

Graduate skills: generic competences and specific subject competences

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Why Generic Competences

- Difficulty in forecasting the environment in which our students will operate. So skills must be adaptable and transferable to new professional settings.
- Employers seem to value characteristics that are not directly related to subject specific knowledge: team work, interpersonal and cultural skills, ethical commitment.
- “Authentic assessment”, align assessment methods with real world professional situations.
- Institutional goals: to develop persons who are “free, responsible, committed to the development of their communities”.
- Awareness that the university has great impact in personal development and should care about values and attitudes as well as specialized knowledge.

Definitions, related concepts

- *Transferable skills, “soft” skills, key skills, core skills* are often synonyms for generic competences.
- One Definition
 - “The terms “transferable skills”, “general skills”, “common skills”, “core skills” are defined in different ways by different authors. Generally speaking, they refer to the skills needed for gainful employment and responsible citizenship, and are important for all students regardless of the field they are studying.” (Fallows and Steven, 2000).

National and cultural context important

Graduate rating of importance of competences in their current work, 2001
UK, Europe, Japan*

* Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden

EU funded study
Quoted by Aurelio Villa Sánchez & Manuel Poblete Ruiz (2008)

UK	EUROPE	JAPAN
1. Learning abilities	1. Learning abilities	1. Loyalty, integrity
2. Working independently	2. Power of concentration	2. Power of concentration
3. Writing skills	3. Working independently	3. Adaptability
4. Teamwork	4. Writing skills	4. Getting personally involved
5. Working under pressure	5. Loyalty, integrity	5. Learning abilities
6. Accuracy, attention to detail	6. Field-specific theoretical knowledge	6. Field-specific theoretical knowledge
7. Power of concentration	7. Getting personally involved	7. Fitness for work
8. Oral communication skills	8. Critical thinking	8. Initiative
9. Problem-solving ability	9. Adaptability	9. Tolerance
10. Initiative, adaptability, tolerance	10. Tolerance	10. Teamwork

The problem of generic competences

- Harder to define a manageable set (Tuning less helpful).
- Not mapped to courses but related to teaching methodologies and learning environment.
- Not easy to quantify in terms of workload.
- Adoption of concept implies pedagogical introspection and has impact in everyday practice.
- Not related to scientific knowledge, but rather to less stable concepts of social effectiveness.
- QA harder without intrusiveness.

Strategy

- Define a short (6-12) list of generic competences at programme level (or university level).
- For each course define the generic competences that the course “promotes”.
- Define “promoting” as “*the existence of a specific approach in teaching methodology and assessment criteria*” targeted at that competence.
- Check the overall balance: are some competences excessively promoted, are others lacking, are the aims of the programme addressed?

More information

- Tuning Academy
 - Aurelio Villa Sánchez & Manuel Poblete Ruiz (Eds.) *Competence-based Learning: A proposal for the assessment of generic competences, Tuning Project, 2008* available at http://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Competence-Based-Learning_EN.pdf
- Coimbra Group, Education Innovation Working Group
 - Bjælde, Lauridsen, Lindberg, *Current trends in assessment in Europe: the way forward*, White Paper, 2018, available at <https://www.coimbra-group.eu/white-paper-on-current-trends-in-assessment-in-europe/>

