External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure

Associated Information

Approving body	Academic Board
Date approved	03 Apr 2024
Date of effect	Commencement of operation
Next scheduled review	Three years from when policy commences
Policy owner	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Policy contact	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Related Documents	Quality Assurance Framework AI Framework
Related Legislative and Regulatory Instruments	HESF Standard 1.4.1, HESF Standard 5.3.1, HESF Standard 5.3.4, HESF Standard 6.3.1b HESF Standard 6.3.2e

Purpose

1. The External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedure sets out the approach that Zenith Innovation Institute (**Zenith / ZII / the Institute**) will adopt towards external referencing including benchmarking its operations and activities.

2. By comparing how it operates with others in the higher education sector, the Institute can maintain and improve on the way it operates.

3. For the purpose of this Policy, the following definitions apply:

    (a) **External referencing**- a process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s).

    (b) **Benchmarking** - a structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes.

Scope

4. This Policy applies to:

    (a) all Zenith staff, academic and corporate (full-time, part-time, casual or contract)

    (b) members of all governing bodies and

    (c) all TEQSA accredited courses.

Policy

5. To ensure Zenith operates consistent with sector best practice, a range of external referencing activities will be undertaken to compare with other private higher education providers and peer and aspirational institutions the following matters:

    (a) student outcomes

    (b) course structure and content and

    (c) processes, resources and structures (operational and governance).

6. The results from external referencing will be used as part of continuous improvement to improve the student experience through changes in teaching and learning, governance and operations.
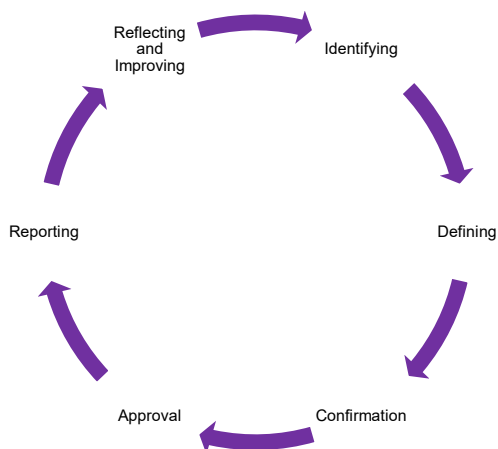
Types of external referencing

7. The purpose of external referencing is varied, but typically includes:

    (a) providing evidence of the quality and standing of a provider's operations

    (b) offering an external evidence base as context for the development of internal improvements to student outcomes and

    (c) establishing or fostering collaborative improvement across providers.

8. A number of approaches and techniques can be used for external referencing, including peer review, moderation and benchmarking.

9. Benchmarking is the most common example of external referencing and at the broad level and can be organisational, relative to the course, process outcomes and best practice.

10. A more detailed analysis on the types of benchmarking is included below.

Types of benchmarking

11. The Institute may undertake benchmarking with similar providers on the following aspects of its operations:

   (a) **Course** – course structure and content, entry criteria, learning outcomes and assessment methods

   (b) **Policies and frameworks** – comparing academic and non-academic policies

   (c) **Process** – comparison of particular processes and practices, e.g. complaint resolution time

   (d) **Student outcomes** – comparing outcomes data, e.g. student attrition, progression, completion and

   (e) **Structures** – comparing company structure, e.g. academic staffing, corporate services, governance.

12. Benchmarking can be undertaken through:

   (a) **Desktop audits** – audit of publicly available information and data, including but not limited to:

   (i) providers' websites

   (ii) higher education data from the Department of Education (DoE) and

   (iii) Quality Indicators for Teaching and learning (QILT).

   (b) **Formal arrangement** – formalising a benchmarking agreement:

   (i) with a provider offering courses in similar disciplines and

   (ii) through participating with QILT or similar industry/sector collaboration (e.g. the Higher Education Private Provider – Quality Network).

Procedures

13. External referencing will be conducted according to the following stages:

Stages	
Stage 1 Identifying	Identifying areas for improvement and/or good practice, e.g. entry requirements, course learning outcomes.
Stage 2 Defining	Define the type of and method for external referencing, e.g. course benchmarking using a provider's website.
Stage 3 Confirmation	Confirm availability of staff with relevant knowledge and skills for the external referencing exercise.
Stage 4 Approval	If required, receive approval from the Academic Board (AB) for a formal benchmarking arrangement.
Stage 5 Reporting	Report external referencing outcomes to management or relevant governing body, including identifying improvement plans.
Stage 6 Reflecting and Improving	Reflect on feedback and outcomes to identify strengths and areas for enhancement, implementing improvements to ensure continuous development and excellence.

14.   Appendix 1 provides a schedule of external referencing activities.

15.   We are committed to complying with all relevant data protection regulations and implementing robust safeguarding practices as part of our external benchmarking policy

Responsibilities

16.   The AB is responsible for:

    (a)   setting institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes and

    (b)   monitoring the implementation of actions taken to improve the Institute's operations.

17.   The CEO with support from the Academic Dean (academic-related activities) is responsible for:

    (a)   overseeing external referencing activities and

    (b)   reporting to the GB on outcomes from external referencing, including recommending actions for improvement.

18.   The Academic Dean is responsible for:

    (a)   overseeing academic-related external referencing activities and

    (b)   reporting to the AB on outcomes from external referencing, including recommending actions for improvement.

19.   All staff are responsible for:

    (a)   undertaking external referencing activities in accordance with this policy, when requested

    (b)   awareness of developments in external referencing practices and

    (c)   implementing improvements arising from external referencing in their areas of responsibility.

Definitions

20.   For the purposes of this Policy and Procedure, the following terms are defined as follows:

Term	Definition
External referencing	A process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s).
Benchmarking	A structured and collaborative quality assurance process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes. Benchmarking is a type of external referencing.
Governing body	Includes the Governing Board (GB) and the Academic Board (AB), and any other committees established under Zenith's Governance Instruments.
Provider	A TEQSA-registered 'Institute of Higher Education'

Version control

Version	Changes	Approval Body	Approval Date
1.0	New Policy	Academic Board (AB)	
1.1	Point 13 updated to include "Reflecting and Improving" Diagram updated from linear to circular Point 5 updated to "To ensure Zenith operates consistent with sector best practice, a range of external referencing activities will be undertaken to compare with other private higher education providers and peer and aspirational institutions the following matters" Point 15 added "We are committed to complying with all relevant data protection regulations and implementing robust safeguarding practices as part of our external benchmarking policy." AI Framework referenced in Related Documents	Academic Board	03 Apr 2024

Appendix 1 – External referencing activities

Type	Objective of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external reporting	Responsible officer	Responsible body
Course	Course reviews including course and unit design, entry criteria, learning outcomes, assessment.	Annual review Comprehensive review (refer to the *Course Monitoring and Review Policy and Procedure*)	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board
Course	Delivery, including technology-enhanced learning, availability of learning/library resources and learning support	Comprehensive review	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board
Policies and Frameworks	Academic and non-academic	At least once every three years		CEO / Academic Dean (academic)	Academic Board Governing Board
Process	Academic misconduct cases, type, frequency	At least once every three years	Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board
Process	Grievances and appeals, number, type, days to resolution, number of external appeals	At least once every three years	Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic	Academic Board Governing Board
Process	SASH incidents, number, type, days to resolution,	At least once every three years	Formal arrangement	CEO	Governing Board

Type	Objective of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external reporting	Responsible officer	Responsible body
	number of external appeals				
Process	Student recruitment, source countries, market trends	At least once every three years	Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Governing Board
Structures	Academic appointments including staff qualifications, professional development and promotion processes	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Governing Board
Structures	Academic staff-to-student ratio	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board Governing Board
Structures	Wellbeing and safety provisions and support services, including professional staff to student ratio	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO	Academic Board Governing Board
Structures	Facilities, resources and infrastructure	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Governing Board
Structures	Governance bodies structure and Terms of Reference	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO	Governing Board

Type	Objective of external referencing	Frequency	Type of external reporting	Responsible officer	Responsible body
Structures	Monitoring quality assurance mechanisms	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board Governing Board
Structures	Approach to student representation and involvement in deliberative decision making	At least once every three years	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO	Academic Board Governing Board
Student outcomes	Student performance such as grade distribution, progression rates, retention rates, attrition rates and completion rates.	Annually	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board Governing Board
Student outcomes	Student feedback and satisfaction	Annually	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean / Academic teaching staff	Academic Board Governing Board
Student outcomes	Moderation, e.g. external double marking of samples of assessment items	At end of each semester	Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board
Student outcomes	Graduate outcomes, graduate course satisfaction, graduate employment and further study	Annually	Desktop audit Formal arrangement	CEO / Academic Dean	Academic Board Governing Board