



Monika Schröder,
Dipl.-Ing.
Project Leader FIBAA Consult

Learning Outcomes in Accreditation¹

In which areas of assessment and based on which criteria are Learning Outcomes evaluated?

In the following article, you will find information regarding the areas of assessment of accreditation procedures in which learning outcomes are evaluated, the requirements of an accreditation in terms of learning outcomes and how to avoid mistakes.

Terminology

The term “learning outcome“, as it will be used in the following, includes learning outcomes and competences and is furthermore applied in contrast to “teaching/learning objectives“, since learning outcomes are formulated from the student’s point of view. In this definition, the term “learning outcome“ implies the paradigm shift towards outcome orientation, competence orientation and student-centred learning – in the following, the term will thus refer to competence oriented learning outcomes.

Where do Learning Outcomes play a role in Accreditation?

There are several areas of assessment in the self-evaluation of a study programme (the same applies accordingly in case of institutional accreditation) and in its appendices that demonstrate whether or not learning outcomes are understood and implemented correctly. The requirements for FIBAA’s Quality and Premium Seal are in line with European quality standards².

¹ Programme accreditation according to the international quality standards of FIBAA

² International Quality Standards of FIBAA see: <http://www.fibaa.org/en/procedures-at-programme-level/prog-according-to-fibaa-quality-standards/guidelines-and-targets.html>

Areas of Assessment in Programme Accreditation

1. Objectives of the Study Programme

In this assessment criterion, the assessors evaluate the plausibility of learning outcomes on programme level (often referred to as qualification objectives). The qualification objectives of the programme should be explained and convincingly presented in relation to the target group, targeted professional field and societal context of the discipline. The qualification shall cover the competence fields academic proficiency, comprehensive employability, as well as the development of the individual student's personality. A necessary prerequisite for the FIBAA quality seal is the integration of theory and practice into the programme as well as interdisciplinary thinking, ethical aspects and methods and scientific practice.

2. Logic and conceptual coherence

In this field of assessment, the assessors evaluate e.g. if and how the qualification objectives of the study programme are reflected by the curriculum. Please note:

- **Coherence of learning outcomes on programme- and module level:** The qualification objectives of a study programme are transferred to module level. Not all competence fields must be addressed in all modules, but overall (in the module manual), the previously formulated objectives must be found as learning objectives in the modules in concrete terms.
- **Writing Learning Outcomes:** Learning Outcomes in module descriptions are to be formulated assessably, clearly and in the form of competences. There are instructions on how to formulate learning outcomes.³
- **Learning outcomes and teaching formats:** The teaching-/learning formats must fit the learning outcomes; furthermore, the format of the exam should be "trained", i.e. if, in the exam, a case study will have to be worked on, case studies should also have been discussed in class.

3. Examination and final thesis

The assessors, in this field of assessment, evaluate whether the chosen form of examination matches the learning outcomes. The examination of communicative competences by means of a written exam, for instance, would not make sense.

Please note:

- **Form of examination matches learning outcomes:** It must be recognisable that the form of examination has been chosen with regard to it being (best) suitable to assess the learning outcomes.
- **Diversity of examination forms:** Due to the fact that the learning outcomes are to cover several competence fields (see above), a variety of different forms of examinations is expected.
- **Thesis:** The students have to prove, especially in their thesis, their ability to do scientific work and that the study programme's qualification objectives have been achieved.

4. Didactical concept

In this field of assessment, the assessors evaluate whether the didactical concept matches the qualification objectives and the learning outcomes. In application-oriented study programmes, for

³ Eg.: FIBAA Consult. (2015). Writing Learning Outcomes! Factory Article. http://www.fibaa.org/uploads/media/15_Werkstatt_Lern-ergebnisse-formulieren_Oktober_2015_EN.pdf. Last access for all sources: 09.12.2015

instance, learning outcomes that focus especially on the connection to or transfer towards practical experiences should be conveyed first and foremost. The didactic concept and the chosen teaching and learning formats should implicitly support the students in reaching the expected learning outcomes

Modular structure of the study programme:

In this field of assessment, the assessors have to evaluate whether the programme structure helps students to reach the defined learning outcomes. The module descriptions must provide detailed descriptions of intended learning outcomes and the information defined in the ECTS Users' Guide.

5. Internationality and Skills:

In this field of assessment, the assessors evaluate the HEI's internationality. Please note:

- **Faculty and student body:** the student body and faculty (teachers from different countries, teachers with international academic and professional experience) promote the acquisition of international competences and skills.
- **International contents and intercultural aspects:** International and intercultural contents and learning outcomes are part of the curriculum and students are thus enabled to act in an intercultural environment.
- **Multidisciplinary competences and skills:** The students acquire learning outcomes like communication and public-speaking skills, cooperation and conflict handling skills as well as multidisciplinary competences, such as leadership skills (where appropriate).
- **Skills for employment / Employability:** employability – for instance through the integration of theory and practice and through the promotion of multidisciplinary competences and skills – is one of the key outcomes of the study programme.

6. Faculty

In this field of assessment, the assessors evaluate, amongst other things, whether the teaching personnel possess the didactical qualifications necessary to implement a learning outcome orientation. Possible fields of assessment are:

- **Teaching skills:** the teaching staff should have the pedagogical and didactical qualification to meet the requirements and objectives of the study programme.
- **Further Training:** the HEI is to provide offers for further training in the areas of learning outcome orientation / didactics.
- **Evaluation of didactical competences:** the didactical competences of the teaching staff should be verified by means of an established procedure (e.g. evaluation). Furthermore, specific improving measures should be offered in case of deficient assessment results.
- **Facilities:** the material (and technical) facilities are to enable the implementation of the teaching- / learning formats.

7. Quality Assurance and Development

In this assessment area, the assessors evaluate whether the quality assuring measures (evaluations) and the development of the study programme are oriented towards "outcome".

- **Evaluations:** It is the aim of these evaluations to emphasise the determination of learning outcomes and the acquisition of competences. Students may be asked to give information

regarding their acquisition of competences and their learning activities, and competence tests may be undertaken.

- **Capture of Workload:** One part of quality assurance is capturing the students' workload that is necessary for the attainment of the learning outcomes. The workload must be captured in a way that identifies overload and underload and enables the HEI to make the necessary adjustments. The workload not only contains in-class hours, but also takes into account the students' time needed for preparation, follow-up work, examinations and all self-study activities.
- **External Expertise:** When adding external expertise in the process of quality assurance, as for instance in the exchange with businesses and in the survey of graduates, learning outcomes and competences should still be the main focus.

Common Mistakes in the HEI's Accreditation Documents ⁴

Relating to learning outcome orientation, assessors often discover the following shortcomings:

Objectives of the Study Programme:

- The development of the individual student's personality is not mentioned enough or at all.

Logic and conceptual coherence:

- The development of the individual student's personality is not mentioned in the modules even if it is included in the overall qualification objectives.
- Learning outcomes are not formulated in an outcome-oriented manner.

Examination and final thesis:

- There is little variety in the forms of examination, with written examination often largely outweighing other forms of examination.
- The forms of examination do not fit the learning outcomes.
- Due to the planned forms of examination, (parts of) the learning outcomes of the module cannot be verified.

Contact Us

FIBAA Consult
Berliner Freiheit 20-24
53111 Bonn
www.fibaa-consult.org

Tel: +49 (0) 228 – 280 356 32 oder 33
Fax: +49 (0) 228 – 280 356 20
consult@fibaa.org

⁴ Experiences from within FIBAA, those do not claim to be exhaustive.