External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to specify the external referencing and benchmarking activities used by Western Sydney University International College (WSUIC) to assure the quality of its academic programs, support systems, governance and professional activities. WSUIC engages in all of the following types of benchmarking: organisational, course, process, outcomes, policy and best practice benchmarking.

1.2 External referencing and benchmarking are used by WSUIC to:

1.2.1 Provide evidence of the quality and standing of WSUIC's operations and course offerings

1.2.2 Provide an external evidence base to identify key areas for improvement and ways to enhance all of WSUIC's activities, but especially student outcomes

1.2.3 Support collaborative improvement efforts through external benchmarking networks of which WSUIC is a member, in particular in the Higher Education Private Providers' Quality Network.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all of the components of the WSUIC integrated Risk, Quality and Standards Framework (RQSF) and to all aspects of WSUIC provision.

3. Definitions

"Benchmarking"
Refers to a structured, collaborative, learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes. It is used to evaluate performance by comparing WSUIC practices to those of selected education providers with a view to identifying comparative strengths and weaknesses, as a basis for developing improvements in academic quality or performance. (TEQSA Guidance Note on External Referencing & Benchmarking 2018)

Benchmarking can also be defined as a quality process used to evaluate performance by comparing institutional practices with identified good practices across the sector.

Benchmarking can be either internal or external and can be used to both prove and improve quality.

"Course"
A formal program of study made up of study components known as Units.

Any hardcopy (printed) version of this document is to be regarded as uncontrolled. The current revision can only be verified by direct reference to the Amendment History of the document on the Shared Point web site

"External referencing"
A process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with external comparator(s). This can, for example involve comparing the design of a course of study and/or student achievement of learning outcomes with that of a course from another provider. (TEQSA Guidance Note on External Referencing & Benchmarking 2018)

"HESF (Threshold Standards)"
Higher Education Standards Framework.

"KPIs"
Key Performance Indicators

"HEPPQN"
Higher Education Private Providers Quality Network.
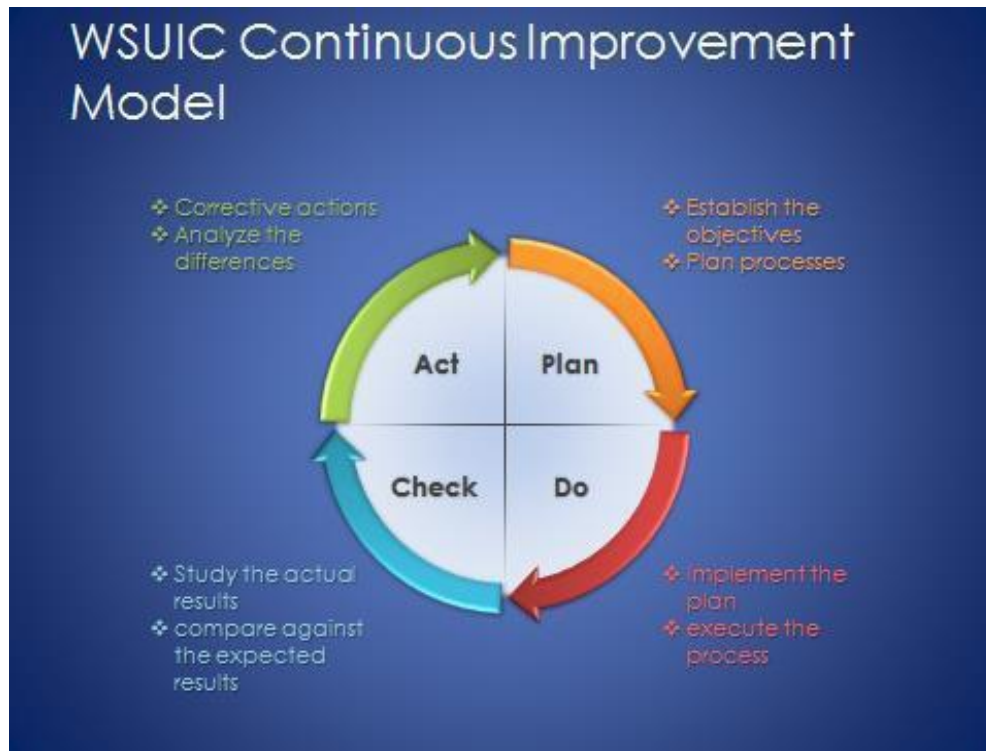
"TEQSA"
The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

4.   Policy Statement

4.1   WSUIC is committed to undertaking benchmarking activities that promote best practice in course design, support, delivery and student outcomes.

4.2   This policy has been developed in line with the requirements set out in the HESF (Threshold Standards), the 2018 TEQSA Guidance Note on External Referencing and Benchmarking and with reference to a range of parallel policies in public and private Higher Education Providers. WSUIC uses its internationally benchmarked RQSF to guide its external referencing and benchmarking. In doing this, WSUIC seeks to:

4.2.1   Compare the standards of its performance on course design, support, teaching and student outcomes with other comparable Higher Education Providers

4.2.2   Benchmark academic achievement in terms of admission criteria, academic rigour, student performance data and student satisfaction

4.2.3   Systematically identify priority areas for improvement, effective ways to address these and to ensure they are addressed promptly, consistently and effectively

4.2.4   Enhance student outcomes through activities that support its mission, vision, core values and strategic priorities and to

4.2.5   Provide reports on external referencing outcomes through the WSUIC Academic Board to the WSUIC Board of Directors.

4.3   WSUIC recognises that external referencing and benchmarking focus areas need to be commensurate with WSUIC's specific mission, vision, student needs, marketing positioning, operating context, institutional profile and scale of operations.

5. Benchmarking Methodology

5.1 WSUIC seeks to ensure continuous quality improvement and assurance by applying the proven plan, do, check, act (PDCA) approach successfully used by many higher education providers.

5.2 The PDCA framework ensures continuous quality assurance and improvement through the collation of data, comparative analysis, the identification of agreed areas for enhancement action and then implementation monitoring to ensure these improvement strategies are effective. External input from selected benchmarking partners helps identify proven ways to address agreed quality improvement priorities and provides additional insights and opportunities for improvement against best practice models.

5.3 The components and performance benchmarks identified in the WSUIC RQSF and Meade's Model of Benchmarking Procedure are used to ensure that WSUIC's approach to external referencing and benchmarking is systematic and comprehensive.

6. Academic Governance and Accountability

6.1 The WSUIC Academic Quality Committee (AQC) and Academic Director are responsible for monitoring the quality of WSUIC performance in all of the areas identified in the RQSF and for benchmarking this performance against selected external benchmarking partners.

6.2 Regular tracking and improvement reports developed by the AQC using benchmarked trend data on all aspects of WSUIC performance are presented to the Academic Board by the Academic Director. These AQC reports identify key areas of good practice against WSUIC's performance standards and suggested priority areas for improvement, along with solutions

identified through internal and external benchmarking.

6.3   The WSUIC Academic Board checks the veracity of the data and analysis in these reports, then agrees on key areas of good practice and priority areas for improvement action. Their analysis and the performance report with their recommendations are forwarded to the WSUIC Board of Directors for approval

6.4   The AQC and the Academic Director are responsible for ensuring that the agreed areas for quality improvement and the good practice solutions identified through benchmarking are implemented promptly, wisely and effectively.

6.5   All information gathered as part of any external moderation or benchmarking is to be treated as confidential and how the data will be shared and used must be agreed in advance by the partners.

7.   Selecting External Referencing Partners

7.1   WSUIC will identify partners from the wider higher education community to undertake external referencing activities, benchmarking, moderation and peer review. HEPPQN is one of the key network partners for benchmarking.

7.2   Benchmarking partners will be identified as those HEPs who have similar missions and operating contexts to WSUIC and who are performing well against the key performance standards identified in the WSUIC RQSF. It may also be relevant at times to select benchmarking partners who are quite different to WSUIC but who are recognised as leading the sector in the quality of their approach to learning and teaching.

7.3   A Memorandum of Understanding will be signed with a proposed benchmarking partner identifying the parameters of the benchmarking to take place, the methodology that will be used, the release of benchmarking outcome data and covering confidentiality to protect intellectual property for both parties.

7.4   For course and unit reviews WSUIC will identify other providers who are delivering the same units of study with successful learning outcomes and a comparable student cohort.

8.   Benchmarking Schedule

To meet its external referencing regulatory requirements, WSUIC will conduct ongoing benchmarking exercises with agreed partners in the following areas:

8.1   Benchmarking in the WSUIC Course Development and Review Process

8.1.1   Review and improvement of Courses is informed by the WSUIC Course Design, Approval, Review and Discontinuation Policy and are based on a range of inputs including:

8.1.1.1   Formal feedback (e.g. graduate tracer studies) from Western Sydney University (WSU)/WSU The College (WSTC)

8.1.1.2   Pass rates in comparable courses and units of study at WSTC and within Navitas

and other benchmarking partners

8.1.1.3 Pass rates in comparable courses and units of study at WSTC

8.1.1.4 Retention rates in comparable courses and units of study at WSTC and within Navitas and other external benchmarking partners

8.1.1.5 AQC analysis of grade distributions

8.1.1.6 Student satisfaction survey data

8.1.1.7 Feedback provided by TEQSA and/or other regulators

8.1.1.8 Comparative trends in market demand

8.1.1.9 The ACODE benchmarks on assuring the quality of technology enabled learning.

8.1.2 Development of new courses is undertaken on the basis of input from a range of internal and external stakeholders, and will draw heavily on the curriculum of first year courses offered by WSU.

8.1.3 The process engages input from WSUIC staff and their industry-linked connections, governance structures (refer to Section 6), various professional accreditation bodies (e.g. Engineers Australia, The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) as well as insights from WSU/WSTC, other Navitas colleges and colleges from the wider HEP community. The internationally benchmarked FLIPCurric site is used to ensure that the quality of course outcomes, design, assessment and moderation is benchmarked against key externally agreed quality checkpoints.

8.2. Benchmarking of Assessment

8.2.1 Benchmarking processes used to monitor the quality of assessment can include the analysis by the AQC of historical data for the same unit over time including:

8.2.1.1 Comparisons against the same unit delivered by WSU/WSTC;

8.2.1.2 Comparisons against similar Courses delivered by Navitas colleges and other external benchmarking partners;

8.2.1.3 Cross marking and peer review of assessment tasks using the grading and calibration sections of the FLIPCurric site as benchmarks;

8.2.1.4 Feedback/recommendations provided by teaching colleagues and/or moderator on assessment, calibration and grading.

8.3. Benchmarking of Student Satisfaction

8.3.1 The collection and analysis of student feedback is a vital component of the benchmarking process and WSUIC ensures regular feedback is collected, collated and compared over time and against equivalent cohorts.

8.3.2 WSUIC utilises the following surveys to gauge how it compares to other HEPs and where it might focus its improvement initiatives:

    8.3.2.1   WSU and Navitas-linked surveys that benchmark WSUIC against WSU/WSTC and other Navitas colleges in the areas of student satisfaction, graduate satisfaction and staff satisfaction over time

    8.3.2.2   Internal surveys that gauge student satisfaction in relation to new arrival processes

    8.3.2.3   Student Feedback on Unit (SFU) surveys (linked to unit content/delivery), Student Feedback on Teacher (SFT) surveys (linked to teacher satisfaction) and feedback on Support Services and College Environment survey (linked to student support team and overall college environment satisfaction) benchmarked over time, across units and against WSTC. Whenever possible, comparable data will be sought from WSU.

    8.3.2.4   Participation in miscellaneous surveys that offer comparative data that may be offered from time to time.

8.3.3   Survey outcomes are benchmarked against WSUIC performance standards and external best practice models, bearing in mind WSUIC's scale of operations as well as its mission, vision, core values and strategic priorities.

8.4.   Benchmarking of Admissions

8.4.1   Benchmarking entry requirements is in line with established WSUIC English language and academic entry qualification requirements.

8.4.2   Academic benchmarking is confirmed as complying with the specifications in the Australian Qualifications Framework (www.aqf.edu.au).

8.4.3   Academic and English requirements for each course are separately determined with reference to the standards for direct entry into WSU.

8.4.4   Entry standards reflect the standards set in collaboration with WSU. These standards are monitored and endorsed by WSU on an ongoing basis.

8.4.5   Admissions benchmarking seeks to assure quality in each of the following areas: marketing; online applications; advanced standing; agents; English testing; special needs students; WSU entry guidelines; and ESOS guidelines.

8.5.   Benchmarking against the WSUIC Risk Management Framework

8.5.1   This policy relates to both academic and non-academic governance matters**.**

8.5.2   The WSUIC Risk and Compliance Committee (RCC) identifies and monitors WSUIC's performance in all of the areas it identifies as priorities for risk management. The RCC monitors and gives reports to the Board of Directors on:

    8.5.2.1 Business reset & transformation
    8.5.2.2 Business resilience
    8.5.2.3 Competition & Disruption

8.5.2.4   Complaints Management

8.5.2.5   Cyber security

8.5.2.6   Data & Technology

8.5.2.7   Debt and Liquidity Management

8.5.2.8   Govt Regulation and Policy

8.5.2.9   Learning and Teaching

8.5.2.10 Legal and regulatory compliance

8.5.2.11 People and culture

8.5.2.12 Reduced demand for international education

8.5.2.13 Staff & Student Safety & Wellbeing

8.5.2.14 Student Debt

8.5.2.15 Student Mobility

8.5.2.16 Third party risk

9.   Quality and Compliance

9.1   This policy is reviewed periodically (at a minimum every two years) to ensure regulatory compliance, operational currency, the identification of continuous improvement opportunities and risk identification and mitigation. This review is reflected in WSUIC's Quality Management Framework and Risk Management Framework.

9.2   This policy will be available on the WSUIC website for students and the WSUIC SharePoint site for staff access.

9.3   Emails will be issued to all staff to inform and update them on any changes to the policy and/or procedures and guidelines.

9.4   New staff will receive policy information during the induction process where it relates to their position.

10.   Related Forms and Documents

- Non-disclosure (Confidentiality) Deed and Mutual Obligation template, refer to the file embedded in Appendix A.

- External Unit Benchmarking and Review questions, refer to Appendix B

11.   Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines and Legislation

- POL 27 WSUIC Course Design, Approval, Review and Discontinuation Policy

- POL 04 WSUIC Assessment and Moderation Policy

- Higher Education Standards Framework (HEF) 2015 Standard 5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement

- TEQSA Guidance Note on External Referencing and Benchmarking, July 2018

- FRA03 WSUIC Integrated Risk, Quality and Standards Framework

- Meade's Model of Benchmarking Procedure (from Benchmarking: A Manual for Australian Universities)

Approval and Amendment History

Approval Authority:	Western Sydney University International College Academic Board
Policy Owners:	Academic Director/Academic Leadership Team
Approval Date:	3 May 2019
Date for Next Review:	21st August 2025

Amendments		
Revision Date	**Version**	**Summary of changes**
October 2017	1.0	New Policy Developed
03/05/2019	1.1	Minor formatting changes and corrections to typographical errors throughout the document Section 7.1 rephrased and reference to International College of Management removed
06/07/2021	1.1	No amendments
22/08/2023	1.2	Amendment to Clause 8.5.2 for risks as per WSUIC Risk Register and updates to Clause 10: related forms and documents.

Appendix A

Non-disclosure (Confidentiality) Deed and Mutual Obligation template.

Non disclosure
(Confidentiality) Dee

Appendix B

Unit Review Questionnaire to the Reviewer

Justify your response to the below questions 1-7:

1. Does the unit documentation clearly present the rationale, objectives, structure, learning outcomes, assessment approaches and mandatory requirements?

2. Does the unit documentation show that the unit has an overall coherence (alignment between Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs) and assessment items)?

3. Are the Unit Learning Outcomes appropriate for the AQF 5 qualification level?

4. Do the prescribed texts and other learning materials suit the curriculum design and will they ensure that students can achieve the unit learning outcomes?

5. Do the methods of assessment and the assessment tasks enable students to demonstrate attainment of the relevant ULO's and relevant CLO's?

6. Is the description of the performance standards (e.g. marking guide/marking criteria/assessment rubric) appropriate to the specified ULO's and relevant CLO's?

7. Are there other matters which are not covered in above questions that you wish to draw to the attention of the Course Convenor?

8. Optional - We are always looking for techniques to increase student engagement with our unit. If you have any good tips, techniques or suggestions, they would be welcome.