

# Designing assessment to activate student-led learning engagement for early professional skills development

**Gesa Ruge**

University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia

[gesa.ruge@canberra.edu.au](mailto:gesa.ruge@canberra.edu.au)

**Coralie McCormack**

University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia

[coralie.mccormack@gmail.com](mailto:coralie.mccormack@gmail.com)

This paper contributes new research through undergraduate students' perspectives of how assessment for learning engages them in constructing and experiencing their generic and early professional skills development. It is recognised that through its timing, tasks, scope and feedback, assessment encourages academic and early professional knowledge and skills development for work-ready graduates. Yet concerns about alignment of higher education assessment, and the assurance it provides, to meeting threshold learning outcomes for higher education and early professional knowledge acquisition is shared by institutional and industry accreditation bodies alike. This research investigates students' experiences and covers four annual cycles of development framed by a reflective practice-based methodology. Over 200 second and third year undergraduate students recorded their individual generic and professional unit level skills experiences and contributed to the following findings:

- A 'constructive, explicit and reflective' assessment for learning approach at unit level increases student awareness and engages their generic and professional skills development.
- Assessment for employability is enhanced through a deliberate discipline-based course design process across three dimensions: horizontal (undergraduate course learning level), vertical (competence of industry professional skill) and cohort adaptive (for class, unit and discipline learning context).
- Qualitative and quantitative data, collated formally and informally monitors how learners recognise, respond to and acknowledge attainment of generic and early professional skills.