**Accompanying Guide and Information**

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**Section 1 - Overview**

**Purpose and principles**

This guide describes a collaborative process for external referencing of academic achievement standards, where peers who are acknowledged discipline or professional experts, review and report on the assessment methods and grading of students’ achievement of learning outcomes.

The design of this process was driven by the following key principles:

*Effective*

* Enables the external referencing of assessment methods and grading of students’ achievement of learning outcomes across comparable courses of study
* Supports both the quality enhancement and quality assurance of course and units

*Efficient and sustainable*

* Provides lean, sufficient and sustainable end-to-end process for external referencing that can be operationalised and used routinely by participating universities

*Transparent*

* Engages multiple perspectives and facilitates critical dialogue between teaching staff across comparable courses to support consensus building around standards of student learning outcomes

*Capability Building*

* Contributes to the professional development of participating staff and discipline communities of practice

This referencing process focuses on:

* Course and Unit Learning Outcomes[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Assessment methods
* Student Achievement Standards

**Background – The EROS Project**

External Referencing of Standards Project (EROS) developed and piloted the end-to-end process and resources provided in this guide. The project, a collaboration between the RMIT, Curtin University, QUT and University of Wollongong, aimed to address the quality enhancement of assessment and student achievement standards, balanced with quality assurance against the Higher Education Standards Framework. The EROS process focused on assuring student achievement of academic standards through referencing of coursework program (and unit) learning outcomes using randomly selected and previously marked assessment items from selected final year units.

The project drew on academic and project expertise of the four participating universities and adapted methodologies and resources developed and tested in the OLT national project titled “Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation” (Kraus and Scott et al, 2014). It also drew on processes implemented by the Group of Eight Research Universities, and Innovative Research Universities, and included expert advice from the National Peer Review Network OLT project team. The final project report and resources drew on information, feedback and views of pilot participants. The project led to the establishment of inter-university partnerships that can be utilised on an on-going basis for future external referencing activities. It also contributed to the establishment of a sustainable sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality being established through a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking tool.

**Section 2 - Process for Triads and Dyads**

Once the courses and institutions participating in the external referencing process have been matched and confirmed it is recommended the following steps be undertaken.

**Key steps**

1. The participating course coordinators/leaders through consultation nominate a final year unit and discipline staff in each course to be involved in the external referencing process. It is recommended at a minimum the coordinator for selected unit is nominated. The relevant course coordinator may also choose to be involved in the referencing process.
2. All staff agreeing to participate are asked to sign a participant agreement covering confidentiality and ethical behaviour (see attached Template - Participant Agreement).
NOTE: If not already in place the participating institutions may also chose to sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* that will require confidentiality in handling of information, reports and other outputs of the external referencing process.
3. A cross-institutional group is formed from the nominated discipline staff from the participating courses.
4. Each group conducts a preliminary or introductory conversation of a fairly informal nature in order to:
* share their expectations of the peer referencing process
* provide a brief introduction to the units and assessment selected for review using unit outlines to inform the discussion
* discuss any reservations they may have and generally get to know each other prior to beginning the review process
* confirm timeline and key dates (e.g. draft reports and review meeting, final reports).

It is recommended that this preliminary conversation be undertaken using, for example, Skype or Blackboard Collaborate so that people can see each other. Distributing unit outlines prior to the meeting is also useful.

1. Each participating institution provides the review materials for selected unit to the other participating institutions. See the Review Materials checklist in this guide and on page 2 of the report template.
2. Participants each individually review student work samples and background curriculum material provided as follows:
* Institution A and B review C’s set of curriculum materials and work samples
* Institution B and C review A’s set of curriculum materials and work samples
* Institution C and A review B’s set of curriculum materials and work samples

*Notes:*

*Ideally a triad of three participating institutions (A, B and C) would be involved to enable multiple perspectives, robust discussion and increased transparency, however there may be circumstances where only two institutions can be involved (A and B). It should also be noted that there are additional organisational and time considerations associated with triads.*

*During any stage of the process, reviewers can request more information, or clarification of information provided.*

1. Each reviewer drafts responses to the questions on the report template and notes areas where any additional information might be provided by the unit coordinator that would further inform the reviewer’s understanding of the assessment context.
2. These draft reports are provided back to the originating institution and then the group meets (in person or online) to conduct feedback conversations on each set of materials reviewed guided by the following points.
3. Group provides general comment on the overall reviewing experience
4. For each reviewed unit a collegial, robust discussion is undertaken. Following is a suggested structure for this discussion:
* Invited the unit coordinator to comment on the draft report and their own review experience.
* Reviewer/s raise questions emerging from the reviewing process (e.g. the conditions under which the assessment task was performed, how the task related to similar tasks in other units likely to have been undertaken by the same students etc.).
* Reviewer/s provide feedback on the appropriateness of judgements. Feedback should be supported by explanatory comment regardless of whether judgements were deemed appropriate or not.
* Reviewer/s comment on areas of strength and areas likely to benefit from further attention. Reviewers who have identified several points may wish to limit these to the 3 considered most important so as not to overwhelm the person receiving feedback.
* Staff from the reviewed institution are invited to provide further comments or ask questions throughout the discussion.
* The main points raised during the conversation are summarised by the group.
1. Reviewers individually complete their external referencing report that is returned to their institutional coordinator.

Final reports are discussed between the relevant program coordinator and unit coordinator who participated in the external referencing process. Any errors of fact in the reports may be corrected at this stage. Responsive action is determined, briefly documented on the template and followed up according to school or faculty processes.

**Section 3**: **Review Materials Checklist**(for the institution requesting the external referencing)

The requesting institution will provide the reviewer with the following information:

**General points**

* An overall course or study plan structure which positions the unit being reviewed. (A curriculum map, showing the way the ULOs are mapped to the CLOs, is helpful if available)
* List of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)
* Specific CLOs relevant to the Unit being reviewed

**For the selected unit**

* Unit outline
* Unit Learning Outcomes (ULOs)
* A schedule of learning for the unit showing key learning and assessment over the teaching period

**For the selected assessment task**

* Information provided to students setting out the assessment task requirements and/or questions
* Weighting of the assessment
* Assessment Rubrics, marking guides, or criteria sheet

**Grading**

* Explanation of the grading scheme as it applies to the samples of student work and explanations of nomenclature

**Samples of student work**

Please read Section 4 for information on how to select samples of student work

* Samples of de-identified student work provided

**Section 4 - Guidance on the selection of student work for external referencing.**

Student work selected for external referencing should be able to demonstrate some of the course learning outcomes (CLOs), i.e. those that characterise the knowledge and capabilities students should have achieved by the completion of their course. (It is recognised that samples will not be able to cover the full range of possible outcomes.) It would be unusual to encounter this problem but avoid selecting samples that might have intellectual property implications (e.g. commercial-in-confidence). Samples should be selected from defined grade ranges, based on the final mark achieved as described below. Within these grade ranges, sampling is conducted at random. Student work must be de-identified prior to the external referencing process, but otherwise the work is left intact, complete with any annotations made by the original assessor. (If assessor comments/marks are on a separate document, such as a rubric, this should be included alongside the student work.)

**Stratified Random Sampling**

To enable a focus on threshold standards, and to provide a consistent format for the comparison of student work across institutions that may use different grade band boundaries, samples for external referencing should represent a random selection of assessed work to include the mark ranges as follows:

1. **A minimal pass** (selecting a sample at random from student work that achieved the minimum pass mark up to no more than 5% above this. If there is no student work that falls into this category, the work with the lowest passing mark should be submitted for review.)
2. **A fail** (selecting a sample at random from student work that did not meet the pass mark, but did not fail by more than 10% below the minimum pass mark. If there is no student work that falls into this category, then the work with the highest failing mark should be submitted.) If there are no failing students then a second sample from the ‘minimal pass’ category should be added.
3. **A grade greater than a pass** (selecting a sample at random from student work that achieved a mark that is higher than that which falls within the grade range associated with a ‘Pass’. [e.g. Credit, Distinction, High Distinction] If there are no students achieving a strong pass then do not submit work in this category.)

The procedure above is designed to produce at least two and normally three samples of work for review. Work should be selected using some form of random selection procedure (i.e. selecting a sample at random from a sub-list of eligible samples, or selecting samples at random from the full cohort until the three sample criteria are met.

**Selection of student work examples:**

**Example 1 Example 2**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Institution X has five grade bands within their institution, as follows: |  | Institution Y also has five grade bands, but with different boundaries compared with University X: |
| High Distinction | 80-100 |  | High Distinction | 85-100 |
| Distinction | 70-79 |  | Distinction | 75-84 |
| Credit | 60-69 |  | Credit | 65-74 |
| Pass | 50-59 |  | Pass | 50-64 |
| Fail | 0-49 |  | Fail | 0-49 |
| Unit X1 has the following distribution of marks for the final assessments: |  | Unit Y1 has the following distribution of marks for the final assessments: |
|  |
|  |
| Student | Mark | Grade Band |  | Student | Percent | Grade Band |
| 1 | 14 | Fail |  | 1 | 29 | Fail |
| 2 | 23 | Fail |  | 2 | 32 | Fail |
| 3 | 40 | Fail |  | 3 | 36 | Fail |
| 4 | 43 | Fail |  | 4 | 50 | Pass |
| 5 | 45 | Fail |  | 5 | 53 | Pass |
| 6 | 50 | Pass |  | 6 | 55 | Pass |
| 7 | 52 | Pass |  | 7 | 58 | Pass |
| 8 | 55 | Pass |  | 8 | 59 | Pass |
| 9 | 58 | Pass |  | 9 | 60 | Pass |
| 10 | 59 | Pass |  | 10 | 63 | Pass |
| 11 | 60 | Credit |  | 11 | 67 | Credit |
| 12 | 63 | Credit |  | 12 | 65 | Credit |
| 13 | 67 | Credit |  | 13 | 66 | Credit |
| 14 | 65 | Credit |  | 14 | 70 | Credit |
| 15 | 66 | Credit |  | 15 | 71 | Credit |
| 16 | 69 | Credit |  | 16 | 76 | Distinction |
| 17 | 70 | Distinction |  | 17 | 80 | Distinction |
| 18 | 71 | Distinction |  | 18 | 86 | High Distinction |
| 19 | 76 | Distinction |  | One sample of assessed work for external referencing should be randomly selected from within the:1. green strata (representing a minimal pass)
2. red strata (representing a fail – but in this case there are no students with a score between 40-50%, so the highest failing mark [36%] is selected instead.)
3. blue strata (representing a strong pass)

If there had been no students scoring 65% or more, then only samples 1) and 2) would be selected and put forward for review. |
| 20 | 80 | High Distinction |  |
| 21 | 86 | High Distinction |  |
| One sample of assessed work for external referencing should be randomly selected from within the:1. green strata (representing a minimal pass)
2. red strata (representing a fail)
3. blue strata (representing a strong pass)

If there had been no failing students, then two samples would have been drawn from the green strata. |  |

**Template 1**

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT**

1. I have had the referencing process explained to me and have read the information and guidelines provided.

2. I agree to participate in the referencing process as described

3. I understand my role in the process is to provide collaborating institutions with the required unit information for which I am unit coordinator. I will use the checklist of information to complete this. I will also be available to speak with staff of the other universities to develop the relationship necessary for the review, and to provide clarification and advice as required.

4. In turn I will be required to review the unit or units of the other universities involved in the external referencing process using the template report format and associated guidelines provided.

5. I understand that if I have questions about the referencing process I can contact the institution contact.

6. My participation in the referencing process will give me access to confidential information including samples of de-identified student assessment tasks.

7. I will respect the views and opinions of others during the process

8. I will not compromise anyone else’s intellectual property or participant confidentiality

**Name**:

**Date**:

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**Signature**

**Glossary of terms and acronyms**

**Academic standards**: refers to both learning and teaching standards. Teaching standards are understood to encompass “process” or “delivery” standards, while learning standards refer to “outcome standards” which describe the “nature and levels of student attainment” (TEQSA, 2011, p. 3).

**Assessment**: a process to determine a student’s achievement of expected learning outcomes and may include a range of written and oral methods and practice or demonstration. It is expected to fairly, validly and reliably measure student performance of intended learning outcomes. Valid assessment refers to the explicit and clear alignment between intended learning outcomes and the assessment methods used to measure student achievement of those outcomes.

**Assessment Rubric or Guide:** A tool designed to measure the level of student achievement against consistent criteria and to award scored and/or graded outcomes. Assessment guides usually have three elements:

* Criteria for assessment
* Scored/graded outcome
* Descriptors of the performance criteria for each scored or graded outcome

Another commonly used term is **‘Assessment Criteria sheet’.**

*Example of an Assessment Rubric:*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Scored/Graded Outcome** | High Distinction | Distinction | Credit | Pass | Fail |
| **Criteria** |  | **Example of Descriptors of the performance criteria for scored or graded outcome.** |
| Thesis | Clearly stated, concise and consistent |  |  |  |  |
| Argument | Logical and well evidenced |  |  |  |  |
| Originality | Strong conceptual grasp and unique presentation of ideas that goes well beyond the prescribed reading for the unit  |  |  |  |  |

**Assessment Task**: illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined learning outcomes, allowing students to demonstrate their learning and capabilities. Assessment tasks include, but are not limited to essays, tests, examinations, laboratory, clinical or field practicums, projects, compilations, productions, presentations, performances, web-based discussions and participation in forums.

**Assessment Weight**: the number of marks or % value attributed to a particular assessment item, which should reflect the relative importance of that assessment

**Assurance**: the process of ensuring that activities and outcomes meet an agreed standard.

**Course**: whole-of-degree program. **A course is** collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as **program**.

**Course Learning Outcomes**: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a student has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning across the whole program.

**Coursework Program**: Those taught programs of students. Higher Degree Research programs are generally not considered coursework programs.

**End to End Process** – A term used to refer to the beginning and end points of a methodology. It can refer to an academic methodology such as the EROS project, service delivery, administrative and business processes.

**External Referencing**: External review of all, or aspects, of a program, unit of a program, or student achievement standards by a peer from another institution who is an acknowledged discipline or professional expert.

**Grade Descriptors**: describe performance at the subject level, but may be indicative of levels of performance of certain types of assessment task (especially project work, reports and other extended writing tasks).

**Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF)** – These are the standards enacted under the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency Act, and are binding on universities.

**Marking:** the act of assessing individual assessment components, generating a score and/or grade, and feedback, as appropriate.

**Program**: whole-of-degree program. **A program is** collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as **course**.

**Program Learning Outcomes**: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a student has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning across the whole program.

**Quality**: is fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard.

**Referencing**: see External Referencing

**Reliability**: trustworthiness of assessment, the extent to which the grade awarded by one marker aligns with that awarded by another marker. Standards: statements describing the level or quality of student performance of criteria, in an assessment task.

**Unit**: an individual unit taken as part of a whole-of-degree program. A single component of a qualification, or a stand-alone unit, that has been approved/accredited. A unit may also be called a ‘course’, ‘subject’, or ‘module’.

**Unit Learning Outcomes**: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a student has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning in an individual unit/ subject.

**Validity**: in establishing outcomes which are the focus of assessment, validity refers to the process of confirming, on evidence and against a range of agreed reference points, that what is being given focus on in a course or subject is both relevant and desirable. In terms of the process of assessment, validity refers to the use of assessment methods that are ‘fit for purpose’ – that is, they are shown to be the best way to measure the development of the capabilities and competencies set down for achievement in a particular course or subject.

**Acronyms**

AQF – Australian Qualification Framework

EROS – External Referencing Of Standards Project

HESF - Higher Education Standards Framework

PLOs – Program Learning Outcome

TEQSA – Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

ULOs– Unit Learning Outcomes

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Kraus, K-L., Scott, G., et al (2014). Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation.

<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-assuring-learning-teaching-standards-inter-institutional-peer-review>

D. Royce Sadler (2012): Assuring academic achievement standards: from moderation to calibration, Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 2012, 1–15.

Executive Director, Innovative Research Universities Secretariat, Conor King, for permission to draw on resources developed for their Academic Calibration Project.

Hancock, P., Freeman, M., Abraham, A., De Lange, P. Howieson, B, O’Connell, B., & Watty, K. (2015) Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Accounting Learning Standards, Final report.

[www.achievementmatters.com.au](http://www.achievementmatters.com.au)

National External Peer Review of Assessment Network Project (2014).

<http://www.utas.edu.au/student-evaluation-review-and-reporting-unit/nprn>

The Group of Eight Quality Verification System

1. Course: A collection of units of study leading to an award or qualification. Also known as a program.

 Unit: An individual unit of study. Also known as a subject or course. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)