



**Background to a
Learning Outcomes Approach
at DCU**

**Learning Innovation Unit,
Dublin City University**

The EU and National Context

The learning outcomes approach focuses on what the student will know, understand and be able to demonstrate as a result of the learning process. As such, the question for graduates in future will be more about what they are able to do as a result of a programme of study than what content they covered in the programme.

Aims of the Bologna Process

Education ministries in all participating EU countries have undertaken to adopt the Bologna principles and to establish national frameworks of qualifications to achieve the following aims:

- * easily readable and comparable degrees,
- * a credit transfer system,
- * promotion of mobility,
- * promotion of cooperation in quality assurance.

Learning outcomes are considered as the common means by which the aims of the Bologna Process can best be achieved.

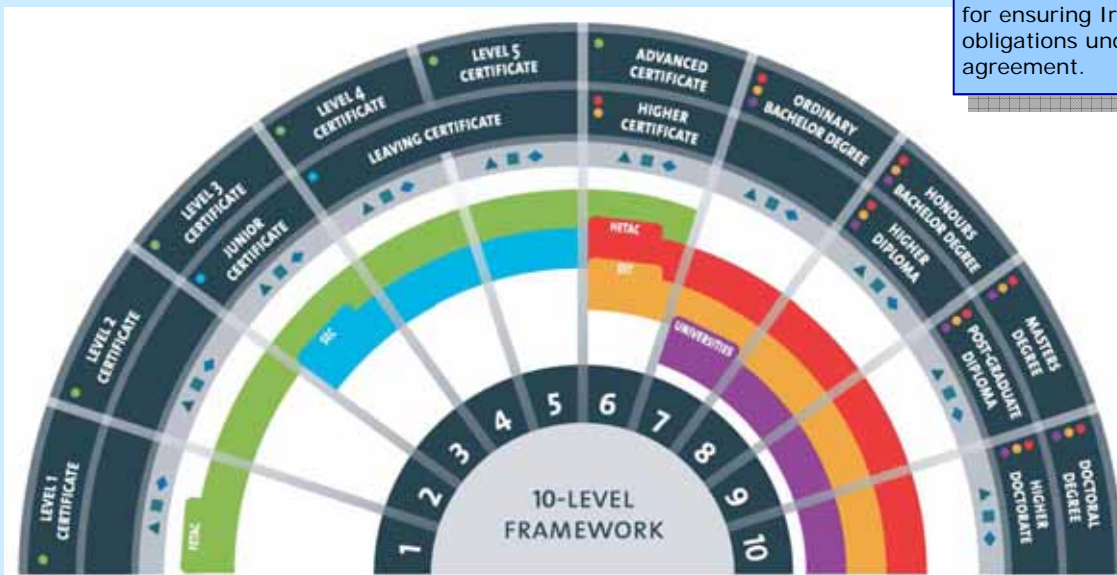
Ireland's Framework

"The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) has been in place since 2003. The NFQ is designed for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence acquired by learners. The Framework consists of 10 levels, from basic learning to Doctoral awards. Thus, it is designed to accommodate all types of education and training, wherever it takes place."

www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/provider.html

Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has responsibility for ensuring Ireland meets its obligations under the Bologna agreement.



www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/provider.html

Further Reading

The National Framework of Qualifications: www.nfq.ie

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI): www.nqai.ie

Advantages of a Learning Outcomes Approach

The advantages of a Learning Outcomes approach, properly used, have been recognised internationally. It is anticipated that a Learning Outcomes approach will have significant benefits to both students and staff of DCU. Some of the benefits are outlined here.

Advantages of a learning outcomes approach:

A learning outcomes approach to teaching and learning has received strong support at an international level.

Jenkins and Unwin (2001) list the following advantages of learning outcomes:

- Help teachers to tell students more precisely what is expected of them.
- Help students to learn more effectively: students know where they stand and the curriculum is made more open to them.
- Help teachers to design their materials more effectively by acting as a template for them.
- Make it clear what students can hope to gain from following a particular course or lecture.
- Help teachers select the appropriate teaching strategy matched to the intended learning outcome, e.g. lecture, seminar, group work, tutorial, discussion, peer group presentation or laboratory class.
- Help teachers to tell their colleagues more precisely what a particular activity is designed to achieve.
- Assist in setting examinations based on the materials used.
- Ensure that appropriate teaching and assessment strategies are employed.

It is important to note that while there are clearly significant advantages to the learning outcomes approach, reservations have been expressed from philosophical/conceptual and practical/technical perspectives about the dangers of a narrow interpretation and application of this approach to education (Adam, 2004). However as Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan (2006) point out "this need not be the case if learning outcomes are written with a focus on higher-order thinking and application of skills".

"The chief advantage of learning outcomes is the clarity and precision they can bring to learning from the perspectives of the learner, teacher and employer." Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan (2006)



Kennedy, Hyland and Ryan (2006) Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A Practical Guide. Bologna Handbook C 3.4-1. Available from: <http://www.bologna.msmt.cz/files/learning-outcomes.pdf>

Adam, S. (2004) Using Learning Outcomes, Scottish Executive. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/09/19908/42704>.