Skills Builder

Award

GUIDE

LISTENING · SPEAKING · PROBLEM SOLVING · CREATIVITY · STAYING POSITIVE · AIMING HIGH · LEADERSHIP · TEAMWORK

Contents

Introduction & Overview

The Skills Builder Partnership works with schools and colleges to ensure that every child and young person builds the essential skills that they need to succeed.

Over the last ten years, we have seen some incredible examples of schools and colleges who have ensured that building essential skills becomes a normal part of a good education. The Skills Builder Award works to recognise this sort of excellent practice. This Guide is designed to explain how the Award works, the principles that it is built on, and some examples of great practice to learn from.

The Skills Builder Award is achieved by schools and colleges who are demonstrating best practice through the embedding of the Skills Builder Principles. These six principles are informed by both the theory and evidence for what works in building skills, and confirmed by the practical experience of hundreds of schools and colleges over a decade. They are:

Keep it simple	Start early, keep going	Measure it	Focus tightly	Keep practising	Bring it to life

Together, these principles help to structure a comprehensive, effective approach to ensuring that every learner is able to build their essential skills to a high level during their time in education.

There are three levels of Skills Builder Award:

Skills Builder Bronze Award

For those making a commitment to high-quality essential skills education.

Skills Builder Silver Award

For those building on their commitment to high-quality essential skills education.

Skills Builder Gold Award

For those modelling best practice in high-quality essential skills education.

Decisions about Skills Builder Awards are guided by the Skills Builder Principles Matrix (See page 24). This rubric provides a framework against which schools and colleges can reflect on their practice in this area.

Along with information about the Skills Builder Principles, and how they can be put into practice, this Award Guide include case studies of schools and colleges, and how they put those principles into practice. For each school we have highlighted examples of good practice in relation to each of the Principles. We hope these case studies will inspire and inform leaders and teachers of other schools and colleges, as they work towards their own Awards.

Tom Ravenscroft
Founder & CEO, Skills Builder Partnership

The Skills Builder Approach

The Skills Builder Partnership was set up by a team of teachers in 2009, with a goal to ensure that one day, every child and young person would build the essential skills to succeed.

The challenge

There is a real challenge that young people are not getting the opportunities they need to build the essential skills that they need in order to thrive in the wider world. We see this framed in three broad challenges:

- *Learning in the classroom:* Often children and young people struggle to organise their work, articulate their ideas or work with others in a productive way.
- *Thriving in further or higher education:* These institutions often reflect that their students struggle without the additional support structures that schools put around them.
- *Successful transitions in the working world:* Employers frequently call for a greater focus on broad transferable skills that support employability.

The Essential Skills

Although the language and terminology in this area can often be confusing, over the last five years we have carried out a comprehensive set of reviews of essential skills. We define *essential skills* as 'those highly transferable skills that almost everyone needs to do almost every job' and which in turn support the application of knowledge and technical skills.

We found that although there is great variation in the language, there are four broad areas that fulfil that definition: communication skills, self-management skills, interpersonal skills, and creative problem-solving. We balance nuance and pragmatism to focus on eight essential skills, with a pair of skills focused on each of those four broad themes. This gives us:

There is no shortage of people who care about these skills. As one example, research from the Sutton Trust found that 97% of teachers thought that these essential skills were as important as academic achievements for their students' long-term success. The challenge is that there is no common language or shared outcomes to align our efforts – or to give educators the confidence in building them effectively.

The Skills Builder Framework

Over the last decade we have focused on working closely with primary, secondary and special schools, drawing on the expertise of our team of outstanding teachers. In doing so, we developed the Skills Builder Framework. This Framework stops these essential skills being hazy, and instead breaks them down into 16 teachable, assessable steps.
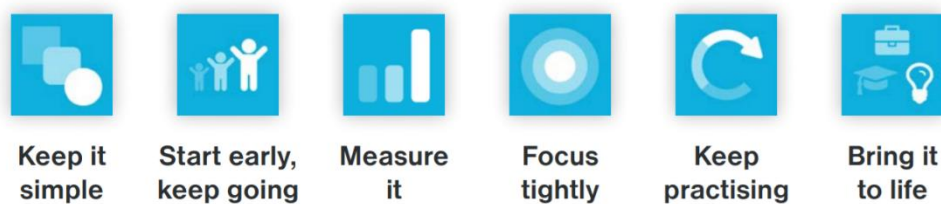
For example, Teamwork includes taking it in turns for the youngest students, then taking responsibility for tasks, decision-making approaches, conflict resolution, evaluating team members' strengths and weaknesses, and making suggestions to improve team performance.

Broken down in this way, it becomes possible to build essential skills effectively.

The Skills Builder Principles

If the Skills Builder Framework gives the 'what' when it comes to building essential skills, the Principles give the 'how'. They have been developed over a decade of research and practical application, and provide a consistent guide to what success looks like.
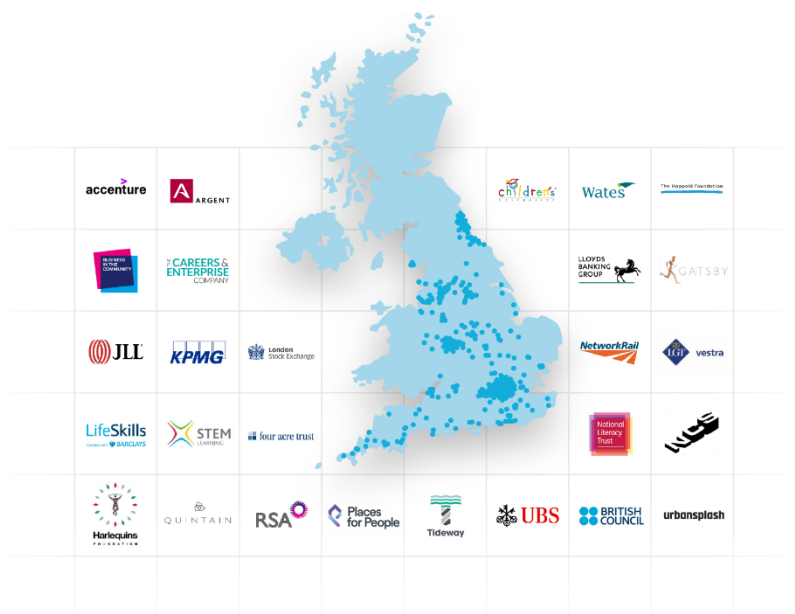
The Principles are used by schools and colleges as a guide to what an excellent and effective approach to building essential skills look like. The following section of the guides will expand on these further, but briefly they are:

Keep it simple	Start early, keep going	Measure it	Focus tightly	Keep practising	Bring it to life

The Skills Builder Partnership

The Partnership brings together educators, employers and impact organisations around a collective mission to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to thrive. All of the 800+ organisations in the Partnership are committed to using the same language and shared outcomes that the Skills Builder Framework provides, and working collectively to help everyone build them.

This means that for any individual student, they are getting a joined-up approach to skills.

The Skills Builder Principles

In the last decade, we have had the privilege of working with thousands of educators across primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and colleges. Despite the huge diversity of these organisations, we have found remarkable consistency in what they do well.

In honing these Principles over the years, we have gone back and forth between the theoretical backdrop to these skills, and what we have seen and researched ourselves on the ground. If you want to dig into the background to these Principles, there are some additional resources and research reports referenced in the back of this Guide.

Briefly, schools and colleges who are building essential skills effectively are following six Principles to:

Keep it simple: They focus on a simple, consistent set of essential skills covering interpersonal skills, self-management skills, communication skills, and creative problem-solving. They make these skills as tangible and objective as possible.

Start early and keep going: They see these skills as supporting learning and students' wider development, and as something to be sustained rather than being built as a quick-fix at the point of entering employment.

Measure it: They take care to really understand the existing strengths and development needs of their students in relation to essential skills. They also track progress over time, to keep every student on track for success.

Focus tightly: They use their prior understanding of students' essential skills to focus on the next steps. This includes explicit and direct instruction on essential skills – not just hoping that they get picked up along the way.

Keep practising: They reinforce these essential skills in other parts of the curriculum and beyond it, including by linking up with other impact organisations with programmes that can support their learners.

Bring it to life: They make the essential skills real by bringing the working world into the classroom, and showing learners how these skills are useful across their lives. This boosts their transferability beyond education.

The following pages explore how each of these principles can be brought to life in your school or college. Each pair of pages cover:

- What the principle is
- What the traps are to avoid
- What we should be aiming for
- How this principle is reflected in the Principles Matrix at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels
- Some reflection questions to think about
- Skills Builder platforms to help embed the principle

They are complemented by the case studies later on in the Guide.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The Principle

Schools and colleges that are effective in ensuring progression in essential skills focus on a limited number of teachable skills. They express these skills in a very tangible way and are consistent in their use.

The trap

The reason why this principle is important is that this is an area that can easily become confusing: there is so much variation in language and terminology. An individual might use terms like teamwork and collaboration interchangeably, but this can quickly become confusing to a child or young person. It means that they cannot build a clear, consistent mental map of what their skills look like.

We also need to avoid the risk of abstraction – that is, trying to work on or too readily claim progress against, broad student dispositions like "confidence" or terms that are ill-defined like "charismatic communication".

What we should be aiming for

The most important thing is to try to make the language around the essential skills as simple and consistent as possible. This is essential because we all need to have a shared mental map of what building the essential skills looks like – and that includes teachers, parents, and the students themselves. The essential skills should be a consistent thread through a student's learning – but they will not be able to follow that thread if the way it is described keeps changing.

The other part of keeping it simple is to focus on skills at their most tangible. That's why in the Skills Builder Framework we avoided using intangible concepts like confidence or resilience. We set ourselves the challenge that if we would not be able to objectively assess whether a student had achieved a particular step then the step was not defined with enough clarity.

Putting it into practice

Schools and colleges who are putting this into use effectively often do some of the following things:

- *Build awareness of the essential skills:* For example, by having them up on the walls of school hallways and in classrooms and by training staff on how to define and to build them.
- *Ensure students understand:* They introduce students to the Skills Builder Framework as a consistent way of thinking about how the skills are built, step by step.
- *Use the language consistently:* Avoid introducing other language and terminology around essential skills.
- *Recognise the value of essential skills:* They demonstrate that achievement in the essential skills is valued alongside academic achievement. For example, by updating parents and carers on their children's progress in reports or update meetings or through other awards.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
The language of essential skills is used in some aspects of school or college life and among some members of the community, including: students, teachers and leaders. Some events such as assemblies also begin to reference the essential skills.	Development of essential skills forms part of strategic planning and policy development, with the result that the language of essential skills is used across many areas of school or college life and among many members of the community. Assemblies and other events often reference the skills.	The essential skills are embedded within teaching and learning policies and curriculum plans across the school or college with the result that the language of essential skills is used extensively across all areas of school or college life and among all members of its community. Assemblies, staff meetings, parent meetings and other events regularly reference the skills.
Some teachers recognise and reward student effort and achievement in relation to essential skills.	A majority of teachers recognise and reward student effort and achievement in relation to essential skills.	The school or college's policy and approach to rewarding and recognising effort and achievement reflects and builds essential skills. All teachers follow this.
Some classrooms and other spaces where the essential skills are taught have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.	Many classrooms and other spaces have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.	Most or all classrooms and other spaces have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.

Some reflection questions to think about

- Does everyone know which essential skills you focus on in your school or college?
- Do all staff and students use a consistent language when referring to the skills?
- Do all staff receive training and support on these skills?

Platforms to help you embed this principle

➢ Skills Builder Universal Framework provides a common language for the 8 essential skills to help students, teachers and parents and carers build consistency when referring to the skills.

➢ Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes introductory modules to ensure all staff are aware of the essential skills, their importance and how to build them with their learners.

➢ Skills Builder Hub includes a selection of display and reward materials.

Get Started…

o Create a Skills Builder display in your school or college reception
o Display skills icons in classrooms
o Use skill icons as reward tokens
o Include essential skills in your parent newsletter

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

The Principle

Schools and colleges that are excelling in this area are introducing essential skills from the youngest students and working with them throughout their education – setting them up to learn effectively and then to be successful thereafter.

The trap

There are three traps that we see schools and colleges sometimes fall into when it comes to this principle:

- In some cases they link essential skills too closely with employability – and so think about these skills as being only relevant when students are close to leaving education. In these cases, they sometimes introduce essential skills teaching too late.
- In other cases, essential skills are seen as being foundational – that they are relevant to children to get them started in their learning, but after that they can be left.
- Or, finally, they are seen as a nice idea, but are seen as a lower priority than examination success, and so are squeezed out as soon as exams come into view.

What we should be aiming for

Schools and colleges that are effectively building their students' skills have another thing in common: they see these essential skills as being important all the way through education, and at all ages. They do not fall into the trap of assuming that essential skills are only important for employability – instead they see them as being key enablers of learning throughout childhood too.

This intuitively makes a lot of sense: we know that students who can listen effectively and articulate their ideas will get more out of class, and be able to share more too. Similarly, students who can set their own goals and plans are better able to take ownership of their own progress and take responsibility for achieving their educational goals. The ability to think critically and to problem-solve also helps to explore, process and join up different concepts.

It's also important to start young because we see differences in students' essential skills open up early. There is often a real contrast on the first days of school between those students who can introduce themselves to others, cope with new routines, and form friendships quickly and those who struggle. Starting early helps to address those imbalances.

At the same time, it is important to keep going. The essential skills are complex. Against the Skills Builder Framework we anticipate that most students will get to between Steps 8-12 during their time in school – so there is still plenty more to learn to really master those skills.

The Skills Builder Framework supports schools and colleges to create an appropriate structured learning programme because the different steps can be adopted as learning outcomes to provide a sequenced programme over many years.

Putting it into practice

Schools and colleges who are doing this effectively are doing some of the following things:

- They talk about the long-term picture of where they want their students to get to in terms of their essential skills, creating a shared sense of aspiration and intention.
- They might then break this down into what they want students to be able to do at each age, using the Skills Builder Framework as a way of having clear statements to work towards. An important part of this is to think about what children and young people in the school need to do at different ages in order to really access learning and thrive in their wider lives.
- They set the expectation with teachers, students, parents and carers that the development of these essential skills is a goal of the education system.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
Some year groups or classes have regular opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.	Most year groups or classes have regular and planned opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.	All year groups and classes have regular and planned opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.

Some reflection questions to think about:

- Do you think about these skills for all the students you work with?
- Could you introduce these skills earlier on?
- Are there opportunities for students to build the skills further as they grow up?

Platforms to help you embed this principle

- Skills Builder Universal Framework provides clear stages of progression in each of the essential skills to help identify a starting point and a route to mastery.

- Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes modules on specific phases of education so teachers understand what essential skills look like for age group.

- Skills Builder Homezone helps parents and carers to build their child's essential skills with activities that can be enjoyed together as a family.

- Skills Builder Launchpad is an online learning platform for anyone aged 14+, with modules and activities to build their own essential skills.

Get Started…

- o Decide on a whole-school approach or a specific cohort, key stage of year group
- o Build staff understanding of the framework via training modules
- o Share Homezone with parents & carers

Principle 3: Measure it

The Principle

Leading schools and colleges bring rigour to the essential skills through consistent measurement and formative assessment.

The trap

There are several traps we see school systems fall into when it comes to measuring essential skills:

- Sometimes it is assumed that these skills are too difficult to measure, and so their measurement is ignored.
- On occasion, schools go too far the other way, and try to introduce an examination method to measuring essential skills.
- Other times, schools assume that those students who are the most amenable, easy to teach, or talkative must be the highest performing in their essential skills. In fact, a closer, more objective assessment of their essential skills might reveal a very different picture.

What we should be aiming for:

It is impossible to see progression without a clear understanding of where an individual started from and then where they got to. In this sense, measurement is critical.

Critically, this is absolutely not saying that we need any sort of examination in essential skills. There are other ways that can be effective in assessing essential skills that help to provide the insights that we need to ensure progression:

- *Individual assessment by a teacher:* The most intensive option is for a teacher to make an assessment of each student individually, reviewing the steps they are secure on, and what they need to be able to do next. This gives the most detailed view, but is quite time-intensive and needs a good level of understanding of each individual.
- *Group-level assessment by a teacher:* In a classroom setting, it often works well for a teacher to reflect on the skills of their group as a whole: what proportion of the students have achieved each step. This takes much less time, and gives insights into the needs of the class as a whole.
- *Individual self- or peer-assessment:* A further option is that individual students can self-assess their own skills, or potentially work with a peer or with a parent or mentor to complete the individual assessment themselves. This works best with older students, although it can work with younger ones if they have a lot of support.

In this way, teachers and students can generate an insight into which steps have already been achieved on the Skills Builder Framework, and what therefore should be the next focus.

Putting it into practice

At a school or college level it can be challenging to introduce a new type of assessment. We find that those who are doing this well take a thoughtful approach to measuring essential skills:

- *Focus on how the data can be used:* The assessment is only worthwhile if it is actually used. This means that teachers have to have some training to understand the Skills Builder Framework and why progress against it matters for their students.
- *Lowering the stakes:* There is more teacher judgement needed in some of these assessments – they cannot be traditional examinations – so it is important not to make clear that this is a low-stakes, formative assessment. It should be used to help the teacher plan learning, not to make a judgement of them or their class.
- *Repeating:* As a formative tool, it is important that this assessment is not just completed once. As teachers return to it, they will become more confident, and will be able to see progress.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
Some teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform their teaching of essential skills.	A majority of teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform the teaching of essential skills.	All teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform the teaching of essential skills.

Some reflection questions to think about

- Are you using a consistent skills framework and assessment tool like Skills Builder?
- Does your framework reflect quantifiable progress over time?
- Do you check in on progress regularly?

Platforms to help you embed this principle

➢ Skills Builder Universal Framework provides a common language for the 8 essential skills to help students, teachers and parents and carers identify clear routes of progression for their learners.

➢ Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes a module on the value of skills assessment to help staff understand the importance of tracking their learners progress in the essential skills.

➢ Skills Builder Hub provides a group level diagnostic tool to help teachers identify the starting point for their class.

➢ Our Skills Builder Benchmark tool allows learners from 11 years old to complete an individual self-assessment against the 8 essential skills to identify their areas of strength and development.

Get Started…

o Set your staff up as users on the Skills Builder Hub
o Share teacher training modules to support staff with skill assessment
o Direct older learners to self-assess on Skills Builder Benchmark

Principle 4: Focus tightly

The Principle

When building essential skills, the best schools and colleges are making focused time available to directly build the skills and to allow for deliberate practice. This means drawing on the insights from measurement to pitch learning at the correct level.

The trap

There are a few traps that schools and colleges can fall into with regards to this principle:

- Sometimes they focus too much on doing as many activities as possible that use the essential skills, rather than thinking about what students are getting out of those activities and whether they are pitched at the right level.
- Sometimes essential skills activities are designed without thinking about learning objectives or outcomes.
- In some cases, no links are drawn between different activities to build essential skills, so students cannot make connections between them.

What we should be aiming for

The insight of what students can and cannot already do means that we can use this information to focus our efforts on the next critical step. This is a big shift away from the idea of just *using* the skills and hoping that students pick up what we need them to do from the practice.

Instead, with the understanding gained from measuring those skills we can explicitly teach what is required to make the next step of progress. That might mean teaching about three different styles of leadership, how to take it in turns with other children, how to create goals and a plan to achieve them, or how to use mind maps to generate new ideas. All of these things are better taught directly than simply hoping that students pick them up through good luck.

This direct instruction is often overlooked when it comes to essential skills, but once we have isolated the building blocks of those skills then we can be much more focused about building them.

Putting it into practice

Schools and colleges who are doing this effectively might do a few different things:

- Make dedicated time available to teach essential skills – perhaps only 15 minutes to an hour per week, but time when the sole objective is a specific step of progress in the essential skills.
- Ensure that teachers feel equipped to build skills directly and have the tools and resources available to do so.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
Some teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.	A majority of teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.	Most or all teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.
Timetables or planning show that some teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level	Timetables or planning show that a majority of teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level.	Timetables or planning show that most or all teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level

Some reflection questions to think about:

- Do you have different goals for what different students should be aiming to do when building their skills?
- Do you make time just to focus on explicitly developing skills?

Platforms to help you embed this principle

- Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes a module to guide teachers in teaching skills from the Universal Framework in a more focussed way.

- Skills Builder Hub provides over 300 resources for teachers to use, including short lessons which teach each skill at a step level.

- Skills Builder Homezone provides resources and activities to allows parents and carers to build essential skills with their children.

- Skill Builder Launchpad provides interactive modules for learners aged 14+ to build their essential skills independently.

Get Started…

- o Pick a 'skill of the month'
- o Allocate a frequent tutor or circle time session to deliver short lessons from the Hub
- o Link essential skills to PSHE topics
- o Direct older learners to work on a development step on Launchpad

Principle 5: Keep practising
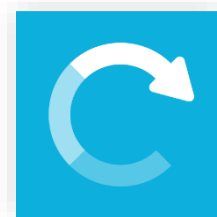
The Principle

The best schools and colleges are supplementing focused time on building the essential skills with wider reinforcement and practise across the curriculum, and beyond it.

The trap

Some of the traps that schools and colleges can fall into in regard to this principle include:

- Presuming that the dedicated time available to build essential skills will be sufficient by itself.
- Not making the most of opportunities to apply those skills to other learning, or missing opportunities to be deliberate in applying and reflecting on those skills in other contexts.
- Seeing essential skills as being irrelevant to wider learning in the curriculum and the full range of different subject areas.

What we should be aiming for

The importance of direct instruction in the skills that was highlighted in the previous principle does not, however, mean that practising is less important. The big difference is that we are talking about *deliberate* rather than *naïve* practice.

Deliberate practice is distinguished by focused attention on a particular goal, often with the support of an expert of coach.

Schools and colleges build this deliberate practice into their curricula in different ways. Some use a specific project as a basis to apply the essential skills to a real-life challenge: for example, creating a radio show, a school performance, a community event or a sports competition. These approaches can be highly effective as the sole focus of the learning is on securing progression in the essential skills.

It can also work well though to weave chances to practice the essential skills through the curriculum without the need to make lots of additional time available. This works best by taking a view across the learning of a particular year group and spotting the natural opportunities to practice applying different steps of the Skills Builder Framework. For example, by giving the opportunity to create a presentation in English, to apply research methods in Geography or to structure problem-solving through Maths.

Of course, the most effective schools and colleges do both having the focused practice made possible by dedicated time and then regular reinforcement in other subject areas too.

Putting it into practice

Schools and colleges who are applying this principle effectively do some of the following things:

- Ensure that the language of essential skills is being used across the whole school or college, with common shared standards.

- Include visual cues and reminders to encourage teachers to make reference to those skills in other parts of their teaching. For example, by having the essential skills posted up on the walls in the classrooms, or in the front of student planners or exercise books.
- Other visual reminders include wall displays of what students have been studying and how it links to the development of essential skills.
- Some schools and colleges also build in the expectation that essential skills will be reinforced in the design of lesson plans or curriculum planning.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
Some teachers provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.	A majority of teachers provide regular opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.	Most or all teachers provide regular opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.
	There are some opportunities for practising essential skills in the written curriculum.	The school or college's written curriculum makes reference to opportunities for practising essential skills across all subjects.
	Some extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills.	Most or all extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills.

Some reflection questions to think about:

- Are there regular opportunities for students to use their essential skills?
- When they do, are these opportunities highlighted clearly to them?
- Is there regular opportunity to actively reflect on the skills and how they have been developed?

Platforms to help embed this principle

➢ Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes modules on how teachers can encourage their learners to keep practising their skills both in and outside of the classroom.

➢ Skills Builder Universal Framework includes practical ideas on how to practise each step of each skill whether you are an individual, educator or parent/carer.

➢ Skills Builder Hub includes over 300 resources to help teach, practise and reinforce the learning for each skill.

Get Started…

- Display skills icons on lesson resources such as PowerPoints and worksheets
- Build essential skills into knowledge organisers
- Encourage teachers to use the essential skills language in subject teaching

- Skills Builder Homezone provides resources and activities for learners to practise their skills at home.

- Skill Builder Launchpad provides interactive modules to build and practise every step of the Universal Framework independently.

- Skills Builder's Impact Directory includes over 40 Skills Builder approved programmes offered by a range of impact organisations who are supporting young people to continue building their essential skills in a variety of different ways.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

The Principle

Schools and colleges who are transforming their students' essential skills are using links to the working world to increase the depth and transferability of those skills. They give students opportunities to apply these skills in a much wider range of settings.

The trap

Some of the traps that schools and colleges fall into when considering this principle include:

- Lots of schools have only very limited links to employers. In some parts of the country there are a greater range of available employers and links between schools and employers are better facilitated than others.
- Seeing employer events being separated or isolated from wider learning.
- Teachers struggle to make links between the curriculum as it is taught and how the skills and content could have real-life applications.
- There can be a nervousness about engaging the broader community with what is happening in schools or colleges.

What we should be aiming for

The final principle that we have consistently seen made a big impact is linking the essential skills not just to classroom learning, but also to wider life, including the world of work. This is particularly important because we want the skills to be transferable beyond education.

Employers often cite the importance of these essential skills in the workplace too – but then worry that the young people joining them at the end of their education have not built them to the standard that they expect or require. Sometimes this is a challenge of *articulation* – that young people have actually built the skills but that they struggle to talk about them in a way that is convincing to employers. In this case, it is important that students have a strong conceptual framework of their own skills that they can communicate with others.

Other times, it is that they do not have the skills built in such a way that they can effectively use them in a workplace. To build this transferability, it's important that students have the chance to apply their skills in lots of different settings so that they can see that the building blocks of being able to share an idea are the same in a classroom or a workplace or on the football pitch even though the setting looks quite different.

Putting it into practice

There are several approaches that schools and colleges use to put this principle into practice effectively:

- One approach that can be very effective is to use a project-based learning methodology. This is helpful because the project can be focused on a real challenge or problem – either faced by the local community, within the school, or set by an employer. For example, the creation of a radio show to inform students about an upcoming festival which allowed students to apply their listening and speaking skills, as well as creativity to write an

interesting show. This radio show was then shared with parents and other community members, giving a real-life application of the skills.

- The effective components of Project-Based Learning we have found are:
  - o Starting by sharing the existing knowledge in the team
  - o Using that to highlight what students will need to learn or be able to do in order to complete the project
  - o Researching and seeking out that information
  - o Applying their skills and knowledge to complete the task
  - o Redrafting and improving their work
  - o Sharing what they have achieved, with a final product
  - o Celebrating their successes and reflecting on what they have learnt

- Another approach which can be helpful is to work with external partners. This might mean bringing in a volunteer or representative of an employer or the local community to talk about their role and the relevance of essential skills to them and their work.

- Alternatively, depending on the context of the school, it might mean taking students out of the classroom to visit employers or other community sites. In such instances, a well-facilitated activity and discussion can help students to connect the essential skills as they are being built in the classroom and their application in the wider world.

The Skills Builder Award descriptors

Bronze Award	Silver Award	Gold Award
The school or college makes some provision of experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.	The school or college makes provision for the majority of students to have experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.	The school or college makes provision for all students to have experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.
	Some students use opportunities to apply and develop their skills outside school, for example in volunteering or work experience. *(Secondary and college only)*	Many students use opportunities to apply and develop their essential skills outside school, for example in volunteering or work experience. *(Secondary and college only)*

Some reflection questions to think about

- Are the skills framed in terms of their usefulness for education, employment and wider life?
- Are there opportunities for students to use their skills in different settings?
- Do you use links to employers to support building these skills?

Tools to help you:

➤ Skills Builder Online Teacher Training includes a module which guides teachers in supporting their learners to understand how essential skills can be transferred to different settings and applied to different problems.

➤ Skills Builder Hub provides a collection of premium resources designed to help bring the essential skills to life. These include projects, challenge days, virtual employer engagements and work experience modules.
Contact your Education Associate if you are interested in making a purchase.

Get Started…

o Include skills icons on work experience booklets
o Purchase a Skills Builder project or build an essential skills focus into existing projects
o Encourage employer speakers to refer to essential skills in their visits

➤ Skills Builder Launchpad provides interactive modules that highlight the importance of each skill step in the context of education, the workplace and wider life. There are opportunities for real-life application and space to articulate skills through independent reflection, discussion and written records.

➤ Skills Builder's Impact Directory includes over 40 Skills Builder approved programmes offered by a range of impact organisations who are supporting young people to continue building their essential skills in a variety of different settings.

The Skills Builder Award

Achieving the Skills Builder Award should be the culmination of your year on the Skills Builder Accelerator or Accelerator+ programme. The Award is designed to recognise best practice in building essential skills in education, and will be valid for three years upon completion.

Different levels of Award

The level of Award that you achieve will depend on how fully your school or college has been able to embed the Skills Builder Principles over the year:

Skills Builder
Bronze Award

Skills Builder
Silver Award

Skills Builder
Gold Award

For those making a commitment to high-quality essential skills education.

For those building on their commitment to high-quality essential skills education.

For those modelling best practice in high-quality essential skills education.

- Started embedding the Skills Builder Principles
- Some teachers will be using a common language for essential skills
- Plans for further development will be in place

- Made good progress towards embedding the Skills Builder Principles
- Majority of teachers will be using a common language for essential skills
- Policies and procedures will have begun to reflect the approach

- Fully embedded the Skills Builder Principles
- All teachers will be confident educators of essential skills
- Essential skills education will be fully integrated into daily practice

How the Award fits into the Accelerator programme

Over your first year with Skills Builder, you will have opportunities to reflect on progress and make plans with the support of your Education Associate to work towards achieving the Award. Initially, the first Skills Leader Training Day will support with creating an action plan for your school or college, which will then be confirmed in your first Strategy Meeting, including a member of your school senior leadership team.

The Spring Term starts with the second Skills Leader Training Day which will give a chance to reflect on progress so far, and to set priorities in the second Strategy Meeting. The third Strategy Session should be focused on reviewing progress over the year, and will give a chance to review the Award level that has been achieved.

Your Education Associate will guide you in your decision to continue partnering with Skills Builder for the following year, either on the Accelerator+ programme to work towards the next Award level, or through a self-led Digital Membership.

The Skills Builder Principles Matrix

Progression across the Principles Matrix reflects how fully the Skills Builder Principles have been embedded into teaching and learning in school. In order to achieve the Award level, there will need to be evidence of the following descriptors having been achieved.

Principle	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Keep it simple *Rationale:* A consistent focus on the essential skills helps ensure everyone's shared understanding and makes building skills a tangible process.	The language of essential skills is used in some aspects of school or college life and among some members of the community, including: students, teachers and leaders. Some events such as assemblies also begin to reference the essential skills.	Development of essential skills forms part of strategic planning and policy development, with the result that the language of essential skills is used across many areas of school or college life and among many members of the community. Assemblies and other events often reference the skills.	The essential skills are embedded within teaching and learning policies and curriculum plans across the school or college with the result that the language of essential skills is used extensively across all areas of school or college life and among all members of its community. Assemblies, staff meetings, parent meetings and other events regularly reference the skills
	Some teachers recognise and reward student effort and achievement in relation to essential skills.	A majority of teachers recognise and reward student effort and achievement in relation to essential skills.	The school or college's policy and approach to rewarding and recognising effort and achievement reflects and builds essential skills. All teachers follow this.
	Some classrooms and other spaces where the essential skills are taught have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.	Many classrooms and other spaces have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.	Most or all classrooms and other spaces have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.
Start early, keep going *Rationale:* Starting as young as possible allows more time for the skills to be developed, allowing for age appropriate teaching.	Some year groups or classes have regular opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.	Most year groups or classes have regular and planned opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.	All year groups and classes have regular and planned opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.
Measure it *Rationale:* A balanced understanding of strengths and	Some teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform their teaching of essential skills.	A majority of teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform the teaching of essential skills.	All teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform the teaching of essential skills.

Principle	Bronze	Silver	Gold
weaknesses in relation to essential skills, highlights progress and informs next steps.			
Focus tightly: *Rationale:* Building essential skills should build upon students' previous learning and skill attainment. It should allow dedicated time for the explicit teaching of skills.	Some teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills	A majority of teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.	Most or all teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.
	Timetables or planning show that some teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level	Timetables or planning show that a majority of teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level.	Timetables or planning show that most or all teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level
Keep practising: *Rationale:* Using & reinforcing skills as often as possible accelerates progress and embeds learning.	Some teachers provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.	A majority of teachers provide regular opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.	Most or all teachers provide regular opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.
		There are some opportunities for practising essential skills in the written curriculum.	The school or college's written curriculum makes reference to opportunities for practising essential skills across all subjects.
		Some extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills.	Most or all extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills.
Bring it to life: *Rationale:* The linking of skills with real world experiences, problems and challenges, ensures students see the relevance and importance of essential skills.	The school or college makes some provision of experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.	The school or college makes provision for the majority of students to have experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.	The school or college makes provision for all students to have experiences to apply essential skills. These might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.
		Some students use opportunities to apply and develop their skills outside school, for example in volunteering or work experience. *Secondary and college only*	Many students use opportunities to apply and develop their essential skills outside school, for example in volunteering or work experience. *Secondary and college only*

How Award decisions are made

The awarding process depends on the level of Award that is being sought. In order to achieve the Award, the goal is that all of the descriptors for that level of Award will have been achieved.

Bronze:

- At the third Strategy Meeting, the Education Associate will facilitate a reflective discussion focused by the Principles Matrix, the objective of which is to reach a consensus as to whether the criteria for a Bronze award have been met.
- To achieve a Bronze Award, all of the Bronze level descriptors need to be achieved.
- Most of the evidence for this level of Award can be drawn from things like data showing usage of the Skills Builder Hub by teachers, and examples that can be brought to the meeting.

Silver:

- Prior to the third Strategy Meeting, the Skills Leader will submit a portfolio of evidence related to Silver level criteria (informed by checklist of examples).
- To achieve a Silver Award, all of the Bronze level descriptors and at least 9 of the 12 Silver level descriptors should have been achieved.
- At the third Strategy Meeting, the Education Associate will facilitate a reflective discussion focused by the Principles Matrix, the objective of which is to reach a consensus as to whether the criteria for a Silver Award have been met.

Gold:

- Prior to Gold level school or college visit, the Skills Leader should submit a portfolio of evidence related to Gold level criteria (informed by checklist of examples, see *Appendix*).
- Gold level school visits take place before the final strategy meeting. The Education Associate undertakes a learning walk with Skills Leader and gathers further evidence, guided by an observation checklist.
- To achieve a Gold Award, all of the Bronze and Silver level descriptors and at least 9 of the 12 Gold level descriptors should have been achieved.
- At the third strategy meeting, the Education Associate facilitates a reflective discussion focused by the Principles Matrix, the objective of which is to reach a consensus as to whether the criteria for a Gold level award have been met.

Case Studies

This Guide to the Skills Builder Award has shared what good practice looks like when it comes to building essential skills in education.

To bring it to life, we are pleased to share some examples of great schools and colleges, which represent each phase of education at each award level. These demonstrate what it looks like to build the essential skills of every child and young person – setting them up to thrive.

Beyond this, you can explore our full range of case studies on our Case Study Showcase which allows you to filter on the phase of education, award level and geographical region you might be interested in.

As you explore these case studies, we'd encourage you to think about what ideas and examples might be a good fit for your school or college context.

Bronze Case Studies

- Welland Academy (Primary school)
- Sanders Drapers School (Secondary school)
- Queensbury School (Specialist provision)

Silver Case Studies

- Wolf Fields Primary School (Primary school)
- Sandhill Academy (Secondary school)
- Grantham College (College)
- Brook Green Centre for Learning (Specialist provision)

Gold Case Studies

- St Mary's CE Primary School (Primary school)
- All Saints Academy (Secondary school)
- Newcastle College (College)
- Pioneer House High School (Specialist provision)

Welland Academy

Skills Builder Bronze Award 2021

Context

Welland Academy is a primary school situated in Peterborough. There is a high level of unemployment and pupil aspirations are usually low. Most of the children enter the school with little or no life experience, low speech and language levels and non-existent life skills.

The school decided to incorporate the Skills Builder Accelerator programme into their curriculum because they wanted to offer their pupils a wide, varied and rich syllabus where the children learn not just core and foundation subjects, but also the essential life skills that they will need for their wider life.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

As a school, all teachers are now incorporating the Skills Builder Framework in lessons. The school dedicate an assembly to each individual skill, and teachers devise their lessons based on which skill steps pupils are meeting at any particular moment. Some classrooms have displays linking to each of the skills which also included examples and photos of how the pupils have demonstrated these.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

At the beginning of the academic year, there were only three teachers delivering the Skills Builder Accelerator Programme to three year groups. However, given the positive effect the programme was having on pupils, the school decided to ensure that all pupils were able to access the materials.

Principle 3: Measure it

All teachers begin by assessing their class as a whole to decide which step they need to begin with. They continue to use this assessment tool as they progressed through the steps. Teachers will also look for evidence of when children are using the skills in other curriculum areas and have begun to reward students through 'Dojo Points' or assembly certificates.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Teachers use the suggested teaching activities on the Skills Builder Hub. They also display skills icons on teaching slides to give pupils the opportunity to build on the skills in class. The school also purchased a Challenge Day linked to the essential skills covered so far.

Principle 5: Keep practising

The essential skills have become increasingly present within the curriculum at Welland Academy. Teachers have become better at pinpointing when a skill is being used in their subject lessons and display the skills logos on teaching slides to help make the visual connection for pupils.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

The school has decided to integrate skills learning with a wide range of career prospects for pupils. They have started to weave skills through career fairs, visits to places of employment and visitors to the school including companies such as DHL.

Sanders Draper School

Skills Builder Bronze Award 2021

Context

Sanders Draper school is a mixed-ability secondary school in Hornchurch, London. The Pupil Premium rate is above national average by 5%. The school is inclusive, celebrating originality and diversity and promoting student wellbeing. The Progress 8 scores have improved over the last 3 years with results being in line with national average.

There has been recent recognition that students are not able to articulate where they demonstrate employability skills, such as teamwork. Skills Builder has played a part to promote employability skills and show students how they could improve these skills, to secure employment after their studies.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The approach has been gradual across the school beginning with Year 7. Tutors deliver sessions twice a week, which has been monitored by the Skills Leader and Heads of Year. The language of essential skills is therefore used regularly, supported by posters in all Year 7 classrooms. There has also been an award ceremony rewarding the top student from each form, as well as the top form.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

All of Year 7 have the skills embedded in form time. But the Year 7 form tutors also use some of the activities with other year groups during curriculum time, to start to develop these skills in other year groups, and in other contexts linked to curriculum.

Principle 3: Measure it

Form tutors have used the assessment tool to show progress in the skills. The group skill scores show that all form groups have made progress and an internal student survey saw 85% of Year 7 students enjoying Skills Builder activities and learning how to improve these key skills. 89% said that their skills had improved since beginning the Skills Builder activities.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Year 7 form tutors have been delivering activities every week and monitoring development. This has meant sessions have remained explicit rather than getting lost in the curriculum to begin with. Some of the form tutors have begun to plan essential skills activities in their own subject lessons as well, across different year groups.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Form tutors who deliver Skills Builder sessions to Year 7 also use the key skills in their curriculum teaching and highlight how to use the skills and develop them. The skills are used in Science, English and Maths in particular.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Students in Year 7 have been able to apply some or all of the eight essential skills within their Ethics and Values lessons. Through heavy discussion and reflection, students have demonstrated their understanding and progress in Listening, Speaking, Teamwork and Creativity especially.

Queensbury School

Skills Builder Bronze Award 2021

Context

Queensbury is a special secondary school and sixth form for students with SLD, MLD, SEMH and ASD in Birmingham. They believe that all students have the ability to unleash their limitless potential provided they are given the opportunity to do so.

There was a desire to take part in the Accelerator programme to develop their skills-centred approach to learning and to embed the language of essential skills with the students that they work with.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

There are Skills Builder displays around the building and in classrooms promoting the language of the essential skills. The language and awareness of skills is referenced in lessons taught live and those set remotely. Staff have re-iterated the use of language across the school and the curriculum areas to increase students' familiarity and understanding that the skills are transferable.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Queensbury School started to formally follow Skills Builder with their Sixth Form students, encouraging teachers to use the language across their planning and reference the essential skills in lessons across the board.

Principle 3: Measure it

Skill development has been measured using both the Universal and Expanded Frameworks as part of their internal assessment system which, together with the skills passports, have been vital in supporting the students in understanding the steps involved in mastering the different skills. Teachers are tracking students' progress against the skills in their day-to-day teaching.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

The curriculum has been aligned with the essential skills and the assessment system has the framework embedded in it. Teachers track students progress daily to ensure they are teaching the skills at an appropriate and targeted level for their learners.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Whilst students practise the skills daily in lessons, Challenge Days and other skill-related challenges have been delivered to provide opportunities for students to showcase and apply their essential skills.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

The Challenge Day and other skills-related challenges were based around life skills, real experiences and situations students will likely encounter in their future. Therefore, these have been successful in supporting their 'preparing for adulthood' outcomes.

Wolf Fields Primary

Skills Builder Silver Award 2021

Context

Wolf Fields Primary School are based in Middlesex and have worked with Skills Builder for a number of years and recognise the value it can bring. This year, they wanted to ensure that an approach was fully embedded across their PSHE curriculum. They believe the essential skills provide foundations to support their pupils on their journey through the school and beyond into high school and adult life. As a school, Wolf Fields Primary wanted to build essential skills from a young age, to provide students with a wholesome education as early as possible.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The Skills Builder icons are displayed in every classroom and hall to maintain awareness of the skills and to support consistent use of the language of Skills Builder. The skills are explicitly taught to ensure all children understand what these skills are at a level that is appropriate for their age.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Essential skills are taught as a whole-school focus as part of the Health & Relationships Education (HRE) curriculum throughout the year. Skills Builder was included in part of the remote learning offered to children which allowed parents to see this for themselves.

Principle 3: Measure it

The Skills Builder Hub is used to baseline and track progress. This is a teacher-led assessment further enhanced by Assessment for Learning (AFL) in class discussions and any written work, both in dedicated Skills Builder lessons and when making cross-curricular links.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

The short video lessons and stories on the Skills Builder Hub are used to give regular opportunities to build essential skills with timetabled slots for this across the school. Teachers have had time during INSET to become familiar with the Hub and the resources available.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Teachers make links to the essential skills verbally across a range of lessons and have made links in written work, such as identifying which skills have been used at certain points by characters within the novel that a class is currently reading.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Staff have made time within the curriculum to host a series of project weeks for the latter part of the summer term in order to enable children to see essential skills being used in a real-life context.

Sandhill View Academy

Skills Builder Silver Award 2021

Context

Sandhill View Academy is an 11-16 Academy located in the city of Sunderland. The academy strongly believes that skills are just as important, if not more important, than academic qualifications in preparing our students for when they leave school.

The Accelerator programme gave the school the opportunity to benefit from additional staff training, support to develop a strategy and to be able to network and receive further advice and ideas in order to develop their skills strategy further.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The essential skills have been embedded into all aspects of teaching and learning. Students were introduced to the essential skills through weekly tutor time sessions. This was then supported with further work in SMSC lessons where students were able to record how they have achieved each skill. Teachers use the skills icons in their resources and display skills posters in classrooms. The website hosts a page to highlight the emphasis on these skills to parents and employers.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

All teachers use the videos and the materials from the Skills Builder Hub. The training sessions have encouraged staff to work together in their subject teams and share ideas so that everyone can see where the skills are being used. Many aspects of school life are skill 'branded' with skills icons.

Principle 3: Measure it

Skills Builder ladders have been included in student planners, meaning the Framework is at hand at all times. Teachers stamp in planners to indicate when students are demonstrating a step. Additionally, all subject areas have been asked to choose 3 particular skills to build into their lesson objectives.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Teachers regularly use skill icons and step descriptors in lessons.These are used by teaching staff to simply refer to the skills at opportune moments throughout the lesson.This is then further supported by the Framework in student planners.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Careers Weeks and Home Learning Challenges are examples of how Sandhill provide opportunities for practising the skills outside of the classroom. There is a plan to build skills into the extra-curricular provision next year.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Year 10 students participated in a Virtual Trip where they were able to use the skills throughout the day to find a solution to a business challenge and then present to the employer. Year 8 students learned about setting up a business via a Skills Builder Challenge Day.

Grantham College & University Centre

Skills Builder Silver Award 2021

Context

Grantham College, based in Lincolnshire, have recently taken significant steps to revitalise the Careers and Employability offer to ensure students are prepared for the workplace. The college wants to ensure all students could learn the essential skills and go on to thrive in their future. The college recognised Skills Builder as an engaging and sophisticated approach, with tools and resources to teach and assess skills, which would support staff to simply and effectively build essential skills of their students. The common language provides students with an understanding and ensures staff deliver consistent messages to them.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

Raised awareness of essential skills has been achieved through icons on display boards across the building, and producing content to be shown on TV screens, college desktop screens and the website. External stakeholders are informed about the Skills Builder approach in newsletters and in meetings with School Governors. Staff reward students with 'Skill Certificates'.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Essential skills are incorporated into Careers and Employability lessons, which run from Entry Level courses through to Level 3. These are timetabled, weekly lessons. The college is also now including essential skills on weekly planning documents for subject lessons college-wide.

Principle 3: Measure it

Students complete self-assessments using Benchmark, in both the Autumn and Spring terms. Students share their Benchmark reports with their tutors and create SMART targets to progress. Teachers of 16-19 study programmes complete group level baseline assessments and are encouraged to regularly update dashboards to keep track of progress and identify skill priorities.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Lessons incorporate Hub resources such as the short lessons, employer videos, skill overviews, and icons. Essential skills are woven into a variety of subjects. For example, in an Equality and Diversity in the Workplace lesson, students practised summarising and rephrasing (Listening Step 8) and Developing Confidence (Staying Positive Step 4)

Principle 5: Keep practising

Staff have created decks of cards which have essential skills-related activities for students to practise as part of their homework. Employer opportunities and work experience, including virtual placements, have given students opportunities to practise their skills outside of lessons too.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

The Performing Arts students and Teaching Assistant apprentices practised essential skills with Accenture and Network Rail employees in 'Skills Summits'. In work experience projects, students have applied skills when working in teams to develop creative ideas to meet live briefs. The college is encouraging employers delivering talks to students to include essential skills in their conversations, to demonstrate the importance of the skills in the workplace.

Brook Green
Centre for Learning

Skills Builder Silver Award 2021

Context

Brook Green, in Plymouth, is a SEND school for students aged 11-16 who have moderate learning difficulties. The careers team appreciate the value of core skills in preparing their young people for the many transitions they may face in their chosen careers path.

The Skills Builder programme provides an ideal opportunity for students to explore and discuss these core skills, suitable for all abilities and age ranges.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

All classrooms have essential skills posters on tutor noticeboards. Skills Builder forms part of the strategic planning of the Careers programme which is published on the school website for both parents and students. The language is also used as part of the Centre's marking feedback and is displayed using stickers in students' work.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

All KS3 students have a 'Learning in the Natural Environment' day each week to build resilience, problem solving, team work and other essential skills. All KS4 students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh challenge in Year 10/11 which has been linked to the 8 essential skills.

Principle 3: Measure it

The teachers who have used the Skills Builder Hub assessment tool comment on how useful it is and how engaging it for the students, particularly in Year 7 and 8. The aim is to encourage all staff to be using this tool consistently.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

KS3 students have Building Blocks on their weekly timetable which is allocated time to work on essential skills. KS4 students have one tutor lesson a week in which the skills can be taught. The students who do not study for formal exams have 'Life Skills' timetabled in for 6 lessons a week in which the skills are explicility taught.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Students practise essential skills as part of collapsed timetable days such as Maths Day or World Book Day. The BTEC Sports students assist at sporting events for students, where they can practise essential skills. KS3 students have an 'Activities Passport' that records activities and links them to each skill. For example, making a game and teaching someone how to play it links to Speaking and Creativity.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Interactions with employers have emphasised the importance of linking essential skills to their role. A number of Year 10 and 11 students took part in an external work experience opportunity as part of 'Build Plymouth', with essential skills forming part of their recorded progress. All students have the opportunity to develop their essential skills outside the classroom through offsite projects, work experience and volunteer work, such as Duke of Edinburgh.

St Mary's CE Primary School

Skills Builder Gold Award 2021

Context

St Mary's in Wigan is a friendly school with a family ethos, committed to providing a high-quality education and support system for the community. The reason they became involved with Skills Builder was to develop the ways in which children work as a team; creatively solve problems; communicate effectively and persevere through challenges. Staff wanted to equip pupils with the skills to value the opinions of others and learn from each other, which in turn would improve their progress and attainment.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

There is a shared language of skills across the school. Children are praised for using essential skills across all areas of the curriculum with reference to the skill step they are working on. Children have therefore started using more essential skills-related vocabulary. Skills are discussed in assemblies and reported on in parent/teacher meetings and Class Dojo points and certificates are sent home. Regular Facebook videos and pictures of children practising the skills are also shared.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Skills are worked on from Reception to Year 6. Reference to the skills has become classroom culture, as tasks will always bear the skills in mind. Students use resources on the Hub and in activities across the curriculum and skills are reflected on in termly reports.

Principle 3: Measure it

Students are assessed regularly. Skill steps are always on display next to the icons. Self-reflection resources from the Hub are used to identify when students have used that skill and their next steps. Emails are sent out regularly to ensure teachers baseline their class before teaching. Older students are able to give their opinion on the accessibility of each skill, which teachers take into account moving forward in further lesson planning.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Time is made in the curriculum to explicitly teach essential skills using the resources on the Hub. This is usually time that is woven into a specific lesson. Skills are taught and then developed in the lesson activity. Skill passports have been used for specific children who have their own specific target for the skill to show differentiation.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Each child has a Skills Builder floor book that shows evidence of each skill being taught and practised. Classes collectively discuss what each skill means to them before being explicitly taught, then reflect on this skill afterwards. The school have used virtual trips, projects and Challenge Days, as well as developing essential skills in off timetable days, such as World Book Day.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Colleagues were invited from Skills Builder to join the school assembly, in which skills discussion is a regular feature. Virtual trips this year have included Key Stage 2 students speaking to employers from three workplace settings, about how essential skills are used in the different job roles. Children engaged with a challenge day and reflected on the skills they had used. Teachers gave out certificates for excellence in specific skills.

All Saints Academy

Skills Builder Gold Award 2021

Context

At All Saints Academy in Dunstable, there is a significant commitment to students' personal development. Whilst qualifications are important, it is important that students develop morally, and in relation to the broader skills which will prepare them for the next phase of their lives. Together with strategic support from Skills Builder, the curriculum has been rewritten whereby individual topics are centred around a skill and a virtue. There are 11 topics for each year group and every topic has a specific skill allocated to it. The skill then permeates the lesson content to ensure that skill development is integrated rather than a bolt-on addition.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The subject content for each curriculum topic makes explicit reference to the skills and ensures that the skill development is seen as integral by all students. Knowledge organisers for each topic use the language/steps from the Universal Framework so students understand the progression. Skills are referenced in parent meetings and students have engaged with weekly personal development/ skills challenges. Every classroom has an A3 laminated sheet for all 8 skills on display.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

The creative curriculum model gives all students the opportunity to learn specific skill steps and apply their skills across the curriculum. Teachers make regular reference to the skill step posters so that students understand how to progress in relation to each of the skills. The skill steps are broken down across all year groups to show an average expected progression route for all students.

Principle 3: Measure it

All students have a personal development tracker where they record evidence of where they have met the requirements of different skill steps. Students reflect on skill development at the end of each week and where good progress has been made and sixth form students review the evidence and award students with a badge linked to the specific skill. The assessment tool is well utilised by staff to inform their choices over which step and which resources to focus on with their tutees.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Students have a weekly tutor session which focuses explicitly on direct instruction in relation to the essential skills. Both the assembly programme and character education lessons are aligned to the skill covered in each curriculum topic to reinforce the key language and support development. Each Friday, students reflect on the development of their skills and provide specific examples.
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Principle 5: Keep practising

Skill activities are built into subject curriculum; whilst the subject content changes, the opportunities to explore and practise the skill remain consistent. Every booklet and lesson PowerPoint has the skill logo displayed. Extra-curricular activities are linked to skills too.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Year 11 took part in a 3-day Crime Scene Investigation experience. Year 7 and 8 took part in the Operation Moonbase Challenge Day. During the Careers Day for Year 9 and 10, each of the careers input made explicit reference to the skills associated with different careers.

Newcastle College

Skills Builder Gold Award 2021

Context

Newcastle College is a further education and higher education College in the heart of Newcastle.

The college used the initial 8 essential skills to benchmark and create its own set of Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB) appropriate to the development needs of students. The college's aim is to signpost these skills at every opportunity for students to see the relevance and context when working with a range of key stakeholders as part of their course. The sequential structure of the 6 Principles easily aligns to their own academic structure and calendar.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

Every student as part of tutorial engagement receives a reflective log book promoting the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB) required to achieve well. The 8 essential skills were used to formulate the KSB framework. Aligned to the teaching and learning policy and quality assurance plans, the booklet is used to review and evaluate progress by the student and personal tutor. Parents are informed through termly progress reviews and parental engagement activities.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Planning of skills development resources is aligned to engage all students irrespective of academic level. Promotion and application of skills takes place at every stage of the careers guidance journey whether during prior-enrolment in schools, on programme or at exit to inform progression.

Principle 3: Measure it

All Newcastle College teaching and learning delivery is centred around twelve teaching, learning and assessment indicators to achieve success. The delivery model focuses on the purpose of learning and the mechanisms that are incorporated as consistent practice for students to learn. Formative assessment of learning takes place through regular student discussion including one-to-one interactions where action plans are agreed.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

College policy and procedures relating to teaching, learning and assessment underpin the emphasis on high-quality delivery. Every student receives a weekly timetable based on developing essential skills as they progress through their course. eTrackr is used by students and staff to record their initial targets based on their current abilities and qualifications.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Students are proactively encouraged to demonstrate and apply their understanding of essential skills through a broad range of contextualised vocational projects, work experiences and interactions and engagement with employers as part of the overall curriculum offer.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Employer engagement and exposure to the world of work is used so students are aware of what is required in their chosen vocation. Virtual work experiences allow students to engage with employers online, providing opportunities for students to communicate directly with employers. This enables student groups from different curriculum areas to work together to resolve business challenges.

Pioneer House High School

Skills Builder Gold Award 2021

Context

Pioneer House is a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision for 11-19 year olds. The students that attend Pioneer House have significant learning difficulties amongst other needs such as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The aim of the school is to prepare students for living and working as independently as possible in their adulthood. Students in the upper school gain a wealth of work experience and complete accreditation courses to prepare them for their next destinations. Skills Builder is a great way of helping students to understand the essential skills needed for work readiness and how to improve them in small steps.

Principle 1: Keep it simple

The school have built the language of essential skills across learning. This includes seeing the language as a normal part of lessons. Students are set skill targets which are included in their Education, Health and Care Plans. Students are rewarded for working on these target skills through collecting stickers for their skills passports. During the partial school closure, the essential skills were built into the remote offer and covered daily with students working on site and at home.

Principle 2: Start early, keep going

Essential Skills are taught in Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 at Pioneer House. The launch of the whole school Skills Builder programme was intended for skills to be built sequentially in Skills Builder lessons as well as in all curriculum lessons.

Principle 3: Measure it

Pioneer House set up a small-steps measuring tool before the Expanded Framework came into use by Skills Builder. Pioneer House are currently migrating their system with the new small steps expanded framework to be able to more readily use Skills Builder resources. Progress is tracked on spreadsheets and within students' individual Education, Health and Care Plan reviews.

Principle 4: Focus Tightly

Skills Builder is incorporated in classroom non-negotiables, meaning every lesson has a skills focus alongside learning objective. All medium-term plans contain a section to highlight the skill focus across the module being delivered. There are whole-school termly foci of set skills per term. Skills are referred to in celebration assemblies such as weekly Head Teachers Awards.

Principle 5: Keep practising

Each student builds their own individual digital learning portfolio on Seesaw. Each skill step has its own code, giving students and teachers a simple way of recording when the skills are practised. Essential skills are within extra-curricular activities such as work experience, enrichment and 'Fantastic Fridays'. Projects and virtual trips have also been engaged with.

Principle 6: Bring it to life

Pioneer House's innovative work experience programme is intrinsically linked to essential skills development. The school has developed various tools to help students focus and reflect on how they use skills during their placements. These include: a map which links all placements with target skills, skills cards which are laminated and pocket sized so that staff and students can capture and record moments when skills are being used during placements, and workbooks which include skills.

Other Resources

There are lots of resources available to support you in the journey to embed effective essential skills teaching across your school or college.
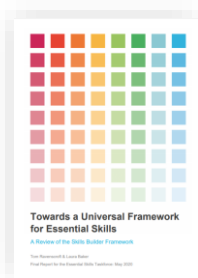
Publications and guides

The Missing Piece: The Essential Skills Education Forgot

Tom Ravenscroft details the rationale for building essential skills and evidence behind the six principles.

skillsbuilder.org/ themissingpiece

Towards a Universal Framework for Essential Skills

Read the full report of the research behind the development of the Universal Framework.

skillsbuilder.org/ towards-a-universal-framework-for-essential-skills

Skills Builder Universal Framework: Toolkit for Education

Get started building essential skills education into in your school or college curriculum with our free Toolkit

skillsbuilder.org/ toolkit-education

Insights

Our Better Prepared report surveyed 3000+ young people in partnership with YouGov highlighting the correlation between essential skills and employment outcomes
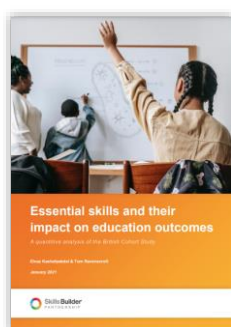
This report built off analysis of the British Cohort Study which highlighted the correleation between essential skills and higher literacy, numeracy and career aspirations
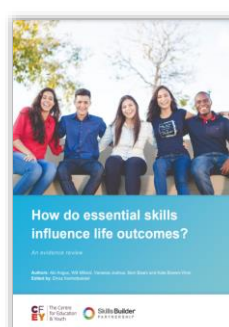
Written by the Centre of Education & Youth and Skills Builder, this report reviews existing academic studies exploring the links between essential skills and wider life outcomes

Led by a member of the Skills Builder Education team, this paper channels the voices of teachers and their motivations around building essential skills, as well as taking a look at the barriers which exist.

Practical resources

Explore the complete interactive Universal Framework online and access detailed descriptions of how to build every skill at every step – in any context.

skillsbuilder.org/framework

Skills Builder HUB

*Access a huge **range of resources** on our online platform for building skills – complete with a **built-in assessment tool**.*

skillsbuilder.org/hub

Skills Builder BENCHMARK

*Benchmark you and your students against the 8 essential skills with our **independent** self-assessment tool.*

skillsbuilder.org/benchmark

Skills Builder HOMEZONE

*Build essential skills in **a home setting** with this free selection of resources for all skills, steps and ages to **enjoy together**.*

skillsbuilder.org/ homelearning

Skills Builder LAUNCHPAD

*Learners aged 14+ can access a range of **interactive** modules and activities to **build their own** essential skills.*

skillsbuilder.org/launchpad
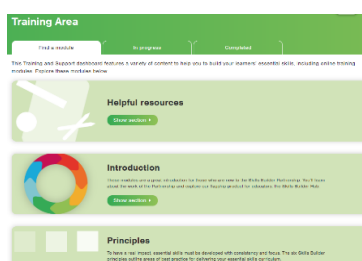
*Check out these **online teacher training courses** to learn the best methods to effectively teach essential skills using the Principles.*

hub.skillsbuilder.org/training-area/

*Browse a range of Skills Builder approved programmes on our **Impact Directory** supporting young people to build essential skills*

skillsbuilder.org/impact-directory

Thanks and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the teachers, Skills Leaders and Senior Leadership Teams at Pioneer House High School, Windy Arbor Primary School, Great Western Academy, Hornsey School for Girls and William Tyndale Primary School, for their enthusiasm for and commitment to essential skills education, as well as for the willing way they gave up their time to contribute to this Guide. In addition, thanks to Welland Academy, Wolf Fields Primary School, St Mary's CE Primary School, Sanders Draper, Sandhill View, All Saints Academy, Grantham College, Newcastle College, Queensbury School and Brook Green Centre for Learning for their case study contributions to the Guide.

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Appendix: Award Evidence

At Bronze and Silver levels, most evidence will be gathered though conversations as we work together over the course of the year. However, on occasions, you might be asked to provide a handful of pieces of evidence against particular descriptors as part of our quality assurance process, and these are likely to be in line with the examples below.

At Gold level, you will normally be expected to provide at least one piece of hard evidence against each descriptor from the list below. This will be built upon through conversations with teachers, students and parents, as below. The list below is not exhaustive, and you might have excellent evidence not on the list too.

Principle	Gold Descriptors	What evidence might look like
Keep it simple *Rationale:* A consistent focus on the essential skills helps ensure everyone's shared understanding and makes building skills a tangible process.	The essential skills are embedded within teaching and learning policies and curriculum plans across the school or college with the result that the language of essential skills is used extensively across all areas of school or college life and among all members of its community. Assemblies, staff meetings, parent meetings and other events regularly reference the skills.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Teaching and learning policies ☐ School/ College improvement plan ☐ School/ College prospectus ☐ School/ College Curriculum Intent ☐ Intent/ Implementation/ Impact Statements ☐ Lesson observation proformas ☐ Newsletters to parents ☐ Staff meeting agendas or bulletins including essential skills ☐ Student assemblies referencing essential skills ☐ Website and social media content
	The school or college's policy and approach to rewarding and recognising effort and achievement reflects and builds essential skills. All teachers follow this.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Rewards or recognition policies including certificates, house points, sticker charts ☐ Reports to parents
	Most or all classrooms and other spaces have visual cues and reminders of the skills (such as posters) on display.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Essential skills classroom / communal displays ☐ Essential skills icons in student planners or teacher lanyards ☐ Skills icons on lesson PowerPoints/ Google classroom or similar ☐ Examples of other visual cues in use
Start early, keep going: *Rationale:* Starting as young as possible allows more time for the skills to be developed, allowing for age appropriate teaching.	All year groups and classes have regular and planned opportunities for the learning and practising of essential skills.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Curriculum planning for teaching essential skills ☐ Examples of what each year group have been doing to build their essential skills

Principle	Gold Descriptors	What evidence might look like
Measure it: *Rationale:* A balanced understanding of strengths and weaknesses in relation to essential skills, highlights progress and informs next steps.	All teachers regularly use formative assessment to prioritise and inform the teaching of essential skills.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Data from the Skills Builder Hub showing assessment has taken place ☐ Internal assessment data for essential skills (e.g. trackers) ☐ Evidence of how Skills Builder Benchmark data is collected and used by teachers ☐ Marking feedback to students ☐ EHCP targets It might also be supplemented by: ☐ Conversations with students ☐ Conversations with teachers
Focus tightly: *Rationale:* Building essential skills should build upon students' previous learning and skill attainment. It should allow dedicated time for the explicit teaching of skills.	Most or all teachers engage in focused and explicit teaching of essential skills.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Skills Builder Hub usage data ☐ Curriculum planning documents ☐ Teacher lesson plans ☐ Essential skills lesson objectives ☐ Student knowledge organisations linking to essential skills
	Timetables or planning show that most or all teachers dedicate time to the teaching of skills, pitching teaching at an appropriate level	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Skills Builder Hub usage data ☐ Curriculum planning documents ☐ Teacher lesson plans ☐ Student timetables reflecting dedicated essential skill sessions
Keep practising: *Rationale:* Using & reinforcing skills as often as possible accelerates progress and embeds learning.	Most or all teachers provide regular opportunities for students to practise essential skills in the wider curriculum, crossing into different subject areas.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Skills Builder Hub usage data ☐ Schemes of work referencing essential skills ☐ Examples of essential skills in lessons in the wider curriculum ☐ Lesson time projects incorporating essential skills ☐ Home learning plans ☐ Classroom floor books
	The school or college's written curriculum makes reference to opportunities for practising essential skills across all subjects.	
	Most or all extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to practise essential skills.	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ Mapping of extra-curricular opportunities against the essential skills ☐ Extra- curricular timetables
Bring it to life:	The school or college makes provision for all students to have experiences to apply essential skills. These	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ CIEAG overview documents ☐ Curriculum planning documents

Principle	Gold Descriptors	What evidence might look like
Rationale: The linking of skills with real world experiences, problems and challenges, ensures students see the relevance and importance of essential skills.	might include project-based learning, off-timetable days, employer encounters, workplace visits and enterprise challenges.	☐ Photographs of employer engagement opportunities which refer to the essential skills ☐ Photographs of student trips which refer to the essential skills ☐ Photographs or work produced as part of a Skills Builder Challenge Day, Project, or Employer Engagement
	Many students use opportunities to apply and develop their essential skills outside school, for example in volunteering or work experience. *Secondary and college only*	Evidence of this descriptor might be drawn from: ☐ CIEAG overview/ documents ☐ Work experience policies ☐ Work experience documentation supporting the students in their essential skills whilst on placement ☐ Employer feedback commenting on students' essential skills

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