

Benchmarking Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction

The Benchmarking Policy and Procedure will outline the processes for undertaking benchmarking activities at the Australian Performing Arts Conservatory's (APAC) and the type of activities that will occur. This policy and procedure acknowledges the overview of benchmarking provided in the 'TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)'.

1.1. Purpose

This policy and procedure provides a framework for benchmarking of the APAC higher education curriculum and teaching and learning practices. It serves to promote best practice and compare outcomes that lead to continuous improvement across all aspects of courses delivered by APAC.

1.2. Scope

This applies to all staff, members of boards, contractors and consultants engaged in work for APAC.

1.3. Principles

APAC will engage in:

- Using external reference points, including benchmarking in particular, to assure the quality of APAC's provision of education.
- Regularly comparing teaching and learning outcomes against other higher education providers (HEPs).
- Regularly benchmarking higher education courses to ensure that they are innovative and remain current.
- Continuous improvement to strive for best practice.

2. Policy Statements

APAC is committed to consistency with the requirements set out in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HESF).

2.1. Course Benchmarking

The HESF requires benchmarking activities be conducted at least once every seven years as part of comprehensive course reviews. The Academic Board will implement cyclical reviews of the curriculum as per the Course Development and Review Policy and Procedure. A Course Advisory Committee may be appointed to assist in this purpose.

A comparative analysis will be undertaken against other similar courses and include:

- Course Structure

- Course Content and Assessment
- Course Resources
- Any other matters identified from student performance data and student and lecturer feedback.
- Other data to inform the course benchmarking exercise.

The Teaching and Learning Plan should also be used to inform this exercise, taking account of the strategies and measures listed in the Teaching and Learning Plan, and to determine if the Teaching and Learning Plan should be recalibrated or reviewed taking note of findings arising from the course review process.

2.2. Outcomes Benchmarking

Benchmarking of course outcomes and teaching and learning outcomes will be undertaken annually and may include participation in an external benchmarking consortium or similar activity. The aim will be to compare teaching and learning outcomes from a range of non-university higher education providers and use the results to identify areas for improvement and acknowledge good practice. The results should also be analysed to reveal variations and to establish whether those variations arise from the individual nature of the courses or the student cohorts, or from variations in quality or academic standards

The findings from outcomes benchmarking should be analysed in conjunction with the strategies and measures in the Teaching and Learning Plan, particularly in areas relating to student satisfaction survey measures and attrition, progression, and retention rates.

2.3. Other Benchmarking

APAC may undertake other benchmarking activities such as comparisons of processes and practices, non-academic benchmarking, or specific best practice activities.

3. Procedures

The following five steps are a guide for APAC benchmarking processing:

- 3.1.1. Planning- prior to engaging in benchmarking, relevant stake holders are to identify the activities that need to be benchmarked.
- 3.1.2. Collection of information- measure key metrics and practices within business areas, against competitors, industry peers or other providers both domestically and internationally.
- 3.1.3. Analysis- identify and classify any performance deficiencies, including areas of risk of noncompliance with the HESF; identify and classify examples of good or improved practice that might be adopted.
- 3.1.4. Implementation- a formal action plan should be formulated ensuring that stakeholders are fully committed to the process and there are sufficient resources in place to facilitate improvements.

3.1.5. Monitoring- a systematic evaluation should be carried out on a regular basis.

All information gathered as part of benchmarking activities is to be treated as confidential. Permission should be sought and granted from the Higher Education Director for academic matters and the Chief Executive Officer for other matters before any external communication relating to benchmarking outcomes.

A benchmarking partner or partners should be selected and a Memorandum of Understanding prepared. Ideally a benchmarking project manager will be appointed to oversee the project. The elements to be benchmarked should be outlined in a proposal.

Benchmarking proposals to the Academic Board:

- Outline the purpose and scope of the benchmarking activity.
- Identify whether the benchmarking activity is a one-off project or an annual activity.
- Identify the areas of performance to be benchmarked.
- Include the planned approach and methodology.
- List partner institutions.
- Identify resources required to complete the exercise.
- Include information on the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of findings, including how recommendations will be actioned and resourcing required.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. The Academic Board

As the approval authority, the Academic Board will have oversight of academic benchmarking activities and this policy on completion of the benchmarking exercise, the Academic Board should review and endorse the Benchmarking Report.

4.2. The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for identifying any non-academic benchmarking activities, which may be delegated to Executive Management.

4.3. The Director of Higher Education

The Director of Higher Education is responsible for initiating a benchmarking project and the approval of benchmarking partners.

4.4. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The CEO is responsible for initiating non-academic benchmarking activities and the approval of activity timings and partners.

4.5. All Students

Students have a responsibility to contribute to quality assurance and quality improvement, including participating constructively in benchmarking activities.

5. Relevant Documents

- APAC Quality Assurance Framework
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act)
- TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking), April 2019.
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

6. Definitions

- **Benchmark** is a point of reference against which something may be measured.
- **Benchmarking** is 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. Benchmarking can also be defined as a quality process used to evaluate performance by comparing institutional practices to sector good practice.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** is a document that records the common intent of two or more parties where the parties do not wish to assume legally binding obligations. A MOU provides a framework and set of principles to guide the parties in undertaking a project or working arrangement.

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