

STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

Policy on Student Skills

The development of skills is now high on the Government's agenda for education at all levels, as a way of ensuring that the UK workforce remains competitive in the global market. Individuals need the relevant skills to help them adapt to a society characterised by changing patterns of employment, the decline of traditional jobs, the growth of new technologies and the need to develop a proactive approach to change.

The Dearing Report in 1997 stressed the importance of developing skills within the higher education curriculum. While support for skills development has always been implicit within the curriculum, universities are now taking action to make skills more explicit within programmes of study. The Learning and Teaching Committee of the University has therefore approved a University-wide strategy for Queen's to encourage and support the development of skills in all students. This strategy is at a level of generality.

The Key Skills Co-ordinating Group in Stranmillis has studied the QUB Policy Statement and recommends that the QUB Policy should also be followed closely by the University College and should be articulated in a manner which is most appropriate and relevant to the University College.

Policy Statement

(a) **Categorising and Defining Skills**

Three broad categories of skills – key, subject-specific and employability skills – should form a core element of students' learning experience at Stranmillis University College. At a national level the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and DfES have identified six key skills and implemented a national strategy to ensure that they form an integral part of secondary, further and higher education curricula. A significant element of this strategy is that each key skill may be acquired at a range of levels, thus offering the opportunity for individuals to progress in their skills attainment along a clearly defined path. A consequence of current developments in bench-marking and subject specification is that subject-specific skills should be more explicit within the curriculum. At a time when there is rapid change in the economy and workplace, supporting students in their development of a range of employability skills is essential.

The three categories of skills described below should be an integral part of the students' learning experience at Stranmillis University College and should be developed and supported.

(i) **Key Skills**

"A set of generic, transferable skills that are essential to every individual's personal development in his/her education, work and everyday life."

- intellectual (includes critical, analytical and creative thinking, and problem solving);
- communication;
- information and communication technology (ICT) and managing information;
- numeracy (application of number);
- improving own learning and performance
- working with others

(ii) **Subject-specific Skills**

"A set of skills essential to the understanding and practical application of knowledge within an academic discipline and/or a vocation/profession."

Defined according to national subject specifications, benchmarking criteria and teacher education competence statements.

(iii) Employability Skills

“A set of skills which enhance achievements in learning and facilitate transition into the effective performance in the workplace.

- Management of self and others (eg., effective relationships, time management, change management and effective leadership);
- negotiation;
- networking;
- presentation;
- career management* (eg., self-awareness, business/organisational awareness, action planning/job search, entrepreneurship).

**A set of skills which enable individuals to integrate their knowledge, experience and transferable skills in order to make effective progress in learning and lifelong career development.”*

(b) Principles for Implementing the Policy

- (i) The University College requires that all students, by the time of their graduation, should have the opportunity to develop the skills defined in Section (a).
- (ii) These skills should be acquired by a variety of means within programmes of study.
- (iii) Course teams will be expected to provide opportunities for their students to develop and practise the range of skills defined in Section (a).
- (iv) Course teams should provide information to students on the nature and level of the skills addressed
- (v) Skills should be made explicit when describing modules and programmes of study. Appropriate methods of teaching, learning and assessment should be employed to achieve the stated learning outcomes.
- (vi) The processes of module and pathway review will provide opportunities for staff and students to monitor the extent to which learning outcomes regarding skills have been achieved, and recommended action where appropriate.
- (vii) Where it is not possible to develop a particular skill through a specific programme of study it may be acquired and developed through alternative mechanisms recognised/accredited by the University College where feasible.
- (viii) The University College should provide information to students on the range of additional opportunities available for them to acquire and develop skills at various levels within the University College and elsewhere.
- (ix) The skills acquired and developed by a student will be recorded on his/her university transcript/career entry profile/record of achievement.
- (x) The acquisition and development of skills by students should be regarded as a dynamic area and consequently University College policy should be subject to regular review.
- (xi) Specific guidance on implementation of Key Skills Policy will come through the Course Teams responsible for: BEd, BA, BSc and PGCE programmes and will be supported by the Key Skills Co-ordinating Group.

3 December 2001