

**2<sup>nd</sup> POLICY LEARNING FORUM:****Defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications***Cedefop, Thessaloniki 13-14 October 2016***Plenary****Similarities and differences: challenges and opportunities-key findings and conclusions from working groups****Work flow**

The 3 working groups discussed issues related to learning outcomes.

National representatives shared the national experiences in defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications, as a starting point of group discussions. The participants were presented with different questions for further exploring the topics of

- Common language: dilemmas and opportunities in writing learning outcomes
- Setting standards: learning outcomes and their role in defining the content of VET qualification
- Supporting active learning: dilemmas and opportunities in aligning teaching and assessment with learning outcomes

*The first working group identified some of the critical points of the topics of discussions concerned. The working group underlined the multiple challenge in the process of writing learning outcomes. The nature of qualification is central issue when writing learning outcomes. There was a consent regarding the sequential logic of the process starting with occupational standards that gives an opportunity to involve industry and relevant sectors' stakeholders and then transforming the LeO's to learning outcomes. Local, regional and sectoral differences especially regarding mapping, planning, writing and delivering learning outcomes limit to standardize too much. Standardisation might be captured at higher abstraction level. But this also poses risks if it is too abstract then trust in mutual learning and added value of the kind of common language can be lost. Referring to these above mentioned significant challenges the working group emphasized the value of having a common language in some wise that balances between transnational and local level. It was stressed that sectoral approach to find out coverage and level of common language could support to make understand of differences and get closer the practices in certain extent. Some sectors seem to be already using common language such as insurance, banking, IT, etc. Due to the varying context and circumstances of the VET qualifications systems of European countries, flexibility and respect for national traditions have to be taken into consideration.*

*The second working group discussed the issues of standardization of learning outcomes. The emphasized that there are commonalities but interpretations are rather different when going deeper into national context. The working group touched upon questions of having learning outcomes of qualifications be more prescriptive and/or broad. Its been discussed in light of stability and dynamism of the qualifications. Pace of change in the labour market requires both aspects be kept. Stability is also important to keep the system integrity and that can be served by the broader foundations of learning outcomes while reflections to dynamic changes can be assured with the prescriptive nature of LeO's, which parts of the set of learning outcomes can be more easily adjusted to new requirements. The working groups also discussed the questions intended – achieved nature of learning outcomes in light of the context of regularity, assessment standards, curriculum, etc.*

*The third working group dealt with the dilemmas and opportunities in aligning teaching and assessment with learning outcomes. The working group members acknowledged the importance of intensified policy discourse on learning outcomes but pointed out the gap between policy discussions and actual practice at grass root level is quite huge. Implementation of LeO's approach in VET varies widely across countries. Implementation has to go beyond qualification policy domain and should entail policy levers of changing teaching and learning culture. Without a pedagogical cultural change or strong shift to outcome and assessment oriented practice the implementation of learning outcomes in teaching and learning can be haphazard. External factors that hinder implementations included organizational, quality assurance issues of VET schools and training providers, and impacts of using LeO's in daily practice on employment and financial questions have to be revisited. Practices of situated and active learning can be promoted by using learning outcomes if they are connected or aligned with assessment standards. There is tendency to move away from central directions to more participatory and bottom-up approach when setting learning outcomes standards. Differences in theory and practice have to be considered. That is imperative to push subject-oriented dominance of the curriculum content to more outcome oriented directions. Teaching and learning processes are rather subject to content requirements and reference point provided by curricula and evaluations. Any cultural change can be achieved if teachers are prepared for that so initial teacher training and continuous professional developments are the most crucial grounds where concentrated efforts have to be made. Aligning LeO's with assessment standards has to take into consideration of the formative and summative nature of assessment their weight in evaluation practice. Formative assessment is mostly based on process oriented standards which supports learning progress in contrary with summative standards that is more close to learning outcomes. Common units of content bring closer the traditionally separated communities of practices of LeO's and evaluation. There are success factors of aligning which are common and others that are dependent on national circumstances.*

**The key messages of the first WG can be summarized as follows:**

- Start from the occupational profiles can help to establish common language if all actors concerned is involved.
- Standardization is possible at some level of abstraction.
- Flexibility respecting the autonomy of national specificities has to be maintained.
- Common principles and common format for presenting learning outcomes rather than common terms could intensify cooperation at EU level and increase mutual learning which all can contribute to penetration of learning outcomes.
- Sectoral approach could help to establish common principles to a kind of common language across countries.
- Structured European dialogue, peer learning and communities of practice are strongly supported.

**The key messages of the second WG can be summarized as follows:**

- Common communication platform and level of common language can be envisaged which is promising for future work.
- Better understanding of institutionalization of interaction between and with stakeholders is key to reveal their interests, roles and possibilities to engage them.
- The intended and achieved nature of learning outcomes should be discussed further so as to understand what works in aligning LeO's with assessment standards.
- Delivery is a key factor to strengthen learning outcomes approach and having consequences to standard setting.
- Increasing awareness of the value of LeO's approach requires deeper understanding what the reference points are for whom (qualifications standards, learning outcomes, curriculum requirements, modules/units, assessment standards and so on).

**The key messages of the third WG can be summarized as follows:**

- Policy implementation practices and tools to reinforce learning outcomes in teaching and learning and aligning with assessment standards should be analyzed and showed up.
- Factors hindering LeO's implementation should be identified.
- The role and actual appearance of LeO's in teacher training practice and in CPD should be dealt with form policy and practice points of view.
- Revealing practices of what work in different contexts and Member States are contributing to
- More hands-on, functional and practical guides, formats and wording examples of aligning would be important.

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