

External Referencing and Benchmarking Procedure

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 The External Referencing and Benchmarking Procedure provides details of the operationalisation of external referencing and benchmarking activities. This procedure should be read in conjunction with the External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy.
- 1.2 This procedure is not utilised when measuring the progress of corporate and academic KPIs.
- 1.3 This procedure applies to all AIAT staff and all members of Boards and Committees included in external referencing and benchmarking activities.

2. Definition

Refer to *Glossary of Terms* for commonly used terms. The definitions below are included for clarity.

Benchmarking – A structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes with other organisations.

External Referencing – A process through which AIAT compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator. Typical techniques include benchmarking, peer review and moderation.

3. Procedure

- 3.1 External referencing is undertaken to compare specific practices and performance measures against external comparators. It is intended that external referencing be a process of reflective practice to learn, adapt and improve performance.
 - 3.1.1 External referencing may include one or more of the following methods
 - a. external professional accreditation
 - b. external peer review
 - c. external moderation
 - d. external benchmarking
 - 3.1.2 The academic practices of another relevant higher education provider; publicly available information or market intelligence; academic or professional body standards; and/or external documents (e.g. policies, strategies) are all potential external comparators.
 - 3.1.3 External professional accreditation occurs when a relevant professional accreditation body undertakes external accreditation of a course.
 - 3.1.4 External peer review involves academic experts in learning and teaching and/or the relevant discipline or field of education undertaking impartial and independent assessment of AIAT's learning and teaching activities, including teaching practice and course design, delivery and assessment.

- 3.1.5 External moderation is a quality assurance process that aims to ensure the appropriate quality of assessment tasks and assessment outcomes, with valid and consistent judgment of student performance in standards of achievement. External moderation is undertaken by reference to comparable assessment tasks from a comparable course external to AIAT and/or review of assessment tasks by an expert external to AIAT with teaching responsibilities in a comparable course, or learning and teaching expertise in a cognate discipline or field of education.
 - 3.1.6 External benchmarking involves external comparison, for example, through a relationship with a benchmarking partner (e.g. higher education provider), comparisons with publicly available data such as the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) survey data. Details on types of benchmarking and the procedure are in 3.2 Types of Benchmarking and 3.5 Benchmarking procedure.
 - 3.1.7 An indicative schedule of external referencing and benchmarking activities is in Appendix A.
- 3.2 Types of benchmarking
- 3.2.1 **Organisational benchmarking** involves comparisons at the institutional level (staffing profiles, courses, subjects, institution policies and procedures, criteria for academic appointments, financial information).
 - 3.2.2 **Course benchmarking** of course design and student performance within courses. This may include, but is not limited to, a review of: individual subjects within a course, admission criteria, learning outcomes, content and alignment with relevant industry expectations, assessment designs, methods and criteria, grade distribution, course-specific student feedback, student performance and outcomes.
 - 3.2.3 **Process benchmarking** involves the review of specific processes and practices within AIAT. For example, course admission applications, complaints handling, disciplinary process, or access to support services.
 - 3.2.4 **Outcomes benchmarking** focuses on comparing institutional outcomes data, especially student outcomes such as progression, attrition, completion and retention rates, employability and student intakes.
 - 3.2.5 **Best-practice benchmarking** involves a comparison with “best-in-class” comparator and may focus on institutional policies and procedures to determine their efficiency and cost effectiveness.
 - 3.2.6 **Competitive benchmarking** is a comparison with competitors on any relevant aspect of AIAT’s operations and associated outcomes.
 - 3.2.7 **Generic benchmarking** is undertaken when comparing AIAT’s operations and associated outcomes against an unrelated organisation.
- 3.3 Benchmarking program
- 3.3.1 AIAT implements a benchmarking program with adequate coverage of its operations, including academic and corporate processes, and student and financial outcomes. Only a selection of operations and processes are targeted to be benchmarked each year.

- 3.3.2 The Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management consults with the Board of Directors, Executive Management Group and Learning and Teaching Committee on an annual basis to develop the annual benchmarking program.
 - 3.3.3 The annual benchmarking program is reviewed by the Executive Management Group for non-academic matters and by the Learning and Teaching Committee for recommendation to the Academic Board for academic matters.
 - 3.3.4 The program will provide details regarding:
 - a. Targeted functional areas for benchmarking;
 - b. For each functional area, the relevant objects of review;
 - c. For each object of review, relevant indicators;
 - d. External parties involved in the activity;
 - e. Responsible officers for conducting the activities; and
 - f. Timeframes for completion of the activities and reporting of the findings to the relevant governing bodies.
 - 3.3.5 The Board of Directors approves the annual non -academic benchmarking program based on the recommendation of the Executive Management Group and the Academic Board.
 - 3.3.6 The adequacy of the coverage of the annual academic benchmarking program is determined by the Board of Directors on the advice of the Academic Board having due regard to student outcomes.
 - 3.3.7 The Executive Management Group, Learning and Teaching Committee, and Academic Board receive regular reports on the status of benchmarking activities.
 - 3.3.8 The Executive Management Group and Learning and Teaching Committee may reallocate resources or re-prioritise benchmarking activities to ensure satisfactory delivery of approved activities.
 - 3.3.9 Significant benchmarking activities with resourcing implications or involving external parties which arise out of the regular planning cycle must be approved by the Board of Directors. Out-of-cycle benchmarking activities which are not regarded as significant may be authorised by the Executive Management Group or Learning and Teaching Committee, as appropriate, and reported to the Board of Directors and Academic Board, respectively.
 - 3.3.10 The Board of Directors and Academic Board receive an annual report on completed benchmarking activities, including recommendations for improvement.
- 3.4 Benchmarking partners
- 3.4.1 Where there is a requirement for sourcing data externally, or where AIAT has entered into benchmarking partnership or is a participant in an industry referencing initiative, the responsible officer should confirm support from AIAT governing bodies and partners for the exercise with the Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management.
 - 3.4.2 In selecting benchmarking partners and industry referencing initiatives, governing bodies will have regard to:
 - a. alignment with strategic objectives and alliances;

- b. comparability of the partner, including student cohort size and characteristics, course offerings, and standing;
 - c. quality and credibility of previous benchmarking exercises and outcomes;
 - d. a record of good performance in the area(s) to be benchmarked; and
 - e. willingness to share information and commitment to the exercise by relevant staff at the benchmarking partner.
 - 3.4.3 Benchmarking partnerships must be established through formal agreements which identify the benchmarking indicators and functional areas and include provisions for the confidentiality of the shared data and for the allocation of any costs arising from the exercise.
 - 3.4.4 Benchmarking agreements are authorised by the Board of Directors, upon the recommendation of the Academic Board for academic matters or the Executive Management Group for non-academic matters.
 - 3.4.5 Data and information received as part of a benchmarking partnership may only be used for the purpose stated in the agreement or as expressly permitted by the partner.
 - 3.4.6 The Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management advises on required communication with benchmarking partners, including pre-collection meetings to ensure comparability and reliability of data.
 - 3.4.7 Where possible, AIAT will participate in industry referencing initiatives such as the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching's Student Experience Survey.
- 3.5 Benchmarking procedure
 - 3.5.1 **Define the scope.** The responsible officer will
 - a. establish what publicly available data on higher education operations in Australia, such as Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching and the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment's *Higher Education Statistics*, are available;
 - b. convene a meeting of internal stakeholders to discuss;
 - c. convene a meeting of proposed external collaborating higher education providers and/or accreditation bodies to discuss;
 - d. determine whether an external benchmarking activity is required based on the outcomes of the two meetings. Continue to step 3.5.3 if external benchmarking will be conducted, otherwise continue to step 3.5.2.
 - 3.5.2 **Desktop benchmarking exercise.** A desktop benchmarking exercise can utilise any or all of the following:
 - a. academic practices of another relevant higher education provider;
 - b. publicly available information or market intelligence;
 - c. academic or professional body standards; and
 - d. external documents (e.g. policies, strategies).
 - 3.5.3 **Partner identification.** The responsible officer will
 - a. Select a benchmarking partner
 - select and liaise with appropriate benchmarking partner(s) as defined in section 3.4 Benchmarking Partners;

- organise the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding;
 - obtain legal advice and approval from benchmarking partner(s).
- b. identify and agree on scope of review with benchmarking partner(s).
 - c. establish what data set(s) will be used, how it/they will be analysed and how it/they will be segmented.
 - d. agree timeframe with benchmarking partner(s).
- 3.5.4 **Conduct benchmarking.** The responsible officer will
- a. conduct analysis as agreed with benchmarking partner(s).
 - b. document any relevant rules that have been used in the analysis.
 - c. highlight any instances where a benchmarking partner has performed significantly better or worse than other benchmarking partners.
- 3.5.5 **Prepare and discuss initial findings.** The responsible officer
- a. develop and agree reporting template for findings and recommendations with benchmarking partner(s).
 - b. prepare initial findings on the understanding that they will:
 - be discussed and agreed with collaborating higher education providers.
 - not necessarily be published either internally or externally.
 - c. investigate and share any insights where the higher education provider has a high/low performance for a particular metric.
 - d. reflect on/discuss benchmarking methodology/analysis and document areas for improvement where relevant.
- 3.5.6 **Finalise formal findings and agree publication/dissemination.** The responsible officer will
- a. add any necessary insights/further information to contextualise initialize findings.
 - b. not publish formal cross-institutional findings unless endorsed by the Academic Board and partners.
 - c. discuss any exceptions to (b) with benchmark partner(s) which may include:
 - individual higher education providers publishing their own findings provided that judgements and statements about benchmark performance are limited to their organisation and/or
 - individual higher education providers referencing superior performance of another provider subject to agreement by that higher education provider.
- 3.5.7 **Review findings internally and make recommendations about next steps.** The responsible officer will
- a. provide report to appropriate governing board. This may include:
 - summary of benchmarking conducted and findings.
 - recommendations for internal/external dissemination/publication.
 - recommendations for the development of institute and/or course-specific Action Plans.
- 3.5.8 **Develop and implement Action Plan(s).**

- a. The responsible officer, with the assistance of the Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management if required, will develop institute and/or course-specific Action Plans in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders detailing responsibilities for each.
- b. The Action Plan(s) will be approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee and/or Executive Management Group.
- c. The Learning and Teaching Committee and/or Executive Management Group will review and refer the Action Plan(s) to the Academic Board and Board of Directors respectively.
- d. Academic Board will communicate action items to relevant AIAT academic management and committees to ensure implementation of specific recommendations.
- e. The Board of Directors will communicate action items to relevant AIAT non-academic management and committees to ensure implementation of specific recommendations.
- f. The responsible officer will provide regular updates on the Action Plan(s) to the Learning and Teaching Committee and/or Executive Management Group.

3.5.9 Reporting on Action Plan(s): The Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management will provide Academic Board and the Board of Directors with an update on progress of all Action Plan(s).

- a. Academic Board will monitor recommendations through to completion.
- b. Board of Directors will monitor recommendations through to completion.

3.6 Ad hoc external referencing and benchmarking activities

- 3.6.1 The Executive Management Group or Learning and Teaching Committee can recommend an ad hoc external referencing and/or benchmarking activity to the Board of Directors or Academic Board respectively.
- 3.6.2 The Quality, Audit and Risk Committee can recommend to the Board of Directors an ad hoc external referencing and/or benchmarking activity.
- 3.6.3 The Board of Directors or Academic Board can request an ad hoc external referencing and/or benchmarking activity outside the annual benchmarking program based on an identified or potential issue, a topic of interest, a possible impact or an opportunity.
- 3.6.4 The Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management will coordinate the ad hoc request utilising the appropriate method and report back to the requesting entity.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The Board of Directors:

- 4.1.1 Oversees institutional quality assurance and approves institutional corporate benchmarks;
- 4.1.2 Receives reports on the suitability of AIAT's standards and its performance against set benchmarks;

- 4.1.3 Approves the annual benchmarking program based on the recommendation of the Executive Management Group and the Academic Board; and
 - 4.1.4 Requests ad hoc external referencing and/or benchmarking activities based on the recommendation of the Executive Management Group or the Quality, Audit and Risk Committee.
- 4.2 The Academic Board:
- 4.2.1 Recommends annual benchmarking program to Board of Directors;
 - 4.2.2 Requests ad hoc external referencing and/or benching marking activities based on the recommendation of the Learning and Teaching Committee; and
 - 4.2.3 Oversees and monitors institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes.
- 4.3 The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for:
- 4.3.1 recommending, monitoring, and evaluating academic external referencing activities; and
 - 4.3.2 making recommendations for improvement on institutional standards and comparative performance.
- 4.4 The Executive Management Group is responsible for:
- 4.4.1 recommending, monitoring, and evaluating non-academic external referencing and benchmarking activities; and
 - 4.4.2 making recommendations for improvement on institutional standards and comparative performance with similar providers.
- 4.5 The Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management is responsible for coordinating external referencing and benchmarking activities in accordance with AIAT governing bodies' direction and guidance.

5. Procedure Details

Institution	Australian Institute of Advance Technologies (AIAT)
Procedure name	External Referencing and Benchmarking Procedure
Procedure Reference No.	PROC – 09
Procedure Approval	Board of Directors in consultation with Academic Board regarding academic matters
Procedure Authority	Executive Management Group
Responsible Officer	Director, Quality Assurance and Risk Management
Governance Reference Threshold Standards	HESF 2021: 5.3.1, 5.3.4, 5.3.7, 6.3.1.b
Related Documents	Course and Subject Lifecycle: Proposal and Development Policy Course and Subject Lifecycle: Review, Monitoring and Change Policy External Referencing and Benchmarking Procedure Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy

	Stakeholders Feedback Policy Student Survey and Feedback Policy
Related Legislation	Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HESF)
References	AIAT has referred and benchmarked with the following institutions and policies during the creation of this policy: Central Queensland University (2021) External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure IJET (2020) Benchmarking Procedure Kaplan (2017) Benchmarking Policy University of the Sunshine Coast (2021) External Referencing: Program Benchmarking - Procedures
Date of approval	21 April 2022
Review date	December 2026
Policy Category	Governance

6. Document Version Control

Document No	PROC - 09	Last Modify Date	Summary of Changes
Version No	1.0	NA	Initial version approved by Board of Directors
	1.01	31/3/2022	Update titles in Appendix A to match Organisational Chart
Created Date	Feb 2022		

Appendix A – Indicative schedule of benchmarking activities

Functional Area	Object of Review	Frequency	Responsible officer
Academic	Academic staff to student ratio	Annually	Director, Learning and Teaching
Academic	Academic Policies and Procedures	At least once every 2 years	Head of Institute
Academic	Casual academic staff to student ratio	Annually	Director, Learning and Teaching
Academic	Completion rates	Annually	Course Director
Academic	Completion times	Annually	Course Director
Academic	Course design, including industry consultation	At least once every 3 years	Course Director
Academic	Course of study, including learning outcomes and methods of assessment	At least once every 3 years	Course Director
Academic	Graduate Capabilities	At least once every 2 years	Director, Learning and Teaching
Academic	Learning resources, including library	At least once every 2 years	Course Director
Academic	Progression rates	Annually	Course Director
Academic	Review of academic decisions	At least once every 2 years	Director, Learning and Teaching
Academic	Student achievement of learning outcomes	Annually	Course Director
Academic	Student admission requirements, including English language proficiency and pathways	Annually	Campus Manager
Academic	Student retention and attrition rates, including first-to-second year retention rate	Annually	Course Director
Academic	Student support services, including orientation and transition	At least once every 2 years	Head of Institute
Academic	Subjects, including learning outcomes	At least once every 3 years	Course Director
Academic	Teaching quality	At least once every 2 years	Director, Learning and Teaching
Corporate	Corporate staff to student ratio	Annually	CEO
Corporate	Financial performance	Annually	CEO
Corporate	Student complaints and appeals	At least once every 2 years	Head of Institute
Corporate	Non-Academic Policy and Procedures	At least once every 2 years	CEO
Governance	Governing body's structure	At least once every 3 years	CEO

Governance	Monitoring of internal academic standards	At least once every 3 years	Director, Learning and Teaching
Governance	Monitoring systems, including escalation of material issues	At least once every 3 years	CEO
Governance	Performance evaluation methods	At least once every 3 years	CEO
Governance	Student representation	At least once every 3 years	Director, Learning and Teaching
Marketing	Publicly available information	At least once every 2 years	Director: Marketing
Marketing	Representation of educational offerings	At least once every 2 years	Director: Marketing
Marketing	Representation of AIAT	At least once every 2 years	Director: Marketing