



1. Pedagogical Framework

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Introduction

Transversal skills (also called soft skills, key skills, core skills, or transferable skills) (1) are crucial to lifelong learning and are essential for promoting active and involved European citizenship in civic and social life. Lifelong learning is defined as “*all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective*” (2 p9). They are transferable for many fields. Transversal skills can be achieved in both formal and informal contexts. For example, OECD countries have started surveying pupils on social-emotional skills, but this is still missing in the higher education (HE) context.

Both international and national agencies have stated the need to shift the focus towards teaching learning strategies that work on transversal skills throughout the training journey. These competencies are also important in tackling gender inequities and strengthening interprofessional cooperation in health and social care, thereby ensuring that the HE system does not prolong entrenched gender biases.

One of the gaps identified in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a lack of implementation of teaching–learning strategies to work on transversal skills throughout the overall educational continuum in healthcare and social care. This situation relates, among other factors, to the absence of a framework that defines the gradation of the process of skills development: although there are numerous classifications and definitions, it is necessary to establish a gradation by levels that state the degrees of skills development and associated specific learning outcomes. In this sense, the aim of this pedagogical framework is to support the transversal skills teaching and learning process in the context of healthcare and social care (in HE).

This framework focuses on three key transversal skills: **a) interpersonal/socioemotional, b) creative thinking, and c) learning to learn**. This pedagogical framework is intended to support lecturers who strive to implement transversal skills training into their subjects, courses, and modules. Additionally, the guide aims to support planning the courses, specific activities, and learning outcomes that are intended to work on transversal skills. For each skill, different areas are defined with their respective learning outcomes.

We have designed and formulated this pedagogical framework, as well as defined and delimited skills (see Table 1 and Annex 1) based on previous reports, studies, pedagogical references, and European qualifications frameworks, and especially on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (3), which promotes lifelong learning, and the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (FINQF) (4). This

pedagogical framework offers practical and descriptive guides to plan transversal skills into training activities, with the aim of improving the students' transversal skills. In addition, the guide will help HE institutions as well as lecturers in healthcare and social care to review their curricula and then to design new programmes, courses, and modules that incorporate the development sequentially and progressively.

This framework can also be useful as a guide for learning and teaching in practice (see the Methodology part of the guide). The perspective is consistent with a social constructivist pedagogical approach and a student-centered approach, while at the same time helping lecturers to learn how to teach transversal skills. In this pedagogical framework, we have defined and explained one of the suitable pedagogical theories for teaching and learning transversal skills, levels of development of the skills (Tables 1-3 and Annex 1), as well as levels of progression for improving students' transversal skills (Table 4), to provide continuous incorporation of transversal skills training throughout the overall academic and professional journey.

Key elements for developing transversal skills: a student-centered approach and social constructivism

Transversal skills cannot be learned on their own. In fact, the opposite is true, since they are skills that must be achieved in a social context with other people. For that reason, these skills are often taken for granted in the educational context in general, and there is evidence that more attention needs to be placed on these skills in the HE context specifically (5).

According to social constructivist learning theory¹, learning is a collaborative process, which means that the role of social interactions and active participation are extremely important for constructing knowledge. This perspective of the transversal skills is also related to the zone of proximal development, which states that there is a distance in the learning process between the actual developmental level determined by independent problem solving, and the potential developmental level determined by problem solving in collaboration with others. Acting next to the zone of proximal development in social interaction can provide an improvement in learning.

It is clear that social interactions are key for learning some transversal skills, such as interpersonal and socio-emotional skills; however, they are also important for other transversal skills addressed in this project, such as critical and creative thinking, and learning to learn; indeed, it is important to note that social interaction also plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (6). When thinking about teaching and learning transversal skills, it is also important to understand that the roles of culture, shared interpretations, and shared understanding of reality are crucial. Therefore, the social constructivist learning theory can offer important pedagogical basics for improving transversal skills, especially because of the importance of social interaction during the learning process. To achieve this objective, there are many methods, tools, and approaches to developing transversal skills.

¹ Social constructivism has developed from the ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, and Bandura; see Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, for overview.



From a pedagogical perspective, it is also relevant to consider student-centered learning in order to first teach students transversal skills and then to support them in improving their transversal skills. There are two broad orientations in teaching: i) “the teacher centered/content-oriented conception and ii) the student centered/learning oriented conceptions” (7). The **student-centered learning** perspective states that the knowledge is constructed by students, while the lecturer has the role of being a facilitator of learning; this includes elements like flexible learning (8-9), self-directed learning, and experiential learning (10). Additionally, three types of social interactions have been recognized as key aspects of learning: a) interactions with peers, b) interactions with a more experienced person, and c) interactions with oneself.

Several authors (7,11) have noted that student-centered learning should incorporate the following:

- A reliance on active rather than passive learning;
- An emphasis on deep learning and understanding;
- Increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the learner;
- An increased sense of autonomy in the learner;
- An interdependence between teacher and learner;
- Mutual respect within the learner–teacher relationship;
- A reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process on the part of both the teacher and the learner.

Defining learning outcomes for transversal skills

The first step in planning any learning process, including learning transversal skills, is to define the learning objectives to be developed. For this, it is important to define the expected learning outcomes, the knowledge, and the skills and competences to be developed.

Learning outcomes are measurable, and refer to the statements of what a learner knows, understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process; they are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence.

Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories, and practices that are related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual (3). **Skills** refer to the ability to apply knowledge and to use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (e.g., involving the use of logical, intuitive, and creative thinking) or practical (e.g., involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools, and instruments). **Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge and skills, as well as personal, social, and/ or methodological abilities, in work and/or study situations and in both professional and personal development.

In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy (3 p11). Additionally, competence can be defined as *“Managing and transforming work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches. Additionally, a person take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams”* (3 p13). Furthermore, it can be said that competency is the *“ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, training, work or professional development)”* (12 p47, 13).

Development of transversal skills

Although transversal skills are the subject of several [Erasmus+ projects](#), there is a need for an academic discussion in the field of healthcare and social care sciences. In this framework, innovation lies in aligning the levels of the development of skills with their respective learning outcomes.

The chosen transversal skills that were developed in this guide were based on EQF and its adaptation in Finland (FiNQF), as mentioned above; this is related to the skills required in Master’s degrees. We believe that it is important to have a common European framework, as we are living in a time in which professionals with HE degrees are able to work in different EU countries.

These two European qualifications frameworks, at this level, cover comprehensive and highly specialized concepts, methods, and knowledge corresponding to the specialized skills within respective fields, which are used as the basis for independent thinking and/or research. At the EQF7 level, the learning outcome expected is to understand issues that are at the interface between different fields and to critically evaluate them together with new knowledge. Further, at this level, one should be able to use tools for solving demanding problems creatively, in research and/or innovation, in order to help develop new knowledge and procedures and to apply and combine knowledge from various fields.

In this guide, we chose level EQF 7 also for theoretical reasons: to understand which transversal skills can be achieved in ‘ideal world’ at an ‘ideal level’—in other words, they should not be made into the most relevant aims.

At the EQF 7 level, students should be able to (14):

- Work independently on demanding expert tasks in the field as well as in international cooperation or as an entrepreneur;
- Manage and develop complex, unpredictable, and new strategic approaches;
- Manage things and/or people and evaluate the activities of individuals and groups;
- Accumulate knowledge and practice in the respective field and take responsibility for the development of others;
- Continue with lifelong learning;



- Consider communal and ethical aspects when dealing with different people in learning and working communities as well as with other groups and networks;
- Communicate at a good level, both verbally and in writing, in his/her native language, to audiences both within and outside the field;
- Be capable of demanding international communication and interactions in his/her field in at least one foreign language.

The following Table shows the dimensions that include the three transversal skills of the ITSHEC project (interpersonal/socio-emotional, creative thinking, and learning to learn) and the associated learning outcomes.


Skill	Dimensions	Learning outcomes
 Interpersonal / socio-emotional	Communication	<p>Able to express ideas clearly and fluently.</p> <p>Able to use precise and descriptive/content-specific vocabulary to enhance the topic or message.</p> <p>Able to share information in an organized and interesting way.</p> <p>Able to share an analysis of the main message to interpret, synthesise and/or evaluate the meaning of the content in order to draw a logical conclusion about the topic.</p> <p>Able to show empathy and use non-verbal communication and active listening.</p>
	Reflection and responsibility	<p>Able to self-reflect, evaluate one's own actions and emotions, and take responsibility for own actions. Has improved professional and social-emotional responsibilities.</p> <p>Able to perform tasks efficiently and carefully.</p> <p>Able to persevere in the face of difficulties.</p>
	Relationships	<p>Able to develop positive and emotionally safe interaction and to develop and co-create teamwork.</p> <p>Able to reflect and manage emotional and self-regulation, and to show empathy in professional relationships.</p>
	Partnership, network, and cooperation	<p>Able to work cooperatively with others: listens to others, incorporates what others say, encourages peers' participation, engages in group decision making, helps peers selflessly, and accomplishes shared goals.</p> <p>Able to act and cooperate with others autonomously under structured conditions, and to take account of various social roles and emotions in various contexts.</p> <p>Has the ability to build networks and partnerships in changing interprofessional and disciplinary (projects) teams and to innovate/reform it in a complex and unpredictable world.</p> <p>Able to develop an empathetic leadership by understanding the needs of others and being aware of their feelings and thoughts, and to facilitate collaborative and participatory problem-solving.</p>
	Conflict management	<p>Has the capacity to create a non-discrimination atmosphere.</p> <p>Is able to facilitate conflict resolution, remains calm under pressure, and control one's emotions in conflict situations.</p>
	Cultural sensitivity	<p>Able to evaluate and develop one's cultural awareness.</p> <p>Has the knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of other cultures, and the willingness and capacity to understand people from different backgrounds and to embrace diversity.</p>

Table 1. Transversal knowledge, interpersonal and socio-emotional skill, and learning outcomes in ITSHEC (for more detailed information, see Annex 1).




Skill	Dimensions	Learning outcomes
 Critical and creative thinking	Problem-solving	Able to identify and deal creatively with unexpected, unforeseen, and complex situations that can be exploited, and to evaluate different solutions.
	Systems thinking/ Interdisciplinarity	Able to recognize and understand relationships. Able to collectively analyse complex systems; to think of how systems are embedded within different domains (society, environment, economy, etc.) and different scales (local to global); and to deal with uncertainty.
	Critical analysis	Able to acquire, process, produce, and evaluate information critically and from the perspectives of different fields and decisions, taking into account both individual and community perspectives. Has the ability to question norms, practices, and opinions, and to reflect on own one's values, perceptions and actions.
	Creative thinking	Has the capacity to develop innovative solutions to answer different questions and to create new and worthwhile ideas; to elaborate and evaluate ideas in order to improve and maximize his/her creative efforts.
	Sustainability	Able to apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems, and to develop viable, inclusive, and equitable solution options that promote sustainable development in the working environment with clients, patients, and other participants. Has the capacity to apply the knowledge base and professional, ethical, and sustainable principles of his/her field as an expert (and developer of working life) in research, development, and innovation (RDI) activities.

Table 2. Transversal knowledge, critical and creative thinking skill, and learning outcomes in ITSHEC (for more detailed information, see Annex 1).


Skill	Dimensions	Learning outcomes
 Learning to learn	Self-regulation learning	<p>Able to self-report one's feelings, thoughts, and effort concerning a certain task in order to perform tasks more effectively.</p> <p>Able to identify learning outcomes, relate them to prior knowledge, and manage her/his own learning process.</p> <p>Has the capacity for self-assessment.</p>
	Metacognitive skills	<p>Able to plan, monitor and assess one's understanding and performance on a certain task</p> <p>Able to use prior knowledge to plan a strategy for approaching a new task, and to transfer what they have learned from one context to another, or from a previous task to a new task.</p>
	Digital skills for learning	<p>Able to design and compose digital documents in a variety of digital modes.</p> <p>Able to make effective use of a range of digital tools for writing, peer reviewing, researching/developing, and collaboration.</p> <p>Able to (ethically) use and choose the most relevant digital platforms, data, and tools for learning and co-creation.</p>
	Lifelong and non-formal learning	<p>Able to meet and handle learning challenges, and to persevere even when faced with challenging circumstances.</p> <p>Able to recognize learning possibilities (outside of formal studies) and reflect on them as learning outcomes in relation to their own profession.</p>

Table 3. Transversal knowledge, learning to learn skill, and learning outcomes in ITSHEC (for more detailed information, see Annex 1).

Level of progression in the development of transversal skills

There are many kinds of methods, models, and tools to support and follow students' learning and progression of skills; in this guide, we present one of them. We give a general description of the level of the process in Table 4 (see also 15). Students' skills development or progression can be split into different levels. The levels can be distinguished as foundation, intermediate, advanced, and expert; there is a large variance between students' skills and competencies in practice. This implies that lecturers and teachers who are guiding students and helping them to improve their transversal skills need to take account these different perspectives. In other words, while students can manifest and utilize their skills for practice and everyday life, it is important to remember that these are very much connected to context and the timeframe; for instance, in some contexts, a minimum level of skills has been achieved, while in other contexts, it seems to be impossible.



In this guide, we offer this model for lecturers and students to reflect on and assess their progression. This model can be used while developing transversal skills. It is also possible to see it as an optional tool for assessing one's own level of progression. Optional ways to categorize the level of student progression to level 7 are listed in Table 4.

Foundation	Intermediate	Advanced	Expert
Relying on support from others	Building independency	Taking responsibility	Driving transformation, innovation, and growth
Discover/explorer	Experiment	Improve/reinforce	Expand/transform
Recognizing phenomena	Recognizing phenomena from many different approaches	Transforming and applying for action and taking responsibility, valued oriented	Capacity to achieve excellence (in RDI)
Basic level of social and emotional sustainable	Intermediate level of social and emotional sustainable	Advanced level of social and emotional sustainable	Expert level of social and emotional sustainable

Table 4. Level of skills progression (15)

Final considerations

Transversal skills training allows linkage between undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional development stages in dimensions that should be enhanced; in turn, transversal skills training will continue during the professional development stages. **The level scale** (evaluation) seeks progressive and continuous incorporation of transversal skills training throughout the overall academic and professional journey. It also facilitates a student-centered approach, as it allows the starting point for each student (individual level of development) to be guided and assessed. This perspective is consistent with a constructivist pedagogical approach that seeks to work from the zone of proximal development of each learner. There are many methods to evaluate and assess transversal skills, but the key question that needs to be considered is: what is the purpose of this method, and does it support the most convenient way for a student's transversal skills development? In this framework, we recommend using Tables 1-4 to ensure that this question is addressed.

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ANNEX 1

More detailed transversal skills knowledge, skills and Responsibility and autonomy. In the context of the EQF responsibility and autonomy is described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility (15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24)

LEVEL 7 (EQF) Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) (2008) European Communities)**	KNOWLEDGE Highly specialized knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research (* pp.12)	SKILLS Specialized problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields. (* pp.13)	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches. Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams. (* pp.13)
Critical and creative thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension of the target of critical and creative thinking • Innovativeness • Ethical theories and principles • Creative theories and principles • Digitalization of society • Sustainability • Awareness of the significance of creative activities and art for the people • Evidence-based knowledge • Awareness of disinformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to reflect and use thoughtful thinking in a decision-making situation. • Ability to have a diverse approach (multidimensionality) in various everyday operations in RDI activities. • Ability for creative problem solving • Ability to apply an intuitive approach. • Digital and social media skills • Can tackle disinformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the capacity to argue and to justify • Has the capacity to apply the knowledge base and professional ethical and sustainable principles of their field as an expert (and developer of working life) to research, development, and innovation activities (RDI) (ARENE 2010) • Able to identify and deal creatively with unexpected, unforeseen, and complex situations that can be exploited, and to evaluate different solutions • Able to acquire, process, produce, and evaluate information critically and from the perspectives of different fields and decisions, taking into account individual and community perspectives (ARENE 2010) • Able to appreciate the creative importance of ideas, experiences, and emotions in a range of media, such as music, literature, and visual and performing arts, and to use them in diverse contexts • Able to contribute principles of social responsibility, equity, and sustainability to one's working environment • Can confidently and critically use information and communications technology in managing working life



LEVEL 7 (EQF)	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
<p>Interpersona/ socio- emotional</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of theories of emotions and emotional intelligence (Goleman etc. 2017) • Interpersonal sensitivity (IS) (Hall et al. 2009) • Emotional and self-regulation and resilience • Mentalization • Qualified empathy and trust • Awareness of social roles and norms • Sensitivity to Interdisciplinary and inter- professional identity at work • Cultural knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity • Equality and equity, gender perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to keep up a good communication skills and to support others in interactions • Ability to advance social relationships and to create meaningful connections between people • Ability to express one's own opinion with a good manner • Ability to understand social norms and roles. Interpersonal Accuracy skill (Schlegel et al. 2017) • Ability to show for a service-users or/ & colleagues: caring, compassion, diplomacy, kindness, patience, respect, and sensitivity • Ability to handle demanding conflict situations • Ability to show optimism and hope • Ability to negotiate and use problem-solving skills • Ability to offer support and feelings of empowerment and participation to colleagues or service-users/patients • Cultural skills, motivation, and cultural interaction 	<p>COMMUNICATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to develop positive interactions and co-create teamwork • Able to show unconditional acceptance and use non-verbal communication and active listening <p>REFLECTION AND RESPONSIBILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to self-reflect, evaluate own actions and emotions, and take responsibility for own actions, to improve professional and social-emotional responsibilities (Slawinski 2013). <p>PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the ability to build network and partnerships in changing interprofessional and disciplinary (projects)-teams and innovate/reform it into complex and unpredictable world (ARENE 2010) <p>CONFLICT MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the capacity to create non-discrimination atmosphere and handle demanding conflict situation. <p>CO-OPERATIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to act and cooperate with others autonomously, under structured conditions, and to take account of various social roles and emotions in various contexts <p>CULTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to evaluate and develop one's cultural awareness

LEVEL 7 (EQF)	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY
<p>Learning to learn</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal settings • Learning techniques • Evaluation • Critical reflection • Self-regulation • Metacognition • Ability to transfer the knowledge • Digitalization of society • Non-formal learning • Lifelong learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to identify learning outcomes, relate them to prior knowledge • Critical ability to select learning resources, extract the most relevant ideas, and know how to apply them in different contexts • Ability to evaluate both oneself and peers • Ability to use effective study techniques • Ability to partake in critical reflection • Able to meet learning challenges and to cope with them • Able to continue even when faced with challenging circumstances • Able to overcome potential (or actual) disappointment or being unsuccessful • Approaches new challenges in learning cheerfully • Has digital and social media skills • Able to act effectively in communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to evaluate and develop one's expertise diversely and goal-directed • Has the capacity to bring into one's system different behaviours, attitudes, and policies, and to work effectively to produce better outcomes • Confident and critical usage of information and communications technology in managing working life