Broadening conceptions of employability:

*How changing our understanding of graduate attributes can help our search for a skilled workforce*

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Outline

• To explore some of the different ways universities have been talking (at cross purposes) about graduate attributes

• To look at some of the ways we might start to change the conversations about graduates to position ourselves to meet the needs of tomorrow’s society and economy

• Draw on a project called the National GAP
Imagine tomorrow.....

• What are some of the words that you think will describe tomorrow’s world, tomorrow’s work and tomorrow’s careers?
Thriving amidst uncertainty

• This is a condition called Supercomplexity

• It requires more than Mode 1 or Mode 2 knowledge

• It needs a new way of dealing with the world, with ourselves and with each other....
Don’t graduates learn that at university?

• Is this what universities are trying to talk about when they list graduate attributes?

• Somehow the lists don’t bear much resemblance to these aspirations…. they are often much more mundane……and they rarely deliver.
Why……..

• ‘We’ haven’t recognised we have different ideas about the outcomes and are ‘talking’ about different things

• ‘We’ haven’t taken the time to have a real conversation

• ‘We’ haven’t made the best use of a university education for students, society or the world of work
How we have traditionally talked about graduate attributes

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<th>1. Necessary <strong>precursor</strong> skills and abilities</th>
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<td>The three Rs – reading writing and arithmetic – and some basic technology and library skills – the sort of things we used to be able to reasonably expect any student who had completed high school to have. I think that it is cynical of the university to say that it teaches students such skills when we clearly don’t. We expect students to already have them when they come to university. Of course often they don’t these days and those students that need to should be able to access extra help however, I think it is unrealistic to expect academics to try to do that.</td>
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<th>2. Skills that <strong>complement</strong> discipline knowledge</th>
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<td>The generic skills acquired as the result of a university education and therefore understood to be outcomes that are part of the university syllabus but separate from and secondary to the learning of disciplinary knowledge…sitting alongside but not altering or interacting with disciplinary knowledge in any way.</td>
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<th>3. Abilities to <strong>translate</strong> or apply disciplinary knowledge</th>
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<td>Graduate attributes are closely connected with discipline learning outcomes and they change the discipline learning outcomes. They include clusters of linked personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application which are essential in allowing the translation and application of discipline knowledge in the real world and are what lets new knowledge arise for the real world. They are hard to judge in ‘abstract’ because they are not about extra skills – they are about using the knowledge</td>
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<th>4. Abilities that infuse and <strong>enable</strong> all scholarly learning and knowledge</th>
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<td>Graduate attributes are integral to disciplinary knowledge and provide a reusable framework that enables students to acquire and shape new knowledge as required. They transcend disciplinary boundaries even though they are initially developed within a disciplinary context. Graduate attributes are about re/shaping and transforming knowledge to meet new challenges in contexts far removed from that of the original discipline. They are the sorts of abilities about intellectual and personal development that are the keys to inquiry and learning in many aspects of life, not just formal study.</td>
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*Adapted from Barrie, 2006*
What might **communication** look like at each level?

What might **global citizenship** look like at each level?

What might **lifelong learning** look like at each level?
Global citizenship

• An inclusive attitude or stance towards the world and one's place in it..... Graduates of the University will be Global Citizens, who will aspire to contribute to society in a full and meaningful way through their roles as members of local, national and global communities.
Lifelong learning

• An attitude or stance towards themselves.....Graduates of the University will be Lifelong Learners committed to and capable of continuous learning and reflection for the purpose of furthering their understanding of the world and their place in it.
Achieving graduate attributes

• ........meaningful solutions have proved elusive and there remains a 'national gap' between the rhetoric of generic attributes and the reality of the student learning experience.
Students and graduate attributes

Students develop ‘ideas’ about GA ….

I don’t have the faintest idea…
These are lists of things on the front of assessments and study guides…
These are extra things we need to develop by doing extra extra things…
These are things we are told employers want…

Where do these ideas come from?
Students do say of their courses…

• “My courses at uni changed the person I am……I think differently and I interact with other people’s ideas differently. I see the world differently……I just don’t deal with work or life in the same way because of what I’ve learnt about X / Y / Z ……I know I’m different to my friends who didn’t go to uni…but I don’t know how to put that difference into words”

• Why don’t students see this transformational learning as being about graduate attributes?
How can we improve outcomes? (for us all)

• Focus on what we want – not what is easy to list on a survey or a form

• Have meaningful conversations that engage all the different stakeholders in identifying the outcomes… and in creating the opportunities for the development of these outcomes.

• Work with students to help them see what and why an education matters
Talking to students about university

- Becoming the person you can be through university……

- Transition in…..developing your identity as a university student….. (Foundation Skills)

- Transition through…..developing your identity as a historian / scientist …. (Graduate Attributes)

- Transition out…developing your identity as a graduate employee and an educated member of society…(Graduate Attributes)
Three actions from the student perspective:

• Ensure that the students’ T&L experiences of university do explicitly focus on fostering graduate attributes, rather than “courses + generic skills”

• Explicitly connect students with this graduate attributes experience through transparent assessment and authentic learning

• Have meaningful conversations with students about graduate attributes in the context of their aspirations and experiences of university - so that they stop missing the point of our efforts
Thank you!