Application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe

Some preliminary finding from Cedefop study

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Aim of the study and research questions

- Tracks the extent to which and how the shift to learning outcomes is influencing education and training policies at national level (VET, HE, general education)
- Tracks whether and to what extent LOs approaches are used in institutions educating future teachers
- Interaction between different levels
Scope of the study and methodology

- Comparative overview and analysis in 33 countries
- 10 case studies in faculties educating future teachers in 9 countries: documentation review, interviews with 2-6 staff members, observations of the teaching lessons, focus groups.
- Focus on uses and users of learning outcomes
How are learning outcomes defined?

‘Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.’

or

‘Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion and/or is able to demonstrate after completion a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal.’

(Cedefop, 2014)
The structuring of learning outcomes

The horizontal dimension is crucial

- How do we understand the different domains of learning?
- How do we balance between learning domains, between theory and practise, knowledge and skills, how do we understand competence?

The vertical dimension of LO is crucial

- How do we express the complexity of learning?
- How do we see progression in a learning domain?
Variety of LO’s approaches across countries

- Diversity of LO approaches (concept, terms) across countries reflecting different origins, influences, national traditions, values
- Comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) for LLL are evolving and have a stronger influence than in 2009
- Many countries do not have a single definition or the notion of LO or the same usage across subsystem
- In some countries – LO and competence-based approaches are used interchangeably
Main findings

- Significant progress has been made in recent years, but uneven across countries and subsystems
- NQFs have been the main driver of progress in many countries and many subsystems
- VET / HE often take the lead - on-going process
- HE: progress informed by Bologna + QFs but uneven
- General education: PISA, competences/key competences & educational standards, curriculum change, less assessment
- VET: continuation, extension of trends
Learning outcomes approaches in VET

- Many countries involved in VET qualifications and curriculum reforms geared towards learning outcomes in recent years
- Outcomes-based VET standards and assessment standards increasingly introduced
- Progressively aligned with NQF level descriptors – work in progress
  - Most countries are institutionalising the participation of social partners in standard-setting procedures - sectoral skills councils
- Key role of EU processes, instruments and programmes
Implementation of LO: some important factors

- Simultaneous & parallel use of macro & micro perspectives + top-down & bottom up
- Fundamental changes in daily behaviour individuals & institutions – complex processes of individual & collective learning
- Need for significant implementation capacities and resources, time
- Embedding of LO approaches is a non-linear processes – feedback-loops – mutual learning
Capacity-building is a key driver of change at the micro level

- The LO approach has grown roots and is increasingly used in teacher education in several countries
- The teacher education sector may potentially play a key role in promoting change at the micro level
- Professional development for head teachers and inspectorates, teacher counselors/trainers, assessors is also vital
Challenges and tensions

- Need for further reflection and debate on writing LO and strategies and practices used for implementing them.
- LO approach has implications for assessment: alignment of assessment practices with intended LO still remains significant challenge in most countries;
- New innovative assessment approaches are emerging; reliability and validity; complex qualitative assessment with large-scale assessments etc.
One interviewee pointed out that ‘it was not clear what was meant by ‘completion of learning’ when talking about LO. When is learning completed? This can be seen during assessments: there is a difference in the cognitive or operational (application) of outcomes right after the end of a course or if the learning outcomes are assessed after two years. This is related to the issue of: sustainability, especially in teacher education where sustainable professionalisation is a core issue.’