

# Descriptions of Skills

Employers look for a number of things when recruiting a member of staff. These can include specific academic qualifications, relevant knowledge, and possibly previous work experience. In addition, employers almost always have a list of **skills and personal qualities** they believe to be important for the job.

Employers then look for 'evidence' of these skills during the application and interview process. They try to find out about the skills a candidate has and how readily transferable those skills might be into the workplace. It is **vitaly important**, therefore, that you understand the skills you possess and where you might have used them already, be it in your studies, in any work experience and in your life generally.

This Information Sheet provides descriptions of the skills employers often look for to help you to:

- understand what employers mean when they refer to particular skills;
- reflect on the extent to which you think you possess them;
- identify examples of using these skills in your various experiences;
- and recognise areas where you need to develop your abilities further.

Studying at the University of Sheffield is helping you to develop many talents, including the attributes of **'The Sheffield Graduate'**, a number of important characteristics that the University aims to foster among all its students. As many of these relate directly to the skills required by employers, many of 'The Sheffield Graduate' attributes are included in the skills descriptions below.

## ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

- Ability to identify key goals and constraints
- Ability to understand information quickly and accurately
- Logical and objective approach to analysing situations
- Appreciation of all the variables affecting an issue
- Ability to evaluate and choose workable solutions to problems
- Willingness to reach decisions and make recommendations based on available information
- Appreciation of the effect and implications of decisions

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'A critical, analytical and creative thinker', 'An entrepreneurial problem solver' and 'Sees the big picture and understands the importance of context'.*

## COMMUNICATION

- Ability to communicate clearly and succinctly, both orally and in writing
- Ability to identify the most effective communication medium for a given situation
- Willingness to question and listen to others to aid own Understanding, and check that of others
- Ability to convey complex information at the right level so it is understood by others
- Applying different styles of communication when appropriate, e.g. negotiating, persuading, influencing

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An accomplished communicator'.*

## ORGANISATION AND TIME MANAGEMENT

- Willingness to take responsibility for work or a project
- Capacity to set objectives and plan activities and resources to achieve a goal
- Ability to anticipate difficulties
- Ability to manage time effectively to prioritise activities and meet deadlines

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An efficient planner and time manager'.*



## **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

- Ability to form relationships at all levels and motivate and support other team members
- Equally comfortable as leader of a group delegating tasks as well as being part of a team under the leadership of another
- Willingness to ask others for advice or help when solving a problem
- Ability to work fairly and productively alongside others, keeping others informed of progress or developments
- Positive about enhancing co-operation amongst colleagues
- Appreciation of how compromise can represent the best route to a result

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'A flexible team worker', and 'Professional and adaptable'.*

## **INFORMATION LITERACY / DIGITAL LITERACY**

- Ability to recognise when information is required, and locate, evaluate, and present appropriate information
- Ability to use a range of IT packages competently
- Ability to select and apply appropriate packages for a given task
- Capacity and willingness to learn new packages and applications
- Familiarity with a range of social media
- Confidence when using new technology
- Ability to identify how IT can be applied to improve efficiency and solve problems

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'Information literate', 'A skilled and ethical researcher', 'Skilled in the use of IT' and 'Knowledgeable in their subject area'.*

## **INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS / EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

- An interest in people and what is important to them
- Awareness and tolerance of the diverse needs, feelings and views of others
- Respectful and courteous approach to others
- Co-operative and collaborative approach
- Willingness to support, help and share information with others
- Appreciation of, and respect for, personal and cultural differences
- Respect for the alternative views of others

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An active citizen who respects diversity', 'Experienced in working with others outside the University', and 'Culturally agile and able to work in multinational settings'.*

## **FLEXIBILITY, OPENNESS TO CHANGE**

- Ability to generate ideas or solutions
- Willingness to adapt
- Willingness to challenge the status quo when appropriate, and participate in, or drive change
- Ability to identify links between previously unconnected situations or problems
- An openness to others' ideas

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'A critical, analytical and creative thinker' and 'Professional and adaptable'.*

## **BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL AWARENESS AND PROFESSIONALISM**

- Awareness of key market forces which influence the priorities of organisations
- Awareness of the importance of competition and other market forces in driving business decisions
- Understanding of the need for high quality customer service and innovative approaches
- Awareness of how economic and political issues can affect organisations and their products or services
- Recognition of the importance of a professional and responsible approach to own role within an organisation
- Understands own role within teams and how it contributes to a team's performance

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An entrepreneurial problem solver', 'Professional and adaptable' and 'Experienced in working with others outside the University'.*

## **SELF-DIRECTION**

- Willingness to take responsibility for tasks and outputs without supervision or prompting
- Having a planned, organised and structured approach to tasks, setting one's own goals
- Having a conscientious approach to important details
- Ability to remain focused on tasks
- Ability to adapt plans, priorities, or views in light of new or changed information
- Comfortable switching between tasks or problems when appropriate
- Ability to evaluate own performance

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An independent learner' and 'Well rounded, reflective, self-aware and self-motivated'.*

## **CULTURAL / GLOBAL AWARENESS**

- Appreciation of, and respect for, personal and cultural differences
- Can communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds and countries
- Appreciation of varied perspectives from different cultures and parts of the world
- Understands how global issues may affect society and people's lives
- Willingness to play an active role in society at various levels - local, national and international

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'An active citizen who respects diversity' and 'Culturally agile and able to work in multinational settings'.*

## **CONFIDENCE / ASSERTIVENESS**

- Willingness to express needs, views and feelings clearly, confidently and courteously
- Appreciation of the value of one's own abilities and role, and is not overawed by seniors
- Willingness to put forward and promote an unpopular view when appropriate
- Confidence to take calculated risks
- Willingness to negotiate and a desire for a 'win-win' conclusion which benefits all parties
- Appreciation of how compromise can represent the best route to a result
- Ability to sell ideas to others, gaining their trust and support

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'Competent in applying their skills and knowledge'. 'Professional and adaptable' and 'An accomplished communicator'.*

## **DRIVE AND DETERMINATION / RESILIENCE**

- Motivation to achieve and deliver on commitments
- Energetic and enthusiastic approach to work/tasks
- Desire to continuously learn and develop
- Perseverance in the face of obstacles
- Resilience to reasonable demands and pressures

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'Well rounded, reflective, self-aware and self-motivated'.*

## **NUMERACY**

- Ability to interpret statistics and numerical data
- Ability to make decisions based on numerical or financial information
- Can make calculations using mental arithmetic and/or a calculator
- Ability to solve 'standard' numerical problems
- Familiarity with the ways in which numerical information is gathered and is presented

*The Sheffield Graduate attributes include: 'Information literate'.*

## **HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS**

In order to demonstrate to employers that you have the skills they require, you need to reflect on your experiences and identify examples of using these skills, which you can then use in applications and at interviews. The grid on the next page will help you do this. Write down a few words that describe your examples under the different headings for the different skills (see the examples in italics). If possible aim for 2 scenarios for each skill. Use examples from all areas of your life to show that you have lots to offer. This exercise will also indicate if there are any gaps in your skill set so you can work on developing that skill.

You can then write up detailed descriptions of your different examples to answer employers' questions such as: 'Tell us about a time you have demonstrated team working skills, what did you do and what was the outcome?' (in 200 words). To create these descriptions, use the STAR structure – Situation, Task, Action, Result. Our information sheet 'Example Application Form Answers' also helps produce convincing responses to employers' questions [www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/flipbooks/exampleappformanswers](http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/flipbooks/exampleappformanswers).

Skill	Degree	Work Experience	Activities / Societies / Sports	Voluntary Work	Other
Analytical problem Solving					
Communication (written)	10,000 word Dissertation		Minutes of meetings – Secretary of the History Society		
Communication (verbal)					
Organisation & Time management					
Work with others/ Team working		At Tesco on a busy shift		St John's Ambulance at Folk Festival	
Information/Digital Literacy					
Interpersonal					
Flexibility/ Openness to change					
Commercial Awareness					
Self-direction					
Cultural/ Global Awareness					
Leadership					
Confidence/ Assertiveness					
Drive & Determination					
Resilience					
Numeracy & Financial					

There are lots of ways the Careers Service can help you to identify, develop and promote your talents. See 'Develop your skills' at [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/advice](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/advice) for more details. Meanwhile the 'Experience US' page at [shef.ac.uk/experience](http://shef.ac.uk/experience) provides links to lots of extra-curricular opportunities which can add to your skills and experience while studying at Sheffield.