

Essential Student Skills Project

1) Outline the project or initiative and what makes it innovative and inspiring (max 300 words).

The need for high quality induction and support materials is a given at any university, as is the fact that these materials should be available to *all* students irrespective of course, location or mode of study. In the past different colleges and programmes have provided different materials covering the same or slightly different topics. Some of these resources have been honed over several years, reflecting valuable feedback, however, maximising the benefits of this process across the University has yet to happen and not all students have had access to the same materials.

The Educational Development Unit (EDU)'s *Essential Student Skills* project sought to level the playing field and offer *all* students the same high quality resources via an online portal (Figure 1). The resources are designed to cover the whole student journey and are generic in nature. Each resource can be used as a 'stand-alone' resource or be contextualised by academic staff for use in their own subjects.

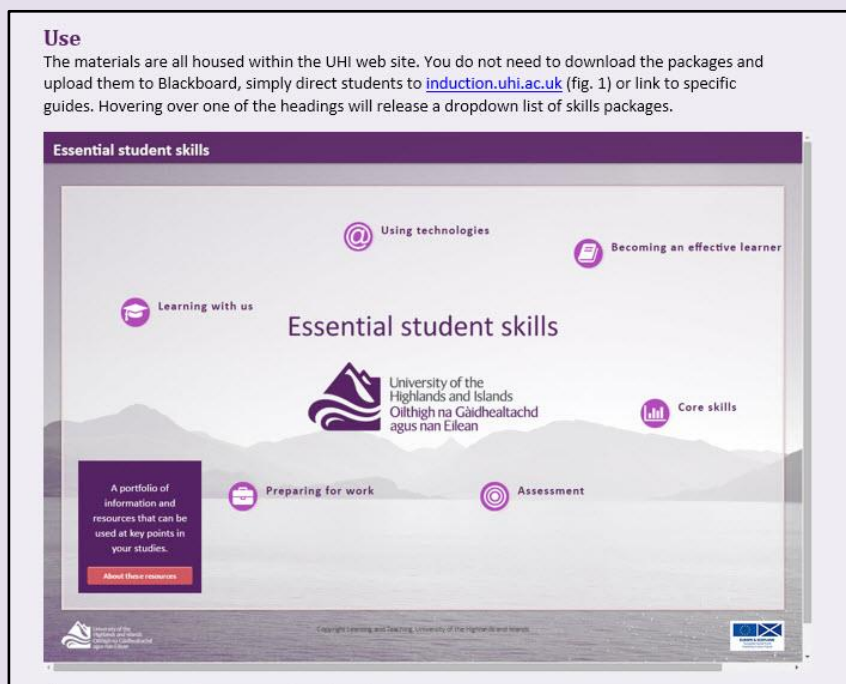


Figure 1 Essential student skills web portal

Using a single point of delivery ensures equity of experience and the currency of the material (only one version needs to be updated). Students are able to become familiar with the resources prior to enrolment (unlike materials on the VLE); a considerable benefit in preparation for study. In addition they can access the online resources in their own time and return to them as often as required throughout their studies.

It was considered crucial that the materials built on existing materials rather than being created from scratch. The project would not have been possible without staff willingly sharing their resources and the 20 packages created by the project represent the culmination of a long process of amalgamating and refining such existing resources. The team are proud of the fact that the resources created emerged from actual practice at UHI.

2) Detail how the project or initiative was delivered, from the planning stage through to its successful conclusion (max 300 words). Include details of timing* and funding.

In 2012 Evelyn Campbell and Heather Fotheringham proposed the creation of University-wide induction resources. This idea became reality when the EDU was approached to create a set of high quality online materials, which could be accessed when desired and on any type of device.

After project approval a team was established, a PID* completed (including aims, outcomes and stakeholders) and a timeline agreed. The project was led by Andy Blackall (EDU) with Heather Fotheringham and Ian Horne as Academic Development Advisors (ADAs).

A list of topics was agreed and a scoping exercise undertaken to collate existing resources from across the University. This gave the project team a grasp of where materials could be repurposed, and where they would have to be newly created. In fact, only three of the final 20 packages consist of new material, with the others based on existing material. Much of this material came from an existing study skills unit (*Skills4Study*, written by Heather Fotheringham). Other material was sourced from UHI programmes: BA Health Science, BA Golf Management and MSc Sustainable Rural Development, and some externally from the University of Leicester.

The ADAs wrote and revised content which was then put online by EDU developers. EDU expertise was used to introduce interest and interaction into the materials wherever possible to cater for a broad range of learning styles. As each resource was drafted it was reviewed internally. Once a complete set of resources was ready staff beyond the project team were invited to give feedback. A number of people were involved in providing source materials, peer reviewing and giving advice (listed in the Appendix). The project ran from 3 February to 31 July 2014.

The portal has been available since September 2014. The project was signed off as successfully complete on 27 October 2014.

* Project Initiation Document

3) Outline the project or initiative's outcome(s) within the university and beyond with relevant supporting evidence, metrics or testimony where appropriate (max 400 words).

Creation of flexible and accessible resources

The resources fall into six categories and individual RLOs are found within the categories and can be viewed in isolation or as part of a larger learning experience. The content is mobile compatible, resizing automatically to support viewing on various devices (Figures 2 and 3 below). The design of the resources allowed for additional content to be added in the future, supporting currency and expansion of the support offered to students.

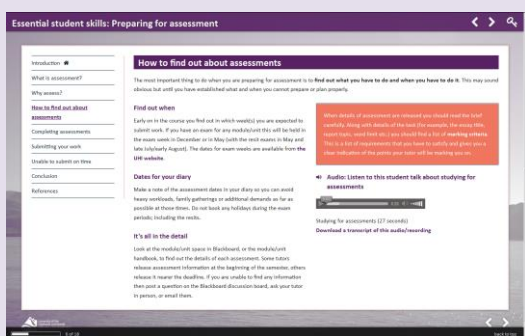


Figure 2 How to find out about assessments on a mobile device

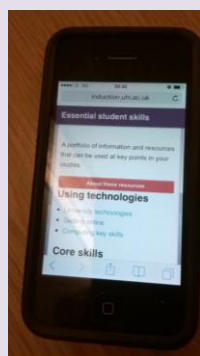


Figure 3 Essential student skills displayed

Preparing students for blended learning

Most programmes at UHI use a blend of delivery formats and one of the key outcomes of the ESS project was to prepare students for this new style of learning. Three of the 20 ESS packages are designed to introduce students to the tools used for communication and collaboration in a blended learning setting. The resources themselves also provide an experience of learning online.

Staff engagement

A valuable benefit of this project was the staff engagement which took place- particularly in the initial scoping exercise. A number of staff also engaged in the peer review of the material during the development process. Feedback was very positive and provided excellent constructive comments.

After completion, the materials were disseminated to a number of groups within the University as well as through the ongoing programme of staff engagement. Staff have particularly welcomed the mobile compatible web portal design as this widened dissemination options and has helped support the promotion of the resources (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Tweet issued by Moray College on 8/9/14

Student engagement

Student feedback on a draft of the resources was provided by the Subject Network Student Officers (SNSOs) at a workshop held on 29 April 2014. The feedback was again positive and a number of their recommendations were taken on board following the session.

Use of materials

To date, the materials have been widely used by students. Website usage statistics show a spike of activity during September (in excess of 10,000 page views). Statistics also show that users have engaged with different sections at different times, as planned by the project team. For example, engagement early in the year has been with Learning with us section and later usage with the Assessment section.

The materials have also been adopted by School of History as the core of their induction programmes. Students receive a combination of ESS material and subject-specific material; demonstrating that the generic nature and planned flexibility of the resources has been successful.

Appendix: Staff involved in the project

Staff who wrote/provided material

Allane Hay, Moray College UHI
Colleen Maclean, Perth College UHI
Evelyn Campbell, Inverness College UHI
Michael Smith, Lews Castle College UHI
Rosie Alexander, Executive Office UHI
Ruth Priest, Shetland College UHI
Sandy Iliffe, Inverness College UHI

Staff involved in peer review, proofreading etc.

Alice Mongiello	Hazel Maguire	Mairi MacCuaig
Andy Fraser	Helen Anton	Maria Preston
Barbara Ziehm	Helen Doig	Marion MacDonald
Bryan Peterson	Iain MacInnes	Mark Ross
Catherine Campbell	Iain Morrison	Melissa Schouten
David Worthington	Ian Graham	Morag Gilmour
Dhonna McCallum	Jackie MacPherson	Murdo Macmillan
Duncan Ireland	Jane MacIntosh	Murray Stark
Elaine Macdonald	Kathleen Murray	Nicola Smith
Elizabeth McHugh	Lin Kengen	Simon Clarke
Evelyn Campbell	Linda McLaughlan	Simon Martin
Fiona Ryan	Lucy Huby	Susan Berry
Gisele Reid	Lyndsay MacColl	Tracey Cruickshank