Academic Skills
Statement

INDEX

POLICY

1. Introduction

Academic skills refers to the wide range of skills required from students in order for them to thrive in their university studies. Often referred to as 'soft' skills, they include areas such as finding academic research, referencing and critical thinking.

The positive impact of studying academic skills on student outcomes has been observed for several years[1] but most recently it has been recommended that universities "strategically position" services such as Skills for Learning (SfL) to enhance student success[2].

At the University of Wolverhampton, academic skills are chiefly supported by the Skills for Learning (SfL) team. This is a centralised resource operating within Library Services. The SfL team is well-regarded across the University, with faculty staff frequently incorporating their services into module teaching or referring students to their in-house support.

Other key services within the university also support academic skills development, including Academic Coaches (ACS), Student Transition Teachers (STTs), the Academic Skills Hub (ASH) and the International Academy (IA).

The University recognises the importance of academic skills development and aspires to adopt a best practice approach helping to ensure best possible student outcomes.

1.1 Aims and Purpose

This statement aims to:
- Provide aspirational best practice guidance and recommendations for the Skills for Learning service, and academic skills provision at The University of Wolverhampton more broadly.
- Raise awareness of the importance of academic skills development within the institution and start to develop a culture of collaboration between academic and professional services departments engaged within academic skills delivery.

2. Academic Skills: Best Practice

Research demonstrates that students are best placed to succeed when teaching involves a focus on academic skills, as well as subject content. All courses at The University of Wolverhampton should aspire to include learning opportunities to develop academic skills, following on from the best practice currently identified in a number of Level 4 courses.

Fragmented support for academic skills leads to student frustration and lack of engagement. The University should aim to streamline the support available to students in a way which avoids simple signposting from those teaching on modules to SfL.

To meet student expectations it is necessary to develop cohesion between core teaching and SfL visits. The adoption of a co-design and co-delivery approach between academic staff, SfL staff and student representatives would allow effective embedding of academic skills into the curriculum.

Academic skills sessions should not be seen as a 'one-off' or 'add-on' to a module. Whilst an initial, short intervention from SfL, introducing library services as well as the SfL offer can be provided, this should then be followed by additional sessions and learning opportunities around key dates in the academic year (i.e. assignment submissions) to allow students to develop their academic skills further.

A robust and effective institution-wide referral process should be introduced, involving professional services teams and tutors. The development of a more comprehensive system, beyond that currently implemented between SfL and

---

[1] Ashton-Hay, S. and Doncaster, N. (2021), 'Student success and retention: What's academic skills got to do with it?', *Journal of Academic Language and Learning,* 15(1), pp. 102-116. Available at: https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/727

[2] Hassanbeigi, A., Askari, J., Nakhjavanic, M., Shirkhodad, S., Barzegare, K., Mozayyanf, M., and Fallahzadehg, H. (2011), 'The relationship between study skills and academic performance of university students', *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 30, pp. 1416-1424. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S187704281102101X

Academic Coaches, would have significant benefits including the ability to track referrals and identify students not engaging with recommended support.

Academic colleagues and professional services teams should actively seek to work together on projects to support the enhancement of academic skills development.

SfL staff may be consulted and engaged when considering ways of embedding academic skills or designing learning activities focused on academic skills development. This can be through involvement when planning schemes of work or when validating/re-validating modules. This does not need to be an onerous process but will allow SfL staff to better understand module aims and assignments, thus providing better support for students. It also allows SfL staff to share best practice with academic colleagues.

The SfL Team will take every opportunity to promote their services to academic staff and other professional departments, specifically liaising with key department contacts to promote services in a timely and effective way.

Academic skills should be considered through an inclusive lens. The Inclusivity Framework, highlights potential barriers in curriculum design and the importance of flexibility, ensuring the following should be considered:
- Scheduling Skills interventions at appropriate times (mis-timed skills interventions, being either too early for meaningful learning, or too close to the relevant assessment deadline, could be a barrier to engagement).
- SfL 1-2-1 appointment service should be promoted alongside course teaching, as many students may not wish to ask questions or express difficulties within the context of a lecture.
- Engaging with SfL support as part of formative assessment – this will offer students an opportunity to consolidate their learning, and potentially improve course outcomes.

3. Monitoring and Evidence of Impact

In order to effectively monitor and review impact the SfL team will produce an annual report that presents a range of data and qualitative evidence capturing student participation; student outcomes and feedback; and evaluative evidence.

Through the Learning & Teaching sub-committee, the University should monitor and report the breadth and depth of academic skills activities across the institution, highlighting best practice. Identified themes, actions, and areas of concern should be progressed through the committee structure.

The SfL Team will monitor the following for evidence of impact:
- Increase in student participation and engagement with SfL
- Student satisfaction with the University's approach to academic skills delivery
- Level of academic staff engaging with SfL
- Engagement with the SfL Canvas topic

4. Related Policies & University Frameworks

This statement should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:
- Education and Students Sub-Strategy
- Graduate Attributes Framework
- Inclusivity Framework
- SfL Appointment Guidance Policy
- SfL Policy

5. Information and resources

- Learning & Skills Development Manager – Joe Carey

  The University of Wolverhampton, Harrison Library, Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1LY

  Email: j.carey2@wlv.ac.uk

- Head of Compliance (Interim) - Louisa Volante

  The University of Wolverhampton, Wulfruna Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1LY

  Email: Louisa.Volante@wlv.ac.uk

VERSION	1.0	AUTHOR/OWNER	Joe Carey, Learning & Skills Development Manager
Approved Date	15/06/2022	Approved By	Academic Board
Review Date	15/06/2025		