

***Invitational Forum on Converging Competences: Diversity,
Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy***

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Room G03

Competences, Learning Outcomes and Convergence

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A complex topic that raises many questions:

1. What are learning outcomes and how do they differ from competences?
2. Why are learning outcomes and competences so important?
3. What role do learning outcomes play in the Bologna Process?
4. What is the potential (and vital) role of higher education learning outcomes and competences in the wider political and societal spheres - the London Communiqué, May 2007
5. Four presentations - examples of competences in practice



Where to start??

1. What are learning outcomes and how do they differ from competences?

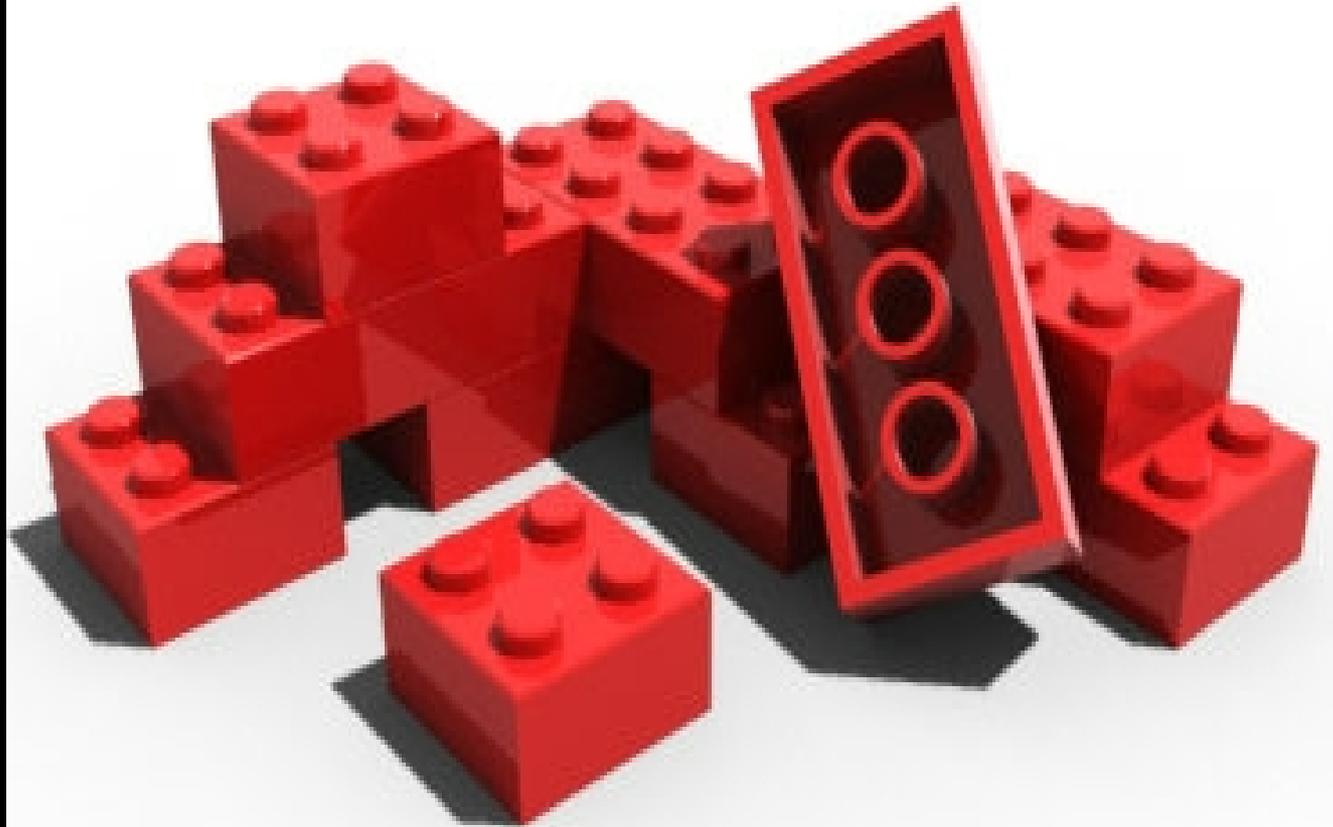
- ❑ This prosaic topic has assumed a significance that was not recognised at the start of the Bologna Process, but now there is huge interest.
- ❑ Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning. They are explicit assertions about the outcomes of learning - the results of learning. They are crucial for the process of curriculum development
- ❑ Learning outcomes exemplify a particular methodological approach for the expression and description of the curriculum (modules, units and qualifications) and level, cycle and qualifications descriptors associated with the 'new style' Bologna qualifications frameworks (multiple applications).
- ❑ Learning outcomes were not mentioned in the original 1999 Bologna Declaration nor in the Prague Communiqué 2001. Since then they have appeared in every new ministerial Communiqué.

Learning outcomes and competences

The relationship between learning outcomes and competences is a complex area - the subject of some debate and no little confusion. 'Competence' and 'competences' are used in association with learning outcomes in a number of ways - hence the problem. 'Competence' can broadly refer to aptitude, proficiency, capability, skills and understanding, etc. A competent person is someone with sufficient skills and knowledge and capabilities. Some take a narrow view and equate competence solely with skills acquired by training. It should be recognised that there is no precise common understanding or use of the term.

WARNING!

Learning outcomes are just educational tools that are complex and easy to misuse. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.



2. Why are learning outcomes and competences so important?

Learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna education reforms + part of an educational paradigm change:

It is arguable that the main end product of the Bologna reforms is better qualifications based on learning outcomes and certainly not just new educational structures. For this sort of bottom-up reform it is recognised that there is a need for fundamental changes (using learning outcomes) at the institutional level where academics are responsible for creating and maintaining qualifications.



LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- o Provide a clear focus on what students achieve

Lead to better qualifications and improved student experience
Can be subject specific or transversal
Underpin all the Bologna reforms
Impact at the local (HEI), national (EFMD) and international levels...



bologna
process

3.
What role
do learning
outcomes
play in the
Bologna
Process?



4. What is the potential (and vital) role of higher education learning outcomes and competences in the wider political and societal spheres - the London Communiqué, May 2007

- ❑ Ensures that education is not reduced to just training + helps counters the domination of 'market forces' in shaping the educational agenda
- ❑ Important role in terms of 'access' and 'social inclusion'
- ❑ Forces us to articulate and think about our values, moral attitudes and ethics - embed in our learning outcomes
- ❑ Enriches the curriculum + enhances the student experience
- ❑ In the long-term promotes social cohesion and understanding of the diversity that increasingly marks modern life
- ❑ These 'life skills' are important if we want informed, engaged, responsible graduates/citizens

The London Communiqué, May 2007

“We reaffirm our commitment to increasing the compatibility and Comparability of our higher education systems, whilst at the same time respecting their diversity. **We recognise the important influence higher education institutions (HEIs) exert on developing our societies**, based on their traditions as centres of learning, research, creativity and knowledge transfer as well as **their key role in defining and transmitting the values on which our societies are built**. Our aim is to ensure that our HEIs have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes. **Those purposes include: (1) preparing students for life as active citizens in a Democratic society; (2) preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; (3) creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; (4) and stimulating research and innovation.**”

Fine words but (1) + (2) are rarely translated into concrete action using learning outcomes = a huge challenge!

5. Four presentations - examples of competences in practice:

Ding-Jo Currie President of Coastline Community College

Georgia Nugent President of Kenyon College

Zarko Nozica Pro-rector of the University of applied
Sciences in Zagreb, EURASHE

Ayne Hyland Former Vice-President of the Cork
University College, EUA

Jeanine Bruun European Students' Union, ESU