

Kingston University London



Academic
Development
Centre

**Kingston University's
Skills Framework**
A guide for staff



**KINGSTON
ENHANCING
YOUR ACADEMIC AND
EMPLOYABILITY
SKILLS**

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY'S SKILLS FRAMEWORK

The framework's aim is to help students to unlock their potential:

- Within their studies
- To gain employment
- To plan for their personal development
- To engage with lifelong learning

DEFINING SKILLS

Skills are “those capabilities that can support study in any discipline and are the abilities and practices that employers seek when recruiting graduates.”

(Forbes and Kubler, 2007 p2).

This definition was used to help shape the changes to the skills framework, building on the key skills framework from 2000. The new framework developed through a process of consultation with stakeholders and was informed by the literature and examples of practice from other higher education institutions. To reflect the changes in the framework, it has been given the mnemonic **'KEYS' – Kingston enhancing your academic and employability skills.**

THE CONTEXT FOR SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In recognition that graduates work, learn and live in different contexts, it is important to ensure that educational practices nurture skills and attitudes that will offer appropriate preparation for their futures. The commitment to this ideal is explicit within the key skills framework at Kingston University (which was first introduced in 2000), promoting Kingston University's mission to equip students to make effective contributions to society and the economy. Key skills are currently required to be incorporated in all undergraduate courses and evidenced in all programme specifications.

In response to current agendas, such as the requirement that all students studying in higher education have opportunities to plan for their educational, personal and career development (QAA, 2001), together with policy drivers (such as the Leitch Report, 2006), a review of the key skills framework was undertaken in 2008. This is particularly timely in view of recent concerns expressed by employers about the varying ability of graduates to demonstrate their skills (Archer and Davison, 2008). Higher level skills are also a key part of the strategy outlined in the report for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) entitled 'Higher education at work – high skills: high value' (2008).

THE NEW SKILLS FRAMEWORK

The aims of the framework are designed to encourage students to become increasingly future focussed as they progress through their studies. They can access opportunities to develop skills through both the design and delivery of programmes and engagement in extracurricular activities.

The new framework identifies 7 areas for skills development, which differs from the previous framework which identified five key skill categories (communication; numeracy; ICT; teamwork; and independent learning). The revised categories can be seen to encompass these previous categories, while also recognising the opportunities students have to develop broader skills, such as entrepreneurial skills. They explicitly address the skills employers identified as being most important when recruiting new graduates (Archer and Davison, 2008).

A decision was taken not to indicate stages of progression for skills, as had been illustrated previously, but to enable skills to be progressed as appropriate for the discipline and level of the student. The new framework is designed to be used within programmes of study at both undergraduate **and** postgraduate levels.

SKILLS IN THE CURRICULUM

Most academics include skills as part of their teaching and, since 2000, key skills have been a core element of curriculum design at Kingston University. The new framework has been designed to build on good practice in embedding skills in curricula while offering course teams greater flexibility in matching skills to disciplinary requirements.

All courses will normally be expected to incorporate all categories of skills, together with evidence regarding where they are facilitated and how they are to be assessed. (It will be for a course team to provide justification for omissions at validation or review). In recognition that different disciplines and programmes within the university have their own approaches to skills acquisition, the skills have not been articulated as learning outcomes. However, as stated in the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook in section C:

“Programme specifications should make explicit the intended outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and other attributes.”

It is also a requirement of validation, that information about how skills map onto modules is provided (see section C of the Quality Assurance Procedures Handbook). A mapping framework for skills is included in Appendix One.

The different levels of study and approaches to progression of skills will require consideration of how skills can be balanced and combined by the course team – as appropriate for the discipline and student market. Course teams may find it helpful to consult:

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) which offers subject-specific support to enhance the student learning experience through its network of subject centres. Most of these subject centres offer resources to support skills development. These can be accessed at www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/subjectcentres

The HEA has also developed student employability profiles with the help of the Subject Centres and the Council for Industry in Higher Education. Skills that can be developed through studying a discipline have been mapped against skills and attributes valued by employers. These can be accessed at www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/employability/disciplines

The Quality Assurance Agency which outlines the expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas, through subject benchmark statements. These define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. They can be accessed at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp

Educational Initiative Centre Guide on General Principle of Assessment which offers some ideas about how different skills might be assessed, either formatively or summatively, within a programme (**see Appendix two**).

It may also be helpful to consider:

- When and how students are formally introduced to the importance of skills in enhancing their experience of Higher education
- What opportunities are available to enable students to assess their current skills levels and identify areas for development
- How students can be helped to manage their learning needs and access development opportunities
- How students can track their skills development across a programme
- What are the opportunities and expectations in relation to students reflecting on and recording their skills development
- How are opportunities for co-curricular and extracurricular activities communicated

Integrating skills into the curriculum offers a means of enabling students to develop a structured approach to their personal development planning (PDP). Students should be encouraged to identify skills gaps (through completion of skills audits or reflection exercises) and to accept personal responsibility for documenting, action planning and developing of their skills. It is also important to communicate to students that skills development takes time, commitment and practice.

KEYS – KINGSTON UNIVERSITY'S SKILLS FRAMEWORK

1 SELF AWARENESS SKILLS	4 RESEARCH AND INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for own learning and plan for and record own personal development • Recognise own academic strengths and weaknesses, reflect on performance and progress and respond to feedback • Organise self effectively, agreeing and setting realistic targets, accessing support where appropriate and managing time to achieve targets • Work effectively without supervision in unfamiliar contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for and select relevant sources of information • Critically evaluate information and use it appropriately • Apply the ethical and legal requirements in both the access and use of information • Accurately cite and reference information sources • Use software and IT technology as appropriate
2 COMMUNICATION SKILLS	5 NUMERACY SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express ideas clearly and unambiguously in writing and the spoken word (including CV writing) • Present, challenge and defend ideas effectively • Actively listen to ideas of others in an unbiased way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle and understand number as required for context • Interpret and apply data to inform judgements
3 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	6 MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work well with others in a group or team • Work flexibly and respond to change • Discuss and debate with others and make concessions to reach agreement • Give, accept and respond to constructive feedback • Show sensitivity and respect for diverse values and beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the scope of a task (or project). • Identify resources needed to undertake the task (or project) and to schedule and manage the resources • Evidence ability to successfully complete and evaluate a task (or project), revising the plan where necessary • Motivate and direct others to enable an effective contribution from all participants
	7 CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View problems from a range of perspectives to find solutions to problems • Imagine, create and exploit ideas • Work with complex ideas and justify judgements made through effective use of evidence

APPENDIX TWO: METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment method	Learning outcomes which might be assessed
Examinations: Standard 3 hour unseen paper of limited choice	Retrieval of knowledge from memory; working under pressure; analysis; writing skills; organising/presenting information; arguing a case; problem solving.
Seen examination: Students are given copies of the exam paper prior to the examination	As above, plus evaluation; research skills; use of resources (less emphasis on memory).
Open book examination: Key texts or reference books allowed in the exam	Finding information etc under pressure (less emphasis on memory). More complex questions can be set.
Restricted choice examination: Students have to take some compulsory questions with very little choice	Retrieval of knowledge from memory; working under pressure; analysis. Essential topics can be compulsory; may include short questions on a large number of topics. Might cover the syllabus more fully.
Tests: Where a smaller part of the curriculum is 'examined' in less formal circumstances	Retrieval of knowledge from memory; working under time constraints. Can be useful to help students understand the extent to which they are successfully learning.
Multiple choice questions	Memory, knowledge of subject. Comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, computation, interpretation and reasoning

Laboratory reports/notes	Skills of observation; recording experimentation/action; analysis of results; interpretation; evaluation.
Logbook/diary	Writing skills; recording events/process/progress; analysis, self-awareness, reflection; planning and organisational skills.
Essays	Researching/selecting/presenting information; writing skills; critical evaluation; debating.
Reports	Similar to essays but with a focus on workplace suitability.
Essay plans	Researching; selecting; planning and organisation; summarising.
Dissertation	Researching; selecting; project management; originality; critical evaluation; presentation skills.
Literature/journal reviews	Evaluation; summarising; pitching to appropriate audience. Often more creative than essays.
Journal article	As for essays and practice for the real thing! Writing for a particular audience.

Presentations (solo/group)	Oral skills, non-verbal communication, using visual aids, presenting/structuring information, interpersonal skills, thinking on your feet. Group work – delegation, team work, responsibility to others.
Posters	Creativity, visual impact, graphical presentation skills, summarising, selection, knowledge.
Case studies	Problem solving, applying theoretical concepts to real situations, application of knowledge, decision making. Group work – ability to assume certain roles, responsibility to others, team work.
Orals	Fluency/comprehension (languages); thinking quickly, articulation; exploration of knowledge and understanding (key issues/topics); interpersonal skills.
Group projects	Planning, organisation and managerial skills; team work/leadership; problem solving; creativity; application of knowledge/data; analysis; decision-making; report writing if part of project.
Portfolios	Progress over time; reflection; skills/personal development; applying theory; record of process; managing material; presentation skills.
Models	Creativity; understanding of structures; visualising design; problem solving; testing for practicality.

Audio tapes	Self or group presentation skills; creativity; selecting material; pitching at appropriate/specific audience; knowledge and application; technical skills.
Exhibition (architects, designers, film/video makers, photographers, fashion etc)	Creativity; range of work; presentation/display skills; group skills as in 'Group projects' above for film etc.

Taylor, T (2005) *General Principles of Assessment*. Educational Initiative Centre: University of Westminster. Available from: www.wmin.ac.uk/pdf/GPAfinal.pdf
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FURTHER RESOURCES

There is a wide range of information available that may be of use in developing and delivering skills to enhance the student experience. A small selection is offered below:

- Bennett, N; Dunne, E; and Carré, C (2000) *Skills development in higher education and employment*. Buckingham: SRHE/OUP
- Cottrell, S (2005) *Critical thinking skills: developing effective analysis and argument*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan
- Cottrell, S (2003) *Skills for success: the personal development planning handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan
- Cottrell, S (2001) *Teaching study skills and supporting learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan
- Council for Industry and Higher Education. www.cihe-uk.com
- Fraser, G; Crook, A; and Park, J (2007) A tool for mapping research skills in undergraduate curricula. *Journal of Bioscience Education*. (9) Available online: www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/vol9/beej-9-1.aspx (last accessed 08/01/09)
- Gibb, A (2005) *Towards the Entrepreneurial University Entrepreneurship. Education as a lever for change* National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship Policy Paper #003 Available from: <http://ncge.com/files/biblio593.pdf> (last accessed 08/01/09)
- Holmes, L (2001) Reconsidering graduate employability: the 'graduate identity' *Quality in Higher Education* 7 (2) 111-119
- Pickford, R and Brown, S (2006) *Assessing skills and practice*. London: Routledge
- Open University (n.d.) *Key skills in Higher Education. Briefing paper 2*. Available from: www.innovations.ac.uk/btg/resources/publications/keyskills.pdf (last accessed 08/1/09)
- Salford University. Skills Audit. www.pdp.salford.ac.uk/myppdp/documents/pdpques.doc (last accessed 08/1/09)
- SEEC. www.seec.org.uk
- Surrey University – Key Skills online package. <http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/lskills/t1tp3/entersite.html> (last accessed 08/1/09)
- Universities UK (2006) *Skills and Employer engagement: Policy, progress and emerging issues*. Available from: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/PolicyAndResearch/PolicyAreas/Documents/Employability/mapping.pdf (last accessed 08/01/09)

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- DIUS (2008) *Higher education at work – high skills, high value*. Available from: www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/con_0408_hlss.html (last accessed 08/01/09)
- Forbes, P and Kubler, B (2007) *Skills in the curriculum – A guide*. Educational Initiative Centre; University of Westminster
- Leitch Review of Skills (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. Available from: www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/2006-12%20LeitchReview1.pdf (last accessed 08/01/09)
- QAA (2001) Developing a progress file for HE: Guidelines on HE progress files. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency [online] Available from: www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressFiles/guidelines/progfile2001.asp (last accessed 08/01/09)

With acknowledgement and thanks to all members of the Key Skills working group and stakeholders who took part in the consultation.

For further information please contact:

Stephanie Aiken
 Academic Development Centre
 Millennium House
 21 Eden Street
 Kingston upon Thames
 KT1 1BL
 E: s.aiken@kingston.ac.uk



Academic Development Centre, Millennium House,
21 Eden Street, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 1BL
T: 020 8547 7770 www.kingston.ac.uk