Guidance toolkit for Soft Skills Development

INDEX

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Executive Summary

In order to foster effective leadership, teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving, it is essential that young water professionals develop soft skills. Throughout the higher education curriculum for water management, this soft skills development guidance toolkit offers a structured approach for incorporating and developing critical abilities like communication, teamwork, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. The toolkit aims to ensure that students possess the interpersonal and cognitive abilities necessary to succeed in dynamic, real-life situations, in addition to preparing them for the technical difficulties of the water industry.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

5

Acronym	Meaning
PDP	Personal Development Plan
HEIs	Higher education institutions
HE	Higher education

1. Introduction

The concept of "soft skills" is relatively new, according to Newman (2006), being first mentioned in a US Army training manual published in the 1970s. Nowadays, the soft skills are gaining more and more notoriety, being trained, required and valued in various fields. This change reflects that the technical expertise alone is no longer sufficient in today's dynamic and interconnected work environments. Skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, adaptability, teamwork, and critical thinking are now considered essential for both personal and professional success. In a world where automation and artificial intelligence are taking over many hard-skill-based roles, soft skills remain uniquely human and irreplaceable, making them more relevant than ever.

Given the growing importance of these competencies, higher education institutions (HEIs) have started to incorporate soft skills development into their curricula, aiming to prepare students not only professionally, but also interpersonally. Several research studies have been published focusing on teaching and evaluation techniques that promote and develop soft skills in students and young professionals (Emanuel et al., 2021; Ngang et al., 2015; Sethi, 2018; Widad & Abdellah, 2022). The main idea across the four studies is that developing soft skills is essential in higher education (HE) and professional training, and various strategies and frameworks can be used to enhance these skills effectively. Emanuel et al. (2021) explored an online platform designed to enhance soft skills in university students, demonstrating the potential of digital tools in developing communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Ngang et al. (2015) investigated how novice teachers perceived the integration of soft skills into their professional training, highlighting the importance of adding these skills into teacher education curricula. Sethi (2018) introduced the FSIAR (Facilitation, Self-awareness, Introspection, Action, and Reflection) framework for self development of soft skills, promoting a self-facilitation approach. Widad and Abdellah (2022) provided a review of the strategies used in undergraduate nursing education to teach soft skills, underlining the importance of pedagogical diversity (e.g., simulations, role-play, reflective practice).

By using class-based activities, behaviors, routines, and reflective practices that naturally incorporate soft skills into teaching, the present *Toolkit* supports teachers in delivering, reinforcing, and maintaining the development of soft skills through classroom experiences in water-related education. It is designed to be used along with the current *Standardized framework for integrating soft skills into the higher education curricula for water management* and *Practical guidance for implementing the framework* developed under the SKILLS4WATER project.

Although the *Framework* and *Practical Guide* provide the foundation for soft skills integration, it is crucial to have a guidance toolkit for soft skills development in addition to these two documents for several reasons. The *Toolkit* offers teachers/instructors and students a methodical, practical way to use soft skills in targeted activities, resources, and techniques. While the *Practical Guide* offers activity ideas to develop soft skills, the *Toolkit* functions as a practical guide for implementing, monitoring progress, giving feedback, and modifying learning experiences. This makes it possible to increase the chances that students' soft skills are continuously developed and that the learning process adapts to their requirements.

The present *Toolkit* provides various templates usefull in developing soft skills but also in continuous monitoring of their learning/constant improvement.

2. Soft skills development planning

In order to organize and structure the teaching activities to effectively integrate soft skills development into the curriculum, we propose a few templates in the present *Toolkit*. These templates focus on aligning soft skills with course objectives, designing activities, and setting up effective assessments. The templates allow for easy tracking of student progress and ensure that all the key soft skills are addressed in a systematic, intentional, and measurable way. The templates are based on the *Framework* and *Practical Guide*.

2.1. Soft skills activity planning

The template provided in **Annex 1** is designed to support the development of soft skills within the water sector. Its purpose is to help educators design activities that intentionally target one or more soft skills, with clearly defined and measurable objectives. **Table 1** presents an example of how this template can be used in practice, illustrating its application in a real-world educational context.

Table 1. Soft Skills Activity Planning Template

Activity Title	Soft Skills Targeted	Activity Description	Learning Outcomes	Materials Needed	Assessment Tools
E.g. Water Management Role-Play	**E.g.** Communication, Leadership	**E.g.** Students role-play a team tasked with developing a water resource management plan.	**E.g.** - Enhance communication in a leadership context - Practice negotiation skills	**E.g.** - Case study of a real-world water project - Scenario cards for each role 30 minutes	**E.g.** - Peer feedback on leadership - Self-reflection journal

How to use it:
- ✓ Align with the course objective: instructors should begin by identifying the most relevant soft skills for their course or professional context. Activities can then be selected or adapted to address these specific areas.
- ✓ Contextualize activities: each activity should be contextualized to reflect real-world challenges relevant to the students' field. For example, case studies and role-plays can be based on scenarios from the water sector to enhance engagement and authenticity.
- ✓ Prepare materials and logistics: the "Materials Needed" column helps instructors plan effectively for each session. Including time estimates for each activity may further support session management.
- ✓ Integrate formative assessment: the use of peer feedback, self-reflection tools, and rubrics provides opportunities for formative, low-stakes assessment, encouraging personal growth rather than focusing solely on grades.
- ✓ Foster reflective practice: after finishing the activities, teachers are encouraged to facilitate reflective discussions or written reflections (e.g. self-reflection journal). This helps students internalize their experiences and improve their application of soft skills over time.

2.2. Weekly Lesson Plan

The template provided in **Annex 2** is designed to help educators plan each class session in advance, with a clear focus on integrating soft skills development through structured activities. It ensures that

each lesson promotes student engagement, supports skill-building, and includes opportunities for reflection. **Table 2** illustrates a practical example of how this template can be used effectively.

Table 2. Weekly Lesson Plan Template

Lesson Title	Date	Targeted Soft Skills	Learning Objectives	Activities/Methods	Assessment & Reflection
E.g. Understanding Water Resources		**E.g.** Communication, Problem-solving	**E.g.** - Understand water resource management systems - Communicate complex water issues effectively	**E.g.** - Group discussion on water problems - Case study analysis	**E.g.** - Group peer feedback on communication - Instructor feedback on problem-solving

How to use it:

- ✓ Plan: template help to follow the progressive development of soft skills alongside subject-specific content. Each week should build upon the last, reinforcing key concepts and fostering skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence.
- ✓ Incorporate diverse methods: the "Activities/Methods" column allows teachers to intentionally vary instructional strategies (e.g., discussions, case studies, role-plays, or guest talks), keeping learners engaged while providing multiple contexts for applying soft skills. It is recommended that multiple softskills teaching methods be used within a class to improve understanding and learning, activate different learning styles, and last but not least, to increase engagement and motivation.
- ✓ Align objectives and assessments: for each session, learning objectives should directly inform the choice of both activities and assessment tools. The inclusion of both peer and self-assessment, along with the instructor feedback, supports a comprehensive and reflective learning process.
- ✓ Encourage reflection and application: the "Assessment & Reflection" section is vital for prompting learners to consider how their skills are evolving over time. Reflection journals, group evaluations, and action plans promote metacognitive awareness and professional growth.

2.3. Soft Skills-Oriented Activity

The following template is an excellent tool for designing intentional, outcome-driven classroom activities that simultaneously build subject knowledge and soft skills.

Table 3. Daily activity template

Activity Title:	**e.g**. Community Water Crisis Simulation
Purpose:	**e.g.** To simulate a real-world water allocation conflict among competing users in a river basin. The activity strengthens understanding of water governance while developing soft skills like communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, and empathy.
Duration:	**e.g.** 50 min
Topic:	**e.g**. Crisis management and water resource allocation

Soft Skills Targeted:	**e.g.** Communication; conflict resolution; leadership; problem-solving; teamwork; decision-making; negotiation;	
Instructions:	**e.g.** 1. Introduction (5 minutes): Instructor presents a scenario: A river basin is experiencing reduced water flow due to drought. Stakeholders must decide how to allocate limited water. 2. Role Assignment (5 minutes): Students are divided into small teams (3–5 members), each representing one stakeholder: local farmers, a hydroelectric company, urban planners, environmental NGOs, and community. 3. Preparation (15 minutes): Each team researches their stakeholder's priorities and develops arguments. They must identify minimum water needs, potential compromises, and negotiation strategies. 4. Role-Play Negotiation (15 minutes): Teams enter a moderate negotiation round. They present their positions, respond to others, and attempt to reach consensus on a fair water-sharing plan. 5. Reflection and Debrief (10 minutes): Students discuss what worked, what failed, and how they felt. Instructor guides reflection on soft skills used and group dynamics.	
Expected Outcomes:	Knowledge:	**e.g.** Understanding of water resource management challenges and stakeholder interests.
	Skills:	**e.g.** Enhanced communication, negotiation, teamwork, and strategic thinking.
	Attitudes:	**e.g.** Students develop empathy for diverse perspectives, ethical reasoning, openness to compromise, and respect for collaborative decision-making.
Assessment Criteria:	**e.g.** Role Preparation (20%) – Stakeholders show evidence of understanding their roles and arguments. Communication & Participation (25%) – Clear expression, respectful dialogue, and balanced team participation. Negotiation Strategy (20%) – Use of facts, creative solutions, and compromise to find common ground. Collaboration & Conflict Resolution (20%) – Ability to manage disagreements constructively and reach consensus. Reflection Quality (15%) – Insightful self and peer assessments, identifying strengths and areas for growth in soft skills.	

How to use it:
1. Activity Title: provide a clear and concise name for the activity. It should reflect both the theme and purpose.
2. Purpose: briefly describe the objective of the activity. Explain how it supports both the learning of water management concepts and the development of one or more soft skills.
3. Duration: indicate the estimated time required to complete the activity. This can range from a single class period to a multi-day project.
4. Soft Skills Targeted: list the specific soft skills students are expected to develop or apply during the activity.
5. Instructions: break the activity into clear, manageable steps. Each step should include what the students will do, group format (individual, pairs, small teams), and where soft skills are being used or practiced. The instructions for various activities and games are proposed in the **Practical guidance for implementing the framework** provided within this project.

6. Expected Outcomes: describe what students should achieve by the end of the activity, divided into three categories:

- Knowledge: What water-related facts, concepts, or systems will students understand?
- Skills: What practical or interpersonal skills will they practice?
- Attitudes: What values, behaviors, or mindsets are encouraged (e.g., ethical reasoning, responsibility, openness to feedback)?

✓ Assessment Criteria: define how student performance will be measured. This can include rubrics for soft skills, observation checklists, peer or self-assessments, reflection journals, performance in group tasks or presentations. Ensure that the assessment aligns with the soft skills targeted and gives constructive feedback opportunities.

3. Classroom culture tips

Creating a supportive and engaging classroom environment is essential in order to encourage the development of soft skills in students and young professionals. The environment in which students learn significantly influences their ability to practice and improve soft skills. By cultivating an atmosphere of trust, respect, and collaboration, teachers can guide students in developing the skills they will need for success in the water sector (Monteiro et al., 2021; Oyeronke et al., 2024).

Promoting a safe and inclusive environment is essential in skills development according to an article published by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (https://education.illinois.edu/about/news-events/news/article/2024/04/12/nine-powerful-ways-to-promote-inclusion-in-the-classroom). Soft skills like communication, conflict management, and emotional intelligence enhance in a classroom where students feel safe and included. When students feel their ideas are valued, they are more likely to take risks, collaborate, and engage fully in activities.

An educational system based on fundamental pedagogical concepts serves as the foundation for successful teaching and learning. They assist teachers in making informed choices about how to teach, which approaches are necessary, and how to successfully stimulate and promote student learning. With a defined set of rules to follow, teaching becomes focused and consistent, resulting in improved educational results throughout situations. Many basic concepts emphasize understanding learners' needs, experiences, and abilities, which makes learning more inclusive and effective. Teachers can also utilize these ideas to constantly examine and improve their own teaching methods.

When teaching soft skills, the following core principles are important:

1. Active learning: refers to an actively engagement in tasks, discussions, and reflections in order to emphasize creating a learner-driven environment where students can take ownership of their soft skill development (Yesildag & Bostan, 2023).

Various strategies for active learning are presented also in the scientific literature, for instance:
- *Flipped Classroom*: students prepare for class by reading or watching video with certain information at home, and then attend prepared to participate in activities that require them to use soft skills (e.g., group discussions, problem solving, critical thinking) (Howell, 2021; Wilson et al., 2019).
- *Peer teaching*: students teach each other key subjects or lead conversations. This improves communication, leadership, and teamwork abilities (e.g. the Jigsaw method) (Astalini et al., 2021; Maceiras et al., 2025; Tanto et al., 2025).

2. Experiential learning: or learning by doing focus more on hands-on experience rather than passive

learning.

Experiential learning can be applied through:
- *Simulations and role-plays*: engage students in real-life scenarios (e.g. managing a community water crisis, negotiating with stakeholders, or leading a project) helping them gain knowledge through direct experience (Dorożyński & Dorożyńska, 2022).
- *Fieldwork, internships, volunteering*.

3. Metacognitive Awareness: or, as Ho & Lau (2025) name it, "thinking about thinking", represents the ability to think about and understand your own thinking and learning processes (Akpur, 2025).

This can be applied through:
- *Journaling:* promote active learning by self reflection (Widad & Abdellah, 2024);
- *Peer coaching*: stimulate giving each other feedback, asking reflective questions, and helping each other analyze and improve their learning strategies (Cortellazzo et al., 2025).
- *Intervision*: helps people support one another, expand their perspectives, develop abilities for questioning and expressing curiosity, and build a common understanding, confidence, and receptivity.

5. Spiral Learning: or repeated practice suppose that the targeted soft skills are revised repeatedly over time, each time at a deeper or more complex level.

6. Psychological Safety: creating a psychologically safe environment is an essential part of any learning process (Vaughn et al., 2024). It involves the perception that a person can express herself without fear of the negative repercussions or feedback that their words, opinion, or action may cause (Lateef, 2020). By setting clear ground rules, encourageing active listening and respectful dialogue, promoting reflection without judgment, focusing on effort and growth, students may feel safe and willing to open up and develop during classes. Information about how to create a safe environment for soft skills learning are provided in the ***Practical guide***, at *Chapter 5. Student engagement and motivation*.

Together, these strategies help to create a dynamic, inclusive, and learner-centered environment that is critical for soft skill development. Teachers may help students engage more fully in the learning process by incorporating active learning, experiential strategies, metacognitive reflection, and psychological safety. This approach improves students' communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills while also building confidence and a development mentality. Finally, such a supporting structure guarantees that students are better prepared to use their abilities in real-world professional contexts, particularly in complex and collaborative industries such as the water industry.

4. Assessment, monitoring and continuous improvement of soft skills

The following assessment and reflection tools are designed to support both teachers and students in monitoring and evaluating soft skills development throughout the course. By regularly engaging in self-assessment, peer feedback, and reflection, students can gain valuable insights into their progress, identify areas for improvement, and set targeted goals for growth. Additionally, these tools help instructors track soft skills development, provide formative feedback, and ensure continuous improvement of teaching practices.

Although many details about the assessment, monitoring and continuous improvement of soft skills are provided in the deliverable ***Report on Implemented Innovative Training Programme***, in the following, some templates examples will be provided. All templates can be personalized.

4.1. Instructor assessment templates

4.1.1. Soft skills observation list

Table 4 provides a structured format for observing and evaluating soft skills among students during a specific course or session. It includes essential fields such as course/session, date, instructor, and student name, ensuring each observation is well-documented and traceable. The corresponding template can be found at **Annex IV**.

The checklist breaks down soft skills into categories like Communication, Teamwork, Problem Solving, and Adaptability, which are key competencies in both academic and professional settings. The multiple checkboxes provide the possibility of rating performance over time or in different activities, although a labeled scale or criteria for checking boxes could also be added. Finally, the Notes section allows instructors to provide qualitative feedback, which can help clarify why certain boxes were checked and guide student development.

Table 4. Soft Skills Observation Checklist

Course/Session						
Date						
Instructor						
Student Name						
Soft skills	E.g. *Communication*	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
	E.g. *Teamwork*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
	E.g. *Problem Solving*	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐
	E.g. *Adaptability*	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Notes						

4.1.2. Feedback Form Template (Peer)

Table 5 offers a more detailed and qualitative approach to assessing students' soft skills. Key identifiers like Course/Session, Date, Instructor, and Student Name ensure proper documentation and tracking of individual progress. Each soft skill is paired with a criteria description, a rating scale (1–5), and space for comments. This structured format allows instructors to provide both quantitative and qualitative feedback, offering a more holistic view of student performance. The Notes section is a helpful addition for capturing general observations or context that may not fit into the individual criteria rows. The corresponding template can be found at **Annex V**.

Table 5. Instructor feedback form

Course/Session		
Date		
Instructor		
Student Name		
Criteria Description	**Rating (1-5)***	**Comments**
E.g. Communication	4	E.g. Clearly expressed ideas and listened actively
E.g. Collaboration	3	E.g. Worked well with team members
E.g. Problem Solving	5	E.g. Contributed to addressing challenges
Notes		

the rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest.

4.2. Self-assessment templates

Self-assessment surveys are an effective instrument for tracking an individual's opinion of their soft skills and improvement over time. This allows students to reflect on their learning experiences and suggest areas for personal progress. Students can assess whether the training helped them reach their goals.

4.2.1. Self-assessment grid for soft skills development

The template (from **Annex VI**) detailed in **Table 6** is intended for students to use at the beginning of their courses to establish a baseline. As the course progresses, they are encouraged to revisit the grid to monitor their growth and refine their learning goals. To gain a well-rounded perspective on their development, students should be encouraged to seek feedback from both peers and instructors.

Table 6. Self-Assessment Grid for Soft Skills Development

Soft Skill	Current Rating (1-5)*	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	Action Plan
E.g. Communication	4	E.g. Clear when speaking one-on-one, confident in presentations	E.g. Needs improvement in active listening during group discussions	E.g. Practice active listening in group settings, take notes during discussions
E.g. Teamwork	4	E.g. Good at collaborating, open to ideas from others	E.g. Struggle with taking the lead in large groups	E.g. Volunteer to lead a group project to practice leadership
E.g. Leadership	2	E.g. Can motivate peers when given a role	E.g. Need more experience in delegating tasks and managing conflict	E.g. Read about leadership styles, actively seek leadership opportunities
E.g. Conflict Management	3	E.g. Remain calm under pressure, listen to others	E.g. Often avoid conflicts, need to improve on addressing issues early	E.g. Practice conflict resolution in role-plays, observe how others manage conflict
E.g. Problem-solving	3	E.g. Strong at analyzing technical problems, good at finding practical solutions	E.g. Need more creativity in brainstorming ideas	E.g. Engage in brainstorming activities and try thinking "outside the box"
E.g. Emotional Intelligence	4	E.g. Understand and recognize others' emotions	E.g. Sometimes slow to recognize own emotional responses in stressful situations	E.g. Keep a journal to reflect on emotional reactions and responses in group

				settings
E.g. Decision-Making	5	E.g. Good at making decisions based on data and facts	E.g. Could improve by considering the emotional impact of decisions	E.g. Practice making decisions in small groups, reflect on emotional consequences
E.g. Time Management	3	E.g. Consistently meet deadlines and stay organized	E.g. Occasionally overestimate available time for tasks	E.g. Create a more detailed weekly schedule, track time spent on tasks
E.g. Flexibility/Adaptability	5	E.g. Adapt well to changes in planned activities	E.g. Need to work on embracing change without initial resistance	E.g. Reflect on past experiences of change and plan strategies for embracing change proactively

* the rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest.

4.2.2. Personal Development Plan (PDP)

The aim of the PDP (template in **Annex VII**) is to support students in setting clear objectives, monitoring their progress, and outlining practical steps to enhance their soft skills over time. These should be regularly updated to reflect on accomplishments, assess progress, and revise goals as necessary. An example of how to use it can be found in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Personal Development Plan

Goal	Soft Skill Focus	Action Steps	Timeline	Support Needed	Evaluation Method
E.g. Improve Active Listening Skills	**E.g.** Communication	**E.g.** Attend active listening workshop Practice summarizing what others say during group discussions	**E.g.** 1 month	**E.g.** Feedback from peers Instructor guidance	**E.g.** Self-assessment of listening skills Peer feedback
E.g. Enhance Leadership Abilities	**E.g.** Leadership	**E.g.** Volunteer to lead a team project Read a leadership book and summarize key takeaways	**E.g.** 3 months	**E.g.** Mentoring from an experienced leader	**E.g.** Feedback from team members Self-reflection journal
E.g. Strengthen Conflict Resolution	**E.g.** Conflict Management	**E.g.** Participate in conflict resolution role-plays Observe peers handling conflicts	**E.g.** 2 months	**E.g.** Peer support Instructor guidance	**E.g.** Role-play feedback Self-reflection journal
E.g. Improve Problem-Solving	**E.g.** Problem-Solving	**E.g.** Brainstorm solutions to hypothetical water	**E.g.** 1 month	**E.g.** Peer feedback - Instructor	**E.g.** Self-reflection - Group

Creativity		sector challenges - Discuss creative solutions with peers		suggestions	project feedback
E.g. Develop Emotional Intelligence	**E.g.** Emotional Intelligence	**E.g.** Keep a journal of emotional responses in stressful situations. -Attend emotional intelligence training.	**E.g.** 3 months	**E.g.** Feedback from a counselor or mentor	**E.g.** Journal reflections Self- assessment of emotional awareness

4.2.3. Reflective journal

The aim of journaling is to encourage students to reflect on their experiences and track their development in key soft skills. Students should keep a weekly journal to reflect on their soft skills practice, identifying areas of improvement, challenges faced, and how they can apply their learning to real-world situations. Reflective questions can be used to guide students and help them explore deeper into their self-awareness and development.

A set of questions that can be applied to note the important personal changes can be:
- What did I learn this week?
- What soft skills did I practice or notice in myself?
- What was easy or challenging about using these skills?
- What would I do differently next time?
- How does this connect to the real world?
- What strategies did I use to communicate clearly in my group today? Was I able to listen actively? How can I improve my communication next time?
- Did I contribute equally to the group discussion today? How did I handle different opinions? What can I do to be a more effective team person?
- Did I take on a leadership role today? How did I guide my team? What leadership skills do I need to develop further?
- Was there a conflict during today's group activity? What triggered it? How did I handle it? What could I have done to resolve the issue more effectively?
- What was the biggest challenge I faced today? How did I approach the problem? What could I have done differently to solve it more efficiently?
- What emotions did I experience today during the project? How did I manage those emotions? What triggers can I identify in my emotional responses?
- What decision did I make today that affected my group's work? Was I confident in my decision? How can I improve my decision-making process?
- Did I manage my time well today? Was I able to meet all my deadlines? How can I improve my time management for the next project?
- How did I respond to unexpected changes today? Was I adaptable? What could I do to be more flexible in future situations?

4.3. Monitoring and continuous improvement

The monitoring and continuous improvement process ensures that students are not only developing essential soft skills but also that their development is tracked, supported, and enhanced throughout the course. By integrating regular feedback, self-reflection, adjusted teaching methods, and goal

setting, both instructors and students can ensure that soft skills development is dynamic, engaging, and ultimately leads to successful long-term growth in the water sector.

Receiving throughout the course, not just at the end, could be more effective. In addition, after group discussions, team projects, or presentations, instructors must provide specific feedback on what students did well and what could be improved. Moreover, it is important that students collect feedback from multiple sources, including peers, instructors, and even self-reflection. This helps students gain a comprehensive view of their strengths and areas for development. The 360-degree feedback, also known as multisource feedback, is a widely used tool in performance management and human resource development that can provide a comprehensive view of each student's soft skills (Dalvi et al., 2023).

Monitoring and continuously improving how soft skills are trained must remain a key priority. Instructors should regularly review course objectives related to soft skills, using student progress and feedback to guide the adjustments. When students face challenges in specific areas such as conflict resolution or leadership, teaching strategies, assignments, or activities should be adapted accordingly. Employing a variety of instructional approaches supports ongoing improvement. For example, time management workshops or exercises with real-world deadlines can help students struggling in that area, while role-playing or peer review sessions can strengthen communication skills. Diversifying learning activities is also essential. Soft skills should be embedded across the curriculum. For instance, simulating real-world water management scenarios in class can encourage decision-making, collaboration, and problem-solving. Group debates and discussions foster critical thinking, communication, and conflict management. Additionally, inviting industry professionals to share how soft skills are applied in the water sector can reinforce the relevance and practical value of these competencies.

5. Conclusions

The **Toolkit** serves as a comprehensive, practical tool meant to support instructors in systematically incorporating soft skills development into higher education courses, particularly in the water management industry. As technological innovation and changing workplace dynamics make soft skills more important, this Toolkit addresses an essential educational need by offering organized templates, advice, and pedagogical concepts that are consistent with both academic and professional goals.

Soft skills including communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence remain uniquely human strengths that are essential for success in a variety of industries, even in a world where technology is changing hard-skill-based jobs. The effective development of soft skills requires deliberate planning and alignment with course objectives. The *Toolkit* provides structured templates for activity planning, weekly lesson mapping, and daily classroom exercises that integrate soft skills alongside technical content. Creating a psychologically safe, inclusive, and student-centred environment is critical for soft skill growth. Principles such as active learning, experiential strategies, and metacognitive reflection foster this type of environment. Ongoing assessment through instructor observation, peer feedback, and self-assessment ensures continuous growth. Reflective practices, such as journaling and personal development planning, empower students to take ownership of their learning journey.

Teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also mentors who model and reinforce soft skill development. The Toolkit equips them with the necessary resources to fulfil this role effectively. In sum, this Toolkit, used in conjunction with the Standardized framework and Practical guide, offers a robust and flexible approach to equipping future water professionals with the soft skills they need to thrive in collaborative, complex, and rapidly evolving environments. Its implementation promotes lifelong learning, personal development, and professional readiness, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and human-centred water management practices.

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Annex I. Soft Skills Activity Planning Template

Activity Title	Soft Skills Targeted	Activity Description	Learning Outcomes	Materials Needed	Assessment Tools

Annex II. Weekly Lesson Plan Template

Lesson Title	Date	Targeted Soft Skills	Learning Objectives	Activities/Methods	Assessment & Reflection

Annex III. Daily activity template

Activity Title:	
Purpose:	
Duration:	
Topic:	
Soft Skills Targeted:	
Instructions:	
Expected Outcomes:		
Assessment Criteria:	

Annex IV. Soft Skills Observation Checklist

Course/Session	22					
Date						
Instructor						
Student Name						
Soft skills		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
		☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Notes						

Annex V. Instructor feedback form

Course/Session	23	
Date		
Instructor		
Student Name		
Criteria Description	Rating (1-5)*	Comments
Notes		

* the rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest.

Annex VI. Self-Assessment Grid for Soft Skills Development

Soft Skill	Current Rating (1-5)*	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	Action Plan

* the rating scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest.

Annex VII. Personal Development Plan

Goal	Soft Skill Focus	Action Steps	Timeline	Support Needed	Evaluation Method