

TOP SKILLS FOR 2021

What are employers looking for this year?

2020 was a challenging year with employers often having to make tough decisions about their workforce. In 2021, employers will need to continue helping their teams develop the skills to deal with the ongoing change and take them into a new era of work.

This guide will help you discover the top specialist and transferable soft skills that employers need, as established in a survey of 23,000 professionals across the UK. Find out how they apply to you, and how you can develop and promote these skills during your job search.

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TOP SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills are universally transferable and useful to all professionals regardless of role. They help you progress your career and make it easier to move to new roles where you might not have as much technical or specialist experience. Here are the top soft skills in demand from employers.



Communication and interpersonal skills

Most employers are looking for people with communication and interpersonal skills, it is number one on their wish list as it is vital to the running of a successful team. As remote working has become a necessity due to national lockdowns, it is increasingly important to demonstrate how your communications skills transfer to this new way of working.

How can I get better?

There are lots of techniques you can use to improve your communication, from practicing body language to learning how to negotiate or deliver criticism. Check out the [communications microlearning courses](#) we offer free from My Learning, our online training portal.



Ability to adopt change

The next most sought-after soft skill is an aptitude for adopting change. It's a transformative time for many businesses and employers want to know that their employees are going to be willing and able to adapt to new processes and systems quickly, and work to improve them.

How can I get better?

Being able to adopt to change can be as simple as diving in feet first and being enthusiastic and communicative about new systems or processes. Express an interest in working on new projects and in training for any new systems or technology. For a more methodical approach to change management, check out our range of free [change management courses](#).



Problem-solving

In 2020 we were all faced with new and challenging problems, so it's no surprise that looking ahead, employers are interested in professionals with strong problem-solving abilities. When applying for jobs or interviewing, make sure you provide a few examples of problems you faced in the past, and how you worked to overcome them.

How can I get better?

To benchmark your abilities, try asking your manager or colleagues to assess your strengths and weaknesses. Our [problem solving training](#) is a great way to hone some techniques, remember problem solving really relies on using your intuition, thinking laterally about problems and ensuring you communicate possible solutions to your team.



Flexibility and adaptability

Like flexibility, adaptability and the ability to adopt change are key traits for any professional working in uncertain times. New technologies may be adopted, roles and responsibilities could expand. Potential employers need staff who are able to adapt to changing situations, and can manage shifting requirements and accelerated schedules.

How can I get better?

Flexibility and adaptability might sound more like personality traits, but a lot of it is attitude, self-care and preparation. Be innovative, engage with new projects or systems, express an interest in expanding your role and see how you can help out on wider projects. You can also use our [productivity training](#) to learn how to manage your time and organise your day to manage any extra workload you take on.



People management skills

For any senior or management role, people management is a must, and today, leaders must be able to demonstrate their people management skills in regard to remote teams. It's one thing managing someone face to face, but if you want to stand out in your applications, make it clear that your skills extend to managing remote teams too.

How can I get better?

Try to find a mentor from a more senior leadership background who can help you navigate the challenges of leadership. On top of this, training is a good route to [improving leadership and people management skills](#), check out our free training options now, including courses which help you manage teams through change. Our [mental health & wellbeing training](#) can help you to better understand and protect your team's mental wellbeing when under pressure.

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TOP SPECIALIST SKILLS

Specialist skills relate more to specific roles, and while they won't be applicable to all professionals, knowing about them will help you understand employer priorities over the coming months. If you have any of these skills, it's worth emphasising them on any new applications, or developing them further with training.



Projects and change management

Project and change managers are in high demand as employers rush to start new projects or implement company wide change for 2021. Knowing the basics of projects and change management will help many professionals with their career prospects.

How can I get better?

Change management is a hot topic at the moment, and many organisations are running webinars and roundtables discussing it, attending some of these and checking out our range of [change management](#) and [project management courses](#) can help you understand and improve your skills in this area.



Finance

Budgets were stretched in 2020, and good finance skills, budget management or similar finance skills will be invaluable to employers. While some of the roles will require further education, many will just require understanding and basic aptitudes.

How can I get better?

Our [accounting and invoicing courses](#) can help you improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your finance skills, but for more formal training and qualifications, check out the relevant institute, like [CIMA](#) or [CIPP](#). If you're unsure about how to develop specific finance skills, [contact your local recruitment consultant](#).



Operations

The administrative heart of any organisation requires staff with good operations skills to keep it beating. As the pandemic required many organisations to restructure, professionals with strong operations skills who can keep things moving efficiently will be highly sought after.

How can I get better?

Operations is a broad term for any set of skills that help you in your chosen role and improve the way things are done at your organisation as a whole. Take a look at our [training categories](#), and explore the training best suited to your role.



IT infrastructure

Rapid digital transformation was widespread in 2020 because of the rapid movement into remote working. This put a strain on the IT skills of all employees, so it's no surprise to hear that IT infrastructure skills are in demand from employers.

How can I get better?

Technology skills vary wildly in complexity depending on your role. For most, a general tech-savviness is sufficient. For these, brushing up on [Office 365 skills](#) is advisable, while for developer roles specifically, we offer free training on some specific [coding and programming skills](#).



Managerial/leadership

Good leaders make a real difference in times of crisis, and employers are looking for people with strong leadership skills in 2021. If you're looking to change jobs or progress into senior roles, emphasise the effort you've put into improving your leadership and managerial skills.

How can I get better?

Great leaders inspire their team to perform better. Take a look at our ['Lead in the new era' hub](#), where you can find insights, reports and guides pertaining to your area of expertise. You can also develop your leadership skills with our [Team Management training](#). As management also relies on clear instructions and feedback, don't forget to check out our [communications training courses](#) too – Free from My Learning.

Want to discuss your next career steps?

Our recruitment experts are standing by to help.

Talk to your local consultant at hays.co.uk/offices



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Honing any of these top skills will make you a more compelling prospect for employers and could help advance your career, so don't neglect your development. Sign up for free training at hays.co.uk/mylearning

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