Benchmarking Policy and Procedures

Purpose

This Policy outlines the benchmarking process that is used by the Central Institute of Technology and Innovation (The Institute) as part of the Institute's commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement of all Higher Education operations. A rigorous benchmarking framework allows the Institute to continue to meet industry and academic best practice. Benchmarking is also undertaken to meet the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021.

Scope

The policy applies to all staff, students, and other members of the Institute community to whom the policy applies.

Related Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Institute documents:

- Course Development and Review Policy and Procedures
- Information and Records Management Policy and Procedures
- Information and Privacy Policy and Procedures

All documents referenced in this policy can be accessed via the CITI website.

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Definition of Key Terms

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

Term	Definition
Benchmarking	Benchmarking: a quality process used to evaluate performance by comparing institutional practices to identified good practices across the sector. Benchmarking can be undertaken collaboratively with another department or institution, as a desktop exercise using publicly available information about another organisation or against external standards.
Desktop benchmarking	Desktop benchmarking is a benchmarking activity that is undertaken using data points that are publicly available and/or do not require sharing of information between organisations

Policy Principles

The Institute is committed to ensuring the high quality of its higher education operations and program delivery through regular internal and external benchmarking activities. Benchmarking activities are a key quality assurance mechanism. Benchmarking is critical to improving higher education course offerings and internal processes and operations by bringing them in line with current good practice within the sector. Benchmarking provides a transparent process for establishing comparability and competitiveness with other similar providers.

Benchmarking activities undertaken by the Institute are underpinned by six principles. All benchmarking activities should be:

1. **Effective:** Benchmarking activities conducted against external reference points or other higher education providers should be effective. Effective benchmarking supports both the quality enhancement and quality assurance of course, units, and operations.

2. **Efficient and sustainable:** Efficient and sustainable benchmarking provides a streamlined, efficient, and sustainable process for benchmarking that can be operationalised and used routinely by the institute.

3. **Sufficient:** Benchmarking activities should be robust in design to ensure that data collected are sufficient to inform the outcome of the activity.

4. **Transparent:** Transparent benchmarking ensures that multiple perspectives are considered. Transparent benchmarking facilitates critical discussion both within the Institute and between other institutions and/or regulatory bodies.

5. **Consultative and Collaborative:** Relevant staff members (i.e., lectures and unit coordinators) should be consulted as part of the benchmarking process to ensure that transparency is maintained and as part of the Institute's approach for creating a positive and collaborative workplace.

6. **Capacity building:** Benchmarking activities should contribute to the professional development of participating staff and the formation of networks and contacts with staff from other institutions.

Policy Statement

The purpose of a stated benchmarking activity is to assess the standard and performance of a unit or course by comparing the unit or course against an equivalent unit or course at another provider/s, and/or against national discipline data/standard/s, and to use this information to guide improvements where appropriate. Noting here that benchmarking activities can focus on a singular element and/or a whole course depending upon the stated outcome of the benchmarking activity.

1. Benchmarking can be undertaken collaboratively with a partner provider, and/or against national data as a desktop benchmarking exercise.

2. A schedule for course benchmarking will be developed by the Academic Board. As part of the quality assurance and course review process

3. The Academic Head may instigate additional activities as part of ongoing quality assurance processes at a unit and course level.

1. Partnerships and Collaborations

When considering potential partnerships and collaborations the following should be considered:

1.1 Identification of institutions which are most comparable to the Institute in terms of size, profile, and any other relevant factors. This may include other private Higher Education Providers or Universities.

1.2 Identification of institutions which are perceived as having an outstanding reputation as a provider of quality education and/or good practices in learning and teaching and/or highly successful graduates and graduate employment rates and/or other similar indicators of a quality learning and teaching in the area/s identified for benchmarking.

1.3 Prior to the commencement of any benchmarking activity with an external organisation, consent must be secured from the Academic Board for formal or institution-level benchmarking activities or the Academic Head for unit and course-level benchmarking activities.

2. Memorandum of Understanding

Prior to the commencement of any benchmarking activity with an external organisation a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the shared commitment and understanding of the benchmarking goals with the proposed partner(s) must be established.

The Memorandum of Understanding should consider:

2.1 The inclusion and wording of any additional performance indicators to be benchmarked.

2.2 The timeframe for completion of the project.

2.3   The data or information required by each organisation.

2.4   Self-review processes and the scale of the review process.

2.5   A clear outline of how any data will be shared and how privacy will be maintained.

2.6   Parameters for the scheduling of a peer-review workshop to discuss the findings of the benchmarking.

Procedures

The following procedures are designed to be a guideline for benchmarking activities. It is acknowledged that there may be variations to the process on the basis of the nature of the benchmarking activity. The steps outlined below refer to the process for collaborative benchmarking. The same process should also be followed for desktop benchmarking, except that the steps relating to communication with a partner should be omitted.

1. Phase 1: Concept and Scope of Benchmarking Activities

All coursework programs must benchmark:

1.1   Progression rates, attrition rates, and completion times/rates, including where applicable rates for different assessments, units, and modes of delivery.

1.2   Expected program learning outcomes (except those programs which have undertaken such benchmarking over the previous five years as part of the professional accreditation process).

1.3   Where practicable, coursework programs also benchmark graduate outcome data. The Academic Board may also elect to benchmark additional aspects of the course where collection of this information would be beneficial for the Institute.

1.4   During this phase, the first step is to identify and document:

- The leader (staff member) for the benchmarking project.

- Whether any additional performance indicators will be benchmarked.

- Possible partner(s) for collaborative benchmarking.

- Relevant discipline standards and/or national data to be used for desktop benchmarking.

- The proposed timeframe and/or stipulated deadlines for the benchmarking activity.

- Any programs which are professionally accredited may use the relevant discipline standards to benchmark expected course and unit learning outcomes.

2. Phase 2: Conducting Benchmarking Activities

Benchmarking activities should be fit for purpose. Desktop benchmarking and benchmarking with partner institutions may follow similar processes. Benchmarking activities should consider:

2.1   The institutional processes to obtain data relating to progression rates, attrition rates and completion times/rates for the program, including where applicable mode of delivery.

2.2   The scales by which data points will be measured (i.e., Likert-style, rankings, yes/no)

2.3   Processes to identify everything that contributes to the current performance outcomes (whether positive, negative, or neutral in their impact) and includes:

- Areas of good practice

- Weaknesses and gaps in performance or process

- Potential explanations for differences between the partners (if relevant)

- Potential areas for sharing and collaboration between partners (if relevant)

- Trends over time

- Impact of market events and changes in student cohorts

- Changes in the workforce and impact on learning and teaching activities

- Presentation of final benchmarking report and the dissemination of information.

3. Phase 3: Reporting on Benchmarking Activities

The Benchmarking Report and Action Plan should be submitted to the Learning and Teaching Committee in the first instance for review and endorsement. The final report should be submitted to the Academic Board where practicable. As part of the benchmarking process, the leader or delegate must develop a brief Benchmarking Report which:

3.1   Outlines the process and methods used for the benchmarking project.

3.2   Provides an assessment of the program for each performance indicator.

3.3   Identifies the priority areas for the program to address – including weaknesses, gaps, and areas of strength to build upon.

3.4   Includes recommendations for action.

3.5   Does not include any information designated as confidential that was provided by any benchmarking partner (if relevant).

3.6   Develop and implement a brief Action Plan to address each recommendation in the report. The Action Plan must be capable of being implemented in a reasonable timeframe. The Action Plan:

3.7   Identifies specific actions, who is responsible for each action and the target dates for completion of each action.

3.8   Should be supported by the benchmarking team and all those who have specific responsibilities within the Plan.

4. Phase 4: Evaluation and Review

As part of the benchmarking process, an evaluation and review of the outcomes of the benchmarking activity and Action Plan should be conducted in a timeframe relevant to the benchmarking activity and Action Plan.

5. Phase 5: Reporting

Reports will be submitted to the Learning and Teaching Committee, The Academic Board, and the Board of Directors where relevant.

5.1   The Academic Head is responsible for creating detailed records of all benchmarking undertaken, including the method used, comparators employed, conclusions drawn, and the outcomes or improvements made.

5.2   Compliance is responsible for ensuring that all records are captured on the relevant program file in the records management system, in accordance with the Information and Records Management Policy and Procedures.

Related Legislation

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following related documents:

- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
- Australian Qualifications Framework

Change and Version Control

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Policy Information

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Responsible Officer	Academic Head
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