North West Business Leadership Team

In partnership with

Skills England

The North West Star



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Foreword

As Chair of the North West Business Leadership Team, I've had the privilege of hearing directly from employers across our region about the opportunities and challenges they face in building the workforce of the future.

One message comes through consistently: businesses are looking for talented people from all backgrounds, but many are finding it harder to connect with emerging talent and identify those with the right skills. Skills that will help both individuals and businesses to succeed in a rapidly changing world of work.

At the same time, the North West is facing significant challenges. Not least, the rising numbers of young people not in education, employment or training, changing expectations around work readiness, and the growing impact of technology and artificial intelligence.

That's why NWBLT has developed the **North West Star**. The framework sets out the behaviours, attributes and capabilities that employers tell us matter most for entry-level talent today – be they college leavers, university graduates or those returning to work. It is intended to provide a shared language for employers, educators and skills providers, helping us better prepare people for work and unlock talent from every part of our region.

The North West Star is about identifying the qualities that enable people to contribute, grow and thrive throughout their careers. By working together around a common understanding of what good looks like, we can help more people access opportunity while supporting the long-term success of our businesses and economy.

Chris Woodroofe,
Chair, NWBLT

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Developing the North West Star

This paper articulates the 'North West Star': the attributes and skills that support individuals to thrive in a changing labour market, contribute positively to teams and continue developing as roles evolve through technology, artificial intelligence and changing employer needs.

We have summarised the key themes emerging from workshop discussions with NWBLT Team Members on their views on what businesses need from entry-level talent. We explored how high-potential candidates stand out, together with how artificial intelligence is changing the skills landscape, and what this means for recruitment practice and those seeking to enter the jobs market.

Why the North West Star matters

The labour market is changing quickly. Employers are placing increasing emphasis on human, transferable and adaptive skills alongside technical capability. Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping tasks, especially routine administration, basic drafting, data handling and research, which means that entry-level candidates increasingly need to demonstrate judgement, curiosity, communication and the ability to learn rather than simply task-based competence.

This is a national issue which will take partnership working to solve. NWBLT has been working with Skills England to align and strengthen each other's work on supporting employers and entry level candidates to match skills to opportunities.

The North West Star provides a common language for what good looks like at entry level. It is not designed to create a narrow or exclusive definition of talent. Instead, it recognises that entry-level talent includes school and college leavers, graduates, postgraduates, apprentices, career changers, veterans and people returning to work. The model is intended to help employers recruit and develop talent more clearly and fairly, and to help skills providers prepare learners for the realities of modern work.

North West Star: the ideal candidate

The North West Star is a candidate who may not arrive with every technical skill, but they demonstrate the behaviours, attitudes and foundations that allow them to succeed, learn and contribute.



North West Star

Purpose and professionalism: Takes pride in their work, understands its impact on others, and approaches tasks with care and integrity.

Reliability and accountability: Delivers on commitments, manages time effectively, and takes responsibility for outcomes.

Communication and interpersonal skills: Demonstrates strong oracy skills, communicates clearly online and offline, listens actively, and works respectfully with others.

Digital and AI fluency: Demonstrates confidence with new digital tools, understands the opportunities and limitations of AI, and applies appropriate human judgement and quality checking.

Curiosity and resilience: Seeks feedback, demonstrates a strong desire to learn and develop, acquires new skills and responds positively to challenge and change.

Emotional intelligence and self-awareness: Understands their own impact, shows humility, values different perspectives and builds positive working relationships.

Initiative and problem solving: Identifies what needs to be done, acts on their initiative and does not always wait to be told. Sees the bigger picture and applies common sense to tasks and challenges.

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What has changed because of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence is not affecting every role in the same way. Some roles will see limited immediate change, while others are already being reshaped. However, the direction of travel is clear: candidates will increasingly need to work alongside AI, understand its strengths and limitations, and use it responsibly.

Employers and educators should avoid assuming that technical familiarity alone equals work readiness. AI literacy should sit alongside critical thinking, ethical judgement, communication and adaptability to ensure responsible use of digital tools.



Shared priorities for employers and skills providers

The North West Star will only be meaningful if employers and skills providers use it together.

Employers need to describe their expectations clearly and create opportunities for people to develop.

Skills providers need to prepare learners for real workplace behaviours and help them evidence their potential.

Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive talent pipeline for the region.

What educators should do

- **Embed employability across the curriculum:** build communication, teamwork, resilience, accountability and critical thinking, alongside AI, into learning rather than treating them as optional extras.
- **Support learners to evidence their attributes:** help them describe examples of curiosity, initiative, problem solving and accountability in applications and interviews.
- **Create safe opportunities to fail and learn:** use feedback-rich activities that help learners practise resilience, self-awareness and constructive response to critique.

What employers should do

- **Write job descriptions from the candidate's perspective:** explain what the role involves day to day, avoid jargon and make expectations clear.
- **Offer more workplace exposure:** provide placements, tasters, shadowing, internships and project-based experiences so candidates understand workplace expectations.
- **Support early-career development deliberately:** provide feedback, mentoring and structured opportunities to build confidence, resilience and workplace judgement.

What we should do together

- Use a shared language for entry-level skills, behaviours and attributes.
- Co-design placements, projects and assessment tasks that reflect real workplace expectations.
- Support young people and career changers to understand workplace culture, not just job tasks.

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A challenge for employers

If communication, curiosity, adaptability and judgement are the attributes that matter most, do your job descriptions, application forms and interview questions actively assess them?

Conclusion

The North West Star is not a perfect candidate who can do everything on day one. Instead, it describes people who have the foundations to grow: purposeful, reliable, curious, communicative, resilient, self-aware and able to apply these attributes to use new technology effectively.

For employers, the challenge is to recruit and develop for these attributes more intentionally.

For skills providers, the challenge is to help learners practise, understand and evidence them.

We therefore welcome the forthcoming employability skills framework from Skills England. By creating a common understanding of the attributes that underpin success, we can widen access to talent, improve workforce readiness and progression, and strengthen the North West economy.

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