Assessing Learning Outcomes in VET in Europe: Policies, Practices, and Prospects

(interim stage)

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(April 25-27, 2012)
Starting Point

The study shall deliver answers on the following questions:

○ How and up to what extent the current emphasis on learning outcome-oriented approaches have influenced assessment methodologies in initial vocational education and training in 32 countries under examination?

○ What are the implications of learning outcome-oriented approaches to the design of assessment methodologies?

○ What are the main similarities and differences between countries and examined sectors?

○ How are the current assessment methodologies applied in practice?

○ What are the implications of applied assessment methodologies to individuals and the labour market?
Evidence base

- Preliminary results of reports on assessment in 32 countries, based on desk research and interviews with stakeholders

- Preliminary results of case studies carried out for the electronics and the tourism sectors
Conceptual Framework

- A grid for the description of VET systems and stakeholders was used to get a preliminary description of the conditions under which assessment takes place.

- A reform grid was used to describe the understanding and formulation of learning outcomes linked in the assessment reforms and understanding the rationale.

- An assessment approach grid was used to identify the relationship between understanding/formulation of learning outcomes and how they impact assessment, assessment instruments, quality criteria, reference to key competences, reference to standards.

- Country reports were based on a research template with a comprehensive list of questions, referring to the above mentioned grids.
Case Studies: Criteria for the Selection of Countries

- **Relevance** of the sector in the country to be selected
- Profile of the **VET system**, geographical balance, old, new MS
- **Scope** of on-going reforms and their link to assessment
- Identified **innovative approaches** in terms of assessment methodologies
- **Problem zones and challenges**

- **Electronics**: Finland, France, England, Germany, Lithuania
- **Tourism**: Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Sweden
Case Studies: Levels of Analysis and Core Issues

System level

Qualification Frameworks
- Status of national QFs
- Impact of EQF
- Impact of transnational activities

Intermediary organisations level

Concepts of LOs and competence
- Relations between LO, qualification, knowledge, skills, competence
- Relation of these concepts to performance in practice
- Relation to VET policies

Assessment institutional level

‘Theory’ and practice of assessment
- Assessment regulations in the context of national VET policies, QFs, concepts of LOs and competence
- Roles and responsibilities of organisations regarding assessment
- Specific agendas of organisations regarding assessment
- ‘Theories’ of assessment in relation to QFs, LOs and competence
- Practical settings of assessment in relation to these ‘theories’
10 Case Studies: Operational Model

1. Starting hypotheses via collection of primary data assigned to key dimensions:
   - The concept of learning outcome to which assessment refers
   - The relationship of identified assessment approaches to the concept of learning outcomes - Reasons for using them
   - The stakeholders and their specific importance for the identified ways of assessment
   - The specific conditions for using these assessment approaches
   - The acceptance of applied/planned assessment approaches
   - The impact of assessment procedures on other elements of the “educational chain”
   - Perspectives of further development
   - Transferability of identified approaches to other environments
   - Derivable recommendations

2. Report on the results of investigations (assigned to the above described levels of analysis)

3. Derive recommendations for further procedure
Findings: Dimensions to be considered

Investigation up to now carried out turned out that a difference has to be made between three levels of developments:

1. The level of **scientific debates** which consider the best ways of assessment first and utmost *independently* from the specific conditions under which assessment can currently take place.

2. The level of **policy reforms** initiating changes in the way how assessment is carried out.

3. The level of actual assessment **practice**.

There are overlaps between these levels, and in ideal case debates on Level 1 should determine developments at Level 2, and these reforms should determine practice at Level 3. As a matter of fact, specific national conditions (resources, traditions, balance of power between stakeholders) are important for the actual practice of assessment.
Findings: Assessment methods (1)

A lot of various assessment approaches are discussed within the scientific debate, but mostly not (yet?) applied in practice:

- **Psychometric methods** to measure competence
- **Computer-based simulations**

Predominantly applied in practice:

- (standardised) knowledge tests,
- **Performance-based assessment**:
  - via observation of the fulfilment of (small) tasks on the job and demonstrations
  - via assessment of professional projects, oral presentations

An upcoming method is assessment via **portfolios**, mainly related to key competences
Findings: Assessment Methods (2)

- It cannot be claimed that the *shift* to learning outcomes has recently influenced the design of *new* assessment methods as such. If they are devoted to this approach, this has long ago already influenced the design.

- But the learning outcome approach has influenced the implementation of already used assessment methods into contexts where they are still new (as portfolios, skills demonstrations, projects).
Findings: Assessors (1)

The identified groups of assessors are:
- Teachers
- Company trainers
- Professionals
- Chamber representatives
- Representatives of social partners
- Verifiers and witnesses
- Representatives of local bodies

Having a look at the actual expertise of individuals representing these groups, it has turned out that they mainly can be assigned to two groups: Teachers and people with professional work experience in the relevant field.
Findings: Assessors (2)

It could appear that a stronger representation of the external side already delivers a guarantee for a better orientation to the needs of professional practice, but this is not necessarily the case: It is important not only to consider who assesses, but how and what she/he assesses and in which context. Thus, balance between external and internal assessment is not a quantitative, but a conceptual requirement.
Findings: The scope of assessment (1)

Relationship to quality criteria

- Most important quality criteria seem to be reliability and validity.

- The more assessment is related to a holistic concept of professional work, it has to deal with the fulfillment of tasks that include the ability to deal with unforeseeable and therefore not reproducible situations; this contradicts the principle of reliability, which is certainly better achieved by providing standardized tasks for assessment: The smaller the tasks are, the better they can be standardised and assessed, but beyond a wider professional context their authenticity is reduced, and this is against the principle of validity. Countries take/consider measures to address this.
Findings: Innovation

- Innovation can be observed with regard to the establishment of assessment cultures, combining elements of assessment (responsible assessors, assessment in authentic contexts etc.), including approaches developed beyond the national context at hand as new assessment methods; balancing teachers’ assessment and external assessment, organising assessment in progressive and more flexible ways, strengthening importance of formative assessment within broader assessment frameworks in the national context.
Thank you!