

EmployABILITY thinking and your students

Educator report, Semester 1 2019

**For sample cohort, May 2019, prepared for
[lecturer/coordinator], Sample University**

The EmployABILITY Initiative is led from Curtin University by Professor Dawn Bennett. Over 40 institutions are involved globally and the resulting dataset promises to be the most comprehensive longitudinal dataset of students' developmental thinking in the world.

The first section of this report presents an overview of the approach and its potential for program- and institution-wide adoption. In the second section, we outline the thinking of your student cohort.

Thank you for being part of this new approach to employability, which enables educators and careers practitioners to embed employABILITY thinking within the existing curriculum, enables students to shape their learning and their future lives and careers, and creates the datasets needed to drive global research.

Why is this important?

University educated workers are critical to every nation's economic health, international standing and social wellbeing. For graduates to meet their full potential, however, they need to have developed, as students, **the ability to find, create and sustain meaningful work and learning across the career lifespan**. This is how we conceptualise employability in the higher education context.

The employability of 21st century workers is

developed and sustained only through explicit career- and life-long identity and employability work. In higher education, employability is inadequately described by terms such as skill, job, employer and employment. Rather, we see employability as a metacognitive challenge which underpins the developmental role of higher education. This can be thought of as the development of employABILITY thinking: **students' cognitive and social development as capable and informed individuals, professionals and social citizens.**

What is employABILITY thinking?

EmployABILITY thinking is a strength-based, metacognitive approach to employability development delivered within the existing curriculum, without the need for additional time, expertise or resources. The approach prompts students to understand why they think the way they think, how to critique and learn the unfamiliar, and how their values, beliefs and assumptions can inform and be informed by their learning, lives and careers.

As suggested by its use of capitals, rather than focus on learners' potential to be "employed" and directed by others, the approach focusses on learners' ABILITY to create and sustain meaningful work. This is as relevant to workers in traditional, full time employment with a

single employer as it is to workers who combine multiple roles to create portfolios of work.

Program- and institution-wide adoption is supported by student resources, educator guides, faculty and student workshops, and a validated socio- cognitive measure known as *Literacies for Life* (L4L).

A dedicated [educator site](#) features dedicated and plain-language employABILITY thinking student resources, educator guides and expert guides. Educators can request aggregated cohort-wide data and engage with the research. Activities, research and writing from the Initiative are regularly updated in the [EmployABILITY research lab](#) and in the [Community of Practice](#).

EmployABILITY thinking has been successfully adopted by over 20,000 students. By the end of 2019, we expect some 50,000 students to have contributed their responses to the longitudinal data set.

Students report being more agentic in their learning behaviours, more aware of their developmental strengths and needs, and better able to create the professional artefacts which will support their transition to professional life.



You can download the student and educator flyers from our website

Why is employABILITY thinking a logical solution?

Higher education employability frameworks, policies and initiatives have little impact unless they connect with students, yet most employability development activities are co-curricular and attract the students who need them least. Initiatives within the curriculum tend to be program-wide streams or distinct modules which are separated from the discipline studies in which students want to engage. Only when employability development and career guidance is aligned with disciplinary knowledge, skills and practices will it become core business.

Employability development is not yet at the core of the higher education curriculum because it has been poorly defined as the acquisition of generic skills which are developed separately from the core business of learning a discipline. Employability development includes but extends beyond discipline skills, knowledge and practices: the technical aspects of doing a discipline. Employability is enabled both for graduates and in the longer term by the ability to conceptualise future life and work through broader employABILITY thinking.

Properly defined, students are motivated to develop their employability because they are interested in developing their futures. Student engagement in explicit employability development creates cognitive links; it also increases the chance that graduates will secure work and that they will recognise their development when responding to graduate surveys! In practical terms this can be achieved within the curriculum by helping students to find the relevance between the learning we assign them and their expectations for their future lives and work.

How does employABILITY thinking work?

EmployABILITY thinking is embedded into the curriculum through the use of touchpoints: explicit links between learning and students' futures. We embed one touchpoint into every unit. We then map existing career development activities and add these and the touchpoints to a visual map, creating a program-wide, integrated developmental program.

Data are generated through a formative, online self-assessment tool which encompasses the measure. Students use the online tool to create personalised employability profiles which they can review and revise at any time. [The 29-page personalised profile report](#) is a prompt for analysis and action rather than as a score card; over 50 embedded resources enable students to be more agentic in their development.

Most students engage with the tool as a required reading. Students are directed to employABILITY resources at touchpoints such as before and/or after an industry placement, during a reflective task, when working in teams, or when giving and receiving feedback. The self-reflection tool, profile and resources form part of a [Student Employability Starter Kit](#).

To summarise, there is a critical need for a systematic and inter-institutional approach to employability development. It is my hope that the work will shift the landscape of higher education policy and practice so that employability development — *employABILITY thinking* — is established as the vital link between the purpose of higher education, graduate outcomes and the future of work.

When engaging in the approach, please follow the six-step process:

The 6-step employABILITY process

- 1. Register with the employABILITY website and connect with your careers service;**
- 2. Incorporate the self-assessment tool as a required reading, activity or assessment task;**
- 3. Identify and then embed a place (touchpoint) in your module (unit) where employABILITY thinking can be made explicit;**
- 4. Upload the self-assessment tool and resources to the learning management system;**
- 5. Pass on the process to colleagues who will teach some or all of the students next semester;**
- 6. Encourage students to renew their profiles each academic year; engage with the research data you are interested in the research.**

Where can I find more information?

For more information, visit the websites, the research lab or the LinkedIn community; or email us at contact@developingemployability.edu.au.

Educator site:

<https://developingemployability.edu.au>

Student site:

<https://student.developingemployability.edu.au/>

EmployABILITY research lab:

<http://bit.do/https-www-researchgate-net-lab-EmployABILITY>

Community of Practice on LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13553226/>

Top-line Results

For sample unit, May 2019, prepared for sample lecturer, Sample University

In this section, we pull out some top-line results for your students. This is a snapshot of the findings, informed by the requests and interests of educators who participated in our trial.

Here, you can see the mean level of confidence for each literacy. Students can find their individual radar diagram on page 7 of their personalised report.

Shown below, the literacies divide a raft of information and topics into six manageable sections. The student reports include developmental resources for each of the indicators below. Please see Appendix 1 for sources.

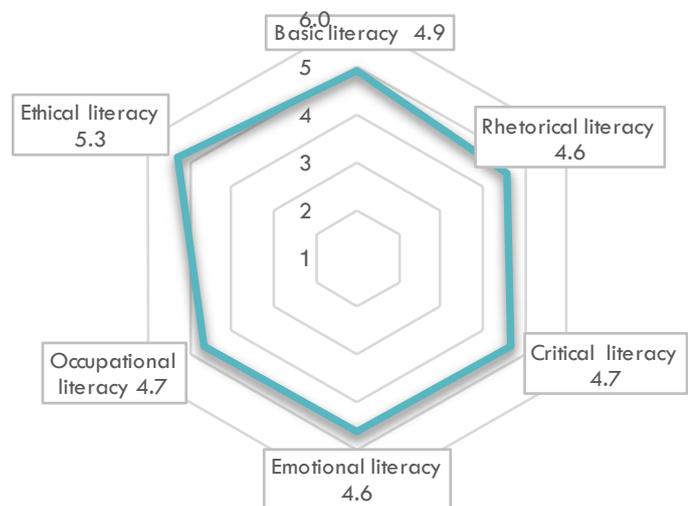


Chart 1: Cohort-wide radar diagram. How confident are students overall?

Literacy	Indicator
1. Basic literacy	1.1 Self and career awareness
	1.2 Communication
	1.3 Technological and digital literacy
2. Rhetorical literacy	2.1 Problem solving and decision making
	2.2 Goal-directed behaviour
3. Critical literacy	3.1 Career identity and commitment
	3.2 Belief in one's ability to succeed (self-efficacy)
	3.3 Belief in one's ability to succeed academically (academic self-efficacy)
	3.4 Willingness and ability to learn
	3.5 Understand the relevance of learning
4. Occupational literacy	4.1 Career exploration and awareness
	4.2 Occupational mobility (agility)
5. Emotional literacy	5.1 Intra- and interpersonal emotional intelligence
6. Ethical literacy	6.1 Ethical and responsible behaviour

Students' ability to identify their strengths and understand how these can be deployed in their career

Charts 2a and 2b report your students' reported level of confidence in their ability to articulate their strengths and how these can be deployed in their career. Students will find associated resources on page 11 of their personalised report. *Source: Bennett: Self and career awareness.*

Students respond to a 6-point Likert scale where 6-point Likert scale. 1= strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree.

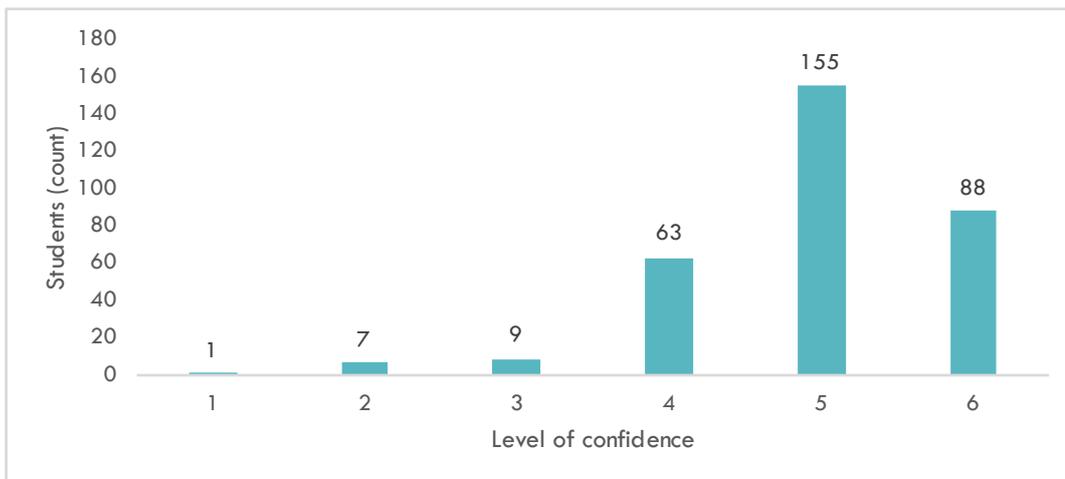


Chart 2A: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students: I can articulate my personal strengths and how they these can be deployed in my career.

Chart 2b illustrates the average level of confidence for your students against the average for all students in the same year of study and all respondents who had completed the tool at that time.

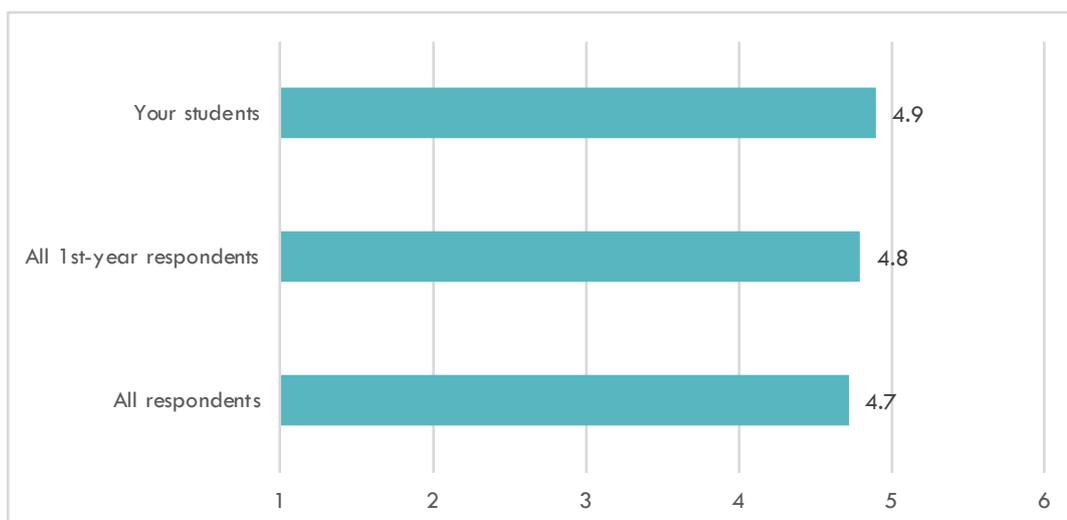


Chart 2B: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students respondents in the same year of study and all respondents.

Belief that the program is preparing students for graduate life

Chart 3a illustrates the extent to which your students believe their degree program is preparing them to meet the realities of graduate life. This is the distribution of your students across a 6-point Likert scale where 6-point Likert scale. 1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree. *Source: Bennett, self and career awareness.*

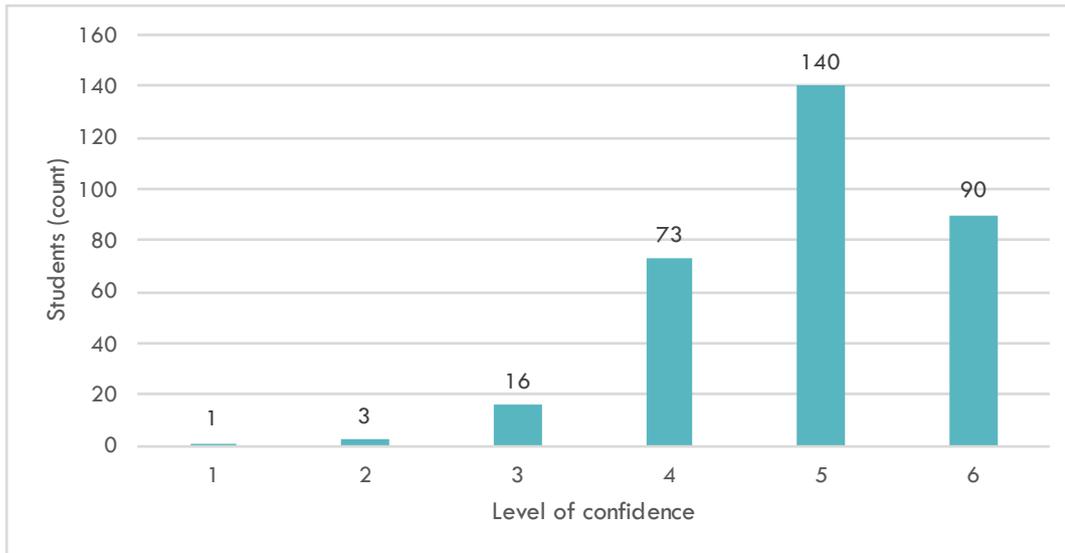


Chart 3A: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students: my program is preparing me for graduate life)

Chart 3b illustrates the average level of confidence for your students against the average for all students in the same year of study and all respondents who had completed the tool at that time.

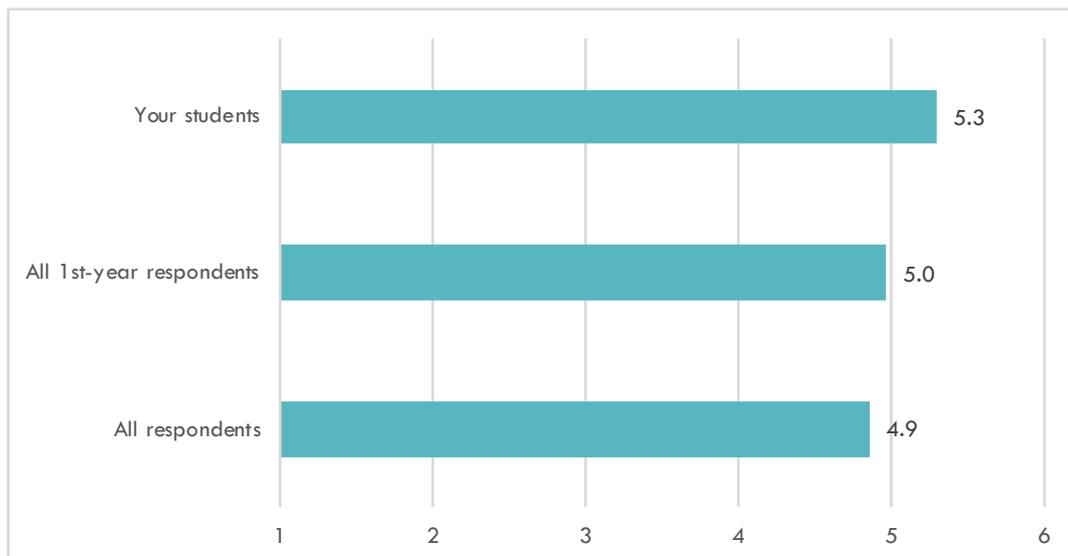


Chart 3B: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents.

Problem solving and decision making

Chart 4 illustrates students' confidence in their abilities to solve problems and make decisions. This relates to Factor 2.1 of the model (problem solving and decision making). Students address this aspect of their employABILITY thinking on page 14 of their personalised reports. Students responded to eight items using a 6-point Likert-type scale where 1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree.

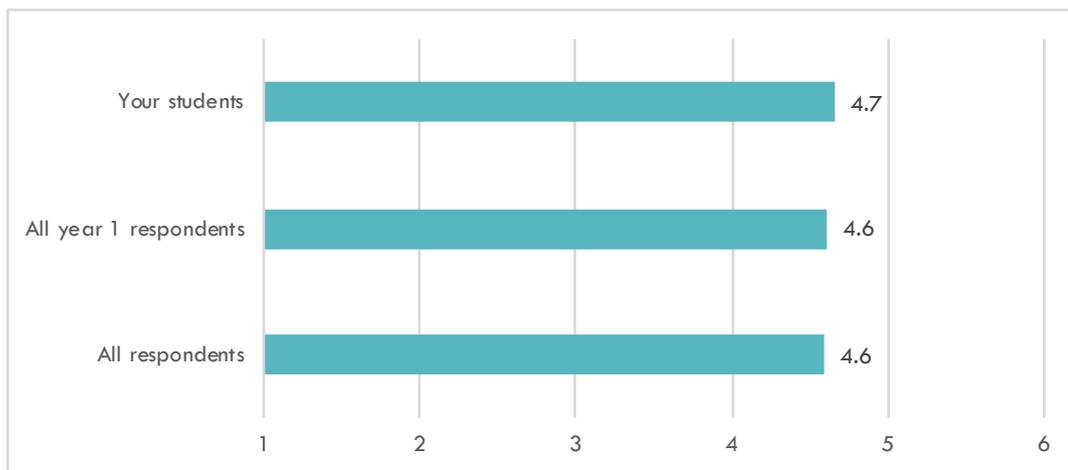


Chart 4: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents.

The extent to which students report goal-directed behaviour

Chart 5 illustrates Factor 2.2 of the measure, which incorporates 10 items related to proactivity and initiative in achieving goals, tasks or deadlines. The factor employs a 6-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree. Students explore this aspect of their employABILITY on page 16 of their personalised reports.

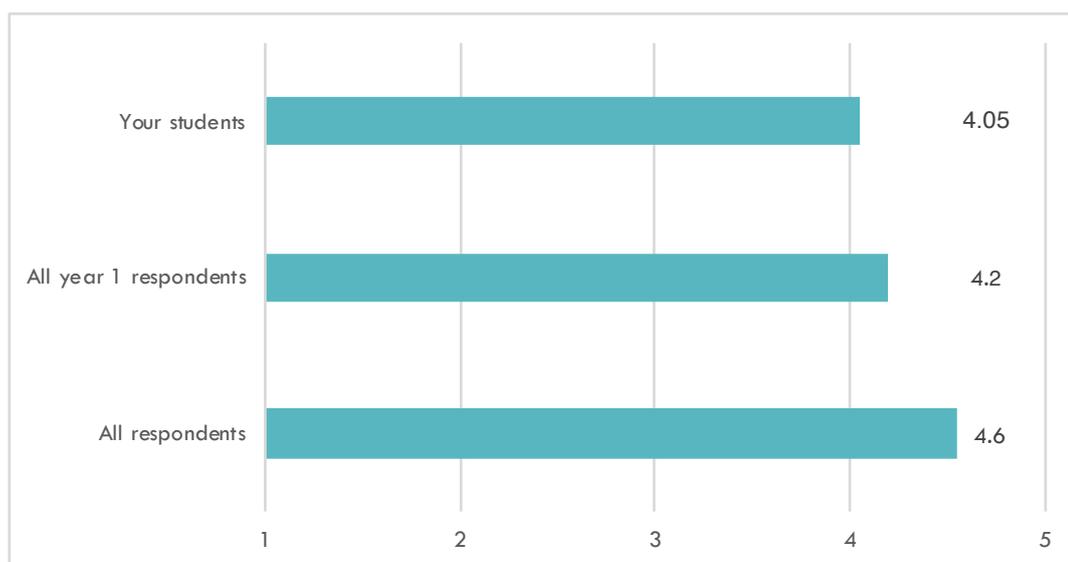


Chart 5: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students: goal directed behavior

Personal self-esteem and academic self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a crucial aspect of students' development and is explored on page 17 of their personalised employABILITY profiles. Students self-assess both their personal and academic self-efficacy.

Chart 6a illustrates your students' personal self-efficacy: their belief that they can succeed. The Factor (3.2 in the model) employs a four-point Likert scale where Strongly disagree=0 and Strongly agree=3. *Source: Rosenberg's self esteem scale (1965).*

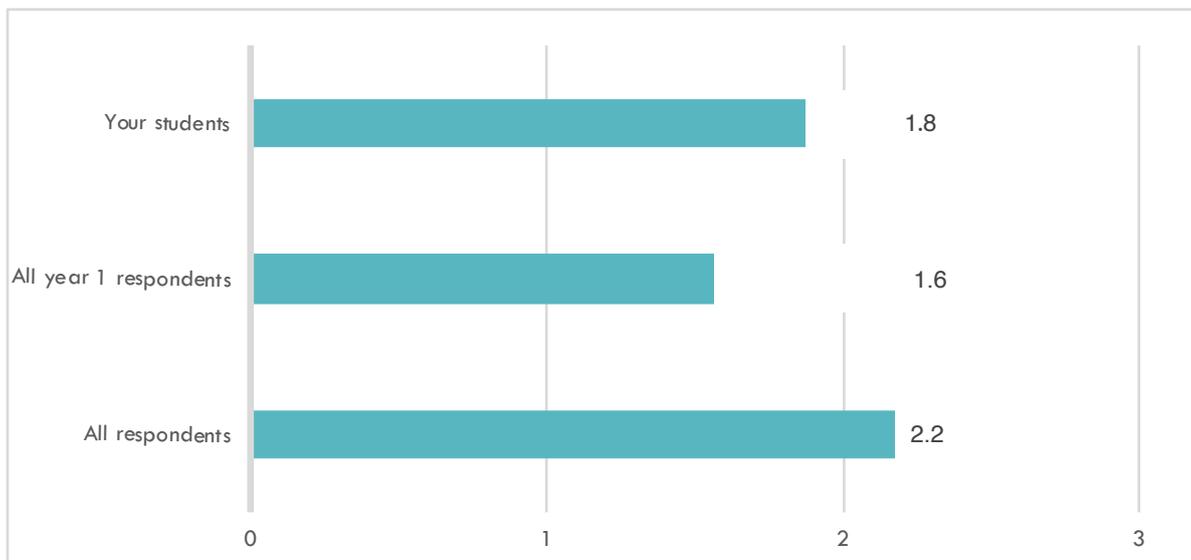


Chart 6A: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students

Chart 6b reports Factor 3.3: the belief in one's ability to succeed academically. The chart illustrates the mean level of confidence for your students, all students in the same year of study and all respondents. Students respond to a 7 point likert scale where 1= not confident at all and 7=completely confident. *Source: Byrne et al. (2014), Academic self-efficacy*

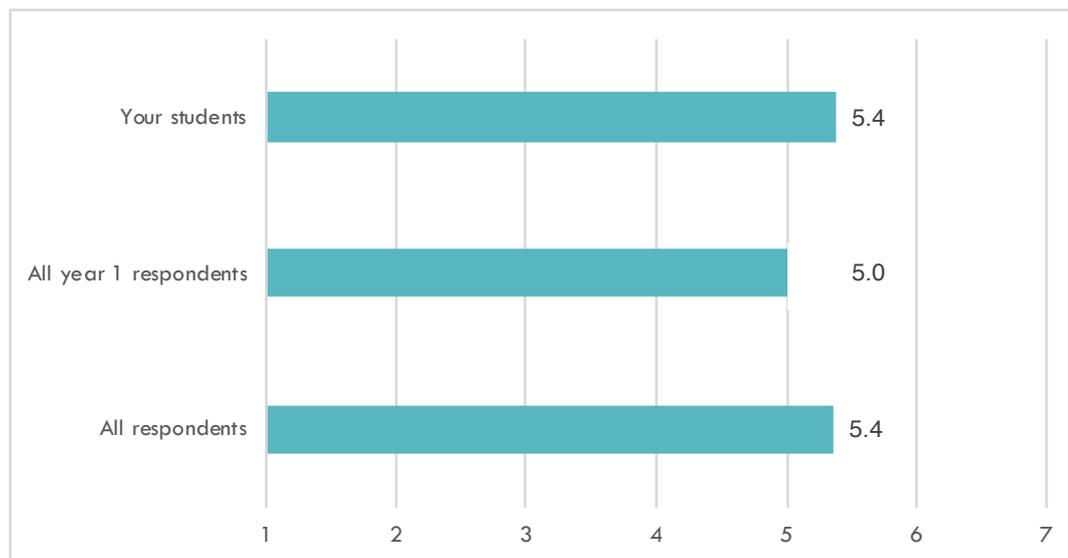


Chart 6B: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents.

The extent to which students can manage stressful, difficult and upsetting situations

For chart 7, we turn to students' confidence that they can manage stressful, difficult and upsetting situations. The items include their ability to manage stress, to keep calm and to deal with feelings of anger. These are aspects of emotional intelligence, which students consider on page 23 of their personalised profile reports. Students responded to a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1=very inaccurate to 5=very accurate. *Source: Brackett et al.(2006) emotional intelligence.*

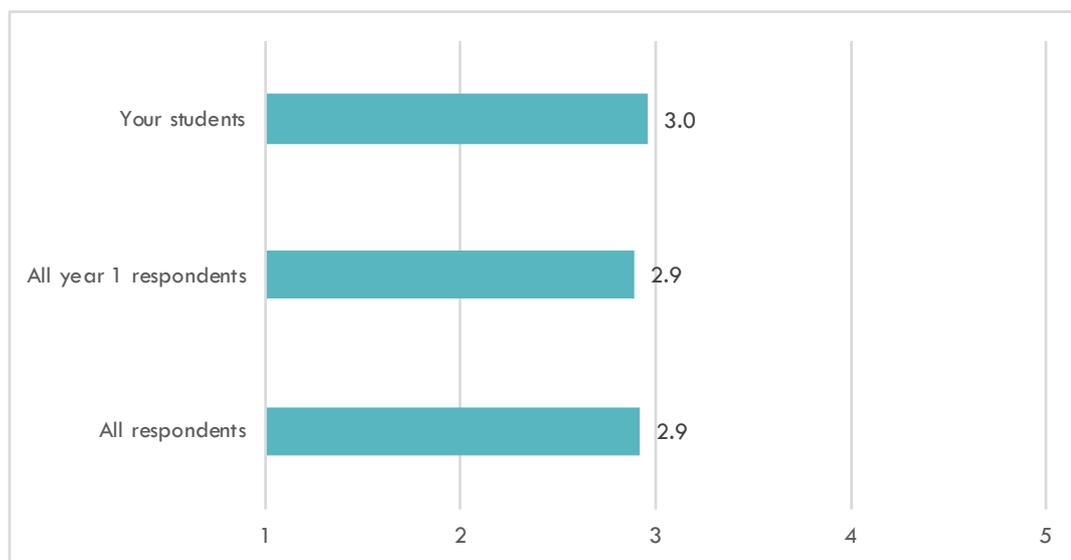


Chart 7: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents: Belief in the the ability to manage stressful, difficult and upsetting situations.

Career exploration and awareness

Factor 4.1 of the measure considers the extent to which students are aware of possible career paths and have explored a variety of roles. Students consider this on page 24 of their personalised profile reports.

The scale employs a 10-point Likert-type scale where 1 = no confidence at all and 10 = complete confidence.

Chart 8a illustrates students' confidence that they can make informed, career related decisions.

Source: Lent (2016) *decisional self-efficacy*.

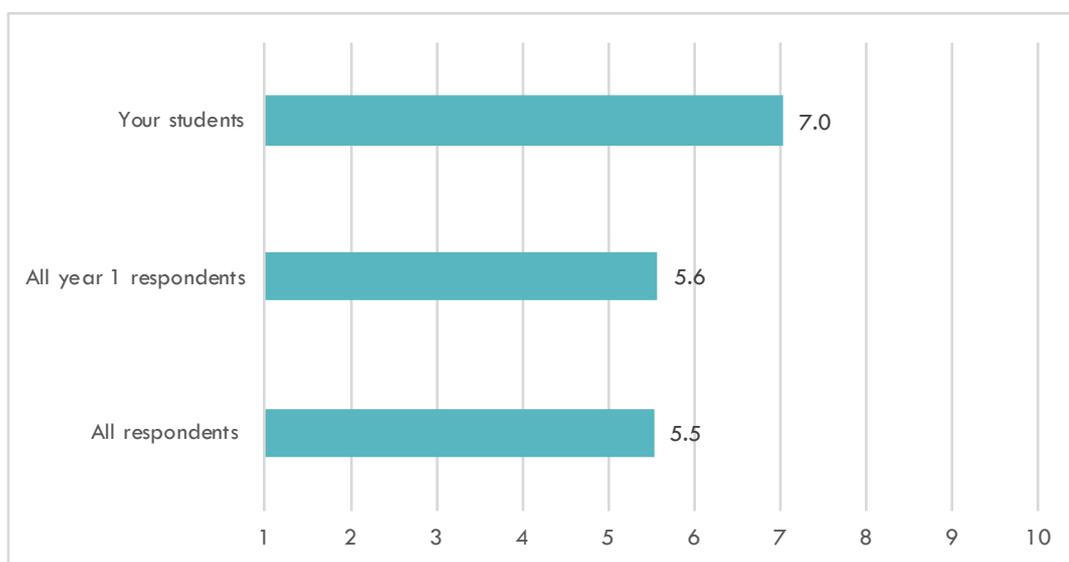


Chart 8a: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents: Ability to make informed, career-related decisions.

Occupational mobility

Chart 8b reports occupational mobility (factor 4.2), which employs Lent’s (2016) decisional coping efficacy factor (CEDSE-CE) – occupational mobility and agility. This factor asks students how they will cope if their first career choice does not work out and whether they have or can create a back-up plan. This is essential thinking for students because it is taking far longer for today’s graduates to become established in their careers.

The four items are scaled on a 10-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (no confidence at all) to 10 (complete confidence). (0–9 scale metric converted to 1–10.)

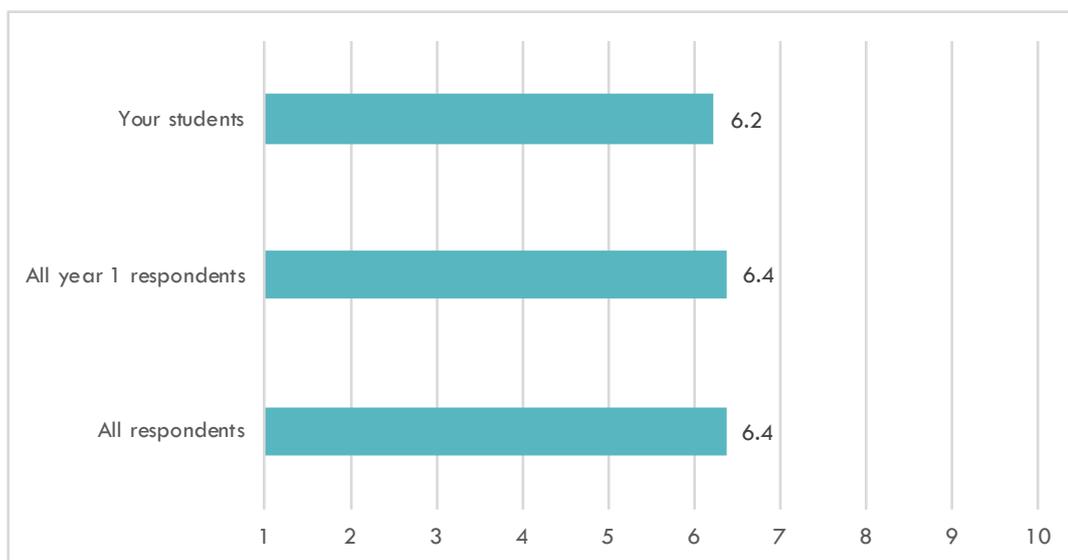


Chart 8b: Distribution (level of confidence) reported by your students, respondents in the same year of study and all respondents: decisional coping and occupational mobility.

Appendix 1

Employability as literacies for life: Data categories and sources

Literacy	Indicator	
1. Basic literacy	1.1 Self and career awareness	Bennett 'Discipline skills and knowledge'
	1.2 Communication	Coetzee 'Interactive skills'
	1.3 Technological and digital literacy	Bennett 'Technological and digital literacy'
2. Rhetorical literacy	2.1 Problem solving and decision making	Coetzee 'Problem solving and decision-making skills'
	2.2 Goal-directed behaviour	Coetzee 'Goal-directed behaviour'
3. Critical literacy	3.1 Career identity and commitment	Mancini 'Career commitment'
	3.2 Belief in one's ability to succeed (self-efficacy)	Rosenberg 'Self efficacy'
	3.3 Belief in one's ability to succeed academically (academic self-efficacy)	Byrne 'Academic self-efficacy'
	3.4 Willingness and ability to learn	Coetzee 'Continuous learning orientation'
	3.5 Understand the relevance of learning	Smith 'Perceived relevance'
4. Occupational literacy	4.1 Career exploration and awareness	Lent 'Decisional Self-Efficacy'
	4.2 Occupational mobility (agility)	Lent 'Decisional Coping Efficacy'
5. Emotional literacy	5.1 Intra- and interpersonal emotional intelligence	Brackett 'Self rated emotional intelligence'
6. Ethical literacy	6.1 Ethical and responsible behaviour	Coetzee 'Ethical resp. and behaviour', adapted

Additional information collected within the online tool

Age in years; sex; location
 Highest completed level of education
 Educational institution and student number; cohort code

Open questions (5): work background, choice of major, intention to work in the discipline, self-directed development, feedback on program

Source documents

Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., Shiffman, S., Lerner, N., & Salovey, P. (2006). Relating emotional abilities to social functioning: A comparison of self-report and performance measures of emotional intelligence. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 91(4), 780.

Byrne, M., Flood, B., & Griffin, J. (2014). Measuring the academic self-efficacy of first-year accounting students. *Accounting Education*, 23(5), 407-423. doi: 10.1080/09639284.2014.931240

Coetzee, M. (2014). Measuring student graduateness: Reliability and construct validity of the Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(5), 887-902. doi: 10.1080/07294360.2014.890572

Jackson, D. (2018). students' and their supervisors' evaluations on professional identity in work placements. *Vocations and Learning*, 1-22. doi: 10.1007/s12186-018-9207-1.

Lent, R. W., Ezeofor, I., Morrison, A., Penn, L. T., & Ireland, G. W. (2016) Applying the social cognitive model of career self-management to career exploration and decision-making. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 93(2016), 47-57.

Mancini, T., Caricati, L., Panari, C., & Tonarelli, A. (2015). Personal and social aspects of professional identity. An extension of Marcia's identity status model applied to a sample of university students. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 89(2015), 140-150.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Smith, C., Ferns, S., & Russell, L. (2014). Conceptualising and measuring 'employability': Lessons from a national OLT project. Proceedings of the ACEN National Conference, Gold Coast 2014.