Overview

Module learning outcomes should detail the knowledge, skills and related attributes that a student will be required to demonstrate on the successful completion of each module. This differs from aims which reflect the intention of the teacher. Module outcomes should map onto the programme of study outcomes of which it belongs.

Module learning outcomes should be written at a pass or threshold level. It is important that you do not include module outcomes that only the highest achieving students have the ability to achieve.

The Outcomes Approach

The constructive alignment learning theory (Biggs, 1999) is the basis of the outcomes approach. It argues that to support and enable student learning there needs to be a strong connection between (a) learning outcomes, (b) assessment and (c) teaching and learning process and resources. Jackson et. al. (2003) summarise these three areas of alignment as:

- **"an explicit statement of learning intent** (intended learning outcome) expressed in a form that permits their achievement to be demonstrated and measured.
- **the process and resources to enable the outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated** (curriculum, teaching, learning methods and materials, assessment and support and guidance methods);
- **the criteria for assessing whether the intended outcomes have been achieved** and for differentiating the performance of students."

They go on to argue that an "outcomes approach requires teachers to pose and answer the questions:

1. What do I **intend students to learn**
2. What teaching methods and curriculum design will I use to **encourage students to behave in ways that are likely** to achieve these outcomes?
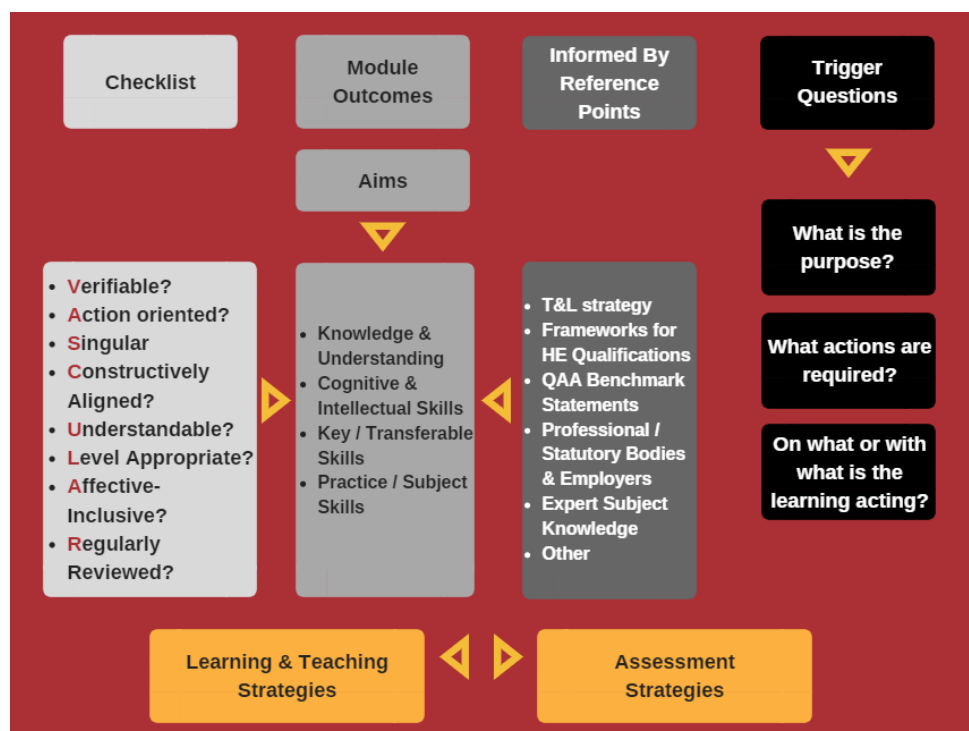3. What assessment tasks and criteria **will tell me that students have achieved** the outcomes I intend?"

The Process

There are many parts that impact on the development of quality learning outcomes for modules. Not only your subject knowledge but also:

1. Programme which your module sits within
programme learning outcomes will inform your module outcomes

2. University and School's Learning and Teaching Strategies
these help inform your design

3. Framework for HE Qualifications and SEEC Level guidance
this provides you with generic level appropriate guidance

4. QAA Benchmark Statements
provides a statement (for the majority of subject) on the standards required for awards

5. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
they provide guidance and/or requirements for students to undertake before they can be accepted into a professional role

Learning Outcomes Process

Are Your Learning Outcomes VASCULAR?

Sally Brown (2019) proposes putting the life-blood back into learning by using VASCULAR learning outcomes which are:

- **Verifiable?** Can we tell when they've been achieved? And can students?
- **Action orientated?** Do they lead to real and useful activity?
- **Singular?** Avoid portmanteau outcomes combining two or more into one – these are difficult to assess if differently achieved. Outcomes should readily be matchable to student work produced.
- **Constructively aligned?** (so that there is clear alignment between aims (What do students need to be able to know and do?), what is taught/ learned, how these are assessed and evaluated).
- **Understandable?** Are the language codes used meaningful to all stakeholders?
- **Level-appropriate?** Suitable and differentiable between 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, Masters, other PG?
- **Affective-inclusive?** Outcomes should not just covering actions but include capabilities in the affective domain (values, organisation, responding and receiving phenomena).
- **Regularly reviewed?** It is important that outcomes are fit-for-purpose and therefore should not be stuck in history.

Read the whole blog piece here: https://thesedablog.wordpress.com/2019/03/07/sally-brown/

References

Biggs, J.B. (1999) Teaching for Quality Learning at University. Buckingham: Society for Research in Higher Education & Buckingham: Open University Press.

Jackson, N., Wisdom, J. and Shaw, M., (2003) Guide for busy academics. Using learning outcomes to design a course and assess learning. *LTSN generic centre, Imaginative Curriculum project team.*
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University of Birmingham (2015) Education Strategy 2015-2020, Birmingham: University of Birmingham https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/teaching-academy/documents/public/education-strategy2015.pdf

QAA (nd) Subject Benchmark Statements https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

Further Reading

Stefani, L. (2009) Curriculum Design and Development (in Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S. eds., A handbook for teaching and learning in higher education, Enhancing academic practice, 3rd edition). London: Routledge.