

Academic Quality (Higher Education) Benchmarking Procedure

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Purpose

This procedure outlines the University's strategic approach to benchmarking as a core component of academic quality assurance. It defines the principles, types, and processes for benchmarking activities, including both mandated and discretionary benchmarking. The procedure supports informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and alignment with sector standards, and set 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 courses conducted solely by research. It is enacted in conjunction with the Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure and the Course Quality Annual Assessment 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	A structured peer review process to validate assessment standards and grading practices, ensuring alignment with discipline norms and AQF levels. <i>Note: Academic calibration is distinct from moderation. While moderation is an internal process governed by the Moderation of Assessment Manual and focuses on consistency and fairness within a unit, academic calibration involves external peer review to validate assessment standards across institutions. Calibration complements moderation by providing external referencing of academic standards, as required under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, Section 5.3.</i> Moderation vs Calibration: Moderation is an internal process focused on consistency and fairness within a unit (see Moderation of Assessment Manual). Calibration is an external benchmarking activity that validates assessment standards across institutions, supporting external referencing and sector alignment.
ADLT	Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching)
Benchmarking	A structured process for comparing course performance, design, delivery, and outcomes against internal standards or external comparators.
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

Benchmarking Principles and Types

Federation University recognises benchmarking as a strategic and reflective process that supports continuous improvement, external referencing, and academic integrity. Benchmarking activities may be mandated (e.g. for regulatory compliance or accreditation) or discretionary (initiated for internal quality enhancement).

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 programs with similar characteristics.
- **Transparent:** The rationale, methodology, and outcomes of benchmarking must be clearly documented.

- **Actionable:** Benchmarking should lead to meaningful insights and improvements.

Types of Benchmarking

The University supports a range of benchmarking types, aligned with TEQSA's definition of external referencing and sector good practice???:

- **Internal Benchmarking:** Comparison of performance across similar courses or disciplines within the University.
- **External Benchmarking:** Comparison with equivalent courses or institutions nationally or internationally.
- **Academic Calibration:** Peer review of assessment standards and grading practices, providing external validation of academic standards.
- **Discretionary Benchmarking:** Voluntary benchmarking initiated by academic staff or leadership to explore innovation, address performance concerns, or support curriculum renewal.

Each type of benchmarking may serve a different purpose:

- **Diagnostic:** To identify gaps or areas for improvement.
- **Formative:** To inform ongoing development and enhancement.
- **Summative:** To validate outcomes and confirm quality.
- Benchmarking activities should be embedded in course review and improvement cycles and overseen by academic governance processes, as required by the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 ???

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

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Actions

Minimum Benchmarking Requirements

Tiered Benchmarking Model

Federation University adopts a three-tiered benchmarking model to ensure comprehensive quality assurance.

Table 1: Minimum Benchmarking Requirements by Tier

The following table outlines the minimum expectations for each benchmarking tier, including the required frequency and key indicators to be used in evaluating course quality and performance.

Tier	Minimum Requirements	Frequency	Indicators
Tier 1: Internal	All sealed award courses	Annually	EFTSL, Attrition, Progress, Completion, Grade Distribution, SFS, Unit Evaluation
Tier 2: External	All courses in review cycle	Every 5 years	Completion, Assessment, Graduate Outcomes, SES, Curriculum
Tier 3: Calibration	At least one unit per course	Per review cycle	Assessment alignment, grading consistency, AQF level, rubric clarity

This tiered model ensures that all courses are subject to regular internal review, periodic external comparison, and peer validation of assessment standards to support continuous improvement and regulatory compliance.

Minimum Benchmarking Expectations (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 Assessment 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 referencing of curriculum, assessment, and student outcomes.
 - Academic calibration of at least one unit.
- Document benchmarking activities and outcomes in course review reports or annual assessments. Where benchmarking is not mandated (e.g. by VRCA or professional accreditation), discretionary benchmarking must still be undertaken to:
 - Identify opportunities for improvement
 - Validate course quality and relevance
 - Support curriculum renewal and innovation

Benchmarking activities must be planned, documented, and approved in accordance with this procedure and related templates.

Benchmarking Planning and Documentation

All 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
- **Type of benchmarking** (internal, external, calibration, discretionary)
- **Selection of benchmarking partners** (if applicable)
- **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)

A **Benchmarking Planning Template** will be provided to support consistent planning and approval.

Documentation and Reporting

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

- **Course Quality Annual Assessment Reports**
- **Self-Review Reports**
- **Course Review Panel Reports**
- **Academic Calibration Reports**

All documentation must be uploaded to the Quality and Accreditation SharePoint site used for the Course Review, as appropriate.

Tier 1: Internal Benchmarking

Internal benchmarking is conducted annually via the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure. This procedure provides the operational framework, and data sources, for Tier 1 activity.

The Benchmarking Procedure defines Tier 1 as a strategic activity that compares similar courses within the University to identify variation, exemplars, and opportunities for improvement.

Tier 1 benchmarking is operationalised through the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure, which outlines the data sources, indicators, and reporting mechanisms used to support internal comparison and continuous improvement. For detailed steps, metrics, and reporting requirements, refer to the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure.

	Activity	Responsibility	Steps
A	Identify Comparable Courses	Course Coordinators; ADLTs (with support from Manager, Strategic Course Quality)	1. Use course clusters or discipline groupings to identify internal comparators. 2. Review previous benchmarking reports and performance data.
B	Collect Internal Data	Manager, Strategic Course Quality; Course Coordinators; Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching)	1. Gather student outcomes, assessment practices, and teaching quality metrics. 2. Tier 1 benchmarking is conducted annually via the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure, which outlines the indicators, data sources, and reporting mechanisms used to support internal comparison and continuous improvement. For detailed metrics and analysis steps, refer to the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure.
C	Analyse and Compare	Course Coordinators; Manager, Strategic Course Quality	1. Conduct thematic analysis across similar courses. 2. Identify internal exemplars and areas needing support.
D	Report and Share Findings	Course Coordinators; LTQC	1. Document findings in the Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure.

			2. Share best practices across institutes.
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Tier 2: External Benchmarking

External benchmarking is conducted every five years or during major course reviews. Comparison with peer institutions nationally and internationally.

Benchmarking must be conducted against at least one Australian university and one 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	1. The selection of benchmarking partners is a critical step in ensuring meaningful and valid comparisons. Benchmarking partners must be chosen based on clear, justifiable criteria and aligned with the purpose of the benchmarking activity. 2. Selection Criteria: Benchmarking partners should be selected based on the following considerations: • 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). • Strategic alignment: Alignment with Federation University's strategic goals, partnerships, or areas of focus. • Data availability and quality: Willingness and ability to share relevant, high-quality data. • Reputation and quality assurance maturity: Institutions with established

			quality assurance processes and sector credibility. 3. Documentation Requirements: All benchmarking activities must include a documented rationale for partner selection. This must: • Identify the selected institution(s) and course(s). • Justify the selection based on the criteria above. • Be approved by the Manager, Strategic Course Quality. • Be retained as part of the course review or benchmarking record. A Benchmarking Partner Selection Template will be provided to support consistent documentation and approval. 4. Manager, Strategic Course Quality reviews and endorses selections for consistency with institutional standards. <i>Note: This approach aligns with TEQSA's expectations for external referencing under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, particularly Standard 5.3.1, which requires providers to demonstrate that assessment methods and grading are consistent with sector norms.</i>
B	Develop Benchmarking Plan	Manager, Strategic Course Quality; Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching)	1. Define scope, indicators, methods, and timelines. 2. Align with the Review of Established Sealed Award Courses schedule.
C	Collect External Data	Course Coordinators; Manager, Strategic Course Quality	1. Gather comparative data on student outcomes, course design, and graduate success. 2. Metrics to be used: 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. Student Experience Survey (SES) Results (QILT) - Compare student satisfaction nationally. 3. Use national datasets (e.g. QILT) and partner-provided materials.
D	Analyse and Report	Course Coordinators; ADLTs	1. Compare performance against external benchmarks. 2. Document findings in the Self Review Report and Course Review Panel Report as part of the 5 yearly review – Manager, Strategic Course Quality may provide analytical support or review as needed.
E	Consultation and Governance Alignment	Course Coordinators	1. Course Coordinators must consult with HoDs and ADLTs to ensure benchmarking findings are aligned with accreditation needs and institutional priorities.

Tier 3: Academic Calibration (Peer Review)

Validation of assessment standards and grading practices. This procedure complements the Moderation of Assessment Manual by providing external validation of standards, whereas moderation focuses on internal consistency.

Calibration reviewers may refer to moderation models (e.g., blind marking, sampling, double marking) as outlined in Appendix III of the Moderation of Assessment Manual, to contextualise assessment practices and ensure alignment with sector norms.

Table 2: Mapping of moderation types (I–III) to benchmarking tiers (1–3):

Moderation Type	Benchmarking Tier	Purpose
Type I - Design	Tier 1 - Internal	Internal QA of assessment design
Type II - Marking	Tier 3 - Calibration	External validation of grading standards
Type III - Practice	Tier 2 - External	Review of assessment effectiveness

	Activity	Responsibility	Steps
A	Select Units for Review	Course Coordinators; Manager, Strategic Course Quality	1. Identify core or capstone units for calibration. 2. Prioritise units with high enrolment or strategic importance.
B	Identify Peer Reviewers	HoDs; Course Coordinators (with Manager, Strategic Course Quality support)	1. Identify and engage internal or external academics with disciplinary expertise as approved by the ADLT or HoD. 2. Manager, Strategic Course Quality provides briefing materials and ensures alignment with sector standards. 3. Ensure reviewers are briefed and approved.
C	Prepare Review Materials	Course Coordinators	1. Compile assessment tasks, rubrics, sample student work, and unit outlines. Detailed guidance will be provided in the Academic Calibration Report Template. 2. Ensure materials are anonymised and aligned with AQF standards.
D	Conduct Peer Review	Peer Reviewers; Course Coordinators	1. Use standard templates and criteria. 2. Metrics to be used: a. Assessment Task Alignment with Learning Outcomes - Ensure tasks

			reflect intended learning outcomes. b. Grading Consistency Across Reviewers - Validate fairness and reliability of marking. c. Rubric Clarity and Use - Assess transparency and usability of grading criteria. d. AQF Level Appropriateness - Confirm alignment with qualification level standards. e. Feedback Quality - Evaluate usefulness and constructiveness of feedback provided to students. 3. Provide structured feedback and recommendations.
E	Integrate Feedback	Course Coordinators	1. Incorporate reviewer insights into course improvement plans. 2. Document outcomes in the Course Review Panel Report.
F	Governance Consultation	Course Coordinators	1. Course Coordinators are expected to consult with HoDs and ADLTs to validate calibration outcomes and ensure they inform course review and improvement processes.

Supporting Documents

- Higher Education Course Quality Assurance and Review Procedure
- Course Quality Annual Assessment Procedure
- TEQSA Guidance Notes on Benchmarking and Academic Quality Assurance
- Moderation of Assessment Manual (V5, Nov 2023)

Forms

Templates for documenting benchmarking activities are under development and will be made available via the University's academic quality assurance framework.

These may be embedded within related procedures such as course reviews, annual assessments, or calibration processes once finalised.

- Benchmarking Partner Selection Template
- Benchmarking Planning Template
- Academic Calibration Report Template

Responsibility

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global, Engagement and Quality) (as the Approval Authority) is responsible for monitoring the implementation, outcomes and scheduled review of this procedure.
- Dean, Quality and Accreditation (as the Document Owner) is responsible for maintaining the content of this procedure as delegated by the Approval Authority.
- Manager, Strategic Course Quality (as the Subject Matter Expert) is responsible for coordinating with the Policy team and updating this procedure on behalf of the Document Owner.

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, eg. 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 and Accreditation	7 years after last course review