# Chapter 15
# The Future of Transversal Competencies in Higher Education Assessment

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter evaluates the rising significance of transversal competencies and the implications for higher education assessment practices. Transversal competencies are expected to play a definitive role in future of work scenarios. This chapter evaluates the decisions and impacts surrounding the integration of transversal competencies into higher education assessments. In particular, the chapter explores the commitments and adjustments that higher education leaders must make to build the competence assessment infrastructure and supports required. The guiding role 'student-centred learning' pedagogies can play is discussed. Relatedly, early-stage competence frameworks are offered as insight into how student-centred learning can deliver novel, active, reflective assessments that embrace competence diversity and target meaningful development. Finally, a roadmap is offered for higher education leaders to guide them in this challenging but pertinent transformation of university teaching and learning.*

## INTRODUCTION: TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

With the world of industry rapidly evolving towards a 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', concerns are emerging that academic learnings through traditional educational practices are no longer fulfilling the longer-term needs of learners (Schwab (2017). Indeed, learners have begun navigating their own educational preparation by obtaining informal ways of constructing relevant competencies to achieve, or at least signal, desired competencies identified as valuable to the labour market and longer-term

career efficacy (Gallagher, 2018). While many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) refer broadly and, in aspirational terms to graduate attributes, specific competence achievements cannot be considered a routine and uniform component of HE formal curricula (Oliver & St. Jorre, 2018). Many job descriptions emphasize qualifying competencies which are not formally captured by HEIs because they are not collectively assessed and quantified. In other words, most of what is captured by a 'qualification' is an individual's formal learning experience and not their informal competency proficiency. Heron (2018) argues this lack of competence recognition is something to thoughtfully review as a significant portion of a learner's journey occurs beyond their participation in explicit, passive knowledge exchange. Consequently, the challenge arises regarding how HEIs can support learners to achieve, through formative assessment, the competence required for their future work aspirations. This chapter seeks to address this challenge through the following four objectives. Firstly, the chapter seeks to explain the emerging urgency of competencies for HEIs and offers definitions to illustrate the key features of a competency. Secondly, the chapter explains different approaches and challenges to integrating competencies into HEI curriculum and assessments. Thirdly, the chapter aims to deliver starting point for HEIs via constructing a sample competence progression and grading framework that builds on the principles of student-centred learning pedagogies. Finally, a decision-making roadmap is offered with the aim of identifying the key issues to be determined by HEI's wishing to enhance the presence and value of transversal competencies across the curricula.

## BACKGROUND: THE 'WHY' AND THE 'WHAT' OF TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCIES

An acclaimed argument heralding the value of competence first appeared in the 1990s via the influential publication on core competencies by Prahlad and Hamel, (1990). Toward the end of the 1990s, the emphasis on knowledge as the key source of graduate capital made way for the concept of competencies as being a learnable and teachable attribute that signal graduates' aptitude to perform varying work activities to a high standard. Such transversal competencies are also commonly referred to as skills, attributes, meta competencies and future skills and these are considered *"the cornerstone for the personal development of a person"* (ESCO, 2021). Competencies are key enablers of productivity shaping an individual's ability to apply knowledge in a range of contexts and to a variety of problems. It is for this reason that such competencies are viewed as important for longer term employability and thought to directly elevate organisational productivity. As the OECD notes '*A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context*' (OECD, 2005:4). The European Commission offer the following helpful definition which delineates competence and skills:

*Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. They are described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. While sometimes used as synonyms, the terms skill and competence can be distinguished according to their scope. The term skill refers typically to the use of methods or instruments in a particular setting and in relation to defined tasks. The term competence is broader and refers typically to the ability of a person - facing new situations and unforeseen challenges - to use and apply knowledge and skills in an independent and self-directed way. (EU, ESCO)*

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