THE NATIONAL COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR BEGINNING TEACHING: A RADICAL APPROACH TO INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION?

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Introduction

This article is based on a report (Preston & Kennedy 1995) which was one of two reports developed as part of a project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, and managed by the Working Party on Teacher Competencies which continued the work of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning. The project investigated relationships between the *Draft National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching* (1994) (referred to throughout the paper as the *Framework)* and initial teacher education courses. A separate report (Kennedy & Preston 1995) provides details of the project as a whole, and of the procedures and findings of the investigation of current relationships between the *Framework* and a number of courses.

The purpose of this paper is to assist teacher educators and teachers who are considering the use of the *Framework* (or another set of competencies) in any way in initial teacher education.

The context of competency approaches to professional education is not widely, clearly and consistently understood. Conceptualisations of the central notions are contested and dynamic, and still developing in ways that might be particularly fruitful for initial teacher education and the teaching profession. We therefore include background information on competency approaches in Australia, and on the development of the *Framework*. We also include a detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of competency which underlies the paper. From particular conceptualisations flow different ways of understanding initial teacher education and the work of the teaching profession, different ways of doing many aspects of initial teacher education, and different roles for such courses in universities and in the endeavour of schooling.

We barely scratch the surface of the possibilities of a coherent, integrated competencies approach to initial teacher education—our intention is to open the field, not to set the boundaries. In supporting such an approach we do not wish to imply that it is the only approach, though we believe it has some compelling advantages over other approaches.

In the final section we make suggestions regarding the review of the *Framework*. In this context of change, debate and uncertainty, any competencies approach needs to be tentative and open to discussion.

The development of the Draft National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching

The background to Australian competency approaches

The development and application of competency standards in Australia have their recent origins in attempts to solve particular economic, industrial relations, labour market, and vocational education and training problems which were identified in the mid 1980s. In response to falling commodity prices and the need to restructure the Australian economy, the Commonwealth government, the union movement and employers took up a broad strategy which included increasing productivity through increased skill utilisation in the workplace. The strategy involved improved and more widespread vocational education and training, recognition of the skills held by workers, changes in work organisation, and changes in career structures to support skill development and utilisation. These elements were brought together in the industrial relations strategy of 'award restructuring'. While increased productivity provided the overarching goal, and award restructuring the industrial relations mechanism, there was lacking a simple and comprehensive way of understanding, organising and integrating the different areas of skill development, recognition and utilisation.

A framework based on competency standards was seen to meet that need. Techncial and Further Education (TAFE) was set for reform and expansion, and thus was open to a new approach. The competencies movement developed rapidly after its introduction in the late 1980s. In occupations up to professional level, and in vocational education and training outside universities, there are now general requirements that competency standards be developed and utilised, and that it be done according to specified formats and procedures—detailed in the National Training Board's *National Competency Standards: Policy and Guidelines, Second Edition* (NTB 1992) and the Board's *Technical Guidance* (NTB 1992).

There is no such requirement for the professions and higher education. The Commonwealth Government's position was made clear by the then Minister for Higher Education, Peter Baldwin, when he said in an address to the Australian Council of Professions in November 1992 that 'there is no Government policy stipulating that competency standards must be adopted by professions or incorporated into higher education programs preparing students for the professions' (Baldwin 1992).

The development of competency standards in about twenty professions was auspiced by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) in the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, and several professions have developed standards independently of NOOSR. NOOSR has produced publications and carried out supportive activities which promote consistency with the National Training Board (NTB) framework, format and procedures. Professions are free to develop or not develop standards, and are free to use them as they see fit.

Competency standards are thus for professions (and universities providing professional education) a tool to be used if and when appropriate. Other tools might be a better alternative in particular circumstances, and competency standards may be insufficient alone to do a particular job. Competency standards are no panacea, nor are they an unavoidable imposition.

The 'format' and 'framework' for structuring competencies

The National Training Board's standard format involves building a set of competency standards from a collection of roughly half a dozen broad 'units' or areas of competence (such as the following example from the competency framework for teaching: 'Using and developing knowledge and values') which are subdivided into 'elements' (such as 'The teacher engages the students actively in developing knowledge'). For each element there will be a number of 'performance criteria' which are 'evaluative statements which specify the required level of performance' (NTB 1992, p. 31). There are also 'range indicators' which indicate contexts in which the performance criteria are expected to apply. There may also be 'evidence guides' or 'cues' to assist with interpretation and assessment.

There are a variety of ways of 'packaging' units using various combinations of core, options and specialisations. The *Framework* is all core—that is, all of the elements are considered essential for all beginning school teachers.

The Australian Standards Framework (ASF) developed by the NTB provides broad descriptors for competency *levels* from one (initial 'unskilled' entry to employment) to eight (highest level of competency and responsibility in employment) (NTB 1992, p. 18-19). Professional entry after a course of initial professional education at university level (and perhaps after an induction or clinical period) is generally at level seven. The alignment of the units of competency to levels in the ASF is relevant to matters such as industrial/salary classifications, the depth of understanding involved in courses, levels of credentials awarded, the structure of workplaces and work organisation, and the matching of individuals to positions or courses. The *Framework*, like many other sets of standards for professions, does not specify levels, and level seven could be assumed.

Models of substantive content of units and elements of competency

Any set of competencies is a social construct, developed by particular people at a particular time, and could be different. The NTB, NOOSR and various industry competency bodies (NTB 1992, Heywood et al 1992, Emery 1993) suggest strategies for ensuring that the development of competencies best reflects the current and expected future practice in an occupation, and that the views of practitioners and other stakeholders are taken into account. There are many different ways in which the substantive content of a set of standards can be structured. It is the units which indicate that structure. Units 'describe a broad area of professional performance' (Heywood et al 1992, p. 32), based on a notion of competency which, according to the NTB Guidelines, 'embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments... (and) encompasses:

* the requirement to perform individual tasks (task skills);

* the requirement to manage a number of different tasks within the job (task management skills);

* the requirement to respond to irregularities and breakdowns in routine (contingency management skills);

* the requirement to deal with the responsibilities and expectations of the work environment (job/role environment skills), including working with others' (NTB 1992, p. 29).

An analysis of sets of standards from a number of professions (see Australian Association of Occupational Therapists 1994, Australian Nursing Council 1993, Scheeres et al 1993, NPQTL 1994) indicates units and elements in several general areas (not all of which are included in each set of standards):

* the application of the knowledge base and ethical principles of the profession;

* the processes of central practice—needs identification, program planning, implementation, and review (this might be individual and local, or collective and broader, or some combination);

* management of practice and related functions—including formal accountability, administration, supervision, teamwork and communication;

* reflective practice—may include collective as well as individual reflection and development;

* contribution to the profession through, for example, involvement in the education, training and mentoring of others; contribution to the knowledge base of the profession through research and scholarship; participation in

professional associations to improve the work of the profession and the industry; communicating the work of the profession to the wider community.

Competencies from more than one area (even all areas) may be simultaneously involved in the work of an individual (or team) at a particular time.

The development of competency standards for teaching

The *Framework* was developed under the auspices of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) in 1992 and 1993. The NPQTL was a three year tripartite project which arose out of award restructuring negotiations in 1989 and 1990. It was established early in 1991 with a governing board composed of representatives of the government and non-government school authorities and teacher unions, the Commonwealth, and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Its charter covered the complex professional issues associated with award restructuring—teachers' work organisation, professional education and career development, and recognition of qualifications. As in a number of other professions, initial impetus for the development of competency standards for teaching came in part from the 'mutual recognition' discussions among Australian Heads of Government meeting at Special Premiers' Conferences which became a formal agreement in May 1992 (Phillips 1994, p. 11).

The governing board of the NPQTL believed that, if properly and appropriately used, national competency standards could:

- assist teachers to improve their work organisation and their workplace performance by encouraging them to reflect critically on their own practice, individually and collaboratively;
- inform professional development to support improvements to teaching;
- boost teachers' self-esteem and their commitment to teaching by enhancing their awareness of the nature of their teaching competence;
- underpin a national approach to improving teacher education programs, including curriculum and pedagogy;
- underpin a national approach to improving induction programs in schools and systems;
- possibly form the basis for a nationally consistent approach to registration and probation;
- provide a basis for communication about the nature of teachers' work and the quality of teaching and learning within the education community and among education interest groups (Peacock 1993, p. 8).

The NPQTL commissioned three consultancies to work on the development of a set of competencies. The September 1993 edition of *Unicorn* included articles written by the three consortiums which carried out the consultancies (Louden 1993, Eltis & Turney 1993, Abbott-Chapman et al 1993), as well as an introduction by the director of the NPQTL (Peacock 1993), and responses from a researcher, a teacher educator, a teacher, and a teacher unionist (Batten 1993). The results of these projects were distilled and field tested, and the result was the *Framework* (NPQTL 1994).

The *Framework* is generally (but not fully) consistent with the 'integrated' (nonbehaviourist) approach to competency standards, and with the format developed under the auspices of the National Training Board and NOOSR. However, a number of the elements are not presented as 'competencies' but as more limited 'attributes' (statements of propositional knowledge), and it remains a 'framework', rather than a comprehensive set of 'standards' with appropriately specified 'levels'.

In 1994 consultancies were commissioned to investigate the application of the *Framework* to initial teacher education, induction, and inservice. This paper arose out of the project on initial teacher education.

The conceptualisations and assumptions underlying this paper

The conceptualisation of competency

Framework was developed before the conceptualisations of 'competency' (for professions in particular) had developed to current levels of complexity (and usefulness), and it is likely that conceptualisations will develop further in fruitful directions over the coming years. The *Framework* is not fully consistent with the conceptualisation outlined below.

An important feature of the conceptualisation of competency used here is that it is not behaviourist. Behaviourism was the basis of the Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) initiatives in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, and of many of the competency-related initiatives in vocational education and training around the world over recent decades. It also informed the thinking of some of the early work which evolved into the current competency-based systems in Australia, and it appears to continue to be a feature of some of the notions of competency being implemented in teaching and teacher education in England and Wales. The seductive simplicity and common sense appeal of a behaviourist approach means that it continues to be a powerful force.

An alternative to behaviourism is informed by more recent developments in cognitive psychology, learning theory and related understandings of purposeful action in complex real life situations—including work where initiative, judgement and collaboration are important. In this conceptualisation, *competency* is the *relation* between an individual's personal *attributes* (such as their knowledge, physical and social skills, values and dispositions), the performance of *tasks* (which can be very broadly defined and can involve professional judgement), in the *context* of practice (which can be complex and unpredictable). Competencies are the *combination* of personal attributes which *enable* competent performance in particular contexts. There are thus important distinctions between *competencies*, the *attributes* which constitute them, and *performance*.

Only by taking proper account of the essentially relational nature of the concept of competence can the holistic richness of work be captured in competency standards (Hager & Beckett 1995, p. 2).

Figure 1 provides a simplified illustration of the relationships between attributes, competencies, and performance.

Figure 1: Simplified illustration of the relationships between attributes, competencies, and performance
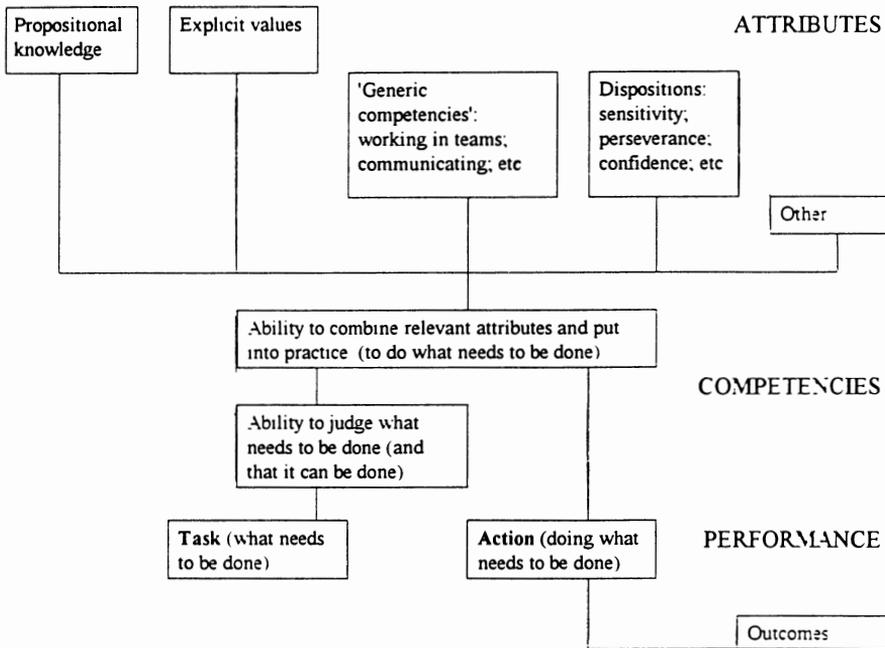
Note: Elements in this model are interconnected in ways not shown, there are feedback loops, and there are additional elements

This 'integrated' approach has been developed and elaborated by Paul Hager, Andrew Gonczi and others (see for example Gonczi et al 1990, and Hager et al 1994), and is becoming established as the theoretical basis of more recent developments in Australia.

Characteristics of behaviourist and integrated approaches to competencies are indicated in Table 1, which is adapted from Preston and Walker (1993, p. 119) where the term 'holistic' is used instead of 'integrated'. That table was based on Walker (1992) where the 'holistic' notion is developed. While there are some important distinctions between 'holistic' and 'integrated' (see, for example, Hager & Beckett 1995), they are not addressed in this paper.

An appropriate stem for a competency (element of competency) refers to capacity or ability, not performance. It is common practice in Australia for the

stems of elements of competency to refer directly to performance ('the individual does X'), rather than the capacity to perform ('the individual can do X'). However, we believe that this is inappropriate and more consistent with a behaviourist than an integrated model. A performance-based stem is appropriate for important examples of evidence that the competency is held, but not for describing the competency itself.

Table 1: Characteristics of Behaviourist and Integrated Approaches to Competencies

	Behaviourist Approach	**Integrated Approach**
Nature of competencies and relations between competencies	Individual, specific, discrete and defined in terms of behaviour only.	Competencies are complex combinations of personal attributes, enabling the performance of a variety of tasks. They are the nexus between attributes and performance in particular contexts. They form coherent 'structures of competence'.
Evidence of competencies	Direct observation of performance of relevant activities—which are assumed to give direct and clear indication of whether or not the competency is held.	A range of evidence may be sought, in general none can give certainty that relevant competencies are held. What evidence to use and what to make of it would be indicated by relevant theories and determined by the judgement of the assessor.
	Required knowledge is inferred directly from behaviourally defined competencies.	Knowledge exists and can be understood separately from the exercise of competencies. Knowledge can be understood as having a complex and coherent structure.

Table 1 (cont.): Characteristics of Behaviourist and Integrated Approaches to Competencies

	Behaviourist Approach	**Integrated Approach**
Relation between competency statements and the education or training program	Competency statements indicate directly the content, structure and assessment criteria of education and training programs. There can be little diversity, local flexibility, experimentation and development.	There can be broad coherence between structures of competence and education and training programs, and programs will generally have overall coherence. Programs can, however, be diverse in their structure and curriculum, be flexible, and involve experimentation and research.
Variation in specification of competency based standards according to purpose	There can be little variation in the way standards are specified.	The way standards are specified can vary significantly according to purpose. In particular, for 'summative' purposes standards generally should be explicit and public, and assessment procedures rigorous, valid and reliable; for 'formative' purposes a more flexible and open approach is possible.
Appropriate wording for the stem of an element of competency	'The individual does X'	'The individual is capable of doing X'

The distinction between attributes and competencies is fuzzy at the border. A statement of propositional knowledge, such as 'knows content and its relationship with educational goals', is clearly an attribute in the sense outlined here, and a statement of capability such as 'can match content, teaching approaches and student development and learning in planning' is clearly a competency. However, 'generic competencies' such as 'communicating ideas and information', 'working with others in teams', and other 'Key Competencies' developed by the Mayer Committee (NTB 1992, p. 44), are generally best considered attributes. They become competencies when combined with other attributes (such as knowledge relating to teaching and learning, and values or purposes related to educational goals), in the broad context of an area of work. Other types of borderline

attributes are cognitive processes (such as interpreting, reasoning, decision-making, reflecting, judging, predicting, and so on) which might be considered types of knowledge or generic competencies, and 'practical knowledge' where the knowledge appears inseparable from practice, and involves 'tacit knowledge'. While it might be difficult to always clearly determine whether such cases are attributes or competencies, such a difficulty does not detract from the importance of the distinction between attributes and competencies.

Appreciating the distinction between attributes and competencies is essential for what we believe are some of the most valuable contributions which a competencies approach can make to initial teacher education.

The conceptualisation of competency as the relation between attributes and performance (or tasks) is slippery. Bowden and Masters (1993) found in their investigation of the implications for higher education of a competency-based approach to education and training, that there is often a tendency to focus on the tasks (which may involve a tendency to behaviourism), or to focus on the attributes (a traditional 'academic' approach to vocational education).

Just as a behaviourist approach can be contrasted with an integrated approach to competencies, so, too, can the traditional 'academic' approach be contrasted with an integrated competencies approach to professional education and assessment. Many educationists have a clear understanding of the problems with behaviourism and of how to avoid them. Clarifying the differences between a traditional academic approach and an integrated competencies approach to initial professional education is a more recent issue and an important aspect of this report.

In a recent paper, 'Problem Based Learning and Paradigms of Assessment', Hager and Butler (1994a) consider in detail assumptions underlying a traditional academic approach to vocational education and assessment (what they call the 'scientific measurement paradigm') and a coherent competencies approach (what they call a 'judgemental paradigm'). Their consideration is summarised in Table 2 which combines four tables in their paper. Hager (1994) also provides a very useful comparison between the three approaches: 'behaviourist or specific tasks approach', 'attribute or generic skills approach' (for example, traditional academic), and 'integrated or task + attribute approach'.

Assessment of competence

Competencies held by individuals cannot be absolutely known, and competence cannot be directly observed. Rather, there may be evidence which more or less strongly indicates the presence (or absence) of competencies (which might be of varying strength, depth or complexity). Appropriate evidence may include performance of real or simulated tasks, supplemented by justifications of actions and explanations of the underlying knowledge and theoretical understandings.

Other methods of assessment include records of achievement and prior performance or portfolios, and traditional ways of assessing knowledge and understanding. Assessors make judgements about the adequacy and appropriateness of particular forms of evidence on a case-by-case basis (Hager et al 1994, Gonczi et al 1993).

Table 2: Assumptions underlying a traditional academic approach to vocational curriculum and assessment, and an integrated competencies approach to vocational curriculum and assessment (Hager & Butler 1994b)

Traditional Academic Approach ('Scientific Measurement Paradigm')	Integrated Competencies Approach ('Judgemental Paradigm')
EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS	
Theory prior to practice	Integration of theory and practice
Foundationalist knowledge	Non-foundationalist knowledge
Certain knowledge	Provisional knowledge
Impersonal knowledge	Knowledge as a human construct
Context-free knowledge	Context-dependent knowledge
Disciplinary and subject focus	Interdisciplinary and problem focus
Structured problems	Unstructured problems
Curriculum unproblematic	Curriculum problematic
ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE MEASUREMENT PROCESS	
Measure 'g' factor	Infer kinds of combinations of knowledge, skills, abilities, etc. from performance
Problem of objectivity: i.e. how to ensure data is scientifically reproducible	Problem of induction: i.e. how to collect sufficient evidence
ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES	
Assess tasks remote from the world outside of classrooms	Assess tasks that reflect outside contexts
Assess solutions to problems	Assess processes by which problems are solved, as well as the solution
Assess simplified, discrete tasks	Assess performance of holistic tasks in their actual context
Assess individuals only	Assess group work as well as individual work
Emphasise one right solution	Emphasise alternative ways to reach acceptable solutions
Assess tasks directly from the curriculum as taught	Assess tasks that are relevant to the curriculum but expand on it
Assess discrete tasks one by one	Assess performance on holistic tasks as well
Teachers rigidly prescribe nature and form of assessment tasks	Learners help to design nature and form of their assessment tasks

Table 2 (cont.): Assumptions underlying a traditional academic approach to vocational curriculum and assessment, and an integrated competencies approach to vocational curriculum and assessment (Hager & Butler 1994b)

Traditional Academic Approach ('Scientific Measurement Paradigm')	Integrated Competencies Approach ('Judgemental Paradigm')
ASSESSMENT PRACTICES	
Examination focus	A variety of diverse assessment events as the focus
Measurement of attainments	Inference of competence
Single scores and measures	Multiple sources of evidence
Controlled test conditions	Simulation of life situations
Emphasis on objectivity	Emphasis on avoidance of bias
Focus on test instruments, validity and reliability	Focus on triangulation, direct evidence, informed judgement

Assessment involving performance in complex real life (or well-simulated) situations can provide evidence for competencies involving values, attitudes, personal dispositions, and social and personal capabilities (such as sensitivity to the emotional states of others, or perseverance). Unlike simple propositional knowledge, for example, such attributes are well-nigh impossible to assess out of the context of application. All such measures would be quite indirect, and they are often easy to fake. However, the complex combination of such attributes with other attributes into competencies which are exercised in realistic situations can be more readily assessed—even if that assessment is still a matter of the assessor's judgement. Hager and Beckett note that:

> 'Empathising with the patient' is not difficult to assess in real holistic work contexts where it is an important part of overall performance. What is difficult is assessing 'empathy' in the abstract (Hager & Beckett 1995, p. 17).

The professional work of teachers and its implications for initial teacher education

Before we can consider in detail the application of a competencies approach to initial teacher education, we first need to make explicit our assumptions about the nature of teachers' work and of the broad parameters of initial teacher education.

The effective work of teachers is understood as deeply professional in the sense of constantly requiring situational judgements based on complex combinations of sophisticated knowledge, values, skills, and personal dispositions, sensitivities and capabilities. The work of the teaching profession is inherently both strategic and collective. For example, the education of particular

students is dependent on the work of many teachers over many years—some of those teachers having a direct teaching relationship with the students, others playing a part in curriculum development and creating the culture and climate of the schools and the system as a whole. (Within this complex, strategic and collective framework, much of the day-to-day work of teachers is routine, autonomous, individual, immediate, and direct in its outcomes.)

The implications of this for initial teacher education are several. Clearly, knowledge and understanding need to be developed in breadth and depth in areas such as content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts and the work of teachers, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values (drawn from Shulman 1987, p. 8). This indicates the importance of a university-level education in these various areas.

The complex, collective, and strategic nature of teaching, however, requires much more. The different areas of knowledge need to be deeply integrated, and able to be put into effective practice in many different contexts—over time and in relation to the work of other teachers. That integration and application goes well beyond a traditional academic education. It requires a high priority given to the integration and coherence of courses, and benefits from the collaborative involvement of practicing teachers, and a more central and significant place for the practice of teaching. It is here that a competencies approach can be particularly useful, though other tools may equally serve the same purpose in some situations.

Applying competencies to initial teacher education

In A Guide to Development of Competency Standards for Professions, published by NOOSR in 1992, it is noted that:

> Competency standards are *not* curriculum documents. Entry-level competency standards specify what new graduates should be able to do in the workplace, but say nothing about how that state is to be achieved. Hence for providers of professional education there is as much flexibility as ever to decide what material to teach, how to teach it and how to assess it ... (However) because the competency standards are a powerful guide to providers of professional education, without being a curriculum document, they provide common ground for discussion between providers, registering authorities and the profession ... (Heywood et al 1992, p. 46).

A competency approach to initial teacher education can take several forms and involve a number of different elements. Sets of competencies can be used in different ways. In this section the uses of a *set of competencies,* and the uses of a more general *competencies approach* are both discussed.

1. A set of competencies as a checklist for course content and student assessment

A set of competencies may provide a checklist for the areas of content which should be covered in a course. This is a relatively superficial, though valuable, use of a set of competencies, and may be done where the general approach to the course is either integrated competencies, behaviourist, or traditional academic.

Areas which are often usefully indicated by a set of competencies and which might not otherwise be explicitly included in traditional courses include competencies of a 'generic' nature such as communication, working with others, task management and so on; areas such as the ethical and legal aspects of practice, and seemingly mundane matters like maintaining records and general administration. For example, the *Framework* indicates the need for activities involving team work with teachers and non-teaching staff; communication with parents; monitoring students (over time); using a range of strategies for teaching and assessing; planning in relation to school goals; reflection for improvement; and so on. Using the *Framework* as a checklist indicates the importance of explicitly covering (and assessing) these areas—some of which may otherwise be at best only incidentally covered.

Where a set of competencies is being used for such a checklist, the distinction between attributes and competencies is not always important, and the list may cover the major areas of what a graduate (or beginning teacher) should 'know' as well as 'be able to do'. In fact, to ignore attributes (what graduates should know, for example) may tend to behaviourism and a distortion of provision.

A long list which seeks to be comprehensive may be useful for internal course planning or review purposes, though such a list might be far too unwieldy and potentially distorting of courses if it is used for external review or for mandating areas of content. Such a checklist approach is a common response to detailed lists of what graduates should 'know and be able to do', such as the NSW 'Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers' (Boston 1993).

Those developing courses need to consider other sources in addition to any particular set of competencies (used as a checklist) for indications of what should be included in the content of courses and assessment. There are a number of reasons for this:

• A coherent, integrated set of competencies would not specify the attributes required (though many would be implicit, and others might be indicated in

evidence guides), and it is up to those developing courses to decide the attributes necessary for the development of competencies in the context of the students in the course and the wider circumstances.

- The content of any set of competencies (and the associated attributes) will always be contestable and open to change.

- There is often a legitimate argument that not all that is covered in a set of competencies for beginning practitioners is appropriate for a formal initial professional education course. For example, for practical (and legal) reasons it may not be appropriate to fully incorporate in an initial teacher education course element 2.7 of the *Framework*, 'The teacher works effectively with parents and others responsible for the care of students'.

- On the other hand, a set of competencies for beginning teachers may exclude competencies relevant to a long term career. The lack of any competencies related to matters such as 'contribution to the knowledge base of the profession' in the *Framework* may indicate such an orientation. Perhaps a more expanded set of competencies should be developed for the purposes of initial teacher education where preparation for a career, not just the initial period, is the intention. Similarly, a set of competencies for a profession such as teaching should incorporate the competencies (and attributes) considered important outcomes for a course of general university education—intellectual curiosity and a disposition towards life-long learning, an appreciation of diverse ways of understanding, sensitivity, tolerance, and so on.

A checklist of competencies (and attributes) also can be used as a guide to assessment criteria for student achievement. Again, the inclusion of attributes may be important, and longer lists might be useful for internal purposes but would be inappropriate for external purposes. Employing authorities may require (or prefer) an indication of achievement in areas specified in a set of competencies. Whether such requirements are reasonable would depend on what was required and the context (the parties involved in formulating the set, the timeline of its implementation, the requirements of other jurisdictions, and so on).

A set of competencies may be used to guide assessment criteria in a way consistent with different approaches. Assessment using a very high quality set of competencies, and assessment processes as part of a coherent competencies approach are discussed further below.

Using a set of competencies as a checklist is only a small part of a coherent, integrated competencies approach, and may also be used with a traditional academic approach to initial professional education, or with a behaviourist

competencies approach. The use of a set of competencies as a checklist has its value, but does not take advantage of the rich potential of a coherent competencies approach and needs to be used with care to avoid disjointed or distorted programs.

2. A set of competencies providing criteria for graduation and the framework for the goals of the course

The use of a set of competencies as criteria for graduation and thus the framework for the overall goals of a professional education course is the most widely known and understood use of competencies of either the integrated or behaviourist type. It makes clear the 'outcomes' orientation of a competencies approach.

In teacher education, as in many other fields of vocational education, the need for explicit and appropriate standards to be achieved before a credential is awarded is becoming more widely accepted. The *Statement of Principles and General Policy* of the Australian Council of Deans of Education notes that:

> Education Faculties have a responsibility to ensure that the credentials received by graduates of initial professional education courses communicate clearly the Faculty's assessment of the graduate's readiness for initial employment and potential for a successful teaching career (ACDE 1994, p. 3).

The limitations of the mechanisms and criteria currently used for graduation need to be evaluated against alternatives such as using competencies.

The coherent use of a set of competencies as criteria for graduation and as the framework for the overall goals of a course is not the same as the use of a set of competencies as a checklist, though the two uses can be considered on a continuum.

It is essential that a set of competencies used as criteria for graduation be of a very high standard. They must have appropriate coverage in both breadth (the substance of units and elements) and depth (the substance of evidence guides), and be well structured. If the set of competencies is not of the highest quality then the damage in terms of course distortion and inappropriate indications of the competence of graduates may be high. The quality and appropriateness of a set of competencies are inherently contestable matters. A less than optimal set of competencies may be used with a range of other criteria for determining graduation—the actual mix would be dependent on the nature of the set of competencies and other possible criteria, and the nature of the course.

It is essential that the levels are clearly specified. The need for the clear specification of levels is apparent from the common pattern in initial teacher education courses where some elements of the *Framework* are addressed in two or more years of a course. Each time, the students develop the competency at a higher level.

The *Framework* is generic, and all elements are core—that is, all beginning teachers are expected to have competence in all elements. Some elements, however, may require more specification according to teaching specialisations, and other matters (such as competence in indigenous education) which might be of importance to competent practice (and to employers) are also not explicitly covered, and could be specified in evidence guides and dealt with in assessment reports, or may be taken up in assessment separately from assessment based on the set of competencies. Alternatively, units of competency which are specialisations and/or options could be developed.

These matters of levels, substantive coverage, structure and packaging need further consideration before there is any general or mandatory use of the *Framework* as indicating criteria for graduation.

Using a set of competencies as necessary criteria for graduation implies that their achievement by all students is the central goal of the course. How that goal is achieved is a matter for those running the course. However, the course as a whole could be evaluated in terms of its success in achieving it.

The use of a high quality set of competencies to provide the necessary criteria for graduation provides a clear indication to employing and registering authorities and professional colleagues of the nature and level of a graduate's competence. It can play an important part in making the nexus between initial teacher education and professional practice transparent and commonly understood—it assists communication and collaboration (something taken up in more detail below).

Even if a set of competencies is not of exceptionally high quality, and thus is not appropriate for straight forward criteria for graduation and indicating the goals of the course, a *competencies approach* can still be applied to many aspects of the course (including the processes of assessment), involving some profound changes in the way initial professional education is understood and carried out.

3. A competencies approach to assessment procedures

Assessment plays a central role in a competencies approach because of its orientation to outcomes (what is learnt) rather than inputs (what is 'covered'). Assessment can be formative or summative, individual or collective, done by an expert assessor, by peers or by oneself.

Assessment of competencies is generally much more complex than assessment of attributes—but also more valid:

> The complexity of the inter-relationships among candidate (student teacher), client (school students), environment and assessor (supervising teacher) makes the task of separating the intrinsic standard of performance of the candidate from these other factors very difficult. On the other hand, alternative means of assessing professional competence by attempting to reduce the complexities and thus simplify the assessment task, reduce the validity of the assessment (Hager & Butler 1994b, p. 6).

Any assessment, whether formative or summative, requires some understanding of *standards*—whether implicit or explicit. Some sense of standards is implicit in the *Framework*, especially in the 'indicators of effective practice', but the *Framework* is generally without an indication of levels (or 'standards'), and thus it is not a set of 'competency standards'. In some practicum programs, supervising teachers carry out informal and formal, formative and summative assessments in terms of competencies with standards apparent to some extent. Usually, however, the understanding of standards by experienced teachers is tacit, and there may not be common understanding between supervising teacher, student teacher, and university staff.

A competency approach, using a set of competency standards, can provide a framework for assessment which is according to publicly known and agreed standards with a high level of validity, and can be carried out with relative efficiency and effectiveness.

Some principles for the carrying out of such assessment have been developed by Hager and Butler (1994b):

- The assessors are expert in the practice that they are observing;

- The assessors are trained in the techniques of observational assessment: self understanding as a component of judgement; where to gather evidence; the effects of context on assessment; observational skills; interviewing skills including the development of questionnaires; item construction skills; skills in interpreting evidence; the scope and level of beginning practice to be assessed in relation to their own.

- The standards applicable to each competency are given a precise verbal description that conveys as much meaning as possible, and is under constant review. The assessors continue to review the formulation.

- The assessors are given detailed cues and explicit instances of the competencies—critical action checklist—that can lead to the inference of competency. The assessors also continue to add to and modify the list of cues.

- The assessors are given extensive experience in assessment, so that they become expert in this important function.

- Groups of assessors engage in activities by which they can share their standards, discuss cases and converge on some consensus about the standard on each competency—so called 'moderation meetings' (Hager & Butler 1994b, pp. 9-10).

These principles have significant implications for initial teacher education. They imply a greater commitment of resources, time and attention on the part of both school and university authorities and personnel than is now commonly the case. Individual universities can work on these principles with the teachers involved in their courses, but meeting all the principles is likely to take time, and needs to be undertaken collaboratively by all the universities, the teaching profession as a whole, and school authorities at the state or, preferably, national level.

The assessment of student teachers and practicing teachers throws up a lot of challenges, but much can be learnt from the recent work on standards-based and outcomes-based assessment of school students.

4. A competencies approach as a comprehensive guide to course structure and coherence

'Traditional' initial professional education courses are based on discrete disciplines/subjects, each with separate assessment processes and little if any concern about how the learning in one area fits with another—there is silence about 'how the whole curriculum relates to the sum of its parts' (Heywood 1994, p. 3). 'Foundation', 'discipline' and general studies subjects tend to be among the most removed from the practical/clinical parts of the course. Often the practical/clinical units are concerned with the basic management skills and routines of practice, and not with the integration and application of the knowledge, understanding and skills developed in other parts of the course.

There can be various ways of facilitating coherence and making the course more than the sum of its parts—but the application of a competency approach can be most effective. A competency approach focuses on the bringing together and practical integration of attributes (such as knowledge gained in different subjects or units, and personal and social skills developed in other units) to form the competencies which enable effective performance. Not only should the course ensure that appropriate attributes are gained (the student knows certain things, and has certain skills, for example), but *also* that those attributes can be appropriately combined and put into practice.

Too often practicing teachers (especially beginning teachers) have difficulty drawing on the 'theoretical' aspects of their course in their everyday practice—

leading to expressions of dissatisfaction with their preservice course and a wariness of anything which smacks too much of 'theory'. However, as Batten et al (1991) commented on their finding of a high proportion of beginning teachers advocating a 'more practical' initial teacher education course:

> These pleas for a more practical orientation must be heeded by those involved in teacher education, but perhaps the solution lies not in a lessening of the theoretical component of a teacher education course, but in helping students to make stronger links between theory and practice (p. 16).

A competencies approach makes it clear that knowledge ('theory') on its own is not enough, and (equally important) practice must draw from that knowledge (and other attributes) to be truly effective. Such an approach implies that the all essential elements of the course must be powerfully integrated with an appreciation of their connection, however indirect, with practice. The practicum must be integrated not only with the curriculum/method subjects/areas, but with the foundation and discipline subjects/areas.

This does not mean that a competencies approach requires that all elements of the course must be under the control of relevant Education Faculty staff—involvement outside the Education Faculty, and variety and choice within courses, can be important in developing competencies related to flexibility, initiative in the face of uncertainty, and a creative and open approach to life-long learning. However, the principle of coherence of the initial teacher education program as a whole does need to be addressed. It raises issues of the role of the first (or other) degree in double award programs—a matter which is particularly acute in serial programs where the teaching award course is of only one year duration and is commenced after students have completed their other course (such as the BA/BSc Dip Ed pattern). How the attributes developed in that other course can be drawn into the competency development process, and how appropriate attribute development to support the acquisition of teaching competencies can be ensured need to be addressed. There are also issues of the development in students of values and identification in relation to teaching (for example, as they begin their teaching award course, do they feel that teaching is the fall-back for those who cannot 'do' whatever their first award was concerned with). These issues are most acute for those institutions moving on a large scale away from four year integrated programs to serial four or five year double degree programs. Similar, but less pressing, problems arise for concurrent double degree programs and integrated programs when subjects are taken outside the Education Faculty. These issues point to strategies such as collaboration or co-ordination

with other faculties and the development of an appreciation among those outside Education Faculties who teach students preparing to become teachers that they, too, are 'teacher educators'.

It is a common and logical pattern for the development of attributes in the earlier stages of the course, leading towards the development of competency in the latter stages, especially (but not only) in practical or clinical units. This is apparent from the investigation of current experiences with competencies in initial teacher education which provides background to this paper (Kennedy & Preston 1995), and it is consistent with a model for curriculum development and assessment for initial professional education developed by Hager and Butler (1994b).

The Hager and Butler model has three levels, 'each level nested in and a requirement for the next level'. The first level involves knowledge, attitudes and discrete skills, and is consistent with the traditional academic approach (which goes little beyond this level). The second level integrates several of the areas developed in the first level for performance in simulated situations. At this level, performances tend to be isolated and assessed by an impersonal and fragmented checklist. This is consistent with the 'checklist' approach outlined earlier.

Hager and Butler describe the third level, 'personal competence in the practice domain' in the following way:

> ... personal competence is a characteristic that can only be displayed in the practice setting. Therefore it can be learnt and assessed only in the practice setting. It demonstrates the highest level of personal integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and accumulated reflective experience. It includes the previous two levels but goes far beyond them in the sense that their contributions are at the service of higher order thinking in a setting of complex practical problems. It is this form of reflective and integrative thinking that needs to be the focus of assessment procedures that are faithful to real practice.

This level begins in the practice settings of practicums, and continues through internships (where they exist), induction periods, and throughout teachers' careers. There would also be feedback, based on reflection by student teachers, practicing teachers and teacher educators, to teaching and learning at the other two levels—indicating new or elaborated knowledge and skills to be developed at the other levels (in other subjects and units) which are needed for more effective practice.

This broad issue of the application of a competencies approach to the overall structure and coherence of courses is a rich source for course development and

improvement, and for overall discourse about teacher education. The discussion of overall course structure has connections with other current debates about curriculum in higher education (for example, Candy, et al 1994, pp. 65-66).

Within this overall framework of a competencies approach to initial teacher education, some specific aspects will be discussed in the following sections.

5. A competencies approach as a guide to the role and nature of the practicum

The third level on the Hager and Butler model, 'personal competence in the practice domain', is best matched with the practicum component in initial teacher education (internships and induction programs may also be included). The implication is that the practicum is not an add-on to develop some classroom management and lesson planning skills to assist with the beginning teachers' survival. Rather, it is the culmination of the course as a whole, developing and drawing from the other elements of the course, to a large extent giving them their reason for being in a course of initial professional education. A competencies approach involves the richness and complexity of the practice setting as an essential part of the curriculum of the practicum.

A more central role for the practicum is not at the expense of the other aspects of the course. An integrated competencies approach (unlike a behaviourist approach) does not downgrade the value of knowledge and understanding. It is consistent with ground-breaking research and scholarship, and with learning which is open and critical. It does not threaten the quality and international standing of the research, scholarship and teaching of the institution. It does provide a context and, for many students, a purpose and motivator for academic study.

This approach to the practicum has implications for the role and status of university staff and practicing teachers involved in the practicum—what is expected of them, how they are trained, how they collaborate with other staff involved in the course. It has implications for the curriculum and assessment of the practicum, including students' understandings of what is expected of them and their self assessment.

There are several common (but not universal) problems which affect the practicum in initial teacher education:

- A low status within the university for the practicum and the staff involved. This usually arises from a 'traditional academic' orientation within the Faculty or the wider university which gives overwhelming value to the traditional academic pursuits of research leading to publication in international journals, and discipline-based teaching.

- A lack of adequate integration between the practicum and the rest of the initial teacher education program. This usually arises from the different principles underlying the two elements—those other than the practicum having a discipline basis with little connection with practice.

- A lack of appropriate resourcing for the practicum—from both universities and school authorities. For example, universities may not be able to give staff the time to spend in schools for effective collaboration with the school staff and the student teachers; schools may not have the resources to allocate sufficient time for the support of student teachers; universities may not have the resources to adequately inservice and support participating teachers; and when universities do have resources and programs for inservicing, the teachers many not have the time to participate. This is, in part, the result of a lack of belief on the part of the university and school authorities that the practicum is doing much more than providing the 'practice' necessary to ensure the neophyte teacher's survival through the initial weeks of teaching.

- A 'distance' and a lack of common understandings between university-based teacher educators and practicing teachers. The individual university and school staff involved in the practicum may equally value the practicum, but because of the lack of resources may have little opportunity to work though their understandings of and aspirations for the practicum so that there can be effective collaboration.

University staff involved in the practicum play a pivotal role in the initial teacher education course as a whole. They need to co-ordinate with staff involved in the rest of the course, they need to understand what is learnt in those other units, and to be able to provide feedback to the other staff from the experience of students' application of what they have learnt in those other units. They need to collaborate closely with participating teachers to ensure they are adequately inserviced and play their part in the course as a whole. To carry out these responsibilities, university staff involved in the practicum need themselves to be highly competent, to have authority within the university and in schools, and to be adequately resourced.

School teachers involved in the practicum have a much more significant role than supporting and assessing students in developing basic classroom and planning skills. In a competencies approach, compared with a traditional approach, the practicum is seen to play a different role in the course as a whole, and so, too, are participating teachers to play a different role. That role is more central to the course as a whole, and thus those teachers need to be inserviced and supported—and to accept their responsibility accordingly. The implication is that practicing teachers in general have a more significant role in initial teacher

education, and collaboration needs to be very substantial—something which is discussed in the following section.

A competencies approach also has implications for student teachers' roles and responsibilities during the practicum. They need to have the sense that the practicum provides the opportunity to develop and apply competencies which draw quite powerfully from the attributes developed in the rest of the course. Thus the practicum is not something separate from the rest of the course, but is deeply integrated. The differences in site, routines, demands, ways of working, relationships, and stress levels, tend to make it psychologically difficult for students to appreciate the ways in which the practicum is integrated with the rest of the course, and thus strategies need to be developed to ameliorate unnecessarily 'alienating' factors. A competencies approach can provide a framework for students to understand more clearly what is expected of them and to make self assessments during the practicum. That framework can enrich reflection on their experiences, provide substantive criteria for the analysis of critical incidents, and lead to a deeper and more explicit understanding of aspects of teaching they may otherwise only understand tacitly.

A competencies approach has implications for the curriculum of the practicum—to ensure that high level competency development occurs, and not just the development of some basic (if essential) skills and routines. Similarly, the formative and summative assessment concerned with the practicum needs to support and evaluate high level competency development.

6. Competencies as a framework for collaboration

Other approaches to initial teacher education might be able to give a central position to the practicum and to the university and school staff involved. However, a competencies approach has a particular advantage. A set of competencies can provide a common framework for collaboration between and among university staff, school staff and student teachers. The more widely understood and accepted a particular set is among practicing teachers, teacher educators, student teachers and school authorities, the more effectively it can facilitate collaboration. It provides a common language and way of seeing the work of the profession, it indicates intended outcomes, and can provide a framework for determining appropriate content and activities.

A competencies approach has implications for the roles and responsibilities of practitioners. It implies a more significant role for practitioners in the development of the 'knowledge base' of a profession and in understanding how that knowledge (and other attributes) can be integrated, applied and developed in intending members of the profession. This requires substantial and close collaboration between practicing teachers and university-based education researchers as well as teacher educators. The deep practical knowledge of

experienced and expert practitioners is of vital importance in many phases of initial professional education, not just the implementation of the practicum. The profession, through representative structures, needs to be involved in overall course planning and to be actively engaged in wider debate about initial teacher education. (Such involvement in the development of the profession through contributing to the knowledge base and involvement in teacher education should be the subject of elements of competency in any set of competencies for the teaching profession.)

7. A competencies approach as a guide to pedagogy

Pedagogy generally has not been addressed with any seriousness in traditional academic approaches. With such approaches university-based teaching staff are expected to facilitate the gaining of knowledge and understanding, but their role only incidentally at best encompasses the development of other attributes and the ability to put the knowledge and understanding into practice in professional contexts. Thus 'academic' pedagogy tends to be limited to the most efficient and effective ways of developing knowledge and understanding—a knowledge and understanding which can be demonstrated in written and spoken form. Thus pedagogies tend to be limited to lecturing, seminar discussions, individual library research, and laboratory or field work as appropriate.

A competencies approach to professional education requires the development of a diverse range of attributes in addition to knowledge and understanding, and the ability to combine and apply those attributes in many different situations. Such diverse and complex outcomes require much more attention to pedagogy.

As a general principle, a competencies approach involves an experiential pedagogy. There is a range of ways of learning which promote the general competencies of effective professional practice—being able to take initiative and be self-directed, to work effectively with others, to communicate, to operate strategically, to reflect and continue learning throughout a career, and so on. In a recent report, Candy, Crebert and O'Leary concluded that the following teaching approaches 'did most to promote learning outcomes that translated into lifelong learning skills':

- self-directed and peer-assisted learning;
- experiential and problem-based learning; and
- reflective practice and critical self-awareness (Candy, et al 1994, p. 128).

These would assist the development of many appropriate competencies, and to them could be added:

- group work of many different kinds;

- field projects in various contexts;
- simulated practice;
- real experience of professional practice.

The general model of course structure of moving from attribute development to competency development indicates a similar pattern of pedagogy.

Many different ways of teaching and learning may be appropriate for the development of attributes, especially early in the course. Pedagogies such as those noted above will play a part in developing essential generic competencies and skills as well as developing particular areas of propositional knowledge and understanding. Course planning and co-ordination will need to take account of the learning outcomes arising out of the pedagogies employed in particular subjects and units. Desirable learning outcomes involving attributes such as generic competencies and skills (such as 'ability to work in teams') need to be planned for and to be assessed in much the same way as learning outcomes in the various areas of knowledge are planned for and assessed.

Later in the course, as the focus moves to the competencies specifically associated with teaching, the pedagogical implications are more profound. To fully develop the competencies necessary for effective practice, the student needs to be able to experience and reflect on genuine practice (or as close to genuine practice as is feasible).

8. A competencies approach as a framework for student self-management of learning

A set of competencies can provide students with a clearer picture of what it means to be an effective teacher by making the practice of teaching more explicit. Students can more clearly formulate their own goals for the course, and have a framework for negotiating learning activities and assessments with staff, reflecting on their experiences during the course, and assessing their own progress. Developing this self-management of learning during a course does, of course, develop very important attributes and competencies for an effective and satisfying professional career.

It may be appropriate not to give high priority to the use of the set of competencies until background knowledge and understanding has been developed—students may be overwhelmed by the totality of complex competencies, and find it easier to comprehend them as they build up requisite attributes. Such matters might be best decided on a course or individual student basis, and would be a matter of judgement and negotiation.

9. A competencies approach to the review and development of the provision of initial teacher education

A common and agreed set of competencies with which all the stakeholders in initial teacher education are familiar would provide a useful framework for general discourse about initial teacher education—current provision and how it might be delivered in the future nationally or on a more local level. The discussion in the previous sections indicates how this might occur. However, the limitations of any particular set must be kept in mind. And however good a particular set might be, there can always be alternative sets which reflect different perspectives on the teaching profession and its work, and which have different implications for professional education. There will also be other non-competency approaches to professional education. Therefore the principles of encouraging diversity and innovation in initial teacher education must be maintained.

Table 3: Applications of competencies to initial teacher education—summary table

Use made of competencies	Features	Benefits	Limitations
1. A set of competencies as a checklist for course content and student assessments.	Likely to involve attributes as well as competencies. Consistent with behaviourist and traditional academic approaches as well as integrated competency approach. Should not be used on its own for determining the content of courses. A flawed set of competencies may still be useful as a checklist.	May be helpful in ensuring important content is included and assessed, especially in more traditional academic programs. Can assist with course co-ordination.	May result in disjointed and distorted programs if given too prominent a role in course development; may give a misleading impression of competence if used as a checklist for assessment.

Table 3 (cont.): Applications of competencies to initial teacher education—summary table

Use made of competencies	Features	Benefits	Limitations
2. A set of competency standards as criteria for graduation and the framework for the overall purpose of the course.	A high quality set of competency standards, with well defined levels appropriate to the point of graduation from a course, can provide both the criteria for individual achievement of graduation eligibility, and the framework for the general purpose of the course.	A clear, comprehensive and valid indication of the eligibility of a student for graduation, and thus of readiness to teach, which is understood by other stakeholders and conveys essential (if not total) information for selection and deployment, and the beginning teacher's reflective practice.	The use of a flawed set of standards for such a powerful task can be distorting of courses and misleading regarding the competencies of (potential) graduates—to the detriment of all stakeholders.
3. A competencies approach as a guide to assessment procedures.	Assessment of competence in the 'practice domain', using the informed judgement of skilled assessors.	Usually the most valid form of assessment for both formative and summative purposes in professional education.	Assessors require training, resources, and time for 'moderation meetings' to ensure consistency of assessment, etc.
4. A competencies approach as a comprehensive guide to course structure and coherence.	A powerful framework for organising courses so that the development of attributes leads to their integration and application as competency. Provides a framework for other features of courses (see below).	Has the potential of significantly improving initial teacher education and the involvement in and commitment to the enterprise of practicing teachers. Provides a framework for public discourse about initial teacher education.	Requires a high level of co-ordination, and thus a high level of understanding of and agreement with the basic approach. Problems may result from changed status and authority structures in more traditional faculties.

Table 3 (cont.): Applications of competencies to initial teacher education—summary table

Use made of competencies	Features	Benefits	Limitations
5. A competencies approach as a guide to the role and nature of the practicum.	Places the practicum as the central focus and the culmination of the course.	The course as a whole is more effective in developing effective teachers.	Practical difficulties such as the above and ensuring adequate resourcing—it cannot be done on the cheap, especially in the developmental stages.
6. A competencies approach to facilitate collaboration among university staff, practicing teachers, student teachers, and others.	An agreed, common set of competencies, based on understood assumptions provides a framework and set of criteria for collaboration on many aspects of initial teacher education.	Improvements in the quality of teaching would be assisted by greater involvement by practicing teachers in the education of the profession and in research related to the work of the profession.	Time, commitment and resources are necessary. An inadequate or inappropriate set of competencies may result in frustration, disillusionment and a waste of time and energy.
7. A competencies approach as a guide to pedagogy .	Different ways of teaching and learning (such as group work, various forms of presentation, field research) are systematically planned and their outcomes assessed in terms of development of relevant attributes and competencies.	Outcomes in addition to development of propositional knowledge and traditional academic skills can be effectively and efficiently ensured. (However, the appropriate place of traditional academic approaches to learning complex knowledge must be recognised.)	Staff may need professional development and other forms of support to ensure effective pedagogy of all appropriate types.

Table 3 (cont.): Applications of competencies to initial teacher education—summary table

Use made of competencies	Features	Benefits	Limitations
8. A competencies approach to assist student self-management of learning .	Students have a framework for assessing their own strengths and weaknesses, their progress, and the most effective ways of achieving their learning goals.	Assists students to take responsibility for their own learning (both during the course and after graduation)—thus promoting better learning and relieving staff of some of their responsibility.	May be overwhelming or confusing to students if over-emphasised too early in a course.
9. A competencies approach as a guide to wider discourse about and development of initial teacher education provision .	Provides a framework for debate and collaboration.	Assists all stakeholders to be constructively involved and assists the development of clearer policy.	Should not be allowed to constrain diversity and innovation. Alternatives to particular sets of competencies and to a competencies approach should be recognised.

Issues for the review of the *Framework*

The application of this *Framework*, or of any competencies approach, may not be the only way to facilitate the course coherence and focus; the effective and efficient collaboration between the parties; the clarification and elevation of the role of the practicum; the assistance with development of reflective practitioners; the effectiveness and appropriateness of assessment, and so on, noted above. However, the *Framework* is a tool which is out in the public arena on a national basis, with an increasing level of understanding and acceptance among the teaching profession, school authorities, and university-based teacher educators. For some time, at least, application generally needs to be tentative and open for review.

Most of the analysis in this paper is consistent with a range of possible sets of competencies, and we make some suggestions for the development of the *Framework* below.

We recognise that at this time there is pressure on universities in some states to work with local sets of competencies endorsed by employing authorities.

However, one of the most important issues on the agenda for initial teacher education in Australia is to develop deeper collaboration between university-based teacher educators and the profession of practicing teachers. A set of competencies can play a powerful role in facilitating such collaboration. This indicates the importance of working towards the implementation of one agreed, national set of competencies, with any local variations being justified on the grounds of genuine local differences. Universities will need to take these matters into account when deciding which (if any) sets of competencies they will make use of. It might be quite possible to use local sets as a 'checklist' for course content and assessment, while using a national set for overall course development and other matters. This may meet the requirements of local employers, while maintaining the integrity of the course and meeting broader needs.

A number of issues relevant to the review and further development of the *Framework* have been raised in this document. As teacher educators and the teaching profession implement competencies approaches, further issues will be raised, and specific recommendations may be formulated. Any set of competencies should be open for periodic review and amendment through a process which is carried out by the profession concerned (with others as appropriate) and is known by and assessable to all stakeholders. At the time of preparing this paper, such a process has not been set up. However, when a process is established it is likely to be accessible through the Australian Teaching Council.

The refinement of the *Framework* can benefit from the contribution of those involved in initial teacher education. Courses in initial teacher education are developed with a great deal of considered contributions by teacher educators and may have considerable input from practicing teachers, students, recent graduates, and academics in other fields. They are often reviewed and updated or otherwise modified in response to feedback from the field and new developments. Sets of competencies are developed by particular people at particular times—while care might be taken to ensure diverse, informed involvement and the careful integration of input, they remain social constructs and are not absolute. Thus a consideration of the relationships between a set of competencies and various teacher education programs may indicate gaps, biases or inappropriate structure, levels or packaging in the set of competencies. The contributions of those involved in initial teacher education could lead to significant improvement in the set of competencies and make them more useful for a range of other tasks.

Some issues which may need consideration in any review of the *Framework* include:

- the representation of elements in the *Framework* consistently as competencies (as defined in this report), not as attributes consisting only of propositional knowledge;

- the matter of 'levels':
  - if they should be developed,
  - what they should specify (standards during courses, at graduation, at various stages of beginning teaching, for more experienced teachers) and if they should link with the Australian Standards Framework or some other standard,
  - whether the substantive content of elements needs to be amended to better reflect standards appropriate at different stages of teachers' careers (note that the NSW set uses the notion of 'developing' where full competency would not be expected of a graduate or beginning teacher),
  - when and how specification of any levels should be used (for example, with more rigorous specification for summative purposes);

- the specification of 'range indicators', especially in association with 'levels' and in the context of appropriate deployment and induction practices by employing authorities;

- the substantive content of the competencies, especially as they reflect particular views of the teaching profession and its work, including (but not only):
  - the inadequate coverage of
  - the application of understandings of educational contexts and institutions,
  - the collective and strategic aspects of teaching,
  - the work of teachers not directly involving teaching (such as contributions to the profession through research and involvement in teacher education);

- the ordering of units (areas) and elements which imply a priority or a centrality to practice of certain competencies or attributes (for example, some have been concerned that 'knows content' comes before knowing students).

Some other sets of competencies for beginning school teachers and related occupations are included in Preston and Kennedy (1994). In general, these sets

are not fully consistent with the conceptualisation of competencies used here—rather, being more or less extensive checklists of attributes as well as competencies. Comparisons between the *Framework* and these other sets may assist the effective application of the *Framework* as well as its review.

Acknowledgment

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