

CALOHEE Policy note

Towards a more reliable model for evidence based learning and quality assurance and enhancement

Millions of students finish university education every year. They enter the labour market with sets of competences based on their personal experiences and their studies. Are they really prepared for the jobs they go after? What are the demands of employers? Are they equipped to fully engage with their civic responsibilities? Are students trained to cope with the many uncertainties that life and work will bring to them? Are our universities up to speed? Do existing quality assurance instruments offer sufficient evidence to answer those questions? Can institutional performances be compared to identify best practices?

Additional instrument needed

Relevance of HE and meeting quality standards are high on the agenda of HE institutions and national authorities. However, existing approaches to assess quality tend to look at processes and not at achieved learning. To overcome this obvious weakness, a different – complementary – approach is required.

The Erasmus+ supported feasibility study: *'Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in European Higher Education in Europe'* (CALOHEE) has conceptualized a multi-dimensional approach for assessing and diagnosing the outcomes of higher education from a learning outcomes-based perspective.

CALOHEE applies a forward looking approach, focusing on what a graduate *should know and be able to do* in order to function successfully in life and contribute to society. The chosen approach brings evidence-based accountability into the teaching and learning role of HE institutions by focusing on competences acquired by students, which meet the needs of society and the graduates.

What has been done so far?

CALOHEE has defined a unique multi-dimensional framework covering four strands and (at present) five disciplines, that allows for the development of appropriate assessment instruments. The four strands are: 1) Knowledge (theory and methodology); 2) Applying knowledge and skills; 3) Preparing for employability and 4) Civic, social and cultural engagement. CALOHEE has also developed Assessment Frameworks which are based on a successful merger of the QF for the EHEA and the EQF for LLL. These act as reference points at both BA and MA level for the disciplines involved: civil engineering, history, nursing, physics and teacher education. They represent five broader educational sectors: engineering, humanities, health care, natural sciences and social sciences.

The Assessment Frameworks are built on sets of learning outcomes' descriptors (one page per discipline) prepared by teams from the respective academic communities, in close consultation with stakeholders (e.g. alumni, employers) and open to public scrutiny. The descriptors and

related frameworks are precise enough to offer a basis for assessment and broad enough to encompass a wide range of programme profiles.

They describe the disciplines in terms of multiple dimensions: key elements which define a subject area. For example, in the case of civil engineering: 'knowledge and understanding', analysis and problem solving', 'design', 'investigation', 'practice', decision making', team-working', 'communication' and 'lifelong learning'.

This multi-dimensional taxonomy provides an excellent basis for developing transnational assessments, making transparent the quality of individual HE degree programmes by using a comparative perspective.

What is the next step?

The next step will be to develop and pilot a series of assessments in a comparative perspective. Piloting will start with two out of the five disciplines covered by CALOHEE, looking at students who are at the end of their bachelor studies.

The assessments will be developed by team of disciplinary experts, supported by a Testing organisation. For reasons of reliability, efficiency and cost effectiveness, CALOHEE intends to use machine-scored testing only. This allows for the assessment of profound knowledge and understanding as well as high level skills and wider competences (like responsibility and autonomy), such as critical awareness, analysing and composition.

Testing formats will include responding to and analysing footage, applying computer simulation and progressive choice-making. Use will be made of appropriate experiences at national and international level, such as the OECD-AHELO feasibility study.

Test items will be developed in English and will be translated into one or two other languages to begin with. Individual assessments will take three hours, possibly split in parts taken by different groups of students of the same programme/ institution. The development of a reliable assessment item bank and the actual pilot testing will take around two years.

A detailed plan (describing the assessment platforms) will be presented in March 2018. The budget will depend on various factors, including the number and complexity of assessment items. More ambitious assessment formats will imply higher costs, but might in return offer better gains and benefits worth the initial investment in particular in a medium and long term perspective. The plan will include price alternatives.

What are the expected benefits?

The tests results will offer meaningful insights into the strengths and weaknesses of degree programmes and how they compare to each other. Test results will serve primarily self-diagnosis by universities, but they may also ultimately be used to inform benchmarking, accreditation and quality comparisons at national and international level.

Once fully developed, the CALOHEE diagnostic approach will be rolled out over Europe and could inform, complement or even replace the present external degree programme evaluations, by offering more reliable tools for assessing and comparing and learning in a European perspective.

In sum, CALOHEE offers academic engagement, subject focused context and evidence based tools for analysis and diagnosis, serving our universities and providing meaningful information to all stakeholders. A challenging endeavour with high potential.