

## HU HONOURS: WHY?

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In 2022, honours education has firmly established itself as a programme available in higher professional education. Honours education meets an ongoing need of a proportion of students (around 5-10%) who want and can do more than the regular (bachelor) programme<sup>1</sup> has on offer. They have a need for an extra challenge to get the best out of themselves and their studies. They are more than averagely motivated to learn. It is not necessarily just students with high grades, but students who want to learn more to develop further and create an impact in professional practice and society.

Honours education at HU exists for **all** curious and ambitious students who are looking for extra challenges to discover and further develop their qualities and talents. Students are given the freedom and responsibility to take charge of their own personal and professional development.

HU Honours contributes to realising HU's ambitions as outlined in the *HU in 2026* ambition plan, with an emphasis on student success. HU Honours aims to educate students to become confident, strong professionals and autonomous individuals and active and critical (world) citizens. In Biesta's terms, honours education at HU contributes to qualification as well as personal development and socialisation.

The HU honours community felt driven to reflect on the question: what is the added value of honours education? The room for experimentation the honours programme offers enables us to lead the way in training future-proof professionals. We want to maintain and strengthen that leadership position. We live in a rapidly changing society, in which the honours community sees honours students have a crucial role to play. To take on that role, an understanding of future developments and required competences is indispensable. Two questions are relevant in the training of a future-oriented professional:

1. What is the HU honours student **facing**? What will the HU honours student face in the future? What problems, challenges, developments and trends are coming his way?
2. What does the HU honours student **represent**? What does the HU honours student have to offer the professional field and society? What is the surplus a HU honours student has at his disposal?

The following describes the findings of the literature review which forms part of the larger search for a new profile for the HU honours student. This new profile, the Y-professional (read: *why* professional), was launched on 25 November 2021 in the HU honours community<sup>2</sup>.

### 1. Global Exploration of the Future

Much has already been written and discussed about future developments in the labour market and society. We know the outlines of upcoming changes and we also know that the future is hard to predict. It is impossible to say for sure how fast all kinds of developments will take place, but it is certain that certain technologies are coming and that they will influence our work and life. For example, Dijkgraaf (2019) mentions in his DWDD University lecture that 'the technologies that exist today were experimented with in laboratories 50 years ago'. According to him, technological

breakthroughs have been accelerating since 1985. There is usually a technological breakthrough every three to four years, but the CRISPR-Cas technology materialised after only two years. This example illustrates that the acceleration is exponential and that the future will be here sooner than we think.

Rotmans (2021), professor of Transition Studies, believes that we are living in a 'change of era' and not an era of change, as this juncture is also often described. By this, Rotmans means that we are heading to a new world. 'The deep change we are in now, the change of era, only occurs once every 100/150 years.' The world is now in a systemic crisis. Multiple systems are under pressure: economic, environmental, democratic and moral. We are in an 'interim', where old systems are being broken down and new ones are being built. There is chaos, according to him, and at the same time that chaos is necessary to move forward. The chaos, the turmoil in the world reflects the turmoil in ourselves. The trick is to find peace in the turmoil and embrace the chaos. This is what makes personal transition so important according to Rotmans: the inward journey to create outward change. 'If you blame the world or the system, you place the issue at the feet of something external. If you really want to change, you look for the change within yourself' (Rotmans, 2021).

Change also takes centre stage in '*Houdbaar voor de toekomst. Strategische agenda hoger onderwijs en onderzoek*' (Sustainable for the Future; strategic higher education and research agenda) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). 'Society and the labour market are changing rapidly. The connection of higher education to this is and will remain crucial. With this, the importance of broad skills is increasing and the required subject-specific knowledge is rapidly changing' (OCW, 2019, p. 8). Three key trends are described, as well as their potential impact on higher education:

1. Demographic development (both decline and growth depending on the region), social segmentation (level of education as a new social divide) and increase in diversity (greater differences in the ethnic, linguistic and cultural background of students).
2. Digitalisation and the changing labour market: many jobs and tasks will disappear and new jobs and tasks will emerge in the coming years, accompanied by more dynamics and uncertainty. The rapidly changing tasks place high demands on people's ability to adapt and learn. Digitalisation and robotisation of work make it increasingly important to maintain more broad skills (such as critical thinking, problem-solving thinking and acting, and collaboration), to be flexible and to have an open attitude towards learning (p. 26).
3. Internationalisation and regional cooperation. On the one hand, international cooperation has become more important for finding solutions to global societal challenges. On the other hand, 'urban regions have become an important factor for innovation and economic growth' (p. 27).

These three trends have been translated into four substantive ambitions, the first of which is 'accessible higher education and greater student success'. There, the focus on broad development stands out: 'Students are given the opportunity to get the most out of their studies and develop broadly (student success)' (p. 30). 'Students should also be given space for self-development and broad development during their studies' (p. 45). The third substantive ambition, achieving better alignment with the needs of society and the labour market, addresses the shift from routine tasks to those requiring broad skills. 'Employment growth has been strongest in occupations with high levels of problem-solving and interpersonal skills' (Fouarge, 2017, in OCW, 2019, p. 72). The OECD also

advocates a greater focus on broad skills (Damme, 2018). Allen et al. (2021) point to the growing importance of non-routine skills for highly educated people. Their research provides insight into the extent to which non-routine skills are incorporated in the current profile descriptions of higher professional education programmes.

Like Rotmans, the authors of '*Digitale intelligentie*' (Digital Intelligence; Hoornstra & Van Lieshout, 2019) argue that society is in transition: from an information society to a digitally connected society. They characterise today's society as a constantly changing environment, with a lot of uncertainty and complexity. They cite the term '*VUCA*', introduced by the US military, to characterise our world. VUCA stands for:

- volatile;
- uncertain;
- complex;
- ambiguous.

The VUCA world is shaped by developments that, in turn, shape our daily lives and work. The key developments (external drivers) they discern are: artificial intelligence, increasing life expectancy, networks and platforms, a new information ecosystem and hyperconnectivity (through video, digital animation, virtual and augmented reality; we consume information in a completely different way; the internet is long gone from being a neutral, personalised bubble – requirements set to media literacy), the data-driven world and global warming (p. 46).

Man and technology are increasingly merging. Technology is going to take over more and more tasks from people. This Fourth Industrial Revolution is not about replacing human labour and energy with machines, as in previous industrial revolutions. It involves replacing human thinking: recognising and analysing patterns and connections (Pilot, et al., 2018). Colvin (2015) sees the key question as: what are the activities we humans want done by other people, with or without the help of computers? Developments around artificial intelligence enable computers to learn faster than humans, and this has major implications. We, as humans, need to get better at our specific human capabilities that lie in the interpersonal area. According to Colvin, empathy is the key to the most important human skills.

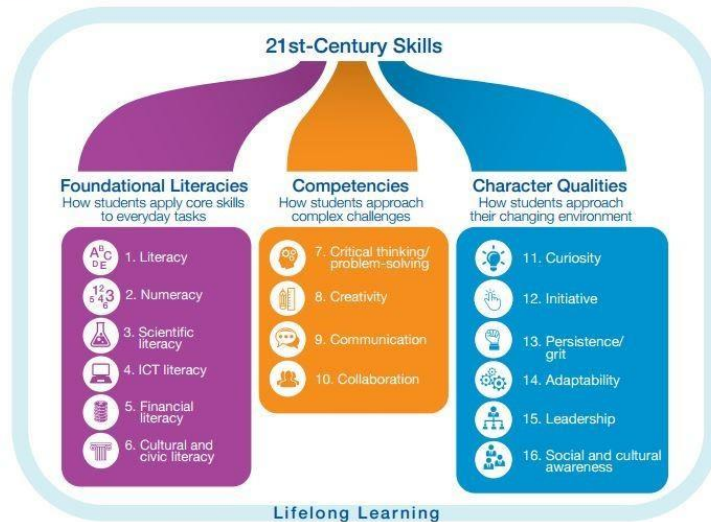
### *Summary*

The question of what awaits us in the future was the focus of the first part of this literature review. This is a major question that cannot be answered easily. The future remains uncertain and what keeps emerging is that we live in a rapidly changing world with a lot of dynamism, complexity and uncertainty. In order to relate well to this or to play a meaningful role, there will be different emphases in the competences of future professionals.

## 2. Exploring Skills for the Future

A rapidly changing society characterised by uncertainty and complexity requires professionals to possess different knowledge and skills. Much research has been performed into the competences required of future employees. At the global level, these include organisations such as UNESCO, the United Nations, OECD and the World Economic Forum.

Exhibit 1: Students require 16 skills for the 21st century



Note: ICT stands for information and communications technology.

World Economic Forum model

Companies like Google and IBM have also formulated their competence sets for employees in the future. Closer to home, there is the following publication: *'21 century skills: dé uitdaging voor iedere medewerker en iedere organisatie'* (21st century skills: the challenge for every employee and every organisation; Boon, 2018). These future-oriented competences have made their way into education under the term '21st-century skills'. NRO, Kennisnet and SLO are the organisations that have put this topic on the map in the Netherlands. Conceptual models of 21st-century skills differ in terms of emphasis and choice of knowledge, skills and attitudes required.

The best-known model for 21st-century skills in the Netherlands was developed by SLO and Kennisnet. It encompasses eleven skills that vary greatly in content, but which are mutually interrelated. This interrelationship is most visible in the four skills that are also jointly referred to as 'digital literacy'.



Another widely used model for vocational education is that of the Expertisecentrum Beroepsonderwijs (Expertise Centre for Vocational Education), which takes the eleven skills from the SLO/Kennisnet model and adds one: 'entrepreneurship' (Christoffels and Baay, 2016). They divide the skills into four clusters: digital skills, thinking skills, interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills.

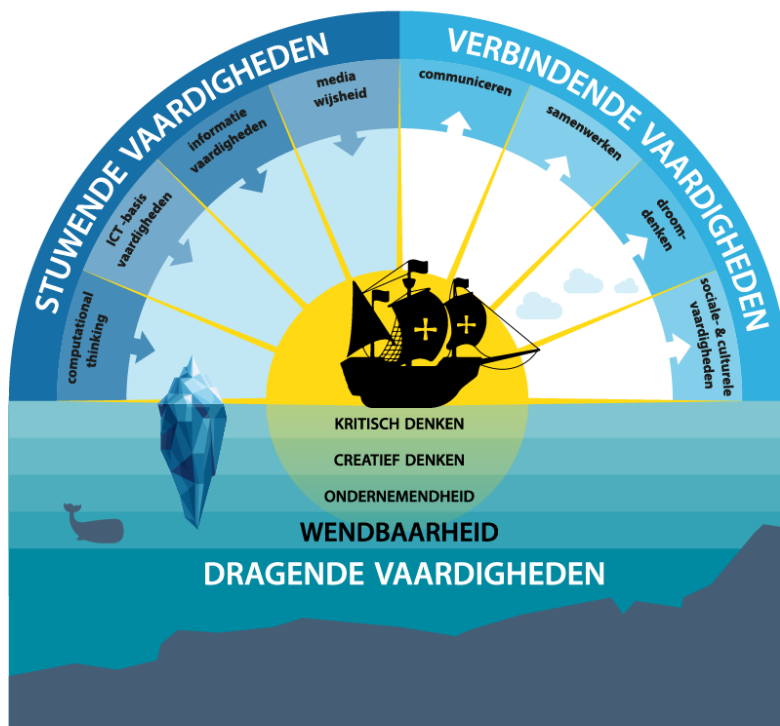
The Columbus model of 21st-century skills was introduced by Hoornstra and Lieshout (2019) in *Digitale Intelligentie* (Digital Intelligence). The authors cite the main difference of this model compared to the models previously mentioned as that it provides coherence and hierarchy. This is as, in their view, not all skills carry equal weight. The skills gain meaning through being related to characteristic developments of the 21st century. The rapidly changing society associated with complexity and uncertainty demands that we learn to deal with these unpredictable dynamics. This requires a mental attitude that cannot be separated from personal development, an attitude that involves taking a genuine interest in the world around you but also in yourself. They prefer the concept of *agility to self-regulation*, which latter term is used in the SLO and ECBO models. Agility, they say, is the most important skill and they use the following definition (p. 82):

Agility is the ability enabling people to observe and let go of existing beliefs, thinking patterns and behaviour in relation to the outside world and themselves when a changed context requires such. Agility requires **self-awareness** and alert **environmental awareness**.

Besides agility, entrepreneurship, creative thinking and critical thinking are among the 'supporting skills' they consider the most important cluster (p. 128):

Supporting skills are the most important, but they also immediately pose the biggest challenge. This is as they relate to the development of our personality<sup>3</sup>. The driving and connecting skills are more operational in nature: you have to learn to do something. Supporting skills, however, require self-reflection and call on the ability to critically consider and let go of your own beliefs. Supporting skills are about how you make sense of the world around you and what role you play in it. It's not just about what you think and do, but mostly about who you are.

The 'driving skills' correspond to the four skills of digital literacy. The 'connecting skills' are mainly the interpersonal skills you need when connecting with others. The skill of 'dream thinking' is also placed in that cluster, which skill replaces 'problem-solving' from other models.



2019 Columbus model

Translation (top to bottom, left to right):

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DRIVING SKILLS				CONNECTING SKILLS			
computational thinking	IT basic skills	information skills	media literacy	communication	collaboration	dream thinking	social and cultural skills
CRITICAL THINKING							
CREATIVE THINKING							
ENTREPRENEURSHIP							
AGILITY							
SUPPORTING SKILLS							

In the development of the primary and secondary education curriculum, as shown on curriculum.nu, 'digital literacy' and 'broad skills' have been separated. Digital literacy forms its own field of learning alongside 8 others including arithmetic & mathematics, man & nature, and man & society. In addition, broad skills are described and divided into:

- ways of thinking and acting (critical thinking, creative and problem-solving thinking and acting);
- ways of interacting with others (socio-cultural skills, cooperation, communication);
- ways of knowing yourself (self-regulation, entrepreneurial thinking and acting, orientation in respect of yourself and your career).

In honours education, attention has long been paid to these broad skills, because in addition to substantive professionalism, personal development receives ample attention there. Van Eijl and Pilot (2016) link honours students' experiences to 21st-century skills, based on the Australian KSAVE model that stands for: knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethics (Binkley et al, 2010, in Van Eijl and Pilot, 2016, p. 187). The same two authors (Van Eijl and Pilot, 2017) argue that 'each honours programme can be characterised by its own profile regarding the type of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills' (p. 1). They add a category to the skills already known from the various models: 'skills yet unknown to take care of unclear and unexpected skills that may also be needed later in this century'. At the end of the article, they give examples such as 'skills yet unknown: dealing with ethical dilemmas ("doing the right thing"), personal integrity and awareness of potential implications of own actions' (p. 13).

Jones et al. (2020) describe new key competences that students in higher education need to develop for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They put forward honours education as an experimental space for developing these future-oriented skills to then transfer to regular higher education. 'As honours programmes are the breeding ground for innovation, universities might consider testing the twenty-first-century curricula with the smaller honours cohorts eager to focus on self-improvement and willing to tackle the development of relevant competencies needed for the Fourth Industrial Revolution' (p. 3).

Like Colvin (2015), Jones et al. pay attention to what it means to be human with all the new technologies: 'These new technologies are changing us and altering what it means to be human, resulting in changes to the way we think, live, work, and interact with each other' (Kaplan, 2015; Levy & Murnane, 2012, in Jones, 2020, p. 3). They then distinguish four areas of competence: human literacy, digital fluency, hyper-learning, systems and design thinking. Interestingly, they explicitly combine the importance of deep expertise in one discipline with the four generic competence sets. Individuals with these competences 'will have, besides deep functional expertise in at least one field of study, the needed attributes to develop into super employees of the future: individuals who can see the big picture, who show real grit, are kind, and move the needle in the organisation' (p. 9). In short, professionals who dare and can make a difference!

### *Summary*

Models on competences for the future differ in emphasis and choice of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Terminology varies. Nevertheless, comparison of these models reveals a fairly consistent picture of the skills considered relevant for the 21st century by various experts. What stands out is the focus on personal development, i.e. the importance of getting to know yourself. There has been a shift in terminology: the term '21st-century skills' is disappearing. Supplanting it is 'digital literacy' as a separate learning area. The remaining skills are called 'broad' skills. The importance of collaboration is much emphasised: crossing boundaries of professions, social groups, culture or nation, as well as a solid knowledge base in one discipline to work together across disciplines from there.

### **3. New HU Honours Profile**

The two questions at the beginning of this article about the future and the skills needed have thus been broadly explored, and the question remaining is: what do the insights gained mean for a new HU honours profile if it is to be a compass for broad talent development of our students?

Before this literature review, the honours community had already started the search for a new HU honours profile. During a design session, the first outlines of a new profile for the future-proof professional emerged. We then assigned the name 'Y-professional' (read: *why* professional) to that confident, powerful and innovative frontrunner. The Y as a sequel to the T-shaped professional: a complement and an innovation<sup>4</sup>. In essence, the Y-professional is a T-shaped profile PLUS. It is based on broadening and deepening. As an additional dimension, we added the 'connection' factor to the Y-professional. Forging a connection between your deep professional knowledge and your broad skills, and a connection with yourself and your environment. Connecting with yourself involves discovering who you are, what you want, what you stand for and what gets you out of bed in the morning, and why you want to make a particular contribution; in short: your own *why* (Y) or *purpose*.

Making an impact when solving complex issues requires personal authenticity (involving the person as a whole) and an integrated approach (involving the system as a whole). Translated, this means having a 'connection' with yourself (purpose) and with your environment (integration) to which you add value (synergy) in innovative ways.

The literature review was intended to substantively load and substantiate the original idea of the Y-professional. Since the Y-professional is a continuation from the T-shaped professional, the next section is about the T-shaped professional.

### ***T-Shaped Professional***

David Guest is the first to mention the term 'T-shaped professional', in 1991. In 2010, Tim Brown used this concept for the recruitment and selection of employees, to form interdisciplinary teams with the aim of fostering creative processes. It is a simple model where the vertical bar, the trunk, represents expertise and skills in one discipline and where the horizontal bar, the branches, represent the ability to collaborate across disciplines and apply specific professional knowledge in an area of expertise other than your own. Later, all kinds of variations on this were devised incorporating (a selection of) 21st-century skills on the horizontal bar. However, the question that remains unanswered is: what actually makes someone able to collaborate interdisciplinary, i.e. what is 'the disposition of collaboration' (Brown, 2010)?

Coppoolse et al. (2013, p. 63) have created a T-shape model for excellent professionals. 'The essence of the T-shape model is that an excellent professional is someone who has an impact on their own profession and their professional actions, acting from different dimensions in doing so. At the intersection, the connection is made between the dimensions and one's own profession.' The trunk represents the profession and depth in this. The branches represent broadening by engaging multiple disciplines and cross-disciplinary skills, including engaging multiple perspectives. At the intersection of the horizontal and vertical bars are the three rings from Renzulli's model, which form the core of the excellent professional. The three rings represent the three clusters of characteristics of an excellent professional: above-average competence, above-average task dedication and above-average creativity. At the intersection, the excellent professional forms the cross-connection between his profession and diversification (p. 65).

However, the concept of excellence has become disused since the Sirius programme<sup>5</sup> ended in 2014. Students did not identify with the word 'excellence'; it reminded them of the elite. They felt more



affinity with concepts such as: relevance, freedom, responsibility, social commitment, motivation, individuality and innovation. 'Honours' gradually began to replace the term 'excellence' from then on. The T-shape model for the excellent professional with a central position for above-average skills is no longer 'suitable' in 2021. However, the focus on the intersection, the cross-connection, between deepening and broadening remains valuable.

Eckert (2017) also zooms in on the 'connecting competences at the junction between the disciplinary root and the ability to collaborate across disciplines' (p. 138). At the Department for Arts & Design in Lucerne, Eckert and colleagues were redesigning the master's degree in design: they no longer wanted to train specialists but professionals who can work together in a variety of contexts. They asked themselves the question: 'What sort of skills might be needed for the transition from disciplinary towards cross-disciplinary working modes?' They zoom in on the intersection and describe the 'missing link' as 'a repertory of connective competences'. They then propose the Y-shaped designer as the designer of the future (p. 140):

The *Y-shaped skill* model does not intend to replace the model of *T-shaped personas*. For design education, it rather works as a complementary and more detailed view on what sort of competences students need to acquire to embed their depth of skill into a collaborative and cross-disciplinary context.

The 'connection' factor that the HU honours community added to the T-shaped model shows a high degree of overlap with the 'connecting competences' highlighted by Eckert. The question of what enables the connection between deep knowledge of one discipline and a broad context and outlook is not explicitly answered by Eckert either. However, Eckert's Y-shaped model did boost the initial image of the Y-professional for HU Honours.

### ***Y-Professional***

The question of the 'disposition of collaboration', or that which enables connection at various layers, was still left unanswered. At the final session<sup>6</sup> of this search for a new HU honours profile, one honours student presented the 'missing link' as follows:

'I want to put myself to work, using my professional knowledge and broadening skills. My work is based on a purpose. I am entrepreneurial and willing to keep learning and developing for all kinds of situations. I want to seize opportunities and do something innovative. I want to take a first step because I want to achieve more. Getting the best out of myself to give the best to the world.

I feel an internal drive, a need, to want to create something from my convictions. It is something internal that wants to come out. You want something, based on yourself and on a vision. You also carry out that vision. It is putting your own **why** to work for the world.'

Here, he puts forward that which initiates the connection, the student's own *why*: the drive, the need to want something based on one's own convictions, from the internal to the external. The letter Y represents the own *why* or *purpose* located at the intersection of the vertical trunk and horizontal branches of the T-shaped profile. It is about students discovering their purpose and, from there, connecting with others and the environment where they want to create an impact. With this, we've come full-circle. This was the breakthrough to definitively launch the Y-professional as the new profile for the HU honours student.

The profile of the Y-professional provides direction and space for the broad talent development of HU honours students. It is a tool which students can use to gauge their personal and professional development. In short, a compass at the beginning of the honours journey and a tool for reflection during and after honours activities. At the final assessment, the HU honours student who wishes to obtain an honours certificate upon graduation is able to convey his personal story and shows how he has sought deepening, broadening and connection. Using the image of the Y, he explains how he discovered his own *why* and sought to connect with others and the environment to make a difference.

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<sup>1</sup> At HU, students in associate's degree and master's degree programmes can also participate in honours education.

<sup>2</sup> This white paper serves as a background article to the launch of the new profile for HU Honours, the Y professional, on 25 November 2021 in the honours community and to the new '*HU Honours: Extra talentontwikkeling voor nieuwsgierige studenten. Visie en strategie 2021-2026*' (HU Honours: Extra talent development for curious students. Vision and strategy 2021-2026) policy document.

<sup>3</sup> Biesta makes a sharp distinction between personality formation and person formation. Person formation is not about characteristics of personality, but in education it is about the more complex and difficult question of right or good person formation. Biesta suggests distinguishing between person formation in the domain of socialisation, namely formation in norms, values, traditions and practices, and person formation in the sense of subjectification: supporting young people to want to take up their place in the world as free, responsible and mature subjects. At HU Honours, we aim to strengthen personality formation in both domains.

<sup>4</sup> The HU honours committee organised a draft session on the new HU honours profile. The first contours of the professional of the future emerged there, and we named him the 'Y-professional' (read: *why* professional). The Y as a sequel to the T-shaped professional: a complement and innovation. The Y-professional was officially launched in the honours community on 25 November 2021. For more information on this search, refer to the PowerPoint accompanying the presentation and the written text. Together with this whitepaper, they form a triptych.

<sup>5</sup> The OCW Sirius programme (2009) aimed to challenge the better students in higher professional education and university education to get the best out of themselves *and* to pave the way for an educational climate in which students are allowed, willing and able to excel.

<sup>6</sup> 4 October 2021