

**2nd POLICY LEARNING FORUM:****Defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications***Cedefop, Thessaloniki 13-14 October 2016***First working group session****Working Group 3****Supporting active learning? Dilemmas and opportunities****Work flow**

The working group discussed issues related to supporting active learning and aligning teaching, learning and assessment to learning outcomes. Anastasia Pouliou moderated the session, introducing the thematic focus of the workshop and explaining the session flow. The participants were presented with questions for further exploring the topic of dilemmas and opportunities in aligning teaching and assessment with learning outcomes. Two presentations from Finland and Slovenia on the use of learning outcomes in VET introduced the discussions that continued in 3 sub-groups to discuss the questions listed below. A representative of each sub-group shared the key messages discussed to all participants of WG3. Irina Jemeljanova, Cedefop, was the rapporteur of the three working groups.

The discussion focused on the following questions:

1. How can teachers use learning outcomes to shape and structure the learning process?
2. Which are the main challenges faced by teachers when working with learning outcomes?
3. To what extent can learning outcomes statements in qualifications be aligned with assessment?
4. How can assessment criteria be written so as to support an active and open learning process?

Overall, the discussion highlighted that:

- ✓ There is a **gap** between policy discussions and actual practice so it is important to **intensify policy discourse on learning outcomes but support it** by implementing provisions.
- ✓ There are success factors of aligning learning outcomes to teaching and assessment, which are common to all countries, and others, which depend on national settings.

QU1 –How can teachers use learning outcomes to shape and structure the learning process?

- ✓ The writing of learning outcomes need to be followed by **implementation**, through teaching and learning but implementation in VET **varies** widely across countries.
- ✓ Implementation of learning outcomes approach has to go **beyond the qualification** policy domain. It is important to understand at which point and how learning outcomes defined in qualifications translate into teaching and learning processes; qualifications are

- built in learning outcomes while teachers follow educational standards and programmes.
- ✓ Teachers should consider how **general** or **specific** learning outcomes should be. **Flexible delivery** to reach outcomes is needed as well as professional autonomy of teachers. An effective practice seems to be when broad standards are defined nationally while VET providers, including teachers and trainers, have autonomy in developing educational programmes and/or curricula. Modules of curricula and units in qualifications facilitate this process; still, this can vary due to national circumstances i.e. expectations may be on centrally-directed teaching approaches; but learning outcomes require freedom to move away from time-based learning for students. The learning outcomes approach allows students not to do the same things at the same time, but follow their own pace.

OU2 – Which are the main challenges faced by teachers when working with learning outcomes?

- ✓ The implementation of the learning outcomes approach, moving from traditional to more active ways call for changing the mindsets of the educational community, which is a **difficult task**.
- ✓ Are we **prescribing** learning? The challenge is to go deeper as it is a **multifaceted** aspect. National support mechanisms are missing, and a lack of resources is observed.
- ✓ Weight of tradition in systems; centrally-driven systems. It is essential to move away from central directions to more participatory and bottom-up approaches when setting learning outcomes standards to team learning /teaching; out of subject strict limits.
- ✓ Successful use of learning outcomes in teaching requires a lot of **cooperation**, team work and reflective practices. Teachers and trainers may lack competences to engage in it.
- ✓ **Organisational** settings of institutions, **financial regulations** and **quality assurance issues** of VET schools can hinder implementation of the approach.

The groups also attempted to **address these challenges** and emphasized that:

- ✓ Approaches that link theory with practice make a difference. It is essential to push the subject-oriented dominance of the curriculum content to more outcome-oriented directions.
- ✓ It is necessary to move to **learner-focused** approaches and change the learning culture in institutions.
- ✓ A high level of **collaboration** among teachers from different fields constitutes a success factor has implications for flexible learning pathways. The implementation of learning outcomes requires reiterative approaches, regular reviews and reflection on the learning outcomes defined.
- ✓ **Initial teacher training** and **continuous** professional development of teachers is an essential prerequisite for teachers to work with learning outcomes and to reflect on teaching and learning processes. First and foremost, it is important to raise teachers' awareness about learning outcomes and their use in the qualifications.
- ✓ Collecting best practices, **practical** guides-guidelines, formats and specific examples of alignment in different contexts and settings is essential.

OU3 –To what extent can learning outcomes statements in qualifications be aligned with assessment?

- ✓ While research points that alignment of learning outcomes and assessment is critical, the reality shows that it is still a challenge.
- ✓ The groups put an emphasis on aligning teaching with assessment - **shifting to outcome**

oriented practices.

- ✓ Do **all** learning outcomes have to be assessed? Partial learning outcomes based qualifications?
- ✓ **Units** facilitate flexible assessment and certification fitting the assessment to learning; split assessment criteria by KSC.
- ✓ There is a distinction between assessment standards and learning outcomes as they are considered two **different communities of practice**.
- ✓ There is a difference between assessing learning (formative) and assessing the acquired learning outcomes (summative). In both types of assessment, learning outcomes play a key role. The formative and summative nature of assessment has to be considered when aligning learning outcomes with assessment standards. Learning outcomes based assessment requires good feedback mechanisms and guidance to teachers.

OU4 – How can assessment criteria be written so as to support an active and open learning process?

- ✓ Assessment criteria should be developed in the way they can express the **minimum requirements** or concrete levels which have to be met by the learners: **not** to be very **rigid**, or **narrow** but to take into account the **diverse learning** experiences of individuals.
- ✓ Assessment criteria should be **clear** and **measurable**.
- ✓ Practices of situated and active learning can be promoted by using learning outcomes if they are connected or aligned with assessment standards. Ideally, assessment needs to be linked to or take place in real work situations where various learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) are applied to solve such situations.
- ✓ **Who** is involved in the process is something that needs to be considered carefully (not only focus on the 'How'); involvement of employers, workplace assessment.
- ✓ Teachers need to have autonomy in deciding ways to achieve the defined learning outcomes and to customize their teaching to students' ways of learning.
- ✓ **Flexible** assessment methods are needed to allow for different learning paths; including **variable times** to be assessed; when a candidate is ready, not time-limited.
- ✓ During this process, other needs are also created: for guidance professionals; assessors from the sector; recognition of prior learning is important.