Programme Outcomes

Learning Outcomes are clear statements of learning achievements for students, stating what it is the student should be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning.

Overview

Programme level learning outcomes are high level learning outcomes, expressing the knowledge, skills or attributes a **graduate** of an entire programme should be capable of demonstrating.

Programme outcomes differ from module learning outcomes, which will be specific to the learning for a given module and, as such, may have more specialised or targeted language.

It is important to ensure that programme learning outcomes are not simply a compilation of module or course outcomes, but are instead more general statements focusing on generic skills that are transferrable, preparing students for further study, employment, and citizenship while still capturing the discipline specific skills a programme cultivates.

Guidelines

Ideally learning outcomes will be performance orientated, so the question we ask ourselves when designing a programme or writing outcomes for an existing programme is "**What should a graduate of this programme be able to do?**"

Outcomes will typically take the form:

On successful completion of this programme, the graduate will be able to:

> ➤ Outcome 1;
> ➤ Outcome 2;
> ➤ …
> ➤ Outcomes 6.

5-10 outcomes

Outcomes will necessarily be quite broad in order to capture the entire learning of a programme. Between 5 and 10 outcomes are recommended to outline the minimum essential learning required to successfully complete the programme.

Of course, some programmes will be constrained in terms of their programme outcomes, due to external accreditation etc, partly to ensure comparability across institutions and also to provide a general picture (for employers, usually) of the level of professional competence of graduates at that level.

Care needs to be taken when writing outcomes for programmes with streams or module options that the outcomes are valid irrespective of individual module choices and common to all students of a programme.

Assessment

Unlike module learning outcomes, programme outcomes are not directly assessed, but can be indirectly demonstrated through the achievement of module learning outcomes. A recommended approach is to produce a simple course map (example on reverse), identifying where in the overall suite of modules (or other components) each Programme Outcome is addressed.

NFQ

It is a university requirement that programmes be mapped on to the National Framework of Qualifications and therefore programme outcomes should be written to align to the NFQ level descriptors. The NFQ level descriptors for Programme learning outcomes are, technically, what determines the overall level of a given programme on the framework. They use a language and approach that is not culturally embedded within the university sector per se, but yet if we claim a given NFQ level for a programme, we should be able to justify it in these terms for compliance. See the Resources section (reverse) for more information.

Review

To ensure that the intended programme outcomes are appropriate to the actual learning taking place and therefore a true reflection of the actual graduate outcomes, it is worth consulting students, past and present, employers and other members of the programme team before learning outcomes are finalised.

This will help ensure that the intended outcomes are representative of actual achievements, realistic expectations for current students, and adequate for current employment markets.

Summary Checklist

Programme learning outcomes should	☐
be general enough to describe the essential knowledge, skills or attributes of a graduate	
describe the essential learning required to successfully complete the programme	
clearly focus on the learner	
be written with students and prospective employers in mind	
be aligned to module outcomes and therefore indirectly assessable via the course module	
be appropriate to the NFQ level descriptors for the intended qualification	
be visible (to students, current and prospective, employers, etc. on the website and course prospectus)	

Resources

1)   Guidelines for designing programmes within the NFQ, case studies and examples are available from the 2009 Framework Implementation Network report "The University awards and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ): Issues around the design of programmes and the use and assessment of learning outcomes":

http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/A_Guide_to_designing_UNiversity_Awards_for_Inclusion_in_the_National_Framework_of_Qualifications/Default.132.html

2)   Examples of Programme Outcomes may be obtained from a variety of sources, including the UK Benchmark Statements for Subject Disciplines (QAA) http://www.qaa.ac.uk; the disciplines piloted in the (Bologna) Tuning project (Business, Earth Sciences, Education, European Studies, History, Mathematics, Nursing, Physics) http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/; and other institutions , professional bodies, etc.

3)   Programme/Module outcomes mapping tool:

	Module 1	Module 2	…	…	Module …
Programme Outcome 1			x		x
Outcome 2		x			x
…					
…			x		
Outcome 8	x	x	x	x	x

Additional resources and support are available from CELT: [Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching - University of Galway](#)