0%	6%	2%	20%
Verbal reasoning tests	25%	5%	15%	3%	2%
Phone interview	19%	2%	7%	10%	0%
Game based assessments	15%	3%	8%	1%	3%
Online job simulation	15%	2%	3%	7%	3%
Other psychometric/aptitude assessment	15%	2%	10%	3%	1%
Role play	13%	0%	0%	2%	11%
Email inbox exercises	11%	0%	1%	3%	8%
Hybrid assessment centre	8%	0%	0%	1%	7%
Virtual reality activities	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%



A Typical Recruitment Process:

Schroders



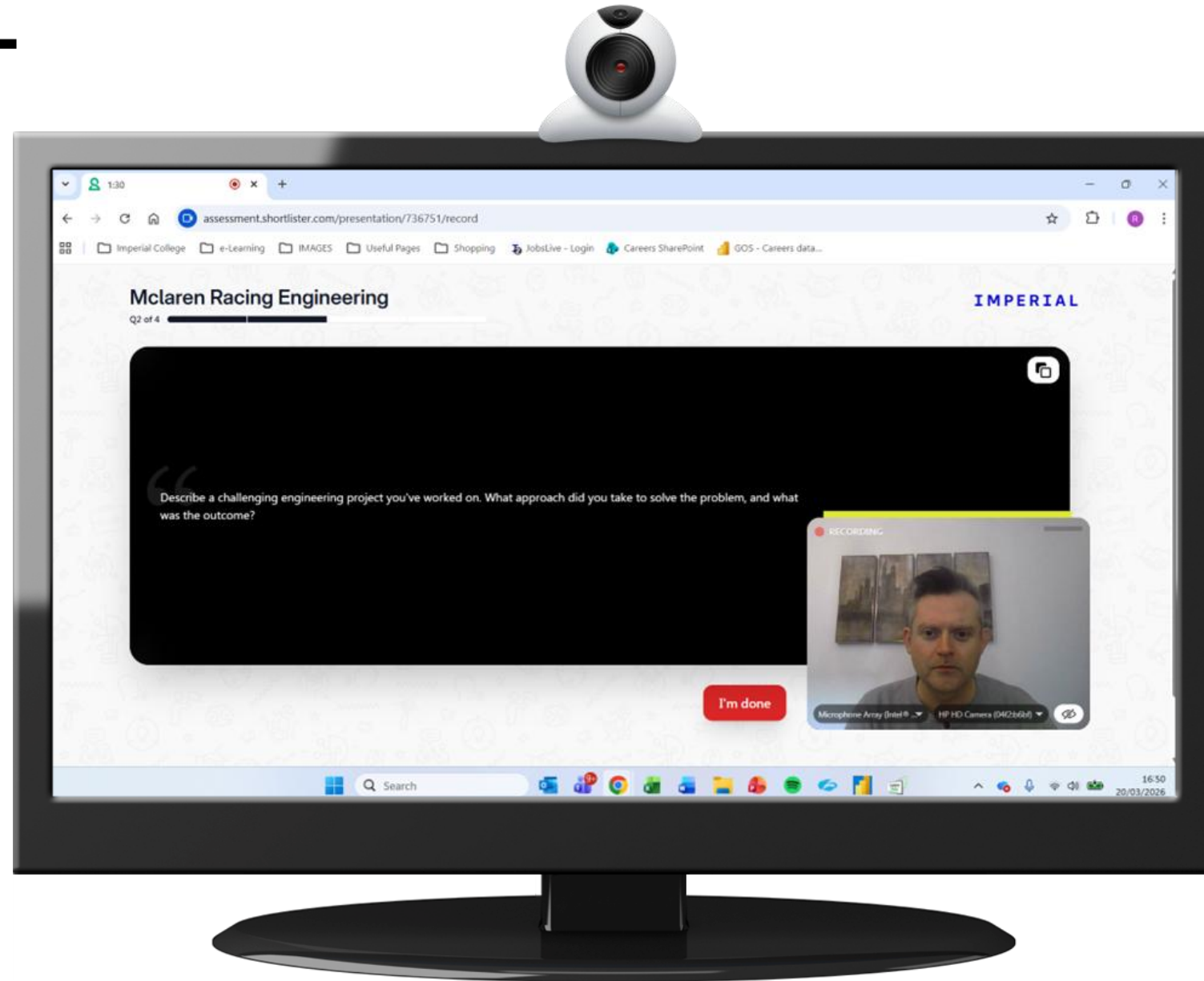
Gamified Testing:



Immersive Testing:



Recorded Interviews:



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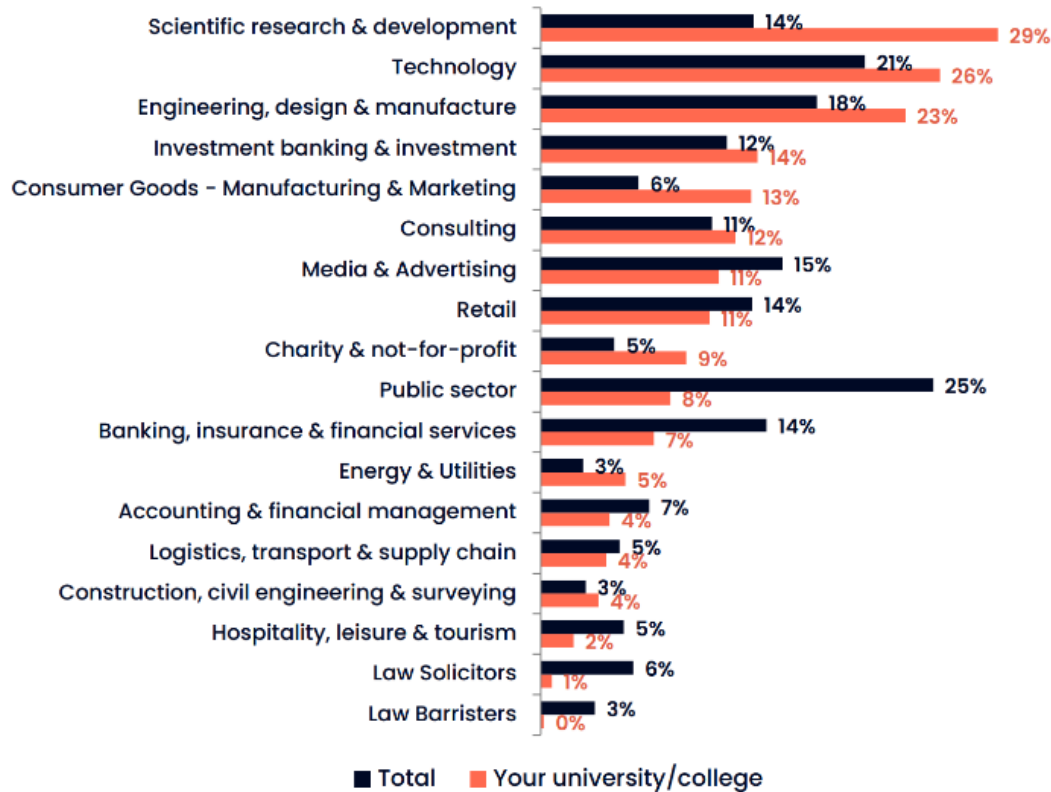
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What role can universities play?

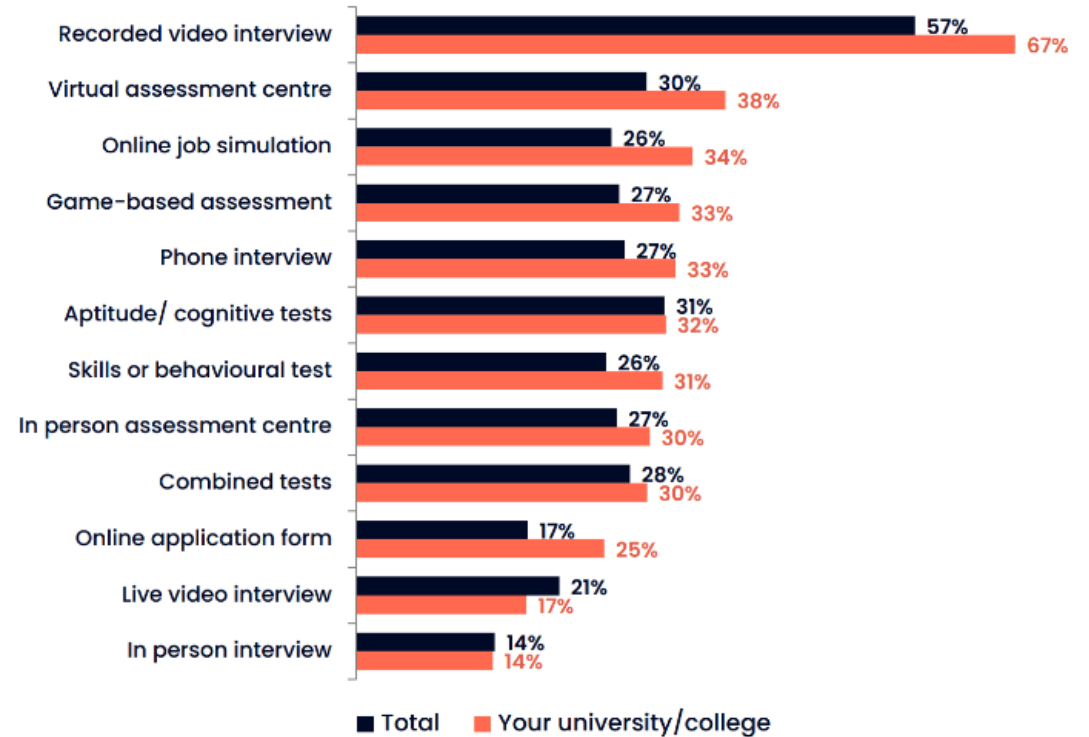


Data Insights:

Sector aspirational preferences



Which assessments do you dislike/would make you drop out?



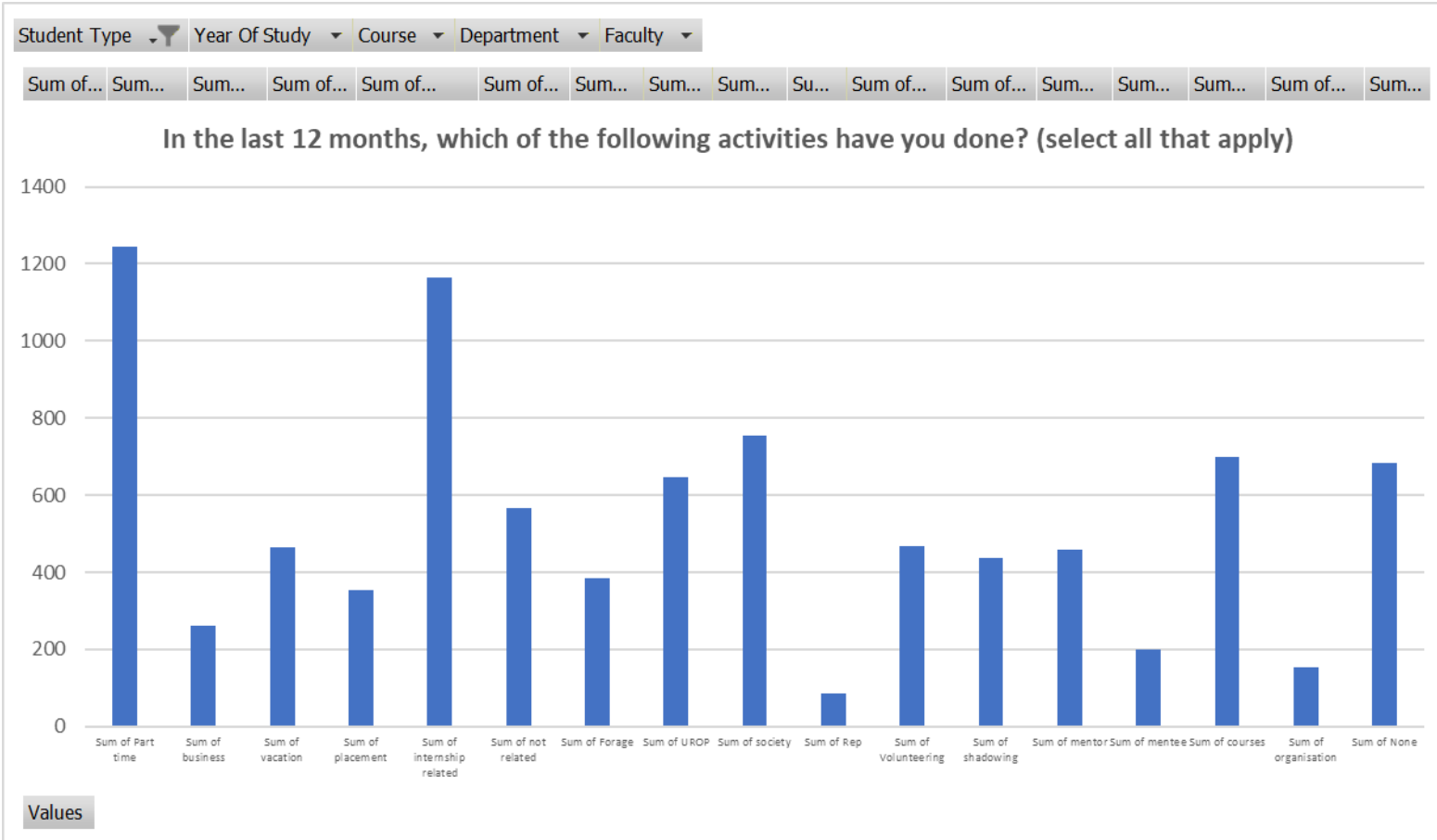
Career Readiness:

Student Type	UG	▼
Faculty	(All)	▼
Department	(All)	▼
Course	(All)	▼

Count of Student Number	Column Labels						
Row Labels	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5	YEAR 6	Grand Total
I am not ready to start thinking about my career yet.	28	22	9	12	2	2	75
I have no career ideas yet but I want to start thinking.	268	214	93	35	5	1	616
I have some career ideas and I am ready to start planning.	423	609	458	182	26	8	1706
I know what I want to do but I am not sure how to get there.	119	174	202	96	9	4	604
I intend to gain relevant experience or develop a professional portfolio.	249	573	472	70	11	4	1379
I plan to set up my own business after I graduate.	8	13	5	6			32
I am ready to apply for graduate level opportunities or further study.	3	17	148	282	27	2	479
I have been applying for graduate level opportunities or further study but have not been successful yet.	3	6	74	152	12		247
I have a job, further study or my own business plan confirmed.	2	7	17	27	1		54
Prefer not to say	31	29	36	26	7	5	134
Grand Total	1134	1664	1514	888	100	26	5326



Career Readiness:



Part time work alongside my studies
Self-employed/running my own business .
A casual vacation job (e.g. in a restaurant, shop, or bar etc).
A placement (3-12 months) that is part of my degree.
A professional internship related to my degree subject area.
A professional internship not related to my degree subject area.
A virtual work experience (e.g. through Forage or Bright Network etc)
A research internship (e.g. UROP).
A position of responsibility or a committee member for a student club/ society .
A Department Academic Rep
Volunteering in my local community.
Work shadowing .
I have been a mentor .
I have been a mentee .
Taken additional online courses (e.g. through LinkedIn Learning or Coursera etc).
Member of a professional organisation .
None of the above.



Surfacing Skills: A Shift in Employability

“Employability education works best when it accepts the labour market graduates are entering: messy, unequal, fast-changing, and often poorly explained. Preparing students for that reality means shifting some responsibility back into curriculum design, assessment, and institutional narratives.”



Dr Miri Firth
Senior Lecturer,
University of Manchester



Learning and assessment:

Revisiting our teaching and assessment can strengthen alignment in the AI age and the world beyond university. For example:

- **Embed authentic, applied tasks:** adapt assessment to include executive summaries and client-style briefs.
- **Assess process as well as product:** Include decision-making, reflection and articulation in marking criteria.
- **Be explicit about skills:** Clearly map and label assessment criteria to workplace skills and encourage discussion of these.



Embedded Reflection Example:

- Incorporate skills-based reflective assessment within group projects.
- Builds authentic communication and reflective skills.
- Mirror workplace assessment within curriculum exposing students to challenges and expectations.

From MCQs to Interviews: Embedding Authentic Employability Assessment in Engineering

The Professional Engineering 2 (PEN2) module supports Mechanical Engineering 2nd-year students in developing practical academic and professional communication skills that enhance their confidence and employability. Introducing a recruiter style competency-based recorded interview provides a more authentic way for students to build verbal communication and reflective skills, whilst also preparing for future job applications.

The Case for Change

Feedback from both students and teaching staff indicated that the previous written-only assessments in PEN2 were no longer effectively engaging learners or capturing the skills they were developing. At the same time, recorded interviews had become increasingly common in early-stage recruitment (Fig. 1), yet many students did not understand and struggle with these processes (Fig. 2), the project therefore set to design the PEN2 assessment in a way that improve engagement while also preparing students for the realities of modern recruitment.

Figure 1 - ISE Student Recruitment Survey 2025, Organisations use of selection and assessment activities

Activity	UK	International
Online application form/portal	95%	95%
Academic qualification/grades	95%	95%
In-person tests for technical skills	85%	85%
Written tests/assessments	85%	85%
Interviews	85%	85%
Group projects	85%	85%
Case studies	85%	85%
3D modelling	85%	85%

Figure 2 - CYSIL Job Search & Recruitment Process survey 2025, - Which assessments do you dislike/would make you drop out?

Assessment Type	Dislike %	Drop out %
Recorded video interview	25%	15%
Online personality tests	20%	10%
Online job interviews	15%	5%
Online technical assessment	10%	5%
Phone interviews	5%	2%
Applied / cognitive tests	5%	2%
Written or take-home tests	5%	2%
Written assessment/essays	5%	2%
Extended tests	5%	2%
Online application forms	5%	2%
The video interview in person interview	5%	2%

How will a recorded interview assessment enhance student learning?

- **Structures real recruitment processes**
ISE graduate students use authentic recorded interviews in the early stages of graduate and internship recruitment (Fig. 1). This assessment will give students authentic practical a real-world academic setting.
- **Builds student preparedness and confidence**
Helps students develop the communication skills needed to perform effectively in real interviews, increasing their confidence and employability.
- **Increases engagement through clear professional relevance**
Students are more motivated when assessments connect directly to future career expectations and provide tangible benefits.
- **Develops spoken communication skills**
Moves beyond written assessments to evaluate students' ability to articulate their experiences, reasoning, and learning - all essential professional skills for engineers.
- **Multi-stage assessment of PEN2 learning outcomes**
Requires students to apply their knowledge (MCQs) and reflective insight with a more aligned method that replicates industry' applied understanding.
- **Encourages reflection through verbal explanation**
Requires students to talk through their experiences and choices, mirroring competency-based questions used by employers.

How do the interviews work, and what are students asked?

- **Delivered via Blackboard**
Using Imperial Careers Service's Blackboard platform, which provides a consistent, scalable and tailored interview experience, replicating employer practices.
- **Assessment window**
Interviews will take place in March. Each student receives a personalised link and has 10 days to complete the task.
- **Accessibility built in**
Extra-time accommodations are automatically applied for students registered with this requirement.
- **Question format**
Imperial staff have included a bank of interview questions focused on skills, experiences, and technical drawing.
- **Students answer 2 competency-based questions**
• Unlocked as an integral recorded video + an essay task (Figure 3 & 4)
• 30 seconds preparation time
• 90 seconds to record each response + Completion in one continuous sitting
- **Skills assessed include:**
Teamwork + Learning + Decision-making + Logic + Creativity + Passion for engineering + Reflection
- **Fairness and integrity**
Multiple versions of 2 interview questions variety, reduce predictability, incentivises genuine assessment.

What the students will see (Figures 3 & 4)

What happens next?

- **Integrated assessment (March 2026)**
The first PEN2 contact will complete the new recorded interview assessment for the first time.
- **Department review**
We will evaluate the delivery, marking process, and overall implementation.
- **Student feedback**
Local reflections will be collected to assess impact and guide refinements.

Mark Allen - Careers Consultant, Imperial Careers Service
Chris Age - Principal Teaching Fellow, Mechanical Engineering Department

References / further reading
1) Institute of Student Employers (ISE) - Student Recruitment Survey 2025 - Pg 2-3
2) ISE (2025) Graduate Recruitment UK 2025 - Insights for employers - p16
3) Graduate.com (2025) Graduate Recruitment Survey 2025 - Pg 2-3
4) https://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers-service/online-employment/assessment/pen2_2025.pdf



Closing the Language Gap:

Preparing students for a transitional shift from academia to employment where expectations become blurred

- Perfection to practicality
- Embracing failure
- Managing ambiguity
- Broader accountability
- Diverse teams
- Subjective feedback



Collaborative Teaching and Assessment:

The Careers Service can:

- Complement subject-specific knowledge to support the teaching of workplace capabilities, reflection, and articulation of skills.
- Co-design meaningful, real-world-aligned assessments.
- Evolve from remedial intervention to curriculum-embedded support.

Interpersonal Skills (Communication, Teamwork, Leadership)	
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overly dominates the conversation (too assertive or aggressive)• Shares little and any contribution lacks value• Lacks empathy and built no rapport with others
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shares ideas but lacks confidence in conviction• Listens to others and encourages others to share• Builds relationships with others• Constructively challenges or builds on the ideas of others• Use open, positive and encouraging body language
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shares ideas and opinions positively, confidently and persuasively• Summarises and reflects helping the group to progress• Makes connections, alliances and identifies compromises• Demonstrates assertiveness without damaging relationships• Tactfully and diplomatically challenges other ideas when necessary• Demonstrates good emotional intelligence



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Further Reading



Further Reading:

- [2026 graduate labour market: what recruiters need to know](#) - ISE
- [6 graduate recruitment trends to watch in 2026](#) – Prospects Luminate, January 2026
- [5 trends you need to know from ISE’s Recruitment Survey 2025](#) - ISE
- [Attributes and Aspirations](#) – Imperial
- [Beyond The Buzz: Developing the AI Skills Employers Actually Need](#) - Lightcast
- [Graduate attributes and skills – What are employers looking for?](#) Amber Rolfe – Reed.co.uk
- [How do UK graduates stack up globally?](#) – ISE
- [I, T, M, or V: Which Employee Archetype Defines You?](#) - LinkedIn
- [ISE Student Recruitment Survey 2025](#) - ISE
- [Skills on the Rise: The Fastest-Growing Skills in 2026](#) – LinkedIn News 24 February 2026
- [Stop fixing students: what employability education gets wrong about “readiness”](#) – GFI, 2026
- [The transition from a VUCA world to a BANI world: how uncertainty has changed and how companies can face the challenges](#) - LinkedIn
- [The Future of Jobs Report 2025](#) – World Economic Forum
- [What Skills Do Employers Want from Graduates? 20 Key Skills](#) – HE Professionals
- [The skills universities need to build in their graduates now](#) – QS



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The Careers Service

Supporting our students during their studies and for three years after graduation.

Opening hours

Open throughout the year:

Monday – Friday 10.00 – 17.00

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