

Benchmarking Policy

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1. Purpose

Higher Education Leadership Institute (HELI) is committed to providing high quality higher education award courses in conformity with the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF 2021) and the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF 2013).

The purpose of this policy is to:

- establish a systematic approach to external referencing and benchmarking that drives continuous improvement and adoption of best practice in academic and operational activities;
- ensure the collection and analysis of evidence that informs strategic decision-making and course development;
- support the Institute’s quality assurance processes in alignment with regulatory requirements; and
- facilitate the implementation of improvements based on benchmarking outcomes.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all internal and external referencing and benchmarking activities conducted by or on behalf of HELI. The policy applies to all award courses.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
<i>External Benchmarking</i>	An external referencing process that utilises “a structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes, or performance outcomes. Its purpose is to identify comparative 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 with identified good practices across the sector” (TEQSA, 2019, p. 6).
<i>Internal Benchmarking</i>	A process of comparing performance, practices, or outcomes against the institution's own targets, standards, or historical performance, or among different units, programs, or entities within the same institutional group.
<i>External Referencing</i>	A “process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s); e.g., comparing the design of a course of study and/or student achievement of learning outcomes with that of a course from another provider” (TEQSA, 2019, p. 1). External referencing also includes comparison against professional standards, peer reviews, moderation processes, and benchmarking activities.
<i>Desktop Audit</i>	A review of documented evidence and data against established criteria without requiring site visits or direct observation.
<i>Peer Review</i>	A process of scrutiny or evaluation conducted by qualified individuals within the same field of expertise, who may be internal or external to the institution.

<i>External Moderation</i>	The process of engaging with external partners to validate and moderate assessment design, marking or grading, and student achievement standards.
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4. Policy Statement

HELI is committed to ensuring that the student experience and outcomes are informed by evidence and benchmarked against best practice in the sector and in the wider higher education community locally and internationally.

This policy, which is aligned to HELI’s Quality Framework, is designed to meet the Institute’s commitment to students and other internal and external stakeholders. The outcomes of external referencing and benchmarking provide evidence of the validity of current practice and/or clearly indicate areas for further improvement, as well as inform course reviews, strategic planning, and decision-making.

This policy is designed to meet Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 – Standards 1.4.1, 1.4.3, 1.4.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.4, 5.3.7 6.3.1, and 6.3.2.

5. External Referencing and Benchmarking Activities

External referencing and benchmarking activities can be a desktop audit, peer review, or external moderation with industry partners. Activities may include but are not limited to:

- **Organisational benchmarking** in which comparisons are made at the organisational level (institution, faculty/department, course, and unit). Examples include benchmarking course offerings, staff appointments, and non-academic activities.
- **Course benchmarking** of course design including benchmarking (e.g., peer review, desktop audit) of learning outcomes, assessment, rubrics, and student performance.
- **Process benchmarking** involving comparisons of particular processes and practices, such as admissions processes and student support processes.
- **Outcomes benchmarking** involving the comparison of outcomes data, including student satisfaction, student academic outcomes, and graduate outcomes.
- **Best practice benchmarking** involving selecting comparator(s) at the forefront in the area to be benchmarked, and may include comparisons of quality in teaching, research, and scholarship.

A Benchmarking Plan may be developed to outline the approach, phases and milestones for specific benchmarking activities.

6. Selection of Benchmarking Partners

The selection of appropriate benchmarking partners is critical to the success of benchmarking activities. Partners should be selected based on:

- Relevance to HELI’s strategic priorities and operational context
- Compatibility in terms of institutional profile, size, or specialisation
- Quality and reputation in the area being benchmarked

- Willingness to engage in a collaborative benchmarking process

7. Frequency and Scheduling

HELI will conduct external referencing and benchmarking activities according to the following schedule:

- Comprehensive course benchmarking: At least once during each course review cycle (normally 5 years)
- Student outcomes benchmarking: At least once every two years as part of quality assurance processes
- Ad hoc benchmarking: As required in response to identified risks, opportunities, or strategic initiatives

8. Confidentiality and Data Handling

All benchmarking activities must adhere to:

- Privacy legislation and HELI's Privacy Policy
- Confidentiality agreements established with benchmarking partners
- Ethical data collection and storage protocols
- Transparent reporting of findings while protecting sensitive information through measures such as:
 - Aggregation of data where individual performance cannot be identified
 - Exclusion of commercially sensitive or strategically confidential information from shared reports
 - Separate internal and external reporting formats with appropriate levels of detail for each audience

Staff involved in benchmarking activities must ensure all data shared with external parties is de-identified where appropriate and used only for the agreed benchmarking purpose.

9. Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the *Dean (Academic)*, *Dean (Research and Scholarship)*, *Deputy Dean (Programs)*, and *Registrar* to:

- Propose benchmarking activities to the Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Board;
- Implement and manage external referencing and benchmarking activities approved by the relevant governing body (or its committee);
- Identify appropriate external referencing and benchmarking partners;
- Formulate partnership agreements and initiate the collection and exchange of data;
- Manage and monitor benchmarking projects;
- Report on benchmarking outcomes and planned improvements; and
- Implement approved improvements derived from benchmarking data.

It is the responsibility of the *Learning and Teaching Committee* to:

- Determine which units undergo moderation;
- Evaluate benchmarking proposals;
- Submit proposals to the Academic Board for approval;
- Monitor ongoing benchmarking projects; and
- Report the outcome of the benchmarking activities and outcomes to the Academic Board.

It is the responsibility of the *Academic Board* to:

- Approve the proposal and partners for benchmarking projects;
- Evaluate the results of benchmarking projects;
- Report the results of benchmarking projects to the Board of Directors; and
- Oversee the implementation of improvements arising from benchmarking activities.

10. Reporting

The scope and results from all benchmarking projects will be reported to the Academic Board as a part of their normal monitoring and quality assurance responsibilities. Results will also be included in the *Annual Course Reports* and *Comprehensive Course Review Reports*.

All benchmarking activities will be summarised in the HELI *Benchmarking Register*.

11. Related Documents

- Assessment and Moderation Policy
- Course Development, Review, and Improvement Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Quality Framework
- Benchmarking Plan
- Benchmarking Register
- Learning and Teaching Plan

12. Related Legislation

- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011 (Cth)
- TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)
- Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000
- Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- The National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (The National Code)
- Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

13. Version Control

Document ID	Benchmarking Policy
Category	Quality
Document Owner	Dean (Academic)
Approved by	Academic Board

Version	Summary of changes	Approval date	Next review date
1.0	The policy was developed as a result of Academic Governance review and the existing benchmarking plan was included with the policy.	Academic Board: 2 December 2022	2 December 2024
1.1	Insertion of three new sections: <i>Selection of Benchmarking Partners, Frequency and Scheduling, Confidentiality and Data Handling.</i> Updates to titles and wording for clarity.	Academic Board: 6 June 2025	6 June 2027