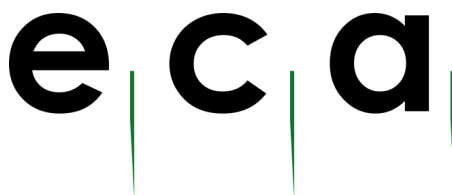# An introduction to international and intercultural learning outcomes

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An introduction to International and intercultural learning outcomes

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"Standard assessments are not always able to capture international or intercultural learning outcomes. They often need to be amended or extended to demonstrate students' achievement of the programme's intended international and intercultural learning outcomes."

*More information about the **Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation**, supporting documentation, templates and identified good practices can be found on www.ecahe.eu/internationalisation.*

Table of content

1. Introduction

This publication is published in the framework of ECA's Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation (CeQuInt) and complements *The Guide for Assessing the Quality of Internationalisation*[1].

CeQuInt provides a methodology for the assessment of internationalisation, which focuses on the impact internationalisation has on teaching and learning. The Certificate can only be awarded to those programmes or institutions that have successfully incorporated a significant international and intercultural dimension into the purpose, function and delivery of its education. The intended learning outcomes of a programme must therefore comprise appropriate international and intercultural components. These are referred to as the international and intercultural learning outcomes, i.e. the international and intercultural components of the learning outcomes.

In European higher education, learning outcomes are considered the most transparent way to present a programme's aims and objectives. In line with the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, a programme's intended learning outcomes are *"statements of what a student is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of a period of learning"*[2]. Intended learning outcomes are thus neither a description of the curriculum nor a wish list of graduate attributes. All intended learning outcomes are meant to be achieved by all students.

This publication presents an introduction to international and intercultural learning outcomes from the perspective of quality assurance and CeQuInt.

Three elements play an important role: the way the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes correspond with the programme's intended internationalisation, the appropriate way in which this learning is assessed in order to demonstrate achievement, and the way teaching and learning enables students to achieve the international and intercultural learning outcomes.

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[1] Aerden, A. (2013). *A Guide to Assessing the Quality of Internationalisation*. ECA Occasional Paper. The Hague.
[2] **Bologna Follow-Up Group**. (2005) Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. Kopenhagen. p. 29
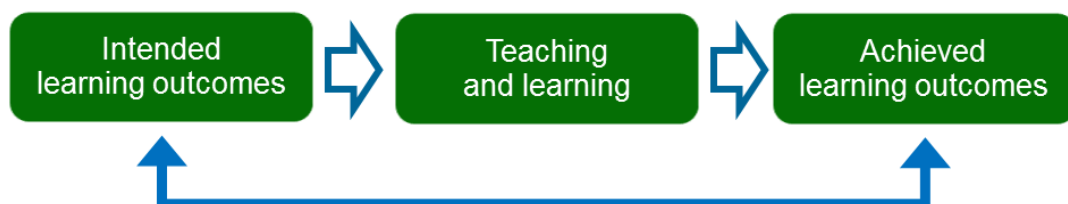
2. Writing learning outcomes

Several resources are available to write learning outcomes. We here include a very short introduction and then link this to international and intercultural learning.

Learning outcomes can be considered the new lingua franca for higher education and its stakeholders. They provide an easily understandable and transparent tool to communicate about programmes and degrees awarded. They also tie together and align curriculum, teaching methods, learning environment, and student assessments. Writing - designing, you might say - learning outcomes brings about three important questions: (1) What do we want to achieve with our students by the end of the programme? (2) How can we enable this achievement through teaching and learning? And finally, (3) which assessments will demonstrate that students actually achieve the intended learning outcomes? These questions embody the holy trinity of learning outcomes.

Figure 1: The holy trinity of learning outcomes from a quality assurance perspective

The programme's intended learning outcomes provide all the information about what students need to be able to demonstrate (achieve) by the end of the programme. Here **fitness of purpose** is important. The degree awarded (or the qualification) represents the purpose, e.g. master of science in engineering. In this example, the intended learning outcomes need to align to master's level, most often provided by a qualifications framework. In addition, the intended learning outcomes need to incorporate the current requirements of the engineering discipline and of the corresponding professional field.

Teaching and learning need to correspond with these intended learning outcomes and should enable the achievement of all the intended learning outcomes. Here **fitness for purpose** is important. If, for example, one of the intended learning outcomes refers to presentation skills, teaching and learning need to enable achievement of these skills, for example by having students study examples and giving them the opportunity to showcase a

presentation in class. If this is not covered however, these presentation skills cannot be achieved.

The achieved learning outcomes are demonstrated through the assessment of students. These assessments show that all students actually achieve the intended learning outcomes. This also means that all the programme's learning outcomes need to be assessed otherwise achievement cannot be demonstrate. In the example above, the intended learning outcomes included presentation skills. For the demonstration of achievement, the students will need to have their presentation skills assessed.

What are good learning outcomes? It is important to distinguish learning outcomes from competences and from descriptors used in qualifications frameworks. Learning outcomes are SARA; they have all of the following characteristics:

- **Specific**
   The learning outcomes are written in a clear and unambiguous language which is understandable for all stakeholders (e.g. students, labour market) and each learning outcome includes sufficient detail.

- **Achievable**
   All students will achieve all learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are purposely written for this programme and take into account the way the programme will be offered (e.g. amount of credits, teaching methodology).

- **Referenced**
   The learning outcomes are referenced to the relevant qualifications frameworks (national, international, sectoral) and to the appropriate requirements of the subject/discipline and the professional field. Not every individual learning outcome needs to be referenced; but from the intended learning outcomes the level and the subject/discipline must be clear.

- **Assessable**
   The learning outcomes are made assessable by indicating the standard or the level of achievement and/or by including the way the outcome can be demonstrated. If you cannot answer the question "How would this be assessed?" then you do not have a learning outcome.

A good way to begin writing learning outcomes is to start with the phrase *"After successful completion of this programme, students will be able to:"* and then follow that phrase with six to nine learning outcomes. Less learning outcomes (four to six) are expected at module level.

An example better shows how we can turn a generic competence into a learning outcome. *"Being able to participate in group work"* is a competence, but it is not a learning outcome. It is too broad (not specific) and it does not make clear how a student will be able to demonstrate achievement since *participating* can be quite passive (thus not assessable). In order to improve we need to turn the competence into a real learning outcome by making it more specific and assessable. This can be done by specifying the type of group work (*debates and discussions*), by setting a standard (*productively*), and by including assessable activities (*taking the lead, presiding*). In addition, group work can be referenced to the subject/discipline (*health care management*) and/or the context (*an international and culturally mixed group*). The resulting learning outcomes is then: *"Being able to participate in group work productively and taking the lead on occasion, presiding over debates and discussions on ethical health care management in an international and culturally mixed group."*

As mentioned above, learning outcomes tie together and align teaching, learning and student assessments. The following figure presents this alignment.

Figure 2: From intended to achieved learning outcomes
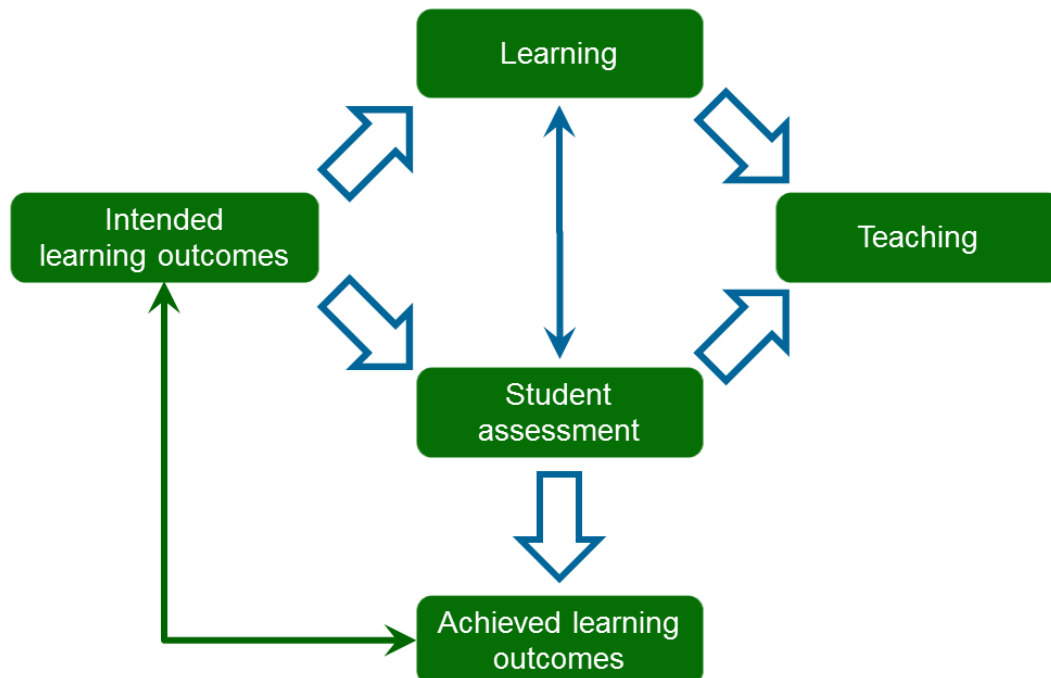
From a programme's intended learning outcomes, the learning and the methods of assessing the learning becomes clear. The teaching and teaching methods are chosen as a

result of the required learning and the chosen methods for assessing students. Student assessments, both formative and summative, are then used to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. These assessment can take various forms and can in itself demonstrate the type of learning, e.g. assessment of taught content and skills, sampled assessment of module learning outcomes, observation of modelled behaviour, scrutiny of skilled mastery and/or ability to creatively adapt, personal display of adaptive mental structures, appraisal of self-regulation, and socially constructed products. The achievement of the learning outcomes can be demonstrated through various means, e.g. curriculum checklists, written documentation (tests, papers, etc.), presentations, videos of performance, group participation, authentic products, projects, portfolios, pieces of originally designed (science, music, art) projects, and original pieces of art and/or innovation.

The teaching methods are then conducive for the learning and the students assessments, e.g. scripted lessons, direct instruction, modelling, demonstration and guided practice, guided inquiry projects, and self-organised learning activities.

Learning outcomes facilitate the reorientation of higher education from input and processes towards outcomes and results. They can essentially act in the same way for internationalisation and shift the focus from quantity (e.g. number of international students) to quality. Programmes therefore need to provide students with the appropriate learning outcomes for an increasingly interculturally and internationally connected world. The implications of this approach on the learning outcomes itself, on student assessment and on teaching and learning are outlined below.

3.   Intended learning outcomes

The programme's intended learning outcomes provide all the information about what students need to be able to demonstrate (achieve) by the end of the programme. In this chapter, we relate international and intercultural learning to these learning outcomes.

3.1.   International and intercultural learning outcomes

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes:

> *"The intended international and intercultural learning outcomes defined by the programme are a clear reflection of its internationalisation goals."*

This necessitates that those responsible for a programme clarify the intended internationalisation for the programme by means of international and intercultural learning outcomes. This implies that international and intercultural components are an integral and explicit part of a programme's general learning outcomes.

International and intercultural learning outcomes embody current developments in higher education and research. These developments, notably in research, are not local. They are also no longer national or only regional. This borderless development of higher education and research takes place in an increasingly interconnected world. We might now add that the professional fields and the labour markets are no longer local or merely national. They are increasingly regional and in some disciplines even

"Without having a goal, it's difficult to score." PAUL ARDEN

global. Both these developments should have an impact on the requirements for graduates. They can be expected to be internationally competent. This expectation should not be reduced to being competent for a global labour-market, which is a vague and rather virtual concept. It is more about the ability to shift perspective; to look at your subject or discipline from another perspective. To see how the perspective on, approach towards, and application of your discipline can be different in other contexts and in other parts of the

world. **An international learning outcome should refer to an ability to function in a certain discipline with and in other contexts and other regional settings of the world.** Even though we are all increasingly interconnected, we are still culturally distinct. We have different cultures and we use different languages. Cultural distinctiveness is something all graduates will be confronted with: business studies graduate end up in an international professional field and graduate nurses join hospitals with patients from other cultures and, increasingly, colleagues from other countries. This development should have an impact on the requirements for graduates. They can be expected to be interculturally competent. This expectation should not be reduced to being able to identify cultural differences and sensitivities. It is more about the ability to think and act interculturally. **An intercultural learning outcome should refer to an ability to value cultures without judging enabling effective and appropriate communication and cooperation with people of all cultures.**

There are no general or generic international and intercultural learning outcomes for higher education programmes. Each programme should design learning outcomes which suit the programme's context best and which are the result of the programme's internationalisation goals. This means that a correspondence between the international and intercultural learning outcomes and the programme's internationalisation goals can be demonstrated. This correspondence can be demonstrated in both directions. If the internationalisation goals refer to *global citizenship*, the components contributing to this citizenship are identified in the intended learning outcomes. If one of the intended learning outcomes includes *"[…] reports or presentations appropriate for a global audience […]"*[3], it is made clear were this component fits in the internationalisation goals for the programme. Not every international and intercultural component of the learning outcomes needs to be explicitly linked to an internationalisation goal. Some of these components can of course be the result of the programme's regular goals and objectives.

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[3] The learning outcomes included in this publication are reproduced from **Lokhoff, J. & Wegewijs, B.** (Eds.). (2010). *A Tuning Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles Including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes*, Bilbao: University of Deusto. or from the example in the annex.

3.2. Curriculum

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding the curriculum:

The content and structure of the curriculum provide the necessary means for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

A curriculum is here understood to be the coherent and structured set of educational content (courses, modules, etc.) covered by a programme and, when completed successfully, leading to a degree. The curriculum should provide students with the necessary learning opportunity to achieve the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

If, for instance, the graduates of a Bachelor of Nursing are intended to *"be able to teach, supervise and assess junior colleagues in professional practice"*, the curriculum should cover (and assess) this type of teaching, supervising, and assessing.

If, for example, the graduates of a Master of Health Care Management are intended to be able to *"use a range of interpersonal skills to lead and influence others in an international working environment, including the management of conflict situations"*, the curriculum should cover these different aspects of this learning outcome. For *the management of conflict situations*, the curriculum covers the relevant knowledge (e.g. the key stages for dealing with conflict situations), skills and attitudes (e.g. the pertinent behavioural models). In addition, the curriculum can also covers cultural differences in communication style and how this could influence a conflict situation in a working environment, e.g. its influence on the behavioural models).

> **"Without goals, and plans to reach them, you are like a ship that has set sail with no destination."**
> **FITZHUGH DODSON**

An easy way to document this correspondence between the intended learning outcomes and the curriculum is a matrix with on one axis the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes and on the other axis all the courses, modules, etc.

Figure 3: Correspondence matrix learning outcomes - curriculum

Programme	Module A	Module B	Module C	...
Intended LO 1			✗	
Intended LO 2	✗	✗		
Intended LO 3		✗	✗	
Intended LO 4	✗			
Intended LO 5				
Intended LO 6				✗
...				
	(C. &) LOs	(C. &) LOs	(C. &) LOs	
	Assessment	Assessment	Assessment	...

For each module, it should be clear to which of the learning outcomes it contributes. In the matrix this is indicated with an X. Some modules can contribute to two or more learning outcomes. There might even be modules which do not directly contribute to any of the intended learning outcomes. However, for each of the individual learning outcomes there needs to be at least one module identified as contributing to it. In the matrix above, that would mean at least one cross behind each learning outcome. A line with a missing cross denotes an incomplete correspondence.

4.   Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning relate to the setting in which the students should be able to achieve the learning outcomes. Two elements play an essential role here: the teaching methods and the learning environment. These elements should be the result of the intended international and intercultural learning and provide the means and act as the enablers to achieve these learning outcomes.

4.1.   Teaching methods

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding the teaching methods:

The teaching methods are suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

From a teacher's perspective, the teaching methods refer to the principles and methods of instruction and to the ways of presenting teaching materials or conducting teaching activities. Commonly used teaching methods may include demonstration, lecturing, recitation, memorisation, or a combinations of these. The choice of the teaching method or methods to be used depends mainly on the intended learning experience, but it may also be influenced by the aptitude and interest of the students. If the graduates of a Master of Arts in History are expected to *be able to participate in group work productively and to take the lead on occasion by presiding over debates and discussions in an international or multicultural group*, this should also have repercussions on the teaching methods. In this case the teaching methods need to enable class participation and provoke discussion. It should include work in smaller and mixed groups, where the teacher may coach students to chair groups or preside debates.

If a programme is intended to provide an even wider global perspective, the work situation in different settings could be simulated and the assessment method adjusted accordingly. Teachers in a physiotherapy programme for example simulate the setting of a rural hospital in a developing country. Students are given the tools and resources available in those hospitals and are required to run diagnostic tests and propose treatment. The proposed

treatment takes into account whether the patients will be seen again and whether the patient will have to take care of the treatment him or herself. The programmes intentions are to take students out of their comfortable environment and provide a hands-on approach in teaching them a global perspective on diagnostic testing.

4.2.   Learning environment

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding the learning environment:

> *The learning environment is suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.*

From a student's perspective learning environment refers to the entire range of conditions and activities which determine the learning process; it consists of an enabling context, adequate resources, and a set of tools. It is the sum of the internal and external circumstances and influences affecting the learning process. The learning environment can consist of international classrooms, computer-supported systems, virtual environments, student placement abroad, etc. If the graduates of a Doctorate in High Energy Physics are supposed *to be able to work in large international groups appreciating different national and cultural traditions and ways of working*, this should have repercussions on the learning environment. In this case the setting in which learning takes place needs to accommodate working in large international groups. Additionally, the students' activity in these large groups ought to be versatile, paying tribute to different cultural traditions.

Another example comes from the field of visual arts. In order to provide students with a stronger international learning environment, programmes have been connected across borders. In the case of documentary filmmaking, students work on a project with a colleague in another programme abroad, most often in another continent. In some cases, they are asked to give feedback on each other's work; in other cases, they are obliged to present one final project. In the learning environment arising issues (or sometimes even provoked issues) are discussed with respect to cultural differences and the impact these have on cross-border cooperation. In addition, different professional requirements for the graduates (e.g. mass media versus independent filmmaking) are used to provide an international perspective on field production techniques.

5. Achieved learning outcomes

5.1. Student assessment

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding student assesments:

The methods used for the assessment of students are suitable for measuring the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.

Student assessment comprises the total range of written, oral and practical tests, examinations, projects and portfolios that are used to evaluate and foster a student's progress. Two types of student assessments can be distinguished: formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments are progress-focused and mainly endorse and foster students' progress towards further learning, while summative assessments are end-performance assessments which evaluate a student's progress after a period of learning.

Assessments should be consistent with a programme's intentions; they demonstrate whether students achieve the learning outcomes a programme aims for. If assessments are not consistent with the learning outcomes, these outcomes are empty pretences. This requires thinking strategically about student assessments and how these can demonstrate (to all the stakeholders) that the international and intercultural learning outcomes are achieved. All types of assessments can be taken into account, such as interim assessments, final examinations, final projects, research assignments, theses, performance evaluations, and (exit) interviews. They should, however, be suitable to assess the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes. Attitudinal learning outcomes, for example, can more easily be captured in interviews and focus groups than in written examinations; while skill-related learning outcomes are more convincingly demonstrated in behavioural approaches than in questionnaires.

Standard assessments are not always able to capture the international or intercultural learning outcomes. They often need to be amended or extended to test for the students' understanding of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes of the programme. To this end, ways of gathering direct (performance-oriented) or indirect (learner-perspective) evidence must be demonstrated. Some assessment approaches, like multiple-choice questionnaires for example, require additional substantiation. In all cases, particular attention could be paid to

including international and intercultural competencies into assessment forms and/or templates. International and intercultural learning is not always clearly understood. An inclusive and universal approach, accommodating all students' (cultural) backgrounds, needs to be safeguarded when organising and phrasing assessments and questions. It is essential to critically review their appropriateness to all students.

Intercultural learning is an on-going process. Assessments can thus be formative, i.e. progress-focused. Completing questionnaires or surveys focused on the intended intercultural learning, for example, draws students' attention to those outcomes. It can thus create an awareness that directly impacts and enhances actual learning.

In this context, portfolios can help students compile and synthesise achievements. It creates opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and often reveals to students that their learning has progressed further than they realised.

Increasingly, group projects and their assessments are now used to address the need for students to be able to learn and work together. For this type of assessment to work, students need to understand clearly what is expected of them and how the task(s) will be assessed. This requires careful planning and diligent structuring.

Just like internationalisation, student assessments are not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Still, these assessments ought to be part and parcel of a programme's teaching and learning and the students' actual learning.

5.2. Graduate achievement

CeQuInt's assessment framework includes a standard that relates a qualitative expectation regarding graduate achievement:

> *The achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes by the programme's graduates can be demonstrated.*

Suitable student assessments can transparently demonstrate whether the graduates of the programme actually achieve the international and intercultural learning outcomes the programme is aiming for. All the assessments used within the programme can provide a direct demonstration of graduate achievement.

Additionally an indirect demonstration of graduate achievement may be presented. Most popular indirect demonstrations are alumni and labour market appraisals of the programme's graduates. Alumni can offer insights that students cannot provide. An often used question, illustrates this best: "How often does your current job require the application of intercultural

skills?" and "To what extent has our programme prepared you for working in multicultural groups?"

Indirect demonstrations, however, cannot replace direct demonstrations. They merely provide additional evidence and corroborations. The actual demonstration needs to be direct. The lack of direct demonstration can never not be compensated with indirect demonstration.
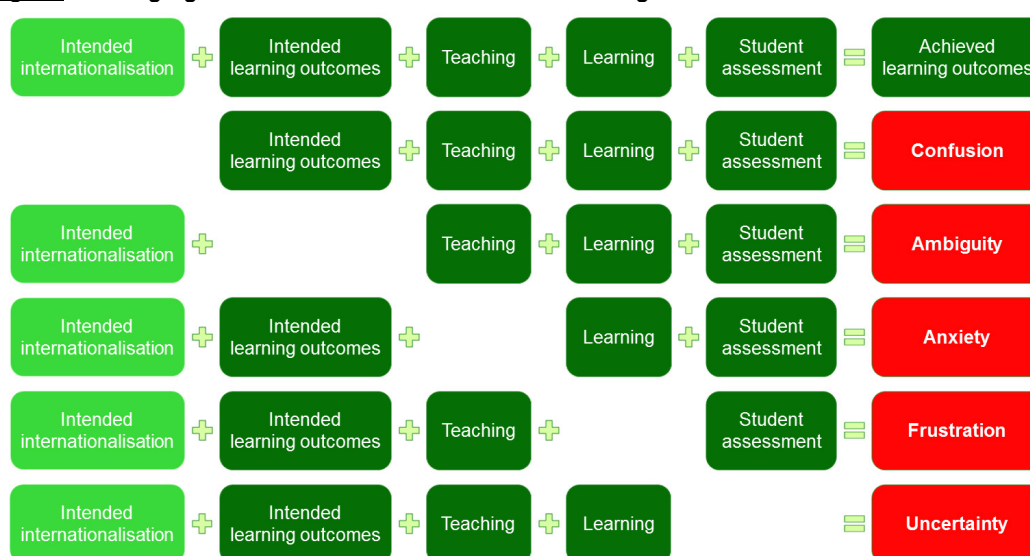
There is a common misconception that a period abroad more or less automatically leads to acquiring a certain level of international and intercultural learning (outcomes). It is clear from research that this is not the case; not if the study period abroad did not purposefully aim to achieve this. In order to purposefully aim for the achievement of the international and intercultural learning outcomes, those responsible for the programme first need to identify which of the programme's intended learning outcomes will be (partly) achieved through the period abroad and inform the outgoing students accordingly. Second, the students' achievement of international and intercultural learning outcomes should be assessed during and/or after their stay abroad.

6. Concluding overview

To achieve international and intercultural learning outcomes, all elements covered in this publication are conducive and essential. Missing one piece of the puzzle undermines the achievement of international and intercultural learning outcomes. Drawing inspiration from Ambrose's model for managing complex change[4], the following figure presents what happens when one piece of the puzzle is missing.

Figure: Managing international and intercultural learning outcomes

Intended internationalisation	Intended learning outcomes	Teaching	Learning	Student assessment	Achieved learning outcomes
	Intended learning outcomes	Teaching	Learning	Student assessment	**Confusion**
Intended internationalisation		Teaching	Learning	Student assessment	**Ambiguity**
Intended internationalisation	Intended learning outcomes		Learning	Student assessment	**Anxiety**
Intended internationalisation	Intended learning outcomes	Teaching		Student assessment	**Frustration**
Intended internationalisation	Intended learning outcomes	Teaching	Learning		**Uncertainty**

Our recipe for achieving international and intercultural learning outcomes identifies five critical elements: intended internationalisation, intended international and intercultural learning outcomes, teaching, learning and student assessment. Lack of even one of these elements may lead to confusion, ambiguity, anxiety, frustration, or uncertainty.

[4] Ambrose, D. (1987). Managing complex change. Pittsburgh, PA: Enterprise Group.

Annex: Example of learning outcomes

During a regular accreditation procedure a master's programme in **Health Care Services Management** presented the following intended learning outcomes. When reading through them, you will notice that you can divine the intended internationalisation and anticipate the required teaching and student assessments.

After successful completion of our master's programme, our students will be able to:

- *Critically review personal leadership and management skills so as to develop a personal action plan for achievement.*
- *Analyse organisational cultures and critically debate the impact of these cultures on staff performance, client experience and health outcomes.*
- *Plan, execute and critically evaluate leadership and management of effective, appropriate and sustainable change in an international and multicultural work environment.*
- *Show a critical knowledge of the factors that promote working environments conducive to the generation of creative and innovative solutions to organisational or client-based problems.*
- *Anticipate future workforce needs taking account of ethical and international human resource management and public health drivers.*
- *Critically debate the current and future roles of clinical leaders and managers in the light of current policy developments in developing regions of the world, global trends and public health targets (international, national and local).*
- *Produce management reports or presentations appropriate for a global audience and suitable for executive level appraisal.*
- *Use a range of interpersonal skills to lead and influence others in an international working environment, including the management of conflict situations.*
- *Critically debate how patient safety is enhanced or compromised by leadership, management, global and intercultural skills, and strategic governance practises.*

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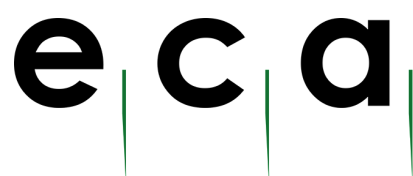
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