



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Definition and writing of learning outcomes

Issues and questions

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*Why a policy learning forum on the
definition and writing of learning
outcomes?*

A general shift to learning outcomes taking place across 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





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 initiatives taken during recent years: ***Europass, the EQF, ECTS, ECVET and ESCO.....***
- While the **learning outcomes are nothing new**, the high priority given to this principle at European, national and local level is new.



Expectations at policy level

- Transparency
- Increased relevance and quality of qualifications
- As a way to strengthen dialogue education-labour market
- Accountability
- Seen as a way to open up to non-formal and informal learning

Expectations at the level of practitioners

- Sets clear targets for the learner
- Motivates learning
- Encourages flexible learning pathways
- Guides teachers and trainers
- Orients assessors



Concerns at policy level

- Are learning outcomes a policy hype – a fashion soon to disappear?
- Are LO monitored and reviewed?
- Can LO reduce local and institutional autonomy, imposing unhealthy top-down management?
- Are LO defined by too narrow a group of stakeholders?
- Are LO too much a reflection of education and training providers?
- Do we impose unnecessary bureaucracy?

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 aim of the policy learning
forum***



The diversity challenge

The diversity of interpretations and applications calls for more dialogue and sharing of experiences. The PLF responds to this need for mutual learning and will focus on the following questions:

- How are learning outcomes conceptualised?
- How are learning outcomes to express the content and profile of a qualification?
- What informs the writing of learning outcomes?
- How are learning outcomes reviewed and renewed?

A concrete focus

Three concrete VET qualifications cases from the crafts, industry and service sectors will be used:

- Plumbing (Heating and cooling)
- Machine operator (CNC)
- Tourism/travel sales and services

***The issues and challenges as
understood by the PLF participants***

Main points from the questionnaire



The purpose of learning outcomes descriptions (I)

Broad agreement that LO act as the formal reference point for specifying expectations, requirements and intentions in the area of education and training and learning

Three main functions (and corresponding) users are commonly listed:

- LO supporting individual learners (and parents), to increase their capacity and awareness
- LO supporting education and training providers, helping these to clarify programme objectives
- LO supporting enterprises and labour market stakeholders, strengthening the relevance and quality of qualifications

A possible tension between those who emphasise programme objectives and those who emphasise local and individually tailored solutions



The purpose of learning outcomes descriptions (II)

There is broad agreement that LO play a key role when designing and carrying out assessment

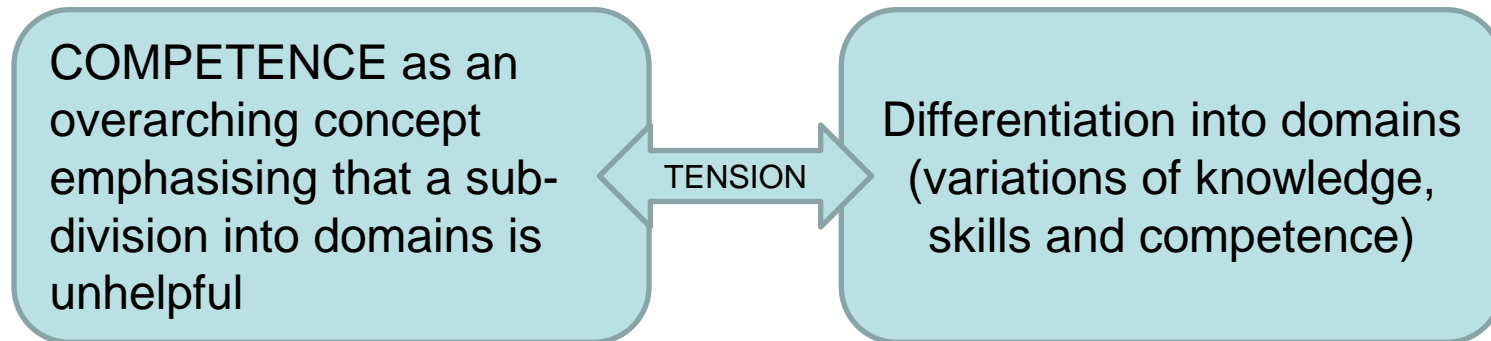
- Detailed prescriptions of LO can overload the assessment process and result in 'teaching to the test'
- Too general LO descriptions leaves room for more interpretation and possibly reduces reliability

LO are seen as key to national and international comparisons and transparency – a function closely linked to the implementation of NQFs



The learning domains (I)

Two main approaches



- Differentiation supports a systematic and comprehensive coverage
- Helps to balance descriptions (for example) between theoretical knowledge and practical skills
- The distinction between KSC can be artificial
- Differentiation risks over-specifying descriptions
- A risk of narrowing down the scope of learning requirements



The learning domains (II)

Holistic or differentiated – common challenges and issues....

- The integration of specific and general skills and competences
- A qualification is something more than professional tasks; how can we capture key competences critical for lifelong learning and citizenship?
- What role should attitudes play?
- How strong should the link to the NQF be – should qualifications use the same domains as the framework?



Levels and complexity

- A challenging issue – limited feedback from questionnaires – an issue for follow up?

Consensus

Level and complexity is described through the combination of {Active/action verbs} and {context descriptions}

Challenges

- How are action verbs interpreted and applied?
- Is there a shared understanding on how to describe context of learning? How general, how specific?
 - How technique and enterprise-neutral?
- Levelling and complexity of particular importance for assessment
- Levelling critical for consistence between qualifications, institutions and national systems (EQF)
- Some countries write learning outcomes facilitating grading



Which are the main challenges?

- ✓ The challenge can be defined as a question of **what, how and who?**
 - ✓ How to get the content right?
 - ✓ How to improve technical and methodological solutions?
 - ✓ How to involve and balance different stakeholders?

- ✓ Overall challenge: changing mindsets and developing shared understanding of concepts, objectives and methods of writing learning outcomes



Which are the main challenges?

Technical challenges:

- level of detail (clear, precise, operational)
- how to determine scope and volume
- how to leave room and freedom for local adaptation

Content challenges:

- How to balance learning outcomes between current needs of employers and broader preparation for future change and learning
- How to balance subject and science-based approach and working life activities and functions?
- How to ensure compatibility of learning outcomes between different learning venues (school–workplace, IVET : CVET, VET : HE)



Which are the main challenges?

Stakeholder challenges:

- Contextualisation of learning outcomes important – transferability challenge; how to develop relevant but at the same time technique and enterprise-neutral learning outcomes
- To write learning outcomes in line with industry needs and at the same time student age appropriate and realistic
- To update and review learning outcomes (stakeholder involvement, frequency, labour market intelligence)
- To translate occupational standards to learning outcomes in curricula and provision



A few concluding words....

- The PLF provides an unique opportunity to systematically compare practises; first time such a group has been brought together
- Success depends on your participation and your sharing of experiences – to identify shared challenges and opportunities
- Start of a European community of practice?