EVALUATING TRANSNATIONAL COURSE/UNIT DESIGN AND DELIVERY

The transnational course/unit coordinator is jointly responsible with the teaching team to maintain a quality learning experience for students at all locations. This task is a cyclical one that requires the coordinator, in collaboration with their teaching team onshore and offshore, to actively drive and manage the process involved. Aspects of the student learning experience that require regular consideration include:

- Course/Unit learning outcomes and their alignment with Program learning outcomes
- Design of assessment tasks and their alignment with course/unit outcomes
- Learning activities to generate student engagement
- Learning resources to support student learning
- Course/Unit delivery appropriate to the student profile and physical learning spaces
- Internationalisation and/or contextualisation for different locations
- Availability of academic skills and English language support for students
- Assessment Moderation

These key aspects of the course/unit coordinator's role are essential for supporting a positive student experience, and to ensure that the course/unit complies with Australian Government regulatory requirements for learning and teaching quality.

Australian Government standards

The Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) assures the quality of the Australian Higher Education sector through the provision of minimum standards (Higher Education Standards Framework - Threshold Standards), and the conduct of quality audits of Australian HE providers.

TEQSA regulates the way universities meet minimum standards with regard to:

- Course/unit review and design
- Assessment quality
- Teaching quality
- Access to learning resources

An overriding requirement specified by TEQSA is that "…the course of study is systematically updated, through internal revision and external reviews, and that its coherence is maintained". The teaching team must collaborate closely with the coordinator to meet this government requirement.

Specific standards also exist for every qualification level offered by Australian tertiary education institutions. These standards are inherent in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which provides qualification level criteria and descriptors for every type of tertiary qualification available in Australia. Ten AQF levels exist to cover all qualification types.

Program learning outcomes must be aligned with the AQF framework at their respective qualification level. The courses/units comprising that program must also show alignment with the program outcomes. The alignment of assessment tasks with the course/unit outcomes ensures the quality of learning and teaching, as does the student engagement in the learning process.

Institutional Drivers of Quality

Alongside the external regulation of quality standards, the self-regulating goal of continuous improvement is another important driver, influencing and enhancing the student experience. For the transnational course/unit coordinator and the teaching team, the review and reflection on quality may be guided by quality assurance processes, but this activity may also be seen as an opportunity for assuring learning outcomes that respond to local contexts and different student profiles. Effectively managed transnational teaching teams can play an important

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role in assuring flexible and innovative approaches to student learning across locations, reflecting national, institutional and local contexts.

A key challenge for transnational delivery is maintaining academic standards and ensuring the Equivalence and Comparability of courses delivered in multiple offshore and onshore locations. It is essential Transnational Teaching Teams understand the need for effective quality assurance processes – Equivalence, Comparability, Contextualisation and Customisation.

Equivalence, the need for compliance with 'academic standards' should be accompanied by an acknowledgement that contextualisation is sometimes desirable to accommodate diverse and cultural and educational contexts. Subsets of comparability accommodate the need for contextualisation and customisation.

Defined standards for learning outcomes; internationalisation strategies; teaching quality; and course/unit management for all offerings of a single course/unit are accommodated within the concept of Equivalence.

Comparability results from the contextualisation and customisation of a course/unit to suit local factors and the specific student profile, while maintaining equivalence with other offerings of the same course/unit.

Contextualisation, or adaptation of one or more elements in a course/unit offering, may be appropriate to increase its cultural, personal, professional, and global relevance to students in that offering.

Customisation, or the alignment of a course/unit offering's learning design and materials with its students' profile, may be needed to enhance student engagement and effective learning.

These definitions operationalise a quality assurance framework for transnational programs. A clear distinction is made between what needs to be the same for courses offered transnationally, and what can be appropriately adapted to suit local learning environments and student profiles.

References

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). (2011). Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) Chapter 3, Section 6: Course monitoring, review, updating and termination are appropriately managed (6.1). Canberra: Australian Government.

Pyvis, D (2013) *Applying quality principles to Australian university transnational teaching and learning,* Office for Learning and Teaching, Accessed May 15, 2014 from http://www.olt.gov.au/project-applying-quality-principles-australian-university-transnational-teaching-and-learning-2011

Reviewing Course/Unit Quality & Student Learning

The three topics below may be used for discussion among all transnational teaching team members. At the end of the semester, take time to review and reflect on the questions below and check the boxes. Where useful, make notes in the review table about where and how you think improvements could be made.

Quality in Teaching and Learning	
Is the relationship between the course/unit and other courses/units in the program clear to all stakeholders?	☐
Is assessment regularly moderated and evaluated?	☐
Are grades and pass rates for assessment tasks monitored?	☐
Are issues raised in student feedback identified and addressed?	☐
Have the course/unit offerings been reviewed for equivalence of learning outcomes and comparability across locations?	☐
Has feedback relating to student experience across locations been incorporated into a discussion of course/unit quality?	☐

Student Learning	
Is student learning activity aligned with course/unit learning outcomes?	☐
Is student learning consistent with the scope and level of the course/unit?	☐
Are task and assessment criteria descriptions clear and unambiguous?	☐
Are learning activities appropriately weighted and scheduled across the study period?	☐
Ensure teaching and learning activities are negotiated with offshore teaching staff	☐

Preparing an Improvement Plan	
Have reports from all locations been reviewed? These should address assessment tasks, learning activities, internationalisation strategies, learning resources, course /unit delivery models, student feedback.	☐
Are highlights and issues that may have impacted on course/unit outcomes identified and explored?	☐
Have planned actions for improvement been identified?	☐

Adapted from RMIT Course Coordinator's Handbook: www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/bus/public/CCH

Transnational Teaching Teams

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