

Competence Standards and Reasonable Adjustments

Frequently asked questions

If you have completed the online course '[Competence Standards and Reasonable Adjustments](#)', and you still have further questions, the following frequently asked questions are designed to offer more clarification of some commonly raised questions. **Please bear in mind when considering this information, we do not wish to proliferate competence standards unnecessarily at the University.**

Are Competence standards only found in programmes accredited by professional bodies?

No, competence standards (CS) may also be found in other non-accredited programmes, but they are more common in programmes with Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PRSB). Many programmes at the University will not have any CS, and this is no reflection on the quality or value of these programmes. For programmes with PRSBs, CS will usually present as word for word, or closely aligned with standards set out by the professional body. Professional bodies may not use the term competence standards, but something similar e.g. 'requirements', 'day one competencies', 'core capabilities', 'outcomes for graduates'. Please note it is possible that some programmes with PRSBs have no CS. This might occur where, for example, a graduating student may be required to undertake a further professional exam, in which a PRSB will test a graduate against PRSB set CS.

Is there a quick check to know if something is a competence standard or not?

A good test of whether something is a CS or not, is whether a student can graduate from a programme without having met the particular requirement. If there is flexibility for a student to not meet a requirement, it is not a CS. In this instance, the most common reasons for flexibility are the expectation that reasonable adjustments should be made to the assessment, course or programme learning outcomes for students with disabilities. CS are non-negotiable required standards that every student needs to meet. They often, but not always, involve a pass/fail decision, in other words a student either meets or does not meet the CS (rather than involving grading or different levels of ability).

What if I am still unsure if an ability is a competence standard?

If you are still unsure, speak to your Director of Teaching, or the Convenor of your Board of Studies who may be able to offer advice, or contact colleagues in [Academic Development](#) or the [Disability and Learning Support Service](#).

Are competence standards assessed at course level?

Competence Standards are normally set at programme level. However, we would expect course learning outcomes to align with the achievement of programme level CS, and for those course level learning outcomes to be assessed. At course level, reasonable adjustments to assessments should be made for disabled students as far as is possible, even where

assessments align with programme level CS. The programme level CS itself remains non-negotiable and can't be adjusted.

What is the difference between a competence standard and an assessment method?

Competence standards are rarely the same as an assessment. Most assessment methods are required to be reasonably adjusted for disabled students, but competence standards are non-negotiable for all students. Very occasionally in some clinical subjects and languages, the assessment method is the same as the competence standard, such as when speaking in a language for an oral exam (languages), or being able to demonstrate the ability to clinically examine an animal in an emergency situation (veterinary medicine).

What is the difference between a competence standard and a learning outcome?

According to the Equality Act we must make reasonable adjustments to learning outcomes for disabled students, while CS are not adjustable. Learning outcomes on courses should align with programme level learning outcomes as well as with programme level CS. The course learning outcomes and associated assessments should feed into the programme level learning outcomes and programme level competence standards. There may be courses in a degree that don't explicitly link to CS, and the number of these will depend greatly on how many CS there are for a programme.

There may be strong overlap between some Programme level LOs and programme CS, but programme learning outcomes, like course learning outcomes, are still expected to be adjustable for disabled students according to the Equality Act.

What is the difference between a competence standard and an important element of the curriculum?

Colleagues may believe some important parts of the curriculum or ways students learn should be a CS in a particular discipline or degree programme, but in many cases, they may just be important elements of the curriculum that relate to programme learning outcomes. This can be indicated by a compulsory course ('courses which a student must take as part of their degree programme, as specified in the Degree Programme Table in the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study'), or a core course ('This is a course that must be taken and passed in order to progress to the next stage of study within a specific degree programme'), or simply by clear statements to students about expectations of important elements in the curriculum that are highlighted in the programme learning outcomes.

Examples are given here to illustrate some common approaches/topics that can be confused with CS:

1. **Group work.** Group work may be a very important approach to learning in some disciplines, but if the programme does not set a pass/fail test of group working skills at any stage, it's unlikely this is a CS. It is perfectly acceptable for Programme information to emphasise the importance of/extensiveness of group working within the curriculum without this being a CS. Exceptions may be where evidence of effective group/team working is specifically required by a professional body and where there is no flexibility for reasonable adjustments.

2. **English language competence.** A specific English language competence level is often an entry requirement for a programme. For most programmes we do not have the same requirement for exit, which makes it unlikely in most cases that this is a CS. It is also very unusual to have common CS that would apply across a range of degree programmes. In specific language programmes there may be CS related to required levels of speaking, writing, reading, and listening to a language,
3. **Oral presentations.** Oral presentations are a form of assessment and are usually eligible for reasonable adjustments to be made. It is unusual for oral presentations to also be a CS. There are some limited exceptions where e.g. a professional body stipulate that students must meet a competence in presenting to a professional group.

A Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PRSB) has stipulated that you cannot offer credit on aggregate for a particular course, does this mean the course is a competence standard?

An entire course is not usually a CS. Where a professional body stipulates credit on aggregate cannot be used for a course, it indicates that the course needs to be treated as a 'core' course – one which must be taken and passed in order to progress to the next stage of study. If a PRSB makes stipulations that differ from the University regulations, Programme Directors should explain the rationale for any exemptions to rules for credit on aggregate in the programme approval process. It is also important that students are provided with this information about any courses not subject to credit on aggregate.

It is possible that where a PRSB identifies a course as needing to be exempt from credit on aggregate, this is due to the course covering knowledge or development of skills that are related to CS. As stated previously, in this situation, reasonable adjustments to assessment methods would still normally be expected to be made.

Is a competence or competency the same as competence standards?

No. Competence standards are the non-negotiable standards all students must meet. Students may still build towards competence in many elements of their programme, and may demonstrate competency in a subject. It is also possible to use competence-based assessments that are not necessarily related to competence standards. Try to ensure you use consistency in the term 'competence standard' if you are referring to a non-negotiable programme level standard students must meet.

Does mandatory attendance mean something is a competence standard?

If a programme requires mandatory attendance at any sessions or elements of courses, this may be an indicator of the importance placed on those elements of the curriculum or core courses needed to meet programme level CS. It does not make mandatory attendance itself a CS. For example, in Medicine, clinical skills sessions and communication skills sessions are mandatory attendance elements of the curriculum, in all likelihood, these will be linked to clinical skills and communication skills programme level CS, further linked to professional body requirements in these areas.