



# Professional English Skills For Employability Across EU – PESE

Handbook on the current professional English  
requirements throughout partner countries





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## List of Contents

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Introduction – Overview of the Project .....</b>   | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>IO1 - Handbook/Guide on the current professional English requirements throughout partner countries. ....</b>                   | <b>7</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 1: Summary of findings from partner countries.....</b>   | <b>8</b>   |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in Spain.....</b>                            | <b>9</b>   |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in Portugal .....</b>                        | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in the United Kingdom.....</b>               | <b>21</b>  |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in Malta .....</b>                           | <b>27</b>  |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in Cyprus.....</b>                           | <b>32</b>  |
| <b>Summary of findings on employers’ professional English requirements for employees in Romania .....</b>                         | <b>38</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 2: Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries.....</b>              | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Spain. ....</b>    | <b>46</b>  |
| <b>Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Portugal .....</b> | <b>51</b>  |
| <b>Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of UK .....</b>       | <b>55</b>  |
| <b>Best Practice Guide on Intervention Techniques to Upskill Unemployed Citizens – The case of Malta.....</b>                     | <b>59</b>  |
| <b>Best Practice Guide on Intervention Techniques to Upskill Unemployed Citizens – The case of Cyprus .....</b>                   | <b>64</b>  |
| <b>Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Romania.....</b>   | <b>70</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 3: Mapping of particular skills and competencies required.....</b>   | <b>76</b>  |
| <b>Language specific skills .....</b>   | <b>77</b>  |
| <b>Cultural competence .....</b>  | <b>81</b>  |
| <b>Non-linguistic communication .....</b>   | <b>85</b>  |
| <b>Professional Skills and competences .....</b>  | <b>91</b>  |
| <b>Online communication and telephone skills .....</b>  | <b>97</b>  |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>   | <b>102</b> |



## Introduction – Overview of the Project

The project Professional English Language Skills for Employability Across EU brings together six partner institutions from six countries: **Centre for Social Innovation (CSI)** Cyprus; **MECB Ltd** Malta, **Lusófona University** Portugal, **TEAM4Excellence (T4E)** Romania; **Babel Idiomas** Spain; and **Eurospeak Language Schools Ltd** United Kingdom.

The main objectives of the project are: make high-quality professional English training available for specifically unemployed citizens across Europe; produce a sensible ready-to-go framework for a curriculum for professional English that can have an impact on Language teachers and trainers, and upskill unemployed citizens with professional English skills that are actually required by employees.

This project aims to research the labour market in partner countries and establish the type of English skills employers currently require from their employees. This information will be collated in the form of the current handbook/guide to serve as a reference from which we can then establish a framework for a curriculum. The curriculum will then form the basis of an e-course on professional English skills targeted towards unemployed people in Europe.

The hope is that this e-course will help to upskill the participants and increase their probability of finding employment. The fact that this is an e-course will obviously benefit those who live in rural areas and do not have access to language schools or face-to-face classes.



## **IO1 - Handbook/Guide on the current professional English requirements throughout partner countries.**

This handbook is the first intellectual output developed by the project and was prepared with the full contribution of all project partners. It is based on research carried out by the partner organisations in order to establish the type of English skills employers currently require from their employees. The findings herein will serve as reference for building a framework for a curriculum for professional English for employability that, in turn, will serve as the basis of an e-course targeting unemployed people across the EU.

The handbook comprises 3 chapters that are divided into different sections. The first chapter is a summary of findings of research into current labour market requirements for professional English in the partner countries. The second chapter is a best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens and the final chapter includes a mapping of particular skills and competences required.



## **Chapter 1: Summary of findings from partner countries.**

This chapter includes the findings of research carried out by partner organisations in their own countries on the types of English skills the employers currently require from their employees. The findings and analysis by each partner organisation are presented in the different sections of the chapter.

This research was divided into two different types: field research and desktop research.

Field research was conducted using interviews held in person or via online conferencing platforms, use of online questionnaires and over the telephone with people in charge of companies and organisations and also language teachers and trainers. A list of questions was provided to the partner organisations that was the basis of questionnaires and/or interviews.

Desktop research focused on information retrieved from a number of different sources, namely mainstream media sites, career service sites, company websites, academic research published online, blogs, job ads, among others.



## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in Spain

Due to the harsh language policies and ineffective education system during the years of the Franco regime, Spain has lacked the same linguistic exposure to foreign languages—especially English—in comparison to the rest of Europe.

Spain's labour market has severe structural problems, such as high unemployment rates among young people and those aged over 50, a low-skilled workforce, and the high level of temporary employees.

Spain's business structure is highly fragmented, consisting of small business units. 8 out of every 10 companies in Spain have two or fewer employees.

An international survey reported that a significant amount of business is being lost as a result of insufficient language skills. Of the companies surveyed, **more Spanish companies (19%)** reported having lost business than French (13%) and German (10%) **due to the lack of language skills.**

The Economist Intelligence Unit conducted a global survey in 2012 measuring the effect communication and cultural barriers have on business. **This report singled out Spain for its lack of linguistic diversity.** Of the companies surveyed in Spain, **40%** believe that difficulty in communicating in non-native languages has **significantly hindered** cross-border business.

According to the 7th report by Adecco on Employability and languages, 33.4% job offers in Spain request that candidates speak several languages. This requirement is directly proportional to the professional category. 51.7% of all management positions ask for high level proficiency in English.

English language is the most demanded on the labour market (90% of job offers) followed by French (7.2%), German (7,1%), Portuguese (1.3%), Italian (0.8%). However, according to the Cambridge Monitor study published by Cambridge University Press, 44% of surveyed employees estimate their English level as 'low' and 'very low'. Only 22 % said that they have 'high' or 'very high' knowledge of English.

**The highest English language requirements** are in business sectors, such as **Banking, Finance, Law, Telecommunication and IT.** Language requirements are lower in Travel, Leisure, Hospitality, Transportation, Distribution and Utilities, possibly because customer-facing roles tend to use more **everyday English.**

**Methods to assess the employees' level of English proficiency** are English test at interview (externally provided) (11%), English test at interview internally created (28%) Interview in English (58%), International English language certificate (22|%), English test taken at school 31%, Degree taught in English (39%).



## Field research

### Which professional language skills are the most required by employers in Spain?

We sent a questionnaire to various companies from small local shops to international banks. The participating companies came from many different backgrounds. Analysing over 30 answers, we concluded that the most sought-after language communication needs are an ability to speak freely with clients or customers, participate in meetings, phone conversations, delivering presentations, oral instructions and participation in teleconferences.

Promotional speeches and social conversations seem to be the least demanded.

Among listening skills, telephone phone conversations were given the highest value. Understanding of both formal and informal conversations were given almost equal importance. Being an active listener in conversations turns out to be important to half of the surveyed companies. An ability to understand different accents was given very low importance (27%).

When it comes to writing skills, writing emails is the most demanded (72%), followed by contracts, reports, proposals, instructions and manuals, websites and blog content. Memos and inventory tracks were given less importance.

Emails are also considered to be the most important reading skill (83%). Social networks, reviews and business articles were demanded by 50%, 38% and 30% of companies respectively.

Being asked about the necessity for soft skills, respondents highlighted the importance of problem-solving skills (88%), confidence (70%), creativity (64%) and teamwork (70%). Emotional intelligence, actions in crisis and an appropriate body language were required by 50% of companies. Cultural awareness was given less importance (23%).

Most companies replied that employees only occasionally use English with clients and customers (66%). 27% said that they use English on a daily basis to communicate with customers. Only 11% use English to talk to colleagues within teams. 11% of respondents require only writing English skills.

The most required level of language proficiency is B1 (44%), followed by B2 (38%) and C1 (27%).

Another questionnaire was aimed to survey teachers working with business clients. We received 16 responses.

Language of meetings and interviews, phone conversations were given the highest importance (86-93%), followed by spoken instructions, holding a teleconference and customer attention (70-73%). Chatting over business lunches, giving feedback to colleagues and placing orders were included by 60 % of teachers. Accent reduction for professionals was mentioned by 7% of teachers.

Language of meetings, effective pitching techniques and negotiating tactics were considered the most problematic to teach.

Good listening skills are most demanded in phone conversations (87%), teleconferences (73%), informal conversations (87%) and formal reports (73%). Ability



to understand various accents is viewed very important by 67% of respondents. Podcasts, series and webinars were given less importance (6.7%).

Reports and emails are among the most important writing skills (93%), followed by proposals, memos, meeting agendas, instructions and letters of apology and thanks (60% approximately).

Articles, technical reports, business article analysis, research reports, business case analysis, social media and scientific research are most commonly mentioned among reading skills.

Confidence as a soft skill was included by all the teachers. Other important soft skills were problem-solving (67%), team work (73%), emotional intelligence (67%), persuasion (60%) business etiquette (78%), cultural awareness (50%). The least required soft skills were actions in crisis and techniques to managing stress (20%).

All the respondents teach body language in-company. Facial expressions, dress code and proxemics are taught by 67%, 58% and 17% of teachers respectively.

### **Language learning in Spain.**

Well aware of the problem of poor English levels and the need to improve the population's language skills, the Spanish and autonomous community governments have established a number of initiatives.

1. The **Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas**, over 300 centres throughout Spain, which offer subsidised language tuition and officially-recognised certificates.
2. **Grants and direct financial support for the study of foreign languages**, especially English, amounting to €73 million per year
3. **The employment in state schools** of more than 2,800 language teaching assistants, of whom over 1,200 are North American
4. **The Spanish Ministry of Education–British Council Bilingual Schools Project**, operative in 122 schools in the Madrid area.
5. **The bilingual schools are established by each Comunidad Autónoma.**
6. Some governmental organizations as well as worker unions offer free courses of general English to the unemployed.

### **Corporate markets.**

Some of the larger organisations in the Spanish corporate sector have been hugely successful in the past decade or so in their internationalisation strategies. **Examples include Banco Santander, Union Fenosa, Telefónica and Iberdrola.**

**In parallel to the government, many Spanish corporations are now investing heavily in developing the English language skills of their middle and senior management.(13)**



**Potential problems:**

1. Despite the remarkable boom in public bilingual centres in Spain (in the 2010-2011 period, 240,154 students were studying a bilingual programme in one of Spain's regions. In the 2016-2017 period, that figure had jumped 360% to 1.1 million, according to an EL PAÍS study of data from the Education Ministry), experts say there is not enough analysis or objective data on the effect of bilingual learning.
2. There is a real concern that language teaching methodology is outdated and that the teachers in particular have insufficient skills to deliver the bilingual/CLIL curricula now being rolled out across the educational system.
3. As training budgets come under pressure, funding for individuals and companies taking language courses is declining and tends to be reserved for only the most senior managers.
4. Lack of tailored courses adapted for specific needs of company employees. The vast majority of schools offer only general English.
5. Lack of free courses for the unemployed.



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## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in Portugal

### Field research

In order to find out the language requirements of employers in Portugal we carried out field research by interviewing teaching professionals providing English classes for specific purposes in companies and by contacting companies/organizations.

Based on the information shared by the teaching professionals we interviewed, we came to the conclusion that, most of the time, only people in middle to top management positions have access to Business English courses and there is also an increasing demand for individual classes aimed at addressing the specific needs of a given person. These professionals stressed that, currently, oral communication skills tend to be at the same level as written communication skills in terms of what companies require from their employees since these organizations communicate in English in their daily business activity.

A questionnaire was sent to companies/organizations mostly located in Lisbon and surrounding municipalities and we received 24 responses from micro, SME and 2 large companies, operating in a wide variety of sectors such as: Services, Bank, IT, Insurance, Communication, Health, Education, Industry, Tourism, Distribution and Retail, and the third sector.

The companies require their employees to be fluent both in oral and written English but the level and the specific type of skill is determined by the position, with 63% of the companies reporting that they require advanced skills and fluency.

When it comes to the types of tasks carried out in English, the responses were varied with a special focus on client service, participating in meetings, conference calls, delivering presentations, problem solving with co-workers, writing reports and highly specialized documents, minutes, memos, emails, letters, production of instructions, rules and standards, daily oral communication with clients and supervisors in foreign countries, social media management, and communication on the phone. We may, therefore, conclude, that oral and written communication are used simultaneously.

As for the frequency of the use of English in the workplace, 63% of the responses corresponded to daily continuous interactions in English, with only one company reporting low frequency and the rest reporting weekly use of English.

When we look at the previous experience of employees in terms of Business English courses, 20% of the companies said that their employees have not attended any courses, 33% reported that their employees had or are having Business English classes



and the rest mentioned English learned only in secondary school, university or language schools such as Cambridge, British Council and Wall Street.

Based on the information gathered, we can say that companies value and expect their employees to have fluency in oral and written English and knowledge of the vocabulary used in the company/sector.

Interestingly, only one of the respondents (a bank) mentioned that skills are evaluated on a regular basis and development plans are made according to the identified needs. Another respondent drew the attention to the fact that the teaching of English should target current business reality and needs and only one company focused the need for cultural knowledge in addition to oral and written skills.

As a conclusion, we may say that although companies expect their employees to be fluent in English most of the ones we interviewed do not provide for any type of English courses, with 20% of the companies saying that their employees have not attended any specific Business English courses and roughly 47% of the companies saying that their employees have only attended English classes in secondary school, university or language schools but have not attended any specific Business English courses.

### **Desktop Research**

In Portugal, language skills have been increasingly valued by both individuals and businesses, with significant progress being made between 2007 and 2016, when 71.8% of adults (18-64 years old) stated they spoke at least one foreign language (up from 52% nine years earlier) (Ribeiro, Calvão & Simões, 2019, p. 82).

In 2016, Cambridge English in collaboration with QS published a global, cross-industry overview of English language skills at work, entitled *English at Work* (Cambridge English, 2016). According to the study website (<http://englishatwork.cambridgeenglish.org/>), its findings were based on data provided by over **5,300 employers in 38 countries/territories** that completed the annual QS Global Employer Survey, as well as insights from Cambridge English experts. This survey found that, as regards Portugal's situation, workers are quite adequately prepared: 84% of staff at top management level had the English skills needed to succeed in their role (well above the 78% of global average). The same was true for employees in marketing and in accounting and finance (respectively, 81% and 67% for the Portuguese, compared to 74% and 64% for the global average). Sales is the only area where the Portuguese case equals the global average, 70% of workers in this area have the English skills it takes to succeed at their job.

This positive appraisal of the level of English skills among Portuguese people is borne out by a more recent study entitled "EF English Proficiency Index 2020" (Education First, 2020), carried out by Education First on a sample that "represents



adult language learners from a broad range of ages” (Education First, 2020, p. 44), which places Portugal in 7<sup>th</sup> place of the very high proficiency band. Examples of tasks which individuals in this band can perform include “use nuanced and appropriate language in social situations, read advanced texts with ease, negotiate a contract with an English native speaker.” (Education First, 2020, p. 46). Also the already-cited 2016 study indicated that 9% of employers (compared to a mere 4% of the global average) were planning to improve the English skills of their employees, a result which is equal across four job roles targeted in the study: top management, marketing, accounting and finance, and sales (Cambridge English, 2016). This seems to point to the importance that English skills have for Portuguese business-owners as a whole, especially, as stated on the study website, for top and middle management roles (<http://englishatwork.cambridgeenglish.org>).

In order to obtain a picture, albeit imprecise, of the present demands regarding English skills, a search was conducted on the dedicated website SapoEmprego ([www.emprego.sapo.pt](http://www.emprego.sapo.pt)), searching for jobs that included knowledge of English as a requirement. The search was done on December 5th and resulted in 2,137 job offers which met this criterion, but the number is misleading, since a considerable number of job ads was repeated.

The conclusions we can draw are:

- The majority of the jobs which included English as a requirement were technology-related positions (hardware technicians, network managers, software developers, systems administrators, programmers, technology consultants, business intelligence, and mobile developers). Call centres and customer care positions also include knowledge of English as a requirement, which also happens in many vacancies in real estate firms, but it is interesting to note here that these are for firms located in areas with a stronger presence of foreign customers, such as Cascais, Estoril, Sintra (and adjacent areas), the Algarve or Madeira. Sales positions included English as a required skill when the company in question had an international dimension. In a significantly reduced number, we found job offers for positions in law and accounting (with firms which specifically stated dealing with foreign clients). A note should be made that jobs in hospitality and catering were few, which is unsurprisingly due to the pandemic situation, since jobs in this area always include English (most often, at an advanced level) as a required skill.

These findings in terms of relative weight of professional areas is in keeping with data provided by the EURES platform of the European Commission on the Portuguese situation (updated October 2020), which listed the ICTs and contact/business centres as the two fields where need for professionals was found (EURES, see reference below).



## What skills in English?

The more general and vague wording of job ads regarding their English requirements makes it difficult to ascertain which area is more in demand in terms of communication in this language, or which particular skill is required in a specific industry or sector of the economy. However, given the degree of specialization in some areas, such a general characterization is not at all helpful. What speakers of English as a foreign language in the workplace today need is what Celce-Murcia (2008) describes as 'interactional competence', which includes knowledge of how to perform certain speech acts involving interpersonal interactions, the ability to take turns in conversation, and the adequate use of silence, body language and space between speakers. The areas above can already be found in a 2000 study on Language needs on business, a survey of European multinational companies (Didiot-Cook, Gauthier & Scheirlinckx, 2000), which considered that English use in business at advanced and near native skill level involved making decisions, solving problems, being persuasive, handling complaints, negotiating, handling crises, resolving conflicts, making recommendations and implementing strategies. Despite being aware that 20 years have elapsed since this study was carried out and that much has changed in business, we believe the need for these skills, if anything, has become more pressing, given the heightened complexity and breadth of business interactions today.



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EURES – Information on the job market in Portugal  
<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=2645&lmi=Y&acro=lmi&lang=pt&recordLang=pt&parentId=&countryId=PT&regionId=PT1&nuts2Code=PT17&nuts3Code=null&mode=shortages&regionName=N%C3%ADvel%20Nacional>

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Blog RH Bizz. Available at: <https://www.ife.pt/blog> - Blog on human resources issues and concerns

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### **Legislation cited:**

Decree-Law 176/2014, of 12 December – defines the inclusion of English in the curriculum of Basic Education as mandatory subject, starting at the 3rd grade.



## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in the United Kingdom

Field research was carried out by contacting local employers, language institutions and fellow teaching professionals who were providing in-company language classes.

These organisations were based in southern England in the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire and West Sussex as the South East of England has the second highest density of businesses in the UK after London at 1,272 per 1000 people (Small Business People, 2020). The majority of the companies approached were clustered in and around Reading in Berkshire, Southampton and Portsmouth in Hampshire, and Chichester in West Sussex. The population density in each city varied greatly. Portsmouth is the most densely populated city in the UK outside London with 5,373 citizens per square kilometre; followed by Southampton with 5,050; Reading with 4,045 and Chichester with only 154 citizens per square kilometre (ONS, 2020). The types of businesses in each city varied. Reading has a large hospitality sector with many hotels and restaurants catering for tourists and business people. It also has a number of internationally-recognised knowledge-intensive IT businesses.

The businesses and organisations contacted in the regions ranged from small to large-scale industrial manufacturing, accountancy, IT, law enforcement, law and banking. These businesses either operated locally and/or internationally and, who on average, employed at least eight to ten percent of foreign-born workforce with the exception of the law enforcement agency and industrial manufacturing who employed personnel mainly from Nigeria who consisted of approximately 1 percent of the professional active and administrative force and 45 percent respectively.

Questions concerned which communication skills were required by the company for employees working in professional positions with their companies. Questions were open- and closed-ended. Questions were asked under the following headings:

- Non-verbal communication (cultural awareness and body language)
- Verbal-communication (including listening)
- Written communication (including reading)

The primary purpose of the research was to identify target tasks that business professional would use. With this in mind, the following questions were developed:

1. What communication skills do you require from your employees?
2. What communication skills do you require from employees working in a professional capacity within your organisation?



3. What communication skills do you require from you employees whose first language is not English?
4. What communication skills do you require from you employees whose first language is English?
5. Of the communication skills not mentioned above, which of the following do you consider vital for employees in professional appointments active in your organisation:

**Writing:** reports, witness statements, tenders, legal letter writing, letters of apology and thanks, witness statements, estimates, rules, legal briefs, meeting agendas, inventory trackers, handbooks, reports, memos, newsletters, press releases, and proposals.

**Oral:** Presiding over meetings, giving presentations, providing staff feedback, disciplining and dismissals, questioning interrogating, giving spoken instructions, explaining details, placing orders.

6. What are the tasks that staff need to perform using English at work?
7. How frequently is each identified task performed?
8. What are the business professionals' previous experiences with business English courses?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add with regard to verbal and non-verbal communication?
10. Please provide any further information that you believe is would help us understand the English language requirements of an employer in the southern region of the UK.

The basic requirements sought by business, industry and government were excellent listening, verbal and written communication skills. They demanded communication be clear, concise and focused.

Of particular need was the necessity for employees to be able to participate fully in meetings. There were a number of specific language and non-linguistic skills that businesses highlight.

Specifically, employers said that employees working in professional roles needed the language skills required to communicate with superiors, subordinates, peers, other workforce members and importantly, clients; additionally, it was imperative they understood and gave verbal and written instructions.

This was especially true should they be working in a hazardous environment such as construction, heavy industry or law enforcement where safety was a concern, and law enforcement and the legal profession, for example, where accuracy was required.



Employers also mention that non-linguistic skills were required, for example, assertiveness, emotional intelligence such as empathy and anticipating the needs and concerns of others, confidence and amiability.

An interesting observation made by most of the businesses interviews was that highly qualified and competent 'non-native' born managerial staff working with local 'native' speakers needed to have a high degree of communicative competence and cultural understanding of the language spoken on the factory shop floor, environments where the language-specific dynamics are different to a professional business environment. This was echoed by legal professionals who were required to work with clients using a non-standard language.

A summary of their requirements follows:

*Local employees whose first language is English*

- An understanding of what is considered 'international' English and a conscious effort to reduce culturally based idioms and vocabulary;
- Open mindedness and cultural sensitivity for communication

*Employees whose first language is not English*

- Confidence building skills for presentations
- Telephone communication skills
- Web-conferencing skills
- Communicating feedback appropriately
- Increased listening competency through an awareness of English pronunciation which was required when managing not only employees using the local vernacular but also other foreign employees using English
- The need to increase 'small talk' or social communication for conferences, business meeting etc. This included giving extra information for conversation continuance and softening negative comments; using affirmatives, interjections, vocalized pauses and fillers such as "um", "I understand," "really," "I see," and "yes, of course" to acknowledge one's understanding;
- Presentation skills for meetings, workshops, conferences and promotional activities;
- Questioning, asking for clarification, asking open-ended questions to stimulate dialogue
- Writing: an understanding of instructional, informational, persuasive, and transactional writing; writing etiquette for traditional paper-pen communication and written communication for electronic media such as Slack, text, and email; using formal, semi-formal and informal language; genre-specific writing: legal, academic and law enforcement; avoiding jargon
- Showing respect to those under and over you and using honorifics;



- Active listening skills that required acknowledging the speaker, showing interest, interjecting and turn taking;
  - Body language communication skills;
  - Open mindedness and cultural sensitivity for communication.
  - An understanding of banter, conviviality, humour and profanities;
- using phatic expression as conversations starters such as "Hi", "hello", "how are you?", "Howzitgoin?", and "good afternoon".

It should also be noted that the skills required specifically were not always present or actively employed in first-language native speakers and should be skills, abilities and competences displayed by all employees.

Of the desktop research we conducted, we focused on websites and research published on the internet within the previous six years in order for it to provide IO1 with relevant data. The online research looked to provide depth to sections 1, 2 and 3 of IO1.

The project also concluded that much academic research regarding language skills was secured behind paywalls and not freely available to in-company researchers or prospective employees doing background research unless their organisation had subscribed.

We also found various anecdotal evidence across the web as to which skills were sought by companies. We used approximately forty to fifty websites for general background research; although some sites regurgitated information from other websites, we used twenty-three websites that provided useable information for IO1.

The included mainstream media sites, career service sites and academic publications as well as company websites. The information sought was related to the linguistic needs of companies in general. This was to provide two things, firstly it provided us with an outline for our research and secondly, to confirm what interviewees had told us regarding their language requirements for employees. The content focused on language requirements of businesses using English as their business's 'official' language. The research for section 2 identified many websites focused on educational intervention techniques specifically for children and young people.

There was a dearth of information specifically for adult jobseekers learning and/or using English for work; however, language professionals and educators would agree that the techniques identified in the research could, and are being employed by language educators during training.



What was discovered online more or less reflected what our survey participants told us. What most of the desktop research provided was that employers were looking for non-linguistic communication skills as well as language-related communication skills. From the samples, the communication skills most employers felt were desirable for an employee to have in business (Smallbusinessify.com, 2019) were active listening, writing skills for contracts, memos etc; verbal skills for public speaking including giving presentations, interpersonal communication skills, selling including presentation skills, negotiating, and networking.

According to Cambridge Assessment English (Cambridge, 2020) the most important skill demanded by employers was reading because it is the most frequently used language in international publications. This was followed by speaking in such sectors as customer service.

According to Nick Rajas in a Salesforce (2019) blog, there are ten communication skills that are required in business. Among them are organising your information coherently, developing problem-solving strategies, use of manners, employ emotional intelligence, understand non-verbal communication, become a good listener, learn how to challenge and ask questions, and know when to be assertive which reflected what our respondents said.



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## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in Malta

### Field Research

Field research was carried out by contacting local employers and teaching professionals that use English in their work. A total of thirty-one small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), seven multinational corporations (MNCs) and eight language teachers were approached through email and Facebook communication. Due to the COVID pandemic, there were no physical encounters with the interviewees. Of the companies and people that were approached, thirteen SMEs responded positively and were willing to assist our research and three MNCs responded the questionnaire. The remainder did not respond to the communications sent about the questionnaire. Six of the eight language instructors contacted were happy to respond to the questionnaire.

This questionnaire was carried out in order to clarify the English Language communications needs of businesses so that the project could compile the Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of countries and the Mapping of particular skills and competencies required. The organisations contacted are all based in Malta and Gozo.

The types of businesses approached varied. Among these there were language schools, IT, finance, law, energy and manufacturing businesses among others.

The questionnaire was held via an online platform. The interviewees represented management and human resources departments of the organisations contacted. Interviewees were asked a set of closed and open-ended questions related to their specific language requirements sought in employees.

The respondents cooperated with the project on the provision that although the results would be published, they would remain anonymous. These businesses operated and employed a small foreign-born workforce.

Questions concerned which communication skills were required by the company for employees working in professional positions with their companies. Questions were open and closed ended. The primary purpose of the research was to identify target tasks that business professionals would use. With this in mind, the following questions were developed:

1. What communication skills do you require from your employees?
2. What communication skills do you require from employees working in a professional capacity within your organisation?



3. Of the communication skills not mentioned above, which of the following do you consider vital for employees in professional appointments active in your organisation:

Writing: reports, witness statements, tenders, legal letter writing, letters of apology and thanks, witness statements, estimates, rules, legal briefs, meeting agendas, inventory trackers, handbooks, reports, memos, newsletters, press releases, and proposals.

Oral: Presiding over meetings, giving presentations, providing staff feedback, disciplining and dismissals, questioning interrogating, giving spoken instructions, explaining details, placing orders.

4. What are the tasks that staff need to perform using English at work?
5. How frequently is each identified task performed?
6. What are the business professionals' previous experiences with business English courses?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add with regards to verbal and non-verbal communication?
8. Please provide any further information that you believe would help us understand the English language requirements of an employer.

The answers for questions 1 and 2 show that all the respondents required a minimum of good level of listening, speaking, reading and written English communication from their employees. Some pointed out that the level of English should be advanced or professional, as this was essential to work with clients, colleagues and superiors and carry out tasks efficiently. Overall, all respondents pointed out that English communication should be clear, understandable, polite and professional yet friendly.

Employers had specific requirements for their employees with regards to English skills, both written and spoken English. With regards to the required written skills, the skills most required by employers were the necessity for employees to be able to write reports. Almost half of the respondents chose this option. The second and third most common skills required were writing agendas and writing memos. Some other relevant written skills selected were writing proposals, rules and handbooks. The least required skills were writing witness statements and legal briefs. The most required spoken skills were explaining details and give spoken instructions. Both of these skills were identified as important by more than half of the respondents. The third most important skill identified was giving presentations. The least important skill according to the respondents was questioning and interrogating.



Question 4 asked what were the tasks that staff needed to perform using English at work. The answers here varied, due to different business. The answers from English instructors outlined the need of good English skills in order to carry out teaching successfully and in the most effective manner. communication with co-workers, superiors and students. Furthermore, other tasks outlined included: asking and answering questions, explaining concepts of the language, preparing and giving presentations, worksheet and notes preparation, oration, corrections of work. For the other businesses, various tasks were outlined. These included: communicating with international partners, writing progress reports, answering calls, writing new tender/project submissions, participate in meetings and presentations, writing minutes, writing orders, writing emails, speaking to clients, dealing with suppliers, among others. All these different tasks show that English is used in various aspects of different jobs, both in written and spoken English. This shows the importance of good comprehension of English at different levels.

With regards to the frequency of the tasks mentioned in the previous question, most answers show that a good majority of these tasks are carried out every day. Some tasks which are not performed on an everyday basis, such as report writing and giving presentations, were marked as frequently, regularly and/or quarterly.

From the respondents only a selected few said that business professionals had experience with business English courses. For English instructors, English qualifications and certifications were required in order to work at the English schools. Most of the other respondents said that Satisfactory English qualifications are enough from employees, and these do not need to be business English courses. Two businesses said that these courses are provided for employees.

Further comments on verbal and non-verbal communication were provided by the interviewees. Some expressed that both verbal and non-verbal communication is vital to businesses as it is the best advert for any business to keep clients happy and satisfied within a friendly environment. Furthermore, employees must have the ability to adhere to a multitude of cultural backgrounds and explain one common goal. Many businesses identified English verbal communication as the most important, due to a large number of foreigners that one would need to communicate with. It was also highlighted that politeness, friendliness and clarity when speaking was key in the workplace. For English instructors, both types of communication (verbal and non-verbal communication) are essential. During lessons, we teachers allocate much importance to verbal communication by being clear and simple in our explanations and instructions. Non-verbal communication such as body language is also of utmost importance. If any of these types of communication is not carried out effectively, the student is likely to have a harder time learning the language.



Finally, other insights from employers were provided. A few believe that employees should possess skills in etiquette and customer care, and that the general use of English should be up to par in order to carry out daily tasks like sending emails, etcetera.

### **Desktop Research**

This research was conducted online by looking at various websites. The websites visited included company websites and career service sites.

From the research conducted, a general pattern can be noticed in the English language requirements which job applications ask for. It was clear that most companies in Malta use English as one of the main languages to run their business. This can be attributed to the fact that English is one of the official languages of Malta, along with Maltese. It is also good to note that job opportunities are listed in English, which shows the wide use of English in companies to recruit employees. Furthermore, English is a compulsory subject in all primary and secondary schools in Malta, showing the educational relevance of this language.

The general linguistic needs for job positions were specified. The skills which were sought by companies in prospective employees outlined the importance of good reading, speaking, understanding and writing skills. Others simply stated that proficiency in English is one of the eligibility requirements. No other skills with regards to language were mentioned in job applications. These requirements of the English language were present in advertisements of different forms of jobs, from engineers to clerks.

Data collected from a representative sample of employers presented that the skills considered most important in candidates were oral communication skills (78.7%), team-working skills (78.6%), English language skills (74.4%) and customer handling skills (72.3%). All these findings applied for jobs both in the private and public sector. In conclusion, these findings match the findings in the first part of this research, which shows that professional English is a requirement for most jobs in Malta throughout all sectors and levels. Both written and oral communication are required from prospective employees.



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## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in Cyprus

### Field research

Even though the vast majority of job adverts in Cyprus are in English (see desktop research), business is often conducted in English (KTC, 2018) and knowledge of English is required in most positions, unfortunately, there is no research which is publicly available on the use of professional English in Cyprus. The survey below attempts to bridge this knowledge gap by gathering feedback from HR professionals and managers as well as Business English professionals and provides unique insights on what English skills employers in Cyprus currently require.

### Methodology

Due to time limitation and the current pandemic, an online questionnaire was set up on Google forms which included questions on what specific English skills employers and Business English language teachers considered the most important for the Cypriot workplace.

The survey was sent to medium and large businesses across a variety of sectors. Local companies, HR professionals and English language professionals were contacted and asked to complete the survey. All responses were treated as confidential and were anonymous unless the respondents wished to be informed about the outcomes of the research.

### Participants

About 100 invites were sent and 30 responses were received. 63% of the respondents were women, most of the respondents (50%) were 30-39 years old and 83% were above 29 years old.

50% of the respondents were in HR/training roles and 50% in managerial positions including senior managers and directors. 17 of the respondents worked for local or national companies and the rest worked for multinational organisations. Finally, the participants worked in a range of sectors from Finance, Advertising, Hotel and Food services to Construction and Education.

Furthermore, 5 Business English language teachers have provided their input. All of them were female and the majority were 40-49 years old. Two taught Business English at all levels whereas two taught from B2- Upper Intermediate upwards. All the respondents worked for the private sector and one of them also worked in the public



sector. Finally, the majority have been teaching Business English for longer than 5 years (60%) at Higher Education institutions.

## Results

### HR Professionals/managers

The majority of respondents, as expected, stated that very good or excellent written and verbal skills were required (e.g., *'writing, reading, speaking skills'*, *'ability to answer all internal communication (oral or writing) in business level English'*, *'excellent oral and writing'*). Two of the respondents focused more on writing skills and written communication in general (*'tasks, slack, emails, etc'*). Others stated that English was the official language used by their business, therefore excellent English skills were essential. One respondent referred to formal qualifications as a requirement (e.g., *'an O' level degree for example and a higher one depending on the position'*).

The top three writing communication skills employers identified as the most important for them were emails (100%), reports (83.3%) and proposals (70%). Writing memos (46.7%), meeting agendas (43.3%) and handbooks (40%) were also of high importance. Although the frequency of which each skill was reportedly used varied, most participants agreed that written skills were required daily, especially email communication.

The top three oral communication skills respondents identified were explaining details (80%), giving spoken instructions (73%) and giving presentations (73%) with providing staff feedback (56.7%) and presiding over meetings (46.7%) also high on the list.

In addition, only 5 respondents had previous experience with Business English, 2 during their studies and 3 at their current workplace.

Interestingly, when asked to add any further information on what English language skills employers require, some of the respondents focused on oral communication, (e.g. *'discussing with clients casually and formally'*), a skill reportedly Cypriots lack in (see desktop research) whereas others focused on written skills (e.g. *'draft content in a professional, efficient and well decoded manner'*) and one of the respondents stressed the importance of transitioning from University to the world of work.

### Business English language professionals

Similar to the employers' responses, Business English language professionals stressed the importance of both oral and written skills (*'email correspondence, sales, presentations, customer service, problem solving, etc.'*, *'fluency, accent, problem-solving'*).



Regarding written communication, the top three most important skills Business English teachers identified were writing reports (100%) and emails (80%), similar to what employers identified as important, but also writing letters of apology and thanks (80%), which was surprising as that was not considered as important for employers. Writing proposals (60%) and meeting agendas were also believed to be of high importance (40%). Furthermore, when asked to identify how frequently they believed those skills were used, the respondents replied that writing emails and reports, were needed often, whereas one of the respondents stated that it depended on the job role and the industry the employee worked in.

The responses of the Business English teachers regarding oral communication were almost identical to those of HR professionals/managers. The top three oral communication skills identified by Business English teachers were giving spoken instructions (100%), explaining details (100%) and giving presentations (80%), followed by providing staff feedback (60%), all of which they considered were used often or daily by employees. Similarly, to written skills, one respondent stated that the frequency in which oral skills were used depended on the specific job role.

When asked to provide any further information they deemed important, interesting remarks were made. Two respondents claimed that employees often lack basic skills (*'employees often have low level English skills', 'Most times not even the employers know how to write a proper email, for example, and so usually results in miscommunication and misunderstanding.'*), one respondent stressed the importance of verbal communication and finally one respondent emphasised the lack of soft skills (*'Current graduates and staff in Cyprus lack soft skills and require training on Professional business English. both for Oral purposes and for Written Communication, even those who have finished English schools and studied in English.'*)

### **Desktop research**

According to the most recent Special Eurobarometer survey (2012), 76% of people in Cyprus can speak English and based on the 2016 Adult Education survey (Statistical Service of Cyprus 2018), that percentage has risen to 86.5%, with 73% reporting that their English language skills were average or advanced, which is not surprising given the island's history. English used to be the sole official language in Cyprus during British colonial rule and continued to be used in courts of law until 1989.

In addition, several private and public professional institutions offer Business English courses. After a review of the main providers in Cyprus, it is obvious that they all focus on the four main skills (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) and although their syllabi vary, they cover similar topics, and interestingly some also offer 'Social English' modules (CIMA, 2021, CIMABVI, 2021, Cosmopolis, 2021).



Furthermore, most job adverts in Cyprus are posted in English. For example, after a recent search carried on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2021 on Ergodotisi, the largest online job board in Cyprus with over 200,000 unique visitors a month and 15,000 company subscriptions, out of the latest 100 job adverts, 78 were written in English. Similar observations were made on other job boards e.g., Carierista and Careerjet.

As reported previously, there is no research on Cypriot employers' requirements for Professional English that is publicly available, but it is common knowledge that fluency in English is essential for most jobs in Cyprus. For example, 92 out of the 100 jobs adverts (from a range of companies and for all levels) reviewed on Ergodotisi, require good or excellent use of written and oral English. Unfortunately, none specified in more detail what language skills they ask for.

A brief internet search on jobs advertised by the largest employers in Cyprus (InBusinessNews, 2021), lead to a similar conclusion with an interesting observation. Good knowledge of the English language was required for the majority of low-level jobs but in higher level positions, more advanced English skills were required. For example, *'good knowledge'* was required for a customer position at the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority (CYTA, 2020) whereas *'excellent verbal and written communication skills'* were essential for an ACA/ACCA trainee position at PWC Cyprus (PWC, 2021).

A similar conclusion can be drawn for jobs in the public sector, which require a diploma/certificate in Academic English or a degree studied in English for all positions, but the level required depends on the level of position the candidates applied e.g., for higher positions *'excellent'* knowledge of English is required which corresponds to Cambridge English: Proficiency (CPE), or IELTS, Band Score 7.5 (Public Service Commission, 2017).

A number of soft skills are considered essential for employers in Cyprus, especially when recruiting graduates, for example communication, problem solving, teamwork, emotional intelligence and organisational skills (Dr Stavrou-Costea, 2017). From all the skills mentioned, communication is one of the most important often required by employers (Kariera, 2017, Compass4u, 2017) but Greek-Cypriots seem to lack confidence in soft skills in English, as reported by one of the Business English Professionals above, a sentiment confirmed by other resources. According to CIIM (2020), *'a good number of employees in Cyprus do not feel comfortable using English in their work-environment despite having studied the language at school. This limits productivity and effectiveness and results in many missed opportunities for both employees and employers'*.



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## Summary of findings on employers' professional English requirements for employees in Romania

The report presents the results of field and desktop research conducted for the PESE project in order to emphasize the labour market requirements for English language skills. The desktop research included a study of academic articles, EU-funded projects results and online articles. Interviews represented the preferred instrument to collect qualitative data for this study.

The target participants in interviews were employers belonging to the blue economy, due to the location of Constanta near the Black Sea; corporate sector employers and SMEs in order to understand their perspective of English language proficiency in the workplace. English teachers from high schools and academia offered their perspective on future employees' training in the field of foreign languages.

Also, Romanian recruiters responded to interviews to give an insight of the English communication skills considered vital for obtaining a job.

Obviously, the role of English language in career advancement is undeniable in this era of globalization. However, for employees at the beginning of a career the set of English professional skills is necessary. The research revealed that one of the skills that employers are looking for is knowledge of the English language. More than a third of the jobs currently offered by employers in Romania require knowledge of English (HIPO, 2021). The Romanian applicants for these jobs usually have an average or above average level of English. Therefore, in order to increase their chances of employment and to target positions that offer a good salary package, employers recommend learning English at an above average level and in addition to technical English skills.

### English communication skills required from employees

According to the results of the vast scientific research literature and based on the outcomes of the EU-funded projects, the necessary English communication skills required by employers are:

- The ability to speak and write in English, considered very important by the recruiters at the time of recruitment
- Companies want people who can basically read and understand written words in the form of instructions, reports, letters, memos, notices and other any form of official documents (DH, 2012).
- The ability to express formal communication orally as well as in written form is considered equally important by the prospective employers.



- As one moves higher in a vertical direction in the organisational hierarchy, it becomes necessary for an employee to be good presenter, negotiator, and chair of meetings.
- The mastery of English will help a person to conduct his duties efficiently.
- Better mastery of English enables employees to participate more actively and consciously in a society which is increasingly plural and open to Europe and to the world (ICM, 2019).

### **Recruiter and Employer perspective on English communication skills**

Recruiters would be happy to interview and recruit persons who have both communication skills in English and job skills.

One of the important deficiencies found by the recruiters in candidates for different jobs is the lack of oral as well as written communication skills. For this reason, the first call for inviting a prospective employee for an interview is in English. It allows the recruiter to shorten the list of candidates.

It becomes a handicap for the candidates who have technical knowledge but lack English skills. Interviewers naturally have a dilemma when they encounter such candidates who have technical expertise, but poor communication skills in English. Depending on the level of subject knowledge, they may take the candidate, but will make sure that they are groomed and trained properly.

The use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages it is not highly valued by the recruiters. Often, even if the candidate knows English at the level required by the employer, he fails to self-assess his skills correctly. Thus, the CV that reaches the recruiter does not reflect the true level of understanding, reading and writing of the candidate in that language. This leads to employer's misperception regarding the candidate's knowledge of the language.

### **English Communication skills vital for employees**

Proper English does not mean only the ability to make grammatically correct sentences but also the other related skills for effective communication like presentation skills and interpersonal skills using English.

Many employers get their first impression of future employees through the writing skills they display in their resume, cover letter and email communications.

Romanian employees selected a range of writing and oral skills that are vital for employees:



**Writing:** English writing skills that mostly influence the quality of employee's work are the ability to express ideas through the written word, concise sentences, the preparation of reports (and associated emails for sending them), clear communication of ideas (technical, subject specific), compilation of documents, and emails.

**Oral:** Oral communication skills considered vital by the Romanian respondents comprise interaction with others, understanding verbal tasks, giving and exchanging information and ideas during meetings and conversations, clear explanations, reasoning, questioning and oral instructions.

Employers' views on the tasks that staff need to perform using English at work  
In a research study about the order of the importance of language skills in the workplace, speaking skills were chosen by most respondents with 86.8% (Ojanperä, 2014).

QS Global Employer Survey of language skills in the workplace revealed that English language skills are important for over 95% of employers in many non-native English-speaking countries (Clement & Murugavel, 2018).

When asked about the tasks that staff need to perform using English at work, Romanian employers mentioned communications tasks. Because there are many foreigners in management, employees will have to interact with other English-speaking employees. Employers also added that they appreciate employees having an academic or professional experience that helps to improve their knowledge of English, for example scholarships abroad, internships in a foreign company, volunteering, in general, any kind of interaction with native English speakers that would help with the new employment tasks.

For corporate jobs, employees need to have day-to-day business dealings and communication with executives from different parts of the world. English is the most widely used language and the knowledge of English has become one of the most important employability skills.

Activities like emails, online chat, business presentations require 'above average' language skills in order to have an unambiguous and clear-cut transfer of information to all participants.

Poor English language skills slows down the flow of effective communication, causes misinterpretation, it can create frustration and creates barriers among the employees (Ojanperä, 2014).



## Tasks that staff need to perform using English at work

Hospitality and tourism. English is a vital aspect in the tourism sector since it allows providing the best service to foreign visitors who do not know the local language. The hospitality and tourism sectors were identified as important workforce providers for the labour market from Romania. For this reason, the employers were asked to give details on the main tasks that the staff need to perform using English at work and the frequency. Among these:

- giving information, followed by the rendering of services, and offering help to problems
- skills of speaking and listening are applied together in essential activities, such as making reservations by phone
- creating a tourist package, and for this, the employees must have good reading and writing skills as well as specific terminology since in most cases communication with companies that are in other countries are given by emails
- research and updates on various tourism topics are mostly in English; reading ability helps both the knowledge of new topics in tourism and promotion to future tourist

People who work for tourism and hospitality purposes are required to use English in their daily activities and routine work. Tourism professionals need to speak English to foreigners to make their visit more enjoyable (Erazo & all, 2019). With reference to the level of specialised knowledge, “it is not technical or over-specialized in nature” (Strutt, O’Keeffe, & Dubicka, 2003), textbooks are significantly similar to any general English textbook.

Port and maritime sectors are important economic sectors for Romania. Because these are continually changing and evolving as a result of globalization and innovation, employers require a high level professional and linguistic competences. English skills are among the most demanded employees' skills. Unanimously, employers and English teachers agreed that the tasks that staff need to perform using English at work are:

- onboard routine communications regarding the operations & maintenance and everything used for work of the engineering department,
- transmitting alerts, urgency & distress messages
- sending and receiving weather alerts and safety communications
- discussing issues related to port state control inspections, harbour authority, cargo operations and marine transportation.
- report writing for sending daily messages and reports to company.
- basic skills in communicating daily ideas and thoughts are vital.



Because seafarers from different nationalities and cultures are working together onboard vessels (Rosedi, 2013), it is vital that they share a common language on board while working and living at sea. This language in the shipping industry is known as Maritime English. An international Maritime English IMO Model Course governs the teaching of the subject worldwide.

Participants in interviews also mentioned a few of the concerns that make English communication skills “a must” for future candidates. The mostly mentioned: necessity to interact with customers, suppliers and business partners, globalization of tasks and resources as well as geographically dispersed employees of a company that need to interact to make important decisions. All these make the English language the most natural means of effective communication.



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## **Chapter 2: Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries.**

This chapter includes a description of intervention methods, techniques and best practices used in each partner organisations' country to teach and train unemployed people in a general manner and in terms of the English language for professional purposes.

This information provides an overview of what is available in terms of government programmes, training offers in public and private institutions aimed at upskilling unemployed people.



## **Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Spain.**

Despite the economic recovery in the pre-Covid period, Spain suffers from imbalances in the economic and labour spheres: high public debt, small scale industry and insufficient/inefficient investment in research, development and innovation (2); high rates of unemployment – especially youth and long-term unemployment, excessive segmentation of the labour market, among others. In 2017, Spain had the second highest unemployment rate in EU, at 17.2%, after Greece (21.5%).

The 2017-20 Spanish strategy for employment activation (MEYSS, 2017c) is represented by projects and measures to rationalize the unemployment protection system and to provide the national employment system with a set of tools, infrastructures and information systems necessary for its modernization and to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. This includes training and qualification for employment.

The publication in September 2015 of Act 30/2015 (Head of State, 2015) which regulates vocational training for employment set a new framework for the management and implementation of VET in the field of employment. This is still being developed. The act called for an efficient system for monitoring and prospecting the labour market, based on the coordination of all actors: administrations, social agents, experts, etc. It also stressed the need to assess the impact of training on accessing and maintaining employment, enhancing competitiveness of enterprises, improving workers' skills, meeting labour market needs, and ensuring efficiency of resources (MEYSS, 2015c).

To boost the national youth guarantee system (Head of State, 2016), the Government approved urgent measures in December 2016 favouring access and registration of young people in the system with more flexible requirements such as automatic registration of all young people registered as job seekers in public employment services; and retroactive registration.

Specifically, to help prevent early school leaving in compulsory secondary education, basic VET programmes were designed as an alternative route to stay in or return to education and training.



The different funding schemes for training programmes available free of charge to unemployed and employed workers can be as follows:

- a. training organised by companies for their employees (formación programada por la empresa), funded by discounts on what companies have to pay to Social Security;
- b. subsidised training schemes through open calls for proposals, such as sectoral and cross-sectoral training programmes for the employed and self-employed, including those working in the social economy (cooperatives - known as planes de formación intersectoriales, sectoriales, autónomos, y economía social);
- c. subsidised training schemes for the unemployed, including 'training plans' (planes de formación) aimed at meeting needs identified by the public employment services and specific training programmes. They are funded through open tendered calls for proposals;
- d. other training initiatives, such as individual training leaves (permisos individuales de formación), alternance training (formación en alternancia) , civil servants' training, training in prisons, among others. The way in which these initiatives are funded varies.

The Covid pandemic has forced many people to leave their jobs and search for the ways to improve their employability. For this reason, SEPE (Public Service of State Employment) launches new training programmes every week to help those who have lost their jobs due to the health crisis.

The Public Employment service and FUNDAE collaborate with companies such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), CISCO, Cloudera, Everis, Accenture, Fundación Telefónica, Google, Huawei, IBM, Linux, Oracle and SAP offer anyone who is interested and enrolled as a jobseeker to acquire new digital and language skills.

As a matter of fact, the IT and programming sector has 0% unemployment rate in Spain, which creates a huge demand for professionals in this area. According to statistics, 3.2 million jobs are expected to be provided for IT specialists by 2030. The majority of these workers are required to have an appropriate level of English. That is why SEPE offers free language courses to help the unemployed obtain A1,A2,B1,B2 and C1 certificate of language proficiency (2021).



In general, following courses and training programmes can be found on SEPE official websites:

1. Courses in Ceuta and Melilla
2. National centres
3. Training of digital skills
4. Education in autonomous regions
5. Education through the employment counselling programmes

**Cursoinem.es** is a valuable resource for those who are looking for free online courses offered by SEPE and regional employment services.

For example, **Smartmind** offers business language course which includes company structure description, clients' attention, business communication within teams, writing professional profiles, telephone communication, email or written correspondence, travelling vocabulary, frequent errors and false friends, etc. Course duration is 60 hours.

**Vipper Sistemas** is a training centre approved by the Madrid community which provides a wide range of SEPE courses completely free of charge.

Another interesting resource is EUROFARMAC which is one of the many tools that the State Foundation for Employment Training (FUNDAE) provides to facilitate and promote life-long training for workers with the main aim to increase the competitiveness and productivity of companies. EUROFARMAC offers free courses for companies and the unemployed.

**Grupo Hedima** offers longer language training courses (A1-C1 level) to unemployed workers in the Hospitality and Tourism or Social Economy sectors. Course duration is 120 hours.

**Academia Integral** provides various courses to upskill workers and the unemployed in tourism sector, emergency services, finances and banking, logistics and transportation, tourism and hospitality, catering services, client attention, management assistance, business negotiation.

Federación de Enseñanza (CCOO) is a non-governmental organization that supports educators at all levels of the Spanish educational system with training courses, information on competitive examinations, proposals for educational improvements, vacancies abroad, reports on current problems in the classroom, online free services. It offers various language courses as well (A1-C1 level).



**UGT** is the Union of workers which represents itself as an independent, democratic, committed and demanding organization with a presence in all working sectors in Spain. This organization is well-known for running different courses including language ones.



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## Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Portugal

Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training) is the Portuguese public body responsible for the development and implementation of employment and vocational training policies and it works under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

This institution runs its own vocational training centres and includes central and regional structures and is responsible for the large majority of the vocational training offered by the Government to unemployed people. Alongside the Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional, there are private companies which are certified to deliver vocational training that in addition to offering tailor-made solutions to companies from different business sectors also offer some vocational training actions that are funded by the EU. These companies along with Language Schools offer English courses for specific purposes but these are not for free and are not aimed at unemployed people and, therefore, we do not cover them in this text.

In 2007, Portugal established a National Qualification System (Decree-Law No. 396/2007, of 31 December 2007) that constitutes a framework to all vocational training provisions. This system aims precisely to harmonize, normalize and articulate the qualifications obtained in the different educational and vocational training subsystems but also to take into account those competences obtained in non-formal or informal contexts.

This system included the creation of a National Catalogue of Qualifications that establishes profiles of qualifications according to educational and vocational training areas, classified by levels according to a European Qualification Framework. It also identifies the educational and vocational training terms of reference necessary to obtain those profiles. These training terms of reference are organized by modules. All the educational and vocational training terms of reference in the Catalogue include modules of English language.

Currently in Portugal, there are six types of vocational training programmes for unemployed people:

*Learning* – this programme is for young people under 25 years old with at least lower secondary education. The training is carried out on an alternative basis, between a Vocational Training Centre and a company. The courses have a 3-year duration. This programme allows young people to obtain a Level 4 qualification and to complete one of the profiles of qualifications defined in the National Catalogue of Qualifications and includes several modules of English.



*Educational and Vocational Training courses for adults* – this programme is for people over 18 years old. It is organized as a flexible training pathway adapted to the skills already held by the trainees, allowing them to complete the lower or the upper secondary education. When completing the programme, each trainee is expected to have achieved one of the profiles of qualifications in the National Catalogue of Qualifications which includes several English modules.

*Modular Vocational Training* – this is an individualized answer for adults that wish to complement their knowledge and professional skills to re-enter the labour market. These are short-term vocational training actions, with a minimum duration of 25 hours. They are also organised according to the educational and vocational training terms of reference of the National Catalogue of Qualifications but each action is equivalent to only one or several modules included in each term of reference. The purpose of this programme is to allow adults to build gradually and over several years their own qualification pathway in order to be able to complete one of the profiles of qualifications in the Catalogue.

*Active life - Qualified employment* – this programme aims to help unemployed adults with very low qualifications to re-enter the labour market. It includes short term vocational training actions and a period of on-the-job training. These vocational training actions are organized according to the National Qualifications Catalogue.

*Technological Specialization* – This is a programme for young people and adults with upper secondary education. These courses have a social and cultural component that may include English modules.

From the above, taking into account that all the training references that are part of the National Catalogue of Qualifications include English language learning and that the professional training programmes aimed at the unemployed are organised according to the same Catalogue, it can be concluded that English language learning is part of the whole training offer aimed at this public.

However, in practice, if this is true for training programmes with a longer duration and which allow the achievement of a training term of reference (such as Learning and Education-Training Courses), this is not necessarily the case for programmes which are developed in short-term training actions (such as Modular Training or Working Life - Qualified Employment), since these correspond only to some modules of a training term of reference. In fact, the aim of these shorter duration programmes in modules is to solve the immediate problem of the unemployed person, preparing him/her for a rapid re-integration into the labour market.



But, on the other hand, these programmes also safeguard longer term objectives, making it possible for each individual to progress in their qualifications, according to their needs, by completing one of the qualification profiles in the catalogue, by attending several short-term training courses over the years. And these long-term training paths include learning the English language. It is also important to bear in mind that all these training programmes without exception prioritise the teaching of ICT (information and communication technologies), which often use English terminology. This often acts as an incentive to include English language modules in the training activities.

As for specific vocational training in English, we can point out some examples of short-duration courses being offered by Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional, such as “English Language – Writing Techniques”, “English Language – Business Activity”, “English Language – Stock Management and Logistics”, “Multimedia Training in the Tourism, Hospitality and Restaurant Areas – English”, “Business English”.

Some of these training actions are only available in different parts of the country according to the activity sectors present in the region, however, this situation may be changing at a fast pace due to current developments in distance teaching and learning processes. Due to space restraints, we are not analysing the contents of these courses in this text, but it is worth mentioning that most of them seem focused on acquisition of vocabulary, grammar contents, they are not innovative in terms of topics and do not seem to cater for different levels.



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## Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of UK

Best practices for English language learning.

It would be easy to assume that the UK, being an English-speaking nation, had no particular practices related to English language learning for the unemployed, but there are many unemployed foreigners in the country, and while the UK no longer allows entry to migrants without English, it still has a high number of resident migrants whose first language is not English. While younger migrants may have English sufficient for some jobs, their older counterparts may be less advantaged- about 25% of migrants who can't speak any English arrived after they turned 50 (full fact).

While unemployed people may access free online courses the bulk of English learning for the unemployed comes under the umbrella of ESOL- that is English to Speakers of Other Languages. The UK government offers ESOL courses for the unemployed which means they are free up to level two. ESOL providers, often regional colleges, package these courses under names such as English for Life or English for Work and several resources can be harvested from a large online platform managed by The Education and Training Foundation.

ESOL in itself could be considered the main best practice. Its methodology is further divided into several mini best practices. Examples include material that is specifically aimed for adults in real world situations; considerations of learners' short-term goals and the contexts in which they will need to use English; learners' educational and employment aspirations; learners' broader requirements for skills, such as Information Technology, study skills, problem solving, job-searching or specific subject skills; the local community context.

Best practices for teachers within ESOL include techniques for teaching mixed-level groups and groups of learners with very mixed educational backgrounds; techniques for teaching individuals whose listening/speaking skills are much higher or lower than their reading/writing skills; ESOL teachers best practices include schemes of work, lesson plans and detailed record keeping to supply evidence of what was achieved in the lessons.

The best of the best for the unemployed learners without access to colleges (e.g., rural dwellers) would be a free online ESOL course whose best practices incorporate colourful videos, infographics and quizzes. One such course offers a curriculum of: Jobsearch and interview skills- body language awareness and preparing for interviews; Using English in the Workplace; Office work meetings and presentations; Employment rights, pay and working conditions; Health and safety at work; Jobs, careers and the world of work.



One of the major players in the provision of ESOL is the British Council which provides online material that divides English skills into the specific areas of employment being sought by the student, for instance, Retail and Self-Employed.

**Conclusion:**

From the UK the best intervention techniques for the unemployed to be included in the PESE project could be considered short, well defined modules, with clear learning outcomes and a completion certificate. Quizzes and audio/visual content is also popular and content that has 'real world' application is a must.



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## Best Practice Guide on Intervention Techniques to Upskill Unemployed Citizens – The case of Malta

### Introduction

According to Eurostat, Malta has one of the EU's lowest unemployment rates. Nonetheless, there are various efforts from the public sector that offers unemployed people professional English courses in order to improve their chances at employment. In Malta, the primary body which targets programmes for unemployed people in Malta is JobsPlus. This is a national agency with a vision designed to meet the needs of a changing economy.

Part of its commitment is to enhance and facilitate access to jobs and the labour market. By offering interactive and dynamic functions, as well as a more personalised experience through the use of customisable dashboards; jobseekers now have an improved overall job-matching experience and offer various training programmes. Adults can also access training to improve their chances of employment through MCAST and the LifeLong Learning Department.

### *JobsPlus*

JobsPlus currently offers various online courses to help citizens improve their skills which would increase their employability chances. One of the courses offered is English for Business. Individuals who are 16 years of age and older and who hold a MQF level 2 qualification or have at least 3 years' work experience can apply for this course. This course is delivered through a series of grammar presentations, discussions, role plays and hands-on exercises. Authentic business contexts are created so learners can understand business concepts and situations and language skills can be developed during this course. Assessments take place in oral, written or practical exercises. The modules this course include: Social English and Networking, Meetings & Negotiations, writing e-mails, letters and reports and Telephoning & Exchanging Information this certificate to be at Level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework.



Another interesting course is Foundation in English for Foreigners. This is open to anyone aged 16 years and over. It covers the basic skills of the English language. This course aims to teach people the English language in order to be equipped with this language when seeking employment. Furthermore, once a candidate successfully concludes this course, there are two other courses offered to help build on the knowledge learnt from this course. These two courses are: Elementary Award in English for Foreigners and Award in English for Foreigners. Both of these involve assessments which test listening, reading, speaking and written abilities.

Another useful course by JobsPlus is the Vocational Education and Training Award in Principles of Sales Techniques. This aims to teach jobseekers Communication Skills and Selling Techniques as well as After Sales and Customer Care. It is important to note that all JobsPlus courses are offered free of charge to all trainees irrespective whether one is seeking employment or is already in employment. This is a great incentive as it offers citizens the opportunity to build on their skills, one of which is learning professional English and increase their chances at employment.

### *LifeLong Learning Department*

The Lifelong Learning Department is part of the Ministry of Education which offers courses to help citizens in acquiring skills that are relevant to their work life. It offers training in various courses to help unemployed people improve their abilities and prepare them for employment. The Lifelong Learning Department offers training in English at all levels. The courses include English lessons at a basic level, advanced level, conversational level, and English as a foreign language. The basic English course aims to improve student's competence in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and also to build up the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become more independent in thought and action through methods of learning and teaching. At the conversational level, the very basics of the English grammar are taught, as well as basic sentence structure and the frequently used phrases used to communicate. At an advanced level, these English courses help students develop critical sense, personal response and independent judgement as well as appreciate in a disciplined and critical way literary and non-literary texts. Furthermore, the English courses offered are recognized by the European Qualifications Framework. The



highest level of English taught here is at Matriculation Ordinary level, which the exam taken at the end of secondary school. Here, the lessons are based on the requirements from the syllabus. This includes grammar, reading comprehension, writing compositions among other elements of the English language. The prices of the courses vary. The very basic courses are offered at around 40 Euros while the more advanced courses are around 70 Euros.

### *MCAST*

The Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) aims to provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy. It offers students the opportunity to follow courses and training even if they have not achieved any O-levels or A-Levels, starting from as low as Level 1 Courses or Access Pathway level. It also offers vocational training in English. In order to apply for this course, one must finish compulsory education and possibly sit for an interview. There are other courses offered by institutes that offer Introductory and Foundation Certificates to their courses for people who did not gain the necessary qualifications to follow a particular line of work.

MCAST also offers the possibility of following Short Courses to help improve employment opportunities in various sectors, including English. The Proficiency in English course offered is at MQF level 5 and costs 195 Euros. At this level, participants are expected to have sufficient knowledge of English in order to deal with everyday situations in scenarios ranging from home, work, social, public and educational settings. This course enhances participants' skills and competencies when developing the necessary support tools related to literacy.

### *Conclusion*

After looking at the various public bodies that offer English courses, one can notice that there are various opportunities for unemployed people to take up in order to develop their English skills. JobsPlus is the public body which offers a wide range of English courses, both at basic level (for beginners or foreigners) and more



advanced levels and that all these courses are offered free of charge. The second department which offers various English courses is Lifelong Learning Courses. Lastly, there are various English courses offered at MCAST courses. Both of these bodies charge a fee for these courses, and it is noticeable that MCAST courses are more expensive but the MQF level certificate is higher. Despite the fact that there are these courses for citizens to develop their English skills, it is clear that there is a lack of opportunities where unemployed people can learn business and professional English in Malta. Having training in business English is an important asset to have for unemployed people when searching for a job, as this makes them more qualified and prepared for the job.





## Best Practice Guide on Intervention Techniques to Upskill Unemployed Citizens – The case of Cyprus

### Introduction

According to the latest Eurostat report, unemployment in the EU was 7.5% and youth unemployment reached 17.7%. The overall unemployment percentage was similar in Cyprus with an unemployment rate of 7.8% but Cyprus is doing significantly worse in youth unemployment as the most recent statistic available, a percentage of 21.4%, reported in September 2020, is one of the highest across the EU.

In Cyprus, the majority of interventions specifically targeted for the unemployed are developed or partially funded by the Department of Labour, which is part of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLSI). In addition, the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA), a public body reporting to MLSI, in cooperation with the department of Labour as well as other organisations across Cyprus approves and manages a number of schemes aimed at unemployed people. HRDA is currently the largest administrator of vocational and other relevant training for the unemployed in Cyprus.

### Interventions, techniques, best practices

#### *a. For the unemployed in general*

The HRDA, as mentioned above, in collaboration with the Department of Labour and relevant providers in Cyprus, is the main facilitator of training for the unemployed in Cyprus as it offers a large number of programs throughout the year. It is publicly funded by all private employers on the Republic of Cyprus (public bodies are excluded), which are legally obliged to contribute to the Human Resources Development Fund.

One of the many schemes available aims to aid long-term unemployed individuals to re-enter the world of work. According to the program specifications, employers are paid by the HRDA to recruit and train a long-term unemployed person for a period of 4 months (HRDA, 2021). Employers are required to set and describe in detail a number of units/modules/training activities they are planning to implement during that period, in advance. HRDA also runs a plan specifically in gaining experience and training in public departments and not for profit organisations. Similarly, to the first scheme described, training takes place at the place of work for 4 months and each unemployed individual is assigned a tutor who guides and trains them for the duration of their work experience.

Two programmes target a particular unemployed group, as they aim to assist groups of unemployed who are not able to obtain a job or qualify for job seeker's allowance due to illness, age or other reasons. One of the schemes, again, similarly to the



programme available for long-term unemployed in general, offers work experience in the public domain, with the hope the individuals can then be employed later on in the process. The second scheme available for this group of unemployed individuals is a three-month vocational training provided by professional organisations. (HRDA, STEED, 2021)

Vocational training, either freely available or partially funded, is offered for all the unemployed, regardless of the length of time they have been unemployed for or the specific reasons. Based on the general scheme under the name 'Multi-Company training programmes', after approved by HRDA, an unemployed person can apply for a position on a training programme they are interested in. The main aim of this programme is acquisition of new knowledge and skills or enhancement of existing knowledge and skills in order to assist the unemployed to obtain a job.

HRDA funds a huge number of training programmes across various occupations, levels and sectors and are all developed and delivered by accredited (by the HRDA) training providers who are required to submit a relevant form with details of the training they propose in order to be approved and be able to participate. There are training programmes available on specific vocational skills related to a vast range of areas from management, technology, marketing, product development and production, public relations, languages, health and safety, rules, laws, regulations and others.

The topics and industry areas of programmes is defined based on the current labour market needs in Cyprus, identified by excessive research HRDA conducts, as well as taking into account public data and information from other relevant authorities (HRDA, list of approved multi-company training programmes-'common', 2021).

To ensure the consistent quality and efficiency of each programme, HRDA approved training providers are required to meet a comprehensive list of specifications, for example the provider must be directly involved in activities relevant to the programme they deliver and they must employ relevant staff as well as own necessary equipment and infrastructure (HRDA Training Program for the Unemployed Guide, 2020).

These programmes involve a variety of training providers across the island and the exact duration and format of the training is adapted based on the topic. For example, the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC, 2021) offers HRDA funded accelerated short courses on technical vocations such as construction, plumbing and sewing.

In addition, a scheme aimed in assisting young adults who enter the world of work after their studies is available, in which employers are partially funded in order to



recruit Higher Education graduates under 30 years old so they can gain knowledge, experience and specialised knowledge and skills in the industry they wish.

Furthermore, non-profit organisations such as the Youth Board Council and SEAL Cyprus offer free one-off series of career labs for young unemployed individuals delivered by professional career advisors (SEAL Cyprus, 2021).

Courses on relevant professional skills, essential in today's labour market are also available. For example, the Cyprus Productivity Centre offers 3.5- and 8-hour long courses which aim to enhance the unemployed' soft skills, professional skills, for example their CV as well as short-term training in basic digital skills essential in today's digital era, such as Microsoft Office package training.

To sum up, two main ways of intervention for the unemployed are developed and implemented in Cyprus. The first is through practical experience at established and approved by the HRDA employers across Cyprus and the second is through either training provided by non-profit organisations or accredited training which is specific to occupations which are in demand at that given period and is always of short duration (3-4 months), they include realistic scenarios, and/or a practical element and it's provided by approved industry experts and other relevant trainers. Training available is offered based on the labour market needs, in order to enable the unemployed taking training to obtain a job quickly after they finish their training. Also, training and guidance relevant to soft, digital and other professional skills is also available, to enable unemployed of all ages and backgrounds to improve their chances of employment.

*For the unemployed who wish to improve their Professional English skills.*

HRDA offers partially funded or discounted English language courses tailored and aimed at specific industry sectors or occupations, for example Business English training for housekeepers, waiters, bus drivers, professionals in the sales and service sector as well as a generic Professional English course, for example Professional Communication (in English). All courses are short in duration (30 hours), cover the main topics relevant to the specific sector, they also include grammar and relevant vocabulary lessons, and are provided by accredited vocational trainers in Cyprus (HRDA Approved vocational programmes for first semester of 2021).

For example, Business English For Professionals in the Sales and Service Sector delivered by the Education and Information Technology Centre in Nicosia, is a 30-hour course and consists of 15 units focused on relevant topics such as greeting visitors, meetings, negotiations, networking and presenting information. Grammar and relevant vocabulary are also embedded in all units (EDITC, 2021).



Similarly, Business English for bus drivers, is also a 30-hour course and includes units on vocabulary about routes timetable, dealing with engine issues and describing monuments or other landmarks in Cyprus, topics relevant to Cypriot bus drivers (Tutors Panaretos Executive Education, 2021).

In addition, Interlead Experts in Limassol (Interlead, 2021) offers a similarly structured course that is English for Customer service, which is a fast-track Business course for adults (pre-Intermediate level). Each programme consists of two weekly sessions for a total of 30 hours (approx. 3 months) with a maximum of 11 students. 'With the completion of the course, the participants can communicate much more effectively with English-speaking customers and their English skills (reading, writing, comprehension, speaking, grammar etc.) are majorly improved, giving them the confidence, they need to be more efficient at work and in everyday life' the instructor who delivers the specific course commented.

In conclusion, Professional English related courses available for the unemployed, similar to other training programmes offered by the Human Resources Development Authority, are fast paced, designed to meet specific needs and the majority include real-life scenarios based on possible issues the unemployed might face at that specific occupation if they choose to follow it. They all seem to cover the four main language skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) as well as grammar and vocabulary related to the relevant sector. However, they are only partially funded and tend to focus on a specific sector, and therefore, we identify the need for more generic courses that are freely available for the unemployed people.



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## Best practice guide on intervention techniques to upskill unemployed citizens of EU countries – The case of Romania

This section summarizes the findings in Romania's approaches regarding the intervention methods, techniques and best practices to teach unemployed people and specifically to teach them English. In many countries, training for unemployed people is part of more general employment frameworks (EC, 2015). In Romania, the current Unemployment Insurance Act (Law 76, 2002) provides training of unemployed people, as one of the main services to support their labour market reintegration.

### *National interventions*

There are national interventions for upskilling unemployed people and for increasing employability. The National Agency for Employment applies a series of active measures aimed at integrating the unemployed and jobseekers into the labour market.

### *Grant subsidies*

Measures to increase the chances of employment of the unemployed include participation in courses for specialization and the granting of subsidies. Thus, jobseekers participate in courses and the grant is awarded to encourage employers to include people belonging to disadvantaged categories or with more difficult access to the labour market. Thus, employers who employ, for an unlimited period, the unemployed over the age of 45 or single parents supporting single-parent families, the long-term unemployed or young NEETs, receive monthly subsidy grants. The grant is for a period of 12 months, for each person employed in these categories, in the amount of 2,250 RON (about 450 Euro), with the obligation to maintain employment or service relations for at least 18 months (ANOFM, 2018).

### *Training courses*

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate increased. The Ministry of Labour announced that almost 30,000 employment contracts were terminated as of March 2020, when the state of emergency was declared. Most of these contracts were from manufacturing, retail, automotive repair and construction sector. More recently another 596,000 employment contracts have been suspended. As an intervention, the National Agency for Employment has offered 67 professional



training courses throughout the country, including English courses for those who want to learn to communicate in a foreign language.

The unemployed people either follow a training programme that is selected for them by a specialized counsellor in the employment office, or when they register with the public employment office, they can enrol on a training course that is individually selected, provided that it leads to employment. Unemployed workers cannot refuse enrolment on a training programme that has been selected for them by a specialized counsellor of the local employment offices without having their unemployment benefit suspended.

#### *First-employment bonus for young unemployed*

This approach was developed to subsidize employment for young people. Instead of subsidizing employers, young people are entitled to a sum equal to their employment benefit if they find employment prior to the termination of their unemployment benefit period. Graduates the age of 16 or over are eligible for a first-employment bonus equal to the amount of the social reference indicator of 500 RON (about 100 EUR) under the condition of gaining full-time employment for a period of 12 months or more (CEDEFOP, 2015).

#### *Recognition of learning outcomes*

Training which leads to certification, if not formal qualifications, is generally considered a good thing to show participants' achievements in a way that has some lasting benefit. There appears to be a trend towards certification of training. In Romania, special provisions include the certification of skills acquired informally or non-formally (EC, 2015). This is part of national intervention for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Evaluation is carried out in competence assessment centres according to Procedure for assessment and validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal context (EPALE, 2015), approved by the Joint Order of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour no. 4543/468/2004.

#### *Local and regional interventions*

Public and private institutions, SMS, NGO and in some cases even individuals can also approach national programmes that are implemented at local or regional level. The most notable are:

#### *Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020*

Regional projects funded by the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020, through public institutions, associations or chamber of commerce and industry



organize courses for specialization and for communication in English. The courses are addressed to people who want to develop their communication skills in English, as well as vocabulary and grammatical structures so that they can achieve correct and efficient communication. Because of the pandemic, the courses are organized online via the ZOOM platform, easy to use, allowing an efficient interaction with the lecturer of the course, as well as a good visibility of the course materials. Participation in the course is usually free, as part of the POCU programme (CCIBV, 2020). Sometimes, depending on the structure of the project, the participants receive a grant subsidy during the participation period.

### *StartUp Nation programme*

StartUp Nation programme represents an initiative of the Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds to encourage unemployed or inactive people in small towns and villages to open small businesses. Potential candidates elaborated and submitted business plans which were evaluated for approval of a selection committee, based on criteria established by the beneficiary of the non-reimbursable financing. Funds of up to 25,000 euros were given to the selected organizations to implement their businesses (MDRAPE, 2017).

### *Joint efforts at organization level*

Several EU-funded projects addressing upskill of unemployed citizens, teaching English and exchanging of good practices for teaching English language to various categories of people are implemented. Organizations from Romania are involved in such projects aiming at improving English communication skills:

- Sharing Best Practices in Teaching English for 50+ (Erasmus, 2019a), - to provide instructors with a toolkit to assist during teaching
- Practical and Communication based Maritime English (Erasmus, 2019b) - to give seafarers enhanced competence in Maritime English and better communication skills.
- Language skills and intercultural issues in the hospitality industry: unity in diversity in the EU labour market (Erasmus, 2016)

### *Recruiters' advices*

From the perspective of recruiters, there is also an endeavour to help candidates to improve their English communication skills. They are trying to motivate prospective employees to study the English language, which would significantly contribute to increasing their chances of employment. Recommendations include the option of



taking accredited courses and unassisted methods that can greatly improve English language performance:

- Watch TV and radio stations that broadcast in English
- Watch movies that are spoken in English language - initially, use subtitles to familiarize with the terms, after which gradually give it up
- Read books in the English language, of variable difficulty depending on own degree of knowledge; read bilingual books, in which one of the pages is written in English language, and the opposite page translates the text into Romanian
- Read the online editions of newspapers and magazines in English
- Use settings in English on own phone, computer, etc. to familiarize with common terms
- Periodically test own evolution by making language tests available on the Internet



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## Chapter 3: Mapping of particular skills and competencies required

The four traditional language skills are usually the main components of any language course, however, nowadays it is widely accepted that these skills need to be complemented with others in order to prepare learners for communication in a foreign language that is actually effective.

Drawing on the findings of the research carried out for the first chapter of the handbook and on additional research, this chapter offers insights on the different types of skills and competences required in a professional context: language specific skills, professional skills, online communication skills, cultural competence and non-linguistic competence.

This mapping document is based on research conducted in section one of IO1. It is a guide to what modules will be included in the Professional English Skills for Employability Across the EU instructional materials. It outlines the skills required by employers for employees in the UK working in professional white-collar positions such as civil service, finance, logistics, accountancy, and business and executive management and blue-collar manual personnel employed across a range of fields.



## Language specific skills

Language is often defined, in very simplistic terms, as a system of oral and written symbols used by people to communicate and exchange ideas with other people, that is, a structured use of symbols or words. Individuals need, therefore, to make use of the language skills if they are to communicate. But these are not enough to communicate, individuals also need to master communication skills, which relate to the ability to communicate in an effective manner. As Cunha says “Communication skills are no longer recognized just as listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition to language, functional or interactional skills are necessary for an effective communication. (Cunha, A., 2020)

At a glance, the overlapping that seems to exist between these two sets of skills make it difficult to separate language from communication skills and as Obenaus mentions recruiters are not strange to this, “Indeed, it is not always easy to separate communication skills from language skills and they are often perceived as one and the same by recruiters.” (Obenaus, 1998). Despite this lack of awareness on the recruiters’ part, in the daily activities of a company, the difference shows. The fact that a member of the staff is proficient in a given language, that is, masters the language skills, does not mean that this person is a good communicator, since communication skills involve the ability, for example, to share ideas in a clear manner, to be able to listen to the others and give feedback, to be aware and tackle cultural differences, to be able to speak in public, just to mention some.

We can, therefore, assume that these skills are interlocked, overlapped and contribute to the act of communication, with language skills working like a piece of music that is played by a musician in order to produce a beautiful performance. But for the purposes of this text, we will only look at the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, which can be divided in different ways, for example in receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) or oral skills and written skills since listening and reading deal with understanding the oral or written speech individuals are faced with whereas writing and speaking deal with producing speech, starting and maintaining oral interactions, producing documents or texts that convey ideas in a structured manner.

In general terms, the level of proficiency of users of English (or any foreign language) is often unbalanced, and this is especially true in a professional context since it is closely related to the types of tasks employees carry out within the company and to the type of business sector to which the company belongs, and over the years this unbalance tends to accentuate, added to the fact that when companies seek tailor-made training in English, they tend to ask for courses that privilege their own very specific needs, which sometimes does not cater for all language skills.



According to the research we conducted (although we must mention that our sample is a relatively small one), currently, in Portugal, most employers put their requirements in terms of oral and written skills at the same level when mentioning the tasks in which they require their employees to use English, such as customer service, participating in meetings, conference calls, delivering presentations, problem solving with co-workers, writing reports and highly specialized documents, minutes, memos, emails, letters, production of instructions, rules and standards, daily oral communication with clients and supervisors in foreign countries, social media management, communication on the phone. We may, therefore, conclude, that oral and written skills are used simultaneously since these are organizations that communicate in English in their daily business activity.

However, when discussing with trainers who have extensive experience in teaching English in professional contexts, they drew our attention to the fact that the requirements differ a lot according to the business sectors, with, for example, the tourism and travel industry being very focused on listening and speaking whereas in banking, financing and law, companies tend to be particularly demanding in all four language skills.

Always bearing in mind that a four-skill model for teaching English tends currently to be overlooked, for the purposes of this section and based on findings of our research conducted with employers and trainers of English we present below a tentative summary of tasks carried out in a professional setting per oral and written skills as well as a set of activities developed by trainers aimed at preparing and/or developing learners' proficiency in these skills.

### **Speaking and listening**

Greetings in English, telephone English, small talk in English / speaking about the weather (here we may add the cultural awareness), deliver presentations, participating in meetings/conference calls with supervisors, clients, co-workers in the country and abroad, dealing with complaints, conducting a negotiation, customer-service, problem-solving with co-workers. To carry out these tasks, employees must be able to understand different accents and to provide follow-up on conversations, either face to face or on the phone, they need to know how to agree and disagree, express opinions, argue, persuade, know and use terminology according to the business activity.

There are many activities that can be implemented during training sessions to address speaking and writing like watching videos without any subtitles and listening to audio files to identify pieces of information, to draw the learners' attention to different accents, to get the main idea, to identify details, give a sequence or identify



specific vocabulary, listening to audio files with repetition exercises to correct pronunciation, exercises with minimal pairs, role-play exercises, interviews, presentations, brainstorming sessions, debates.

### **Writing and Reading**

Write, read and understand different types of documents related to a given field of activity or expertise like reports, contracts, instructions, rules and standards and other highly specialized documents, memos, letters, emails, minutes, handbooks of different sorts, newsletters, job ads, business proposals, knowledge and use of terminology according to the business activity. This involves structuring ideas, sequencing, comparing, writing about cause and effect, describing, define, expressing opinions, arguing and persuading, the correct use of capital letters, spelling rules, abbreviations, punctuation, signs and symbols, different types of reading according to the type of document or the reading objective (skimming, scanning or extensive reading).

Among the many activities aimed at improving written skills are obviously writing the different types of documents used in the company/business sector, vocabulary-building exercises, idioms exercises, sentence transformation, rephrasing, creative writing exercises. Reading and interpretation of different types of texts, not just the mentioned documents, but articles from newspapers and magazines, either specialized or not that can be discussed orally or can be the basis for writing comments, summaries. True or false, multiple choice or fill in the gap exercises are also very popular in training sessions.

Interestingly enough the trainers we interviewed did not mention specific work on grammar contents, which is unavoidable in teaching/learning any language, and this is obviously a sign that there has been a paradigm shift. Grammar is addressed in classes/training sessions but not as a topic itself.

Even though we chose to separate tasks and activities in these two groups, it is more than evident that they all dialogue in the teaching/learning process and in the use, individuals make of them, but it is worth mentioning that in professional settings, the more specialized and demanding the position a person holds, the highest requirements and the most comprehensive requirements there will be in terms of English language skills.



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## Cultural competence

### *International English*

The wide variety of people using English for international communication is growing on an unparalleled scale and the spread of English shows no signs of stopping. There is a growing body of studies on the phenomenon of international English, yet it is defined in various ways in the literature and what is included in these definitions differs considerably. Most speakers of English, whether they are 'native' or 'non-native' speakers do not speak an international form of English. International English is the idea of the English language as a global means of communication and the movement towards the creation of an international standard of English. Many times, it is referred to as Global English, World English, Common English, Continental English, General English. "International English" and the terms listed above refer to a wish of a standardised language, i.e., Standard English; There have been many proposals for making International English more accessible to people from different nationalities. Basic English is an example, but it never really managed to make any progress. It has also been argued that International English is held back by its conventional spelling.

The similar yet different ways of writing words in American and British English (colour vs. color, fulfil vs. fulfill, aluminium vs. aluminum) presents a small challenge for an international readership. The different choices of words with the same meaning (highway vs. motorway, lawyer vs. barrister) is already more of a hindrance. What is really problematic is the use of expression or idioms which are specific to a country or region (e.g., Derived from baseball or golf: you're in the big leagues now! His performance was not up to par) which only certain native speakers English would understand. International English is a language which is free of culturally-specific words and language. In today's mass global movement of people and the globalisation of work, both native and non-native users of English are required to speak a form of the English language which can be widely understood. Therefore, teaching the 'native' speaker to communicate in International English is just as important as language teaching English to a second-language (L2) learner. Communication is a two-way process; therefore, it is important that native English speakers are able to communicate in a way that does not include culturally specific language by reducing the use of contentious lexis, jargon, sexist language, phrasal verbs and figurative speech, and using clear, concise language. (Jenkins, 2000).

When using or teaching International English, it is important to:

- use language that is easily understood both by native English speakers around the world, as well as by people who speak English as a foreign language.
- write clear, short sentences.
- chose idioms carefully.



- use humour in a culturally sensitive way and culturally “neutral” language.
- avoid using phrasal verbs (e.g., to put someone off; to go on about) and colloquial expressions (e.g., to blow someone off; great to have you on board!).
- write dates in a way that eliminates ambiguity, e.g., by writing out the month in full: 4 March 2016 instead of 04/03/2016 (UK) or 03/04/2016 (US).
- include the international prefix with phone numbers and the name of the country in addresses
- be precise when using currencies. Avoid writing “\$1000,” but instead include abbreviations to specify the currency, “USD 1000,” “UD 1000” or “CAD 1000.”

## 2. *Cultural awareness*

Becoming fluent in a language also requires a certain level of cultural competence. Cultural competence is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively engage with people despite their cultural differences. Cultural competence includes

- being aware of how individuals view the world
- developing positive attitudes towards different cultures
- getting to know unique cultural practices and global perspectives
- developing cross-culture communication and interaction skills.
- Taking a respectful, considerate and open-minded approach to interactions with other nationalities, cultures and ethnic groups.

This also includes interactions with individuals and groups which particular cultures perceive as socially superior, equal or subordinate. Workplace leaders, including employers, supervisors and union representatives who are culturally competent respect diverse cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrating the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and accept differences.

*Culture* includes language, ideas, communications, traditions, beliefs, values, and different racial, ethnic, religious or social institutions.

*Competence* is the potential to work within the culture effectively. Cultural competence is a combination of linguistic knowledge of a culture's native language, as well as understanding any culturally specific nuances.

When learning a language, you also learn about the different elements of the spoken and written language – like grammar, pronunciation, slang, and some idioms – which will help you to be understood. However, in truth, effective communication is more than knowing the correct grammar and having perfect pronunciation. If want to communicate in a meaningful way, you need to gather an awareness of the differences that exist between your culture and the culture of your host



country. Understanding cultural competence is as important as the learning the language itself.

Language is an intrinsic part of what we call culture. Culture is also made up of subtleties of that culture's non-verbal communication. Culture is about the norms adopted by society when a member of that group deals with problems, negotiates issues and conflicts, views time, deadlines, etc. It is important to understand cultural competence as well as English language skills in order to successfully negotiate a new culture. In order to avoid communication problems within a work or social environment, both language fluency and cultural competency are required.

Familiarising yourself with common expressions, behaviour, non-verbal communication, levels of directness in communication, informal expressions of greeting and how to express gratitude. All these cultural and social behaviours are very important to help you successfully integrate into that culture.

The importance of practicing the language and spending time and building relationships with native speakers should not be underestimated.

When learning a new language, it is always very helpful to make friends with some native speakers. You can let them know that you want to be told if you say something which is grammatically incorrect, if you mispronounce a word, confuse words or mess up expressions, idioms etc. Apart from this, it is important to observe how they behave, how they express their values, how they communicate.



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## Non-linguistic communication

Nonverbal communication is generally defined as the aspect of communication that is not expressed in words. As this definition suggests, nonverbal communication encompasses a wide range of behaviours, some of which may not even be considered as behaviours by all. Thus, next to such more obvious nonverbal behaviours as facial, vocal and postural expressions, touch, proxemics and gaze, we can also list physical attractiveness, facial morphology, as well as different behavioural choices: hair style, clothing, and adornment or more generally appearance. (Hess U., 2016). This definition includes a speaker's vocal tones and inflections, but excludes the actual words used in the exchange. (De Paulo and Friedman, 1998).

Nonverbal communication is an exceedingly important but under-studied element of organizational life. The effectiveness of communication in business depends strongly on the ability of workers to read and send nonverbal messages. From preparing for the job interview to executing the position's responsibilities, business people are constantly exchanging and interpreting nonverbal behaviour. (Ravi S. Kudesia and Hillary Anger Elfenbein, 2015). Body posture plays a significant role in perceiving who has a higher status, certain gestures might give away dominance, good eye contact helps to build a better rapport.

But the workplace is not a single entity that functions uniformly across companies and industries. Not only workplaces exhibit a wide array of diversity in terms of structure, power distribution, culture, etc., but there exists a great deal of diversity within any organisation as well (for example, even within a university, academic departments differ tremendously).

Body posture is very important in interpreting body language. Unlike facial expressions, gestures and vocal tones, postures can be observed from long distances. They allow us to convey a particular message to a larger audience. (The Scientific Portal on Body Language).

Posture has been acknowledged as an important modality of affective communication in many fields. Behavioural studies have shown that posture can communicate discrete emotion categories as well as affective dimensions. (Andrea Kleinsmith and Nadia Bianchi-Berthouze, 2007).

Powerful postures have been found to impact affective states, as well as interoception (the ability to perceive inner bodily signals). The level of anxiety can be reduced through adopting powerful or neutral postures (twice daily for two weeks). Interoceptive ability increased in research groups after only two weeks of training. (Felicita Weineck, Dana Schultchen, 2020).



Facial expressions are strongly connected to our emotional temperament. Depending on the culture, suppressing or expressing emotions might be an essential part of social messages. In Japanese culture, and to a lesser extent British culture, great value is placed on not revealing emotions, thereby demonstrating the desired characteristics of self-control (Morris 2002). High-status people tend to smile less in comparison to lower-status workers or subordinate. However, in human interactions smiling does not necessarily mean submission, but positive and spontaneous response. Paul Ekman identified 18 types of smiles and proposed that there might be as many as 50 in all. (Paul Ekman, 2021). The Facial Action Coding System (FACS), developed by the same author, is a comprehensive, anatomically based system for describing all visually discernible facial movement. It breaks down facial expressions into individual components of muscle movement, called Action Units (AUs). FACS may also enable greater awareness and sensitivity to subtle facial behaviours. Such skills are useful for psychotherapists, interviewers and anyone working in communication. It is used as enhancement of human emotional intelligence and empathy.

Importance of facial expression in Business: The research published by Allison S. Gabriel and Jennifer D. Acosta (2015) reveals that employee positive emotional displays had the strongest influence on evaluations of performance under low familiarity contexts. Thus, positive emotional displays served as a signal of good performance when there was limited pre-existing information about the employee.

Haptics is a form of nonverbal communication that involves touching. Touch is necessary for human social development, and can be welcoming, threatening, or persuasive. Various types of touch include social-polite, functional-professional, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy and sexual-arousal touch. Touch can be an effective tool to communicate messages within working teams, but managers and subordinates should be aware that even a simple gesture might cause misunderstanding. A hand on shoulder may signify support for one person and provoke a negative response in another one. (Hans and Mr. Emmanuel Hans, 2015)

Proxemics is the study of how space is used in human interactions. For example, authority can be communicated by the height from which one person interacts with another. If one stands while the other sits or lies down, the person standing has placed himself or herself in a position of authority. (Amy Haddad, 2019). Another aspect of proxemics is the distance maintained between people when they are communicating. The four distance zones are as follows (Edward T. Hall, 1990):

- Intimate distance, involving direct contact
- Personal distance, ranging from 1 to 4 feet. At arm's length, subjects of personal interest can be discussed while physical contact, such as holding hands.



- Social distance, ranging from 4 to 12 feet. At this distance, more formal business and social discourse takes place.
- Public distance, ranging from 12 to 25 feet or more. No physical contact and very little direct eye contact are possible.
- Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we are in a situation when someone violates our space deliberately.
- Kinesics is the study of how people use body movements when they are communicating with other people.

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. Adaptors are touching behaviours and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. Common self-touching behaviours like scratching, twirling hair, or fidgeting with fingers or hands are considered self-adaptors. Some self-adaptors manifest internally, as coughs or throat-clearing sounds. Smartphones have become common object adaptors, as people can fiddle with their phones to help ease anxiety.

*Emblems* are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning. These are still different from the signs used by hearing-impaired people.

*Illustrators* are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. (Hans and Mr. Emmanuel Hans, 2015)

*Oculesics* is the study of eye movement, eye behaviour, gaze, and eye-related nonverbal communication. Eye behaviour is a crucial part of nonverbal communication and an essential requirement of face-to-face interaction. The most important aspect of oculusics is eye contact that opens communication channels, signals availability for interaction, listening, immediacy, and intimacy. The absence of eye contact engenders negative attributions including rudeness, deceptiveness, insincerity, unfriendliness. (Peter A. Andersen, 2015)

*Olfactics* is the study of smell and how they are perceived. Social scientists discover that olfactory sensation has a potent influence on social interaction. Survey data indicate that a significant percentage of adults are conscious of and influenced by smell in their environment. In the research by Amy Wrzesniewski (1999) 452 participants were asked to rank the relative desirability of permanent loss of their sense of smell, their hearing in one ear, or their left small toe. About 50% of subjects ranked loss of



the sense of smell as most unacceptable. This finding supports the idea of high variability in the perceived importance of the sense of smell in life.

*Dress code.* A dress code is a set of standards that companies develop to help provide their employees with guidance about what is appropriate to wear to work. Dress codes range from formal to business casual to casual, depending on the needs of the individual workplace and the customers it serves.

The formality of the workplace dress code is normally determined by the number and type of interactions employees have with customers or clients in the workplace. In workplaces that are frequented by clients who expect their counselors to exhibit professionalism and integrity, the dress is often formal. This includes law offices, financial consulting firms, banks, and some large businesses.

However, even these organizations are relaxing their dress codes. For example, banking giant J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. now allows its employees to wear business casual attire most of the time. In a visit to a law firm, it was noted that employees were dressed in business casual but most had jackets hanging on their office doors. This allowed them to work comfortably yet stay prepared for unexpected client interaction at any time. (Susan M. Heatfield, 2020).



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## Professional Skills and competences

### Introduction

The adjective 'Professional' is defined by the Cambridge dictionary (2021) as *"having the qualities that you connect with trained and skilled people, such as effectiveness, skill, organization, and seriousness of manner"*, which is a quite broad term with multiple interpretations. 'Professional skills' is an umbrella term which covers a range of skills essential for obtaining a job as well as competences required for successful employment. For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on soft and employability skills.

#### A. Soft skills

As indicated by field and desktop research in Cyprus conducted for IO1.1 of the project there is currently lack of soft skills in Cyprus employees.

As reported from employers in Cyprus and across the world, these skills are considered essential for a successful career, so acquiring and developing soft skills, and the ability to develop and efficiently use those in the English language, in particular, is vital as business is mainly conducted in English.

Soft skills in itself is a broad term, which may include a range of different competences. According to the well-known career website Targetjobs (2021), the top ten key skills employers seek in graduate employees are commercial awareness, communication, teamwork, negotiation and persuasion, problem-solving, leadership, organisation, perseverance and motivation, the ability to work under pressure, and confidence.

Similarly, senior-level executives in the coaching industry, members of the Forbes Coaches Council (Forbes, 2019), identified skills such as empathy, the ability to influence peers, emotional intelligence, curiosity and positivity, active listening, humility, communication skills, creative problem-solving, resilience, observation skills, the ability to contextualise, willingness to ask questions, courage to make recommendations, relationship building, and self-awareness as necessary to succeed when entering the world of work.

Of all the skills mentioned, communication, negotiation and persuasion, problem-solving and active listening will be further explored below as they are frequently included in relevant articles and other resources.

##### 1. Communication

Workplace communication can be defined as *"the process of exchanging information and ideas, both verbal and non-verbal between one person/group and another person/group within an organization. It includes e-mails, text messages, notes, calls, etc."* (Faizal, 2019).

Communication is one of the most frequently reported essential skills, which is no surprise as effective communication is critical in *getting the job done* but it also enhances teamwork, can increase employee engagement and job satisfaction, builds trust, eliminates misunderstandings, ambiguities, and questions, which can in



turn, improve productivity (Proofhub, 2021). In addition, lack of communication or miscommunication can have detrimental effects on employees' productivity and can cause frustration and confusion (The Alternative Board, 2019).

A significant aspect of communication which was highlighted in field research is informal conversations at work which may take place with colleagues, customers, or other relevant parties. Informal communication is highly beneficial both for employers and employees, as well as the organisation in general, as it can enhance teamwork, build strong relationships within and outside a company and create a sense of belonging, though it can lead to mass disinformation if not done within reason or if caused by language miscommunication (Bamboo HR, 2021). It is obvious, therefore that it is important that employees are aware of relevant functional language and are able to have an informal conversation at work in English.

One of the barriers that can impede communication is language (Faizal, 2019). For example, effective communication requires active listening, which might not be achieved if one party of the communication does not have the language efficiency to be able to understand the other, therefore it is important to include a relevant module in a Professional English course in which common language barriers are explained and possible ways on how to avoid them.

## 2. *Negotiation and Persuasion*

The ability to persuade and successfully negotiate is an essential element for specific occupations such as marketing, sales, advertising and buying (Wigan and Leigh College, 2021), but they are also important in everyday life and at the workplace in general, regardless of the industry or specific occupation.

As Behrmann (2016) describes, negotiation is needed in any work environment, from managers negotiating and persuading when and how to delegate tasks to employees, managing collaborations between companies, handling complaints and for conflict management internally, within teams and externally between business partners or other collaborators. Negotiating in a foreign language can be particularly challenging as negotiation is in essence a linguistic act, therefore knowledge of relevant vocabulary is vital. There are also cultural differences in negotiation methods, which employees should be aware of in order to reduce any anxiety that might cause as well as avoidable misunderstandings.

## 3. *Problem-Solving*

Problem-solving is a universal skill, required for any position and industry, as the ability to successfully deal with and overcome challenges, either every-day, smaller ones or more complicated, difficult ones is of high importance in any occupation. In order to efficiently solve a problem, one first needs to define it before brainstorming possible solutions (Careerbuilder, 2017) therefore clarity and correct understanding of the issues to be dealt with as well as the ability to brainstorm are required, which further stresses the importance of the ability to effectively communicate in English.

## 4. *Active Listening*



Active listening is a communication method originally used in counselling, training, and conflict resolution, in which the listener feeds back to the speaker what they hear, by re-stating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words, to confirm what they have heard and moreover, to confirm the understanding of both parties (Rogers & Farson, 1957). It has now become a significant soft skill at the workplace, which can enhance communication. For example, when interviewing for jobs it can demonstrate to the interviewer that you are interested in the organisation and that you are a team player (Doyle, 2020); therefore, it's important to be able to fully understand the listener and paraphrase what they say, which can be even more challenging if they speak in a non-native to the listener language.

## **B. Employability skills**

In order to obtain a job nowadays, it is essential to prepare a strong, professional CV and a cover letter, be aware of how and where to job search, as well as how to succeed in job interviews, which can be more difficult if the job seeker's level of English is low. As reported in field research, the majority of job advertisements in Cyprus are in English and require a CV and cover letter written also in English. In addition, the interview may also be conducted in English, therefore strong employment skills not only in one's native language but also in English are even more important for the unemployed as well as individuals looking for a change in career or employer.

### *1. CV and Cover Letter writing*

A potential employer's first impression of an employee is the CV and cover letter that they provide with their job application. Having a strong, concise but impressive CV to one's disposal, is more important than ever in today's competitive labour market. It is therefore essential for an individual be able to prepare a well-informed, error free, tailored to the employer's interests CV, using relevant, professional vocabulary and the correct terminology (EF English Live, 2018).

A cover letter is still required by most organisations and it is of high importance, as it can help a candidate stand out from the hundreds of applications that employers go through every day. Similarly, to what is mentioned about CV writing above, a cover letter should clearly communicate that the candidate is interested in the position as well as the company. It should be personalised and include keywords, there should not be any spelling, grammatical or either language-related mistakes and should include relevant, professional, and appropriate language (McNeill, 2019).

### *2. Job hunting*

Job hunting can be time and life consuming as it can take months to obtain a job; consequently, job-hunting skills are vital. There is a huge number of online job boards nationally and internationally, so it is important to be aware of the position and industry in which one is interested. Also, applying for any and every job could be a waste of time, as well as networking blindly. In addition, building a profile on professional websites, such as LinkedIn, can assist in networking and help obtain a job



faster (The Undercover Recruiter, 2021). To be able to effectively job hunt, strong English language skills are required, as most of the job advertisements in Cyprus and worldwide are written in the English language. Consequently, it is vital for an employee to be able to fully understand the requirements of each position for which they apply, which will enable them to prepare a tailored, personalised CV and cover letter.

### 3. *Job Interviews*

A job interview is probably the most significant part of the job-hunting process, as it is the final and most determining step before obtaining a job. At the same time, it can be a nerve-racking, stressful experience, especially if it is not conducted in the candidate's native language and if the candidate has been unemployed for a long period of time; therefore, being successful at a job interview requires careful preparation. The candidate should practice answering common interview questions about themselves, any relevant experience they have, and the reasons they applied for the job, and also be able to answer competency and hypothetical questions using professional language and avoid going off topic (British Council, 2020). It is also of significant importance for the candidate to be able to demonstrate their presentation skills, as employers often ask candidates to prepare a short presentation about themselves or a specific topic during an interview; a skill employers highly value as field research conducted for IO1.1 has indicated.



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## Online communication and telephone skills

Online communication skills are critical to success in the 21st century. The internet, and the recent expansion of online social media platforms, offers a wealth of opportunities for communication that most of us use regularly these days. Digital communication in the workplace is associated with wellbeing at work (Okkonen, Bordi, Mäkinemi, & Heikkilä-Tammi, 2018).

There are several subtle differences between communicating online (with written words and images) and communicating with others face to face. Many people fail at properly communicating online and they can come off as disingenuous, awkward or even rude. The biggest difficulty is that we lack a critical element when communicating online: non-verbal communication.

Online communication can take place:

- Synchronous - in 'real time'; for example, via instant messaging or a 'chat' facility.
- Asynchronous - when participants communicate in their own time; for example, by responding to messages that have been posted in an online forum.

The online communication skills necessary to be considered and developed are:

### 1. *Netiquette*

Netiquette or the development of a set of behaviours favouring ease of communication across the web. Although we tend to assume that teleconferencing applications such as Zoom and Google Meet are live real-time platforms, they are in fact subject to various time-lags which can inhibit the free-flow of communication between participants.

The word netiquette is a combination of 'net' (from internet) and 'etiquette'. It means respecting other users' views and displaying courtesy when posting your views to online discussion groups (BBC, 2012). When working and communicating in shared online spaces, it is important to:

- Treat others with courtesy and respect
- Safeguard confidentiality and personal security
- Do not send unsolicited emails
- Avoid personal attack
- Learn and apply the rules of the community
- Avoid committing or supporting plagiarism
- Understand and respect copyright



## 2. *Building an online persona and branding*

Creating a professional online image by dressing and acting the part regardless of the location means dressing for online meetings and conferences as you would in the office. This also includes demonstrating your value, marketable skills, qualities through a company's online social media presence, intranet and internet.

Be careful with what you post online. Once it's out there, you may not be able to get it back. Anything is possible with information that reaches the internet. It can go viral. It will be stored somewhere and may be findable through search. What you post can easily affect your relationships and career, if not now then possibly in the future. So always, be at least a little cautious in your online interactions.

Choose to promote a positive and professional image of self-image online (McGilvery, 2012). It is essential to understand that once you post an image, comment, etc. online, it is there forever. You need to keep in mind, however, that "Freedom of Speech does not equate to freedom of consequences" (Oxley, 2010). A potential problem is that employers check for information about prospective candidates online (TheManifest, 2020).

## 3. *Giving presentations*

Virtual meetings currently do not have the spatial presence of in-person events. The dynamics of working in a 'real-time' web environment are different to an in-person presence where a participant has the advantage because conversations are not belayed by time lag, you are also able to perceive participants' non-verbal cues better and turn-taking is less stilled. To mitigate these issues, the road map will teach students to navigate and manage these issues (Slack, 2020).

Make your perspective clear. Try to avoid speaking or writing in a dogmatic and impersonal way, so avoid phrases like 'It is a fact that ...' as they leave no room for anyone else's perspective. So, why not start with 'I think ...'? When you are studying a course, you may want to present someone else's views; if so, say whose they are, perhaps by a quote and acknowledgement (OpenLearn, 2020).

Expressing empathy during online communication can be difficult. In our day-to-day lives, our body language and other nonverbal cues emit a host of information to others. These signals provide key insights into our mood, thoughts, and emotions. In the age of the virtual conference room, nonverbal cues often speak louder than our words. Below are a few advises:



- Pay attention to your body language,
- Your eyes and head are doing most of the nonverbal communication.
- Limit hand gestures since they tend to get exaggerated on video, especially if you are sitting too close to the camera.

#### 4. Taking part in meetings

The dynamic is different in an online meeting; interactions are not as fluid as one would expect in a face-to-face meeting. The social conventions do not always apply to online interactions and allowances must be made to delay and quality of connection.

Practice active listening during online meetings. Paraphrasing what others have said and then responding with your perspective on the discussed topic is an effective way to inform peers you've heard what they have said, and have validated their perspective by offering your opinion on the subject (Mendoza, 2020).

Acknowledging before differing. Before you disagree with someone, try to summarise the other person's point in your own words. Then they know you are trying to understand them and will be more likely to take your view seriously.

Give and receive constructive peer feedback. In addition to listening actively, tell others how you might feel in specific situations about their actions or their work, and be open-minded about the feedback you receive in return.

Enhance human connectivity. Listen up, lean in and maintain eye contact. These are all signs of empathetic listening—arguably our most powerful human skill

#### 5. Use of language

Use of clear and concise language free from jargon and culturally specific language such as; profanity, phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions, the use of oral punctuation and pauses to ease communication.

Keep It Simple. Clarity is king. If you can explain something complex in a simple and easy to understand way, you're doing it right. Use industry jargon as appropriate, but there is no point in distancing yourself from your audience by using complicated words if they aren't necessary.

Avoiding 'flaming'. If you read something that offends or upsets you, it is very tempting to dash off a reply and hit 'Send' – but don't! Online discussions and Twitter exchanges seem to be particularly prone to such 'flames', and can escalate into a flaming spiral of angry messages. So if you feel your temperature rising as you write, save your message, take a break or sleep on it – don't hit 'Send'.



Take time to write a proper response. A big difference between online and in-person communication is that we have time to draft better, more thought out responses. This means you can say the right thing, avoid flippant replies, and get your point across more clearly. If you're in a confrontational conversation, this extra time can be the difference between remedying a situation and escalating it to the next level. No one expects instant replies online anymore. Take the extra time to write a good one (Pham, 2019).

Avoid using All CAPS. You can use them to draw attention to something important, just be careful that it is obviously not trying to convey that you're angry or upset about something.

Match replies in length and tone. If someone gives you praise and it's 6 sentences long, replying with a "thx," makes you look indifferent. Add some substance to your reply and show you actually care. Something like, "Thanks! That really means a lot to me to hear that."

## 6. Telephone skills

These focus on outgoing, incoming and cold calling calls and how to develop a person's telephone skills and personality through preparation, positive telephone voice, answering business calls, controlling your call, voice and tone, honesty over excuses, providing workable call-back schedules and feedback, dealing with tough questions and aggression, not taking things personally. This also includes SMS and WhatsApp.

Practice thanking, acknowledging and supporting people. People cannot see you nod, smile or frown as you read their messages. So, if they get no acknowledgement they may feel ignored and be discouraged from contributing further.

Clearly show your emotions via SMS and WhatsApp. Emotions can be easily misunderstood when you cannot see faces or body language. People may not realise when you are joking, and one person's joke may not seem amusing to someone else. You should always be aware of the receiver(s) of your message, particularly as people from widely differing cultures and backgrounds may read what you write online. What you find funny may be offensive to them.



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## Conclusion

The present-day workplace is changing quickly and dramatically when it comes to skills and competences. The demands upon staff have become more pressing, and the need for educated, agile and inventive workers has increased too. To keep up with fast-paced change and quickly mutating work environments, professionals must constantly refresh, update or upgrade their aptitudes. In fact, recently “Sloan Management Review and Deloitte’s 2018 Digital Business Global Executive Study and Research Project, which surveyed 4,300 executives and professionals from around the world, found that 90% think they need to update their skills at least annually, and 44% see development as a year-round exercise” (Education First, 2020, p. 14).

For many years, knowledge of languages, especially English, has been a basic skill required of a number of jobs and positions. They are perceived as “human capital, as a vehicle for the transmission of values and as an asset with geostrategic value” (Ribeiro, Calvão & Simões, 2019, p. 81). Low foreign language skills, especially English, can be detrimental both to employees and to the companies they work for; conversely, a command of foreign languages represents a competitive advantage for both individuals and organizations, promoting career mobility, group cohesiveness and trust formation, opening up international markets and business opportunities (Tenzer, Terjesen & Harzing, 2017). Globalisation (of businesses in all sectors as well as heightened mobility of people be it for work or leisure) and the fast-paced developments of new technologies have fostered the need for a *lingua franca*, and English has thus become the language of international business, science and research.

All this is well evident from the information gathered by the research conducted in the different partners’ countries, and as an overall conclusion, according to the data presented, we can say that English is used in most companies contacted on a daily basis, regardless of the business sector, being a must-have skill for employees.

With regards to the skills required from employers, research suggests that all four language skills are given importance by employers when we consider oral and written communication, while at the same time they have become aware that only writing, reading, listening and speaking do not suffice to communicate effectively in English, and therefore point out non-verbal communication, politeness, friendliness and clarity in communication as being important as well.

Since due to internationalization of companies, contacts are being made on a daily basis with people from different geographical locations, cultural awareness is growing



in importance, although research in Portugal and Spain suggests that companies give it less importance.

Customer service, participating in meetings and conference calls, delivering presentations, giving instructions, phone conversations are pointed out as being common on the daily life of companies with regards to oral communication-related tasks.

Writing emails, reports, contracts, proposals, rules and handbooks, instructions manuals, and other highly-specialized documents, agendas and memos were among the most common tasks related to written communication.

According to the research conducted on the type of interventions available to upskill unemployed people, we may say that in the partner countries there are several public and private initiatives that address the teaching of English, with some courses tailored to specific business activities, although it is suggested that a relevant number of examples points out to general English courses.

In some countries, like Malta for example, there is a lack of offers for unemployed people to learn business and professional English. In countries such as Cyprus, formal education does not prepare learners in Professional English and in Spain, for example, the research identified a group of 35-45 years old who did not even have great opportunities to learn English at schools, and, therefore, are less equipped to deal with employers' requirements.

With regard to the professional English courses offered across the partner countries, they all seem like short-duration courses focused on the specific sectors they cater for and based on a more traditional approach in terms of teaching, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, role play exercises, among others while not giving special relevance to some crucial aspects like cultural awareness.

Therefore, we see this as an opportunity to innovate in building a professional English course that is based on a more comprehensive approach that integrates cultural competence, language specific-skills, on-line communication skills, non-linguistic communication and professional skills, and foresees the use of technological tools as to enable a more dynamic teaching and learning process.



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