

**WESTERN SYDNEY**  
UNIVERSITY



*Australian Office for Learning & Teaching  
National Senior Teaching Fellowship*

# **Developing and assessing graduates who are 'work ready plus'**

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## **Key themes**

- **Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas**
- **Change doesn't just happen but must be led, and deftly**



## Why bother?

- **Assessment drives learning (and teaching?)**
- **The assessment domain in *CEQuery* has the lowest odds of a ‘best aspect’ comment**
- **It is assessment that confirms universities are achieving their mission**
- **It is no good to assess well if what we are assessing doesn't count – the world-wide focus is now on assuring assessment’s fitness *of* purpose not just its fitness for purpose – work ready *plus* graduates.**
- **It is being argued that higher education has become too instrumental, vocationalised and is losing its ‘moral purpose’**
- **It is assessment that confirms universities are achieving their mission**
- **Valid, well managed and transparent assessment significantly decreases litigation and time-consuming appeals’ processes**
- **Employer satisfaction with graduates’ capabilities and graduate satisfaction and success builds demand**



## **Why bother?**

- **95% of the world's political leaders have a degree**
- **The international shift is towards assuring the quality of impact L&T has on graduates not just the quality of inputs or student satisfaction**
- **When stakeholders are consulted on the graduate outcomes they most value, a comprehensive, validated professional capability framework is rarely used**
- **Need to 'flip' the curriculum not just the classroom**
- **Need to assure consistent L&T quality and achievement standards whilst avoiding a 'one size fits all' compliance system**
- **Systems' thinking, capacity building and alignment improve quality**



## Two quotes

*'Nothing is new except what has been forgotten'*

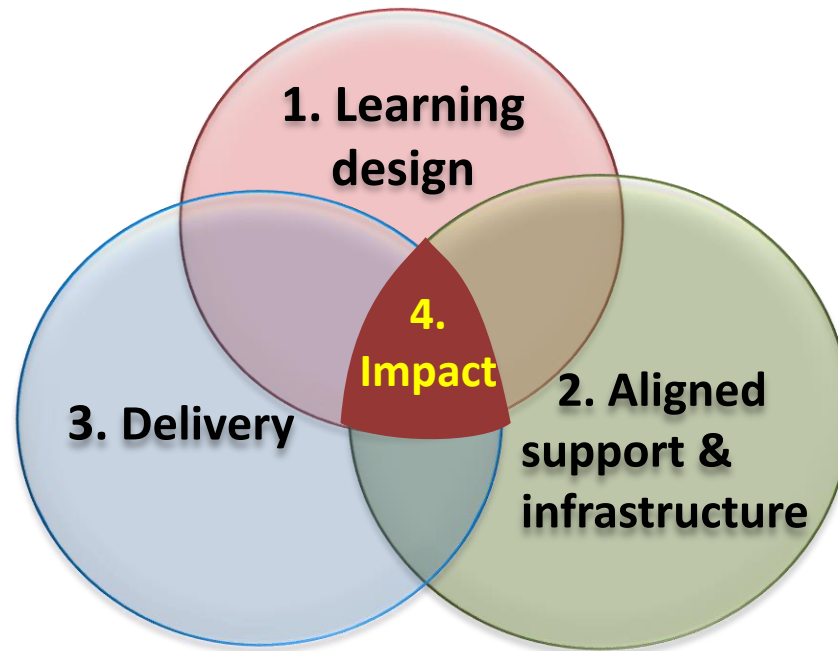
**Throughout our study we were impressed that what today's college is teaching most successfully is competence – competence in meeting schedules, in gathering information, in responding well on tests, in mastering the details of a special field ... But technical skill, of whatever, kind, leaves open essential questions: Education for what purpose? Competence to what end?**

Ernest Boyer (1987) pg 283

**... a remedy for the crude instrumentalism which has begun to gnaw at the edges of higher education and which for a time dominated discussions of competence... capability shifts consideration to the most important question of all: what sort of learning do we need to promote in higher education to equip us for the future?**

David Boud in Stephenson & Yorke (1998: p viii)

# Where this fits into an overall Quality & Standards framework for L&T



**Aligned governance, policy, strategy,  
quality management & resourcing system**



## Key components of a comprehensive, integrated HE assessment framework

*'Right' (evidence-based, benchmarked, peer-confirmed):*

- ***Program level outcomes*** – relevant, desirable, feasible, clear, comprehensively considered against multiple reference points
- ***Mapping*** – confirmation that all program level outcomes are being picked up in units of study in a scaffolded way
- ***Assessment tasks*** – demonstrably fit-for-purpose (valid assessment tasks which address the mapped L.O.s for each unit)
- ***Grading*** – agreed, operational picture of what indicators will be used to allocate different grade levels
- ***Calibration*** – peer agreed indicators for different grade levels
- ***Learning design and resources*** – fit-for-purpose learning design, learning resources, with an aligned student support system and capable staff available to deliver it.



## What are learning outcomes?

*The capabilities and competencies students are expected to demonstrate they have developed to a required standard by the end of a program or unit of study*

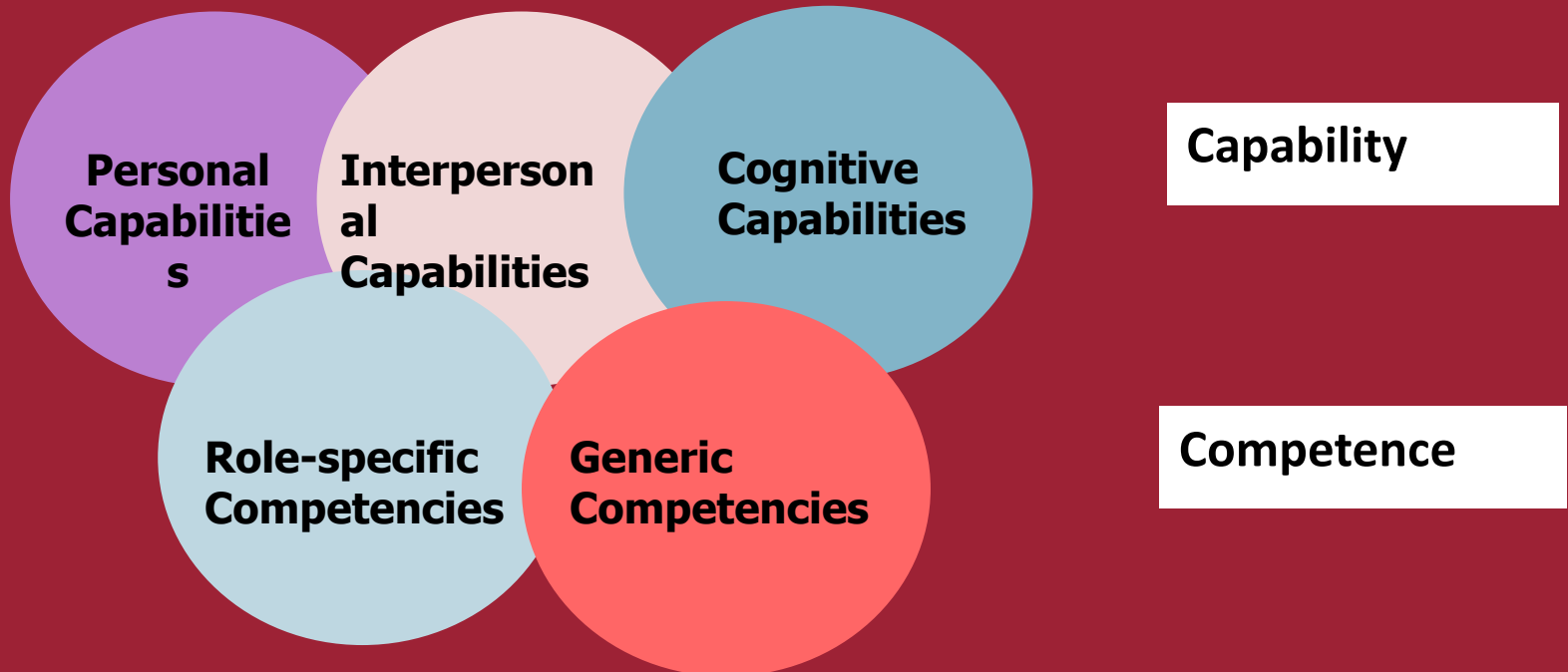
**They include personal, interpersonal and cognitive capabilities and the key knowledge and skills necessary for effective early career performance and societal participation**

**(See successful graduate studies for a valid framework)**





# Professional capability framework





# Professional capability subscales

## Personal capabilities

- Self awareness and regulation
- Decisiveness
- Commitment

## Interpersonal capabilities

- Influencing
- Empathising

## Cognitive capabilities

- Diagnosis
- Strategy
- Flexibility and responsiveness



## **Top ranking capabilities successful graduates in 9 professions**

- 1. Being able to organise work and manage time effectively (GSK)**
- 2. Wanting to produce as good a job as possible (P)**
- 3. Being able to set and justify priorities (C)**
- 4. Being able to remain calm under pressure or when things go wrong (P)**
- 5. Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback (P)**
- 6. Being able to identify the core issue from a mass of detail in any situation (C)**
- 7. Being able to work with senior staff without being intimidated (IP)**
- 8. Being willing to take responsibility for projects & how they turn out (P)**
- 9. Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects (IP)**
- 10. A willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated (P)**
- 11. The ability to empathise and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds (IP)**
- 12. Being able to develop and use networks of colleagues to help solve key workplace problems (IP)**



# Capabilities greater than 4/5 on importance for 147 Western Sydney employers

## Personal capabilities

- Willing to learn from errors; calm under pressure; perseveres; responsible; wants to do a good job; ethical practitioner; sustainability literate; adaptable; knows own strengths/ weaknesses; can defer judgement; pitches in; has sense of humour & perspective

## Interpersonal capabilities

- Empathy – can work with diversity; listens; networks well; team-player; communicates effectively; understands organisations; not intimidated

## Cognitive capabilities

- Can set priorities; sees key point; diagnostic not fixed approach; can adjust plans in practice; independent thinker; creative & enterprising

## Generic skills & knowledge

- Can organise and manage workload; effective user of IT; effective at self-managed learning and professional development; sustainability literate



## The idea of producing work ready *plus* graduates

People who are not just work ready for today but work ready *plus* for tomorrow (95% of the world's leaders have a degree). The plus can include being:

- Sustainability literate
- Change implementation savvy
- Creative and inventive not just 'regurgitative'
- Clear on where one stands on the tacit assumptions driving the 21st century agenda, assumptions like:
  - 'growth is good for everyone'
  - 'consumption is happiness'
  - 'ICT is always the answer'
  - 'globalisation is great'



## **Validating learning outcomes**

**Key reference points for assuring learning standards:  
whose voice counts most/least?**

- **National Qualifications Framework or equivalent**
- **The University's mission and its graduate attributes**
- **Learning outcome standards determined by ALTC discipline groups, UK subject benchmarks/Quality Code, AHELO, WASC, NILOA, DESD, BCA etc.**
- **The learning outcomes for courses of the same name in other places**
- **External professional accreditation standards (when applicable)**
- **Results from inter-institutional benchmarking, peer review**
- **Academic experts' input, inter-institutional peer review and moderation**
- **Key capabilities identified by successful early career graduates/alumni/in job advertisements**
- **Employer feedback; input from External Course Advisory Committees**
- **The results of School/Department Reviews**
- **Government policy and funding incentives**
- **What parents, prospective students and others say they want**
- **Plus?**



## **Powerful Assessment – Key Tests**

- **Attracts high levels of positive feedback from graduates**
- **Addresses work ready *plus* capabilities in context**
- **Is integrated – tests all of the key capability and competency dimensions**
- **Whenever possible is ‘authentic’: dilemma-based, ‘wicked’, real-world focused**
- **Is directly related to what is relevant to early career practice**
- **Is directly related to what has been learnt**
- **Is solutions oriented – involves doing not just knowing**
- **Can be used for formative as well as for summative purposes**
- **Produces representations of what students can do not just grades**
- **Can be digitally enabled**
- **Is scalable**



## **Types of 'Powerful' Assessment**

- **Assessment of creativity, entrepreneurialism, invention**
- **Capstones which test an integration of what has been learnt**
- **Case-based assessment**
- **Co-creation projects**
- **Critical appraisal tasks**
- **Dilemma-based assessment**
- **Field-based assessment**
- **Interview-based assessment**
- **ICT-supported assessment**
- **Learning contract**





## **Types of 'Powerful' Assessment cont'd**

- **Performance-based tools**
- **Portfolios that give impact evidence on key capabilities**
- **Problem-based assessment**
- **Product analysis**
- **Reflective journals**
- **Role play/simulation**
- **Thesis/viva voce**
- **Plus?**



## **The effective L&T change leader -**

*Change doesn't just happen but must be led, and deftly*

- **Listen, link, leverage then lead, always in that order**
- **Listen to resisters**
- **Engagement not dissemination**
- **Leader as teacher/model**
- **Nested leadership for support via 'steered engagement'**
- **Key players like Deans engaged early**
- **Consistent application of the key lessons on effective change implementation in HE learning and teaching**



## **Effective change implementation in Higher Education**

*- Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas*

**Key lessons from Western Sydney University experience and 30 years' research**

- **Focus on a small number of agreed priorities for action**
- **Steered engagement – the focus is on engagement not dissemination**
- **Nested leadership with clear, agreed, fit-for-purpose complementary roles**
- **Accountability for implementing agreed actions**
- **Consensus around the data not around the table**
- **Change is a learning and unlearning process, not an event – aligned incentives**



## **Some common implementation challenges when seeking to assure the quality of assessment**

### ***For university students***

- **Unclear expectations (c.f. use of assessment focused unit learning guides)**
- **Unclear on where each unit of study and its assessment fits into the bigger picture of where their degree program is leading**
- **Inadequate or unfocused feedback**
- **Different assessment loads/assessment tasks all due on the same day**
- **Over-assessment of basic skills and knowledge out of context**
- **Group assessment and ‘free loaders’**



## **Some common implementation challenges when seeking to assure the quality of assessment**

### ***For University staff***

- **Processes used to assure the quality of assessment don't add value**
- **Time consuming meetings without a productive outcome for students**
- **Absence of a shared language, overall framework and clear accountabilities**
- **Unavailability of good practice models, exemplars and 'lonely planet' guides**
- **Unaligned services and rewards for improvements in QA for assessment**
- **Limited, timely tracking and improvement data**
- **Inadequate opportunities to benchmark for improvement**
- **Unclear leadership**
- **Limited peer support**
- **Sessional staff are not engaged and/or 'in the loop'**



## **Some L&T myths to be alert to in this area**

- **One size learning designs and assessment fits all**
- **MOOCs are the answer**
- **Information is learning**
- **Teaching is learning**
- **Learning is not a profoundly social experience**
- **Students will know how to use ICT for learning**
- **Assessment doesn't count**
- **All change is progress**
- **Change is achieved through brute logic**
- **The 'knight on the white charger' myth**
- **When in doubt restructure**



## **Key insights and what next?**

- **One aspect of this talk you found particularly helpful**
- **One aspect you would like to know more about**



## Further reading and resources

- AAHE (1996); *AAHE principles of good practice in assessing student learning*. [http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/resources/AAHE Principles of Good Practice.pdf](http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/resources/AAHE_Principles_of_Good_Practice.pdf)
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