Assessing and Grading Meta-skills in Next Generation Higher National Qualifications

Information for Centres

This edition: August 2024 (version 2.0)

www.sqa.org.uk

Contents

Introduction

This document is designed for practitioners who deliver and assess meta-skills. It contains information about the meta-skills outcome common to all Next Generation Higher National (NextGen: HN) Qualifications, including evidence requirements, guidance around assessment standards and meta-skills elements of course grading.

Meta-skills development is founded on a clear process of self-assessment, goal setting, action planning and reflective practice. Learners have opportunities to develop meta-skills throughout their NextGen: HN Qualification. They do this at:

♦ unit level — every unit signposts opportunities for learners to develop meta-skills, and course teams assess learners on a meta-skills outcome in one of the mandatory units

♦ course level — course teams consider a learner's commitment to engaging with meta-skills development when they make overall grade decisions

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help people to adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Each of these is made up of four meta-skills and a number of sub-skills.

Self-management	Social Intelligence	Innovation
• Focusing	• Communicating	• Critical Thinking
• Integrity	• Feeling	• Sense-making
• Adapting	• Collaborating	• Creativity
• Initiative	• Leading	• Curiosity

The integrated inclusion of meta-skills demands that centres focus on them throughout the course. Learners have long developed these skills alongside technical and subject-specific knowledge, and they are valued in further education and in industry. From early on in the qualification, we want learners to identify and understand the meta-skills they can develop, and to appreciate the personal and professional value of these skills. And we want to help them to continue to articulate, utilise and build on them well after they have achieved their qualification. In this way, we prepare learners with broad skills profiles, who can thrive in a changing world.

We have produced a range of resources to help you work with meta-skills. Course-specific documents include information on mapping meta-skills to subject content, and signposting opportunities for development. They also contain information on assessment and grading. In addition, practitioners and learners can access a range of generic teaching, learning and assessment resources on meta-skills through the NextGen meta-skills web page.

Assessing meta-skills

Meta-skills outcome

Every NextGen: HN Qualification contains a meta-skills outcome, in one of the mandatory units.

The meta-skills outcome is the same at Higher National Certificate (HNC, SCQF level 7) and Higher National Diploma (HND, SCQF level 8). Learners who progress from HNC to HND should continue to build on their meta-skills development. They can produce evidence entirely within the context of the unit where it is included, but can also produce evidence from any other relevant activities and experiences across the course.

There are many interrelationships and dependencies between these skills and, at SCQF levels 7 and 8, learners should focus on developing meta-skills in ways that are relevant to their vocational or academic context.

The outcome is worded in this way:

'Develop meta-skills in a vocational or academic context'

It is detailed as follows:

Evidence requirements

Learners must produce evidence to show they can:

♦ self-assess their meta-skills baseline
♦ create a plan to develop their own meta-skills
♦ carry out activities to develop and demonstrate their meta-skills
♦ use reflective practice to monitor and assess the meta-skills they have improved and developed

For more information about meta-skills, see the Educator Guide, [Skills 4.0, a skills model to drive Scotland's future](#) and [SQA's meta-skills web page](#).

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
Learners should understand: ♦ the meta-skills categories of self-management, social intelligence and innovation, and associated meta-skills, as described in [Skills 4.0](#) ♦ the importance of developing meta-skills, including employability, adaptability and effectiveness ♦ what meta-skills are most relevant to their vocational or academic context ♦ how to develop meta-skills, including these approaches: — self-awareness: analysing preferences, strengths and development needs, meta-skills self-assessment — goal setting and action planning — reflective practice: principles, tools and approaches for effective reflective practice	Learners can: ♦ create a plan to develop their meta-skills ♦ carry out, review and adapt their meta-skills development plan ♦ assess their meta-skills development

Exemplar — Assessment evidence checklist

HN meta-skills outcome: Develop meta-skills in a vocational or academic context (SCQF levels 7 and 8)

Evidence requirement	Sources of evidence	Notes
Self-assessment of meta-skills baseline. Has the learner: ♦ reflected on their meta-skills baseline in all three meta-skills categories? ♦ demonstrated an analytical approach in their baseline reflections?		
Plan for meta-skills development. Has the learner: ♦ set three goals? ♦ covered all three categories? ♦ identified actions or steps to work towards goals?		
Record of activities undertaken to develop and demonstrate meta-skills. Has the learner: ♦ referenced relevant activities in their reflective practice?		

Evidence requirement	Sources of evidence	Notes
Reflective practice to monitor and assess meta-skills development and improvement. Has the learner: ♦ included baseline self-assessment reflections plus either mid- and end-point or ongoing reflections? ♦ ensured their reflections range across all three categories? ♦ taken an analytical approach in their reflections?		

Outcome achieved: Yes/No

Assessor:

Internal verifier:

Assessment guidance and support: unit level

In this section, we detail the assessment evidence and minimum standards required for learners to achieve the meta-skills outcome.

Approach to assessing meta-skills

You do not assess learners on their competence in any one meta-skill. There are no SCQF-levelled competence descriptions that learners must follow to achieve individual meta-skills.

You assess learners holistically on evidence they produce to show they have gone through a personal process of developing their meta-skills.

This process should include:

♦ self-assessment
♦ goal and action planning
♦ implementing planned strategies and activities
♦ reflective practice

Evidence should range over all three meta-skills categories of self-management, social intelligence and innovation. Learners can produce evidence for this outcome entirely within the context of the unit where it is included. They can also produce it from other relevant activities and experiences across the course. You should consider the accumulated evidence holistically.

Meta-skills development is unique to each learner and is contextualised within the course. A learner's individual experience determines the kind of evidence they generate.

Equality and inclusion

There is a great deal of flexibility in the types of evidence that learners can produce for this outcome. Evidence can take any appropriate form and centres should work with the needs of their learners to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements](#) web page.

Assessing meta-skills to specific assessment standards

Self-assessment of meta-skills baseline

Evidence requirements

Learners must reflect on how they view their meta-skills near the beginning of the development process.

They can do this on a skill-by-skill basis. Alternatively, they can reflect on each category, referencing the skills as appropriate. Whichever approach they take, they must reference **at least three of the four skills in each category** (self-management, social intelligence, innovation).

In their reflections, learners must take an analytical approach, connecting personal strengths and areas for development to things like:

♦ previous experiences (including work, study and interests)
♦ the qualification they are doing
♦ personal and professional ambitions
♦ any activities they do to understand themselves better
♦ any other relevant information

Additional guidance

Learners should use the initial self-assessment as a foundation for goal setting and action planning. Taking a broad view at the beginning will help them to focus in on those skills they want or need to develop. This in turn will help them set meaningful and relevant goals, and give them a baseline against which they can measure their progress. A well-considered self-assessment can form part of their evidence of reflective practice.

Learners can base their reflections on initial work they have carried out to understand themselves, the qualification they are doing, and the meta-skills they need develop to achieve their personal and professional goals. Although there are aspects of personal development that a learner may want to address, they should not approach meta-skills as a deficit model that focuses on perceived weaknesses.

Some learners may benefit from additional support in taking a predominantly strengths-based approach. You may need to guide them in recognising meta-skills they already possess or have used in the past, and in considering how they can continue to develop these through their experiences and their learning.

Self-assessment and justifications can take any form relevant to the learner and their context, and could include ratings, confidence statements or narrative descriptions. When you are advising learners about these, guide them in using whichever approach best supports a positive mindset.

Plan for meta-skills development

Evidence requirements

Learners' plans must include goals and intended actions or strategies to develop at least one meta-skill in each category.

They do not need to develop or reference all 12 meta-skills, and no one particular meta-skill is mandatory.

Goals

Learners must define a minimum of three goals that, in combination, reference all three meta-skills categories.

In their goal descriptions, they must describe clear targets that reference their academic or vocational context.

Action plan

In their action plans, learners must describe the actions or strategies they intend to take to reach their goals.

Additional guidance

Goals

Learners can set goals that:

♦ focus on a particular meta-skill, such as critical thinking
♦ cover a meta-skills category, such as innovation, and reference individual skills within it
♦ describe personal goals linked to the qualification and/or future ambitions and meta-skills, such as to develop self-confidence when working with others; these goals may range across meta-skills and categories

Whichever approach or mix of approaches learners take, they can set goals that play to their strengths and/or target areas for development.

Action plan

Learners should present their action plan in any suitable format that allows them to track and reflect on their progress.

They can include references to course assignments, work placements, group work and project work to be completed. Just as valid, they can describe strategies, behaviours or ways of working that might help them to reach their goals.

You can help learners to create meaningful action plans by showing them which course activities and projects would help them to develop their meta-skills.

There are no set ways to record intended actions or strategies for meta-skills development.

Some learners may:

♦ choose to write or make a recording of their ideas, outlining potential approaches they will try out to achieve their goals
♦ plot strategies and activities against course content in a diary, table, mind map or other visual approach
♦ be inspired by their subject area to consider a relevant professional development review or other approach

Activities to develop and demonstrate meta-skills

Evidence requirements

Completing coursework, experiences or any other strategies relevant for meta-skills development, and referencing a selection of these as part of reflective practice, is evidence enough for this requirement.

Additional guidance

Learners' evidence of their intended meta-skills development should come from actions as outlined in their plan.

They can also produce valid evidence through other course activities and experiences not initially outlined in the plan.

Their evidence can include:

♦ examples of projects, coursework and assignments
♦ feedback from lecturers, assessors, peers and others (including work placement supervisors and project clients)
♦ activity related to visiting speakers and workshops
♦ lecturer records detailing learner progress

When supporting learners with evidence gathering, you might suggest they use voice notes or simple records. Learners can annotate their work or action plan to make connections between experiences, coursework and their meta-skills development.

You could also discuss learners' progress with them, to help them recognise their own meta-skills development and how this contributes towards their course grading.

Reflective practice to monitor and assess meta-skills improvement and development

Evidence requirements

You must assess the accumulated evidence of learners' reflective practice holistically.

Assessment evidence includes reflections for initial self-assessment and goal setting, and evidence of additional reflective practice containing, at a minimum, mid- and end-point reflections.

Across these reflections, learners must demonstrate an analytical approach and recognise the link between activities, feedback, experiences and demonstration or development of meta-skills.

Reflections should range across the three meta-skills categories.

Additional guidance

An analytical approach to reflective practice at HN level should:

♦ recognise cause and effect, and see how meta-skills and course activities or experiences inform one another as part of the development process
♦ develop a line of thought, and have evidence or examples to illustrate this
♦ look back on activities or experience, think about the impact or effect of these, and reflect on using or adapting approaches in the future
♦ describe insights and understanding of own strengths and development needs

Learners who are making satisfactory progress on the course will have examples of meta-skills development they can reference to recognise progress or celebrate success. It is also valid for learners to reflect on examples of where they have not achieved all they hoped. and the reasons why. Learners' reflection can include repeating the self-assessment exercises, and reconsidering goals, actions and strategies.

Course planning and timetabling, assessment periods, project or work experience completion can all present natural points for reflective work or deadlines, especially if learners use a mid- and end-point approach to producing reflection.

You could encourage those learners who find it difficult to look back after some time has passed between experience and recollection to maintain an ongoing record of reflection, rather than produce only a mid-point and end-point reflection

Some learners may benefit from additional support to recognise their progress. Some could find it helpful to produce a factual recollection of a learning activity, before answering a set of reflective prompts provided by the lecturer. Others might find it helpful to produce a visual representation as part of their reflection, such as a mind map or timeline. You could also encourage them to keep a portfolio, diary of reflection or reflective annotations on marked or returned work.

Take care not to over-assess, both in terms of the quantity of work produced, and the potentially negative impact of intensive or too much reflection, which risks fatiguing learners.

Remediation and re-assessment

Evidence requirements

Practitioners should monitor learners' progress and offer extra guidance where a learner is failing to meet the evidence requirements. This might include additional guidance on scope, detail and depth of reflection required.

Grading information: course level

In NextGen: HN courses, learners must complete every unit satisfactorily to gain a grade of Achieved in grading for the whole qualification.

Every course unit provides rich opportunities for learners to develop meta-skills. As such, effective individual performance in subject-specific content both reflects and necessitates effective engagement with meta-skills development. In this way, it can be said that meta-skills development contributes to grading for the whole qualification. You can find information about this in your subject-specific grading pack.

Course teams can consider whether they can map assessment evidence gathered for subject-based knowledge and skills against evidence of learners' engagement with meta-skills development. This might be particularly relevant where qualifications include professional behaviours, reflective practice or project-based assessment as part of their core subject content.

Remember, you do not assess or grade learners on their competence in individual meta-skills. When qualification teams make overall grade decisions, they consider the learner's holistic commitment to engaging with meta-skills development. We unpack this in the following table.

Grading statements

This matrix specifies learners' standards of engagement with the process of meta-skills development, and how this differentiates the grade outcomes: Achieved, Achieved with Merit, and Achieved with Distinction.

Develops meta-skills in the vocational or academic context

Achieved	Achieved with Merit	Achieved with Distinction
Adequately engages with the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: ♦ undertaking self-assessment of meta-skills, giving reasons for ratings or judgements made ♦ setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories ♦ using reflective practice strategies to track progress and analyse the links between course activities, experiences and meta-skills development	Demonstrates a clear commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: ♦ undertaking self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made ♦ setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories ♦ using reflective practice strategies to track progress, analyse and demonstrate some insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development	Demonstrates strong commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: ♦ undertaking self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made ♦ setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories, and updating these as required ♦ using reflective practice strategies very effectively to track progress, analyse and demonstrate insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development

Quality assurance

Your external quality assurer (EQA) can provide support and guidance on how to embed meta-skills in your qualification delivery and how to evidence them through learner coursework.

The EQA will provide three touchpoint meetings across the academic year. Each will include an opportunity to discuss meta-skills:

♦ Touchpoint 1 — support and guidance
♦ Touchpoint 2 — review progress, additional support and guidance
♦ Touchpoint 3 — review progress, additional support and guidance

EQAs will also review candidates' meta-skills evidence throughout the delivery of the qualification.

You can find more information in our document [Higher National Quality Assurance Guidance for Centres.](#)

Administrative information

Published: August 2024 (version 2.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Refined, clarified and in some cases re-ordered detail in the Self-assessment of meta-skills baseline, Plan for meta-skills development and Reflection practice sections.	August 2024

Note: please check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.