

The DfEE's Development Programme gave De Montfort University the opportunity to build on its progressive and developmental approach to key skills, by providing funding to support advances within a rapidly changing educational environment.

Aims

The project aims were to:

- › Provide an initial assessment of individual student's key skills on entry to the university.
- › Provide guidance and support mechanisms to enable students to improve their key skills profile.
- › Provide guidance and support to enable students to demonstrate their key skills profile in a record of achievement.

Objectives

Ten interrelated objectives were identified which were to be progressed in parallel with other University priorities.

- › Establish a whole institution approach to key skills across the full range of post-16 provision.
- › Provide an underpinning professional development programme for staff to support learning, teaching and assessment of key skills.
- › Identify the desired key skill profiles for students on entry to the University.
- › Assess the key skill profiles of students on entry to the University.
- › Develop, trial and implement generic key skill learning packages.
- › Develop, trial and implement student records of key skill achievement.
- › Work with partners in the compulsory and Further Education sectors.
- › Define by subject the anticipated 'graduate key skills profiles'.
- › Obtain the endorsement by employers and professional and statutory bodies of the graduate key skill profiles.
- › Collaborate, network and disseminate.

Key outcomes

The major outcome of the project was the agreement of a key skills policy, to be implemented across the full range of the University's awards. This has been reflected as one of six key objectives which form the basis of the University's learning and teaching strategy for 2000–2005:

'To ensure that the student learning experience includes a range of personal and key skills appropriate for employment in the information age'

The learning and teaching strategy includes a clear statement of the policy, to be progressed within the University's seven Faculties.

'The University's (key skills) policy is to adopt and phase in the national framework for key skills (defined by the regulatory bodies), as benchmarks within the University's provision (post-16, undergraduate and postgraduate). The policy aims to ensure equality of entitlement to support for all students to enable them to develop key skills. The policy requires clear articulation, within modularity, of opportunities for students to learn, practise and be assessed in key skills.'

The strategy document clearly acknowledges the role that the DfEE support has played in further promoting the University's key skills agenda:

'In 1998 the University was successful in securing development funding of £200,000 from the Higher Education and Employment Division of the DfEE to build on its extensive experience of key skills work.'

'A cross university team has taken this forward in a variety of ways, including a large scale programme of self-assessment testing for new undergraduates and the transformation of modules to include learning outcomes for key skills.'

'In recognition of the scale of the activity and the professional development required, this activity will be phased in.'

De Montfort University Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2000 – 2005

The Faculties will continue to receive professional development support for key skills through the newly formed Student Learning Advisory Services. SLAS will provide expertise in key skills alongside other aspects of student learning. In addition, a Key Skills Forum will provide a focus for the exchange of good practice, debate and continued collaboration with staff in Associate Colleges.

Finally, the University places the student experience very much at the heart of its vision and values. It is important therefore to ensure that the student view is paramount in key skills developments. Much of the work described in the main report of the project may appear to have been aimed at the more traditional entrant from school or college. However, the following quotation demonstrates the benefits in key skills as perceived by a mature student:






'De Montfort University's delivery of key skills awareness has opened up my personal horizons, and I am now working to enable others to develop and improve their key skills – to unlock future potential and change lives. As well as pursuing a postgraduate qualification, I am currently a part-time lecturer in key skills in a male prison.'

Rosemary Hicks, BA (Hons) First Class in Business Studies, July 2000

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