Virtually every student that I’ve met either doesn’t know, or care about graduate attributes. Here are the most common views that I encounter from other students:

1. ‘I have to take some useless classes not even related to my degree, or learn pointless information with little/no link to the real world’.

2. ‘I’m only trying to get passes anyway, because in the end I will still have a degree’.

3. ‘I can’t wait to finish – I’m sick of study’.

To me, these comments all suggest that these students feel powerless over their own education. It is then not hard to understand why many feel resentful towards having to pay large sums of their time, energy and money. I believe that this perceived loss of personal power is the main reason behind student apathy.

I see a gap between graduate attributes and what those attributes are supposed to achieve. The connection is lost to students. Study becomes a means to an end, rather than a pathway of self actualisation that enriches the realisation of that end.

What I am suggesting, is to shift the focus from building empowered citizens to supporting students to want to be empowered citizens all on their own. Motivate students to motivate themselves by instead supporting their sense of personal power – so that they not only know that they can make a difference, but want to. Unlike building empowered citizens directly which can seem other-centred, building personal power is more student-centred.

Students usually already have all the personal power they need. The challenge for graduate attributes is to support students in regaining the sense that they have it and can use it.