**Faculty of Humanities guidance for supporting the development of Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

Introduction

This document aims to support colleagues in both their teaching and submission of unit specifications (etc) as part of School and Faculty Quality, Standards, Design and Enhancement (QSDE) approval processes. As such it is not a comprehensive guide to the underpinning theory and writing of learning outcomes but rather the aim is to try to help demystify and support the process of approval.

Inevitably some nuance may be lost when trying to demystify the process, therefore if you think that the guidance does not fit with your intentions then please do discuss with Faculty Teaching and Learning Officers, the Learning Design team or Directors of Teaching and Learning as the aim is not to constrain or stifle teaching, but to help colleagues achieve their ambitions within the regulatory, policy and framework expectations.

**1.Effective Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

ILOs should be concise statements of what students will learn and be able to ‘demonstrate’ as a result of successfully completing an academic ‘unit’. Learning outcomes therefore define (on the unit specification) the essential components of learning that will need to be achieved and demonstrated in order to successfully complete an academic unit and consequently be awarded ‘credit’ within the university framework.

The components of what students will be expected to learn by the end of a programme or course unit should therefore:

* Focus on what the students will be learning but will be written to state what students can ‘demonstrate’ as a consequence of the learning (expressed as ‘students should/will be able to’) in line with the course unit specification.
* Learning outcomes define the means to success and achievement of ‘credits’, they therefore need to be summatively assessed.
* Effective learning outcomes are typically precise and measurable in order to support learning and facilitate teaching and assessment.
* Effective learning outcomes should align with the broader aims of the unit specification which should in turn align with programme aims and specification. This means that each learning outcome contributes to both the unit and programme.
* ILOs are not however just for the purpose of a unit form. They provide a focus for teaching, student learning and assessment.
* Students should be able to clearly see what the ILOs are and how each aligns with the assessment method and criteria.
* Ideally ILOs should be written using a single, clear action verb for each learning outcome, avoiding vague terms such as ‘know about’, ‘be familiar with’, ‘understanding of’, ‘be aware of’, etc as these are all difficult to assess. Some useful phrases for writing learning outcomes can be found [here](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/quality/programme-specifications/-useful-phrases-for-intended-learning-outcomes-/), whilst support on writing ILOs can be provided by the Faculty Learning Designers. Further information can also be found in the [University Guidance on Writing aims and ILOs](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=4713)
1. **Assessing Intended Learning Outcomes**

Assessments should be ‘designed’ to effectively assess student achievement of the ILOs at the appropriate level and in line with [Faculty Maximum Summative Assessment Guidance](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=65432). Where learning outcomes state transferable and practical skills as well as knowledge and understanding, this should be appropriately reflected in the chosen assessment methods. This is known as [constructive alignment.](https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/humteachlearn/curriculum-design/learning-theories-approaches/)

Assessment should be aligned to learning outcomes at course unit level and should also feed into the overall programme level learning outcomes, as it is these that are needed to be achieved to pass the degree programme as a whole. Not every course unit will feed into every programme level ILO, so the design of ILOs should be considered carefully both at unit and programme level. Note, students should always be assessed at unit level to ensure that the required credit is achieved to attain the minimum amount of credit required for the award.

1. **Frequently Asked Questions**

How many ILOs should my unit have?

The is no one answer to this as it will vary by subject, the focus of the unit and the credits being awarded. As a general guide the Faculty Learning Design team recommend between 6-8 ILOs per 15 credit unit. It is important to note that not all learning within a unit has to be linked to an ILO. ILOs represent the essential and prioritised learning required in order to meet the achievement of the academic unit.

Do I have to have ILOs in each of the UoM categories?

It is not essential to have learning outcomes under every category so long as the spread of assessment across all units and the programme overall ensures that the programme level ILOs are met, this should avoid overassessment. A curriculum mapping exercise should be undertaken as part of the programme development or amendment process to ensure that this is the case and evidenced on the Programme Specification Document (using the [UG programme specification template](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=65825) or [PGT programme specification template](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=65826)).

Do all ILOs have to be assessed and how?

All ILO **must be ‘summatively’ assessed** and marked to a clearly defined rubric which should be made clear and available to students from the outset of the unit. Students should know what they need to demonstrate against each of the ILOs in to order to ‘pass’ the academic unit.

Formative Assessment should be used to monitor student progress towards meeting an ILO. Formative assessment is a two-way process as it typically provides immediate ‘real time’ feedback to students whilst providing feedback to academics on how they may need to adjust their teaching if students are not making sufficient progress against the ILOs.

Formative assessment is integral to effective teaching and learning and is embedded within the expectations of the [University Assessment Framework](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/policy-guidance/assessment/assessment-principles/).

How do I avoid over-assessing of ILOs?

Numerous summative assessments at the end of (or at an agreed point in the unit) which repeatedly assess the ILOs can lead to both overassessment and blandness in approach which can lead to negative feedback and poor performance from students. It is advised to use ILOs as the starting point for planning assessment (and teaching methods). For example, particular tasks should be chosen and then mapped to the related ILO. Assessment weightings are then allocated as appropriate to the relative importance of those outcomes. Faculty Learning Designers can provide additional support and guidance in this area.

How should I use formative assessment effectively?

In summary, summative assessment and feedback tells you where you are, formative assessment and feedback tells you how to get to where you want to be. An over-reliance on summative assessment at the end of each unit will provide students with a mark (of where they are), but often provides very little feedback that will help them develop and improve before they reach the end of the programme (where they want to be). Therefore, achieving a balance between formative and summative assessments is vital to supporting student progression.

What about resit tasks?

Whilst teaching and learning should always be designed to ensure that the student has full knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and opportunity to practice and develop relevant skills at the appropriate level in order to achieve the ILOs, it is recognised that not every student will achieve this within the first formal summative assessment (first sit). ILOs should therefore always be designed to ensure that any resit assessment will ensure that the outcome can still be evidenced and achieved under different circumstances. For example, where a unit uses group work or presentations as an assessment method to assess communication skills academics should consider how an individual resit activity can replicate this effectively.

Can an assessment task assess multiple ILOs?

Yes. It is essential that each ILO is summatively assessed, and that the assessment method is appropriate to the category of ILO. However multiple ILOs can be assessed within the same piece of work but the criteria for the assessment of each ILO should be clear (usually within the assessment rubric).

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| Related Procedures and Guidance: | [New Programme Approval Procedures](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/quality/development-programmes/new-programme-approval/)  |
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