

Bologna Seminar: Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education - The Scottish Experience (Edinburgh, 21-22 February 2008)

Conclusions and recommendations:

1 Learning outcomes

The seminar endorsed the proposition that “learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms” and that this methodological approach is at the heart of the paradigm shift from teacher to student-centred learning.

2 Implementation

The seminar drew attention to the danger of learning outcomes being implemented in a false or superficial way in response to external pressures and the need to recognise that such a complex and multidimensional reform cannot be easily or rapidly achieved. If it is to be more than a merely cosmetic or bureaucratic exercise and if it is to result in a better learning experience for Europe’s students, the learning outcomes based approach needs time to develop, embed itself and mature in a way that respects and reflects the local priorities, diverse needs and national traditions of the Bologna countries. Training in the writing and implementation of learning outcomes should be given a high priority.

3 Stakeholder engagement

The seminar recognised the need to find effective ways of engaging and supporting staff, students and other stakeholders (such as employers) in the development and implementation of a learning outcomes based approach.

It recommends that the Bologna Follow-Up Group consider what national or international action is needed to bring about the willing and informed cooperation of staff and students in the systematic implementation of learning outcomes (properly understood) at institutional, programme and module level and to support the constructive alignment of learning outcomes with learning, teaching and assessment.

One suggestion is the creation of a special programme to promote trans-national staff and student mobility to share good practice in the development and implementation of learning outcomes – thereby re-engaging with one of the original Bologna concepts.

4 European Qualifications Frameworks

The seminar believed that there was a need to clarify further the relationship between the overarching *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* and the *Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA*, so as to ensure that Europe has a widely understood and accepted approach to lifelong learning that facilitates recognition of all forms of learning and the transition between VET and HE, and that promotes mobility, encourages individual educational ambition and motivates learner achievement. In particular, there is a need to promote dialogue between ECTS and ECVETS to ensure

interoperability.

5 Terminology

The seminar noted that there is a perceived lack of clarity and shared understanding about some of the key terms associated with the introduction of learning outcomes in different countries (for example, “competences”, “workload”, “notional learning effort”), which was likely to impede effective implementation. It recommends that consideration be given to developing an agreed terminology based on a shared understanding amongst staff, students and other stakeholders about what the key concepts mean.

6 Levels

The seminar noted that there is uncertainty about whether learning outcomes should be written at “threshold” or “average” or “modal” level. It recommends that outcomes should normally be written at “threshold” level to facilitate recognition and mobility.

7 Learning outcomes and workload

The seminar agreed that it was unhelpful to counterpoise learning outcomes and workload, since both elements were important in the use of ECTS.

8 Learning outcomes, assessment and grading

The seminar agreed that there was value in mutual discussion and exchange of good practice in relation to the use of learning outcomes applied to assessment and their role in assessment and grade criteria.

9 Monitoring progress

The seminar noted that it is difficult to obtain accurate information about the progress of implementation of this fundamental Bologna reform across the EHEA. It therefore recommends that consideration be given to finding an effective way of assessing progress in the 2009 Stocktaking Exercise, as well as in the next EUA *Trends* exercise and the ESU *Bologna With Student Eyes* report.

10 Evaluation

The seminar noted that there remains a degree of scepticism about the value and appropriateness of the learning outcomes approach in the context of higher education. It recommends that consideration be given to commissioning a longitudinal study which would collect evidence from graduates and employers about its impact and effectiveness.

11 Guidance

The seminar recommends that the report on *Learning Outcomes: Current Developments in Europe*, prepared by Stephen Adam for this event, be widely circulated as an additional source of guidance for the sector. Attention is particularly drawn to chapters 4 and 5, which contain helpful advice about the use and abuse of learning outcomes (including sections on good and bad practice) and identify some of the practical and technical issues that may need to be resolved if problems of interpretation are to be avoided.

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