Learning outcomes in Europe

'Lernergebnisorientierung im deutschen Bildungssystem – Ein bildungsberechubergreifende Dialog'

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Learning outcomes – the policy dimension

Learning outcomes in European education and training policies

➢ The learning outcomes principle is – explicitly since 2004 – systematically promoted in the EU policy agenda for education, training and employment.

➢ The learning outcomes principle can be seen as the 'glue' binding together a wide range of European initiatives taken during recent years: *Europass, EQF, ECTS, ECVET and ESCO…*

➢ Learning outcomes are increasingly influencing national strategies on qualifications and lifelong learning

➢ While not new as such, the high priority and visibility given to the learning outcomes principle is new.

Expectations at policy level

➢ To increase transparency

➢ To increase relevance and quality of qualifications

➢ To strengthen dialogue education-labour market

➢ To strengthen accountability

➢ To open up to non-formal and informal learning

Expectations at the level of practitioners

➢ Sets clear targets for the learner

➢ Motivates to learning

➢ Encourages flexible learning pathways

➢ Guiding teachers and trainers

➢ Orientation to assessors

Concerns at policy level

✓ Are Learning outcomes a policy hype – a fashion soon to disappear?

✓ Are LO too much a reflection of education and training providers?

✓ Are LO defined by too narrow a group of stakeholders?

✓ Do we impose unnecessary bureaucracy?

✓ Are LO monitored and reviewed?

✓ Can LOs reduce local and institutional autonomy, imposing unhealthy top-down management?

Concerns at practitioner level

✓ Do we risk to reduce the scope and richness of learning?

✓ Do we undermine the vision of open and active learning?

✓ Do we decrease rather than increase transparency?

The use of learning outcomes in Europe

The shift to learning outcomes in Europe

Cedefop's **2009** publication on learning outcomes showed

- – Increasing use across Europe
- – A geographical difference
- – Differences within education and training

Cedefop's **2015** study on learning outcomes (forthcoming) demonstrates that the shift to learning outcomes is gaining speed (33 countries studied, all education and training sectors covered)

The shift to learning outcomes in Europe - Vocational education and training (VET)

- The learning outcomes approach is well established in European VET.

- Almost all countries are now referring to learning outcomes or competences as fundamental to VET

- The learning outcomes principle has become a more explicit and visible building block for VET
  - A way to increase transparency of VET
  - A way to broaden access to VET
  - A way to improve relevance of VET
  - A way to put the learner at the centre of the process

- Design and conceptualisation varies – occupational standards important in many countries

The shift to learning outcomes in Europe - Higher Education

- A remarkable change has taken place during the last decade. While lagging behind VET in 2006-2007, the learning outcomes principle is now rapidly gaining ground across Europe

- European cooperation on qualifications frameworks and quality assurance has contributed to the shift

- Communities of practise/projects like ' Tuning' play a role

- Some countries and institutions resist the shift

- Uneven progress at local and institutional level/some staff resistance

- Differences between disciplines and subject areas as regards take up

The shift to learning outcomes in Europe – General Education

- General upper secondary education still (as in 2006-2007) have yet to embrace learning outcomes
- In compulsory education we observe a shift referring to
  - Revisions of national and core curricula
  - Increase focus on key competences
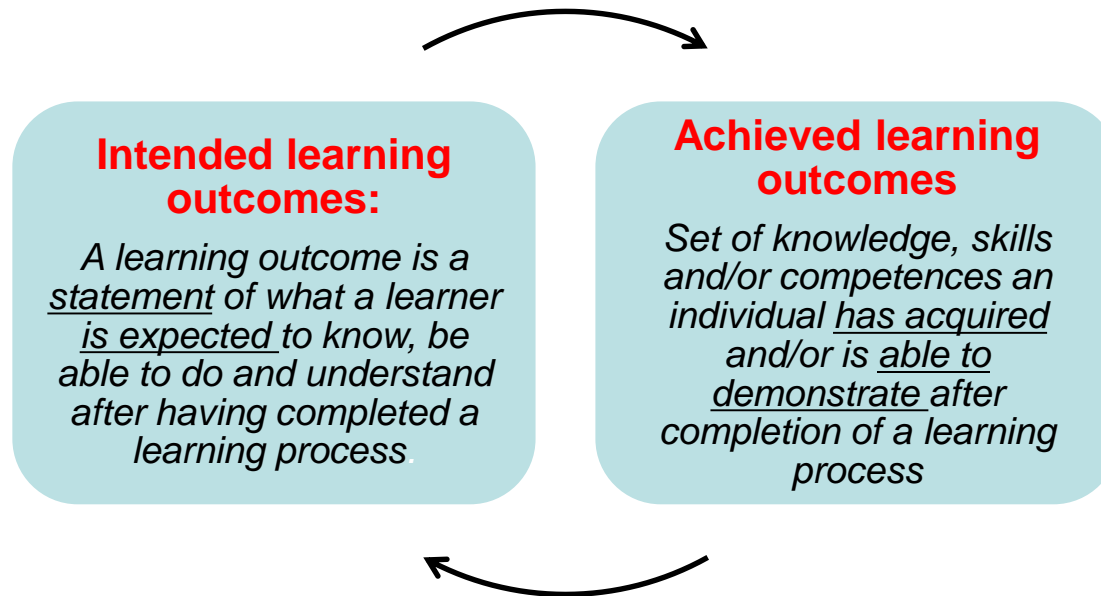 - Impact of international assessments (PISA)

ADULT Education and training

- National policies on lifelong learning play a role
- Policies on validation play a role

Conceptual and methodological challenges

The learning outcomes concept

Intended learning outcomes:

A learning outcome is a <u>statement</u> of what a learner <u>is expected</u> to know, be able to do and understand after having completed a learning process.

Achieved learning outcomes

Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual <u>has acquired</u> and/or is <u>able to demonstrate</u> after completion of a learning process

A tendency across Europe to use learning outcomes and competence as interchangeable concepts – focussing on achieved learning outcomes

Conceptual origins and inspirations

Blooms taxonomy (1956, revisions 1965 and 2001) is influential – explicitly and <u>implicitly</u> used by many European countries. Bloom is criticised as being 'cognitively' and 'behaviouristic' biased

An alternative 'constructivist' approach influenced by Dreyfus (1984) and exemplified by the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy

A tension between limited functional, task analysis and a holistic approach where learning is seen to take place in a wider social and occupational context

Creating
Evaluating
Analyzing
Applying
Understanding
Remembering
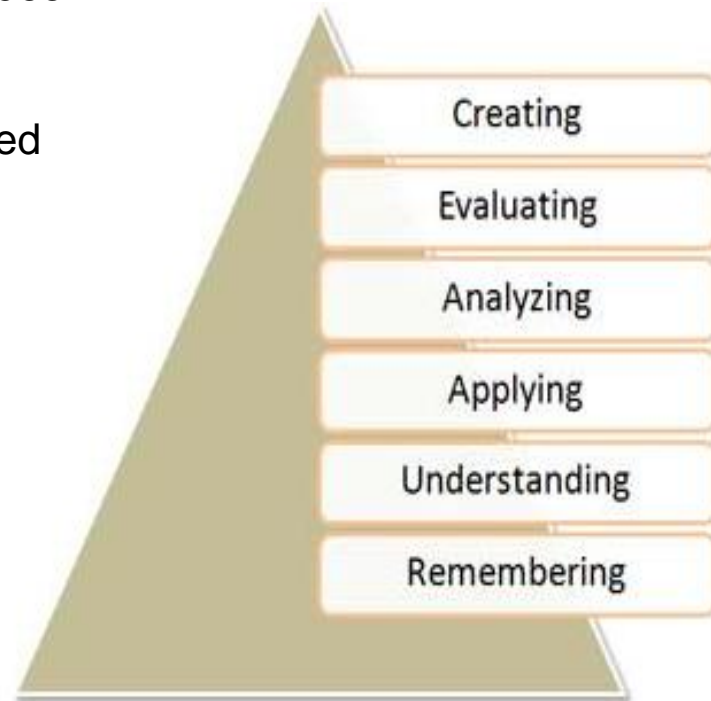
Cedefop study (2014) on the definition and writing of learning outcomes

- An analysis of learning outcomes based VET standards and Higher Education study programmes in 10 countries
- An analysis of guidelines for writing learning outcomes in VET and HE in the 10 countries
- Which are the main problems and challenges?
- How can we improve?

Cedefop study (2014) findings

- The definition of learning outcomes varies between institutions, education and training sectors and countries – not yet a common language

- The structuring of learning outcomes descriptions vary

- No common format for describing learning outcomes exists, reducing comparability

- The level of detail varies dramatically, reducing transparency and comparability

- Smaller differences between VET and HE than expected

Writing learning outcomes – the key dimensions

The horizontal dimension of LO descriptions is crucial. The way we define and describe learning domains is crucial. In many cases these dimensions are not explicit in standards and programme descriptions

- How do we understand the different domains of learning
- How do we balance between learning domains, between theory and practise, knowledge and skills…..

The vertical dimension of LO is crucial,

- How do we express the complexity of learning?
- How do we see progression in a learning domain?
- How can research support articulation of progression?

How do we support assessment – what counts as observable learning? Is there a need for separate assessment criteria?

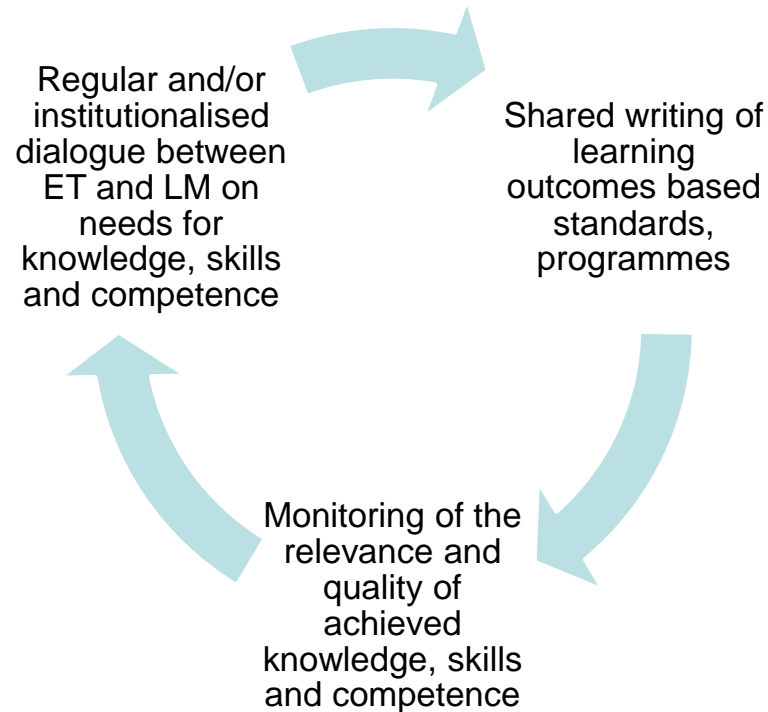# *Who writes, defines and review learning outcomes*

Can learning outcomes facilitate the dialogue education-labour market?

- If defined and described exclusively by the education and training system the relevance of learning outcomes may be seriously reduced

- If not systematically and continuously reviewed and renewed, the relevance of learning outcomes statements may be seriously affected

- If not systematically monitored, the transformation from intended learning outcomes to actual skills and competences can not be assured

The importance of a learning outcomes feed-back loop

Regular and/or institutionalised dialogue between ET and LM on needs for knowledge, skills and competence

Shared writing of learning outcomes based standards, programmes

Monitoring of the relevance and quality of achieved knowledge, skills and competence

The importance of a learning outcomes feed-back loop – the crucial role of sectoral stakeholders

- The further development of the learning outcomes principle requires the involvement of relevant stakeholders
- The learning outcomes approach can be used more actively as a tool for review and renewal of education and training
- For stakeholders it provides a reference point for
    - for teaching and training
    - for assessment of learning
    - for monitoring of the relevance of qualifications to the LM
    - for the definition, writing and rewriting of standards, curricula etc.

A handbook on the writing and application of learning outcomes - purpose and scope

There is a need

➢ to bring together experiences (through examples and guidance material) in a more systematic manner

➢ to encourage exchanges across different parts of the education and training system

➢ to encourage cross-country exchanges

➢ to make it easier for communities of practise to evolve in this area

➢ to make it clear where resources exist

➢ to identify existing networks and cooperation platforms

➢ No single solution exists – we should clarify existing options and the implications of these

The structure of a Cedefop handbook

- Will contain a conceptual clarification
- Focus on the definition and writing of learning outcomes
- Focus on the application of learning outcomes in practise
- Focus on the review and renewal of learning outcomes
- Supported by examples and guidance material

Provide a resource for stakeholders at national and European level

A common format for the presentation of learning outcomes?
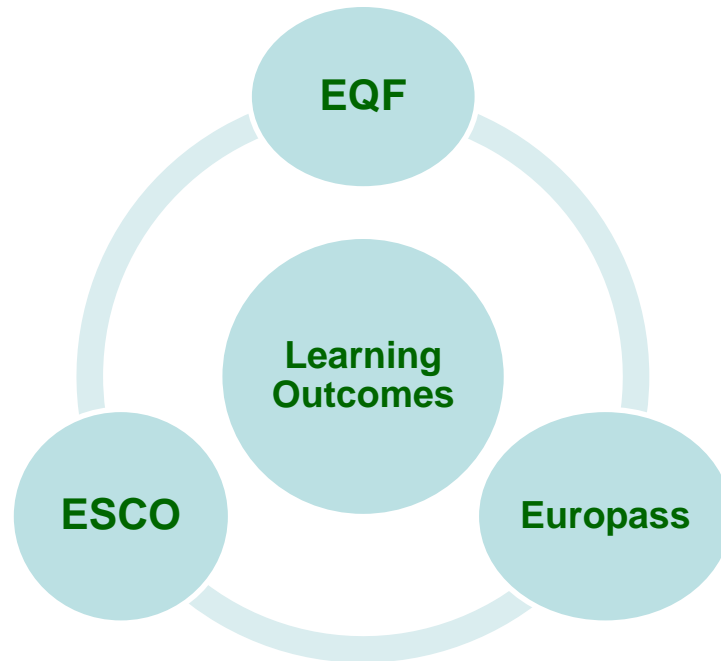
EQF AG has asked for a draft format to be discussed in the May 2015 meeting – recognising the need for and the importance of a common format not only for EQF but also for ESCO and (possibly) Europass

SCOPE of a common format

- A common format for the presentation of learning outcomes should not replace existing learning outcomes descriptions as used at national or institutional levelIt must be short (defined number of words)

- It must use a pre-defined syntax

- It must refer to agreed but flexible learning domains

- It must be supported by

- guidelines

- standardised list of action verbs

The learning outcomes description should be limited to a maximum of 4-600 characters

The learner is the reference for the description	Action verbs should signal the level of learning expected	The object of the learning should indicated,	The occupational and/or social context should be clarified	
The object and the scope of learning can be addressed through the reference to action verbs and learning domains				
Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy	Responsibility	Other

Thank you for listening!

For questions:

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