

Learning Outcomes: The Irish Approach

Dr. Declan Kennedy, Senior Lecturer in Science Education, Department of Education,
University College Cork (Ireland)

The signing of the Bologna Agreement in 1999 has major implications for all involved in third level education throughout the world. International trends in education show a shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach, i.e. the focus is not only on teaching but also on what the students are expected to be able to do at the end of the module or programme. Statements called Learning Outcomes are used to express what the students are expected to achieve and how they are expected to demonstrate that achievement. By 2010 in all of the 45 countries that have signed up to the Bologna process, all modules and programmes in third level institutions will be written in terms of learning outcomes. In addition, many countries outside the Bologna process are aligning their third-level educational systems to be compatible with the Bologna process in order to facilitate description of qualifications, mutual recognition of degrees and mobility of students.

The advantages of learning outcomes for teachers and students are well documented in the literature in terms of clarity, effectiveness of teaching and learning, curriculum design and assessment. In addition, learning outcomes assist greatly in the more systematic design of programmes and modules.

This presentation will cover the experience of introducing learning outcomes into University College Cork (UCC) over the past four years. It will discuss the provision of professional development to the university staff to assist them in writing learning outcomes for modules and programmes. In addition, the speaker will speak about the key areas that had to be addressed when introducing learning outcomes into the university environment and will discuss the strategies used in UCC to help make the transition to learning outcomes as smooth as possible.