



Inverness College UHI/University of the Highlands and Islands

Further Education Essential Skills Policy

PL/LT/2019/01

Lead Officer (Post):	Depute Principal (P&SE)
Responsible Office/ Department:	Applied Science and Education
Responsible Committee:	Learning, Teaching and Resource
Review Officer (Post):	Head of Applied Science and Education
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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 Inverness College UHI and all academic partners in the University of the Highlands and Islands partnership.
Purpose	This policy sets out 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 implantation. 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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Impact Assessment	<p>Equality Impact Assessment: Completed – No action necessary.</p> <p>Privacy Impact Assessment: n/a</p>

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 [Appendix 2](#) of five example delivery models (Discrete, Contextualised, Integrated, Embedded and Cross-Assessed).

3. Purpose

- 3.1 This policy sets out 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. [National Numeracy estimate](#) 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.’
- [The Open University Business Barometer 2018](#) 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 [research](#) 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](#)

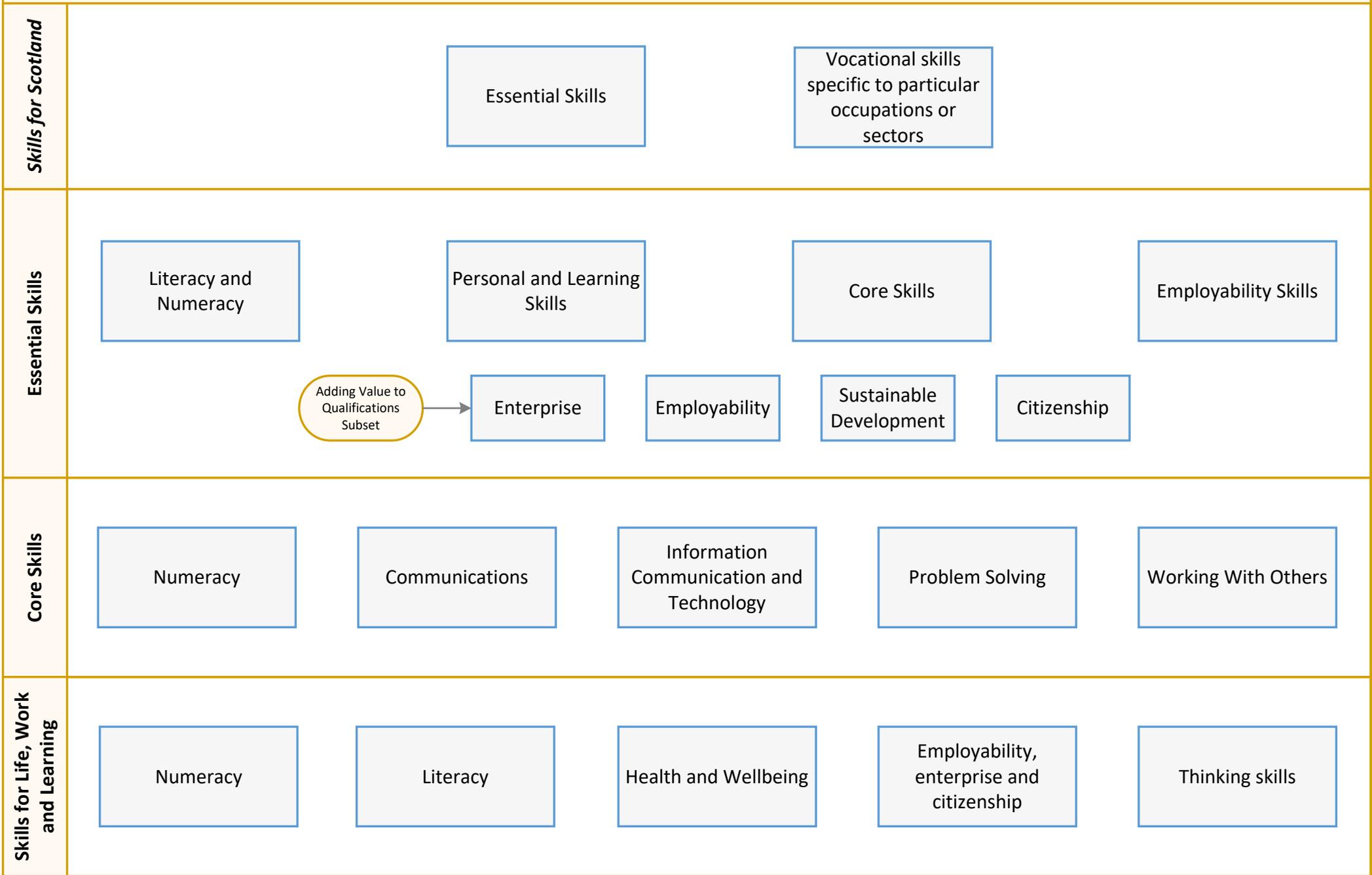
[Scottish Funding Council - Outcome Agreement Guidance \(2016\)](#)

[Scottish Government: Costs of Learning Student Funding Guide](#)

9. Version Control and Change History

Version	Date	Approved by	Amendment(s)	Author
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1				
2				

Appendix 1 - Skills Map



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These definitions are based on the SQA Combined Core Skills Framework.

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Core Skill: Numeracy

To cope with the demands of everyday life, including work and study, people need to be comfortable with numbers and with graphs, symbols, diagrams, and calculators. The skills needed for this involved interpreting, processing, and communicating, quantifiable and spatial information.

Component: Using Graphical Information

- o This is the ability to interpret and communicate quantifiable information that is given in writing, diagrams, or pictures. Attainment levels range from:
 - Working in familiar contexts with simple, specified tables, graphs and shapes
to:
 - Working in more abstract contexts and with more complex graphical information which may require some analysis, and where decisions have to be made on effective ways to communicate the information

Component: Using Number

- This is the ability to apply numerical and other relevant mathematical and statistical skills. Attainment levels range from:
 - Working confidently with basic numbers in everyday contexts,
to:
 - Working confidently with more complex numerical concepts and techniques in more abstract contexts

Core Skill: Information and Communication Technology

Information and Communication Technology is concerned with the electronic collection, organisation, analysis, presentation, and communication of information. It encompasses all media types and formats as well as all relevant tools.

The Core Skill focuses on the ability to use information and communication technology to process information in a variety of ways which will be necessary for further learning in work and in the home. It is not about developing IT specialists who will act as first-line support for others or install specialist systems.

Component: Accessing Information

- This is the ability to use information and communication technology to support a range of information-accessing activities. Attainment levels range from:
 - Accessing basic information and communication technology to perform simple processing of familiar data and to select information from a local database or a simple internet search,
to:
 - Working confidently with more complex numerical concepts and techniques in more abstract contexts

Component: Providing/Creating Information

- This is the ability to use information and communication technology to provide, create and process information. Attainment levels range from:
 - Using familiar application software to carry out very simple processing tasks and providing/creating very simple information technology,
to:
 - Using a range of information and communication technology in unfamiliar contexts, observing security procedures and the needs of other users. Evaluating and sharing information.

Core Skill: Working with Others

The fact that Working with Others is a Core Skill emphasises the importance of co-operation and teamwork in social, learning, and working situations. Working with Others has two components: Working Co-operatively with Others, and Reviewing Co-operative Contribution.

While achieving a shared goal is the main focus, co-operation with others should be developed through all stages of any collaboration.

Reviewing your own contribution and learning through reflection also has a wider application to personal development.

Component: Working Co-operatively with Others

- This is about using interpersonal skills appropriately, to recognise and value the roles of other people, taking responsibility for your own contribution, and supporting co-operative working in appropriate ways. Attainment levels range from:
 - Identifying, with support, your own role and the roles of other people, and helping to achieve a shared goal, to:
 - Analysing the roles and behaviour of others and adapting your own behaviour to deal with the complexity of challenging and changing dynamics

Component: Reviewing Co-operative Contribution

- This is the ability to discuss the process of working co-operatively with other people, reflecting on and reviewing the collaboration. This might include commenting or resolving issues and handling other people's behaviour.
- Learners should evaluate the outcomes, identify the value of their own contribution, and reflect on any personal learning and development that may be needed to enhance their contribution to future collaborative work. Attainment levels range from:
 - Identifying a strength and weakness in the way you helped achieve things together, suggesting how your own contribution could be strengthened in the future, to:
 - Identifying and gathering evidence, critically evaluating your own contribution, and making appropriate recommendations about future learning and contributions

Core Skill: Problem Solving

The three components of this skill are the stages involved in tackling issues and problems in personal, social, and work contexts. They are often used in sequence, and repeatedly. Each component can also be a focus of activity in its own right.

Component: Critical Thinking

- Critical Thinking is about using analysis and reasoning to make decisions and to create or suggest ideas, courses of action, and strategies.

Attainment levels range from:

- Working in situations that involve a few, easily-identified factors set in familiar contexts,

to:

- Analysing the roles and behaviour of others and adapting your own behaviour to deal with the complexity of challenging and changing dynamics.

Component: Planning and Organising

- Planning and Organising is the ability to plan a task, taking account of available resources, and to manage the task to completion. Attainment levels range from:

- Creating plans involving a small number of steps and using familiar resources,

to:

- Efficient management of a more complex plan, which may include a review of strategy and a degree of research in identifying the resources to be used to deal with difficulties.

Component: Reviewing and Evaluating

- Reviewing and Evaluating is the ability to reflect on and review the process of tackling issues and problems, to evaluate the outcomes, and to identify where alternative strategies might have been used.

Attainment levels range from:

- Identifying a strength and weakness in a strategy,

to:

- Identifying and gathering evaluation evidence, evaluating strategies, and making appropriate recommendations.

Appendix 2 – Delivery Models

	Discrete	Contextualised	Integrated	Embedded	Cross-Assessed
Outline	Groups are timetabled to attend formal non-contextualised classes with generic teaching and discrete summative assessment activities.	Similar to discrete provision but with some delivery and/or assessment activities set in a vocational context.	Where appropriate, delivery and/or assessment may be undertaken by either a Core Skills specialist within a vocational class or by a vocational specialist within a Core Skills class (or a mix).	As per SQA guidance, Core Skills can be achieved where they are embedded in SQA qualifications.	Where appropriate, tools of assessment are created jointly by Core Skills specialist and the vocational specialist, and assessed jointly.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy to timetable. - Easy to track/monitor. - Facilitates transferability. 	<p>As for discrete, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May provide greater motivation. - Can help to emphasise importance/relevance. 	<p>As for contextualised, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can foster greater shared practice and better relationships between teaching staff. 	Automatic certification is awarded on completion of a vocational unit identified as carrying embedded Core Skills.	<p>As for integrated, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners can achieve multiple credits from one activity.
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can appear to be non-vocationally relevant. - Difficult to motivate certain groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource intensive to establish. - Difficult to tailor levels appropriately. - Not possible for all components of all core skills. - Contingencies required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource intensive (team teaching). - Timetable challenges. - Contingencies required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-discrete provision can reduce the impact of undertaking Core Skills and may reduce opportunities for specific skill development in a more widely applied context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource intensive at planning stage time. - Timetabling. - Marking.