



An introduction to Graduate Attributes for tutors and tutees

Overview

Click on any of the headings below to jump to the relevant section

1. What are Graduate Attributes?

The skills, abilities and approaches students have the opportunity to develop while at University – shaped by both their academic and non-academic experiences

2. How are Graduate Attributes developed?

Through experience and reflection

3. Where are Graduate Attributes developed and used?

Everywhere! In students' studies and in their personal and professional lives, now and in the future

4. What place do Graduate Attributes have in personal tutoring?

As a fundamental part of students' success, both now and in the future, Graduate Attributes are central to the Personal Tutor relationship. Exploring achievements, challenges, goals and plans in relation to Graduate Attributes can help ensure productive and useful discussions

5. Where can I find out more?

This section contains links and resources for both students and staff



The Graduate Attributes Framework describes attributes essential to success both as a student and for study and work after graduation. Therefore, developing and focussing on Graduate Attributes not only ensures students are more employable post-graduation, it also contributes to their success while at University.

1. What are Graduate Attributes?

Graduate Attributes are **the skills, abilities and approaches students have the opportunity to develop while at the University of Edinburgh**. These attributes can set students apart from the competition in the future and help them be successful while at University.

So why not just talk about 'transferable skills'? A couple of key reasons:

- 'transferable skills' tends to make people think about lists of basic-level skills – we don't believe this is what being at University or being a graduate is about; Graduate Attributes are instead about higher-level skills and abilities fundamentally influencing the way you think and approach things; and
- 'transferable skills' suggests that skills can be transferred from one context and directly applied in another with no change – experience dictates that this simply isn't the case. Instead we generally have to adapt our skills and approaches for each situation. For example, the sort of verbal communication skills required when presenting research findings are very different to those needed when dealing with clients on the telephone or when supporting a friend.

Instead, 'Graduate Attributes' is a term that encompasses skills, abilities, attitudes and the ways we approach things, but also recognises that these will look slightly different in each situation in which they are developed and used.

Graduate Attributes at the University of Edinburgh

Being at the University of Edinburgh should be a transformative experience, enabling students to grow and develop as individuals. Staff and students at the University have talked about what skills, abilities and ways of thinking students should have the opportunity to develop and strengthen during their time here. There were lots of different ideas, but these generally fell into two different types:

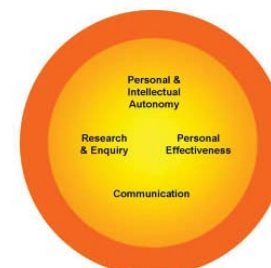
- **how we approach things**

- o *Enquiry and Lifelong Learning* – how we approach knowledge and learning
- o *Aspiration and Personal Development* – how we approach our own development and goals
- o *Outlook and Engagement* – how we engage with the world around us



- **skills and abilities** (grouped under four different headings)

- o *Research and Enquiry*
- o *Personal and Intellectual Autonomy*
- o *Communication*
- o *Personal Effectiveness*





Together, these form the University's Graduate Attributes Framework. Students' approaches, skills and abilities in these areas will set them apart.

Students taking control of their own development, and being supported in this, are necessary for success both at university and beyond.

So is the Graduate Attributes Framework about producing clones? No, that wouldn't be useful to anyone. Individuality is really important; the Framework provides overall coherence at the same time as allowing for individual distinctiveness. People's attributes are invariably shaped by the situations in which they are developed and used – therefore people's choices and experiences can lead to them strengthening attributes in some areas more than others – this is part of what will make everyone's experience at the University distinctive to them as individuals.

Academic studies are a pivotal part of the entire student experience, and therefore Schools have already done work in describing the specific Graduate Attributes that are encouraged in their degree programmes. **Studies, combined with non-academic experiences, produce a set of Graduate Attributes that's individual and unique to every student.**

2. How are graduate attributes developed?

Think about the last project you were involved in. Even in that one project, you will have needed to use a range of attributes. You will have used different skills and abilities, and the way you tackled the project will have been influenced by your own attitudes and approaches.

This is how Graduate Attributes are developed – through experience. The more experiences we have and the more diverse those experiences are, the greater the range of attributes likely to be developed and the stronger these attributes will become.

But it's not just about quantity and quality of experience, reflection is also key. By reflecting on experiences, the amount of learning and development achieved is significantly increased. Reflection is a fundamental part of taking control of our own development – discussions with Personal Tutors can be instrumental in encouraging and supporting this.

3. Where are Graduate Attributes developed and used?

Everywhere! No, **really**. Look at any part of student life – studies, co-curricular or extra-curricular activities – and you will see attributes being used, developed or shaping how things are approached. The methods used to facilitate academic learning develop a whole range of attributes: from research skills, critical thinking and intellectual autonomy, to summarising, debating and teamwork. But academic study doesn't just develop different skills and abilities, it also influences the way we view knowledge in general and the world around us. For example, some disciplines value subjective thinking, while others strive for objectivity – this is often then reflected in people's approaches more generally.

The same is true for non-academic activities whether inside or outside the University. Experiences in these areas develop and use multiple Graduate Attributes, and are a vital part of the student experience.

Work experience, volunteering, clubs and societies, socialising, organising holidays... the list goes on.

But the development and use of Graduate Attributes doesn't stop with the end of one's time at University – professional and personal experiences after University continue to develop people's attributes and ways of thinking – this is something particularly critical for employers who look for these attributes to be demonstrated, evidenced and continually developed.

4. What place do Graduate Attributes have in personal tutoring?

Central to personal tutoring, at all stages

The development of Graduate Attributes is central to the Personal Tutor role and relationship:

- in reflecting on academic performance;
- in reflecting on how formal and informal learning contributes to longer-term aspirations; and
- in engaging as a member of a community of learners.

Discussing Graduate Attributes development is useful at all stages of University life. Strengthening Graduate Attributes is a topic that tutees and Personal Tutors can return to again and again to provide a focus to their discussions and ensure productive and useful outcomes. These discussions provide an opportunity to explore the link between day-to-day experiences (academic and non-academic) and longer-term development aspirations.

The Graduate Attributes Framework describes attributes essential to success both as a student and for study and work after graduation. Therefore, developing and focussing on Graduate Attributes not only ensures students are more employable post-graduation, it also makes for more successful students while at University.

Potential discussions

Although it may take a while to get used to, informally reflecting on, talking about and taking stock of experiences as a student, is one of the most effective positive steps in our personal, professional and intellectual development.

Some example topics for discussion include:

- Surprising or challenging aspects about University study so far
- Activities being done alongside studies, either on or off campus (e.g. sports, volunteering, clubs and societies, part-time work...)
- Attributes that have improved the most – what and how
- Attributes that there haven't been the opportunity to use as much
- Any attributes that could particularly benefit from being strengthened
- Course-specific attributes – areas of strength, needing developed or haven't really been used yet
- Ideas or plans for after graduation (tentative or firm)
- How can time at University be used to explore future options and help make the right choices
- How can time at University be used to ensure that attributes required for the future are developed?

1. To find out more about the Graduate Attributes developed on a particular degree programme, look at the 'Degree Programme Specification'. These documents give a concise description of the degree's learning outcomes and how these are achieved and demonstrated. Not all have been updated but you should at least find one for each major degree, which will be a great starting point.

Other potential questions for discussion are included in the MyEdGE Workbook (see below in the student section of 'Where can I find out more?').

- The workbook section entitled 'The Bigger Picture' looks at our approaches and attitudes, i.e. the outer ring of the Graduate Attributes Framework, and provides some questions for each of the three headings.
- Equally, progress made against the example skills and abilities provided in the MyEdGE Workbook, is another potential area for discussion.

Elsewhere in resources for students and Personal Tutors

Other resources developed for students and Personal Tutors include activities, questions and information that relate (directly or indirectly) to students' development of their Graduate Attributes.

Hopefully this guide will have given you enough of an introduction so that you can think about the attributes being developed and used in any part of the student experience. This should help to maintain an overview of the development being achieved, identify how this fits into longer-term aspirations (both academic and non-academic) and plug any gaps you identify.

5. Where can I find out more?

For staff

Further background information and resources on Graduate Attributes are available in the staff section of the Employability Initiative website – www.employability.ed.ac.uk

Staff who would like to find out more about Graduate Attributes should contact Dr Gavin McCabe at the University's Employability Consultancy – Gavin.McCabe@ed.ac.uk

For students

The MyEdGE Workbook focusses on the Graduate Attributes Framework – both attitudes and approaches, as well as skills and abilities. It has been designed to help you recognise what makes you unique and the overall development that you're achieving while at University. Further information is available in the student section of the Employability Initiative website – www.employability.ed.ac.uk

The **student section of the Employability Initiative website** (www.employability.ed.ac.uk) also gives information on how you can increase your employability, your Graduate Attributes being a central part of this. You'll also find information on two resources developed to help students make the most of their experiences:

- WAVE – for work and volunteering experiences, and
- TATA – for any time spent away from the University as part of the academic experience, e.g. a year abroad or an industrial placement.

As work on Graduate Attributes increases across the University, you will see more and more references to Graduate Attributes – in classes, in course documentation, in institutional media, in co-curricular activities, in supporting resources.

But what any of these things say about Graduate Attributes matters far less than what you actually do about your own Graduate Attributes. Being at University can be an amazing experience and a fantastic opportunity: an opportunity to develop from the student you are into the graduate you want to become. Doing this, you will capitalise fully on your Edinburgh experience to expand your potential and develop that all-important Edinburgh edge whatever your future holds!