Developing and assessing graduates who are ‘work ready plus’

Addressing the new quality agenda for Higher Education

Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott
OLT National Senior Teaching Fellow
Western Sydney University
Supported by

Australian Government

Office for Learning & Teaching
My focus

• Assuring the quality of achievement standards and their valid assessment – not just work ready graduates for today but work ready *plus* graduates for tomorrow

• Assuring the fitness of purpose of assessment not just its fitness for purpose

• 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.
• Valid, well managed and transparent assessment significantly decreases litigation and time-consuming appeals’ processes.
• 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.
• Employer satisfaction with graduates’ capabilities and graduate satisfaction and success builds demand.
• New government focus on innovation, agility, creativity.
Why bother?

- It is assessment that confirms universities are achieving their mission
- 95% of the world’s political leaders have a degree
- The international shift is towards assuring the impact quality L&T has on graduates not just the quality of inputs or student satisfaction
- 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
Where this fits into an overall Quality & Standards framework for L&T

1. Learning design
2. Aligned support & infrastructure
3. Delivery
4. Impact

Aligned governance, policy, strategy, quality management & resourcing system
Ensuring we are speaking a common language – some key L&T quality terms

- **Standard** – a level of achievement with clear criteria, indicators and means of testing
- **Quality** – fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard
- **Learning** – a demonstrably positive improvement in the capabilities and competencies that count
- **Assessment** – gathering evidence about the current levels of capability and competency of students using valid (fit-for-purpose) tasks
- **Strategy** – linking relevant, desirable and clear ends to the most feasible means necessary to achieve them
- **Evaluation** – making judgements of worth about the quality of inputs and outcomes (including the evidence gathered during assessment)
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)
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?
Professional capability framework

- **Personal Capabilities**
- **Interpersonal Capabilities**
- **Cognitive Capabilities**
- **Role-specific Competencies**
- **Generic Competencies**
Professional capability subscales

Personal capabilities
• Self awareness and regulation
• Decisiveness
• Commitment

Interpersonal capabilities
• Influencing
• Empathising

Cognitive capabilities
• Diagnosis
• Strategy
• Flexibility and responsiveness
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’
  - ‘consumption is happiness’
  - ‘ICT is always the answer’
  - ‘globalisation is great’
Powerful Assessment

• Assess less but better
• What you learn is what you assess
• Focus on the capabilities that count and ability to draw appropriately from and deliver key skills and knowledge
• Dilemma-based, problem based, integrated assessment (real world or simulated) – decreases the chance of plagiarism
• Creativity and invention not just regurgitation
• How to scale this up in large U.G. programs
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
• 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
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 cont’d

• Engage the disengaged
• Work to model and build a ‘why don’t we’ culture not a ‘why don’t you’ one
• Learn by doing – start small, build on your successes: ready, fire, aim
• Room to lead and change
• Aligned policies, incentives and agile processes that ‘value add’
• Networked learning and shared solutions via evidence-based benchmarking for improvement
Suggestions so far on the best support for this area

• A ‘one stop shop’ that brings together multiple web-sites, allows online confidential peer feedback and lists good practice tips on the six ‘rights’

• A role-specific self-teaching guide on how to lead change successfully in this area (targeted at local leaders)

• Capacity building workshops for local leaders that both use and enhance the role-specific learning guides

• Other suggestions
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.**


- **HEA (2012): A marked improvement: transforming assessment in HE, HEA, Newcastle, UK**
  http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf - This link doesn’t work

- **Krause, K.L et al (2014): A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation, OLT, Sydney**

- **Scott, G (2006): Accessing the student voice, Australian Government, Canberra**