



SKILLS BUILDER AWARDS



Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP

Award Guide for Schools and Colleges

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Introduction

Skills Builder Partnership works with schools and colleges across the world to ensure that every child and young person builds the essential skills to thrive.

Every day, we see incredible work by those institutions which helps to ensure that every learner is building those skills, step by step, as a core part of a good education.

The Skills Builder Awards recognise this great practice. We do so by assessing institutions against six principles that we see really drive learner progress:



Align



Plan



Measure



Teach



Practise



Apply

Together, these principles create a joined up approach which sets every learner up for success.

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. 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 includes examples and case studies of schools and colleges, and how they put those principles into practice.

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



Skills Builder Awards

Principles Matrix

For programmes and Awards from 2026-27 onwards

Principles Matrix

This is the simplified version of the Principles Matrix:

	 Bronze Award	 Silver Award	 Gold Award
 Principle 1: Align	Some members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework.	A majority of members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework.	Almost all members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework.
 Principle 2: Plan	Some learners benefit from planned regular opportunities to progress in essential skills.	A majority of learners benefit from planned regular opportunities to progress in essential skills.	Almost all learners benefit from planned regular opportunities to progress in essential skills.
 Principle 3: Measure	Some learners' essential skills are assessed to inform teaching of essential skills.	A majority of learners' essential skills are assessed to inform teaching of essential skills.	Almost all learners' essential skills are assessed to inform teaching of essential skills.
 Principle 4: Teach	Some learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.	A majority of learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.	Almost all learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.
 Principle 5: Practise	Some learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.	A majority of learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.	Almost all learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.
 Principle 6: Apply	Some learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.	A majority of learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.	Almost all learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.



Principle 1

Align

The principle

Effective schools and colleges are aligned behind a common goal for building learners' essential skills, and a common language from the Skills Builder Universal Framework.

Why this matters

This principle matters because any effective approach starts with an aligned vision behind a common goal. This means that there is a shared sense among educators, learners, school or college leaders, and the wider community that building essential skills is a vital part of a good education.

Alignment also requires a shared understanding of what essential skills are and a common language so that everyone is talking about and understanding essential skills in the same way. The Skills Builder Universal Framework was created to achieve just this.

What we should be aiming for

Schools and colleges should be looking to ensure that their vision for learners' essential skills is widely shared and championed by leaders and educators across the institution.

This can then be made tangible by using the Skills Builder Universal Framework to be clear on which essential skills are the focus and how they will be built for every learner. This language should then be used consistently so that learners, educators, leaders and the community have a shared understanding of what is intended.

How to put it into practice

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

- *Champion the value of essential skills:* They advocate and demonstrate that achievement in the essential skills is valued alongside academic achievement. For example, by updating parents and carers on their learners' progress in essential skills in reports or update meetings or through other recognition.
- *Build awareness of the essential skills:* For example, by having them up on the walls of hallways and in classrooms and by training educators on how to define and to build them.
- *Ensure learners understand:* They introduce learners to the Universal Framework as a consistent way of thinking about how the skills are built, step by step.
- *Use the language consistently:* They use the language of the skills and skill steps across school or college life.



Skills Builder Award descriptors

The descriptors from the Skills Builder Awards help to define good practice:

	 Bronze Award	 Silver Award	 Gold Award
Descriptor	Some members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework.	A majority of members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework	Almost all members of the school or college community, including learners, educators, and leaders, use the language of Skills Builder Universal Framework
Reach	You should confirm that this has been achieved with at least some learners.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 50% of learners in the institution.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 80% of learners in the institution.
Evidence required	<i>At least two pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least three pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least four pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.
Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Learning spaces having visual cues or reminders of the skills, such as posters on display. • Events which promote essential skills (like community or learner events) • Recognition of learner effort and achievement in relation to essential skills • Training completed by educators on essential skills • Newsletters or other media promoting essential skills • School or college development or improvement plans Evidence can include photographs, news items, videos, documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find tools to help raise awareness of essential skills across your school or college, including *display materials* with the skills icons on, *reward systems* based around essential skills, and *assembly materials* to introduce the Skills Builder approach.

Reflection questions

- How have you raised awareness of essential skills in your school or college?
- How have you ensured that learners, educators and leaders in your school or college are consistently using the language of skills from the Skills Builder Universal Framework?



Principle 1: Align

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they are aligned behind a common goal for building learners' essential skills, and a common language from the Skills Builder Universal Framework.



Visual reminders

Learning spaces having visual cues or reminders of the skills, such as posters on display: Displaying posters and icons in classrooms and hallways keeps the essential skills visible and front-of-mind for everyone. This creates a consistent environment that helps learners build a clear mental map of the skills they are developing.



Events

Events which promote essential skills (like community or learner events): Dedicated events like assemblies or community workshops help to normalise the language of essential skills within daily school life. These gatherings ensure that learners, staff, and parents are all aligned with the same shared goals and terminology.



Learner recognition

Recognition of learner effort and achievement in relation to essential skills: Using certificates, reports or reward tokens to celebrate progress shows that these essential skills are valued alongside academic success. This targeted recognition motivates learners to engage with the framework and take pride in their progress.



Training

Training completed by educators on essential skills: When educators complete specific training, they gain the confidence and expertise to build these skills effectively with their learners. This ensures that all staff are using the Universal Framework consistently to provide a joined-up approach for every student.



Communications

Newsletters or other media promoting essential skills: Promoting skills through newsletters and social media keeps the broader community informed and engaged with the school's mission. Sharing these updates helps parents and carers support skill-building at home using the same common language as the classroom.



Development or improvement plans

School or college development or improvement plans: Including essential skills in strategic improvement plans ensures they are embedded into the core of the institution's policy and long-term vision. This high-level commitment guarantees that skill education remains a priority for all members of the community.



Evidence examples

Visual displays in classrooms



Visual displays in corridors



Visual displays in other areas



Essential Skills training/meetings



Assemblies focused on essential skills



Newsletters, social media and press articles on essential skills



Reward systems and celebrations



Workshops with parents or other members of the community



Sharing essential skills with other educators and visitors





Principle 2

Plan

The principle

Effective schools and colleges have planned regular opportunities to support learners' essential skills progression across their education.

Why this matters

This principle is important because these skills help learners at every stage of their education - and beyond. As such, it is important that these skills are neither only seen as important for the youngest or oldest learners but instead form a strand of regular opportunities for learners to build essential skills throughout their time in school or college.

Planning for progression matters. While all learners differ, setting age- and stage-related expectations is important to structure progression for learners to avoid them just *using* the skills but not actually having scope to *improve* them.

Similarly, an inclusive approach to essential skills means planning for learners' differing needs and making essential skills accessible to all.

What we should be aiming for

Schools and colleges see essential skills as being important all the way through education, and at all ages. We know that learners who can listen effectively and articulate their ideas will get more out of class and be able to share more too. Similarly, learners 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. It is also important to start early because differences in learners' essential skills often become obvious very early in education.

At the same time, it is important to keep going and that progression is planned. The essential skills are complex. Against Universal Framework 2.0 we anticipate that most learners will get to between Steps 8-12 during their time in school or college - so there is still plenty more to learn to really master those skills. Adult learners continue to benefit from building these essential skills across college or careers too.

How to put it into practice

Educators, schools, and colleges who are doing this effectively are doing some of the following things:

- *Essential skills as a journey:* They talk about their long-term aspirations for their learners' essential skills, creating a shared objective over a long time period.
- *Step by step approach:* They then break this down into what they want learners to be able to do at each age or stage, using the Skills Builder Universal Framework.
- *Planning:* They create a shared plan for how these essential skills will be built for learners across their education with a focus on inclusive practice.



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Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Curriculum planning for essential skills which covers the full range of ages reached • Planning which shows how inclusion is achieved • Evidence of regular usage of learning materials on the Hub • Timetables which include evidence of essential skills lessons or projects • Homework including essential skills for different ages Evidence can include photographs, news items, videos, documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find tools and resources which help to make essential skills engaging for learners of all ages. These span *stories* to introduce essential skills for the youngest learners, to *virtual work experience* for the oldest learners. There are also lots of resources to support *inclusion* approaches too so every learner is involved.

Reflection questions

- How do you approach these essential skills for learners of different ages or stages?
- How do you take an inclusive approach to essential skills building?



Principle 2: Plan

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they have planned regular opportunities to support learners' essential skills progression across their education.



Curriculum plans

Curriculum planning for essential skills which covers the full range of ages reached: A comprehensive curriculum plan ensures that essential skills are introduced to the youngest learners and developed sequentially as they grow. This joined-up approach provides a clear route to mastery, allowing students to build on their previous attainment year after year.



Inclusion planning

Planning which shows how inclusion is achieved: Effective planning considers the diverse needs of all learners, ensuring that skill steps are pitched at a level that is appropriate for every individual. By adapting the framework for different abilities, every student is given the opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed.



Hub usage

Evidence of regular usage of learning materials on the Hub: Consistently using the short lessons and videos on the Skills Builder Hub provides teachers with high-quality resources to support explicit skill development. Tracking this usage demonstrates a commitment to delivering a structured skills programme across the whole institution.



Timetables

Timetables which include evidence of essential skills lessons or projects: Including dedicated time for essential skills on the weekly timetable ensures that skill-building is prioritised alongside academic subjects. This visible commitment helps learners understand that these transferable skills are a core part of their educational journey.



Homework

Homework including essential skills for different ages: Setting homework tasks that focus on essential skills allows learners to practise and apply their learning in a home environment. These activities engage parents and carers, helping to reinforce a shared language for skills outside the classroom.



Anonymised photographs

Anonymised photographs of different year groups using Skills Builder: Anonymised photographs of students in action provide powerful evidence of how essential skills are being practised throughout the institution. Capturing these moments helps to celebrate learner effort and brings the skill-building process to life for the entire community.



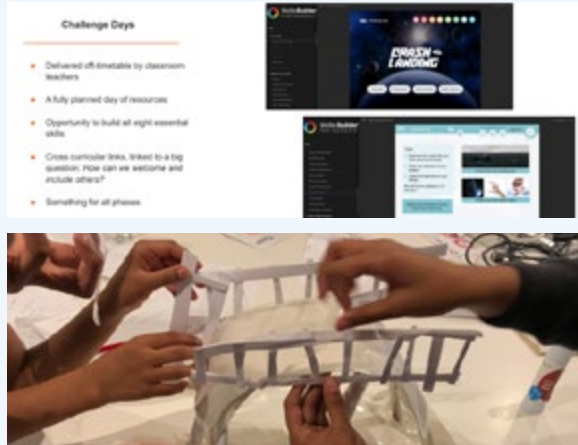
Evidence examples

Unit/Lesson plans from different classes/year groups

No.	Component	Time (mins)	(Teacher Action)
1	Opening	10	Context Switch Temp check Agenda Progress so far
2	Advisory Time	10	1. Reflection on Behaviour 2. Reflection on Community Code data 3. Bonding Activity 4. Any other activity the adviser wishes to conduct Note: Advisers who struggle with pacing can keep this as a buffer time.
3	Recap of the previous class	5	Recap action steps from the previous class. Award merits for shifts you have seen in students. Activities to enable students to articulate the What, Why, and How the step, through various activities. Ex. 1. 9AM 2. What's Your Story of the week?

Week No.	Week of	Essential Skill	Step No	Presentation
1	25th October	-	-	-
2	30th October	Skill Builder Survey	-	-
3	6th November	Introduction to Skill Builders	-	-
4	20th November	Staying Positive	0	Step 0 - Staying Positive
5	27th November	Staying Positive	1	Step 1 - Staying Positive
6	4th December	Aming High	0	Step 0 - Aming High
7	11th December	Aming High	1	Step 1 - Aming High
8	18th December	Leadership	0	Step 0 - Leadership
9	25th December	Leadership	1	Step 1 - Leadership
10	2nd January	Buffer/Revision	-	-

Whole school challenge days



Homework across grades

HOMEWORK ACTIVITIES Autumn Term 2 2023 (Year 8) - Year 3/4 Journey Through Europe

WEEKLY HOMEWORK TASKS:
 Spelling - Practice to learn weekly spellings. A good strategy is for children to LOOK, COVER, WRITE, CHECK each word. Spellings will be set and tested every Tuesday.
 Reading - The expectation is to read (to an adult or independently) four times per week for 20 minutes. Please upload a photo, comment or video to Seesaw at least once a week. Log which book they are reading and how they did. Questions to support children's understanding of their reading can be found on the school website. Spine books will also be sent home as age appropriate texts that aren't book banded.
 Mathematics - Children should undertake at least one Tasking Tables APP test at home each week. Take a screen shot of their final result and upload to Seesaw.

For more challenge at home that supports your child's learning in school, please use one of the following tasks and share them on Seesaw. Children will be rewarded with a Skills Builder token for each task completed.

Confident Communicators	Resilient Learners	Aspirational Citizens	Community Champions
Communicate Confidently by researching any country in Europe to create an information poster to show what you have learned. Consider location, landmarks, travel, and interesting facts! Can you think of an interesting way of presenting your information?	Be a Creative, Resilient Learner by researching European flags, and using your art skills to recreate your favourite one! You could use colouring pencils or felt tips, collage using old magazines, tissue paper, or anything you can find! Ask your teacher if you would like to borrow some resources!	Be an Aspirational Citizen by writing a short story that is set in a European country. You could use one of the countries that we have been learning about in school, or carry out some research first.	Be a Community Champion by learning and playing a game with some of your friends or family. It could be a sport that you haven't tried before, a board or card game, or even a game of your own creation!
Communicate Confidently by writing a list of 5 questions that you would ask a person that lives in a country in Europe of your choice! Think really carefully about specific questions to find out as much as possible! What interesting facts would you want the answers to?	Be a Problem Solving, Resilient Learner by designing your own piece of cave art! Use the internet to research cave art, and use whatever materials you want to be to create your own artwork.	Be an Aspirational Citizen and write a silly story using some of your spelling words! You could choose a selection of words from different lists to fit into a very short story, make it as silly as you can!	Be a Community Champion by working with an adult or sibling to find out about the National funds for European countries. Can you find the national dishes for every European country? Which one is your favourite?

Skills Builder Summer Challenge

Name: _____ Class: _____

Task	Task	Task
Spelling You have been challenged to tell a group of people up to 5 'interesting facts' about yourself.	Leadership Interview a family member about their job. What is their job? Where do they work? What tasks do they do at work?	Problem Solving Go on a Shape Hunt. How many shapes can you spot in your house? Record examples of the same shape in different sizes.
Creativity Imagine the year in your house has turned to jelly. How would this change the way you live there? Can you and your family design a gelatin that would help you to live in a jelly house?	Aming High Create a Priority chart on empty paper. It is with 'happy' and 'sad' messages. People in your household can take a message from the jar when they are doing a task.	Aming High How many times can you catch a ball in 60 seconds? Can you beat your score tomorrow? When will your score be by the end of the week?
Leadership Choose a person or group as a leader. Around your drawing write down your leadership strengths. The things that make you a great leader!	Spelling Make a cake with a member of your family by playing a riddle.	Problem Solving Pretend please tell us why the activities have been completed. You can use pictures to help design your page on Wednesday. On September 1st to be entered into a prize draw.

Assessment data from different classes/year groups

Listening			Speaking			Problem Solving			Creativity			Staying Positive			Aiming High		
Baseline	Latest	Change	Baseline	Latest	Change	Baseline	Latest	Change	Baseline	Latest	Change	Baseline	Latest	Change	Baseline	Latest	Change
-0.75	0.0	0.75	-0.5	0.0	0.5	-0.75			0.5	1.0	0.5	-0.75					
-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5			-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5			-0.5		
-0.25	-0.5	-0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5					
-0.5			-0.5	-0.5	0.0	-0.5			-0.75			-0.75			-0.75		
-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25
-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5			-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5			-0.75		
-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.75	-0.25	0.5	-0.5			-0.75	-0.5	0.25	-0.5			-0.5		
-0.5	0.5	1.0	-0.5	0.0	0.5	0.0			-0.5	0.5	1.0	0.5			0.0	0.25	0.25
-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.25			-0.25			-0.25					
-0.75	-0.25	0.5	-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.25			-0.25	-0.5	-0.25						
-0.75	-0.25	0.5	-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.5	-0.25	0.25	-0.25	-0.25	0.0	-0.25		

Timetables showing essential skills from different classes/year groups

DAYS																		
MON	SKILLS BUILDER	ENG	ENG	ENG	ENG	MATHS	K, P	MATHS	SPORTS	SPORTS								
TUE	SKILLS BUILDER	MATHS	MATHS	MARA	MATHS	ENG	ENG	ENG	DRAW	DRAW								
WED	V.E.D	ENG	ENG	CRAFT	CRAFT	MATHS	K, P	SING	ENG	MATHS								
THU	V.E.D	MATHS	MATHS	MARA	MARA	MATHS	K, P	MATHS	LIB	MATHS								

Year	10:00 - 10:30	10:30 - 11:00	11:00 - 11:30	11:30 - 12:00	12:00 - 12:30	12:30 - 1:00	1:00 - 1:30	1:30 - 2:00	2:00 - 2:30	2:30 - 3:00	3:00 - 3:30	3:30 - 4:00	4:00 - 4:30	4:30 - 5:00	5:00 - 5:30	5:30 - 6:00	6:00 - 6:30	6:30 - 7:00
Y10 - Y11	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths
Y12 - Y13	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths



Principle 3

Measure

The principle

Effective schools and colleges assess learners' essential skills to support planning, teaching and tracking progression.

Why this matters

This principle matters because an informed understanding of learners' essential skill levels helps to set the right priorities in terms of teaching. For example, identifying the correct target skill steps for learners.

It is also important because assessment helps to track progress - both to encourage learners and educators to see the impact of their efforts, and also to make clear what is working most effectively in supporting learner progress in those skills.

What we should be aiming for

We should recognise that assessing essential skills is sometimes challenging, and so it is important to be as objective as possible. This means thinking carefully about learners' understanding of the underpinning knowledge for the skill steps and the consistency of how they demonstrate the skill steps.

While age- or stage-related expectations can be a helpful guide, it is important to recognise diversity in learners' needs, particularly where learners have additional or special educational needs.

How to put it into practice

Different approaches can be effective in assessing essential skills and help to provide the insights that we need to ensure progression:

- *Questioning:* The skill steps all have an underlying knowledge base which can be questioned and to assess learners' understanding as with any other knowledge. However, this is only the starting point because while this underpinning knowledge is important, it is not sufficient.
- *Observation:* Seeing whether learners actually use the essential skills in practice is therefore also important. In the Skills Builder Handbook, what an educator can look for when assessing learners is made clear.
- *Evidence building:* Additionally, learners can build out a portfolio of evidence against the skill steps. This can strengthen learners' self awareness of their own essential skills and also be an important formative tool.

In combination, these approaches can help provide critical formative insights into learners' essential skills - including which skill steps are already secure and therefore what the next focus should be.



Skills Builder Award descriptors

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Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Data from Skills Builder Hub showing assessments of learners (anonymised) • Data from Skills Builder Benchmark showing learner assessments (only aged 14+ and anonymised) • Your own data showing assessment of learners' essential skills (anonymised) • Evidence of learner reflections (anonymised) • Evidence of appropriate target setting process • Evidence of peer feedback (anonymised) Evidence can include photographs, news items, videos, documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find assessment tools for educators to use, and *self assessment* learning passports that allow learners to reflect on their essential skill steps offline. For older learners, you could also use Skills Builder Benchmark which combines learner self-assessment and educator feedback.

Reflection question

- How do you assess learners' essential skills to inform teaching and track progress?



Principle 3: Measure

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they assess learners' essential skills to support planning, teaching and tracking progression.



Hub data (anonymised)

Data from Skills Builder Hub showing assessments of learners (anonymised): Using the assessment tool on the Skills Builder Hub allows educators to baseline their class and track progress accurately over time. This data provides a clear picture of which skill steps are secure and where further teaching is needed for the group as a whole.



Benchmark data (anonymised)

Data from Skills Builder Benchmark showing learner assessments (only aged 14+ and anonymised): The Skills Builder Benchmark tool enables older learners to complete independent self-assessments to identify their own areas of strength and development. This data helps students build a personal mental map of their skills, helping them prepare for future transitions.



Educator assessment data (anonymised)

Your own data showing assessment of learners' essential skills (Anonymised): Institutions may choose to integrate the Universal Framework into their own internal tracking systems or spreadsheets to monitor skill development. This evidence demonstrates a commitment to using the framework as a consistent, quantifiable measure of growth across the entire curriculum.



Learner reflections (anonymised)

Evidence of learner reflections (Anonymised): Regular reflections, such as entries in floor books or digital portfolios, allow learners to consider how they have used specific skill steps in different contexts. These records show that students are engaging deeply with their own development and can articulate the progress they are making.



Target setting (anonymised)

Evidence of appropriate target setting process: Setting specific targets, such as SMART goals, ensures that every learner has a clear and manageable focus for their next step of development. This process uses assessment data to pitch learning correctly, ensuring that students are always challenged at the right level.



Peer feedback (anonymised)

Evidence of peer feedback (anonymised): Peer-assessment encourages students to recognise and celebrate essential skills in their classmates while reinforcing their own understanding of the framework. This collaborative approach provides diverse insights into how skills are being applied during team tasks or group projects.



Principle 4

Teach

The principle

Effective schools and colleges are making focused time available to directly and explicitly teach learners essential skill steps.

Why this matters

This principle matters because each of the skill steps has an underpinning knowledge content which learners need to acquire. Most of these concepts are best taught directly because they form tools which users can use in the future. For example, how to create a mind map, approaches to having a difficult conversation, or the difference between causes and effects are all directly teachable.

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

What we should be aiming for

The insight of what learners 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 learners pick up what we need them to achieve from the practice.

Instead, with the understanding gained from measuring those skills, we can directly teach the underpinning knowledge for the next skill step. That might mean teaching about what it means to demonstrate active listening, why and when using open questions is helpful, or how to create goals in your stretch zone.

While this underpinning knowledge is not sufficient by itself, it is necessary for learners to be able to use the skills effectively and transfer them between settings adeptly.

How to put it into practice

Schools and colleges find the approaches that work for them, depending on their context:

- *Create essential skills lessons:* This might only be between 20 minutes to 1 hour per week, focusing on a single skill step at a time and taking time to ensure it is built.
- *Deliberately teach essential skills:* If particular time is not available on the timetable, different subjects might take responsibility for different skill steps.
- *Directly instruct in the skills:* Using the Handbook pages that follow allows for the underpinning knowledge for each skill step to be directly taught.



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Descriptor	Some learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.	A majority of learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.	Almost all learners are directly taught essential skills using steps from the Universal Framework.
Reach	You should confirm that this has been achieved with at least some learners.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 50% of learners in the institution.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 80% of learners in the institution.
Evidence required	<i>At least two pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least three pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least four pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.
Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Data from Skills Builder Hub showing completion of short lessons or other direct instruction • Timetables or plans showing dedicated time for essential skills teaching • Lesson materials showing direct teaching of essential skills including plans, worksheets, or slides • Anonymised photographs of different year groups using Skills Builder Evidence can include photographs, screenshots, videos, or documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find *short lesson* resources which can be easily used by educators to teach the underpinning knowledge of each skill step. There are three twenty minute lessons for each skill step which take each of the three Building Blocks in turn along with activities and exercises to consolidate understanding.

Reflection question

- How are you ensuring that learners are being directly taught essential skills steps from the Universal Framework?



Principle 4: Teach

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they are making focused time available to directly and explicitly teach learners essential skill steps.



Hub data

Data from Skills Builder Hub showing completion of short lessons or other direct instruction: Using the Hub to track the completion of short lessons provides clear evidence that essential skills are being taught explicitly and in the correct sequence. This data ensures that every learner is receiving the targeted instruction required to progress through the framework.



Planning or timetables

Timetables or plans showing dedicated time for essential skills teaching: Allocating dedicated time on the school timetable ensures that essential skills are treated with the same importance as any other core subject. This purposeful scheduling allows for consistent, high-quality teaching that helps learners make steady progress throughout the year.



Lesson materials

Lesson materials showing direct teaching of essential skills including plans, worksheets, or slides: Using specific lesson plans and resources shows that the teaching of essential skills is grounded in the Universal Framework and tailored to the needs of the learners. These materials help to break down complex skills into manageable steps that students can easily understand and master.



Anonymised photographs

Anonymised photographs of different year groups using Skills Builder: Photographs of students across different year groups provide a clear visual record of how direct teaching is being delivered throughout the whole institution. They capture the active engagement of learners as they work through the framework and build their proficiency in each skill.



Evidence examples

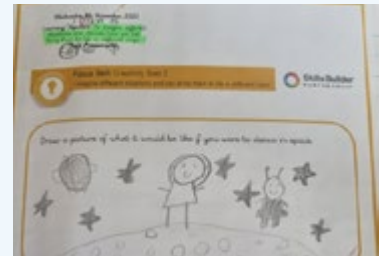
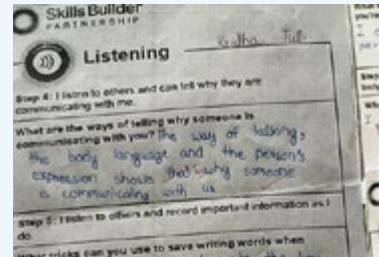
Lesson activities



Hub Short lesson



Students' work samples



Step specific planning documents

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Teach Short lesson Step 5 In this short lesson, learners create a poster to celebrate the diversity within a team they belong to.	Apply Lend an ear 1. Listen to people that you spend time with regularly, for example, colleagues or classmates. 2. Consider: Do they have the same beliefs, background and culture as you? Do you know anything about their culture or religion? Do you know if their culture, religion or background cause any regular challenges for them? 3. Seek to understand more about their culture and lives.	Reflect Recap learning from lesson 1. Which skill were we focusing on? Who was able to demonstrate this skill? Reflect or discuss your understanding of this step ✓ What does behaving positively look like to you? ✓ When do you find it easier or more challenging to work with others in a positive way? ✓ Can you give examples? Students to complete 1 step 5 reflection from the Skills Builder Hub.	Teach Short lesson Step 5 In this short lesson, learners give advice to a team who are welcoming a new group member.	Apply Advice time Reflecting on the learning from last lesson, where students had to welcome a new group member. • Students to create a poster of 'top tips' to make every member of the group feel valued. Or • Role play a scenario where students welcome a new member to the group.	Reflect Recap learning from lesson 4 and 5. Which skill were we focusing on? Who was able to demonstrate this skill? Reflect or discuss your understanding of this step ✓ What does behaving positively look like to you? ✓ When do you find it easier or more challenging to work with others in a positive way? ✓ Can you give examples? Students to complete 2 step 5 reflections from the Skills Builder Hub. Reward students with the Skills Builder Hub.



Principle 5

Practise

The principle

Effective schools and colleges are practising learners' essential skills across the curriculum.

Why this matters

While it is vital to teach essential skills directly, that is not sufficient by itself. As with all skills, deliberate practice across different areas of the curriculum is important for them to become intuitive to learners.

This principle also supports making the most of opportunities to apply those skills to other learning across the curriculum, and using opportunities for deliberate application and reflection on those skills in other contexts.

This ensures learners connect essential skills to wider learning in the curriculum and the full range of different subject areas.

What we should be aiming for

The importance of direct teaching in the skills that was highlighted in the previous principle does not mean that practising is less important. Deliberate practice is about focused attention on a particular goal, in this case by focusing on a target range of skill steps.

Schools and colleges who do this well weave opportunities 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 practise applying the appropriate *four-step range* of the Universal 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.

How to put it into practice

Schools and colleges who are applying this principle effectively often:

- *Plan for how essential skills will be practiced in the curriculum:* A strategic view is required for how different skill steps can be practiced in the curriculum so that every subject area has a stake in helping learners practice their essential skills.
- *Using the four-step range:* The four step range is a powerful tool for designing activities across the curriculum to deliberately practice essential skills. The same activity can be used while allowing learners to practice skill steps at their right level.
- *Reinforce regularly:* Schools and colleges often find other opportunities to reinforce the continuity of essential skills in different curriculum and subject areas - for example, through displays, inclusion in planners or on exercise books. It is good to be consistently explicit about the essential skill steps being built.



Skills Builder Award descriptors

The descriptors from the Skills Builder Awards help to define good practice:

	 Bronze Award	 Silver Award	 Gold Award
Descriptor	Some learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.	A majority of learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.	Almost all learners practise essential skills across the curriculum in different subject areas.
Reach	You should confirm that this has been achieved with at least some learners.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 50% of learners in the institution.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 80% of learners in the institution.
Evidence required	<i>At least two pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least three pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least four pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.
Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Essential skills incorporated into curriculum teaching plans • Lesson materials showing essential skills in other curriculum lessons including plans, worksheets, or slides • Materials showing connections being made between subjects and essential skills practicing • Anonymised photographs of essential skills being practiced through curriculum learning Evidence can include photographs, screenshots, videos, or documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find *curriculum guides* which can be easily used by educators of different subjects to think about how they can effectively practice essential skills as part of their subject content. These help model how to use the four-step range too which is fully explained in the Skills Builder Handbook.

Reflection question

- How do you ensure that learners have opportunities to practice their essential skills across the curriculum?



Principle 5: Practise

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they are practising learners' essential skills across the curriculum.



Curriculum teaching plans

Essential skills incorporated into curriculum teaching plans: Including essential skills within curriculum planning ensures that skill development is a deliberate part of every subject rather than an optional extra. This long-term view helps staff identify natural links where learners can reinforce their skills during their regular, everyday lessons.



Lesson materials

Lesson materials showing essential skills in other curriculum lessons including plans, worksheets, or slides: Adding skill icons and descriptors to worksheets or presentation slides keeps the Universal Framework visible during daily learning. These visual cues encourage both teachers and students to explicitly name and focus on the specific skills they are using as they work through the curriculum.



Planning for connections

Materials showing connections being made between subjects and essential skills practising: Resources like knowledge organisers can be used to show how specific skill steps relate directly to different areas of study. Highlighting these connections helps learners understand that the skills they use in one subject, such as Problem Solving in Maths, are exactly the same ones they need to succeed in another.



Anonymised photographs

Anonymised photographs of essential skills being practised through curriculum learning: Anonymised photographs of students working on curriculum tasks provide a clear visual record of essential skills being applied in real-time. These images demonstrate how learners are actively turning the framework steps into practical habits during their regular classroom activities.



Evidence examples

Essential skills in a lesson plan from different subjects

Legal studies



Art and design



Essential skills in extra curricular activities

Cricket club



School council



Duke of Edinburgh with mapped essential skills

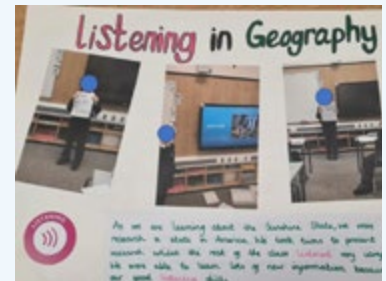


Essential skills present in subject based activities

English



Geography



Music



Reflection at the end of all lessons



List of skills for extra curricular activities

Club	Description	Main Skills	Career Explorer
Lego Club	Lego Club is a club to let your imagination run wild. Plan and build whatever your heart desires independently or as a team before sharing your design with the group.		Builder, architect, computer designer, engineer
Times Table Rock stars	An opportunity to hone your skills and aim high as you smash personal targets and challenge your friends to aim high.		Accountant, teacher, cashier, bank clerk
Gymnastics Club	A series of workshops where you will get the chance to develop your skills and compete against others.		Coach, physiotherapist, athlete, sports parolist, sports pundit
Reading Club	Are you buzzing about books? This is the club for you! In reading club, we will read together and talk about our favourite books, authors and genres.		Author, illustrator, librarian, researcher, journalist, news presenter, actor



Principle 6

Apply

The principle

Effective schools and colleges are using projects and links to the wider world to allow learners to apply their essential skills.

Why this matters

This principle matters because it is vital for learners to connect the essential skills that they have been developing to their real-life application.

This supports learners to build up the experience of using these skills which ultimately makes them intuitive and transferable to other contexts.

It also ensures that they can see the value of their skills and can articulate examples of where they have put them into practice.

What we should be aiming for

Learners should ideally have varied, extended opportunities to put their essential skills to use. When combined with connections to the working world this particularly helps skills to be transferable across life and beyond education.

Schools and colleges can create extended opportunities to apply essential skills in different ways. Some use a specific project as a basis to apply the essential skills to a real-life challenge like creating a radio show or a school performance or creating an extended research project.

Extended opportunities outside the classroom are also helpful as they support the skills' transferability into the workplace. That might be through community or extracurricular projects or engagements with the world of work like visits, volunteering or work experience.

How to put it into practice

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

- *Project-based learning*: The project can be focused on a challenge or problem linked to curriculum learning.
- *Working with external partners*: Depending on the context of the school or college, it might mean taking learners out of the classroom to engage with employers or other organisations
- *World of work*: Finally, for older learners, visits, volunteering or work experience can all be valuable extended opportunities to put their essential skills to use.



Skills Builder Award descriptors

The descriptors from the Skills Builder Awards help to define good practice:

	 Bronze Award	 Silver Award	 Gold Award
Descriptor	Some learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.	A majority of learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.	Almost all learners have real life experiences to apply and reflect on essential skills.
Reach	You should confirm that this has been achieved with at least some learners.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 50% of learners in the institution.	You should confirm that this has been achieved with more than 80% of learners in the institution.
Evidence required	<i>At least two pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least three pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.	<i>At least four pieces of evidence</i> from the last 12 months, which shows the range of learner ages reached.
Evidence options	Potential pieces of evidence can include: • Evidence of projects learners have completed with community or employer links with how they have applied skill steps directly • Evidence of using projects or challenge days through the Skills Builder Hub • Photographs of essential skills connecting with activities beyond the curriculum • Anonymised learner reflections on developing essential skills through projects, employer or community engagement • Overviews of extra-curricular activities, linked to essential skills Evidence can include photographs, screenshots, videos, or documents.		

Skills Builder Hub resources

On Hub, you can find *challenge days* (projects to complete in one day), *extended projects* of 10 taught hours, and a *guide* on how to create your own projects. There are also resources to support *work experience* and *virtual employer encounters*.

Reflection question

- How do your learners apply their essential skills through projects or other real-life experiences?



Principle 6: Apply

Putting the principle into practice

There are lots of ways that schools and colleges around the world have demonstrated that they are using projects and links to the wider world to allow learners to apply their essential skills.



Projects with community or employers

Evidence of projects learners have completed with community or employer links with how they have applied skill steps directly: Collaborating on projects with local employers or community groups allows learners to apply their essential skills to genuine, real-world problems. This experience helps students see the direct relevance of specific skill steps in a professional setting, making their development feel more meaningful and tangible.



Hub Projects or Challenge Days

Evidence of using projects or challenge days through the Skills Builder Hub: Using the structured projects and Challenge Days available on the Hub provides an immersive way for learners to practice multiple skills simultaneously in a high-impact environment. These resources are designed to simulate real-life scenarios, helping students to consolidate their learning and build confidence through collaborative tasks.



Anonymised photographs

Photographs of essential skills connecting with activities beyond the curriculum: Photographs of students using their skills during off-site visits or workplace encounters capture the moment these essential skills are transferred to new settings. These visual records provide clear evidence that learners can adapt their skills to different environments, from a football pitch to a professional office.



Anonymised learner reflections

Anonymised learner reflections on developing essential skills through projects, employer or community engagement: Capturing reflections from learners after they engage with employers helps them to articulate how they have used their skills in a non-educational context. This process of deep thinking ensures that students understand their own progress and can clearly explain their strengths to others as they prepare for future transitions.



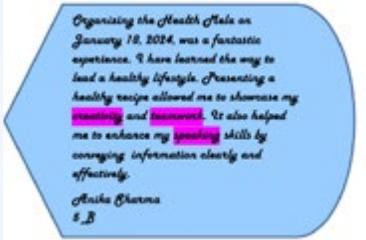
Extra-curricular activity plans

Overviews of extra-curricular activities, linked to essential skills: Mapping essential skills to extra-curricular clubs and activities demonstrates that skill-building is a consistent priority across the entire institution. By highlighting these links, educators help learners see that their hobbies and interests are valuable opportunities to keep practising and refining their essential skills.

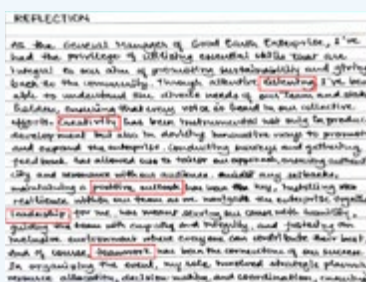


Evidence examples

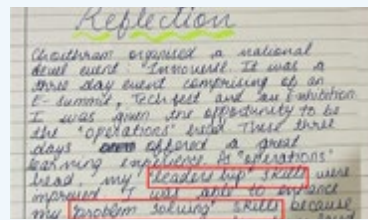
Projects reflecting on essential skills



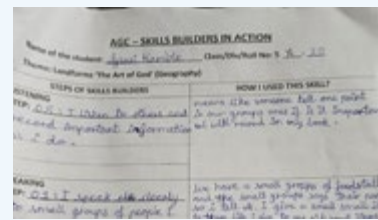
Competitions linking essential skills



Essential skill festivals with reflection



Exhibition with essential skills and student reflection



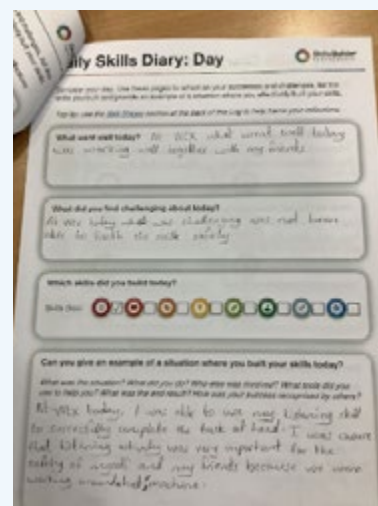
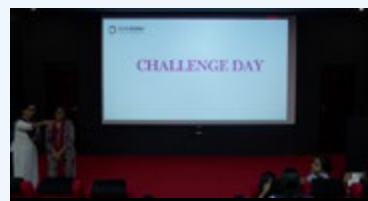
Excursions reflecting on skills



Work experience linking essential skills



A Skills Builder Challenge Day or Project





Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP

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