
National Academy of Professional Studies (NAPS)

Skills Framework and Skills Hub

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1. Importance of Skills at NAPS

The National Academy of Professional Studies (NAPS) is committed to graduating creative professionals who are capable of developing innovative solutions to problems facing the wider society as well as in their workplace. This will require graduates to possess analytical and critical capacities as well as the ability to synthesise ideas and adapt to new situations.

NAPS expects its graduates to have developed a body of professional and disciplinary knowledge and technical skills as well as a set of appropriate professional values and life-skills, also known as 'soft' skills. For this reason, we have distinguished between generic skills and specific professional skills.

A skills statement is always a 'work in progress'. Thus, the NAPS Skills Hub will evolve over time and will be continually evaluated to ensure the skills taught are relevant and up-to-date. However, NAPS can only prepare students to a level of basic competency in these various skills by providing online opportunities, although they will also use these skills as part of their learning, for example in presentations and class group work. The mastery of these skills is a lifelong journey continuing throughout their careers.

2. Goals of the NAPS Skills Program

The purpose of this skills statement is to:

- a. more clearly define 'professionalism';
- b. ensure NAPS addresses the concerns about 'skills gaps' between higher education in the professional areas and what is needed in practice;
- c. highlight NAPS developmental approach that defines the student skills development across the curriculum; and
- d. endorse the view that all professors are skills teachers.

3. Implementation

The skills and attributes expected of NAPS graduates are expressed in general or generic terms that provide a framework for their development in the context of different award levels and specific disciplines and professional fields. The skills and attributes will be:

- a. the focus on professional education at NAPS;
- b. supported and understood by all staff and students of NAPS;
- c. fundamental to curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment within subjects;
- d. contextualized at the level of individual subjects and courses;
- e. relatable to the teaching and learning outcomes of particular subjects;
- f. explicitly communicated to faculty, students and potential employers through subject documentation;
- g. capable of self-assessment by students;
- h. demonstrable through presentation of appropriate evidence by students; and
- i. regularly reviewed.

4. Generic Business Skills and Attributes

NAPS recognises that individuals entering its program bring with them a diversity of personal and professional attributes that should be further developed by their experience as students and graduates of NAPS.

NAPS expects all of its graduates to have developed the following skills and attributes to a level appropriate for their award which will equip them for success in professional life:

Communication

Graduates are expected to be able to:

- a. express knowledge, ideas and opinions in their professional field, both orally and in written form, with confidence and clarity;
- b. present arguments and ideas effectively;
- c. actively listen and respond to the ideas of other people;
- d. negotiate effectively;
- e. create and present new ideas;
- f. lead a brainstorming discussion and moving it forward to an action plan; and
- g. conduct a meeting and lead group discussion.

Business Context

Oral and written communication skills of the highest order are required of a successful accountant or business person, no matter how students use their degree. In addition to being able to make excellent oral presentations, feedback from employers tells us that they expect students to excel at research and writing. These communication skills are developed by guided practice and individualised feedback. In studying at NAPS, students will experience a broad range of settings in which communication skills can be nurtured.

Some of these contexts include:

- a. strong business research and writing programs;
- b. oral presentations on a particular topic;
- c. problem solving presentations;
- d. business scenarios where students play various roles,
- e. drafting of marketing plans and other business documents;
- f. draft letters of advice; and
- g. client interviewing where students learn active listening skills.

Information and Communication Technology

Graduates are expected to be able to select and use appropriate information and communication technology to retrieve, manipulate and present information. These skills may include, for example:

- Word Processing
- Electronic Legal Research
- Investigation: factual research on the net
- Web 101 and Advanced
- Podcasting

- Blogs
- Email
- Calendar
- Databases
- Excel
- Powerpoint
- Electronic Litigation support
- Project management software
- Time management software
- Chat
- Security/privacy awareness in a networked environment
- PDF/Adobe
- Video Conferencing

Business Context

NAPS students receive excellent training and valuable experience using the leading research tools. While at NAPS students will be provided with online tutorials that provide students with additional opportunities to practice such skills where relevant, such as:

- a. business and business law research;
- b. how to do well on business examinations;
- c. strategic contracting;
- d. legal compliance and good management; and
- e. negotiation.

Problem Solving

Graduates are expected to be able to:

- a. identify problems and analyse the main features of problems relevant to their professional field;
- b. apply appropriate problem-solving processes, arguments, critical and creative thinking;
- c. develop, implement and evaluate strategies for the resolution of problems;
- d. anticipate and define new problems; and
- e. identify and resolve new problems in new fields.

Business Context

Problem solving is one of the most important skill-sets of the accountant or business person. In almost every unit, students will develop a range of approaches, tactics and strategies involved in problem solving. Problem solving includes not only the narrow aspect of research and writing but also viewing the business in context to incorporate the role of business in risk management, compliance, creativity and design.

Collaboration/Teamwork

Graduates are expected to be able to:

- a. work with others as part of a group;
- b. take responsibility for carrying out agreed tasks;
- c. be aware of the different roles and responsibilities of group members;
- d. evaluate group performance;

- e. take initiative and demonstrate leadership; and
- f. respect the rights of others irrespective of their cultural background, race or gender.

Business Context

Professionals increasingly work in teams, often including people from other disciplines such as accounting, economics, information technology, communications and so on. At NAPS, students are provided with multiple opportunities to develop their collaborative skills, to learn to work as a team in developing a strategy, solving a problem and achieving important outcomes.

At NAPS we promote collaborative and teamwork skills, for example, by:

- a. encouraging group work involving research, presentations, client interviewing and other contexts;
- b. encouraging students to be actively involved with our Business Students Association;
- c. encouraging students to seek out volunteer or work experience opportunities; and
- d. designing assignments and providing classroom experiences requiring collaborative work.

Effective Workplace/Business Skills

Graduates are expected to:

- a. demonstrate entrepreneurial skills including creativity, initiative, adaptability, leadership, resourcefulness;
- b. understand 'business' language and basic business terms;
- c. have a basic understanding of accounts and related business skills;
- d. have the ability to initiate new ideas, implement decisions and cope with uncertainty;
- e. be able to function in a multi-cultural or global environment;
- f. understand role of business law and business in risk management and business strategy;
- g. be skilled in time management; and
- h. be skilled in knowledge management.

Business Context

Effective workplace skills are best nurtured in a place where it is exciting to work. In the extraordinary environment of Sydney, our students have the benefit of living, studying and working in one of the world's most beautiful cities. Sydney is home to many major companies, it has approximately 40% of Australia's start-ups, a world-class education system and information infrastructure. Sydney is an 'international city'. Many of Sydney's citizens walk on not only a national, but an international stage. We seek to get these global professionals actively involved with our Academy. This involvement greatly enriches the quality of learning of our students.

Professional Ethics

Graduates are expected to:

- a. act responsibly, ethically and with integrity in the context of their profession and their obligations to society; and
- b. appreciate the social and cultural context of their profession.

Business Context

In addition to specialised units dealing with professional ethics, students learn about and encounter ethical issues throughout their course of study. This includes both the study of philosophical theories of ethics and even more importantly how to apply those ethics in practice. Although writing about law, the following comment is equally true of business.

As noted by Oxford's Professor Peter Birks in *Examining the Law Syllabus* (1992) Oxford University Press, p. 3:

The great difference between law and moral philosophy lies in the obligation to come to decisions: day after day the courts have to give judgment. Law, thus carries the extra burdens of certainty and consistency. This is what Blackstone means when he says, following Aristotle, that law is 'the principal and most perfect branch of ethics' and remarks on it as a matter of astonishment and concern 'that a science like this should ever have been deemed unnecessary to be studied in an university' (Commentaries, 1.27). And this too is what the great Ulpian meant when he told first-year law students at the beginning of the third century AD that their business was to cultivate justice and to profess the knowledge of all that was fair and good, 'a genuine philosophy and not, unless I am mistaken, a sham'.

Social Responsibility

Graduates are expected to:

- a. work toward improvement in society;
- b. understand economic, political, social, and environmental systems with an international perspective;
- c. act in environmentally sustainable ways; and
- d. accept service to the community as the primary purpose for professional life.

Business Context

Professional disciplines such as business are founded on the philosophical and ethical principles that inform and guide a society. Yet, business is influenced by and in turn influences the history of that society. The study of business and supporting scholarship in these disciplines are important not only for professional use, but is of immense importance to all other callings in society. Every academic staff member of our professional schools takes seriously their duty and responsibility to be involved in the wider community. We celebrate that role and recognise it in promotions and other ways. We do this because we want to model for our students, and have them learn for themselves, the importance of social responsibility.

Lifelong Learning

Graduates are expected to:

- a. be independent self-directed learners with the capacity and motivation for lifelong learning;
- b. be aware of how they best learn;
- c. possess self-knowledge and the ability to assess their own performance critically and accurately; and
- d. have an understanding of how to apply their knowledge and abilities to many different contexts and fields.

Business Context

Acquiring a NAPS professional degree is only the beginning of an exciting lifelong journey. At NAPS we strive to have students not only learn about accounting and business, but also to be equipped and enthusiastic for life-long learning. As Plutarch stated, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” As stated above, our focus is on a student-centred curriculum with special attention given to research, reasoning and writing instruction as well as online learning.

Personal Attributes

Graduates are expected to:

- a. be independent thinkers and agents for change;
- b. have confidence to challenge existing ideas;
- c. be creative in coming up with solutions to legal problems;
- d. show commitment to ongoing self-development;
- e. value and respect differing views;
- f. be confident in themselves and their own skills and knowledge;
- g. be able to work collaboratively and effectively with others;
- h. have the ability to manage time, set priorities;
- i. demonstrate emotional intelligence; and
- j. be an effective leader.

Business Context

Studying to be a professional in accounting or Islamic Business is a very challenging, exciting and competitive environment where students can test themselves against a select and very talented peer group. This student matrix encourages students to be independent, to value diversity and experience, to reflect upon their special attributes and how they might best develop their talents to the full. At the same time, students must also be able to work with others and develop their emotional as well as their intellectual intelligence. Students must learn to be effective leaders. These and related attributes will be inculcated through our skills programs, placements and experiences both within the classroom and through extra-curricular participation such as essay competitions and student organisations.

Critical Thinking and Creativity

NAPS graduates are expected to be sound critical thinkers. They are also expected to be able to think ‘outside the box’ and work with others to find creative solutions to problems as well use their creativity to provide better service to their employers, their clients and better serve the community generally.

Business Context

NAPS students also learn the art and skill of critical thinking and creativity. Critical thinking, written communication, oral advocacy and creative problem solving are all inculcated through exercises and activities that start in Year 1 of a NAPS degree and continue throughout.

Internationalisation

Internationalisation is in many respects an ‘outlook’, and approach - a mind-set. This will be developed in the classroom and in our teaching through the introduction of international developments and perspectives throughout all units as the opportunity arises. It will also occur through interaction among students and with our academics as we develop an international learning community through which we learn with and from one another.

Business Context

The world is becoming a much smaller place. Well -functioning legal and business systems are now seen as part of the competitive advantage of nations. International and comparative perspectives are becoming increasingly important. NAPS seeks to develop an international outlook in our students. This includes an introduction to international/comparative research methods through which, for example, students may develop a skill-set that equips them to broaden their learning and look for the best theory and practice wherever in the world it may be found.

5. NAPS Online Skills Development

Technological literacy is important for NAPS graduates as are workplace, leadership and life skills also known as ‘soft’ skills. NAPS will use technology to help our students develop such skills in more detail than is possible within their regular learning. This goal will be achieved through the development of the NAPS Skills Hub.

The NAPS Skills Hub is one of the features that facilitates a professional culture and community of scholarship and professional excellence at the Academy, to enrich the learning experience for students and NAPS’ staff.

It is the gateway to online tutorials and other useful information to help students to acquire the ‘soft skills’ required for professional business as well as career information and shared electronic discussion boards for collaborative learning.

The Hub is organised into four categories:

- Business Degree Skills
- Technological Skills
- Learning Skills
- Resources for NAPS Teachers

The Hub will also have a special focus on e-Leadership, preparing students for the role of technology in enabling transformational change and coping with disruption in traditional models of employment, in institutions and in society itself. The Hub will also provide resources to develop leadership skills which will help to secure sustained success and growth in students’ chosen professions, sharing some of the extensive literature available about how leadership can be learned and developed.

Business Degree Skills Hub

This includes resources such as:

- Improving Academic English proficiency and Writing Skills;
- academic success aids, including Academic Integrity, time management, etc.
- database of targeted study resources;

- career information related to professions which benefit from a business degree;
- shared electronic discussion board to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous feedback on written and other work;
- a calendar facility able to send electronic reminders to students as well as 'motivational' material to encourage students to 'stay the course'; and
- self-paced online skills units to help ensure NAPS students develop the many 'soft skills' required of today's professionals, eg project management, tutorials for Microsoft Office products, career advice and more.

In the future, it will also include a General Business Skills section. In this area, online learning modules will be progressively added to help develop skills such as the following. The priority will be determined by student demand.

Potential areas are:

- Negotiation
- Written communication
- Oral communication/Public speaking
- Data analytics
- Marketing and sales
- Management
- Leadership
- Project management
- Emotional intelligence
- Technology literacy
- Networking
- Intercultural IQ

Technological Skills

Below is a non-exhaustive list of technological literacy that students should aim to develop during their time at NAPS. Specific information, articles, podcasts and more will progressively be made available on the Skills Hub to help students develop these important skills.

- Microsoft Word (including use of stylesheets)
- Excel
- PowerPoint and other presentation software
- Adobe
- LinkedIn
- Facebook, Twitter and other social media
- Google tools
- Project Management
- Time Management
- Entrepreneurship
- Business Skills
- Website design/creation
- Blogs and Vlogs
- Podcast

- Coding
- Statistics

Learning Skills

Resources to help students develop life-long learning skills will also be on the Skills Hub. These will include up to date blogs, podcasts, YouTube videos and TED Talks.

Examples of potential courses include:

- a. Success in your business Course/degree
- b. Reading skills for Business Studies
- c. Quantitative Skills
- d. Written Assignments
- e. Networking
- f. Thinking about your career
- g. Examinations
- h. How to get the most out of small group work, such as tutorials
- i. Ethics issues (eg cheating and plagiarism)
- j. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Resources for NAPS Teachers

The Skills Hub will also include resources for NAPS teachers to support their professional and on-going skills development.

These include, for example:

- <http://www.bschool.com/business-teachers-resource-page/>
- <http://www.businessenglishresources.com/>
- <https://www.ijser.org/researchpaper/Effective-Methods-of-Teaching-Business-Education.pdf>
- <http://www.ijmbs.com/Vol4.3/spl1/krishna-kumar.pdf>
- <forevercurious.org/business-lesson-plans/>

6. Contact

For more information on the Skills Hub, for requests for additional resources in a particular area or to give suggestions for additional materials staff or students are aware of that may be useful to others at NAPS, please contact the NAPS IT and Website Services Manager.

7. References

This Framework was developed based on NAPS core materials such as the Strategic Plan, Vision and Mission and related policies to help meet their goals. It also incorporates the ideas of NAPS Board of Directors and Council, and NAPS Executive. 