Moray College University of the Highlands and Islands

Further Education Essential Skills Policy

POL

Lead Officer (Post):	Director of Learning and Teaching
Responsible Office/ Department:	SLT
Responsible Committee:	Learning Teaching and Quality Committee
Review Officer (Post):	Head of Curriculum (Core Skills)
Date policy approved:	11/06/2015
Date policy last reviewed and updated:	11/06/2019
Date policy due for review:	January 2022 (or earlier if required)
Date of Equality Impact Assessment:	20/02/2019
Date of Privacy Impact Assessment:	n/a

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Accessible versions of this policy are available upon request.

Policy Summary

Overview	This policy is required to set out a regional approach to Further Education Essential Skills for Moray College and all academic partners in the University of the Highlands and Islands partnership.
Purpose	This policy sets outs a robust and transparent framework for the delivery of Essential Skills in Further Education programmes of study, creating parity of experience for students across the University of the Highlands and Islands partnership.
Scope	This policy applies to all further education programmes of study. Certain courses are exempt, as set out in Section 4.2.
Consultation	The policy has been developed by practitioners from across all partners. The policy received feedback from Senior Management Curriculum Team, before being endorsed by Partnership Council. The policy was then sent to Boards of Management for approval.
Implementation and Monitoring	Staff in Academic Partners will be responsible for local implementation. The Policy Ownership Group will reconvene to review and monitor the policy.
Risk Implications	Risk will be mitigated by streamlining the student experience of Essential Skills across the region.
Link with Strategy	The policy is aligned to the UHI Strategic Vision and Plan 2015-20 whereby the university is committed to continue to meet the needs of students within the region. The policy supports the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy by contributing to the development of values of Learning for Employment, Assessment and Feedback for Learning and Supporting the Learner as an Individual.
Impact Assessment	Equality Impact Assessment: Completed – No action necessary.
	Privacy Impact Assessment: n/a

1. Policy Statement

1.1   The policy sets out to create a coherent and comprehensive approach to support and optimise the regional and local delivery of Essential Skills in the Academic Partners of the University of the Highlands and Islands providing further education.

1.2   Created to meet government policy and facilitate the improvement of outcomes for all students, the policy will raise the profile of Essential Skills amongst both the staff and students. Reinforcement of Essential Skills in the curriculum and colleges will highlight the value of these skills and their lifelong role in development and achieving positive destinations.

1.3   The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) state in their 2013 report, *Skilled for Life*, that: 'Skills transform lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion. Without the right skills, people are kept at the margins of society, technological progress does not translate into economic growth, and enterprises and countries can't compete in today's globally connected and increasingly complex world'. The University of the Highlands and Islands and its partner colleges aim to be at the forefront of promoting the benefits of skills for students and staff.

1.4   All colleges are encouraged to be innovative in their approach to essential skill delivery, and to share successful practice with other Academic Partners. The policy recognises that no single approach or methodology is superior to another, and the optimum delivery will depend on the individual students, subject and local context.

2. Definitions

2.1   **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework ("SCQF")** – SCQF is the national qualifications framework for Scotland. The SCQF helps education and training providers of all kinds to identify the level that has been studied in a particular subject and make it easier to transfer credit point between different learning programmes.

2.2   **Essential Skills** – as set out in *Skills for Scotland*, Essential Skills consists of the following:
   - **Personal and learning Skills** that enable individuals to become effective lifelong learners;
   - **Literacy, digital literacy and numeracy**;
   - **The five Core Skills** (see 2.4);
   - **Employability skills** that prepare individuals for employment rather than for a specific occupation;

2.3   **Vocational skills** are specific to a particular occupation or sector.

2.4   **Core Skills** – As developed by Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the five Core Skills are the skills most needed in many work environments. In addition to SQA, other awarding bodies may be used for Core Skill accreditation.

Jobs require some level of ability in some or all of these skills. The Core Skills are: Communication, Numeracy, Information & Communication Technology, Working with Others and Problem Solving. Core Skills can be awarded via qualifications between SCQF Levels 3 and 6. Please refer to Appendix 1 for a diagram setting out the Core Skills in relation to the other Skills frameworks.

2.5 **Delivery Models** – The delivery model(s) chosen to deliver Core Skills are dependent on available resources and the vocational content of the course. Optimum delivery may involve elements of different approaches. Further details are given in <u>Appendix 2</u> of five example delivery models (Discrete, Contextualised, Integrated, Embedded and Cross-Assessed).

3.   Purpose

3.1 This policy sets outs a robust and transparent framework for the delivery of Essential Skills in Further Education programmes of study.

3.2 The policy will create a parity of experience for students across the partnership, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop the skills required for employment and academic progression. Essential Skills play a crucial role in the academic and holistic development of students, and complement the vocational content and technical skills developed on courses. Development of Essential Skills is priority for each college, across all curriculum areas and involving all staff and students.

3.3 Development of Essential Skills will be explicit in delivery across all programmes in the Further Education setting.

Academic Partners will ensure staff promote and signpost through planning and delivery ensuring students develop contextually relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to meet their specific vocational and wider skillsets.

3.4 **Research and Evidence**
- Skills Development Scotland, in their 2017 publication _Jobs and skills in Scotland_, emphasise the importance of skills: 'Where skills shortages and skills gaps occurred, these were most often caused by a lack of soft skills, for example the ability to manage tasks and people. This suggests that there is a need to place more emphasis on soft skills throughout the education and training system to ensure that it delivers workers who have sufficient hard and soft skills.' This emphasises the importance of increasing the profile and delivery of Essential Skills alongside the vocational content of courses.

- Development of Essential Skills plays a vital role in the lives of individuals during and after their college course. <u>National Numeracy estimate</u> that the cost of poor numeracy to the United Kingdom economy is at least £20.2billion, equivalent to 1.3% of GDP.

- A House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report, _Digital Skills Crisis_, stated: 'Digital skills are becoming increasingly essential for getting access to a range of products and services. However, there is a digital divide where up to 12.6 million of the adult UK population lack basic digital skills. An estimated 5.8 million people have never used the internet at all. This digital skills gap is costing the UK economy an estimated £63 billion a year in lost additional GDP.'

- <u>The Open University Business Barometer 2018</u> reported that it had cost organisations across the UK £6.3 billion to plug the skills gap, with talented workers benefitting from an additional £2.16 billion due to their in-demand skills. 28% of business reported applicants lacking IT skills, and 20% reported candidates lacking soft skills (e.g. communication and problem solving); these areas are three of the five Core Skills.

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise <u>research</u> showed that 73% of businesses in the region anticipated difficulty in recruiting young talent with highly sought after skills such as

communication, being a good team player, a desire to continue their learning/skills development and the ability to work independently.

3.5 The Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work agenda set out in Curriculum for Excellence establishes the development of essential skills in our students as a priority. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has also emphasised that colleges have a significant role to play in implementing the Government's skills strategy and college performance will be assessed in this regard through the Education Scotland Quality Framework, How Good is Our College.

3.6 A key element of this policy is that Communication, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology will be included in and certificated in all full time Further Education programmes of study (or reflected in a student's Skills Profile). Certification can be through any awarding body or college certificate. It is expected that Problem Solving and Working with Others will be included but not necessarily certificated.

3.7 For part time courses, teaching staff will emphasise to students the importance of skills, identifying when skills are being taught and highlight transferability of skills. Opportunities will also be created through curriculum design to promote skills development.

3.8 Skills development allows students to meet entry requirements for higher level courses, facilitates pathways into employment and promotes progression in learning.

3.9 Diagnostic assessment activity will be carried out during the recruitment process or at the beginning of the course. It provides valuable information to ensure that students are supported appropriately in their learning by adapting materials and setting the initial pace of learning.

This diagnostic assessment information can be shared across delivery teams to provide a rounded picture of the strengths of a student and their areas for development, to ensure that the existing Communication, Numeracy and ICT skills of the student are used to inform the pedagogy of the course.

3.10 **Recognition of Prior Learning** – Regardless of the Core Skills requirement of the main course, students will always be encouraged to improve their Core Skills profile for Communication, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology. For example, students who require Level 5 and already have Level 5 will be supported to work towards achieving Level 6 through extension or bridging activity. Students who have already achieved Level 6 will be supported to fulfil their credit requirements with alternative modules.

4. Scope

4.1 This policy applies to all further education programmes of study, normally up to and including SCQF Level 6. There are a small number of Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) courses at SCQF Level 7 that are considered as Further Education courses for the purposes of the UHI Partnership.

4.2 The following courses are exempt from the requirement for certificated Core Skills set out in 3.6:
- Short full-time courses (on a discretionary basis in Academic Partners)
- Part-time courses
- Commercial courses
- Leisure courses

5.   Notification

5.1   All staff will be notified of changes to the Essential Skills policy through a range of methods, including but not limited to staff meetings, intranet, Academic Partner websites as per normal policy update processes.

5.2   Academic Partners will be notified of any changes, allowing sufficient time to for updates to be made.

5.3   Students will be notified of changes by academic partners working with HISA.

6.   Roles and Responsibilities

6.1   It is the responsibility of everyone in the college to create a positive environment for both students and staff to develop Essential Skills (including Core Skills).

6.2   It is the responsibility of managers of all levels within the college to enable staff to deliver this policy, where necessary directing resource or facilitating changes to curriculum and teaching. This includes ensuring all staff are appropriately skilled and qualified for their role.

6.3   It is the responsibility of vocational teams to design courses that include Essential Skills and Core Skills as appropriate, following curriculum design principles.

6.4   It is the responsibility of Core Skills and vocational teams to collaborate to include the three certificated Core Skills in programme design, and to adopt an appropriate delivery model for Core Skills on their course and offer support to meet internal and external verification requirements.

6.5   It is the responsibility of students to proactively engage in Essential Skills learning, and work with all staff to ensure new skills are developed or existing skills reinforced.

6.6   It is the responsibility of the Academic Partner to ensure any students in scope of the policy undertake any relevant diagnostic assessments to ascertain Core Skill levels.

7.   Legislative Framework

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005

Equality Act 2010

Education Scotland – Curriculum for Excellence

Skills for Learning, Skills for Life, and Skills for Work (2009)

Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (2014)

Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy (2007)

8.   Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines and Other Resources

College Development Network – The role of essential skills in Scottish national education policy

Education Scotland – How Good is our College?

Highlands and Islands Enterprise – Business Panel Survey: Workforce, Skills and Young Talent 2018

Scottish Funding Council - Outcome Agreement Guidance (2016)

Scottish Government: Costs of Learning Student Funding Guide

9.   Version Control and Change History

Version	Date	Approved by	Amendment(s)	Author
0				
1				
2				