National Academy for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning

Investigating graduate competences

This document presents the views of a broad spectrum of stakeholders regarding the importance of equipping learners with various global generic competences and how best to integrate these into the curriculum. Nearly 2700 survey responses were gathered from employers and the higher education sector. The responses from the higher education sector were drawn from a representative sample of staff and students from both universities and institutes of technology with responses gathered from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. The integration of global generic competences into the curriculum is a challenge for many teaching professionals. The National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching & Learning (NAIRTL) and the Bologna Working Group are working to develop national guidelines in this area. The current survey is one of a number of initiatives feeding into this objective.

The results of the survey form the basis of a NAIRTL workshop at the CELT conference at NUI Galway on June 11th-12th. In addition, the Bologna Working Group are organising a one day Symposium in University College Cork on September 30th 2009 entitled “Integrating generic competences into your curriculum”.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in this national survey. Please contact us if you have any comments relating to the issues raised in this report.

Best wishes,

Dr Stephen Cassidy
Chair of the Bologna Working Group,
June 2009

Survey results
Method
The survey was sent to staff and learners in 38 higher education institutes and to employers via inclusion of a link to the survey in two IBEC newsletters. Over the course of two months a total of 2677 responses were gathered. Some 962 (36%) responses came from HEI staff members; 1402 responses came from learners (52%); while 235 responses were from the public and private employer sector (9%).

The lists of generic competences were ranked according to the perceptions of the respondents of their importance. These rankings were then analysed to determine whether different views emerged depending on the source of the response e.g. employment sector or type of higher education institute.

Within the sample, almost half of the respondents are affiliated to a university (48%), more than a quarter are affiliated with an institute of technology (28%), and 15% are affiliated with an educational college (including pontifical colleges).

The responses were also analysed according to the disciplinary background of the respondent. Half of the respondents are involved in the Humanities and Social Sciences, while close to a third are involved in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, and an eighth of the total respondents associated with medical and Health sciences.

The lists of generic competences were ranked in relation to perceptions of importance and the rankings were then interrogated according to whether differences emerged depending on type of employment sector, disciplinary background, or type of higher education institute.

Key findings
The NAIRTL survey asked staff and students in 38 Higher Education Institutes and employers to rank three categories of competences as to which they consider to be the most important for graduate students to be equipped with.

The responses were filtered according to response source (academic responses versus private and public sector or University versus Institute of Technology) and the disciplinary background (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths versus Humanities and Social Sciences).
Section 2: Communication, cultural awareness & social responsibility

Figure 2.1
- Academic responses vs. private and public sector
- University responses vs. Institutes of Technology
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) vs. Humanities and Social Sciences

Figure 2.2
- Academic responses vs. private and public sector
- University responses vs. Institutes of Technology

Section 3: Skill set

Figure 3.1
- Academic responses vs. private and public sector
- University responses vs. Institutes of Technology

Overall results:
- Interpersonal and interaction skills
- Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness
- Oral and written communication skills in native language
- Ability to communicate with non-experts
- Appreciation of, and respect for, cultures and customs
- Commitment to environmental conservation
- Ability to communicate in a second language

Academic vs. employer:
- Interpersonal and interaction skills
- Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness
- Oral and written communication skills in native language
- Ability to communicate with non-experts
- Appreciation of, and respect for, cultures and customs
- Commitment to environmental conservation
- Ability to communicate in a second language

STEM vs. HSS:
- Interpersonal and interaction skills
- Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness
- Oral and written communication skills in native language
- Ability to communicate with non-experts
- Appreciation of, and respect for, cultures and customs
- Commitment to environmental conservation
- Ability to communicate in a second language

Overall results:
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Ability to self-organize and time-manage
- Determination and perseverance in tasks & responsibilities
- Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals
- Ability to work autonomously
- Skilled in the use of computers and ICTs
- Ability to work in an international context

Academic vs. employer:
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Ability to self-organize and time-manage
- Determination and perseverance in tasks & responsibilities
- Ability to motivate people and move toward common goals
- Ability to work autonomously
- Skilled in the use of computers and ICTs
- Ability to work in an international context
Section 3: Skill set continued

Figure 3.3:
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) vs.
- Humanities and Social Sciences

Section 4: Strategies for the development of student competences

This training should be embedded throughout a student’s course
Graduate competences should be developed in the HEI
Graduate competences should be developed in the workplace
Assessment of generic competences should be embedded throughout the curriculum
HEIs should focus on developing discipline-specific competences
Generic competences are best assessed individually
Generic competence development should be a specific module for students

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Sample breakdown

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
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<td>All Hallows College</td>
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<td>C of I College of Education</td>
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