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Constructing a Practice Informed Graduate Attributes Toolkit: built in not bolt-on

Jen Harvey
Dublin Institute of Technology

Allison Kavanagh
Dublin Institute of Technology, allison.kavanagh@dit.ie

Dave Kilmartin
Dublin Institute of Technology

Rachel O'Connor
Dublin Institute of Technology, rachel.oconnor@dit.ie

Ciaran O'Leary
Dublin Institute of Technology

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Jen Harvey, Allison Kavanagh, Dave Kilmartin, Rachel O'Connor, Ciaran O'Leary, and K.C. O'Rourke

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It is generally recognised that Higher Education students should be afforded a range of formal and informal learning opportunities to develop skills, or graduate attributes, that have the potential to enhance their success both in their chosen career choice and as active global citizens. This requires a shared understanding of these graduate attributes among programme team members, students and external stakeholders.

The DIT Graduate Attributes policy (2012) therefore requires that all programmes make explicit an agreed set of graduate attributes intended to be fully integrated within curriculum design, with their development clearly mapped across programmes. To facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experience across the Institute, initiatives such as the Graduate Attributes Toolkit are being developed.

The online toolkit draws on a database of case studies collected from lecturers across a broad range of disciplines. Users of the Graduate Attributes Toolkit are invited to select one of five overarching attributes – enterprising, engaged, enquiry-based, expert and effective; and then explore each of these further through associated, detailed attributes such as excellent communicator and digitally literate. Toolkit users are provided with a description and rationale for each of the 20 detailed graduate attributes, and then a tool to help them recognise the degree to which their practice currently supports students in developing this attribute. They are then provided with access to case studies which demonstrate how the objective of developing this attribute can further inform the development of their practice. The case studies are accompanied by lists of suggested learning outcomes which can help the lecturer both recognise how their current activity contributes to the development of key graduate attributes, and can also encourage them to further develop their modules to reflect those attributes. The DIT Graduate Attribute Toolkit is a growing resource which is available at http://dit.ie/teaching/graduateattributes/

CONSTRUCTING A PRACTICE INFORMED GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES TOOLKIT: BUILT IN NOT BOLT-ON

JEN HARVEY
ALLISON KAVANAGH
DAVE KILMARTIN
RACHEL O'CONNOR
CIARÁN O'LEARY
KEVIN O'ROURKE

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http://dit.ie/teaching/graduateattributes/

FUTURE GRADUATES

One of the most fundamental questions in planning for the future is: what are the right skills for the graduates of 2015 and of 2030 and what mix of skills should we pursue as learning outcomes of higher education? To address the societal needs over the coming years, increased attention must be paid to core skills such as quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-working skills and the effective use of information technology. The emphasis has switched from over-specialisation towards deeper and broader disciplinary foundations, with learning objectives that explicitly seek to nurture in students the creativity, enthusiasm and skills required for continual engagement with learning. In this context, the arts, humanities and social sciences have a key role to play. The Innovation Taskforce emphasised the importance of independent thinking and 'the development of creative, high-skilled graduates as well as lifelong learning, mentoring and continuous professional development'. (Hunt report, 2010)

STUDENT SUCCESS

Academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance

Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

"Employers were less satisfied with graduate's 'ability to work autonomously' expecting them to be better able to work on their own initiative, manage their time effectively and be responsible for themselves and their tasks.

Attitudinal skills and an approach to work that suggests enthusiasm and willingness to learn and develop were also highlighted as areas for improvement.

The survey suggests that employers are now expecting higher education institutions to embed generic or employability skills more fully into their curricula.

IBEC – Education and skills report – November 2010

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

Skills (beyond the minimum entry requirements) identified by employer organisations that their organisation currently requires and the Irish higher education system is currently not providing

- A greater level of soft skills transferrable into the working environment, e.g. verbal and written communication, teamwork, grammar
- More practical workplace experience through placements or work experience programmes
- More technical skills such as, problem solving, analytical skills, data analysis
- An entrepreneurial spirit
- Specific languages with a high level of proficiency in sufficient quantities
- General presentation skills.

National Employer Survey (2015)

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

Intelligence and 'cop on'   Technical Skills   Flexibility

Customer Orientation   A willingness to learn from and listen to older colleagues

Good communication skills – with clients and colleagues

Attention to detail   Effective presenters   Relationship Management

Good English and ability to write clearly and concisely

Problem Solving   Teamwork   Integrity & honesty

Ability to develop good business relationships - able to understand clients' needs

Hard work   A willingness to go the extra mile

Willingness to own up to mistakes and not try to brush them under the carpet or blame someone else

Obviously, totally digitally literate!

Recognition that spelling is important, letters/reports cannot go to clients with mistakes

A knowledge of/ interest in the wider business world

Good general knowledge – up to date with current news/events, readers of newspapers, not just soundbites or headlines

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DIT GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES POLICY

In 2007, the DIT Academic Council approved a recommendation that '*all programmes will provide students with a range of opportunities to develop, practice and be assessed on an agreed range of key employability skills or graduate attributes.*' These to be made explicit as learning outcomes within the appropriate programme documentation.

In order that all graduates leave with an agreed set of key skills for employability, it was felt that it would be necessary for DIT to identify a set of desired generic skills (in line with professional body recommendations) which are

- defined as key, cognitive and subject specific
- made explicit within programme documents,
- measurable and assessable with strategies put in place in order that they are taught, practiced or assessed.

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DIT GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

Graduate Attributes	Definition
Engaged	*Civically engaged, socially responsible graduates who contribute meaningfully and positively in their professional, community and social environments.*
Enterprising	*Graduates who have the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to apply creative ideas and innovations and to find practical solutions.*
Enquiry based	*Graduates with a spirit of curiosity and a desire to learn, motivated to draw upon existing knowledge, generating new ideas, seeking out learning opportunities, exploring the application of theory to practice and actively creating new knowledge*
Effective	*Effective, highly skilled and confident graduates with the capacity to achieve desired results, believing that they can make a positive difference.*
Expert in chosen subject discipline	*Graduates with the professional knowledge and capacity independently to practice, reflect, review and build upon disciplinary expertise and judgment.*

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DIAMOND-9

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TOOLKIT DESIGN

Support for programme teams

Built on best practice

Linked to existing initiatives

Practically focussed:

- Assessment methods
- Learning outcomes
- Learning and teaching methods

What does this mean?
Why is this important?
Ideas...

http://dit.ie/teaching/graduateattributes/

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