

Of course students develop
generic graduate attributes
while at university ...

Yeah Right

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Graduate Recruiter Perspectives

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What are Graduate Attributes?

- **Generic skills, attributes and personal qualities**
 - Not discipline specific
- **Linked to successful employment outcomes** (e.g., Bennett, 2002; Jackson, 2014; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005)
- **a.k.a. employability skills, soft skills, core skills, generic attributes, or competencies** (Hager & Holland, 2006)
- **Associated with employability** (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Kaiser, 2013)

Why have a graduate profile?

- **An expectation of student attainment**
- **Public declaration – to students and staff, to potential students, to employers, to the community and to other academic institutions**
- **Assigns staff and student responsibility for developing attributes**

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/learning-and-teaching/strategies-goals-and-plans/graduate-profiles.html>

UoA's Graduate profiles

- **Discipline and level specific**
(e.g., undergrad, postgrad, BSc)
- **The undergraduate profile**
 - **Three sections:**
 - **I: Specialist knowledge**
 - **II: General intellectual skills and capacities**
 - **III: Personal qualities**

Why evaluate the Profile?

- **Consistency & Quality**
 - **Bologna Reform**
 - **Attributes agenda**
(e.g., Engelberg & Limbach-Reich, 2012; Hager & Holland, 2006)
- **Skill gaps** (e.g., Division of Occupational Psychology, 2012; Harkison, Poulston & Kim, 2011)
- **NZ context**
 - **Teaching vs Research** (Spronken-Smith et al., 2013)
 - **Accountability** (Ministry of Education, 2010)
 - **Relevance - 2003**

Research questions

- **Do graduates have the graduate attributes listed in the profile?**
- **Are the profile attributes what recruiters/employers are looking for?**
- **Is the NZ experience similar to what is being reported in the literature?**

Recruiter/employer perspectives

- **Qualitative, exploratory**
- **Semi-structured interviews (30-60 minutes)**
- **10 participants from the graduate employment industry based in Auckland, New Zealand**
- **General inductive approach** (Thomas, 2006)
- **Limited by sample size, location, method**

Do graduates have the skills listed in the Profile?

It is what I traditionally, what I would have seen as old fashioned Masters' graduate.

Do you think it still applies for a Masters graduate?

[...] the majority, probably 60-70% yes, but undergraduate no.

HR Advisor

How does the university know?

[...] it's just a bit of a stretch to say that all of our students are going to have these things when you're not testing for that or they don't need to have to display those to graduate [...]

Organisational effectiveness consultant

What skills are missing?

The reality of work

You very quickly learn, “I don’t know everything, I might know the theory, but I don’t know the practical realities” [...]

Psychologist

Business etiquette

[...] basically not knowing the etiquette of the working world for one, and then just not understanding how businesses work.

Management consultant

Networking skills

[...] we're finding that when they come and join our business or clients business they're very poor at networking, networking skills are very poor, has that got something to do with the increased use of technology?

HR practitioner

What skills are important?

[...] it's resilience, it's strive for results, it's strong EQ, it is good interpersonal savvy, getting on with people, it's a natural curiosity for what's going on, you know not just accepting at face value what's being given to you, you know pushing yourself harder.

Graduate manager

What do employers look for?

So what you are essentially getting hired on is your soft skills, for us on our grad program as an example, we don't actually care what you've studied.

For us it's more about who you are as a person, and what you can bring to the business.

Graduate manager

[...] it's about the right person for the right organisation in the end.

HR researcher

Rounded candidates, not just grades

Talent ID consultant

Use information, make decisions

I give them information, they can distil what's needed, they can critically look around it, they can build it in a new information.

HR advisor

Skill priorities

[...] when they are under my guidance I want to shape them, I want them to learn from my style or my colleagues style [...]

Psychologist

Is the 2003 Profile relevant?

Yeah I think it looks good, I can't see anything off the top of my head that's missing.

Talent acquisition manager

I think it's really good, it's the sort of thing that I'd be looking for.

Psychologist

[...] it is very important especially in modern workplaces where people need to accept change more rapidly, more than ever before.

HR advisor

Next steps

- **Measure student self-ratings of graduate attributes and how they change over time**
 - Longitudinal Questionnaire – 3 time points
 - Use GPA to cross-validate self-reported ability
- **Ask students to describe how university study contributed to the development of attributes**

Conclusion

- **Some have developed graduate attributes**
But, skill gaps are a reality
- **The profile is largely unknown**
But, it does list important graduate attributes
- **NZ context appears similar to the literature**

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Thank you

Questions?

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To access the University of Auckland's graduate profiles:
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