

## EXTERNAL REFERENCING (including Benchmarking) POLICY

### Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

#### Purpose

- (1) The purpose of this Policy is to set out how external referencing (**including benchmarking**) assures the quality and standards of the College's courses, student outcomes, processes, operations and governance. External referencing provides:
  - (a) a point of reference of the quality and standing of the College; and
  - (b) an evidence base to guide planning and continuous improvement activities.
- (2) In developing this Policy, the College references TEQSA's Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking) Version 2.5 (16.04.2019) (the TEQSA Guidance Note).

"The main focus of external referencing in the HES Framework is on comparison of courses or units of study and of student achievement to inform improvements. This does not preclude a provider from undertaking much broader comparative activities across any aspect of its operations, including through benchmarking."

Source: [TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing](#) p1.

#### Scope

- (3) This Policy applies to all academic and non-academic staff involved in review and continuous improvement activities and all externally appointed persons involved in governance committees (such as, but not limited to, the Board of Directors, Academic Board, Learning and Teaching Committee and Course Advisory Committees).

### Section 2 – Definitions

- (4) In this Policy:
  - (a) **Benchmarking** means a type of external referencing.

"It can be defined as a structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes, or performance outcomes. Its purpose is to compare strengths and weaknesses, as a basis for developing improvements in academic quality or performance. Benchmarking can also be defined as a quality process used to evaluate performance by comparing institutional practices across the sector."

Source: [TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing](#) p7.

- (b) **Desk research** means the process of finding, collecting, and comparing publicly available data or information with the College's own data or information.

- (c) **External referencing** means, in the context of the HESF, a process by the College compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s), for the purpose of monitoring, review and improvement processes. Examples can include benchmarking, peer review and moderation.
- (d) **HESF (or the HES Framework)** means the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, as amended from time to time.
- (e) **Learning Outcomes** means a statement of what students will be able to do, know and understand at the completion of a class, unit or course.

## Section 3 – Policy Statement

### Principles

- (5) The College is required by the HESF (Standard 5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement), to undertake a comprehensive review of all accredited courses (at least every seven (7) years or one (1) year prior to course re-accreditation if that is earlier), and include external referencing or other benchmarking activities in that comprehensive review. The comprehensive review includes:
  - (a) the design and content of each course of study;
  - (b) the expected learning outcomes;
  - (c) the methods of assessment of those outcomes;
  - (d) the extent of students' achievement of learning outcomes; and
  - (e) takes into account emerging developments in the field of education under review, modes of delivery, the changing needs of students and identified risks to the quality of the course.  
(See: HESF Standard 5.3.2)
- (6) In line with the HESF requirements, the College supports its comprehensive review of courses with regular interim monitoring of the quality of teaching, student progress and the overall delivery of units within each course.
  - (a) The College's review and improvement activities include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses. This includes:
    - (i) analysis of student progression, attrition, and completions; and
    - (ii) analysis of the assessment methods and student grades against the learning outcomes for selected units.  
(See: HESF Standards 5.3.3 and 5.3.4)
- (7) The College will use external referencing / benchmarking as part of its regular reviews to assess the success of its student cohorts. Applicable findings will be used to improve areas such as admissions, course design, teaching, supervision, and learning and academic support.

- (8) The College may also use external referencing / benchmarking to review other aspects of its operations, including but not limited to:
  - (a) at risk units - curriculum, assessment, and outcomes;
  - (b) learning and teaching – comparison of number, pedagogy;
  - (c) governance – comparison of structures and practice;
  - (d) third party partners – student experience, outcomes, financial viability;
  - (e) staffing – comparison of staff ratios, criteria for academic employment;
  - (f) student support – services available in other organisations;
  - (g) academic staff scholarship – publications, conferences, higher qualification completion; and/or
  - (h) policies and procedures.
- (9) The College's External Referencing (Benchmarking) Review Schedule outlines the regular benchmarking activities that are planned, the external partners to be used (if any) and the areas responsible for overseeing and managing this process.
- (10) The College may engage in other *ad hoc* external referencing / benchmarking activities when opportunities are presented or as required by the College's management or academic governing bodies.
- (11) While external referencing / benchmarking should inform improvements, the College will always consider its specific circumstances, its scale, student cohort and strategic directions when assessing whether to pursue findings following external referencing / benchmarking activity.

## **Benchmarking**

- (12) Benchmarking is a type of external referencing undertaken to compare one aspect of the College or its services with that of another (national or international) organisation (usually a higher education provider or a peak body).
- (13) The College conducts benchmarking by:
  - (a) engaging with one or more external organisations to undertake benchmarking and / or external review (see clauses 15 – 17 in relation to benchmarking partners). This is particularly done when reviewing courses, learning and teaching outcomes, and governance; and / or
  - (b) undertaking a desk review, comparing publicly available information and market intelligence with the College's internal data and information.
- (14) When conducting benchmarking, the College may use one of the following broad types:
  - (a) Organisational benchmarking in which comparisons are made at the organisational level.
  - (b) Course benchmarking of course design and student performance.
  - (c) Process benchmarking in which comparisons are made of particular processes and practices.

- (d) Outcomes benchmarking in which comparisons are made of outcomes data, especially student outcomes such as attrition and completion rates.
- (e) Best-practice benchmarking in which the College selects a comparator thought to be at the forefront in the operations area to be benchmarked.

See [TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing](#) p7.

### **External Referencing (Benchmarking) Partners**

- (15) Benchmarking partners will normally be comparable higher education providers (national or international) offering similar programs or professional bodies relevant to the courses offered by the College. In selecting a benchmarking partner, the College will give consideration as to whether the proposed partner:
  - (a) has a similar student demographic;
  - (b) offers courses within the same / similar fields of education;
  - (c) offers courses with a similar mode of delivery;
  - (d) has a record of good performance in the area(s) to be benchmarked with reliable data; and/or
  - (e) is committed to quality improvement and is willing to share relevant information on a mutually confidential basis.
- (16) The arrangements with a benchmarking partner is normally reflected in a formal agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) which sets out the purpose, the area(s) of benchmarking, the benchmarking processes employed, the possible outcomes, confidentiality issues and the permitted use of benchmarking information by the parties.
  - (a) Depending on the nature of the activities to be benchmarked, either the CEO or the Dean is responsible for approving the arrangements in relation to benchmarking activities with an external organisation.
- (17) Following the conclusion of a benchmarking process with an external partner, the CEO or the Dean will provide a report to the Board of Directors or the Academic Board and/or other internal governance mechanisms. This report should set out (among other matters) the lessons learned and proposals for improvement.

### **Responsibilities**

- (18) The Board of Directors and/or Academic Board, through their respective sub-committees, will ensure outcomes of external referencing / benchmarking are incorporated into the College's continuous improvement processes, as appropriate to the College's specific circumstances, its scale, student cohort and strategic directions.

## Section 4 - Procedures

(19) Nil.

## Related documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with but is not limited to:

- Assessment Policy
- Course Design, Development and Review Policy
- Course Development Procedure
- Course Monitoring and Review Procedure
- Moderation of Assessment Policy
- Moderation of Assessment Procedure

### Legislation

- Australian Qualifications Framework
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act)
- TEQSA (2019) Guidance Note: *External Referencing (including Benchmarking)* Version 2.5 (16.04.2019)

### References:

- Australian Institute of Business (2022) *Benchmarking Policy* [accessed September 2023]
- AIM Business School (2021) *External Referencing (including Benchmarking) Policy* A5.2 [accessed September 2023]
- Kaplan (2021) *Benchmarking Policy* [accessed September 2023]

## Document Administration

<b>Policy Name</b>	External Referencing (including Benchmarking) Policy
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Dean
<b>Approval Authority</b>	Academic Board
<b>Approval Date</b>	04 December 2023
<b>Effective Date</b>	As at Approval Date
<b>Next Review #</b>	Three years from the Approval Date
<b>Amendment history</b>	
<b>Version 1:</b>	Document developed and implemented. Approved by the Academic Board on 16 October 2023. Endorsed by the Board of Directors on 04 December 2023.

# Unless otherwise indicated, this Policy will still apply beyond the Review date