

Learning outcomes / competences at programme and module level

European higher education at the beginning of 21st Century: need for a changed **learning** paradigm

- **shifting** from *input* to *output*
- need for more **flexibility** & **transparency**
- **learning outcomes** = the key to this



definition:

"Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do or is able to demonstrate after completion of any learning process or at the end of a period of learning (knowledge – skills – competences)"

Learning outcomes →
can be used (in higher education) at different levels:

- “Module”-level (cf. ECTS-Information Package)
- Assessment criteria and grading criteria
- Descriptors of different qualifications
- National descriptors of qualifications
- National / Discipline specific / Sectoral benchmark statements
- National level descriptors
- Cycle descriptors

Advantages of using learning outcomes:

- better match between needs of the labour market and education and training provision
- facilitates transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education & training systems
- facilitates validation of non-formal and informal learning

⇒ ***basis for all qualifications frameworks***

Qualifications Frameworks at the European level

Different qualifications frameworks at the European level:

→ “Bologna” framework

**A Framework of Qualifications for the
European Higher Education Area**

→ “Copenhagen” framework

**European Qualifications Framework for
Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL)**

→ need for (sectoral &) national frameworks

Implementation of NQF's is a challenge

- **Translating** Qualifications Frameworks at the European level into (an) operable national framework(s)

- Creating generic reference points (based on LO's) useful
 - in **curriculum design**
 - for **quality assurance** reasons (including accreditation) and
 - **information** for the public.

- Majority of countries chooses for **overarching** framework / some countries give priority to HE (only)

Qualifications Frameworks in Flanders

- In 2003 → “Structural Decree” (for higher education)
= kind of *de facto* QF for HE in Flanders (based on Dublin cycle descriptors)
→ validated in Nov-Dec 2008 (coordinated by NVAO)
- In 2009 → overarching (i.e. including HE) framework
“Flemish Qualification Structure”

Decree on Flemish Qualification Structure (Spring 2009)/1

- Long negotiations with stakeholders
 - Employers
 - Trade unions
 - Education (including higher)
- Advice from the official boards, e.g.
 - VLOR (Flemish Education Council)
 - SERV (Socio-economic Council Flanders)
- Validation procedure throughout Europe
 - Flanders and the Netherlands → NVAO

- FQS = 8 levels (cf. EQF), with level descriptors
- Level descriptors: described in terms of “competences” (for HE = learning outcomes)
 - Knowledge / Skills
 - Context / Autonomy / Responsibility
- The descriptors are:
 - Inclusive (all types of learning → generic)
 - Cumulative (2= also 1; 3= also 2 and 1 etc.)
 - distinctive (focused at the differences between levels)
- Only essential characteristics have been included
(hence: never attitudes because these can not be *levelled* ; e.g..
“patient” or “honest”)

Procedure for HE in Flanders

- HEIs write domain specific (e.g. “*communication studies*”) learning outcomes together
(5 = short cycle; 6 = Ba; 7 = Ma; 8 = PhD)
- NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) validates the descriptions = automatic recognition as qualification
- NVAO sends qualifications to Agency for QA in Education and Training

- To be coordinated by VLUHR (= VLIR (Rectors Conference) & VLHORA (Flemish Board of University Colleges))
- In line with the Dublin descriptors and with the Flemish, Belgian and international regulations about access to a profession
- Does not lead to common programmes or course units!
- A lot of work has already been done in the previous years
→ each HEI has defined LO's for each discipline and each course unit/module [in the framework of the external quality assurance procedures]
(but outside a framework; based on ≠ methodologies)

Agreements between Vlir and Vlhora/1

- Characteristics of domain specific Learning outcomes:
 - 1 Global: at the level of the discipline (and not course units)
 - 2 Generic: although specific aspects of same disciplines remain possible (*topic of discussion*)
 - 3 Related to Flemish Qualification Structure
 - 4 Prototypical: focus on characteristics of a discipline

Agreements between Vlir and Vlhora/2

- 5 Adequate basis for QA
 - 6 Distinctive: makes profiles more clear
 - 7 Sustainable and open for evolution
 - 8 Basis for international comparison
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- ⇒ 12 to 15 LOs per discipline
 - ⇒ general terms of Dublin descriptors and decree not to be repeated
 - ⇒ disciplines (± 600) to be clustered (± 45)
(= horrific challenge)

Procedure in Flanders step by step/1

- Steering committee
 - 1 person per institution per discipline
 - 1 project guide
 - Consultation of colleagues inside HEI
 - Consultation of stakeholders (students, employers, trade unions)
 - Comparison with international examples
 - Based on an agreed methodology (Tuning, EUA Bologna Handbook, ...)

Procedure in Flanders step by step/2

- Testing group
 - Representatives of the steering committees
 - Compares the \pm 45 descriptions
 - Negotiates with steering committees

Procedure in Flanders step by step/3

- Stakeholders
 - Proposals negotiated with student unions, employers, (former) members of evaluation committees, professional bodies
 - Suggestions incorporated in final proposal
- Decision by VLUHR, validation by NVAO, acceptance by Flemish Agency for QA

Procedure in Flanders pilot project

- Currently: the methodology is being tested
- In a number of pilot disciplines
 - “Construction (engineering)”
 - “Communication”
 - “(Bachelor in) Nursing”

Procedure in Flanders topics to be solved

- Timing: (probably) 2017 (following the scheme of external QA)
- Costs: support for HEIs is 300.000 euro (1FTE for 5 years): who pays?
- Procedure for periodical revision?
- Procedure for new programmes?
- Same procedure or common task with the Netherlands? (general agreement on recognition of diplomas in the pipeline)

Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

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