External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy

Document

Document Name	External Referencing and Benchmarking Policy
Brief Description	The purpose of this policy is to articulate the principles and practices that underpin the process of external referencing (including benchmarking) at the Sydney Institute of Business and Technology (SIBT).
Responsible Officer	Academic Director
Delegated Approver	Academic Board
Initial Issue Date	5 June 2023
Date for Next Review:	20 May 2028

Version Control

Date Approved	Version No.	Summary of Changes	Approver
05/06/2023	1	Initial Release	Academic Board
20/5/25	2	Benchmarking added to Policy Title and throughout the Policy. External Comparator and Sector and Reciprocal Benchmarking definitions and context added. Updated reference to RPL to align with related Policy. Clarified provision for MOU with benchmarking partners and transparency on SIBT's relationship with the partner, their IP and process. Added Monitoring and Reporting Clause and Review Clause.	Academic Board

Related Documents

Name	Location
Learning and Teaching Plan	SIBT SharePoint
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (TEQSA Act 2011)	Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (legislation.gov.au)

Contents

1. Purpose

a) This Policy establishes the requirements for external referencing and benchmarking at the Sydney Institute of Business and Technology (SIBT) to evidence quality assurance and inform quality enhancement in relation to academic programs, business operations and governance. Its focus is to improve academic performance and student success and contribute to continuous improvement in other areas of SIBT operations.

2. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Benchmarking	A structured, collaborative learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes with identified good practices across the sector. Its purpose is to identify comparative strengths and weaknesses, as a basis for developing improvements in academic quality or performance.
External Comparator	Provides a benchmark or a point of comparison to help evaluate the identify strengths and weaknesses in SIBT practices, policies and performance. Navitas Colleges are considered external for IP and Program related benchmarking only as the comparison is between SIBT IP and a Navitas College's University Partner IP.
External Referencing	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 program of study and/or student achievement of learning outcomes with that of a program from another provider.
Reciprocal benchmarking	When a mutual action or relationship exists, both parties have equal engagement and benefit from the process.
Sector Benchmarking	Enables comparison of performance against others in the higher education sector in Australia and to ensure the ongoing quality and performance of SIBT's programs, demographic trends and organisational efficiency e.g. through final exam peer review and post-marking moderation.

3. Application

a) This Policy applies to external referencing and benchmarking activities relating to the organisation, its programs and operations including:
   i. Higher education coursework awards and units;
   ii. Non-award programs, short courses, or micro-credentials; and
   iii. SIBT policies, procedures and operations relating to learning and teaching.

4. Policy Statement

a) External referencing, one of SIBT's continuous improvement tools, is an evidence-based process used to compare aspects of SIBT's operations and performance with an external comparator. SIBT is committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and will use external referencing and benchmarking processes to identify strengths and weaknesses in practices, policies and performance.

b) SIBT enters into reciprocal arrangements for Program benchmarking with Navitas Colleges where SIBT Programs and IP are assessed against another Navitas College's University Partner's Programs and IP;

c) SIBT enters into reciprocal benchmarking arrangements with Higher Education Providers to identify areas for improvement and good practices across the sector, and to inform decision making;

d) SIBT will draw on relevant, reliable, and recent data, and use external referencing to inform planning, determine areas for future development or growth, and for review using comparisons of:
   i.   Program and unit design;
   ii.   Cohort analysis of student performance and achievement of outcomes; and
   iii. Policy, procedure, and operations.

5.   Types of External Referencing

a) SIBT may use a variety of external referencing and benchmarking approaches to monitor academic performance and standards, including but not limited to:
   i.   Organisational benchmarking in which comparisons are made at the organisational level (institution, discipline, program, and unit levels). This may include comparisons of student experience, measured through external surveys, responses to internal surveys, or through other tools.
   ii.   Program benchmarking, including program and unit design, assessment, and student performance. Program benchmarking may include comparisons of program components such as program structures, entry requirements, delivery modes, assessment, and learning outcomes.
   iii. Process benchmarking involves comparisons of particular processes and practices e.g., efficiency, and delivery modes.
   iv.   Outcomes benchmarking relating to the comparison of data, including cohort analysis of student outcomes such as foundation versus direct entry, retention, progression, attrition, and completion rates. Cohorts can include the following:
      • Pre-identified: cohorts identified by factors such as location, international students, third party arrangements, annual intakes, field of education program groups, diversity groups, at-risk groups, and students with substantial academic credit or Credit of Prior Learning.
      • Data-driven: detected risk areas such as clusters of under-performance, significant breaches of academic integrity, slow progression/completion or attrition with a common factor (agent, country of origin, admission entry pathway, mode of study, market niche, location).
   v.   Best-practice benchmarking in which SIBT selects a comparator thought to be at the forefront in the area to be benchmarked.

6.   Outcomes of Benchmarking and External Referencing

a) Outcomes of benchmarking and external referencing will be used to guide and evaluate enhancements to improve the standard of learning and teaching including, but not limited to:
   i.   Assessment design;

ii.   Graduate attributes;

iii.   Program, unit and curriculum design;

iv.   Program structures;

v.   Credit arrangements;

vi.   Delivery modes;

vii.   Use of institutional systems and technologies;

viii.   Admissions standards;

ix.   Third party arrangements; and

x.   Policy, procedure and operations.

7.   External Referencing and Benchmarking Partners

a)   SIBT will ensure the methods of assessment are valid and reliable.

b)   Depending on the nature of the external referencing and benchmarking activity, the Quality and Compliance Manager will identify partners for non-academic proposals and the Program Convenors, or the Academic Director, may identify partners for academic proposals.

c)   An external referencing and benchmarking partner should:

i.   Be a recognised institute of higher education;

ii.   Have a comparable mission, vision and objectives;

iii.   Be of comparable size with a similar student demographic;

iv.   Offer similar programs/units to SIBT;

v.   Have a willingness to share; and

vi.   Demonstrate a record of good performance in the area(s) to be benchmarked; and,

vii.   Have an executed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place for Providers outside Navitas.

d)   The Benchmarking register and subsequent reports will ensure clarity and transparency of SIBT's relationship with the Partner organisation, in particular when partnering with another Navitas College. The IP owner of benchmarked curriculum and processes is to be clearly identified in the report.

8.   Responsibility

a)   The Academic Board is responsible for:

i.   Monitoring compliance with the [Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021](#);

ii.   Considering and approving recommendations for external referencing raised by its committees in relation to academic matters, or that include arrangements with external organisations;

iii.   Setting the expectation that reviews on academic governance and quality include external referencing, and that any recommendations on changes to programs, units, learning and teaching should consider this data;

iv.   Overseeing the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing recommendations.

b)   The Academic Director is responsible for:

i. Ensuring there are appropriate processes and resources in place to undertake the required activities to meet the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021;

ii. Considering and approving proposals for external referencing in relation to academic matters, including proposals to partner with other organisations;

iii. Reporting progress and outcomes of such external referencing activities to the Learning and Teaching Committee;

iv. Working with Program Convenors to monitor the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing report recommendations.

c) The Program Convenors are responsible for:

i. Developing proposals for external referencing in relation to academic matters;

ii. Considering external referencing data when overseeing periodic reviews of program curricula and delivery; and when reviewing the outcomes of the delivery performance of each individual program;

iii. Making recommendations to the Learning and Teaching Committee on improvements or changes to the design and delivery of programs, including improvements to assessment strategies, tasks, marking criteria and processes;

iv. Working with staff to monitor the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing report recommendations;

v. Preparing proposals and reports for external referencing as required;

vi. Leading and managing external benchmarking activities as required.

d) The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for:

i. Monitoring and reporting on external referencing activities in relation to learning and teaching matters;

ii. Reviewing external referencing data when considering recommendations made by Academic Board subcommittees, before endorsing and submitting recommendations to the Academic Board; and

iii. Evaluating benchmarking and external referencing activities to determine the effectiveness of the activity.

e) The Chair of the Learning and Teaching Committee will report on the results, outcomes and recommendations from external referencing activities to the Academic Board to identify common themes, trends and drive improvements.

f) The Quality and Compliance Manager and Academic Director are responsible for providing support to adhere to this policy.

9. Monitoring and Reporting

a) SIBT monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the terms under this Policy to identify continuous improvement opportunities and risk identification and mitigation and to inform updates to the policy.

b) The Benchmarking Register, maintained by the Program Convenors, ensures all units undertake benchmarking at least twice during their accreditation period.

c) The Register and a summary report are presented to the Academic Board under a standard agenda item at each Academic Board meeting.

10. Review

a) SIBT monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the terms under this Policy to identify continuous improvement opportunities and risk identification and mitigation and to inform updates to the policy.

b) This Policy will be reviewed by the Responsible Officer and the Quality and Compliance Manager, a minimum of every three (3) years, or when there are updates to the regulatory compliance requirements, legislation, regulation, and guidelines.