

Essential Skills:

Professional Identity & Personal Effectiveness

Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

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Essential skills – September 2026 Term

We will work through a series of sessions focused on developing your professionalism and preparing you for employment or further study.



Session Objectives

During this session you will:

- Critically evaluate behaviours that contribute to professional identity and credibility and effectiveness;
- Analyse how individual professional behaviours influence colleagues and team culture and organisational outcomes.

This session prepares students for the transition into graduate employment by exploring how professional credibility is established through competence, reliability, judgement, self-awareness and behaviour

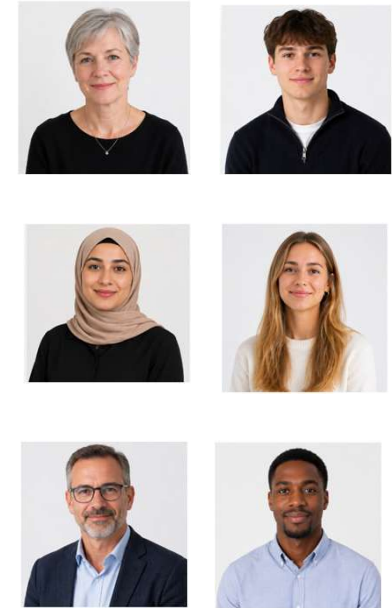
Who Would You Want on Your Team?

Who Would You Trust?

You are part of a team recruiting a new trainee employee.

All six candidates have the qualifications required for the role.

You are going to work alongside this person every day.



Read the six profiles. Then, decide who you would choose to join your team?

The profiles

Candidate A – Alex:

Alex achieved excellent academic results and has very strong technical knowledge. Alex is confident in her ability and usually completes individual tasks to a very high standard.

When Alex believes someone else's idea is incorrect, she tends to say so directly. She sometimes becomes frustrated when colleagues take longer to understand something that seems obvious to her.

Alex prefers completing important work personally because she knows it will be done correctly.

Colleague comment:

"Alex is brilliant at what they do. I'm just sometimes reluctant to ask her for help."

The profiles

Candidate B – Morgan



Morgan is friendly, enthusiastic and very confident. He regularly volunteers for additional tasks and is usually the first person to say: "Yes, I can do that."

Morgan contributes lots of ideas in meetings and gets on well with colleagues. However, Morgan sometimes underestimates how long work will take. He has missed several deadlines because he agreed to too many things.

Colleague comment:

"Morgan's great to have around, but I'm never completely sure whether something will actually be finished when he says it will."

The profiles

Candidate C – Sam



Sam doesn't usually speak first in meetings and can appear quiet when joining an unfamiliar group.

She listens carefully, takes notes and asks questions when she doesn't understand something. Sam reliably completes agreed tasks and will tell colleagues early if they encounter a problem.

After becoming comfortable with a team, Sam increasingly contributes ideas.

Colleague comment:

"Sam doesn't make a big impression immediately, but if she says she'll do something, it gets done."

The profiles

Candidate D – Taylor



Taylor produces excellent work independently. She rarely need assistance and prefers getting on with her tasks without unnecessary meetings or conversations.

Taylor sometimes doesn't respond quickly to messages because she doesn't want communication interrupting her concentration. She rarely asks colleagues for help and doesn't particularly enjoy group work.

Colleague comment:

"Taylor's work is excellent. Sometimes we just don't know what she is doing until it's finished."

The profiles

Candidate E – Jordan



Jordan is supportive and gets on well with most people.

If someone is struggling, Jordan will usually offer to help. He dislikes conflict and tries to keep everyone happy.

When Jordan disagrees with a decision, he will sometimes remain quiet rather than risk upsetting someone.

He has occasionally taken on additional work because he found it difficult to say no.

Colleague comment:

"Jordan is lovely to work with. I sometimes wish he'd tell us what he really thinks."

The profiles

Candidate F – Casey



Casey has less experience than some of the other candidates.

He openly acknowledges this and asks plenty of questions.

Casey regularly asks colleagues for feedback and keeps notes about things he needs to learn. He made a mistake during his placement but informed his supervisor immediately, helped correct it and changed his working process so it didn't happen again.

Colleague comment:

"Casey doesn't know everything yet, but he learns incredibly quickly."

Who would you choose to join your team?



Work in a group to consider the following:

1. Who would you most like to work alongside?
2. Who would you trust to complete an important piece of work with minimal supervision?
3. Who would you appoint as team leader?



Justify each answer with **specific evidence from the profiles.**



Share and discuss your choices and reasoning

Knowledge and skills Vs Professional Behaviours

- Being professional does not mean perfect.
- Casey making a mistake is not necessarily unprofessional
- Hiding the mistake might be.



- Alex's expertise is an individual strength
- Colleagues becoming reluctant to ask questions may reduce team effectiveness.

Professional effectiveness is not only about how well you perform. It is also about the effect your behaviour has on other people and shared outcomes.

Professional, Unprofessional, or "It Depends"?

Professional, Unprofessional, or "It Depends"?

For each workplace behaviour listed below, vote:
'Professional' or ***'Unprofessional'*** or ***'It depends'***



You disagree with a decision made by senior management but have been asked to implement it.

A high-performing colleague regularly behaves badly towards less experienced staff.

Your manager asks for your professional recommendation but you know they favour a different option from you.

Professional, Unprofessional, or "It Depends"?

What was the most common answer?

The interesting answer to many is:
"It depends"

For example:
**Disagreeing with your manager
is not inherently unprofessional.**

How you disagree can be.

Context is often crucial to consider;

- What is the issue?
- Who else is present?
- Is there a safety/ethical concern?
- How certain are you?
- Have you misunderstood something?
- Is this the appropriate forum?
- What are the consequences of remaining silent?

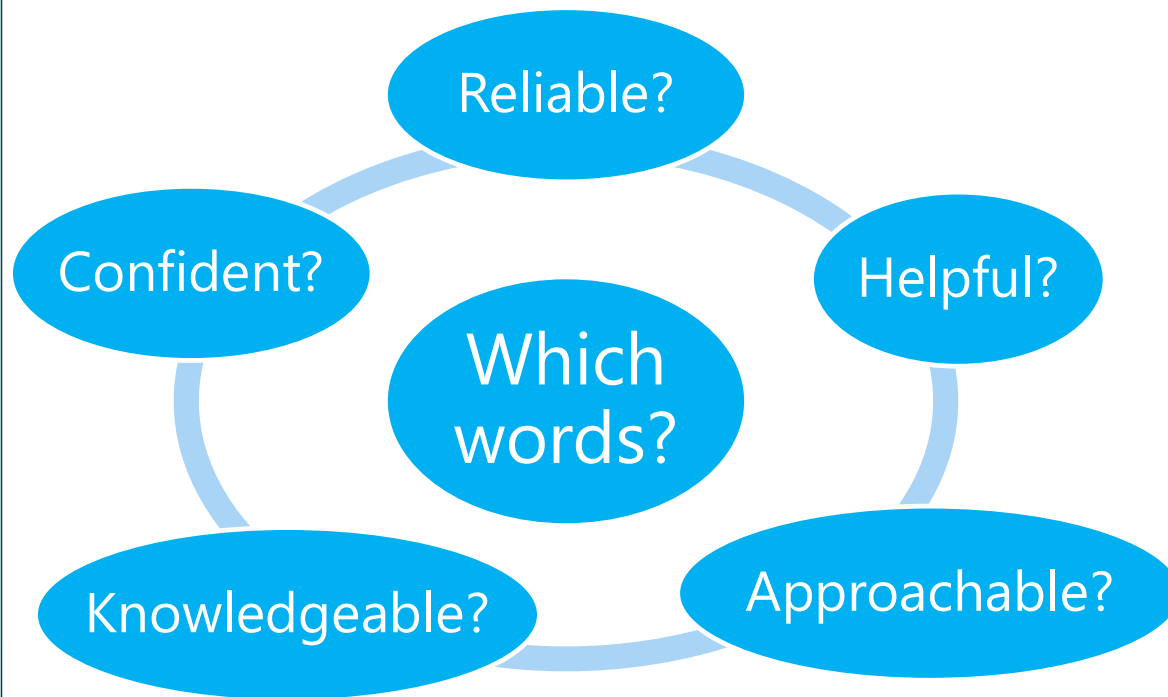
From Professional Quality to Professional Impact

From Professional Quality to Professional Impact

Write down five words you would like colleagues to use to describe you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

From Professional Quality to Professional Impact



Which words did you choose?

You cannot simply decide to be "reliable".

What would somebody actually see you doing?



Professional?

Do Keith or David show any professional qualities in this short appraisal?

From Quality to Impact

Desired reputation	What I do.	Impact on others and work
Reliable		
Approachable		
Organised		
Assertive		
Supportive		

From Quality to Impact

Your professional reputation is built from repeated behaviours, not the words you use to describe yourself.

Choose five professional qualities and for each, write:

- one behaviour that will show your colleagues this quality
- one impact this will have on others at work.

Word 1 – ...
Behaviour – ...
Impact...

Word 2- ...
Behaviour – ...
Impact...

Professional Scenario Challenge

What Would You Actually Do?

Professional Scenario Challenge

For each scenario, work as a group to agree a response.

Use 4 minutes per scenario.

The key question for every scenario is:

What is your professional judgement, how would you justify it, and what responsibility are you prepared to take for the consequences?

Scenario 1 – "I Don't Understand"

It's your second week in a new role.

Your manager explains a task and asks: "Is everything clear?"

You have already told your manager you understand and have spent two hours working on it before realising you don't. You suspect other people may also have misunderstood the instructions.

Discuss

Do you speak? What is the risk of silence? What is the risk of speaking? How could you test your understanding without undermining others?

Scenario 2 – The Mistake

You send some information to a client.

Twenty minutes later, you realise you've included incorrect information.
A colleague notices first and says: "Let's wait and see whether anyone notices.."
Correcting the mistake will be expensive and embarrassing for the organisation.

Discuss

Who is responsible for deciding whether it matters?

What information do you need?

What are the consequences of action versus inaction?

How might professional codes/policies affect the decision?

Scenario 3 – The Impossible Deadline

Your manager asks: "Could you get this finished by 4pm?"

You already have another task due today and don't believe both can be completed properly. Both tasks affect other colleagues who are waiting for your work.

Your manager looks very busy.

Discuss

Do you simply say yes? How could you respond professionally? Construct what you would actually say to the manager.

Scenario 4 – Everyone Else Knows Each Other

You've joined an established team. Everyone appears to know one another and there are lots of conversations and jokes you don't understand.

At lunchtime, most people disappear together without inviting you. After several weeks you notice that the established team often excludes another new colleague too.

Discuss

How could you begin building relationships? What shouldn't you assume?
How much responsibility lies with you versus the team? At what point might you have some responsibility for helping create a more inclusive team?

Scenario 5 – "That's Not How We Do It"

You notice what appears to be a much easier way of completing a routine task. When you suggest it, an experienced colleague replies:
"We've always done it this way."

You have evidence that your proposed method could save the team several hours each week. Your proposed change would improve efficiency but require colleagues to learn a new way of working and initially increase their workload.

Discuss

Do you push the idea? Drop it? Who should be consulted? How would you build support? Is improvement always worth disruption?

Scenario 6 – The Group Chat

Several colleagues have a private WhatsApp/group chat. You supervise one of the people participating in the chat. Someone posts an unkind joke about another member of staff.

Other people react with laughing emojis. You don't find it funny. A new team member privately messages you afterwards: "Does everyone here talk about people like this?"

Discuss

Has your responsibility changed? What effect could silence have?
What could challenging achieve? What risks accompany challenging?

Professional Scenario Challenge

What responses did you come up with?

Did every group agree?

Has anyone encountered these types of scenarios in real life workplaces?

One Professional Credibility Commitment

As a final point of reflection and focus, choose a quality and behaviour that you will aim to develop in the coming term.

Complete the following sentences as a note in a book or a voice note on your phone

A professional capability I want others to trust me for is...

The behaviour I will deliberately develop is...

I will demonstrate this through...

The impact I want this to have is...

The evidence that will demonstrate my development will be...

References and further reading

- Cabinet Office (2018) Success Profiles: Civil Service Behaviours. London: UK Government.
- Holmes, L. (2001) 'Reconsidering graduate employability: the "graduate identity" approach', *Quality in Higher Education*, 7(2), pp. 111–119. doi:10.1080/13538320120060006.
- Holmes, L. (2013) 'Competing perspectives on graduate employability: possession, position or process?', *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), pp. 538–554. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2011.587140.
- Jackson, D. (2014) 'Student identity development in higher education: implications for graduate attributes and work-readiness', *Educational Research*, 56(1), pp. 65–89. doi: 10.1080/00131881.2013.874157.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2025) *Career Readiness Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce*. Bethlehem, PA: NACE.

See you next week for:

Week 2

Confidence, Assertiveness & Communication.

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