



**How Might We:**

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**Professional literacy**



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# Overview

Professional literacy is:

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**...a student's understanding and capacity to apply the skills that they develop through their degree experience and other life experiences. These skills will support students' future career prospects regardless of what sort of employment, career, or life-role they may choose to pursue. Developing professional literacy also enables students and graduates to relate to others and to share their expertise in a way that makes a valuable contribution to society.**

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(University of Western Sydney 2021)

Professional literacy is already a component of many degree programmes at Leeds, and it may be that the term ‘employability’ is one that programmes will recognise as having many similar elements. However the definition also supports the notion that professional literacy is wider (in its application and purpose) than the ability to attain a job and as such, is an appropriate proposition for how all curriculum experiences at Leeds can support a student's wider life aspirations. Supporting our students to be professionally literate through their curriculum experience requires programmes, where appropriate, to embed real-world activities, including opportunities to make connections as to how they can apply their learning in a post-graduation setting.

In doing so, students are more able to understand the relevance and connection of their curriculum experience to the working world and other potential aspects of their graduate life. And regardless of their capacity to access extra-curricular opportunities, the curriculum experience provides a level playing field to develop and then showcase relevant transferable skills and knowledge.

## Student Opportunities and Futures Strategy 2022-25 The Role of Professional Literacy

The Student Opportunities and Futures Strategy outlines the University's “holistic approach to enabling, empowering, and enhancing student opportunity and career prospects through all aspects of the student experience. Supporting our students through their curriculum experience to be **professionally literate**, will develop their understanding of the necessary values, attributes, behaviours, skills and knowledge they will require to achieve their individual aspirations.”

“The University is committed to being continually aware of the needs of society and the wider working world, so that we can develop professionally literate graduates who are confident, connected, global citizens. In doing so, we aim to foster a community of lifelong and life-wide learners, who can adapt and manage healthy future working lives in an ever-changing world.”

Professional literacy will also be developed in non-curricular settings and students will be encouraged to access a range of experiences and opportunities.

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**Personal professionalism is visualised as a complex set of beliefs, identity, ways of thinking and behaving, capability, qualities and dispositions that are integrated by an individual in a highly personal way, in the act of being in a professional context. These contexts are not limiting to the professions like the practice of law, medicine, engineering and accountancy, rather they are a feature of all work environments in which an individual has the opportunity to adopt a particular approach to their work.**

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(Beale 2010)

Professional Literacy is one of the 3 literacies within the overarching Capabilities Framework: Academic, Digital, Professional. Each literacy has an individual approach and aligned components in relation to how they influence programme design and delivery. There are also many aspects which are similar and complementary across all literacies. If this is highlighted to students, it can further develop their levels of self-confidence and efficacy in relation to how they can approach their studies.



# Benefits

## The benefits of professional literacy

Professional Literacy is not solely about getting a job or how much you earn. It's about preparing our students for a life beyond University, whatever that might be. And whilst most likely that will include a career, it is also about the behaviours, mindset and self-belief that will support them to secure a successful future.

### Benefits for your students:

Professionally literate students and graduates are able to:

- Recognise and articulate the transferability of their studies to the context of the workplace and other relevant destinations
- Proactively develop their skills and knowledge in order to inform decisions around their lifelong learning and career direction
- Enjoy easier transitions into whatever post-graduation endeavour they choose

For our students, **Professional Literacy** at tLeeds includes the following outcomes which programmes can consider in relation to their role in supporting students:

- **Career Readiness** - the level to which students possess the necessary information and skills required to enter the profession of their choosing
- **Work Ready Skills** – the level to which students develop those skills which graduate employers require to be successful in the workplace

- **Decision Making** – the capability of students to make informed decisions about future careers and other aspirations and the best course of action for them to take to reach those goals

### Benefits for your discipline

Supporting students to appreciate how professional literacy can support their academic experience (and vice versa) is important on a number of levels.

Appreciating that a 'professional mindset' to their studies can benefit them as a student of any discipline - that their attitude to study is one that will contribute to a positive learning environment. Being a knowledgeable and confident student stems from developing good working practices such as being organised; working well with others; a resilient attitude to overcoming obstacles and taking informed decisions to problems and potential solutions. All of which will give them a strong foundation for when they graduate and the 'new' world which they will enter.

### Benefits for the working world

The Institute of Student Employers (ISE 2020) are clear in saying that what organisations need are graduates that have potential. The potential to learn and develop once they enter the workplace, regardless of what they have studied, or their specific previous experience. And crucially they are looking for graduates who know they have potential - those who can demonstrate that they exhibit the 3 outcomes of being professionally literate, and that have the self-belief that given the right opportunity, they can bring a positive contribution to any workplace of their choosing.

## The curriculum as a levelling environment for professional literacy

We cannot assume that students can access equitable opportunities to develop their professional literacy through extra-curricular activity.

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**There is clearly value in questioning assumptions that an equivalent offer is being extended to all students, particularly in respect of placements, internships and extracurricular activities. Opportunities designed with the best of intentions may in fact prove to be differentially available to students when considered in the wider nexus of background, self-concept, self-efficacy and human and other capitals.**

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(AdvanceHE 2021)



# How might we...

## Surfacing professional literacy within the curriculum

Programmes will already be providing opportunities for their students to become more ‘professionally literate’. So as a starting point, programmes can review if they are including:

- Authentic learning and assessment opportunities
- Clear signposting as to where and how students are developing transferable skills
- Reflective opportunities to enhance their students’ levels of self-awareness and self-efficacy (which will lead to improved decision-making)

### 1. Career readiness

The level to which students possess the necessary information and skills required to enter the profession of their choosing.

Student Careers measure and track all students with regards to their self-assigned level of career-readiness at the start of each academic year. This data can be accessed by all programmes and will also help to target any students who feel that they do not have the necessary ideas, plans or information to successfully transition once they graduate.

#### What can you do?

Completing the career readiness audit could be included in induction activities, skills modules or

reflection activities. However, whilst it does not explicitly need to be built into any curriculum activity per se, the opportunity for students to reflect upon their current position and to actively research the necessary skills, knowledge and experience that they will need to achieve their goals, is one that programmes could naturally build into APT conversations.

For further information, contact your Faculty or School employability team to access the career readiness data for your student cohort. All Academic Personal Tutors should also have access to this within their tutees dashboard.

### 2. Work ready skills

This is the level to which students develop those skills which graduate employers require to be successful in the workplace

These are the skills that graduate employers most frequently request (regardless of sector or role). As 86% of graduate jobs do not specify a specific degree subject, this means that these skills are ones which all students should be aware of throughout their time at university.

#### What can you do?

Programmes can support students by:

- Consistently and regularly signposting any work ready skills that they develop through their degree

- Ensuring that their students are aware of the work ready skills that their degree will NOT fully cover, so that they can choose to proactively seek opportunities outside their degree to develop them

For further information, access the Leeds Skills Matrix. Work Ready Skills are 1 of the 6 different skills domains contained within the Matrix that your programme can use to surface or newly include the skills most relevant to your discipline

### 3. Decision making

The capability of students to make informed decisions about future careers and other aspirations and the best course of action for them to take to reach those goals

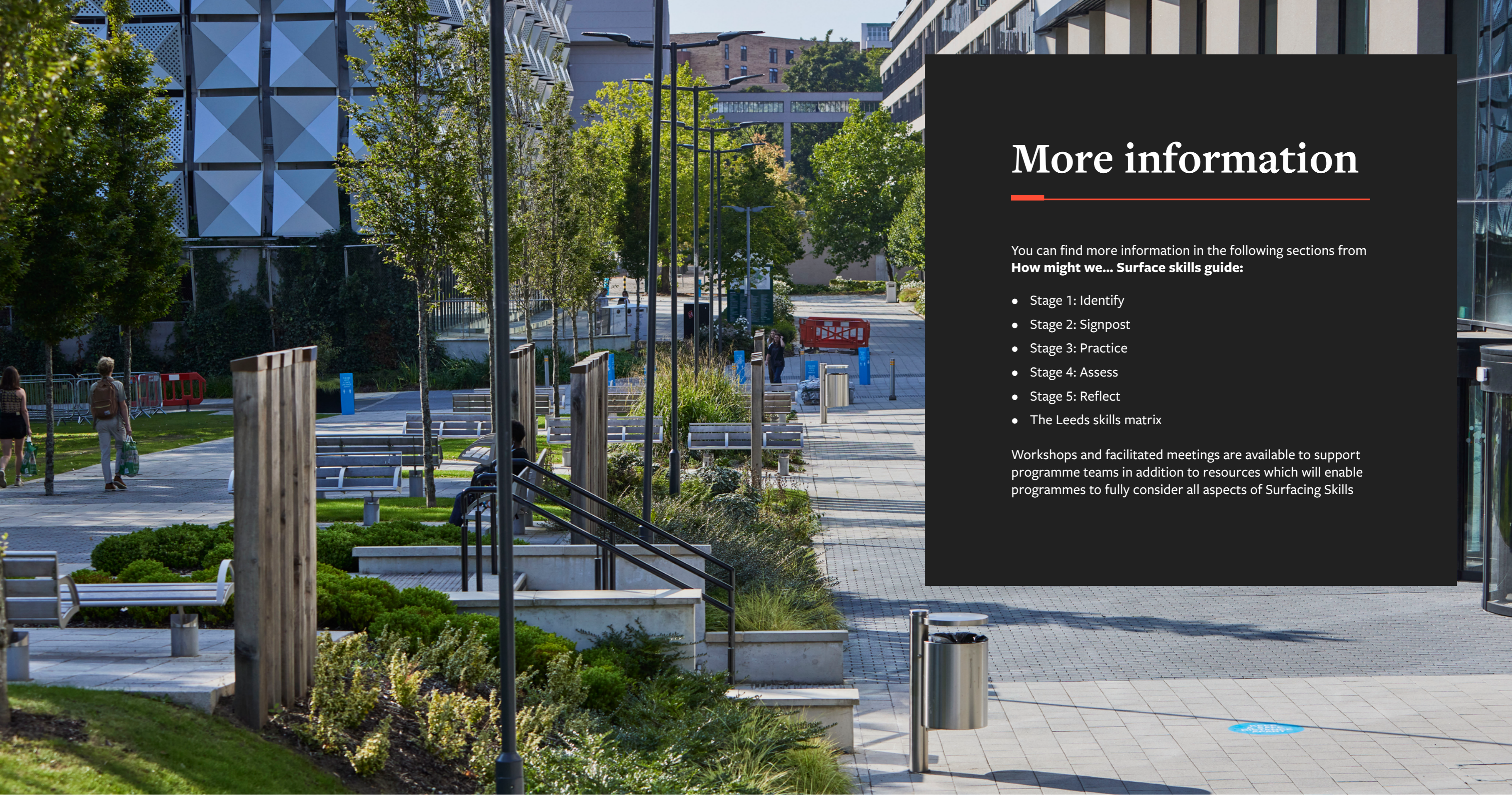
The level to which future (career) decision-making is embedded within a programme will vary according to discipline (and may not feature at all). However, decision-making per se, is also an academic skill that students will be developing throughout their programme of study and of an increasingly complex nature.

#### What can you do?

Programmes can highlight students’ ability in this area; that to make informed decisions, you need to first research and understand options/solutions/differing perspectives before then applying that knowledge to offer a potential solution (decision). Students can then transfer this skill into a career or other post-graduation setting. And through repeated practice in an academic

context, (and experiencing successful results), students will be more confident to articulate their experiences in recruitment settings.





# More information

You can find more information in the following sections from **How might we... Surface skills guide:**

- Stage 1: Identify
- Stage 2: Signpost
- Stage 3: Practice
- Stage 4: Assess
- Stage 5: Reflect
- The Leeds skills matrix

Workshops and facilitated meetings are available to support programme teams in addition to resources which will enable programmes to fully consider all aspects of Surfacing Skills



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