

Report on the Workshop on Course Design and Syllabus Development

Organized by the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance and

Internal Quality Assurance Office

Epoka University

26-27 September 2018

Executive Summary

In pursuit of ongoing improvement in student achievement, the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance at Epoka University organized the Workshop on Course Design and Syllabus Development on the 26th-27th of September 2018. Two leading experts in the Bologna system and quality assurance and harmonization in higher education, Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich and Dr. Norma Ryan, were invited to provide instruction on the phrasing of learning objectives and the alignment of assessment strategies with learning objectives. Following each guests' lecture, workshop participants worked in departmental groups to peer review learning objectives and assessment strategies in their syllabi with respect to best practice in European education.

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Following in the established tradition of providing staff training twice each year, the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA), in cooperation with Internal Quality Assurance Office (IQAO) organized a training for staff for September 2018. Given the vital role of course design and syllabus development, the PCQA and IQAO organized a workshop to ensure that Epoka University were familiar with best practices in Europe and able to revise their existing syllabi in light of such best practices. Two leading European experts in the fields of quality assurance, the Bologna system and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and harmonization of education frameworks in participating Bologna agreement countries were invited to lead a two-day workshop on these topics.

Summary of Workshop

Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich, provided the first workshop and is a renowned Bologna Promoter and expert in ECTS who has worked in reform and quality assurance within his own home institution at the Hochschule Osnabrück—University of Applied Sciences, Germany, with training programs for numerous directorates of the European Union, and in countries throughout Europe and its wider neighborhood. Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich's workshop, held on the 26th of September 2018, focused on the alignment of learning and teaching at the national and regional level and at the institutional, program, and educational component levels. Specifically, Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich emphasized that learning outcomes must specify the subject, or who is doing the learning, an active verb showing what the learner will do to demonstrate learning in the context of Bloom's taxonomy, the object of the active verb, and the modality of the demonstrated action. For example, "Students will be able to write a thesis at a professional standard" would be a learning objective, in which "students" is the subject, "will be able to write" expresses the action they will do, "thesis" the object of that action, and "at a professional standard" the modality of the action. "

Following Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich's presentation, Prof. Dr. Teoman Duman shared a model syllabus with participants and led a discussion on possible design variants to the syllabus.

In an afternoon session, workshop participants divided into groups by department to examine their respective syllabi, particularly the phrasing of learning outcomes, to identify possible improvements that could be made in light of best practices in the field as shared by Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich.

In the second day of the workshop, 27 September 2018, Dr. Norma Ryan guided participants through best practices in the alignment of learning, teaching, and assessment. She drew upon her experience in

leading the University College Cork (UCC), Ireland, through the transition to the Bologna system and in her many years of experience in directing quality for UCC and training other organizations and staff through the same process. Dr. Norma Ryan shared the history of the Bologna system and the functioning of the ECTS system. She shared practical steps the UCC had taken to implement the ECTS system and challenged the participants to develop their own unique approach within the ECTS framework. Dr. Norma Ryan reinforced the instruction on the formulation of learning outcomes from the previous day and challenged the audience to carefully examine the alignment of assessment methods to those outcomes and the relative student workload to ECTS credits within modules and within programs.

Following Dr. Norma Ryan's presentation, workshop participants broke into departmental groups for afternoon work on examining the assessments as specified in their respective syllabi to document learning outcomes. Participants engaged in peer review and provided each other with recommendations for improvements to the assessments specified in their respective syllabi.

Next Steps

Departmental staff were able to examine a number of syllabi in the small break-out sessions, yet further revisions will be done by individual staff to better ensure syllabi reflect best practices in the formulation of learning outcomes and the alignment of assessments with learning outcomes.

Dr. Ryan's experience at UCC may provide a roadmap for Epoka's next steps of reform. Dr. Ryan narrated UCC's roll-out of the ECTS system and syllabus reform. At UCC, individual staff first aligned their individual syllabi to the best practices in writing learning outcomes and assessment strategies, beginning in the first year of studies. This was followed by reviewing the alignment of objectives at the program, degree level, and institutional level to national and European standards. The process took a number of years with greater flexibility in earlier years to ensure room for annual revisions of learning outcome statements. Once alignment was achieved at multiple levels, the procedures for proposing changes to objectives and outcomes at various levels were more formalized.

The individual department staff at Epoka are thus encouraged to review all their syllabi to ensure alignment of learning outcomes with program objectives using the models shared by Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich and Dr. Norma Ryan and ensure alignment of assessments with learning objectives. This can be followed by a wider re-assessment of program objectives and their alignment up to institutional, national, and European objectives and downward to individual educational component objectives and outcomes.

Furthermore, Epoka would do well to explore the possibility of following up on the QAinAL Erasmus+ project with a project focusing on improving teaching skills for university lecturers. Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich and Dr. Norma Ryan may play an important role in this or may be able to recommend others who could make valuable contributions. The workshop lecturers may be contacted through their email addresses in the attached slideshows.

Recommended resources for further reading include *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A Practical Guide* by Declan Kennedy (available at the UCC website) the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland (available at <http://www.qqi.ie>), and the ECTS Users' Guide (available at https://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf).

Documentation

The program for the activity, the presenter's slideshows, the signed lists of attendees, the results of the participant evaluation of the workshop, and the reports of each department's activities in their small-group breakout sessions are archived as an evidence for the workshop and its outcomes by IQAO.