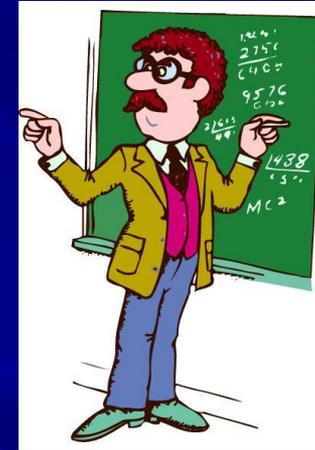


Linking Learning Outcomes to Teaching and Learning Activities and to Assessment



Presentation 4

12 May 2015

International Forum: Education and cultural area: development vectors. Voronezh State University, Russia.

Dr Declan Kennedy,
Department of Education,
University College Cork, Ireland.

“The adoption of a learning outcomes approach represents more than simply expressing learning in terms of outcomes. It entails much more due to their significant implications for all aspects of curriculum design, delivery, expression, assessment and standards”.

Adam S, 2004

Assessment of Learning Outcomes

- Having designed modules and programmes in terms of learning outcomes, we must now find out if our students have achieved these intended learning outcomes.
- *How will I know if my students have achieved the desired learning outcomes? How will I measure the extent to which they have achieved these learning outcomes?*
- Therefore, we must consider how to match the method of assessment to the different kinds of learning outcomes e.g. a Learning Outcome such as “Demonstrate good presentation skills” could be assessed by the requirement that each student makes a presentation to their peers.
- When writing learning outcomes the verb is often a good clue to the assessment technique.
- How can we design our examination system so that it tests if learning outcomes have been achieved?



Misconceptions about Assessment

- “A view of teaching as the transmission of authoritative knowledge has little space to accommodate the idea that different methods of assessment may be appropriate for the evaluation of different parts of the subject matter or that assessment techniques themselves should be the subject of serious study and reflection. In such a conception, lecturers see teaching, learning and assessment as tenuously related in a simple linear sequence”.
- “Assessment is something that follows learning, so there is no need to consider its function as a means of helping students to learn through diagnosing their errors and misconceptions and reinforcing their correct understanding”.
- “Assessment, like teaching, is something done to studentsAssessment classifies the students on the criterion of how well they have absorbed the data thus transmitted. What could be simpler?”

(Ramsden, 2005)

Formative Assessment

- ❑ Assessment **FOR** learning – gives feedback to students and teachers to help modify teaching and learning activities, i.e. helps inform teachers and students on progress being made.
- ❑ Assessment is integrated into the teaching and learning process.
- ❑ Clear and rich feedback helps improve performance of students (Black and Williams, 1998).
- ❑ Usually carried out at beginning or during a programme, e.g. coursework which gives feedback to students.
- ❑ Can be used as part of continuous assessment, but some argue that it should not be part of grading process (Donnelly and Fitzmaurice, 2005)



Summative Assessment

- Assessment that summarises student learning at end of module or programme – Assessment
- Sums up achievement – no other
- Generates a grade or mark.
- Usually involves assessment using examination.
- Only a sample of the Learning Outcomes cannot assess all the Learning Outcomes



Continuous Assessment

- A combination of summative and formative assessment.
- Usually involves repeated summative assessments.
- Marks recorded.
- Little or no feedback given.



Assessment

- “Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences” (Huba and Freed, 2000)
- *Assessment is "a set of processes designed to improve, demonstrate, and inquire about student learning"* (Mentkowski, M. qtd. in Palomba, C. A., and Banta, T. W. (1999). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass,).
- “A way of finding out what our students know and can do”

Evaluation

- **Evaluation:**

"the systematic process of determining the *merit, value, and worth* of someone (the evaluatee, such as a teacher, student, or employee) or something (the evaluand, such as a product, program, policy, procedure, or process)." (*Evaluation Glossary* (n.d.). Retrieved December 18, 2007, from [Western Michigan University, The Evaluation Center Web site](#), emphasis added).

- Assessment and evaluation not only differ in their purposes but also in their use of collected information. While it is possible to use the same tools for the two approaches, the use of the data collected differs. For example, an instructor can use the results of a midterm exam for both assessment and evaluation purposes. The results can be used to review with the students course material related to common mistakes on the exam (i.e. to improve student learning as in assessment) or to decide what letter grade to give each student (i.e. to judge student achievement in the course as in evaluation).

<http://www.purdue.edu/cie/teaching/assessment-evaluation.html>

Assessment and Evaluation of Teaching

- ***Assessment of teaching means taking a measure of its effectiveness***
- ***Evaluation*** involves measurement as part of a judgement, i.e. determining its “value,” e.g. Evaluation of teaching means passing judgment on it as part of a process such as quality assurance.
- Evaluation involves a judgement of quality.

Assessing learning outcomes: points to consider

- Learning outcomes: “statements of what a student will know, understand, and/or be able to do at the end of a learning experience”.
- Having described your courses in terms of learning outcomes, you now want to find out whether students have achieved them
- Specify the types of student performance that will provide evidence of learning

“Techniques” of assessment

- *Written*: tests, examinations, assignments
- *Practical*: skills testing; lab/workshop practice
- *Oral*: interviews, various formats
- *Aural*: listening tests
- *Project work*: individual/group; research/design
- *Field work*: data collection and reporting
- *Portfolio* : combination of techniques

Common assessment techniques in Higher Education

- Paper/thesis
- Project
- Product development
- Performance
- Exhibition
- Case study.
- Clinical evaluation
- Oral exam
- Interview
- Research assignment
- Portfolio
- Others??

Interrogating our assessment

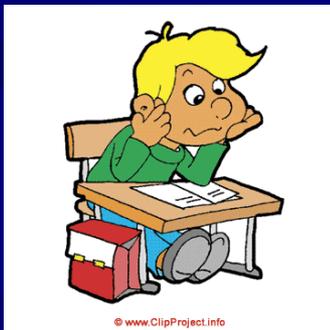
1. Have we included a good balance of learning outcomes in our modules? (*e.g. Bloom's Taxonomy*)
2. How do we know if students have achieved the intended learning outcomes: is there a good match between learning outcomes and assessment?
3. How can we improve assessment so that it tests the intended learning outcomes?

Implications of Multiple Intelligences I Theory for Innovative Forms of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

“If we truly accept and value the theory of MI, then we are obliged as teachers to be far more inventive in our teaching. We must search for and develop methodologies that will allow all intelligences to shine in the learning experience.we must grasp the notion of constructivism with both hands and give the students the freedom to explore and construct knowledge and understanding, beginning with their own strengths” . (Hyland (ed.) *Final Report MI Project*, 2000, p. 126)



- One of the big challenges is to move away from assessment based solely on terminal exams – not intelligence fair, forcing all kinds of learning to fit into the paper and pencil test straight jacket.
- Purposes of Assessment: feedback, diagnosis, motivation, guidance, learning support, selection, grading, certification, progression, professional recognition, gate-keeping.....



Example of Matching the Assessment to the Learning Outcome

Learning outcomes

1. Demonstrate good presentation skills.
2. Formulate food product
3. Identify an area for research
4. Identify signs and symptoms of MS in a patient

Assessment?

- a) Multiple choice questions
- b) Prepare a 1000-word research proposal
- c) Lab-based project
- d) Make a presentation to peers

Assessing your assessment – is it doing the job you want it to do? Is it comprehensive?

	Assessment Task 1 e.g. Written Exam	Assessment Task 2 e.g. Project	Assessment Task 3 e.g. Presentation	Assessment Task 4 e.g. Lab work
Learning Outcome 1 Describe...				
Learning Outcome 2 Investigate..				
Learning Outcome 3 Demonstrate..				

To what extent has each Learning Outcome been achieved?

- Not a question of “yes” or “no” to achievement of Learning Outcomes.
- Rubric: A grading tool used to describe the criteria which are used in grading the performance of students.
- Rubric provides a clear guide as to how students’ work will be assessed.
- A rubric consists of a set of criteria and marks or grade associated with these criteria.

Linking learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Learning outcome	Assessment criteria				
	Grade 1	Grade 2 : 1	Grade 2 :2	Pass	Fail
<p>On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Summarise evidence from the science education literature to support development of a line of argument. 	<p>Outstanding use of literature showing excellent ability to synthesise evidence in analytical way to formulate clear conclusions.</p>	<p>Very good use of literature showing high ability to synthesise evidence in analytical way to formulate clear conclusions.</p>	<p>Good use of literature showing good ability to synthesise evidence in analytical way to formulate clear conclusions</p>	<p>Limited use of literature showing fair ability to synthesise evidence to formulate conclusions.</p>	<p>Poor use of literature showing lack of ability to synthesise evidence to formulate conclusions</p>

- Important to ensure that there is alignment between teaching methods, learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- Clear expectations on the part of students of what is required of them are a vitally important part of students' effective learning (Ramsden, 2003)
- This correlation between teaching, learning outcomes and assessment helps to make the overall learning experience more transparent and meaningful for students.
- For the good teacher, learning outcomes do not involve a “paradigm shift”.



Teaching for understanding



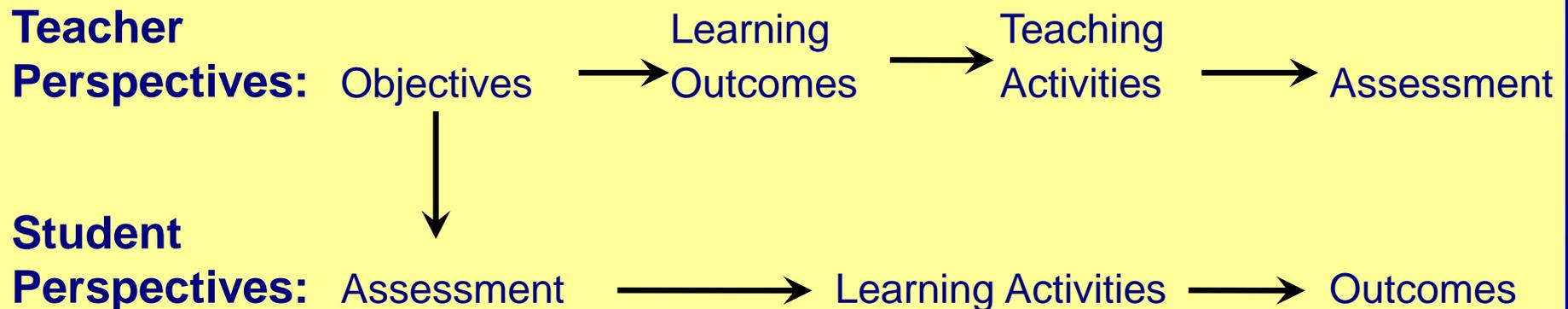
Learning outcomes



There is a dynamic equilibrium between teaching strategies and Learning Outcomes.

It is important that the assessment tasks mirror the Learning Outcomes since, as far as the students are concerned, the assessment *is* the curriculum: “From our students’ point of view, assessment always defined the actual curriculum” (Ramsden, 1992).

Biggs (2003) represents this graphically as follows:



“To the teacher, assessment is at the end of the teaching-learning sequence of events, but to the student it is at the beginning. If the curriculum is reflected in the assessment, as indicated by the downward arrow, the teaching activities of the teacher and the learner activities of the learner are both directed towards the same goal. In preparing for the assessment, students will be learning the curriculum” (Biggs 2003)

“Constructive Alignment” (Biggs, 2005)

Constructive

- The students construct understanding for themselves through learning activities. “Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning” (Biggs, 2003).
- “If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher’s fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes.... It is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does” (Shuell, 1986)

Alignment

- Alignment refers to what the teacher does in helping to support the learning activities to achieve the learning outcomes.
- The teaching methods and the assessment are aligned to the learning activities designed to achieve the learning outcomes.
- Aligning the assessment with the learning outcomes means that students know how their achievements will be measured.

- Constructive alignment is the deliberate linking within curricula of aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and assessment.
- Learning Outcomes state what is to be achieved in fulfilment of the aims.
- Learning activities should be organised so that students will be likely to achieve those outcomes.
- Assessment must be designed such that students are able to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes.
- Constructive alignment is just a fancy name for “joining up the dots”.

(Morss and Murray, 2005)

Steps involved in linking Learning Outcomes, Teaching and Learning Activities and Assessment

1. Clearly define the learning outcomes.
2. Select teaching and learning methods that are likely to ensure that the learning outcomes are achieved.
3. Choose a technique or techniques to assess the achievement of the learning outcomes.
4. Assess the learning outcomes and check to see how well they match with what was intended

If the learning outcomes are clearly written, the assessment is quite easy to plan!



Linking Learning Outcomes, Teaching and Learning Activities and Assessment

Learning Outcomes	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessment
<p>Cognitive (Demonstrate: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation)</p> <p>Affective (Integration of beliefs, ideas and attitudes)</p> <p>Psychomotor (Acquisition of physical skills)</p>	<p>Lectures</p> <p>Tutorials</p> <p>Discussions</p> <p>Laboratory work</p> <p>Clinical work</p> <p>Group work</p> <p>Seminar</p> <p>Peer group presentation etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •End of module exam. •Multiple choice tests. •Essays. •Reports on lab work and research project. •Interviews/viva. •Practical assessment. •Poster display. •Fieldwork. •Clinical examination. •Presentation. •Portfolio. •Performance. •Project work. •Production of artefact etc.

Learning outcomes Module ED2100	Teaching and Learning Activities	Assessment 10 credit module Mark = 200
Cognitive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Recognise and apply the basic principles of classroom management and discipline. •Identify the key characteristics of high quality science teaching. •Develop a comprehensive portfolio of lesson plans 	Lectures (12) Tutorials (6) Observation of classes (6) of experienced science teacher (mentor)	End of module exam. Portfolio of lesson plans (100 marks)
Affective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Display a willingness to co-operate with members of teaching staff in their assigned school. •Participate successfully in Peer Assisted Learning project 	Participation in mentoring feedback sessions in school (4) Participation in 3 sessions of UCC Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Programme. Peer group presentation	Report from school mentor End of project report. (50 marks)
Psychomotor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Demonstrate good classroom presentation skills •Perform laboratory practical work in a safe and efficient manner. 	Teaching practice 6 weeks at 2 hours per week. Laboratory work	Supervision of Teaching Practice Assessment of teaching skills (50 marks)

Programme Accreditation

- Module descriptors with clearly written Learning Outcomes – see handout (1) CIT.
- Framework for Accreditation e.g. Engineer's Ireland.
- Mapping of Programme Areas vs Programme Outcomes – see handout (2) CIT.
- Mapping of Module Learning Outcomes vs Programme Learning Outcomes

	Prog. Outcome 1	Prog. Outcome 2	Prog. Outcome 3	Prog. Outcome 4	etc
Module 1		✓			
Module 2	✓				
Module 3			✓		
Module 4				✓	
Module 5	✓				
Module 6		✓		✓	

Does every learning outcome have to be assessed?

- In theory “yes” but in practice “no”.
- In some cases they have to be assessed, e.g. licence to practice (e.g. medicine) or to perform essential tasks (e.g. aircraft pilot).
- When assessment is limited purely to an examination paper, it may not be possible to assess all the Learning Outcomes in such a short space of time – sampling of Learning Outcomes.
- Even if all the Learning Outcomes are assessed on an examination paper, due to choice of questions, a student may not be assessed on all of them.

Learning Outcomes and Level Descriptors on Qualification Frameworks

- A Learning outcome on its own does not give us an indication of the level of that learning outcome in a National Qualifications Framework.
- The level of the programme in which the learning outcome (programme learning outcome or module learning outcome) is written must be indicated in the programme description.
- The institution in which the programme is being taught must ensure:
 - ✓ (a) that the programme learning outcomes map on to the relevant level in the National Qualifications Framework
 - ✓ (b) that the module learning outcomes map on to the programme learning outcomes.
 - ✓ (c) that within each module there is alignment between the Learning Outcomes, the Teaching and Learning Activities and the Assessment.

What other information, apart from the Learning outcomes is needed to describe a module?

- **Credit Weighting:** Number of ECTS credits.
- **Teaching Period(s):** Term 1, Term 2 or both. .
- **No. of Students:** Maximum number of students allowed to take the module.
- **Pre-requisite(s):** Module(s) that should already have been passed by student.
- **Co-requisite(s):** Another module that the student must take with this module.
- **Teaching Methods:** Details of number of lectures, tutorials, etc.
- **Module Co-ordinator:** Name of person in charge of module.
- **Lecturer(s):** Name(s) of person(s) teaching the module. .

Module Description (continued)

- **Module Objective:** A sentence stating the objective of the module.
- **Module Content:** A list of topics covered in the module.
- **Learning Outcomes:** On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:
[List of learning outcomes].
- **Assessment:** Details of total mark for module and details of the breakdown of this total mark, e.g. written paper, continuous assessment, project, etc.
- **Compulsory Elements:** Any part of assessment that **MUST** be passed in order to pass the module, e.g. professional practice component.
- **Penalties (for late submission of Course/Project Work etc.):** Details of marks deducted for late submission.
- **Pass Standard and any Special Requirements for Passing Module:** The minimum mark that must be obtained in order to pass the module.
- **End of Year Written Examination Profile:** Number and duration of examination papers.
- **Requirements for Supplemental Examination:** Number and duration and date of repeat examination for those who fail the module.



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IChemE

Making programme learning outcomes explicit for students of process and chemical engineering

J.J. Fitzpatrick^{a,*}, E.P. Byrne^a, D. Kennedy^b

^a Department of Process & Chemical Engineering, University College, Cork, Ireland

^b Department of Education, University College, Cork, Ireland

ABSTRACT

There is a global shift in education from solely content-driven teaching to teaching that takes learning outcomes into account. This movement underpins much of the educational reform in the area of engineering education. Programme learning outcomes for degrees in engineering education are more commonplace as more and more professional accrediting bodies require fulfillment or compliance with prescribed learning outcomes. However, the students may not be presented with these learning outcomes as they are often "hidden" in documentation submitted by institutions for accreditation purposes and hence may not be divulged to students. Undergraduate students (2006–2008) taking the BE degree programme in Process & Chemical Engineering at UCC were first surveyed to assess their level of knowledge of the learning outcomes concept and of the degree programme learning outcomes. The contents of two documents used in applications for accreditation by professional accreditation bodies as well as professional Institution guidelines were reviewed to formulate the degree programme learning outcomes which were presented to the students. These students were then surveyed after the presentation. The results of the questionnaire completed by students demonstrated a major improvement in their knowledge of both the concept of learning outcomes and also of the degree programme learning outcomes. It also showed that the students found the session to be of overall beneficial value.

Modularisation

ECTS and MODULARISATION

In ECTS, the formulation of learning outcomes is the basis for the estimation of workload and hence for credit allocation. When those responsible for designing educational programmes establish the qualification profile and the expected learning outcomes of the programme and its components, ECTS credits help them to be realistic about the necessary workload and to choose learning, teaching and assessment strategies wisely.

ECTS Users' Guide p. 14 (2009)

What is a module?

- A module is a self-contained fraction of a student's programme workload for the year with a unique examination and a clear set of learning outcomes and appropriate assessment criteria.
- The size of a module is indicated by its credit weighting. Under modularisation, each academic year of a degree programme is worth 60 ECTS credits.
- ECTS credits are the value allocated to modules to describe the student workload required to complete them.
- The number of credits allocated to each module will vary depending on the fraction of programme workload it represents, e.g. 5, 10, 15 or 20 credits.

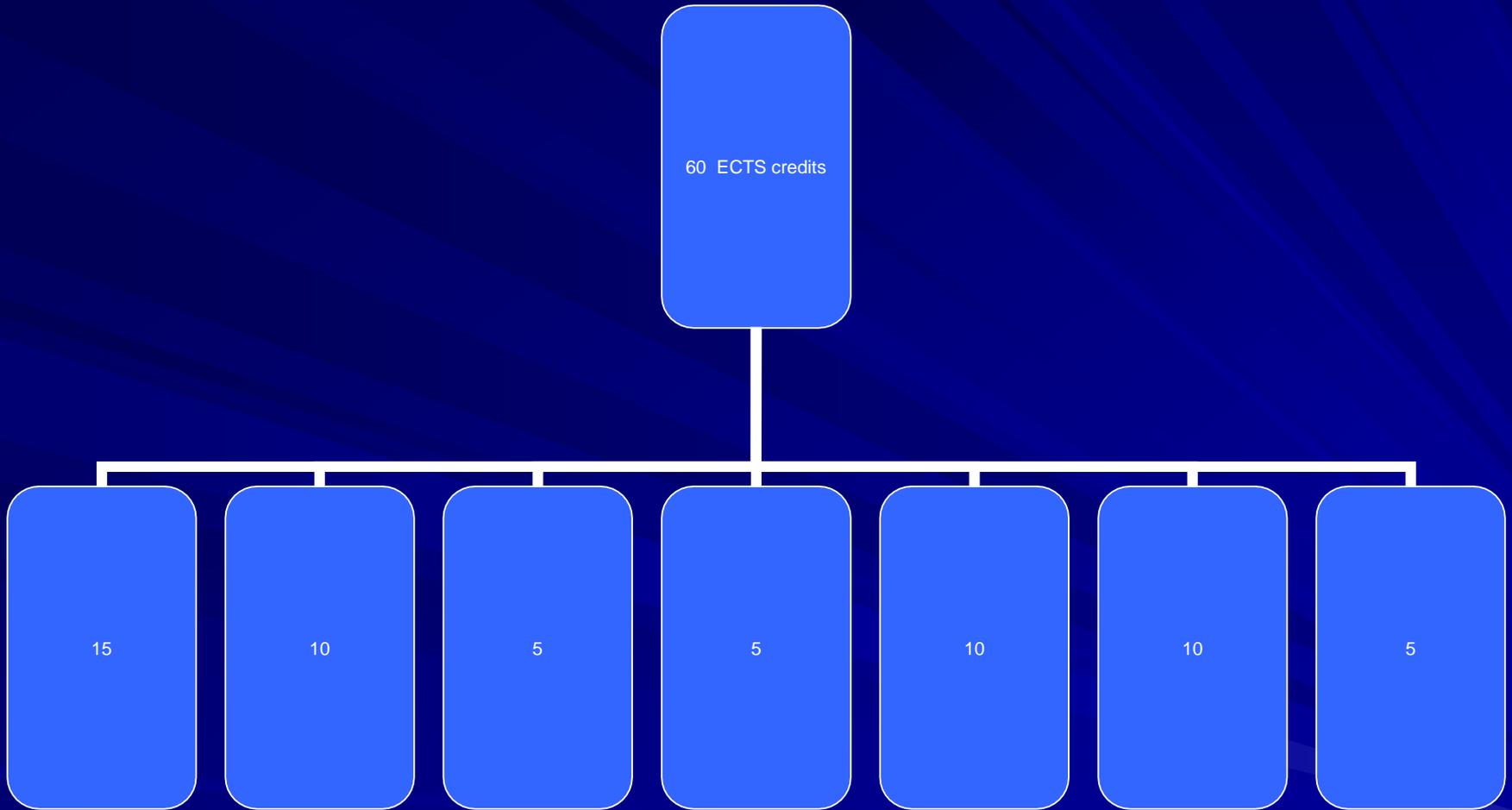
Modularisation

- A module is a self-contained fraction of a student's workload for the year with a unique examination and a clear set of learning outcomes and appropriate assessment criteria.
- The size of a module is indicated by its credit weighting.
- Under ECTS system, each year of degree programme = 60 credits.
- Modules are allocated 5, 10, 15 or 20 credits depending on the fraction of the programme workload covered in the module.
- Each module is given a unique code, e.g. ED2013

ED2013



Education Year 2 Number assigned to this module



Advantages of modularisation

- Gives greater clarity of structure and helps to establish clear relationship between credits and student workload in ECTS system.
- Reflects more accurately the various elements of students' workload.
- Facilitates work abroad, work placement, off-campus study as modules for degree examinations.
- Gives greater clarity and consistency in assessment.
- Provides flexibility in the design of degree programmes by incorporating modules from different areas.

- Facilitates credit accumulation, i.e. increases number of pathways to final degree award. Hence, encourages greater diversity of students, e.g. mature and part time students.
- Allows third level institutions to participate in schemes like SOCRATES so that students obtain ECTS credits towards their degree.
- Facilitates greater ease of student transfer between institutions offering ECTS-based programmes.
- Facilitates resource allocation within university.

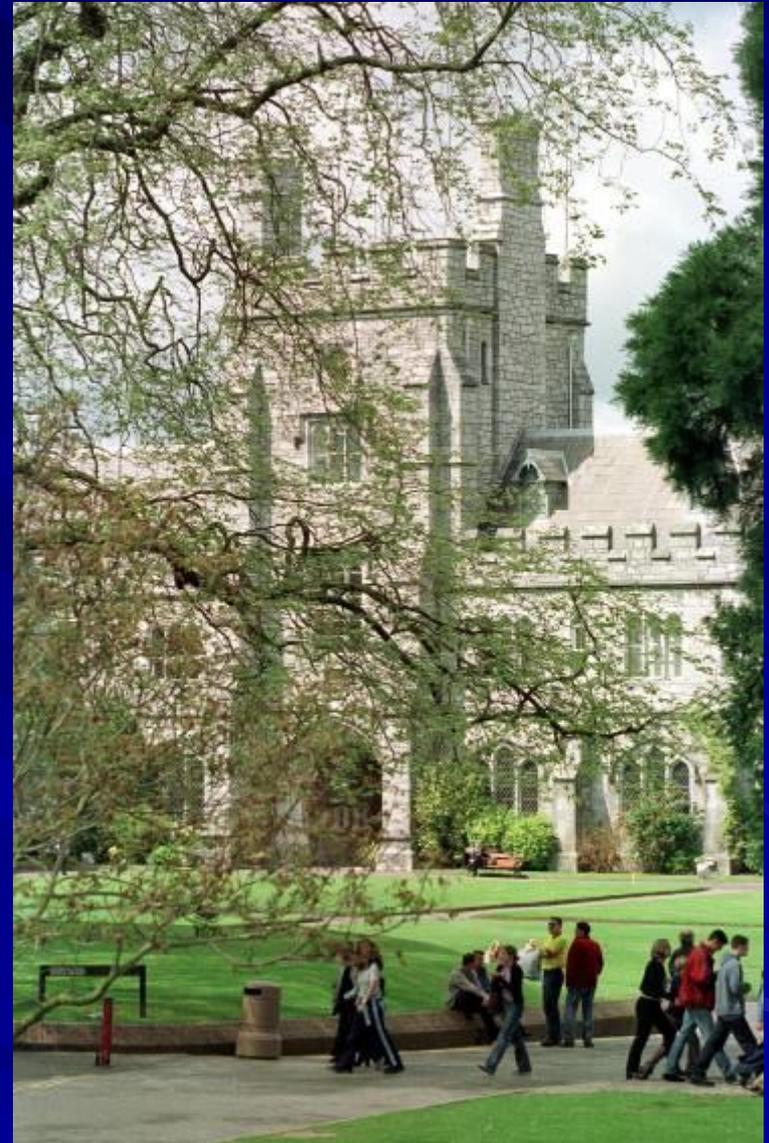
Modules, Marks, Exams in UCC

Module	Student Workload	Marks	Exam Paper
5 credits*	125 – 150 hours	100	1.5 hours
10 credits	250 – 300 hours	200	3 hours
15 credits	375 – 450 hours	300	3 hours
20 credits	500 – 600 hours	400	2 x 3 hours

Note: Total per year = 60 credits = 1200 marks

In University College Cork, a 5-credit module normally consists of 24 hours of lectures plus associated tutorials/essays / readings/practical/coursework
OR

The equivalent in student workload such as literature projects, field courses, or indeed set reading assessed by written examination, work for problem sets, studying of legal material and cases outside of lecture hours, etc.



What information is needed to describe a particular module?

- **Module Code and Title:** unique six character code (identifies subject and level)
 - **Credit weighting:** (5, 10, 15 or 20 credits)
 - **Pre-requisite(s):**
 - **Co-requisite(s):**
 - **Teaching Methods:**
 - **Module Co-ordinator:**
 - **Lecturer(s):**
 - **Module Objective:**
 - **Module Learning Outcomes:**
 - **Module Content:**
- etc.
- See book of modules in www.ucc.ie

Introducing Learning Outcomes at University Level

Learning Outcomes in UCC

- UCC participated in the European Universities Association Network on Quality in Teaching and Learning in 2003 – 2004. "Implementing a Learning Outcomes Approach to Teaching" – Quality Culture Project IV (EUA).
- Network of six EU universities involved.
- Headed up by Prof. Aine Hyland, Education Dept. and Dr Norma Ryan Quality Promotion Unit UCC An 18 month project - the report was published in 2005. The project concentrated on Learning Outcomes rather than Competences

A number of international conferences on Bologna Process were held in University College Cork – how I became involved.

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Implementing Learning Outcomes

Implications for re-defining Teaching & Learning



Friday 10th & Saturday 11th February 2006

LECTURE THEATRE G02,
BROOKFIELD HEALTH SCIENCES COMPLEX
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND - CORK
COLLAÍSTE NA HÍOISCOÍE CORKAIGH
COLLEGIUM HIBERNICUM IORICAE



benelux
2009

The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade

**Communiqué of the Conference of
European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education,
Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009**

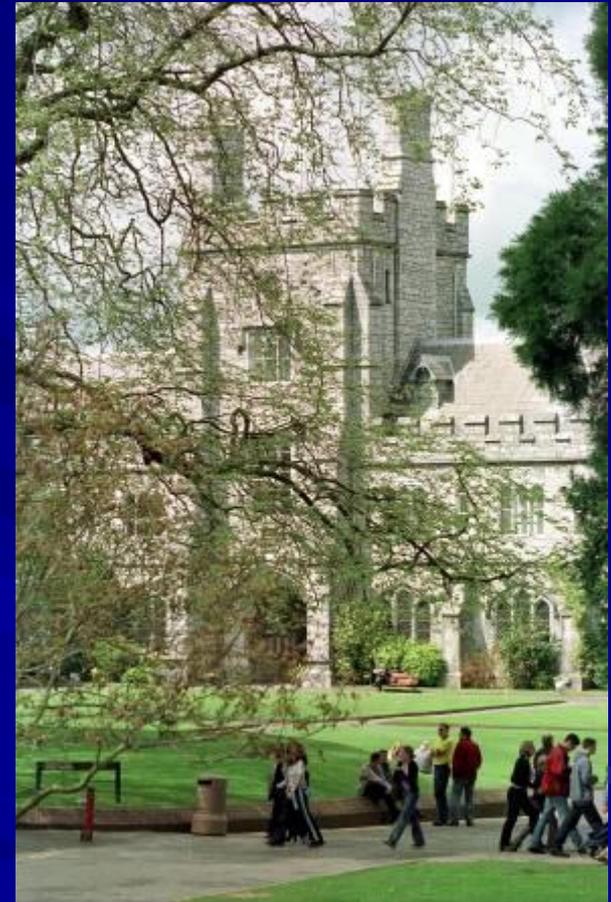
- ***Student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education***

14. We reassert the importance of the teaching mission of higher education institutions and the necessity for ongoing curricular reform geared toward the development of learning outcomes. Student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners, new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support and guidance structures and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all three cycles. Curricular reform will thus be an ongoing process leading to high quality, flexible and more individually tailored education paths. Academics, in close cooperation with student and employer representatives, will continue to develop learning outcomes and international reference points for a growing number of subject areas. We ask the higher education institutions to pay particular attention to improving the teaching quality of their study programmes at all levels. This should be a priority in the further implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance.

The Teaching and Learning Centre

Ionad Bairre

- Set up in October 2006 – Dr Marian McCarthy and Dr Bettie Higgs.
- Has provided a continuous series of lunchtime seminars on Teaching and Learning throughout each academic year.
- “Taking a Learning Outcomes approach to Teaching and Learning”
- “Learning Outcomes-how can we be sure they have been achieved?”
- “Getting to Grips with Assessing Creative and Original Student work - Unpredictable Learning Outcomes”
- Drop-in workshops on Learning Outcomes.



Dear Colleagues,



Applications for the

Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2014/2015

are now being taken until

1 July 2014

A briefing session by Dr Marian McCarthy, Programme Director, will take place at:

1.15pm, today Thursday, 12 June 2014 (light lunch available)

North Wing Council Room

Applications for the
**Postgraduate Certificate in
Teaching and Learning
in Higher Education**

are now being taken until

1 July 2012

The aim of the Accredited Programme (Certificate, Diploma and Master's Degree) is to enable teachers in higher education to research and develop their teaching from the perspective of their students' learning and its impact on the disciplines.

Participants will have the opportunity to:

- Interact with colleagues to foster communities of practice
- Design curricula and develop student-centred teaching strategies to enhance and assess student learning
- Document, research and peer review their teaching
- Publish their research findings

Briefing sessions will take place at:
1pm, 12 June, North Wing Council Room
1pm, 20 June, North Wing Council Room

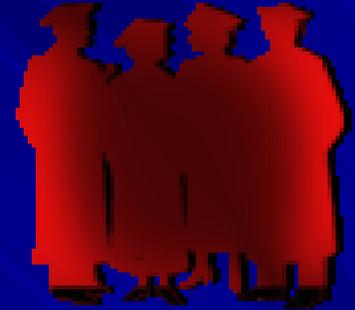
For additional information please contact
Dr Marian McCarthy, mmccarthy@education.ucc.ie
Ms Mary Clohessy, m.clohessy@ucc.ie
021 4902919 (mornings)

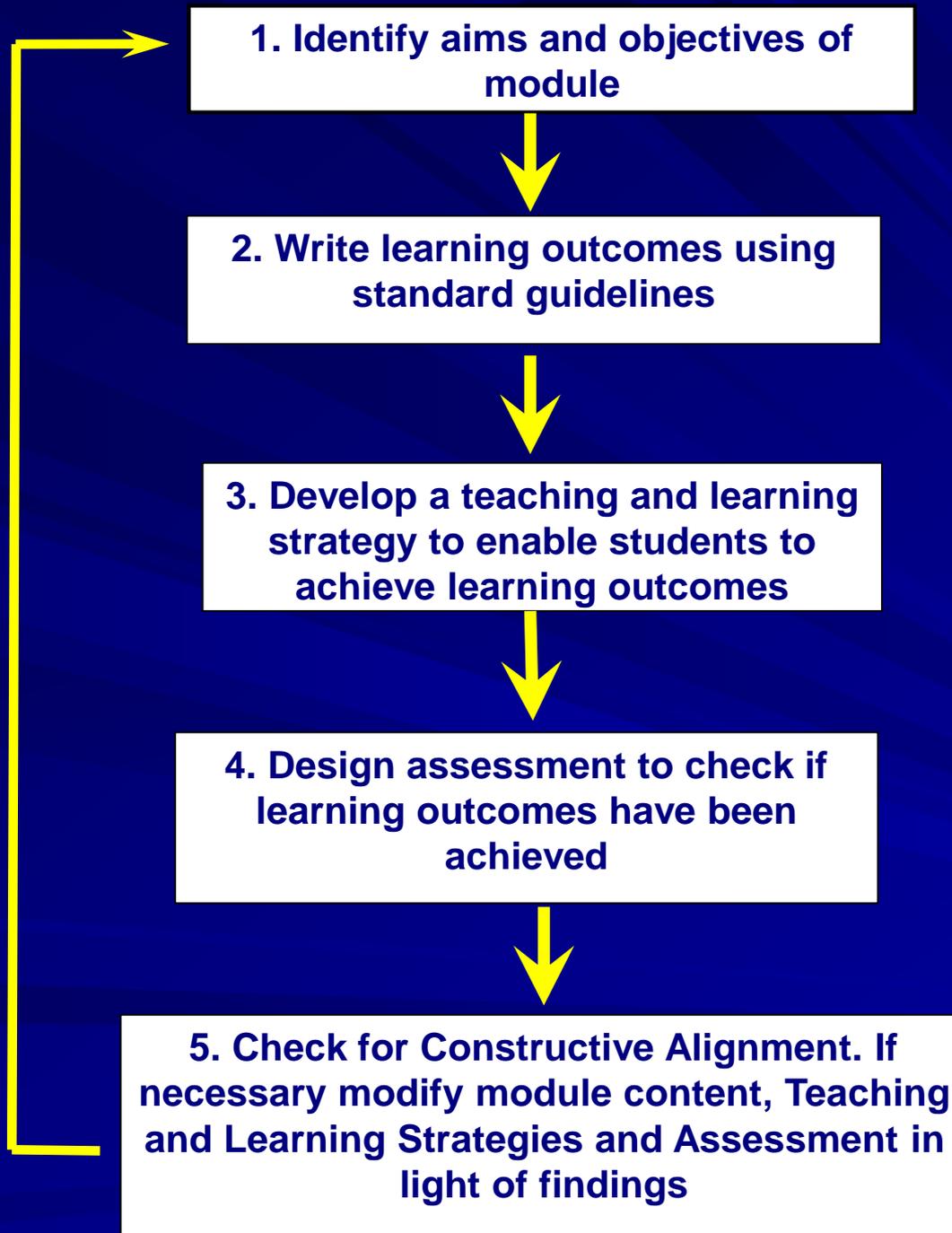
Ionad Bairre, The Teaching and Learning Centre,
West Lodge, behind Main Quadrangle, University College Cork.
All applications must be made online at <http://www.pac.ie/ucc>
For course information please visit <http://bit.ly/2012TLHE>



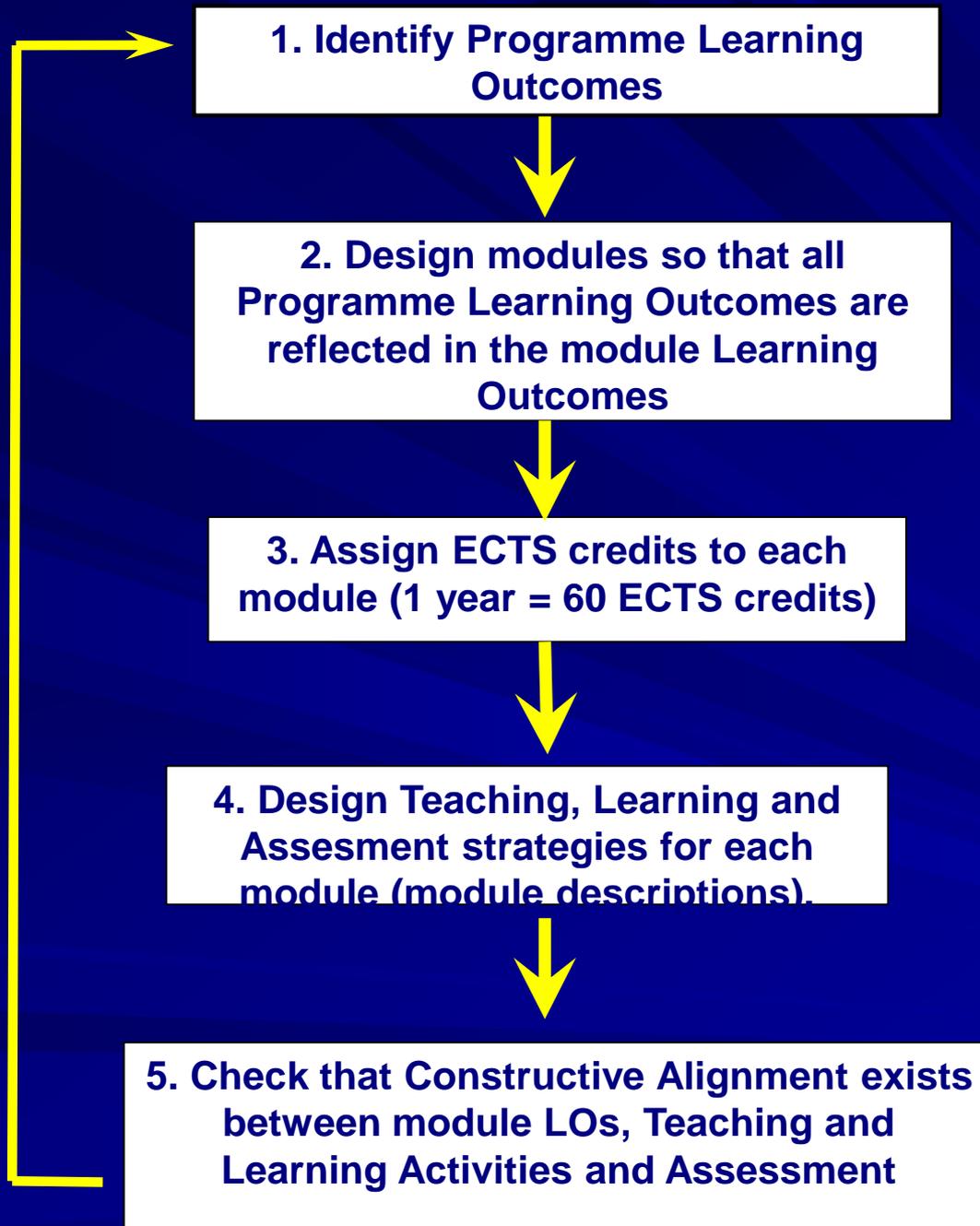
Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and MA in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

- Initiated in October 2004.
- To date 4 cycles of the Postgraduate Certificate course have been completed involving 170 staff.
- A total of 90 staff members have completed the Postgraduate Diploma course.
- The MA in Teaching and Learning at Higher Education has been completed by 20 staff members.
- Has provided a great resource throughout the university – seminars based in individual Departments.





“Bottom up”
approach for
existing
modules



**“Top Down”
Approach for
designing new
programmes**

“Writing Learning
Outcomes is a
Process not an
Event”



Looking to the Future



“Learning outcomes had fundamentally changed the Scottish sector’s approach to learning since the 1990s and had resulted in enhanced coherence of the learning experience, greater transparency, increased dialogue with stakeholders, more opportunity for students to manage their own learning and better support for transitions into and out of learning programmes at points that suited the needs of the student”

- Judith Vincent, Univ of West of Scotland
(Seminar 21 – 22 February 2008)

Students' Perspective on Learning Outcomes

- Learning outcomes are an important aspect of student-centred learning which focused on student needs.
- Learning outcomes provided students with
 - a clear idea of what was expected
 - helped them to identify their own personal and professional development
 - increased their sense of ownership of their educational experience.
 - encouraged them to engage more actively in their learning.
 - gave a more accurate and meaningful picture of student achievement than workload.

(Jill Little National Union of Students Scotland)

Implications of a Learning Outcomes Approach to Teaching and Learning

- The learning outcomes are not just seen as happening at the end, but are built in from the very start in the ongoing feedback and discussion and in the working out of the problem and discussing it with the students along the way – making the learning visible as we go along.



Recommendations from students

- Learning outcomes should not be used in a tokenistic way e.g., only referred to in course handbooks.
- Learning Outcomes should be communicated to students so that they can articulate the knowledge and skills they have acquired.
- Learning Outcomes should be neither so prescriptive as to impede freedom of learning nor so broad as to become meaningless.

(Jill Little National Union of Students Scotland)

Advantages of Learning Outcomes from students' perspective

The use of learning outcomes with ECTS would result in:

- A broader, fairer and more accurate recognition of students' knowledge and skills.
- A more transparent learning environment
- Easier to engage with and to choose programmes.
- Easier mobility within academic fields, education systems and countries.
- Enhanced employability in Europe
- More student-centred learning.

(Jill Little National Union of Students Scotland)

Some General Advantages of Learning Outcomes

- Aids curriculum design, helps to clarify programme aims and module objectives.
- Help to highlight the relationship between, Teaching, Learning and Assessment.
- Students benefit from clear statements of what they will be able to achieve after the specified period of study.
- Students are provided with clear information about programmes and modules.
- In terms of Quality Assurance, learning outcomes bring clarity and explicit transparency between qualifications and within individual qualifications.
- Facilitate mobility of students and graduates seeking employment.
- Facilitate credit transfer and recognition of qualifications – a common language for describing programmes.

Issues with Introduction of Learning Outcomes

- Learning Outcomes are only part of a massive reform package, e.g. Qualification Frameworks, Lifelong Learning, ECTS, Mutual Recognition, Quality Assurance.
- How best to introduce Learning Outcomes (“top down” or “bottom up”? Best left to local and National autonomy.
- How best to deal with sceptical attitude of some staff members – “dumbing down”, “restricting academic freedom”? Hence, important to introduce Learning Outcomes in a proper fashion using sources of good practice and advice.
- Lack of clarity and lack of shared understanding on key terminology, e.g. learning outcomes and competences.

Issues raised when introducing Learning Outcomes

- **Opposition to Bloom's Taxonomy.** This should not present a problem to the writing of Learning Outcomes AS mentioned already, Bloom's Taxonomy is simply a very useful toolkit to assist us in writing learning outcomes. If staff members do not wish to use Bloom's Taxonomy, they can use other taxonomies or use their own system to write learning outcomes. As long as staff members write learning outcomes that are correctly written, that is all that is important.
- **Preference to write competences.** It is not a problem if people like to describe their courses in terms of competences. However, the Bologna Agreement specifies that modules and programmes must be written in Learning Outcomes. If staff members wish to write competences as well as Learning Outcomes, that is not a problem. Learning outcomes bring clarity to competences.

Some Advice

- Introducing learning outcomes at institutional level requires a carefully tailored strategy, whose primary goal should be quality enhancement rather than compliance with external directives;
- Learning outcomes must be capable of assessment and at the module level should be linked to assessment criteria, also expressed in terms of learning outcomes;
- The best learning outcomes are the product of sincere reflection about realistic and attainable combinations of knowledge and understanding, practical and cognitive skills, levels of autonomy, learning skills etc.
- Learning Outcomes are challenging but it is impossible to have a meaningful European Higher Education area without their widespread and consistent use

(Stephen Adams, 2008)

Some Recommendations from Porto Conference (19 – 20 June 2008)

- Develop and disseminate user-friendly documentation to explain to all stakeholders the benefits of learning outcomes and credits.
- Implement a holistic approach, developing learning outcomes as an integral part of teaching, learning and assessment methods within an aligned curriculum.
- Offer incentives to encourage staff to engage in new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

Concluding Points

- Momentum generated by
 - European University Association project.
 - International Bologna conferences.
 - Setting up of Teaching and Learning Centre (Ionad Bairre).
 - Postgraduate Cert/Diploma and MA in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
 - Lunchtime seminars for staff.
- Keep it simple.
- Provide support to staff.
- Staff training is the key.
- Setting up of expertise within each Department – Postgraduate Cert/Diploma course.
- The UCC Quality Promotion Unit - the driving force.
- A team effort.

