

**02.2**

**LEARNING OUTCOMES AND  
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA  
(GUIDANCE NOTE)**

## Learning outcomes and assessment criteria: guidance note

- 1.1 Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are an essential part of curriculum design and need to be written in the planning stages. Well written outcomes and criteria enable higher level skills and a learner-led curriculum to be developed.

### Learning outcomes

- 1.1.1 define what students are expected to learn and what they need to do to pass.
- 1.1.2 provide clarity for an external audience (other colleagues, examiners, parents, employers etc.) of the standards required of learners
- 1.1.3 enable consistency of standards when, for example, several different tutors/markers are involved
- 1.1.4 may, by specifying originality of thought, application or process, mitigate against plagiarism.

**Assessment criteria** are based on the intended learning outcomes for the work being assessed and make explicit the knowledge, understanding and skills markers expect a student to display in the assessment task and which are taken into account in marking the work.

- 1.2 For learning outcomes and assessment criteria to be beneficial to students they need to be clearly aligned with teaching activities. They need to be used by learners within the teaching programme so that students gain familiarity with the language and application. Using criteria actively helps students learn to assess themselves and their peers, promoting autonomous learners.
- 1.3 There is no hard and fast rule governing the number and type of learning outcomes, it is suggested that between 5 and 8 per module (irrespective of credit weighting) is appropriate, with subsets of outcomes for individual learning sessions. Outcomes should, over a whole programme, define the knowledge, applications and skills students are required to learn. Module learning outcomes should flow out of the programme learning outcomes and clear alignment be identifiable.
- 1.4 Outcomes are written to represent the threshold standard expected to pass. Students who do not attain the threshold defined in the learning outcomes by definition cannot pass the module.
- 1.5 Learning outcomes are the focus of the curriculum design. Teaching activities should flow from them and allow students to engage with the knowledge and/or practise the applications and skills designated within

them. Learning outcomes may be assessed by individual assignments or in a larger task, such as a project, which encompasses several. Whether individually or grouped, every learning outcome must be assessed.

- 1.6 Assessment criteria specify how an assessment task will be judged. They may also include recognition of formative assessment, for example by requiring completion of a formative task as a pre-requisite for a summative assignment. Both formative and summative assessment tasks should enable learning by emphasising progress and achievement and hence fostering motivation.
- 1.7 Assessment feedback should relate specifically to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria and indicate to learners how to improve.
- 1.8 When writing outcomes and criteria the potentially broad nature of the audience should be borne in mind (see 1.1.2) and the language kept clear and straightforward, avoiding ambiguity. For further advice on writing outcomes and criteria and developing assignment tasks, consult the Quality Enhancement Directorate website.