

## Competency standards webinar and Q&A

### Transcript

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Great. Thanks. Thanks, Caroline. Jo. Good to see everyone. Thanks for coming along to this briefing this morning. Hopefully people have had sight of the briefing documents that we sent around. We're going to go through some of that anyway.

I'm just going to give it a couple of minutes because I've got other people coming into the meeting. So we'll give it a couple of minutes until we get started properly. But what we're going to do is just go through, what I was planning to do is go through some slides, go through kind of a bit of introduction of our competence standards. Which is going to recap some of the briefing notes, but hopefully that's going to be useful anyway.

And then we're gonna leave lots of time for questions and answers, that's the main point of this session, is to get people's questions and for us to try and come up with a response. Which usefully, Caroline is going to be able to give us the answers to everything. So.

**Caroline Roberts:** Maybe not on the spot, but in due course. I'm just sharing in the chat the link back to the staff news item. Because that's a really good aide memoir for everybody. It's got the link to a video. It's got a link to the review. So all of the documents can then be navigated to from there. So I'm just dropping that in the chat for everybody so that you can kind of pin this meeting and then hopefully keep hold of that information.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Okay. So let me just get this up and running, my IT's being a little bit tricky, so give me a second.

**Caroline Roberts:** Whilst Graeme is just doing that, could I just ask a quick show of hands?

Who feels, let's get this round the right way. Who's feeling comfortable that they understand what reasonable adjustments already look like? Do you want to put your electronic hand on because we've got you spread across three screens now. Excellent. So Hans, Claire. Wendy, Rashaad, Karen. Ooh we've got Mike. Mike I'm glad you feel confident you know what a reasonable adjustment is, excellent news. Great.

Okay, so we've got a split house between those that feel that they already have a good working knowledge and then we've obviously got a number of people who are coming in order to kind of get their knowledge going, which is really great.

So hopefully Graeme and I don't have to do all the steering on this because we've got a nice spread of individuals and good knowledge across the group. Fantastic.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Thanks, everyone. So I'm just gonna share my screen and like I said, I'm going to run through this quite quickly because it will repeat on the briefing notes. But hopefully it's useful in case people haven't had a chance to look at that. But also to give us a bit of a framing before we come into questions.

So hopefully people can see that. Okay.

**Caroline Robert:** Yeah. That's it. Thanks Graeme.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Okay. So starting really at **the beginning**, competence standards are explicitly included in the Equality Act 2010 in relation to higher education. So a competence standard is something that doesn't need to be adjusted in itself as part of a reasonable adjustment based on disability.

We would still want to make changes to how we deliver a competence standard, how students access that. But a competence standard in itself is thought to be an essential part of a subject of a course, that literally a student graduating from that course, if they haven't done this, couldn't be said to have competence within the subject.

So as we've said here, it's the essential elements, knowledge or skills without which a student could not be said to be competent in the subject.

There's some kind of, I don't wanna say myths, but there's some kind of points of confusion sometimes around competence standards, which I'm hoping we'll clear up a little bit. One thing that's probably worth saying is that an assessment mode is almost never a competent standard in itself. So an assessment mode is usually a practice, what we refer to elsewhere as a PCP, which would be adjusted.

There are some, you can think of some examples where that might not be the case, that an assessment mode might be a competence standard. For example, the example that the EHCR gives in fact, is for an automotive maintenance course. The assessment may be to build an engine, and actually building an engine would be a competence standard for someone to say that they have competence as an automotive engineer. So actually the assessment is linked to the subject very closely. But that's very rare, and particularly for the subjects that we deliver at Sussex, it's going to be very unlikely.

The other thing is that competence standard is a standard. So it has to be measurable. So there's kind of minimum threshold that the student should have to meet. So there is something about it that has to be concrete enough to be measured. And again, we can talk about that a little bit more as we go forward.

And the Equality Act gives us sort of **four criteria**, effectively, of what a competence standard has to be. And I think this is probably the most significant thing for us to focus in on, because as we said in the briefing note, I said earlier, sometimes, you know, your course learning outcomes might be competence standards. That's often a good place to start in trying to think about what the competence standards are for a subject. But they would have to meet these criteria to qualify as competent standards.

So they have to be **applied equally**. So all students, they have to be, you know, have that breadth that all students are expected to meet this.

They have to be **demonstrably relevant**, which is often thought to be the kind of objectively justifiable test. So it has to be something that a layperson, somebody that's not specialist in the subject, could reasonably say, actually, yes, this makes sense that this is an essential feature of this subject. This is one of the things, as with many things, where we have to reach a judgment on that ourselves, we have to have a view on that, but the ultimate decision maker about whether something is to be relevant or not would be a Court of Law.

So a lot of the things round competence standards, we have to give our best endeavours at saying this is what we think is right for our course. But there isn't some, here wasn't an external body outside of Court of Law that would be able to say yes or no.

Okay. It has to be **necessary**. So it has to be, again, coming back to the idea of being an essential element as to be something that is, again, justifiably required for someone to be competent in this subject.

And it has to be **proportionate**. So one of the things that's useful probably to think about with that is by saying something is a competence standard and therefore not necessarily adjusted, in itself, it does have the risk of being discriminatory in relation to disability.

So. It is very significant to say something is a competence standard and we have to ask, keep that proportionality sort of sense in mind. Actually, does the importance outweigh that risk and are there other ways of approaching this which don't have that risk? So I think we have to keep that proportionality really clearly in mind.

And I'm sure Caroline might want to come in on that point in a second as well. I'll just whizz through the last couple of slides and then I'll handover.

So, **how do we identify them?** I think we don't want to create an industry in developing competence standards. I think we want to keep things quite straightforward and also recognize that this is a process. This is not something we're going to be able to create overnight, this is our set of competence standards. They're things that will probably develop and adjust over time. And that's absolutely fine.

And we've been talking to a number of other institutions that have been doing this process, that have been going on this journey. And it has taken time for them as well. But I think probably the useful thing to say on that, and the feedback we've had, is that it's useful to get a starting point, get what we think is our set of competence standards. What we think, you know, is our kind of starting point down on paper and get something written. And that's the thing to work from.

So **three things** that probably are useful as starting points when thinking what might be a competence standard.

So I mentioned **course learning outcomes** already. That's often a really good place to start, and even an exercise in going through the course learning outcomes and saying, actually, does this look like a competence standard or not? I would assume a majority would say not. Some might be. And then there's a question around whether you want to think about those outcomes as competence standards, coming back to the criteria that I mentioned before.

For some subjects that have a PSRB, then the **PSRB might give you the competence standards**. And that's very helpful when they do. One thing I would say about that is, even though a PSRB gives us the competence standards in some cases, we're still responsible for them.

So we have to agree that those are competence standards for the subjects. And obviously we have to be responsible for implementing them, but we have to have that sense that, yes, we agree these are competence standards for the subject, because the accountability remains with us effectively.

And the other source of, of information that's useful is the **QAA subject benchmark statements**. Those are not written as competence standards generally, they're not presented as such. But there is a lot of crossover because they do try and bring out the essential features of a course or subject. So again, those are useful things to engage with. Partly because we already engage with those, and those will be familiar to a lot of people in the room as well.

Ok. We've got a few examples. I won't go through those now because they're in the briefing documents.

What we try to do in giving the examples is keep that relevance criteria in mind. So these are sort of subject specific and, you know, a competence standard does have to be clearly subject specific and within context. So we've given a few examples around this. We can pick up on this in discussion.

And then we've got a set of questions which I'm going to give all credit to the University of Leeds for, because we've been working with the University of Leeds on these, and they are much further ahead in their journey than, I think, pretty much anyone else in the sector, to be honest, and this is a set of questions that they've used in helping people to develop their competence standards.

So I think this is a good set of things for us to have in mind. and they link to the criteria that I've already mentioned. So, for example, that **objectively justifiable** criteria. Does it make sense to layperson? You can see that in the bottom right hand corner. Can you explain your justification to a non-expert? That's a way of testing whether that's going to meet that criteria or not.

Okay, we got a few suggested steps, but I'm not going to go through that now. We might want to come back to that later in the briefing.

But I'm going to stop talking because what I'm really keen to do is get into questions and discussion around this. So, Caroline, I'll hand over to you just now because I whizzed through that. Is there things that you want to clarify or add for people?

**Caroline Roberts:** So I think I like your idea of the myth busting. And whilst obviously this has to be framed against the background of the legislation and an awareness of that, I think we would encourage everybody not to think of this as an overly legalistic problem. I think it's fair to say that a lot of the steps in the briefing take you through it in a way that gets you to the right point.

And I think I would also really emphasize to you that there's clearly a battery of people who are, available to discuss this, work it through.

A lot of this is going to be perhaps quite at odds, maybe, with some of our own personal experiences in the sense of we've grown up in an area of: you learn the stuff, you do a test, you get a pass mark. And this is saying that that may still be appropriate in certain circumstances, but there are different ways to, to use my family's phrase, skin a cat. If we can still show that people have an understanding, then that is likely to then be in and of itself sufficient to justify giving a pass mark. So some of it's going to be a change of sort of philosophical approach.

There's lots of people who are available to chat this over as you kind of adjust your thinking and your own processes around this. So please use us, you know, Graeme obviously, Jo, myself, the disability team as well, other colleagues who perhaps have already grappled with this, perhaps in other areas. So I'd really stress that to everybody. So use that expertise, and also don't forget that this is a case by case basis.

So you may have, we're all humans so we all tend to sort of try and group things together and find a pattern and sort of find an easy solution. By which I mean, you know, if we're dealing with perhaps, students who have dyslexia, we may be tempted to sort of put them together as a group and think, how do I support dyslexic students? Which to start with is an absolutely appropriate starting point, but I do, I just want to ensure that that's not the end point for

everybody, because perhaps somebody with dyslexia may have a different complication too, or an additional disability, which impacts the dyslexia in a different way. So it's bearing in mind that this is still on a case by case basis. And yes, we are looking for ways to help minimise any administrative burden.

But this is from a student facing perspective, about giving individual students the reasonable adjustments that they require. So I just stress that point. And again, I don't want that to sort of create a sense of overwhelm because we have a huge amount of expertise within the team in order to support those conversations.

And just reflecting, Graeme, as you were speaking, about those PSRB standards, you know, but just as a sort of personal **example**: being a lawyer, one of the criteria you have to demonstrate is an ability to speak and present. Now, you could do that to a classroom of people. You could do that to a supervisor 1 to 1, or you could record a presentation. Each of those might be a highly appropriate way of demonstrating that competence standard.

So it's as I say, it's about challenging our own individual thinking about, okay, we do need to demonstrate this skill. How do we demonstrate that? And hopefully there is more than one way that can be judged to be appropriate to demonstrate it. That's it from me.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Thanks, Caroline. Yeah. Some of this is going to be, where we have a competence standard, how can we support students to meet that standard? That's going to be the question for us. So identifying what those standards are is the first thing.

Let me open it up to questions or thoughts, reflections. Anybody have anything they'd like to ask or raise? Yeah Rashaad.

**Rashaad Shabab:** Thanks, Graeme. Thanks, Caroline. I guess my question is about, I mean, we've always come at it from the point of view, of course learning outcomes and module learning outcomes. I understand how those could be a useful starting point to figure out what competence standards are.

My question, though, is having identified the competence standards, **does it make sense to still have course learning outcomes** that aren't as focused as the competence standards, right? And is there a potential for that to create confusion among students? Are these competence standards published at the discipline level? Is this something that goes on our prospectus? Is it not?

And I guess managing students' expectations and the expectations of sort of parents and employers and all of that, is something I'm having difficulty sort of figuring out. And it's early days. I'm sure we'll figure it out. Right?

It's just that that's the question in my mind with these two sets of sort of standards, competencies and outcomes that we expect students to have. How do we communicate that effectively to students and employers?

And is there sort of a completing the loop where maybe the competence standards become the learning outcomes? What would we have in a learning outcome that isn't a competent standard? I guess it's another way of putting the question.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Yeah, really, really fair point, and actually it is something we have to work through. So there's several questions there, I think, and I'll try to just give a bit of a kind of response to those.

So I think with the course learning outcomes, they are, we'd expect those to be broader I think than competence standards. So effectively, of course learning outcomes - what is the student expected to get from doing this degree at Sussex? So there might be things that are specific to our degree at Sussex, for example, we might think about, you know, focusing on, we expect students to develop employability in X areas. So you know, that's there's a range of things we might want to do, not all of which are going to qualify as competence standards, because actually we're thinking about what's the essential thing about doing this subject, that means you are competent in that subject.

So in some ways the outcomes can be, I don't wanna say looser, but they can be more, they can cover more things that we want students to get from our degrees. So there's a little bit more kind of an openness about that. The competence standards aren't really open, they're things that actually, if you haven't met this, that you are not, we don't think you are an economist, for example.

So I think it is a difference of scale. A difference of order between them is probably the way I would imagine it. But you're right, there is likely to be a lot of crossover. So I think some course learning outcomes will be competence standards, maybe a little bit reframed, but they will be, but not all of them. So I think it's that.

The other thing I was just gonna say sorry, before I invite Caroline to come in, it's the communication point, because I think we do need to communicate the competence standards to students. But we're going to put that in the context, I think there was a question about how we do that, we need to work that through, but also putting it within the context of reasonable adjustments and disability inclusion, because that's where competence standards are specifically relevant. So I think that's what I would say about it. Caroline, did you want to add anything on that?

**Caroline Roberts:** Yeah, so I, you know, Rashaad, I think there's, as Graham said, there's a couple of aspects to the query and obviously one of them sits with the academics and the course conveners and the creators of the content, which then needs to be aligned to the representation that we give to students by, as you mentioned, prospectus and that sort of CMA component of communicating our approach.

And there is absolutely a direct correlation in terms. both a direct correlation and also a linear development of how we take...

*(we've got quite a lot of background noise at the moment haven't we? Is anybody else suffering with that. I'll just mute everybody for now. There we go. That got rid of the noise.*

*Graeme Pedlingham: That better? Probably my fan, apologies)*

**Caroline Roberts:** So I think Graeme's outlined a really good response. And I think questioning yourself about how do we present this from a competence basis, and then how do we present this from a, what would you learn on this module and how we then create that through the marketing methods. Clearly, one will lead to the other and they both need to exist in harmony.

So as you were talking, I was sort of thinking about something like - English literature, perhaps one learning [outcome], and please don't shoot me down if I've got completely wrong, but I'm sort of thinking one of the **learning outcomes** might be for a module in a term might be, being able to analyse the works of Virginia Woolf from a perspective of dark and moody teenagers, ya know, I don't know, and that might be a learning outcome for that module.

The **competence standard** might then be something much more along the lines of demonstrate, the ability to analyse texts from this period of 20th century writing by showing X, Y, and Z.

So you can see that that's the learning outcome for that module, and we then express it as a competence standard using that input, but we express that in a different way. Now we might then say, well, okay, that's what we want to show as a competence standard. How are you going to **demonstrate that**? Is that by writing essays? Is that by coursework? Is that by a presentation? Is that by a conversation 1 to 1 with your supervisor to demonstrate that you have read the texts and you understand how to do that analysis?

So it's then breaking that down so that you can say, that's what we want to teach them. That's what we want them to understand, and this is how we want them to show us that they do understand it.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Thanks, Caroline. Ruth, did you want to come in?

**Ruth Murrell-Lagnado:** Hi yeah, It's just very much a follow-on point that in Life Science, the majority of our courses are not accredited. And so when we had the workshop, there was some discussion about whether we're not going to have competence standards at all, you know.

And but then what Rashaad sort of said, it makes me think, well, as a student facing or parent / student facing, that actually might not market very well in a subject like Life Sciences, where of course, we're saying there's really important skills, but, you know, we'd hope they'd pick up a broad range of skills, whether any one is absolutely. Anyway... I just, you know, it seems to me **not having competence standards is not the way to go. Is that right?**

**Graeme:** I mean, I think that's true, Ruth, to be honest. And I had some conversations with people externally about that as well.

I think a course without competent standards probably would raise some questions actually, because effectively you're saying there isn't anything essential about this subject which might not be the message you want to give.

**Ruth Murrell-Lagnado:** Yeah, yeah. Okay.

**Caroline Roberts:** Graeme, I'm just going to come in because I'm trying to note when the chat questions come in against the hands going up. So I'm going to jump in and read out Hans's message, who is in a noisy environment, so has very sensibly opted for dropping his question in the chat.

He has said, **should / could a competence standard across courses include something along the lines of e.g. ability to reproduce and apply knowledge without access to tools?** So I guess that you're asking, Hans, if people need to remember stuff in order to be able to demonstrate that? And if so, would this mandate invigilation for assessment that measures such knowledge? Cool. So basically an examination. Sorry I think. This is my read. Closed book no book exam.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** So maybe if I try and start to answer that, but, and then Caroline, you might want to add to it.

So I think with this there's a few things. So the first one is specificity. So remember one of our criteria is that it's going to be relevant to the course. So it does need to be, why is that specific to psychology in this example?

Without access to reference materials, I think there's a question about why that would be necessary for a psychologist not to have access to reference materials, for example, in the workplace. And some of the cases that have come to court around things, I mean, the Bristol case is a useful one, but there are others. It's really that it's coming back to that proportionality point, you know. How fundamentally essential to be a psychologist practicing in the world is it, to have that and is there no other way of doing it?

So, to give an example of one of the cases that I was reading about, a journalism course where an institution argued that there was a competence standard about being able to write notes, because as a professional journalist you need to be able to make notes from scenes. That was thought not to be a competence standard, because there are multiple ways that professional journalists could do that.

So I think it's thinking, what is going to be absolutely essential for a student to demonstrate in that subject. More than how they do that, because the how is usually not going to be a competence standard, it's going to be the what that's the competence standard.

**Rashaad Shabab:** Just to jump in, Graeme, just very briefly, I've [.....]. It's an issue of measurement. It's just if you just specify "and it has to be in the absence of reference materials" is a measurement issue. That's the only way you could measure whether someone has acquired the knowledge. So it's not, and I can see how you could do that in different ways, but it certainly would point to the need for invigilation to ensure that the measurement that you have is accurate and appropriate. Does that make sense?

**Carolien Roberts:** Can I jump in on that, Graeme? Okay. I'm reminded of when I was practicing at the bar and I had a work experience student with me, and she asked what was the success factor for a successful barrister? And I said it's actually about knowing what you don't know and knowing where to look for the answer. And I considered that to be as important to doing my job as knowing off the top of my head, answers to the legal problems.

And that might be a different scenario in psychology. But again, I think perhaps, you know, taking those four steps in the criteria and asking, would somebody who has access to a book to check the definition of something in answering the question, be as effective in that field as somebody who could remember it straight off the top of their head?

So I think it's worth bearing that in mind. And just as I say, I think we intrinsically have a view because of how we have learned and how we have been assessed. But I think we have to, we'll help each other to sort of challenge our thinking on that.

And which I hope by bringing this group together, you are naturally creating a little bit of a grouping that can kind of challenge and probably even challenge across area as well, because I think having somebody who doesn't know your subject matter say, but why is that? Because you know, it may be that that brings a different dimension. And an engineer sort of asking about English literature and so forth may well be a good challenge point to demonstrate that. And I think, Graeme, that's your bottom right box. Could you explain it to somebody else as to why it's necessary?



**Graeme Pedlingham:** Yeah, I think I think that's right. And I can see Hans has put a clarification point in the chat as well [using Artificial Intelligence]. And I think it's important for us to separate out what is the competence that we are looking to test, away from how we test it? So even though it's a standard and it has to be measurable, how we do that testing is likely not to be a competence, it's likely to be a PCB.

So that integrity question is a challenge for us as an institution. And I think a court of law would have expected us to answer that question - that how do we make sure that measurement is robust? Because I think we probably couldn't be in a position of saying there's only one way of testing this standard. Because that's not true of the sector and it's not true of other subjects within the institution as well.

So I think, I think it's moving from the what, it's separating out the what and the how. And like I say, I think is going to be important for this. And that is a challenge for us. I don't think we can shy away from that.

But for a competence standard, I think it is what is the competency?

**Hans Crombag:** But to some extent, sorry to jump in Graeme, to some extent the how is not completely irrelevant, you know, because the fact that I can use tools to reproduce a lot of artistic work doesn't make me an artist. You know, I can use the ChatGPT, GenAI, you know and that should not just give me a degree in art just because I can write, you know, and ChatGPT gives me this. I think that the how can be important in some cases.

But it is complex. I think it is challenging. And I think it's challenging because as you said, the what is going on take the highest priority. But now with so many tools, being able to do so many things I think that's the how will be important. Well, for instance, the question of in this generative AI and artificial intelligence era, what it means to be an expert or knowledgeable or, you know, that you suggest I am an engineer or I am a doctor or whatever it is.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Yeah, that's really fair point. And using art as an example is kind of useful I think, because art is one of those like fine arts, it's going to be one of those subjects where the competence standards actually might be bound up with the assessment. Because you're probably asking a student to produce an artistic piece of work. There's lots of ways they can do that. But a competence standard might be the ability to produce a piece of artistic work. For example, say, that's one of those subjects where there is a bit of a bit of blurring.

But. Yeah and ensuring degrees are credible, the quality assurance side of things. All absolutely right. Slightly separate thing from the competence standard question, but also, clearly important.

Okay, Jacqui, do you want to come in?

**Jacqueline Young:** Hi, Graeme, question is just about PSRBs. So, because you talked about that, we need to be in agreement with the PSRBs, but for instance, our course is it has teachers, it's a teacher training course. So there were eight overarching competence standards. In each standard, there are between 4 and 10 sub competency statements. We're also a full academic masters. So ideally what we would want to be, to do would be to have one competency statement which is meeting the requirements of the professional body competency statements, and then to layer that with other competency statements related to the academic part of the assignment. **Is that okay? Is that acceptable or are you expecting us to unpick and translate the professional body requirements as well?**

**Graeme Pedlingham:** No, no, I think absolutely, if the PSRB has given you the competence standards, I think you can use those as your competence standards. I think when I say we have to agree with them. You know, if, for example, a student challenged us to say, actually we think this competence standard is discriminatory, the challenge would come to us and then we would have to say to the PSRB, you know, we would be accountable for that, effectively, the PSRB wouldn't be accountable to the student. We would be, because we're delivering the course.

So if, as a subject matter expert, you think that a competence standard that your PSRB put forward actually runs the risk of being discriminatory. Then that's something to challenge the PSRB on. That's what we'd be expected to do.

But if we don't think that, absolutely fine, just use the competence standards that we're given. We don't need to reply.

**Caroline Roberts:** Can I add a tiny smidge over the top of that, which is I think we'd also have to give consideration to the fact that a candidate could show enough to satisfy the PSRB, but Jacqueline, they may not be able to demonstrate the master's level competence. So we may also then need to separate out, giving recognition for those components.

**Jacqueline Young:** I mean to be fair, that happens anyway because it is possible to be, to get the teacher qualification without the full academic award. And that's where there are exit points. And in our validation, there are certain modules that can be combined to allow a student to pass with the professional qualification, but without the full academic qualifications.

**Caroline Roberts:** So I would say that's an entirely appropriate use then, of those competence standards in a joint field.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Also, I think it's a good point to acknowledge that some subjects are going to be very familiar with competence standards because they've been deeply embedded within accreditation requirements for some time. Some PSRBs are developing them more recently developed competence standards. So earlier in the journey. And obviously a lot of our degrees are not accredited by somebody. So it'll be a little bit different around the place. so yeah. Phil?

**Phil Jarman:** Thanks. I think we've been slightly around my question already, but just to settle it in my head. Are we okay, as a starting point at least, thinking in terms of **learning outcomes being the things that students might know and competence standards being the things that students can do?**

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Not necessarily. I wouldn't say. So the confidence that it could be something a student has to know. So one of the examples is from law, but actually a competence standard in law might be that a student is expected to know about a particular topic, and actually that topic has to be covered. Basically, the student has to demonstrate their competence in that subject.

So I think a competence standard could be knowledge or skills. Same as a kind of course learning outcome could be knowledge or skills. So I think it's probably not possible to separate out. Caroline, do you think, would you agree with?

**Caroline Roberts:** So I think it's not an unhelpful way of approaching it to start with. I think you need to sort of, I find myself standing in the shoes at the end point and saying, what is it that I need this student to be able to demonstrate in order to either have an award or have the

accreditation? And I kind of, I'm looking at it from a challenge point of view on each of those things. So yeah, some of it might be the doing, but it might be a little bit more nuanced.

So I'm going to bring in Sam's question actually from the chat here, because I think they sort of go nicely together. So Sam's sort of query, well kind of contemplating, cogitating **communicate complex ideas clearly, concisely and appropriately to a range of expert, non-expert audiences might be a good course learning outcome**. And as he said, I'm sorry, Sam, I'm not sure, he / she / they - nice and broad, doesn't dictate format process by which students communicate. Absolutely.

With the example I used of the course included a more specific learning outcome with a specific format of communication, that would, I think, necessitate a competence standard. So, yes, I think that's right. So if you are saying, you know, communicate in writing your analysis of a legally based scenario, that would be a competence standard because you have to file paperwork at the court. You have to be able to articulate a client's case in that format. You then also have to take that written document, and you then have to stand and present the most important summary arguments from that case. So you might file the 98 page document. You might have five minutes to present it. Can you condense that down into a way that's succinct and appropriate? So yeah, I think I agree.

Phillip, again, I'm not sure whether we've kind of like neatly answered your question, but I think, again, it sort of shows that some of this is going to be really context specific. And I think we are going to sort of have to spend a period of time developing our ideas.

Some areas are just going to be so much simpler, you know, just to say this is the learning outcome. This is how these are the things that we need to demonstrate that you can do it. And those are the competence standards.

And then there's going to be some areas that are just, there's just going to be a little bit more wiggle room. We're going to have to spend a bit of time considering those, but I think the briefing materials that everybody has now, are a really great starting point for doing that analysis.

And because it's new and it's different, it kind of feels really quite enormous. But interestingly, I think once you sort of start chunking it down and working through it, I've certainly found sort of taking it on board and then trying to apply it to some scenarios. After a few gos, you start to get a feel for it. Which is why I'd invite you all just to kind of throw it around between yourselves and come to Graeme, come to Jo, come to myself, and we can develop it out.

**Graeme Pedlingham?** Thanks Caroline. The only thing I'm going to say, picking up on Sam's point, I think, as we've said in the briefing document. We wouldn't suggest a competence standard should specify a particular format or a particular kind of method of assessment, because that then would it open up to challenge as to why is that? Why is that a necessary competence?

So, the advice that Leeds gave, which I think is useful, would be that if you want to do that within a competence standard, it's useful to say "for example". If you want to, for example, these are ways that the students might demonstrate this without saying it's a requirement, that they demonstrate in this way because that changes the competence standard, basically. I hope that, does that makes sense? It's in the briefing document. But hopefully this that's all clear. Lorraine.

**Lorraine Smith:** Hi, both. My question is about biomedical sciences because we're looking hopefully to get accredited. And I think it's very similar with, you know, with all of the biomed courses and also with other life sciences courses.

We need students to gain practical skills. We've already got several situations which are difficult in that, for example, we can't put attendance and engagement, you know, and engagement within our learning outcomes or within our assessments. But we really need students to actually gain those practical skills.

If we do make it a competence standard, then we've also got the issue that what if we have another Covid where we can't actually have students in person? We still need students to gain those practical skills. So I feel like I'm kind of going round in circles going, **how do I make this clear that students need to gain those skills**, and yet we don't get ourselves in knots?

So I think it might be useful, if you have got some examples from Leeds or from somewhere else where they've obviously had similar situations, that might really help because I've looked at loads of different documents and papers and yeah, I'm in a bit of a tizz with this.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Yeah. So it's a really fair point, Lorraine, and we can definitely try and help with that, I mean, I think again, it's probably about trying to keep it as flexible as possible. So specify exactly what is the skill that needs to be demonstrated, rather than how it's demonstrated. So there's lots of ways of doing that. And certainly in conversations we've had when it's come to things like lab skills, for example, if that's a kind of a competence to include, you'd want to, you'd want not to reduce the flexibility in how students do that.

So, you know, could they do it in a lab setting? Could they do it in a virtual environment? Could they do it in a kind of home setting, but with takeaway equipment and things like that. So there might be different ways for a student to demonstrate that. But it's specifying what the skill is that's important.

So for example, I know that Covid, as painful as it was, we did do things like send equipment to students to demonstrate their skills in particular sort of subjects, and they would do that. So I'm not saying we should do that, should go back to that, please no, but we want to make sure that we're not constraining ourselves.

**Lorraine Smith:** A lot of things we couldn't do. So we did the best that we could, but we couldn't get students to show that they could prepare. We couldn't, you know, we couldn't get them to actually, you know, work with the equipment. And that's what they need. We need to set them up with it, with a tool, a set of tools so that they can go into a lab environment and actually work with that equipment.

So, yeah the IBMS don't set actual competence standards, Zahid. So, you know, literally lots of documentation and there are some papers that are really useful, but there's nothing that's really pinned down when it comes to laboratory skills. So.

**Caroline Roberts:** If it's alright if I can just add to Graeme's thoughts on that. So obviously send home equipment, et cetera. Videoing set up and allowing somebody to watch back a video of that might be appropriate. Then I'm sort of thinking around maybe having sort of in your back pocket a video of somebody in a lab setting stuff up badly, asking people to critique what was wrong with that, what they would do to improve.

So again, sort of that critical eye for review. It may not be appropriate, but just I think we have to really sort of challenge our thinking about, it may be that historically, what we would expect as a student to be in a physical laboratory environment, to know how to use your clamp stands and how that, you know, the equipment and what the temperatures of boiling points and so on are in order to, I don't know, distillate or perhaps, you know, make a compound or something.

But again, if it's, hopefully we never end up in an environment like that again with Covid, but having in your back pocket, as I say, sort of maybe a Mr. Bean scenario where they're in a laboratory and then allowing students to say, well, they didn't use the right size of pipette for the size of beaker, and they didn't pour the substances in in the right order, so they were going to create an explosion and it wasn't gonna be in a controlled environment. Or that should all have happened in a ventilated cupboard.

All of those sorts of things I think we can think creatively about what is it that we want them to know? Yes, you might then want them to know how to set it up. But I guess you know the scenarios again, where perhaps the lab assistant might be able to come in and help somebody set up equipment. Perhaps if they had a physical limitation that meant that they couldn't do it themselves. But again, sort of being able to eyeball it and say, yes, that is safe and appropriate before I commence my work.

**Lorraine Smith.** Okay. We do have people coming in, just to answer a query in here, I think Amanda's. So we do have support workers with people who have difficulties, but they are there in the lab doing the work or directing the support worker what to do. So it has to come from the student. The student has to actually engage with that.

Okay. I think it's going to be a tricky one.

**Caroline Roberts:** I was going to say Lorraine, let's have a coffee. You know, get a small working group together. Get somebody like Ian, Mike Pudan, Amanda, pick Graeme's brain, pick my brain. We can probably try and set up something like a buddy system with leads, maybe even Graeme? I don't know, I'm just completely spitting the ball here.

I think this is about people having comfort and assurance that other places are doing similarly and are also struggling with some of the similar concepts, because I think the fact that we're struggling and we're asking questions means that we're trying to do the right thing for our students. And I think that's a really great place to be.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Absolutely.

**Lorraine Smith:** Awesome, thank you.

**Graeme Pedlingham,** And I think this is something like Caroline says, the whole sector is trying to engage with this. And I think some places are further ahead, but majority are not actually a majority are really at the beginning point of trying to think what they do.

I don't know if it's useful. It might not be, this is something the Institute of Physics put in their accreditation framework. This is how they get round that question of practical skills. It's keeping it broad. So anyway, it's just an example, so we can build from that. Kostas?

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** Hi I wanted to somehow reframe Hans's question, because, in view of what is going on and with discussions with a lot of maths departments, often people want to set 'fluency' as a competence standard in mathematics. And I can't explain perhaps why, but why this would be important in the discipline, but **the way the fluency is assessed is viewed as**

**something which is closed book and timed, so something like a UX. Is that a valid argument?**

**Graeme Pedlingham:** So I think again, this is probably something we might want to pick up offline because I'm not going to pretend to know the details of fluency, to be honest Kostas, but I think the challenge is always going to come back to: Are there multiple ways of demonstrating that competence? And how we do that. Because the boundary is going to be whether something is a practice or a policy, what does the C stand for, the policy or the practice, or whether it's actually a competence. And I think if we say there is only one way of demonstrating a competence, that's likely to give us a lot of room for challenge, I would say. So I think we can talk about it.

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** Yeah that would be good. I think the biggest, because I've been in a group with most directors across the country, and it seems that some universities are using this argument of

**Graeme Pedlingham:** The thing is that might be useful. I mean, I've, I haven't looked at the IOM, to be fair, but the IOP does try and give a sense of competence standards. They've been very careful not to specify assessment modes or how to do it. So I think that

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** Fair enough. Fair enough.

**Caroline Roberts:** And as a general guidance point, I would say if you're coming to a conclusion where you're saying that only timed and only closed book is the only way of assessing, you probably missed something somewhere.

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** I mean, for instance, our QA benchmark statement says that you should I mean, often students will need to reproduce something that is very close to a model answer. Maybe a standard argument in mathematics that is used throughout. But, if you have access, if it's an open book exam, then, you know, you got notes where there's no point asking anything of these type, you just copy.

And things of this type. So we bring up what we call UEX, as for instance, a way to test competency with, you know, standard arguments.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Again. It's going to come back to that.

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** Yeah. Maybe it requires some further discussion. So that's it.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Thanks, Kostas. I'm conscious of time. Rashaad, do you want to come in?

**Rashaad Shabab:** Sure. Thanks. I think it leads on quite nicely from Konstantinos's point, and also the point that Hans was raising earlier. I mean, I think I'm trying to get my head around this.

I think with the learning outcomes, fluency should be there. With economists, the vast majority of students are going to have better careers if they're able to stand in front of a camera, get, a sort of extreme question from a journalist and be able to answer it without looking at their notes. However, that's different from asking can someone add value and have a legitimate career in economics without that fluency? And I think the answer to that is absolutely yes. There's a lot of economists who could sit in a back office, spend six months writing a paper, and transform our understanding of the field, and we don't want to exclude that potential by setting a competence standard that would benefit the vast majority of economists, so we can have a UEX as the main

assessment, but we don't want to restrict ourselves in making adjustments for people for whom that excludes them.

That seems to be what I've learned from this session. Does that seem like a sensible way to deal with this?

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Sounds sensible to me Rashaad.

**Konstantinos Koumatos:** But perhaps just to make a very small comment when I mean mathematical fluency, I mean the ability as a mathematician to sit down and think of the proof of a theorem without referring to 1 million theorems that you might need to use, in order to build your arguments. That's what I mean by fluency, right? Like you need to know these things. They need to be at the tip of your fingers. You can't be going through pages and pages of books to discover what is out there. That's not in that sense.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** So I think it's probably a good one, cause I think this is that this is going to be a question that comes back, I think. So it probably is a useful one for us to take offline. So let's do that. Let's have the conversation. That'd be good.

**Caroline Roberts:** Just on Charlie's point. Just, dropping a quick response on that because I think Charlie's right in that some areas, and I don't want to lump any degrees in with any other degrees, nor mix different sectors, because everybody is unique and everybody is special, and there is a different flavour to every degree, which is, again, why students choose to go and study particular content over a different subject area.

Now, of course, we've got some things like engineering. My own children, I've got one automotive engineer and I've got one historian in, I don't know, a very niche area of history about Mongols and Middle Ages. Now, you know, those competence standards for those two things are very easy to differentiate.

But, Charlie, I completely agree that when you sort of get towards a more sort of humanities category, you are going to get some overlap in how you express those things. And just because it's maybe not going to be massively differently expressed, doesn't mean that there isn't a competence standard for it, because I think if we then turn around to parents and students and said, no, there is no, you're going to come away with a degree, but you won't have been able to demonstrate anything. I think that wouldn't be true either, because I think we are clearly teaching undergraduate students a set of skills.

And yes, it may be that you're switching out only a few words of difference between a history degree in one subject and a history degree in another. But I think it's important that we do do that distillation so that we can express it. Because as we started off at the beginning by saying there is a clear link through from learning outcome to competency to having a degree. So there is a value add that we are we are looking to do across the piece. Graeme, does that?

**Graeme Pedlingham:** It does and I think really, really useful point, Charlie, because I think I always come back to, you know, that criteria if I'm being demonstrably relevant. So it has to be specific to that subject. So there is a specificity that's needed to a competence standard. But I had exactly the same questions when I was starting to think about this.

Obviously my subject is English literature. What would a competence standard in English literature look like? And actually it helped me to think about it from the reverse, to say actually what would be distinct about an English degree as a subject? Rather than just doing a general

studies degree, for example. And that there has to be something that has to be something distinct, and I won't talk about that now, but I think there is. There has to be something distinct about all about degrees, about what separates them from just a general degree. That might be other ways of thinking about it.

The course learning outcomes absolutely do demonstrate that competence standards are effectively a kind of deeper, more distilled or essential elements of the course than learning outcomes.

There's going to be more on this. We're going to need to keep talking about it. But I think the key thing that we've learned from other institutions is, let's get started. Let's try and think through some of these issues, these challenges. We're not going to have all the answers, but let's try and make a start and then have conversations about it basically, and try and work it through together.

**Caroline Roberts:** One closing question from Verona.

**Verona Ni Drisceoil:** Sorry. I know we're just near time. Thank you. Thank you all so much. I guess just a couple of things. I'm was kind of thinking about the practical side of this. Or how the roll out and the timeline. So I'm obviously aware that the course specification document work is happening, and presumably this is part of that work. So recognising the competencies, the course competencies. This might sound like a kind of a deficit start point, but **is there a minimum / maximum of competencies that we would expect?**

**Graeme Pedlingham:** No. I wouldn't say there is, to be honest. I think. I think we wouldn't. I think we'd expect to have some. I don't think we'd expect to have, like, lots. I mean, if you've got more competence standards than learning outcomes, that's going to be a problem.

**Verona Ni Drisceoil:** You know, that's just, so I was just wondering about that, though, because I think if people are trying to work through this, it might be I don't know, yeah. Would some guidelines on that be helpful? And I think just related to what you said about, you know, as we're all learning together and Lorraine's point, I wondered if it would be helpful to kind of pick from the different disciplines or faculties and try to get maybe a maths example, a humanities example, to maybe if those were like worked through with yourself and Caroline and others, and then that gives people a bit of a template. Otherwise I think we're all kind of maybe, you know, working through this on our own a little bit. I don't know if that would be helpful, but, I thought might be that might be an idea.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** That makes a lot of sense. And, I'm not going to. Amanda might want to say something on this as well, in terms of process, but I think what you've got on the course forms is really asking for a starting point and what we're looking to do with that is, when those forms are coming forward through the sort of Sussex Academic Framework process, then whatever we've got in those competence standards boxes is going to come over to Caroline and to me, and we'll have a bit of a look at those and we might get some feedback and use those as a conversation starter for some cases as well.

But the idea of trying to develop some in-house examples, I think we could look at it.

**Verona Ni Drisceoil:** Yeah. Okay. But can I just maybe very quickly if I may, because you, I think you might be aware we have an assessment away day and Amanda is kindly coming along to that. And we did kind of query whether we would talk about you know, competence standards in that session. But of course, our focus today is very much about modular level assessment



changes right now for today. And so then we worried about are we getting into territory that maybe we don't want to get into. Do you have any initial thoughts on that?

**Graeme Pedlingham:** I mean my initial thoughts would be we're keeping this very much at course subject level. So we're not looking at module level granularity because I think that that is massively complicated. I think that's going to become too unwieldy. The only ask is where we've got competence standards identified in the course. we will need to have some sense of where those are demonstrated. But that's about it. At this point, I don't think we want anything more granular.

**Verona Ni Drisceoil:** Brilliant. Thank you. That helps me too. Thanks.

**Graeme Pedlingham:** Okay. In which case we are out of time. But like I say, we will have more conversations on this. Do reach out to me and to Caroline for any conversations about this that would be useful. And we will have a look at a way forward in terms of possibly another briefing, if that's useful. But thank you for coming along this morning. Hope it's been helpful. Thank you to Caroline for expert insights here as well. Good to see you all. Thanks. Bye.