

# External Referencing and Benchmarking Plan

<b>Supporting plans, policies and procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External Referencing Policy</li> <li>Learning and Teaching Plan</li> <li>Course and Subject Creation, Development and Continuous Improvement Policy and Procedure</li> </ul>
<b>Related Legislation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021</li> <li>Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011</li> <li>Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) <i>Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)</i> Version 2.5 16 April 2019.</li> </ul>
<b>Version</b>	2.0
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board
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<b>Document Review</b>	This plan is to be reviewed every two-years at a minimum from the date of final approval

Version	Review Date and Person/Body	Notes
0.1	Developed and reviewed by Learning and Teaching Committee in May and June 2020	
1.0	Approved by the Academic Board on 16 June 2020	
1.1	Approved by the Academic Board on 20 October 2020	Updated based on further internal and external review
2.0	Reviewed and approved by the Academic Board via email circulation on 23 July 2021	Updates made following the response to the TEQSA Request for Information 23 July 2021

## Background and Scope

This plan outlines MIHE's approach to external referencing to inform, reference and help achieve academic quality and outcomes with a specific focus on Institutional Quality Assurance.

The plan details the actions MIHE has in place to ensure appropriate levels of external referencing (including benchmarking) is undertaken with other higher education institutions to effectively compare and inform all aspects of its operations, e.g. comparing the design of a course of study and/or student support services. The information obtained from these exercises will be used to improve the entirety of MIHE's operations.

External referencing can take the form of benchmarking, peer review and moderation. The purpose for undertaking external referencing activities are typically related to<sup>1</sup>:

- Providing evidence of the quality and standing of a provider's operations,
- Offering an external evidence base as context for the development of internal improvements, especially to student outcomes, and
- Establishing or fostering collaborative improvement efforts across providers.

The plan should be read in conjunction with the MIHE *External Referencing Policy*.

<sup>1</sup> As provided in TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)

## Definitions

Assessment means a process to determine a student's achievement of identified learning outcomes and may include a range of written and oral methods and practice or demonstration<sup>2</sup>.

Assessment Moderation (External)<sup>3</sup> means Quality Assurance, control processes and activities such as peer review that aim to assure:

- Consistency or comparability, appropriateness, and fairness of assessment judgments
- The validity and reliability of assessment tasks, criteria and standards.

Moderation of assessment processes establish comparability of standards of student performance across, for example, different markers, locations, subjects, providers and/or courses of study.

Benchmark means a point of reference against which something can be measured.

Benchmarking<sup>4</sup>- a form of external referencing- 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 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.

The purpose of benchmarking is not to standardise all courses and all assessment outcomes, but to reveal variations, and establish whether those variations arise from the individual nature of the courses or the student cohorts, or from variations in quality or academic standards.

External Referencing<sup>5</sup> means 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. It includes external benchmarking, external review, external moderation.

Refer to Glossary of Terms.

## Internal and External - Referencing Activities

*Internal* activities take the form of assignment and exam moderation which is conducted using the expertise available to MIHE via its academic staff, Learning and Teaching Committee members and Academic Board.

The aim of this moderation is to ensure that marks/grades are fair, valid and reliable for all students, that markers are accountable and to facilitate continuous improvement.

Details regarding these internal activities are outlined in the MIHE *Assessment and Moderation Policy and Procedure*.

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<sup>2</sup> As defined by the TEQSA Glossary of Terms

<sup>3</sup> As defined by the TEQSA Glossary of Terms

<sup>4</sup> As provided in TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)

<sup>5</sup> As provided in the TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking).

MIHE will identify and monitor standards and performance for improving MIHE's processes, outcomes and practices. External referencing will be integrated into the operations of MIHE by the regular analysis of collected data and utilise the outcomes to improve performance. *External* activities take the form of external peer review, external moderation and external benchmarking and are detailed in this plan.

### Types of Benchmarking

MIHE will undertake five key streams of benchmarking<sup>6</sup>:

1. **Organisational** benchmarking in which comparisons are made at the organisational level, e.g. Institutional, Faculty/Department, School, Course, Unit levels.
2. **Course** benchmarking of course design and student performance.
3. **Process** benchmarking involving comparisons of particular processes and practices e.g. of cycle times, efficiency.
4. **Outcomes** benchmarking relating to the comparison of outcomes data, especially student outcomes such as attrition and completion rates.
5. **Best-practice** benchmarking in which MIHE selects a comparator thought to be at the forefront in the area to be benchmarked.

In addition to these areas, MIHE Governance committees may from time-to-time determine any miscellaneous activities for external referencing.

Key considerations taken into account during any external referencing exercise relates to whether the data is reliable, and whether true comparisons are being made.

It is necessary to establish trust between the parties to ensure stakeholders are open and honest with their discussions and that confidentiality of information is maintained. MIHE works within the parameters of its external referencing mechanisms- detailed below- in furtherance of these objectives.

### External - Benchmarking and Peer Review

External referencing offers MIHE the opportunity to compare a broad spectrum of topics/areas within its operational scope. Topics/areas for benchmarking/peer review are detailed in the table below. Note- This is not presented as an exhaustive list of topics/areas.

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<sup>6</sup> As provided in TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking).

## External Referencing and Benchmarking Plan

<b>Organisational</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Best-Practice</b>
Academic Staffing Levels by Classification (i.e. FT/PT/Casual)	Mode of Study/Delivery (online, blended, face to face)	Internal Moderation Activities	Attrition Rate	Staff Recruitment and Selection
Academic Staff Qualifications (AQF+1)	Student Contact Hours	Internal Moderation Frequency	Progression Rate	Academic Integrity
Scholarship Output	Student Satisfaction	External Moderation Activities	Completion Rate	Academic Governance
Student to Staff Ratio	Assessment Types and Quantity	External Moderation Frequency	Completion Time	Academic Grievance and Complaints
Governance Structures	Unit Outlines	Orientation	International and Domestic Student Outcomes	Student Selection and Admissions
Corporate Governance Performance	Grade Distribution	Detection of 'At Risk' Students	Entry Pathway Outcomes	Moderation
Academic Learning Support	Student Feedback Timelines		Graduation Rates	Advanced Standing/Recognition of Prior Learning
ICT Student Support	Group Work Percentage		Post-Graduation	English Language Requirements
ICT Facilities and Infrastructure	Entry Pathways		Assessment Outcomes by Type	Student Appeals
Library and Learning Resources	Entry Requirements		Assessment Outcomes by Unit	Quality Assurance Framework
Facilities	Course Learning Outcomes			
Academic Staff Availability	Achievement of Learning Outcomes			
Learning Environment	Course Design and Structure			
	Workload Expectations			

### External - Benchmarking and Peer Review Procedure

The MIHE approach to external benchmarking and peer review is based on that presented in Appendix B of the *TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)* and is detailed below<sup>7</sup>. The process has been adapted to suit MIHE.

#### Phase 1: Concept and Scope

<sup>7</sup> As provided in TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)- Appendix B

Determine the type of external referencing to use, how to undertake it and with whom.

### Phase 2: Plan and Design

Identify and agree on the project's objectives, scope (as well as what is not in scope), schedule, allocation of tasks, timelines and deliverables and development of a project plan, project team, reference group, and communication plan.

### Phase 3: Self-review

- Plan self-review activities
- Identify key stakeholders to provide information
- Develop institutional context statements
- Collect evidence from sources and stakeholders as required

### Phase 4: Undertake Benchmarking/Peer Review

Conduct benchmarking/peer review 'workshop' (face-to-face and/or online) with partners comparing processes and data. The key aims of the workshop are:

- To identify areas of good practice
- To identify areas for improvement
- To identify areas for sharing and collaboration.

### Phase 5: Communicate and Implement Improvements

Develop reports to communicate the findings from phase 4 internally- including Governance reporting- and implement approved and agreed upon improvements.

The results of the exercise may require MIHE to undertake a more investigative approach to fully understand the results and to identify improvements.

### Phase 6: Evaluate and Review

Evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented improvements and report outcomes of review/evaluation to Governance committees as appropriate.

## External - Moderation

External moderation undertaken by MIHE includes the moderation of Unit Outlines, Assessment Briefs and Student Works such as examinations, quizzes and assignments. Moderators are selected by MIHE and are disciplinary experts external to MIHE. Feedback obtained from external moderation is used to inform continuous improvements within MIHE academic operations.

### External - Moderation Procedure:

1. The Dean selects the units and assessments to be externally moderated. Criteria for selection may include:
  - a) It is the first time the unit has been offered;
  - b) There is a new lecturer or assessment type;
  - c) There has been poor student feedback;

- d) There have been poor student results.
2. The Dean identifies and engages external reviewers who are suitably qualified and experienced.
3. The Dean prepares the moderation schedule.
4. The Dean provides external reviewers with instructions relating to completing the process, including timelines to be met.
5. The Dean sends the materials and the template report to the external reviewers for completion.
6. External reviewers undertake the process reporting their findings on the template provided.
7. The Dean reviews the reports and prepares a summary report which is then tabled at the MIHE examiners committee.
8. Recommendations from the external moderation process inform future assessment design and course development.

### External Referencing Mechanisms

MIHE undertakes external referencing via numerous mechanisms/platforms:

Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA): As a member of IHEA, MIHE participates in IHEA External Referencing activities with fellow members as offered by the peak body.

Peer Review Portal (<https://www.peerreviewportal.com/home>): MIHE utilises the Peer review portal which allows for external referencing activities spanning areas/topics such as:

- Course Design
- Methods of Assessment
- Student Achievement of Learning Outcomes
- Policies and Procedures

Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT): funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, QILT are a collection of government endorsed surveys for higher education providers. The surveys span the entire student life cycle from commencement to employment. Participation in QILT enables MIHE to access robust, nationally consistent performance data for Australian higher education, which contributes to internal quality improvement.

### Cyclical Reviews

As part of MIHE Governance and Quality Assurance mechanisms, MIHE policy dictates that periodic reviews of MIHE course/s, Governance etc. be undertaken to ensure ongoing compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021

These reviews form a component of MIHE external referencing activities, but do not replace annual external referencing undertaken via the mechanisms detailed in this plan.

### Reporting

Critical to the usefulness of external referencing is the use of information to improve upon MIHE operations. To further this objective, reports and recommendations that arise from MIHE's external referencing activities are presented to the MIHE Academic Board periodically.

Reports customarily include:

- Areas for improvement and good practice identified via external referencing activities;
- Analysis as to the reasons for any variation or commonality identified;
- Improvement strategies as developed by MIHE in response to findings;
- Action plans for implementation of strategies;
- Reviews/progress reports against implemented actions.

This reporting mechanism ensures follow through on external referencing outcomes to ensure continuous improvement throughout MIHE operations.