

'Job readiness' more important to UK employers than academic credentials

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Formal academic credentials play a relatively minor role in the UK labour market, with the majority of employers placing greater emphasis on 'job readiness', according to a new study published in the *Journal of Education Policy* that analysed more than 21 million UK job adverts, based on labour market analytics powered by Burning Glass Technologies.

The research, by Professor Phillip Brown and Professor Manuel Souto-Otero of Cardiff University, challenges existing theories that higher levels of formal [education](#) determine the result of the competition for [jobs](#) in the UK labour [market](#).

Rather, the researchers found that only 18 per cent of job adverts specified a qualification requirement. Employers were more likely to highlight social qualifications, specific skills and cognitive abilities such as organisational skills or time management—aspects that signal 'job readiness' - in their recruitment ads.

For most occupational groups, employers looked for a wide range of technical and [social skills](#), with an emphasis on performance within short time horizons, rather than assuming that qualifications already equalled the skills they needed or indicated that candidates would be easier to train.

The focus on job readiness rather than 'trainability' suggests employers are looking for ways to reduce training costs and shorten the time it takes

for newly hired employees to make a productive contribution. It also underlines the need for job candidates to develop marketable skills of immediate value to employers, and helps to explain the increasing popularity and importance of high quality internships in the UK.

But there is little to suggest that a reduced emphasis on academic credentials will lead to a reduction in class-based inequalities in the competition for jobs, the authors warn. Candidates with greater financial, cultural and social resources will likely maintain a major positional advantage when specific skills and personal traits that are not a central part of formal education are deemed an important part of what it means to be 'job ready'.

"Our findings call for a fresh discussion on the meaning of 'merit' and 'fairness' in the relationship between education and the labour market, especially at a time when government reforms in the UK are premised on the assumption that increasing intergenerational social mobility can be achieved by widening access to higher education," the authors said.

"If the exchange value of credentials in the labour market is more limited than assumed, the idea of a level playing field will need to be cast far beyond the school gates or university lecture theatre. The failure to consider the importance of other skills, competences and experiences beyond formal qualifications in recruitment processes is destined to disappoint in efforts to reduce educational, [labour](#) market and wage inequalities."

More information: *Journal of Education Policy*,
www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02680939.2018.1549752

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