

Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan [LOAP] 2008-12

Background

- 1 The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), in its 33rd and 34th meetings, discussed and made decisions regarding the plan for learning outcomes assessment at PolyU. This document is a summary of the major decisions of LTC on this matter. It describes PolyU's overall framework and processes for outcomes assessment, and puts forth a tentative plan for implementing outcomes assessment at the institutional and programme levels for 2008-12.

Meaning of student learning outcomes assessment

- 2.1 Student learning outcomes assessment refers to the systematic collection, review and use of data or evidence regarding students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes on graduation, to improve institutional and/or programme effectiveness in facilitating student learning.
- 2.2 Learning outcomes assessment involves assessment at three different levels:
 - **Subject-level assessment** to determine the extent to which students have mastered the intended learning outcomes of the particular subject. The focus is on the student and on the subject.
 - **Programme-level assessment** to examine the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aims and objectives in terms of students' learning outcomes.
 - **Institution-level assessment** to determine the effectiveness of the University in achieving the broader institutional mission and intended graduate outcomes.
- 2.3 In the context of learning outcomes assessment, legitimate outcomes evidence includes not only data generated from course-related tests, assignments or exams, but also indirect evidence of students' actual attainment with regard to the intended learning outcomes collected from surveys or interviews (e.g., employer and alumni surveys, students' self assessment of learning, etc.) that PolyU has already been collecting for some time.

Purposes

- 3.1 The primary purpose of learning outcomes assessment at PolyU is to help the University fulfil its educational mission and to improve student learning. It is seen as a vehicle for improvement; *not* an end in itself.
- 3.2 The development and implementation of an effective LOAP for PolyU will serve the following two inter-related purposes:
 - **To improve student learning.** Outcomes assessment is an *integral* component of the outcome-based approach to student learning. It acts as a feedback loop to provide reliable and valid information on institutional and programme effectiveness that enables the University, departments and programme teams to confirm the achievement of the institutional or programme goals, to identify discrepancies between what students are *intended* to learn and what they *actually* learn, to make informed decisions about curricular or pedagogical changes based on the evidence, and to take improvement actions where required to enhance the quality of the programme and its

graduates. The relationship between outcomes assessment and the outcome-based approach is illustrated diagrammatically in Appendix A.

- **To demonstrate the quality of our programmes and graduates to key stakeholders** (e.g. the University Grants Committee (UGC), professional bodies, accreditation agencies, prospective employers, parents and students). Outcomes assessment activities and findings will enable PolyU to better communicate to stakeholders within and beyond the University about what it is doing and what it has achieved. This is particularly important for soliciting support from industries and employers, and for attracting prospective students in an increasingly competitive higher education environment. Internationally, there has been a trend for professional or accreditation bodies to put a greater emphasis on the articulation and assessment of learning outcomes for institutional/programme accreditation purposes. Finally, outcomes assessment is the focus of the forthcoming UGC Quality Assurance Council (QAC) audit on the teaching and learning quality of PolyU, which has been scheduled for 2010.

Scope

- 4.1 The PolyU LOAP will cover all of the UGC-funded and self-financed taught programmes of the University at the undergraduate degree level. The target is to have the LOAP formulated, endorsed, and piloted such that at least some outcomes assessment data and evidence at the programme or institutional level are available in time for the UGC QAC audit in 2010.
- 4.2 Learning outcomes assessment for research degree programmes is the responsibility of the Research Committee and thus, will not be covered in this document.
- 4.3 Quality assurance of sub-degree programmes is overseen by the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) set up by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) of Hong Kong under a different quality review framework. Learning outcomes assessment for sub-degree programmes would therefore need to be developed according to the JQRC requirements, with reference to the framework presented in this paper.

Underpinning principles

- 5 The following principles will guide the planning and implementation of the PolyU LOAP at both the institutional and programme levels:
 - The outcomes assessment activities should be **mission-driven**: They should be derived from the mission and goals of the University and departments/programmes to ensure that the assessment is relevant and “fit-for-purpose”.
 - The assessment should be **evidence-based**: Institutional or programme effectiveness can only be evaluated, and improvement actions planned, on the basis of reliable and valid evidence of actual attainment of student learning outcomes rather than on curriculum intention, input or process indicators alone.
 - The assessment should be **improvement-oriented**: The emphasis is on “assessment for improvement” rather than evaluating the performance of individual students, staff, programmes or departments, or placing blame.
 - The assessment should be **“owned” and “driven” primarily by academic staff** together with the relevant academic support units such as EDC and SAO, to ensure that the assessment data collected are meaningful to the key issue owners and are more likely to be acted upon by front-line colleagues.
 - The LOAP should include **both direct and indirect measures**, and makes use of both **qualitative and quantitative data** collected from multiple sources.

- Particular attention should be given to the issue of **staff and student workload** created as a result of the new outcomes assessment plan to ensure that the costs (including staff and student time) of implementing the assessment activities are commensurate with the benefits. The LOAP should be coordinated and streamlined to minimise duplication of effort.
- Emphasis should be put not only on the *collection* of credible outcome evidence but also on the **effective use of the evidence collected to improve student learning**. To achieve this, the assessment activities have to be closely integrated into PolyU's generic quality assurance framework and process, rather than being introduced as something "extra/external" to it.
- Appropriate processes should be established to steer, support and monitor implementation to ensure **effective leadership, shared responsibility, sustainability of effort, and ongoing evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself**.

Overall framework for learning outcomes assessment at PolyU

- 6 An integrated two-tier outcomes assessment framework is adopted for the development and implementation of PolyU's LOAP whereby:
- Faculties/Schools/Departments are primarily responsible for assessing the intended learning outcomes at the programme and subject levels.
 - Outcomes assessment at the institutional level will be coordinated/conducted centrally, as a complement to the departmental outcomes assessment, to appraise the attainment of the broader institutional goals and objectives that are more difficult to measure at the programme or subject levels.

Programme learning outcomes assessment plan and activities

- 7.1 Programme and subject outcomes assessment is the most important aspect of PolyU's LOAP.
- 7.2 All Faculties/Schools/Departments are required to develop an effective programme outcomes assessment plan for each of their undergraduate programmes detailing the methods and processes for assessing the effectiveness of the programme with respect to each of the intended programme learning outcomes, implement the plan, and plan/undertake improvement actions on the basis of the outcomes evidence collected. The proposed timeline for developing and implementing the programme learning outcomes assessment for the period 2008-12 is shown in Appendix B.
- 7.3 Faculties/Schools/Departments can select outcomes assessment methods and measures that are most appropriate for the contexts and mission of their programme, according to the 'fitness-for-purpose' principle.
- 7.4 The Educational Development Centre is responsible for developing resources, templates and teachers' guides for programme outcomes assessment, and organising staff development activities and support to assist Faculties/Schools/Departments to develop and implement an effective outcomes assessment plan. Departments may, if necessary, apply for OBA funding to support the initial development and piloting of programme outcomes assessment plan or activities.

Institution-level learning outcomes assessment plan and activities

- 8.1 Institution-level learning outcomes assessment is needed for collecting campus-wide data and evidence that measure the effectiveness of the University in achieving its broader educational mission and intended graduate outcomes which are more difficult to assess at the individual programme or subject

levels. Data and evidence collected are not intended to be used to appraise the performance of individual staff, programmes, departments or units.

8.2 The following institutional surveys or assessment activities that are currently undertaken by SAO/EDC will be continued as part of the institutional outcomes assessment process to collect **indirect measures of institution-level learning outcomes** pertinent to PolyU's stated mission and intended graduate outcomes:

- Students' Self-Assessment of All-Round Development [SAARD]
- Graduate Employment Survey
- Employer Survey
- Alumni Survey (conducted 12 months after graduation)

The instruments and administration of the various surveys will be streamlined to strengthen their alignment with PolyU's Strategic Plan and intended learning outcomes for 2008-12.

8.3 **Direct measures of institutional learning outcomes:** PolyU has already put in place a policy that requires all its full-time undergraduate degree students to sit for a language proficiency tests in English and Chinese at exit. Results of the Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment [GSLPA] will provide direct measures of the actual achievements of PolyU graduates regarding outcomes relating to language proficiency.

8.4 **Pilot projects on institutional learning outcomes assessment:** To explore other methods of collecting more direct evidence of students' learning for outcomes assessment, three small-scale pilot projects will be set up to develop and try out more authentic methods of assessing students' attainment of the institutional learning outcomes at the institutional and programme levels, which involve the use of **course-embedded assessments, electronic student portfolios, and the Collegiate Learning Assessment** (developed by the US Council for Aid in Education [CAE]).

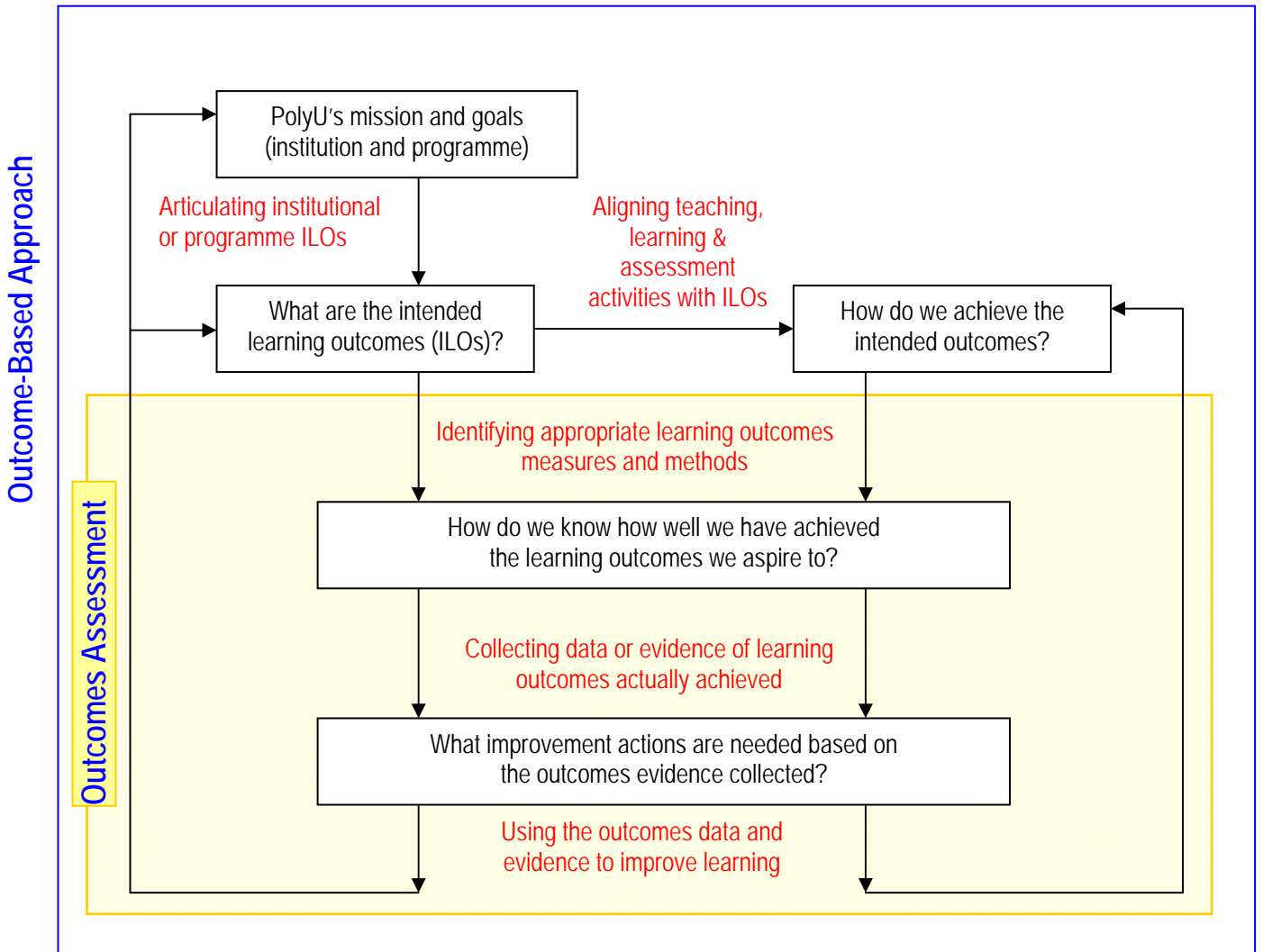
Reporting and use of outcomes assessment results for quality improvement

9 To ensure that the institutional outcomes assessment activities will result in continual improvements in the quality of our programmes and graduates, the assessment activities and results will be integrated into the existing PolyU generic QA system such that the assessment results will be properly reported and utilised to guide/plan improvement actions.

Continual review and refinement of the LOAP

10 An institutional outcomes assessment plan is a constantly evolving document. The PolyU LOAP proposed in this document will be periodically reviewed to ensure that the existing assessment activities and measures are adequate and appropriate for the changing mission and objectives of the University, and will be continually refined based on experience gained.

Appendix A: Outcome-based approach and outcomes assessment: How outcomes assessment contributes to institutional and programme improvements



Appendix B: Tentative timeline for developing and implementing programme learning outcomes assessment at PolyU 2008-12

Date	Tasks
August 2009	Endorsement of programme learning outcomes assessment plans for undergraduate programmes of departments by relevant Faculty/School Boards
August 2010	Submission of interim reports by departments on progress in implementing the undergraduate programme learning outcomes assessment plans
2010	UGC QAC teaching and learning quality audit of PolyU
June 2012	Review and refinement of the undergraduate programme learning outcomes assessment plans

Revised 28 April 2008