NEXTGEN: HNC SOCIAL SERVICES

META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice on incorporating meta-skills.

HIGHER NATIONAL XSQA

NEXTGEN: HNC SOCIAL SERVICES — 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 to course teams coming new to NextGen and meta-skills.

Diane, a qualifications supervisor, explains in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate, and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Social Services.

TOP TIPS

— **Use group activities to profile and contextualise meta-skills**; encourage learners to come up with their own activity ideas
— **Start baseline assessments early** on in delivery to embed meta-skills
— **Prompt learners to record their meta-skill development activities**, perhaps by scheduling it in the timetable
— **Try to integrate meta-skills** with other evidence requirements and outcomes to maintain their relevance throughout the course
— **Don't panic! Meta-skills aren't new** — we're just talking about them differently. Many learners will have come across them before.

META-SKILLS IN SOCIAL SERVICES

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

Working in social services requires many skills to both support vulnerable people and meet the statutory requirements for the role. All meta-skills are relevant to social services, from communication and collaboration through to leadership and accountability. Meta-skills reflection and development can enhance provision and ensure

learners develop skills that meet Health and Social Care Standards and the Scottish Social Service Council's (SSSC) Code of Practice for Social Service Workers.

> " All meta-skills are relevant to social services

Approaching and evidencing meta-skills development within the HNC Social Services can be a challenge, particularly as the award also requires evidencing of National Occupational Standards (NOS). There are opportunities to integrate NOS and HN unit content evidence requirements, however, which should reduce the assessment load for learners, particularly in the unit Develop your Practice through Reflection and Learning, and some of the common knowledge around reflecting on and developing practice. Some learners will already have experience of assessing and developing their own meta-skills, as the idea gathers momentum across education settings.

META-SKILLS CATEGORIES IN CONTEXT

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

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Learners were able to apply this category well to their work and the course itself. All studying and learning requires focus, and some learners felt they were able to develop this during the course. Working in social services requires individuals to reflect on their values, and many learners looked to integrity as an area for development. Other learners concentrated on developing the meta-skill of adapting, given how useful this is when you are working with people and within teams, and the challenges this kind of work can bring.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Learners had many examples of where social intelligence could be developed through their practice while working in Social Services. Some learners chose to develop more than one skill from this category. Feeling and empathy are required when working with vulnerable people. Communication is also highly important, and some people felt they

could develop this skill to communicate more effectively or confidently. Learners were able to explain how they could develop collaborative skills to work with individuals, key people, and multi-disciplinary teams. Leading was a popular choice for development; and relates to many of the unit requirements and activities in their work setting.

INNOVATION

Learners found this category of meta-skills more challenging than the other two. Most were able to relate curiosity to their opportunities for learning and research throughout the course, and align it with learning more about the individuals they support. Some felt that they would like to develop sense-making to understand challenging situations in the workplace. Learners understood that they would require critical thinking skills for research and interpretation, and felt they would need creativity to work with individuals during their projects.

INTRODUCING AND UNDERSTANDING META-SKILLS

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

SHOWING META-SKILLS IN CONTEXT AND IN PRACTICE

Introducing meta-skills very early in the course helps ensure learners engage with the idea. We introduced meta-skills during the course induction, which included a group exercise on meta-skills and their relevance to social services, and a mind mapping element where we gave examples of how they would use these skills in context. This exercise gave learners confidence in their understanding of meta-skills, and they began to understand that meta-skills are used in everyday practice.

> "
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We then asked learners to complete a profiling tool and self-assessment using the proformas provided by Skills Development Scotland, and to write a meta-skills

development plan that includes SMART goals. We quickly discovered that the proformas don't allow for enough detail, so we asked learners to include a 600-word plan on a separate document. Completing these activities in the first couple of weeks of delivery helped to motivate learners, especially as they had now already completed one of their assessments.

DEVELOPING META-SKILLS

We're looking to draw upon your experiences, hindsight, and future plans. Give us a sense of how and where meta-skills fit most naturally in your course delivery.

After learners had completed their assessment and meta-skills development plan, we found that they required some prompting to reflect on this development. We allowed for a period of time after writing the plan to give learners a chance to settle into the course and complete further assessments.

> "...schedule prompts for assessments and evidence submission

Due to the nature of HNC Social Services, particularly because of the VQ component, there are a variety of assessment methods for learners to become familiar with, and we didn't want to overwhelm them. We therefore scheduled prompts during natural breaks in the programme. These tended to come once they had completed their second and third assessment between December and February, and then again when working through an integrated project for the Approaches to Assessment in Social Services unit and chosen optional unit. We asked learners to submit some evidence of meta-skills development before the second interim grading to allow us to give them feedback.

We provided a proforma for learners to record their meta-skills development, which allowed for mapping to the SVQ units. Given that any meta-skills development was reflective of practice, we felt that this was a good opportunity for integration.

The main opportunities for meta-skills development through course content came from the integrated project for the unit Approaches to Assessment in Social Services and their chosen optional unit. In these units, learners have to carry out practical activities in the workplace as part of a project, and were therefore an ideal opportunity to learn and

develop their skills. Learners had to lead the project and collaborate with others; as a result, they could develop many meta-skills, including communication. And it was an ideal opportunity to develop the skills they had planned through their SMART targets. Some learners discussed how they had developed their leadership skills through the project, others discussed how they developed their creativity skills by supporting an individual to design activities to work towards achieving their personal outcomes.

Learners carry out this extended project from March to May, so even if they had few areas of development recorded before this time, we were confident that they would have sufficient evidence after the project.

Learners then collated all evidence of their development and produced an oral presentation of their meta-skills journey. All products were used in the assessment of their meta-skills.

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?

INTEGRATING ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS

We started assessing meta-skills very early on in the delivery of the qualification and continued until the final assessment. Learners first carried out their baseline assessment and plan for developing their meta-skills. We carried out formative assessment of meta-skills during the course to ensure that they were on track recording their own development progress. We encouraged them to map their reflections on their development activities to the SVQ units required for the qualification, which allowed for some assessment integration. The final assessment involved an oral presentation which was combined with other learning outcomes from the qualification.

We integrated the meta-skills outcome into a larger reflective practice project, which was split into three parts and spread across the delivery timeline. It included outcomes from a range of units within the qualification, as well as content from the SVQ units.

As far as possible, we tried to ensure that assessment could occur naturally at relevant points during delivery. Using a final oral assessment and products of work — such as the SDS profiling tool, self-assessment tools and proforma for recording meta-skills development — meant that we could reduce the assessment load, and assessments seemed to flow more naturally.

> " We started assessing meta-skills very early on [...] so that assessment could occur naturally at relevant points...

There is helpful and comprehensive guidance in the Grading Matrix within the Grading Pack. In practice, there may not always be sufficient evidence to judge a predicted grade for meta-skills at the first interim grading, but you do not have to evidence all criteria at this early stage. We found that there is usually sufficient evidence by the second interim grading to indicate a grade to the learner if they continue to produce the same standard of work. Some learners were motivated to achieve a higher grade after interim feedback and others were happy to receive a grade of 'Achieved'.

> " ...grading learners' engagement with the overall meta-skills process, rather than their 'achievements' makes assessment and grading of meta-skills much easier.

The fact that we are grading learners' engagement with the overall meta-skills process, rather than their 'achievements' makes assessment and grading of meta-skills much easier.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED RESOURCES AND APPROACHES

— Meta-skills framework —— exercises connecting skills to their role

— Skills Development Scotland meta-skills toolkit

— SQA Meta-skills Development Log

— Essay: planning SMART goals

— Reflective prompts and deadlines

— Proforma to record meta-skills development activities (mapped to SVQ criteria)

— Oral presentations