

Senate Education Committee

7th November 2024

Skills for Success Framework: Embedding a Skills Framework into the University of Edinburgh Curriculum

Description of Paper

1. This paper outlines a proposal to update the existing Graduate Attributes with a Skills for Success Framework and outlines the case for its effective implementation throughout the University.

Fit with Remit

Education Committee	Y/N
Promote strategically-led initiatives and university-wide changes designed to enhance the educational experience of students and learners.	Y
Promote innovations in learning, teaching and assessment, embrace new teaching methods and consider cross-cutting themes such as research-led and technology-enhanced learning, digital and information literacy, education for employability, internationalisation and lifelong learning. Consider and promote local developments or initiatives with substantial implications for University learning and teaching strategy, policy, services or operations.	Y
Oversee policy relating to students' academic experience and proactively engage with high-level issues and themes arising from student feedback.	N
Give specific consideration to instances in which the experience of one particular cohort of students or learners (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research students, and those involved in non-standard programmes) may diverge from that of others.	N
Anticipate and prepare for new opportunities and likely future developments in learning and teaching for all cohorts of students and learners.	Y
Consider the implications of the Committee's work and its decisions in the context of external initiatives and compliance and legal frameworks, particularly in relation to equality and diversity.	Y

Action requested/recommended

2. SEC are asked to agree the current direction of travel and comment on and support successful implementation of the proposed changes.

Background and Context

3. The Graduate Attributes (GA) framework was introduced in 2010, via work of the Employability Strategy group, with support from the then Senate Undergraduate Studies Committee, and Curriculum & Student Progression Committee. At the time it was sector leading. It was slightly updated in 2016. The rationale for the GA framework is still extremely pertinent - providing **a common reference point, which can be contextualised to discipline and wider contexts, to support students' growth and development, both through and beyond the curriculum.** However, the language and style of the attributes

themselves has become less relevant and requires a refresh to align with the current and future wider context and skills landscape.

4. Skills development amongst HE students continues to remain a crucial factor, not only in terms of employer and funders expectations, but also to enhance social progress (OECD, 2016¹). Within an evolving global context of environmental, digital and social disruption, effective learning, adaptation and personal and professional growth, are required by students both within and beyond university. This increasingly requires not only disciplinary knowledge but, now arguably more importantly, broader skills in areas including socio-emotional, conceptual and inter-personal (Cinque 2016²; Fuller, Langan & Singelman, 2022).
5. Our Strategy 2030 values indicate: *“We are a place of transformation and of self-improvement, driven to achieve benefit for individuals, communities, societies and our world”*. And within our focus on teaching and learning we go on to state: *“We will support and promote teaching that focuses on experience, employability and an understanding of the value of creativity, curiosity, and even failure”*. A consistent, coherent and communicated skills framework supports these ambitions.
6. The Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP) aims to generate an outstanding educational experience for students, and this is reflected in the high-level objectives of the Student Vision: *“disciplinary experts with advanced specialist skills, knowledge and experience; ready to thrive in a changing world; highly employable”*. As Schools begin to engage with new programme archetypes, curriculum design principles and the distinctive Edinburgh component of challenge courses, experiential learning and enrichment elements, there is a unique opportunity to re-engage with embedded skills development and to do so against an updated framework.
7. Without a contemporary and engaging Skills for Success Framework, we risk a tick box approach to existing practice which fails to **intentionally and explicitly, embed, surface and articulate the skills** we know our students need (and in many cases are developing) for success both within and beyond their studies.
8. A coherent and communicated Skills for Success Framework also enables students to make sense of learning from beyond the curriculum. It provides a common frame of reference for professional service and student support staff to reinforce student development, facilitating students to capitalise fully on the rich University of Edinburgh experience.

Discussion

9. Framework Development and Mapping

¹ OECD (2015) “Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills”. **OECD Skills Studies**. Paris: OECD Publishing.

² Cinque, M. (2016) “‘Lost in translation’. Soft Skills Development in European Countries”. **Tuning Journal for Higher Education** 3 (2), 389-427. [https://doi.org/10.18543/tjhe-3\(2\)-2016pp389-427](https://doi.org/10.18543/tjhe-3(2)-2016pp389-427). <https://tuningjournal.org/article/view/1063/1273>

- I. The proposed *Skills for Success Framework* (Appendix 1) has been developed through the Curriculum Transformation Future Skills Working Group (CTFSWG) who have carried out an extensive evaluation and consultation process, which has involved:
 - a. A thorough review of the literature pertaining to the importance of skills development within university curriculum;
 - b. An analysis and mapping of the existing graduate attributes and external skills statements, including those from the World Economic Forum (2023), Skills Development Scotland (2018) and McKinsey (2021);
 - c. Interviews with academics to analyse current best practice³ within the University, and the advantages and challenges thereof;
 - d. Engagement with recent (2-5 years) alumni, via a survey, which evaluated their experience of skills development while students and the skills valued on their transition to work;
 - e. Feedback from employer representatives directly, and via industry advisory boards;
 - f. Focus groups with current students;
 - g. Interviews with identified institutions that are known to have engaged actively in skills development or reformed their delivery of skills development teaching and learning in recent years:

University	Location	Programme
Robert Gordon University	Aberdeen, Scotland, UK.	RGU Plus
Dublin City University	Dublin, Ireland.	DCU Futures
University of Bristol	Bristol, England, UK.	Bristol Plus & Bristol Futures
Kingston University	Kingston upon Thames, England, UK.	Future Skills: The Kingston Approach
Hong Kong University	Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong	Common Core

Figure 1: External Universities consulted

- II. As a result, an initial framework has been developed and then shared for further consultation and analysis through:
 - a. the CTP Experiential Learning and Challenge course working groups;
 - b. the External Accreditation and Professional Bodies working group;
 - c. the Curriculum Transformation Board;
 - d. the Directors of Teaching network;
 - e. the three College Education Committees;
 - f. Sustainability in the Curriculum Working Group;
 - g. CTP EDI secondee;
 - h. student support and student services staff;
 - i. mapping the the existing UoE Graduate Attributes Framework to the Skills for Success Framework (Appendix 2);
 - j. mapping the Skills for Success Framework against the expectations from an illustrative selection of external and professional bodies.

³ Reports on internal and external practice are available on the [CTP Hub](#)

- III. The extensive feedback and mapping have resulted in a set of skills identified as appropriate to the University of Edinburgh Graduate. It is important to recognise, understandably, these do not differ markedly from those of other HE institutions. The distinctiveness can come from how we foster and surface these skills and enable our students to recognise them. **The 'Unique Selling Point' (USP) is in how we use our Skills for Success Framework to positively impact the student experience: to successfully embed, surface and articulate skills development across the student journey.**

10. There are three immediate areas of activity in replacing the existing Graduate Attributes with the Skills for Success Framework:

- Agreeing the Skills for Success Framework and developing an appropriate communication plan;
- Replacing existing reference to and use of Graduate Attributes to align with the new framework;
- Active engagement with the Skills for Success Framework to impact learning & teaching, and wider student experience.

11. This latter point is synergistic with activity related to Curriculum Transformation and why action is proposed now. In addition, to ensuring that implementation of the Skills for Success Framework is embedded in Curriculum Transformation: it is also necessary to align with other relevant strategic activities including implementation of our Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities and exploration of programme-level assessment. Assuming Senate Education Committee are supportive of the proposal, a detailed implementation plan will be developed. The table below provides an overview of immediate areas of focus.

Activity	Who	Timeframe
Recruit fixed term Senior Design Lead for Future Skills	CTP	Q3 2024
Recruit fixed term systems analyst support (part-time for first half of 2025)	CTP	Q1 2025
Engage areas/teams currently referencing and using GAs on transition to the Skills Framework, e.g. Edinburgh Award, PG Cert Academic Practice, Websites, professionally accredited programmes, etc	Careers Service BAU/CTP	Q1 2025
Work with CTP to finalise co-ordinated approach to developing & refining key resources and systems that are impacted by replacing the GA Framework.	CTP	Q1 2025
Creating opportunities for embedding, surfacing and articulating skills using the Skills Framework, e.g. DRPS, Boards of Studies documentation, Course and Programme Design materials	CTP	Q1 2025
Communications plan (for staff and students) to raise awareness and encourage engagement with embedding, surfacing and articulating skills in all aspects of the student experience.	Careers Service BAU/CTP	Q1 2025
Develop, test and refine guidance for teaching teams implementing the Skills for Success Framework in their courses/programmes working with 'early adopter' Schools/subject areas to realise opportunities aligned to their Learning and Teaching priorities and to surface and share practice, including barriers to adoption and infrastructure requirements	CTP	Q3 2025
Work through CTP on ensuring that the Skills for Success Framework is embedded in distinctive learning and teaching activities that are well-	CTP	Q3 2025

placed to use, benefit from and champion skills development e.g. Experiential Learning, Programme Level Assessment		
Work with CTP on producing resources for staff (e.g. Programme Directors, Course Organisers, Cohort Leads, Student Advisers) and students to support engagement with Skills for Success e.g. its synergy with Assessment and Feedback	CTP	Q3 2025
Identify emerging opportunities for engagement with the Skills for Success, e.g. embedding with Making Transitions Personal, use within the student support model; Digital Badging	Careers Service BAU lead	Q3 2025

Resource Implications

12. Taking a gradual transition from one framework to the other, updates to websites and paperwork could be factored into business-as-usual (BAU) revisions. Where more detailed changes are necessary, resource may be required. This can be surfaced in a more detailed implementation plan. The synergistic opportunity to engage with skills development alongside curriculum transition is a resource-efficient approach. Curriculum Transformation funding had been provided for a 2-year, full-time Design Lead and 6-month, part-time Business Analyst resource to support planful and effective embedding of the Skills for Success Framework.

Risk management

13. Student experience is our highest rated risk on the University Risk Register. Failure to equip our students for success beyond their studies risks reputational damage, low league table performance, challenges in student recruitment and poor alumni and industry engagement. Delaying action in this area misses the opportunity to capitalise on investment in Curriculum Transformation to fully deliver the student vision.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

14. The Skills for Success Framework was discussed with CTP Sustainability group, which commented on alignment with more detailed skills for sustainability frameworks. The skills within the framework support **UNSDG Goal 4** – ensuring inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities and **Goal 8** – promote sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Equality & Diversity

15. Embedding skills development within learning and teaching ensures that all students are equipped for success within and beyond their studies. Reliance on co- and extra-curricular activities for skills development disadvantages those who may be time poor, such as disabled students and those with caring responsibilities. These are often the groups who face existing inequity in the labour market, thus compounding the issue.

16. The Skills for Success framework includes aspects relevant to advancing equality and diversity, e.g., **Cultural sensitivity**: *being open to different views and perspectives; harnessing the benefit of difference and diversity; seeking to create inclusive and welcoming environments; communicating across language and contexts*
17. The development of learning and teaching which support skills development needs to ensure inclusive learning practices and assessment, which is true of all learning and teaching activity.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

18. Feedback and suggestions from this Committee will be used to inform the implementation of the Skills Framework as a replacement to the existing Graduate Attributes. The proposed implementation has three distinct, but over-lapping phases:
 1. Embedding: providing a rationale, support and guidance to staff to ensure intentional and explicit means by which skills development is part of the academic experience through programmes and courses from inception;
 2. Surfacing: enabling staff to make explicit the skills they are enhancing in learning outcomes and assessment, and supporting student agency in skills development;
 3. Articulating: guiding students, and providing mechanisms by, which they can reflect, harness, and transfer skills use within and beyond learning.
19. Evaluation will be considered as part of the detailed implementation plan, with a focus on measures of engagement with the Skills for Success Framework at both course and programme level. Suggestions for effective measures to include in the implementation plan would be welcome.

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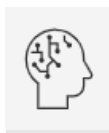
Presenters(s): Shelagh Green, Hannah Chalmers and Tara Morrison

Fol status: Open

Appendix 1: Skills for Success Framework

Our students join us with a wide range of experiences, skills and talents. They will go on to develop their life and professional careers in a wide range of roles, sectors and locations. While studying with us they are encouraged and supported to continue their unique academic, personal and professional development journey, developing skills and attributes that support ongoing success.

The academic experience at Edinburgh embeds:



Critical Thinking: the ability to question norms, practices and opinions; to seek relevant and appropriate evidence, and understand biases; determining the significance of what is being expressed or seeing wider themes and patterns in information.



Curiosity: a desire to learn or discover, and to inspire or create new ideas and concepts; to continuously explore and learn from challenging experiences; to ask searching questions and adopt different perspectives; harness opportunities and take initiative.



Problem Solving: creativity and innovation to imagine alternative ways of addressing problems; translating knowledge to different contexts; consider complex systems with contradictions and uncertainties; facilitate and co-produce solutions.

In the way we design and deliver our teaching and learning, students can develop their skills in:



Collaboration: understanding and respecting the needs, perspectives and actions of others; fostering inclusiveness and managing conflicts in groups; able to connect with, and learn from, others, and build positive relationships.



Reflection: reviewing in- and on-actions; recognising own strengths and emotions; an awareness of personal values and integrity; setting and achieving goals.



Communication: active listening; synthesising knowledge; ability to convey effective meaning and messages; using approaches and media which create shared understanding; public speaking; advocacy, influencing and storytelling.

The richness and diversity of the academic and wider student experience enables:



Cultural sensitivity: being open to different views and perspectives; harnessing the benefit of difference and diversity; seeking to create inclusive and welcoming environments; communicating across language and contexts



Resilience: to be adaptive as circumstances change; to manage own time and wellbeing; to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity; to harness personal drive, motivation and determination.



Data and digital literacy: consider the ethical aspects of using data and technology; able to understand, interpret and question evidence derived from data and its sources; applying appropriately to different settings.



All our students are uniquely talented and have an array of skills and attributes they have acquired, and will continue to develop, through the diversity of their experiences. Our students will be encouraged to appreciate, strengthen and articulate the skills that they value most during their Edinburgh journey

Appendix 2: Graduate Attributes and Skills Framework Mapping

The two frameworks arguably take different starting points in terms of certainty of outcomes and intended audience.

- **Graduate Attributes** talk about graduates that ‘use’ ‘seek’ and ‘draw on’ attributes as if they are guaranteed outcomes, with language more focused on pitching graduates to future employers. Terms used are generalisable and may not easily translate to concrete actions.
- **Skills for Success** reflects on capabilities, attitudes, and approaches the University believes students should aim to embody, translating them into skills for success that students have the opportunity to develop.

Both frameworks

- Focus on taking an open-minded approach
- Highlight the ability to critically evaluate and question ideas/experiences.
- Identify lifelong learning and curiosity as goals.
- Focus on using research to tackle problems creatively.
- Focus on pursuing goals and taking own initiative.
- Identify reflection as a tool for development.
- Note importance of being adaptable and managing own time/effectiveness.
- Highlight ability to understand and synthesise information.
- Emphasise effective communication in a variety of settings/to different audiences.
- Identify communication as a tool to positively engage with others
- Focus on understanding and respecting others.
- Promote inclusivity by acting positively, ethically, and respectfully.

Graduate Attributes	Skills for Success
Personal & intellectual autonomy	Critical thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ability to question norms, practices & opinions• determining the significance of what is being expressed or seeing wider themes & patterns in information Curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to ask searching questions and adopt different perspectives Cultural sensitivity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• being open to different views and perspectives Data and digital literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• able to understand, interpret and question evidence
Enquiry & lifelong learning	Curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a desire to learn or discover and to inspire or create new ideas and concepts• to continuously explore and learn from challenging experiences Problem solving <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Innovation
Research & enquiry	Critical thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to seek relevant and appropriate evidence and understand biases Problem solving <ul style="list-style-type: none">• creativity• to imagine alternative ways of addressing problems

Aspiration and personal development	Curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harness opportunities and take initiative Reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing in and on actions; recognising own strength and emotions • setting and achieving goals Resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harness personal drive, motivation and determination
Communication	Problem solving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • translating knowledge to different contexts Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • able to connect with and learn from others and build positive relationships Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active listening, synthesising knowledge; ability to convey effective meaning and messages Cultural sensitivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicating across language and contexts
Outlook and engagement	Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding and respecting needs, perspectives and actions of others; fostering inclusiveness Cultural sensitivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harnessing the benefit of difference and diversity; seeking to create inclusive and welcoming environments
Personal effectiveness	Resilience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be adaptive as circumstances change • to manage own time Reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an awareness of...integrity Cultural Sensitivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being open to different views and perspectives • adaptive as circumstances change