External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure

Purpose

1. The Australian International Institute of Higher Education ('the Institute') is committed to maintaining the quality and standing of its courses and operations and to using external evidence to inform and develop internal improvements. As such, the Institute undertakes external referencing activities in accordance with this Policy.

Scope

2. This Policy applies to:
   a) all staff of the Institute whether full-time, part-time, casual or contract
   b) members of the Institute's Governing Bodies
   c) individuals engaged in providing services to the Institute, such as contractors or consultants
   d) all significant strategies, policies, outcomes and operations of the Institute.

Definitions

3. For the purposes of this Policy:
   a) ***Benchmarking*** is a structured, collaborative quality assurance process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes.
   b) ***External referencing*** is the broad set of activities through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with external comparators.
   c) ***Moderation*** is validating grades awarded to students against the required level of student attainment, including by calibrating different markers' grading.

Policy

Statement

4. As part of building and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement, and achieving best practices in the sector, the Institute employs a range of external referencing activities to compare the outcomes of its students, its course structure and content, its processes, resources and structures (operational and governance) to that of other comparable providers in the sector.

5. The Institute will use the findings from external referencing to improve the student experience through changes in teaching and learning, governance and operations.

Page 1 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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Procedure

Types of external referencing

6. The Institute implements different types of external referencing, including:
   a) competitive external referencing of performance or processes with competitors
   b) generic external referencing, by comparing strategies, operations or processes with unrelated organisations.

7. External referencing can be undertaken by a desk-top audit of publicly available information and data or through a benchmarking arrangement with a partner organisation.

8. External referencing may focus on different aspects of the Institute and its operations, including:
   a) course content, entry criteria, learning outcomes and methods of assessment
   b) processes, involving comparisons of particular processes and practices, such as complaint resolution time
   c) outcomes, relating to the comparison of outcomes data, such as student attrition and completion rates
   d) structures, involving comparison of organisational structures, such as academic staffing, corporate services, student services, or governance bodies
   e) policies and frameworks, involving the comparison of academic and non-academic policies and their key characteristics, such as admission policy and entry requirements
   f) best-in-class, involving a comparison with a provider thought to be at the forefront in the area to be referenced.

Scope of external referencing

9. The Institute implements an external referencing program covering a wide range of aspects of its operations, including academic and corporate processes, and student outcomes.

10. For each functional area and object of review, the Institute selects relevant indicators for the referencing exercise. Examples of key indicators include minimum acceptable entry criteria, progression and completion rates, grade distributions, and criteria for academic appointments.

11. Indicators are validated as part of the preparation for each referencing exercise.

12. A schedule of external referencing activities is provided in Appendix 1 of this Policy. Each activity is overseen by the appropriate governing body.

Benchmarking partnering

13. Benchmarking partnerships are established through formal agreements. The agreement must identify the benchmarking indicators or functional areas and include provisions for the confidentiality of the shared data and for the allocation of any costs arising from the partnership.

14. Partnering initiatives are led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and authorised by the Governing Council.

Public data and sector-wide initiatives

15. The Institute will use publicly available data on higher education operations in Australia, e.g. *Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching*, *Staff Data* and *Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student*

Page 2 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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Data from the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

16. The Institute will participate in the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching's *Student Experience Survey*.

External referencing process

17. External referencing activities should be conducted in accordance with the following stages:
    a) confirmation of understanding of the context of the activities, e.g. Institute's circumstances, mission, scale, and particular needs of student cohorts
    b) identification of potential areas for improvement and areas of good practice
    c) determination of methodology for the exercise, including confirmation that objects, indicators, and processes used are credible, tenable, and recent
    d) determination of expected benefits and estimated cost for the exercise
    e) confirmation of the availability of staff with adequate knowledge and skills for the exercise
    f) confirmation of support from management and partners, where applicable, for the exercise
    g) analysis of variations or commonalities
    h) development of improvement strategies
    i) report of findings to management and the appropriate governing body
    j) implementation of agreed action plans
    k) review of outcomes of the implemented actions, both against the expected outcome and against subsequent referencing results
    l) recording of lessons learned and institutional knowledge.

Improvement

18. The information resulting from external referencing exercises is comprehensively reviewed to identify opportunities for improvement and institutional learning as well as for identifying any need to adapt the Institute's policies, strategy and processes.

19. The results of external referencing activities are used to mitigate future risks to the quality of the education provided by the Institute and to guide and evaluate academic, governance and operational improvements. This includes the use of data on student progress and success to inform admission criteria and approaches to course design, teaching, learning and academic support.

Responsibilities

20. The Governing Council is responsible for:
    a) setting institutional benchmarks for operational quality and outcomes
    b) the continuous improvement of all operations and activities of the Institute.

21. The Academic Board is responsible for:
    a) setting institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes. Benchmarks will be monitored, and actions initiated to improve performance against these benchmarks
    b) making recommendations to the Governing Council as an outcome of referencing activities.

22. The Academic Dean is responsible for:
    a) overseeing academic external referencing activities

Page 3 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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b) reporting to the Academic Board on the integrity and effectiveness of the external referencing program for academic activities.

23. The CEO is responsible for:

a) overseeing governance and operational external referencing activities

b) approving benchmarking partnerships

c) reporting to the Governing Council on the integrity and effectiveness of the external referencing program for governance and operational activities.

24. Institute staff conducting external referencing exercises are responsible for:

a) following the Institute's external referencing methodology and processes

b) keeping abreast of developments in external referencing practices in their respective functional area

c) implementing improvements in their area of responsibility that may arise as a result of external activities.

Page 4 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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Associated information

Approving body	Governing Council and Academic Board
Date approved	23 October 2020
Date of effect	Commencement of operation
Scheduled review	Two years from when policy commences
Current version approval date	09/08/2024
Next review date	09/08/2026
Policy owner	Academic Dean
Policy contact	Academic Dean
Related AIIHE Documents	Course Development and Amendment Policy and Procedure Facilities and Resources Review Policy and Procedure Quality Assurance Framework Stakeholder Feedback Policy and Procedure
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth)	Standard 5.3, ss 1, 4, 7 Standard 6.2, ss 1 Section 6.3
Other related external instruments/documents	**Related Legislation** • Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth) **Good Practice Documents** • TEQSA Guidance Note: Academic Quality Assurance, Version 2.2 • TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing, Version 2.5 • ISO 21001:2018 – Educational organizations – Management systems for educational organizations • BSI ISO 9004:2018 – Quality management – Quality an organization – Guidance to achieve sustained success

Document history

Version	Author	Changes	Approval Date
1.0	Not applicable	Original version	23 October 2020
1.1	Compliance Officer	Reviewed to align with the HESF 2021, external assessment review information and QILT data are added to the schedule of external referencing activities (appendix 1), and the footer was updated with current addresses.	9 August 2024

N.B. The document is uncontrolled when printed! The current version of this document is maintained on the AIIHE website at www.aiihe.edu.au.

Page 5 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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Appendix 1 – Schedule of external referencing activities

Object of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external referencing *(benchmarking, desktop audit TBC)*	Responsible officer	Responsible body
Teaching and learning				
Course reviews including course and subject design, entry criteria, learning outcomes, assessment.	Annual monitoring Five-yearly comprehensive reviews (see *Course Monitoring Review P and P*)		Academic Dean	Academic Board
External moderation and review of assessment	Annual monitoring Three-yearly review of all subjects in each course (see *Assessment Moderation P&P*)		Academic Dean	Academic Dean
Student performance such as grade distribution, progression rates, retention rates, attrition rates and completion rates.	Annually		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Student feedback and satisfaction	See *Stakeholder Feedback P and P*		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Academic appointments including staff qualifications, professional development and promotion processes	At least once every two years		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Academic staff-to-student ratio	At least once every two years		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Academic misconduct cases, type, frequency	At least once every two years		Academic Dean	Academic Board

Object of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external referencing (benchmarking, desktop audit TBC)	Responsible officer	Responsible body
Course delivery, including technology-enhanced learning, availability of learning/library resources and learning support	At least once every two years		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Teaching performance	At least once every two years		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Moderation, e.g. external double marking of samples of assessment items	As per *Assessment Moderation P and P*		Academic Dean	Academic Board
Student experience				
Grievances and appeals, number, type, days to resolution, number of external appeals	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
SASH incidents, number, type, days to resolution, number of external appeals	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Graduate outcomes, graduate course satisfaction, graduate employment and further study (QILT- SES and GOS)	Annually		CEO	Governing Council
Wellbeing and safety provisions and support services, including professional staff-to-student ratio	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Higher education operations				
Organisational structure, facilities, resources and infrastructure	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council

Object of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external referencing (benchmarking, desktop audit TBC)	Responsible officer	Responsible body
Student recruitment, source countries, market trends	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Governance Bodies Structure and Terms of Reference	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Policies and frameworks	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Monitoring quality assurance mechanisms	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council
Approach to student representation and involvement in deliberative decision making	At least once every two years		CEO	Governing Council

Page 3 of 8 | External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure v1.1
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