



Inspectie van het Onderwijs  
*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en  
Wetenschap*



# THE ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES: DEVELOPING A GUIDE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

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15-4-2011



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## 1.1 Introduction

- a. A definition of learning outcomes (from: Kennedy, D, Hyland, A. and Ryan, N. (2006): Writing and using learning outcomes: a practical guide. Web-based article):  
**Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.**
- b. Related concepts: aims, objectives, attainment targets, competences; hierarchies in learning outcomes (e.g. Bloom); constructive alignment.
- c. Outcomes at BA, MA, PhD-level: knowledge and understanding, application, judgment, communication, learning skills.



## 1.2 Introduction

The relevance: some statements in the Bologna process:

Berlin 2003: .....describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, **learning outcomes**, competences and profile.....

Bergen 2005: ..... generic descriptors for each cycle based on **learning outcomes** and competences .....

London 2007: .... with a view to the development of more student-centred, outcome-based learning the next [stocktaking] exercise should also address .... national qualification frameworks, **learning outcomes** and credits, life long learning and the recognition of prior learning.



## 1.3 Introduction

A stakeholders' comment (students):

*"Learning outcomes are the building blocks of a learner-centred educational model, in which flexibility, participativity and the availability of choice rule supreme".*

Student-Centred-Learning-Conference, A vision for the future,  
Bucharest - May 2010.

+ many booklets, conferences, even awards (eg CHEA, Tuning Report, Report Nordic Countries, ECA, NVAO-conference, ENQA conference Vienna, September 2010, to mention just a few)



## 1.4 Introduction

A short story taken from the Preface of:

Robert F. Mager (1991, revised 2nd edition): *Preparing Instructional Objectives*. London: Kogan Page.

“Once upon a time a Sea Horse gathered up his seven coins and cantered out to find his fortune. Before he had travelled very far he met an Eel, who said....”



## 2.1 Previous work

Report 'Assessment matters' (2007/2008, 8 agencies)

(cf: [www.enqa.eu/files/QA%20of%20Student%20Assessment%20Report.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/QA%20of%20Student%20Assessment%20Report.pdf))

### 1. ESG

Standard: *students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures applied consistently*

A few examples derived from the standard:

- ✓ designed to measure the achievement of the intended l.o.'s
- ✓ appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
- ✓ with clear and published criteria for marking;
- ✓ not relying on the judgments of single examiners.

### 2. DIRI-cycle

- ✓ Design – implement – review - improve



## 2.2 Previous work

Building on ESG and DIRI 'Assessment Matters' came up with 5 Principles:

1. Transparency
2. Consistency
3. Comparability
4. Accountability
5. Involvement of students and staff

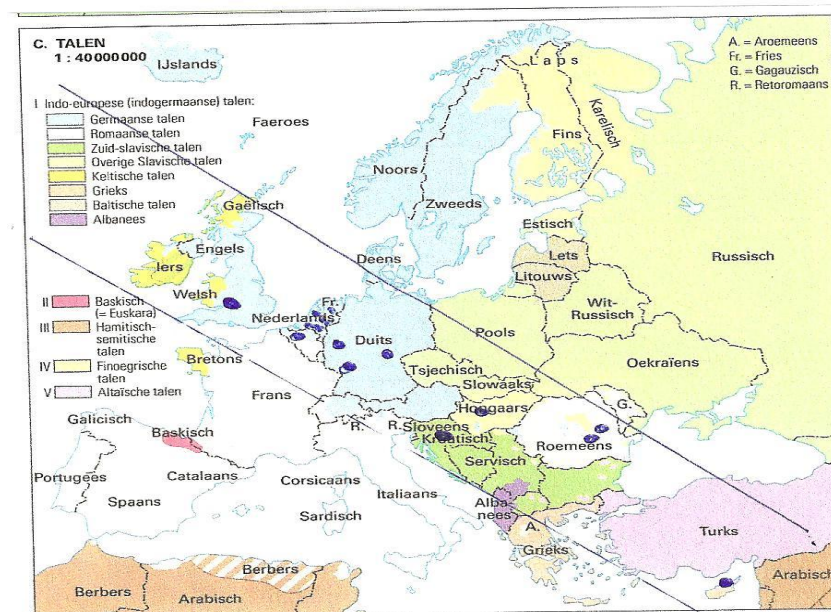
These principles were applied to a few case studies.





## 3. Follow-up

Workshop The Hague, January 2011,  
16 participants, 8 countries



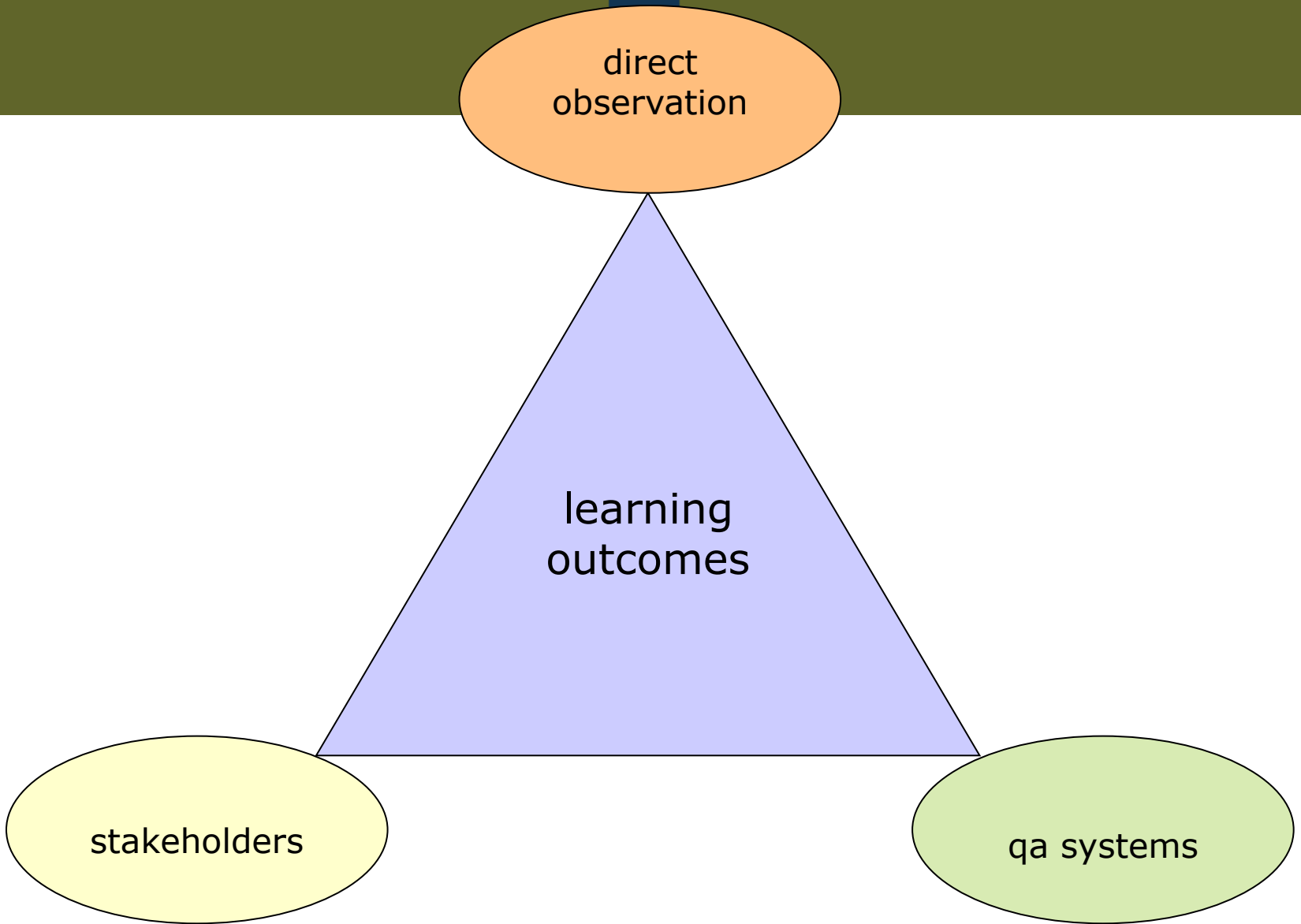


## 4.1 Results

We looked at 3 Components of QA of assessment of learning outcomes:

1. Direct observation of realized learning outcomes
2. Stakeholders' opinions/judgements of the extent to which learning outcomes are realized
3. Systems for quality assurance of the assessment of learning outcomes

The triangle!



direct  
observation

learning  
outcomes

stakeholders

qa systems



## 4.3 Direct observation: tools

- Reading thesis work and exam papers
- Observing demonstration by students
- Studying portfolios
- Comparison of achieved LO with stated learning outcomes
- Initial point: outcomes must be assessed for appropriateness, consistency with national qualification framework



## 4.4 Direct observation: strengths & weaknesses

### *Strengths*

- Direct evidence
- Easily explicable
- Human factor – interaction (not mechanistic)
- Harder to deceive 'assessors'

### *Weaknesses*

- Sampling (can't look at all student work)
- Human factor
- Resource-intensive
- Can be manipulated to present best picture



## 4.5 Stakeholders: tools

*Who are the stakeholders?*

- a. Professional field (employers)
- b. Competent authorities
- c. Alumni/graduates
- d. Students

*Tools*

1. Checklist *Fitness of* purpose, with questions like....:
  - Did you consult the professional field? Competent authorities?
  - Did you do an alumni survey?
2. Checklist *Fitness for* purpose, with questions like...:
  - Did you consult students on the relation of intended learning outcomes to the program?
  - And on experiences with assessment of learning outcomes?



## 4.6 Stakeholders: strengths & weaknesses

### *Strengths*

- Relevant (essential)
- Can help improve the program
- May promote mobility of students

### *Weakness*

- Resource-intensive



## 4.7 QA systems: tools

- National requirements (from which teaching and examination regulations are deduced)
- Qualification frameworks (national and European)
- Description of learning outcomes/module descriptors
- Templates for drafting self-analysis documents
- Grids/guidelines for evaluation of self-analysis
- Accreditation frameworks/criteria for evaluation of assessment
- Interviews (selected versus open)
- Professionalization of examiners (e.g. via training workshops)
- Internal quality assurance units
- Register of examiners
- Independent accreditation agencies





## 4.8 QA systems: strengths & weaknesses

### *Strengths*

Systematic approach (to a certain extent)

PDCA cycle is followed

### *Weaknesses*

Time-limited

May be seen as a 'paper exercise' (does paper reflect reality?)

Insufficient professionalization of some peers

Complex and frequently changing regulations (example: assessment of prior learning)



## 5. Next steps (1): Principles & Enhancement

### a. Principles

In which way do the 3 components address the 5 principles?

- Transparency?
- Consistency?
- Comparability?
- Accountability?
- Involvement of student and staff?

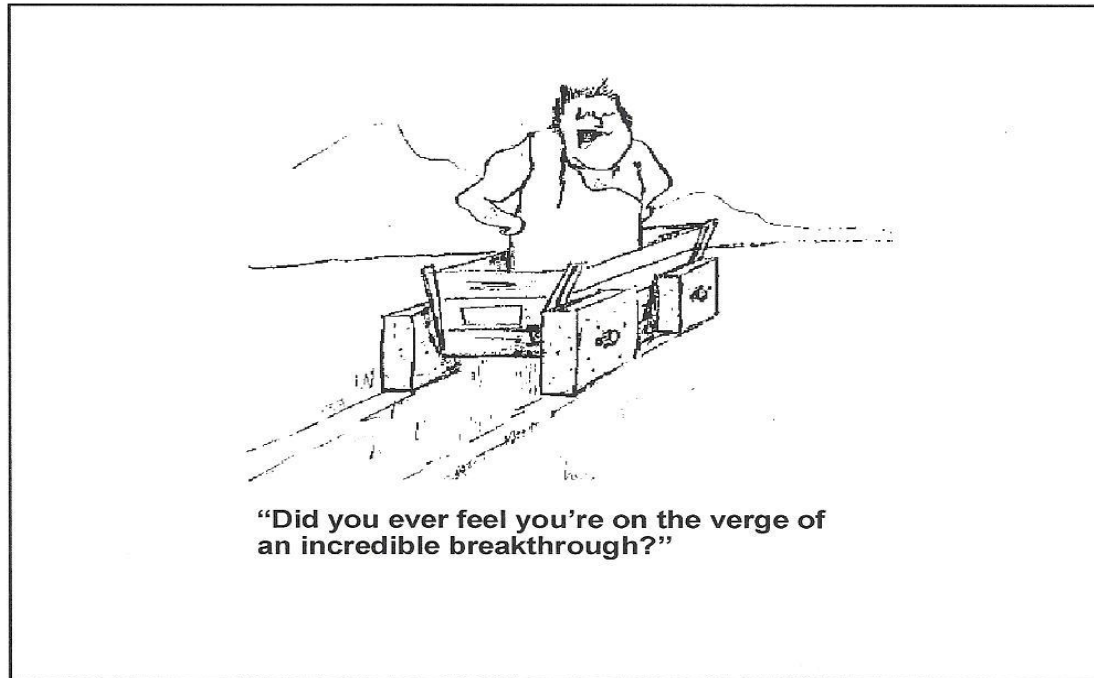
### b. Enhancement

How does this approach contribute to enhancement of the assessment of learning outcomes?



## 5. Next steps (2): Where do we stand now?

Hopefully a Guide in Autumn 2011!





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Thank you for your interest!

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