THE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES: DEVELOPING A GUIDE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

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1.1 Introduction


Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

b. Related concepts: aims, objectives, attainment targets, competences; hierarchies in learning outcomes (e.g. Bloom); constructive alignment.

c. Outcomes at BA, MA, PhD-level: knowledge and understanding, application, judgment, communication, learning skills.
1.2 Introduction

The relevance: some statements in the Bologna process:

Berlin 2003: ......describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, **learning outcomes**, competences and profile.....

Bergen 2005: ..... generic descriptors for each cycle based on **learning outcomes** and competences ......

London 2007: .... with a view to the development of more student-centred, outcome-based learning the next [stocktaking] exercise should also address .... national qualification frameworks, **learning outcomes** and credits, life long learning and the recognition of prior learning.
1.3 Introduction

A stakeholders’ comment (students):
“Learning outcomes are the building blocks of a learner-centred educational model, in which flexibility, participativity and the availability of choice rule supreme”.

+ many booklets, conferences, even awards (eg CHEA, Tuning Report, Report Nordic Countries, ECA, NVAO-conference, ENQA conference Vienna, September 2010, to mention just a few)
1.4 Introduction

A short story taken from the Preface of:


“Once upon a time a Sea Horse gathered up his seven coins and cantered out to find his fortune. Before he had travelled very far he met an Eel, who said....”
2.1 Previous work

(cf: www.enqa.eu/files/QA%20of%20Student%20Assessment%20Report.pdf)

1. ESG
   
   Standard: *students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures applied consistently*
   
   A few examples derived from the standard:
   
   ✓ designed to measure the achievement of the intended l.o.’s
   ✓ appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
   ✓ with clear and published criteria for marking;
   ✓ not relying on the judgments of single examiners.

2. DIRI-cycle
   
   ✓ Design – implement – review - improve
2.2 Previous work

Building on ESG and DIRI ‘Assessment Matters’ came up with 5 Principles:

1. Transparency
2. Consistency
3. Comparability
4. Accountability
5. Involvement of students and staff

These principles were applied to a few case studies.
3. Follow-up

Workshop The Hague, January 2011, 16 participants, 8 countries
4.1 Results

We looked at 3 Components of QA of assessment of learning outcomes:

1. Direct observation of realized learning outcomes
2. Stakeholders’ opinions/judgements of the extent to which learning outcomes are realized
3. Systems for quality assurance of the assessment of learning outcomes

The triangle!
4.3 Direct observation: tools

- Reading thesis work and exam papers
- Observing demonstration by students
- Studying portfolios
- Comparison of achieved LO with stated learning outcomes
- Initial point: outcomes must be assessed for appropriateness, consistency with national qualification framework
4.4 Direct observation: strengths & weaknesses

**Strengths**
- Direct evidence
- Easily explicable
- Human factor – interaction (not mechanistic)
- Harder to deceive ‘assessors’

**Weaknesses**
- Sampling (can’t look at all student work)
- Human factor
- Resource-intensive
- Can be manipulated to present best picture
4.5 Stakeholders: tools

**Who are the stakeholders?**

a. Professional field (employers)
b. Competent authorities
c. Alumni/graduates
d. Students

**Tools**

1. Checklist Fitness *of* purpose, with questions like....:
   - Did you consult the professional field? Competent authorities?
   - Did you do an alumni survey?
2. Checklist Fitness *for* purpose, with questions like...:
   - Did you consult students on the relation of intended learning outcomes to the program?
   - And on experiences with assessment of learning outcomes?
4.6 Stakeholders: strengths & weaknesses

*Strengths*
- Relevant (essential)
- Can help improve the program
- May promote mobility of students

*Weakness*
- Resource-intensive
4.7 QA systems: tools

- National requirements (from which teaching and examination regulations are deduced)
- Qualification frameworks (national and European)
- Description of learning outcomes/module descriptors
- Templates for drafting self-analysis documents
- Grids/guidelines for evaluation of self-analysis
- Accreditation frameworks/criteria for evaluation of assessment
- Interviews (selected versus open)
- Professionalization of examiners (e.g. via training workshops)
- Internal quality assurance units
- Register of examiners
- Independent accreditation agencies
4.8 QA systems: strengths & weaknesses

**Strengths**
Systematic approach (to a certain extent)
PDCA cycle is followed

**Weaknesses**
Time-limited
May be seen as a ‘paper exercise’ (does paper reflect reality?)
Insufficient professionalization of some peers
Complex and frequently changing regulations (example: assessment of prior learning)
5. Next steps (1): Principles & Enhancement

a. Principles
In which way do the 3 components address the 5 principles?
- Transparency?
- Consistency?
- Comparability?
- Accountability?
- Involvement of student and staff?

b. Enhancement
How does this approach contribute to enhancement of the assessment of learning outcomes?
5. Next steps (2): Where do we stand now?

Hopefully a Guide in Autumn 2011!

“Did you ever feel you’re on the verge of an incredible breakthrough?”
Thank you for your interest!

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