Guidance on drafting learning outcomes

A learning outcome is a statement of what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes set the minimum achievement required for the satisfactory completion of the course or module.

1.1 Course learning outcomes and module learning outcomes should be set out in the definitive information in CourseLoop.

1.2 Careful consideration should be given to the number and phrasing of learning outcomes. In general, it is sensible to limit learning outcomes to a manageable number that can be realistically demonstrated by all students upon completion of a module or course. Similarly, it is sensible to produce learning outcomes that provide some flexibility outside of the formal approval process.

1.3 Between 12 and 16 outcomes should be optimal for most courses, while 8 and 12 learning outcomes should be optimal for most modules.

Note

- It is not necessary for a course or module to specify all of the learning outcomes that might possibly derive from a particular learning process. Specified outcomes should be those that are integral to a particular course or module and which a student would reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage were taken of the learning opportunities provided. It is not necessary, for example, for a particular skill that is developed across many modules to be replicated as an outcome on each; it should be stated as an outcome on those where it is most salient - or those which all students must study. This is a course team judgement.

1.4 Learning outcomes should be categorised under two broad headings: **Knowledge and Understanding** and **Skills, Qualities and Attributes**. The former specifies the knowledge and understanding of the subject matter that students will have at

the end of a process of learning and what they will be able to do with it. The latter covers subject specific skills (where appropriate), cognitive skills and personal, transferable skills, as well as other attributes of the NTU graduate or postgraduate.

1.5   All of a course's outcomes must be assessed in at least one (and preferably more) of the modules that comprise the course. To demonstrate this, a course team must compile a curriculum map (this shows in which modules the course outcomes are assessed, and forms part of the definitive course information in CourseLoop). A distinction is drawn between 'Taught' (T) and 'Assessed' (A) learning outcomes for the purposes of drawing up a curriculum map.

Note

■   The term 'taught' is used to denote learning outcomes that are taught, developed, practised or otherwise learned without being assessed. (It is not intended to mean 'taught' in a conventional classroom sense). The term 'assessed' is used to denote that the learning outcome is 'taught' and is also assessed.

1.6   At module level, the assessed outcomes can be described as the essential learning outcomes, since they are the ones that should be achieved in order to pass the module.

Notes

■   It is also helpful to have 'taught' outcomes in a module since they guide student learning and help to demonstrate the overall coherence and balance of the course. A skill such as problem solving is likely to be 'taught' in a wide range of modules, but may be only explicitly assessed in a few. Module leaders and course teams need to strike a sensible balance here: it is helpful for students to understand what they are achieving beyond the assessed outcomes, but it is not necessary to specify all outcomes that might be associated with learning.

■   It may help in drawing up the curriculum map if - in the definitive module information in CourseLoop – a module's learning outcomes are categorised as either 'Assessed' (A) or as 'Taught' (T) – however this is not a requirement for academic approval.

1.7   A 'taught' module outcome needs to be assessed elsewhere in the course if it contributes to a course outcome. Module learning outcomes should articulate with the course learning outcomes, such that a module's assessed learning outcomes contribute to the course outcomes.

1.8   When formulating outcomes, 'strategic' outcomes are articulated for the whole course – these will reflect the aims of the course, subject benchmarks and Strategic Plan alignment. The course outcomes are selectively incorporated into the course modules where they are recast to reflect both the specific aims of each module and its level – these can be characterised as 'tactical' outcomes. The overall process involves cascading the course outcomes down to those expected at individual module level.

1.9   Module learning outcomes must not be designed in isolation from the course. Where a module contributes to more than one course, its fitness for purpose for each – in terms of its contribution to the course outcomes – needs to be confirmed by each course team.

1.10   Learning outcomes should be accessible and avoid excessive use of jargon.

1.11   Courses must have a simple statement of the outcomes that a student will have achieved if they are awarded an interim award (i.e. CertHE, DipHE or Ordinary Degree).

Note

■   It is not necessary to define sophisticated level outcomes unless a School or course team wishes to do so, or is required to do so by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) – the University's Level Descriptors together with the outcomes of modules that comprise a course level should be sufficient to guide students.

1.12   A module's learning outcomes (other than those that are simply 'taught') should be assessed by an appropriate assessment method(s) and associated assessment criteria. These assessment methods and criteria must be explicit and communicated to students through course handbooks and/or module guides, and made available on the NTU Online Workspace (NOW).

1.13   The number of learning outcomes – and the assessment workload – should be in proportion to the module's credit size, and be relatively consistent across the course. While course and module teams should ensure that the assessment method(s) are sufficient to satisfactorily assess all the outcomes (particularly in large modules) it is entirely acceptable for a module to be assessed by one element of assessment.

Note

■   The following QH Section also covers learning outcomes:

QH Section 15 – Assessment.

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
Version:	Approval date:	Implementation date:	Nature of significant revisions:
Sept 2016	30.09.16	01.10.16	None
Sept 2017	12.09.17	01.10.17	None
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	None
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	None
Sept 2021	07.09.21	01.10.21	None
Sept 2022	22.09.22	01.10.22	None
Sept 2023	14.09.23	01.10.23	None

Equality Analysis		
Version:	EA date:	Completed by:
Sept 2016	N/A	