Diploma Supplement network webinar 29.11.2014: Learning outcomes and the Diploma Supplement

10.00 Opening and welcome words, Koen Nomden, European Commission Learning outcomes and the Diploma Supplement

Koen Nomden welcomed the webinar participants. He noted that there were 66 (later 100) people in the webinar – "a sign of success and of the importance of this network." Koen emphasized the importance of learning outcomes – they communicate what has been learned; it is a question of transparency. The diploma supplement is important in many situations, such as when applying for jobs or further studies.

However, it is difficult to write learning outcomes, and poorly written learning outcomes are not useful. Well-written learning outcomes, on the other hand, are becoming increasingly important. The more structured they are, the easier they are to understand for different systems and for example AI. Koen refers to Cedefop's document on learning outcomes, which will be presented by Zelda later in the webinar.

Even though qualifications are often based on learning outcomes nowadays, it does not mean that everything is clear. Challenges exist and need to be addressed. The entire system and the whole learning process need to be adapted.

10.10 Learning outcomes: results of the Short Descriptions for Learning Outcomes project from the perspective of HEIs and the Diploma Supplement, Zelda Azzara, CEDEFOP

Zelda Azzara, Cedefop, an expert on LOs, presented the report "European guidelines for short descriptions." The guide is a result of the work by both the EQF and Europass Advisory groups.

Please also see published PPT.

Zelda first talked about Cedefop's long history of working with learning outcomes – the promotion and use of learning outcomes in policies and practices; and since the early 2000s this is explicitly stated in EU policy. The basis of learning outcomes is now present in all countries, and she describes it as the glue that binds together policy in both higher education and VET. There is a strong political consensus on the use of this approach.

But what are learning outcomes? Learning outcomes are what a learner knows, understands, and are able to do at the end of a learning process – in formal, non-formal, or informal setting. Zelda described the range of purposes that well-written learning outcomes can serve – they can form the basis for creating qualifications, occupational standards, assessment, validation, and more. Learning outcomes put the learner at the center, contribute to transparency and quality qualifications, and opens up the non-formal and informal sectors. Learning outcomes can exist at different levels – more generic or more precise, but they should always support each other.

However, there are challenges in creating learning outcomes – such as a tension between regulation/autonomy, length, structure, etc. There is a need to share experiences.

So why a project group on short descriptions? The working group wanted to address challenges with comparability and the use of digital technology, among other things. Short descriptions, simply put, create the transparency and structure required for comparability and the use of digital technology. Zelda went on to describe the composition and working method of the EQF-Europass working group (2021-2023) (see PPT).

The guidelines can be downloaded from Cedefop's website. They are aimed at experts and bodies working on developing qualifications. They are applicable at all levels and types of qualifications. The guidelines also contain examples of learning outcomes.

See Zelda's presentation for a more detailed description of how the guidelines can support writing learning outcomes.

The guidelines are being translated into all EU languages, and there will be a tool on Europass to make it easier to navigate the guidelines.

10.40 Learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement, Challenges and Opportunities, "Learning Outcomes from an Institutional Perspective" Elva Ellertsdottir, School of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

In 2007, work on learning outcomes began in Iceland – it was all completely new at the time. The reason was that all universities had to apply for accreditation to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and submit learning outcomes for all study programs. Learning outcomes had to comply with a newly established National Qualifications Framework for higher education.

There was little time, it was new and uncertain, and both academic and administrative staff found it complex and difficult. At that time, learning outcomes had to be specified in seven categories. It was a challenge, and unfortunately, people thereby got the wrong impression of LOs.

But since then, a lot of progress has been made. After a revision in 2011, the three categories of knowledge, skills, and competences were introduced. Nowadays, learning outcomes must be specified for all programs and courses, which are published in a course catalog.

Learning outcomes clarify what the student is supposed to learn, but there is a challenge in connecting individual learning outcomes with the overarching ones, which are quite general.

The most important thing is to do course mapping and see how the courses the student takes together fulfill the learning outcomes of the program, which should be described in point 4.2 of the diploma supplement. Maybe AI can help us.

The main challenge is that the work with LOs shifts focus from teaching to learning. It is also a challenge to explain the purpose of learning outcomes, and that we do not know to what extent they are actually used. Many teachers feel that it is just a bureaucratic burden – it is therefore important to succeed in explaining it!

11.10 Practical tips and tools for digitalization

How to get started with the European Digital Credentials for Learning? David Delgado, Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education – SEPIE and Kia Likitalo, the European Commission

David Delgado, Spanish National Europass Centre

The Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education, SEPIE, issues Certificates of Attendance after Erasmus+ experiences, conferences, etc. and they chose this type of certificate to test EDC. One advantage of EDCs is that you create the credential that the certificate is based on just once, and then easily reuse it in order to issue more certificates. You can also include links to events, documents, etc.

In 2019, SEPIE participated in a pilot project on EDC together with Spanish universities. They invited the sector to explain the infrastructure to them - what is the difference compared to an e-signed PDF, for example. It is not entirely easy, though, to explain this.

No one can issue an EDC without some form of IT support behind it. The hardest part is building the credential itself. You have to fill in the correct parts, which correspond to a certain qualification or learning. SEPIE has developed an internal guide on how to do this.

The EDC team in Brussels has also been very helpful. They have been available in a good way via functional emails, etc.

Nowadays, it is quick to issue a credential, i.e., once the LOs are in the infrastructure, it goes fast. No one at SEPIE wants to return to the "old ways". They are now considering developing EDCs for their own staff, after they have attended training.

At SEPIE, there are 5-6 people working with EDC (of which 2 are in IT).

Kia Likitalo, the European Commission

Kia is part of the support team för EDC.

See PPT for more detailed information on this session.

Kia explained how to practically create an EDC. She began by showing how an EDC consists of two parts – content, which should be structured according to ELM (European Learning Model), and an envelope, which stands for the area of identity, authentication, and secure delivery policies. In comparison, for example digital PDFs are very easy to tamper with.

Once a qualification/EDC has been built, it can be issued automatically. There are no restrictions on what an EDC can be, and it does not have to be linked to formal learning; it can, for example, be a letter of recommendation.

The European digital infrastructure (EDCI) is available as open-source.

Kia took us through, step by step, how to build an EDC (see PPT). She suggested not starting with a diploma supplement, as it is quite a complicated credential.

DEMO - how to create a Credential template.

You do not need an organizational account; a personal one is enough to access the credential builder.

Regarding E-seals, she referred to the fact that for most countries, there is a list of trusted service providers for e-seals. However, you do not have to have one based in your own country.

There are different building blocks in the EDC infrastructure, such as for learning outcomes, assessments, accreditations, etc. You can also link ESCO skills to the qualification. Kia showed us how to enter information in different fields, in the various "building blocks."

11.40 Introduction to European Learning Model (ELM) Peer exchange group in Futurium, Focus on opportunities for HEIs, Kia Likitalo, the European Commission

Kia is part of the support team för EDC.

See PPT for more detailed information on this session.

In this part of the webinar we were informed about the Peer Exchange group in Futurium, and how to create a login in to this forum, in order to share information about EDC, ELM, etc. Here, you can ask questions that reach a wider audience than just the EDC Support team. Participants were warmly invited to connect in the Futurium.

11.55 Final words and closure, Yolanda Brännström, Swedish Council for Higher Education

Yolanda concluded the webinar by informing the participants that the next webinar will take place at the beginning of next year and may cover issues such as joint degrees and point 6.1 in the diploma supplement template. However, she said, we want to know what you participants want the network to talk about!

Also – a big thank you to all speakers and participants!

Feedback and ideas from the webinar participants, Susanna Kärki, Finnish National Agency for Education, Finnish NEC

Feedback collected from webinar participants will be used to plan upcoming webinars, workshops and other events as seen relevant. According to the exit poll, participant were satisfied with the webinar (average grade given 8,2/10) and are looking forward to learning more about learning outcomes in the DS, digitalization of the DS, news about DS and the European Learning Model.

Participants also indicated an interest towards Joint Degrees and the Diploma Supplement, both in the poll but also in feedback given. AI was brought up several times under the "something else".

You can find the results of the poll below.