



## The impact of learning outcomes on teaching and learning policy choices ahead

13 June 2025 09.45-13.30 (CET) Virtual event

#learningoutcomes #VETlearningoutcomes



### Virtual conference

## The impact of learning outcomes on teaching and learning: the policy choices ahead

### 13 June 2025

#### Background note

Research carried out by Cedefop demonstrates that, while the [learning outcomes](#) approach is rapidly gaining ground across Europe, the diverse ways in which it is interpreted and applied call for further dialogue and sharing of experiences. Although questioned and contested by some (Hussey and Smith, 2008, Allais, 2014) <sup>(1)</sup>, practically all European countries now actively use learning outcomes (or competence) statements when defining, reviewing, and refining the content and profile of their education, training, and skills provisions, as well as their strategy practices ([Cedefop](#), 2017; 2021; 2022; 2024 among others).

Used in different settings and for different purposes – ranging from qualifications frameworks to qualification standards, curricula and assessment criteria – learning outcomes often influence how **teaching** and **learning** is organised and carried out. The awareness of teachers, trainers and learners is critical in this respect, as they are the ones who apply and use learning outcomes in their work and learning. The decisive question, therefore, is whether the main principle of the approach is known and seen as relevant to their daily work. The success of policies promoting the learning outcomes approach directly depends on this; not only on the capacity of teachers and trainers to use such approaches in their daily practice, but also as part of the role of initial teacher education and continuing education and training. By adopting a particular curriculum philosophy, a teacher or trainer makes a conscious decision about the model of teaching they intend to use. This is central to the shift to learning outcomes. Closely connected to this are the concepts of learner-centeredness, ‘active learning’, ‘flexible learning’, ‘problem-based learning’, and ‘self-directed learning’. In these contexts, the teacher acts as a facilitator and enabler of learning, rather than an instructor simply imparting

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<sup>(1)</sup> Allais, S. (2014). *Selling out education: national qualifications frameworks and the neglect of knowledge*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Hussey, T.; Smith, P. (2008). *Learning outcomes: a conceptual analysis*. Teaching in higher education, Vol. 13, No 1, pp. 107-115.

knowledge to learners. However, research <sup>(2)</sup> shows that although vocational education and training (VET) teachers and trainers are often presented with different theories, these are rarely explicitly linked to the learning outcomes approach.

Cedefop's forthcoming research reveals that while national policies across 10 EU countries <sup>(3)</sup> promote learning outcomes as a key element of VET, the extent to which they influence classroom teaching practices varies. The study highlights that teachers in most countries demonstrate considerable autonomy in choosing teaching methods aligned with learning outcomes, but they face challenges due to unclear or restrictive learning outcome definitions. The findings underscore a need for better alignment between national policies, school-level practices, and teacher/workplace trainer preparation to ensure more effective implementation of learning outcomes in VET.

The learning outcomes approach could easily be seen as a mere symbolic hype to be ignored when seen as external to the day-to-day challenges faced by teachers and trainers. Therefore, a key question to be addressed at the conference is whether **learning outcomes influence the way teaching and learning are conducted**. The discussions will also attempt to shed light on factors that hinder and facilitate the transformation of learning outcomes into actual achievements. Suggestions and lessons for the way forward, supporting stakeholders and policymakers in addressing future challenges and opportunities in this area, will also be presented.

## Conference objectives

The conference will provide a platform for policymakers, stakeholders, experts, researchers, and practitioners to discuss the impact of learning outcomes on teaching, learning, and assessment in initial VET (IVET). Cedefop's findings from its 2023 study [The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality?](#) will be presented. The study analyses the transformation of learning outcomes, focusing on IVET in schools and work-based learning, including apprenticeships.

## Conference methodology

The event will offer an opportunity to compare approaches and exchange experiences as part of ongoing European cooperation to connect practitioners and improve practices in this area. Following a keynote speech on Cedefop's study and findings, participants will hear about national case study examples and share their insights in four dedicated breakout sessions.

- **Breakout room 1:** Understanding and ownership of the learning outcomes approach: how can we ensure that all stakeholders are engaged?

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<sup>(2)</sup> Cedefop. (2024). *The influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools*. Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper.

<sup>(3)</sup> The countries examined in Cedefop's study were Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland.

- **Breakout room 2:** Learning outcomes across the teacher education continuum: how can we empower teachers and trainers?
- **Breakout room 3:** Learning outcomes' impact on assessment: how can we ensure alignment of teaching, learning and assessment?
- **Breakout room 4:** Building on what we know: what tools do we need to share practices on learning outcomes?

Following the breakout sessions, participants will engage directly with various panellists, including policymakers and practitioners, on the implementation of the learning outcomes approach. The panel discussion will promote an active exchange of ideas, encouraging participants to share their experiences and ideas on the practical use of learning outcomes.

## **Breakout rooms**

### **Topic 1: Understanding and ownership of the learning outcomes approach**

The first breakout session will focus on awareness of the learning outcomes approach and its influence on teaching and learning practices. Learning outcomes are generally used at policy level as a tool for governing, managing and reforming education and training. Some see learning outcomes as a way to manage regional and local practices centrally, strengthening the accountability of schools and teachers. Others view them as a means to focus on learners, providing teachers and students with tools for active and open learning. These policy choices, which point in somewhat different directions, illustrate the relationship between the learning outcomes approach and the actual benefits for end users. For example, learning outcomes enable students to take ownership of their learning journey. By understanding what is expected of them, students can set goals, monitor their progress, and make informed decisions about their learning. This sense of ownership fosters responsibility and empowers students to become active participants in their education. Nevertheless, evidence (Cedefop, 2024) shows that although the learning outcomes approach is well known to many researchers and policymakers, this is not necessarily the case for those responsible for implementing it (teachers, schools) or those assumed to benefit from it (students, learners). A key question, therefore, is whether stakeholders own learning outcomes are see them as relevant to their daily work.

*Guiding questions:*

1. How can we ensure that all stakeholders are engaged?
2. To what extent are teachers/students (in your national context) aware of and understand the learning-outcomes-based requirements, and how does this influence their progression?

## **Topic 2: Learning outcomes across the teacher education continuum**

Breakout session 2 will provide insights into how learning outcomes influence the interaction between VET teachers, trainers/company instructors, and trainees/apprentices. The way teachers, trainers, and company instructors interpret learning outcomes and adapt them to the workplace is particularly relevant. The role of initial teacher education, as well as continuing education and training, directly impacts the shift to learning outcomes. Expanding the approach at the micro level, including school and classroom teaching, learning, and assessment practices, requires systematic and targeted guidance and support. Connecting, embedding, and promoting the learning outcomes approach through theories of teaching and learning (epistemology, didactics, pedagogy, including theories on organisational learning) across the teacher continuum is crucial. This allows for a better understanding of the explicit and implicit assumptions made about the role and relevance of learning outcomes for teachers.

Applying learning outcomes also balances the relationship between teachers and learners, enabling the latter to be more actively involved in the learning process. The role of learning outcomes in reforming pedagogy primarily centres on their ability to increase transparency, helping learners understand the learning process and expectations better. For example, learning outcomes can guide educators in designing instruction and assessment methods that promote student growth and achievement, while helping teachers focus on essential content and skills that students need to develop. The selection of teaching methodologies and techniques has implications for the learners and the design of education and training programmes.

Although committed and competent instructors and trainers are crucial to ensuring the quality and relevance of apprenticeships, there is currently a lack of systematic knowledge about whether and how the shift to learning outcomes influences their roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, the role of this approach in changing and transforming teaching often remains assumed rather than empirically founded.

### *Guiding questions:*

1. How can teachers and trainers be empowered? Is existing guidance sufficient?
2. To what extent and in which ways do teacher/trainers (in your national context) use the learning outcomes approach to plan and carry out their professional duties?

## **Topic 3: Learning outcomes impact on assessment**

This breakout session will focus on the influence of learning outcomes on assessment, as this is an important component of the learning outcomes 'chain' in VET. The goal of assessment is to provide feedback or make summative judgments on whether learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes, i.e. knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as defined in curricula or other reference documents. Assessment criteria, which further detail the intended learning

outcomes, can serve as a reference point for designing assessment processes and judging an individual's progress and achievement of learning goals.

When developing qualifications and learning programmes, it is important to ensure consistency between intended learning outcomes, the delivery model (particularly teaching and learning methods – the pedagogical approach) and assessment criteria, used for either formative or summative purposes. This alignment increases transparency for all stakeholders and supports meaningful and effective learning.

Cedefop's forthcoming evidence shows that learning outcomes are a core element of national assessment regulations in all the countries studied. However, the specification and use of assessment criteria for formative assessment purposes varies at the national level. Teachers, trainers and learners generally appreciate the use of learning outcomes in assessment. The study also highlights the need to improve the clarity and relevance of assessment criteria, optimise assessment methods and practices, place learners more at the centre and strengthen the assessment skills of teachers and trainers. Despite growing policy attention and institutional investment in learning-outcomes-based approaches, empirical evidence on the actual impact of the approach on assessment practices remains limited.

*Guiding questions:*

1. How can we ensure alignment of teaching, learning and assessment?
2. To what extent does the context in which learning outcomes are acquired (classroom, company, etc.) influence assessment?

#### **Topic 4: Building on what we know: what tools do we need to share practices on learning outcomes?**

Although the learning outcomes approach is now firmly embedded in European education and training policies and practices, questions and challenges remain. Merely assuming that learning outcomes automatically improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning is untenable. The effectiveness of the approach heavily depends on how it is implemented, interpreted, and shared. To genuinely enhance teaching and learning, tools that promote collaboration, contextualization, comparability, and reflection – rather than merely serving as content repositories – are needed. These tools could be digital, multilingual, and user-driven to meet the evolving needs of teachers/trainers, learners, and policymakers.

Existing online forums, regional workshops, Erasmus+ peer learning activities, and key networks such as the EQF/Europass Advisory Group or the EQAVET/ETCS networks provide spaces for teachers and institutions to exchange experiences and contextual practices. But is this enough? If we want to adopt a common approach to learning outcomes, practitioners must understand how these are interpreted across countries and institutions. Language barriers and differing interpretations of the approach hinder effective knowledge sharing. At the same time, educational institutions must be able to assess the effectiveness of the learning outcomes approach in real teaching and learning contexts. In this session, we will

examine the type of platform(s) that could support the exchange and development of practices related to learning outcomes, fostering collaboration and providing valuable resources across Europe.

*Guiding questions:*

1. What platforms/resources (at national and European levels) are needed to share practices on learning outcomes?
2. How can the learning outcomes approach be supported using digital technologies/tools?

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