Meeting the standard for tourism, hospitality and events: External referencing pilot project

Project report

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings, outcomes and recommendations of the *Meeting the standard for tourism, hospitality and events* external referencing pilot project (the 'Project'). The Project involved a collaborative process for external referencing of the tourism, hospitality and events (TH&E) academic achievement of standards. Peers who are acknowledged discipline experts, reviewed and reported on the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes.

The purpose of the Project was to develop and test a collaborative end-to-end process by which participating Chapter member institutions agreed to collaborate in referencing the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of the TH&E TLOs at unit level. The following external referencing and benchmarking projects were used to assist in the development the methodology and processes: External Referencing of Standards (ERoS) (Bedford, 2016); and Achievement matters: external peer review of accounting learning standards (Hancock et al.).

The Project built on the work of Setting the Standard: Establishing Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for Tourism, Hospitality and Events Higher Education (Whitelaw, Benckendorff, Gross, Mair, & Jose, 2015). In particular, this referencing process focussed on student achievement of the TH&E Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (Whitelaw et al., 2015) (the 'Standards') including unit learning outcomes, assessment methods and Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). The Project was conducted over an eight-month period commencing in September 2016.

In August 2015, CAUTHE members voted unanimously that CAUTHE should become the custodian of the Standards. This role would involve activities including facilitation of annual Standards meetings and calibration workshops and use of the Standards as a basis for discussions around good pedagogy and assessment design. A number of colleagues expressed interest in participating in a pilot peer-review of assessment project. In September 2016, the Executive committee approved a proposal that the project be offered to CAUTHE Chapter members, with a project report to be presented at the 2017 Mid-year meeting. The Project team was comprised of acknowledged experts in the tourism, hospitality and event management fields, many of whom had been involved with the original Setting the Standard project.

The Project methodology included identification of unit learning outcomes, TLOs and their alignment to assessment methods and student work samples. It asked for a review of the suitability of the learning outcomes for the unit against the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and whether the method of assessment was appropriate to demonstrate attainment of the TLOs. The approach focussed on assessment standards in units of study ('units') drawn from the final year of courses, such as capstone units. Project leaders matched participants from disciplines teaching similar units. The Project team chose not to use the double 'blind' peer review methodology (favoured in other similar projects). Instead the methodology called for a transparent and open process of collaboration modelled on the ERoS project approach.

The Project was conducted over eight months and achieved the aim to provide an effective, relatively efficient, comprehensive process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating institutions. While the approach was largely successful, several opportunities for improvements were recommended. It should be noted that several factors impeded or had the potential to impede the progress of reviews.

1. *Adequacy of unit information:* The unit structure and its context needed to be more specific. Participants felt that they would have benefitted from additional triad meetings. There was a need to specify the number of assessment items, for example, the whole assessment regime, to maximise the opportunities to confirm that all relevant specified TLOs and ULOs are achieved.

2. *Lack of a calibration process:* Calibration is crucial to generating a shared understanding and consensus about assessments and outcome standards in comparable units being taught in different institutions. The need for involvement of industry representatives to provide input into this process was also noted.

3. *Use of a suitable online tool:* While most participants found *Dropbox* worked well, this software was not supported at one institution. Further, the manual collation of responses including reference report feedback, reflections and lessons learned at the completion of the Project was time consuming. This highlights the need for a suitable online peer review tool with functionality to manage the process.

4. *The cost of time per unit per institution:* Administration of the process is potentially the area where a project of this nature succeeds or fails. In future projects it may be helpful to use standardised online templates to systematically gather data on time spent. This can be used to provide future participants a more accurate estimate of time required, data on the costs of the processes, benefits for individuals and institutions and, consequently, sustainability.

Project outputs include:

1. Establishing a sustainable TH&E sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality by creating a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking process.

2. Supporting CAUTHE members to meet the requirements of the HESF Threshold Standards by developing and testing a collaborative end-to-end process to effectively support the external peer review of assessment methods and grading of students' achievement against the TH&E TLOs.

3. Disseminating project outcomes, findings and recommendations including additional online assessment exemplars to leverage project outcomes and achieve impact.

4. Developing a set of principles of engagement to guide further work in the area.

The Project team recommends that:

1. CAUTHE commits to continue to facilitate peer-review of assessment for Chapters, and possibly extend the invitation to interested international Affiliate member institutions.

2. CAUTHE continue to meet Secretariat costs to provide coordination and administrative support for up to 7.5 hours/month.

3. The Project team implement improvements to the process to address the issues which impeded progress of the reviews, including:

   a. Adequacy of information for the unit being reviewed:

      i. schedule additional triad meetings to facilitate better understanding of the context and opportunity to provide clarity about the assessment tasks

      ii. request the complete assessment regime for each unit.

   b. Calibration: offer calibration workshops twice per year in conjunction with other CAUTHE events, for example at the Annual conference and Mid-year meeting.

   c. Online tool: investigate the cost of a suitable online peer review tool to expedite data collection, collation and reporting.

   d. Resource implications and scalability: use standardised online templates to systematically gather data on time spent.

4. The Project team use the body of material collected from calibration workshops to review standards (as published) in 5 years (June 2020).

Introduction

This report presents the findings, outcomes and recommendations of the *Meeting the standard for tourism, hospitality and events* external referencing pilot project (the 'Project'). The Project involved a collaborative process for external referencing of the tourism, hospitality and events (TH&E) academic achievement of standards. Peers who are acknowledged experts in the tourism, hospitality and events fields reviewed and reported on the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes. The project sought to provide evidence that assessments and grading standards are appropriate and broadly comparable with those assessment practices occurring in other similar courses elsewhere.

The Project built on the work of three key projects:

- Setting the Standard: Establishing Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for Tourism, Hospitality and Events Higher Education (Whitelaw et al., 2015), which produced a set of nationally agreed upon and clearly articulated TLOs for tourism, hospitality and events higher education coursework programs at Australian Qualification Framework bachelor (level 7) and coursework masters (level 9)

- External Referencing of Standards (ERoS) (Bedford, 2016)

- Achievement matters: external peer review of accounting learning standards (Hancock et al.)

In particular, this referencing process focussed on student achievement of the TH&E Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (Whitelaw et al., 2015) (the 'Standards') including unit learning outcomes, assessment methods and Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). The Project was conducted over an eight-month period commencing in September 2016 and included a half-day face-to-face workshop prior to the CAUTHE 2017 conference.

Project background and purpose

The purpose of the Project was to develop and test a collaborative end-to-end process by which participating institutions agreed to collaborate in referencing the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of the TH&E TLOs at unit level.

'Referencing' in the Project means the assessment and report provided by a peer with knowledge and expertise from a comparable unit of study, based at another institution. The requirement for external referencing and benchmarking is specified in the revised Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) (HESF) (TEQSA, 2015) which came into effect on 1 January 2017.

In August 2015, CAUTHE members voted unanimously that CAUTHE should become the custodian of the Standards. This role would involve activities including:

- Facilitation of annual Standards meetings and calibration workshops.
- Use the Standards as a basis for discussions around good pedagogy and assessment design.

At the 2016 CAUTHE mid-year meeting, a number of colleagues expressed interest in participating in a pilot peer-review of assessment benchmarking project. In September 2016, the Executive committee approved a proposal that the project be offered to CAUTHE Chapter members. Secretariat time (approximately one day/month) was approved for project management for a limited (approximately 12 month) period. A project report would be presented at the 2017 Mid-year meeting.

Project team

The Project team was comprised of invited participants from CAUTHE Chapter member institutions, many of whom were involved with the original [Setting the Standard project](#).

Project Leaders

- Assoc Prof Pierre Benckendorff ([The University of Queensland](#))
- Dr Paul Whitelaw ([William Angliss Institute](#))

Project Manager

- Penny Jose ([CAUTHE Secretariat](#))

Project Team

- Dr David Beirman (University of Technology Sydney)
- Dr Naomi Dale (University of Canberra)
- Marcela Fan (William Angliss Institute)
- Assoc Prof Elspeth Frew (La Trobe University)
- Paul Strickland (La Trobe University)
- Assoc Prof Laurie Murphy (James Cook University
- Dr Kelly Phelan (The University of Queensland)
- Esther Teo, Dr Deidre Giblin and Sally-Anne Leigh (Academies Australasia Polytechnic)
- Dr Mieke Witsel (Southern Cross University)

Project methodology

The approach focussed on assessment standards in units of study ('units') drawn from the final year of courses, such as capstone units. Participants were encouraged to choose units that best demonstrated coverage of the TH&E threshold learning outcome domains:

1. Service and Experiences Design
2. Interdisciplinary Inquiry
3. Collaboration
4. Problem Solving
5. Professional Responsibility

Project leaders matched participants from disciplines teaching similar units. The Project team chose not to use the double 'blind' peer review methodology (favoured in other similar projects) but to opt for a transparent and open process of collaboration based on the triad and dyad approach developed for the ERoS project.

The Project adapted the standardised reports and forms developed for the ERoS project. The peer-review referencing report template captured in one document the external referencing comments and recommendations, and the response of the institution being reviewed. Additionally, the Project developed a 'reflections and lessons learned' template.

Principles of engagement

The principles of engagement included:

Course design

Each participant would establish the relationship between the course design, unit of study, TLOs and assessment regime.

Selection of units of study to be reviewed

Assessment would address two or more TLOs at AQF 7, provide evidence of assurance of achievement of TLOs and demonstrate fitness for purpose. It was noted that typically evidence of learning is addressed at the end of course for example, in a capstone unit. The

number of assessment items was not specified, but depended on factors such as whether or not scaffolding was involved.

Use of dyads or triads

Triads were adopted for the review process, with matchmaking by the project leaders based on the preliminary documentation supplied. Ongoing support for the triads was provided by the project manager (administrative) and project leaders (strategic mentoring).

Breadth and background of participants

Participants represented a breadth of institutional types – group of eight and regional universities, TAFE institutions and private providers. The Chapter directors nominated unit coordinators who had a unit of study and assessment regime which aligned with the principles of engagement. Motivation to be involved in the project was driven both by the external pressures including the requirements of the and internal institutional pressures. For example, a number of colleagues teach units which are located in business management courses, where accreditation bodies such as AACSB or EQUIS require demonstration of benchmarking or external referencing. Interestingly, the Project has subsequently generated interest from other colleagues in the sector who are keen to be involved in future projects. This interest has resulted in new Chapters joining CAUTHE, underscoring the potential for CAUTHE to play a coordinating role that adds further value for members.

Learning outcomes, assessment and student attainment

The Project methodology included identification of unit learning outcomes, TLOs and their alignment to assessment methods and student work samples. It asked for a review of the suitability of the learning outcomes for the unit against the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and whether the method of assessment was appropriate to demonstrate attainment of the TLOs.

Critical to the review process was the description and communication of the performance standards required for achieving learning outcomes. A rubric was used in most cases, and in others marking schemes or exemplars to foster a shared understanding of the standard required across the teaching, marking teams and student cohort.

Assessments were to be de-identified unless the richness of the work inevitably identified them, for example, assessment of video presentations; in which case it was deemed preferable to use the videos. Video presentations can be useful as reported by one participant '*I particularly liked looking at the podcasts created by the students as they became real that way.*' It was also noted that it is time consuming to de-identify work downloaded from Turnitin that is in pdf format. One way to avoid the need for de-identification is to ask students permission to use their work for quality assurance purposes. With videos, it is normal practice to get students permission to use their work because it does identify them.

Dyads and triads

All external referencing in the Project was undertaken by triads. That is, three institutions formed a cross-institutional group to review the chosen discipline units and samples of assessment. Each institution thus had the benefit of external referencing of two other institutions, thus providing greater depth and breadth of perspective.

Participants collected and exchanged the review materials using *Dropbox* and arranged one triad discussion meeting prior to the external referencing process. Table 1 on the following page shows the triads participants by institution, unit of study and area by TLO domain for the project.

Table 1: Triad participants by institution, unit of study and area

Triad	Unit Coordinator	Institution	Unit of study	Year	Area	TH&E Domain*				
						1	2	3	4	5
1	Dr Deidre Giblin / Sally-Anne Leigh	AAP	Resort Development and Management	3	Hospitality / Tourism	X	X	X	X	X
	Dr Kelly Phelan	UQ	Hotel Industry Management	3	Hospitality			X	X	
	Marcela Fang	WAI	Strategy and Innovation	3	Hospitality / Tourism	X			X	
2	Dr Naomi Dale	UC	Service Industry Project Scheme (SIPS)	3	Tourism / Events	X	X	X	X	X
	Dr Laurie Murphy	JCU	Destination Management and Planning	3	Tourism / Events	X	X	X	X	
	Assoc Prof Elspeth Frew	LTU-2	Event Project	3	Events	X	X	X	X	
3	Dr David Beirman	UTS	Current Challenges in Tourism	3	Tourism	X	X	X	X	X
	Paul Strickland	LTU-1	Tourism and Hospitality Simulation	3	Hospitality / Tourism		X	X	X	X
	Dr Mieke Witsel	SCU	Internship capstone	3	Interdisciplinary Capstone	X			X	X

*TH&E Domains

1. Services and Experiences Design
2. Interdisciplinary Inquiry
3. Collaboration
4. Problem Solving
5. Professional Responsibility

Implementation of the process

The implementation steps for the TH&E external reference process is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Project external reference process steps

Formation
- An expression of interest invitation was distributed to Chapter directors to identify unit coordinators for participation in the project based on teaching capstone or final year units of study.
- Participants signed a participant agreement covering confidentiality and ethical behaviour rules outlined.

Matchmaking
- Participating Unit coordinators provided required preliminary information for nominated units of study.
- Cross-institutional groups (triads) are formed with comparable unit coordinators based on matching of the TLO, unit of study area and assessment regime.
- An initial online meeting was held to guide unit coordinators through the documentation and confirm unit matches.

Selection of samples
- De-identified assessed student work samples were selected using stratified random sampling across a grade range.
- Samples selected for external referencing represented a selection of assessed work within the sound (CR, D or HD), limited (low pass) and minimal (high fail) achievement of the outcome categories.

Full exchange of documentation
- Triads conducted a preliminary introductory conversation to provide a brief introduction to the units and assessment tasks selected for review using unit outlines to inform the discussion.
- Unit coordinators upload student work and all necessary supporting documentation (unit outlines, rubrics, learning outcomes etc)

Assess achievement of standards
- External referencing of student achievement of standards by review of student work samples and background curriculum material provided, results in a judgement about the appropriateness of the assessment practices and intended outcomes as evidenced by the grade attained.
- A draft report is provided and checked for appropriateness before sharing with the partner institutions

Discussion of draft report
- A face-to-face workshop was held to discuss draft responses, issues and experiences.
- Triads undertake a collegial, robust discussion to allow a conversation on the standards and clarification of judgement statements.
- The group provides general comment on the overall reviewing experience.

Finalisation of reports
- Reviewers individually complete their external referencing report with the priorities for the implementation of the referencing outlined at the home institution.

Actioning of report
- Closing the QA loop. The institution being reviewed provides an action plan indicating the recommendations that will be implemented.

Managing the process

For efficiency and sustainability, the Project was managed so that academic effort focused, as much as possible, on the review, rather than administrative, processes. Table 2 shows the distribution of administrative tasks.

Table 2: Distribution of administrative tasks

Task	Responsibility
Setting up shared *Dropbox* folders	Project manager
Collation of signed participation agreements	Project manager
Collection, de-identification and exchange of the review material via *Dropbox*	Unit coordinators
Triad formation (matchmaking)	Project leaders
Setting up meetings, project plan and record keeping	Project manager
Collation of information – closing the loop, time spent and reflections	Project manager
Feedback, evaluation and reporting	Project manager and leaders

Project outcomes and evaluation

Outcomes

The Project was conducted over eight months and achieved the aim to provide an effective, relatively efficient, comprehensive process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating institutions. There are some potential weaknesses that have been recognised and recommendations for improvements made.

1. *Assessment items:* Tasks that were not just paper based, and that were appropriate for the stated learning outcome of the discipline e.g. video samples of student work, were used. However, capturing such student evidence is not always routine and could put use of these assessments at risk due to the high(er) workload involved.

2. *Communication:* Both internal and external communication was an essential factor in the success of the project. The project leader planning meetings, project team and triad online and face-to-face meetings. The use of low cost teleconferencing and shared online storage of review materials made for both an effective and efficient communication method between teams.

3. *Commitment:* All participants were committed to the project and participated cooperatively and delivered as agreed. The triad process was open and collegiate, with participants providing open and frank feedback in a non-judgmental way. This commitment was critical to the success of the project.

4. *Project management:* The project process and key steps, aided by the supporting tools and resources developed for the Project, were well understood by participants.

5. *Peer-review referencing process:* The quality of materials supplied and how well they scaffolded the student work and assessment item back to the learning outcomes was a key factor in reviews.

6. *End-to-end review:* The process provides insights to enact quality enhancement of assessment methods in units and courses but the effectiveness of this diminishes if the recommendations are not well captured within an improvement cycle.

7. *Personal and professional development*: Many participants noted that the review process provided opportunities for personal and professional development, especially for individuals that have not carried out similar processes before. Individual reflections included: '*This was interesting as I learnt more about capstone subjects in other institutions'* and '*Each participant had some useful insights to give about each piece of the work uploaded.'*

8. *Capacity building within participating institutions:* The project empowers reviewers to create sustainable communities of practice around standards and quality assurance at participating institutions. One participant: '*My involvement allowed me to gain a very good understanding of the established threshold learning outcomes for TH&E HE in Australia and how different universities foster their development. Granted, I now feel like I have an advanced degree in Setting the Standards, but at times the lack of any background in these terms, TLOs, etc. was frustrating.*'

Outputs

1. Establishing a sustainable TH&E sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality by creating a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking process.

2. Supporting CAUTHE members to meet the requirements of the HESF Threshold Standards by developing and testing a collaborative end-to-end process to effectively support the external peer review of assessment methods and grading of students' achievement against the TH&E TLOs.

3. Disseminating project outcomes, findings and recommendations including additional online assessment exemplars to leverage project outcomes and achieve impact.

4. Developing a set of principles of engagement to guide further work in the area.

Proposed improvements

Several factors impeded or had the potential to impede the progress of reviews.

Adequacy of unit information

The unit structure and its context needed to be more specific – it was important to understand the context of the unit of study being reviewed i.e. gain an understanding of the whole course from which the sample unit of study was selected. Participants felt that they would have benefitted from additional triad meetings to allow more time *'to share/question and update what we eventually discussed face to face as a final submission.'*

Other useful background information may include the attributes of the cohort – domestic vs international students, age and gender distribution, tools and technologies used in the assignments for example, whether *Turnitin* is being used for submission and marking. An explanation required of why a certain grade of student work samples e.g. a pass substituted for a just fail was provided. One participant: '*The range of materials was a little difficult to process.*'

Missing randomly selected samples of student assessment – a need to specify the number of assessment items, for example, the whole assessment regime, to provide a better understanding of whether all relevant specified TLOs and ULOs have been achieved. One participant: '*Not all assessments could be marked effectively due to the limited context or some of the key information is missing (presentations mainly).*' Another participant: '*Need to see an example of the exam…*'

Calibration

A calibration process is crucial – to generate a shared understanding and consensus about assessments and outcome standards in comparable units being taught in different institutions. An experiment that tested the impact of consensus moderation intervention resulted in reduced variability in the assessment of accounting learning outcomes (O'Connell et al., 2015). Calibration both reduced variability across assessors and built assessor confidence. Freeman reported that with just a single workshop, the standard deviation of markers' judgements could be halved ([Freeman 2016](#)).

The involvement of industry bodies in this process is also important e.g. *collaboration* may be sufficient for students to demonstrate their ability to work in groups. However, for third year capstone units, perhaps *collaboration* should include working with external stakeholders in

industry. One participant: '*It appears that the assessment of TLOs is very subjective as everyone's perception is little different.*' And another*: 'Not everyone on the team had a very clear understanding of the collaboration and professional responsibility TLOs.*' Calibration workshops can be used to facilitate the reaching of consensus about or a shared understanding of what it means to meet the minimum standard.

Use of a suitable online tool

While most participants found *Dropbox* worked well, one member whose institution does not support this software had issues. In addition, the (manual) collation of responses including reference report feedback, reflections and lessons learned at the completion of the Project was a time consuming process. A clear outcome is the need for the establishment of a suitable online peer review tool with functionality to manage the process. Additionally, the tool would provide functionality to address the suggestion by one participant that drop down lists be included on forms or a description of the AQF 7 thresholds.

Resource implications and scalability of the process

The cost of time per unit per institution – administration of the process is potentially the area where the project succeeds or fails. Project participants were asked to provide an estimate hours spent on the Project. Some colleagues were surprised at the time involved. Project management involved four hours/month of Secretariat time, which was around half of the one day/month originally estimated. However, most participants under-estimated the time involved.

On average participants, including project leaders, spent 12-15 hours including meeting time, with one participant estimating it took 40+ hours. One participant: '*It was a very worthwhile exercise despite it taking longer than expected.*' Another participant suggested that it would be wise to *'reconsider including new faculty members (or more accurately, those unfamiliar with Australian HE) in this process because it takes so much time to fully understand everything. I was shocked in our CAUTHE meeting when someone said he only spent about 10 hours on this project. I easily spent 40+.'*

In future projects it may be helpful to use standardised online templates to systematically gather data on time spent. This can be used to provide future participants a more accurate estimate of time required, and data on the costs of the processes and, consequently, sustainability.

Recommendations

The Project team recommends that:

1. CAUTHE commits to continue to facilitate peer-review of assessment for Chapters, and possibly extend the invitation to interested international Affiliate member institutions.

2. CAUTHE continue to meet Secretariat costs to provide coordination and administrative support for up to 7.5 hours/month.

3. The Project team implement improvements to the process to address the issues which impeded progress of the reviews, including:

    a. Adequacy of information for the unit being reviewed:

        i. schedule additional triad meetings to facilitate better understanding of the context and opportunity to provide clarity about the assessment tasks

        ii. request the complete assessment regime for each unit.

    b. Calibration – offer calibration workshops twice per year in conjunction with other CAUTHE events, for example at the Annual conference and Mid-year meeting.

    c. Online tool – investigate the cost of a suitable online peer review tool to expedite data collection, collation and reporting.

    d. Resource implications and scalability of the process – use standardised online templates to systematically gather data on time spent.

4. The Project team use the body of material collected from calibration workshops to review standards (as published) in 5 years (June 2020).

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