Introduction

Transnational education (TNE) highlights the need for effective quality assurance processes. A key challenge for transnational delivery is maintaining academic standards and ensuring the Equivalence and Comparability (E&C) of courses delivered in multiple onshore and offshore locations. The proposed College of Business E&C model is guided by Equivalence measures and Comparability conditions. The model is implemented through a course review process held in all course offering locations. A subsequent annual group course review consolidates the results of local reviews in order to produce an action plan to assure academic standards.

This Quick Guide provides an introduction to Equivalence and Comparability, and is supported by the College of Business Equivalence and Comparability Website. Visit the website for detailed information http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/equivalenceandcomparability

Guiding principles

Equivalence

A measure of quality determined by maintaining defined standards with regard to capabilities and learning outcomes; WIL and Internationalisation strategies; teaching quality; and, course management for all offerings of a single course.

Comparability

The condition that exists when a course offering has been contextualised and customised to suit local factors and the specific student profile, while maintaining equivalence with other offerings of the same course.

Contextualisation (a subset of comparability)

The adaptation of one or more elements in a course offering to increase its cultural, personal, professional, and global relevance to students in that offering.

Customisation (a subset of comparability)

The alignment of a course offering’s learning design and materials with its students’ profile to promote effective learning.

The notion of ‘equivalence’ of quality assurance processes and of learning needs to be contextualised in the wider quality issue of pedagogical and cultural appropriateness

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Equivalence and Comparability framework

The university requires that all offerings of a course including those at offshore locations and within the dual hub are equivalent and comparable.

**Equivalence**
Elements related to Equivalence must comply with RMIT predetermined standards for all course offerings (Measured by direct reference to policies, procedures, guidelines and strategic directions)

**Comparability**
Elements related to Comparability may be adapted to suit local factors and the student profile (Measured by fitness for purpose)

Contextualisation

- Capabilities and Learning Outcomes
- Learning Activities
- Learning Resources
- Assessment requirements & types
- WIL strategies
- Internationalisation strategies
- Teaching quality
- Course management

Customisation

- Assessment tasks
- Content relevance (all media)
- Learning activities
- WIL activities
- Internationalisation of content

Equivalence and Comparability Review Process

**Prepare for review**
 Obtain Equivalence and Comparability Guide and Checklist, and previous CES/Offshore student survey data including grade distributions. Data to represent previous equivalent teaching period, i.e. S1-2009 and S1-2010

**Conduct LOCAL REVIEW**
Location specific course review of all Equivalence and Comparability elements. Occurs prior to next offering. Task completed individually by local coordinator or jointly with other local teaching staff.

**Share review outcomes**
Share outcomes of Local Review with other course team members at all locations 2 weeks before Group Review.

**Participate in GROUP REVIEW**
Course team members at all locations:
- Verify Equivalence and Comparability
- Produce and implement Action Plan

**Archive documentation**

Figure 1. The Equivalence and Comparability model
**Equivalence & Comparability framework**

The E&C framework comprises elements that define equivalence and comparability. All elements should be considered during course reviews.

**Elements of Equivalence**

The elements require compliance with strategic directions, policies, procedures and guidelines. The elements are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capabilities</td>
<td>The knowledge and skills to be developed in a course are identified in Part A Course Guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning activities</td>
<td>The learning experiences and resources provided in the classroom or online are identified in Part A Course Guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment requirements and types</td>
<td>The nature of assessment and criteria for measuring or assessing student learning are identified in Part A Course Guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIL strategies</td>
<td>A WIL course offered in multiple locations must meet the same learning outcomes through approved WIL activities, and fulfil the minimum course credit point requirements for programs. The RMIT WIL approved activities are available at: <a href="http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=o9gmyatdq9ao1#_List_of_approved">http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=o9gmyatdq9ao1#_List_of_approved</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalisation strategies</td>
<td>The RMIT Implementation Plan for Internationalising the Curriculum represents the knowledge and skills that equip students to succeed in globalised professional environments by integrating different cultural experiences, practices and knowledge systems into the learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching quality</td>
<td>All offerings will be measured in terms of teaching organisation, teaching delivery, assessment and feedback practice, assessment moderation, academic integrity and usage of eLearning or educational technologies. These are derived from RMIT policies and the Course Experience Survey (CES).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course management</td>
<td>All offerings of a course will be evaluated on the Part B approval process, eLearning/educational technology management, and communication with the principal course coordinator.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elements of Comparability

Comparability allows for contextualisation and customisation of local factors and specific student profiles.

Contextualisation

Contextualisation contributes to an increase of the cultural, personal, professional, and global relevance for students. The appropriateness of such variations will be an outcome of the group review and the final action plan. The elements of contextualisation are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment tasks and learning activities</th>
<th>The requirements of a specific assessment task or learning activity may need to be contextualized for a particular cohort of students in a specific location.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content relevance</td>
<td>Content may need to be contextualised to suit local contexts, (e.g. conceptual understanding may be enhanced through the use of localized themes in learning activities, illustrations, and examples).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIL activities</td>
<td>WIL activities may need to be contextualised to suit local contexts and industry expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalisation of content</td>
<td>Considerations about cultural, economic and industry expectations should be are aligned with the learning needs of local students to equip them with global knowledge and skills relevant to their own needs. For example, students at Singapore might benefit from knowledge of Australian business practices, while students in Melbourne would benefit from knowledge about the unique characteristics of conducting a business transaction with Asian business partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Customisation

The elements of customisation seek to align a course offering’s learning design and the media used for presentation of materials with the students’ profile to promote effective learning. The elements are:

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment tasks and learning activities</td>
<td>Tasks and activities may need to be adapted in view of students’ language proficiency and study preferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td>A particular student cohort might require learning skills and writing support or specific library resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content presentation</td>
<td>The design of content affects student comprehension. Language proficiency and learning preferences are factors to consider. ‘Content Presentation’ seeks to adapt the way content is presented. For example, the use of media rich content or the use of audio to complement lectures can promote effective learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course delivery and Teaching model</td>
<td>Adaptations might be required for different offerings that are affected by class scheduling, class size, learning spaces, professional development of staff and the teaching model. A seminar delivery model might be appropriate in one setting but not so in another, resulting in different pedagogies being adopted between the two offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student learning support</td>
<td>The degree of learning skills needed might vary among different student groups. Support for report writing, referencing and research skills might need to be adjusted in different offerings.</td>
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Equivalence & Comparability Review Process

The E&C review process requires a local review and a group review for every transnational course offering.

Local review

The local tutor or Associate Course Coordinator conducts a local review of the offering. The review is carried out by completing and submitting an online checklist. The purpose of this review is to match the current status of each element of equivalence against the standards listed on the online checklist. The elements of comparability may need local adaptation. The responses are stored online and form the subject of the group review held annually with the Principal Course Coordinator.
Group review

The Principal Course Coordinator, local tutors and Associate Course Coordinators meet annually for a group course review. This meeting may be conducted by teleconference or video conference. The notes collected from the previous local review are discussed and a joint action plan is developed to make adjustments to the course so as to comply with equivalence standards, and to contextualise or customise the course as needed for each offering location.

The action plan contains an implementation timeline and is a resource to inform the next set of local reviews. At the next group review the principal course coordinator signs off on the plan before a new one is developed.

Resources

Support is available from your Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) or equivalent. Your College Academic Development Group or learning & teaching specialist can also provide advice, support and professional development.


