



bolder steps
together

Bolder Conversations:

Putting essential skills at the heart
of young people programmes



The Challenge

At Amey, one of the UK's leading infrastructure services and engineering companies, we are proud to provide industry-leading employment opportunities, training and apprenticeships.

We believe that providing meaningful work, investing in people is fundamental to both social and economic stability. We also recognise that while talent is spread equally across the UK, opportunity is not. We believe business has a key role in addressing inequalities in education and skills to ensure everyone, no matter their background, has a chance to 'get-in' and 'get-on'.

A key enabler for this is the focus on essential skills, the highly transferable skills needed by almost everyone to do almost any job – such as teamwork, speaking and listening, and problem solving. The skills sit between basic (literacy, numeracy and digital) and technical (operationally specific). These skills are particularly important for those in their early careers.



Higher levels of essential skills pay a dividend as a wage premium of around 15% or £3,400 per year for full-time workers (taken from the Essential Skills Tracker Report 2022¹), particularly when combined with the ability to transfer and apply those skills. This supports a robust economic argument for investing in these skills.

It is crucial that employers give these young people the opportunity to develop essential skills within their employment – to help level the playing field.

Bringing partners together

In early September, Amey brought together a group of leading experts in employment skills, including Investors in People; The Duke of Edinburgh's Award; Skills Builder Partnership; and Business in the Community. The group discussed the current trends and approach in supporting the development of essential skills within young people programmes.

The event was co-located with a meeting of 28 Amey employees who were on a one-week residential course – a key component of completing The Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Gold Award. Amey has been in partnership with the DofE for 20 years, providing opportunities for young people to develop their essential skills.

The aim was to connect young people and the experts to help inspire conversation and debate on what more can be done.

Partner observations

- Organisations believe young people are missing the skills of emotional intelligence, risk taking, and being creative on entering the workplace

¹ Original skills: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/essential-skills-tracker-2022>



- Young people believed they were missing skills of confidence; personal skills and being able to interact with people; communication; teamwork; project management; and basic 'life skills' such as financial awareness, tax, pensions, on entering the workplace
- Essential skills are a good way of helping hiring managers to understand that technical skills can be trained for
- Government priorities continue to remain on core subjects (English, science and maths). Arts-based subjects tend to be better at enhancing essential skills, but are often the first to be dropped
- School students have mixed access to, and visibility and understanding of, possible career options. At school and university, the majority of young people really don't understand the world of work
- There is a lack of visible role models for school students – and they often don't represent the backgrounds and diversity of the students themselves. The preference is for these to be 'local' and a mix of ages, helping young people to identify and connect with opportunities and career paths
- There is mixed capability and capacity for careers leads in schools – an opportunity for businesses to 'train the trainer' – in sharing their insight and knowledge for onward student communications
- There is an increasing trend to undertake interviews virtually. Young people often need support and advice on using these online channels for professional vs personal use
- There is an expectation from young people that, when they enter the world of work, they will physically see people. With the increase in hybrid working, there needs to be a concerted effort for face-to-face interactions and opportunities to network and develop relationships
- Not all organisations are using their Apprenticeship Levy, or they use it for senior management roles, which was not the intended purpose.



What businesses can do to help?

- Provide greater visibility and understanding of all the roles and requirements across their sectors – for infrastructure management organisations, this might be roles in design, construction, and maintenance
- Offer visibility on what a working day or week looks like, which will help young people decide on careers and qualifications. The more businesses can share and explain the 'routes in', the more likely they will be to encourage young people into their sectors
- Be much more proactive in recruitment – tapping into wider groups to access diverse skills and experience – and being more visible in communities. Young people often need support and role models to encourage them to apply for opportunities
- Use Skills Builder Framework across education so that it provides a familiar language for young people when embedded into job descriptions – supporting accessibility. This language could also be used within interview questions or tasks, or by assessors to evaluate candidates' abilities
- Consider providing advice, tips or practice for online interviews
- Support and encourage face-to-face interactions and opportunities for young people to network and develop relationships. This is particularly important with the increase of hybrid working



- Supportive and engaging line managers are crucial in the develop of young people. Provide additional training and support for these line managers or select managers who have access to good networks
- Help create a positive image of young people by sharing their successes and the value they bring
- Engage with Tier 1 suppliers, encouraging the principles of essential skills throughout the supply chain by recruiting for potential and training for technical skill
- Speak to more young people. Young people are best placed to say what they need. There should be more conversation and more engagement directly with them on these issues
- Advocate for change. Incentivise our networks (such as supply chains) to do outreach activities and excite people about their businesses.

Key learnings from participants

Participants were asked to share a specific action or reflection that they would take away from the discussion:

- **Investors in People:** "When engaging with other organisations, we need to ask more questions about social mobility and social value. Also meeting the youngsters and hearing from them directly was an absolute insight and inspiring to hear how they had navigated challenges in their young lives to get to where they are."
- **Duke of Edinburgh's Award:** "The necessity to develop young people and their essential skills. Bridging the gap between the government's educational preferences for core subject qualifications and certificating the transferable skills that employers look for in young people."
- **Skills Builder Partnership:** "We work hard as an organisation to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to understand and build their essential skills. Having influential employers, like Amey, advocating for the same thing sends a powerful message. We hope the event helps to raise awareness of how employers can use essential skills to support young people to enter and thrive in the workplace and beyond."
- **Business in the Community:** "My take-away was the importance of having the right line manager in place for supporting new apprentices."
- **Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB):** "On a professional level, the opportunity to drive collaboration. The mix of industries, corporates, educational organisations involved was fantastic and provided me with plenty of inspiration for how we should look to inspire action within the railways. On a personal level, it was positive connecting to young people, and being together face-to-face."
- **Sheffield Hallam University:** "Take a deeper review of the essential skills framework and explore new ways to work with Amey to put 'recruiting for potential' into practice."
- **National Highways:** "Exploring ways in how we can showcase Amey's DofE young people within our National Highways events."
- **Careers & Enterprise Company:** "Making new connections with people who share the same values. Focus on what we can do, not what we can't."



Take a look at our summary video of the event, [here](#).