



Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP

Essential skills in apprenticeships

GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Skills Builder is a global social enterprise with the aim that *one day, everyone builds the essential skills to succeed*. This year alone, Skills Builder has enabled over 2,645,00 individuals to build their essential skills, delivered through the work of 900 partners across 20 different countries.

WHY ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR APPRENTICESHIPS?

Building essential skills within apprenticeships benefits apprentices and employers. The Skills Builder Partnership's tools and bespoke programmes allow employers and apprentices to assess essential skill development areas, build essential skills and measure progress aligned with industry needs.

In this guide, we'll take you through how the Skills Builder Universal Framework can help you develop your apprentices. The Skills Builder Universal Framework provides a robust, impact led approach to building these sought after, highly transferable skills. You can also use this same Framework for development of line managers, helping them to better support apprentices.

We'll also draw on three businesses' work with us.



Higgins Partnerships: is one part of Higgins Group, an award-winning, family-run construction company with over 50 years' experience in major housing developments.



Amey: an infrastructure services and engineering company, with more than 10,000 employees across the UK.



Morgan Sindall: delivers some of the UK's most complex and critical national infrastructure across six core sectors of energy, water, nuclear, highways, rail and aviation for public and private customers.

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS?

We define three broad types of skills:

Basic Skills

these are literacy and numeracy, and basic digital skills.

Technical Skills

those skills that are specific to a particular sector or role, sometimes drawing off a particular body of knowledge. These skills are not easily transferred beyond the sector or role to which they relate.

Essential Skills

those highly transferable skills that everyone needs to do almost any job, which support the application of specialist knowledge and technical skills

At an individual level, people with higher levels of essential skills experience improved social mobility, employment, earnings, job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Where we are able to meaningfully analyse skills together, we find compelling indications that individuals are able to leverage their basic skills, qualifications, or experience only when they also have an adequate level of essential skills.

AT SKILLS BUILDER, WE DEFINE EIGHT ESSENTIAL SKILLS



Listening

The receiving, retaining and processing of information or ideas.



Speaking

The oral transmission of information or ideas.



Problem solving

The ability to find a solution to a situation or challenge.



Creativity

The use of imagination and the generation of new ideas.



Staying positive

The ability to use tactics and strategies to overcome setbacks and achieve goals.



Aiming high

The ability to set clear, tangible goals and devise a robust route to achieving them.



Leadership

Supporting, encouraging and developing others to achieve a shared goal.



Teamwork

Working cooperatively with others towards achieving a shared goal.

1

RECRUITMENT OF APPRENTICES

Challenges in recruiting apprentices

Apprenticeships provide an opportunity to diversify your workforce and attract talent that might not usually consider your industry, so how can you stand out to these apprentices in today's competitive job market?

Skills-based recruitment with the Universal Framework

When hiring, focusing on transferable skills instead of just experience opens up the pool and quality of candidates. Once recruited, these apprentices will use those same skills to foster innovation and enrich the workplace. For employers the Universal Framework is a valuable tool for skills-based recruitment:

- » Emphasising essential skills required for the role over experience or technical ability. This shift in focus opens doors for younger candidates and those transitioning careers.
- » Clear and transparent job descriptions adopting the language of the Universal Framework provides potential applicants with a better understanding of the role and required skills, encouraging applications from a wider pool of individuals.
- » The specificity of the Framework supports accurate measurement of candidates' skills, reducing bias and streamlining selection processes.

In practice



Higgins, in collaboration with Skills Builder, is embedding the language of the Universal Framework in their apprenticeship job adverts to attract high-quality candidates and build a diverse talent pipeline.



Morgan Sindall Infrastructure's implementation of skills-based recruitment aligned with the Framework resulted in a remarkable 170% increase in high-quality applications for their graduate and apprenticeship programmes.

2 DEVELOPING APPRENTICES IN ROLE

Employers play a critical part in supporting apprentices to develop in their role, and succeed in their End Point Assessment (EPA). IfATE guidance recommends providers use the Universal Framework to think through the steps towards building the skills individuals need to achieve their apprenticeships.

During any apprenticeship, supporting apprentices to develop their speaking, problem-solving and creativity skills and supporting them to reflect on their progress in developing these skills will benefit them when they reach the EPA.

Improving the quality of training is key to retaining apprentices. This is particularly important for employers to consider given that apprenticeship dropout rates are 47%. Of those who drop out, 70% report concerns about the quality of their apprenticeship. Quality of training is a combination of off-the-job training by the selected training provider and on-the-job training from the employer. Employers can start to improve the quality of their training through assessing the essential skills development areas of their apprentices and tailoring their training accordingly.

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1. Field, S. (2023) Great Expectations: Three steps to a world class apprenticeship system. A report to the Gatsby Charitable Foundation. <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/latest/great-expectations>
 2. EDSK. (2022). No train, no gain: Apprentices denied the training they are entitled to receive. <https://www.edsk.org/publications/no-train-no-gain/>

Building essential skills with Skills Builder

- » Using Skills Builder Benchmark, an online tool to assess apprentices' skill strengths and areas for improvement, employers can create tailored learning plans which support development of the Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSBs) within the occupational standard.
- » Employers can support apprentices to develop the essential skills needed to pass their End Point Assessment (including problem solving, creativity, speaking, listening) throughout their apprenticeship using the 'build it' section on the online Universal Framework.
- » Sharing how transferable skills are valued at onboarding will help apprentices adapt to the new environment. With 87% of secondary schools and colleges in England having a touchpoint with the Skills Builder Framework, using this same skills language in the workplace can offer continuity and familiarity for apprentices.

In practice



Amey has adapted Skills Builder's Essential Skills Academy – a series of ten workshops – to build their apprentices' essential skills related to their role. The workshops help individuals to better understand essential skill strengths and areas of development against the Framework, how they fit into the context of their role and set goals to improve them. Apprentices have made meaningful progress across all of the skills, which has seen Amey continue with this training since 2022.

3 BUILDING THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF THOSE MANAGING APPRENTICES

Effective manager support leads to happier, more productive apprentices with higher completion rates, so thinking about the skills of line managers too is critical to the success of apprenticeships. A win-win for employers, these managers will gain valuable professional development with practical applications. Beyond the immediate apprentice-manager relationship, embedding essential skills can also be a strong signal around learning culture for the entire organisation.

How to equip managers for success

- » Train managers in essential skills steps around leadership, including coaching and mentoring, problem solving, staying positive, to help them effectively manage apprentices.
- » Support managers to have improved management conversations, including providing feedback and supporting the essential skill development of the apprentice.
- » Embed essential skills development into formal review process for both apprentices and managers.

In practice

Amey's initiative was to train line managers in essential skills so they can nurture and support their direct reports to build these skills. They have also integrated the skills into formal reviews demonstrating a commitment to both apprentice and manager development. Through delivering the programme, staff have been providing feedback, coaching apprentices and graduates in essential skills, modelling best practice by using the tools and resources, and completing activities themselves. Amey has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from staff who are seeing individuals across the business make meaningful progress.

4 TAKE THE NEXT STEP

There are two ways employers can work with Skills Builder to access the tools, resources and expertise to build apprentices' essential skills.

Essential Skills Academy

The Essential Skills Academy is our flagship training course that supports participants to identify, practice and articulate their essential skills. This is a ready to go package, but it can also be customised for your business.

Full access to all ten workshops (in standard and an editable format), the interactive participant workbook, facilitator guidance and a one hour staff training session costs £5,720. There are additional costs for it to be delivered by Skills Builder.

Bespoke Employer Programme

We work closely with many employers to develop unique programmes for the specific needs of their businesses. This ranges from specific projects and assessments to training programmes and resources. Most businesses join the partnership on this programme.

Find out more about the Employer Programme options at
skillsbuilder.org/employers

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