

NEXTGEN: HNC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH



META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice
on incorporating meta-skills.

NEXTGEN: HNC PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH — META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

We asked subject-specialist writers with experience of delivering meta-skills in NextGen: HN Qualifications 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 with course teams who are new to NextGen Qualifications and meta-skills.

Lee and Sarah, lecturers in Sports and Fitness, explain in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate, and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Physical Activity and Health.

TOP TIPS

- **Get started on meta-skills within non-advanced programmes** to smooth the transition into the HNC.
- **Introduce meta-skills as early as possible** in the course — ideally with the entire team contextualising them in all units and discussions from the very beginning.
- **Discuss meta-skills with partnership organisations**; this is particularly relevant to placement providers who may provide placement job descriptors that could mention meta-skills development.
- **Give feedback on students' initial meta-skills.** If possible, record it and include information on contextualisation, signposting opportunities to develop specific meta-skills during the course.
- **Embed meta-skills icons into learning and teaching resources** to help lecturers and learners identify opportunities for meta-skills development..

META-SKILLS IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH

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

Meta-skills are defined, transferable skills that can contribute to a student's approach to learning, and to their eventual success and employment. They are highly valued in the physical activity and health industry. The HNC is mapped to the Professional Standards within the Chartered Institute for the Management of Physical Activity and Health's (CIMSPA) framework for Gym Practitioner, Group Practitioner and Health Navigator. CIMSPA recognition requires a commitment to career-long continuous professional development (CPD) which aligns well with the inclusion of meta-skills.

Meta-skills foster an ongoing enthusiasm for and commitment to lifelong learning. They serve as the basis for knowing how to learn new skills, so that you can stay deployable within your occupational role and maintain your professional status. This is absolutely essential, especially as employers in this sector are prioritising behavioural meta-skills over technical know-how and daily operational duties, driving towards a workforce that is more adaptable and responsive to change.

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META-SKILLS CATEGORIES IN CONTEXT

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

SELF-MANAGEMENT

At the core of self-management is self-awareness, an absolutely key skill in the physical activity and health industry. Many graduates will move into self-employment, and working autonomously — even in a more traditional job — using independent thought, good judgement and effective decision-making is crucial. Reflective practitioners won't shy away from change, and will constantly seek out new opportunities for improvement

within this fast-paced industry. Nurturing an ability to cope with ongoing change and maintain good levels of wellbeing is key, and sets a good example.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The ability to connect and collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds is crucial. Those who succeed in this field continually strive to make a difference within their communities, using strong communication skills and empathy.

INNOVATION

Within the world of physical activity and health, we are faced with an ever-changing landscape of research, and the constant emergence of new technologies. To thrive in this environment, it is important to be able to make sense of this information, remain curious and to be bold and creative.

INTRODUCING AND UNDERSTANDING META-SKILLS

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

In an ideal world, all learners arriving on the course would hold a general understanding of meta-skills. As this is not always the case, introducing meta-skills as early as possible is key to establishing a holistic approach. The first few weeks of the Preparing to Work in

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the Physical Activity and Health Industry unit provides an excellent starting point. The SQA Academy Meta-skills course provides an opportunity to complete formal learning. But, it's the in-class discussions, where we break the meta-skills down and use real-life contextualised examples and language, that really help

engage learners. The infographics produced by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) support rich group discussion.

DEVELOPING META-SKILLS

Tell us about your experiences, hindsight, and future plans. Where do meta-skills fit most naturally in your course delivery?

The Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry unit includes the meta-skills outcome. This is an ideal platform from which encourage learners to ascertain who they are and where they are starting their journey from, within the context of meta-skills. We used the range of resources published by SDS to support the course team knowledge and understanding alongside classroom activities. We also found these tools useful for supporting learners: SQA Academy Meta-skills courses, and SDS' meta-skills profiling tool, self-assessment tool and self-evaluation wheel.

Time was taken to ensure that the learners understood the opportunities for developing meta-skills within the course framework. However, it was important for them to understand that they are not restricted to these; authentic development may occur at different times throughout the course. We produced a mapping document to signpost meta-skills development opportunities, and link them within the unit outcomes. This document initially pulled information from the unit specifications. It has now been enhanced, however, building on the team's experience of running the course units.

To allow authentic development of meta-skills, the entire course team took every opportunity to signpost opportunities, and ensured that conversations with group (guidance) tutors always made reference to them.

The grading conversations at the end of the first term allowed for deeper and more meaningful coaching conversations around meta-skills development, where we used documentation, such

as the self-evaluation wheel, to support teachers. To truly embed meta-skills, the conversations had to become a natural part of everyday learning and teaching.

“
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GENERATING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

We've produced guidance around the assessment of meta-skills. There's quite a lot of flexibility around assessment evidence. Can you give us a sense of what you've been doing in this space?

To build a foundational understanding, all learners took the Introducing Meta-skills SQA Academy course. This engagement can be recorded to cover initial formal evidence around meta-skills understanding.

Informal, formative assessment was carried out in the classroom, as learners discussed

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their thoughts and feelings around the physical activity and health industry, and what support they thought would help them succeed. It was really important, at that stage, to break down the meta-skills language into more user-friendly terminology, and use real-world examples to cement understanding. The use of the SDS toolkit captured learners' evidence of self-analysis, which

they could complete electronically and store for future reference.

Learners' experiences with the self-evaluation wheel was used as a reference point during the grading conversations at the end of the first term. This then helped lecturers to coach learners on setting SMART targets to develop or nurture their strengths. The group and guidance tutor made notes during the meetings which captured evidence around goal setting.

ENSURING LEARNERS CAN DEVELOP META-SKILLS IN EVERY UNIT

It became clear within the first year of delivery that we didn't want this to be the only time that meta-skills development was 'captured', so we made a point of ensuring that all meta-skills development opportunities were identified in the course framework. The course contains vast opportunities for self-evaluation, which in itself involves thinking about meta-skills. Many of the practical elements of delivery require a reflective piece;

for example, the work placement activity (Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry), alongside delivering gym inductions, one-to-one client work or group exercise (Exercise Practitioner 1). The Gym Practitioner 1 unit naturally involves ongoing consideration of meta-skills development and includes weekly session feedback. In addition, when the learner evaluates the gym programme/project as a whole, meta-skills evaluation is included.

There are therefore many opportunities to embed and reflect upon meta-skills development across the entire framework. Whilst these unit outcomes provide holistic evidence for continuing meta-skills development and reflection, they all map into outcome 6 in the Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry unit.

INVOLVING META-SKILLS AT THE PLANNING STAGE

Consideration and goal setting should form part of the planning processes across a multitude of units within the framework too. Naturally, within the mandatory framework, outcome 2 in Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry provides an opportunity to embed meta-skills development into placement objectives. There are opportunities within the optional unit set too. In Research Skills for Sport and Physical Activity, learners are tasked to formulate a research plan, and their considered objectives could relate to meta-skills development throughout the research project. Other units where this would sit naturally include the optional unit Organising and Delivering a Physical Activity and Health Event. The course team have commented upon the rich opportunities presented in this unit, in particular around social intelligence.

There are several opportunities to cross-assess the meta-skills outcome 8 in the unit Preparing to Work in the

Physical Activity and Health Industry, as we show below. The following list is not exhaustive and lecturers should cross-assess where possible. The capture of evidence around meta-skills should feel seamless and a natural part of our planning and reflective practice.

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Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry

Outcome 2

- Planning of work placement aim and objectives
- Evaluation of work placement

Exercise Practitioner 1

Outcome 6

- Group induction evaluation
- One-to-one client work evaluation
- Group training evaluation

Research Skills for Sport and Physical Activity

Outcome 1

- Objective for meta-skills development in planning piece

Outcome 3

- Evaluation of research project could include an appraisal of meta-skills development

Organising and Delivering a Physical Activity and Health Event

Outcome 1

- Event plan

Outcome 4

- Event evaluation that embeds personal contribution

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED RESOURCES AND APPROACHES

- Contextualise meta-skills to work and study
- Use SDS meta-skills infographics and toolkit (especially the self-evaluation wheel)
- Encourage students to complete the SQA Academy module Introducing Meta-skills
- Use SMART targets
- Carry out evaluations: placement activity, gym-based inductions (individual and group), 8-week gym-based exercise programme, group exercise session, personal contribution to event
- Schedule professional discussions and guidance/grading feedback