



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

# Validity and comparability of assessment: how do these concepts relate?

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## ***Abstract***

Validity has been (and still is) extensively theorised. Whilst definitions of validity vary and discussions continue over whether certain concerns should be a part of the concept, there is no denying the importance given to this key principle of assessment and there is a wealth of literature to draw upon. That literature tends not to deal with comparability as a key issue or to have addressed how these two concepts relate to each other. This may, in part, be because the USA has tended to lead theorisation of validity, yet the USA educational context perhaps naturally raises fewer (or less complex) comparability questions and challenges compared to the UK. In England we have a historical context where a number of different awarding bodies run different versions of the same qualification which are considered equivalent. Thus, comparability is an important concept.

The aim of this work is to theorise how comparability relates to current mainstream conceptions of validity, including whether comparability should be considered a part of validity, or a separate concept. Existing literature on validity and comparability were reviewed for any overlap which might support the construction of a combined theory.

This work hopes to identify the appropriate location of comparability within validity theory. In the English assessment context there is a growing emphasis on the provision of validity evidence for public examinations. Existing frameworks for conducting validation studies tend not to address comparability issues. The current exploration will support the addition of comparability to such validation studies.