

6. Course Coherence

A course should be designed as a unified whole because a course's learning outcomes, learning opportunities, assessment and support must be aligned, planned and managed together to maximise student continuation, completion and success.

All students should have the opportunity to engage with and succeed on a coherent programme of study. By adopting a whole course perspective, we will be better able to support students to transition into, through and from a course.

The principle of course coherence underpins the other five principles. Pre-arrival communication and course induction should empower students to be agents of their own learning and success, able to engage with their course's curriculum, to participate in the course's learning activities, to seek and use feedback effectively, and to complete course assessments. Where a course is modularised, students (and staff) should be able to see connections between the modules and levels and understand how learning activities and assessment fit into the course. To support this, module learning outcomes should be mapped to, and directly support, the course's learning outcomes. Assessments should be aligned between and across levels, and ideas and course themes should be revisited and reinforced in different modules and at different levels to support deeper, synergistic learning.

Reflective questions for course teams

Is the course designed coherently?

1. Does the course feel well-co-ordinated? Are the course's curriculum, teaching approaches and management well integrated? Are some parts of the course fragmented or piecemeal?
2. Is course induction effective? How do you support students to prepare, orientate and integrate?
3. How are students supported to make a coherent **transition** between each academic level, and from the course to progress into employment and further study?

Does the course have a planned course curriculum?

4. Do the course learning outcomes concisely **encapsulate** what students must be able to do by the end of the course? Are there coherent, aligned learning outcomes for each level? Is there a clear distinction between requirements for each level of a course? Is it possible to simplify/reduce the number of course and level learning outcomes without compromising the course's overall aims?
5. Has the curriculum been developed holistically to support the course's learning outcomes and course assessment strategy? Do the course's subject strands **spiral** across the course's modules and through levels, developing the threshold concepts of the discipline, revisiting, and consolidating ideas and supporting the application and integration of knowledge for assessment? Are these connections clear to the course team and the students?

6. How are the course's intended learning outcomes achieved where there are **optional modules**? How are the intended learning outcomes of different optional modules mapped? How does the course assessment strategy accommodate students studying different optional modules?
7. If you teach on a module shared between more than one course, how do you **contextualise** and differentiate the content and assessments, so they are relevant to students on different courses?
8. How is the course designed to require students to build on and use formative feedback they gain in one part of the course in other parts of the course? How are opportunities built-in for students to use formative feedback, and what they have learned in previous assessments, to **feed forward** into future assessments and other modules?

Is the course managed and supported by the course team?

9. Are **decisions** made at course level? How are decisions about the course made and by whom? As a course team, do you communicate with each other, and the wider course team, about course design and **enhancements** and how the course is evolving and developing? Do you communicate about individual students to ensure their needs are being **supported consistently** across the course?
10. Is there **consistent messaging** across the course? Are expectations, requirements and language consistent across the course?

For further reading on [Course Coherence](#) see the associated Talis Reading List. For case studies, resources and further support developing a coherent course contact CLT.