



Sohdi, Reece (2025) Linking Theory and Practice: A Structured Approach to Developing Subject Expertise and Professional Skills in Higher Education. In: Advance HE Teaching and Learning Conference 2025, 01-03 Jul 2025, The Wave, University of Sheffield. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/19214/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

**WE ARE THE LIFE-CHANGING
UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND**



**University of
Sunderland**

Linking Theory and Practice:

A Structured Approach to Developing Subject Expertise and Professional Skills in Higher Education

Reece Sohdi

Reece.Sohdi@sunderland.ac.uk



**University of
Sunderland**

The Problem in Context

Profession-facing degrees must prepare students not just to *know* but to *do* yet, many graduates feel unprepared for workplace realities (Eraut, 2004).

Employers increasingly demand transferable skills alongside academic expertise (Schleicher, 2018). As a result, there is growing pressure to embed employability and applied practice in HE curricula (Tight, 2023).

The UK Industrial Strategy (2017) calls for stronger links between education and employment sectors.

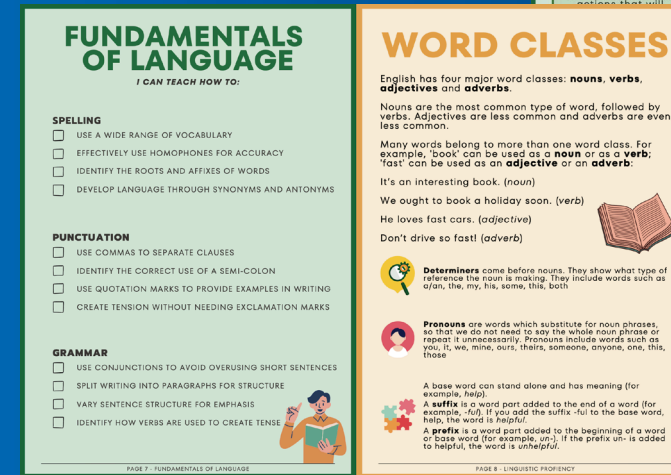
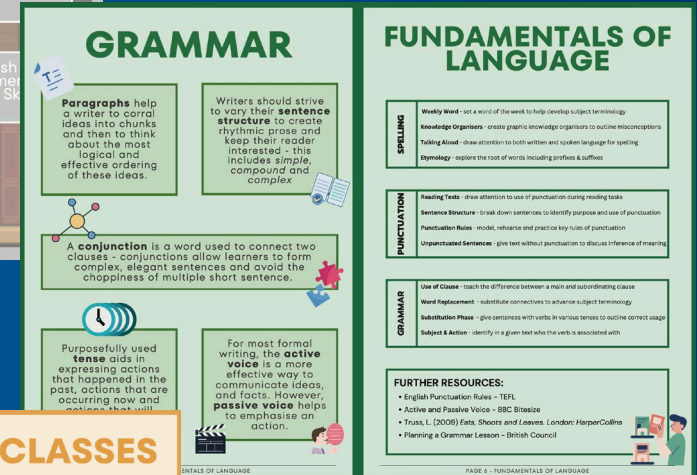
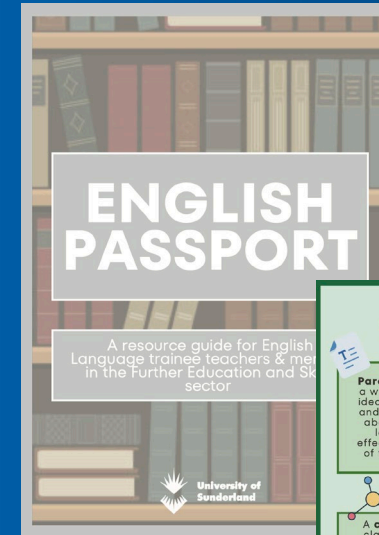
Introducing the FES Subject Passports

Subject-specific frameworks that align academic content with practical professional skills.

Originally developed for Further Education and Skills (FES) teacher training (Sohdi, 2025).

Passport includes mapped tasks, reflective activities, and practice-based goals.

Contextualised to specific subject areas—from English and Maths to automotive and animal care and are designed to be adaptable across other sectors and disciplines.



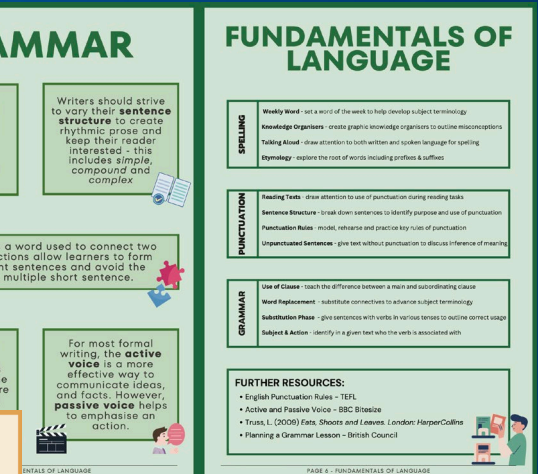
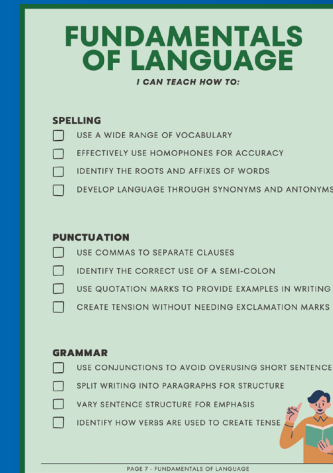
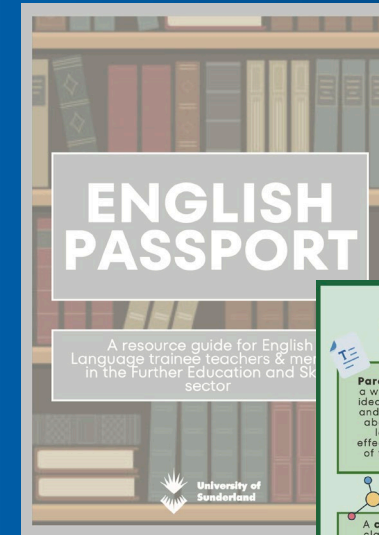
Theoretical Foundations

Informed by Eraut's work on informal and practice-based learning (2004, 2007).

Draws on Ericsson's theory of deliberate practice—structured, purposeful, and feedback-driven (2008, 2019).

Christodoulou (2017) highlights that effective assessment supports progression through well-sequenced, meaningful tasks.

Reflective learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007) is core to building confidence and professional identity.



Addressing Sector Needs

Designed in line with UK Industrial Strategy's call for work-ready graduates.

Supports Ofsted's (2024) emphasis on curriculum coherence and pedagogy.

Enables mentors and students to adapt theory to complex, sector-specific realities.

Relevant in diverse sectors like FES, where subjects and learners vary widely.

Impact and Adaptability

English Language Passport pilot showed improved learner confidence and clarity.

Increased mentor engagement through clearer scaffolding of expectations.

Adaptable to nursing, social work, and other professional and applied disciplines.

Supports UN SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Creating a "Passport"

1. Begin your own Subject Passport
2. Identify key **subject knowledge**, **professional practices**, and **transferable skills**
3. Scaffold learning from **novice to practitioner**
4. Consider curriculum links and **real-world application**
5. Use the provided prompts and template to start drafting

1. Define Your Subject Area

Write the title of your subject or professional area (e.g., “Primary Science Education”, “Adult Mental Health Nursing”, “Social Work with Communities”, “Electrical Engineering Foundations”)

2. Identify Core Subject Knowledge

What 3–5 essential areas of knowledge do learners need to master in this subject to be credible or confident practitioners?

Social Work:

- Theories of human development
- Legislative frameworks (e.g., safeguarding)
- Anti-oppressive and inclusive practice

What are the ‘non-negotiables’ of your subject that learners must grasp to be confident in their professional identity?

3. Map Key Professional Practices

What practices, behaviours, or competencies define professionalism in your subject?

Nursing:

- Accurate clinical documentation
- Person-centred care
- Ethical decision-making

How does someone *do* your subject in the real world?

4. Include Transferable Skills

What wider skills must learners develop to succeed across multiple settings or roles?

- Team collaboration
- Reflective practice
- Critical use of digital tools
- Communication with diverse stakeholders

5. Design Progression – From Novice to Practitioner

Consider how you might scaffold development over time.

Use phrases like:

- “At the beginning of the course, students will...”
- “By the end of the course/module, students should be able to...”
- “In placement or real-world settings, students should demonstrate...”

What progression looks like in your subject—how do learners go from theory to applied confidence?



**University of
Sunderland**

Key Takeaways

FES Subject Passports help integrate academic learning with professional practice.

Promote reflective learning, feedback, and confidence.

Can be adapted across disciplines to enhance employability and equity.

Practical next steps: trial the model, collaborate with colleagues, share practice.

References

- Brockbank, A. and McGill, I. (2007) *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Christodoulou, D. (2016) *Making Good Progress? The Future of Assessment for Learning*. Routledge.
- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2017) *Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain Fit for the Future*. Government of the UK.
- Eraut, M. (2004) 'Informal learning in the workplace', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2), pp. 247–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/158037042000225245>
- Eraut, M. & Hirsh, E. (2007) 'The Significance of Workplace Learning for Individuals, Groups and Organisations' *SKOPE*
- Ericsson, K. A. (2008). 'Deliberate Practice and Acquisition of Expert Performance: A General Overview'. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 15(11), 988-994. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1553-2712.2008.00227.x>
- Ericsson KA and Harwell KW (2019) Deliberate Practice and Proposed Limits on the Effects of Practice on the Acquisition of Expert Performance: Why the Original Definition Matters and Recommendations for Future Research. *Front. Psychol.* 10:2396.: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02396>
- Ofsted (2024) *Further Education and Skills Inspection Handbook*. Ofsted.
- Schleicher, A. (2018) 'Educating Learners for Their Future, Not Our Past', *ECNU Review of Education*, 1(1), 58-75. <https://doi.org/10.30926/ecnuroe2018010104>
- Sohdi, R. (2025) 'A design-based approach to bridging the gap between university learning and classroom pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*. (34). <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi34.1376>
- Tight, M. (2023) 'Employability: a core role of higher education?', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 28(4), pp. 551–571. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2023.2253649>

Thank You

Reece Sohdi

Reece.Sohdi@sunderland.ac.uk



**University of
Sunderland**