External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedures

1. PURPOSE

The External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedures set out the principles and processes for undertaking external referencing and benchmarking as part of Barton Business School's ("BBS") course governance and quality assurance. They focus on improving academic performance and student success as well as performance in other areas of BBS's operations.

The primary purpose of this policy and these procedures is to ensure that all BBS external referencing and benchmarking activities are designed to meet the Threshold Standards and the requirements of the appropriate Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to any individuals, committees, boards, and activities relating to BBS's course governance and course monitoring, review, and enhancement practices. It applies to the assurance of higher-education course quality and performance, academic standards and practice, and monitoring and improvement of student success.

3. DEFINITIONS

Refer to BBS's *Glossary of Terms*.

4. POLICY

4.1. PRINCIPLES

a. BBS is committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement. It will use external referencing and benchmarking to compare its performance and standards with other higher-education providers to provide assurance of the quality of its operations and enhance organisational learning and decision making.

b. BBS will use external referencing for review purposes, to inform planning, and to determine areas for future development. It will undertake comparisons of:
    i. course and unit design;
    ii. cohort analysis of student performance and achievement of outcomes;
    iii. policies, procedures, and operations relating to learning and teaching.

c. External referencing incorporates a range of approaches and methods, including peer review, validation of assessment tasks, and benchmarking.

4.2. TYPES OF EXTERNAL REFERENCING AND BENCHMARKING

External referencing is undertaken to compare specific practices and performance measures against external comparators to learn, adapt, and improve performance. External comparators include courses or academic practices of other relevant higher-education providers, publicly available information, professional-body standards, and external documents such as policies, procedures, and strategies.

a. *Peer Review*: External peer review involves an independent assessment of BBS's learning and teaching activities, including teaching practices and course and unit design, delivery, and evaluation. Peer review is done by academic experts in relevant disciplines or fields of study.

b. *Validation*: External validation is undertaken by referencing comparable assessment tasks from comparable courses external to BBS and by review of assessment tasks by an expert in learning and teaching from a related discipline or field of study.

c. *External benchmarking*: External benchmarking involves external comparisons through, for example, a relationship with a benchmarking partner (e.g., a higher-education provider) and a comparison of courses with publicly available data, such as Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) survey data.

d. *Desktop benchmarking*: Desktop benchmarking is an exercise conducted by comparing publicly available information about the activities of comparable higher education providers, both local and, where appropriate, international, in the following areas:
   i. Course design, structure, and curricula.
   ii. Assessment design, methods, models, and outcomes.
   iii. Course delivery, including modes of delivery and support provided.
   iv. Academic integrity.
   v. Student progress, attrition, and completion.
   vi. Student experience, as measured through internal surveys and other tools.
   vii. Graduate outcomes.
   viii. Policies, procedures, and processes.
   ix. On selected criteria, institutional performance as a whole.

5. PROCEDURES

5.1. COURSE REVIEW AND ENHANCEMENT

External referencing, informed by external comparators, must be used to evaluate BBS's quality and to provide BBS with an evidence base to guide and focus improvement initiatives.

a. External referencing of course-learning outcomes, assessment methods, and student achievement is embedded in BBS's course reviews (refer to the *Course Monitoring and Review Policy and Procedure*).

b. BBS must check the expected course-learning outcomes (CLOs) are consistent with the level and field of education of the qualification awarded by external comparators.

c. BBS's course review, monitoring, and enhancement activities must review the items specified in 4.2.d.

5.2. ASSESSMENT

a. When undertaking external referencing of assessment, BBS must ensure the methods used are valid and reliable.

b. The success of student cohorts against comparable courses must be referenced externally to evaluate the efficacy of:

    i. design and methods of assessment;

    ii. student achievement of learning outcomes.

c. A representative sample of units from each course must be selected for review. For each unit, the evidence for review must include the following:

    i. unit outline, with details of the unit and course-learning outcomes and assessment items for the unit;

    ii. assessment rubrics;

    iii. de-identified samples of student assessment;

    iv. samples of assessment feedback.

d. The main assessment item or an item worth 40% or more of the final grade must be reviewed. Where an assessment item worth 40% or more is not available, the two items worth the most significant proportion of the final grade must be reviewed.

e. A representative sample of student assessments must be reviewed. Where possible, the assessments provided for review will include at least one passing assessment (50 – 55%), one medium-achievement assessment (70 - 75%), and one high-achievement assessment (>80%).

f. Reflecting on the results of the review of the assessment is an essential part of BBS's annual unit and course enhancement procedures:

    i. *Unit enhancement review report* (UER): Each year, each unit must undergo an assessment review. The review's findings and outcomes, including any substantial improvements to the unit, must be reported in the UER. This includes considering the achievement of learning outcomes in the unit and assurance of academic standards relative to the higher-education sector.

    ii. *Course enhancement review report* (CER): Each CER must report on the findings and outcomes of any external referencing of units in the course that has occurred during the past year and any substantial improvements to the course. This includes considering the achievement of learning outcomes in the course and assurance of academic standards relative to the higher-education sector.

5.3. STUDENT SUCCESS

a. External referencing of student cohort success is undertaken as part of course enhancement and review as an integral part of monitoring and reviewing the course and student performance.

b. A Student Success Report (SSR) must be submitted annually to the Academic Board ("AB"). This report must comprise the following two parts:

    i. Part 1: Analysis of trends in the past five years for:
   - a. Progress
   - b. Retention
   - c. Attrition
   - d. Completions
   - e. Against external comparators: state average, the national average

    ii. Part 2: Appropriate commentary and analysis of trends for:
   - a. Progress
   - b. Retention
   - c. Attrition
   - d. Completions
   - e. Against external comparators: state average, the national average
   - f. Cohort analysis by international, domestic, indigenous, and disability

c. The external referencing activity must lead to recommendations for action through the development of an Action Plan.

d. The AB must recommend actions through the development of an Action Plan.

e. The AB must monitor implementation of all Action Plans.

f. The AB must report on the external referencing results, outcomes, and recommendations to the Board of Directors ("BoD") to identify common themes and trends and to drive improvements.

6. BENCHMARKING PROCESS

The procedures below illustrate BBS's benchmarking approach.

6.1. STEP 1: CONCEPTUALISE

The conceptualisation of benchmarking must involve planning in the following areas:

a. identify the areas for improvement within BBS;

b. recruit and seek advice from partners who have a shared commitment to the objective;

c. document decisions about the rationale for undertaking benchmarking activities.

d. Identification of stakeholders.

6.2. STEP 2: DESIGN

The design of benchmarking activities requires identification of:
   a. type of benchmarking;
   b. who will undertake the activity;
   c. expected timelines;
   d. deliverables;
   e. development of a project plan and a project team;
   f. communication plan.

6.3. STEP 3: REVIEW

   a. Evidence must be collected following the benchmarking plan.
   b. All evidence must draw on relevant, reliable, and recent data and information.
   c. Self-review activities must be undertaken to analyse relevant information and data.
   d. Where partners are involved, peer-review activities, such as a workshop, must be undertaken to compare data and processes and to identify areas for sharing and collaboration.

6.4. STEP 4: IMPLEMENTATION

   a. Review and analysis must lead to recommendations for action through the development of an Action Plan.
   b. The AB must monitor the implementation of the Action Plan.

6.5. STEP 5: REPORT

The results, outcomes, and recommendations from the benchmarking activity must be reported to the AB to identify common themes and trends and drive improvements.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

   a. The Dean must ensure that BBS has appropriate processes and resources to undertake external referencing and benchmarking to meet the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* and BBS's policy document requirements.
   b. The AB must monitor compliance with *Threshold Standards 2021* and BBS's policy documents through established course governance, quality-assurance processes, and reporting in line with their terms of reference.
   c. The BoD must monitor compliance with *Threshold Standards 2021* and BBS's policy documents relevant to external referencing and benchmarking.

d. All employees with a role in course governance, accreditation, management, development delivery, review, and administration are responsible for complying with this policy and these procedures.

e. The AB is responsible for monitoring and reviewing this policy and these procedures to ensure their continuing effectiveness.

8. VERSION CONTROL

Document title	External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy and Procedures	
Approved By	Academic Board	
Date of Review	This document is to be reviewed every two years at a minimum from the date of final approval.	
Related Documents	• Academic Progression and Student at Risk Policy and Procedures • Assessment Policy and Procedures • Course Design and Development Policy and Procedures • Course Monitoring and Review Policy and Procedures • External Referencing and Benchmarking Plan • Feedback Policy and Procedures • Terms of Reference - Academic Board • Terms of Reference - Board of Directors	
Related Legislation and References	• Higher Education Standards Framework – (Threshold Standards) 2021 • Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011 • TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking)	
Version	Notes	Date Approved
1.0	• The first draft was tabled in the AB meeting. • Document approved subject to minor changes in sections 4.2.d, 4.3.h, 4.3.a, 5.1.f, 5.2.a, 5.2.d, and 5.3.a.	25/11/2022
2.0	• The AB approved this document with section 4.2 (d) update.	07/02/2025