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## First Year Experience Discussion Forum Generic Skills Bibliography (2003 – 2004)

- B-HERT (2001) The Critical Importance of Lifelong Learning. *B-HERT Position Paper No. 4*, February 2001 [http://www.bhert.com/Docs%5Cpolicy4.doc ]
- B-HERT (2002) Enhancing the Learning and Employability of Graduates: The Role of Generic Skills. *B-HERT Position Paper No 9*. [http://www.bhert.com/Position%20Paper%20No%209.pdf]
- DEST (2002) Employability Skills for the Future (March 2002) *Commonwealth of Australia*. [http://www.dest.gov.au/ty/publications/employability\_skills/final\_report.pdf]
- DEST (2000) Employer Satisfaction with Graduate Skills. *Commonwealth of Australia*. [http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eip99-7/eip99\_7pdf.pdf]
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Barrie, S. (2004) A research-based approach to generic graduate attributes policy. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(3), 261 – 275.

For many years universities around the world have sought to articulate the nature of the education they offer to their students through a description of the generic qualities and skills their graduates possess. Despite the lengthy history of the rhetoric of such policy claims, universities' endeavours to describe generic attributes of graduates continue to lack a clear theoretical or conceptual base and are characterized by a plurality of view-points. Furthermore, despite extensive funding in some quarters, overall, efforts to foster the development of generic attributes appear to have met with limited success. Recent research has shed some light on this apparent variability in policy and practice. It is apparent that Australian university teachers charged with responsibility for developing students' generic graduate attributes do not share a common understanding of either the nature of these outcomes, or the teaching and learning processes that might facilitate the development of these outcomes. Instead academics hold qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon of graduate attributes. This paper considers how the qualitatively different conceptions of graduate attributes identified in this research have been applied to the challenge of revising a university's policy statement specifying the generic attributes of its graduates. The paper outlines the key findings of the research and then describes how the university's revision of its policy statement has built upon this research, adopting a research-led approach to academic development. The resultant two-tiered policy is presented and the key academic development processes associated with the disciplinary contextualization of this framework are considered. The discussion explores some of the implications of this novel approach to structuring a university's policy, in particular, the variation in the relationship between discipline knowledge and generic attributes which was a key feature of the qualitative variation in understandings identified in the research.

Barnett, R. (2004) Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(3), 247 – 260.

What is it to learn for an unknown future? It might be said that the future has always been unknown but our opening question surely takes on a new pedagogical challenge if not urgency in the contemporary age. Indeed, it could be said that our opening question has never been generally acknowledged to be a significant motivating curricular and pedagogical question in higher education. Be all this as it may, the question (What is it to learn for an unknown future?) surely deserves more attention than it has so far received. After all, if the future is unknown, what kind of learning is appropriate for it? The preposition 'for' carries weight here.

The preposition implies an education in which—in our presenting case in point—a sense of an unknown future is probably evidently present; or, at least, serves as a major organizing principle in the design of the curriculum and in the enacting of the pedagogy. If future-as-unknown was missing either from the curriculum or from the pedagogy in some way not far from the surface, we could hardly say that we were in the presence of a learning 'for' an unknown future.

Generic skills may seem to offer the basis of just such a learning for an unknown future. Generic skills, by definition, are those that surely hold across manifold situations, even unknown ones. I want to suggest, however, that the idea of skills, even generic skills, is a cul-de-sac. In contrast, the way forward lies in construing and enacting a pedagogy for human being. In other words, learning for an unknown future has to be a learning understood neither in terms of knowledge or skills but of human qualities and dispositions. Learning for an unknown future calls, in short, for an ontological turn.



Bath, D., Smith, C., Stein, S. and Swann, R. (2004) Beyond mapping and embedding graduate attributes: bringing together quality assurance and action learning to create a validated and living curriculum. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(3), 313 – 328.

With increasing importance being placed on the development of generic skills in higher education, institutions are espousing, as part of their mission and objectives, which generic skills their graduates achieve, and teachers are being required to document how their courses and programs support the development of those skills and attributes. The mapping of opportunities for development of graduate attributes in the planned curriculum thus plays an important role in relation to quality assurance and reporting processes, and embedding these opportunities in curricula may ensure alignment between the espoused curriculum and the taught curriculum. But are these processes enough to ensure that what is espoused and enacted through the curriculum is aligned with what students experience and learn? This issue is addressed here through a case study of a team of university teachers at one Australian institution who went beyond the mapping and embedding of graduate attributes in their courses of study, and engaged in a process of action learning to create a valid and living curriculum for the development of graduate attributes.

Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C-J. and Cragolini, V. (2004) Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: graduates' perceptions, *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(2), 147 – 165.

This paper presents findings from Stage 4 of the Griffith Graduate Project. Graduates from three Schools within Griffith University were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the contributions that the learning contexts of university, work placement and post-graduation employment made to the development of their generic skills. All graduates involved in the project had experienced work placement as a formal part of their undergraduate studies. Supplementary data from focus group discussions held with employers and graduates are also included. Findings showed that while graduates recognized the contribution university had made to their generic skills development, they greatly valued the experience of learning in the workplace during placement and subsequently in employment. The importance of teamwork, being given responsibility, and collaborative learning emerged as the most important factors for effective learning in the three contexts under consideration.

Gilbert, R., Balatti, J., Turner, P. and Whitehouse, H. (2004) The generic skills debate in research higher degrees. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(3), 375 – 388.

Generic or transferable skills as outcomes of research higher degrees have been the subject of considerable development and debate in universities in recent times. The development of generic skills has been motivated by the belief that there are skills which all graduates should possess, and which would be applicable to a wide range of tasks and contexts beyond the university setting. This paper reviews these developments and debates drawing on a literature from the USA, the UK, with particular reference to Australia. It cites examples of generic skills programs and considers evidence of students' responses to them. Reviewing criticisms which have been levelled at the idea of generic skills in research higher degrees, the discussion identifies a number of questions which need to be addressed if this development is to succeed.

Leggett, M., Kinnear, A., Boyce, M. and Bennett, I. (2004) Student and staff perceptions of the importance of generic skills in science, *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(3), 295 – 312.

In the discussion of the inclusion of generic skills in courses, the voices of employers, universities and government have been clearly heard. However, the undergraduate student voice has been largely missing. This paper outlines the results of a survey of staff and undergraduate students. Part A of the survey asked participants to rate a set of skills in terms of their importance. Part B of the survey asked participants to add other skills that they considered important. The student results demonstrate significant year effects. For example higher-order skills such as critical thinking are rated more important at third year than at first year. Comparisons of the staff data and student data show that student perceptions match staff perceptions more closely at third-year level than at first year. When all the results are considered in the broader context of our courses, there appears to be a strong link between students' perception of the importance of skills and the degree to which the skills are assessed.

Moore, T. (2004) The critical thinking debate: how general are general thinking skills? *Higher Education Research and Development*, **23**(1) 3 – 18.

This paper takes up the issue of whether the skill of critical thinking in university education is best thought of as a broad universal generic skill or rather as only a loose category taking in a variety of modes of thought. Through the linguistic analysis of some sample texts, I argue that the discourse of general thinking programs should not be thought of as a generalist discourse at all, but in fact a quite specific one. The implications both for the teaching and testing of critical thinking are considered in the light of this position.