

Chairs of Academic Boards Forum

Transnational higher education from Australia

Drivers for engagement in transnational education (TNE)

Expansion of high-quality offshore delivery is a key priority to support the sustainability of the international education sector. Some of the reasons are:

- TNE offers an opportunity to establish better mutual understanding between people and promote soft diplomacy.
- The world provides a bigger market with fewer capacity issues although TNE usually has lower fees.
- TNE gives wider access to higher education through alternative entry points without compromising the quality of the degrees.
- Australian degrees can be delivered in part in another language to meet the demand for bilingual working professionals.
- Caps are likely to limit the number of international students studying in Australia but there is a TNE exemption.

Key risks and challenges

TEQSA regulates transnational education where the outcome of the activity is an award conferred by an Australian higher education provider.¹ The Threshold Standards require providers to remain responsible and accountable in all aspects of course delivery and support. TEQSA sees heightened risk in arrangements with overseas parties and may apply greater focus in ensuring compliance is effectively implemented.²

Proposed amendments to the ESOS Act now before the Parliament would require providers to receive authorisation from TEQSA before being permitted to deliver courses offshore, notify TEQSA of any new or changed delivery arrangements and report annually to TEQSA on offshore delivery.

Key risks and challenges which require effective quality management include:

- admissions practices and recognition of prior learning (RPL), English language capacity
- student induction, ongoing pastoral care and academic support, effective engagement with students throughout their participation
- student and staff safety and wellbeing
- assessment invigilation, academic integrity and learner authentication
- equivalence of delivery, learning outcomes and award recognition in-country
- cybersecurity risks, including interoperability of systems, access to online material and how to manage offshore student data to adhere to Australian privacy laws
- intersections of Australian and offshore laws and protections, compliance with local laws and regulations
- concerns about institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the host country
- service-level agreements and the application of an institution's policies and procedures in jurisdictions outside Australia.
- business arrangements, including transferring funds, staff travel and communication.

¹ TEQSA, "Transnational education toolkit" (November 2022)

<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/TNE-toolkit.pdf>

² TEQSA guidance note: Delivery with other parties (7 July 2023) <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/guidance-notes/guidance-note-delivery-other-parties>

Survey on transnational activities

The survey questions are listed in Appendix 2.

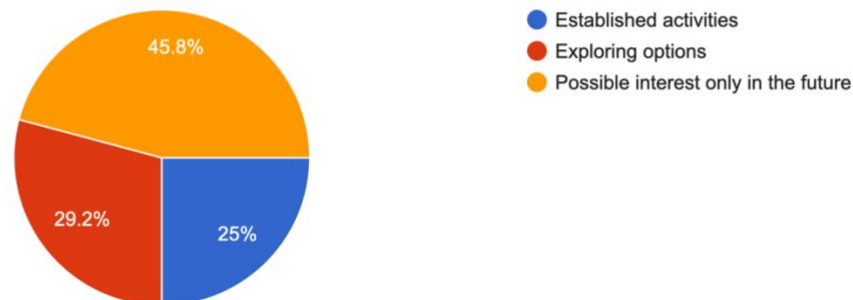
The survey was circulated to members of the Chairs of Academic Boards Forum (CABF) on 22 August 2025 and remained open until 6 October 2025. A reminder was sent to members on 16 and 29. September 2025. There were 24 responses. The data and commentary in this report are extracted from the responses.

The survey asked respondents about their level of interest in TNE, what types of TNE were currently underway and their stage of development. It then probed the quality assurance arrangements in a number of academic areas.

Around two thirds of the respondents are running or actively exploring transnational activities. Most are either franchises with an overseas partner or articulation partnerships. Online programs directed at overseas students are also of some interest.

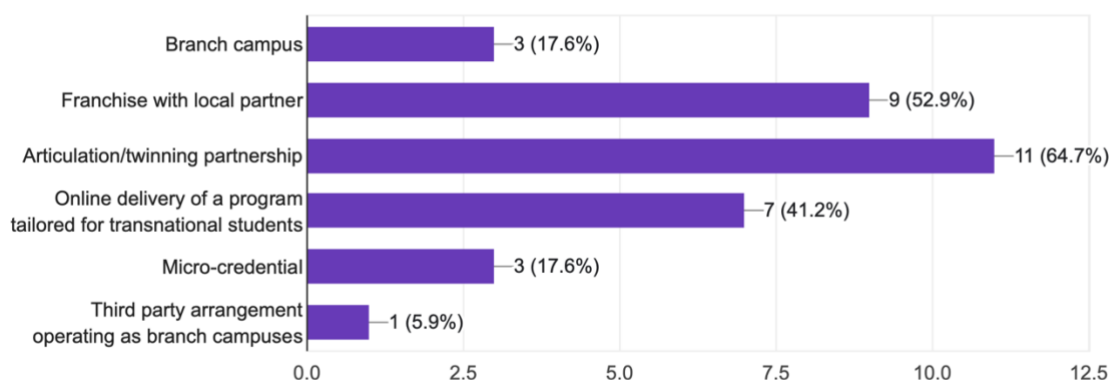
1. Is your institution involved in TNE?

24 responses



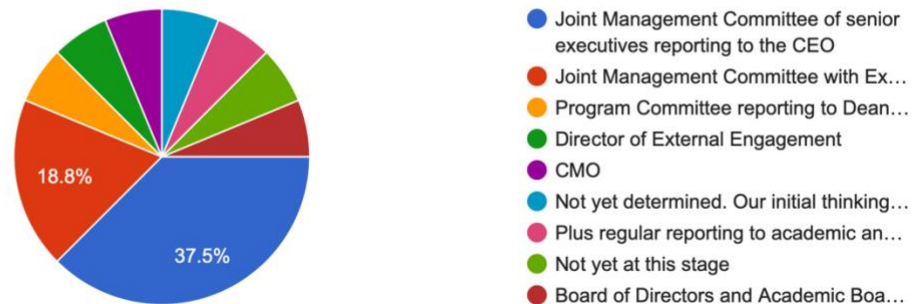
2. What type of TNE is or will be of interest?

17 responses



3. What is the primary group overseeing the partnership and assuring quality?

16 responses



The most common means of assuring quality is through a Joint Management Committee formed by senior executives of the home institution and representatives of the partner reporting to the CEO. In some cases, the Joint Management Committee includes representatives from the Academic Board.

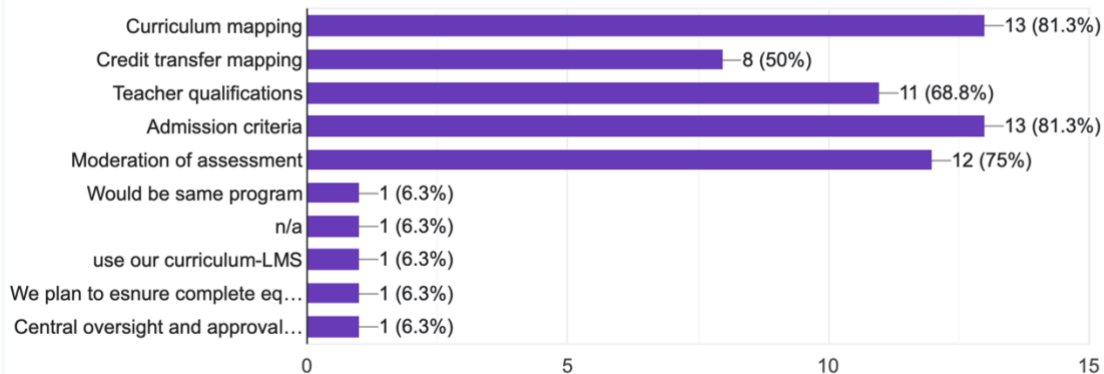
One respondent noted that they use a TNE compliance matrix to capture quality measures and these are mapped to the HESF.

In all cases where this is settled, the student policies for the offshore operation are the same as for the home institution. This is done to meet TEQSA's compliance requirements. Respondents mentioned that there may be legal requirements which require local variations. One institution uses a TNE checklist that enables regulatory requirements for Australia and the offshore country to be addressed and included in the agreement.

Equivalence between the programs at the home institution and the partner is most commonly managed via curriculum mapping, aligned admission criteria and moderation of assessment and measured by the usual student outcomes (retention, progression, completion and satisfaction). Also most commonly, the home institution approves the appointment of academic staff at the partner. In a majority of cases, the home institution approves offers of admission.

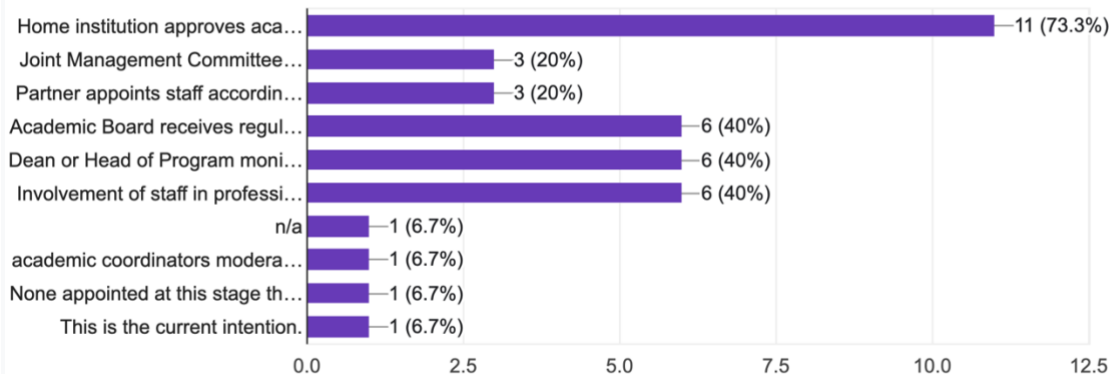
5. How do you assess and assure "equivalence" between programs at home and overseas?

16 responses



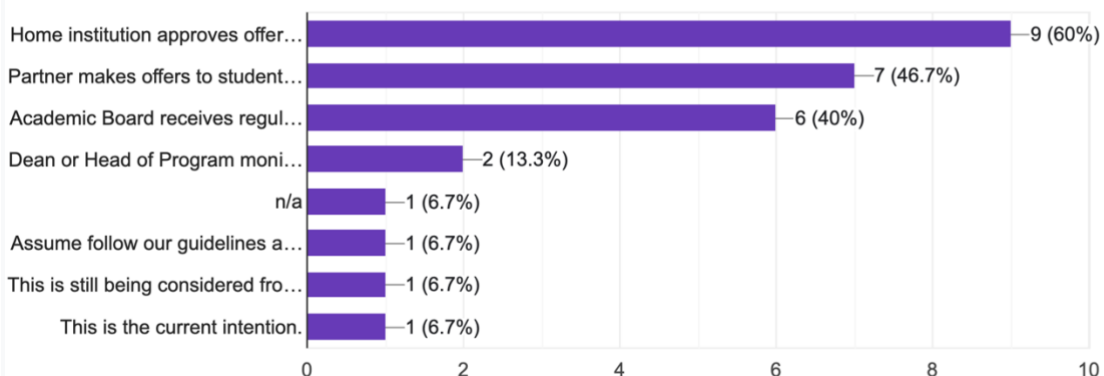
7. How do you assure the quality of academic staff teaching in TNE?

15 responses



8. How do you assure the quality of student recruitment?

15 responses

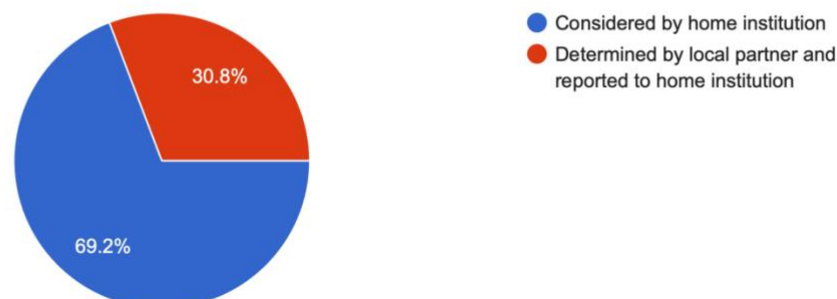


In most cases, orientation and academic advising are managed jointly by the Deans. The home institution usually provides orientation resources and expects the partner to take responsibility for orientation activities and report on them to the home institution. One

response noted that the Program Convenor from the home institution and an academic from the local institution are responsible for academic advising.

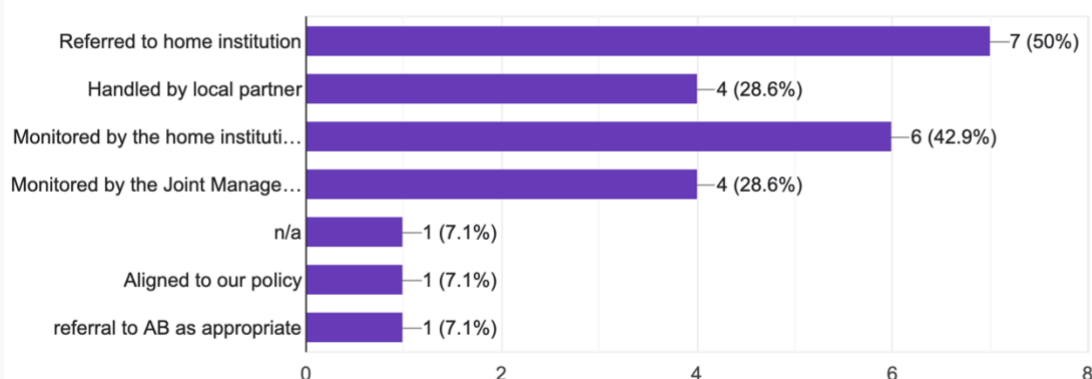
10. How are allegations of academic misconduct handled?

13 responses



11. How are student complaints handled?

14 responses

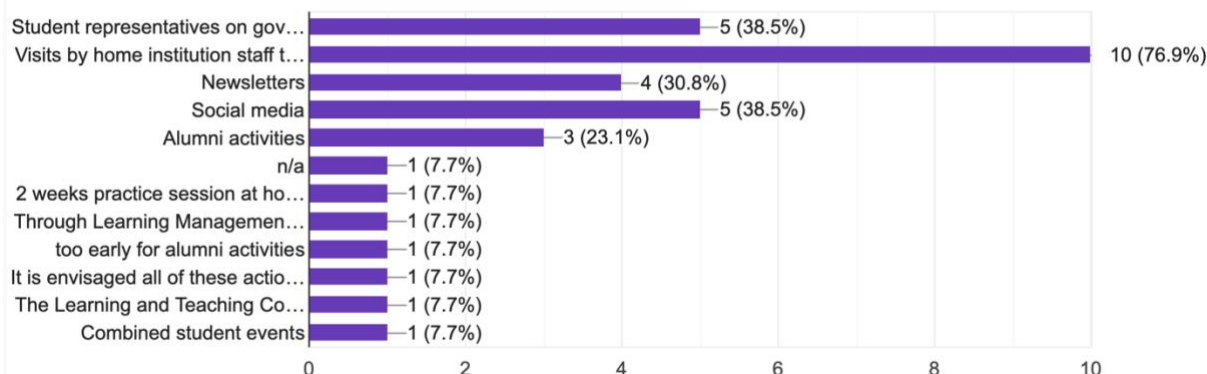


Student safety and wellbeing for TNE are covered by the policies of the home institution but may be tailored to the particular overseas location to meet local regulatory requirements. Student safety and wellbeing is often seen as a responsibility of the partner under the terms of the contract. To support the policies, respondents mentioned using an operations manual, using an annual survey and monitoring whistleblower contacts.

All those who responded confirmed that offshore staff and students use the home institution learning management system. In all cases, the home institution provides technology training.

14. How do you foster student engagement throughout the program and a sense of belonging with the home institution?

13 responses



The frequency of validation visits to audit quality at the partner institution varies. Respondents note that policies require at least one or two visits a year and in practice the visits are more frequent, for example four visits per year or very often. In one case, the Head of Campus at the partner institution provides an annual report. Respondents did not comment on the scope of the validation visits.

Course reviews are performed by the home institution in line with accreditation requirements to ensure that the courses are aligned at the home institution and the partner. This usually means the offshore review is undertaken by the home institution and part of the home institution's review of the course. Comprehensive reviews are usually undertaken every five years and an annual course report is used for continuous improvement. Reports are considered by the Academic Board.

Major academic risks relevant to TNE were listed as academic integrity (including unauthorised use of artificial intelligence), data privacy, cybersecurity, student safety, English language proficiency, equivalence of course experience, non-compliance with home institution policies and poor student outcomes.

Responsibility for monitoring, assessing and mitigating academic risk varies. In most cases, the primary responsibility rests with the Risk and Compliance Committee of the corporate governing body of the home institution. In some cases, the Academic Board of the home institution is involved and in others the Joint Management Committee manages these risks. In one case, the Joint Management Committee has ultimate responsibility. On the ground, risk management is handled by the TNE Quality Manager, Deans and Program Managers.

In most cases, the Academic Board receives an annual report and a report at the end of each teaching period on the performance of the transnational programs. Reporting is part of the TNE checklist and covers metrics on pass rates, attrition, grade distribution and qualitative updates including highlights and teacher feedback.

The question about the Academic Board's involvement in the periodic contract review generated interesting responses. It appears that Academic Board is not involved in most cases but may be consulted.

One comment on third party arrangements in general noted that such arrangements can be high risk and may raise concerns with TEQSA.

Next steps

- Develop a shared TNE quality assurance and improvement checklist and guide aligned with known risk management 'hot spots' based on the TEQSA TNE Toolkit and the data collected from the survey. See Appendix 1 for an initial list.
- Examine the data collected from the survey against the experience of particular types of institutions (for example, pathway colleges and twinning arrangements) to see if we need more specific protocols in such cases.
- Develop an Integrated Risk, Quality and Standards Framework³ for transnational education as a basis for improvement benchmarking
- Run a joint staff development session with the key people from each institution who go (or will go) to the offshore location to confirm consistent and effective compliance with the quality assurance and risk management QA checkpoints in Appendix 1. This would also be an opportunity to review and refine the checklist and suggest practical implementation strategies for each of checkpoint.
- Share good practice in conducting onsite or zoom-based training in quality procedures for staff at the overseas location to confirm that all staff involved in delivering and supporting the program are suitably qualified.

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Geoff Sott
1 November 2025

³ Western Sydney University International College uses such a framework to assure the quality of its learning and teaching 9<https://internationalcollege.westernsydney.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Integrated-Risk-Quality-and-Standards-Framework-v1.2-as-at-22nd-August-2023.pdf>)
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Appendix 1. Transnational quality assurance checklist

1. Student admission criteria are applied fairly and consistently and accurate information is readily available for students covering
 - a. academic admission criteria
 - b. agreed English proficiency levels.Procedures are validated by sampling cases of admission, admission with conditions and non-admission.
2. Student orientation programs are tailored to the needs of student cohorts covering
 - a. key course requirements
 - b. learning management system
 - c. student advising and support systems
 - d. referral systems when the need for additional support is identified
 - e. overall performance expectations.
3. Clear curriculum alignment validated by sampling subject outlines, lesson plans and learning resources.
4. Assessment integrity and alignment validated by
 - a. training of staff involved in setting, marking and reviewing assessment
 - b. moderation of a sample of marked assessment (borderline, good and very good) in selected subjects
 - c. review of grade distributions and student outcomes.
5. Aligned access to and use of artificial intelligence tools in learning and assessment validated by
 - a. training for students and staff
 - b. protocols for ethical use
 - c. measures for assessing student work which is not aided by artificial intelligence.
6. Teaching staff quality validated by
 - a. review of qualifications and experience
 - b. performance monitoring from student feedback and peer assessment
 - c. professional development.
7. Aligned policies and confirmation of consistent policy implementation validated by
 - a. rolling audit of key policies
 - b. use of workflows and templates
 - c. training on changes to policies.
8. Aligned tracking and improvement system covering
 - a. a trained onsite manager who is responsible for the day-to-day quality tracking and improvement of the program as it is delivered
 - b. reports on student outcomes and success measured by transfer and completion rates
 - c. student and staff feedback on good practice and areas in need of improvement.
9. Assurance of student safety and well-being
 - a. prevention of gender-based violence
 - b. access to trauma-informed support
 - c. training for students and staff
10. Procedures for receiving, managing and resolving student complaints and appeals validated by
 - a. accessible information for students
 - b. sample of de-identified cases
 - c. reports on caseload, response times, outcomes, systemic issues identified (if any)
11. Early identification and support of students at risk equivalent student support systems at the home institution.

12. Effective steps to link offshore students to the home institution
 - a. exchange of news about activities
 - b. in-person briefings
 - c. systematic use of peer support.
13. Financial arrangements
 - a. clear policies and procedures for student fees and refunds
 - b. regular financial statements.
14. Cybersecurity and data privacy protocols aligned with the policy and procedures of the home institution.
15. Oversight and compliance monitoring by the home institution validated by
 - a. regular onsite visits by from from the home institution to confirm consistent compliance with all these checkpoints
 - b. ongoing monitoring by the home institution's finance and risk management committee in partnership with the Joint Management Committee
 - c. regular reports for review by the Academic Board and the Board of Directors of the home institution.

Appendix 2. Survey instrument

1. Is your institution involved in TNE?
Established activities/Exploring options/Possible interest only in the future.
2. What type of TNE is or will be of interest?
Branch campus/Franchise with local partner/Articulation/twinning partnership/Online delivery of a program tailored for transnational students/ Micro-credential/Other (please specify).
3. What is the primary group overseeing the partnership and assuring quality?
Joint Management Committee of senior executives reporting to the CEO/
Joint Management Committee with Executive and Academic Board representation/
Program Committee reporting to Dean or Head of Program/Other (please specify).
4. Does the offshore operation use the same student policies as the home institution?
Please describe any major exceptions.
5. How do you assess and assure “equivalence” between programs at home and overseas?
Curriculum mapping/Credit transfer mapping/Teacher qualifications/Admission criteria/Moderation of assessment/Other (please specify).
6. What data do you use or have available to measure the quality of TNE?
Student progress rates/Retention rates/Completion rates/Transfer rates from partner to home campus/Success rates at the home campus following transfer/Student satisfaction/Other (please specify).
7. How do you assure the quality of academic staff in TNE?
Home institution approves academic staff appointments/Joint Management Committee appoints staff/Partner appoints staff according to policy/Academic Board receives regular reports on teaching staff qualifications/Dean or Head of Program monitors teaching staff appointments/Involvement of staff in professional development programs/Other (please specify).
8. How do you assure the quality of student recruitment?
Home institution approves offers to students/Partner makes offers to students according to policy/Academic Board receives regular reports on admissions/Dean or Head of Program monitors admissions/Other (please specify).
9. Who is responsible for orientation and academic advising? How are these activities monitored?
10. How are allegations of academic misconduct handled?
Considered by home institution/Determined by local partner and reported to home institution.
11. How are student complaints handled?
Referred to home institution/Handled by local partner/Monitored by the home institution Academic Board/Monitored by the Joint Management Committee/Other (please specify).
12. How do you assure student safety and wellbeing?
13. Do offshore staff and students have access to the home institution learning management system? Who provides technology training for offshore staff and students?
14. How do you foster student engagement throughout the program and a sense of belonging with the home institution?
Student representatives on governance committees/Visits by home institution staff/Newsletters/Social media/Alumni activities/Other (please specify).
15. What is the frequency and scope of validation visits to audit quality at the partner institution?

16. What is the frequency and scope of course reviews? What body is responsible for monitoring reviews and overseeing improvements?
17. What body is responsible for monitoring academic risks? Please list major risk areas relevant to TNE (for example, academic integrity, data privacy, cybersecurity, student safety, English language proficiency) and indicate how they are managed.
18. How often does the Academic Board receive reports on the transnational programs? What is the scope of the reports?
19. How is the Academic Board involved in the periodic contract review?
20. Please add any further comments on transnational activities at your institution.