

What are employers looking for?

How can we really know what employers are looking for in new hires? Fortunately, the recent focus on the perceived skills gap has led to some informative research and reporting that can help us to understand what specific and broad-based skills we might want to cultivate through experiential learning. Much of this research can be found through the Business Higher Education Roundtable website. The [Business Higher Education Roundtable](#) (BHER) is a joint endeavour of Canadian colleges and universities and a selection of major Canadian businesses. The goal of the roundtable is to improve linkages and collaboration between employers and educational institutions so that postsecondary graduates can enter the workforce well prepared. The BHER is also serving a useful function by collecting and disseminating articles, reports, speeches, and multimedia resources on employability skills.

In an [article featured on the BHER site that was written for the Halifax Chronicle Herald](#), Dalhousie University President, Dr. Richard Florizone, and Alex Usher, a highly regarded education sector analyst and consultant, noted that “The skills of the future are very human ones. Employers will continue to seek specific technical skills, but the skills of the future are those that machines have the hardest time replicating. According to recent RBC research, the top three most important projected skills are active listening, speaking, and critical thinking. Recent surveys by the [Business Council of Canada](#) tell a similar story, with top employers rating so-called “soft skills” as most important, including teamwork, communication, and problem solving” (“Commentary: The Future of Work and Learning,” 2018).

Specifically, the 2018 [Business Council of Canada Skills Survey](#) report mentioned by Usher and Florizone indicates that the top five attributes that Canadian employers are looking for now include collaboration/teamwork/ interpersonal/relationship-building skills; communication skills; problem-solving skills; analytical capabilities; and resiliency. (p. 12) [Burning Glass](#) has taken a deeper dive, examining job postings to derive commonly desired baseline skills by job category to reveal patterns. Their report, [“The Human Factor”](#), is essential reading for those curious about the nature and trajectory of the perceived skills gaps that experiential learning opportunities can help to bridge.

Major employers in Canada are taking this commitment to identifying and cultivating critical skills in Canada’s youth very seriously. The [Royal Bank of Canada’s Future Launch](#) is a great example of how business is working to ensure that early career professionals develop the skills that they need to succeed in the workforce. Colleges and universities are committed to this goal as well.