

Top five trends

FOR MILLENNIAL EMPLOYABILITY



aurecon
Bringing ideas to life

The final study notes have been written. The last exams sat. Graduation has come and gone. With a crisp university degree in one hand, millennials can now take on the world...but just how relevant are today's degrees in preparing the future workforce for the working world?

In December, global engineering and infrastructure advisory company Aurecon, surveyed a network of its millennial workforce to assess their views on skills and employability.

This growing workforce of emerging professionals from all corners of the globe, represent close to 50% of Aurecon's people, and provide a crucial feedback loop for Aurecon's leadership, opening their minds to new ways of thinking, new ideas and the voice of the future thought-leaders.

The **Global Limelight Work Readiness Survey** targeted 870 recent millennial hires (or 'Limelighters') and saw 144 of these from across its operations highlight the skills ambitious millennials believed were crucial if they were to grow and flourish in the booming building, infrastructure and property workforce of the future.

Complementing the **Aurecon Attributes Quiz Survey**, which was taken by 9 700 respondents globally as part of its graduate recruitment campaign launched in January 2017 – the two surveys offer valuable insights into how well universities are preparing students for work, and what employability and on the job skills are seen as vital to the ongoing success of Aurecon's millennial cohort of engineers and infrastructure advisors.

LIMELIGHT IS AURECON'S NETWORK OF EMERGING PROFESSIONALS (1-4 YEARS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY) AND AIMS TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE A CULTURE OF INNOVATION, INVOLVEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT.

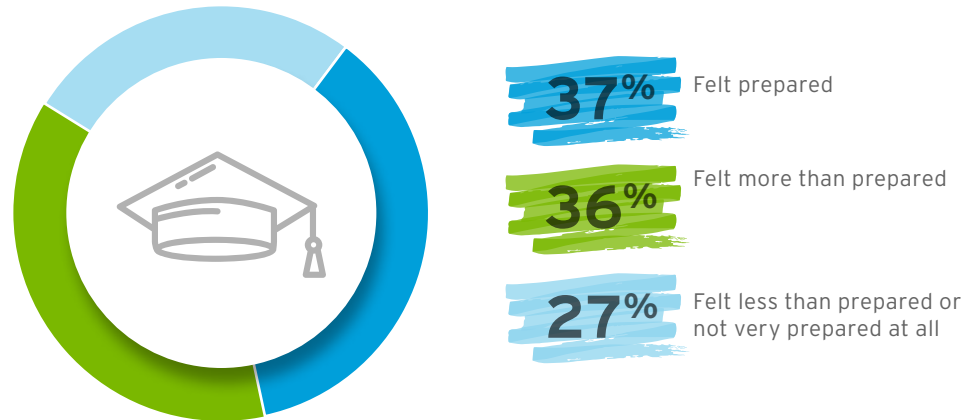
While the results supported the important role a university education plays in a millennial's quest for employment, the findings highlighted a range of key issues emerging professionals face, including other fundamental skills and experiences needed to stand out from the crowd in a highly competitive employment market. The surveys also provided fascinating insights about the factors that helped Aurecon emerging professionals secure their first role.

Overall, 73% of respondents to the Limelight survey said that when they graduated they felt prepared or more than prepared with the skills and capabilities needed for the workforce.

This confidence dropped once they entered the workforce, with **39% stating they were less than prepared or not prepared at all** for their first role.

Moreover, when reflecting on how their university course prepared them for their first job, **39% felt it was less than up to date with current practice.**

When you graduated, how well do you feel university prepared you for work?



Aurecon’s Chief People Officer, Liam Hayes and Penny Nugent, Global Chair of Limelight, share key trends and insights into how graduates can maximise their employability.



Liam Hayes
Aurecon Chief People Officer

As part of Aurecon’s global leadership team, Liam leads our People team which focuses on providing solutions that enable Aurecon to attract the best talent and develop our people to meet our client’s current and future challenges.

Liam and the People team partner with the Aurecon leadership team to execute culture change, organisational and leadership development strategies.

Liam believes the innovation and creativity we bring to our clients is only possible because of the talented and diverse people that work for us. He also lives by the motto that you never stop developing, and when opportunities present themselves, you shouldn’t be afraid to take them on – particularly those that will stretch you and take you out of your comfort zone.



Penny Nugent
Aurecon Global Chair of Limelight

Penelope (Penny) Nugent is a civil engineer from Aurecon’s Infrastructure team based in Brisbane – and she is also the Global Chair of Limelight.

Penny graduated with honours from a Bachelor of Engineering – Civil and Environmental (BEng) (Hons) from University of Adelaide in 2013. Since then she has worked on a variety of transport projects across Australia, including the Adelaide City Tramline Extension Project, the Logan Enhancement Project (Logan Motorway) in Brisbane and the Caulfield to Dandenong Level Crossings Removal Project in Melbourne, to name just a few.

Penny supports the local Limelight committees in each region where Aurecon operates, and encourages them to discuss big ideas to improve the experience of emerging professionals and our clients.

#1 Soft skills are the new hard skills	5
#2 Embrace diversity of thought	7
#3 Get and stay connected	9
#4 Get hands-on with your experience	10
#5 Yes, technical skills are important	11
Where to from here?	12



#1 SOFT SKILLS ARE THE NEW HARD SKILLS

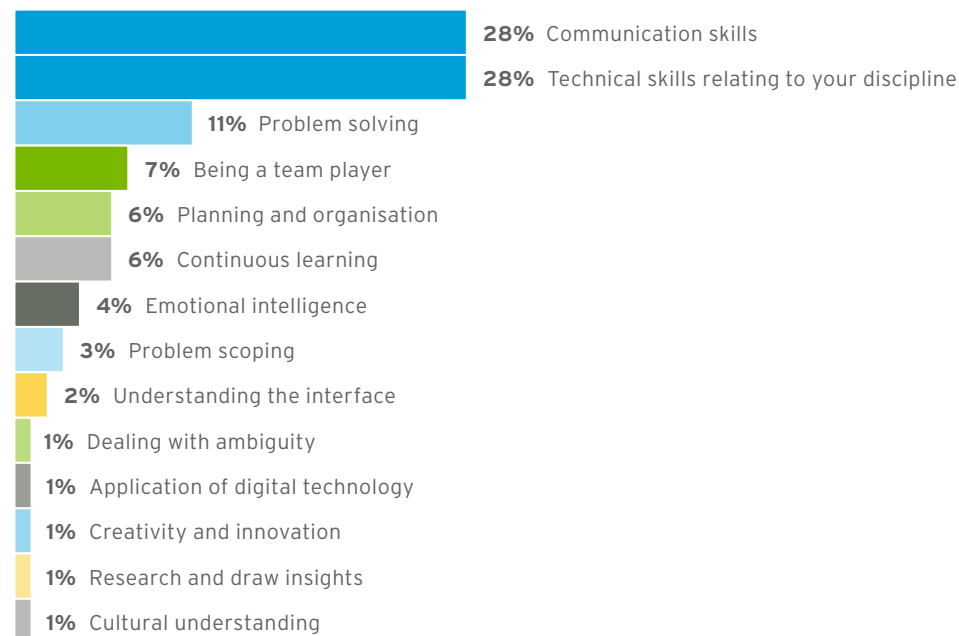
“FINE TUNING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS, ESPECIALLY IN A TEAM ENVIRONMENT, IS A KEY INGREDIENT IN HELPING YOU BECOME A MORE VALUABLE EMPLOYEE”

LIAM HAYES, AURECON CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

While it is imperative to have a sound technical fit to the job you are applying for, it is the suite of complementary skills which employers are looking for that sets you apart from other contenders.

From the Limelight Survey, participants clearly appreciated the value of fine tuning softer skills, such as communication and planning, as playing a pivotal role in their employability. 51% of millennials most valued a mix of 60% technical skills and 40% softer skills in their first role, while Limelighters felt four of the top five skills most significant to obtain graduate employment, lay outside their technical expertise.

What skills and capabilities do you deem most valuable to be outstanding in your role? In order of importance:



Graduates know what attributes they need to be more employable – the results are clear. In fact, 69% of the Attributes Quiz Survey responses showed that **graduates like working in teams**, especially at university – a thumbs up for educators who are nurturing co-creation and collaboration.

How do you feel about working with others? In order of importance:

69%

I relish working in a team

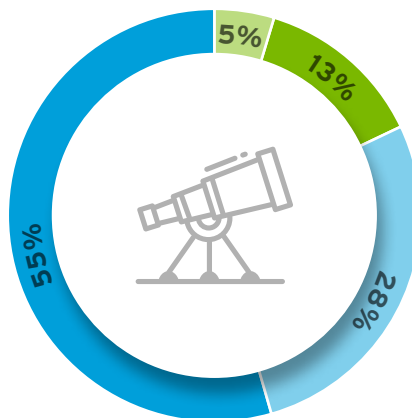
31%

I do my best work by myself, then share it with others



What's more, millennials are hungry to work with inspiring role models in their graduate roles (55%). According to Aurecon's Global Chair of Limelight, Penny Nugent, graduates today like leaders who are able to inspire people and uncover their strengths. "Emerging professionals look for inspiration and for environments where they are valued, understood, and allowed to meaningfully contribute," she said.

What do you think the most important trait is in a leader? In order of importance:

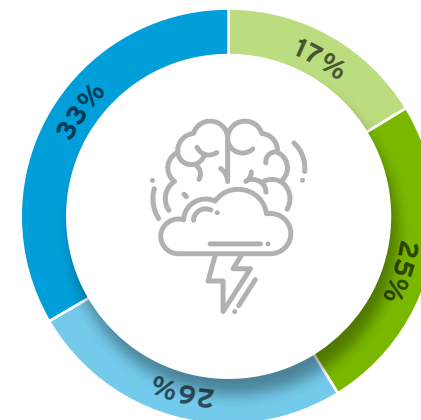


1. Able to inspire people, and uncover their strengths
2. Able to manage others, and communicate strategy
3. Willing to take responsibility in tough times
4. Able to steer the business and respond to competitors

Millennials are also highly ambitious, and enjoy being provided with enough responsibility to feel as though they are making an impact.

"Feeling like your workplace enables you to express ideas, lead change and leave a legacy is a key driver for emerging professionals in the early stages of their career," she added.

What's most important to you in a workplace? In order of importance:



1. Enough responsibility to feel you're having an impact
2. Freedom to challenge the status quo and pursue unusual ideas
3. Mixing with interesting, thought-provoking people
4. Environment where you can have fun, play and follow your curiosity

#2 EMBRACE DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT

“BEYOND COMPLIANCE – MOST COMPANIES DON’T ACTIVELY PURSUE INCLUSION. IF THEY DID, THEY WOULD QUICKLY FIND THEMSELVES BECOMING MORE INNOVATIVE. THE TWO GO HAND-IN-HAND. A WORK ENVIRONMENT WHERE EVERYONE FEELS RESPECTED AND IS WILLING TO CONTRIBUTE FOSTERS DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT.

FROM THE ENTHUSIASTIC GRADUATE WHO HAS FRESH IDEAS AND SPONTANEOUS VIEWS, TO THE SEASONED PRACTITIONER WITH DECADES OF WORK AND LIFE EXPERIENCE. WITHIN EACH CONTRIBUTION LIES A UNIQUE POINT OF VIEW WHICH CREATES ANOTHER LAYER OF DYNAMIC THINKING. AND THE RESULT IS AWARD-WINNING INNOVATION.”

LIAM HAYES, AURECON CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

It came as no surprise that in the Limelight Survey, millennials rated problem solving as the third most important skill to develop in the workplace.

How graduates approach a challenge and find ways to create solutions in our rapidly changing world, are key skills sought by employers.

Aurecon uses **design thinking** to create and nurture dynamic and innovative problem solvers for the future. The ability to think holistically and how we define the problem, allows us to fully understand and appreciate the problems at hand using multiple angles and insights. The result is creating a solution or strategy which may act as a catalyst to find and define problems, not just solve them.

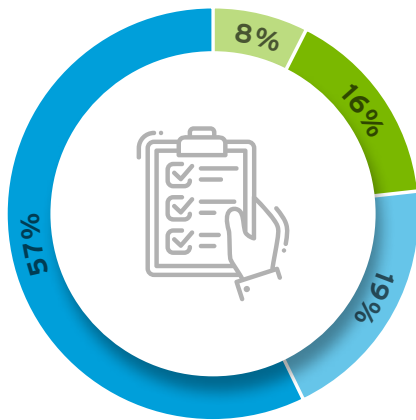


Top 5 skills and capabilities most valued to be outstanding in your role:

- 1+2. Joint top ranking: Communication skills (28%), Technical skills related to discipline (28%)
3. Problem solving (11%)
4. Being a team player (7%)
5. Planning and organisation (6%)

The Attributes Quiz Survey showed that graduates are reluctant to push the boundaries (16%) and are often afraid of making mistakes (8%). At the same time, emerging professionals highly value being understood, encouraged and supported. **As employers, we should be encouraging honest feedback and creating a culture which is open to new ideas.**

I feel I have made a good decision when... In order of importance:



1. I take my time and connect the dots
2. I am quick, decisive and grasp an opportunity
3. I push the boundaries of what's possible
4. I make the brave choice that others avoid

Hayes said it is how you think in the workplace, and not what you think, which makes you a diverse thinker. "Nurturing diversity of thought can further advance innovation and continue to enhance creative problem solving," he said.



#3 GET AND STAY CONNECTED

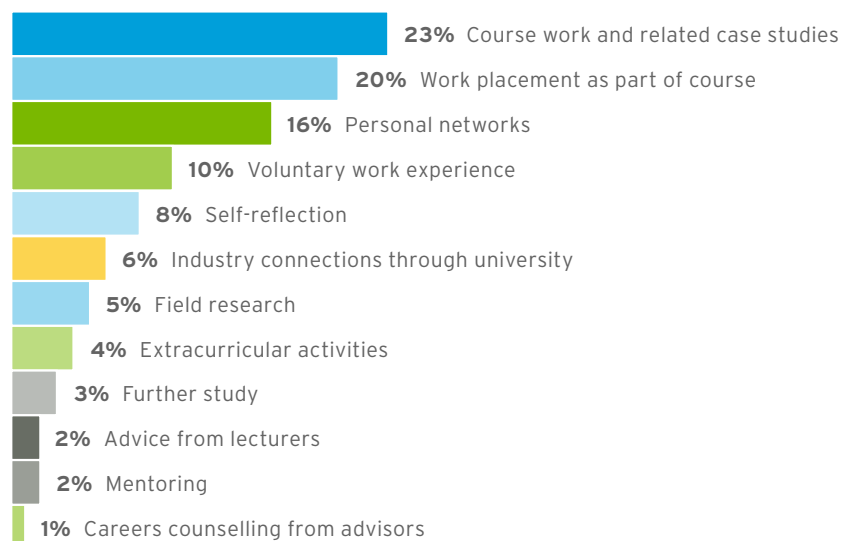
“AT AURECON, WE URGE EMERGING PROFESSIONALS TO CAST THEIR NET EVEN WIDER WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING MENTORS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT. BY INVOLVING YOURSELF IN THE BROADER AURECON COMMUNITY OR READING ABOUT OTHER YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WORLDWIDE, YOU CAN LEARN FROM THEIR HIGHS, AS WELL AS THEIR LESSONS LEARNT.”

PENNY NUGENT, GLOBAL CHAIR OF LIMELIGHT

Getting and staying connected seems easy to millennials. **Staying connected with their communities is in their blood** (or iPhone). But, it is important to be doing it in a way where you reap the benefits in creating personal networks, not just to share selfies. It's also seen by Limelighters as a key skill in gaining employment, ranking third (16%).

“It's important to think strategically about social media. Use platforms such as LinkedIn to start nurturing connections which are relevant to your present and future. Join like-minded communities to share ideas and ideals that can help you 'nut out' what you look for in a role, and what you need to be a valued employee,” said Hayes.

What skills and experiences did you deem most valuable at university to obtain graduate employment?



#4 GET HANDS-ON WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE

"IN ADDITION TO GAINING VALUABLE EXPERIENCE, HANDS-ON OPPORTUNITIES ALLOW UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO NOT ONLY RAMP UP THEIR CV, BUT ARE AN INVALUABLE WAY TO MEET INDUSTRY CONTACTS. YOU NEVER KNOW, YOU MAY LAND A GRADUATION JOB BECAUSE OF IT."

LIAM HAYES, AURECON CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

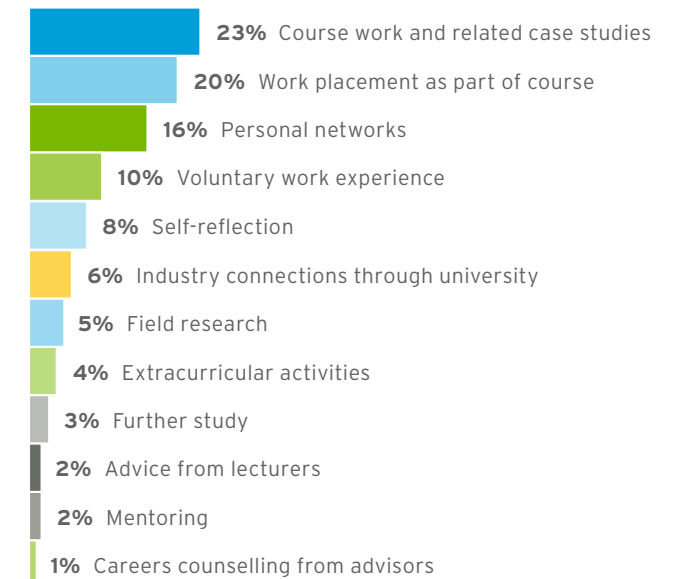
After university, your CV may look pretty slim. Sure, you can beef it up with skills and goals, and yes, there was that stint at the local supermarket you really enjoyed as a teenager, but this does not cut it in the real world. **Employers need to know that you are hungry to build on any experience that you may have.**

In the Limelight Survey, millennials ranked work placement as the second (20%), and voluntary work experience as the fourth (10%) most important skill or experience at university effective in gaining graduate employment.

With some university degrees, work placement is an integral part of learning. Embrace it with vigour as it will not only give you a taste of what is to come but, you never know, it might be the stepping stone for a possible graduate position. Even if your degree does not offer it, seek it in any way you can.

Consider volunteering in areas which not only build your skillsets but also your CV. Not for profit organisations rely on your generosity of time and resources to sustain them. Let them return the favour to you. Your altruism will be a win for you in building your confidence, team building and communications skills. Furthermore, you will be able to apply the technical skills from university in real life situations, which your potential employer will value immensely. It shows you can walk the walk, and talk the talk.

What skills and experiences did you deem most important at university to obtain graduate employment?



#5 YES, TECHNICAL SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT

“HAVING THE RIGHT BALANCE OF TECHNICAL AND COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS IS PARAMOUNT TO INCREASING YOUR OPPORTUNITIES FOR A GRADUATE ROLE.”

LIAM HAYES, AURECON CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

Your time at university is sacred. You are systematically building up your core skills from course work and related content for that post-graduation role. According to the Limelight Survey, **technical skills related to career discipline ranked at the top** to be outstanding in your first role at 28%, while course work and related learning were the most effective skills to obtaining graduate employment (23%).

The survey also found knowledge about the application of digital technologies to be an increasingly important skill, but more work needs to be done around integrating it into the education framework. Overall, 48% of Limelighters surveyed felt 'less than prepared' in terms of their digital skills to enter their profession after university.

In terms of digital skills, how prepared did you feel to enter the workforce?



48%

felt less than prepared with digital skills

34%

felt more than prepared with digital skills

18%

felt prepared with digital skills

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Millennials have career ultramarathons ahead of them and seem to be paddling upstream after graduation to get themselves employer ready. However, as a passionate and driven generation, they are focused on developing their technical and soft skills to construct the career that is right for them. It is clear from the results that there remains a lack of alignment between university education and the necessary skills needed by millennials to excel in their first role.

It is also **important for employers to create an environment in which emerging professionals can be inquisitive**, be heard and learn early in their careers from their peers and colleagues.

With experience, comes maturity and, in turn, graduates will build on skills and competencies to create a sound foundation for their career. A win-win situation!

ABOUT THE AURECON ATTRIBUTES

The **Aurecon Attributes** are themselves an outcome of research undertaken by Aurecon on the types of skills and capabilities that are valued by its clients in helping them respond to a rapidly changing world. The resulting Aurecon Attributes are eight future-focused skills that inform how Aurecon hires, develops and promotes its people. They go beyond technical skills and seek to identify the transdisciplinary capabilities that allow graduates to become both problem solvers and problem finders.



aurecon
Bringing ideas to life