

THE SKILLS YOU NEED GUIDE TO JOBS & CAREERS

# GETTING A JOB



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## Skills You Need

**This is one of a series of eBooks by Skills You Need available for sale at:**

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# Introduction

Getting qualifications, even a degree, is unfortunately not an automatic passport to a lifetime of gainful employment. It is a very good start, because it demonstrates that you have a certain amount of knowledge and an ability to work. However, finding a job can still be a huge challenge.

New graduates or school leavers in particular often find it hard to get their first position because they are unlikely to have experience of the type of job for which they are applying. They therefore struggle to demonstrate that they would be able to do the job.

Even once you have a job, keeping it for life is not often an option—and most of us would not want to do so. Most people will hold jobs with a variety of employers and move across different employment sectors through their working life. Statistics from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the average number of jobs per lifetime is now more than 12. In the longer term, it is estimated that artificial intelligence and automation will result in large numbers of jobs disappearing—but new and different jobs being created that will require new skills.

**Now more than ever, we must all be flexible in our working patterns.**

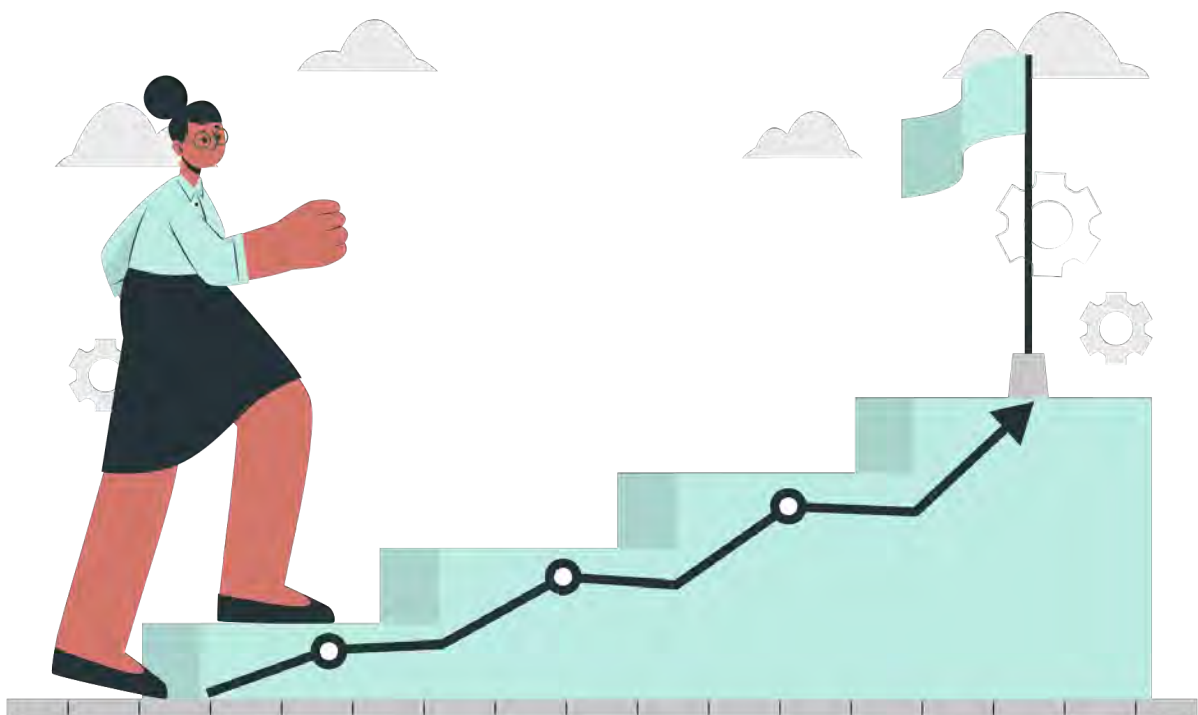
We should be prepared to change jobs and/or sectors if we believe there are better opportunities elsewhere, and we should also be prepared to develop new skills when necessary to meet the requirements of the job market.

This means that all of us need to be prepared to develop transferable skills, skills that we can use in more than one job, and to become experts in marketing ourselves for the job market.

The first ebook in this series, *Career Management*, described the skills needed to navigate a career of this nature, with multiple employers and jobs. This book is designed to build on that, and help people to understand how to develop the practical skills needed to get each new job. In particular, it will help you learn how to present yourself effectively to potential employers.

It starts with a discussion of the ‘skills gap’—the gap between the skills available in potential employees, and the skills required by employers—and moves on to explain the concept of transferable skills. It then provides practical advice about presenting yourself well in an application for a job, and in person, remotely, or on the telephone at interview.

Much of the advice is chiefly aimed at those looking for their first job. However, there is likely to be useful advice for anyone starting a job hunt, particularly if you have been out of the job market for a while, or if you plan to change sectors or roles.



# 1

## Chapter 1. The Skills Gap

**The phrase ‘skills gap’ is one that is often used—some might say over-used—in the news media.**

But what does the phrase really mean? And is it as important as the news reports would have you believe?

This chapter takes a look at some of the evidence and suggests ways in which you can develop your core skills to avoid falling foul of the ‘skills gap’.



## What is the Skills Gap?

**The ‘skills gap’ is the phrase used to describe the difference between the skills that employers want, as shown by their job advertisements, and those that are available from workers looking for a job.**

In the US at the end of October 2020, there were 6.7 million jobs advertised, and 10.7 million people looking for a job: between one and two for every job advertised.

However, employers still complain that they cannot fill jobs with people with the right skills. In a survey from 2019, the accountancy and consulting firm PwC found that 74% of CEOs were concerned about a lack of key skills.

**This is the skills gap.**



## The Nature of the Skills Gap

What is really interesting about the conversation around the skills gap is that there is no real agreement about what skills are unavailable.

For example:

- An OECD report suggests that the UK now has more graduates than non-graduates in the job market. However, the same report notes that high levels of literacy are more likely in Finland, Sweden and Japan. **In other words, the higher levels of qualification are not matched with higher levels of basic skills like numeracy and literacy.**
- **IT skills are often cited as a shortage area.** A recent report from Harvey Nash suggested that almost two thirds of chief information officers responding to a survey were concerned that lack of skills in IT would hold back their companies. **However, the key shortages were in project management and change management, areas not traditionally considered 'IT' skills.**

Given the lack of agreement on precisely which skills are in short supply, it is not surprising to find that there is also no consensus about why there is a skills gap. However, there are plenty of theories about it, and also about how to improve matters. Some commentators have even gone so far as to suggest that it is not so much a skills gap as a problem with employers' expectations.

One theory, put forward by a management academic called Peter Capelli at the Wharton School, is that employers no longer provide training for their staff.

For much of the last century, Capelli noted, companies hired graduates and then trained them to do the job. But with changes in the job and careers market, including the death of 'a job for life', has come a reluctance to invest in the workforce. Companies fear that they will provide training only for staff to leave and join their competitors as soon as they become 'useful'.

This is confirmed by accounting firm PwC. Its CEO survey from 2019 found that three-quarters of CEOs were concerned about the availability of key skills, but only 18% had made any significant progress in establishing an 'upskilling' programme for employees in the last year.

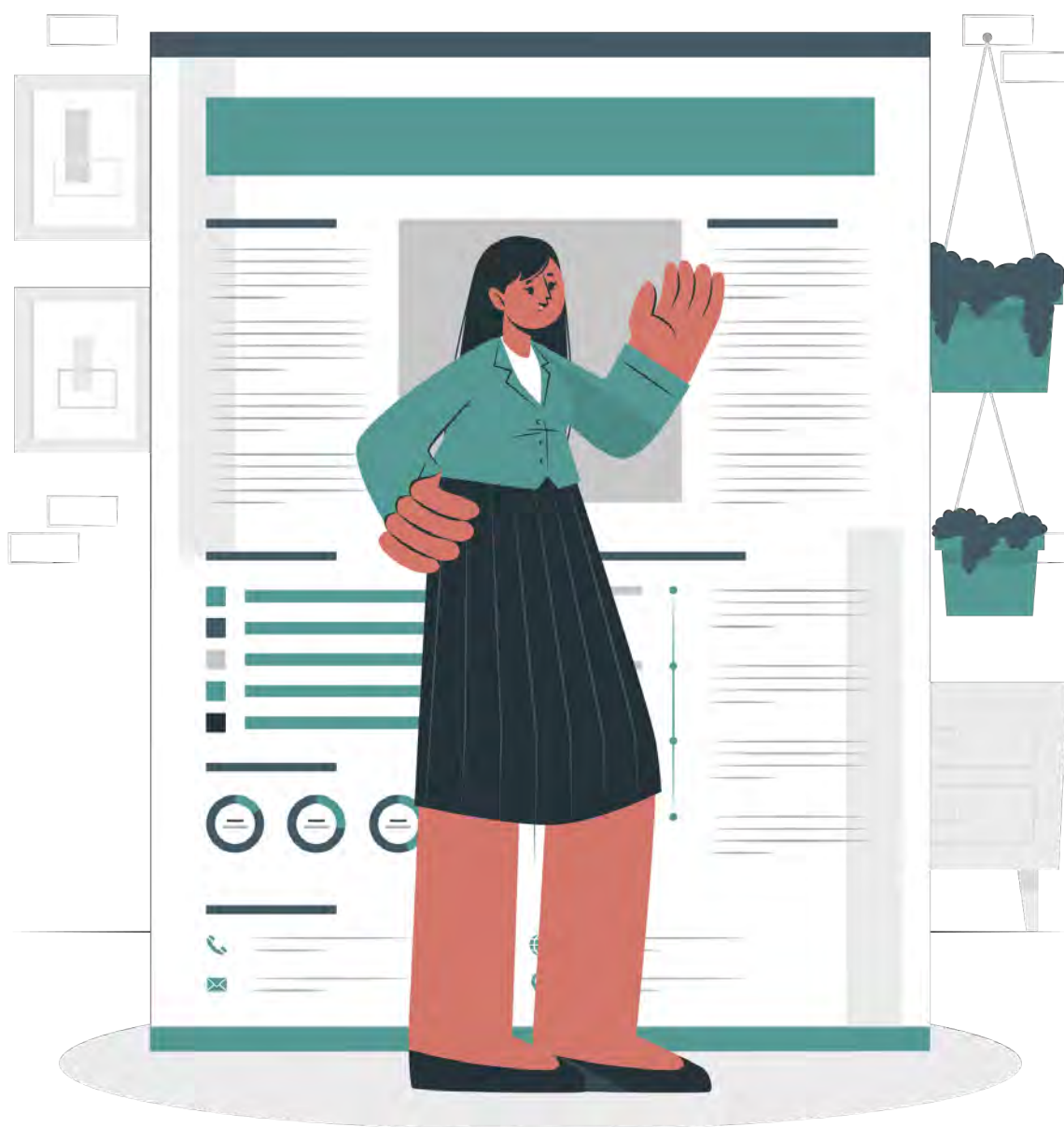
Instead, companies want to recruit 'job-ready' employees, those who can 'hit the ground running'. Experience is therefore much more valuable than potential.

A linked aspect is the rise in degrees and the consequent fall in vocational training and education. Graduates now have higher qualifications but fewer 'workplace skills': put simply, they know more, but can do less.

The good news is that in industries with serious skills shortages, such as IT, senior managers have reported that they now actively offer career support and development, including training, to staff identified as having potential for future leadership roles.



This support may take the form of mentoring and other informal support, rather than formal, off-site training programmes as might have been the case in the past (our eBook [The Skills You Need Guide to Personal Development](#) explains what you need to know to take advantage of opportunities like these). This new support, however, is a sign that employers are starting to realise that the remedy to their skills gap might just be in their own hands.



## Avoiding the Skills Gap

### What can you do on a personal level to ensure that you do not fall foul of the skills gap?

There are two main groups of people who are most likely to fall into the 'skills gap': new graduates or school leavers, and those who have been made redundant or lost their jobs, especially older workers. Why?

- **New graduates and school leavers**, by their very nature, tend to have very little work experience. They therefore lack proof that they have the soft skills needed to get on in the workplace.
- **There tends to be a stigma attached to those made redundant**, especially if they have worked in one place for a long time. Potential employers tend to ask themselves the question 'Why were they made redundant?' Although they may have the soft skills necessary to build good relationships, have they kept up to date with the hard skills and the technical knowledge required?



### Making a difference

You cannot do anything about what other people believe on a general level.

However, you *can* do something about how you demonstrate that you can do the job.

Your first step to addressing your personal skills gap is to work out what you are good at, and what you are less good at.

Take a look at what skills are required for the jobs that you want and do a self-assessment against the criteria. Be honest with yourself. What are you good at, and what are you not good at? Can you demonstrate that you are good at the key skills?

There are a number of tools online to help with this. For example, you could use our Interpersonal Skills Self-Assessment (available online or as an eBook from our shop) to assess areas of weakness and strength, and where you could benefit from further development.

**The full eBook  
is available at**

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