

# EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH

The Young Peoples' Enterprise Forum

13 May 2010



RESEARCH

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This research has been carried out in compliance with the MRQSA international standard (ISO20:252)

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## I. Executive Summary

### Introduction

- In July 2009, Qa Research was commissioned to carry out research amongst employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region to investigate their perceptions and experiences of employing and recruiting young people (i.e. those aged 16-24 years old).
- A two-stage approach was undertaken. Phase one involved desk research to explore existing data sources, while phase two involved primary research with employers, consisting of a quantitative telephone survey with a representative sample of 400 businesses from across the Yorkshire and Humber region. This report details findings from phase two.

### Objectives

- The original objectives of this project were to:
  - Identify employer skills gaps in the region, both short term and long term;
  - Map the skills to relevant enterprise education, qualifications, diplomas, apprenticeships and train to gain provision; and
  - Turn the skills needs of employers into an employer engagement strategy which, where appropriate, will deliver CSR benefits for employers.

### Methodology

- During December 2009 and January 2010 400 telephone surveys were completed with businesses across the Yorkshire and Humber region, utilising the Inter Departmental Business Register to create a sampling framework and weighting procedure to ensure findings are representative of the region by business size, sector and sub-region.
- Only businesses that currently recruit young people or have recruited young people in the past 5 years took part in the research and interviews were with individuals with responsibilities for recruitment within their organisations to ensure responses were informed.

### Recruitment of young people

- Over the previous 5 years, 30% of respondents indicated that their business had seen a 'decrease' in the number of employees, compared to 24% who had seen an 'increase' (24%), although the largest proportion (45%) said employee levels had 'stayed the same'.
- Looking forward, respondents were more positive, with half (50%) expecting to see an 'increase' in the next 5 years, compared to only 3% indicating that a 'decrease' was likely. Again, a significant proportion expected things to 'stay the same' (47%).
- In total, half the sample (50%) said they currently recruit young people while the other half (50%) said they had recruited in the last 5 years. Just over half (51%) of businesses in the region who currently recruit young people were planning on recruiting young people in the next 12 months.

- Reassuringly, the majority of respondents felt the current economic situation would have 'no effect' (63%) on their recruitment of young people. However, of the remainder, a quarter (27%) felt they would 'decrease' recruitment and only 6% said it would 'increase'.
- More than half (55%) of businesses recruit '17 or 18 year olds from school or college' and a third (36%) recruit '16 year olds straight from school', with fewer (14%) recruiting graduates. As we would expect, there is considerable cross-over with regard to the types of young people recruited by businesses, with many businesses recruiting young people across a range of ages.
- **Discussion:** *Given the difficult economic situation over the last couple of years, it not surprising that more businesses have seen their workforce decrease than increase and that this impacts on their recruitment plans for young people. While some regional differences exist, it's encouraging that around half of businesses indicate they plan to recruit young people over the next 5 years, reflecting their recruitment plans per se.*

### Qualification Understanding and Needs

- Respondents were asked to indicate whether vocational qualifications or academic qualifications were most useful/relevant to their business and almost half (49%) said that 'both were equally useful/relevant'. A greater proportion said that 'vocational qualifications' were more useful/relevant than 'academic qualifications' (35% vs. 9%).
- However, a third (36%) of respondents said they had either 'no understanding' or 'low understanding' of vocational qualifications compared to 16% with regards to academic qualifications.
- A clear split between qualification types exists, with two-fifths (39%) of respondents indicating that they feel there are 'too few' people with vocational qualifications, compared to only one-in-ten (11%) believing there are 'too few' with academic qualifications.
- Those respondents working for businesses that recruit graduates where asked which factors they considered to be most important in deciding on an individual's suitability for the job. Half (50%) mentioned 'degree class (e.g. 2:2, 2:1)', although more respondents mentioned 'soft skills such as teamwork and enthusiasm' (61%) and two-fifths (40%) mentioned 'previous jobs/career achievements/career track record'. Mentions of factors relating to qualifications were much lower, including 'degree course followed' (23%) and 'A-level, Scottish Higher grades' (17%).
- **Discussion;** *It's clear that employers, by their own admission, have limited understanding of both vocational and academic qualifications, although academic qualifications are better understood of the two. Given the preferences outlined above, it's not surprising that more respondents indicated they felt there were 'too few' people in the jobs market with vocational qualifications than with academic qualifications. Evidence of this can be seen with regard to the most important factors when recruiting graduates, which are generally seen to be 'softer skills such as teamwork and enthusiasm' rather than more tangible things such as degree class or the course followed.*

## Young Peoples' Skills

- Only 1% of respondents believe school leavers and graduates are 'extremely well prepared' for work. Graduates were more likely to be seen as 'prepared' than school leavers (35% vs. 23%).
- Respondents were asked to rate how important they felt a range of skills that young people may have were to their organisation. The most important were all relatively intangible skills including 'communication skills' (96%), 'time keeping skills' (94%), an 'enterprising attitude' (91%), 'customer care skills' (90%) and 'team working skills' (89%). Other, more core skills were rated as less important including 'numeracy skills' (77%), 'literacy skills' (72%) and 'general IT skills' (56%).
- Although rated as the most important aspect, barely half (52%) of respondents rated the 'communication skills' of the young people they had recruited as 4 or 5 out of 5. The same was true for 'customer care skills' (56%) and 'team working skills' (55%), although ratings were higher for 'time keeping skills' (66%), 'enterprising attitude' (66%) and 'personal presentation' (66%).
- Generally, 'communication skills', 'customer care skills' and 'team working skills' are arguably the skills of most concern, having both high importance and a low rating. More positively, 'time keeping skills', 'enterprising attitude' and 'personal presentation' have both high importance and a high rating.
- Respondents were more likely to mention employees with vocational qualifications as having better skills than those with academic qualifications for the more 'soft skills' including 'team working' (vocational: 26% vs. academic: 8%) and 'self management (e.g. time management, willingness to take responsibility)' (25% vs. 14%). In contrast, those with academic qualifications were more likely than those with vocational qualifications to be seen as having better developed core skills including 'communication and literacy' (vocational: 10% vs. academic: 26%), 'basic IT skills' (8% vs. 20%) and 'numeracy' (6% vs. 20%).
- **Discussion;** *Whether school leavers or graduates, there is clear evidence here that employers in Yorkshire and Humber region do not believe young people are well prepared for the world of work, with school leavers in particular seen as unprepared. Generally, given the gulf between the importance of skills and the quality of those possessed by young people, it is not surprising that so few feel young people are prepared for work. There is some evidence here that vocational qualifications in particular are failing to provide many of the basic skills required by businesses including good literacy, numeracy and IT skills. However, they are seen as providing the softer skills more desired by employers such as team working, self management and a positive attitude and enthusiasm. This may explain why many employers favour these qualifications over more academic ones, although the reasons are likely to be more complicated than this.*

## Attitudes Towards Qualifications

- There is a strong feeling that academic qualifications are not the only important criteria for young employees, with 91% agreeing that 'skills like teamwork and problem solving are as important as academic knowledge' and 77% agreeing that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills'.

- There was almost universal disagreement (93%) that 'young people will only fulfil their potential by going to university'. More generally, 72% disagreed that 'the education system is good at preparing young people to work in <their> industry' and 71% agreed that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on vocational achievement'. The majority of respondents (62%) also disagreed that 'young people are better prepared for work than they were 5 years ago'.
- Feelings were generally positive towards vocational learning, with the majority (80%) of respondents agreeing that 'vocational learning provides a good education' and that it 'often leads to a good career' (75%). Similarly, the majority (78%) disagreed that 'vocational learning is only for those that don't do well at school'. While a similar proportion (71%) agreed that 'every young person should study at least one vocational subject at school', it's important to note that 21% disagreed with this statement.
- Opinion was more polarised with regard to 'taking a vocational qualification route might rule out university as an option', with 26% agreeing with this statement and 47% disagreeing; additionally around a quarter (27%) neither agreed nor disagreed, higher than for any other statement.
- Respondents were asked if they were aware of the changes in 14-19 education which had lead to the introduction of the new national Diploma and almost a third (30%) indicated they were. However, amongst those who were aware, more respondents said they had a 'poor' or 'very poor' knowledge (40%) than said they had a 'good' or 'very good' (28%) knowledge of it.
- **Discussion;** *The data here once again highlight the importance of non-academic based skills to employers. Additionally, there is a clear suggestion that employers feel these skills are not necessarily taught in schools, with too much emphasis on attending university, somewhere that respondents almost universally believed wasn't the only route to a successful career. Given earlier answers, it's perhaps not surprising that such a high proportion disagree that 'the education systems is good at preparing young people to work in <their> industry', something which is obviously of concern.*
- **Discussion;** *With low awareness and understanding of the new 14-19 Diploma it is clear that more needs to be done to communicate the status of this qualifications and to emphasise how it will benefit employers.*

## Employer Engagement

- One-in-ten (10%) respondents said that their business had attempted to contact schools/colleges for employer engagement or work experience/apprenticeships but experienced difficulties that had prevented them from taking things further such as 'little or no response from the school' (28%) and 'bureaucracy' (27%).
- 58% of respondents said their business was currently involved in any engagement activities and by far the most frequently mentioned was 'work experience' (42%). However, almost a third indicated they felt there were 'no benefits' from doing so, but more positively, 26% highlighted that it 'helps to find new/potential recruits' and 13% said that it 'improves perceptions of our business'.

- Respondents who do not currently undertake employer engagement were asked why not and a 'lack of time' (30%) and a 'lack of resources' (28%) were mentioned most frequently, although a significant proportion mentioned that there was 'nothing' (15%).
- The majority of respondents (71%) felt the recession would have no impact on their level of engagement. Slightly more respondents felt it would 'decrease' (15%) than felt it would 'increase' (9%).
- **Discussion;** *With around half of respondents currently undertaking employer engagement activities, this suggests that this is an important part of the recruitment process for many. However, many of the reasons given for undertaking this activity do not suggest a direct benefit to employers and indeed around a third believe there are no benefits to their business.*

### Conclusions and Recommendations

- Conclusion 1: In line with employers across the country, those in the Yorkshire and Humber Region desire 'soft skills' above more core, basic skills.
- Conclusion 2: Employers recognise that gaps exist in the skills of many young people with regard to these 'soft skills'.
- Conclusion 3: As well as being of low importance, more basic, core skills of young people are rated relatively poorly.
- Conclusion 4: There is some suggestion that employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region are less happy with the preparedness of young people for work than in the country as a whole.
- Conclusion 5: Generally, understanding of qualifications (both new and old) is low.
- Conclusion 6: There is some suggestion that vocational qualifications are better than academic qualifications at providing 'soft skills'.
- Conclusion 7: Many employers are switched-off to employer engagement and unlikely to get involved.
- Conclusion 8: Employer engagement is frequently seen as a means to find and recruit new employees.



## 2. Introduction

In July 2009, Qa Research was commissioned to carry out research amongst employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region to investigate their perceptions and experiences of employing and recruiting young people. For the purposes of this research, young people were defined as those aged 16-24 years old.

The research explored perceived gaps in young peoples' skills and evaluated employers' views on vocational versus academic qualifications. In addition, questioning was included to explore the extent to which employers currently engage with schools and educational institutions.

The research project was split into two distinct phases:

- **Phase one** – Desk research to explore existing data sources regarding employer attitudes to young peoples' skills and current engagement practices. This stage was completed in August 2009.
- **Phase two** – Primary research with employers, consisting of a quantitative telephone survey with a representative sample of 400 businesses from across the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Findings from Phase One were delivered via a separate written report. This report details findings from Phase Two, which builds on the recommendations of the Phase One report.

## 3. Context and objectives

The Phase One desk research highlighted the context for the Phase Two telephone survey and it's worth repeating this here;

Success in cultivating a more enterprising region will depend on not only the qualifications of young people, but also on their drive, ambition and generic skills such as creativity, networking and interaction and independent learning<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, skills such as these are critical as over three quarters of employers say they look for them when recruiting graduates<sup>2</sup>. Given an evolving labour market, it is clearly important to understand precisely what this means in terms of skills supply and demand, so that strategies aimed at harnessing a more enterprising region can have a positive impact.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) aims to “address once and for all the age-old gripe from employers that young people emerge from the education system ill-prepared for work.”<sup>3</sup> The UKCES research report ‘The Employability Challenge’ states that skills which enable people to work in a team, communicate clearly, listen, be interested and keen to learn, take criticism, solve problems, read, write and add<sup>4</sup>. Such skills are described as the “lubricant of our increasingly complex and interconnected workplace ... [however] in 2009, too few people have these skills” (p. 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Yorkshire Forward (2007) *The ambitions and aspirations of young people in Yorkshire and Humber*

<sup>2</sup> CBI (2008) *Taking stock: CBI education and skills survey*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/feb/10/work-skills>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeFullReport.pdf>

Indeed, the CBI reports that over 50% of employers reported that they were not satisfied with the generic employability skills of school leavers, and almost a third had the same issue with graduates<sup>5</sup>. As such, young people need to develop skills for employability. This includes a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants need to possess to ensure that they have the capability of being effective in the workplace<sup>6</sup>. These attributes, skills and knowledge include:

- self-management;
- team working;
- business and customer awareness;
- problem solving;
- communication and literacy;
- application of numeracy; and
- application of information technology.

These attributes contribute to a 'positive attitude' which includes characteristics such as a 'can-do' approach, a readiness to take part, openness to new activities and a drive to make those ideas happen<sup>7</sup>.

In this context, the objectives of this project were to:

- Identify employer skills gaps in the region, both short term and long term;
- Map the skills to relevant enterprise education, qualifications, diplomas, apprenticeships and train to gain provision; and
- Turn the skills needs of employers into an employer engagement strategy which, where appropriate, will deliver CSR benefits for employers.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that interviewing for the quantitative stage took place during December 2009 and January 2010. As such, the research was undertaken at a time when the UK was just emerging from recession. Quarter three of 2009 was the sixth and final consecutive quarter of contraction, with growth was recorded in Quarter 4 2009 (GDP grew by 0.4%) and in the first quarter of 2010 (GDP grew by 0.2%).<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the employment rate for the three months to February 2010 was 72.1 per cent and had not been lower since the three months to October 1996. More specifically, unemployment amongst young people continued to rise. For example, unemployment amongst 18 to 24 year olds was 734,000 in the three months to March 2010, up 9,000 from the three months to December 2009<sup>9</sup>.

It is useful to understand this economic context when evaluating the responses given by employees during the quantitative fieldwork.

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<sup>5</sup> CBI (2006) *Employer Trends Survey*

<sup>6</sup> CBI (2007) *Time well spent*

<sup>7</sup> CBI (2007) *Time well spent*

<sup>8</sup> ONS website 23 April 2010

<sup>9</sup> ONS website 21 April 2010

## 4. Research Method

### 4.1 Methodology

The Phase Two research involved a quantitative telephone survey with 400 businesses across the Yorkshire and Humber region. The survey utilised the Inter Departmental Business Register to create a sampling framework and weighting procedure to ensure findings were representative of the region by business size, sector and sub-region.

In order to ensure relevance to the survey, only businesses that currently recruit young people or have recruited young people in the past 5 years took part in the research. All other businesses were eliminated via a screening question at the start of the interview. The survey was only undertaken with individuals with responsibilities for recruitment within their organisations to ensure responses were informed.

All interviewing was undertaken via CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) from Qa's on-site contact centre in York and, on average, the survey lasted 15 minutes. Fieldwork took place during December 2009 and January 2010.

### 4.2 Sample Profile

Quotas were set on area, employee size and SIC code to ensure a representative sample. Larger companies were over-sampled in the analysis to ensure sufficient interviews to allow sub-group analysis. Weighting was applied at the analysis stage to bring the profile of companies back into line with the regional profile (as defined by the IDBR).

The following table demonstrates the number of businesses in the region broken down by the business demographics the survey targeted. It also outlines the target number of interviews and the achieved number of interviews, together with the confidence interval we can expect from individual analysis of each business group.

**Figure 1. Sample Profile**

	Regional Profile	Achieved Interviews		Confidence level
	%	n	%	
Total	-	400	100%	+/- 5%
East Yorkshire	18.0%	20%	81	+/- 11%
North Yorkshire	21.6%	23%	91	+/- 10%
South Yorkshire	20.7%	23%	92	+/- 10%
West Yorkshire	39.7%	34%	136	+/- 8%
1 - 4	65.4%	19%	77	+/- 11%
5 - 9	15.4%	23%	90	+/- 10%
10-49	15.3%	32%	126	+/- 9%
50 - 99	2.2%	7%	29	+/- 18%
100 - 249	1.2%	10%	38	+/- 16%
250+	0.5%	10%	40	+/- 15%

	Regional Profile	Achieved Interviews		Confidence level
	%	n	%	
Agriculture, Production	6.3%	2%	7	+/- 37%
Construction	7.6%	13%	53	+/- 13%
Motor trades	10.3%	9%	35	+/- 17%
Wholesale	3.7%	4%	16	+/- 25%
Retail	5.4%	5%	19	+/- 22%
Hotels and restaurants	12.9%	12%	46	+/- 14%
Transport	7.2%	10%	40	+/- 15%
Post and telecommunications	3.6%	4%	17	+/- 24%
Finance	1.0%	3%	10	+/- 31%
Property and business services	2.3%	1%	5	+/- 44%
Public admin and other services	23.3%	13%	52	+/- 14%
Education	8.1%	9%	36	+/- 16%
Health and social work	2.5%	6%	22	+/- 21%
	5.6%	11%	42	+/- 15%

It's important to note that many of the sub-groups outlined above are small and as a result have large confidence limits, indicating considerable variation in the data. Where base sizes allow, we have indicated statistically significant findings amongst key sub-groups, including the four regions and employee size bands, but only those SIC segments shown in grey in the table above, where the base size is greater than 30 respondents.

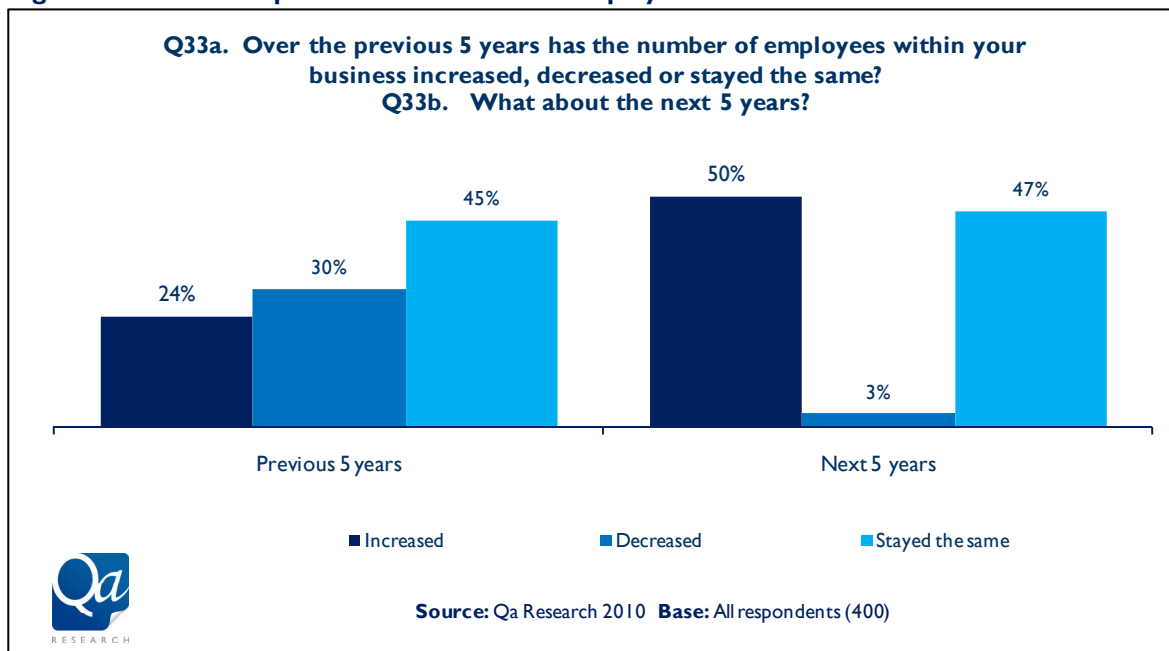
## 5. Key findings

### 5.1 Recruitment of Young People

#### 5.1.1 Past and Future Recruitment of Employees

Respondents were asked if, over the previous 5 years, the number of employees within their business had increased, decreased or stayed the same and how they thought staffing levels would change over the next 5 years. Responses to both questions are shown below;

**Figure 2. Past and present recruitment of employees**



Reflecting the economic environment, more respondents indicated that their business had seen a 'decrease' (30%) in employee numbers than indicated they had seen an 'increase' (24%) over the past 5 years. That said, the largest proportion (45%) said employee levels had 'stayed the same'.

Looking forward, respondents were more positive, with half (50%) expecting to see an 'increase' in the next 5 years, compared to only 3% indicating that a 'decrease' was likely. Again, a significant proportion expected things to 'stay the same' (47%).

#### Sub-group Analysis

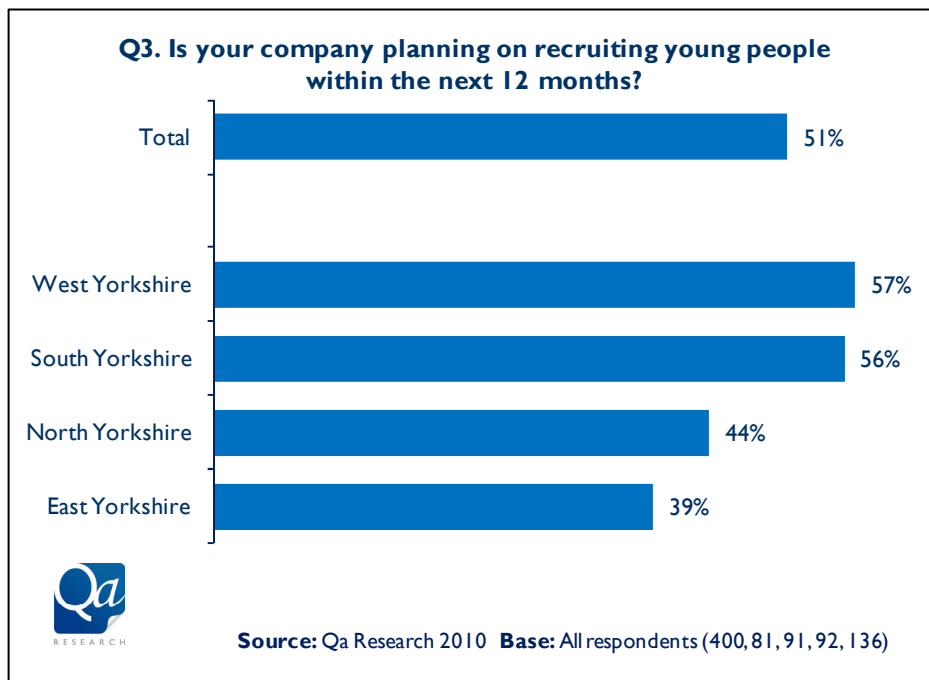
Respondents in North Yorkshire (32%) were significantly more likely to have seen an increase over the last 5 years than those in East (19%), South (18%) or West (26%) Yorkshire.

### 5.1.2 Current and Planned Recruitment of Young People

Respondents were screened to ensure that that either currently recruit young people or have done in the past 5 years. In total, half the sample (50%) said they currently recruit while the other half (50%) said they had recruited in the last 5 years.

As outlined in the chart below, just over half (51%) of businesses in the region who currently recruit young people were planning on recruiting young people in the next 12 months. Businesses in South (56%) and West (57%) Yorkshire were significantly more likely than those in East (39%) and North (44%) Yorkshire to say they were planning on recruiting young people.

**Figure 3. Planning on recruiting young people in the next 12 months**

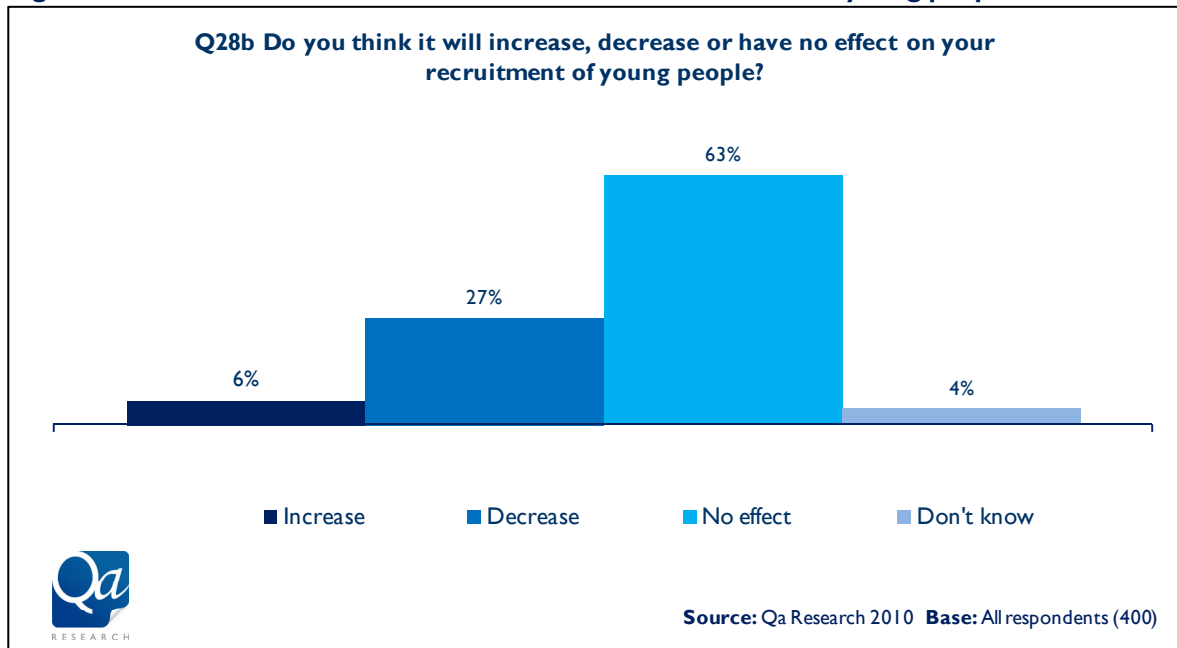


#### Sub-group Analysis

No other differences were recorded.

All respondents were asked what effect the current economic situation might have on their recruitment of young people and responses are shown below;

**Figure 4. Effect of current economic situation on recruitment of young people**



Reassuringly, the majority of respondents felt the current economic situation would have 'no effect' (63%) on their recruitment of young people. However, of the remainder, a quarter (27%) felt they would 'decrease' recruitment and only 6% said it would 'increase'.

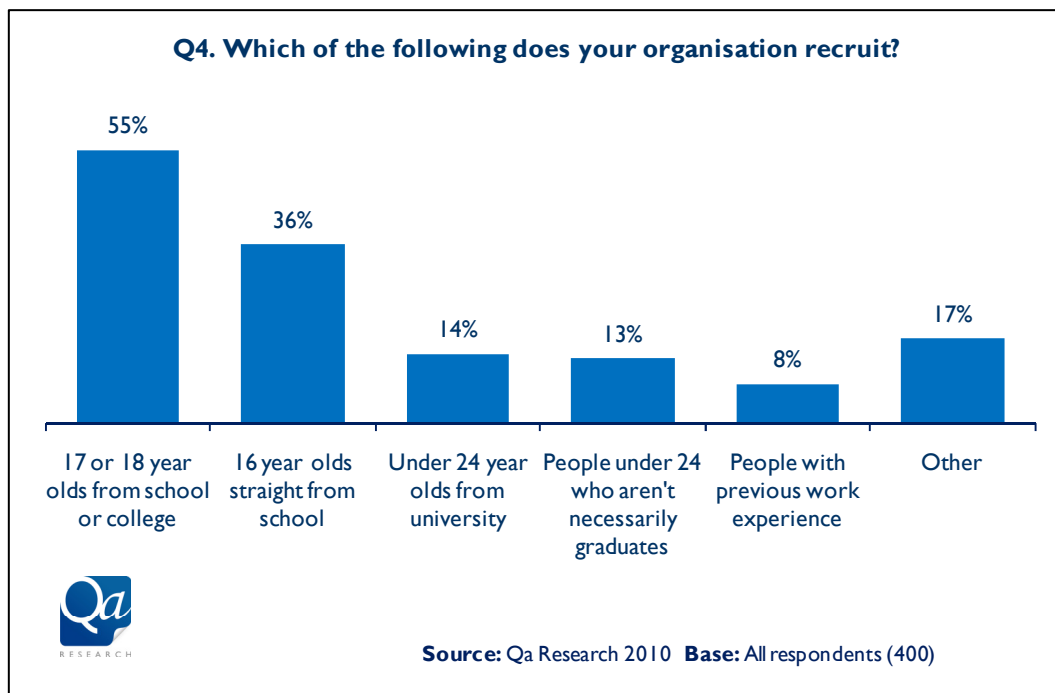
### Sub-group Analysis

Respondents in West Yorkshire (14%) were significantly more likely than those in East (3%), North (2%) or South Yorkshire (1%) to say they would 'increase' recruitment.

### 5.1.3 Types of Young People Recruited

Respondents were asked what types of young people they recruited and as shown in the graph below, more than half (55%) of businesses recruit '17 or 18 year olds from school or college' and a third (36%) recruit '16 year olds straight from school'. Fewer (14%) of businesses recruit graduates, although a similar proportion (13%) said they recruited 'under 24s who aren't necessarily graduates'.

Figure 5. Types of young people recruited



#### Sub-group Analysis

As we would expect, there is considerable cross-over with regard to the types of young people recruited by businesses, with many businesses recruiting young people across a range of ages. Figure 6 highlights the degree of crossover and indicates, for example, that 61% of respondents recruiting '16 year olds straight from school' also recruit '17 or 18 year olds from school or college'. That said, those businesses that recruit graduates ('under 24 year olds from university') are significantly less likely than those that recruit '17 or 18 year olds from school or college' to also recruit '16 years olds straight from school' (22% vs. 40%).



**Figure 6. Mix of young people recruited**

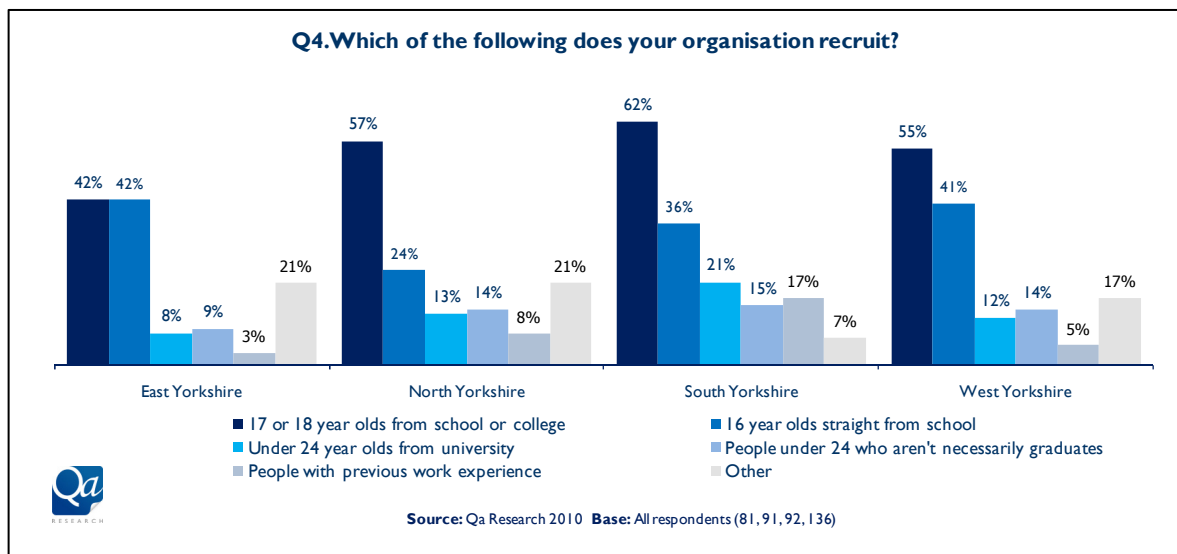
	16 year olds straight from school	17 or 18 year olds from school or college	Under 24 year olds from university
16 year olds straight from school	100%	40%	22%
17 or 18 year olds from school or college	61%	100%	56%
Under 24 year olds from university	8%	14%	100%

**Important Note:** The high degree of crossover shown above means that comparisons between employers recruiting each age group and no others are not possible, due to small base sizes. Consequently, this analysis has been excluded from this report.

Respondents who agreed that over the last 5 years the number of people their business employed had 'decreased' were significantly more likely than those who said it 'increased' or 'stayed the same' to say that they recruit young people with 'previous work experience' (17%, 6% and 4% respectively).

Figure 7 below highlights that businesses in North Yorkshire (24%) are significantly less likely than those in East (42%), South (36%) and West (41%) Yorkshire to hire '16 year olds straight from school'.

**Figure 7. Types of young people recruited (regional breakdown)**



**Discussion;**

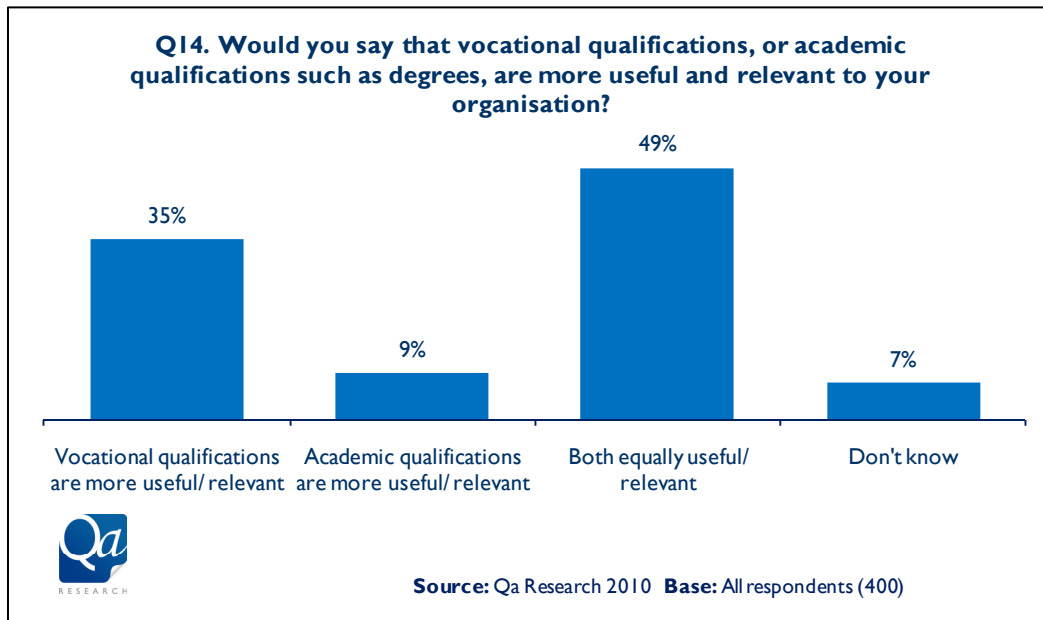
Given the difficult economic situation over the last couple of years, it not surprising that more businesses have seen their workforce decrease than increase and that this impacts on their recruitment plans for young people. While some regional differences exist, it's encouraging that around half of businesses indicate they plan to recruit young people over the next 5 years, reflecting their recruitment plans per se.

## 5.2 Qualification Understanding and Needs

### 5.2.1 Vocational Versus Academic Qualifications

Respondents were asked to indicate whether vocational qualifications or academic qualifications were most useful/relevant to their business and findings are shown in Figure 8 below;

**Figure 8. Usefulness/relevance of academic and vocational qualifications to respondent's business**



Almost half (49%) of respondents said that 'both were equally useful/relevant'. A greater proportion said that 'vocational qualifications' were more useful/relevant than 'academic qualifications' (35% vs. 9%).

#### Sub-groups Analysis

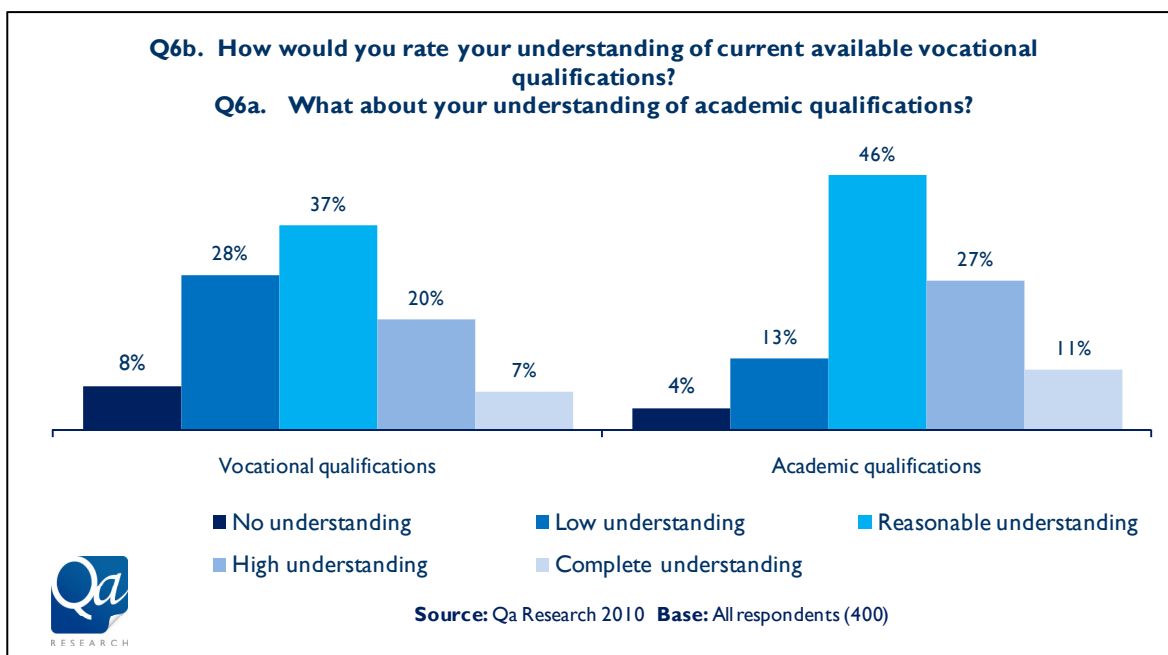
Respondents in North and South Yorkshire were significantly more likely to say that 'academic qualifications' were more useful/relevant (15% and 17% respectively) than those in East and West Yorkshire (1% and 4% respectively).

Respondents who agreed that over the last 5 years the number of people their business employed had 'increased' were significantly more likely than those who said it had 'decreased' to say that 'vocational qualifications' were more useful/relevant (36% vs. 22%).

Mentions of 'vocational qualifications' were higher amongst respondents from the 'public admin and services sector' (53%) compared to all other sectors, particularly 'property and business services' (31%) and 'health and social work' (31%).

Respondents were asked to indicate their understanding of both vocational and academic qualifications and response to both questions is shown below;

**Figure 9. Understanding of vocational and academic qualifications**



In total, a third (36%) of respondents said they had either ‘no understanding’ or ‘low understanding’ of vocational qualifications compared to 16% with regards to academic qualifications. Similarly, respondents were more likely to say they had either a ‘complete understanding’ or a ‘high understanding’ of academic qualifications than vocational qualifications (38% vs. 27%).

### Sub-groups Analysis

Respondents in West Yorkshire (21%) were significantly more likely than those in East (11%), North (11%) and South (11%) Yorkshire to say they have a ‘low/no understanding’ of academic qualifications.

Respondents in the ‘health and social care’ segment were more likely than any other segments to say they had a ‘high/complete understanding’ of both vocational (62%) and academic (60%) qualifications.

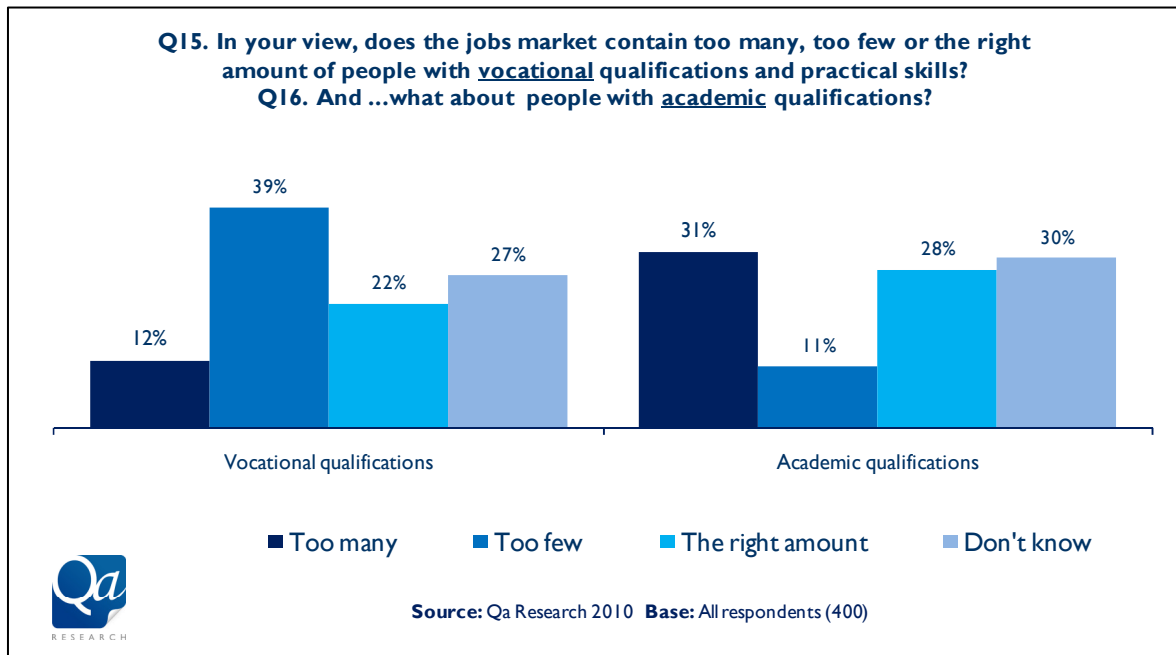
Generally, those respondents who said they had a ‘high/complete understanding’ of vocational qualifications were more likely to have a similar understanding of academic qualifications (77%) than those with a ‘low/no understanding’ (24%). Essentially, this means that respondents tend to have a good understanding of both types of qualifications or neither, rather than one or the other.

Although a small base, half (47%) of businesses that stated academic qualifications were more relevant/useful than vocational qualifications to their business said they had a ‘high/complete understanding’ of academic qualifications. This is compared to only a third (31%) of those who said vocational qualifications were most useful/relevant having a ‘high/complete understanding’ of vocational qualifications.

More than half (53%) of respondents who said that academic qualifications are more useful/relevant than vocational qualifications to their business said that they had a 'low/no understanding' of vocational qualifications, compared to a third (33%) of those who said vocational qualifications were more useful/relevant.

All respondents were asked how they feel about the balance of people in the jobs market with vocational and academic qualifications and responses are shown in Figure 10 below;

**Figure 10. Balance of people in jobs market with vocational and academic qualifications**



A clear split between qualification types exists, with two-fifths (39%) of respondents indicating that they feel there are 'too few' people with vocational qualifications, compared to only one-in-ten (11%) believing there are 'too few' with academic qualifications. In line with this, more respondents felt that there were 'too many' people with academic qualifications (31%) than vocational qualification (12%). More than a quarter said that they 'don't know' about the balance for vocational qualifications (27%) and academic qualifications (30%).

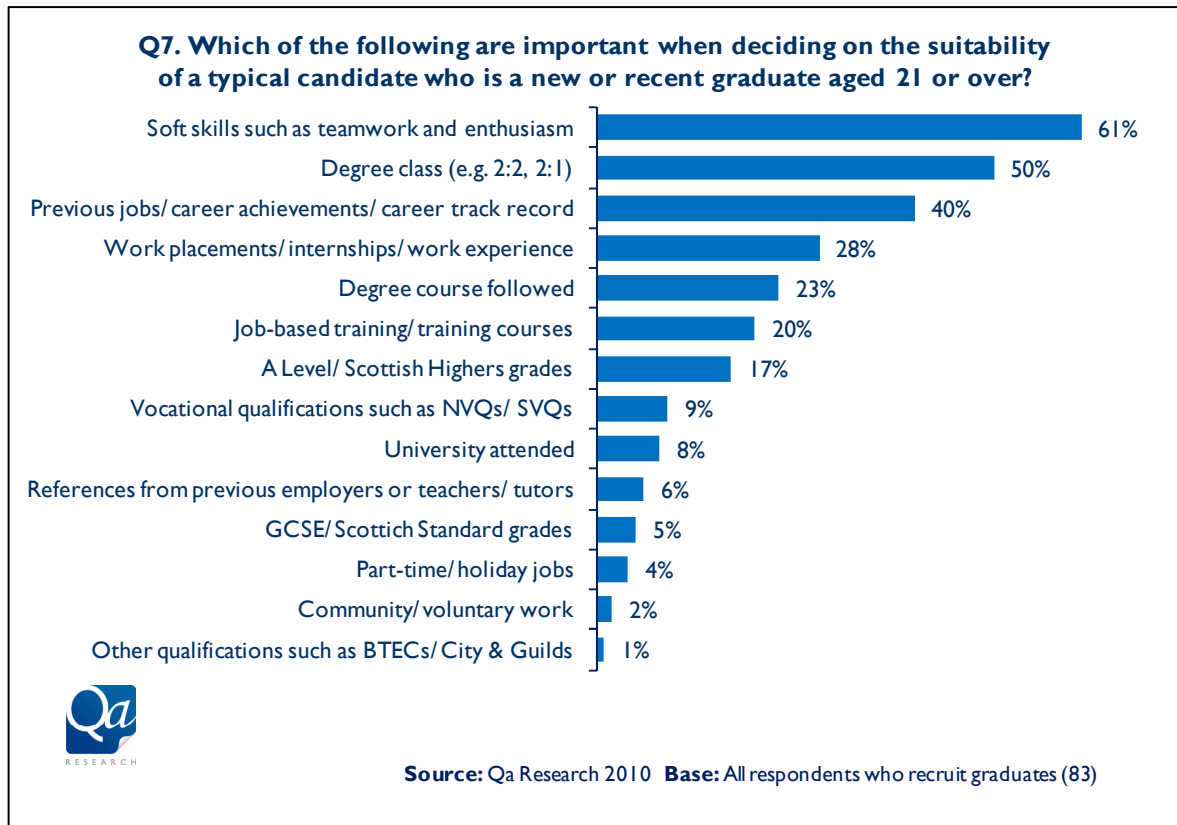
### Sun-groups analysis

Those respondents who said that vocational qualifications were more useful/relevant to their business were significantly more likely than those who said that academic and vocational qualifications were equally useful to say that there are 'too few' people with vocational qualifications and practical skills (52% vs. 35%) in the jobs market.

## 5.2.2 Most Important Factors When Recruiting Graduates

Those respondents working for businesses that recruit graduates were asked which factors they considered to be most important in deciding on an individual's suitability for the job and responses are shown below;

Figure 11. Most important factors when recruiting graduates



Although half (50%) mentioned that 'degree class (e.g. 2:2, 2:1)' was important, more respondents mentioned 'soft skills such as teamwork and enthusiasm' (61%). Additionally, two-fifths (40%) mentioned 'previous jobs/career achievements/career track record' and just over a quarter (28%) mentioned 'work placements/internships/work experience'. Mentions of factors relating to qualifications were much lower, including 'degree course followed' (23%) and 'A-level, Scottish Higher grades' (17%).

### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

**Discussion;**

It's clear that employers, by their own admission, have limited understanding of both vocational and academic qualifications. Generally, academic qualifications are better understood of the two, but even here only two-fifths of employers claim they have a 'high' or 'complete understanding' of these types of qualifications. Perhaps more concerning, is that more businesses said that vocational qualifications were more useful to them than said academic qualifications were, but those businesses that said vocational qualifications were more useful demonstrated a relatively low understanding of vocational qualifications. It's unclear why understanding of vocational qualifications is lower, although the more fragmented and market specific nature of these types of qualifications may explain this.

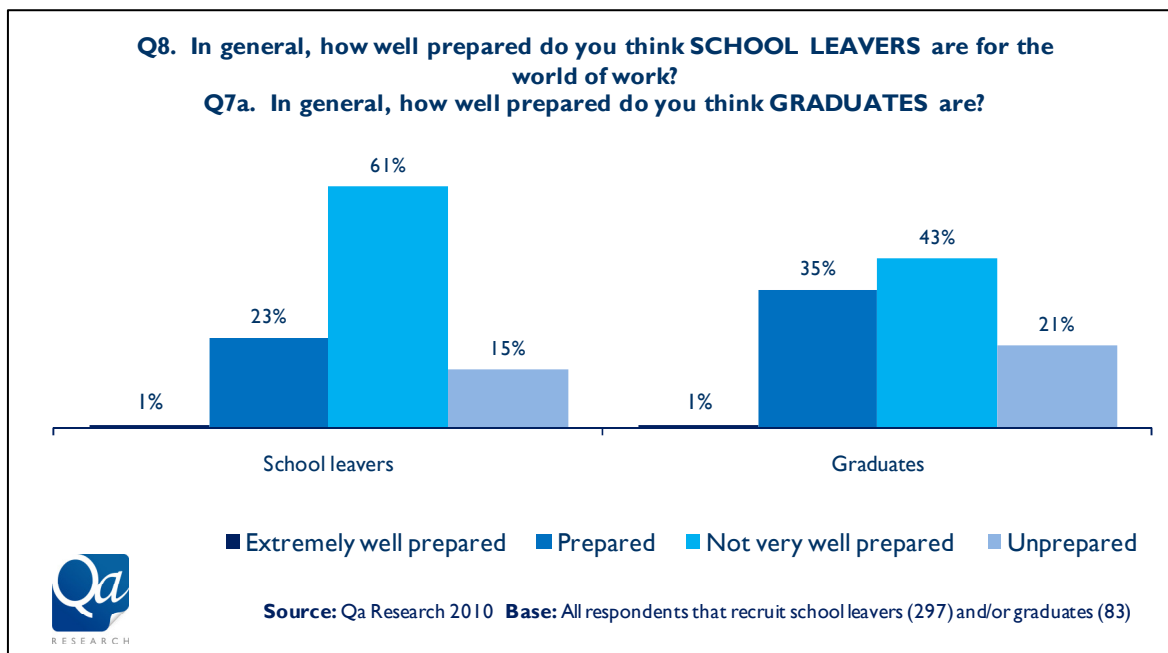
Given the preferences outlined above, it's not surprising that more respondents indicated they felt there were 'too few' people in the jobs market with vocational qualifications than with academic qualifications and this was particularly true for those who felt vocational qualifications were more useful/relevant to their business. Indeed, a third believe that there are too many with academic qualifications. Consequently, there needs to be a better understanding of why these types of qualifications seemingly don't meet respondents' needs. Evidence of this can be seen with regard to the most important factors when recruiting graduates, which are generally seen to be 'softer skills such as teamwork and enthusiasm' rather than more tangible things such as degree class or the course followed. It is perhaps the case that many employees simply don't feel these skills are provided by academic qualifications.

## 5.3 Young Peoples' Skills

### 5.3.1 Preparedness of Young People for Work

Respondents that indicated they recruit '17 or 18 year olds from school or college' and those that recruit 'under 24 year olds from university' were asked how well prepared they thought these young people are for the world of work and responses are shown below;

**Figure 12. How well prepared young people are for the world of work**



The most eye-catching element of the chart above, is that only 1% of respondents believe school leavers and graduates are 'extremely well prepared' for work. Respondents were more likely to state that graduates were 'prepared' for work than school leavers (35% vs. 23%).

#### Sub-group Analysis

Amongst respondents who recruit school leavers, those who said that over the last 5 years the number of people their business employed had 'decreased' were significantly less likely than those who said it had 'increased' to agree that school leavers are 'extremely well prepared' or 'prepared' for work (11% vs. 24%). It is possible that this concern regarding the preparedness of school leavers reflects part of the reason why employment levels have been different in these companies, although further research would be required to understand exactly how much impact this has in relation to other factors such as the recession.

### 5.3.2 Key Skills

All respondents were asked to rate how important they felt a range of skills were to their organisation on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was 'not at all important' and 5 was 'extremely important'. They were then asked to rate the skills of young people they had recruited when they joined their business, where 1 was 'extremely poor' and 5 was 'extremely good'.

The chart below shows response from both questions and indicates the proportion of respondents that gave a score of 4 or 5 for each measure;

**Figure 13. Importance of skills to organisation and rating of skills amongst young people**



The skills rated as most important were all relatively intangible skills including 'communication skills' (96%), 'time keeping skills' (94%), an 'enterprising attitude' (91%), 'customer care skills' (90%) and 'team working skills' (89%). Other, more core, skills were rated as less important including 'numeracy skills' (77%), 'literacy skills' (72%) and 'general IT skills' (56%). Less than three-quarters (72%) of respondents rated 'business awareness' as important and four-fifths (82%) rated 'personal presentation' as important.

Although rated as the most important aspect, barely half (52%) of respondents rated the 'communication skills' of the young people they had recruited as 4 or 5 out of 5, clearly signalling much room for improvement. The same was true for 'customer care skills' (56%) and 'team working skills' (55%), although ratings were higher for 'time keeping skills' (66%), 'enterprising attitude' (66%) and 'personal presentation' (66%).



Although seen as relatively unimportant, half (50%) of respondents rated the 'numeracy skills' and the 'literacy skills' (47%) of recent young recruits as 4 or 5 out of 5.

Ratings were lowest of all for 'general IT skills' (41%), 'problem solving skills' (32%) and 'business awareness' (28%).

### Sub-group Analysis

Respondents who felt that vocational qualification are more useful/relevant to their business than academic qualifications were significantly more likely than those who felt they are both equally important to rate a number of skills as being 'poor' or 'extremely poor' (score 1 or 2) amongst school/college /university leavers they'd employed, as shown below;

**Figure 14. Rating of young peoples' skills by usefulness of qualification type (Score 1 or 2 out of 5)**

	Vocational qualifications more relevant/useful (165)	Both equally relevant/useful (184)
Communication skills	21%	8%
Problem solving skills	28%	8%
Literacy skills	14%	3%
General IT skills	12%	4%
Business awareness	29%	18%

The figure below is based on answers given at Q9a and Q9b. Responses are broken down by respondents who said they recruit young people of different ages, as shown. It is important to note that respondents were not asked to give their assessment of these skills for recruits in each particular age group and instead were asked to give a general assessment of all young people they recruit. Consequently, it is important not to conclude that the importance scores and rating scores relate directly to young people of that particular age group. Additionally, the three sub-groups shown below are not mutually exclusive as many employers recruit young people of different ages.

The data suggest some differences may exist, although further research will be required to thoroughly test this. For example, 'time-keeping skills' and 'personal presentation' are rated more poorly amongst those recruiting older young people, whereas 'literacy skills' and 'general IT skills' are rated more highly.

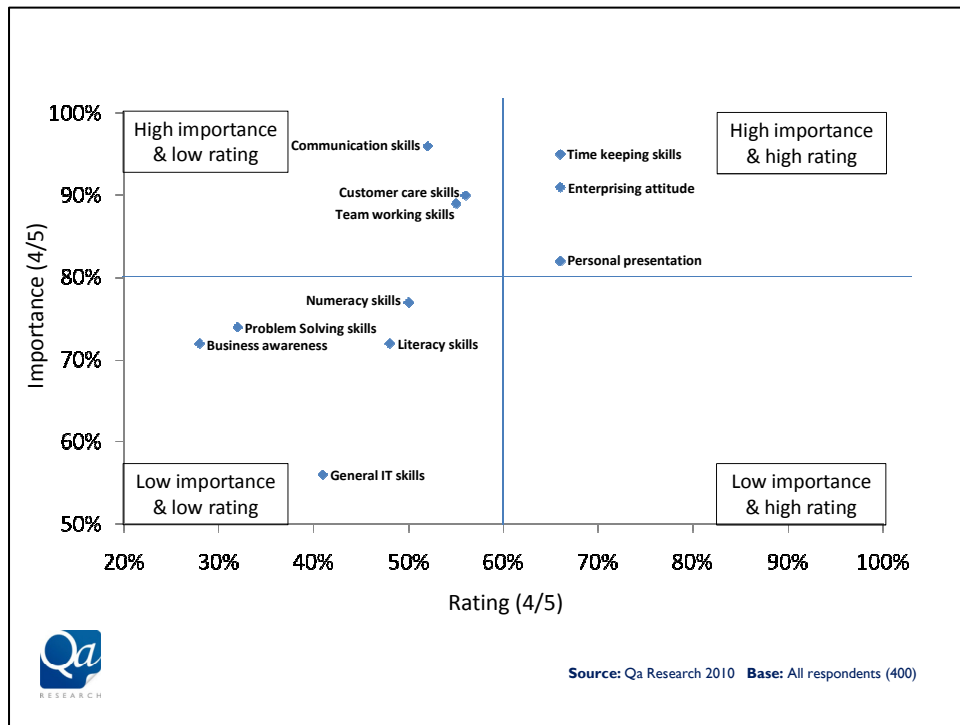
**Figure 15. Importance of skills to organisation and rating of skills amongst young people – by type of young people employed**

	Q4. Which of the following does your organisation recruit?						
	16 years olds from school		17 or 18 year olds from school/college		Under 24 year olds from university		
	(170)		(258)		(83)		
	Importance	Rating	Importance	Rating	Importance	Rating	
Communication skills	97%	55%	94%	49%	99%	53%	
Time keeping skills	94%	73%	93%	63%	90%	42%	
Enterprising attitude	95%	73%	93%	59%	85%	61%	
Customer care skills	86%	56%	90%	49%	94%	45%	
Team working skills	96%	61%	88%	50%	97%	50%	
Personal presentation	96%	72%	85%	67%	80%	58%	
Numeracy skills	81%	49%	81%	48%	73%	53%	
Problem solving skills	78%	28%	76%	30%	84%	30%	
Business awareness	75%	28%	75%	20%	52%	17%	
Literacy skills	68%	38%	68%	43%	76%	55%	
General IT skills	51%	26%	55%	33%	56%	65%	

**Base: All recruiting each age group**

We are able to plot the data from Figure 13 into a quadrant chart to compare the importance and rating of each skill. Results are shown in Figure 16 below, with each skill plotted into one of the four quadrants. For the purposes of this exercise we have decided to divide importance into high and low using a figure of 80% as the cut-off and to divide ratings into high and low using a figure of 60%. These divisions reflect responses given to these two questions.

**Figure 16. Importance of skills vs. rating of skills amongst young people**



As can be seen from the figure above, 'communication skills', 'customer care skills' and 'team working skills' are arguably the skills of most concern, having both high importance and a low rating. More positively, 'time keeping skills', 'enterprising attitude' and 'personal presentation' have both high importance and a high rating.

The more core, basic skills all fall into the quadrant 'low importance and low rating' including 'numeracy skills', 'problem solving skills', 'business awareness skills', 'literacy skills' and 'general IT skills' suggesting that for employers in the region, developing these skills should be less of a focus.

### 5.3.3 Defining Key Skills

To explain their comments, all respondents rating a particular skill as being ‘poor’ or ‘extremely poor’ (score 1 or 2) amongst the young people they had recruited were asked for examples of situations which highlighted their rating. Some selected verbatim comments which illustrate the types of comments made are shown below;

**Figure 17. Why ‘communication skills’ are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"Because they communicate by email or text. They do not know how to talk"
"Some of them including my own children can barely speak English."
"Generally they are not equipped to communicate with people of a different generation."

**Figure 18. Why ‘team working skills’ are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"They dont have a clue when they leave school"
"They had a problem getting on with the other older staff."
"Scared to get involved."
"Have no idea of mixing."

**Figure 19. Why ‘problem solving skills’ are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"They were not sufficiently observant about what their peers were doing so they could sort out things in their turn when there was a problem."
"They have never been presented with problems to solve, not in a real life work situation."
"The young people we've taken on lacked problem solving skills. An over emphasis on the academic route has reduced the calibre of people in this industry generally from the B stream to the D stream."

**Figure 20. Why ‘literacy skills’ are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"When we put staff on training courses, we have to evidence they have understood what we have trained them in, the level of literacy of some recruits means that some struggle to do so."
"Spelling and grammar are appalling, need to write patient notes, but unfortunately our employees tend to be at the lower end of the academic scale and so they really struggle with this."
"They are a non-reading generation."
"Employing from the bottom end of the market, very capable on the computers, but can't read, write or spell very well at all."
"The writing of young people is terrible, and their spelling is really not good."

**Figure 21. Why 'numeracy skills' are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"Without a calculator they struggled to work out simple sums."
"This isn't very important for our organisation, but the level of numeracy of some recruits is very poor."
"They think they have achieved something simply by turning up in a morning."
"They mostly use computerised tills, but when they have been asked to do some basic calculations without, they have been stuck."
"They are fine if they have a calculator but cant cope with doing sums in their head."
"Numeracy is very poor, they have to have calculators, can't do mental arithmetic."

**Figure 22. Why 'general IT skills' are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"Not up to the standards that you would expect from the technological generation"

**Figure 23. Why 'time keeping skills' are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"They always need reminding of the importance of time keeping."
"They don't turn up or phone in when they're not going to - we're always chasing them. They are also often late."
"They found turning up on time a big change from school."
"Deadlines are not imposed at school."
"Young people these days seem shocked that they have to work at all, seems a chore to them."

**Figure 24. Why 'business awareness skills' are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"They lack any awareness of the priorities of the business world."
"Young people are not prepared for the real world in schools and don't appreciate the fact that they have to justify their wage to the business that employs them."
"They don't seem to realise that their job depends on the way they perform."
"They do not understand how the business interacts with the business environments such as business partners"
"Don't look at consequences of actions. Example is clearing the snow off the forecourt so people can come in instead of warning them it is icy."

**Figure 25. Why 'customer care skills' are rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"When customers place orders they are not taken properly and they end up with the wrong food."
"Some of them have poor attitudes. We have to drum in the fact that looking after people is the core of what we do."

**Figure 26. Why 'personal presentation' is rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"We give them whites to wear, yet for the feeblest of reasons they fail to turn up in these."

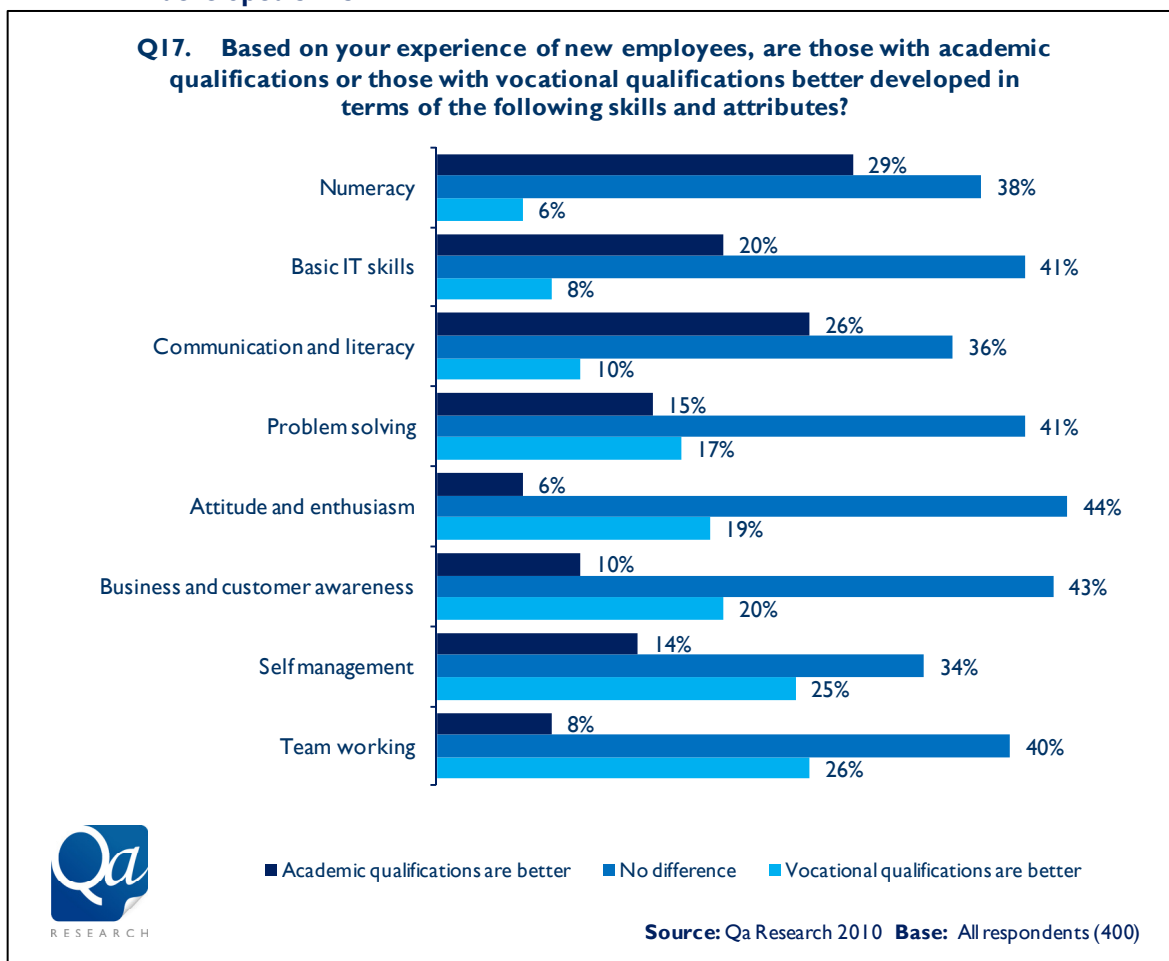
**Figure 27. Why 'enterprising attitude' is rated as poor or extremely poor**

Selected verbatims
"They are too used to everything being done for them. Many are useless 'as useless as a single Wellie!"
"Generally, you have to push them rather than wait for them to act on their own."
"Young people seem to come in these days with an expectation that they should be doing more, starting higher than they do."

### 5.3.4 Whether Vocational or Academic Qualifications Provide the Best Skills

Respondents were prompted with a list of core skills and asked to decide, based on their experience of new employees, whether those with academic or vocational qualifications had better developed skills. Response is shown in the figure below;

**Figure 28. Whether employees with vocational or academic qualifications have the better developed skills**



For all skills, the greatest proportion of respondents felt that there was ‘no difference’ between these two types of qualifications. Feeling was strongest for ‘attitude and enthusiasm’ (44%), ‘basic IT skills’ (48%) and ‘business and customer awareness’ (43%).

Generally, respondents were more likely to mention employees with vocational qualifications as having better skills than those with academic qualifications for the more ‘soft skills’ including ‘team working’ (vocational: 26% vs. academic: 8%), ‘self management (e.g. time management, willingness to take responsibility)’ (25% vs. 14%), ‘attitude and enthusiasm’ (19% vs. 6%) and ‘business and customer awareness’ (20% vs. 10%).

In contrast, those with academic qualifications were more likely than those with vocational qualifications to be seen as having better developed core skills including ‘communication and literacy’ (vocational: 10% vs. academic: 26%), ‘basic IT skills’ (8% vs. 20%) and ‘ numeracy’ (6% vs. 20%).

## Sub-group Analysis

Compared to those who felt there was no difference, respondents who stated that young people with vocational qualifications were more useful/relevant to their business than those with academic qualifications were significantly more likely to believe that employees with vocational qualifications had better developed skills in 'self-management' (32% vs. 22%), 'team working' (34% vs. 21%), 'business and customer awareness' (26% vs. 19%), 'basic IT skills' (12% vs. 3%) and 'attitude and enthusiasm' (31% vs. 14%).

### Discussion;

Whether school leavers or graduates, there is clear evidence here that employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region do not believe young people are well prepared for the world of work, with school leavers in particular seen as unprepared.

Of most importance to employers are less tangible, 'soft skills' such as communication skills, time keeping skills and an enterprising attitude. Specifically, of the core skills presented to respondents, young people received the highest ratings for their time keeping skills and enterprising attitude, although in both these cases only two-thirds of respondents scored these skills as 4 or 5 out of 5. This is particularly worrying given that both skills are almost universally rated as important by respondents. Even worse, half of respondents rated young people's communication skills as 4 or 5 out of 5 and these were the skills seen as most important by respondents. These findings indicate significant skills gaps in these core areas and this echoes findings from the National Employer Skills Survey, where employers most frequently mentioned skills gaps in 'technical and practical skills', 'team-working', 'problem solving skills' and 'oral communication'<sup>10</sup>.

Generally, given the gulf between the importance of skills and the quality of those possessed by young people, it is not surprising that so few feel young people are prepared for work.

There is some evidence here that vocational qualifications in particular are failing to provide many of the basic skills required by businesses including good literacy, numeracy and IT skills. However, they are seen as providing the softer skills more desired by employers such as team working, self management and a positive attitude and enthusiasm. This may explain why many employers favour these qualifications over more academic ones, although the reasons are likely to be more complicated than this.

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<sup>10</sup> LSC (2008) National Employer Skills Survey: Yorkshire and Humber report.



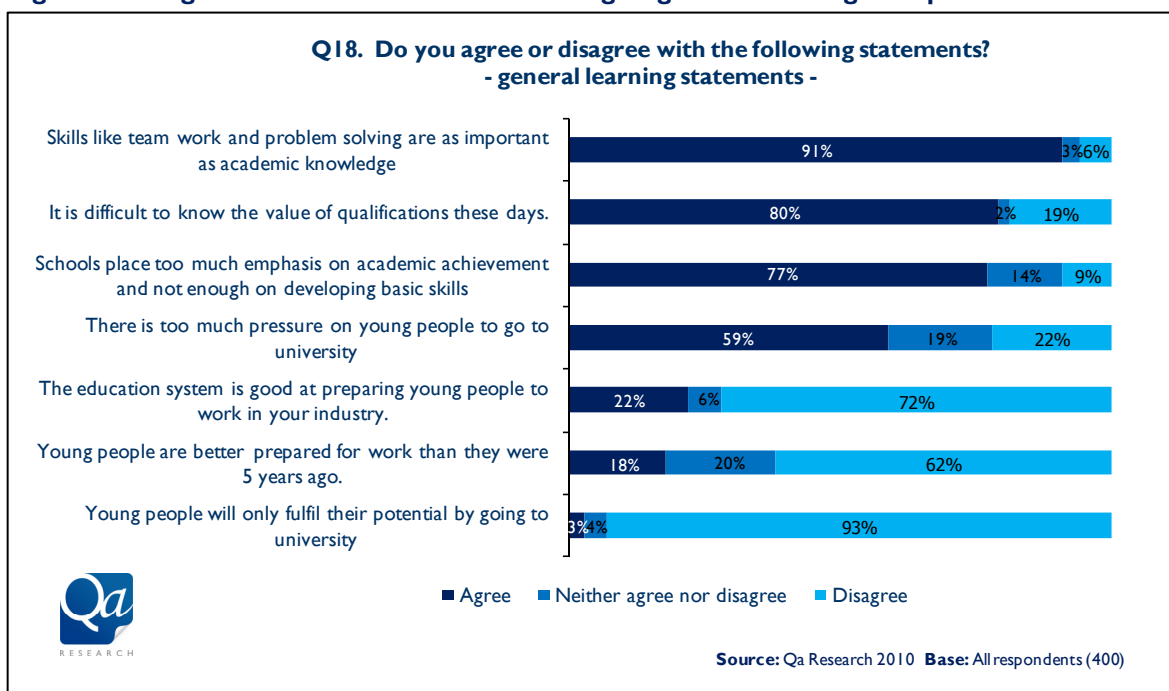
## 5.4 Attitudes Towards Qualifications

Respondents were read a list of statements relating to learning and qualifications and simply asked if they agreed or disagreed with each. This list has been split into two groups, with statements that relate to vocational learning in one and those relating to more general attitudes towards learning in the other. Analysis of each group is dealt with separately below;

### 5.4.1 General Attitudes to Learning and Qualifications

The figure below shows response to statements relating to learning and qualifications in general;

**Figure 29. Agreement with statements relating to general learning and qualifications**



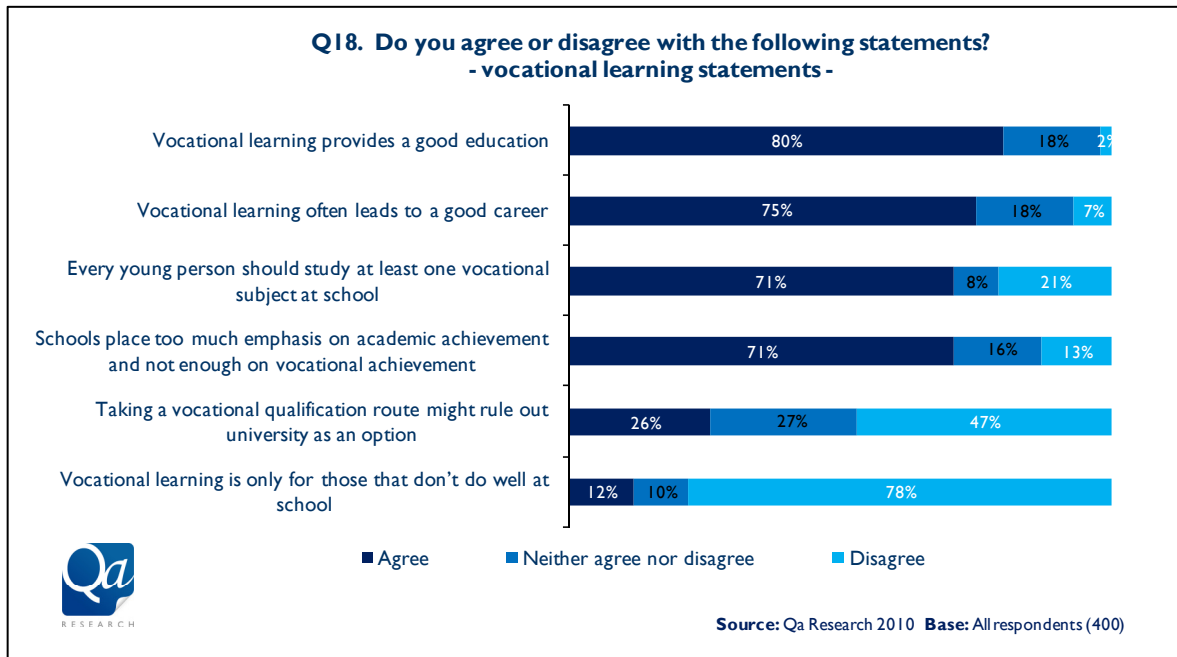
Generally, the pattern of answers to these statements suggests a strong feeling that academic qualifications are not the only important criteria for young employees, with more than nine-out-of-ten (91%) agreeing that 'skills like teamwork and problem solving are as important as academic knowledge' and more than three-quarters (77%) agreeing that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills'. Similarly, almost three-quarters (72%) of respondents disagreed that 'the education system is good at preparing young people to work in <their> industry' and the majority of respondents (62%) also disagreed that 'young people are better prepared for work than they were 5 years ago'.

More specifically, views about the value of university were mixed, with 59% agreeing that there is 'too much pressure on young people to go to university' but almost a quarter (22%) disagreeing with this. However, there was almost universal disagreement (93%) that 'young people will only fulfil their potential by going to university', clearly suggesting that respondents believe there are other ways for young people to progress in their working life.

Finally, 80% of respondents agreed that 'it is difficult to know the value of qualifications these days', although most of the remainder disagreed with this statement (19%).

The figure below shows response to statements relating to vocational learning and qualifications;

**Figure 30. Agreement with statements relating to vocational learning and qualifications**



Feelings were generally positive towards vocational learning, with the majority (80%) of respondents agreeing that 'vocational learning provides a good education' and that it 'often leads to a good career' (75%). Similarly, the majority (78%) disagreed that 'vocational learning is only for those that don't do well at school'.

Almost three-quarters (71%) agreed that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on vocational achievement' and while a similar proportion (71%) also agreed that 'every young person should study at least one vocational subject at school', it's important to note that almost a quarter (21%) disagreed with this statement.

Finally, opinion was more polarised with regard to 'taking a vocational qualification route might rule out university as an option', with 26% agreeing with this statement and 47% disagreeing; additionally around a quarter (27%) neither agreed nor disagreed, higher than for any other statement.

### Sub-group Analysis

Respondents who had seen the number of employees in their business 'increase' over the last 5 years were significantly more likely than those who had seen it 'decrease' or 'stay the same' to disagree that 'vocational learning is only for those that don't do well at school' (91%, 70% and 76% respectively) and that 'the education system is good at preparing young people for <their> industry' (85%, 74% and 63% respectively).

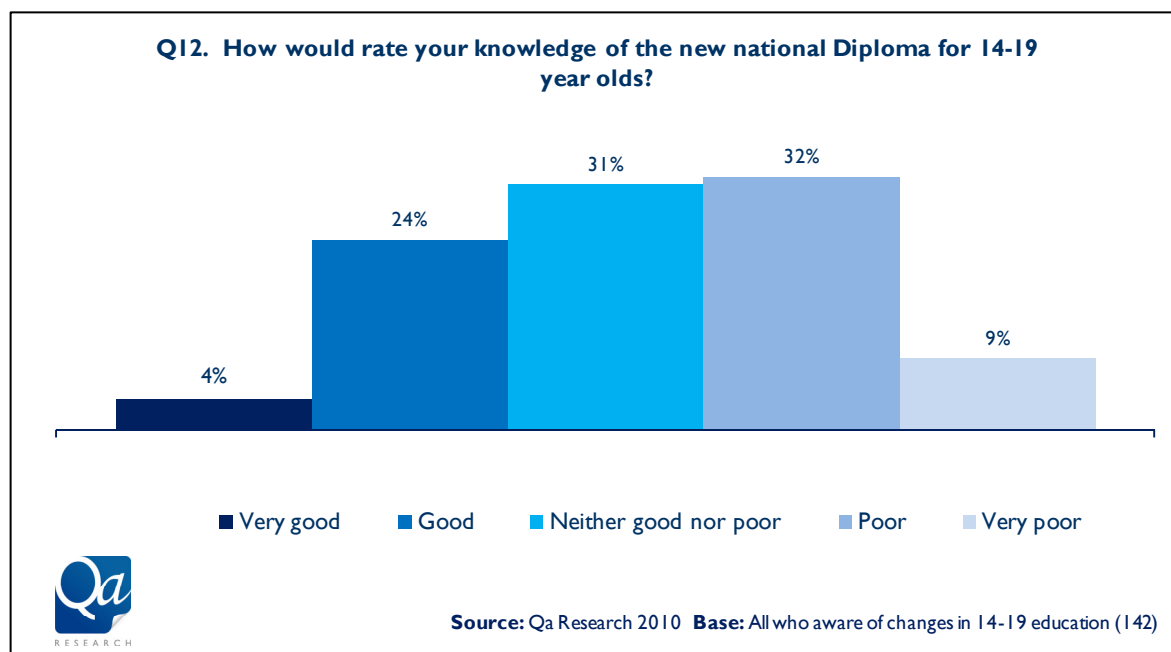
In contrast, businesses that had seen a 'decrease' in employee numbers were significantly more likely than those that had seen an 'increase' to disagree that 'vocational learning often leads to a good career' (16% vs. 4%) and that 'young people are better prepared for work than they were 5 years ago' (66% vs. 47%) and more likely than those recording an increase to disagree that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on vocational achievement' (18% vs. 4%).

Respondents from businesses that take part in any type of employer engagement activities were significantly more likely than those that don't to agree that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills' (84% vs. 67%).

## 5.4.2 Understanding of the New Diploma

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the changes in 14-19 education which had led to their introduction of the new national Diploma and almost a third (30%) indicated they were. These respondents were then asked to rate their knowledge of the new national Diploma and response is shown in the figure below;

**Figure 31. Knowledge of new national Diploma for 14-19 year olds**



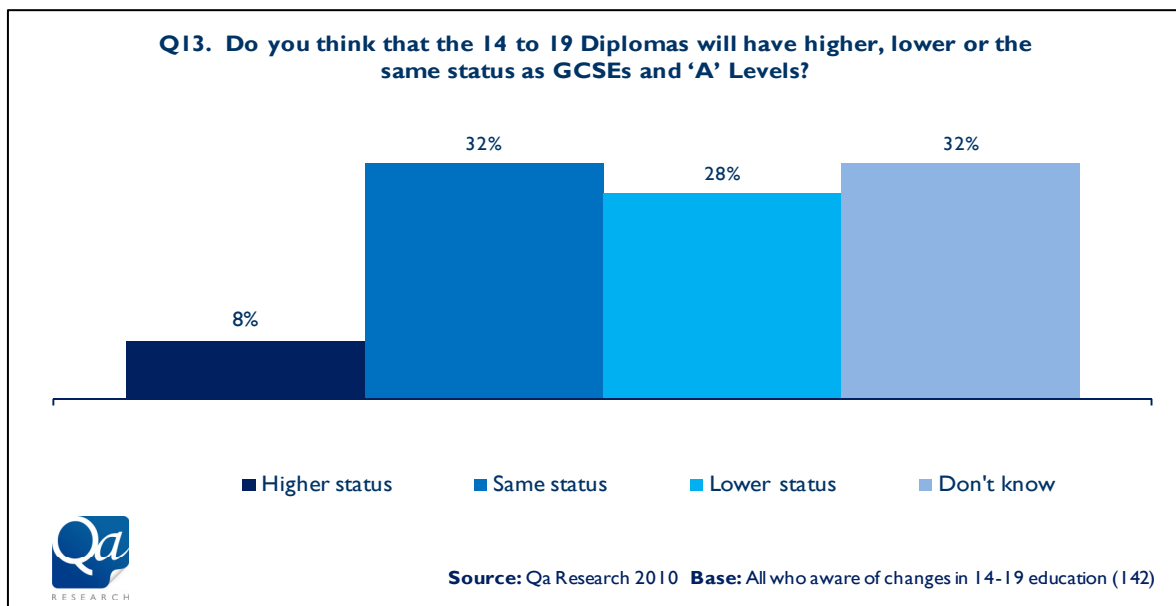
Response to this question was quite polarised, although more respondents said they had a 'poor' or 'very poor' knowledge (40%) than said they had a 'good' or 'very good' (28%) knowledge. A broadly similar proportion (31%) said their knowledge was 'neither good nor poor'.

### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

Those who were aware of the changes to 14-19 education were asked how they viewed the status of the new Diploma and response is shown below;

**Figure 32. Evaluation of 14-19 Diploma compared to GCSEs and 'A' Levels**



A third (31%) of those aware of the changes said they 'don't know' whether the 14-19 Diplomas will have higher, lower or the same status as GCSEs and 'A' Levels, although broadly similar proportions thought they had a 'lower status' (28%) or the 'same status' (32%). Only 8% thought they had a higher status.

### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

### Discussion;

Agreement with the statements outlined in Figure 28 once again highlights the importance of non-academic based skills to employers. Additionally, there is a clear suggestion that employers feel these skills are not necessarily taught in schools, with too much emphasis on attending university, somewhere that respondents almost universally believed wasn't the only route to a successful career. In line with this, the majority of employers would like to see schools place more emphasis on vocational qualifications, reflecting the fact that more respondents believed that vocational qualifications were most relevant/useful to their business than academic qualifications. Given earlier answers, it's perhaps not surprising that such a high proportion disagree that 'the education systems is good at preparing young people to work in <their> industry', something which is obviously of concern.

With low awareness and understanding of the new 14-19 Diploma it is clear that more needs to be done to communicate the status of this qualification and to emphasise how it will benefit employers.

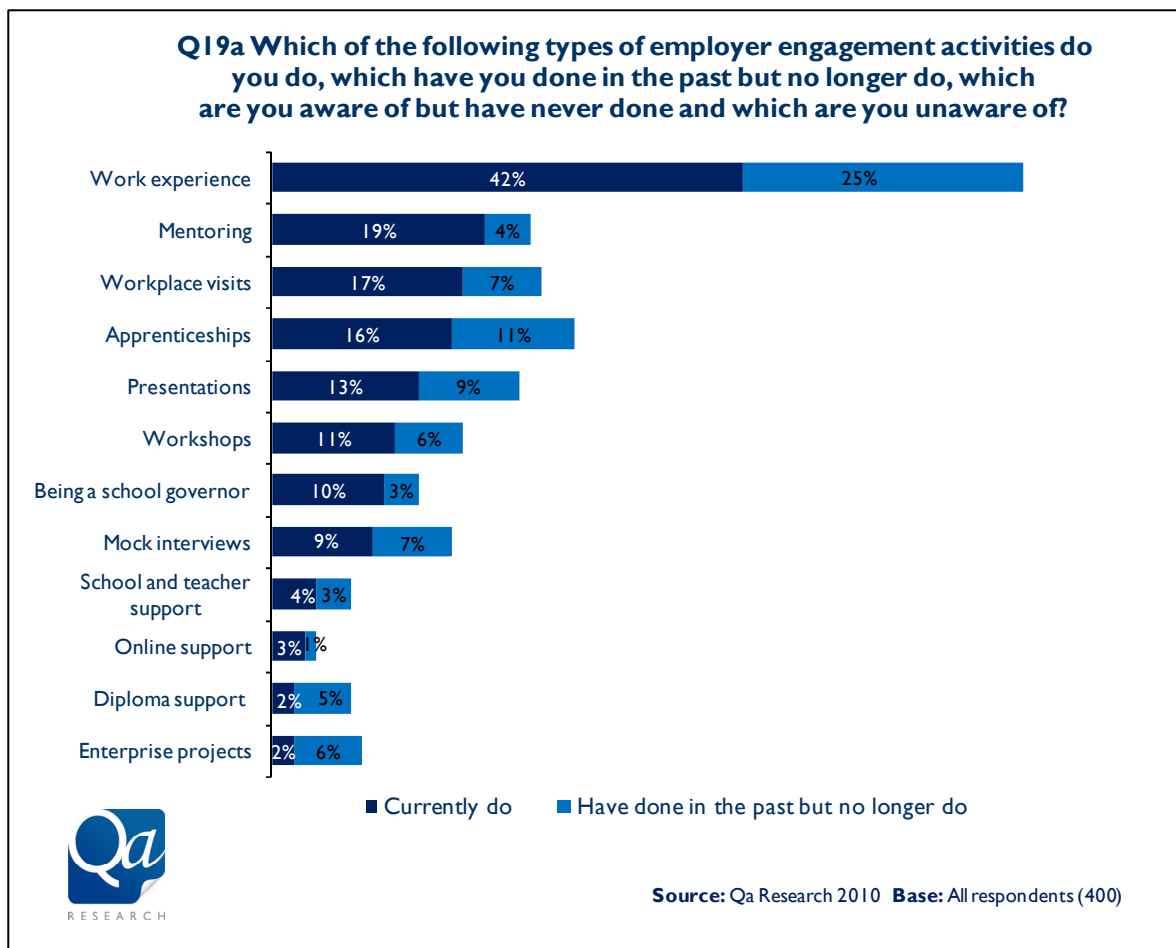
## 5.5 Employer Engagement

### 5.5.1 Types of Employer Engagement Undertaken

One-in-ten (10%) respondents said that their business had attempted to contact schools/colleges for employer engagement or work experience/apprenticeships but experienced difficulties that had prevented them from doing so. Amongst those who had experienced difficulties, the most frequently mentioned were 'little or no response from the school' (28%), 'bureaucracy' (27%), 'complicated work, so student wouldn't be able to do much' (14%) and 'too expensive' (12%).

More specifically, respondents were prompted with a list of different types of employer engagement activities and asked which they current do, which they had done in the past but no longer do, which they were aware of but never done and which they were unaware of. Figure 33 shows the proportion of respondents that either currently undertake each engagement activity, or have undertaken it the past but no longer do;

**Figure 33. Types of employer engagement activities undertaken**



In total, more than half (58%) of respondents said their business was currently involved in any of these engagement activities.

By far the most frequently mentioned activity was 'work experience' which is currently undertaken by two-fifths (42%) of respondents' businesses, with a further 25% indicating they have done this in the past, but no longer do.

Other activities were mentioned less frequently, but around a fifth of respondents said their businesses currently undertook 'mentoring' (19%), 'workplace visits' (17%), 'apprenticeships' (16%) or 'presentations' (13%).

Few respondents mentioned currently undertaking 'online support' (3%), 'diploma support' (2%) or 'enterprise projects' (2%).

Although not shown on the chart above, a large proportion of respondents said they were unaware of 'online support' (91%), 'school and teacher support' (88%), 'mock interviews' (85%) and 'mentoring' (71%).

### Sub-group Analysis

Respondents from businesses that currently undertake any employer engagement activities were significantly more likely than those that don't to say that they 'currently recruit young people' (58% vs. 38%). They were also significantly more likely to believe many of the skills outlined above were important, as summarised in the table below;

**Figure 34. Importance of skills in young people amongst those undertaking employer engagement (rated 4 or 5 out of 5)**

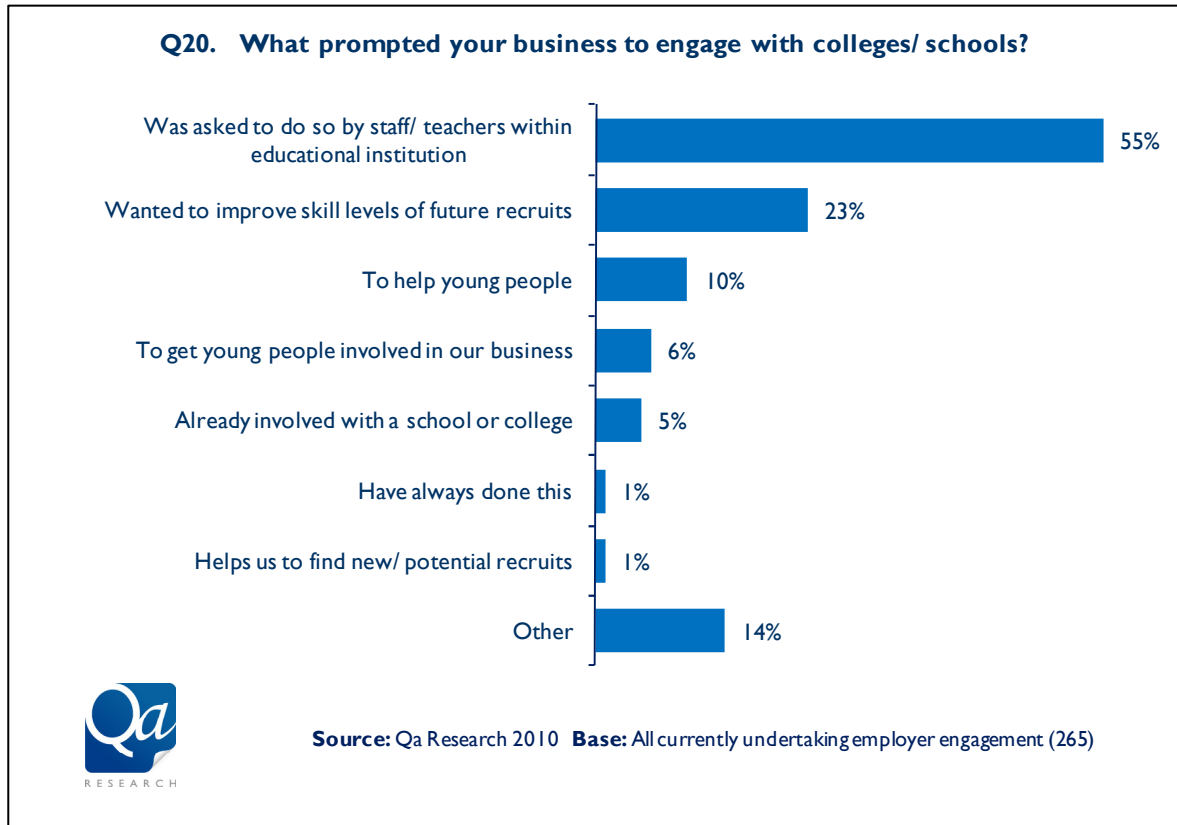
	Currently undertake any employer engagement (265)	Currently don't undertake any employer engagement (135)
Problem solving skills	81%	63%
General IT skills	64%	45%
Business awareness	80%	61%
Customer care skills	94%	83%

In addition, those undertaking employer engagement were significantly more likely than those who weren't to agree that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills' (84% vs. 67%).

### 5.5.2 Reasons for Undertaking Employer Engagement

Those respondents from businesses that currently undertake employer engagement were asked why they did so and answers are shown below;

**Figure 35. Reasons for undertaking employer engagement**



More than half (55%) of businesses undertaking employer engagement activity said they did so after being asked by ‘staff/teachers at school/college/educational institution’. A quarter (23%) of respondents said they actually ‘wanted to improve skill levels of future recruits’ and one-in-ten did so simply to ‘help young people’.

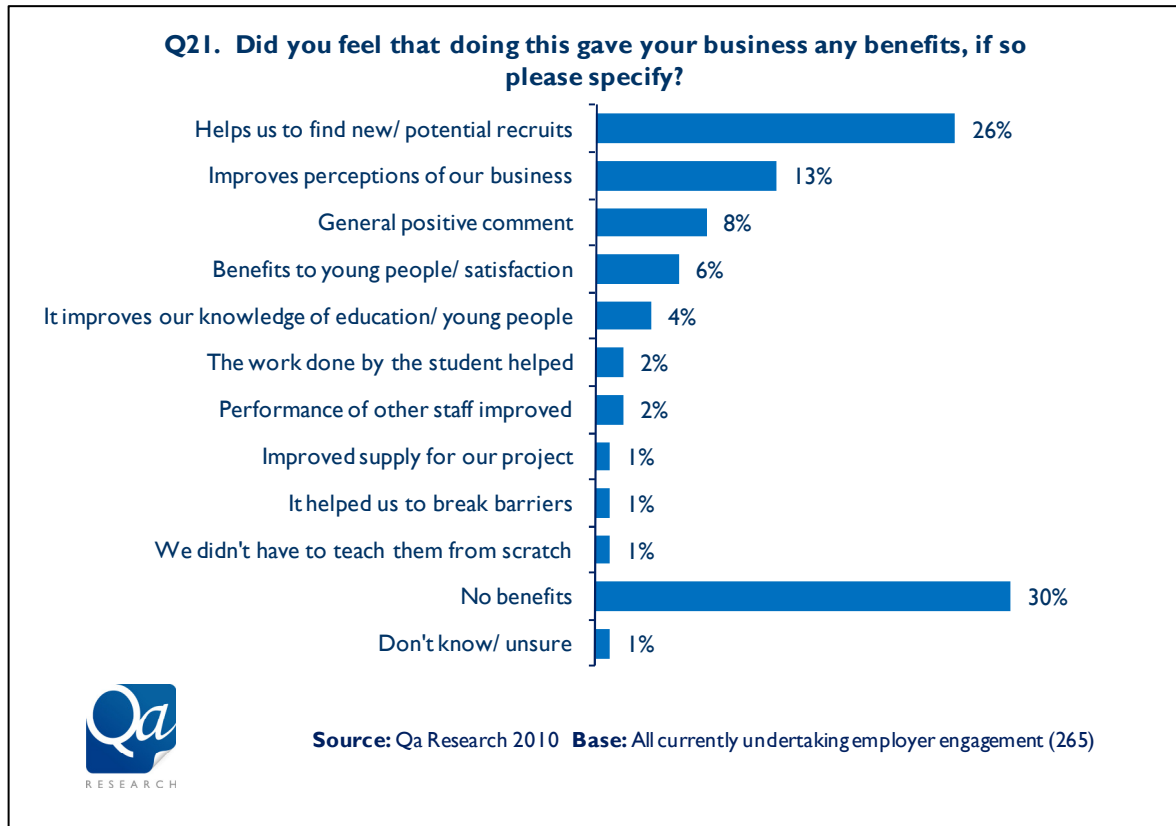
#### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

### 5.5.3 Benefits of Undertaking Employer Engagement

The figure below shows the benefits businesses currently undertaking employer engagement think this brings to their business;

**Figure 36. Benefits of undertaking employer engagement**



Interestingly, almost a third of respondents indicated that they felt there were 'no benefits' from undertaking employer engagement. However, more positively, a quarter (26%) highlighted that it 'helps to find new/potential recruits' and 13% said that it 'improves perceptions of our business'. Other comments were mixed although almost one-in-ten (8%) said something positive but general about the process and 6% identified that it 'benefits young people'.

Respondents were also asked what, if anything, prevented them from having further contact with schools and colleges and educational institutions and half (49%) indicated that there was 'nothing' stopping them. A quarter (25%) mentioned 'lack of time' and 'too much bureaucracy involved' was mentioned by 7%. Other answers were very varied although 6% did say that they simply 'lack resources' to do this.

#### Sub-group Analysis

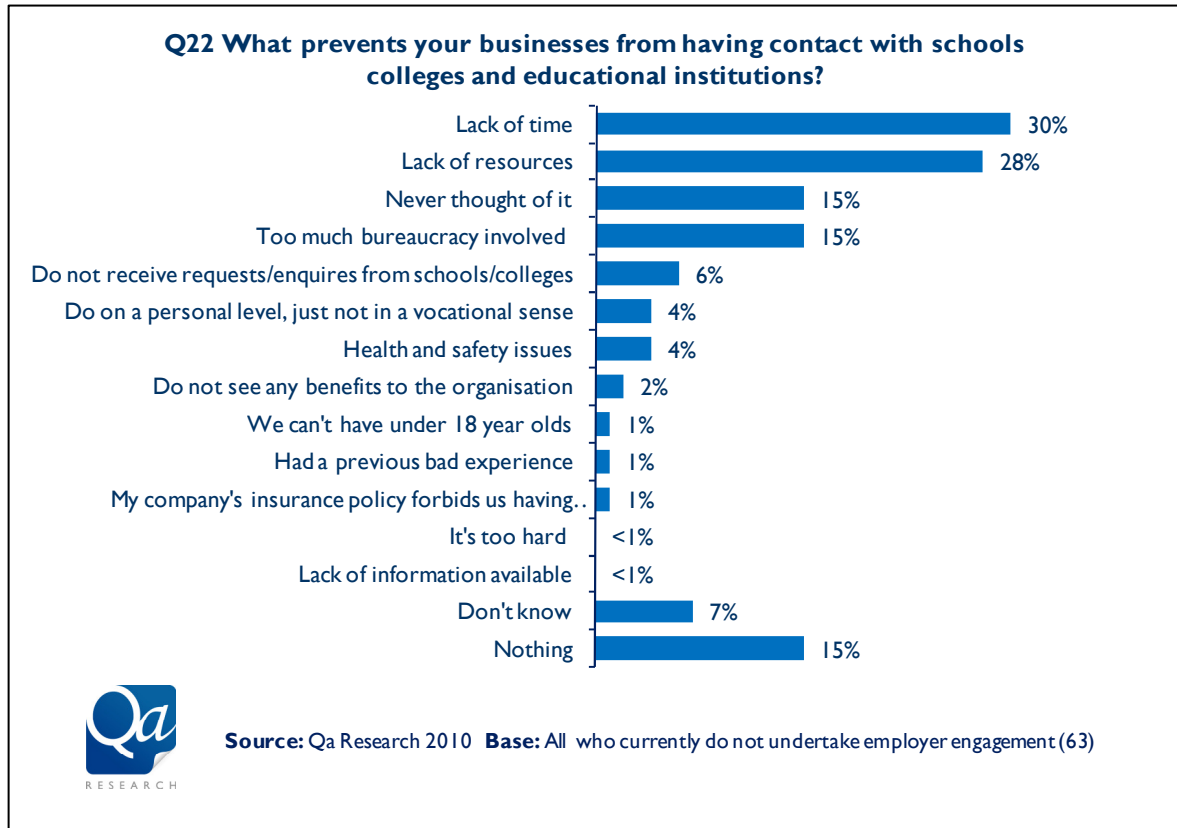
No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.



### 5.5.4 Reasons for not Undertaking Employer Engagement

Respondents who do not currently undertake employer engagement were asked why not and answers are shown below;

**Figure 37. Reasons for not undertaking employer engagement**



A 'lack of time' (30%) and a 'lack of resources' (28%) were mentioned most frequently, although a significant proportion mentioned that there was 'nothing' (15%) stopping them or that they had simply 'never thought of it' (15%). A similar proportion mentioned that there was 'too much bureaucracy' (15%).

These respondents were also asked if anything would encourage them to take part in employer engagement in future and 60% said there was 'nothing'. A handful mentioned that they would do it 'if we were larger' (5%) and a similar proportion mentioned 'money or an incentive' (5%), but other answers were very varied.

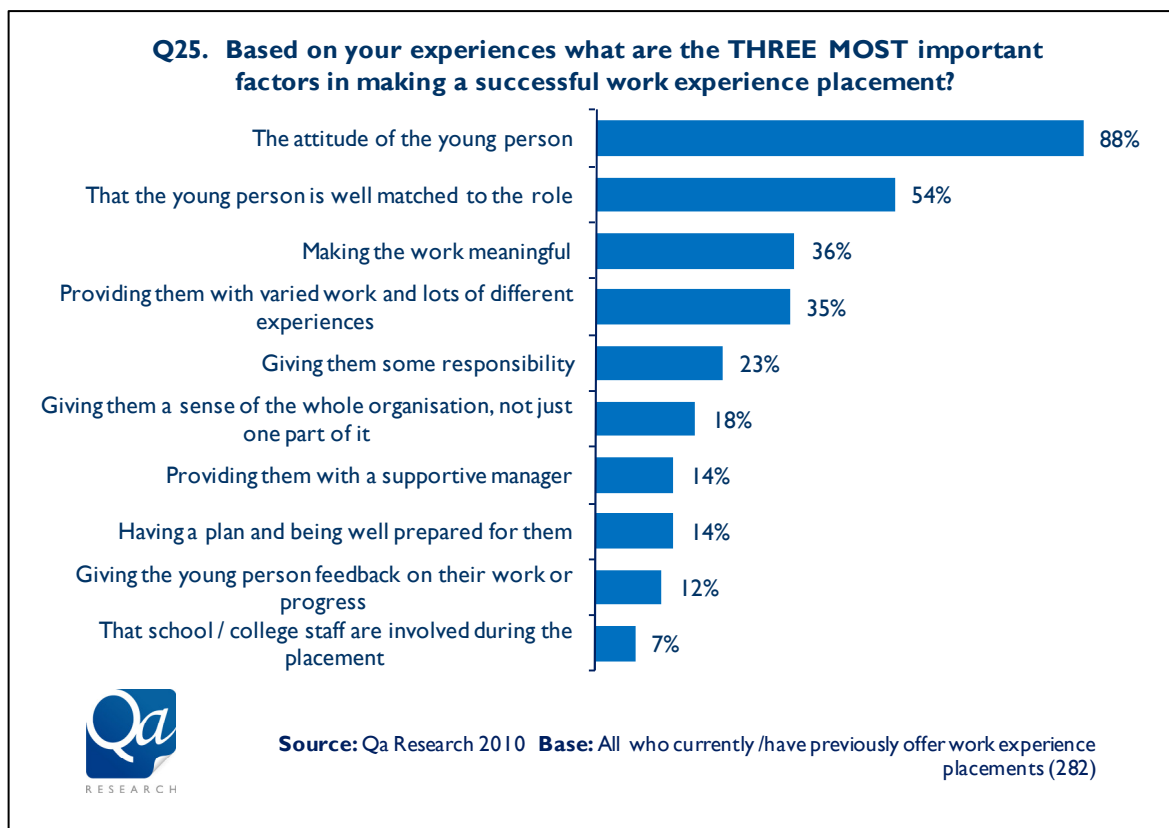
#### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

### 5.5.5 Work Experience Placements

All respondents who indicated that they currently offer work experience placements or have done in the past were asked to select the three aspects that are most important in making placements successful from a prompted list. Answers are shown below;

**Figure 38. Most important factors in making a successful work experience placement**



The figure above clearly highlights that employers believe that young people themselves are the key to work experience placements being successful, with 88% mentioning 'the attitude of the young person' as the most frequently mentioned factor. More than half (54%) indicated that it was important that 'the young person is well matched to the role' and around a third mentioned 'making the work meaningful' (36%) or 'providing them with varied work and lots of different experiences' (35%). A quarter of respondents (23%) felt that 'giving them some responsibility' was important.

At the other end of the scale, few employers felt that having the 'school/college staff involved during the placement' was important (7%).

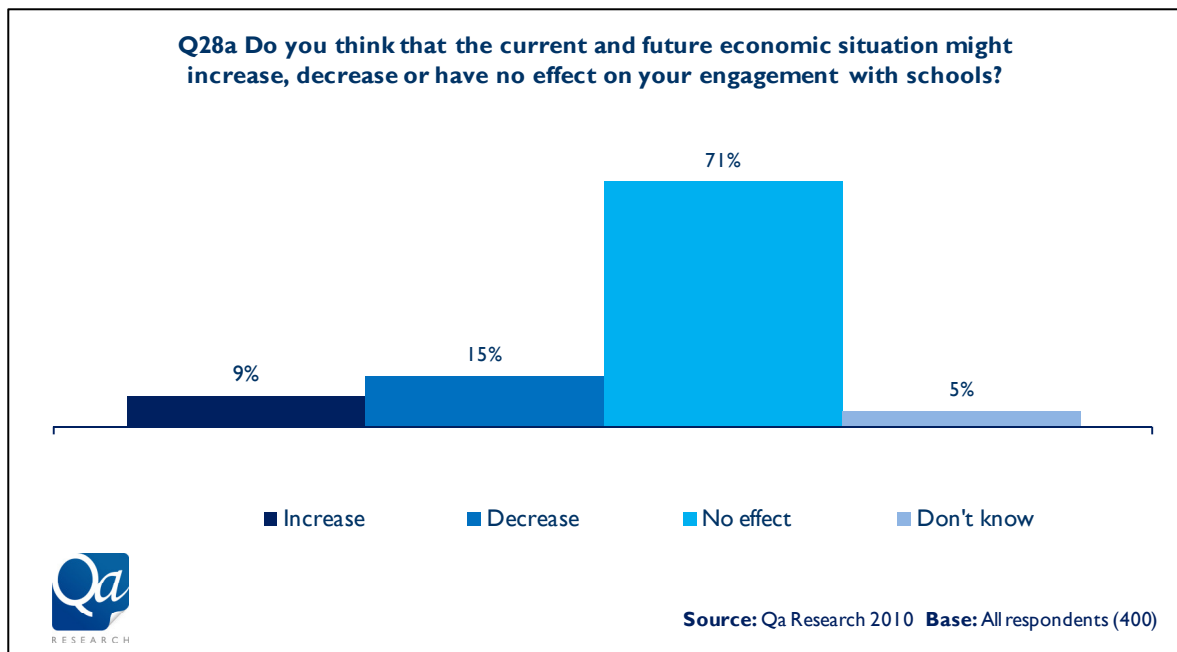
#### Sub-group Analysis

No sub-group analysis is possible due to small bases.

### 5.5.6 Impact of Current Economic Situation on Engagement with Schools

Finally, respondents were asked how the current economic situation would impact on their engagement with schools and responses are shown below;

**Figure 39. Effect of current economic situation on engagement with schools**



The majority of respondents (71%) felt the recession would have no impact on their level of engagement. Slightly more respondents felt it would 'decrease' (15%) than felt it would 'increase' (9%).

#### Sub-group Analysis

No difference was recorded between respondents that work for businesses that currently do undertake employer engagement and those that don't.

#### Discussion;

With around half of respondents currently undertaking employer engagement activities, this suggests that this is an important part of the recruitment process for many. However, many of the reasons given for undertaking this activity do not suggest a direct benefit to employers and indeed around a third believe there are no benefits to their business. That said, many employers are clearly driven by a desire to find potential new recruits and employer engagement is higher amongst those who currently employ young people, compared to those who have done so in the last 5 years but don't currently do so.

There is some suggestion in these results that employers undertaking employer engagement are doing so to replace the work of schools, with 84% agreeing that 'schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills'. Additionally, as those undertaking employer engagement place more importance on less tangible skills such as problem solving skills, business awareness and customer care, it is likely they undertake engagement to identify those potential recruits who offer these skills.

This is all the more likely given that by far the most frequently mentioned type of activity is 'work experience', something that offers employers direct experience of an individual's capabilities. When taken together, the proportion of employers offering or previously offering work experience is broadly in line with that recorded in the CBI education and skill survey (75%)<sup>11</sup>.

With lack of time and lack of resources mentioned most frequently as reasons for not undertaking employer engagement there may be value in offering support to employers who would like to be involved but feel these barriers hold them back.

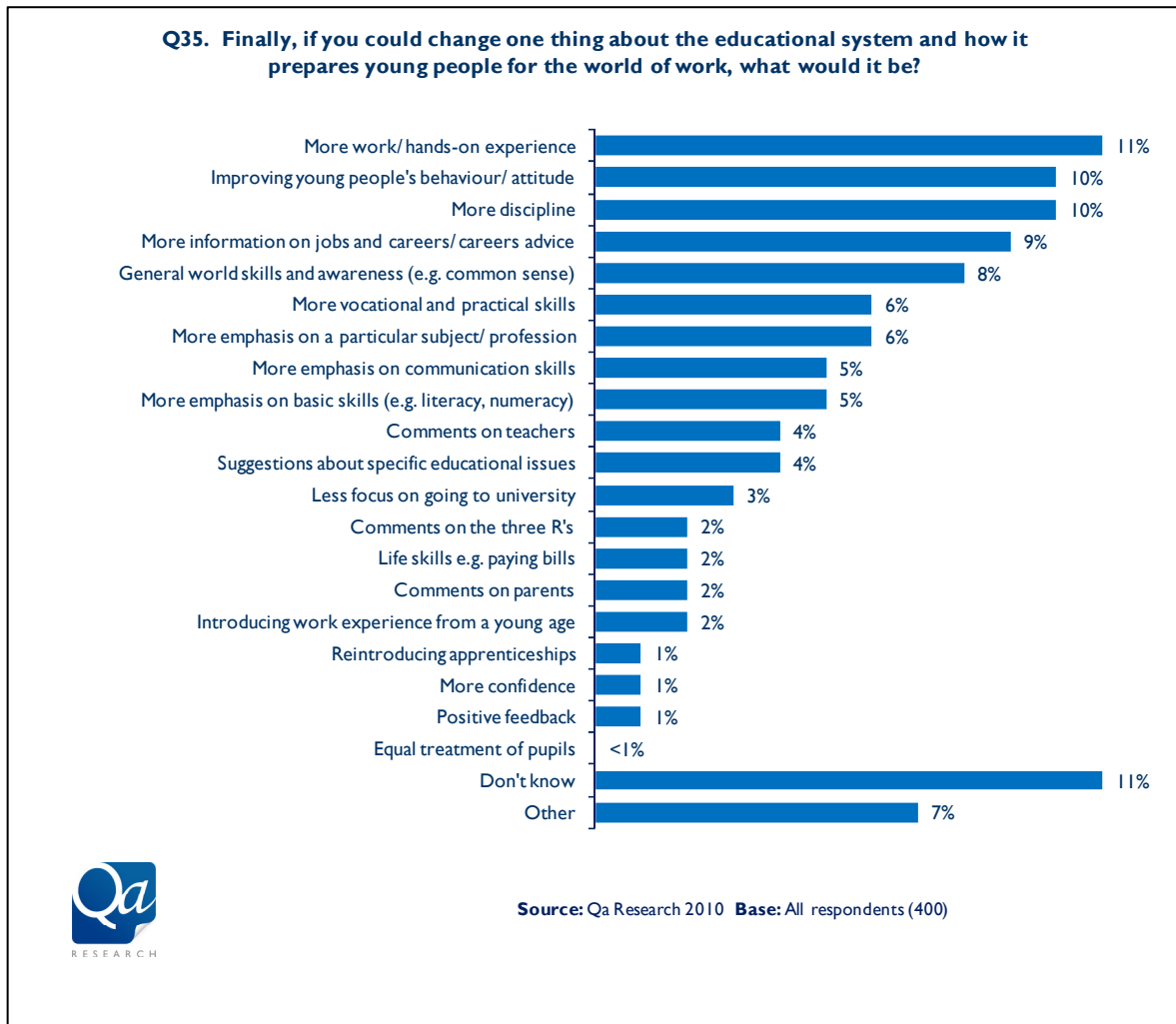
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<sup>11</sup> CBI (2008) Taking Stock: CBI Education and Skill Survey.

## 5.6 Desired Improvements in Educational System

The final question of the survey asked respondents what one thing they would change about the education system to prepare young people for the world of work and responses are shown below;

**Figure 40. Improvements to the education system to prepare young people for the world of work**



This was an entirely open question and this was reflected in the range of comments made by respondents. However, the most frequently mentioned comments related to 'more work/hands-on experience' (11%), 'improving young peoples' behaviour/attitudes' (10%) and 'more discipline' (10%).

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### **Conclusion 1: In line with employers across the country, those in the Yorkshire and Humber Region desire 'soft skills' above more core, basic skills.**

Yorkshire Forward has recognised that success in cultivating a more enterprising region will depend not only on the qualifications of young people, but also on their drive, ambition and generic skills such as creativity, networking and interaction and independent learning<sup>12</sup>. This is in line with the requirements of employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region as recorded in this research, who indicated that basic core skills such as reading, writing and numeracy are of relatively low importance, compared to less tangible 'soft skills' such as communication, time-keeping, team-working, customer care and an enterprising attitude. It is these skills that employers desire in young people and all training and education must ensure that young people enter the job market equipped in this way. This is in line with the broader national context.

### **Conclusion 2: Employers recognise that gaps exist in the skills of many young people with regard to these 'soft skills'.**

Given their importance to employers, it is concerning that ratings of the skills of newly employed young people are low for communication skills, customer care skills and team working skills and arguably, these should be the main areas of focus for educational institutions. Of less importance (but still important to more than 70% of respondents) are problem solving skills and business awareness, but in both cases less than a third rated the skills of young people in these areas highly.

### **Conclusion 3: As well as being of low importance, more basic, core skills of young people are rated relatively poorly.**

The main core skills such as numeracy, literacy skills and general IT skills were rated as relatively unimportant by employers. However, it is still concerning that ratings of these skills amongst school/college/university leavers they have employed are low. This is particularly true for IT skills, something which a number of respondents found surprising given the perceived IT literacy of this generation. Despite their low importance, efforts to further develop these skills amongst young people should not be overlooked.

### **Conclusion 4: There is some suggestion that employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region are less happy with the preparedness of young people for work than in the country as a whole.**

Employers' poor perceptions of the way the education system prepares young people for work are nothing new, with around 75% believing school leavers and graduates are 'not very well prepared' or 'unprepared' for work. That said, these findings amongst employers in the Yorkshire and Humber region suggest they believe young people are less well prepared than in the country as a whole, where the CBI reports that over 50% of employers reported that they were not satisfied with the generic employability skills of school leavers, and almost a third had the same issue with graduates<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Yorkshire Forward (2007) *The ambitions and aspirations of young people in Yorkshire and Humber*

<sup>13</sup> CBI (2006) *Employer Trends Survey*

**Conclusion 5: Generally, understanding of qualifications (both new and old) is low.**

Understanding of existing qualifications is low, although higher for academic than vocational qualifications. Respondents tend to claim they understand both or neither rather than one or the other. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that awareness of the new 14-19 Diploma is low (less than a third) and considerable effort will be required to raise awareness and understanding amongst employers.

**Conclusion 6: There is some suggestion that vocational qualifications are better than academic qualifications at providing 'soft skills'.**

Vocational qualifications are generally seen as more useful/relevant to businesses in the region than academic qualifications. Understanding of vocational qualifications is low amongst employers that prefer vocational qualifications, but they are more likely to rate the 'soft skills' of young people they recruit (presumably with vocational qualifications, although we can't be sure) as high. This suggests that vocational qualifications are seen as the best method for providing young recruits with these skills and this is supported by direct questioning to this effect. Consequently, to meet the needs of employers it will be important to ensure that all qualifications develop these skills in young people, including academic ones.

**Conclusion 7: Many employers are switched-off to employer engagement and unlikely to get involved.**

Around half of employers currently undertake employer engagement. Amongst those that don't, many state that a lack of time and/or resources prevents them from doing so. Tangible support would probably be required to get these employers involved, although the majority also indicated that 'nothing' would encourage them to get involved in employer engagement in the future.

**Conclusion 8: Employer engagement is frequently seen as a means to find and recruit new employees.**

Work experience dominates the employer engagement activity currently undertaken by employers in the region, with many businesses driven by a desire to find suitable recruits. That said, many are also involved for more altruistic reasons. Many other types of engagement are less well utilised. This is particularly true of 'online support', 'Diploma support', 'enterprise projects' and 'school and teacher support' all of which would require greater communication with employers to raise awareness and participation levels.

## 7. Appendix - Questionnaire

**Good morning/ afternoon, my name is ??? and I am calling from QA research on behalf of the Young Persons Enterprise Forum. The forum would like to speak to your business about current policies for recruiting young people, and the skills and expertise you would like from young people looking to join your company. Would it be possible to speak to someone who has an understanding of the recruitment policies and skills requirements of your company?**

**The survey should take around 10 minutes, and your answers will be used to help guide policies in the region regarding young people's skills.**

**All the answers you provide will be kept completely anonymous, and the name of your organisation will not be included in any of the findings arising from the research.**

**Q1 We would like you to think about recruitment in your organisation. Do you personally have any responsibility for ANY part of the recruitment process? (such as reviewing CVs/ applications, short-listing, interviewing or deciding which candidate to recruit)**

Yes, I often have responsibility for recruitment

Yes, I occasionally have responsibility for recruitment

No, I never have responsibility for recruitment

**Please make appointment to speak to relevant person within organisation**

**Q2 Does your company currently, or has it at any time in the past 5 years, recruited young people between 16 – 24 years old?**

Currently recruit young people

Have recruited young people at some point in the last 5 years

Do not currently recruit young people and have not done so in the past five years

**Q3 Is your company planning on recruiting young people within the next 12 months?**

Yes

No

**If “do not currently recruit .....” at Q2, please thank and close**

**Q4 Which of the following does your organisation recruit?**

16 year old individuals straight from school

17 or 18 year olds from school or college

Under 24 year olds from university

Other young people (Please Specify)

**Skills Requirements and current situation**

**There is no Q5**



**Q6b. How would you rate your understanding of current available vocational qualifications on a scale of one to five where one is no understanding and five is a complete understanding?**

- No understanding
- Low understanding
- Reasonable understanding
- High understanding
- Complete understanding

**Q6a What about your understanding of academic qualifications?**

- No understanding
- Low understanding
- Reasonable understanding
- High understanding
- Complete understanding

**Thinking about recruiting new or recent graduates aged 21 or over...**

**Q7 Which of the following are important when deciding on the suitability of a typical candidate who is a new or recent graduate aged 21 or over? Please select the top three. (please read out)**

**Ask only to those using graduates at q4**

- GCSE / Scottish Standards grades
- A Level / Scottish Highers grades
- Degree class (e.g. 2:2, 2:1)
- University attended
- Degree course followed
- Vocational qualifications such as NVQs / SVQs
- Other qualifications such as BTECs / City & Guilds
- Work placements/ internships/ work experience
- Part-time/ holiday jobs
- Community/ voluntary work
- Previous jobs/ career achievements/ career track record
- Job-based training/ training courses
- References from previous employers or teachers/ tutors
- Soft skills such as teamwork and enthusiasm

**Q8 In general, how well prepared do you think SCHOOL LEAVERS are for the world of work?**

**Ask only if uses school leavers/ college leavers at q4**

- Extremely well prepared
- Prepared
- Not very well prepared
- Unprepared
- Don't Know

**Q7a In general, how well prepared do you think GRADUATES are?**

**Ask only if uses Graduates at q4**

- Extremely well prepared
- Prepared
- Not very well prepared
- Unprepared
- Don't Know

**Q9 I am now going to read out a list of skills. For each skill please can you A) tell me how important it is to your organisation on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is not all important, and 5 is extremely important)? And B) tell me how you would rate the skills of school/ college/ university leavers you have employed, when they first start at your businesses (where 1 is extremely poor and 5 is extremely good)**

Importance

Communication skills (ability to articulate clearly, make themselves understood)

Team working skills

Problem solving skills

Literacy skills

Numeracy skills

General IT skills

Time keeping

Business awareness (knowledge of business markets and profitability drivers)

Customer care skills

Personal presentation

Enterprising attitude ("can do" attitude)

Other Please State

**Q10 You mentioned the following aspects [*import from previous question*] as being poor or extremely poor, could you provide examples of situations which highlight this?**

**Only ask to those who have rated as poor or extremely poor at Q9, ask question for each specific "poor/ extremely poor" option coded**

**Q11 Are you aware of the changes in 14-19 education which have led to the introduction of the new Diplomas?**

Yes

No

**Go to q14**

**Q12 How would rate your knowledge of the new national Diploma for 14-19 year olds?**

Very good

Good

Neither good nor poor

Poor

Very poor



**Q13 Do you think that the 14 to 19 Diplomas will have higher, lower or the same status as GCSEs and 'A' Levels?**

- Higher status
- Same status
- Lower status
- Don't know

**Q14 Would you say that vocational qualifications, or academic qualifications such as degrees, are more useful and relevant to your organisation?**

- Vocational qualifications are more useful/ relevant
- Academic qualifications are more useful/ relevant
- Both equally useful/ relevant
- Don't know

**Q15 In your view, does the jobs market contain too many, too few or the right amount of people with vocational qualifications and practical skills?**

- Too many
- Too few
- The right amount
- Don't know

**Q16 And in your view, does the jobs market contain too many, too few or the right amount of people with academic qualifications?**

- Too many
- Too few
- The right amount
- Don't know

**Q17 Based on your experience of new employees, are those with academic qualifications or those with vocational qualifications better developed in terms of the following skills and attributes?**

- Vocational qualifications are better
- No difference
- Academic qualifications are better
- Don't Know
- Self-management (e.g. time management, willingness to take responsibility)
- Team-working
- Business and customer awareness
- Problem-solving
- Communication and literacy
- Numeracy
- Basic IT skills
- Attitude and enthusiasm



**Q18 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Vocational learning is only for those that don't do well at school

Young people will only fulfill their potential by going to university

Vocational learning provides a good education

Schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on vocational achievement

Schools place too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on developing basic skills

Taking a vocational qualification route might rule out university as an option

Vocational learning often leads to a good career

There is too much pressure on young people to go to university

Every young person should study at least one vocational subject at school

Skills like team work and problem solving are as important as academic knowledge

Young people are better prepared for work than they were 5 years ago.

It is difficult to know the value of qualifications these days.

The education system is good at preparing young people to work in your industry.

**Current engagement with schools, colleges and any educational institutions**

**Q19a Which of the following types of employer engagement activities do you do, which have you done in the past but no longer do, which are you aware of but have never done and which are you unaware of? [Please tick all that apply]**

Currently do

Have done in the past, but no longer do.

Aware of but never done

Unaware of

Presentations (giving a school or class a presentation about your industry)

Mock interviews (helping young people improve their interview skills)

Workshops (hands-on demonstrations of your industry)

Mentoring (advice and support to young people)

Workplace visits (supervised tours around your workplace)

Work experience (a placement for a period of time at your workplace)

Enterprise projects (supporting student to set up small companies)

Diploma support (helping schools with curriculum advice and work related learning)

Apprenticeships (taking on apprentices who mix work and learning)

Online support (mentoring or other activities via e-mail or websites)

School & teacher support (e.g. working with teachers, joining the board of governors)

Being a school governor

None of these

***If organisations are not aware any of these go to q22***

**Q19c Are there any other employer engagement activities that you conduct?**



**Q20 What prompted your business to engage with colleges/ schools? (Do not read out)**

Wanted to improve skill levels of future recruits

Was asked to do so by staff/ teachers within educational institution

Other (please state)

**Q21 Did you feel that doing this gave your business any benefits, if so please specify?**

**Go to q23**

**Q22 What prevents your businesses from having contact with schools colleges and educational institutions? (Do not read out, code all that apply)**

Lack of information available

Lack of suitable opportunities

Concerns about having students on my premises

My company's insurance policy forbids us having underage people working on site

Too much bureaucracy involved

Unsure how to go about it

Have had negative experiences with engagement in the past

Do not receive requests/enquires from schools/colleges

Lack of time

Lack of resources

Never thought of it

Do not see any benefits to the organisation

Previous bad experience - Please record

Other (please record)

Don't know

**Go to q24**

**Q23 What do you feel prevents your businesses from having further contact with schools colleges and educational institutions? (Do not read out, code all that apply)**

Lack of information available

Lack of suitable opportunities

Concerns about having students on my premises

My company's insurance policy forbids us having underage people working on site

Too much bureaucracy involved

Unsure how to go about it

Have had negative experiences with engagement in the past

Do not receive requests/enquires from schools/colleges

Lack of time

Lack of resources

Never thought of it

Do not see any benefits to the organisation

Previous bad experience dealing with schools- Please record

Other (please record)

Don't know

Nothing

**Got to q25**



**Q24 What would encourage your organisation to take part in these activities in the future?**

**Go to q26**

**Q25 Based on your experiences what are the THREE MOST important factors in making a successful work experience placement? (please read out code all that apply) Ask only to those having done a work placement at q19 if not done work experience go to q26**

The attitude of the young person

Having a plan and being well prepared for them

Giving them some responsibility

Providing them with varied work and lots of different experiences

Giving them a sense of the whole organisation, not just one part of it

Providing them with a supportive manager

Giving the young person feedback on their work or progress

Making the work meaningful

That the young person is well matched to the role

That school / college staff are involved during the placement

**Q26 In general, has your business ever attempted to contact schools/ colleges for the purposes of engagement with students of becoming involved in work placements/ apprenticeships, but experienced difficulties that has prevented you from doing so?**

**Ask all**

Yes

**Continue**

No

**Go to q28**

**Q27 What sort of difficulties did you face?**

**Q28 Do you think that the current and future economic situation might increase, decrease or have no effect on your engagement with schools?**

Increase

Decrease

No effect

Don't know

**Q28b Do you think it will increase, decrease or have no effect on your recruitment of young people?**

Increase

Decrease

No effect

Don't know

**Demographics**

**Q29 We have [import from database] as your businesses current activity, is this correct?**

Yes

**Continue**

No – How would you describe your current business activities.

**Q30 Which, if any, of the following sectors do you work in/ does the company or organisation that you work for operate in?**

Private sector firm or company (e.g. limited companies and PLCs)

Nationalised industry or public corporation (e.g. post office, BBC)

Other public sector employer (e.g. central government, civil service, LEA, NHS, police, armed forces)

Small business (self employed)

Charity/ voluntary sector (e.g. charitable companies, churches, trade unions)

Other (please record)

**Q31 What is your position at work?**

Owner/ Proprietor

Partner

Chairman

Chief Executive

Managing Director

Non Executive Director

Other board level manager/ director

Other senior manager or director below board level

Middle manager

Other (please state)

**Q32 How many people does your organisation currently employ?**

1

2-4

5-9

10-49

50-99

50-249

250+

**Q33 Over the previous 5 years has the number of employees within your business increased, decreased or stayed the same? What about over the next five years?**

Previous five Years

Next five years

Increased

Decreased

Stayed the same

**Q34 Would you be interested in taking part in further research to explore in more detail some of the issues we have discussed? This would involve us taking some contact details from you and someone from our company may get in touch in the near future?**

Yes – Please ensure contact details are correct

No

**Q35 Finally, if you could change one thing about the educational system and how it prepares young people for the world of work, what would it be?**



RESEARCH