

Narrative 2

Assessment comparability

Dominic's story

Dominic, a lecturer at a partner institution campus, had been teaching several units in an Australian degree program for two years. The Australian-based controller for one unit, Maxine, provided all materials, most of it online, and also set all of the assessments for the unit. Because there was no funding for her to visit the three offshore locations where her unit was delivered, and most communication was by email, she provided detailed marking keys so that her various offshore teachers could mark assignments accurately.

Soon after he started teaching the units, Dominic began complaining that his students were disadvantaged by the assessments which used Australian practices and examples, about which his students had little real knowledge or experience. His students' marks were always lower than the Australian students' marks as a result. His students often complained about the assessments. Despite this, Maxine appeared to be unsympathetic and explained that she was required to deliver identical assessments for all students, regardless of location.

Question: Were Maxine's actions justified?

Question: What were the options for Dominic?

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At the start of his third year, Dominic found himself as the local 'unit coordinator' for Maxine's unit. He again asked that he could alter the content for his students so that he could use local examples and then replace some questions in the assessments to suit the revised content. She again explained that she could not allow this. However, Dominic found that his students were becoming more strident in their complaints and at the end of the first semester, they gave him what he felt was disappointing feedback on the student feedback survey. Given that his on-going employment was dependent on satisfactory performance, Dominic again approached Maxine to ask for changes. Maxine again refused, explaining that it was against Australian regulations.

Because there was little on-going communication between him and Maxine, and visits by Australian staff were rare, Dominic took it upon himself to make some changes both to content and to assessments for the second semester. Dominic tried his best to make minimal adjustments to the assessments, just reflecting the changes he had made to the content, and adapting the marking keys accordingly. His students appeared to be much happier and more motivated by the use of local examples, and their results on the assignments were subsequently better than they had been in the past. Unfortunately, their results on the examination were not as good as there was no opportunity for Dominic to make changes to that. In effect, however, his students' feedback survey results were much better and about five fewer of his students failed the unit. Dominic decided to continue the practice of changing the assignments and began to do the same in his second unit.

Question: What is your view of Dominic's actions?

Question: If you were Maxine, and were somewhat suspicious about the sudden improvement in results from one offshore campus, what would be your response?

Question: What are the main issues and lessons to be learnt from this?