How Might We:

Surfacing skills

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Overview

What is surfacing skills?

Surfacing skills is the process of supporting students to surface the skills value of their degree by ensuring the right skills are developed in the right way, at the right time (and making sure that your students know this!).

It has built upon the work of Daubney 2020 (Kings College London) which supported academic programmes to articulate more clearly their Subject Benchmark Skills to students. The Leeds process however, will widen the conversation to include students, academics and employers, to ensure that programmes have a purpose and meaning to a range of stakeholders.

Surfacing Skills at Leeds aims to:

- Support students and graduates to understand, reflect upon and articulate the value of their specific degree programme in relation to the transferable learning and skills gained.
- Support the development of discipline identity through the identification and application of a unique set of skills (both discipline and professionally relevant).
- Increase the benefits and use of both authentic assessments and authentic, active learning environments for all discipline areas.
- Support a transformational educational environment which provides a level playing field for all students to develop professionally relevant skills and behaviours, regardless of background, networks or access to opportunities outside their curricular experience.

The term 'surfacing' is important. The process is not about adding in a whole new load of content or crowbarring additional skills into your programme or module. We know that in the majority of degree programmes, students are developing a wide range of discipline-appropriate skills. However, evidence from graduate employers, our current students and alumni Graduate Outcome results (for the sector and Leeds) allude to the fact that those embedded skills are 'hidden' meaning that students are not sufficiently aware of them (or that they are developing them).

It is right that any discipline area has control over its own identity and that any discipline-specific knowledge has a direct relationship with the external environment through a connection and relevance to the environment that students will ultimately enter. Surfacing Skills therefore encourages and supports academic teams to develop their programmes in partnership with students, alumni and relevant employers so that it has meaning both within and beyond the disciplinary area, enabling students to flourish once they graduate.

The Surfacing Skills process also underpins the 3 literacies within the overarching Capabilities Framework:

- Academic
- Digital
- Professional

Each of these literacies requires students to practise and develop specific types of skills, but the Surfacing Skills process enables programme teams to determine which ones are most relevant to their discipline and how each is defined and applied. How your programme determines the 'right' skills is again your decision, but we advocate, where possible, that this is done in partnership with staff, students, alumni and relevant employers.

Benefits

> " **Learners who understand the wider value of their qualifications beyond knowledge focus, particularly in relation to transferable skills, are better able to be join, navigate and be agile in a challenging employment market.** "

(Daubney, 2021)

Benefits to you and your discipline

This process enables your degree programme to illustrate how it can contribute to developing students' professional, academic and digital literacy. It can be used as a design or review tool for all programmes and modules, so that you can be confident the skills your discipline requires to develop confident and knowledgeable students are embedded within your degree (even if all that is needed is for them to be surfaced more explicitly).

The process will also enable you to be more confident with regards to the skills value of your degree from the University from Leeds, which is turn will potentially enable prospective students to better distinguish what being a University of Leeds graduate in 'X' means compared to other institutions.

Finally Academic Personal Tutor conversations become more meaningful in terms of a student's ongoing

progress, through considering both knowledge and skill development.

The surfacing skills process will support programmes to:

> " **identify what are the innate transferable skills of the subject. The skills which are developed because of what a subject is, not how it is taught.** "

(Daubney, 2021)

Benefits to the workplace

Evidence from The Institute of Student Employers (ISE 2020) and our own student voice research (2021), informs us that whilst graduates are confident about the skills developed through their extracurricular opportunities, they are far less so in relation to their actual programme of study. Employers are keen to employ graduates with 'potential'. 86% of graduate jobs do not require a specific degree discipline, therefore employers are looking to employ professionally, academically and digitally literate graduates who are self-aware enough to know how transferable their skills and knowledge are in a range of career contexts.

Surfacing skills is not solely for students. It is a process that enables a programme or discipline to demonstrate its purpose, its 'DNA' and it supports the workplace in developing confident future employees.

Benefits to your students

The process will enable students to recognise the transferability of the skills they are developing through their curriculum experience and to be confident in how they can develop them during their studies and apply them in a range of settings throughout their lives. If skills are articulated more explicitly in programme documents and discussed in regular conversations, then students would be better able to recognise, articulate and value the skills content of their programme of study. Importantly, it enables students who do not have the advantage of undertaking significant extra-curricular experiences (paid or unpaid) or who have access to social networks, to still be able to present themselves to an employer as someone who has a wealth of transferable skills.

How might we...

Application of surfacing skills

The 5 stages of Surfacing Skills will enable programmes to consider the skills that are most appropriate to them, using the Leeds Skills Matrix and QAA Benchmark Statements as a review and decision making tool.

Based upon the processes adopted by Advance HE (2019) with regards to their multiple frameworks for enhancing and embedding employability, assessment, student success and enterprise, the Leeds process for Surfacing Skills will adopt a 5 staged, consistent approach. It is anticipated that each stage can be adapted by each discipline area to reflect:

- Their current position with regards to skill identification and development.
- Their relationships with external, professional and accrediting bodies.
- Their capacity to delve deeply into each stage according to resource (at that time).

Stage 1: Identify

Using the Leeds Skills Matrix, each Programme identifies current and potential new skills that are appropriate for their discipline at Leeds and develops an updated list.

Stage 2: Signpost

A clear and consistent method is adopted to signpost students as to the skills they are developing, including where and when they are developing them.

Stage 3: Practice

Students are regularly supported in their skill development through an active learning process.

Stage 4: Assess

Skills are consistently, appropriately and authentically assessed throughout a student's programme of study.

Stage 5: Reflect

Students are provided with opportunities to reflect upon their current skillset and future development needs both formally and informally.

Each stage will has a support package available (sub guides; templates; case studies and workshops). Programmes should approach each stage at a pace and timescale appropriate to them and so differing levels of engagement are also outlined within each Stage Guide to reflect this.

More information

The Leeds Skills Matrix

Your degree programme and related modules will be packed with various skill development, and so this is the starting point; to **surface** those skills, identifying which ones underpin your discipline (and in particular are core). And in addition to those skills that are already included (explicitly or implicitly), you can use the Leeds Skills Matrix to further explore and review current and potential inclusions (and their application).

The Leeds Skills Matrix has been developed through consultation and partnership with experts both within and beyond the University and provides a starting point for your discussions. It is split into 6 different 'domains', each which outlines its most relevant core skills.
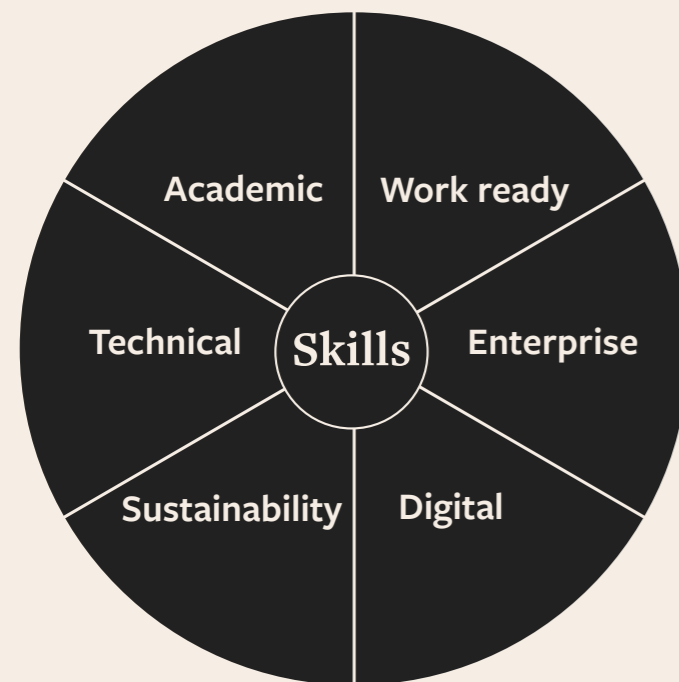
The 6 skills domains

1. **Academic:** skills identified through the advice of the University's Learning and Development Team.

2. **Digital:** skills within the University's Digital Literacies Framework.

3. **Sustainability:** skills identified through the University's Sustainability in The Curriculum Working Group and which deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

4. **Enterprise:** skills which are within QAA and Advance HE guidance, in addition to the University's Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education.

5. **Work Ready:** skills which are identified by Student Careers as the (current) most requested skills by UK graduate employers (2022).

6. **Technical:** additional skills which do not appear within the other 5 domains and which are determined by each discipline in relation to additional subject level or professional standards such as QAA Subject Benchmarks and PSRB requirements.

How to use the Leeds Skills Matrix – A suggested approach

1. There is no set number or type of skill that you should include - each discipline/programme identifies those skills which exist already or would like to include if they do not.

2. You are encouraged to consider the definition of each skill and adapt it to fit YOUR discipline e.g 'creativity' in Maths may be defined and applied differently to that of History. The crucial thing is that your staff and students understand and use the skill and definitions consistently.

3. Some skills are repeated across a number of domains which may lead you to consider the specific application of those skills.

4. You may wish to 'package' up certain skills under broader headings e.g 'communication'.

Further detail with regards to the Leeds Skills Matrix and its application, can be found within the Surfacing Skills: Stage 1: How Might We Guide.

A student's lifewide experience – curating a holistic view of their time at Leeds

Finally, we know that our students are experiencing:

> **a set of learning and developmental spaces, [through their taught experience] in addition to those of the wider world in which they are immersed and continue to be immersed. If lifelong learning is learning that occupies different spaces through the lifespan – 'from cradle to grave' – lifewide learning is learning in different spaces simultaneously.**

(Barnett 2021)

Students will therefore be supported to reflect upon and make connections with all their experiences whilst at Leeds through an e-portfolio and extra-curricular opportunities to curate and evidence their array of experiences in one place.

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