



Developing employability skills

Problem statement

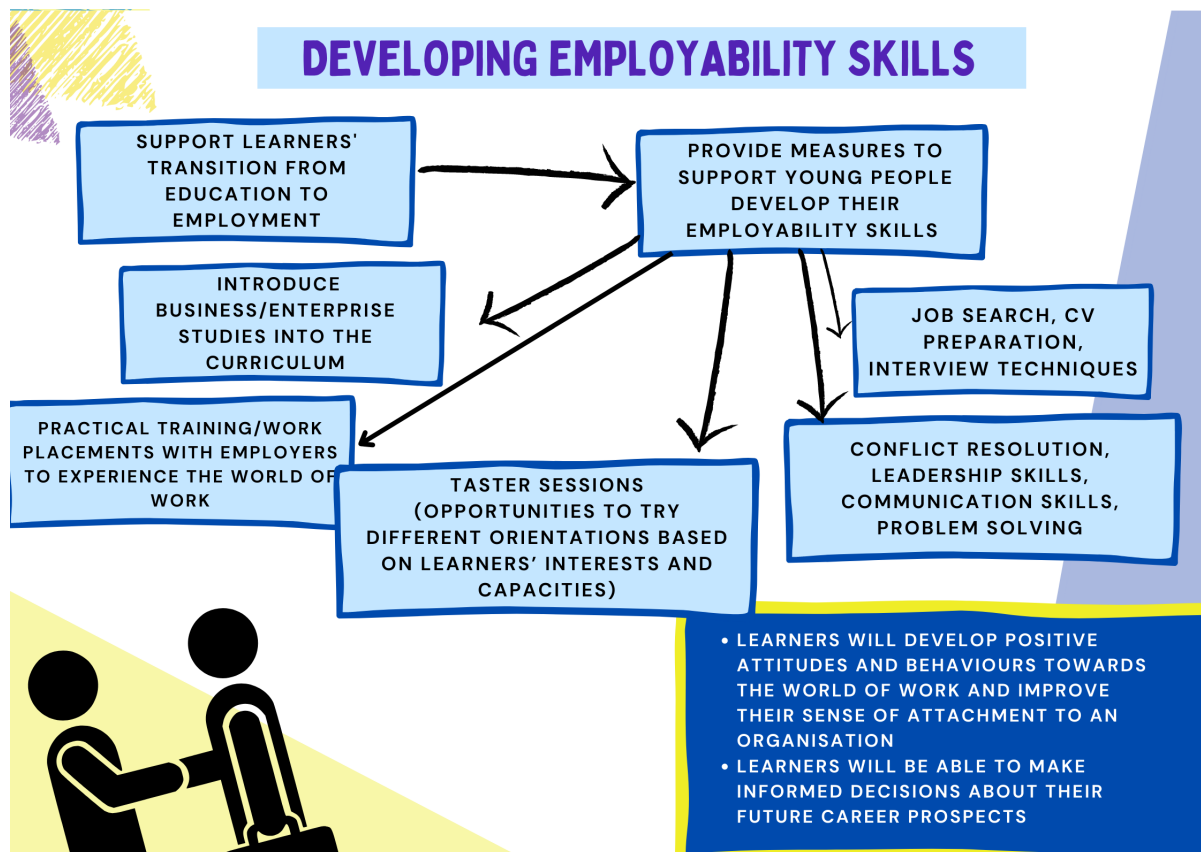
Addressed problem: Helping young people prepare for working life

The development of employability skills, combined with opportunities to experience the workplace, helps young people prepare for working life and supports their transition from education to employment.

Employability skills enable learners to develop the behaviours, attitudes, and competences that employers expect from day one, including:

- Basic skills: literacy, numeracy, digital and IT skills (including AI literacy where relevant);
- Life skills: time management, problem-solving, effective communication, and understanding workplace culture and expectations;
- Workplace behaviours and attitudes: flexibility, adaptability, proactivity, motivation, and a positive approach to learning and work.

Without these foundational skills, behaviours, and attitudes, young people may struggle to integrate successfully into the workplace. They may face disengagement, early leaving from education or training, or even contract termination in the case of apprenticeships.



Beneficiaries

- Early leavers from education and training
- Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training
- Learners at transition points and/or uncertain about career aspirations
- Learners who lack employability skills
- VET students (school-based learning)
- Migrants / refugees
- Low-performing learners
- VET students (work-based learning)

All young people can benefit from activities designed to develop basic employability skills, workplace behaviours, and attitudes in preparation for future employment. These activities are particularly valuable for learners who are at risk of early leaving due to performance challenges, or who are uncertain about their career aspirations, helping them build confidence, competence, and clarity about their professional pathways.

Addressing the problem

Tips: What makes work-readiness measures effective?

Developing employability skills at the stage of IVET is crucial for facilitating the successful transition of learners from education and training to employment. Beyond simply securing a first job, equipping young people with strong employability skills lays the foundation for longer-term career adaptability and resilience in an ever-changing labour market. Work-readiness measures, including practical experience, work-based training, and workplace simulations among others, can help hone a wide range of transversal and technical skills that prepare young people for their entry into the labour market. Additionally, such

measures can make VET more attractive, adding a more practical and tangible element to the learning programmes, and making it more distinctive compared to traditionally theoretical learning pathways. Crucially, the effectiveness of work-readiness measures depends not only on their design and delivery, but also on the degree of collaboration between VET providers, employers, and social partners; ensuring that the skills being developed genuinely reflect labour market needs.

The following tips are offered to policy makers and practitioners involved in designing and delivering work-readiness measures. The information is based on Cedefop research into successful measures.

Tip 1: Provide a range of measures to support young people in developing ‘work-readiness’ skills

A variety of activities can be designed to help young people prepare for working life and support their transition from education to employment. In practice, this involves creating opportunities for learners to gain direct experience of the workplace. Initiatives can be organised in multiple ways and settings, such as:

- **Taster sessions:** Short experiences allowing learners to explore different career paths based on their interests and abilities.
- **Practical training or work placements:** Opportunities to engage with employers and experience real workplace environments.
- **Business and enterprise studies:** Integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum to develop practical business skills.
- **School-based VET programmes:** Providing learners with hands-on experience and support for starting their own business initiatives.

These measures can be incorporated into existing programmes or offered as a standalone initiatives of varying durations, such as a full year, one term, or after school sessions).

Tip 2: Develop and adapt measures to meet the needs of learners

Work-readiness measures should combine basic skills development with activities that foster the behaviours and attitudes employers expect in the workplace.

It is essential to tailor these measures to individual needs. For some, this may mean focusing first on emotional skills before addressing social skills (behaviours and attitudes) and employability competences. Other measures might target motivation, study techniques, or sharing learning experiences.

Diversified support may be necessary for certain learners, involving specialist professionals or outreach services. Case management and individualised learning pathways can help ensure that interventions are adapted to each learner's specific requirements.

Tip 3: Place employability skills at the heart of work-readiness measures

All initiatives aimed at developing work-readiness should explicitly include employability skills as a core objective. Equally important is fostering motivation, confidence, and self-esteem to support learners in developing a broad set of skills and personal qualities for successful workplace integration. Such interventions can focus on areas including:

- Job search strategies, CV preparation, and interview techniques
- Understanding workplace culture and routines
- Building and maintaining professional relationships
- Conflict resolution and problem-solving
- Leadership and communication skills
- Citizenship and social responsibility
- Health, well-being, and resilience
- Self-regulation and independent learning

Tip 4: Keep work-readiness flexible to meet diverse needs

Work-readiness initiatives should be adaptable to different learner profiles. Some measures may be tailored to individuals, while others are designed for small groups or cohorts, such as young people with disabilities, unemployed youth, or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Delivery can occur on a one-to-one basis or in small groups and may involve input from specialist support staff or community-based agencies and stakeholders. Flexibility ensures that interventions are responsive to the unique needs of each learner.

Tip 5: Build digital and AI skills to enhance employability

Digital and artificial intelligence (AI) skills are essential for successful workplace integration. Work-readiness programmes should go beyond basic IT literacy to include responsible and effective use of AI, strengthen digital literacy, and prepare learners for evolving labour market demands.

Training should:

- **Focus on human potential:** Show how digital tools can augment problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity rather than simply replacing tasks.
- **Promote ethical and safe usage:** Teach data privacy, critical evaluation of

AI-generated content (including bias and misinformation), and the ethical implications of technology in the workplace.

- **Integrate practical digital tools:** Include professional digital skills such as collaborative online platforms, digital project management tools, and basic data literacy.
- **Partner with industry:** Work with local employers to ensure training covers the specific digital tools and AI applications used in real-world job contexts.

Tip 6: Provide mentorship and career guidance

[Mentorship](#) and [personalised career guidance](#) help learners navigate the transition from education to employment more effectively. Connecting young people with mentors - whether teachers, industry professionals, or peer mentors - can provide insight, motivation, and practical advice on workplace expectations.

Key elements of this approach include:

- **Individualised guidance:** Offer career counselling tailored to the learner's interests, strengths, and aspirations.
- **Mentor support:** Pair learners with mentors who can share workplace experience, provide feedback, and model professional behaviours.
- **Networking opportunities:** Facilitate connections with industry professionals, alumni, and community stakeholders to broaden learners' perspectives and career possibilities.
- **Ongoing reflection:** Encourage learners to set career goals, track progress, and adapt plans based on evolving skills and interests.

Mentorship and guidance programmes can be integrated into school curricula, after-school initiatives, or workplace experiences, and should complement existing work-readiness measures to strengthen employability outcomes.

Tip 7: Continuously monitor, evaluate, and adapt work-readiness measures

To maximise impact, work-readiness initiatives should include regular monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms. This ensures that measures remain relevant, effective, and responsive to learners' needs.

Key components include:

- **Tracking progress:** Measure learners' skill development, motivation, and confidence over time using surveys, self-assessments, or mentor feedback.
- **Evaluating outcomes:** Assess both short-term outcomes (e.g., improved employability skills, workplace experience) and long-term results (e.g., successful transition to employment or further education).
- **Learner feedback:** Actively involve learners in providing feedback on the activities, content, and delivery methods to inform improvements.

- Continuous adaptation: Use evaluation results to refine content, delivery, and support measures, ensuring interventions remain tailored to evolving learner and labour market needs.

Regular evaluation helps programmes remain evidence-based, learner-centred, and aligned with real-world workplace expectations. Find more about evaluation and monitoring [here](#).

Expected outcomes

Activities designed to develop work-readiness support learners in their integration into the workplace. They help young people build positive attitudes and behaviours toward work, develop professional relationships, understand workplace expectations, and make informed decisions about their future careers.

The expected outcomes can be grouped across three levels:

 INDIVIDUAL	 INSTITUTIONAL	 SYSTEM
• Enhanced social and emotional skills • Improved digital literacy and AI skills • Increased curiosity and engagement with learning • Better work habits and professional behaviour • Positive attitudes toward education, training, and lifelong learning • Improved understanding of career options and job roles • Greater self-awareness of abilities, interests, and aptitudes • Increased overall work-readiness • Enhanced productivity through the support of digital technologies and AI	• Reduced risk of early leaving due to lack of preparedness • Higher learner satisfaction during in-company training (apprenticeships or other placements) • Improved performance of learners in workplace or training environments • Increased satisfaction of trainers and companies receiving learners • Modernised curricula aligned with digital tools, AI, and evolving industry standards	• Lower dropout rates during apprenticeships or school-based VET programmes • Higher progression rates to further learning and employment • Reduced digital divide among vulnerable learners • Stronger alignment between VET outcomes and labour market needs • Improved transition rates from education to employment in modernised sectors

Related protective factors



Work readiness

Related resources

Good practices

Good practice

Ready for Education and Training

Produktionsschule (formerly known as 'AusbildungsFIT)

In Austria, the 'Produktionsschule' initiative offers training modules for practical training and work. Through coaching, workshops and sports, young people develop cultural and social skills needed to take part in education or enter the labour market.

 **Austria**

Good practice

BOP: Vocational orientation programme, offered at vocational training centres

Special focus on BFZ: vocational training centres of the educational institute of the Bavarian Industry and Trade

The German Vocational Orientation Programme, 'BOP', aims to give students an insight into a wide range of professions. It also aims to inform students about their potential to develop an idea as to which professions might suit them better than others.

 **Germany**

Good practice

Guidance and professional initiation courses and professional initiation courses to diverse professions

Cours d'orientation et d'initiation professionnelles - COIP) et cours d'initiation professionnelle à divers métiers - IPDM)

Good practice

Training for Success (TfS)

In Northern Ireland, the 'Training for Success' initiative offers training to help young people develop personal and social skills, employability skills, essential skills in Communications, Application of Number and Information Communication Technology whilst

In Luxembourg, Guidance and professional initiation courses (COIP) include a traineeship of one week or a longer period in a company, and practical classes provided by teachers in a workshop format.

 **Luxembourg**

working towards nationally recognised qualifications.

 **United Kingdom**

 **Good practice**

Orienta4YEL

Supporting educational and social inclusion of young early leavers and those at risk of early leaving through mechanisms of orientation and tutorial action.

 **Germany**  **Portugal**  **Romania**

 **Spain**  **United Kingdom**

 **Good practice**

Early School Workers (ESW)

Erasmus+ project “Early School Workers” was designed and carried out to provide VET teachers and schools with guidelines and tools to support learners from becoming early school leavers and increase the employability of youngsters while fostering their active role in the society.

 **Belgium**  **Germany**  **Italy**

 **Spain**  **United Kingdom**

 **Good practice**

“FUORI SCUOLA” Pathways for the recovery of early school leaving

FUORI SCUOLA Percorsi di recupero dalla dispersione scolastica

FUORI SCUOLA is a project that aims to tackle early leaving from education and training at the local level of provinces.

Having a holistic approach aiming at the wellbeing of young early leavers, each organisation provides services in four areas:

- a) development of professional skills;
- b) development of personal and social skills;
- c) development of key competences;

d) reaching out, engagement, reception, listening and guidance.

 **Germany**  **Italy**  **Portugal**

 **Spain**  **United Kingdom**

Tools

 Tools

Need for all Youngsters

Brug for alle Unge, (BFAU)

The Danish initiative 'Need for all Youngsters' included national initiatives to raise awareness of the educational system, in particular VET, amongst parents from ethnic minorities.

 **Denmark**

 Tools

CodeRed Curriculum and learning material

The Code RED Curriculum and learning material supports young people develop their employability skills. A Tutor Handbook also provides information on supporting young people re-engage in education and training.

 **Cyprus**  **Greece**  **Italy**

 **United Kingdom**

 Tools

Guide and lesson plan examples with suggested activities and resources - promoting social skills among students.

The 'Guide and Lesson Plans' toolkit provides practitioners with concrete activities and resources when developing strategies to promote social skills among learners.

 **Bulgaria**  **Denmark**  **Italy**

 **Poland**  **United Kingdom**

 Tools

DIDO - Dropping-in the dropouts toolkit

The DIDO toolkit contains practical tools aimed at preventing dropout in adult education.

 **Belgium**  **Denmark**  **Finland**

 **Netherlands**  **Portugal**

 **Switzerland**

Publications

 Publications

Ready for Work: The capabilities young people need to find and keep work – and the programmes proven to help develop these

Do you have the answers to the question: how can we help young people be ready for work? This report explores the capabilities young people need to find and keep work – and the programmes proven to help develop these.

Download the report  [here](#).

 **United Kingdom**

 Publications

Learning to grow: what employers need from education and skills

What do employers need from education and skills? An employer survey in the UK explores employer investment in skills, their commitment to schools and colleges and how employers can help prepare young people for the world of work.

Download the report  [here](#).

 **United Kingdom**

 Publications

UNESCO AI competency framework for students

Framework on how to enable responsible AI co-creation and citizenship in the AI era

The UNESCO's AI competency framework for students has a vision that goes beyond basic AI literacy. Its goal is to empower students to become not only skilled and responsible users of AI, but also active contributors to the development of more inclusive and sustainable AI systems.

International

 Publications

The Union of Skills

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

The European Commission's communication on "The Union of Skills" emphasises the critical role of human capital in ensuring the EU's prosperity, economic resilience, and competitiveness.

 **EU level**

 Publications

The role of NGOs in up- and reskilling

Exploring ESF+ supported initiatives in

 Publications

Intra-EU labour mobility

Annual report (Edition 2024)

The report highlights an increase in

Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain

This report explores the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in up- and reskilling, particularly in vocational education and training (VET) and adult learning for socially disadvantaged groups across Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain.

 **EU level**

in working-age EU movers in 2023, who generally have higher activity and employment rates compared to nationals and third-country nationals.

 **EU level**

 **Publications**

Implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2022-2024)

European Commission's report

The report describes the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) focused on engaging, connecting, and empowering young people by promoting their participation in democratic life and supporting their social and civic engagement.

 **EU level**

 **Publications**

Effective practices for literacy teaching

Analytical report from the European expert network on economics of education (EENEE)

The report highlights the significant impact of COVID-19 on literacy levels in Europe, particularly among disadvantaged students. It emphasises the importance of early language development, family literacy activities, and high-quality early childhood education.

 **EU level**

 **Publications**

The situation of young people in the EU

Insights from the 2024 EU youth report

The report provides a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by young people in the European Union. It covers key areas such as demographics, political participation, employment, education, social inclusion, health, and environmental activism.

 **EU level**

 **Publications**

Driving Economic Mobility Through Employment

Five data insights from Generation's work over the last decade

This article presents five key insights from Generation's decade-long experience delivering training and employment programmes for young people.

 **EU level** **International**

Quick wins

★ Quick win

Taster opportunities

Taster opportunities – giving young people the chance to try out different vocational areas before they choose a VET programme – help to tackle misconceptions around VET.

 **France**  **Luxembourg**

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