

Teacher guide – SkillSetPlus

Teacher guidance

Section 1: Intro

Welcome & Thank you letter
<p><i>Welcome to SkillSetPlus, the new skills programme from The Open University.</i></p> <p><i>Firstly, thank you for visiting the website, exploring our resources, and downloading this guide.</i></p> <p><i>We know how busy teachers are, and how many resources are competing for your attention.</i></p> <p><i>Everything in this programme has been designed by, with, and for, teachers just like you.</i></p> <p><i>It has also been created with input from young people – and designed to give them support with the topics that matter to them, in a way that will support you.</i></p> <p><i>At The Open University, our mission is to make learning accessible to all – and at the heart of that is extending the opportunity of flexible education to support students in schools and colleges.</i></p> <p><i>We hope the resources in this guide are a useful first step – if you have any ideas or reflections, you’re welcome to get in touch with us at skillsetplus@wecommunications.com.</i></p> <p><i>We look forward to hearing from you,</i></p> <p>SkillSetPlus Team, The Open University</p>
About the programme
<p>SkillSetPlus is a new skills programme for students aged 13-16. It’s designed to support young people who may lack confidence to count themselves in to higher education or see it as a realistic option for their future.</p> <p>Developed by The Open University, SkillSetPlus draws on decades of expertise in supporting students from all backgrounds to thrive and achieve in education and beyond.</p> <p>SkillSetPlus learning is designed to be real and relevant for young people, and is designed for them to navigate at their own pace and in their own way.</p>

It helps them recognise their unique, individual strengths, alongside building some new skills, can make them unstoppable – showing them how their unique **SkillSetPlus** some practical support can take them to places they never thought were possible.

Why?

Young people growing up today are navigating an increasingly complex and uncertain world. It can feel like the headlines are full of bad news, or stories about their weaknesses – what they can't do or are doing wrong.

This programme aims to take a different approach. It provides accessible and engaging advice on real-world topics in a way that is uplifting and affirming.

It's designed to meet their preferences, and work in a way that reflects the worlds they explore – in their **education, work** and **social** lives. As digital natives, with a so-called infinite scroll of content in front of them, we're meeting them where they are at with short, engaging animations, plain-speaking blogs, and camera roll-friendly visuals.

They're all based on existing content from OpenLearn - our online free-to-access teaching space, designed to help extend learning beyond the classroom without cost or barriers. OpenLearn draws directly from the OU's academic expertise, giving teachers a reliable, high-quality source of materials that mirror the University's approach to accessible, flexible education.

Our modules have all been developed by, with, and for teachers. Each topic was selected because they respond to what you have been telling us – that many young people lack confidence with education or need additional support, but may not have a formal or recognised need.

By taking part in it, young people will have their strengths played back to them – and will be reminded of the ways they are stronger than they know and more capable than they believe.

Section 2: Programme detail

Students' first-stop on the programme is the online quiz – where short, fun multiple-choice questions help them identify their strengths and recommends the modules for them to start with.

Importantly, this is about building on areas they may already be strong in – not judging them, or reminding them of the things they find more difficult.

Persona	Description	Modules to start with
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The Quiet Builder	Students improve steadily. They think before acting and learn from experience — even if they don't always notice it yet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation and goal setting • Understanding and assessing yourself as a learner • Mentoring
The Pattern Spotter	They notice patterns fast, clock when something doesn't add up, and like knowing how things work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to use social media to learn and supercharge your future • Using AI to support your learning • Giving presentations
The Straight-Up Speaker	They do best when things are clear. They ask, explain, and say what's needed — even if it takes practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity and inclusion • Mentoring • Motivation and goal setting
The Calm Supporter	They're steady and thoughtful. They notice feelings (theirs and others) and help bring things down a notch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using mindfulness to stay in control • Understanding and assessing yourself as a learner • Misinformation and disinformation
The Vibe Checker	They read people and information. They notice when something feels fake, forced, or off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misinformation and disinformation • Using AI to support your learning • Non-verbal communication
The Mood Lifter	They lift the mood, include others, and express themselves naturally — even if they don't call it "confidence".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non verbal communication • Advocacy • Using mindfulness to stay in control
The Always on Learner	They're figuring out how you learn best. Once they've got a system that works, things click quickly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying top tips and time management • Understanding and assessing yourself as a learner • Advocacy

The Truth Seeker	They ask “why?” and don’t take things at face value — especially online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using AI to support your learning • Misinformation and disinformation • Giving presentations
The Growing Explainer	They’ve got ideas worth sharing. They understand things deeply — and they’re building confidence putting them into words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving presentations • Advocacy • Study top tips and management

We’ve launched the programme with 12 short, multi-media modules:

Module		Skill	World
Module 1	Non-verbal communication	Communication	Social
Module 2	Giving presentations	Communication	Education
Module 3	Motivation and goal setting	Learning to learn	Work
Module 4	How to use social media to learn and supercharge your future	Understanding information	Work
Module 5	Using AI to support your learning	Understanding information	Education
Module 6	Study top tips and time management	Learning to learn	Education
Module 7	Misinformation and disinformation	Understanding information	Social
Module 8	Diversity and inclusion	Communication	Work
Module 9	Using mindfulness to stay in control	Learning to learn	Social
Module 10	Understanding and assessing yourself as a learner	Learning to learn	Education
Activity 11	Mentoring	Communication	Work
Activity 12	Advocacy	Communication	Education

Section 3: How to use it

Where it fits
<p>These resources are designed to be flexible, so you can use them with the groups of students you feel they are most appropriate for, in the curriculum time you have available.</p> <p>Some suggestions from teachers involved in creating the resources to date are that you could use them...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In tutor time/mentoring time• As part of a subject lesson• In breakouts after an assembly• As part of an enrichment/off-timetable day themed around careers or skills• During PSHE/RSHE• As part of your careers education programme• During independent learning time
Supporting curriculum
<p>These resources are intentionally not to deliver your subject curriculum. They're about the real skills for real life that students want to feel prepared for a changing world.</p> <p>However, they are designed to be complementary to wider enrichment and personal development – which we know sits at the heart of many schools' visions for their students.</p> <p>In particular, these resources can contribute towards personalised, skills-based education and can support you in delivering, PSHE/RSHE programme of study, Gatsby benchmarks 1 and 3, and help you to demonstrate a commitment to personal development and wellbeing.</p>

Section 4: Facilitating SkillSetPlus in your classroom

The activities below are designed to take the individual learning students complete on the programme and provide wraparound classroom learning.

The structure below helps students reflect, embed, and make practical plans based on what they have learned – in line with best practice and to provide the structure students need to make it tangible.

1. Reflection questions	
Below are some suggested reflection questions to ask students based on the module they worked on – so no matter what they're focused on, you can feel confident checking they are on task and thinking hard.	
Module	Reflection questions

Non-verbal communication and creating a positive image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If someone joined a meeting or interview like in your example, what signals would you expect others to pick up about them, even before they speak? ➤ Which non-verbal choices feel easiest for you to control, and which feel harder in real situations? Why do you think that is? ➤ (Checking for learning) What's one small non-verbal change that would improve a first impression straight away in an online setting?
Giving presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Thinking about presentations you've seen, what specific things help you stay focused as a listener, and what usually makes you switch off? ➤ Which presentation tips felt familiar to you, and which ones changed how you think about presenting? ➤ How does preparation affect confidence before someone even starts speaking, and how might that show up in their body language or voice?
Motivation and goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you have any goals you're currently working towards? ➤ (Checking for learning) How does breaking a goal into smaller, clearer steps change how achievable it feels?
How to use social media positively to learn and build your career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What would a "professional but authentic" online presence look like for someone your age, and how is that different from just being online? ➤ If someone looked at your profile or posts, what would they learn about your interests or strengths? What might be missing? ➤ How could you use social media to support learning in a subject, and what boundaries would you need to keep it purposeful?
The benefits and dangers of using AI for work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When you use AI, how can you tell whether it's helping you think more clearly, or just doing the thinking for you? ➤ Looking at a recent piece of work, where could AI help you improve it without losing your own voice? ➤ What's one prompt that improved the work, and one that didn't? What was the difference?
Studying top tips and time management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What usually breaks your concentration, and which strategies help you stay focused for longer? ➤ When might a technique like Pomodoro be helpful, and when might it not suit the task you're doing?
Social Media and Fake News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What differences do you notice between how information is presented on social media compared to a news site? ➤ How do images, headlines, or captions influence how trustworthy or convincing something feels? ➤ Why is it important to question information online, even when it comes from someone you usually trust?

Diversity and individuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How might recognising that people think and learn differently change the way a group works together? ➤ Can you think of a time when a different perspective improved an outcome - or could have if it had been listened to? ➤ (Checking for learning) What's one practical way a group could make it easier for everyone to contribute?
Mindfulness, breathing and staying calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What situations tend to stress you out or distract you during learning? ➤ Which calming strategies feel realistic for you to use outside the classroom, and when would they help most? ➤ How might practising these regularly change how you respond under pressure over time?
Understanding and assessing yourself as a learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Where do you see yourself strongest in the learning cycle, and where do you usually get stuck? ➤ How do your quiz results or strengths show up in real subjects or tasks? ➤ What's one way you could use those strengths more deliberately in your learning this week?
Finding a mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What makes someone a useful mentor for you, skills, experience, or how they communicate? ➤ Which questions helped you learn the most during the mentoring activity, and why? ➤ Who could you ask for guidance next, and what would you want help with specifically?
Asking for help – how listening is a super power!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Which part of asking for help feels most natural to you, and which do you usually avoid? ➤ How does listening well change what you get out of advice or feedback? ➤ Where could you try one of these techniques this week, and what would success look like?

2. Pair share and class discussion on learning – 25 minutes

This activity is to get students to think about what they learned in the different modules they studied – and what can help them learn best. It's designed to build their metacognition skills in a safe and structured way.

Individual reflection: (2 minutes)

- When students have completed the modules, ask them to note down their quiz results and key messages from the module they started – insights, tips, or ideas.
- Bring students back together – at this point devices should be put away to prevent distractions

- Ask students to spend 2 minutes making notes in response to two prompts. First: “what’s one idea that stood out?” Second: “where could that help you; school, work, or online?”
- Making notes on this first helps improve the quality of discussion, particularly for lower-confidence students.

Pair share (5 minutes)

- Next, put students into pairs. Tell them they are each going to talk for 60 seconds, uninterrupted, about what they learned. Explain the listener’s job is to summarise back before they respond.
- Time the room – tell one person in each pair to start, and tell them when time is up and it’s time to switch over. Put prompts and sentence stems on the board – these can include:
 - *My learning content was about....*
 - *It felt relevant because....*
 - *A strength I bring to this is....*
 - *Something that I disagree with is....*
 - *Knowing this about myself could help me when...*
- The use of forced talking and listening builds oracy skills, while the summarising practices active listening and comprehension.

Refinement: (5 minutes)

- Ask student pairs to plan together for something practical they will *both* try based on what they have learned and discussed – if they looked at different modules it works particularly well, as they try to identify common themes.
- Encourage them to come up with a strategy that could help both of them to display their strengths in their work and feel more confident.
- Tell them that this should be something they could try this week, not a long-term goal.
- Working on the ideas together prevents them from identifying too strongly with weaknesses and puts the emphasis on positive ideas.

Whole class ‘listening party’ (10 minutes)

- Ask pairs to share their ideas with the class – first summarising what each other learned about, then together sharing the ideas they had for embedding it.
- Cold call on groups to share, so there’s a balance of perspectives, including those students less confident or likely to share.
- When you have heard from enough students, ask comparison prompts (‘How do these ideas link?’ ‘Which of the other ideas you have heard do you think could be most helpful in school? What about online?’).
- Model expert sense-making by occasionally reflecting on what you’ve heard (“I’m noticing several of these are about planning ahead...”) and help students to make additional links.

Wrap up (2 minutes):

- End by asking them to write down an idea for themselves - “One thing I’ll try next time I’m learning is...” Everyone needs to write, but these won’t be collected or shared. Ask them to circle the bit they think will be hardest and set specific targets to make it more achievable.
- End by reminding them that every one of them has unique strengths that they bring to everything they do. Remind them that exploring simple scenarios like this and reflecting on their natural approach is a great way to let their natural ideas shine.

3. Personality partnering (20 minutes)

This activity is inspired by the online quiz itself. It provides a fun and dynamic way to help students reflect on their persona results without labelling or limiting themselves – and facilitating them to think about practical strategies that can support their learning, whatever their results.

A Icebreaker (5 minutes)

- Ask students to remind themselves of their persona. Then, ask them to move around the classroom to find someone with the same persona.
- Once they’ve done that, ask pairs to move around the classroom finding another pair of the same personas.
- Repeat the activity until the whole class is clustered into one group for each persona.
- This should be a fun activity, with lots of movement and laughing, and then gives a good visual representation of how many people were identified with each persona.

B Group discussions: (10 minutes)

- In groups, ask students to discuss their persona results. They will be exploring the question “When does this persona work best, and what kind of tasks are hardest?”
- You can support with a prompt (verbal or on the board) like: How do they like to work? Did their results match how they think about themselves?
- Ask persona groups to list (using mini-whiteboards or paper) what similarities they noticed as they discussed their results
- Remind them every persona has strengths – and things they find more difficult, and that’s normal. Tell them that’s why reflecting on your style is helpful – it lets you get the most out of your abilities.
- The challenge is to find strategies that help you do your best work. Ask them to discuss as a group – sharing how they work best or coming up with new ideas. What could supercharge their strengths and support with things they find more challenging?
- Go around the class and ask groups to share their strategies and what they thought would be helpful. Observe and discuss any similarities, or differences.

C Personal reflection: (5 minutes)

- End by asking each student to make a personal note of strategies they heard and want to use in their own worlds going forward – that could be something they discussed in their group, or heard another group sharing at the end.
- Ask them to pick one of these strategies and make 2-3 practical immediate actions to put it into practice. Tell them that actions should be small enough to try in your next lesson or piece of homework.

4. Referencing personas in other lessons/tutor time.

These persona results are a great way to make other learning across the curriculum tangible and relevant – helping students think about how they would approach a situation, and where their unique strengths might influence the way they think about a challenge.

Below we've suggested how that could work to get students reflecting and sharing their ideas within our curriculum areas.

5 minute flexible discussion

- In tutor time or subject lessons, when you're discussing different scenarios or learning, you can ask students how they think different personalities would respond.
- It's a way of grounding the discussion and recognising that everyone has different styles and strengths. It gives a language to students for metacognitive discussions about different tasks you're setting them.
- Ask the group open-ended questions. In a science lesson on problem-solving, you might ask:
 - Which persona might jump straight into testing ideas here?
 - Which might want to plan first? What strengths does each bring?
 - How might persona A approach this task?
- Remind students that personas like this are tools – not boxes to limit them. It's a way of looking at yourself differently and your unique strengths.
- Where possible, pair students with different persona results together and ask them to discuss how they would each interpret a situation and what their natural instinct would be (whether it's a potential job role in a careers session, or a particularly hard scientific problem).