

*National Senior Teaching Fellowship*

**Assuring the quality of achievement  
standards & their valid assessment in  
Higher Education**

*Addressing the new quality agenda for  
Higher Education*

**Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott  
University of Western Sydney**

# Summary

**“Assessing students is the most important thing we do in higher education”**

- 1. Key themes – what + how**
- 2. Why bother & international update**
- 3. Fellowship Focus & activities**
- 4. Making sure we are speaking a common language**
- 5. Right outcomes: validating program level learning outcomes using peer review & weighted reference points**
- 6. Right mapping**
- 7. Right assessment & learning design**
- 8. Supporting your role as a key change leader in this area**
- 9. What next?**

# 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**
- **Valid, well managed & 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**
- **Employer satisfaction with graduates' capabilities builds demand**
- **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 & alignment improve quality**

# The new agenda – quality of outcomes & impact not just quality of inputs

- **Valid course outcomes** – the focus is increasingly on assuring fitness *of* purpose not just fitness *for* purpose; on producing graduates who are work ready *plus* (- quality is having more than just basic skills)
- **Ensuring unit/subject outcomes** are aligned with program level ones
- **Validating assessment tasks** – also ensuring appropriate weighting, comprehensive instructions, sound grading, academic integrity and transparent & reliable assessment processes
- **Use of clear, criterion-referenced grading** which is evidence-based
- **Assessing less but better** – authentic assessment
- **Calibration between those assessing**
- **Assessment for learning** (formative assessment) as well as **assessment of learning** (summative assessment)
- **Greater recognition of the need for more targeted support for people in your roles:** as the key arbiters of effective change in this area
- **Engaging all staff with this agenda** – including sessional staff

# International update

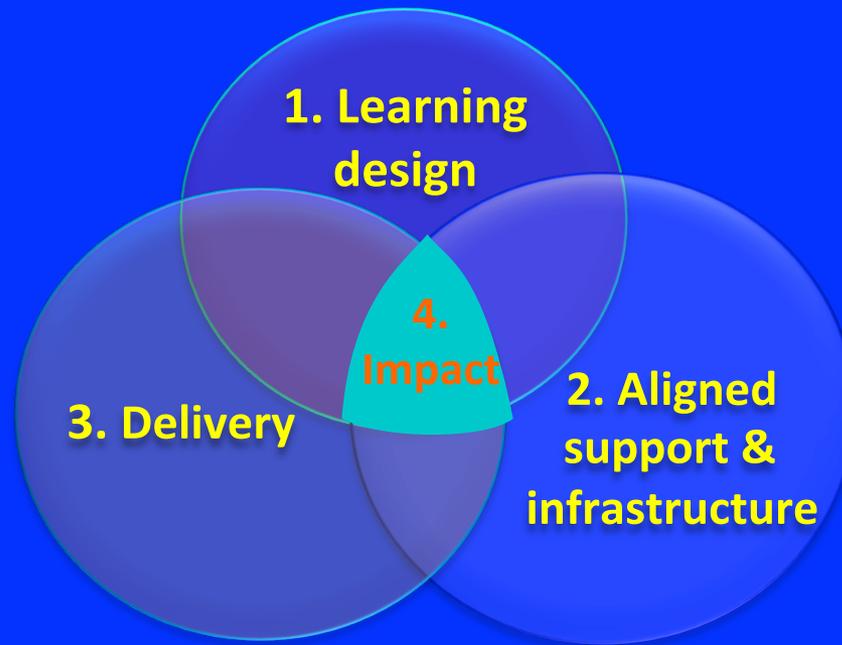
- Increased focus on confirming fitness of purpose & whose voice counts
- Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – met Japan Nov 15
- UK HE Quality Code requires use of multiple reference points to confirm fitness of purpose
- T&L Canada/Ontario Universities' focus is now on Learning Outcomes
- Increased focus on personal/interpersonal capabilities (e.g. 'mindfulness')
- Strong support for applying the peer review process used to assure research quality to assuring the quality of L&T outcomes & standards (including from the Australian HE Standards Panel)
- Increased focus on this area by accreditation bodies, AHELO, WASC etc
- The U.S. 'work ready *plus* white paper' & ethical entrepreneurialism
- Invited work on this focus area has been completed with the University of the South Pacific, Malaysian HEIs, Copernicus, UK, Canada, USA, NZ
- 2015: all Australian HEIs (Avondale & UWS workshops completed in 2014)

# The senior fellowship's focus & activities

- Looking at the 'what' not just the 'how' of assessment
  - on assuring the fitness *of* purpose of assessment not just its fitness for purpose
- Work ready *plus* graduates
- Capacity building with the key arbiters of change – HOSs, A/Deans, HOPs
- Making sure we can see where all the pieces fit together – constructive alignment via frameworks
- Linking and leveraging all the good work that is currently taking place in parallel
- Networked learning & access to situated successful approaches to the six linked components of assessment



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



**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)**

**It has been suggested that LOs need to include:**

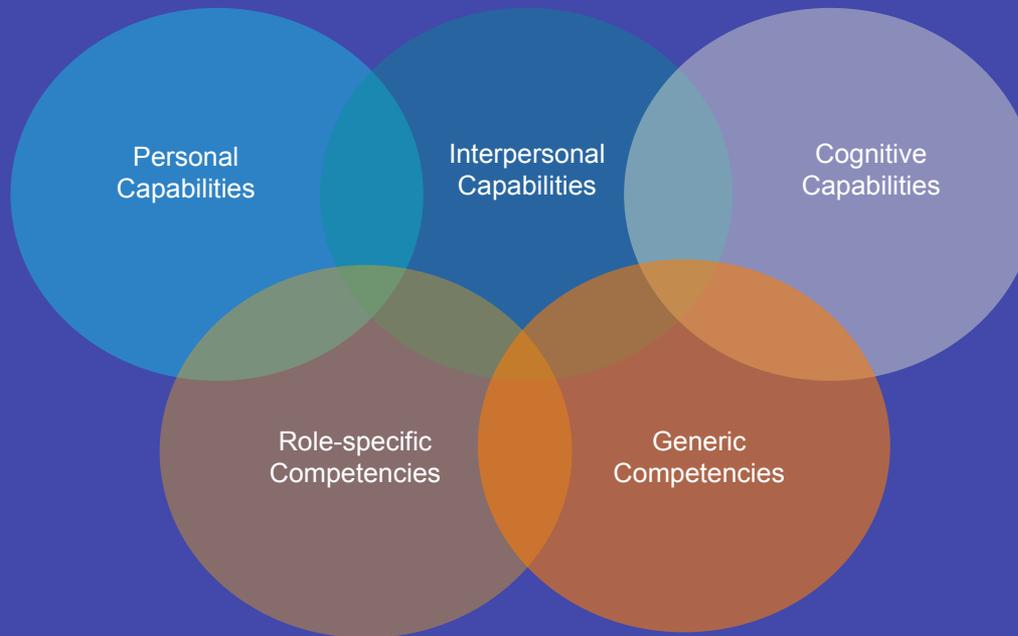
- **A clear task/set of tasks to be performed**
- **A set of validated criteria by which the quality of performance will be judged**
- **A set of explicit indicators of how performance will be evaluated at various grade levels**

# Validating learning outcomes

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

- National Qualifications Framework or equivalent
- The University's mission & 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 & others say they want
- Plus?

# Professional 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**

# Top 12 ranking capabilities from the Wilson & Scott pilot study of successful early career IT graduates 2002

1. Being willing to take responsibility for projects and how they turn out (P)
2. Being willing to face and learn from my errors and listen openly to feedback (P)
3. Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects (IP)
4. Being able to diagnose what is really causing a problem and then test this out in action (C)
5. The ability to use previous experience to figure out what is going on when a current situation takes an unexpected turn (C)
6. Being able to set and justify priorities (C)
7. Being able to remain calm under pressure of when things go wrong (P)
8. An ability to trace out & assess consequences of alternative courses of action and pick the most suitable one (B)
9. Being able to identify from a mass of detail the core issue in any situation (C)
10. Wanting to produce as good a job as possible (P)
11. Being able to organise my work & manage time effectively (GSK)
12. Knowing how to manage projects into successful implementation (GSK)

# 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 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 learning outcomes to subjects/units of study

- 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 your agreed 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

# Clear assessment criteria

## How do you distinguish between

- Fail
- Pass
- Credit
- Distinction
- High distinction

# Right assessment

*Select an assessment task from a particular unit of study in your area which has been well received by students and 'effective'*

- **In a couple of lines**
  - explain what the assessment task required students to do
  - Outline the key graduate capabilities that you believe it addresses
  - Explain why you think it should be used by others
  - Note if a grading rubric is used and, if so, how staff are helped to use it effectively
- **Identify if your institution uses any form of 'clearing house' on good ideas for assessment &/or any other ways you get good ideas for assessment**

# The effective L&T change leader

- **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 learning outcomes and assessment agenda**
- **Other key challenges and how you address them**
- **Your key priorities for improvement & how you like to learn**
- **Comparison with the research on effective change leaders in HE**
  - **listen, link, leverage then lead always in that order**
  - **understand what motivates staff to engage in and stick with professional learning = what engages students**
  - **engagement not dissemination**

***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 HE

- **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 HE

- **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**

# 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 workshop 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)

Freeman, M & Ewan, C (2014): *Good practice Report: Assuring learning outcomes & standards*, OLT, Sydney

at: <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-good-practices-report-assuring-learning-outcomes-and-standards-2013>

Fullan, M & Scott, G (2009): *Turnaround Leadership for HE*, Jossey Bass San Francisco

Fullan, M & Scott, G (2014): *Education Plus*, NPD, 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 et al (2014): *A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation*, OLT, 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.

# Further reading & resources

## Successful graduate research in ICT

Koppi, Tony & Naghdy, Fazel (2009): *Managing educational change in the ICT discipline at the tertiary education level*, ATLC & University of Wollongong, March 2009.

at: [http://www.acdict.edu.au/userDocs/Koppi\\_NaghdyExecutiveSummaryFinal.pdf](http://www.acdict.edu.au/userDocs/Koppi_NaghdyExecutiveSummaryFinal.pdf)

Scott, Geoff & Wilson, David (2002): Tracking and profiling successful IT graduates: an exploratory study, ACIS Proceedings 2002

at: <http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1192&context=acis2002>