

I'm Helen Green and I'm part of the team at LSE LIFE.

I'd like to share some ideas about our approaches to communication to give you some insight into our work. I'll describe two areas: first what we talk about, and second what we say.

On a practical note, I've included a "listening guide" to accompany this audio file. and There you'll find examples and links to some of the things I'll mention as we go along.

In thinking about "what we talk about" I'd like to share with you a set of 21 icons that we use to describe the array of skills that students can discover and develop with LSE LIFE. If you have a look in the listening guide, you'll see a colourful grid of things a student might expect or aspire to do while they're at university - along with a very concise explanation of what each one might mean.

On the left, you'll see red icons - those that are most closely associated with what's done in the classroom: reading, writing, conducting research - academic skills, if you like. On the right are blue icons, which can be considered areas of personal development - being organised, being creative, and being healthy. Down the middle are some icons related to specific goals that are often on a student's mind: exams, career, dissertation. These are purple, because we think they involve combining the red and blue.

The point of showing these areas this way is to help make sense of what might be needed for different tasks - and to show how none of them exist in isolation.

I know that one of the key themes for discussion at the conference is *compétences transverses*. It's important to say here that in coming up with these icons, it wasn't an attempt to catalogue or define or categorise skills comprehensively or formally! Instead these are a framework that is useful to us to propose some order in what is a multi-faceted, intertwined, and sometimes overwhelming set of challenges that students face.

One way we use these icons is on the events page of our website, where students can find workshops they'd like to attend. You have the link to the page on the listening guide - and you'll see that next to each event are the relevant icons. You can also hover over any icon in the column on the left and click on it to filter the events if there's something you're particularly interested in. To be clear, a student doesn't need to master - or even be aware of these icons to use this page.

We use the icons more structurally application on our Moodle page - where we use them to organise and and present our large library of resources. Moodle is our virtual learning environment. I'm afraid that access is restricted so I've shared a few screenshots on the listening guide for you. In the past academic year, we've had about 130,000 visits to these resources from 7,000 individual students. This also where many students will encounter LSE LIFE for the first time - in August, before they begin their course - through the pre-arrival course that my colleague Sarah Taylor is presenting.

Perhaps more functionally, we also use the icons when we create our programme of workshops for each term - to take a look at the variety, balance, and timing of our programme.

Of course, there is overlap and some grey areas when we think about which skills a workshop might cover. All our workshops and resources are associated with a few icons. Doing this helps illustrate that no one skill exists in isolation. The whole point is to show how multiple skills come together in a complex and exciting picture.

We're not pretending to simplify what is necessarily a complicated proposition - we simply use these icons to help make the complexity a little more approachable.

And being approachable brings me to my second point: what we say.

We know that studying and learning are challenging - and that there may even be some discomfort in figuring out what you think and where you stand. And this is one of the fundamental pursuits in studying at university. What we want to say to students is **that Yes, it's difficult sometimes - but no, you're not meant to do it by yourself.**

We want students to understand that LSE LIFE is a place to come to share questions, experiences and ideas - and maybe sometimes worries. This happens in workshop discussions - and especially in the one-to-one conversations we have with students, which my colleague Philip Rauber is presenting.

If we consider communication holistically as a form of social interaction, it's clear that LSE LIFE's work goes far beyond the skills we talk about. It's also a matter of what we say and what we do. We try to create spaces and opportunities to interact with students, and of course for them to meet and work with each other.

When we succeed at doing this, one of the things that students invariably discover is that their peers have very similar questions and worries. They also have a lot of great ideas to share with each other. and helping them find this common ground is how LSE LIFE contributes to fostering a sense of belonging and community. And this in a challenging - sometimes competitive - institutional environment.

A recent post on a British higher education blog critiques the notion of centralised "study skills" provision, arguing that if students succeed academically, it's thanks to subject knowledge - and that subject-specific teaching should be the priority over projects like LSE LIFE - a centralised place at the university where students can develop their skills. It has sparked a lot of debate - and you have a link to that conversation in your listening guide if you're interested.

I mention it here because it made me think - if our work were limited to simply "what we talk about" then a critique of a superficial approach might be warranted. I think, though, it becomes far more interesting when we combine this with "what we say" - and what we do in

saying it. Yes, at LSE LIFE we talk about skills for learning - specific areas where students can develop their competence and their confidence. But we do not presume to offer a tidy package of skills that guarantee success. Every student comes with their own experience and goals - and we don't take a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Our goal is to listen and learn from students and help them listen and learn from each other.

So, our challenge is in how we communicate to create a welcoming environment - whether it's our open-space on the ground floor of the LSE library - or the language and the look & feel of our webpages - or simply some extra, unstructured time on Zoom after a workshop to hear a few more comments and question, or just have a chat.

We aspire to create a space where students can explore different perspectives on what it is to study and learn, take the time to reflect on their own priorities and goals, and think about the context of what they want or need to get done - whether it's making a presentation or making notes ; deciding on a research question and planning a project, or thinking about where they've come from or what they'll try next. We're here for all those conversations.

I look forward to seeing you on June 29th and to hearing your comments and questions about any of these ideas. Thanks for listening.