PROCEDURE	ACADEMIES AUSTRALASIA POLYTECHNIC
Ref. to Legislative Frameworks: HESF2021: Standard 1.3 & 5.3 SRTO2015: Standard 3.2 National Code 2018: Standard 14	**Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement**
Version: 1.2	Procedure Owner: Academic Dean	Issued on: 02/06/2023 Review by: 02/06/2025

Revision History

Current Version	Description of Change	Procedure Developer	Effective Date
1.2	Updated to HESF 2021	Compliance Manager and Academic Dean	02/06/2023
1.1	Updated the content to align with the revised Institutional Quality Assurance Framework Updated references to National Code 2018	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	28/12/2017

PURPOSE

The purpose of the benchmarking procedure is to detail the sequence of benchmarking activities in line with the Benchmarking policy of Academies Australasia Polytechnic (AAPoly).

POLICY STATEMENT

Benchmarking or external referencing is a key aspect of AAPoly's quality assurance and continuous improvement approach. Monitoring, review and improvement processes should encompass reviews against comparators, both internal and external, nationally and internationally (where opportunities avail). Benchmarking activities must be purposeful, systematic, well-managed and appropriate for the intended outcomes.

SCOPE

Benchmarking is relevant to the Higher Education (HE) courses delivered by AAPoly and is useful for the improvement of operational processes. Benchmarking can involve external benchmarking partners but can also include comparing against publicly available information and market intelligence.

DEFINITIONS

Benchmarking	A method to compare processes or outcomes externally and internally to identify exceptional performance and gaps to be addressed in achieving the best practices.
External Benchmarking	In the context of HES Framework, external referencing 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. [1]
Internal Benchmarking	A benchmarking activity that compares operations across different campuses, varieties of timetables or similar courses.
DMAIC Model	AAPoly Institutional Quality Assurance Framework includes the utilisation of the Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control (DMAIC) Model. The DMAIC Model is used in education as a tool to improve information flow, simplify and enhance the efficiencies of an academic assessment process, detect any academic problems and take decisive measures systematically.

---

[1] TEQSA's Guidance Note on External referencing: https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/guidance-notes/guidance-note-external-referencing-including-benchmarking

PROCEDURE

1. External benchmarking requires a collaborative agreement amongst the institutions or organisational units. This could be organised through a formal agreement between the parties such as a formal inter-institution Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or less formal agreement between unit heads. A formal agreement requires the approval of the CEO of AAPoly.

2. A confidentiality agreement must be signed by all parties, to protect the integrity of the shared information.

3. The external partner (s) should:
   o Be specifically selected for the intended benchmarking outcomes;
   o Deliver comparable programs or courses, preferably recognized for the quality of their governance, academic processes and graduate attributes to the level of best practice;
   o Have comparable size and student background;
   o Have commitment to quality improvement and be willing to share information;
   o Have good academic reputation and performance.

4. The quality approach in benchmarking translates into a structured exercise involving various members of AAPoly. The procedure that reflects this approach is illustrated as follows.

Sequence		Evidence
Step 1	**Define**	
	Identify • the areas for improvement within AAPoly • the good practice demonstrated by the partner organisation • the partner organisation, preferably outside the AKG • the methods of comparison	• Record of continuous improvement data collected through students and staff feedback, audit reports, industry reports, moderation, validation, regulatory changes or industry reports and other quality control means • Minutes of internal and external meetings that show identification of continuous improvement needs, agreed actions, timeline and expected outcomes relevant to continuous improvement • Emails and/or proposals for permission to conduct benchmarking, including the rationale, scope, methods and protection of data involved in the benchmarking • Benchmarking reports

Step 2	Measure	

	Determine the scope, methods and indicators of benchmarking e.g. process or outcomes and the areas to be measured that exist in both AAPoly and the partner organisation:
	
	• Application level
	  o AAPoly organisational-wide or
	  o At the level of an organisational-sub unit
	
	• Activity undertaking
	  o will the benchmarking exercise be a data comparison only, or
	  o a detailed investigation to improve organisational performance, or
	  o a combination of both);
	
	• Focus area i.e. which aspects of AAPoly will be the benchmarking influence
	  o an AAPoly organisational process (e.g teaching and learning, operational lines or academic governance)
	  o performance of the organisation, specific areas or individual roles
	  o organisational or functional behaviour
	  o compliance requirement
		• Minutes of internal and external meetings that show identification of continuous improvement needs, agreed actions, timeline and expected outcomes
		
		• Emails and/or proposals for permission to conduct benchmarking, including the rationale, scope, methods and protection of data involved in the benchmarking
		
		• Benchmarking reports

Step 3	Analyse	
	Analyse the outcomes of the benchmarking • reasons for variation identified • variation between AAPoly and the partner organisation • commonalities identified within the scope of the benchmarking	• Data matrix and the information collected in benchmarking • Benchmarking reports • Record of follow-up interviews
Step 4	Improve	
	Formulate improvement plans In preparing the improvement plans, consideration should be given towards: • Actions and deliverables arising from the Benchmarking activity • Responsibility for implementation regarding action within the AAPoly organisation • Budget or other financial implications • Timeframe • Post implementation review i.e. the review methods and people in charge	Action plan or a part of action plan including: • specific actions • timeline • budget • accountable people • clear, measurable indicators of improvement
	Report results The staff member (or other appointed person) undertaking the Benchmarking the activity will • summarise, analyse and interpret the necessary information • provide the AAPoly CEO and Heads of relevant Departments, with relevant, appropriate and timely information to assist in decision making and understanding of any other associated issues arising.	• Minutes of meetings • Emails • File notes

		Implement the agreed action plan(s) Following appropriate deliberation, and heeding advice from any relevant party (e.g. the CEO, other Benchmarking activity stakeholders), the findings of the Benchmarking activity will be referred to relevant departmental head(s) for implementation regarding any issues arising. The implementation of approved action plans is subject to any associated AAPoly procedures or governance processes	• Minutes of meetings • Agreed action plans and the fulfilment checklist • Emails
Step 5	**Control**		
		Review the outcome of the implementation A timeline post implementation is to be agreed upon. Within that timeframe, a review will be conducted and the outcomes reported to the AAPoly Academic Board, AAPoly Board and other relevant departments.	• Progress report back to the relevant department heads and Governance bodies • Final report

RESPONSIBILITIES

- For academic related matters, the Academic Dean plans and is executed by the Associate Dean (Education) for the relevant course-level benchmarking procedures, as well as implements the outcomes of the benchmarking activities.
- The Academic Dean communicates this procedure to relevant staff and ensures their understanding so that they become aware of and understand their responsibilities in the benchmarking activities.
- The Academic Dean reports to the Academic Board or its committees on the purpose and outcomes of any academic benchmarking activities.
- For non-academic matters, the CEO plans and executes relevant operational benchmarking procedures and implements the outcomes of these benchmarking activities. The CEO reports to the Board of Directors on the purpose and outcomes of the operational benchmarking activities.

FEEDBACK

Queries or feedback about this procedure should be directed to the Academic Dean through academicdean@aapoly.edu.au. The Academic Dean will respond to the written question or feedback within two (2) weeks from the receipt, unless an immediate response is required. Feedback that results in material changes will form a part of quality assurance and continuous improvement of AAPoly.

REFERENCES

Source	Document Title
Internal	Benchmarking and Continuous Improvement Policy
External	Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
	National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students
	TEQSA Guidance Note on Academic Governance
	TEQSA Guidance Note: External referencing (including benchmarking)
	TEQSA Guidance Note on Course Design