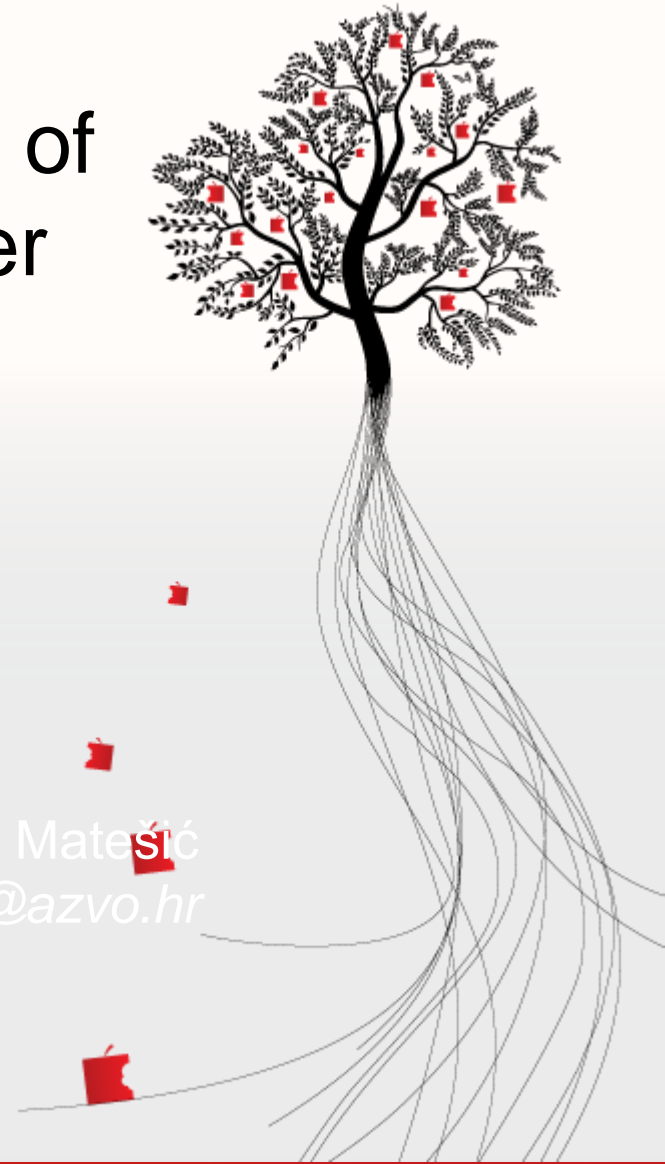


External quality assurance of learning outcomes in higher education – European and Croatian experiences

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QA and LOs (Adam, 2006)



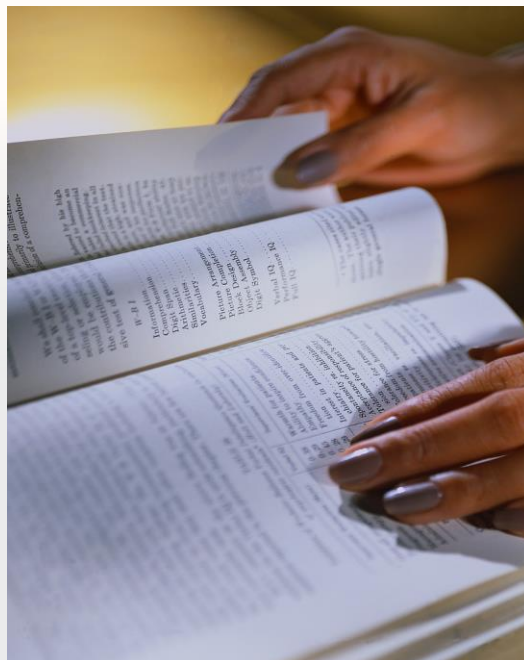
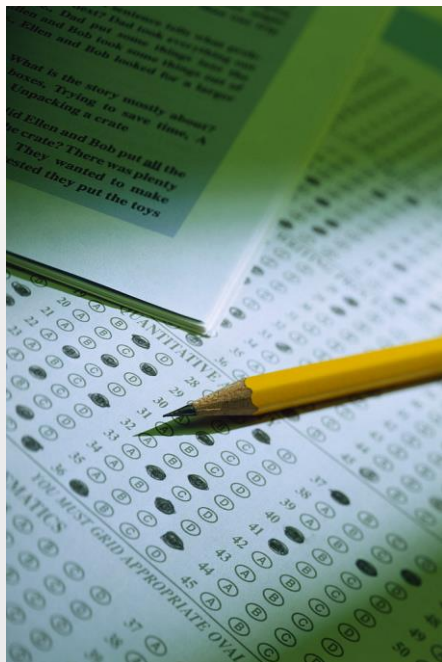
“Quality assurance benefits from the adoption of learning outcomes via the resulting **increase in transparency** and **better comparability** of standards between and within qualifications.

Outcomes-based qualifications possess **greater credibility** and **utility** than traditional qualifications.

They play a key role (nationally and potentially internationally) by acting **as points of reference** for establishing and assessing standards.”



Types of external QA of LOs



What do agencies do in EQA of LOs?



- Initial accreditation: peer panels check
 - Formulation of intended LOs
 - Resources
 - Constructive alignment
 - Institutional QA processes
- (Re)accreditation: also achieved LOs –
 - site visit: interviews with stakeholders
 - samples of assessments



What works? (Dill&Berkeens, 2013)



- **Data collection?**
- **Subject and programme assessment?**
- **Institutional review:**
 - encouraging HEIs
 - using a “**methodology conforming to social scientific standards of evidence**”
 - crucial: **independent, externally evaluated** agency



What have we done so far? Re-accreditation



- 2010/2011: **20** HEIs in the field of Economics and Business
- 2011/2012: **32** HEIs in the field of Technical Sciences
- 2012/2013: **9** HEIs in the field of Biotechnical Sciences and **14** private HEIs
- 2013/2014: **27** HEIs in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities
- 2014/2015: **43** HEIs in the field of Natural Sciences, Biomedicine, Law and Arts, and 3 private universities.



Most often mentioned 'undeveloped' points of Croatian HEIs (in AZVO reports)



- student/teacher ratio
- number of fully employed teachers
- mobility and international cooperation
- strategic documents
- ECTS credits
- **learning outcomes**
- tracking of graduates (alumni clubs)
- internal QA mechanisms



Challenges and Future



- Successful completion of the first re-accreditation cycle
- Reconsidering the model of re-accreditation for the second cycle
- Further development of external QA procedures towards the implementation of National Qualification Framework
- Shift from *inputs* to *outputs* / more focus on **learning and research outcomes** and **employment of graduates**
- QA of transnational education, joint studies, e-learning ...
- Thematic reviews of 'burning issues' in Croatian HE: doctoral education, **learning outcomes**
- Further support to development of quality culture: workshops, reports ...
- Help our HEIs to enhance their position in EHEA and world-wide (mobility, cooperation with industry)
- Support to evidence-based policy making: **focus on data collection**



LOs specifically mentioned in 4 criteria (out of ~57)



- 2.4. **Defined learning outcomes clearly** describe the knowledge and skills students obtain upon the completion of study programme.
- 2.5. Teachers at a study programme ensure that the **assessment of student learning is in line with the defined learning outcomes**, that the **full range of learning is being assessed**, and that the assessment is **appropriate to the qualification level**.
- 2.10. **As appropriate to learning outcomes, students have opportunities to reinforce and apply their learning in the context of practical applications**, such as through internships, business partnerships, community service, or similar arrangements.
- 3.6. The institution regularly **informs the public** about its study programmes, **learning outcomes**, qualifications and employment opportunities.

LOs implicit in some other criteria



- Several other criteria are indirectly connected to assessment of LOs, e.g. monitoring of teaching quality, alignment of teaching methods and intended learning outcomes, quality of and appeal to assessment processes:
- *1.6. Higher education institution has functional mechanisms for **monitoring and improvement of teaching quality**.*
- *2.8. Teachers use **teaching methods** that are **appropriate for subject matter** and different **ways of learning**, and encourage independent student learning.*
- *3.4. Knowledge **assessment procedures and methods** are established and published. **Various methods** of knowledge assessment are used, including teachers' feedback aimed at **improving student learning**, and students have the possibility to **appeal** against a decision concerning their assessment.*

Initial accreditation in ASHE scope



Initial accreditation of study programmes in ASHE scope of activities evaluates only INTENDED LOs and indirectly, e.g. in assessing the assessment:

- 1.3. *HEI has described, defined and published **standards and regulations for assessing learning outcomes** (examination procedures) within the study programme, including methods for evaluating quality assurance, impartiality, transparency, appeal procedures and other relevant areas.*

or learning content and competences (not LOs but closely related)

- 2.5. *Are the **core disciplines**, required by the profession, well represented?*
- 2.6. *Are the **core competencies**, listed in the programme proposal, related to the requirements of the profession?*
- 2.9. *Does the completion of the study programme ensure **the acquisition of professional competencies**, including knowledge, skills and methods of reasoning?*
- 2.10. *Is the outcome of study programme too specialised, too general or appropriate to the objective of the proposed study programme?*
- 3.3. *Do the planned **teaching methods and programme content ensure the acquisition of defined learning outcomes**?*

Only **private HEIs** undergo initial accreditation within the jurisdiction of ASHE – public universities self-accredit study programmes!



System-wide evaluation of the self-accredited programmes



- In 2009- 2013 there were 101 self-accredited programmes:
- for 87 of them ASHE was able establish the performance data through information system– MOZVAG:
- 26 HEIs that deliver newly self-accredited programmes do not fulfil the minimal criteria of student-teacher ratio at the entire institution (e.g. more then 30 students per 1 teacher)
- 27 out of 87 newly self-accredited programmes do not have 50 % of the course schedule performed by full-time academic staff
- 25 are publicly funded study programmes
- 30 are advanced Maters Degree Programmes (self-funded)
- 17 doctoral programmes (self-funded)



Insights from the 1st cycle of evaluations



Recommendations for improvements by foreign panel members:

ASHE should pay more attention in future cycle of evaluation to the content of the curricula and student assessment criteria.

*ASHE should find ways how to evaluate study programmes with similar or corresponding content leading to same qualifications so that evaluations are comparable (using **cluster** model or other ways of levelling the evaluation results).*

Criteria should not be assessing whether there is a system or mechanisms in place e.g. whether ILO are defined – but whether they are defined appropriately (according to the competences required by the labour market, QFs, professional associations, bars, other) and, moreover, whether ILO have been achieved and how.

Achievement of the ILO is crucial – and majority of panels recommended that:

ASHE in future finds ways and space for evaluating diverse final results of learning process (thesis, final projects, exams). This would allow for an insight into the quality of all the elements of LO-based evaluation: learning-teaching-assessment.

Also established criteria should be set clear in what they are assessing – are they assessing the system in place or its achievement, or its methods of achievement



Insights from the 1st cycle of evaluations: Economics (2010/11)



QA procedure take institutions as its subject of evaluation, with only a broad view on the programmes. Still overwhelming majority of the panels detected:

- Lack of ILO on the level of courses and modules
- Lack of link to or alignment with teaching/learning and assessment methods
- Lack of ILO correspondence to labour market

Lack of ILOs on the level of study programmes or modules principally inables any systematic assessment of student achievements, of teaching process and its quality but also inables the communication of the study programme to the requirements of the labour market. The quality of teaching and learning processes is then monitored only through student questionnaires or pass rates and grade distribution but this, without having criteria for assessment of LO or ILO in the first place, proves to be useless.

HEI should immediately define ILO for all programmes and all modules – followed by detailed analysis of the learning process based on set ILOs. This should then initiate a grounded discussion on institutional level on unified standards and criteria for assessment of LOs. This process of self-evaluation should then be used to pass decisions on enrolment quotas and for offering public information on competences of their students for their future careers.





- LO methodology without institutional or group efforts?

Teachers have invested significant efforts in implementing LO structure for all courses of BA and MA programmes and in such way facilitated the Bologna reform in its most demanding aspect. BUT advancing through the programme based on LOs seems much harder – which points at the cleavage between students and teachers in the process creating and evaluating the programme, as well as at the lack of institutional and systematic implementation of LO methodology.

- This is a consequence of LO implementation for the purpose of formality or administrative pressures:

The LO system can not be successful if it is not based on the needs of local, regional and national socio-economic reality, if it is not grown out of research activity of its scientists, or supported by formal and institutional care.

Lack of correspondence to broader surroundings when planning and monitoring of LOs is visible in other problems, e.g.:

BA and MA levels do not differ in competences

Problems in ECTS distribution

Lack of practical training or lack of competences required by the labour market, ect.

Insights from the 1st cycle of evaluations: Technical Field (2011/12)



- LO system of planning and monitoring of study programmes in the field of Technical Sciences/Technology overall have been assessed with significantly higher grades:
 - 1. Machine engineering:
 - ILO are well defined
 - Constructive alignment
 - Achievement of ILO is assured
 - ILO are defined throughout courses and modules
 - Teachers assure that assessment methods and standards correspond to ILO
 - Students as well as broader community seem to be well informed on LO and competences provided by programmes
 - There is a visible correspondence between the content and outcome of learning on one side and qualification framework on the other.
 - 2. Civil engineering:
 - Recommendations for improving the correspondence between ILO with assessment methods and criteria -‘there should be no subjective or ad hoc choice of assessment methods’
 - -‘assessment methods are not assessing all that was intended by the course or they assess more than intended’



Insights from the 1st cycle of evaluations: Technical Field (2011/12)



- Problems with LO are a result of institutional and systematic lack of training on ‘contemporary methods of defining and assessing learning outcomes, such as those based on Blooms taxonomy’.
- This is best visible in the fact that ILO are described in most cases as ‘description of content’ on the level of courses as well as on the level of programmes.
- This unables the assessment of alignment between what was set as ILO and what should be achieved by students.
- System of planning and improving the content of study programmes based on LO and competances is crucial in making clear what is the difference between I. and II cycle of high education (and III) as well as solving the (part of the) problem of bachelor degree misrecognition.
- In regulated professions this is even more important as LO and competences crucial in some professions (e.g. architecture) can be achieved only through practical training (taking here into an account EU labour market requirements and UIA/UNESCO recommendations).
- Recognition of foreign student experiences, mobility within the country and within study programmes, informal LOs recognition.



Future evaluation models – ILO criteria?



- ASHE's primary goal is to assure the fulfilment of minimal criteria and assure the minimal level of academic quality appropriate for higher education? Or to assure that qualifications issued by HEIs correspond to the skills and competences they advertise? Or?
- Can the quality of study programmes – qualifications in the labour market be guaranteed without evaluating study programmes (is institutional evaluation and its minimal capacity criteria enough?)
- Quality of study programmes is equally and primarily a responsibility of HEIs!
- Public discussion with universities and colleges is needed and today Croatian Qualifications Framework should be the central point in this debate.





Thank you for your attention!

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