



Swiss International
Institute Lausanne

LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSEMENT POLICY

Swiss International Institute Lausanne - SIIL

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I INTRODUCTION

The assessment of learning outcomes at the programme level has been a topic of international interest as a method for quality assessment and ongoing programme quality enhancement.

According to a UNESCO report (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009), increasing global integration and exchange of both students and instructors has been an important international objective in higher education in recent years. This trend requires institutions to identify standards of quality, resulting in an increased emphasis on both learning outcomes and evidence from course assessments to demonstrate that students have mastered the expected learning. While there is widespread agreement that institutional autonomy is important, researchers also agree that students would benefit from greater clarity around learning outcomes.

SIIIL's objective in the assessment of learning outcomes is to be able to say without hesitation and with confidence that the Institute is producing a skilled workforce that is meeting employer needs and that students are learning what they need to be successful in their lives and careers. This objective requires SIIIL to commit to:

- Ensuring curriculum aligns with programme and employment objectives;
- Developing an assessment process that is focused on improving student learning and institutional performance;
- Measuring learning in a meaningful way that meets specific programmatic, institutional, and student needs; and
- Using student learning outcomes to help with programme planning, resource allocation, and curriculum revisions.

Through the assessment of student learning outcomes, the institution/study programme:

- Defines what students should be able to do upon completion of the course/programme;
- Implements learning strategies to achieve those competencies;
- Assesses the achievement of the competencies;
- Uses the results to improve programmes and services and inform planning and resource allocation.

While outcomes assessment focuses on measuring student achievement such as graduation rates, employment in the chosen career, and loan default rates, student learning outcomes assessment is the space in which SIIIL focuses on the *learning*. How do we know students have learned the desired knowledge, skills, and competencies? Are we able to show it? Are students aware of what they have learned? Implementing such a system also positions SIIIL to address *Student Learning, Assessment, Progress, and Achievement* of the quality standards which asks for demonstration of successful student achievement, through assessment practices, that students actually acquired

the knowledge, skills, and competencies intended (including elements such as licensure/certificate exams).

II PURPOSE

Course-level and Programme-level learning outcomes identify what students should know, value or be able to accomplish after successfully completing their programme. These outcomes are often achieved through specific learning activities, which are integrated at the course-level and build toward overall programme-level learning.

Intentionally assessing its own programme-level learning outcomes SII:

- ensures that students learn the most important skills, ideas, attitudes and values of the discipline or profession.
- documents evidence of students' learning, based on the actual outcomes they have achieved, or accreditation and accountability purposes.
- ensures that expectations are communicated clearly to and understood by students (including those interested in applying to a programme).
- allows to improve the effectiveness of its programmes based on actual student achievements;
- showcases the quality of its programme;
- makes its graduates appealing to employers and its programmes attractive to prospective students;
- emphasizes current institutional priorities for teaching and learning.

Monitoring both quantitative and qualitative data enables SII to make decisions that lead to improved instruction, stronger curricula with the overall goal of improving teaching and learning. This also reinforces continued engagement for faculties, students, staff and management who work both individually and in teams to design and assess programmes and enhance student learning.

III SCOPE

The present policy applies to quality review of Study Programmes in SII.

The scope of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Policy includes the internal quality assurance procedures concerning the Study Programmes Learning Outcomes under review.

IV PRINCIPLES AND APPROACH

A SII's common approach to intentional programme-level and course-level design is constructive alignment. **Constructive Alignment** is creating courses whose learning

outcomes, learning experiences and assessment tasks cohere internally and build towards programme outcomes.

In a constructively aligned course, learning outcomes, learning experiences and assessment tasks work together to mutually reinforce the achievement of the course-level learning outcomes (Figure 1). By their nature as descriptions of success, learning outcomes are tied to assessment, which is most effective if it takes place in the context of a discipline, profession, study programme and/or course. Outcomes-based learning in the framework of constructive alignment helps curriculum designers observe, measure and assess learning outcomes. Once the learning outcomes and assessment tasks are determined, the learning activities, teaching methods and resources required to achieve those outcomes and assessments may be planned in turn, every element of a course supports the intended learning.

Constructive Alignment at the Course Level



Figure 1

In a constructively aligned programme, the courses are carefully coordinated to ensure steady development or scaffolding from introduction to mastery of the learning outcomes, leading to achievement of the intended programme-level outcomes (Figure 2).

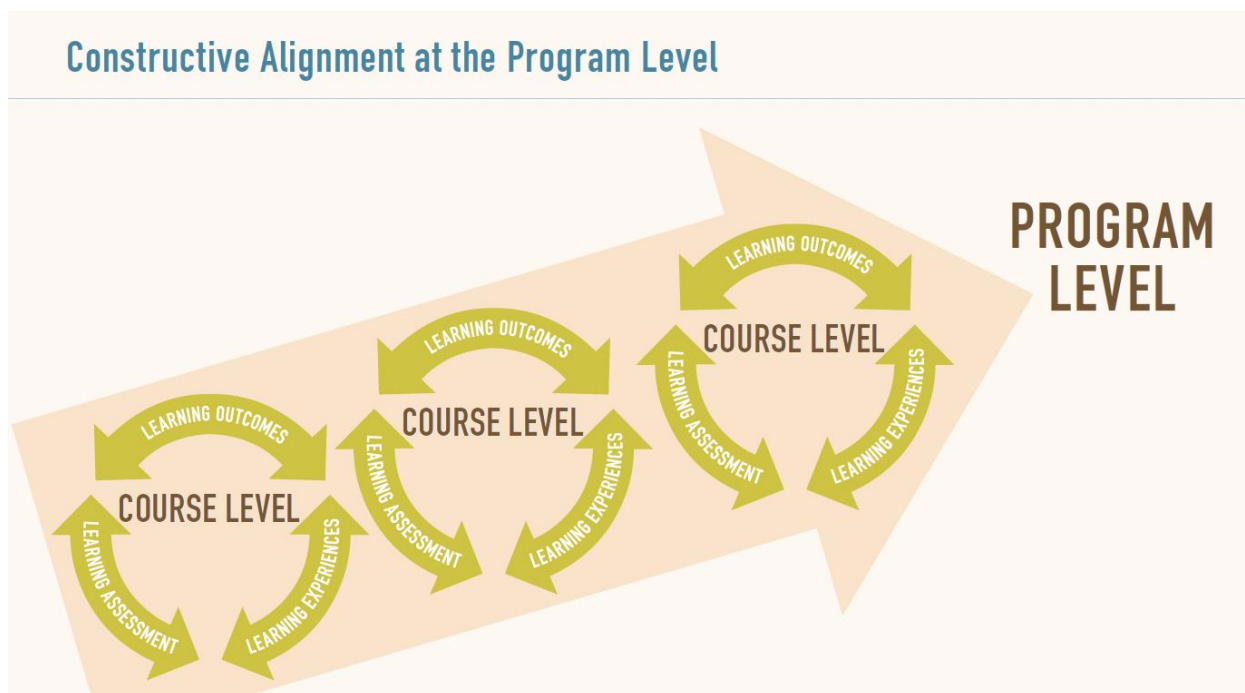


Figure 2

In the assessment activities, students demonstrate their level of achievement of the course learning outcomes. Teaching strategies, learning activities, assessments and resources should all be designed and organized to help students achieve the learning outcomes at the course level.

Programmes composed of constructively aligned courses contribute toward the achievement of programme-level learning outcomes. This programme alignment should be approached developmentally to allow students to meet the expectations expressed in the programme-level outcomes from the first semester to the last.

V POLICY STATEMENT

1. Assessment Process Initiation

Assessment of student learning is defined as the **systematic collection, review, and use of information** about educational programmes undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. It involves many stakeholders within and outside of SIIL including faculty, students, administrators, staff, employers, and alumni.

Meaningful assessment of student learning is built from five principles:

- Develop specific, actionable learning outcomes statements;
- Connect learning outcomes with actual student demonstrations of their learning;
- Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, beginning with the faculty;

- Design assessment approaches that generate actionable evidence about student learning that key stakeholders can understand and use to improve student and institutional performance;
- Focus on improvement and compliance will take care of itself.

In order to develop a framework for the Assessment Process of student learning outcomes, SIIIL through the Programme Board self-assessment procedures and the Academic Council approval report

- Identifies who will be involved in the process;
- Writes actionable learning outcomes;
- Obtains evidence of student learning;
- Evaluate results and initiate improvement plan as needed;
- Communicates results to all stakeholders.

2. Key Features of the Assessment Procedures

a). **Consensus-Based**

Through faculty-led conversations, reflections, and explorations with employers, alumni, and others, a shared understanding and consensus is reached on learning outcomes. This shared understanding serves as the foundation for revising outcomes for enhanced clarity and designing educational experiences. Determining learning outcome statements is an inherently collaborative process.

b). **Aligned**

Using the agreed-upon learning outcomes, faculty and staff align educational experiences for intentional integration, coherence, and fostering of multiple pathways to student achievement. Alignment involves curriculum mapping, scaffolding of learning across educational experiences, assignment design, mapping of career pathways, and co-curricular engagement where applicable.

c). **Learner-Centered**

Educational experiences are designed and built around all learners and their specific learning journey. Taking a student view includes consideration of issues of equity, alternative delivery models, flexibility in offerings, integration of prior-learning assessment where applicable, and building multiple pathways. It reminds us that assessment is not something we do **to** students, but **with** them.

d). **Clearly Communicated**

Communication and collaboration with students and other audiences through transparent discussions around the outcomes sought within the educational system work to make the implicit explicit. Communication involves exploration and integration with advising, documentation of student learning, communication of outcomes and results to students, and meaningful engagement with employers.

3. Developing an Assessment Plan

The development of an assessment plan includes consideration of learner needs, exploration of how students learn, and implementation and support of pedagogies that advance student learning.

When looking at courses collectively or at a programme as a whole, questions addressing student learning include:

- Has student work improved over time? Have students met the expectations for learning at the desired target level?
- Are the learning experiences organized in a coherent manner to allow for cumulative learning?
- Are students demonstrating learning at the desired level of mastery upon exit of the programme?
- Are students applying their knowledge, skills, and competencies effectively within their chosen careers?

The assessment plan should also examine if assessment is undertaken for formative or summative purposes.

Good assessment is undertaken to inform students of their learning and where they are in the path to their goals. It is done to improve practice and reflect on processes. However, it also provides a quality check to verify that students are leaving programmes and educational experiences with the desired knowledge, skills, and competencies. Thus, a SIIIL assessment plan includes a mix of formative and summative assessment measures.

Formative assessment collects information on student learning in order to provide ongoing feedback to improve teaching and learning by identifying strengths and weaknesses and outlining areas of growth. Formative assessments are generally low stakes and provide students with additional opportunities to practice and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Summative assessment examines student learning at the end of a course or programme and compares demonstrated learning against a benchmark or specified target. Summative assessments are often high stakes, examining student mastery of the specified learning outcome.

Programme reporting on the assessment process includes providing documentation of the stated learning outcomes, indicating where and how they are made available to different constituencies, outlining how they are aligned and built into the curriculum, presenting the types of assessment measures used, providing information on who analyzes the results and how, discusses processes for interpreting the data, and indicates how results were used to make changes as well as any resulting improvements in student learning from the changes made.

The assessment plan includes the following elements, represented in the cyclical figure below: **determination** of learning outcome statements, **selection** of appropriate measures of student learning, **mapping and alignment** of learning experiences to the outcomes, **gathering and analyzing** evidence of student learning, **communicating** the results, and **developing and implementing** an improvement plan.

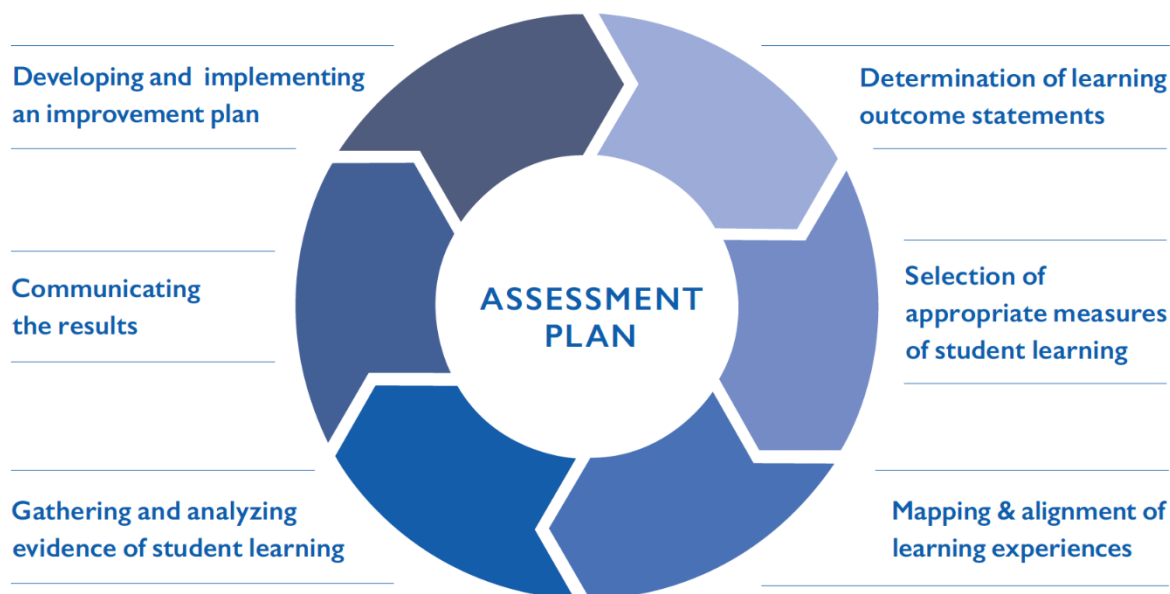


Figure 3

In other words, SIIL learning outcomes assessment plan represents an evaluation of programmes and is systematic, evidence-based, includes benchmarking, is conducted by faculty and administrators, and is ongoing.

4. Six-Stage Cycle for the Assessment of Programme-Level Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes assessment shall be done in the form of the self-assessment report developed by the Programme Board. The Programme Board is chaired by the Academic Director or his/her duly assigned deputy and consists of the Study Programme Director of an assessed programme, 2 module leads, 2 students, 2 alumni and 1 employer representative. This self-assessment report shall take into account 5-stage cycle described below before the final draft of the report will be submitted to the Academic Council for the approval and further recommendations. The cyclical programmatic review process (including learning outcomes assessment procedures) is conducted every 1-3-5 years, depending on development speed of a given industry sector, social, economic and other variables.

The self-assessment report shall be prepared according to the principles of the [General Procedures for Quality Reviews](#). The self-assessment report must contain 5-

stage cycle analysis and respond to the needs of students, society, labour market and industry.

a). Stage 1. Determine Learning Outcomes Statements and Identify Expectations

The first step in programme assessment is to articulate clearly what SIIIL expects its students to learn and how SIIIL expects them to demonstrate this learning by the time they reach the end of the programme. Clearly defined expectations are important because they form the basis for future decisions about the appropriate assessment types to measure the achievement of those outcomes. Clarifying the programme-level learning outcomes will also help to ensure that learning experiences and assessments are focused on the most important skills, ideas, attitudes and values of the discipline or profession. It is therefore important to communicate learning outcomes to students throughout their programme of study.



Figure 4

There are a number of factors SIIIL is considering when identifying learning outcomes (Figure 4), such as:

- students' knowledge prior to entering a programme;
- the curriculum;
- types of teaching and learning techniques they will experience within the programme;
- possible methods of assessment;
- expectations from external bodies, including government agencies and professional associations.

It is often helpful for all instructors in the programme to contribute to the development and review of programme-level learning outcomes to ensure that

essential learning outcomes are captured and that they understand thoroughly the outcomes and their purpose.

Additionally, it is helpful at this stage to involve students and employers, often done through focus groups, interviews or questionnaires. Once desired programme-level learning outcomes are clear and appropriate, the next step is to ensure that there is constructive alignment at the course, programme, institutional and state levels.

Learning outcome statements are derived from a SIIL mission statement and address the knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, attitudes, dispositions, and competencies students are expected to acquire from a programme. Learning outcome statements should be action-driven, clearly stated, realistic, and achievable. The statements should be meaningful, measurable, and manageable. Learning outcome statements help design and define curriculum paths and specify a clear action that identifies the performance to be demonstrated, a statement that specifies what learning will be demonstrated, and a criterion or standard for acceptable performance.

Learning outcome statements should be written in language that is clear to students and employers.

Once learning outcomes have been developed and vetted with relevant stakeholders and partners, it is useful to crosswalk programme learning outcomes with other requirements. A crosswalk, such as the template below (Figure 5), can be useful to ensure that there are no gaps between the developed programme learning outcomes and any other points of connection or regulatory requirements. Sharing the crosswalk with students and faculty members helps to ensure a collective understanding of the multiple ends to which the educational experience is striving.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES	Learning Outcome 1	Learning Outcome 2	Learning Outcome 3
Articulation Opportunities	✓		
Employer/ Occupational Needs	✓		✓
Regulatory Requirements		✓	✓
Certification Requirements	✓		✓
Student Needs		✓	

Figure 5

b). Stage 2: Develop Appropriate Assessment Measures

Once learning outcome statements have been developed and vetted by a variety of stakeholders, approaches to assess student learning and document attainment of the outcomes are identified. Assessing student learning outcomes can involve a variety of

approaches including portfolios, integrative projects, student self-reflection, employer judgment or feedback, and certification exams. In selecting measures to assess student learning or indicating what existing measures or approaches are employed, the Programme Board shall evaluate all existing measures and ensure that they are not overly expensive or time-consuming to implement, provide actionable information for guiding decision-making and curricular change, and provide information to students to help them advance in their learning.

Questions to consider when selecting measures to assess learning include:

- What questions do you have about student learning? What questions do you have about programmes? What do you want to know?
- What can this population realistically tell you? What can this measure or approach tell you in relation to the learning outcomes?
- Will the results give you actionable data? Do you have the power to change anything based on the results?
- What are the expected levels of performance? Are there targets or benchmarks?
- What argument do you want to make about your students' learning? What type of evidence would be necessary to make the argument.

Selection of measures and approaches, as well as documenting those decisions, helps to ensure that when students earn credits or complete a programme, they have done it by meeting the learning outcomes at an acceptable level and that programmes have developed an assessment approach. Any approach employed should meet the definitions of valid, reliable, fair, and flexible.

Valid: process is sound and assesses that which is claimed.

Reliable: evidence consistently interpreted.

Fair: processes are equitable, reasonable, consistently applied, and clearly communicated to students.

Flexible: reflects the individual student's needs; recognizes prior learning; allows for a range of methods.

c). Stage 3: Mapping and Aligning Learning

At this point in the process there are clearly defined learning outcome statements and appropriate measures or means to assess student learning linked to them. Benchmarks for attainment of the outcomes have been set, and the outcomes have been cross-walked to various other standards or points of alignment/connection. Before gathering and analysing the data on student learning though, it is useful to make certain that the entirety of the curriculum and educational experiences have been mapped in relation to the part they play to build towards the desired learning over the course of the programme. To ensure that assessment approaches can be documented for each course or programme offered and that the assessment is a part of the institutional assessment and improvement planning process, the Programme Board will map the curriculum and ensure alignment.

While the choice of assessment approach or measure in the prior section requires an examination of the relationship between the learning outcome, assignment/assessment, and evaluative criteria or learning activities to support student achievement. Such maps also provide useful reference points when reviewing evidence of student learning and determining what might be changed to improve outcomes. The relational view is between the assessment and a learning outcome.

Curriculum mapping provides an effective strategy for articulating, aligning and integrating learning outcomes across a sequence of courses and explicitly locating how student learning outcomes are delivered within a programme. It is important to identify how and where learning occurs in the curriculum and how it is assessed. Curriculum maps often categorize learning by courses and clarify how each course contributes to the programme-level learning outcomes and, furthermore, how these outcomes contribute to institutional or state expectations. Mapping is a visual approach to analysing programmes and it can be accomplished using charts, tables, diagrams or any other process that enables an overview and analysis of the programme as a whole. Mapping reveals patterns otherwise difficult to detect and makes transparent subtleties in the alignment of assessments and programme-level learning outcomes.

Mapping Program-Level Learning Outcomes to Teaching, Learning and Assessment			
Program-Level Learning Outcomes	Degree Level Expectations	Teaching Activities and Learning Opportunities	Assessments and Evidence
By the end of the program, successful students graduating will...	For each program-level learning outcome, with which degree level expectation or accreditation outcomes does it align?	What specific teaching activities and learning opportunities will help students achieve each program-level learning outcome?	For each program-level learning outcome, what is specifically collected from the students as evidence that they can/have achieved the learning outcome prior to graduation?
_____	_____	_____	_____
1...	_____	_____	_____
2...	_____	_____	_____

Figure 6

Mapping Program-Level Learning Outcomes by Course

Program-Level Learning Outcomes	Lower-Level Courses			Upper-Level Courses			Assessment Summary
	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	
Outcome 1	I		R	R		M A1	A1
Outcome 2		I		R A2	M A3		A2, A3

I INTRODUCTORY LEVEL: outcome is achieved at the introductory level, assuming limited or no prior knowledge
R REINFORCED: outcome is reinforced, assuming introduction in a previous course
M MASTERED: outcome is mastered or met, usually assuming introduction/reinforcement in prior courses
A ASSESSED: indicates where in the program the program-level learning outcomes are assessed

Figure 7

Once assessment tasks are mapped into the programme-level learning outcomes (Figure 6), gaps in the assessment of certain learning outcomes may become apparent.

Mapping provides an excellent opportunity to revisit assessment tasks included throughout the programme and ensure alignment with the intended learning outcomes. Specific assessment tasks can be designed to measure course outcomes (Figure 7). Assessment tasks should be set at the appropriate level of proficiency. Each course can be examined individually to be certain that the assessments are congruent and build towards the identified programme-level learning outcomes. This creates a whole-programme approach, in which an overarching framework guides assessment in individual courses to ensure systematic generation of evidence at the programme level.

d). Stage 4: Gathering and Analysing Assessment Results (Evidence of Learning)

Once assessment tasks are designed to measure achievement of learning outcomes throughout the programme, the Programme Board will gather these data on an ongoing basis (by semester and annually) and evaluate them for use in programme enhancement. More specifically, the Programme Board in its self-assessment report will use the information gathered during the assessment of programme-level learning outcomes to:

- determine the extent to which students are meeting the previously determined programme-level learning outcomes;
- prioritize areas in which programme improvement is necessary;
- showcase the quality of the programme to employers, donors and prospective students; and
- document evidence of students' achievement and learning for accreditation and accountability purposes.

Timing of assessment

Ideally information gathering occurs at the beginning, throughout and at the end of any course or programme. Because this will require the Programme Board to collect data during busy times of the semester, it is important to ensure that adequate support is available. Generally, the Programme Board will focus on the end-of-programme courses, as these are the courses that will most likely reflect the achievement of programme-level learning outcomes.

Scope of assessment

Using a variety of assessment tasks will help the Programme Board to provide a holistic picture of student achievement. Both the amount and type of data gathered should be sufficient. It is important to collect the types of data that are most meaningful to disciplinary values and most likely to engage faculty and instructors in conversations about programme improvement.

Collecting assessment data

It would be overwhelming to gather and analyse information on all of the programme-level learning outcomes at once. That is why the Programme Board must establish a manageable plan, embedding assessment at the course level and use assessments that reasonably represent student learning to make the process much more efficient, as they decrease collection and analysis time.

Various types of data may draw attention to disparities between direct and indirect forms of assessment. This can be particularly helpful when triangulating assessment results, instructor perceptions of assessing learning outcomes and student reports of achieving learning outcomes. Relying solely on student self-reporting is limiting; it may be illuminating to ask students to reflect upon their learning experiences. Students might be asked:

- How much has this course/programme contributed to the following outcomes?
- What outcomes did you spend the greatest amount of time developing?
- Which outcomes did you feel had the least time spent developing them?
- What have instructors and staff done that has made the biggest difference to your learning?
- What makes a module difficult for you?

Analysing the results

At this stage, dialogue and reflection between instructors and students are very useful. Guiding questions can lead to fruitful discussion and insight.

e). Stage 5: Reporting the Results

Once data are analysed, they should be reported out and disseminated to a variety of stakeholders. First of all, the results must be reflected in the self-assessment report and be submitted to the Academic Council for approval. In other words, results are reported internally rather than a combination of internally and externally.

When reporting results, it is important to note the difference between simply making information available and meaningfully communicating results to various stakeholders. In the reporting process, there should also be space and time available for faculty and staff to discuss and make sense of the results. Questions to consider when developing reporting processes include:

- What information will be shared? In what format? With whom?
- How will results be presented? With visual displays? Grouped by learning outcome?
- Where will reports be made available? If publicly available online, what contextual information needs to be provided alongside the reports?
- What spaces are available for stakeholders to discuss and reflect on the reports?

In the communication process to coordinate with Marketing department, the point is less to provide documentation that assessment occurred and students learned and more to outline the means by which a programme is ensuring quality through an ongoing integrated and connected assessment process.

f). Stage 6: Making Programme Improvements

An improvement plan indicates the process by which evidence of student learning informed decision-making, along with what is being changed to improve that learning. It is important to the Programme Board to continue to track changes made over time to ensure that the changes lead to actual improvements in student learning. Change on its own does not necessarily equal improvement in student learning or programme effectiveness. Including when to review or examine if the changes led to increased learning also helps to unpack why SIIL thinks making the suggested change will lead to enhanced student learning.

An Improvement Plan should include:

- What data are collected.
- When assessment will occur.
- Who will review data and make recommendations for improvement.
- How improvement/changes will be integrated.

The improvement plan must be proposed by the Programme Board at the end of the self-assessment report. The final improvement plan will be drafted after the discussion by the Academic Council.

A follow-up plan should be developed, including timelines and responsible persons. At this point, the Academic Director can decide if additional information is needed before initiating action. In most cases, this might include a review of the literature on teaching and learning or conducting a small research project on the programme-level learning outcome in question. It might be useful to conduct a data audit to discover

any assessment data the institution collects that are not already used for programme-level learning outcome assessment.

Creating a comprehensive plan for assessment helps to ensure that programme-level learning outcomes are explicit to students and stakeholders; teaching and learning activities are aligned with learning outcomes; assessment tasks are effective, coordinated and structured throughout the programme; students are meeting key learning outcomes; and investment in assessment pays off in improvement and enhancement of programmes.

VI FINAL PROVISIONS

This policy enters in force on 01.09.2020 and will be reviewed in 5 years.

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