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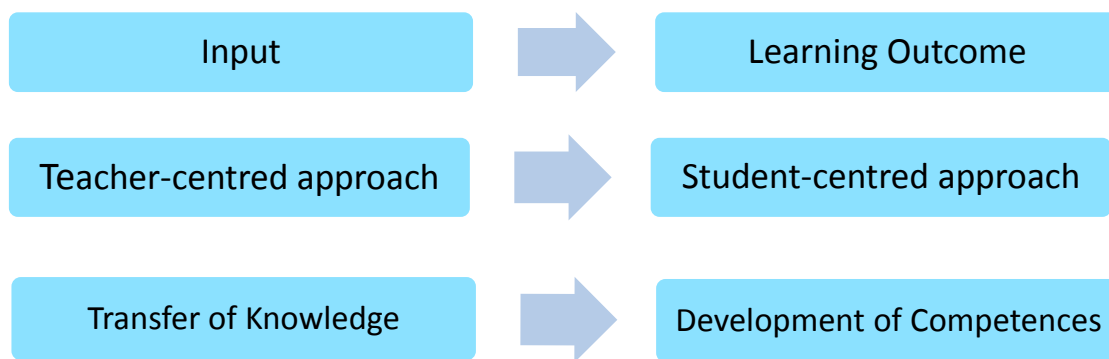
## Competence-oriented study programmes

### *What is Competence Orientation?*

There are a number of different explanations and definitions of the term 'competence orientation', depending on the context. In the field of higher education, two aspects of competence orientation are particularly important. Competence orientation implies a new approach to teaching and learning that noticeably differs from the traditional, content-oriented approach ('shift from teaching to learning') and that enables students to cope better with the times of information overflow and accumulation of knowledge we find ourselves in. Competence orientation goes hand in hand with the Bologna Process, the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's programmes and external quality assurance (accreditation). Competence orientation is thus a modern approach to teaching and learning, aiming at providing students with competences that enable them to deal actively with new knowledge and unknown situations instead of simply conveying new contents. The function of contents

on the other hand is to create a body of essential knowledge in a certain area that can be continually expanded. This (exemplary) knowledge is to be used in order to practice coping with and processing new knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

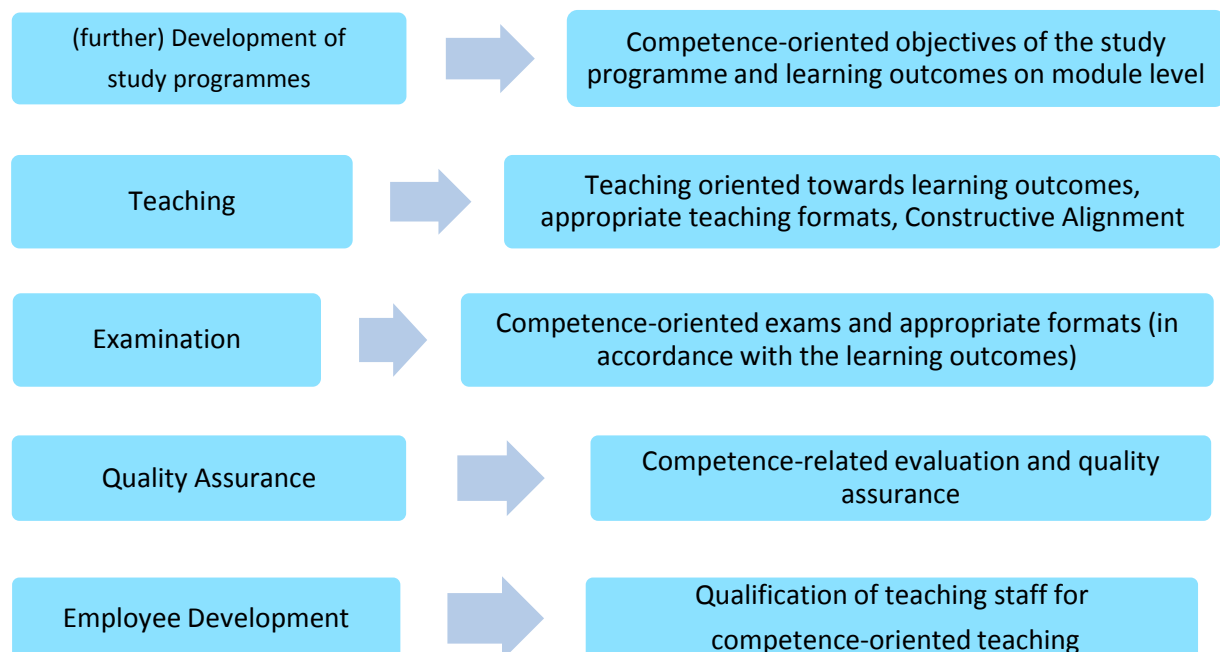
Competence orientation requires the addition of as yet little illuminated perspectives, consisting of three aspects:



Resource: own chart

### *Where is Competence Orientation realised?*

In order to thoroughly implement competence orientation, different areas of studies and teaching need to be adjusted.



Resource: own chart

<sup>1</sup> Competence orientation does not question that the acquisition of (expert) knowledge and (expert) methodology is of course still a vital part of every study programme in Higher Education.

### *What are the Accreditation Criteria used to assess Competence Orientation?*

Special emphasis in the accreditation process is placed upon the implementation of competence orientation. The criteria and their claim for competence orientation derive from international quality standards.<sup>2</sup>

Accreditation Criterion	Reference to Competence Orientation
Description of the Objectives of the Study Programme	The qualification objectives of the programme, including both subject-specific and extra-curricular competences and skills, need to be explained and convincingly presented. They embrace academic proficiency, comprehensive employability, as well as the development of the individual student's personality. The subject-specific and extra-curricular qualification objectives and competences to be acquired correspond with the aspired level at graduation. They take into account the requirements of the national qualification framework.
Implementation of the study programme - Contents	The curriculum adequately reflects the qualification objectives of the study programme. The contents of the modules are well-balanced, logically connected and oriented towards the intended learning outcomes.
Examination and Final Thesis	The exams are knowledge- and competence-oriented and suited in format and content to ascertain the intended learning outcomes. The students prove, especially in their thesis, their ability to do scientific work and the achievement of the study programme's qualification objectives.
Modular structure of the study programme	The programme structure supports students in reaching the defined learning outcomes.
Module descriptions	The module descriptions make clear which learning outcomes are intended, how the competencies and skills shall be acquired and what types of assessment students will pass. The module descriptions provide the information defined in the <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> .
Didactical concept	The didactical concept of the study programme is oriented towards the programme objectives. It allows for the application of different teaching and learning methods. With regard to competence orientation, this includes developing and practicing skills and the capacity to act.
Faculty	The qualification of the faculty correspond to objectives of the study programme. The faculty is qualified for student-centred teaching. Specific measures for the further qualification of the faculty members are implemented.
Quality assurance and quality development	Evaluations monitor and develop the quality of the programme in terms of learning outcomes and competence orientation.

### *From Qualification Objectives on Programme Level to the Learning Outcome of Modules*

<sup>2</sup> [Standards for Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) from 2005; [Equal European MBA Guidelines from 2014](#); [ECTS-Users' guide](#) from 2009; ['Dublin-Descriptors'](#) from 2004; online resources, last accessed 2015-05-28.

A competence-oriented development of a study programme is carried out as 'backward design'<sup>3</sup>. Correspondingly, the review panel is first of all interested in the intended educational outcomes of a study programme. The first step of the development of a study programme is thus defining its qualification objectives. The skills and competences the students (have to) possess are determined thereafter (admission requirements) and they, too, are assessed in the accreditation process. As step two, the curriculum and the structure (as well as the didactics, equipment...) of the study programme derive from the two preconditions above. As a third step, the qualification objectives on programme level are transferred to specific learning outcomes on module level, and the arrangement of the modules is defined ('modular structure'/ 'module formation'). The correlation within the modules regarding learning outcomes, assessment and learning activities ('Constructive Alignment') is described further down. The process of the (further) development of a study programme will possibly be carried out several times, because changes in one step may affect the other two. (Further) programme development using the Backward Design is a continuous process of change.

### *Competence-oriented Modules: The Correlation of Teaching, Learning and Assessing*

Teachers expect the acquisition of competences from their students and they organise and give their lessons accordingly. Students, however, direct their studies on passing the module examination. In order for the students and teachers to reach the same goal despite their different approaches, the correlation between teaching, learning and assessing will be presented here.

Constructive Alignment<sup>4</sup> is an approach that aims at optimising the conditions for quality learning. It intends to coordinate learning outcomes, learning activities and assessments as closely as possible, so that the teachers' expectations of the students' competences acquired at the end of a teaching unit match the students' studies, which are first and foremost directed towards passing the assessment. That is, the learning objectives planned by the teachers and the competences studied and practiced by the students are intended to be as congruent as possible. The model of Constructive Alignment can be used on all levels of Higher Education (curriculum, module, course and lesson). In Bachelor's and Master's programmes the correlation between teaching, learning and assessing takes effect especially on module level.

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<sup>3</sup> McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2004). Understanding by design: Professional development workbook. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development

<sup>4</sup> Biggs, J. (2003). Aligning teaching and assessment to curriculum objectives. Online resource last accessed 2015-05-28: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/biggs-aligning-teaching-and-assessment.pdf>

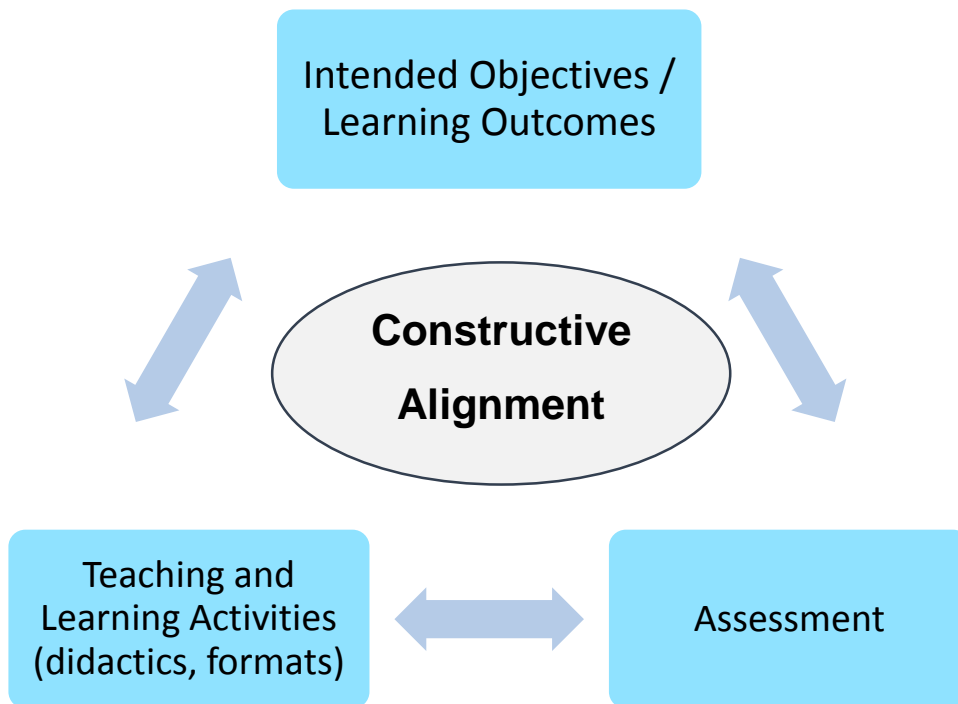


Fig. 1 own design based on Biggs 2003

Constructive Alignment can be successful when

- the Teaching and Learning Activities are shaped for the intended objectives / learning outcomes
- the assessments examine intended objectives / learning outcomes and
- the Teaching and Learning Activities prepare for the assessment.

Prerequisites for this are that the learning outcomes are described in a way that they are testable and that the learning outcomes are generally achievable by the teaching / learning activities.

Competence-orientation is an opportunity for contemporary studies, however, a challenge when it comes to the implementation in practice. In accreditation processes competence and learning outcomes will be increasingly taken a closer look at. This tendency is reinforced by the current Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué<sup>5</sup> that usually finds its way into international standards and criteria. The tools shown above (learning outcomes, Backward Design and Constructive Alignment) offer assistance to transfer competence orientation into the educational practice.

<sup>5</sup> Yerevan Ministerial Communiqué adopted by the Ministers during the Yerevan Ministerial Conference on 14-15 May 2015. Online resource, last accessed 2015-05-28: <http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/YerevanCommuniqueFinal.pdf>

If you want to read more, please visit our homepage: FIBAA Consult Factory: Practical Assistance and Resources and Recommended Literature<sup>6</sup>.

Feel free to contact us, we are happy to advise you!

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<sup>6</sup> FIBAA Consult Factory: Practical Assistance and Resources. Online resource, last accessed 2015-05-28:  
<http://www.fibaa.org/en/fibaa-consult/factory.html>