

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**ABERDEEN 2040 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS: AN ACADEMIC VIEW**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

*This paper outlines the proposed direction of travel for the creation of an Aberdeen 2040 Skills Recognition Framework and associated Graduate Attributes and Skills.*

*The current work is in the design phase and UEC is asked to discuss this paper and provide an academic view.*

*This paper will also be submitted to Senate for an academic view. Following UEC and Senate discussions, feedback and actions will be taken away and discussed within the Skills Recognition Framework workstream to shape subsequent design phases of the framework.*

**2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	<b>Board/Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>
Previously considered/approved by	EEC UEC 2040 UEC	May 2022 May 2022 June 2022
Further consideration/ approval required by	EEC UEC Senate	

**3. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

UEC is invited to discuss and feedback on the proposed Skills Recognition Framework and draft Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills presented in this paper.

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The [Aberdeen Graduate Attributes](#) were one output from a wider Curriculum Reform project that was linked to the University Strategic Plan 2007-10. Since their inception in 2010, they have been part of any new programme or course development as staff are required to align teaching to these Aberdeen Graduate Attributes.
- 4.2 The existing Aberdeen Graduate Attributes previously used to reinforce the learning outcomes of some core co-curricular programmes including the [STAR Award](#) and [Leadership Academy](#).
- 4.3 [Aberdeen 2040](#) underpins the University's strategic vision and as part of the process of taking forward Education at the University of Aberdeen, it is timely to review what it means to be a student at the University and what attributes and skills students will acquire throughout their studies. Aberdeen 2040 provides a focus on our Education in the context of preparing "our graduates to thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future" with commitments that need to be embedded in the experience of all our students.
- 4.4 Furthermore, other external factors have influenced educational practice over recent years, such as the QAA's guidance on Education for Sustainable Development ([ESD](#)) and Advance HE's [Student Success Framework Series](#). Many other higher education institutions have taken these frameworks and used them directly, or incorporated parts of them into their own strategy.
- 4.5 More recently, Graduate Outcomes ([GO](#)) data has shown a relatively poor performance for the University in ranking for measures such as those in highly skilled employment or those who

consider their employment activity to be 'on track' with their future plans. The GO data is a direct KPI for Aberdeen 2040 Commitment 12 (equipping students for global employment) and feeds into multiple university ranking tables (e.g., Graduate Prospects metric in the Complete University Guide / Career Prospects metric in the Guardian University Guide).

- 4.6 As part of an agreed approach to taking forward our Education strategy in light of Aberdeen 2040, a workstream has been setup to create a revised set of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills and create a framework that will support the recognition and reflection of these attributes and skills in a meaningful way for our students. It is felt that by providing opportunities for students to document and reflect on their studies they will be able to articulate the skills they are developing. This in turn would be one way to enhance ranking performance in the GO survey and potentially other surveys (e.g., National Student Survey).
- 4.7 The Graduate Attributes and Skills workstream reports to the University Employability & Entrepreneurship Committee (EEC) and has the following key objectives that have come from a set of recommendations agreed at UEC 2040 (May 2022) and UEC (June 2022):
- a) The University should design a personalised skills development, recognition and reflection framework
  - b) Create a system that can formally record and recognise student skills in all areas of their curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
  - c) Make any skills that are included in programme and course approvals visible and explicitly stated within the course catalogue and co-curricular programmes.
- 4.8 The schedule for the workstream is shown in Appendix A and we are currently on track to meet the various milestones.

## 5. CURRENT CONTEXT

- 5.1 The above recommendations form the basis of the Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills workstream, reporting to EEC, UEC, Senate (and potentially other committees such as Quality Assurance Committee [QAC], Sustainable Development Committee [SDC], Digital Strategy Committee [DSC]) for discussion and an academic view as well as University-wide agreement on the approach(s) taken.
- 5.2 This workstream aims to create a Skills Recognition Framework (potentially with an external partner who will co-create the system with us) to achieve the aims set out above (see 4.7). The following will need to be considered (in no order of preference) for this system:
- a) **Fit with curricula** – Flexibility to fit with our diverse curricula across 12 different academic Schools and their subject disciplines.
  - b) **Fit with study requirements** – Flexibility to fit with undergraduate prolonged periods of study to shorter postgraduate taught one-year programmes and postgraduate research students
  - c) **Always on** – A system that grows as each student progresses through their studies, allowing them to populate and retrieve their skills as they acquire and reflect on them, and as they need to showcase them respectively.
  - d) **Portability** – The system needs to be able to follow the student once they have left the institution and not cease to exist once they have completed their studies or withdrawn.
  - e) **Automation** – Curriculum and co-curricular activities should be automatically added to populate the framework as and when they are completed by the student.
  - f) **Cross-system integration/interaction** – The skills framework would need to link in with multiple University systems (e.g. MyAberdeen and other VLE's, Student Record System, Career Connect, digital badges).
  - g) **Validation** – Some aspects of the framework will need validation (e.g. course completion or specific assessments) in order for students to record the skills they have gained.
- 5.3 Currently we are in the design phase of the Skills Recognition Framework and a recent paper is due to be tabled at the next DSC (meeting on 10/01/23) for approval of the spend associated with the digital system that will support this work.

5.4 The project has three possible routes that will be explored during the initial project design phases:

- a) **Skills Framework in TargetConnect** – The University currently uses a software package called [TargetConnect](#) that allows the Careers & Employability Service to manage many aspects of their service provision as well as advertise and manage job vacancies for students. This system has an additional component they call the Skills Framework but it does not have any flexibility as the skills are set by TargetConnect and cannot be edited by the University or the students.
- b) **Blackboard Ultra Goals** – MyAberdeen currently has functionality for students to record [Goals](#) in the system. These can be set by staff and aligned to particular pieces of work that students complete within Blackboard Ultra. At present this is not a function that is activated in MyAberdeen and it is relatively basic in terms of its functionality.
- c) **Pebblepad** – we have established an initial relationship with the software platform called [Pebblepad](#). This platform provides a large amount of customisation and flexibility for students and staff. The opportunity to partner with them is available to us and they have expertise in creating and supporting digital platforms that fit this project brief. The system also has one big advantage over the other approaches in that it can be kept and maintained by the student after they graduate.

5.5 Further to the digital aspects of this workstream, the workstream group has now ran several workshops to brainstorm and scope out the vision and design principles of the Skills Recognition Framework. Within this consideration to existing frameworks and the wider context of Aberdeen 2040 have all been taken into account.

5.6 In draft form at present, and aiming to encapsulate Aberdeen 2040 and our educational strategic vision, a set of graduate attributes and skills has been created (see Appendix B).

## 6. ACTIONS

UEC is asked to discuss and feedback on the approach taken for the Skills Recognition Framework (see 5.2 and 5.4 above) and the draft set of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills (see Appendix B).

## 7. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from John Barrow ([j.barrow@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:j.barrow@abdn.ac.uk)), Dean for Employability & Entrepreneurship.

6<sup>th</sup> January 2023

**Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status:** *Open*

## Appendix A – Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills Workstream Schedule

Milestone	Details	Forecast Completion Date
Phase 1 & 2 design	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> Vision and design principles and scope and scale of framework (co-design approach involving all key stakeholder groups, held via workshops).</p> <p>Consider existing skills frameworks: UNSDGs, ISE, 7i, SDS meta skills in the context of Aberdeen 2040 (including the five interdisciplinary challenges) to inform development of the framework.</p> <p><i>Phase 2:</i> Framework structure proposal - co-design approach involving all key stakeholder groups, held via workshops.</p> <p>Committee Cycle 2: EEC (6/12/22), UEC (16/01/23), QAC (14/12/23), SSEC (7/12/22) and Senate (8/02/23) view.</p>	Feb 2023
Phase 3 design	<p>Framework content proposal - co-design approach involving all key stakeholder groups, held via workshops.</p> <p>Committee Cycle 3: EEC (28/02/23), UEC (23/03/23) and Senate (19/04/23) view.</p>	April 2023
Framework design approval	Committee Cycle 4 (Approval): EEC (27/04, for information), UEC (16/05/23), QAC (10/05/23), Senate (7/06/23) approval.	June 2023
Implementation	Phased implementation plan for 2023-2024	Throughout AY 2023-24

## **Appendix B – DRAFT Aberdeen Graduate Attributes and Skills**

Aberdeen 2040 states the following:

*The University of Aberdeen has a distinctive, flexible curriculum that encourages students to grow as independent learners. True to our roots as an ancient Scottish university, our degree programmes combine breadth and depth, and draw their strength from the quality of our research.*

*We believe in the interconnectedness of research and teaching, and will create new interdisciplinary pathways for study as we address global challenges. Students and the Students' Association will work together with staff to ensure that our curriculum and our student experience are among the very best in the world.*

*We will prepare our graduates to thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future by working with external partners and alumni. We will develop more challenge-led teaching, which enables students to learn by tackling real-world problems. We will provide more work-based learning, through placements and volunteering. We will make innovative use of digital technology to enable learning, and equip our graduates with digital skills. We will foster their intellectual development, creative thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship. Our students will grow in confidence and understanding, so that they can be change-makers across the globe.*

*Our education is open to all. We will provide an environment in which all students can achieve success, whatever their background or personal characteristics. We will support our students through effective teamwork across the university. We will set ambitious targets for widening access, working with our education partners to support aspiration and attainment. We will expand learning on demand and continuing professional development. Our education will be available to people wherever they wish to learn with us, and at any stage in their career journey.*

We also have an educational strategic vision that states:

*Our Education aims to be among the very best in the world, enabling our students to grow as independent learners, to achieve their full potential and succeed whatever their personal and social background, their mode of delivery and location, and to be equipped for global employment.*

*Our Curriculum is challenge-led, distinctive, has breadth and flexibility with the interdisciplinary challenges embedded. Our Curriculum is inclusive, international, and enables our students to be leaders in protecting the environment.*

*Our Environment aims to be diverse, caring, supportive, challenging, innovative, and developmental.*

Taking these various statements, various attributes and skills have been drawn out to align with the University strategic vision. Examples have also been provided for each and they have been grouped into themes – see overleaf.

**DRAFT** Aberdeen 2040 Graduate attributes and Skills:

<b>Attributes/Skills</b>	<b>Text from A2040/Strategic Vision</b>	<b>Attributes/Skills Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Independence</b>	"Our curriculum encourages students to grow as independent learners"	The ability to identify and pursue learning goals independently, seeking out resources and support as needed	Seeking out resources to learn a new piece of software on your own
<b>Interdisciplinarity</b>	"We will create new interdisciplinary pathways for study as we address global challenges"	The ability to think and work across different disciplines and understand the interconnectedness of different fields of study	Collaborating with a team of students from different degree programmes to develop and implement a work plan for a piece of coursework
<b>Digital</b>	"We will make innovative use of digital technology to enable learning, and equip our graduates with digital skills"	The capacity to use digital platforms and tools to communicate, collaborate, and access information, and adapt to new technologies as they emerge	Using video conferencing software to facilitate online collaboration with staff and students
<b>Creative Thinking</b>	"We will foster their intellectual development, creative thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship"	The ability to think critically, generate new ideas and approaches to problems, and apply knowledge in new contexts	Researching existing literature to understand the current state of knowledge of a topic, then using this to generate new insights and understanding
<b>Communication</b>	"Students will need to be able to effectively communicate their ideas and research findings to different audiences, both orally and in writing"	The ability to convey information clearly and effectively to different audiences	Presenting research findings in class or writing a report that summarises the results for a broader audience
<b>Teamwork</b>	"We will support our students through	The ability to work effectively with others	Working in a group to complete a presentation on time

	effective teamwork across the university"	to achieve a common goal	and deliver it to your class
<b>Leadership</b>	"Our students will grow in confidence and understanding, so that they can be change-makers across the globe"	The ability to take initiative, lead others, and inspire change	Acting as a Class Rep to liaise between the staff and students on your course, and in the process building relationships with other groups and individuals
<b>Inclusion</b>	"Our education is open to all. We will provide an environment in which all students can achieve success, whatever their background or personal characteristics"	Respect and sensitivity to the needs and experiences of others from different backgrounds	Creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for classmates of all backgrounds and experiences
<b>Problem-solving</b>	"We will develop more challenge-led teaching, which enables students to learn by tackling real-world problems"	The capacity to identify and analyse problems, generate and evaluate potential solutions, and implement the most effective one	Participating in a challenge-led course that requires students to develop a solution to a real-world problem, such as improving access to healthcare in underserved communities
<b>Time-management</b>	"With a flexible curriculum and opportunities for work-based learning, students will need to be able to manage their time effectively and stay organized"	The capacity of balancing multiple responsibilities and staying focused and organised to meet deadlines	Balancing coursework, a part-time job, and extracurricular activities while maintaining good grades
<b>Adaptability</b>	"Our Environment aims to be diverse, caring, supportive, challenging, innovative, and developmental"	The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and be open to learning new things	Dealing with unexpected challenges and setbacks during your studies that require changes to plans so that you

			can still achieve your goals
<b>Sustainability</b>	"Our curriculum...enables our students to be leaders in protecting the environment"	The ability to consider the long-term environmental, social, and economic impacts of actions and make decisions that promote the well-being of current and future generations	Participating in a sustainability club that works to reduce waste on campus and educate the community about the importance of environmental conservation
<b>Self-motivation</b>	"all students can achieve success and thrive in the diverse workplaces of the future"	The ability to identify personal goals and take initiative to work towards them, enabling individuals to pursue opportunities that align with their goals and values	Developing a plan to achieve a learning goal by setting aside dedicated study time each week, attending all of their classes, and seeking out additional help when needed, taking initiative to follow through on the plan, even when faced with challenges or distractions
<b>International Awareness</b>	"Our curriculum is inclusive and international"	The ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences and diversity, and to recognize the interconnectedness of global issues and events	Communicating and working effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and being able to consider global issues from multiple perspectives

Potential thematic groupings:

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Skills</b>
Personal and professional development	Independence, self-motivation, time-management
Collaboration and communication	Communication, teamwork, leadership, inclusion
Adaptability and innovation	Adaptability, creative thinking, digital



Critical thinking and problem-solving	Interdisciplinarity, problem-solving, sustainability, international awareness
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Or...

Theme	Skills
Development	Independence, self-motivation, time-management
Communication	Communication, teamwork, leadership, inclusion
Innovation	Adaptability, creative thinking, digital
Problem-solving	Interdisciplinarity, problem-solving, sustainability, international awareness