

Critical thinking and its importance to employers



Project Aims

The group project examined how critical thinking is viewed in universities. However, it is also important to understand how employers view critical thinking.

- Is it an attribute that they feel is important for graduates?
- Are universities producing the graduates that employers want?
- Do divergences in opinions exist about what is important for graduates to learn and to be able to do?

The individual projects that will be conducted by members of the group will explore this issue. Each individual project will look at employers in a particular discipline to discuss the importance of graduate attributes.

This individual project will concentrate on employers in engineering and technical disciplines.

Background

There is currently considerable interest in the generic attributes of graduates (Jones 2009), particularly critical thinking, and considerable discussion about the precise meaning of the term (Barrie 2006, Jones 2007).

Given the increasing emphasis on the ability of universities to clarify the nature of the education they provide and the contribution of their graduates to society, it is important that they can describe the quality of their graduates in ways that are meaningful to a wide range of stakeholders, including employers, professional groups and policy makers (Barrie 2006). Jones (2009) points out that defining

graduate attributes, like critical thinking, needs to be a tripartite process involving policy makers, academics and employers.

In the group project, we have looked at the views of academics and policy makers but we have not yet considered the views of employers regarding what they see as important graduate attributes. The individual projects will, therefore, allow us to include employers in defining and determining the importance of graduate attributes, in particular critical thinking.

Methodology

A series of focus groups and interview will be held with employers to discuss the importance of graduate attributes, in particular critical thinking. Each individual project will focus on a different area of employment.

The real strength of taking a cohesive approach like this to the individual projects is that when viewed with the group project the individual projects will offer a very significant insight into how critical thinking and graduate attributes are viewed across disciplines by academics, students and employers and may inform us on where agreement and divergence exist, allowing us to engage in a more informed debate regarding the importance and value of graduate attributes.

