



## The Importance of Teaching and Assessing of Soft Skills



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**In an increasingly digitised world, graduates stepping into the workforce need to be equipped with an arsenal of soft skills to complement their academic knowledge. AI use to replace many hard skills is becoming commonplace, emphasising the importance of human-centred attributes like flexibility, curiosity, and emotional intelligence.**

**However, research has consistently pointed to a significant gap between the soft skills needs of industry and the skills graduates are actually equipped with. This skills gap, which has been exacerbated by the decline in internships and placement opportunities and the impact of COVID-19 on interpersonal skills development, urgently requires innovative interventions.**

### Industry Expectations

The Institute of Student Employers (ISE) Student Development Survey (2021) identified that the most sought-after skills among employers include business communication, conflict resolution, time management, the ability to prioritise, acceptance and application of critique, understanding business needs, effective listening, concise communication, and navigating change and ambiguity.

This survey also underscored the role of internships and work placements in soft skills development, with 78% of employers agreeing that graduates who had completed such programmes were more skilled.

Higher Education Providers (HEPs) have a pressing task to better align their offerings with Industry expectations in a bid to maximise graduate outcomes

### Teaching and Assessing Soft Skills

Pedagogically, teaching soft skills presents unique challenges and opportunities. Effective methods include role-playing, simulations, and live briefs that provide immersive experiences for students to practice and develop their soft skills. Mentoring, coaching, and work based learning (WBL) can offer valuable insights into the practical application of these skills in real-world settings.

Gamification, self-assessment, and reflection are also valuable tools that can enhance learning by making it engaging and introspective. Team-building activities, interdisciplinary projects, and peer-assessment foster collaboration and teamwork, crucial skills in any professional setting. In addition, student performance reviews can provide useful feedback for students to understand their strengths and areas for improvement.





### **A Balanced Approach**

Incorporating a greater emphasis on soft skills into curriculums is not merely about meeting industry demands but about fostering well-rounded, adaptable, and resilient individuals who can navigate various aspects of their personal and professional lives.

Holding students closer to industry standards may also positively impact on engagement, retention, and participation and can ease the transition to work for graduates.

### **Concluding thoughts**

With AI and digitisation rapidly transforming how we work, the human-centric skills that are hardest to automate remain of paramount importance. By integrating comprehensive soft-skills training into their curricula, HEPs can ensure their graduates are better equipped to meet the demands of the future of work. The result of this balanced approach to education - emphasising both academic and soft skills - will lead to graduates with improved social and interpersonal skills, resilience, acumen, creativity, confidence, and communication skills, thereby enhancing their employability and success in the workplace.

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