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Assessment for distinctiveness: recognising diversity of accomplishments

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Abstract

Universities have responded to the expansion of higher education and restructuring of the labour market by redesigning curriculum to better emphasise transferable skills and embed pedagogies that contribute to graduate employability. However, the ways in which universities judge and share achievement still provides poor evidence of what students can do or the skills and personal attributes that inform job recruitment decisions. Furthermore, assessment provides little opportunity for students to develop the self-knowledge or evaluative judgement needed to portray their professional identity to different audiences. In this paper, we examine shortcomings of current approaches to assessment and propose four principles for redesign of 'assessment for distinctiveness' that recognises students' unique and complex achievements in ways that are relevant to employers, and enable students to understand and appropriately portray their achievements for different audiences.
Keywords: employability, learning outcomes, evaluative judgement, career management, graduate identity

Introduction

A common assumption within media, policy and academic circles, is that higher education qualifications and grades are interpreted as signals of merit for recruitment and access to graduate careers (Sadler 2009; Tholen 2017). However, with the global expansion of higher education in recent decades, increasing numbers of graduates with ostensibly the same qualification are competing for limited job opportunities (Norton and Cherastidtham 2018; Tholen 2017). Employers have the opportunity to pick between graduates, but the ways in which universities assess and represent achievement has changed little over recent decades, and these provide vague information on which to compare and select job candidates. Graduates typically receive an academic transcript that lists grades for the subjects or modules that have been completed, but this rarely captures skills that are required in the workplace (Flynn 2004). Depending on the country, this may be accompanied by a grade point average or a classification of overall achievement, such as a class of honours. Thus, graduates are distinguished by a mark, based on academic practice that provides little indication of what they can and cannot do (Boud 2017; Sadler 2009).

There are growing indications that neither graduates nor graduate employers, find this information particularly helpful. Many employers use additional criteria (such as work experience) or performance tests, to judge the suitability of job candidates, or pay assessment centres to do this for them (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams 2004; Brown et al. 2016). Others have removed degree requirements from their recruitment and selection processes altogether (Coughlin 2016; Sherriff 2015). Employers and recruiters suggest that workforce requirements have changed, and emphasise the importance of behavioural attributes and skills such as proactivity, communication, persuasiveness, drive, resilience, adaptability, self-confidence, and problem-solving, alongside experiences that are thought to reflect these such as work experience, internships, and extra-curricular activities (Brown et al. 2004; 2016). However, observation of their decision making behaviours suggests that how job candidates construct the narrative of their employability is equally important:

> "Where it was once enough to have simply suggested one has travelled the world and been subject to different cultural and personal experiences, the onus is on the individual candidate to demonstrate how these experiences have developed him or her to such an extent that they have the necessary 'experience' and 'initiative' to make certain social situations work in their favour. Where it was once enough to simply state that one had canoed up the Khyber backwards, one now has to demonstrate the individual competences, which have been acquired and developed through undertaking such an exercise, and how they relate to the required competencies being sought by the organization one was hoping to work for"
>
> (Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2004, Chapter 7).

While higher education may be about more than employment, vocational outcomes are among the most common reasons why learners undertake it (Green, Hammer, and Star 2009; Norton and Cherastidtham, 2018), so the career aspirations of students cannot be ignored.

The aim of this paper is to examine ways in which assessment portrays achievement, and to question current assumptions about what assessment needs to do. Following a discussion of the context of change in higher education, we analyse the shortcomings of common assessment representations. In the context of an abundance of students graduating with apparently identical qualifications, having been judged against a common set of standards, we identify the need for a new perspective on the purposes of summative assessment. We argue for the notion of assessment for distinctiveness, which enables graduates' complex and unique accomplishments to be made accessible and portrayed to those who wish to know about them, including students (who need to understand their own achievements and capabilities as they seek employment) and employers (who might offer them opportunities). We propose four principles, illustrated through examples of compatible assessment strategies that might be used as a starting point for re-designing assessment so that it provides students with an impetus and opportunities for developing and demonstrating their distinct graduate identities.

Changing expectations

Globally, government policies aimed at increasing access to higher education for social and economic reasons have expanded and diversified the student profile (Clarke 2018; Hornsby and Osman 2014; Norton 2013). The public and private benefits of higher education are well documented (Bradley et al. 2008; Hornsby, Osman, and De Matos-Ala 2013; Norton 2012), but this 'massification' of higher education also poses a complex challenge. For governments, and tax payers who fund them, the cost of higher education has increased: especially spending on tuition subsidies necessary to support wider access (Holmes 2011; Norton 2013). This burden is often shared with institutions through reduced per capita funding, and with students through fiscal policies related to their immediate or eventual contribution (Clarke 2018; Holmes 2011; Sporn 2007). Increases in enrolment and disproportionate funding have also compelled a shift to larger class sizes and reduced contact hours, requiring new approaches to teaching (Hornsby and Osman, 2014; Hornsby et al. 2013). However, the challenges of massification are arguably greatest for students themselves. They can expect less teacher-to-student contact than their predecessors (Bradley 2008), despite cohorts

having greater variation in prior learning and cultural capital. They are also likely to incur greater study related debt, despite greater uncertainty and competition in the graduate labour market (Clarke 2018).

At the same time, the structure of the labour market has changed in response to globalisation, technological advancement and rise of the share economy (World Economic Forum 2016). The jobs on offer are in flux, with new occupations emerging and others becoming less needed or entirely obsolete (World Economic Forum 2016). Organisation around long-term careers has become less common, whereas short contracts and transactional employment are becoming normalised (Clarke 2018). The skills most sought after in the workplace have also changed and evidence of transferable skills such as digital literacy, communication, critical and creative thinking and the ability to work collaboratively, have become more important for gaining access to entry level positions (AlphaBeta 2016). The same transferable skills are also important to an individual's ability to negotiate uncertainty and changing career circumstances (Green et al. 2009; Su 2014).

There has been much agreement that conventional models of curriculum design and delivery are insufficient to prepare graduates with the skills and understanding needed in this rapidly evolving and highly competitive labour market (Bridgstock 2009; Jackson 2016; Kinash et al. 2016; Succi and Canovi 2019) or to accommodate the learning of diverse student cohorts through large classes (Arvanitakis 2014; Hornsby and Osman 2014; Hornsby et al. 2013). Higher education providers have moved to address these challenges by shifting their focus from teachers to students, from objectives to outcomes, and from the design of curriculum at a module or subject level, to whole of programme design (Lawson et al. 2013). Policy makers, discipline groups and institutions have also made a concerted effort to embed opportunities to develop 'graduate attributes' or generic capabilities of importance to life-long learning and employability into the curriculum (Clarke 2018; Holmes 2011; Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre 2018). However, the ways in which universities judge and represent achievement have lagged behind other curriculum innovations (Boud 2017), and do not reflect the competencies or selection processes commonly used by recruiters or employers.

Despite greater emphasis on the development of transferable skills, assessment still often fails to capture the achievement of individual learning outcomes, especially individual graduate attributes. There is also more to employability than just the acquisition of skills. Graduates must identify, evidence and articulate skills and personal attributes that are compatible with the needs of individual employers and job roles, but assessment rarely provides students with opportunities to practice these skills (Bridgstock 2009;. Clarke 2018; Jorre de St Jorre and Oliver, 2018). With so many graduates competing for positions, individuals need to be able to identify and emphasise personal strengths and experiences that differentiate them from their peers. Development of self-knowledge and evaluative judgement will help students to recognise where they best fit so that they can seek opportunities that are both desirable and realistic. Yet, assessment also rarely provides opportunities for students to draw on or demonstrate their unique achievements or to develop or portray their own graduate identity. This represents a significant oversight, because assessment signals to students that which is most important (Carless, 2017), and is meant to be the basis on which achievement is formally judged and opportunities are gained (Sadler 2009).

Shortcomings of current assessment practices

We argue that to meet the needs of students and those that would employ them, assessment should be designed so as to emphasise relevant learning, provide opportunities for students to differentiate their achievements from those of their peers, verify and communicate the learning outcomes achieved to employers and provide opportunities for students to gain recognition for exceptional achievement relevant to gaining opportunities. However, in reality, current assessment practices often fail to achieve some or all of these needs. We acknowledge that while these flaws are common, they are not ubiquitous, and later in this paper we will draw on existing examples of assessment (that do not have these flaws) to illustrate how assessment can be designed to better meet the needs of contemporary students.

(1) Communication of relevance

If assessment is to inform the actions of students and the judgement of employers, it is imperative that it is designed to reflect the knowledge, capabilities and personal attributes of most value to (and in) graduates. The importance of transferable skills is widely recognised and these are now commonly articulated as graduate attributes or graduate learning outcomes (Clarke 2018; Freeman and Ewan 2014). However, the relevance of these or other learning outcomes to future work still tends to be poorly communicated to students or emphasised through assessment (Jorre de St Jorre and Oliver, 2018; Kinash, McGillivray, and Crane 2018). Research investigating student perceptions of curriculum designed to develop graduate attributes, suggests that where capabilities are embedded but not explicitly communicated or assessed, students often fail to acknowledge evidence of their own achievement (Hill et al. 2018; Jorre de St Jorre and Oliver, 2018). Students also have mixed ideas about where they should direct their efforts to enhance their employability, and the skills and experiences valued by employers; with some students having less awareness of the relevance of transferable skills to employers (Jorre de St Jorre et al. 2019). This is not to say that the discipline specific knowledge and skills are not important, rather, these need to be complemented by broader skills and understanding that facilitate the development, integration and transferability of these across career and life contexts (Candy, 2000).

(2) Homogenisation

Individual differences have been championed as a source of competitive advantage because diverse perspectives and lived experiences can contribute to more varied solutions and better design; diverse staff are also more likely to reflect the profile of customers or clients (Brown et al. 2004). However, despite diversity in students themselves, diverse achievements or experiences are rarely captured, recognised or rewarded by current approaches to assessment. Instead, most require students to demonstrate learning outcomes though the creation of homogenised artefacts, that is, artefacts that are uniform or vary little between students or year groups. For example, students are often required to produce laboratory reports that reproduce answers to known problems (under the guise of inquiry), or essays requiring the articulation of standard arguments (and often the positions of their lecturers). Assessment strategies such as these fail to provide graduates with personalised evidence of achievement that differentiates them from their peers. They also provide little opportunity for graduates to portray their personal identity, worldview or their own initiatives (Fain 2014; Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011), despite evidence that these contribute substantially to the hiring decisions made by employers (Brown et al. 2004; Tholen 2017).

(3) Aggregation of Achievement

Competence-based recruitment and selection processes attempt to break down and interrogate behavioural competencies and skills (Brown et al. 2004), whereas university marking and grading systems are aggregated by academic subjects within a degree program, and typically emphasise content knowledge rather than skills (Boud 2017; Jackel et al. 2017). Marks are further aggregated into grade point averages, eliminating any remaining links to the attainment of particular learning outcomes. Thus, the composite, ill-defined measure of overall performance means little to employers or anyone outside of (and perhaps within) the awarding institution. In many jurisdictions, universities are now expected to communicate and evidence learning outcomes beyond inputs and objectives, including learning that is important to lifelong learning and employability (Freeman and Ewan, 2014; Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). As a result, university-wide processes for mapping and scaffolding the development of important skills across entire degrees have become more prevalent (Lawson et al. 2013; Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre 2018). However, in practice, assessment usually still fails to differentiate between individual learning outcomes because marks for individual assessment tasks, are averaged, subject to variable weighting, and summed to produce a single grade for each subject of study (Boud 2017; Jackel et al. 2017). As such, students who fail to reach a standard (achieve a learning outcome), can achieve a pass or better (if they overachieve in other areas) without having met all of the minimum standards (Boud 2017). Generic skills are interconnected and assessment should provide students with opportunities to develop and represent themselves holistically. However, this needs to be balanced with design that allows verification of the achievement of important learning outcomes, especially those that reflect capabilities required to gain professional recognition or entry to the workforce.

(4) Communication of achievement

The ways in which universities communicate formal achievement have changed even less than assessment itself. The most detailed record of achievement provided to graduates is typically an academic transcript (Flynn 2004). However, these provide little or no information about the context, criteria and standards associated with assessment (Boud 2014; Flynn 2004; Sadler 2009, 2010). Universities in some countries now provide additional statements of achievement, such as the European Diploma Supplement (European Commission Education and Training 2010) and the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (Australian Government 2015), which describe the degree (or award), the institution that issued it, and can include short descriptions of extra-curricular achievement such as university awards or programs. In addition to subjects and grades, these statements provide descriptions of the degree or award and the institution that issued it. However, these documents are written at a high level of abstraction and do little to identify the criteria or standards of achievement that were met to achieve the degree, let alone the characteristics that make an individual learner or their experience unique, such as values, intellect, social engagement and performance (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011). Thus the ways in which universities communicate achievement is of little value for comparing graduates completing degrees at the same institution, let alone those from different institutions or jurisdictions (Sadler 2009).

(5) Recognition of exceptional achievement

Universities have some ways of acknowledging their most distinguished students, for example, through university medals or honours lists. However, these awards are typically exclusive and assessed comparatively within a cohort. They are only extended to a small subset of students, usually on the basis of overall grades without consideration of specific criteria, which provide vague and potentially flawed estimations of what a graduate might be capable of. Given these shortcomings, it is not surprising that employers have questioned the suitability of academic qualifications and achievements for making judgements about future employees and adopted alternative strategies for identifying job candidates (Brown et al. 2004).

Principles for reimagining assessment design

Assessment practices need to be reimagined and re-positioned to better prepare contemporary students for transition into the workplace, whilst also helping them to develop understanding and behaviours that will help them to portray their professional identity and facilitate successful and fulfilling careers in the longer term. At the same time, assessment should provide employers with reliable and meaningful evidence by which to judge student achievement and identify graduates that are an appropriate fit for their organisation. Examples of assessment strategies that meet some or all of these aims are not widespread. We draw on these to illustrate four principles for designing assessment for distinctiveness.

Principle one: Provide opportunities for demonstration of distinct and personalised achievement

Rather than requiring all students to produce homogenised artefacts, assessment can encourage or require students to draw on unique experience and perspectives that provide personalised evidence of what they have learned and can do. This type of assessment, requires a shift in how we judge achievement because much of current assessment practice still carries the residue of norm-referencing, requiring achievement to be judged in the same way so that students can be compared. In contrast, personalised assessment needs to be designed to allow varied portrayal against holistic standards and criteria. Standards based assessment permits students to draw on different experiences to evidence learning outcomes in ways that can be utilised for summative purposes, whilst also allowing curation of evidence for other purposes, such as evidencing employability (Boud 2017).

Opportunities for distinctive learning can be embedded in the curriculum to provide students with opportunities to draw on unique achievements. For example, placements (or internships) provide students with opportunities to gain work experience, performing tasks that are of relevance to their discipline or career ambitions in unique workplace settings. Similarly, applied projects can provide students with opportunities to produce unique value for an organisation, community or discipline. A downside of these examples is that it can be challenging to provide appropriate opportunities for all students, because placements and projects often rely on partnerships with external stakeholders and involve individual mentoring or supervision. However, the challenge here is in the provision of the personalised learning opportunity, rather than the assessment of it, which need not be any more laborious than that associated with judgement of equivalent learning.

There are ways to make personalised learning opportunities more scalable. For example, group projects or placements can require less individual supervision and provide students with personalised evidence of achievement so long as they are assessed on their contribution to the group, not just the outcome. Students can also be supported to leverage their own networks to create their own opportunities for personalised projects or placements. The learning gains associated with these personalised learning experiences are arguably worth the resources required, especially where they are

embedded in programs as capstone experiences that help students to integrate and extend their learning at culmination points in their degree, whilst also providing them with valuable evidence of achievement as they transition out of university into the workplace (Butler et al. 2017; McNamara et al. 2015). There are also other less resource intensive ways of making assessment personalised.

Students can personalise their own assessment where they are required to demonstrate learning outcomes through integrating theory and practice from their degree with other experiences or achievements. Contemporary students have, and benefit from, diverse life experiences: from work and carer roles, to volunteering, and involvement in clubs and societies. All these experiences are relevant to the development of skills and portrayal of employability, and can be leveraged to provide unique evidence of capabilities and personal attributes that are relevant to employers. This type of assessment need not be laborious for students or teachers, and can require students to create various artefacts, from written reflection, to curation of a portfolio (Clarke and Boud 2016; Tomasson Goodwin and Lithgow, 2018), to short video pitches (Jorre de St Jorre, Johnson, and O'Dea 2017), all of which can help to develop students' ability to portray their developing professional identities and confidence in their own employability. Alternatively, students might also be given choice over how they demonstrate the learning outcomes, so that the artefacts produced are even more personalised.

Principle two: Use assessment to foster evaluative judgement

Building learners' capacity to make effective judgements about their own work and that of others, has been identified as development of evaluative judgement (Tai et al. 2018). Evaluative judgement needs to be developed throughout a course so as to enable students to assess their own work and plan their own learning during and beyond their degree. Acts of assessment can contribute to this by providing students with opportunities to calibrate their judgements against those made by their teachers (Boud, Lawson and Thompson 2015) or peers (Tai et al. 2018). An example of this is the use of low-stakes assessment in programmatic assessment (increasingly used in medical education; van der Vleuten et al. 2012). However, while programmatic assessment allows students to focus on their own learning, achievement is driven by quality assurance and standards identified by the profession, rather than by the diverse ambitions, strengths or experiences of students themselves; we propose that assessment can achieve this as well.

A fundamental shift in the notion of summative assessment occurs when students take an active role in utilising assessment for their own ends, both by developing their ability to make judgements, and in portraying what they can do. Acceptance of this view positions students as active learners who can utilise assessment for their own development, instead of as passive subjects on which assessment is carried out. Summative assessment becomes an activity that students engage in to become effective practitioners in the world and to learn beyond the duration of their degree. Thus in designing summative assessment, we must consider how learning outcomes are measured and therefore encouraged, but also how they contribute to the building of students' evaluative judgement.

Assessment that requires students to demonstrate learning outcomes through curation of achievement from different aspects of their lives (as described above) can also be used to influence what students do to enhance and evidence their employability, their capacity to understand themselves (and their emerging professional identities) and to judge their own achievements. Key to this is an assessment design that asks students to self-assess the evidence that they curate against standards and criteria of relevance to their discipline, employers and future aspirations. Standards of expected achievement can be provided and aligned with industry standards to ensure that they are meaningful (to both students and employers), or might be left more open, and informed by students' own analysis of requirements of the opportunities they seek (or are qualified for), such as those identified through analysis of job advertisements and selection criteria. In doing so, assessment becomes not only student focussed, but student-led (a concept we discuss below).

Principle three: Allow for multiple portrayals of achievements for different audiences

Graduates need to be able to repackage evidence for multiple purposes and audiences, such as for different jobs, employers, and applications for awards or entry into higher degrees. Students need to take responsibility for their own portrayal for different audiences, because appropriate representation can only be determined by the student or graduate themselves, taking into account their individual context and aspirations. For example, construction of portfolios can be used to demonstrate individual learning outcome in different ways, and where unique performances are incorporated into these, they allow a diverse array of achievements to be represented in ways that reflect the complex needs of society, employers and an unknown future.

Certification of achievement remains an important responsibility of institutions that award degrees or credentials. However, representation of standardized and abstracted achievement through a transcript cannot accommodate the many purposes for which graduates need to portray their achievement. Shift from the present generalised composite transcript, to verification of the specific learning outcomes required to gain that qualification, would allow students to portray their achievements in different ways. If the institution provides evidence in secure form that each learning outcome has been met at an appropriate level, these can be assembled by students as part of different narratives to represent themselves for different audiences (Clarke and Boud 2016). The individually certified elements are fixed and do not change, but the narrative woven by the student about these elements can be personalised to represent a student's view of their own achievement, and how they wish to portray themselves to others.

Principle four: Provide meaningful evidence of the achievement certified

In addition to positioning students to better evidence their own achievement, universities might consider alternative or additional ways of recognising distinguished achievement, especially towards the end of degree programs. Professional platforms, such as LinkedIn™ (www.linkedin.com) are increasingly being used in job recruitment and selection processes, including the screening of candidates (Caers and Castelyns 2011; Priyadarshini, Kumar, and Jha 2017). Yet few universities utilise the rich data formats and connectivity offered by digital technologies to communicate the achievements of their graduates.

One way of doing this, is through the use of digital credentials, such as those that utilise badging technologies (Carey and Stefaniak 2018; Miller et al. 2017). Digital badges are "electronic symbols used to document performance and achievement" that can be used to easily share detailed and certified achievement through social and professional platforms or digital documents (Carey and Stefaniak 2018). They consist of a digital image that links to additional information about the context of achievement and, in some cases, to artefacts of learning, such as (but not limited to) a digital portfolio. Digital portfolios can be used both to share rich evidence of achievement and

encourage a mind-set in which students take responsibility for curating and portraying their employability (Clarke and Boud, 2016), but digital credentials provide an extra dimension to these (or other digital artefacts), by also verifying the achievement required, such as the standards and criteria upon which judgements were made and by whom.

Thus digital credentials can be used in addition to or in replacement of grades, to summarise and evidence the achievement of important learning outcomes. For example, Miller et al. (2017) describe a work-integrated assessment strategy in which digital credentials were used to incentivise and recognise achievement of individual graduate learning outcomes that reflected skills valued in the workplace. Digital credentials are only as valuable as the achievement represented. To ensure that relevant achievement was represented, Miller et al. (2017) collaborated with industry partners to develop the standards and criteria for the credentials and judgement of student achievement. The contribution of those individuals and organisations were identified in the digital credential, to make the involvement of external stakeholders and, by implication, relevance to industry, explicit to students and those who would consider their achievements.

Broader implications of implementing these principles

Building on critical pedagogy frameworks, Heggart, Flowers, Burridge, and Arvanitakis (2018) argue that education should be designed so as to privilege learners' experiences, build on their knowledge and links to communities, and provide opportunities for learners to self-organise. However, the homogenous assessment practices that are widespread today, are not compatible with complex student-led learning of this kind, whereas the principles we have articulated are. Learning is a many-fold and multi-directional process (between student, teacher and peers), so where diverse learners are given genuine opportunity to contribute to learning environments, they become complex systems and decision-making must be distributed and non-hierarchical to accommodate their diverse understandings (Heggart et al. 2018). Learners change the learning environment (and themselves) as they respond to it, and actual learning outcomes become more diverse and less predictable. To accommodate this, assessment must become flexible and holistic.

As assessment becomes more personalised and is communicated transparently, we might also question whether it is necessary for all students to demonstrate precisely the same learning outcomes or strengths, where these are not essential for practice. For example, while communication is important in the workplace, it includes a broad set of skills, from writing skills to interpersonal communication and relationship building, to oral presentation and digital communication. Within this broad cluster of skills, individuals can be more proficient in some areas and subsequently more suited to roles that require those specific strengths. Current approaches to assessment often require completion of written tasks, so that writing skills are privileged even where they are not intentionally assessed. Yet interpersonal communication is more important in some roles or workplaces, while digital communication or presentation skills are a great asset in others. Thus as we move away from the homogenisation of assessment, students might be allowed to explore, develop and demonstrate unique subsets of skills, that reflect their strengths, interests and passions, instead of requiring all students to evidence the same narrow criteria. So long as assessment captures the context of achievement, this would allow students to reflect on and purposefully develop and collect evidence of skills of greatest relevance to their career ambitions, whilst also allowing employers to identify graduates with profiles that best meet their organisational needs. Designing assessment that encourages autonomy and provides students with opportunities to distinguish themselves, might also help to shift learners beyond unproductive competition, while still allowing validation of important standards that might be determined by the collective decision making of students and teachers alongside community, discipline or industry representatives.

Implementation of the principles that we have described at scale, will require considerable shifts in thinking from teachers, students, and the organisations that support them. However, as demonstrated by the examples used to demonstrate each principle, there are opportunities to build on existing assessment practices. Use of portfolios and placements have already become more widespread in recent years, and where institutions or discipline groups have sought to embed these at scale, there are opportunities to examine and build on existing assessment models as well as mechanisms that have been useful for facilitating cultural shifts and curriculum renewal.

Initial redesign of assessment will undoubtedly require investment, in staff and resources. Some institutions will need to scope and invest in new digital tools or platforms to enable more effective recognition of achievement. Personalised assessment also requires that teachers write and assess against holistic standards and criteria and to become comfortable with judging variable solutions to unknown problems. For many teachers, this will involve teaching and assessing in ways they have not experienced, and developing skills in their students for which they feel unprepared. However, academics exercise similar judgements in other arenas, such as peer review of research where they are expected to judge the quality of diverse and innovative thinking. A further dimension is added by collaboration with external parties, which introduce additional and different perspectives on standards, criteria and professional judgement. Universities and their staff need to get better at engaging external parties in teaching and learning.

In the longer term, assessment that is more personalised does not necessarily need to be more onerous than assessment that is homogenous for students and arguably less interesting for staff to consider. Rather, it is likely to require a shift in where time is spent. As students contribute to the justification of their own work against standards, the role of the teacher shifts from one of sole responsibility for the judgements made, to a more collaborative and advisory role. Where students are expected to take greater responsibility for curating, judging and justifying their own achievements, or to provide feedback to their peers, teachers must still evaluate achievement and provide feedback on students' judgements, but can spend less time judging or providing feedback on artefacts themselves. Standards based assessment also removes the need for teachers to make comparisons between students. Additionally, where students are given unique opportunities to contribute to disciplines, communities or organisations, mutually beneficial opportunities for co-creation can be embedded in the curriculum.

Of course, where students are required to take more responsibility for the curation, evaluation and portrayal of their own learning, the relevance of new strategies needs to be explained so that students understand that universities are not abrogating their assessment responsibilities. It will also be important to scaffold learning that builds students' confidence and capacity for curating achievement and evaluative judgement. However, employability is of great interest to students, who are not ignorant of the declining value of degrees or challenges they will face gaining employment (Tomlinson 2008). Connection to industry and opportunities to enhance employability are valued by students, so making these explicit provides students with a rich motivational context that helps to engage them with the curriculum (Jorre de St Jorre and Oliver 2018).

Conclusion

Universities cannot guarantee graduate employment, numerous factors beyond the control of educators or student influence the opportunities available and how those are allocated. The recruitment and selection practices of employers are also imperfect and variable, both in terms of the capabilities required and the ways in which these are judged (Brown et al. 2004). However, the ways in which universities judge and communicate achievement, are currently far from compatible with these and do little to provide students with the evidence of achievement or skills needed either to understand themselves or to portray their professional identity to others. While formative assessment has been the subject of investigation and renewal in recent years, it is now time to refocus on summative assessment and consider whether it meets the needs of graduates and employers in a time of mass higher education and shifting labour markets. We have argued that it is found wanting, and that new ways of recognising and portraying achievement are needed to demonstrate diverse outputs from students studying the same degrees. We have argued in particular for assessment for distinctiveness in which the variation in the attributes of graduates are recognised and assessment is organised in ways that allow graduates to portray themselves in different ways for different audiences, drawing on certified achievements.

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