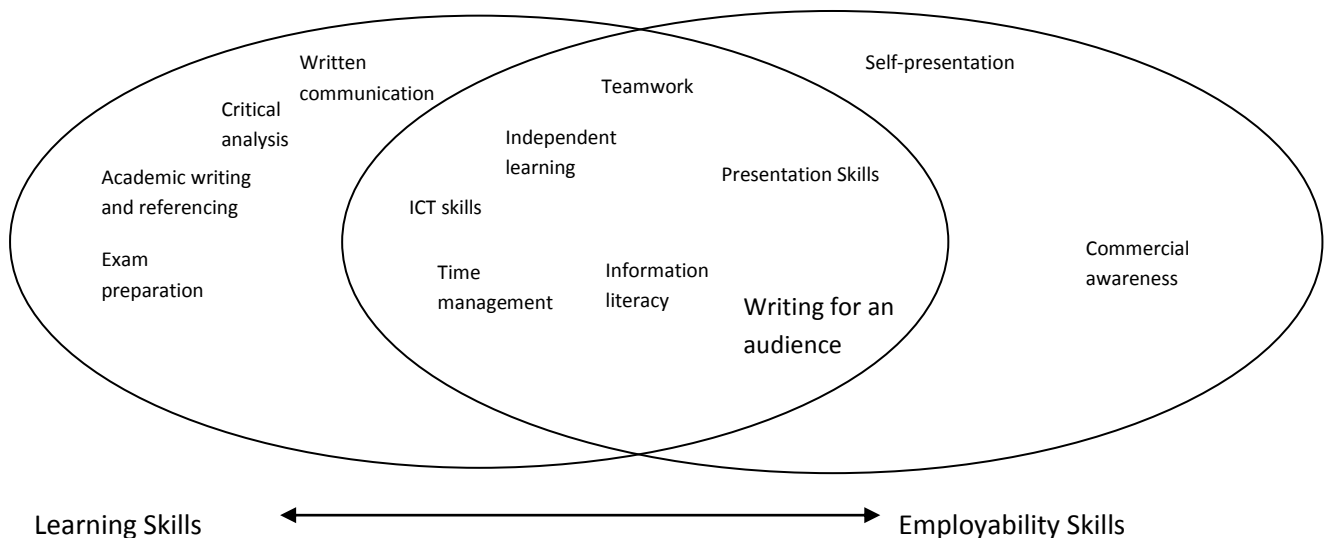UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Learning and Study Skills Strategy

Approved Summer 2008

Defining terms

Learning and Study Skills refer to a range of knowledge and skills which students need in order to be successful on higher education programmes. They vary slightly between disciplines but are likely to include time management; academic writing skills (including understanding academic referencing and what constitutes plagiarism); critical analysis; how to access, organise and evaluate information (often referred to as information literacy); how to learn with and through ICT and how to prepare for examinations. Some disciplines would also include team working, presentation skills, problem-solving approaches and various levels of numeracy. There is an overlap here with the concept of Employability Skills, which are also likely to be slightly differently defined in different disciplines. Employability skills are also likely to include self-presentation (including the preparation of c.v.s) ; career management and decision-making; an awareness of organisational cultures and commercial consideration; and the ability to adapt one's writing to audience and purpose. The concepts might be represented thus:

Written communication

Critical analysis

Academic writing and referencing

Exam preparation

Teamwork

Independent learning

ICT skills

Time management

Information literacy

Presentation Skills

Writing for an audience

Self-presentation

Commercial awareness

Learning Skills ⟷ Employability Skills

Proposals for a strategy for Support for Learning and study skills development.

The key objective of the University Strategy on skills for learning is to ensure that all students are supported in developing the skills they need to maximise their use of the opportunities offered by undergraduate and/or post graduate studies in order to achieve their full potential. To this end we aim to:

i) Ensure that skills for learning are embedded in the curriculum of all programmes
ii) Build in early diagnostic assessment of student skills which would enable appropriate action to be taken
iii) Provide a range of opportunities outside main programmes where students can address gaps in their skills
iv) Integrate the development for learning and employability skills within the PDP/T system such that appropriate ongoing support is provided to students throughout their university career.
v) Award credit for skills attained (Individual Faculties and departments may wish to award credit for skills attained within discipline modules or modules designed specifically for skills development).

These objectives have been developed in light of the university Academic Strategy with reference, in particular to the following paragraphs, 3.2.1b, .3.2.1c, 3.2.1.d, 3.2.1g, 3.2.2e, 3.2.3a, 3.2.4b *

i) Ensure that skills for learning are embedded in the curriculum of all programmes

This to include

- A study should be undertaken to identify the skills for learning needed by students in the first stage of their studies (this to include a review of the considerable literature in the field). It is suggested that second year undergraduates, and second term post graduates be surveyed for their views as to the skills they felt they had needed on entry to the programme, where the gaps were and how well they were filled. This would provide good insights into what should be included early in a programme. It was suggested that recent graduates could be asked to identify which skills developed through their programmes have been most useful and which they would have found valuable which were not developed.
- The programme for implementation of the Information Literacy Standards (approved by the University Learning and Teaching committee, 9th Jan 2007) provides a model, systems and structures already in place, or becoming embedded, that can be learned from, used and modified as the skills for learning strategy is embedded. This programme, driven by the university library, will be reviewed towards the end of 2007/8 providing an ideal opportunity to integrate plans for embedding information literacy skills, skills for learning and skills for employability into the curriculum.
- The overall programme of building skills into the curriculum should be owned by departments and derived from Subject Benchmark statements, professional bodies, student employability profiles, the work of the Learn Higher CETL which UoL is part of, and the

outcomes of studies such as those described above. It should also be linked to the University's employability strategy. Departments should be required to seek feedback from students on their perception of learning skills support delivered within the programme, either included in or in place of a normal module evaluation questionnaire. (This implies that a high priority is given to staff development in relation to curriculum design and skills development)

- Curriculum mapping needs to be carried out on all programmes to identify where skills are developed and to identify gaps in such development (building on the existing process for Key Skills mapping using subject benchmarks).
- The IPR process should be modified such that it includes questions about curriculum mapping of skills provision.
- The APM report should include a question about staff/student perceptions of how study and employability skills are being delivered and could be improved in year.

Key performance indicators

1. Changes to APM implemented for the academic session 2008/9 and IPR 2009/10
2. The findings of studies to identify skills for learning (and employability skills) available by December 2008
3. All departments visited and plans in place (where this has not already occurred) for a review of the UG curricula from January 2009.
4. Ongoing programme of staff development

This to include

ii) Build in early diagnostic assessment of student skills to enable appropriate action to be taken

This to include:

- Inclusion in pre-induction and induction materials and activities that provide students with self-assessment opportunities and materials (mostly web based) to help them develop skills prior to starting the taught programme.
- An item on the programme specification proforma that asks for consideration of where skill development occurs throughout the programme.
- An item in the module specification proforma to indicate whether, and if so how, skills are being targeted for development in that module.
- More early diagnosis of students' skills within programmes to be built in. Various mechanisms for this have been suggested and different departments might want to use different mechanisms. They include:
  - Specially designed early assessed assignments on modules at the start of a programme of study with rapid, constructive, feedback focused on strengths and weakness, with a requirement for students to report on how they have addressed any issues when submitting a subsequent assignment.

- o Better use of PDP activities/review meetings to support early diagnosis (the anticipated changes to LUSID may help here as departments will be able to tailor their own PDP pages)
- o An early self assessment by students of their own strengths and weaknesses should be required based on a list of subject specific skills (the surveys suggested in i) above would be useful here).
- o A review of the policy on students having access to examination work AT LEAST after Yr1 Semester 1 to provide specific feedback on strengths/weaknesses. This to be considered at an early opportunity by the Assessment Working Group.
- o A review of the current situation on Pass/Fail requirements for progression which are not in themselves credit-bearing (to establish whether this is a mechanism to induce students to engage with skills development at least in first year)

Key performance indicators

1. New first year module proforma for new and revised programme for session 2008/9
2. Inclusion in LUSID of early self assessment by students of their skills – for 2008/9
3. Recommendation from the Assessment Working Group on the issue of students being given access to first semester exams 2009
4. Review of Pass/Fail requirement (in relation to Yr 1 skills development) Summer 2008
5. Early diagnostic assessments in place in at least 10 UG programmes for 2008/9 and

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iii) Provide a range of opportunities outside main programmes where students can address gaps in their skills

This to include

- Staff development to ensure that student skill development needs are identified so that they can give appropriate advice to students as to how they might address issues.
- Opportunities to be provided for self directed study by students as a result of early identification of needs e.g. using a study skills website/ one stop shop (all informed by the Learn higher CETL resources)
- Clear information as to the career and skills development sessions offered by the Careers and Employability Service and information Literacy support offered by the Library.
- The provision of additional classes offered on particular skills (numeracy, statistics, writing skills, time management)
- The provision of one-to-one support for students in most need
- Expansion of peer-assisted learning support

Key performance indicators

1. Well publicised provision for students available (web site, one stop shop, etc etc)
2. Student satisfaction increased
3. Reduction in numbers taking resits

iv) Integrate skills for learning and employability skills development within the PDT system such that appropriate ongoing support is provided to students throughout their university career.

- The PDP process is potentially the most useful and practical system for supporting both learning and employability skills development throughout a student's programme. This process should continue to be supported, being enhanced in respect of discipline specificity.

There are resource implications for the suggestions listed above. These include

i) the need for additional staff development in curriculum design re study and employability skills

ii) the need for support for the development and maintenance of a skills support web site, provision of additional classes for students and the provision of targeted 1:1 for students in most need.

iii) The need for some resource to develop and undertake surveys of students and development of questionnaires

***Academic Strategy paragraphs re Skills for learning**

3.2.1b - continue to review undergraduate degree Programmes to ensure that they remain relevant to students, employers, professional bodies and other stakeholders

3.2.1c - work towards identifying and embedding learning skills within the curriculum

3.2.1d - work to ensure that curricula deliver skills to develop employability, through such measures as the integration of skills development within tutorials, the development of an employability dimension within modules, and the provision of work placements and work-based learning opportunities for students

3.2.1g continue to provide workshops on curriculum design, through the Professional Development Programme for staff

3.2.2e – enhance the quality of feedback provided to students and ensure that they receive appropriate and timely feedback on all aspects of their work

3.2.3a - develop the use of ICT for communication and delivery of information and resources, in order to:

- provide opportunities for enhancement and innovation in learning, and teaching
- increase students' engagement with the curriculum outside timetabled classes, and promote group work
- enable academic staff to intervene in the learning process with more timely formative feedback
- promote flexibility and personalisation of learning to support progression and lifelong learning

3.2.4b – work towards the development of an integrated approach to identifying students with particular needs and provide appropriate support