Session title: Active verbs for learning outcomes: an approach to promote consistency in the design of learning outcomes

Session type: Lightening Talk

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Session summary:
This session addresses the challenge of supporting colleagues to write module learning outcomes and select appropriate active verbs. Robert Gordon University has taken a unique approach by producing a table of verbs for each Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level by SCQF level descriptor characteristic. We will describe the methodology informing our approach and key challenges. Impact includes consistency and clarity in learning outcomes, and increased staff support and awareness of learning outcome development.

Session outline:
Module learning outcomes describe what a student should be able to do by module completion and must be aligned to the assessment. Each learning outcome should contain one active verb describing the behaviour that demonstrates the learning and be appropriate for the relevant Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level and the course learning outcomes for each of the five SCQF level descriptor characteristics(1). This session will describe the methodology informing Robert Gordon University's approach to support academics to develop module learning outcomes, challenges faced, changes of direction during the project, and impact.

This session will explain the process of mapping the six levels in Bloom's taxonomy(2) (knowledge, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, create) to the SCQF level descriptor characteristics based on the name of the characteristic or verbs used in the level descriptors for each characteristic. The identification of verbs that fit with each level in Bloom's taxonomy will also be described. Briefly, verbs were included if they were present in 10 or more lists in a sample of top 30 highest-ranking websites based on the search 'action words for Bloom's taxonomy'(3). Additional verbs were added if they appeared in more than half of 47 verb lists (from 35 universities and textbooks) and were in the same level in the taxonomy for more than half of the lists(4), and were present in the SCQF level descriptor characteristics(1). Verbs for 'knowledge', 'understand' and 'create' were restricted to level 7 only, levels 7-9, and levels 8-11 respectively.

A table of active verbs for each SCQF level, and for each SQCF level by SCQF level descriptor characteristic, was produced. Key challenges included the number of verbs to include and the allocation of verbs to each SCQF level. The significance of engaging with all relevant stakeholders is highlighted, along with the process of consultation.

References:
1.   SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK, 2012. SCQF Level Descriptors. Available from: https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/SCQF-LevelDescriptors.pdf [Accessed March 2022].

2.   ARMSTRONG, P., 2010. Bloom's Taxonomy. Vanderbuilt University Center for Teaching. Available from: https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/ [Accessed March 2022].

3.   STANNY, C.J., 2016. Reevaluating Bloom's Taxonomy: What Measurable Verbs Can and Cannot Say about Student Learning. Education Sciences, 6, 37. doi:10.3390/educsci6040037

4.   NEWTON, P.M., DA SILVA, A. & PETERS, L.G., 2020. A Pragmatic Master List of Action Verbs for Bloom's Taxonomy. Frontiers in Education, 5, 107. doi: 10.3389/fduc.2020.00107