

Embedding employability in your course - 2017: Staff Guide

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Background

In 2015, the ECU Graduate Employability Strategy 2016 (ECU, 2015) was designed to support students develop their employability skills throughout their course. The aim is for students to be able to articulate their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to successfully apply for, and maintain, meaningful employment into the future.

To ensure that a consistent definition of 'employability skills' can be referred to, ECU is focusing on the [Core Skills for Work Framework](#) (Australian Government, 2013). This set of skills was developed as a result of collaboration between learning institutions and a number of industries. Its aim is to identify the development of specific employability skills throughout tertiary education and through continued employment. It is anticipated that the Core Skills for Work (see page 3) are already integrated into your Course Learning Outcomes. This pilot project provides you with an opportunity to check that all these skills are covered by your Course Learning Outcomes. At the same time, this approach can ensure that all students in your course understand and can articulate their skills and achievements. Even though students may have learned and practised these skills within their course, it does not guarantee that students recognise this, or their ongoing development in these skills (Peet, 2015). In this document, we aim to provide a model where students can be supported with opportunities to recognise, articulate and evidence their skills in order to improve employability.

To support this process, the Centre for Learning and Teaching has used PebblePad to build a course-long workbook: Graduate Course Action Plan (gradCAP). There is a page for students to consider moments related to each Course Learning Outcome, link these to employability skills and add evidence to support their learning. Students can then use this information and evidence in their final year showcase portfolio.

This guide is designed to be a starting point to support you through the process of embedding employability skills in your course. The Centre for Learning and Teaching will assign your team with a senior learning designer to support you through this process. We look forward to working with you over the year and hope that from this process, we can build a community of practice and a strong, effective method of supporting the development of students' employability skills. If you have any questions, please contact CLT@ecu.edu.au.

Introduction

The aim of this approach is to provide a method for students to:

- Recognise, articulate and evidence their own learning moments, their knowledge and their skills;
- Demonstrate their skills and achievements and readiness for work through a portfolio and to potential employers; and
- Apply their knowledge and skills to their future workplace and into their future life.

Work Skills (Core Skills for Work)

Over the last decade, it has become increasingly clear that generic employability skills need to be incorporated within universities to ensure a smooth transition for students from university to the workforce. In 2013, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) collaborated with other Government departments and a range of industries to develop the Core Skills for Work Framework. This Framework consists of a set of ten employability skills that are broken into three clusters: 'Navigate the world of work'; 'Interact with others'; and 'Get the work done'. Each of these can be broken down into smaller focus areas:

Navigate the world of work

- a. Manage career and work life; and
- b. Work with roles, rights and protocols.

Interact with others

- a. Communicate for work;
- b. Connect and work with others; and
- c. Recognise and utilise diverse perspectives.

Get the work done

- a. Plan and organise;
- b. Make decisions;
- c. Identify and solve problems;
- d. Create and innovate; and
- e. Work in a digital world.

Benefits to using the Core Skills for Work Framework include the following:

- The Framework covers multiple aspects of work and preparation for work, and so can be integrated throughout the course, including WIL units;
- It is used across multiple institutions in Australia, and so can assist in reviewing and benchmarking;
- It is not designed to stop at graduation, but is an ongoing guide to be utilised throughout a working lifetime; AND
- Each skill is independently measurable.

It is suggested that your teaching team identifies each of these Core Skills for Work in your Course Learning Outcomes, or, when more appropriate, in specific Unit Learning Outcomes. For the purpose of the employability pilot project, we refer to the Core Skills for Work as 'Work Skills'.

Developing student self-knowledge

While students certainly develop employability skills and industry knowledge during their years at university, they may not be aware of these abilities. This affects students' ability to articulate their skills and abilities when applying for a position and to be confident of their abilities as they continue their career. Peet (2015) states that students can be taught to identify their skills through describing moments where they have demonstrated these skills. In the gradCAP workbook, these are linked to their Course Learning Outcomes. Students are asked to:

1. Jot down three moments where they have worked towards an aspect of the course learning outcome within a unit,
2. Talk about the three moments with a partner who can help unpack the moments
3. Nominate the key skills that they demonstrate
4. Write up a 150-word snapshot of what the moment demonstrates.
5. Attach evidence to support the student's achievement or ability.

This snapshot and evidence can be used in the gradCAP portfolio that they produce in their final year.

Course Design

Calibrate Core Skills for Work within your course

Using the Core Skills for Work Framework, your Learning Designer will work with you to do the following:

- Review your course to note where these skills are already introduced, taught and assessed;
- Ensure that these skills are clearly articulated in your Course Learning Outcomes and Unit Learning Outcomes;
- Provide students with an overview of these Course Learning Outcomes and Unit Learning Outcomes in every unit, from first year, first semester; and
- Clarify which units will require students to make use of their gradCAP workbook and provide students with opportunities to incorporate evidence at appropriate times throughout the course.
- Provide students with rubrics to evaluate their development in specific work skills

Course-long skills development

To ensure that students are aware of where these skills will be practised and demonstrated, it is suggested students be provided with an overview of where the employability skills will be taught throughout their entire course. Similarly, students should be shown a method for recording their improvements and gathering evidence of development of these skills. Students will then be able to draw on this resource in their final year capstone unit.

One way to do this is for students to keep a course-long workbook (gradCAP) using PebblePad. The self-knowledge students gain about their skills and achievements through maintaining this workbook can be used to build the portfolio for their capstone unit. All students at ECU have access to the **gradCAP Workbook** and sample gradCAP portfolios. GradCAP draws on the Core Skills for Work Framework and integrative learning techniques to assist students make sense of, and articulate, their learning and skills throughout their course and extra-curricula activities. The gradCAP workbook is also adaptable for your course or school needs. Please email your learning designer for details.

Career Services

Find opportunities for members of the Careers and Leadership Services to visit your students. Careers Services have tasks that can work directly into the gradCAP workbook pages 'About Me' and 'Career Research'. Careers Advisers suggest the following time commitments:

- 1st year: 1 hour
- 2nd year: 2 hours
- Final year (3rd/4th year): 1 ½ hours

Work Integrated learning units (WIL)

Ensure that all students have the opportunity to complete a work placement. (Note: All ECU students must be given the option of completing a WIL unit at some point during their degree [Graduate Employability Strategy, 2016]). While calibrating your course for employability skills, consider using the WIL placement and WIL placement preparation as an opportunity for students to practise skills from the Core Skills for Work Framework, Cluster 1 (Skills to navigate the world of work).

Please go to [Learning Intranet > Work Integrated Learning](#) for more information on running a WIL unit.

Capstone unit

A capstone unit offers an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate their achievements and skills. Using the gradCAP workbook, a portfolio can be drawn from information gathered throughout the course-long gradCAP workbook. By providing students with a portfolio sample in first year when the gradCAP workbook is being introduced, students can be made aware from the beginning of their course what they will produce upon graduation. A GradCAP portfolio sample will be available for staff and students from February 2016.

Competencies and Industry

An active Consultative Committee that meets regularly can be an important tool for ensuring that a course complies with professional competencies and that these are kept up to date.

Where feasible, industry or industry representatives should be consulted on the design of your course. Likewise, a Consultative Committee can be asked to perform regular reviews to ensure your Course and Unit Learning Outcomes and your assessments are aligned with current industry needs. They can also give feedback to maintain continuous improvement. Endeavour to invite industry representatives to participate in course activities, such as giving guest lectures and acting as portfolio judges as part of your capstone unit. Please see the [ECU Curriculum Planning and Development Policy, Appendix 2: Engagement Mapping Index](#) (2014) for the engagement point calculation.

Depending on your industry, you might consider adding your professional competencies to your course's gradCAP workbook. This is useful if students are required to demonstrate specific evidence and knowledge that is not covered by Core Skills for Work. Please talk to your learning designer for assistance with this.

Course review

Part of the process, should include reviewing your course yearly. In this way, you will be able to monitor success and to put in place required improvements you have identified through review. Involve industry and your learning designer in your course review to ensure the course remains relevant to industry demands.

Transparency of graduate outcomes

Unit and course expectations

Students should know which Unit Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes will be covered in each unit from first semester, first year. This information should be included in each unit Blackboard unit site and each unit plan. Contact your learning designer for ways of displaying this information. In the same way, it is important to ensure students know when employability skills will be covered throughout their course. By regularly reminding students of their progress within their course regarding the employability skills, students will be more aware of when these skills are being covered.

Graduate Course Action Plan (gradCAP) Workbook

All ECU students on the employability pilot will have access to the gradCAP workbook through PebblePad in 2016. Students can use this workbook to record their development of

employability skills to prepare for employment. The workbook aligns with Career Services and uses the Core Skills for Work Framework as its employability skills. It is designed to guide students through the process of skill development and growing awareness of their own abilities and achievements to prepare them for building their portfolio during their capstone unit. The workbook is adaptable according to the needs of the course.

In the workbook, the Introduction provides students with some guidance in how to complete the gradCAP workbook and an opportunity to get started using the workbook. By completing the first page and saving the workbook, the workbook will be automatically submitted to your nominated workspace. (Please speak to your learning designer to ensure this is set up before semester starts.) This means that students will be able to just keep adding to it and saving to keep it up to date for the rest of their time at university.

Under Preparation, students will find what they need to get going, and to keep them on track throughout their course: 'Course Learning Outcomes', the 'Course Work Skills', 'My Key Skills' and 'Career Research'. Under 'Course Learning Outcomes', students can, with support, add each of the Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and note down in which unit each of the CLOs will be covered. CLOs are listed according to whether they are Knowledge, Skills and Application outcomes. 'Course Work Skills' lists each of the Core Skills for Work. Students can mark these off as they have demonstrated each of these skills throughout their course. 'My Key Skills' allows students an opportunity to explore what their key skills are. This will be useful for differentiating themselves from other students when building their portfolios in their final year. Career Research is a place where students can gather information about potential future employment opportunities.

The remainder of the workbook directly relates to the capstone portfolio. In 'About Me', students are asked to answer questions that help them recognise who they are and what inspires them. This supports students in developing their About Me page in their portfolio.

'Knowledge', 'Skills' and 'Application' relate to aspects of CLOs. Students are given the opportunity to break down three moments when they achieved an aspect of each CLO in the designated unit. To make this meaningful to students, each page will need to ask students to consider a specific embodied aspect of the CLO. Students use these pages to link to each Work Skill, to write up a snapshot moment that can be used in the portfolio and to add a piece of evidence that can support the experience or achievement.

Contact Me is designed for students to add their contact details, including professional social media sites.

If it is relevant to your discipline, you may also consider adding a Philosophy page template to your workbook. Please talk to your learning designer about this, and about making any other changes necessary to the workbook to suit your course needs.

In the table below, you will see the points where each of the pages is being built or being developed by the student, and how this shifts into:

- The student's showcase portfolio
- Self knowledge the student can access and evidence for job seeking and job maintaining.

gradCAP workbook pages	What is it for?	Where it is covered	When its covered
Introduction	Introduction to gradCAP	Core unit	1 st year
Preparation			1 st - 2 nd year
Course Learning Outcomes, Course work skills	Awareness of which units will cover CLOs and Work Skills	Core unit	1 st year
My Key Skills	Awareness of skills and abilities	Independently or in unit	1st year
My Goals, My Philosophy	Current and future direction	Independently or in units	2 nd year
Career Research	Gather information about potential organisations and companies	Careers	2 nd year
About Me	Start building a professional About Me page	Careers	1 st and 2 nd year
Knowledge, Skills, Application	Recognise, articulate and evidence skills and achievements in unit	Units with Work Skills	Throughout course
Contact Me	Build up appropriate professional social media sites.	Careers	2nd year

Table 1: gradCAP workbook pages transferred to capstone unit

Showcase portfolio

Students use their workbooks to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities in their showcase portfolios. The portfolio can be adapted to appear in any way that is appropriate for the specific course and the individual student's needs. However, the sample portfolio includes the following pages:

- About Me
- My Knowledge
- My Skills
- My Showcase
- Contact Me

These portfolio pages are designed to link directly up with the gradCAP workbook, where the workbook is designed to demonstrate ongoing development in each area and the portfolio is designed to showcase these skills and abilities. Introduce students to sample portfolios in first year, so that they can see the link between their formative workbook and their summative showcase portfolio.

Project review

We would like to know how effective this method of improving employability skills is. To do this, we would like to send you, student and industry partners, questionnaires before, during and after the pilot is run. All questionnaires will, of course, be voluntary and will run only with approval from your School. We do hope that by doing this, however, we can identify and support good practice.

Conclusion

We are very interested in any feedback you have in the process over the following year and into the future. Please let us know what works well in your context and what suggestions you have for future improvement. For further assistance on how to embed employability skills into your course, or into specific units, please contact your learning designer, or contact the Centre for Learning and Teaching: cld@ecu.edu.au.

Further reading

- Australian Government, Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science Research and Tertiary Education and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. (2013). *Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework*. Retrieved from <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Core-Skills-for-Work-Developmental-Framework-2013.pdf>
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- Edith Cowan University. (2015). *Graduate Employment Strategy 2016*. Academic Board Minutes. 217-222. (December 3). Retrieved from <http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/staff/centres/planning-quality-and-equity-services/our-services/academic-governance/academic-committees/academic-board>
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