

Internationalising Course Design

Thematic Text

Abstract

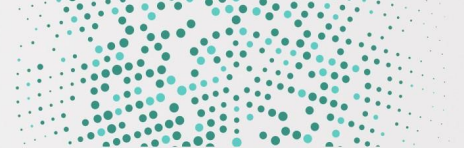
The design of a programme provides the foundation of the students' overall learning experience as it determines the knowledge, skills, and attributes learned throughout the course or programme of study. In order to internationalise the curriculum, it is essential to embed international, intercultural and global learning dimensions into all aspects of the curriculum including the intended learning outcomes, assessment and teaching and learning activities. This may be supported by the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), which is an established concept to underpin curriculum design that also promotes the higher order learning associated with an effective internationalised curriculum. These dimensions should be determined by the overarching graduate attributes that are driving the agenda for internationalisation of HEI. In order for educational developers to support course designers, they require an understanding of the key drivers influencing internationalisation as well as a recognition that internationalising the curriculum (Leask 2015) is an iterative and creative process that will benefit more effectively from the collective ideas, reflection and support of a programme team rather than the thoughts of an individual. This text provides participants of the *Internationalising Course Design* module with some underpinning concepts and models to support a structured, cyclical process of design or transformation of the 'formal curriculum' (see Leask 2015, p.8) to facilitate the internationalisation of programmes in line with the aspirational graduate attributes of the higher education institution.

Identifiers

Key words: Constructive alignment, intended international learning outcomes, graduate attributes, course design, action research cycle

1. Introduction

This text is a brief introduction on how to support the internationalisation of course designs, with a main focus on developing intended international learning outcomes (IILOs) and facilitating constructive alignment of teaching and learning activities and assessment. Furthermore, the iterative process of course design will be highlighted



by following the different phases in Leask’s (2015) internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) process¹.

Constructive alignment integrates an understanding of how learning is achieved by the learner with an alignment of an environment that supports activities and assessments appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes (Biggs and Tang, 2011). It is a well-established concept that underpins the contemporary programme design and delivery. It is further recognized by many higher education institutions (HEIs) as an educational approach that links policy guidelines and strategic vision to programme design and teaching and learning (Ruge, Tokede & Tivendale, 2019). Educational developers (EDs) need to have an in-depth understanding of constructive alignment and the positioning of ILOs within the programme in order to support academic staff with the internationalisation of their course design, and more specifically with translating HEI’s graduate attributes into the course² level intended learning outcomes, activities and assessment.

The EQUiip *thematic text: the International Classroom* provides an overview of key terms related to developments in and around the International Classroom: Comprehensive Internationalisation; Internationalisation of Higher Education; Internationalisation of the Curriculum; Internationalisation at Home; and Intercultural Competence Development.

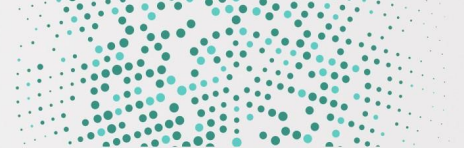
This text contributes to the EQUiip programme by offering a brief overview of some core models and concepts that influence and enhance programme and course design. While we acknowledge the need to internationalise the curriculum in its broader sense, for instance including student support services and other aspects of the informal curriculum, the focus of this text is on how to internationalise the formal curriculum for the courses or programmes that are taught.

2.Theoretical framework

2.1 Embedding international, intercultural and global learning dimensions

¹ In this thematic text, ‘curriculum’ is used only in relation to ‘Internationalisation of the Curriculum’ (Leask 2015), including the formal, informal and hidden curriculum) terms that are discussed and explained in the *Introduction to the International Classroom* module. In general in this text and throughout the EQUiip modules, we prefer to focus on ‘programmes’.

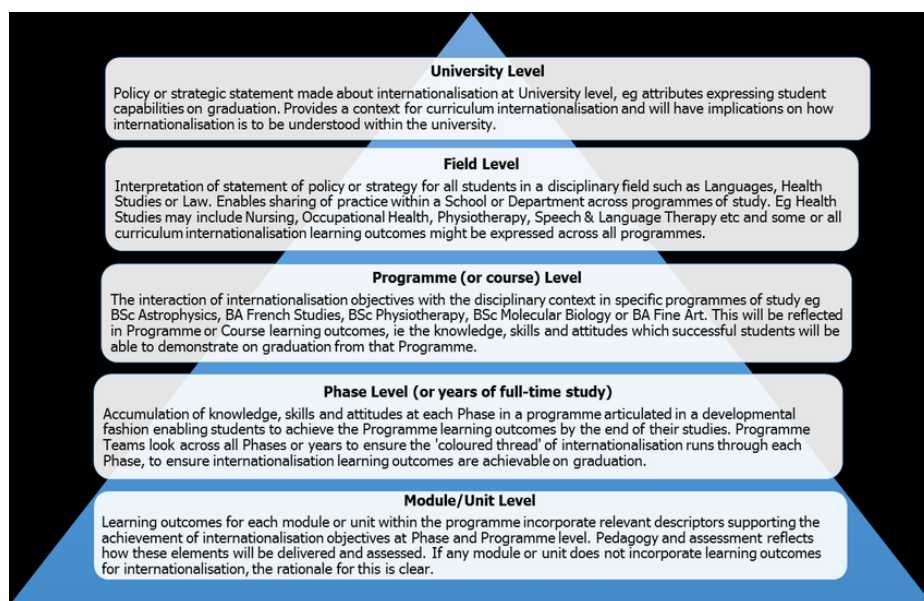
² Reference is made throughout the text to ‘course’, however this can refer to a module or unit depending on context.

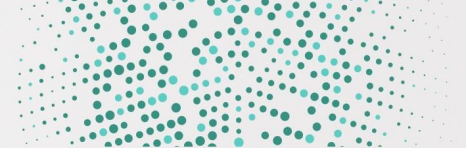


The first step to internationalising a programme is understanding the international, intercultural and global learning dimensions that will produce in our graduates the desired attributes. Bowden et al. (2000, p.3) define graduate attributes as the “qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include, but go beyond, the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university programmes. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents for social good in an unknown future.” The graduate attributes are often an answer to the question “why should programmes internationalise?” and are often linked to employability (Caroll, 2015). Various examples of university-wide graduate attributes exist: e.g. the [common good attributes](#), the [graduate attributes at the University of Sydney](#), and [graduate attributes of the University of the Western Cape](#). A distinct example of a graduate attribute in the context of internationalisation of higher education is intercultural competence. The *EQUIiP Thematic Introduction Enhancing Intercultural Learning in the Curriculum* provides a detailed explanation of this attribute.

The concept of graduate attributes is based on a competency-based model of higher education. The graduate attributes help to frame a narrative and provide a sense of vertical and horizontal alignment in the programme or university in order to internationalise the curriculum within a global, national, local and/or institutional context (See Figure 1 The Curriculum Pyramid from Jones 2013, in which the criteria are scaffolded throughout the various levels within the HEI).

Figure 1. The curriculum pyramid, taken from Jones 2013

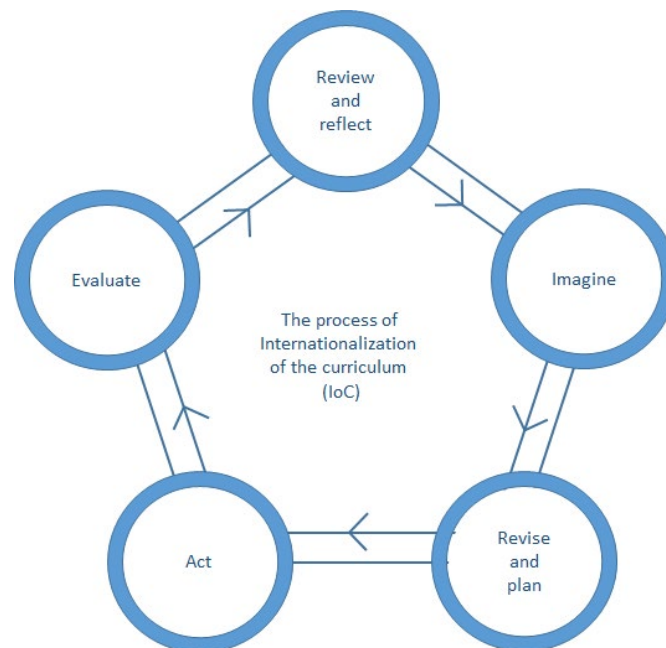


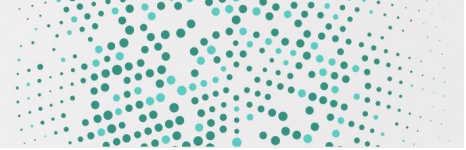


Internationalisation of the curriculum is generally recognized as an iterative process, which requires to be tested, evaluated and revised, enabling an environment that influences behaviours, attitudes and higher order learning. The process takes time, creative thought and ideally a collective contribution of ideas. It is essential to incorporate “international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of programmes as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a programme of study” (Leask, 2015, p.9).

Leask (2015) proposes a structured process which supports the embedding of international, intercultural and global dimensions into the existing curriculum based on a five stage action research cycle (Figure 2). This cycle challenges educational developers to both critically reflect on existing international and intercultural dimensions within their curriculum and be creative, emphasising new possibilities for engaging students and going beyond the fundamental, often discipline-specific, requirements of the curriculum frequently dictated by regulatory bodies. The remaining part of this text will offer educational developers with some tools on how to support academic staff with this iterative design process by following the different phases in Leask’s (2015) model connected to the principles of constructive alignment.

Figure 2. The process of internationalisation of the curriculum, taken from Leask 2015

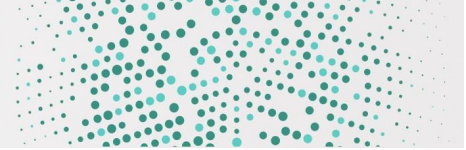




2.2. Constructive alignment

Constructive alignment, introduced by Biggs in 1996, assumes a student-centred outcome-based teaching and learning approach. It is based on the theory that students interpret and create their own learning through relevant learning and teaching activities. Meaning is not imparted or conveyed from the teacher to the learner, but is something that the learners have to construct through activities they undertake in the teaching and learning experience. Thus constructive alignment is well suited to promoting the higher order learning associated with an internationalised programme as it challenges the learner to reflect on their own attitudes, values and unconscious biases. The role of the teacher is to invent and implement appropriate learning activities and environments to facilitate and support the students towards achieving and demonstrating their achievement of the desired learning outcomes. The learning outcomes play a central role in aligning all three components of the constructively aligned programme: the intended learning outcomes (ILOs); teaching and learning activities; and assessment. For an extensive explanation of constructive alignment, please see Biggs and Tang (2011).

Constructive alignment in the EQUIiP module internationalising course design has two main functions. Firstly, it provides a guideline on how to revise and plan the process of internationalising course design by highlighting that the different components all need to be taken into consideration. Secondly, it provides an established model for aligning the strategic vision and policies of HEI's with their programmes and courses (Ruge, Tokede & Tivendale, 2019). Consequently, through constructive alignment the graduate attributes of an institution can be integrated in the intended learning outcomes and at the same time declutter and prioritize: not all learning outcomes have to become internationalised. The graduate attributes, and consequently the learning outcomes connected to the attributes, are scaffolded throughout the programme. Following the principle of alignment, various modules of the programme have to be vertically and horizontally aligned to each other in assessment, content, learning outcomes and activities. Vertical alignment ensures internationalisation is scaffolded throughout the entire programme from the first year to the last. Horizontal alignment ensures courses within the same year are aligned to each other to envelop students in a coherent programme, i.e. the teaching team consider what is taught and assessed (and how) in the course before and after the course they are developing. The explicit nature of constructive alignment can support educational developers in their work with academic staff on internationalising course design (Jones & Killick, 2013).

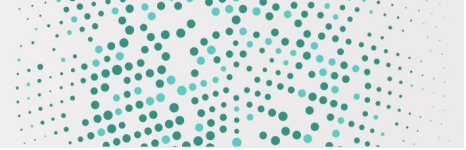


3.1. Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) (Imagine)

Intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are defined as “statements, written from the students’ perspective, indicating the level of understanding and performance they are expected to achieve as a result of engaging in the teaching and learning experience” (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 100-101). ILOs serve two purposes: they provide a focus for teachers when designing courses and they serve as a reference for students to self-regulate their learning. However, even well-crafted learning outcomes do not automatically impact learning. Teachers should take the ILOs forward in their teaching by explicitly linking the teaching and learning activities to the ILOs and by encouraging students to evaluate and compare their learning progress against the ILOs. By doing so, the purpose of ILOs becomes clear to students, and more likely result in a greater positive impact on their learning (Jiang & Elen, 2011).

The ILOs are a starting point to internationalise course design. According to the principle of constructive alignment, ILOs are defined first before teaching and learning activities and assessment are constructed. However, when internationalising the programme, courses and thus learning outcomes often already exist and need to be reframed rather than newly designed. The international dimensions of a course should be in line with the vision and aim of the HEI. Graduate attributes constitute the desired outcomes of the institution. This is represented as ‘University Level’ in figure 1: The curriculum pyramid (Jones 2013). Therefore an alignment between the graduate attributes and the ILOs of a course or programme should be demonstrated.

Incorporating international dimensions into courses can be achieved in two ways: informally, by offering international perspectives and dimensions in dialogue and examples without changing the core content, or formally, by making this learning, which may already exist within the core taught content, explicit in the ILOs and assessment (Carroll, 2015). When formally changing a course, already existing ILOs might become Intended International Learning Outcomes (IILOs) or a new IILO may need to be added. When a new IILO is added to an existing course, it is essential to review the learning outcomes against the general aim and balance of workload. As pointed out by Jones and Killick (2013), it is a matter of embedding an IILO within the course instead of just adding or reframing it.



ILOs are written according to best practice guidelines; for instance, they should include an action verb, are written from the student-perspective, and are measurable. These principles also apply to ILOs. Several authors explain the writing of learning outcomes in detail (e.g. Aerden, 2017; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Examples of ILOs can be found in the work of Jones and Killick (2013).

3.2. Scaffolding teaching and learning activities (Revise and plan)

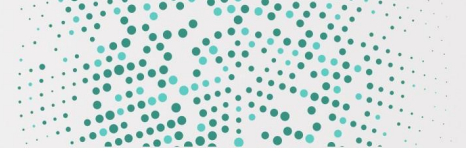
After (re)framing the ILOs, aligned teaching and learning activities have to be implemented to support the student in achieving the outcomes. To prepare the students to work in a global society, teaching and learning activities have to be created that provoke students to explore and challenge various perspectives, points-of-view, values and norms. However, competences and attitudinal change take time to develop. Appropriate scaffolding needs to be provided by teachers to support student learning.

Creating an international and intercultural learning experience can be achieved by internationalising the content (informally or formally) and the teaching and learning activities, in which the diversity of the student population is used as a learning resource. However, learning from others does not happen automatically. Purposeful active teaching and learning activities need to be created to foster positive and meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement between students. Furthermore, opportunities should be created to enable all students to practice and develop their intercultural, international and global competences. Global and intercultural dimensions can be embedded into the learning environment through a range of methods including the use of case studies, or by working on an issue in professional practice (Carroll, 2015) or collaborative online international learning projects (COIL) (e.g. <http://coil.suny.edu/>).

In the EQUiIP programme, this is dealt with in greater detail in the module *Intercultural Group Dynamics*.

3.3. Assessment of students (Revise and plan and act)

Since a graduate attribute envisions what a student will achieve upon graduation, the programme as a whole should work towards enabling students to realise that attribute (Carroll, 2015; Jones, 2013). The graduate attributes should be scaffolded in ILOs, teaching and learning activities and assessment throughout the programme to foster an evolving level of competence (Leask & Carroll, 2013). Graduate

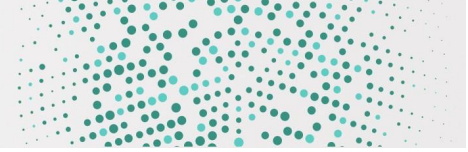


attributes should be assessed incrementally throughout a programme; potentially formatively during an early exposure phase and summatively as the student becomes more immersed in the learning and eventually achieves mastery. To provide students with insights into their learning progress, assessment for and of learning are important. Task-focused feedback during and after the course will enable students to work towards the IILO, and ultimately the graduate attribute.

Following the principles of constructive alignment, assessment methods and criteria should be considered before appropriate teaching and learning activities. However, as stated earlier, teachers are often not starting from scratch when designing a course and similarly assessment methods are often already in place. To evaluate whether students have achieved the IILOs, assessment tasks need to be developed or adjusted appropriately and the internationalised component should be explicit within the assignment and marking criteria.

As with any course design, the principles of assessment also apply when internationalising course design. Assessment should be made transparent to the students. Throughout a programme, the IILOs can be mapped to the graduate attributes, as well as to the teaching and learning activities and the assessment, to show to the students how different courses relate to each other as well as the programme. Assessment should also be authentic in order to prepare students for life after university. Therefore, assessment tasks should not be culturally context-specific but constructed to develop intercultural competence among students (Leask & Carroll, 2013). The vast diversity across the globe does not allow students to obtain an in-depth understanding of all cultures. Instead, students should be prepared to interact in a culturally sensitive manner with people from multiple distinct cultures. Lastly, assessment tasks should be valid, related to the IILOs, and reliable, understood in the same way by different assessors. Since intercultural competence and other graduate attributes are often abstract concepts relating to attitudes and behaviours, (for instance, *Demonstrate effective intercultural engagement skills or global citizenship attitudes*), there is scope for misinterpretation once formulated into concrete IILOs. Therefore, defining the assessment criteria is recommended. An example of this is the intercultural knowledge and competence value rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2009).

3.4. Internationalising course design: An iterative process (Evaluate)



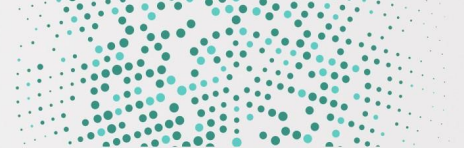
In the last phase of Leask’s (2015) cycle of internationalisation of the curriculum, educators are encouraged to evaluate whether the ILOs have been reached and whether the course contributed to the achievement of the graduate attribute. Since course design is an iterative process, the cycle starts all over again by first reviewing and reflecting on the ILOs, the teaching and learning activities, and the assessment and by considering the alignment between the components.

This iterative process of course design has been illustrated by Hattie (2009) in his creation of a concept map of the ideas in the constructive alignment. By going through a course, or after the final assessment, it can become clear what kind of gaps still exist in students’ knowledge, skills and competences to achieve all the outcomes or graduate attributes. Some of the gaps might need to be addressed and implemented in the course design: in the I(I)LOs; in the teaching and learning activities; and in the aligned assessment. Educators need to revisit the imagine phase and work their way once more through Leask’s (2015) cycle of internationalising course design. This iterative process of course design is discussed in depth in Activity 1: Baseline Ice Breaker activity of the EQUIiP module *Internationalising Course Design*.

So far this thematic text has focused on internationalising a course, often carried out by a single educator. However, as stated by Carroll (2015), embedding international, intercultural and global dimensions in the programme cannot be the sole responsibility of an individual teacher due to the complexity and the time needed to acquire the agreed graduate attribute. The effort to internationalise a programme should therefore be embraced by the programme team in which the course is situated to create a vertical and horizontal alignment within the programme. Also, as a key driver for internationalising the overall experience of the student in most HEIs is to enhance their employment potential and equip them to positively impact society, educators and their teams may want to consider involving external stakeholders, professional bodies and other communities to help steer the programme development process to ensure this can be enabled.

4. Conclusion (including take-away messages)

The development of an internationalised programme is an iterative process, that requires creativity, reflection and a clarity of vision. This text has focussed on the underpinning concepts that influence and support course designers in adapting and transforming their programmes to ensure intercultural and internationalised learning can be incorporated and made explicit for students. The internationalised



programme aims to enable students to graduate as global professionals and citizens. The principles of constructive alignment promote the higher order learning that achieves this goal and Leask's (2015) five stage action research cycle provides a structured process to support EDs and course developers in embedding international, intercultural and global dimensions in the ILOs, assessment and learning and teaching environment of new and existing courses.

Constructive alignment has been accepted as the foremost model for outcomes-based design within HEI. However, it is not without limitations (Ruge, Tokede & Tivendale, 2019). As mentioned earlier, courses very often already exist and educators do not often start the design of a course by outlining the learning outcomes. Perfect alignment is difficult to achieve since not all activities will be tested and attitude development takes time. Furthermore, constructive alignment aims to predefine the learning by aligning all components (Jones & Killick, 2013). However, learning happens in a social environment, and through the interaction between students and between students and the content, emergent learning outcomes might arise which fall outside the predetermined learning route in a constructively aligned course. As Carroll (2015) has pointed out, there is no single way to internationalise a course or programme. EDs have to make an informed decision whether the principles of constructive alignment fit their context and what lies within their control.

This thematic text aims to prepare participants for the second EQUiIP module, *Internationalising Course Design*. In combination with the module, this text offers models and tools for EDs to support educators in internationalising their courses and programmes, while taking into account the specific context in which they work.

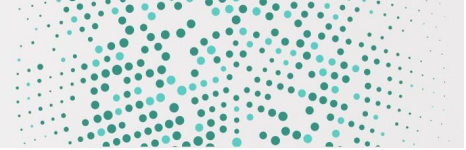
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