

Learning Outcomes Conference

*Learning outcomes: a toolkit for assessment*  
Toronto, October 2014

**Assuring the quality of achievement  
standards & their valid assessment in our  
universities**

***Addressing the new quality agenda for  
Higher Education***

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## Key themes

- **Right outcomes first - then right mapping, right assessment, right design, right grading & right feedback**
- **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?

## *10 Reasons*

1. **Assessment drives learning (and teaching?)**
2. **The assessment domain in the *CEQuery* analysis of 300,000 graduate comments on the CEQ has the lowest odds of a 'best aspect' comment**
3. **Valid, well managed & transparent assessment significantly decreases litigation and time-consuming appeals' processes**
4. **It is no good to assess well if what we are assessing doesn't count**
5. **Employer satisfaction with graduates' capabilities builds demand.**
6. **It is assessment that confirms the university is achieving its 'moral purpose' and strategic intent for L&T**
7. **95% of the world's leaders have a degree**
8. **The international shift is towards assuring the impact quality L&T has on graduates not just the quality of inputs or student satisfaction**
9. **Need to assure consistent L&T quality and achievement standards whilst avoiding a 'one size fits all' compliance system**
10. **Systems' thinking, capacity building & linking & leveraging what currently happens in parallel all improve quality**

# The emerging HE quality agenda – some key elements

- Validation of program outcomes – the focus is increasingly on assuring fitness *of* purpose of what we assess not just its fitness *for* purpose; on producing graduates who are not just work ready, but work ready *plus* (quality graduates have more than just basic skills)
- Right outcomes first and then right mapping, right assessment, right learning design, right staff, right support, right grading and right feedback.
- Need to assess less but better – authentic, integrated, practice focused
- Systematic use of assessment for learning (formative assessment) as well as of learning (summative assessment)
- More targeted support for the ‘mediating leaders’ : as the key arbiters of effective quality assurance and change in this area
- Engaging all staff with this agenda – including sessional staff

# International update

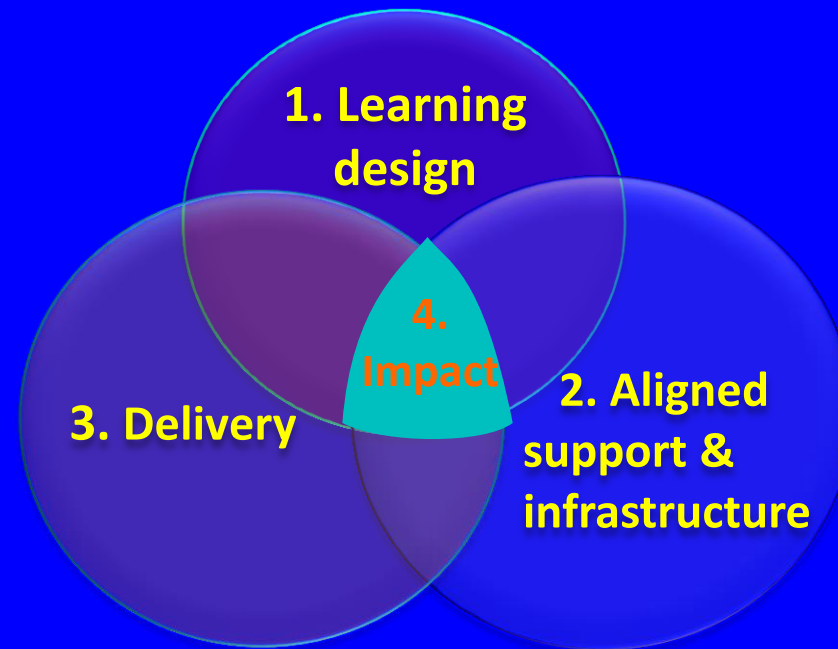
- Increased focus on confirming fitness of purpose & whose voice counts
- Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – we meet Japan Nov
- UK HE Quality Code requires use of multiple reference points to confirm fitness of purpose. Same trend in Australia.
- Increasing number of conferences & forums focused on the area.
- Strong support for applying the peer review process used to assure research quality to assuring the quality of L&T outcomes & standards
- OLT support for this senior national teaching fellowship
- Increased focus on this area by accreditation bodies, AHELO etc
- The U.S. ‘work ready *plus* white paper’ & ethical entrepreneurialism
- Work is underway or completed in Malaysia, a pilot set of Australian HEIs, NZ., the Copernicus Network, the UK, North America & the Pacific.
- 2015: all Australian HEIs & a national conference

# The national senior fellowship's focus & activities

- **Assuring the fitness of purpose of program level outcomes using peer review not just the fitness for purpose of assessment or the quality of its grading & management**
- **Develop a productive capacity-building system for this area**
- **Introduce, identify, test & refine:**
  - **The idea of producing 'work ready plus' graduates;**
  - **The use of proven professional/graduate capability framework & multiple reference points to validate program learning outcomes via peer review;**
  - **Best practice in mapping;**
  - **The most engaging & fit-for-purpose assessment tasks x different FOEs**
- **Identify the best ways in which the key local leadership roles in enacting the above agenda can be supported**
- **Build targeted international networks of support to link good practice.**

# *‘Seeing the forest for the trees’*

## Where this fits into an overall Quality & Standards framework for Learning & Teaching



**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)



# 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)**

# Writing helpful learning outcomes

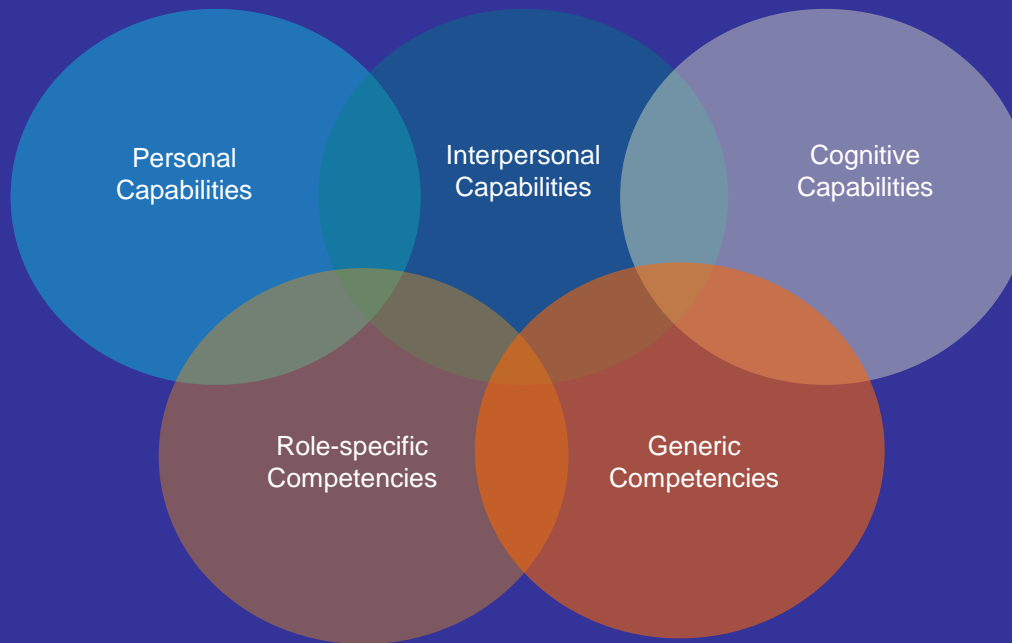
- **What the student will be able to demonstrate at the completion of the program/subject/unit– specific capabilities and competencies to be developed**
- **How this will be demonstrated – e.g. Students being able to effectively outline, predict, formulate, construct, produce, select, communicate, engage, appraise, diagnose, solve, evaluate etc.**
- **How different levels of performance will be judged – clear criteria and indicators**
- **When the task is to be completed by**

# Validating learning outcomes

**Key reference points for confirming we are focusing on the right learning outcomes :  
which voice counts most/least?**

- **National Qualifications Framework or equivalent**
- **The University's mission & its graduate attributes**
- **Learning outcome standards determined by different discipline groups, the UK subject benchmarking process, UK Quality Code, AHELO etc**
- **The learning outcomes for courses of the same name in other places**
- **External professional accreditation standards (when applicable)**
- **Results from inter-institutional benchmarking**
- **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 & others say they want**
- **Plus?**

# Professional & graduate capability framework



**Capability**

**Competence**

# Top ranking capabilities from studies of successful graduates in 9 professions (top 12/38 in rank order)

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)

Code: GSK – generic skills & knowledge; P-personal capability; IP – interpersonal capability

C – cognitive capability

# Capabilities rated greater than 4/5 on importance by 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 & blue economy literate
- Change implementation savvy
- Creative and inventive not just 'regurgitative'
- Clear on where one stands on the tacit assumptions driving the 21<sup>st</sup> century agenda, assumptions like:
  - 'growth is good';
  - 'consumption is happiness';
  - 'ICT is always the answer';
  - 'globalisation is great'.

# Right outcomes:

**Reference points you currently use to confirm the relevance of your programs**

*Select one program from your area*

- **Identify which reference points you currently use to confirm its relevance & how much 'weight' you give to each, explaining why**
  - **Consider the relevance of developing 'work ready plus' graduates as you do this**
- **Identify additional reference points you believe could be considered in the future in your selected program area, explaining why**
- **How do or can we best use peer review to support this process?**



# Right mapping of program learning outcomes to subjects/units of study

## *Eight quality assurance checkpoints*

- Identify/justify which subset of program level learning outcomes (PLOs) each subject/unit of study will pick up on
- Ensure that all of the PLOs are being addressed in assessment somewhere in the combined set of subjects/units of study
- Ensure that there is no duplication between subjects
- Ensure there is an equal assessment load across units/subjects
- Consider if there will be ‘scaffolding’ of related areas between earlier and later years of the program
- Ensure the assessment chosen is valid (*fit for purpose*) – that it is the best way to the measure outcomes determined for each unit/subject
- Identify how the standards of assessment will be judged and ensure that what is required for a F, P, C, D, HD aligns with the institution’s assessment standards and exemplars are provided for each unit
- Directly match learning methods and resources to enable students to successfully complete the set assessment to the required standards

# Right assessment

*Select an assessment task from a particular unit of study in your area which you believe is engaging, well received and 'fit-for-purpose'*

- **Explain why you selected it as a good example**
- **Outline briefly the learning outcomes it is assessing and how it does this well**
- **Note briefly which component(s) of the professional capability framework it is assessing (one or a mix of relevant personal, interpersonal, cognitive capabilities and key competencies)**
- **Consider how we might best share/classify assessment tasks like your chosen example so that others can easily locate & build on them**

# Right grading: Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education (Biggs)

## Pass (C grade)

- Evidence of understanding of the basic points in the course material with a basic level of appropriate application to real life practice.
- Limited or patchy critical appraisal of course material and no great additions or insights.
- Evidence of minimal wider reading.
- Unintegrated and more encyclopaedic than succinct.
- Basic requirements of length and layout of assessment tasks are met.
- Evidence that some aspects of stance (empathy, persistence, commitment to excellence, enthusiasm, willingness to take sensible risks and learn from errors, action oriented, ability to tolerate ambiguity) are present.

# Right grading: Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education (Biggs)

## Credit (B grade)

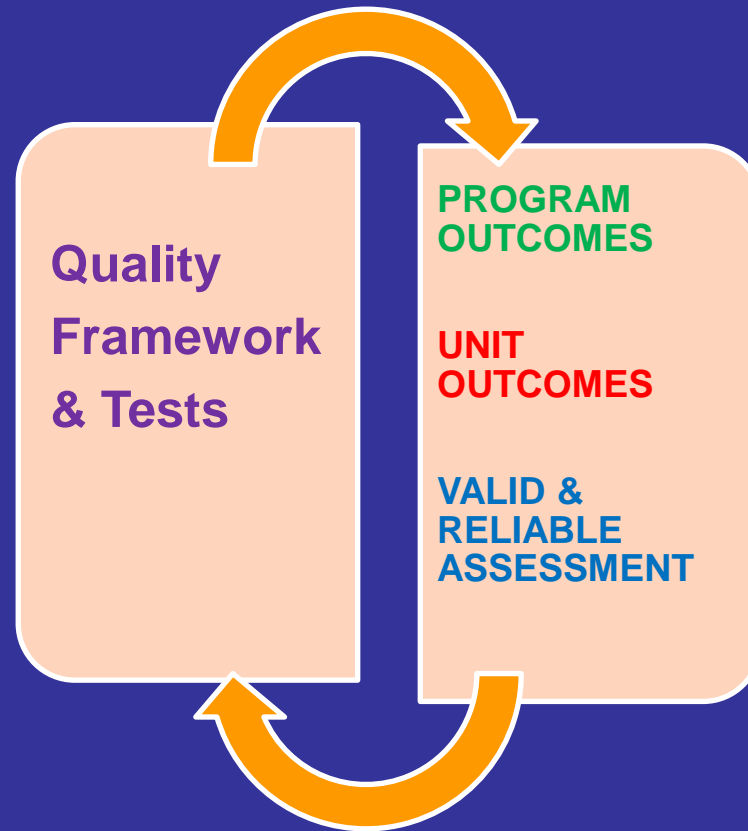
- Evidence of a broad understanding of key points raised in course materials with some evidence of transformation, selectivity and appropriate application.
- All assessment questions answered appropriately, succinctly and relevantly.
- Some evidence of wider reading with patchy use of this to critically appraise course material.
- Basic requirements of layout and length for assessment tasks met.
- Evidence that some aspects of stance (empathy, persistence, commitment to excellence, enthusiasm, willingness to take sensible risks and learn from errors, action oriented, ability to tolerate ambiguity) are present.

# Right grading: Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education (Biggs)

## High distinction (A+ grade)

- **As per Distinction but highly consistent levels of appropriate, creative or original insight. Consistently cuts to the core of the issue. Highly reflective, sharply perceived with consistently high levels of critical perception.**
- **Evidence of wide reading, always appropriately applied, especially to the critical appraisal of material presented in the course.**
- **Identifies relevant linkages between different units of study**
- **Nothing included that is not to the point. Exceptionally well argued and presented.**
- **Evidence that most aspects of stance (empathy, persistence, commitment to excellence, enthusiasm, willingness to take sensible risks and learn from errors, action-oriented, ability to tolerate ambiguity) are present**

# Alignment of Outcomes (Avondale College of H.E.)



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

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

## **Key lessons on effective change implementation in higher education**

- **Steered engagement – the focus is on engagement not dissemination**
- **Nested leadership**
- **Aligned policies, incentives and agile processes that 'value add'**
- **Change is a learning & unlearning process, not an event**
- **Engage the disengaged**
- **Consensus around the data not around the table**
- **Learn by doing – start small, build on your successes**
- **Networked learning & shared solutions**

## **Key lessons on effective change leadership in higher education**

- **Listen, link, leverage then lead – always in that order**
- **Effective leaders are effective teachers & practice what they preach**
- **The most effective leaders have highly developed personal, interpersonal and cognitive capabilities**

# Supporting & clarifying your role as a key change leader in this area

- **Clarifying the focus of your role as a leader of change and quality improvement in assuring the quality of achievement standards and their valid assessment**
- **Tackling the challenges of the role – e.g. how to engage the disengaged**
- **The support you would find most helpful in delivering the role**
  - The potential to develop a self-teaching guide for staff on what we have explored; would a national/searchable clearing house of good practice be relevant and work?
  - Embedding this focus into the University's policies and practices so that it is given priority & its importance is understood by everyone?
  - Using networked learning & inter-school/university peer review
  - Plus?
- **How to address this agenda in 'digestible chunks'**



# Your experience as a change leader in higher education

- **Strategies that have worked best for you so far to engage all staff (not just the already enthusiastic) and develop the capabilities necessary to successfully and consistently implement your agreed learning outcomes and assessment agenda**
- **Other key challenges and how you address them**
- **Your key priorities for improvement**

# Key insights and what next?

- **One aspect of this presentation you found particularly helpful**
- **One aspect you would like to know more about**
- **One suggestion on how we can best build university staff capacity in this area – especially the capabilities of sessional staff**
- **One suggestion on how to help further develop your capabilities in this area**
- **Other suggestions**

# Further reading & resources

AAHE (1996); AAHE principles of good practice in assessing student learning.

At: [http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/resources/AAHE\\_Principles\\_of\\_Good\\_Practice.pdf](http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/resources/AAHE_Principles_of_Good_Practice.pdf)

Campbell, S (2008): Assessment reform as a stimulus for quality improvement in university L&T: an Australian case study *Outcomes of HE conference*, IMHE, OECD, Paris, September  
at: <http://www.oecd.org/site/eduimhe08/41203854.pdf>

Fullan, M & Scott, G (2014): *Education Plus*, NPDFL, Washington

Hanover Research (2013): *Best and innovative practices in HE Assessment*, April 2013, at:  
<http://www.grip.umn.edu/assets/best-and-innovative-practices-in-higher-education-assessment-%284%29.pdf>

HEA (2012): *A marked improvement: transforming assessment in HE*, HEA, Newcastle, UK  
at: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A\\_Marked\\_Improvement.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf)

Krause, K.L & Scott, G (2014): *A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation*, Office of Learning & Teaching, Australian Government, Sydney.

At: <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-sector-wide-model-inter-university%20moderation>

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

Scott, G (2013): Improving learning and teaching quality in higher education, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 27 (20, 2013: 275-294.

Videos on the area: <http://youtu.be/5e5g6uAIMQB> and <http://youtu.be/dyLjGsCgiiM>