

LUMINARY

EMPLOYABILITY ESSENTIALS



THE EMPLOYABILITY ESSENTIALS: WHAT WOMEN *REALLY* NEED TO LEARN TO DEVELOP READINESS FOR WORK AND MAXIMISE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY.

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INTRODUCTION

Employability Essentials: A briefing paper from Luminary Bakery.

The employability essentials: what women *really* need to learn to develop readiness for work and maximise their employability.

We've read widely around the area of employability to understand the core components that need to be covered in an individual's employability education to enable them to successfully enter paid work. Our reading ranges from academic publications, and good practice from educational institutions, to research from like-minded women's organisations like WorkingChance - this paper reflects their insights. Naturally, Luminary writes with a nuance: **a focus on the unique experience of women on an employability journey having experienced multiple disadvantage and gender-based violence.** The majority of whom will be entering the working world for the first time, thus we explore a person's employability journey from the very start, from precontemplation. The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide Luminary and the wider sector we're part of with some core foundations to uphold our work on employability and shape our training curriculum. We aim to make recommendations for the essential content that should be included in an employability curriculum for organisations and education providers who are training adults who have experienced trauma and consistent unemployment. This strategic paper will inform Luminary's own Employability & Independence curriculum.



DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

Employability can be defined as: **developing the attributes needed to get paid work and secondly, the translation of that into securing paid work.**



"While the employment rate may be important, it is not the primary concern of employability, which is about developing and articulating abilities. Employability – having the attributes to succeed in employment – is significantly different from actually getting employment, which is affected by a range of extraneous factors."

The mission of Luminary's Employability & Independence Programme follows this definition, our work seeks to prepare women for the working world by nurturing the skills needed for work. Our goal is that this results in Employment, Education or Further Training outcomes for women - we plan for women to engage with one of these within 24 months of support from Luminary. Ideally, finding roles in line with their skills that leave them feeling fulfilled and positively stretched by the work they do. In our context, we consider a woman to be meaningfully employed when she meets the following indicators:

1. "Briefings on Employability 5 - Employability | The University of"
http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/HEA-Briefing5-Helping_depts_develop_employability.pdf. Accessed 19 May. 2021.

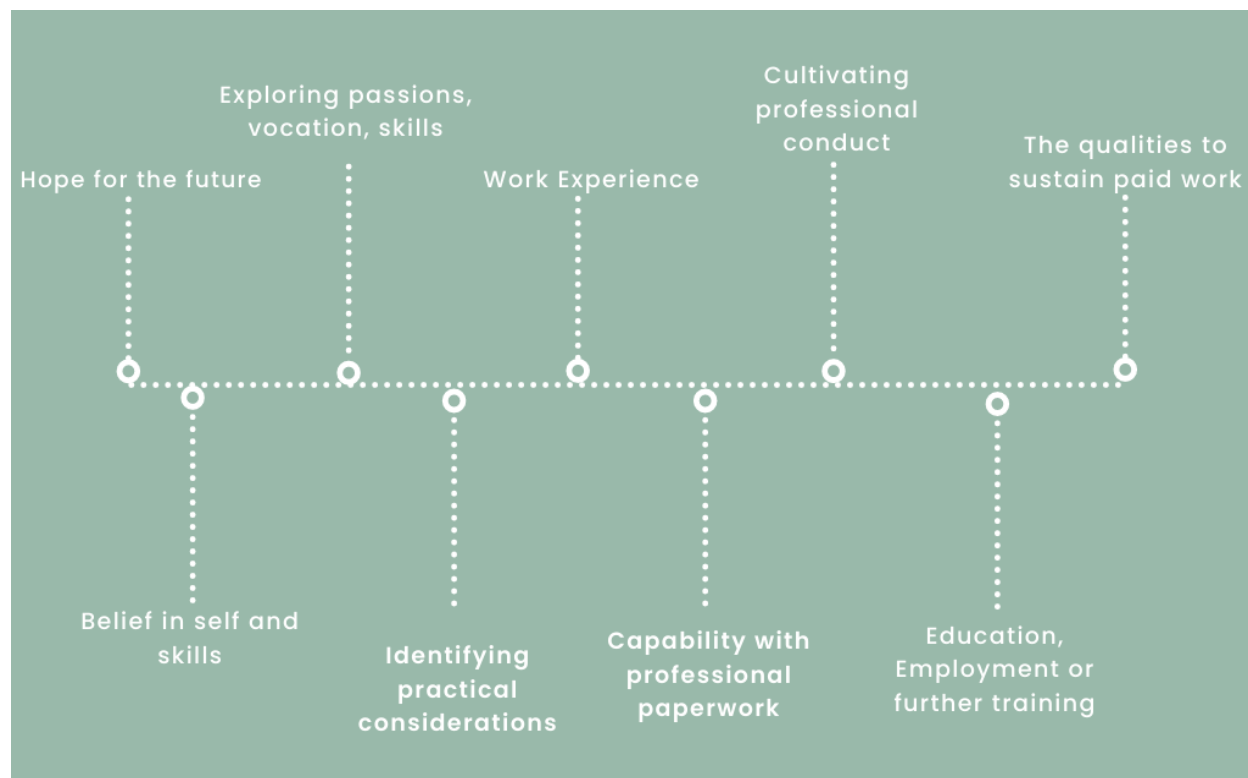
Employment, Self Employment & Further Training Criteria

Luminary's criteria for measuring women's EET outcomes, including self employment.

	WAGE BASELINE	HOURS BASELINE	CONTRACT BASELINE	ASPIRATIONAL
SELF EMPLOYMENT	£1000 profit annually, to be able to register as a sole trader	X	X	Consistent regular monthly income. Committed business for sustainable future income
EMPLOYMENT	Minimum Wage	Four hours pw	Zero hours contract	London Living Wage 15 hours pw Permanent Contract
FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	X	X	Accredited Training	X

EMPLOYABILITY TIMELINE

We work with women at the contemplation and preparation stage of the change cycle, at the earliest point in the employability journey. A woman's employability journey usually involves the following stages:



EFFECTIVE EMPLOYABILITY

Effective employability training should result in trainees and graduates developing the attributes that will assist them in getting, retaining and developing within a job.

This involves:

- Developing a range of attributes employers want.
- Developing a range of attributes necessary for career progression.
- Exhibiting a range of attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their organisation.
- Developing a range of attributes to become a lifelong learner.

From our research, we understand that effective employability training should cover the following themes:

1. Qualifications and training in chosen field of work or vocation.
2. Self-skills: self-confidence, self-reliance, self-management, self-evaluating.
3. Interpersonal skills: ability to work collaboratively. Including an awareness of professional conduct, and conflict management skills for the workplace.
4. Social and emotional learning for emotional intelligence.
5. Career management skills (making applications, job searching).
6. Interview skills and confidence for self-promotion.
7. Professional writing skills: applications and written communication in the workplace.
8. IT essentials and digital skills.
9. Adaptability and flexibility.



Note: not covered here are the practical elements of work readiness that are crucial to the employability journey of those living with disadvantage ie. having a bank account. At Luminary, we address practical needs in support work as well as through our Employability and Independence Programme, which includes a module on 'stability for the working world' designed to address women's practical barriers to work. It's imperative that these practical needs are met, alongside employability training.

Our recommendations on essentials for employability training are rooted in research, and we've summarised a supporting statement for each of our recommendations.

QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING IN CHOSEN FIELD OF WORK OR VOCATION

1. A report by Young Women's Trust found that lack of training or work experience was a significant barrier to women under the age of 30 stepping into paid work. Their research, from a client group not dissimilar to Luminary's, found that "63% have either been prevented from applying for or accepting a job because they did not have the right qualifications. 65% of those not in education or employment with children feel that the training provided by the Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme only led to more training and not to employment"¹. Their research cites apprenticeships as the obvious missing step here, combining training with paid work.

The vocational training offered by apprenticeships is often considered to be "a ladder of social mobility". They can support employability and enable individuals to gain skills in a non-academic context. They can also upskill and re-skill workers, giving a second chance to those already in employment. A report by the Social Mobility Commission into Apprenticeships found that for those facing disadvantage, "Apprenticeships boost employment and reduce the gap in earnings between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners". As well as providing an essential training ground and bridge into the working world, apprenticeships are proven to reduce inequality. The report explains: "This is because apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds receive a larger boost in their earnings from apprenticeship completion than their non-disadvantaged peers. For disadvantaged women achieving an intermediate apprenticeship, the earning boost stands at 16% compared to 10% for non-disadvantaged women"².

¹ Young Women's Trust. "Totally Wasted? The crisis of young women's worklessness." *Young Women's Trust*, Young Women's Trust, 2014

<https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/our-research/the-crisis-of-young-womens-worklessness/>

² "Apprenticeships and social mobility: fulfilling potential - GOV.UK." 24 Jun. 2020,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-and-social-mobility-fulfilling-potential>.

Accessed 16 Feb. 2022.

SELF SKILLS:

SELF CONFIDENCE, SELF REFLECTION, SELF MANAGEMENT

2. As an employability programme, a willingness to self reflect is crucial for self development. During our programme we encourage women to be constantly evaluating their own skills and behaviours, to identify ways they can continue to improve. Alongside this, we foster a culture of candid feedback - where we encourage trainees to invite and welcome feedback from trusted trainers and support workers. Pool and Sewell highlight that the ability to self-reflect on one's skills and experiences, "provide(s) a crucial link between knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability... Personal development planning (PDP) is a highly appropriate vehicle for reflection and evaluation in this context."³ The researchers later state that, "mastery experiences are the most effective way of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy, and so play a vital role within employability."⁴

Our training, support work and therapeutic interventions all seek to nurture women's confidence, recognising that this is crucial to employability. Our programme creates a safe place to explore new skills, giving women an opportunity to grow in confidence before they showcase their skills to the working world. Our work experience is a good example of this, trainees are given the opportunity to put their employability skills into practice in the safety of our business, building their confidence to later embrace external employment opportunities.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS; ABILITY TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY, AS WELL AS COLLABORATIVELY IN A GROUP AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

3. The Committee for Children (CFC) states that Social and Emotional learning skills are imperative for individuals searching for employment listing personal skills, people skills, and workplace skills as requirements for employability.⁵ For some trainees, particularly those who may have experienced neglect in their formation years their interpersonal skills, which are crucial for existing harmoniously in the workplace, may be underdeveloped. That is, in part, why women begin the first

³ "The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate"
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.18900!/file/UCLAN-model-of-graduate-employability.pdf.
 Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

⁴ "The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate"
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.18900!/file/UCLAN-model-of-graduate-employability.pdf.
 Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

⁵ "Why Social and Emotional Learning and Employability Skills Should"
<https://assets.ctfassets.net/98bcvzcrxcl0/4td00pUENWgSY2MKYQCe0/f7203d5566545b1efeaaa8a2fd8eb0e8/sel-employability-briefing-paper.pdf>. Accessed 16 Jun. 2021.

stage of our employability programme in a small cohort of seven, before moving to a larger cohort of twenty eight in the second stage of the programme. This small, intimate group gives women an opportunity to nurture their interpersonal skills as they form working relationships they are training with. Alongside this, interpersonal skills are developed through direct teaching on this subject, for example in a workshop named “Responding to conflict in the workplace”, where we explore how responses to conflict at work, need to be conducted differently to those within our family or wider community. This session is full of practical advice that nurtures our trainees professional conduct. Lester (2003) identifies the breadth of interpersonal skills needed to exist harmoniously in the workplace: “Interpersonal skills are to do with getting along with other people. They include tact, diplomacy, being aware of other people’s status and concerns, through to conviviality and humour”.⁶

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

4. The Committee for Children (CFC) defines Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to understand and manage emotions, set and accomplish positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”⁷ The CFC goes on to state that “in the long run, greater social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of...readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship.”⁸

Goleman (1998) provides strong support for the inclusion of emotional intelligence in any model of employability when he says: “In a time with no guarantees of job security, when the very concept of a “job” is rapidly being replaced by “portable skills”, these are prime qualities that make and keep us employable. We’ve talked about them loosely for decades under a variety of names, from “character” and “personality” to “soft skills” and

⁶ “The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate”
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.189001/file/UCLAN-model-of-graduate-employability.pdf.
 Accessed 29 Jun. 2021.

⁷ “Why Social and Emotional Learning and Employability Skills Should”
<https://assets.ctfassets.net/98bcvzcrxclo/4tdo0pUENWgSYy2MKYQCe0/f7203d5566545b1efeaaa8a2fd8eb0e8/sel-employability-briefing-paper.pdf>. Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

⁸ “Why Social and Emotional Learning and Employability Skills Should”
<https://assets.ctfassets.net/98bcvzcrxclo/4tdo0pUENWgSYy2MKYQCe0/f7203d5566545b1efeaaa8a2fd8eb0e8/sel-employability-briefing-paper.pdf>. Accessed 27 May. 2021.

“competence”, there is at last a more precise understanding of these human talents, and a new name for them: “emotional intelligence”.⁹

CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS (MAKING APPLICATIONS, JOB SEARCHING)

5. The cumulative research of Pool and Sewell found that people training for the job market “need to learn how best to research the job markets to see what opportunities are available to them, how to present themselves effectively to prospective employers, and how to make considered decisions about their careers.”¹⁰ This is exemplified by Grace Chocolates, a seven-week programme that works with women with experience in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to work towards employment through chocolate making. While gaining vocational training women also gain work experience and learn how to develop their CV. Grace aims to “support women into employment through; meeting new people, learning new skills and developing confidence... Women who have completed the course said they felt ‘they now had something of value to offer potential employers.’”¹¹

Equally, employability training must leave women confident in where to look for work and how to identify roles that align with their skills and needs. “There is little to be gained in developing employability if, at the end of the day, a student cannot identify a market in which to advertise their newly developed employability... After acquiring so much knowledge, understanding and skill at university, they will need help and guidance in how best to explain to potential employers about their achievements and how they will be of benefit to them, in application forms, CVs and interview activities.”¹²

For this reason our programmes include the process of applying for work in depth in a module called ‘entering the working world’. We start with the basics: where to look for work, based on your skills and vocation. Progressing to the techniques women need to apply and interview successfully.

⁹ “Why Social and Emotional Learning and Employability Skills Should”
<https://www.cfchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/policy-advocacy/sel-employability-brief.pdf>. Accessed 28 Jun. 2021.

¹⁰ “The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate”
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.189001/file/UCLAN-model-of-graduate-employability.pdf. Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

¹¹ “Working it Out - Prison Reform Trust.”
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Working%20it%20Out%20FINAL%20NEW.pdf>. Accessed 16 Jun. 2021.

¹² “The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate”
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.189001/file/UCLAN-model-of-graduate-employability.pdf. Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

INTERVIEW SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE FOR SELF-PROMOTION

6. The fruit of targeted interview preparation is best demonstrated in the outcomes of our friends at Smartworks, who provide interview coaching and preparation for women exploring work after a period of unemployment.

50% of those referred to Smartworks had been rejected from 20 roles when they were referred. With specialist training on interview techniques, 62% Smartworks clients had gone on to be offered a job.¹³

This data is a testament to the value of specialist interview training and coaching to a person's journey into work. Someone's search for work can be accelerated when they are trained and supported with the skills needed for success at an interview. We take this as evidence of the crucial need for interview skills training in employability upskilling. We're grateful for an ongoing partnership with Smartworks, who deliver this training - as well as role specific pre-interview coaching - to Luminary trainees.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING SKILLS: APPLICATIONS AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

7. In an employability analysis done by Lee Harvey of Sheffield Hallam University and Peter Knight of Open University, the research found "that employers want graduates with knowledge, intellect, willingness to learn, self-management skills, adaptability, communication skills, team-working and interpersonal skills."¹⁴ Professional communication skills cannot be assumed or overlooked in employability training, conversations with our trainees and graduates have supported this.

A Luminary graduate, now a training assistant, told us: "Professional writing skills for the working world is really important to the start of any kind of work. As we know every job type is different and needs different skills and communication - whenever we're working we always need to keep in regular communication with our managers and colleagues through email and text form. In personal or social relationships we're quite liberal in the way we communicate but writing for professional relationships the words and approach are always different. It's crucial women are taught to understand

¹³ "The Smart Works annual report 2020/2021 is here." 14 Sep. 2021, <https://smartworks.org.uk/2021/09/14/the-smart-works-annual-report-2020-2021-is-here/>. Accessed 18 Feb. 2022.

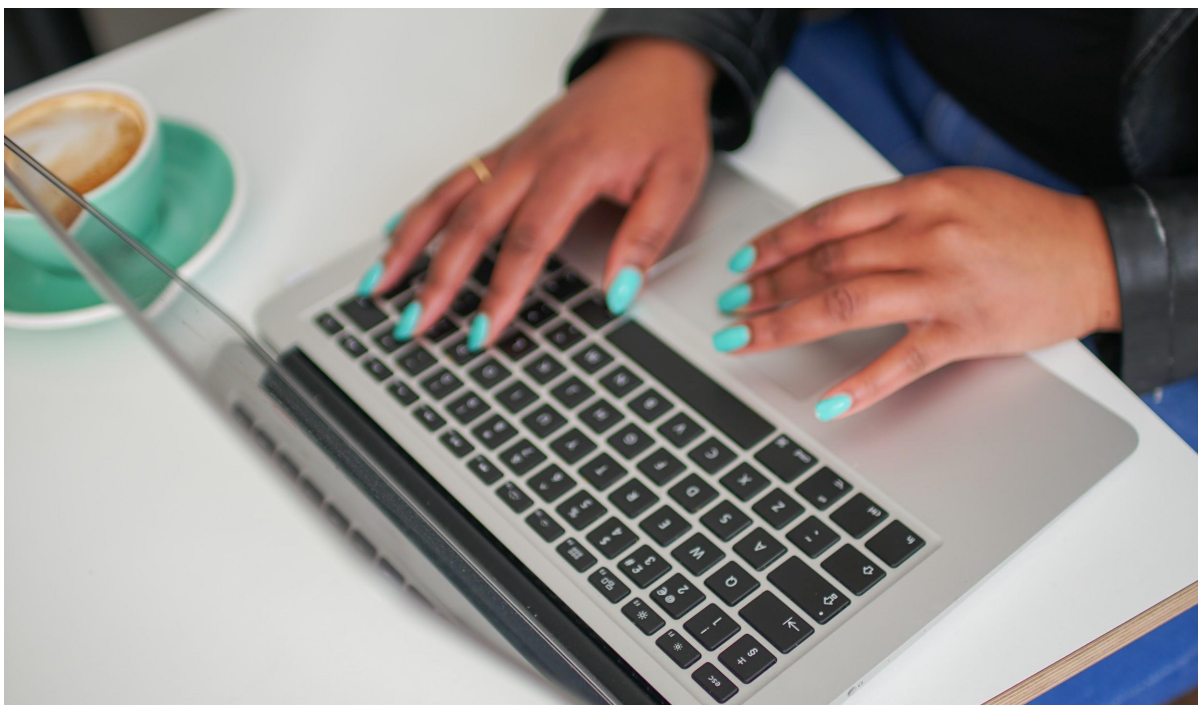
¹⁴ "Briefings on Employability 5 - Employability | The University of" http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/HEA-Briefing5-Helping_depts_develop_employability.pdf. Accessed 17 Jun. 2021.

the difference. Being a good employee always requires us to be good communicator in our work place”.

Affirming this, a trainee who has recently completed this session stated:

“This is an important area of work. There needs to be a boundary in place in how you communicate to your colleagues and senior leadership that needs to be different to outside of work. It shows professionalism and understanding between the different roles in your life. It also shows that you know what is and isn’t appropriate for the workplace. It shows self-respect and respect to others. Most of all, it’s healthy to have a distinction between work and self. I don’t think women would know this if it wasn’t covered in an employability programme. Women don’t have that mindset yet and they are still trying to find their professional voice. Covering this on the programme helps them find it. For those with historic work experience - some sectors like hospitality and retail have an informal style. If women have worked in this environment that might think that’s normal and appropriate for all workplaces, when we know it isn’t. For this reason, this theme is important for all - those who have never worked, and those changing sectors”.

IT SKILLS AND DIGITAL SKILLS



8. In their paper ‘Bridging the Gap Between Digital Skills and Employability for Vulnerable Population’ Lyons et al, highlight the link between digital and economic exclusion as the working world shifts to an increasingly digital approach. The latest research found

that 9 out of 10 businesses now describe digital skills as essential¹⁵. For this reason, their research advocates for IT & Digital Skills training to be at the heart of employability programmes.

“Vulnerable populations are more likely to be excluded from the digital economy and therefore from the workforce, digital literacy approaches should specifically address their needs. As highlighted by Chetty et al. (2017), “impoverished communities with limited capabilities have fewer opportunities to gain the skills needed to advance within the rapidly transforming digital economy.” Even when Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and connectivity are made available and affordable, these segments face numerous challenges in accessing and using digital technologies. Bridging the divide between education and employment has been found to result in significant “digital dividends” for disadvantaged populations (Bolstad et al., 2012; Chetty et al., 2017).¹⁶

ADAPTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

ABILITY TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE AND APPROACH CHALLENGES WITH A GROWTH MINDSET

9. According to the work of Harvey and Knight, “flexibility and adaptability are important as the world of work is constantly changing. There are fewer ‘jobs for life’ and even those keep changing. Being able to respond to change is essential and being able to anticipate change is even more useful.”¹⁷

For this reason, early on in our Employability and Independence Programme we run a workshop on the growth mindset, a resilient approach that helps us see the hurdles in our path as an opportunity for learning. This mindset helps us stay motivated in the face of failure and challenge, it keeps us positively progressing towards our goal. Having introduced the concept early on, we refer to the growth mindset repeatedly throughout our programme - particularly at the stage where trainees begin applying for work and their early applications, or first interviews are met with rejection. Harvey and Knight’s research illustrates that flexibility and resilience aren’t merely required in the early years of our career, but our key qualities for a long, successful career.

¹⁵ "Disconnected: exploring the digital skills gap - WorldSkills UK." 22 Mar. 2021, <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/insights/disconnected-exploring-the-digital-skills-gap/>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.

¹⁶ "(PDF) Bridging the Gap Between Digital Skills and Employability for" 27 Mar. 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332013345_Bridging_the_Gap_Between_Digital_Skills_and_Employability_for_Vulnerable_Populations. Accessed 6 Aug. 2021.

¹⁷ "Briefings on Employability 5 - Employability | The University of" http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/HEA-Briefing5-Helping_depts_develop_employability.pdf. Accessed 16 Jun. 2021.

CONCLUSION

In summary, having read widely on the theme of employability, we've been able to set out the employability content we determine as essential for our context. We recognise the diversity of the women we support, the varying degrees of trauma they live with and the wide-ranging needs they bring into training. By covering these themes on our Employability and Independence Programme, we're confident we're offering women the knowledge and practical skills they need to progress along our 'timeline of employability'. In light of the diversity of experiences, we acknowledge that women may progress at different rates. For this reason, we're not merely celebrating a woman's arrival at paid work, but every progression she makes along our timeline of employment. For women who have experienced unthinkable trauma, arriving at 'Hope for the Future' and progressing towards 'Exploring career aspirations' is a huge success in itself.



From this paper and the findings of our [literary review](#) we're clear that holistic employability training will be most effective when complimented with in depth support around a woman's barriers to work and the parts of her life that remain unsafe and lacking in stability. This will range from practical tasks, like setting up a bank account to more significant challenges, like those in Luminary's 'Stability for the working world' module - safe housing, debt management

and budgeting. When supporting vulnerable adults into work it's imperative that employability training is always combined with a person's holistic development.

Conducting this research has left us more convinced than ever that employment really is essential to break generational cycles of abuse and disadvantage. We echo the evidence offered in our literary review: "The ability to find and maintain employment having exited an abusive situation is crucial for those fleeing abuse. Women who are financially independent will likely find it easier to live independently from their perpetrator, at least economically, if not emotionally, socially and legally".¹⁸ This paper affirms the conclusions of our Literary review and the evidence we see in the outcomes for women we support - the Luminary team move forward, confident that we are in the right place, with the right model, delivering the right employability content to support women into the working world.

¹⁸ "Resources - Luminary Bakery." <https://luminarybakery.com/pages/resources>. Accessed 2 Mar. 2022.

APPENDIX

We cover the essential employability content highlighted in this paper in the second phase of our Employability and Independence Programme. In months 6-12 of our programme, we progress from the baking and holistic development stage, to deepdive into employability. The programme of which, including modules, is below.

EMPLOYABILITY & INDEPENDENCE PROGRAMME PHASE 2 | Month 6-12



MODULE 1 | PREPARING MYSELF FOR THE WORKING WORLD

INTRODUCING THE NEXT PHASE ON THE LUMINARY JOURNEY
EXPLORING YOUR CAREER ASPIRATIONS
RECOGNISING YOUR TOP SKILLS AND STANDING STRONG IN THEM
IDENTIFYING YOUR BARRIERS TO WORK AND OVERCOMING THEM
MANAGING MY MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK
RELATIONSHIPS: BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK
RELATIONSHIPS: MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

MODULE 2 | STABILITY FOR THE WORKING WORLD

CAP MONEY COURSE
CAP MONEY COURSE
CAP MONEY COURSE
HOUSING ADVICE, ASK THE EXPERTS

MODULE 3 | ENTERING THE WORKING WORLD

TOOLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL JOB SEARCH
ACEING APPLICATIONS!
EXCELLING IN INTERVIEWS

MODULE 4 | PROFESSIONALISM IN THE WORKING WORLD

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT, WHAT TO SAY IN THE WORKING WORLD
PROFESSIONAL WRITING SKILLS FOR THE WORKING WORLD
KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK

MODULE 5 | MAKING THE MOST OF MENTORING

MAKING THE MOST OF MENTORING
MEET & GREET: MEET YOUR MENTOR