
POLICY A5.3

EXTERNAL REFERENCING (INCLUDING BENCHMARKING)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

The AIM Business School (ABS) is a nationally accredited higher education provider and training institute offering postgraduate qualifications.

The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 requires providers to conduct external referencing to inform learning and teaching, and to inform the provider's continuous improvement. In the context of the Standards, external referencing means a process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with another provider.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate how external referencing assures the quality and standards of the courses, student outcomes, processes, operations, and governance.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to governance committees, Executive Director, ABS Academic Managers, Registrar, and any staff involved in review and continuous improvement activities.

1.4 Scope Exceptions

None.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

1. All staff involved in new course and unit design, development and review, governance and policy review, evaluation and continuous improvement activities should use external referencing to inform recommendations. The data collected through external referencing should be documented and be referred to in reports.
2. The Executive Director has overall responsibility for developing and implementing external referencing activities for academic programs and governance controls.
3. Specific responsibilities for key ABS staff are outlined in the External Referencing (including Benchmarking) procedure and the Course & Unit Lifecycle policy and procedure.

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4. The **Course Review Committee** is responsible for considering external referencing data when:
- overseeing periodic reviews of ABS course curricula and delivery, including comprehensive course reviews; and when reviewing the outcomes of the delivery performance of each individual course;
 - making recommendations to the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Academic Board on improvements or changes to the design and delivery of courses; and
 - overseeing the implementation of approved action plans.

Refer to the Course Review Committee Terms of Reference.

5. The **Course Advisory Committee** is responsible for reviewing external referencing data when:
- overseeing the design and development of a new courses and assessments to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of course content and design; and
 - making recommendations to the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Board on the structure and design of the new course.

Refer to the Course Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.

6. The **Assessment Review Committee** is responsible for considering student outcomes and external referencing data when making recommendations to the Teaching and Learning Committee on improvements to assessment strategies, tasks, marking criteria and processes.

Refer to the Assessment Review Committee Terms of Reference.

7. The **Education Partnerships Committee** is responsible for considering external referencing data when:
- undertaking audits and performance review of a third-party partner; and
 - making recommendations to the Teaching and Learning Committee.

Refer to the Education Partnerships Committee Terms of Reference.

8. The **Teaching and Learning Committee** is responsible for:
- monitoring and reporting on external referencing activities in relation to academic matters; and
 - reviewing external referencing data when considering recommendations made by its subcommittees, before endorsing and submitting to the Academic Board.

Refer to the Teaching and Learning Committee Terms of Reference.

9. The **Academic Board** is responsible for:

- considering and approving recommendations for external referencing raised by its committees in relation to academic matters, or that include arrangements with external organisations;
- setting the expectation that reviews on academic governance and quality include external referencing, and that any recommendations on changes to courses, units, learning and teaching should consider this data; and
- overseeing the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing recommendations.

Refer to the Academic Board Terms of Reference.

3.0 POLICY

3.1 Principles

1. External referencing processes, such as benchmarking, is a principle of Scenia's Quality Assurance Framework . ABS will use external reference points and higher education sector benchmarks to inform the development and review of plans, policies, procedures, practices, and new initiatives in relation to academic delivery and institutional practice.
2. As required by the Higher Education Standards (Standard 5.3), ABS uses external referencing to review:
 - course and units - assessment instruments, assessment moderation, learning outcomes
 - courses - course design, implementation, student learning outcomes
 - success of student cohorts - progression rates, attrition rates and completion rates (including comparison of location, delivery mode, student cohort and pathway),
 - at least every seven years, or 1 year prior to course re-accreditation by TEQSA if that is earlier, course performance and design as part of the. The course and Unit Lifecycle an Moderation policies and procedures outline how benchmarking will be used to review course and units.
3. ABS should use external referencing as part of regular reviews of the success of student cohorts. The findings will be used to improve areas such as admissions, course design, teaching, supervision, and learning and academic support.

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4. External referencing should also be used to review:
 - at risk units - curriculum, assessment, and outcomes
 - learning and teaching - comparison of number, type and relevance of qualities, pedagogy
 - governance - comparison of structures and practice
 - third party providers - student experience, outcomes, financial viability
 - staffing - comparison of staff ratios, criteria for academic employment
 - student support - services available in other institutions
 - scholarship - publications, conferences, higher qualification completion
 - policies and procedures
 5. The ABS Course and Unit Review and Benchmarking Schedule outlines the reviews planned, the external partners to be used and the areas responsible for overseeing and managing this process.
 6. While external referencing should inform improvements, decision-makers must consider the organisation's unique circumstances, scale and specific student cohort when accepting recommendations.
 7. ABS uses a variety of techniques to conduct external referencing - such as benchmarking and peer review - and uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

3.2 Benchmarking

1. Benchmarking is the most common type of external referencing used by ABS to compare one aspect of the organisation or its services with that of other higher education providers (national and international), providers considered best practice, peak bodies and organisations in other sectors.
2. Benchmarking is done through:
 - engaging one or more external organisations to conduct benchmarking and external review. This is particularly done when reviewing courses, learning and teaching, and governance.
 - a desk review, comparing publicly available information and market intelligence.
3. When conducting benchmarking with an external organisation, ABS must always establish a Memorandum of Understanding. The External Referencing (including Benchmarking) procedure provides details on setting up such arrangements. The External Referencing (Benchmarking) procedure provide details on responsibilities for various stages of the benchmarking process and provides staff with guidance on how to conduct benchmarking.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- **Benchmarking** - is 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.
- **External Referencing** - In the context of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HES Framework), external referencing means a process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s) (for example comparing the design of a course of study and/or student achievement of learning outcomes with that of a course from another provider).
- **Learning Outcomes** - The intended learning outcome is provided in writing, in the unit outline, prior to the commencement of teaching the unit. Learning outcomes serve as a reference point for the pre-assessment moderation of assessment tasks.
- **Student** - Refers to domestic and international ABS students.

5.0 REFERENCES AND ASSOCIATED INFORMATION

- External Referencing (including Benchmarking) Procedure
- Scentia, AIM, ABS Quality Assurance Framework
- ABS Review and Benchmarking Schedule
- Course and Unit Lifecycle Policy and Procedure
- Assessment Moderation Policy and Procedure

6.0 POLICY OWNERSHIP

Policy Owner	Executive Director, ABS
Status	Reviewed on May 2024
Approval Authority	ABS Academic Board
Date of Approval	25 June 2024
Effective Date	2 July 2024
Implementation Owner	Executive Director, ABS
Maintenance Owner	Head of Compliance
Review Due	May 2027
Content Enquiries	Sabina Cerimagic - Executive Director, ABS Email: sabina.cerimagic@aimbusinessschool.edu.au

7.0 AMENDMENTS

Version	Amendment Approval (Date)	Amendment Made By (Position)	Amendment Details
A5.0	11 March 2020	Academic Board	Initial document review
A5.1	14 September 2021	Director of Education	Rewrite to clarify responsibilities and specify how external referencing will be used.
A5.2	10 March 2023	Head of Compliance	Minor administrative change: update to staffing titles.
A5.3	25 June 2024	Executive Director	Update to staffing titles.