

LEVEL 7 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Student name:		Student ID number:	
Programme:	MSc Programme		
Module:	Research Methods and Professional Development		
Module code:	ACFA 7004 20 CREDITS	Contribution to Overall Module Assessment (%):	100%
Lecturer:	Jaymie Phillips	Internal Verifier:	JR
Assignment Title:	Research Proposal & presentation	Word count (or equivalent):	12 min presentation plus A4 summary sheet (30%) 4,000 word Research Proposal (70%)
Submission deadline:	7th December 2021 VIVA 14 January 2022 Proposal	Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:	
Submission method:	All written assessments, where practical and possible, must be submitted via Turnitin unless otherwise instructed by the Lecturer. (Please DO NOT put this assessment specification into Turnitin or it will match many similarities with other students' submissions.) Alternative submission method (if applicable): Late submission of the assessment will result in a late penalty mark. Penalties for late submission: Up to one week late, maximum mark of 50%. Over one week late, 0%. Only the Extenuating Circumstances Panel may approve a change to submission dates.		
Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Module Learning Outcomes (from module syllabus)

On successful completion of this module students will be able to: -

1. Generate a project proposal that meets a given domain research requirements;
2. Identify and visualise a complex research problem within a specific research domain, outline the investigative approach and comprehensively consider appropriate methods and solutions;

3. Critically appraise the research process and its outcomes.

TASK DESCRIPTION

Assessment Component 1 – 70%

Write a postgraduate research proposal on the topic of your choice.

The research proposal is to be of approximately 4,000 word (plus appendices).

Report Submission Date: 14th January 2022

The area of study covered in the research proposal can be used as the basis for your later MSc dissertation. This will need to be discussed with the tutor prior to submission.

For some students use of the proposal generated at this stage will not be appropriate. If this is the case, an alternative proposal will need to be written and agreed with the dissertation supervisor prior to commencement of the dissertation stage.

Assessment Component 2 –30%

A PowerPoint (or equivalent) presentation of your research proposal which presents an outline of the proposal and the reasons why the topic is Master's worthy. The PowerPoint is presented to the group prior to submission of written work. The work is peer-reviewed and assessed by staff (12 mins presentation time per student, plus up to 5 minutes for questions from the assessors).

Please note that students will need to respond to comments and observations raised during their presentations in their written proposals.

GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS IN THE COMPLETION OF TASKS

NOTE: The guidance offered below is linked to the five generic assessment criteria overleaf.

1. Engagement with Literature Skills

Your work must be informed and supported by scholarly material that is *relevant* to and *focused* on the task(s) set; you should make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources, as appropriate (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline). You should provide evidence that you have accessed a wide *range* of sources, which may be academic, governmental and industrial; these sources may include academic journal articles, textbooks, current news articles, organisational documents, and websites. You should consider the *credibility* of your sources; academic journals are normally highly credible sources while websites require careful consideration/selection and should be used sparingly. Any sources you use should be current and up-to-date, mostly published within the last five years or so, though seminal/important works in the field may be older. You must provide *evidence* of your research/own reading throughout your work, using correctly a suitable referencing system, including in-text citations in the main body of your work and a reference list at the end of your work.

2. Knowledge and Understanding Skills

At level 7, you should be able to demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of your academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, with a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to your own research or advanced scholarship. Your work must demonstrate your growing mastery of these concepts, principles, current challenges, innovation and insights associated with the subject area. *Knowledge* relates to the facts, information and skills you have acquired through your learning. You demonstrate your *understanding* by interpreting the meaning of the facts and information (knowledge). This means that you need to select and include in your work the contemporary concepts, techniques, models, theories, etc. appropriate to the task(s) set. You should be able to explain the theories, concepts, etc. meaningfully to show your understanding. Your mark/grade will also depend upon the *extent* to which you demonstrate your knowledge and understanding; ideally each should be complete and detailed, with comprehensive coverage.

3. Cognitive and Intellectual Skills

You should be able to: evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses; deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively to make sound judgements in the absence of complete data. Your work must contain evidence of logical, analytical thinking, evaluation and synthesis. For example, to examine and break information down into parts, make inferences, compile, compare and contrast information. This means not just describing what! But also justifying: Why? How? When? Who? Where? At what cost? At all times, you must provide justification for your arguments and judgements. Evidence that you have reflected upon the ideas of experts within the subject area is crucial to you providing a reasoned and informed debate within your work. Your choice of methodologies to gather data and information must be rigorously defended. Furthermore, you should provide evidence that you are able to make sound judgements and convincing arguments using data and concepts. Sound, valid, persuasive conclusions are necessary and must be derived from the content of your work. Where relevant, alternative solutions and recommendations may be proposed.

4. Practical Skills

At level 7, you should be able to demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline. This includes acting autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level, originality in tackling and solving problems, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts or situations.

You should be able to demonstrate mastery of the leading edge subject-related concepts and ideas as they relate to real world situations and/or particular contexts. How do they work in practice? You will deploy models, methods, techniques, and/or theories, in those contexts or circumstances, to assess current situations, perhaps to formulate plans or plausible, justifiable recommendations to solve problems, or to propose new models, or to create artefacts, which may be innovative and creative, thereby demonstrating your understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research and/or application. This is likely to involve, for instance, the use of real world artefacts, examples and cases, the application of a model within an organisation and/or benchmarking one theory or organisation against others.

5. Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice

Your work must provide evidence of the qualities and transferable skills necessary for postgraduate-level employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments. This includes demonstrating: the independent learning ability for continuing professional development to advance existing skills and acquire new competences of a professional nature that will enable you to assume significant responsibility within organisations; that you can initiate and complete tasks, projects and procedures, whether individually and/or collaboratively, to a professional level; that you can use appropriate media to effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms for a variety of audiences; fluency of expression; clarity and effectiveness in presentation and organisation. Work should be coherent and well-structured in presentation and organisation.

How to write a research proposal

1.1 Introduction

Research skills are a vital prerequisite of postgraduate studies. In the first instance a successful dissertation is founded on a clear understanding of the research process and its application. Secondly, the skills developed help in the vocational world in relation to independent and critical thinking within the construction industries. Hence, this research methods module will form the basis from which your understanding of the research process is based.

1.2 What are Research Proposals?

Research proposals serve a number of purposes. Among them:

- They convince others that your research is worth undertaking.
- They enable you to demonstrate expertise and competency in your particular area of study.
- They may serve as a contract between the researcher and her funders.
- They serve as a planning tool for the researcher. (Higson-Smith, 2005)
- They serve as a form of assessment for research courses.

1.3 How to Write a Research Proposal?

Most students and new researchers do not fully understand what a research proposal means, nor do they understand its importance. To put it bluntly, one's research is only as good as one's proposal. An ill-conceived proposal dooms the dissertation.

A research proposal is intended to convince others that you have a worthwhile research project and that you have the competence and the work-plan to complete it. Generally, a research proposal should contain all the key elements involved in the research process and include sufficient information for the readers to evaluate the proposed study.

Regardless of your research area and the chosen methodology, all research proposals must address the following questions:

1. What you plan to accomplish?
2. Why you want to do it?
3. How you are going to do it?

The proposal should have sufficient information to convince your marker that you have an important research idea, that you have a good grasp of the relevant literature and the major issues, and that your methodology is sound.

The quality of your research proposal depends both on the quality of your proposed dissertation and the quality of your proposal writing. A good research project may run the risk of rejection simply because the proposal is poorly written. Therefore, your writing needs to be coherent, clear and compelling.

1.4 Structure

1.4.1 Title:

The title should be concise and descriptive. For example, the phrase, "An investigation of . . ." could be omitted. Often titles are stated in terms of a functional relationship, because such titles clearly indicate the independent and dependent variables. However, if possible, think of an informative but catchy title. An effective title not only pricks the reader's interest, but also predisposes him/her favourably towards the proposal.

1.4.2 Introduction:

The main purpose of the introduction is to provide the necessary background or context for your research problem. How to frame the research problem is perhaps the biggest problem in proposal writing.

If the research problem is framed in the context of a general, rambling literature review, then the research question may appear trivial and uninteresting. However, if the same question is placed in the context of a very focused and current research area, its significance will become evident.

Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules on how to frame your research question just as there is no prescription on how to write an interesting and informative opening paragraph. A lot depends on your creativity, your ability to think clearly and the depth of your understanding of problem areas.

Some considerations:

1. Try to place your research question in the context of either a vogue area, or an older area that remains viable.
2. Brief but appropriate historical backdrop.
3. The contemporary context in which your proposed research question occupies the central stage.
4. Identify "key players" and refer to the most relevant and representative publications.

In short, try to paint your research question in broad brushes and at the same time bring out its significance. The introduction typically begins with a general statement of the problem area, with a focus on a specific research problem, to be followed by the rationale or justification for the proposed study. The introduction generally covers the following elements:

1. State the research problem, which is often referred to as the purpose of the study.
2. Provide the context and set the stage for your research question in such a way as to show its necessity and importance.
3. Present the rationale of your proposed study and clearly indicate why it is worth doing.
Has the study been done before?
Will the study benefit patients advance understanding or influence policy?
4. Briefly describe the major issues and sub-problems to be addressed by your research.
5. Identify the key independent and dependent variables of your experiment. Alternatively, specify the phenomenon you want to study.
6. State your hypothesis, theory, (Please do not confuse the hypothesis with the statistical null hypothesis.)
7. Set the boundaries of your proposed research in order to provide a clear focus.
8. Provide definitions of key concepts. (Wong, 2005) (Calgary University, 2004)

1.4.3 Literature Review:

The literature review serves several important functions:

1. Gives credits to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
2. Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
3. Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question and their relative significance.
4. Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information.
5. Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesise the existing literature.
6. Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.
7. Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a contribution to the literature.

Most students' literature reviews suffer from the following problems:

- Lacking organization and structure
- Lacking focus, unity and coherence
- Being repetitive and verbose
- Failing to cite influential papers
- Failing to keep up with recent developments
- Failing to critically evaluate cited papers
- Citing irrelevant or trivial references
- Depending too much on secondary sources
- Writing an essay

Your scholarship and research competence will be questioned if any of the above applies to your proposal. There are different ways to organise your literature review. Make use of subheadings to bring order and coherence to your review. For example, having established the importance of your research area and its current state of development, you may devote several subsections on related issues as: theoretical models, measuring instruments, etc.

1.4.4 Methods:

The Method section is very important because it tells your lecturer how you plan to tackle your research problem. It will provide your work plan and describe the activities necessary for the completion of your project. The guiding principle for writing the Method section is that it should contain sufficient information for the reader to determine whether methodology is sound. Some even argue that a good proposal should contain sufficient details for another qualified researcher to implement the study.

You need to demonstrate your knowledge of alternative methods and make the case that your approach is the most appropriate and most valid way to address your research question (methodological review).

1.4.5 Results:

Obviously you do not have results at the proposal stage. However, you need to have some idea about what kind of data you will be collecting, and what statistical procedures will be used in order to answer your research question or test your hypothesis.

1.4.6 Evaluation:

It is important to convince your reader of the potential impact of your proposed research. You need to communicate a sense of enthusiasm and confidence without exaggerating the merits of your proposal. That is why you also need to mention the limitations and weaknesses of the proposed research, which may be justified by time and financial constraints as well as by the early developmental stage of your research area (Wong, 2005).

1.5 Some considerations you should address

Overall Quality of the Study

1. Good research question
2. Appropriate research design
3. Rigorous and feasible methods

Quality of the Proposal

1. Informative title
2. Clear research questions
3. Scholarly background and rationale
4. Relevant previous work
5. Appropriate population and sample
6. Appropriate measurement and methods
7. Sound analysis plan
8. Ethical issues well addressed
9. Realistic timetable

Quality of the Presentation

1. Clear, concise, well-organized
2. Helpful table of contents and subheadings
3. Good schematic diagrams and tables
4. Appropriate grammar and use of language
5. Limited typographical errors

STUDENT FEEDBACK FORM

This section details the *extent* to which the assessment criteria are demonstrated by you, which in turn determines your mark. The marks available for each category of skill are shown. Lecturers will use the space provided to comment on the achievement of the task(s), including those areas in which you have performed well and areas that would benefit from development/improvement.

Generic Assessment Criteria	Marks available	Marks awarded
1. Engagement with Literature Skills	20	
2. Knowledge and Understanding Skills	20	
3. Cognitive and Intellectual Skills	30	
4. Practical Application Skills	10	
5. Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice	20	

Assessment Mark (Assessment marks are subject to ratification at the Exam Board. These comments and marks are to give feedback on module work and are for guidance only until they are confirmed.)	Late Submission Penalties (tick if appropriate)		%
	Up to 1 week late (50% Max)		
	Over 1 week late (0%)		

GENERIC ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Level 7

In accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, at the end of Level 7 students should be able to demonstrate: a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship; originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline; conceptual understanding that enables the student to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences. They will demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level to continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level. They the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations/professional environments; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Level 7	FAIL	FAIL	MARGINAL FAIL	SATISFACTORY (Pass)	GOOD to VERY GOOD (Merit)	EXCELLENT (Distinction)	EXCEPTIONAL (Distinction)
Category	0-29%	30-44%	45-49%	50-59%	60-69%	70-84%	85-100%
Engagement with literature (including current research, referencing, academic conventions and academic honesty)	Little or no evidence of reading and/or reliance on inappropriate sources. Views and findings mostly unsupported and non-authoritative. Referencing conventions used incoherently or largely absent.	Poor engagement with essential reading. No evidence of wider reading. Reliance on inappropriate sources, and/or indiscriminate use of sources. Heavily reliant on information gained through class contact. Inconsistent and weak use of referencing.	Engagement with a very limited range of relevant and credible sources. Some omissions and minor errors. Referencing conventions evident though not always applied accurately or consistently.	Engagement with an appropriate range of research-informed literature, including sources retrieved independently. Some over-reliance on texts. Referencing may show minor inaccuracies or inconsistencies.	Engagement with a wide range of research-informed literature, including sources retrieved independently. Selection of relevant and credible sources. Very good use of referencing, with no/very few inaccuracies or inconsistencies.	Engagement with an extensive range of relevant and credible literature, informed by the latest research. Consistently accurate application of referencing.	Exceptional engagement with an extensive range of relevant and credible literature, informed by the latest research. High-level referencing skills consistently and professionally applied.

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Knowledge and understanding (A systematic, conceptual understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of the discipline; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research)	Major gaps in knowledge and understanding of the subject matter is not systematic. Substantial inaccuracies. No awareness of current problems, insights or the latest research and/or advanced scholarship within the discipline.	Gaps in knowledge, with only superficial systematic understanding. Some significant inaccuracies and/or irrelevant material. No critical awareness of current problems, insights, or latest research within the discipline.	Limited knowledge and systematic understanding of the concepts and principles within the subject area, which to some marginal extent, is informed by current research and scholarship. Some critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, but often under-developed.	Knowledge is accurate and reasonably detailed. A systematic understanding of the field of study informed by, to some extent, current research and scholarship. A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights though this may be under-developed occasionally.	Knowledge has a well-defined focus, which is reasonably extensive, coherent and detailed, with a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. Exhibits good understanding of the breadth and depth of contemporary and established views, and the work is, at least in part, well-informed by current research and scholarship.	Excellent mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge. A systematic, excellent understanding of the concepts of the subject informed by current research and scholarship. Highly critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. A critical, awareness of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research.	Exceptional mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge. An exceptionally critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights. An outstanding understanding of the concepts of the subject, well-informed by current research and scholarship. A critical, sophisticated and nuanced awareness of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research.
Cognitive and intellectual skills (Critical evaluation of current research and methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new	Wholly or almost wholly descriptive work. Little or no evaluation or critique or attempt at a systematic approach. Failure to develop arguments,	Largely descriptive work, with superficial use of critical evaluation of research and methodologies. Absent or weak development of hypotheses and judgements. Information	Limited attempt at critical evaluation/ critique of current research and methodologies, tending towards description. Limited attempt to propose new hypotheses. Can	Some critical evaluation/ critique of current research and methodologies, though slightly underdeveloped in places, Proposes adequate but limited new	Sound critical evaluation/ critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes new hypotheses, where appropriate. Can deal with complex issues	Excellent critical evaluation/ critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes innovative hypotheses, where appropriate. Can synthesise	Exceptional critical evaluation/ critique of current research and methodologies, Proposes innovative hypotheses, where appropriate.

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hypotheses; make sound judgements in the absence of complete data.)	leading to illogical or invalid judgements. Unsubstantiated generalisations, made without use of credible evidence.	accepted uncritically, uses generalised statements made with scant evidence and unsubstantiated opinions. Ideas sometimes illogical and contradictory.	deal with complex issues but not systematically or creatively. Some evidence to support emerging judgements but these may be underdeveloped or with a little inconsistency / mis-interpretation. May assert rather than argue a case.	hypotheses, where relevant. Can deal with complex issues but not fully systematically or creatively. Ability to make judgements based on data (that may be incomplete) but with some tendency to assert/state opinion rather than argue on the basis of reason and evidence.	systematically and with some creativity. Ability to make sound judgements based on data (that may be incomplete)	complex issues systematically and creatively. Ability to investigate contradictory or incomplete information and make strong, persuasive, arguments and sophisticated judgements.	Exemplary systematic and creative synthesis of complex issues. Ability to investigate contradictory or incomplete information and make strong, persuasive, arguments and sophisticated, nuanced, judgements. Potential for journal publication or doctoral research.
Practical skills (Originality / creativity in the application of knowledge, tools and techniques and in tackling and solving problems in complex and unpredictable professional situations; practical use of established techniques of research and enquiry to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.)	Limited or no use of methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. Little or no appreciation of the context of the application. Limited understanding of the application of theory to practice or making appropriate links between the two. Very weak problem-solving	Rudimentary application of methods, materials, tools and/or techniques but without consideration and competence. Flawed appreciation of the context of the application. Weak understanding of the application of theory to practice, with	An awareness and mostly appropriate application of well-established methods, materials, tools and/or techniques, with occasional errors. Basic appreciation of the context of the application. Theoretical knowledge and understanding applied in	An appropriate application of standard methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. Clear appreciation of the context of the application. Mainly consistent, accurate and logical application of theory to practice, making	A very good application of a range of methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. Very good consideration of the context of the application, with perceptive insights. Can identify problems and propose appropriate solutions in complex and	An advanced application of knowledge, methods, materials, tools and/or techniques. The context of the application is well considered, and insightful. Can identify complex problems and propose excellent solutions. An excellent grasp of techniques	Exceptional application skills in complex, unpredictable, contexts, drawing skilfully on the latest research within the discipline. Can identify complex problems and propose sophisticated, original solutions. An outstanding application of techniques

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	skills in complex and unpredictable contexts.	only occasional evidence of making appropriate links between the two. Weak problem-solving skills in complex and unpredictable contexts.	practice, but not always making logical links between the two. Can identify problems and propose basic solutions without fully appreciating the complexity of unpredictable contexts.	appropriate links between the two. Can identify problems and propose mostly appropriate solutions in complex and unpredictable contexts, with elements of originality.	unpredictable contexts. Evidence of originality and creativity.	applicable to own research or advanced scholarship. Shows originality in application of knowledge and techniques, and of how established techniques of enquiry create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.	applicable to own research or advanced scholarship. Shows originality in application of knowledge and techniques, and of how established techniques of enquiry create and interpret knowledge in the discipline with assimilation and development of cutting edge processes and techniques.
Transferable skills for life and professional practice (Exercise of self-direction, autonomy and personal responsibility; plan and implement tasks at a professional level; independent learning; use appropriate media to communicate effectively and professionally to a variety of audiences; fluency of	Communication medium is inappropriate or misapplied. Work is poorly structured, disorganised and/or confusingly expressed. Very weak use of language and/or very inappropriate style. Little or no evidence of autonomy (or collaboration, where relevant) in the completion	Communication medium is poorly designed and/or not suitable for the audience. Work is poorly presented in a disjointed manner. It is loosely, and at times incoherently, structured, with information and ideas often poorly expressed. Weak use of language and/or inappropriate	Can communicate in a suitable medium but with some room for improvement. Mostly ordered presentation and structure in which relevant ideas / concepts are reasonably expressed. Work may lack coherence in places. Can work as part of a team, but with limited	Can communicate effectively in a suitable format, but may have minor errors. Mostly coherent, organised work, in a suitable structure and is for the most part clearly expressed. Can work effectively independently and/or as part of a team, with clear contribution to group activities.	Can communicate well, confidently and consistently in a suitable format. Work is coherent, fluent, well-structured and organised. Can work very well autonomously and/or as part of a team, with a good contribution to group activities. Demonstrates comprehensive	Can communicate professionally confidently and consistently in a suitable format. Work is coherent, very fluent and is presented professionally. Can work autonomously with initiative. Where relevant can work professionally within a team, showing leadership skills	Can communicate with an exceptionally high level of professionalism. Work is remarkably coherent, very fluent and is presented professionally. Can work outstandingly well and professionally within a team, showing advanced leadership skills.

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expression; systematic approach; clarity and effectiveness in presentation and organisation.)	of tasks. Little or no evidence of the skills required in professional, postgraduate employment.	style. Weak independent initiative (or collaboration, if relevant). Limited evidence of the skills required in professional, postgraduate employment.	involvement in group activities. Demonstrates some but not all of the basic skills required in professional, postgraduate employment, with some areas of minor weakness.	Demonstrates the skills required in professional, postgraduate employment, with some areas of strength and some of minor weakness.	professional, postgraduate employment skills.	as appropriate, managing conflict and meeting obligations. Demonstrates excellent professional, postgraduate employment skills and a strong appetite for further development.	Demonstrates exemplary professional, postgraduate employment skills and a strong appetite for further development.