

Comparing specifications from diverse qualifications: instrument development

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Abstract

The UK qualifications system has thousands of diverse qualifications. Comparability research about qualification standards generally utilises two established comparators: (1) Quality of candidates' performance; and (2) Demand. In the case of vocational qualifications samples can be deficient for research purposes, so studies use other comparators including specification features e.g. depth of knowledge. Specifications are usually documents detailing the knowledge, skills, competencies and assessment arrangements for a qualification. The paper describes the process of compiling a research instrument for comparing the features of cognate units from diverse qualifications and subjects. Such an instrument is atypical but valuable for conducting comparability research. As part of a wider project about comparing diverse qualifications Kelly's repertory grid interviewing elicited knowledge from twelve experts. They represented three subjects and vocational, vocationally related, composite and general qualifications. A secondary thematic analysis of the data was completed. The result was a series of features: (1) Learning, (2) Knowledge; and (3) Summative assessment task and system. Each feature had several sub-features. Both features and sub-features were used to categorise the interview data. An instrument was derived from the features and sub-features, and refined through consultation with colleagues. A pilot of the instrument is underway. Future research might compare qualifications with data collected using the instrument.

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