



Determining Equivalency

for Courses Completed at Institutions Outside BC

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BCCAT

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Executive Summary

BC Transfer System (BCTS) member institutions build and share their articulation agreements using the Transfer Credit System (TCS) and the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG), which are both maintained by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). As these institutions agree to uphold BCCAT *Principles and Guidelines for Transfer* (BCCAT, 2023b) as a condition of BCTS membership, their in-system articulation processes and outcomes organically achieve a degree of harmonization despite the different local approaches, policies, and protocols.



The determination of *external equivalencies*—considering courses outside the established system of articulation agreements for transfer credit—is not subject to BCTS protocols, however, and given the diversity of both extra-provincial requests and institutional policies, this category of transfer credit assessment remains less predictable despite recent TCS upgrades designed to make decision-making easier and more consistent.

This report contextualizes and summarizes a Fall 2024 survey commissioned by BCCAT’s Transfer and Articulation Committee (TAC) to explore BCTS member institutions’ policies and practices for determining external equivalencies. The resulting environmental scan presented here outlines commonalities and differences among BCTS institutions’ approaches for assessing external equivalency requests.

Recommendations in this report highlight the following opportunities for institutions to leverage and expand localized and system-wide supports in determining external equivalencies:

1. Review external transfer request processes as a separate workflow category to monitor their quantity and distribution accurately and ensure that resources are available.
2. Create or clarify public-facing policy language that outlines, step-by-step, the procedures/guidelines for assessing external transfer requests for equivalency: these can be developed at the school- or department-level as needed for disciplines, programming, or credential level to support areas that see higher numbers of external equivalency requests.
3. Consult with current and prospective ad hoc reviewers to develop additional training opportunities and “troubleshooting” resources.
4. Apply BC Transfer System technology to make the determination of external equivalencies easier and more efficient: publish external equivalencies in the BC Transfer Guide and refer to Transfer Credit System information to assess external transfer requests.

Key Terms and Concepts

Articulation ¹	The process of determining if a course/program at a sending institution is equivalent to a specific course/program at a receiving institution and eligible for transfer credit . An <i>articulated course</i> is the product of a course-to-course articulation agreement.
External equivalency ²	Recognition of equivalency for a course that is not articulated and/or completed at an institution outside of the BC Transfer System.
Lisbon Recognition Convention ³ (LRC)	A legal framework jointly created by the Council of Europe and UNESCO to facilitate the recognition of educational qualifications across international borders: notably, substantial difference is the core principle of this Convention.
Receiving institution (receiver) ¹	The institution assessing a sending institution's course/program for transfer credit , and to which a transfer student intends to move.
Sending institution (sender) ¹	The institution where a transfer student completed a course/program being evaluated for transfer credit by the receiving institution .
Substantial equivalency ⁴	An approach to recognition that is based on how similar an external qualification is to one's own; prior to the Lisbon Recognition Convention , this was the governing principle of recognition.
Substantial difference ⁵	Principle of recognition in the LRC that assumes equivalency unless "the qualification is <i>substantially different</i> ...and the onus is on its educational institution to prove that it is." ⁶
Transfer credit ¹	Recognition by the receiving institution that a course/program at a sending institution is equivalent to its own course/program. Transfer credit can be assessed and awarded through articulation or as external equivalencies .

¹ As defined in *How to Articulate* (BCCAT, 2023a).

² *How Transfer Works* (BC Transfer Guide, n.d.)

³ (Council of Europe, 1997).

⁴ *Substantial Difference* (CICIC, 2021b)

⁵ Article IV.1, *Lisbon Recognition Convention* [LRC] (1997).

⁶ *Details of Treaty No. 165*. (Council of Europe, 1999).

Background

Within the BC Transfer System (BCTS) ecosystem, member institutions' articulation agreements are built and shared via the Transfer Credit System (TCS)⁷ and the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG), both of which are maintained by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). Member institutions are autonomous in their approaches, policies, and protocols for assessing transfer credit requests; however, as BCTS institutions agree to uphold BCCAT [Principles and Guidelines for Transfer](#) (BCCAT, 2023b) as a condition of membership, in-system articulation processes and expectations are based on collective values and are thus harmonized to some extent, albeit indirectly. As a result, the aims and outcomes of articulation are consistent, even though the methods by which institutions arrive at these may differ.

In 2018–2020, the TCS underwent a major redesign that allowed the inclusion of external equivalencies—granting of transfer credit for a course that is outside of a TCS articulation agreement—including those from outside the province. Prior to this change, these data were housed within individual institutions' internal transfer tables; integrating this information into the TCS and making it publicly accessible allowed both students and institutions to find potential transfer opportunities much more easily, including extra-provincial ones. Additionally, the TCS redesign was intended to consolidate and bank data from completed evaluations in a platform that could be leveraged by all BCTS members to streamline their respective business processes.

Updating the TCS coincided with enrolment trends that anticipated increased international and interprovincial transfer traffic into BC. With international student enrolments almost tripling between 2007 and 2017 (Heslop, 2018), it was reasonable to expect attendant increases in transfer among these students and in external equivalencies. Moreover, any growth in international student transfer occurred in tandem with a slow but substantial increase in the rate of interprovincial student mobility into BC from 7% to 12% between 1992/1993 and 2018/2019 (Usher, 2021).

However, most transfer assessment policies and protocols are silent on the assessment of external equivalencies, and given that courses considered for external equivalency can (and often do) arrive from far beyond provincial jurisdiction, the institutional processes involved in evaluating these requests for transfer credit are carried out “backstage” and on a case-by-case basis. Requests from outside the BCTS are not always accompanied by full, “typical” documentation, such as course outlines or syllabi, and the extent to which BCTS members' institutional policies inform the assessment of external evaluation requests can vary greatly. Accordingly, the processes associated with the determination of external equivalencies and the resourcing required to assess them must be better understood to ensure such work is appropriately supported at both the institutional and systemic levels.

This report summarizes and contextualizes key findings from a Fall 2024 survey commissioned by BCCAT's Transfer and Articulation Committee (TAC) to explore BCTS member institutions' policies and workflow processes for determining equivalency for courses completed outside BC. Registrarial staff from thirty-five BCTS institutions⁸ were invited to offer their perspectives on workflow for evaluating external requests for transfer credit and whether procedures differed meaningfully between in-province/in-system and external requests. Respondents were also asked about their use of the TCS in assessment and any changes in workload and resourcing attributable to requests arriving from outside BC. The resulting environmental scan presented here is intended to outline commonalities as well as differences among BCTS institutions in evaluating external equivalency requests and highlight opportunities to build upon existing efficiencies.

⁷ From its inception in 2001 to its redesign in 2018, this application was known as the Transfer Credit Evaluation System (TCES).

⁸ In-province institutions with an identified Registrar's Office/Admissions contact.

Policies, Protocols, and the Challenge of Diverse Recognition

The BC Transfer System is based on established trust relationships and shared principles and runs on efficiencies developed and operationalized by its institutional members: transfer in this context is a “song with many singers,” whereby institutions autonomously develop policies and practices to facilitate articulation. While there is robust articulation between BC Transfer System members, explicit policy language explaining the processes for determining external equivalencies remains scant, particularly for reviewing requests from outside the in-system frameworks of comparability (such as international requests).

Available institutional policies and information related to external equivalencies reflect the challenge of recognition in an increasingly diverse articulation environment. All BCTS member institutions will consider external transfer credit equivalency, though some treat such requests as exceptional cases and assign conditions accordingly (e.g., specific interprovincial pathway agreements, international accreditation standards, etc.) Typically, however, institutions evaluate external equivalencies informally and on an ad hoc basis at the time of admission or just after, with case-by-case review providing the flexibility required to respond to requests involving different subject areas, documentation, and student and institutional circumstances (BCCAT, 2013; CICIC, 2021).

The nonstandard, bespoke nature of this type of course-specific review encourages agile and creative assessment approaches, but the additional material and steps behind these can be challenging to integrate into TCS workflow, which in turn means that processing external equivalencies requires additional attention and resources on the part of receiving institutions. Moreover, an assessment of cost differences between resourcing external equivalencies and previously articulated transfer credit is frustrated by the ad hoc nature of the former: a BC articulation cost analysis completed in 2004 estimated that a review of unarticulated transfer credit costs three and a half times more than transferring an articulated course (Jarvis, 2004, p. 18). While the review of external equivalency requests is necessarily diverse and dynamic, most institutions favour the integration of this work into broader, established support areas, which inadvertently masks the impact such resource-intensive tasks may have on these structures and any cost implications as well (Duklas, 2019).

Despite potential gains in flexibility and institutional-level efficiencies, relying on ad hoc review for external equivalency assessment can also introduce inequities into the evaluation process. As the requests are diverse, so too are the variables in the review process (documentation, translation, subject matter expertise, etc.), and with “greater variability comes greater risk of bias in equivalency assessment” (Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2021, pp. 14-15). Decentralizing document review (course outlines, etc.) among subject matter experts is necessary to conduct a thorough assessment, but even with robust policy and guidelines in place, reliance on a large pool of ad hoc reviewers makes the review process inherently less predictable and transparent due to differences in reviewer experience and perspective (Logue, 2023; ONCAT, 2021). Furthermore, the additional time⁹ required to process an external equivalency request and fees required to complete the service (e.g., for document translation) are “affordability disconnects” (SOVA, 2023) that place this segment of transfer students at a significant disadvantage.

⁹ In the Canadian transfer context, this is an area of particular concern given November 2024 changes to Provincial Attestation Letter [PAL] rules that require international students to secure a PAL ahead of transfer.

Much work has been done by the international recognition community to make transfer and articulation more consistent and learner-centred for all users, with perhaps the most significant shift being the use of *substantial difference* as a means of reducing non-recognition. Previously, assessment was governed by the principle of substantial equivalency, involving a disinterested comparative analysis in which discrete differences count against a match.

Conversely, the adoption of substantial difference in

contemporary legal instruments such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention [LRC] (1997) and the UNESCO Global Recognition Convention (2019)—both of which Canada is a signatory to—reverses the burden of proof, such that equivalency is the default presumption and recognition is denied only when the receiver can prove that a difference between the learner’s qualifications and the receiver’s requirements is substantial enough that the learner would not be successful in further study or employment. The concept of substantial difference has also been expanded in LRC subsidiary documentation to include provisions for partial and alternative recognition, signaling a global change in policy attitude toward greater flexibility and accessibility in the recognition of higher education qualifications.

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Literature Review

This project complements a series of recent BCCAT research projects, all of which were commissioned by TAC to dive more deeply into postsecondary institutions’ transfer credit evaluation practices. The first in this sequence produced a report that focused on intake practices at institutions across Canada for handling transfer credit requests from international students (Duklas, 2019). Two subsequent reports on institutional decision-making (McQuarrie, 2020) and defining characteristics of sending institutions’ “acceptable comparability” (McQuarrie, 2021) concentrated on BCTS members’ processes. A throughline in these three reports, which continues through this project, is how best to maintain quality and consistency in transfer while upholding institutional autonomy and localized expertise.

International Transfer Credit Practices (Duklas, 2019)

An overview of international document assessment for transfer equivalency among Canadian post-secondary institutions, this report highlights the challenges posed by a dramatic increase in international student enrolment nearing its peak at the time of the project. Institutional representatives shared their perspectives on the growing number and complexity of requests and described significant informational gaps in the metrics of both demand (volume and type of documentation) and supply (resources and workload required to complete international equivalency requests).

Those engaged in supporting transfer credit evaluation often reported that while the profile of their assessments had changed, their policies and practices had not, and international transfer credit reviews were generally managed in the same fashion as domestic ones. The immediate benefit of consolidating all requests within the status quo assessment “architecture” is obvious, but this centralized arrangement makes it much more difficult to parse out resourcing requirements for international requests (p. 37); comparing resourcing demands against the increase in international assessments is important given that these are more time-consuming and labour-intensive than domestic assessments.

In addition to strategies that mitigate cost and workload pressures within institutions (e.g., charging fees for assessing international documents; establishing international-specific review units; involving third-party service providers, such as translators; enhancing tools and training for assessors), system-level changes may also help support international transfer credit requests. Duklas advocates for the use of a system-wide agreement database and the expansion of partnerships with third-party credential evaluation service providers. Most consequential, though, is the recommendation to reorient the overall approach to assessment in Canada away from substantial equivalence and toward substantial difference.

Who Decides Transfer? A Review of Policies and Practices at BC Transfer System Member Institutions (McQuarrie, 2020)

This report presents a comparative analysis of BCTS institutions' transfer credit decision-making policies and procedures, with particular attention to the designation or authority of specific roles or areas in informing the granting of credit and the net effect of their involvement on the quality and utility of final determinations regarding unarticulated courses, including those received from out of province. Unlike articulated courses in the BCTS ecosystem, for which comparators can easily be found, courses from outside BC and Canada are more complicated to evaluate and often require multiple assessors; as a result, evaluating these requests requires wider participation and more time and labour to complete.

A policy that provides a clear, step-by-step description of transfer credit evaluation processes, assessment criteria, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved can help expedite the review of external equivalency requests. Processes could also be set up to streamline decision-making: accurate records that reflect the rationale for credit awarded in special circumstances prevents unintentional precedents, and analyzing the volume and types of requests in particular subject areas may help identify issues with transfer equivalency (p.17).

Assessing Sending Institutions Outside the BC System (McQuarrie, 2021)

A "sequel" to the examination of transfer credit decision-making in BC, this report provides a closer look at the criteria used by BCTS member institutions in reviewing transfer credit requests to evaluate "senders." All BCTS institutions, in a receiver capacity, require assessment of sending institutions in their transcript evaluations (p. 23), but because there is no national post-secondary accreditation body or framework in Canada, institutional comparability must be measured through proxy indicators such as ministry designations, eligibility for student loans, provincial transfer system membership, and inclusion in national organizations for universities and/or colleges.

At the level of institutional policy and procedural language, assessment criteria for senders should align with indicators but also afford decision-makers enough latitude to "exercise their professional judgment as necessary when assessing the academic comparability of a sending institution" to accommodate diverse senders (p. 25).

Determining Equivalency Survey

To situate the assessment of external equivalencies within the current BCTS landscape, registrarial staff from thirty-five member institutions were invited to participate in a survey on the assessment of courses completed outside BC. Twenty-two representatives started the survey (63%), and of these respondents, fifteen completed the full survey (68% of participants; 43% of invitees); most questions had fifteen or sixteen respondents, and n-values are indicated in this report for individual prompts/themes.

The survey touched on various themes related to the general operations associated with evaluating transfer requests but concentrated primarily on policies and business processes for completing external equivalency requests from outside of the province, including the day-to-day local and granular tasks that institutional representatives facilitate to support the assessment of unarticulated transfer credit.

- *Where are non-BC transfer credit requests coming from?*¹⁰

Overall, institutions note that it is normal for about four in ten requests for transfer credit equivalency to come from outside the province. Respondents noted that non-BC requests are more likely to arrive from within Canada than outside of it. On average, 22% of total transfer credit requests come from another province or territory, while 17% are from another country. These numbers align with other data based on Student Transitions Project (STP) information that shows a stronger transfer tendency among domestic students compared to their international counterparts (Ting and Bui, 2022).

However, a comparison of public versus private institutions' respondents regarding requests from outside the country shows a roughly 4:1 disparity between the proportion of external requests received by private institutions (43%) versus public institutions (11%). Despite the small respondent sample¹¹, this breakdown by sector supports the assumption that the mobility of international students may be "hidden" from current reporting, much of which relies primarily on public institutions' data, and that a significant number of international students are enrolling in private institutions with the intention of transferring to another institution later.¹²

- *Does the institution have specific policy language, procedures, or evaluation criteria for transfer credit from outside the province?*

Just over half of the respondents (53%) stated that their institutions did not have policy language that referred directly to the administration of external equivalencies (n=15), while one respondent was unsure if the institutional credit policy included such a differentiation. Of the 40% who indicated that the institutional policy mentioned out-of-province transfer credit, the policy descriptions varied greatly, with some institutions explicitly assigning the same processes to all requests regardless of origin and others categorizing specific types of external equivalency requests and their respective requirements.

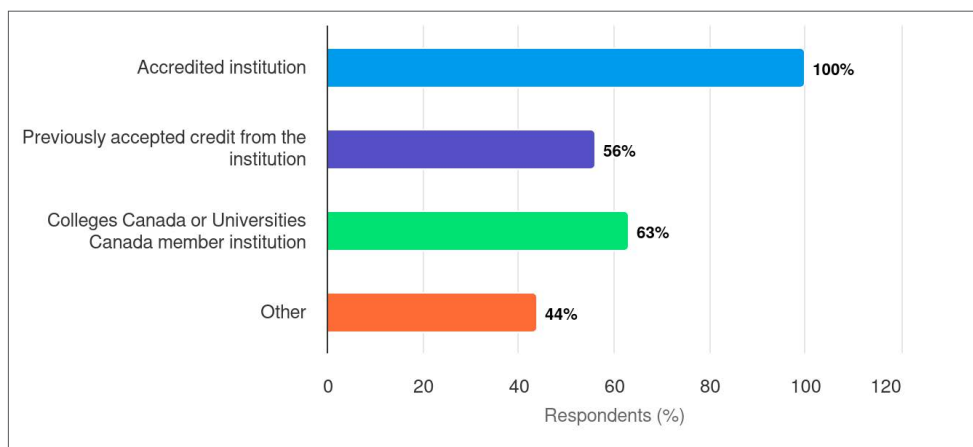
¹⁰ The survey asked about both interprovincial requests (n=20) and international requests (n=16).

¹¹ Only three respondents explicitly noted that their institutions were private.

¹² The 2018/19-2022/23 [Transfer Students Profile and Performance](#) report (A. Wong, N. Franzova, and S. Bajracharya, 2025) noted that almost three-quarters (73%) of international BC transfer students had a private BCTS sending institution.

In the recognition of transfer credit from outside BC, respondents unanimously agreed on verifying that the sending institution is accredited (100%, n=16). When assessing requests from another province or territory in Canada, three-quarters (75%) of institutional representatives also check for membership in Colleges Canada or Universities Canada, and one respondent confirmed that other provincial and territorial ministry websites could be used to validate documentation accompanying an equivalency request. Most assessors also considered whether transfer credit from a non-BCTS institution had previously been accepted as equivalent (56%), and in the case of international requests, third-party evaluations (e.g., World Education Services [WES], International Credential Evaluation Service [ICES]) and qualification frameworks such as UK NARIC [the National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom]¹³ are also cited as helpful recognition resources.

Figure 1: Criteria used to verify transfer credit information (n=16)



- *What do institutional workflow processes look like when determining equivalency for non-articulated courses from outside BC?*

Regarding workflow processes for evaluating non-BC transfer credit requests, 88% of respondents (n=16) described these as being the same for all non-articulated course assessments, with approximately the same percentage of respondents (87%) confirming that the evaluators were identical in reviewing all requests. The roles/staff positions typically responsible for assessment are faculty, as subject matter experts (75%) or department heads/chairs (75%). Occasionally, the Registrar (19%), Associate Registrar (19%), or Registrar's Office staff (25%) participate regularly in evaluations, and less frequently, advisors (6%)¹⁴ or administrators (12%) are involved.¹⁵ The storage of assessment information is almost always handled by the Registrar's Office at some stage (94%), although at some institutions schools, departments, and/or advisors may also keep records; the TCS was also identified as a place for record-keeping.

¹³ UK NARIC is an agency that provides educational quality benchmarking, transnationally, on behalf of the British government.

¹⁴ In Figures 2 and 3, 6% of the 16-person sample represents a single respondent.

¹⁵ Respondents were able to select multiple roles.

Figure 2: Roles/positions responsible for assessing articulation requests from outside BC (n=16)

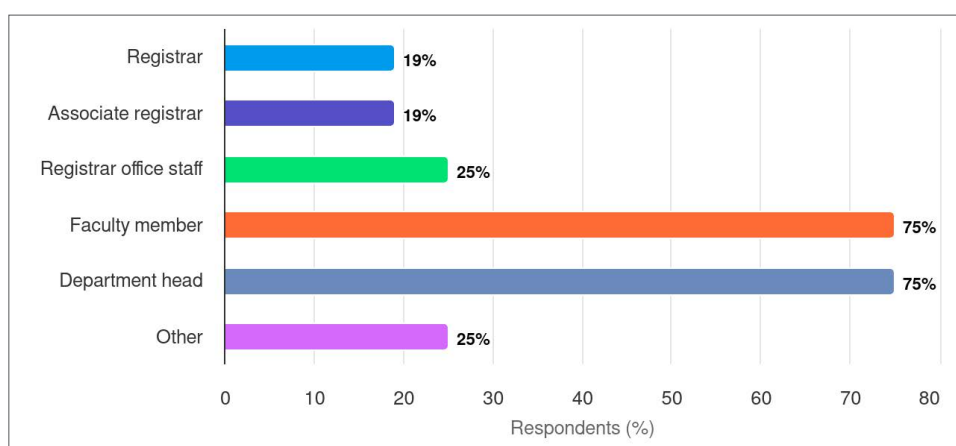
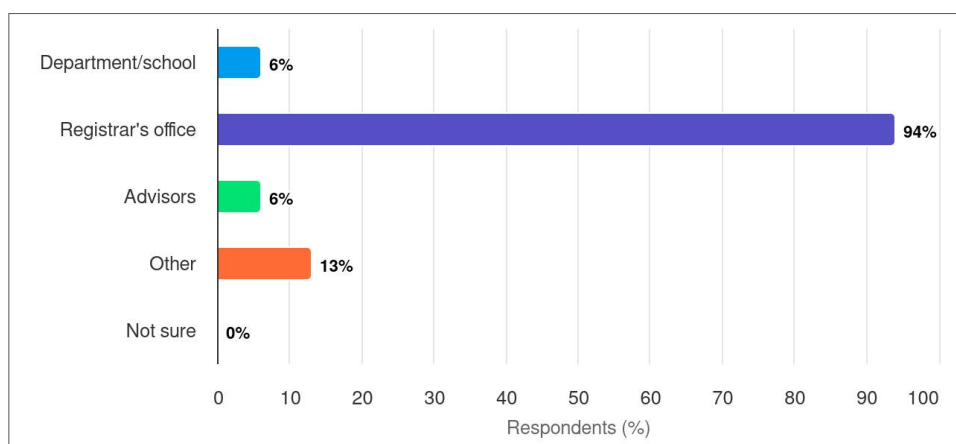


Figure 3: Storage locations for assessment information/records (n=16)



When asked about using the Transfer Credit System (TCS) to assess external articulation requests, respondents (n=15) were evenly split between those who used the TCS (47%) and those who did not (47%), with the remaining 7% being unsure. It is unclear whether non-users are uncertain about how to integrate TCS information into evaluating external equivalencies or if they simply do not see enough requests involving non-articulated courses to make regular use of the TCS in their work.

The inclusion of external transfer equivalencies in the TCS from 2020 onward was intended to consolidate workflow processes and facilitate the overall user experience. However, for the system to work optimally, institutions' external equivalency data need to be added or updated in the TCS and published in the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG); while 86% of survey respondents know that external equivalencies can be published in the BCTG, *only 46% confirmed that their institutions are currently doing so*. Consequently, improving the utility of the TCS for institutional articulation assessment is contingent on institutions uploading more of their data into the BCTG database. BCCAT can also assist institutions who are interested in making their external equivalencies more widely available via the BCTG/TCS.

- *With which programs and levels of study are external equivalencies most commonly associated?*

The subject area identified by respondents (n=16) as the most active for external equivalencies is Business (38%). Among Science courses, Math was most frequently cited (31%), while English (25%), and Psychology (19%) are the most common Arts/Humanities courses to encounter in an external articulation review. Often, learners must complete courses in these subjects to satisfy specific admissions/program entry requirements.

As for levels of study or credentials, responses (n=16) were divided evenly between identifiable study levels (44%) and the absence of such a pattern among external equivalency requests (44%), with the remainder (13%) reported as unsure¹⁶. One specific credential was identified as common among external equivalency requests (19% of respondents): the Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) degree. Diplomas, post-degree diplomas, and certificates in Business were also named as levels commonly associated with external transfer credit requests. Unsurprisingly, 100- and 200-level courses also appear in external equivalency due to their engineered “portability” in transfer.

- *Has the BCTG inclusion of equivalencies from outside BC/Canada affected the number or type of external requests that institutions receive?*

To test a prevailing assumption that shared equivalency records via the TCS would beget more of the same, survey respondents (n=16) were asked if the BCTG’s recent inclusion of institutions’ recorded external equivalencies had any material effect on the number and/or type of external articulation requests coming into institutions for review.

In terms of the number of requests from outside BC, the majority of respondents (63%) had seen no significant change in the number of requests, and the remaining 38%¹⁷ were unsure if there had been any effect. The question asking if there had been any change attributable to the inclusion of non-BC equivalencies in the type(s) of requests generated a similar pattern in responses, with zero “Yes” responses received, most (64%) reporting there had been no noticeable change in the type of requests received, and one representative answering “Not sure” (36%). Notably, a follow-up question prompting a description of examples of institutional practices/scenarios also received zero responses, suggesting that respondents were unsure about what information to provide or uncomfortable about answering this survey question.

At this time, the addition of external equivalencies appears to have had a negligible effect on the number and type of transfer credit evaluations that institutions complete. However, the disproportionately high number of “Not sure” responses submitted in this question category suggests that institutional representatives may need more time to experience the “new” TCS and its functionalities to determine any system-driven changes in this area of their work.

¹⁶ Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.

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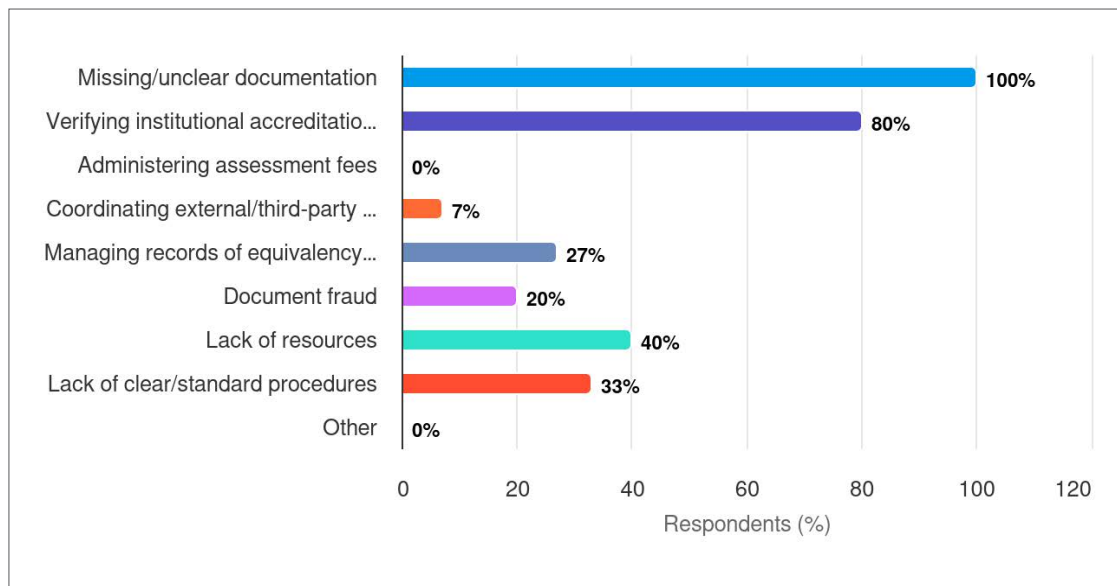
- *What challenges do external equivalency reviews present?*

Asked to discuss particular challenges in assessing external equivalency requests, almost all respondents (94%, n=16) confirmed that external equivalency evaluations came with additional challenges (the remaining representative responded “Not sure”). The most common complication was missing or unclear documentation—an issue that 100% of respondents (n=15) said they frequently encountered in managing external articulation requests. A large majority (80%) referred to the verification of institutional accreditation or recognition as another barrier specific to external equivalency review.

Addressing the resources required to assess external transfer credit, the vast majority of respondents (88%, n=16) noted that external equivalencies take more time and resources to assess; among this group, 79% described the added time requirement as being “significantly more.” Additionally, 40% of respondents referred directly to insufficient resources as a challenge to getting external transfer credit requests reviewed.

Other issues associated with evaluating external transfer credit requests are a lack of clear or standardized procedures to follow (33%), records management for equivalency decisions (27%), document fraud (20%), and coordinating external or third-party assessments (one respondent).

Figure 4: Challenges in assessing external equivalency requests (N=15)



Discussion

The information that respondents shared supports other data that show external transfer credit requests are comparatively time- and labour-intensive; respondents unanimously described external equivalency reviews as requiring more work than in-system transfer credit assessments, yet these are generally subject to the same policies and processes and managed by some of the same personnel as requests involving provincially articulated courses. Consolidating review protocols in this manner creates procedural efficiencies (i.e., routinizing parts of case-by-case review) but may also inadvertently obscure the additional time and background work required by external equivalency reviews, which in turn makes it difficult to identify and direct supports specifically for this category of assessments. More in-depth study of how institutions manage a mixed portfolio (i.e., consolidated articulated and unarticulated transfer credit review) will be required to parse out resource requirements specific to external equivalency evaluation.

Survey results also suggest that, on balance, international transfer credit requests account for the minority that BCTS member institutions process. Transfer students coming into BC are more likely to arrive from another part of Canada, and while the survey in this project did not ask about sending provinces/territories, the country's lead "exporters" of students to other Canadian jurisdictions have traditionally been Ontario and Alberta (Usher, 2021). Despite the rate of growth for interprovincial transfers being very slow compared to that of international student enrolment in BC over the last decade, there has not been a seismic shift in international student mobility, with international students' overall share of transfers in the BCTS, at least among public institutions, remaining low. A comparative analysis of international student transfer in public versus private BCTS institutions would help in gauging whether international student mobility differs by sector. Following the changes in 2024 to international student study permits and an anticipated decline in international student enrolment compounded with additional unknowns in international student transfer, information about this learner group's mobility needs and behaviours will require special attention moving forward.

Even as more continues to be learned about how to integrate external equivalencies more effectively, there are system-wide, accessible resources that those supporting transfer credit recognition in the BCTS can presently leverage to streamline institution-level work. Updates to the TCS to include external equivalencies were designed to scale up decision-making efficiencies by making it easier for BCTS institutions to record, share, and access information about external equivalencies; however, the survey results suggest that these TCS functionalities are not being used to their fullest potential. Survey respondents reported that they know about publishing external equivalencies on the BCTG, but only about half could confirm that their institutions were doing so; likewise, fewer than half of those surveyed reported using the TCS in assessing external equivalencies, despite the system being modified purposefully to support such activity (BCCAT, n.d.; BCCAT, 2023a). Currently, the TCS lists over 60,000 external equivalencies from 452 institutions in 33 countries, and as a "force multiplier," its utility improves with continuous input and updating of data. Increasing BCTS member engagement with both the BCTG and the TCS will be integral to maintaining and modernizing the system.

Re-orienting transfer credit assessment toward *substantial difference*, which assumes equivalency to be the default unless a qualification is found to be substantially different, will require future study and collaboration that extends beyond the scope of this project and the BC transfer environment. Focusing on differences substantial enough to disqualify equivalency is a more efficient approach than a broad comparison of content. More important, working in tandem with global transfer credit frameworks towards a system and policy attitude based on substantial difference—and operationalizing these at institutions—would reduce the burden of proof placed on learners and allow for more flexible and adaptable recognition of their educational qualifications.

Recommendations

BC Transfer System member institutions have made headway developing their internal economies of scale to evaluate external equivalency requests, and there is potential to extend these efficiencies:

1. Completing procedural audits of external transfer requests as a separate workflow category would make it easier for institutions to monitor their quantity and distribution accurately and help ensure that reviews are adequately resourced.
2. Creating or clarifying public-facing policy language that outlines, step-by-step, the procedures/guidelines for assessing external transfer requests for equivalency makes reviews more consistent, transparent, and efficient for both evaluators and students: these process descriptions can be developed at the school- or department-level as needed for disciplines, programming, or credential level to support areas that see higher numbers of external equivalency requests.
3. Consulting regularly with current and prospective reviewers helps to align additional training opportunities and “troubleshooting” resources with their needs.
4. Applying BC Transfer System technology to publish determinations about external equivalencies and assess external transfer requests streamlines the determination of external equivalencies, and the resulting data input contributes to system capacity.

Conclusion

The recognition of transfer credit gives more options to more learners in accessing post-secondary education, and as the system continues to grow more inclusive and diverse, so too must its methods for determining equivalency. The global recognition community's recent orientation toward substantial difference and the growing acceptance of alternative and partial recognition of educational qualifications sets the tone for institutional innovations to address persistent equity gaps faced by transfer students.

Most BCTS institutions are now seeing 40% of their transfer requests come in from outside the province, making the evaluation of external equivalency requests almost as common as that of articulated courses. To adapt to this new reality, the design of future system-wide developments will need to re-position external equivalencies as part of the normal business of admissions, rather than exceptions to established articulation protocols.

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Additional Resources

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- ICES (International Credential Evaluation Service). <https://www.bcit.ca/ices/>
- WES (World Education Services). <https://www.wes.org/>

Appendix: Determining Equivalency Survey¹⁸

Registrar/RO Staff Survey: Assessing Articulation Requests from Outside BC

The BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) is currently exploring how articulation requests from outside of BC are assessed by BC Transfer System member institutions.

As a Registrar, Associate Registrar, or RO staff member, your subject matter expertise is extremely valuable to us. This survey asks for information about how articulation requests from outside the province are evaluated at your institution. You will need approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey: all data will be deidentified prior to reporting.

We would appreciate it if you could complete this survey by November 30, 2024.

Thank you for participating in this project and for sharing this information with others at your institution who may be interested in this work. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Elle Ting, BCCAT Research and Projects Officer (eting@bccat.ca).

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1. Approximately what percentage of transfer credit requests that come to your institution involve credit **from another province/territory within Canada**?
 2. Approximately what percentage of transfer credit requests that come to your institution involve credit **from outside of Canada** (international requests)?
 3. Does your institution have a specific policy about assessing external articulation requests?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
 4. What criteria are used to assess external articulation requests? Please select all that apply:
 - ☐ Accredited institution
 - ☐ Previously accepted credit from the institution
 - ☐ Colleges Canada or Universities Canada member institution
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
 5. Is the process for evaluating courses from outside BC the same as the process for reviewing those from within the BC Transfer System?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure

¹⁸ Launched October 10, 2024 on SimpleSurvey.

6. Do you use the Transfer Credit System (TCS) for external articulation requests?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
7. Do assessors differ depending on whether a request comes to the institution from within BC or outside of BC?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
8. What roles/staff positions are responsible for assessing articulation requests from outside BC? Please select all that apply:
- ☐ Registrar
 - ☐ Associate registrar
 - ☐ Registrar office staff
 - ☐ Department head
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
9. Where is information about assessment/equivalencies stored at your institution? Please select all that apply:
- ☐ Department/school
 - ☐ Registrar's office
 - ☐ Advisors
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
 - ☐ Not sure
10. Are there particular subject areas that get more external requests?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
11. Are there particular levels of study/credentials that get more external requests?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
12. Do external articulation requests take more time/resources to assess?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure

13. How much more time/resourcing does the assessment of external equivalencies require?¹⁹
- ☐ Slightly more
 - ☐ Significantly more
 - ☐ A lot more
14. Are there challenges in assessing external articulation requests?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
15. What are the most frequently encountered challenges in assessing external articulation requests? Please select all that apply.²⁰
- ☐ Missing/unclear documentation
 - ☐ Verifying institutional accreditation/recognition
 - ☐ Administering assessment fees
 - ☐ Coordinating external/third-party assessments
 - ☐ Managing records of equivalency decisions
 - ☐ Document fraud
 - ☐ Lack of resources
 - ☐ Lack of clear/standard procedures
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
16. Has the BC Transfer Guide's (BCTG) inclusion of equivalencies from outside BC/Canada affected the number of external articulation requests that come to your institution?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
17. What effect has the inclusion of external equivalencies in the BC Transfer Guide had on the number of external articulation requests at your institution?²¹
- ☐ Slight increase
 - ☐ Significant increase
 - ☐ Slight decrease
 - ☐ Significant decrease

¹⁹ Skip logic applied unless previous (Q12) response was "Yes."

²⁰ Skip logic applied unless previous (Q14) response was "Yes."

²¹ Skip logic applied unless previous (Q16) response was "Yes."

18. Has the BC Transfer Guide's (BCTG) inclusion of equivalencies from outside BC/Canada affected the type of external articulation requests that come to your institution? Please explain.
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
19. Did you know that you can publish external equivalencies in the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG)?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
20. Does your institution publish its external equivalencies in the BC Transfer Guide (BCTG)?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Not sure
21. How might the process for evaluating external equivalencies be improved?
22. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the assessment of external articulation requests at your institution or within the BC Transfer System as a whole?
23. Please tell us what type of post-secondary institution you work at.
- ☐ Publicly funded research-intensive university
 - ☐ Publicly funded teaching-intensive university
 - ☐ Publicly funded college
 - ☐ Publicly funded institute
 - ☐ Private university
 - ☐ Private college
24. In which region is your institution located/based?
- ☐ Southwestern BC/Metro Vancouver
 - ☐ Vancouver Island
 - ☐ Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays
 - ☐ Cariboo-North
 - ☐ Outside BC

Thank you very much for completing this survey.

BCCAT

Your guide through post-secondary education.



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