



**PEDAGOGIC RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT**

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**KEY SKILLS ON SPORT AND  
EXERCISE SCIENCE DEGREE  
PROGRAMMES**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In recent years the role of higher education (HE) has been changing with a growing emphasis on the preparation of graduates for employment and the need for personal and key (transferable) skills. The Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997) clearly endorsed the role of key skills in higher education and has led to the development of programme specifications and subject benchmark statements that require programmes to address the issue of key skills development. However, the manner in which key skills have been addressed varies tremendously between and within HE institutions. Some institutions have developed 'top-down' policies that affect all programmes whilst in other institutions there have been a variety of 'bottom-up' initiatives at programme and department level. The aim of this project was to review different approaches to key skills on sport and exercise science degree programmes. The specific objectives were to:

- To identify how many sport and exercise science degree programmes have a key skills scheme and for those that do, what type of scheme is in operation (e.g. top-down or bottom-up initiative).
- To investigate the range of methods used to develop and assess key skills.
- To investigate how the success of key skills schemes are evaluated.
- To disseminate the results from the project to the sport and exercise science higher education community.

## **2.0 METHOD**

A survey methodology was employed. The first stage was to identify all the sport and exercise science-related undergraduate degree programmes on offer in the UK. A search was carried out using the UCAS website, which revealed that there were 1250 sport science and 467 exercise science programmes. Although many programmes appeared under both categories, the main reason for the vast number of programmes was that, for joint or combined honours programmes, every possible subject combination was listed as a distinct programme. The list of programmes was reduced based on the following criteria:

- Only BSc programmes were included.
- Programmes with titles that included the terms sport science, exercise science or a combination of these were included.
- Programmes with more general titles such as sports studies and sports development were excluded.
- All HND or Foundation degree programmes were excluded.

A total of 93 programmes were identified, including two within the Project Leader's Department. However, twelve of these (6 single and 6 joint honours) were excluded from the survey on the basis that it was difficult to identify the nature of the programme or a relevant contact person. Eighty-one programmes were included in the survey, twelve of which were joint or combined honours awards. A named individual such as the programme leader was identified for the majority of these.

A questionnaire was devised that included a mixture of closed and open questions and addressed five main areas:

- Key Skills Policy
- Development of Key Skills
- Assessment Procedures
- Monitoring Process
- Evaluation

Some of the questions contained in the questionnaire were based on materials from CDELL (1997) and QAA (1999) and permission to use these was obtained from both organisations.

A pilot of the questionnaire was carried out. Nine colleagues from other institutions were asked to complete and comment on the questionnaire. Comments were received from six colleagues and based on this feedback, the questionnaire was amended and the final version produced (see Appendix 1).

The survey was carried out between June and August 2002. The questionnaire was distributed to 81 programmes in 68 different institutions. Two questionnaires were completed in-house for the two programmes in the Project Leader's department. The rest of the questionnaires were distributed by post with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey and recipients were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided. The initial mail-out resulted in 27 returns, therefore a follow-up mail-out was sent to non-respondents, which resulted in a further 10 responses. The total number of responses was 39, including the two questionnaires completed in-house, which equated to a 48% response rate. One respondent indicated that the programme was no longer running and therefore did not complete the questionnaire. One returned questionnaire was based on a HND programme and was therefore excluded from the survey. So, in total 37 completed questionnaires were used.

Data from the closed questions was coded and entered in a spreadsheet for subsequent analysis. Responses to open questions were coded, typed, collated and analysed.

### **3.0 FINDINGS**

The findings from the survey are presented in the five main sections that were used on the questionnaire.

#### **3.1 Key Skills Policy**

This section of the questionnaire sought to explore issues related to the existence and nature of key skills policy, student numbers, the terminology used for key-skill type initiatives, skills addressed and the extent to which these skills were defined / specified within programmes.

The majority of programmes operate in institutions where there is some type of institutional key skills policy or at least an expectation that programmes have their own policy. Eighteen programmes (48.6%) are in institutions that have an institution-wide key skills policy that applies to all undergraduate programmes and three programmes (8.1%) are in institutions where it is optional for programmes to engage in the institution-wide scheme/policy. Institution-wide schemes can be described as top-down initiatives, i.e. policy is set at institution rather than local (department / programme) level. Seven (18.9%) of programmes are in institutions that have no policy on key skills but departments or programmes are expected to have their own and seven (18.9%) programmes are in institutions that are in the process of developing a policy. Two respondents were either unsure or undecided about institutional policy.

At the programme-level, all the sport and exercise science (SES) programmes surveyed have some form of key skills policy, although the nature of these varies. Twenty-eight programmes (76%) have a key skills policy that is part of a department-wide policy. Three programmes (8.1%) have policies that operate independently of other programmes in the department and three are in the process of developing a policy. Three respondents ticked the 'other' category. One of these stated that they just implement the institution policy; the other two did not explain their reasons. It is important to note that the department / programme policies could either be the implementation of a top-down institutional scheme or a bottom-up initiative that has developed at department / programme level. So there appears to be considerable variation in the level at which key skills policy is determined.

One of the major issues surrounding skills development in HE and other sectors is the confusion regarding terminology. It was not surprising therefore to find considerable differences in the terminology used on SES programmes and that in most cases, more than one term is used to refer to these skills. As can be seen from Figure 1, the terms 'key skills' and 'transferable skills' are the most commonly used,

which may be a reflection of the QCA and QAA terminology, but other terms are also used.

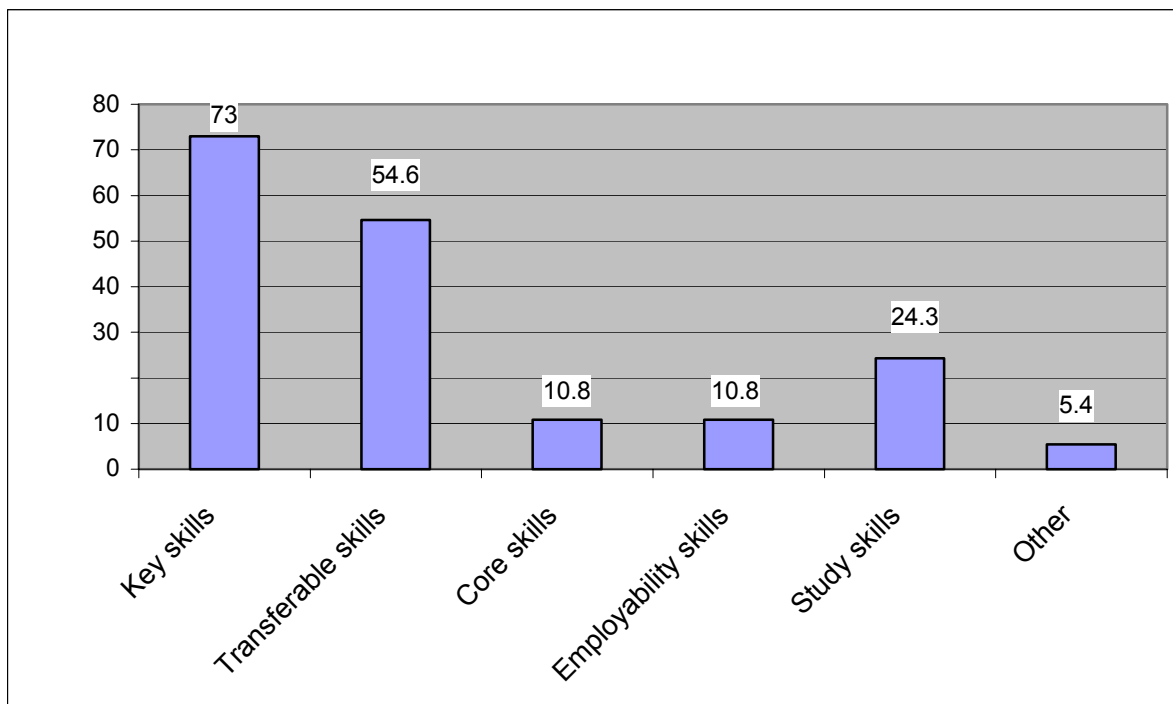
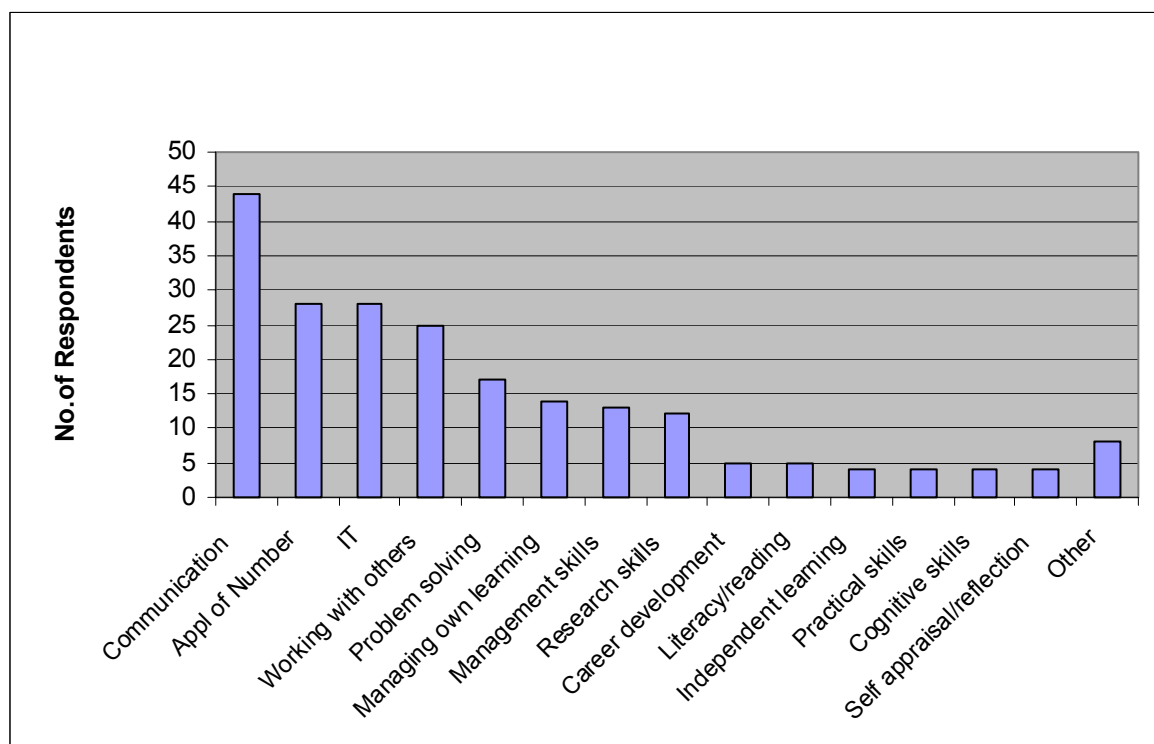


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents using various terms

Key skills are typically classified into discrete categories or areas and the number of skills areas being used on programmes ranged from 3 to 16, with a mean of 6 areas per programme. The terminology used to describe the areas varies, so for the purpose of analysis similar terms have been grouped under a generic heading, e.g. 'managing own learning' incorporates terms such as 'learning how to learn', 'improving own learning and performance' etc. The most common skill areas being used are illustrated in Figure 2. The value for communication (44) exceeds the number of respondents (37) because often more than one communication area is used by a programme, e.g. oral communication and written communication may be separate areas. Interestingly the six most common areas are related to the QCA key skill areas: communication, application of number, use of IT, working with others, improving own learning and performance (managing own learning) and problem solving.

According to CDELL (1997) agreeing the scope of each skill area is important, as there are likely to be a variety of perceptions about what a skill area means. So, respondents were asked whether clear definitions of key skills areas are available to staff and students. For most programmes (23, 65.7%) such definitions are available to staff and students although on three programmes (8.6%) these definitions are only

available to staff and on one programme these are only available to students, which seems unusual.



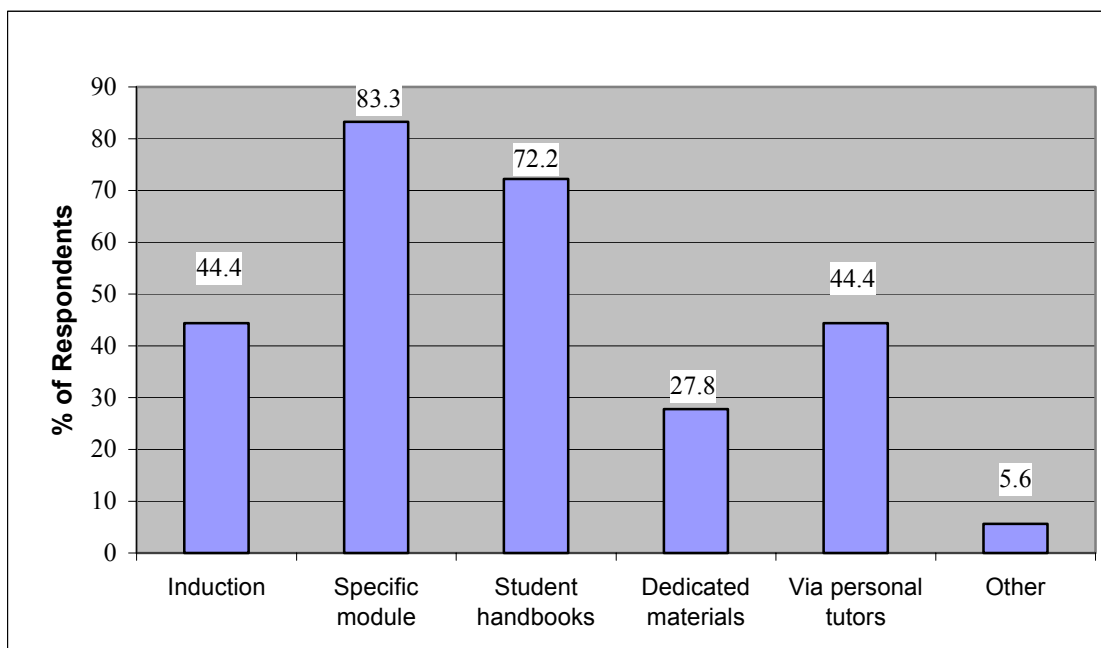
**Figure 2: Key skill areas used by programmes**

On eight programmes (22.9%) definitions are not available to staff or students. This question was not completed in two cases where respondents were unclear what was meant. Further analysis of the responses to this question revealed that those institutions with an institution-wide ('top-down') policy were more likely to have clear definitions available to staff and students.

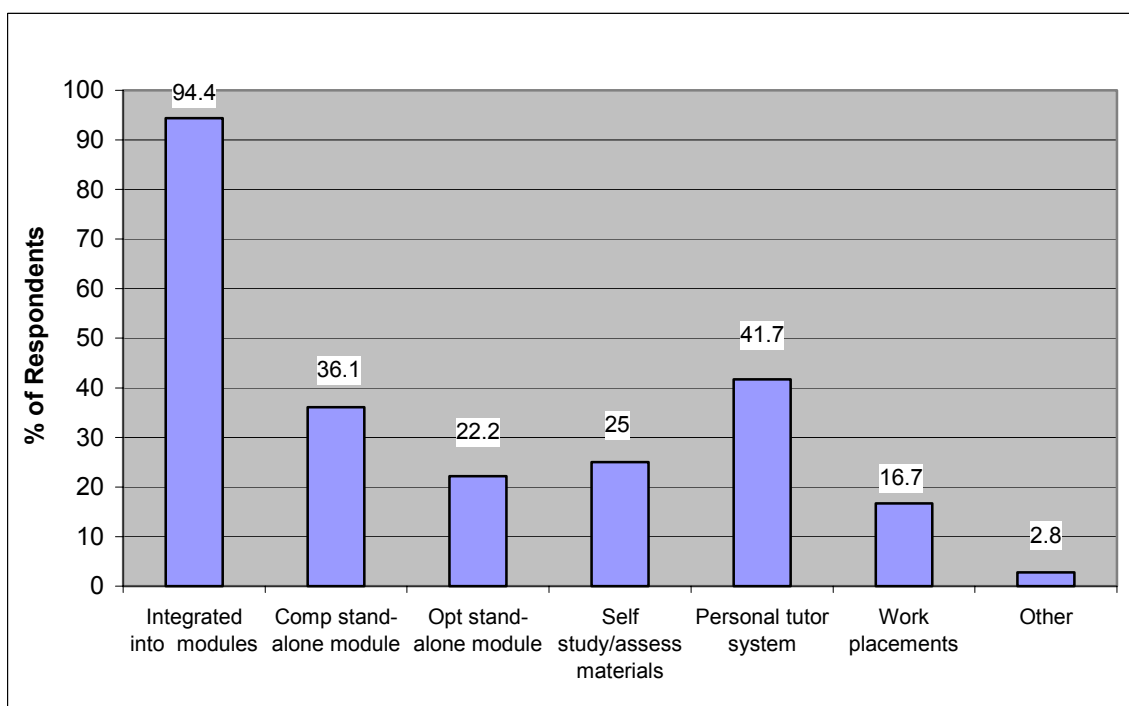
In developing a key skills specification, CDELL (1997) also recommend identifying the different aspects or elements of a skill. Half the programmes break down each skill in this way but half do not. The development of a detailed specification is likely to enhance the level of shared understanding of the different aspects of the skill, which should promote consistency. Developing an institutional specification saves considerable time and effort but needs to take into account the various contexts within which it will be applied. In so doing the specification may become too general and not account for local needs. The development of a tailored specification for every department and / or programme would ensure it was specific to the context, but would be very time consuming. Therefore, the extent to which these specifications are in use may depend on resource issues.

### 3.2 Development of Key Skills

There are a variety of models for the development of key skills on HE programmes. This section of the questionnaire sought to explore the methods used by programmes to introduce and develop students' key skills throughout the programme. As can be seen from Figures 3 and 4, a variety of methods are used and most programmes utilise more than one method for each purpose.



**Figure 3: Methods used to introduce key skills**

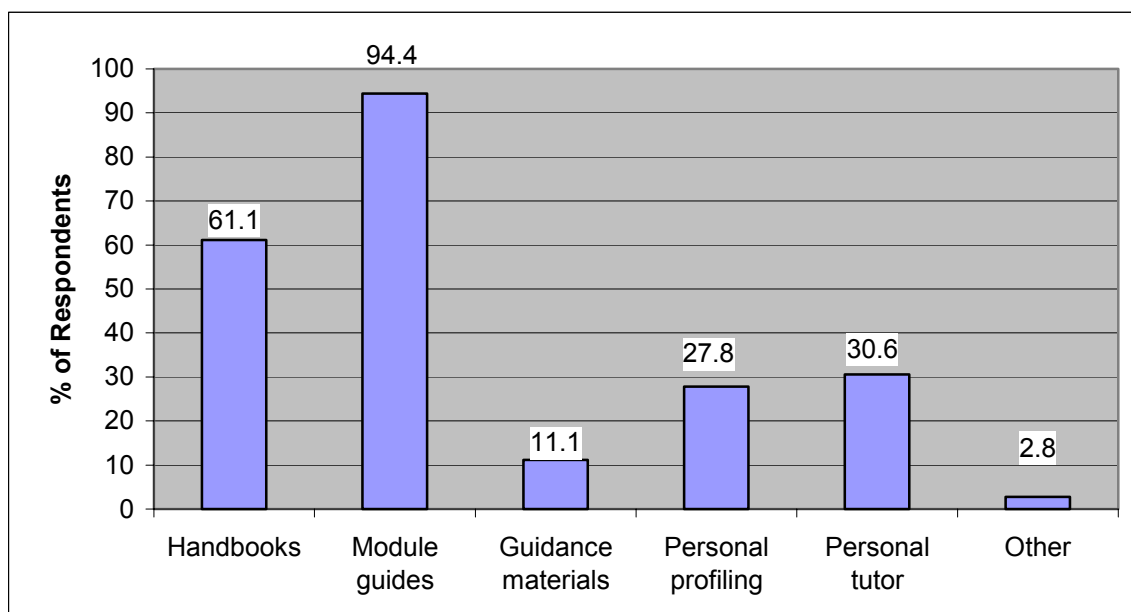


**Figure 4: Methods used to develop students' key skills**

On most programmes (83.3%) a specific module is used to introduce key skills to students, but this is not necessarily a module solely on key skills. Induction sessions and personal tutor meetings are also popular methods of introducing key skills. In terms of providing information to students via documentation, most programmes seem to prefer the use of student handbooks (72.2%) rather than dedicated materials (27.8%).

Figure 4 clearly illustrates that the vast majority of programmes (94.4%) prefer an integrated approach to the delivery of key skills, i.e. key skills are developed within subject-related modules. However, over half the programmes also include a compulsory or optional stand-alone key skills module so a mixed approach seems to be the most popular.

A variety of methods are also used to show students where key skills will be developed throughout their programme (Figure 5), with the use of module guides and handbooks being the most popular methods (94.4% and 61.1% of programmes respectively).



**Figure 5: Methods used to show student where skills are developed**

Most programmes (29, 80.6%) use a matrix approach to map which key skills are covered in which modules, although this is done in a variety of ways. Nineteen programmes map each key skill area across every module in the programme and two programmes map each element of each skill area to every module. In addition, eight of these programmes also identify on the matrix whether the skill is taught, practised / developed and / or assessed, and one programme indicates the extent to which the

skill is covered in the module, e.g. a primary feature, a component or some occurrence. A number of programmes mentioned that these matrices had been developed as part of validation and review procedures. It would appear therefore that the QAA Programme Specifications and Benchmark Statements are having a positive influence in terms of getting programmes to address key skills.

Central services such as students' services or careers are involved in the delivery of key skills on 25 programmes (71.4%). On thirteen programmes this involves students having access to materials / open workshops that are provided by central services but are not a specific part of the programme. On six programmes, central services are actually involved in the delivery of specific modules. At two institutions students have the option of taking a specific key skills module offered by central services. On other programmes central services are involved in induction, careers monitoring and / or in offering a separate key skills award.

A variety of issues surrounding the development of key skills were identified by programmes, such as whether key skills should be integrated or a separate module (5), students' awareness of the need for key skills (3), role of staff – is it our job? (3), purpose of HE – education versus training (2), students' awareness of when key skills are being developed (2), mapping of key skills (2) and the extra burden on staff (2). There were various other issues raised by individual programmes, so clearly, there is a considerable diversity of issues across programmes, rather than a common issue that is affecting all programmes.

### **3.3 Assessment Procedures**

This section of the questionnaire explored whether key skills are assessed as part of programmes and if so how? Key skills are assessed on most (80.6%) but not all programmes. The 29 programmes that do assess key skills were asked to complete further questions regarding how they were assessed, so the rest of the information in this section is based on 29 responses. The most popular method of assessment is via subject-based module assessments, used by 26 programmes (92.9%). Separate key skill specific assessments are used by four programmes (14.3%) and work-placement assessments by three programmes (10.7%). One programme assesses key skills as part of a stand-alone module and one programme uses student self-assessment of key skills. Clearly therefore, there is a preference towards assessing key skills as an integral part of subject-based modules. Not surprisingly therefore, on the majority of programmes (24, 82.8%), assessment of key skills contributes to student grades and degree classification. However, on three programmes, key skills are only assessed at level one and therefore do not affect degree classifications.

There were mixed responses in terms of the general assessment criteria used for each key skills area or element. Twelve programmes (46.2%) have general assessment criteria for each skill or skill element whereas 14 programmes (53.6%) do not. Three programmes use specific key skills criteria, although these are not specified at all levels. Two programmes have key skills criteria incorporated into programme level descriptors. On most of those programmes (13 out of 14) that do not have general criteria, the key skills assessment criteria are set by tutors or module leaders responsible for the assessment.

The assessment criteria are made explicit to students on 26 programmes (92.9%) so clearly, although many programmes do not have generic assessment criteria for the key skills, these are devised at module level and made explicit to students. This has the advantage of being able to relate criteria to specific assessment situations but may mean a lack of consistency across tutors and modules in terms of standards expected.

A variety of issues surrounding the assessment of key skills were identified by programmes, such as separate versus integrated assessment (3), identification of separate marks for key skills aspects (3), differences in assessment criteria being used (2), differentiation between levels (2), as well as a range of other issues raised by individual programmes. As with the development of key skills it appears that there are no main assessment issues affecting large number of programmes but rather a considerable diversity across programmes.

### **3.4 Monitoring Process**

This section sought to examine how students' key skills achievement is recognised and progress monitored throughout the programme, if at all. Achievement in key skills is not explicitly recognised by most programmes (21, 58.3%), probably because most programmes integrate key skills into the main programme. However some programmes do recognise achievement in the following ways: a personal development profile (12 programmes), a transcript of achievement (3), a free-standing institutional certificate (1) or other methods (3). In terms of the other categories, in one case this refers to specific feedback provided on assessment sheets and recorded through the tutorial system. In another case the programme is developing plans to use student transcripts. In the third case the respondent felt that the degree awarded recognised the achievement of key skills. Interestingly, none of the programmes offer the opportunity of a certificate awarded by an external body.

Nineteen programmes (52.8%) monitor key skills progress during the programme but 17 (47.2%) do not. Of those 19 that do monitor progress, the majority do this through the personal tutor system (11 programmes, 57.9%) involving regular meetings and in

six cases the development of associated paperwork, i.e. personal development profile, progress files or preparation / reflection forms. Eight programmes use other methods such as careers officers, self-monitoring, student progress files and assessments. On seventeen out of the nineteen programmes, students are given some responsibility for monitoring their own progress via the methods described above.

### **3.5 Evaluation**

Only five out of the 37 respondents answered the question regarding how key skills are evaluated, which may indicate that this in itself is an issue. On three programmes, evaluation of key skills forms part of module evaluation and reviews and on one of these, specific key skills evaluations by questionnaire are used periodically. On one programme the careers officer carries out an evaluation but it was not clear how and one programme does not evaluate key skills yet. The limited response to this question may suggest that this is an area that has not been given much attention by programmes and hence is an area worthy of further exploration.

## **4.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Key Skills Policy**

- More than half the sport and exercise science programmes surveyed have an institution-wide key skills policy and a further 19% of programmes are in institutions where such a policy is being developed.
- All programmes had some form of key skills policy at the programme level and the majority of these formed part of a department-wide policy.
- The terms 'key skills' and 'transferable skills' are most commonly used to describe skill-type initiatives.
- Key skills on programmes are divided into 3-16 areas (average of 6). The most common categories being used correspond to the six QCA skill areas.
- Two-thirds of the programmes surveyed make clear definitions of key skill areas available to staff and students. This was most likely to be the case on programme where there is an institution-wide policy.
- Half the programmes divide each key skill area into different elements but half do not.

### **4.2 Development of Key Skills**

- A variety of methods are used to introduce and develop key skills. Most programmes use a specific module to introduce key skills and also provide information in the student handbook.
- Over 94% of the programmes integrate key skills development into subject-based modules. However, over half the programmes also offer either a compulsory or optional stand-alone module in key skills, so a mixture of integrated and 'bolt-on' approaches are used.
- Module guides and student handbooks are used by most programmes to show students where key skills are developed on the programme.
- The majority of programmes use a matrix approach to map which key skills are covered in each module, however, only eight programmes identify whether the skill is taught, practised and / or assessed.
- Central services are involved in the delivery of key skills in over 70% of programmes. The extent of involvement ranges from providing materials and workshops for students, to involvement in the delivery of specific modules on a programme.

- The issues identified surrounding the development of key skills varied tremendously across programmes.

### **4.3 Assessment of Key Skills**

- Key skills are assessed on 81% of the SES programmes surveyed and the vast majority of these (93%) use subject-based module assessments. Separate key skills assessments are only used on 14% (4) programmes and work-placement assessments on 11% (3) programmes.
- Key skills contribute to student grades and/or degree classifications on 83% of programmes.
- Just under half the programmes (46%) have general assessment criteria for key skills. On the rest of the programmes module leaders or tutors devise the criteria for key skills aspects of assessments.
- The issues identified surrounding the assessment of key skills varied tremendously across programmes.

### **4.4 Monitoring Progress**

- Most programmes do not explicitly recognise achievement in key skills. Of those programmes that do, twelve use personal development profiles, three use transcripts of achievement and one uses a freestanding institutional certificate.
- No programmes appear to offer students the opportunity to gain a key skills certificate awarded by an external body.
- 53% of programmes monitor students' key skills progress during the programme and in most cases a personal tutor system is used for this purpose and students are given some responsibility for monitoring their own progress.

### **4.5 Evaluation**

- Only five programmes completed the question relating to evaluation of key skills, which may indicate that this is an issue or it may be that this question was unclear. On three programmes key skills are evaluated as part of module evaluation procedures and in one case this is supplemented periodically by a specific key skills evaluation. On one programme a careers officer carries out the evaluation of key skills.

## **5.0 REFERENCES**

CDELL (1997) *Supporting Key Skills in Higher Education*. CDELL, University of Nottingham.

National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) (the Dearing Report) (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Report of the National Commission*. Norwich: HMSO.

QAA (1999) *Questionnaire on Key Skills: Building a typology of approaches to key / transferable / core skills in the UK in Higher Education*. Gloucester: QAA.



**Survey of Key Skills Practices on Sport and Exercise Science Degree Programmes**

**If you are not the person named on the above label or there is no name given, please state your name and position in relation to the above programme (e.g. key skills coordinator etc)**

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Instructions:**

Please answer all relevant questions by placing a tick in the relevant box(es):  
 Select one response per question unless indicated otherwise. Please supply  
 any further details that you feel might be helpful.

 ✓

**Section 1: Key Skills Policy**

**1. Which of the following best describes the situation in your institution?**

- The institution has a policy on key skills that applies to all UG programmes.....
- The institution has a policy on key skills that is optional for programmes to engage in..
- The institution is in the process of developing a policy on key skills.....
- The institution does not have a policy on key skills but expects departments or programmes to have their own policies.....
- The institution does not have a policy on key skills and does not expect departments or programmes to have their own policies (although some may have their own).....
- Other, please specify.....

**2. How many students are there on your programme (approximately)?**

- Level 1:
- Level 2:

- Level 3:
- Level 4:
- (if applicable)

**3. Which of the following best describes the situation on your sport and exercise science programme?**

There is a key skills policy for this programme that is part of a Department-wide policy on key skills .....

This programme has its own key skills policy that operates independently of other programmes in the departments.....

There is no key skills policy for this particular programme (*If so, please go to Section 7 on page 8*).....

A key skills policy is currently being developed for this programme.....

Other, please specify.....

**4. Which of the following terms does the programme use to define these types of skills? (Please tick more than one, if applicable).**

Key skills .....

Employability skills.....

Transferable skills.....

Study skills.....

Core skills.....

Other, please specify.....

**5. Which key skills areas (e.g. communication) have been adopted for use on your programme?**

**Please list:**

**6. Are these key skills areas:**

Programme-specific skill areas?...

Institution-wide skill areas?.....

Department-wide skill areas? .....

Other, please specify .....

**7. Are clear definitions of key skills available to staff and students?**

Staff only.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Students only.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff & Students .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither staff or students .....	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If possible, please include a copy of any definitions when returning your questionnaire.*

**8. Are the key skills areas broken down into a number of elements?**

Yes.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	No .....	<input type="checkbox"/>
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*If yes, explain briefly or include a copy of these areas and their elements when returning your questionnaire, if possible.*

**Section 2: Development of Key Skills**

**9. At the start of a programme, how are key skills introduced to students? (Please tick more than one, if applicable).**

During induction sessions.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dedicated materials.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
As part of a specific module/ unit...	<input type="checkbox"/>	By personal tutors.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student handbooks.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

**10. How do students know which key skills are being developed in different parts of their programmes? (Please tick more than one, if applicable).**

Student/ course handbooks.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal profiling system.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Module/ unit specifications/ guides.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal tutor system.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dedicated guidance materials e.g. key skills booklets.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other, please specify.....	<input type="checkbox"/>

**11. Which of the following methods are used to assist students to acquire and/or develop key skills? (Please tick more than one, if applicable).**

- They are integrated into subject-based modules/units.....
- Through a compulsory designated 'stand alone' module/unit(s).....
- Through an optional designated 'stand alone' module/unit(s).....
- Students are provided with self-study/self-assessment materials.....
- Through the personal tutor system .....
- Through structured work placements .....
- Other, please specify .....

**12. Is a matrix approach used to map which key skills are covered in which units/modules?**

- Yes.....  No .....

**13. Are central services (e.g. students services, careers etc) involved in the delivery of key skills?**

- Yes.....  No .....

*If yes, please explain how.*

**14. Identify any issues that have arisen around the question of developing students' key skills.**

**Section 3: Assessment Procedures**

**15. Are key skills assessed in any way?**

Yes.....

No .....

*If no, please go to Section 4 on page 6.*

**16. How are key skills assessed? (Please tick more than one if applicable).**

Separate key skills assessments.....

As part of work placement .....

As part of subject-based  
module/unit assessments.....

Other, please specify.....

**17. Does assessment of key skills contribute to student grades and degree classification?**

Yes.....

No .....

*If yes, please explain how.*

**18. Are there general assessment criteria for each key skill area of element?**

Yes.....

No .....

*If yes, do these assessment criteria differentiate between students at different levels of the programme?*

*If no, who determines the assessment methods and performance criteria?*

**19. Are assessment criteria made explicit to learners?**

Yes.....

No .....

*If yes, how?*

**20. Identify any issues that have arisen around the question of assessment.**

**Section 4: Monitoring Progress**

**21. How is achievement in key skills recognised at the end of a programme? (Please tick more than one, if applicable).**

- Via a certificate awarded by an external body (please specify).....
- Via a free-standing institutional certificate.....
- Within a transcript of achievement.....
- In a personal development profile maintained by students.....
- Not recognised explicitly.....
- Other, please explain.....

**22. Is progress in key skills monitored during the programme?**

- Yes.....       No .....

*If no, please go to Section 5 on page 7.*

**23. How is progress monitored?**

- Through personal tutor system.....       Through year tutor system.....
- Through designated key skills meetings.....       Other, please specify.....

*Explain.*

**24. Are students given some responsibility for monitoring their progress?**

Yes.....

No .....

*If yes, to what extent?*

**Section 5: Evaluation**

**25. Is the key skills scheme for the programme evaluated? If so, how?**

**Section 6: Follow-up**

**26. If it were considered appropriate, would you be willing to be interviewed about key skills?**

Yes.....

No .....

**27. Would you be willing to contribute materials for a compilation of case studies?**

Yes.....

No .....

*Please go to Section 8 on page 8*

**Section 7: For those programmes with no key skills policy**

**28. Are there any particular reasons why key skills are not included as part of your degree programme? If so, please explain why?**

**29. Are there any intentions to introduce key skills into the programme? If so what form is this likely to take?**

**Section 8**

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The information you have provided will be very useful in painting an overall picture of key skills on sport and exercise science degree courses.

Please return the questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope to:

Nuala Byrne,  
Dept of Exercise and Sport Science,  
Manchester Metropolitan University,  
Hassall Road,  
Alsager ST7 2HL

*before 12<sup>th</sup> July 2002*

**Acknowledgements**

Some of the questions included in this questionnaire have been based on questions from the following sources:

- CDELL (1997) Supporting Key Skills in Higher Education. CDELL, University of Nottingham.
- QAA (1999) Questionnaire on Key Skills: Building a typology of approaches to key/transferable/core skills in the UK in Higher Education. Gloucester: QAA.