# Key Concepts (Conceptual Engagement)

**The idea of a key, or threshold, concept is that certain ideas are held to be central to the mastery of a subject (Meyer and Land, 2003).**

**Overview**

A threshold concept, once understood, changes the way in which the student views the discipline. It may be challenging to acquire but can bring together different aspects of the subject that previously did not appear to be related.

According to [Cousin (2006)](https://doi.org/10.11120/plan.2006.00170004), using threshold concepts can help overcome ‘a stuffed curriculum’, in which there is a tendency for academics to burden themselves ‘with the task of transmitting vast amounts of knowledge bulk and their students of absorbing and reproducing this bulk’. She argues that focus on threshold concepts can enable teachers to make refined decisions about what is fundamental to a grasp of the subject they are teaching. If students can grasp and understand the key concepts it can help strengthen their sense of identity particularly with the subject discipline and on accredited professional courses ([Rodger et al, 2015](https://srhe.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2013.830832#.Xs4kq2hKiUn)).



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| **Course teams could ask:**   * What are the **key concepts** our students need to understand and internalise on the course? What are the core, important qualities, knowledge and skills the students need to develop to help with this? How do they relate to, and accommodate, the appropriate benchmark statements? * How can you encourage the students to **engage** with and **understand** these concepts? * How badly ‘**overstuffed**’ is the curriculum? What content might be removed that could make threshold concepts clearer and give time and space to teaching related to them. * How can you **use the new modified teaching weeks flexibly** post-Covid to provide the same number of contact hours? Think about the combination of large and small group teaching and how best to engage those not learning synchronously to grasp the key ideas. * How can the way you design and teach your blended, hybrid, campus-based and online courses help the students really **achieve the learning outcomes** and **understand the fundamentals**? * Which key concepts are most appropriately **developed at each level**? |



**References**

References and further reading for this section can be found in the [Key Concepts](https://rl.talis.com/3/beckett/lists/086BF37E-85D6-9E4A-D3A6-B7EA51D08C98.html?lang=en-US&login=1#33F8EF10-9C6A-8BB8-8EFE-9B8CC929F184) section of the [Course Development Principles reading list](https://beckett.rl.talis.com/lists/086BF37E-85D6-9E4A-D3A6-B7EA51D08C98.html) on Talis Aspire.