Using Skills as a Trojan Horse to Influence a University-Wide Approach to Curriculum Design and Delivery

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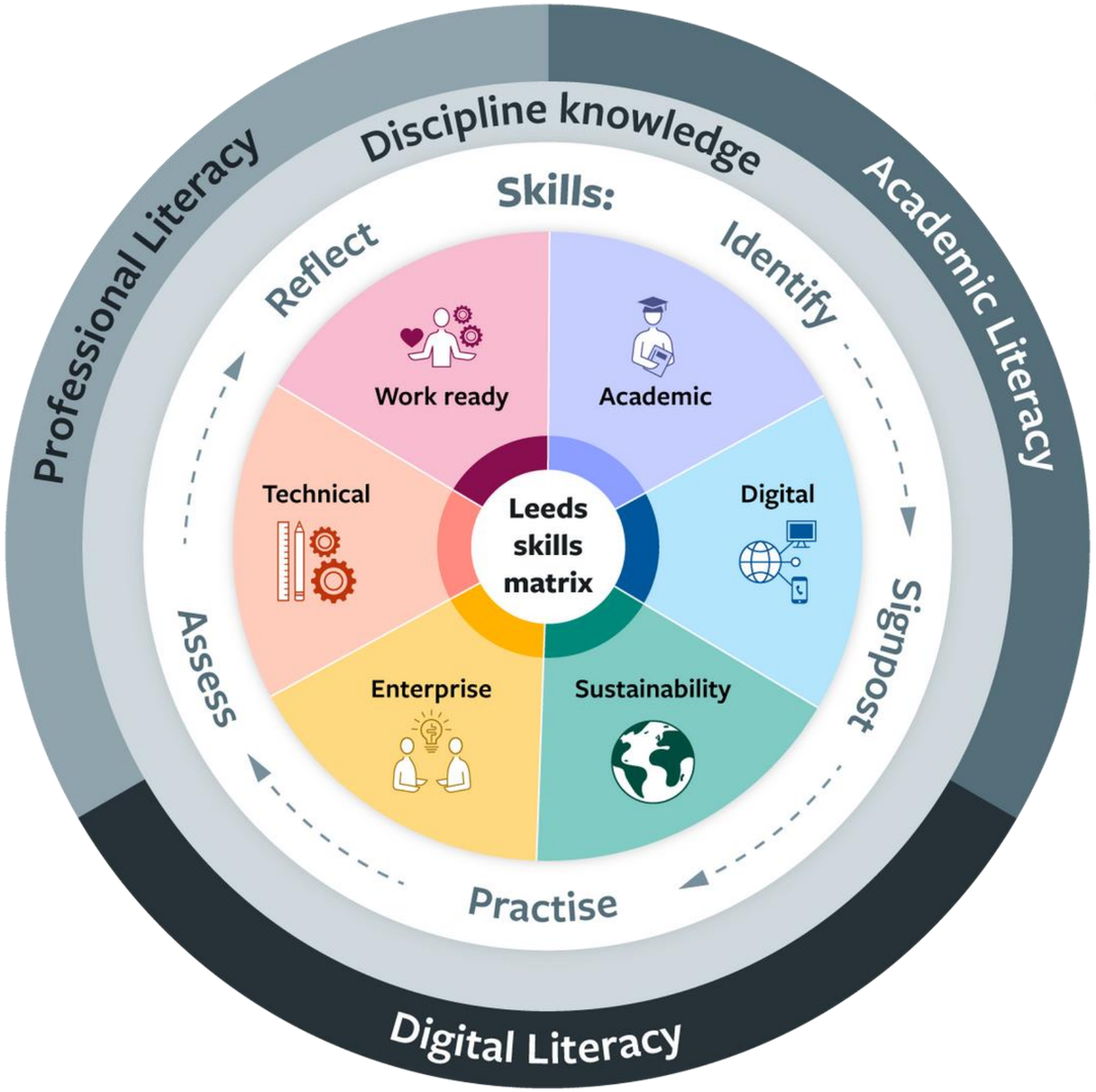

The overview today

- The context at University of Leeds
- Key aims and needs
- Our approach
- How its going

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The Context at Leeds

- 40,000 students
- Traditional ‘Russell Group’ research-intensive institution
- 75th in world rankings
- 7 large Faculties
- Complex, costly and unwieldly programme and module structure

The Strategic Context at Leeds

- 2020 – new 10 yr strategy
- 2021 – 10 yr curriculum change programme: **Curriculum Redefined (**CR)
  - 100 new CR educators appointed
  - New Leeds Curriculum
- Graduate Outcomes results
  - ‘Using skills from studies’ agree response lower than expected/wanted (65%)
- 2022 – Student Opportunities and Futures Strategy (replaced ‘employability’ strategy)

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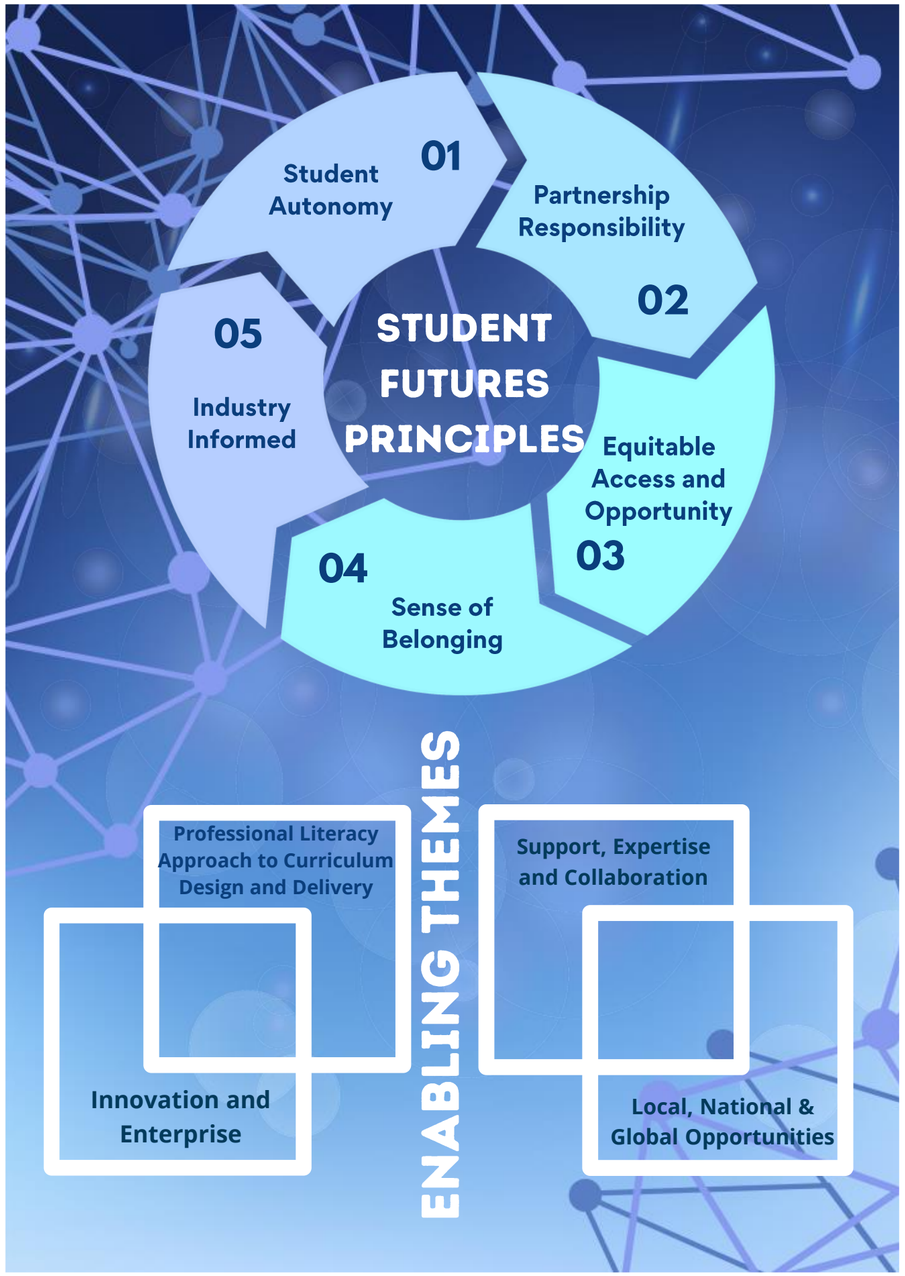


Strategic Layer: Student Opportunities and Futures Strategy 2022-25

- Previously the University's Employability Strategy
- 'Curriculum' was not evident in previous iterations
- 4 enabling themes including:
  - **Professional Literacy Approach to Curriculum Design and Delivery**
- All Faculties to outline how they will enable this to be realised
- Direct links to the University's Assessment Strategy & Access/Participation Plan

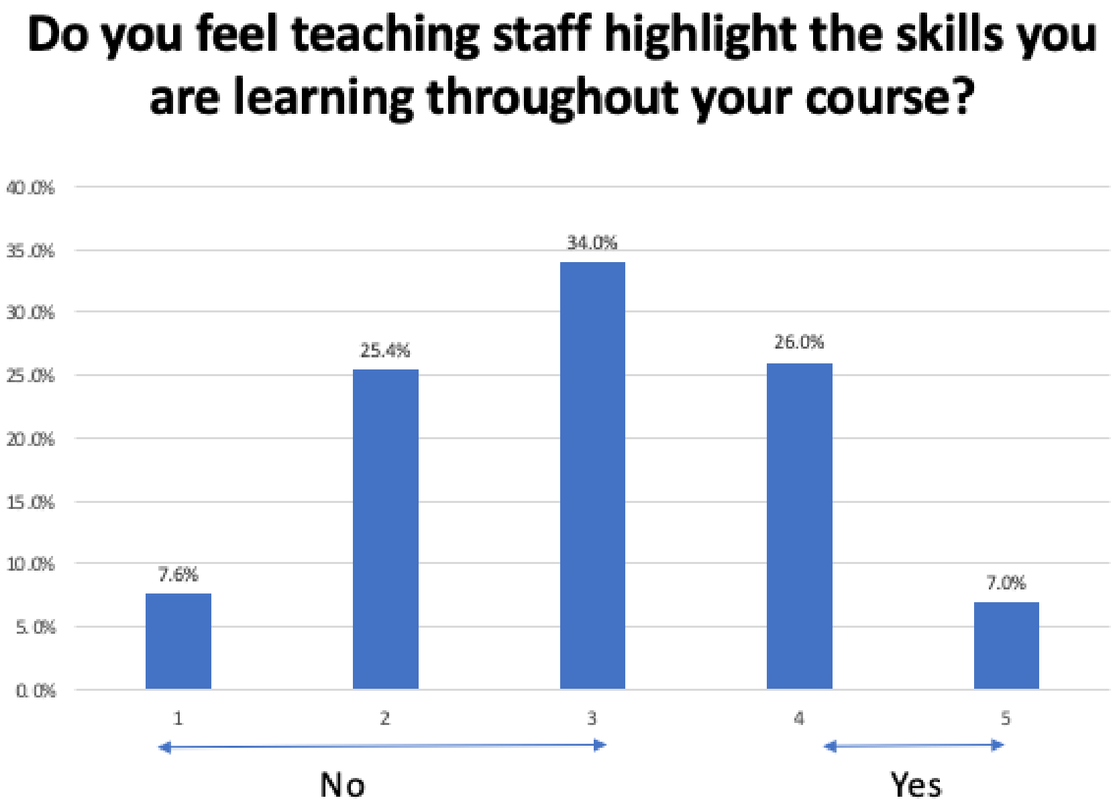
The power of student voice…

CONFIDENCE LEVELS

- It is my belief that my course has sufficiently supplied me with the skills to work in my chosen profession or continue into further study
  - 32% disagree or neutral

- I feel confident articulating the skills I have developed throughout my academic studies to an employer during a job interview
  - 42% disagree or neutral

SURFACING SKILLS BY STAFF

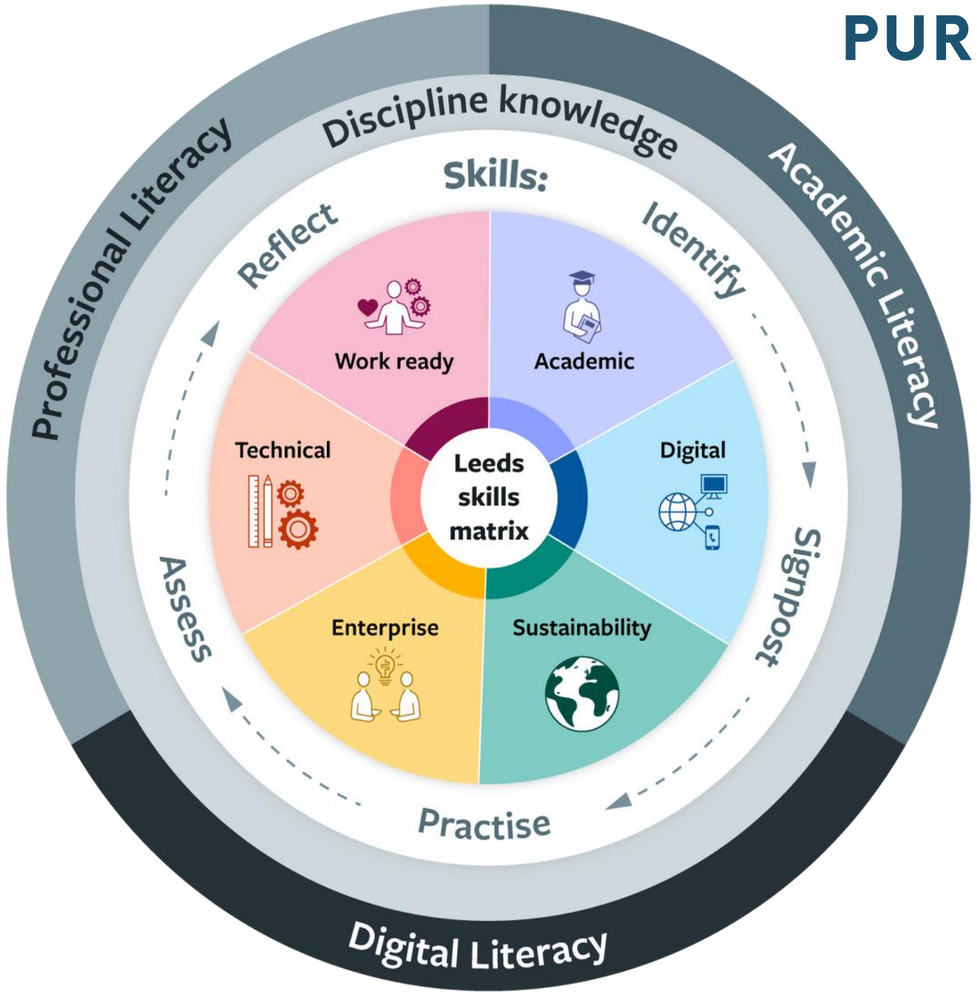


Student Voice Research 2021

So the environment was ‘right’ to:

- Implement a consistent, programme-wide approach to curriculum design
- Re-evaluate what that meant for ‘employability’ at a traditional Russell Group University
- Influence curriculum conversations at both a strategic and delivery level
- Develop a collaborative approach across the University for services who also had difficulty in influencing curriculum design and delivery (at scale):
  - Sustainability
  - Digital education
  - Learning development (libraries)
  - Enterprise
  - Student Careers

CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK



PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

- To support staff in how to integrate **academic, digital and professional literacies** (and their related skills) within curriculum design and delivery.
- To enable programmes to demonstrate an explicit coherence between **discipline level knowledge and skills**, which in turn will support students to articulate both the knowledge and **skills value** of their degree.

Our messages to academic teams...(NOT about employability)

PROFESSIONAL LITERACY IS NOT SOLELY ABOUT GETTING A JOB OR HOW MUCH YOU EARN.

It's about preparing our students for a life beyond University, whatever that might be. And whilst most likely that will include a career, it is also about the behaviours, mindset and self-belief that will support them to secure a successful future.

The key aspect of surfacing skills is that...

the skills are already there...

...THEY JUST HAVE TO BE BOUGHT TO THE SURFACE, TELLING OUR STUDENTS WHAT THEY ARE, WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT AND HOW THEY WILL DEVELOP THEM

How was a 'spotlight on skills' conversation a Trojan Horse?

- Less contentious than 'employability' with academic colleagues
- Focused upon curriculum only (no mention of careers or extra-curric)
- Focus upon what was already there rather than embedding (KCL)
- Socialised 'skills' and the term 'surfacing skills' with senior academics
- Used that to introduce wider topics of student choice/aspiration/mindset/authentic assessment/experiential learning

Our Skills Approach:
Build it and they will come…

- Developed a simple, generic ‘product’ - the **5 Stage Process**
- Removed compliance to a set number of skills (previously had been 12 graduate skills) – encouraged free choice to reflect discipline ‘DNA’
- Devised a **matrix** which enabled different skills ‘domains’ to be recognised & collaborate
- Created a staff sharepoint ‘Skills Hub’ to house information, resources and a new skills network of interested staff

SURFACING SKILLS:

The 5 Stage Process

Stage 1

Identify

Each programme develops and publishes an agreed list of Programme Level Skills.

Stage 2

Signpost

A clear and consistent method is adopted to signpost students as to the skills they are developing, including where and when they are developing them.

Stage 3

Practise

Students are regularly supported in their skill development through an active learning process.

Stage 4

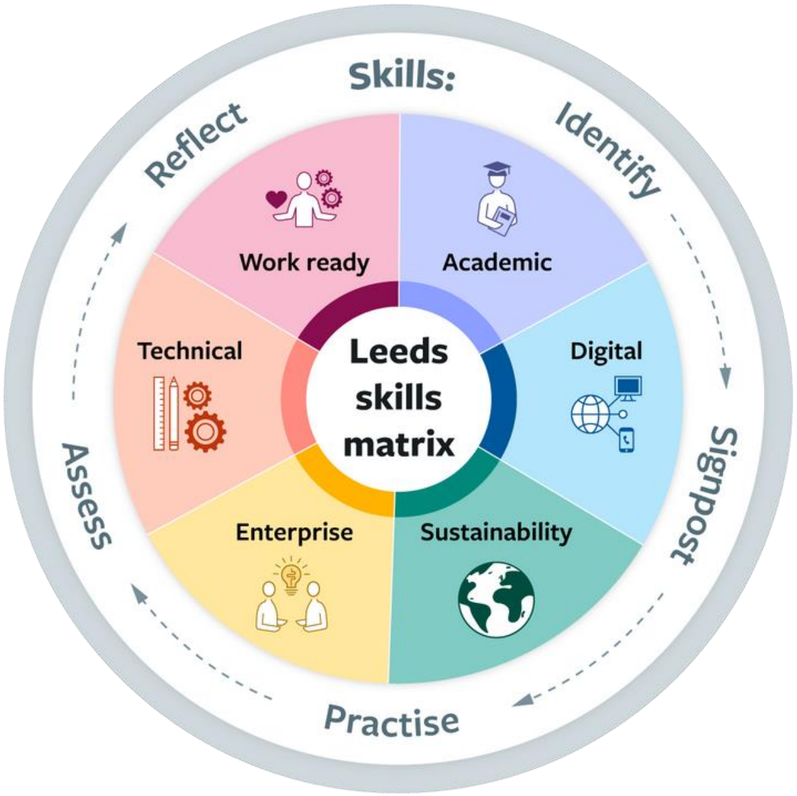
Assess

Skills are consistently, appropriately and authentically assessed throughout a student's programme of study.

Stage 5

Reflect

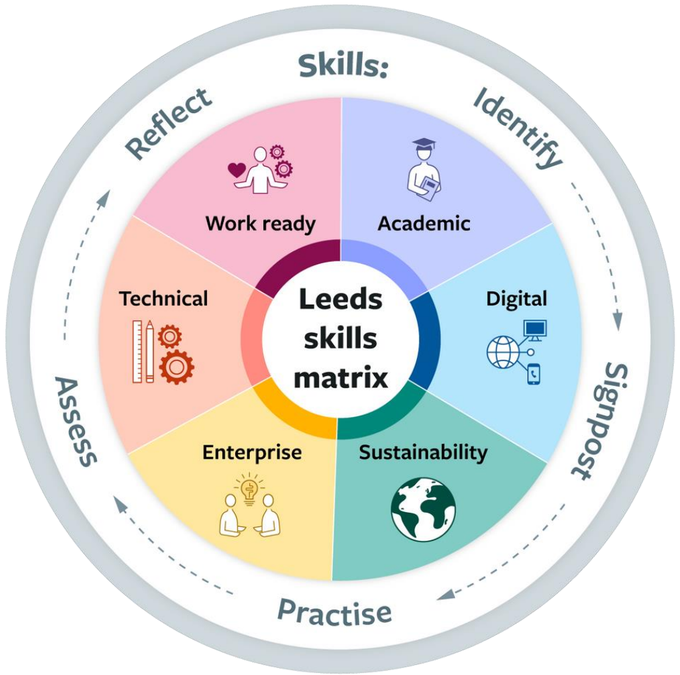
Students are provided with opportunities to formally and informally reflect upon their current skillset and future development needs.

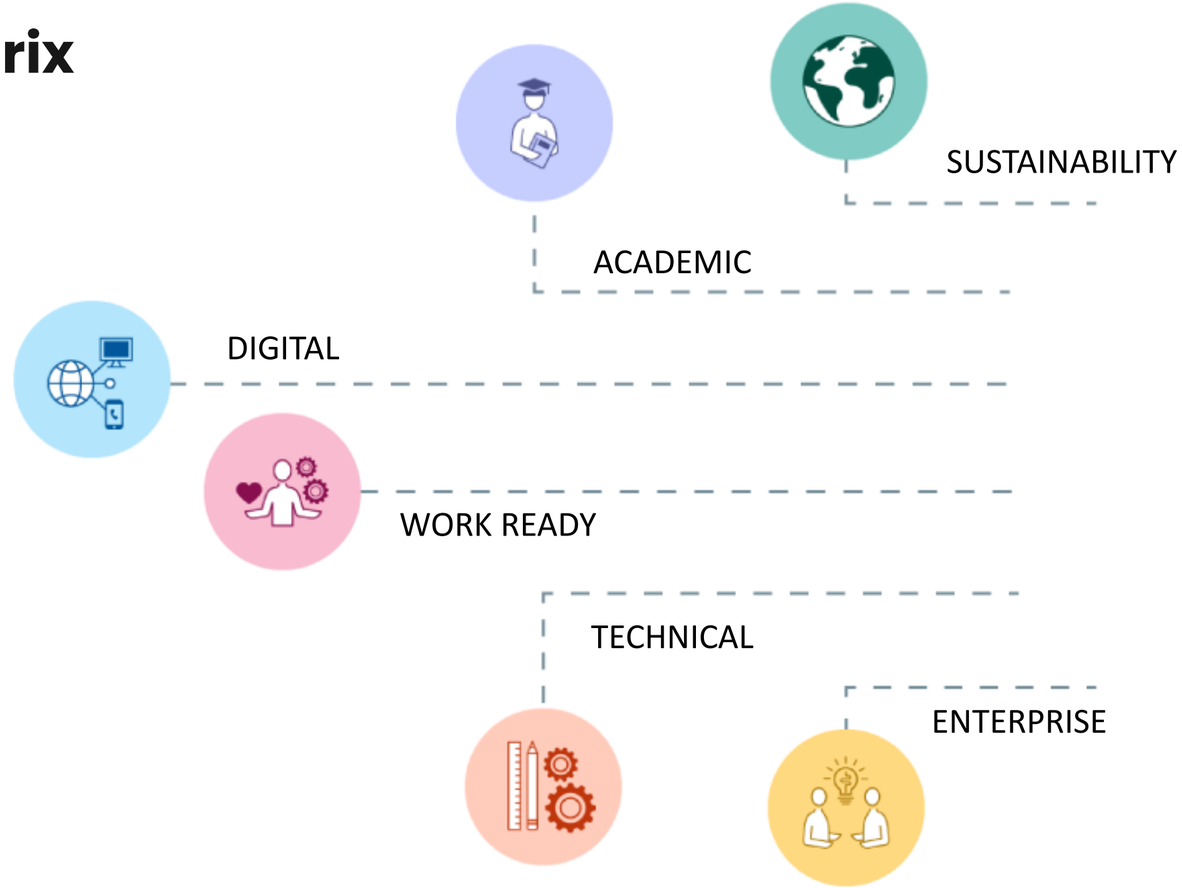


Supporting our educational offer to develop & enhance the development of skills

SURFACING SKILLS:

- **The Leeds Skills Matrix**
  - 6 Skills Domains





- Accessed academic strategic groups and committees to outline the need and introduce the 5-stage approach
- Ran introductory workshops to socialise the framework and process for teaching staff
- Developed new resources in partnership between advocate academics and professional service staff
- Responded to ‘invites’ from programme teams to work with them on surfacing and developing skills when rewriting their degree programmes
- Supporting Uni-wide areas with how they could use the surfacing skills process in their work: digital education; sustainability in the curriculum; EDI

How is it going and what is still to do?!

Strategic Influence

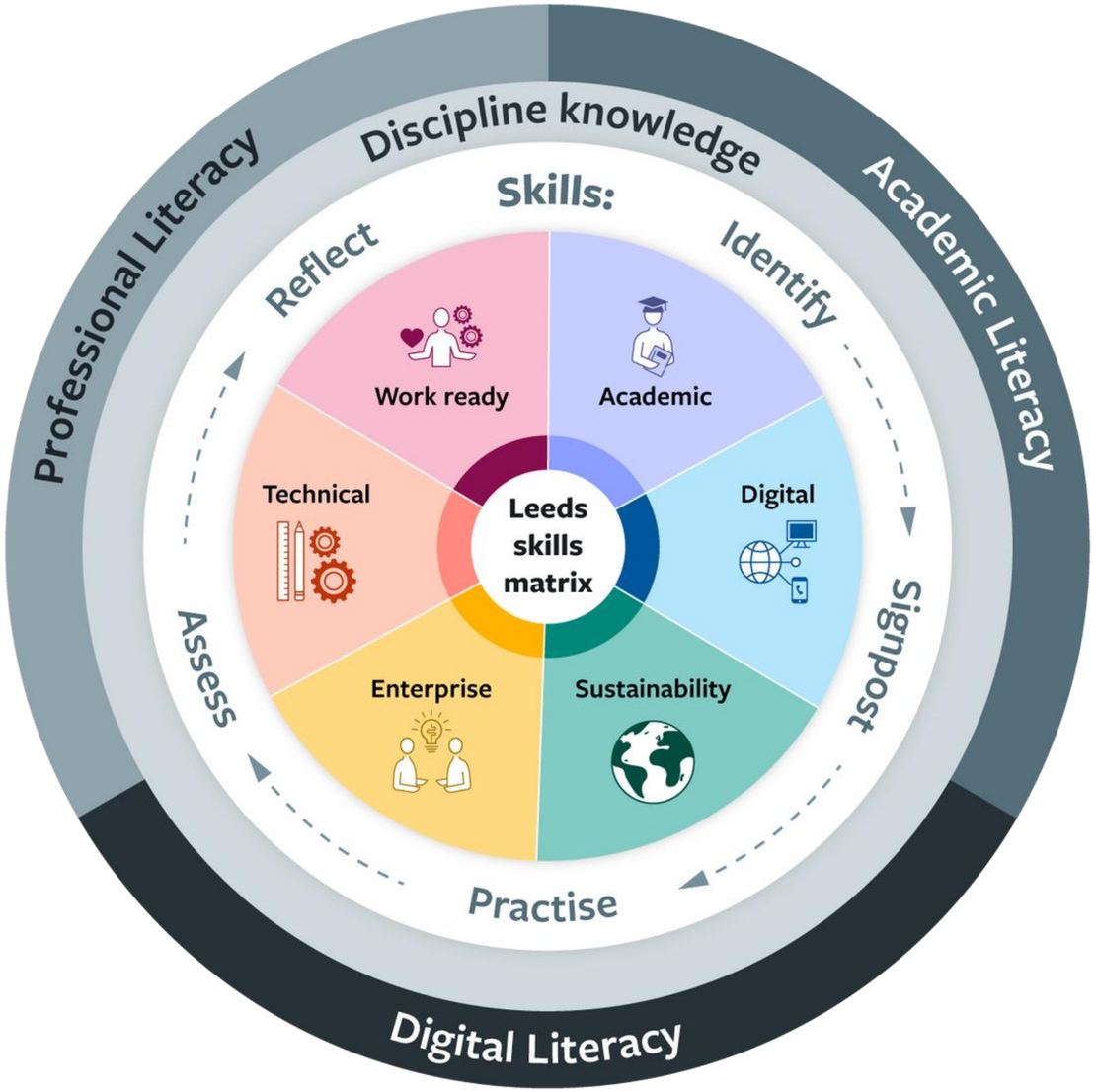
- DVC senior level support
- Academic lead for Surfacing Skills
- Targeting Curriculum Redefined Educators – some will have a focus on surfacing skills
- Programmes using the process within all Faculties
- Inclusion in <u>some</u> Faculty strategic plans
- Formal funded CR workstream in experiential learning (connected to the stages of practice; assessment; reflection)

Operational

- Skills requirement written into QA processes and requirements – tighter level needed
- Curriculum mapping software being trialed in Engineering (to include skills and authentic assessments)

How is it going and what is still to do?!

- **Programme Development & Staff Awareness/Support**
  - University ‘Surfacing Skills in the Curriculum’ Conference
  - Continued workshop programme
    - Targeted & generic
  - Continued Curriculum resource development
  - Greater links with other curriculum areas beginning e.g assessment; active learning; decolonisation; EDI
  - Continued partnership work with learning development (libraries); sustainability; digital education
- **Adaptation of co & extra-curricular offer re: skills**
- **Student Voice & co-creation**
- **Student Offer**



Thank- you!

For further information and collaboration ideas contact:

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