

NEXTGEN: HNC ACCOUNTING



META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice
on incorporating meta-skills.

NEXTGEN: HNC ACCOUNTING — META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

We asked subject-specialist writers with experience of delivering meta-skills in NextGen: HN to write a 'Meta-skills in practice' guide, giving us a sense of how they approach the integration of meta-skills within course delivery. In this way, practitioners could share real-life insights, practical advice and examples to course teams who are new to NextGen Qualifications and meta-skills.

Margaret, a lecturer in accounting, explained in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Accountancy.

TOP TIPS

- **Talk meta-skills.** Use the language of meta-skills frequently so that this becomes part of the classroom vocabulary.
- **Link them to work.** Get your students to buy into meta-skills by aligning them with future practice. The meta-skills outcome, like the appraisals they will receive in the workplace, offer opportunities for development — they are not there to highlight failings and weaknesses.
- **Exploit practical opportunities.** Presentations give an obvious opportunity to work on multiple meta-skills. We use the theory part of Financial Accounting as a way to get the students to produce posters, and present to the rest of the class. When they are working in groups, mix them up to keep it fresh.
- **Monitor progress.** Keep the objectives for each task as SMART as possible and track them as you go.
- **Model meta-skills.** With innovation, for example, state at the start of new tasks you've designed that you're trying to be innovative. Ask learners for feedback and show how you learn from it.
- **Let the journey be their own.** Learners must feel acknowledged for what they have achieved. Help them to recognise progress from *their* starting point, and remind them not to compare themselves to others.

META-SKILLS IN ACCOUNTING

Give us a general introduction to meta-skills within the context of your subject area.

Meta-skills have been added into the HNC qualification to help students develop an

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understanding of what they will need to work on to develop as an individual. These skills are transferable and so fit in with the ethos of strengthening candidates holistically, as well as our specific subject area.

Meta-skills help to prepare learners for

continuous professional learning and competence development in the face of oft-changing and complex regulations. Organisation and time management, for example, are not only vital skills for our course, but also help to prepare learners well for the workplace. Accounting is a busy industry, where customer service responsibilities sit alongside the need to manage huge volumes of data with care. This is essential to minimise the risk of data breaches or missed deadlines. Finally, the technical skills required to use accountancy-related technology, software and processes require confident and curious lifelong learners.

Whilst we don't ask learners to develop their meta-skills to a specific level, the process allows learners to develop an understanding of the distance covered and what they have attained. It is

important to encourage the students to take ownership of this process. They should be picking the area to work on and choosing how to improve

their skills. It is the tutor's role to support this process and to offer opportunities for the student to showcase what they have learned. Tutors should also highlight the accountancy-related employability skills that students are developing hand-in-hand with their meta-skills, and help them to showcase these skills to potential employers.

“ ...encourage students to take ownership of their meta-skills development

META-SKILLS CATEGORIES IN CONTEXT

Explain the three meta-skills categories as they relate to your subject.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Our learners need to be able to quickly find information, manage their time and utilise resources to meet deadlines. In work and study, the ability to focus is important. These skills can be developed through research-based tasks that require the learner to look at and condense a large volume of sources.

Within industry, accountants must pay close attention to detail, given that even the smallest of errors can result in major financial discrepancies for individuals or businesses. Integrity is paramount. Strict codes of professional conduct must be adhered to; future accountants must be objective, ethical, and honest in their work.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Communication skills, written and oral, are integrated into coursework presentations — both in terms of what is presented and how it is presented. It is about the student considering the audience's ability and understanding, alongside how to convey information effectively. This skill also involves feeling — their ability to 'read the room', think about others' needs, and how they might react to or engage with you.

In industry, accountants are required to build and maintain good relationships with colleagues, clients and other stakeholders. They must be able to make sense of the information and communicate complex numerical data in a way that others can understand and interpret. Depending on the role or the project, accountants need to be able to work independently or in a team — demonstrating strong collaborative skills and the capacity to lead, support and develop others

INNOVATION

Within the course, we build curiosity through the learners' desire to explore and build on concepts. This is where we ask individual learners to read around a topic in which they are interested — or develop their own topic — and present what they have learned.

Encourage your learners to be innovative and creative in their presentations.

Both during the course and in industry, sense-making and critical thinking are important skills when working with financial data. Accountancy students must learn the importance of accuracy. Accountancy work requires problem solvers and competent decision makers who can recognise the significance and implications of financial data, as well as its anomalies.

INTRODUCING AND UNDERSTANDING META-SKILLS

How do you help learners to buy in to meta-skills and understand their relevance?

We introduced meta-skills in the first week of the relevant course: in the HNC, we use the unit Professional Considerations in Accounting (PCA) to introduce meta-skills. This unit covers the ethics element of the course. In the HND, we use the unit Business Performance and Managing Risk.

To get buy in from students, they must fully understand the meta-skills and where they sit within them. We covered this during the first few weeks of the course by reviewing the definitions of the meta-skills. We worked with the learners to develop an

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understanding of the meta-skills and how they relate to the course and the accountancy industries. We also introduced types of activities that will help them to develop these skills, starting with exercises to find the learners' skill base level.

In the HNC, learners completed **three reflective tasks** and then completed a formal wheel to record their baseline level. Using the wheel-style method allows students to plot and visualise the current level of meta-skills that they feel they have achieved, to return to later in the course.

In the HND, learners completed the wheel earlier, as learners already knew how to judge their ability and confidence levels in terms of meta-skills.

HND learners might find it helpful to consider the relationship between meta-skills and professional standards and behaviours, such the ICAS code of ethics.

DEVELOPING META-SKILLS

Learners select specific meta-skills to develop over a session, semester or year, and we may discuss key skills as a class. But,

given that meta-skills are also embedded and linked, others will naturally develop with time. It is useful to acknowledge and recognise

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this fact, but it's also important to keep the student focused so that they can clearly see the progress they are making towards their specific goals.

Currently, we introduce meta-skills in the first weeks of term and work on the specific skills in that course. We will always acknowledge the work learners do in other courses, in which they are also developing meta skills, i.e. a presentation or report in another subject.

Within the PCA unit, we:

- looked at professional ethics and considered how this relates to the development of meta-skills
- asked the students to produce a mouse mat that showed creativity, IT and curiosity
- asked learners to review an airline using a management model. This allowed students to consolidate a lot of information and prioritise what they shared in a written report.
- focused on learners' ability to look subjectively at information around contentious subjects; like, should there be an upper limit on driving, or should school uniforms be mandatory? These were group presentations that allowed for teamworking and reflection on how they present.

At HNC, we set goals just after the October break. These were done in a one-to-one meeting where the student and lecturer both discussed and agreed on the student's main focus. They were encouraged to not be too ambitious with the number of goals that they chose — three is enough.

At HND, where learners were already familiar with meta-skills and the development process, this was done with the wheel in week one.

GENERATING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Meta-skills need to be considered in several ways to make a fair assessment.

LOOK AT OVERALL IMPROVEMENT

A student who was unwilling to give a presentation and who is now presenting (even if there's still potential for growth) has made a huge improvement. A student who goes from facing the board reading slides to speaking to the audience has also improved. It is not about who has achieved the most; it is about recognising the *progress* of both students, which is unique to them.

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MEASURE AGAINST GOALS

We believe that feedback and reviews should be positive and encouraging. To do this, we found it important to set goals that are as SMART as possible (Specific to them, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound). By doing this, praise and acknowledgement can be used and goals can be reset regularly. This may mean that we are able to clearly track the progress, or we may find that there are moments when they fall back.

LET THEM GET THINGS WRONG

Let the class have successes and failures. We are thought to learn more from our mistakes. Give them lots of opportunities to work at and be assessed on their meta-skills. It's essential to build meta-skills into the other tasks that need to be completed for the course.

We gather evidence throughout the academic year. For each task that a student completes, they should consider what meta-skills are involved, as they are written in the task instructions.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

The main review is in the final presentations at the end of the course. In the HNC, learners complete their reflections in the sustainability presentation at the end of the year. In the HND, this presentation was on MIS systems. Indeed, the presentation itself embodies many of the student's meta-skills, including social intelligence, curiosity, and the ability to compile and communicate information. We ask students to discuss their meta-skills journey during the presentations: what they focused on, and the change they have experienced. It can also be beneficial at this point to ask them to think about their meta-skills development goals for next year.