

Higher Education Benchmarking Procedure

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Purpose

This procedure outlines the University's approach to benchmarking as a core component of academic quality assurance. It defines the principles, and processes for benchmarking courses. The procedure supports informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and alignment with sector standards, and sets minimum expectations for benchmarking across all Higher Education courses.

Scope

This procedure applies to all established sealed award Higher Education courses at Federation University, excluding non-award enabling and foundation courses and courses and non-award enabling and foundation courses conducted solely by research. It is enacted in conjunction with the [Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure](#) and the [Higher Education Course Quality Annual Monitoring Procedure](#), and forms part of the University's academic quality assurance framework.

Legislative context

- Federation University Australia Act 2010
- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act)
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

Definitions

Term	Definition
Academic Calibration	<p>A structured peer review process to validate assessment standards and grading practices, ensuring alignment with discipline norms and AQF levels.</p> <p>Academic calibration involves external peer review to validate assessment standards across institutions and complements moderation by providing external referencing of academic standards, as required under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.</p>
ADLT	Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching)
Benchmarking	<p>A structured process for comparing performance, design, delivery, and outcomes against internal standards or external comparators.</p> <p>Academic benchmarking is primarily undertaken across courses, including student outcomes and experience, teaching and learning quality, graduate outcomes and student support services.</p> <p>Benchmarking for governance, compliance and operational efficiency is also possible.</p>
Course Review	The formal process of evaluating a course's quality, relevance, and compliance with institutional and regulatory standards. As defined in the Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure .
External Referencing	Comparison of student outcomes, assessment practices, and course design with similar courses at other institutions.
HoD	Head of Discipline
QILT	<p>Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching</p> <p>A suite of government endorsed surveys for higher education, across the student life cycle from commencement to employment.</p>
SES	<p>Student Experience Survey</p> <p>A comprehensive survey conducted which focuses on aspects of the student experience that are measurable, linked with learning and development outcomes, and potentially able to be influenced by higher education institutions.</p>

Benchmarking Principles and Types

Federation University recognises benchmarking as a strategic and reflective process that supports continuous improvement, external referencing, and academic integrity.

Benchmarking Principles

Benchmarking at Federation University is guided by the following principles, consistent with TEQSA's expectations for quality assurance*:

- **Purposeful:** Benchmarking must be aligned with course and institutional goals.
- **Comparable:** Benchmarks must be drawn from institutions or courses with similar characteristics.
- **Transparent:** The rationale, methodology, and outcomes of benchmarking must be clearly documented.
- **Actionable:** Benchmarking should lead to meaningful insights and improvements.

*Source: [TEQSA Guidance Note: Academic Monitoring, Review and Improvement](#)

Actions

Minimum Academic Benchmarking Expectations for all Courses

All Higher Education courses must engage in benchmarking as part of the University's academic quality assurance framework, regardless of whether external benchmarking is mandated by regulatory or accreditation bodies.

At a minimum, each course must:

- Participate in **internal benchmarking** annually through the Course Quality Annual Monitoring Procedure.
- Undertake **external benchmarking** at least once per review cycle (i.e. every five years, aligned with the [Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure](#)), including:
 - external comparison of curriculum, assessment, and student outcomes.
- Document benchmarking activities and outcomes in course review reports or annual monitoring to:
 - Identify opportunities for improvement
 - Validate course quality and relevance
 - Support curriculum currency, renewal and innovation

Academic Benchmarking Planning and Documentation

All academic benchmarking activities must be planned, documented, and reported in accordance with the University's academic quality assurance framework. This ensures transparency, consistency, and alignment with institutional and regulatory expectations.

Planning Requirements

Each benchmarking activity must be supported by a documented plan that includes:

- **Purpose and scope** of the benchmarking activity
- **Selection of benchmarking partners**
- **Indicators and data sources** to be used
- **Methods of comparison** (quantitative, qualitative, or both)
- **Timeline and responsibilities**
- **Intended use of findings** (e.g. course review, curriculum renewal, quality improvement)

Documentation and Reporting

Benchmarking outcomes must be documented in the appropriate quality assurance reports, including:

- **Course Quality Annual Monitoring Reports**
- **Course Review Panel Reports**

Internal Benchmarking

Internal benchmarking is a strategic activity that compares similar courses within the University to identify variation, exemplars, and opportunities for improvement.

Internal benchmarking is conducted annually via the [Higher Education Course Quality Annual Monitoring Procedure](#). The data sources, indicators, and reporting mechanisms used to support internal comparison and continuous improvement can be found in the Course Quality Annual Monitoring Procedure.

External Academic Benchmarking

External benchmarking involves comparison with comparable institutions nationally and/or internationally.

Benchmarking must be conducted against at least one Australian university or an international comparable institution with similar course offerings, qualification level, and delivery mode.

The rationale for selecting benchmarking partners must be documented, and comparisons should include both qualitative and quantitative data.

	Activity	Responsibility	Steps
A	Benchmarking Partner selection and justification	ADLTs; Course Coordinators with Manager, Strategic Course Quality support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Selection Criteria: Benchmarking partners should be selected based on the following considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary relevance: Similar fields of study, curriculum structures, or professional accreditation requirements. • Institutional comparability: Similar scale, mission, student demographics, or delivery modes (e.g. online, blended, on-campus). 2. Documentation requirements: All benchmarking activities must include a documented rationale for partner selection. This must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the selected institution(s) and course(s). • Justify the selection based on the criteria above. • Be retained as part of the course review or benchmarking record.

B	Collect external data	Course Coordinators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gather comparative data on student outcomes, course design, and graduate success. 2. Metrics to be used as a minimum: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Progression and Completion Rates - Validate student success against sector norms. b. Assessment Methods and Grading Standards - Ensure alignment with national/international practices. c. Graduate Outcomes (Employment, Further Study) - Benchmark course relevance and impact. d. Course Structure and Learning Outcomes - Compare curriculum design and coherence. e. Industry Engagement and Accreditation Feedback - Ensure courses meet professional and employer expectations. f. External student experience survey results (e.g. QILT) - Compare student satisfaction nationally. 3. The use of national datasets (e.g. QILT) and partner-provided materials if required.
C	Analyse and report	Course Coordinators; ADLTs; Manager, Strategic Course Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare internal course performance against external benchmarks. 2. Document findings in the Self Review Report and Course Review Panel Report as part of the 5 yearly review.

Supporting documents

- [Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure](#)
- [Higher Education Course Quality Annual Monitoring Procedure](#)

- TEQSA Guidance Notes on Benchmarking and Academic Quality Assurance
- Moderation of Assessment Manual (V5, Nov 2023)

Responsibility

- Dean, Quality, Accreditation and Partnerships (as the Approval Authority) is responsible for monitoring the implementation, outcomes and scheduled review of this procedure.
- Manager, Strategic Course Quality (as the Document Owner) is responsible for maintaining the content of this procedure as delegated by the Approval Authority.

Promulgation

This procedure will be communicated throughout the University community via:

1. A FedNews announcement and on the 'Recently Approved Documents' page on the University's Policy Central website.
2. Distribution of e-mails to Head of Institute/School/Head of Department/University staff.
3. Documentation distribution, e.g. posters, brochures.
4. Notification to Institutes/Schools/Federation TAFE.

Implementation

This procedure will be implemented throughout the University via:

1. A FedNews announcement and on the 'Recently Approved Documents' page on the University's Policy Central website.

Records management

Document title	Location	Responsible officer	Minimum retention period
Benchmarking Reports	Quality and Accreditation SharePoint site	Dean, Quality, Accreditation and Partnerships	7 years after last course review