BENCHMARKING PROCEDURE

Approving Authority	Executive Management Team
Purpose	This procedure outlines the principles and approach to the benchmarking of the Institute's practices, processes and performance.
Responsible Officer	Academic Dean
Next Scheduled Review	August 2026
Document Location	R:\Managers\OIHE\Policies
Associated Documents	Benchmarking Policy
	Assessment Moderation Policy and Procedure
	Course and Unit Development, Approval and Review Policy and Procedure
	Policy Development and Review Policy
	Procedure Development and Review Policy
	Quality Management Framework

1. PRINCIPLES

Ozford Institute of Higher Education (hereafter referred to as the "Institute") adopts a policy of self-evaluation, and it benchmarks its performance targets, staffing, learning and teaching activities, outcome indicators, course structures, processes and practices with data from comparable Higher Education providers by way of benchmarking activities.

Benchmarking enables the Institute to:
- discover new ideas for achieving the Strategic Plan;
- provide an evidence-based framework for change and improvement;
- confirm the quality and standing of the Institute's courses and operations
- improve student outcomes and Institute processes and practices;
- inform planning and goal setting;
- improve decision-making through referencing comparative data. .

The Institute regards benchmarking as the overarching term to describe all external referencing activities designed to identify comparative position (strengths and weaknesses), as a basis for developing improvements in academic and other quality or performance.

The quality framework of the Institute is an enabler to this procedure. Benchmarking assists the Institute to measure its effectiveness in achieving its performance objectives and to place these achievements in a broader context.

2. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all Institute staff, consultants, peer reviewers and stakeholders involved in benchmarking of the Institute's practices, processes and performance.

3.   DEFINITIONS

Benchmark
A Benchmark is defined as a point of reference against which something may be measured (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Benchmarking can be defined as a quality process used to evaluate performance by comparing institutional practices to sector good practice (TEQSA, 2018).

Benchmarking
Benchmarking is a form of external referencing and typically consists of focused improvement through relationships with a benchmarking partner or partners and also includes comparing course design against publicly available information and market intelligence.

External referencing
In the context of *Threshold Standards*, 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. A number of approaches and techniques can be used for external referencing, such as benchmarking, peer review, moderation or information from publicly available sources.

Partnering
Partnering occurs when the Institute enters into a formal agreement with one or more other comparable Higher Education Providers to compare data for a defined range of institutional outcomes related to teaching and learning.

Peer review
Peer review is an impartial and independent assessment by an external person with expertise in the same or a related field. It is usually an activity conducted by intendent experts or external experts, usually who are involved in delivery of or have delivered similar accredited courses.

Stakeholder reviews
A stakeholder review is an independent review by an industry, professional organisation or government stakeholder with specific knowledge and expertise in the area subject to benchmarking.

Student performance data
Student performance data measures the success of student cohorts. Data may include student progression, attrition, completion times and rates and different locations of delivery. Some examples include:
- grades distribution per program of study over a calendar year;
- attrition rates per program of study;
- completion rates per program.

4.   PROCEDURE

4.1   The Academic Dean in liaison with the President and CEO initiate and manage benchmarking activities that:
- inform planning and goal setting

- improve decision-making
- inform and improve Institute policies, procedures and guidelines, teaching and learning
- provide an evidence base for changes and improvement
- provide an external focus to internal activities.

4.2 The benchmarking activities will consider:
- How does the Institute compare to its peers?
- What is good practice? Where are any performance gaps? Are there reasons for the gaps?
- How can the Institute improve or enhance practices to adapt good practice from other providers? What strategies may address the gaps? What opportunities are there to enhance existing or develop new strategies/practices?

4.3 The areas in which the Institute can conduct benchmarking of both quantitative (e.g. attrition rates) as well as qualitative (e.g. course entry requirements) include:
- Admissions
  - course entry requirements
- Program delivery:
  - new course design
  - course reviews
  - learning and assessment;
  - academic and student support services;
- Student performance:
  - student performance data
  - academic integrity
  - student satisfaction

Desktop review

4.4 The Institute's staff when developing or reviewing Institute policies, procedures, accredited courses and supporting practices should consider publicly available data and information of comparative providers including:
  - comparison of external policies and practices to inform development of policies and processes;
  - comparison with national survey outcomes;
  - review against externally recognised benchmarks such as discipline standards;
  - comparison against accepted professional and industry standards, which may or may not result in certification/accreditation.

4.5 The Institute's staff should analyse relevant, reliable and recent data and information. The staff should identify anything positive, negative or neutral in their impact.

4.6 The Institute's staff should make recommendations to develop, amend or change Institute policies, procedures, accredited courses and supporting documentation to incorporate areas for improvement or enhancement.

4.7 The recommendations can be actioned once approved as set out in the Institute's policies and procedures for the are subject to review.

4.8   The Institute's staff should ensure the Institute policies, procedures, accredited courses and supporting documentation acknowledge and set out the data and information used in benchmarking in an Acknowledgement or external reference section.

Partnering

4.9   The Academic Dean researches and identifies appropriate benchmarking partners or suitable partnering groups.

4.10   The Academic Dean and the President and CEO meet with the benchmarking partner(s) or group to establish suitability. The Institute's benchmarking partners should normally:
- be similar in size, vision, corporate strategy, and objectives;
- be comparable in terms of student demographics;
- offer similar existing and projected programs;
- be willing to share ideas and meet on a regular basis;
- ensure objective records of key performance indicators are maintained.

4.11   If suitable, the Academic Dean recommends to the President and CEO that the Institute should partner with the benchmarking partner(s) or group.

4.12   Once approved, the Academic Dean will prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with benchmarking partner(s), including the following:
- confidentiality and agreed use of the information to be exchanged
- parameters for benchmarking or areas of improvement, such as staff portfolios, program delivery and student outcomes;
- timeframe for benchmarking;
- procedure for data gathering and agreed format; and
- report template.

4.13   Institute staff when undertaking benchmarking projects where a request for information is involved will consider:
- ***Confidentiality***: All benchmarking exchanges should be treated as confidential and publication and external communication of findings should not proceed without the permission of all partners.
- ***Use:*** Benchmarking information should not be used for other than the express purpose for which it was obtained, prior consent should be obtained from all participating partners.
- ***Exchange:*** The type or level of information exchanged should be comparable between the benchmarking partners.

4.14   The Academic Dean and relevant Institute staff will attend benchmarking meetings with the benchmarking partner(s) at agreed intervals to establish the Institute data and information to be subject to benchmarking.

4.15   Once the benchmarking area has been agreed, the Academic Dean and relevant Institute staff will collate and exchange the Institute data and information with the benchmarking partner (s) or group. The data and information selected for benchmarking will be sufficient, de-identified, and clear.

4.16   The Academic Dean and relevant Institute staff may meet with the partner to:
• compare data and processes
• identify any additional data requirements or contextual information needed
• consider reasons for differences between the partners
• identify areas for sharing and collaboration.

4.17   The Academic Dean will chair an internal discussion with relevant staff to discuss and analyse the comparative data and information. The discussion should consider:
• How does the Institute compare to its peers?
• What is good practice? Where are any performance gaps? Are there reasons for the gaps?
• How can the Institute improve or enhance practices to adapt good practice from other providers? What strategies may address the gaps? What opportunities are there to enhance existing or develop new strategies/practices?

4.18   The Academic Dean and relevant staff will also evaluate the effectiveness of the benchmarking, including how the process could be improved.

4.19   The Academic Dean will prepare a report setting out the benchmarking outcomes and highlighting any instances where the Institute has performed significantly better or worse than benchmarking partner(s) and recommended actions. The report will also provide an evaluation of the process.

4.20   The Education Committee will review the benchmarking outcomes report and recommendations.

4.21   The Academic Dean will oversee the implementation of the action plan and any proposed changes to the benchmarking process.

4.22   The Academic Dean may, from time to time, collect publicly available information from other institutions to measure its performance in comparison to a broad cross-section of providers.

Peer review and Stakeholder engagement

4.23   The Institute's benchmarking may involve peer review or engagement with stakeholders about the benchmarking topics.

4.24   The benchmarking activities may involve:
o independent experts or external experts with higher education knowledge and expertise
o staff involvement in professional associations and external review activities that facilitate identification and sharing of practices
o other stakeholder engagement such as professional associations, ie. CPA

4.25   The Institute's peer reviewers or stakeholders will be encouraged to review and report on the Institute's data and information against comparative data. The benchmarking should consider:
• How does the Institute compare to its peers?

- What is good practice? Where are any performance gaps? Are there reasons for the gaps?
- How can the Institute improve or enhance practices to adapt good practice from other providers? What strategies may address the gaps? What opportunities are there to enhance existing or develop new strategies/practices?

4.26   The Academic Dean will chair an internal discussion with relevant staff to discuss peer review or stakeholder feedback. The review of the feedback may:
   o   identify matters of fact that need to be rectified;
   o   actions to address performance gaps
   o   opportunities to enhance existing or develop new strategies/practices

4.27   The Academic Dean will prepare a report setting out the benchmarking outcomes and highlighting any instances where the Institute has performed significantly better or worse than benchmarking partner(s) and recommended actions. The report will also provide an evaluation of the process.

4.28   The Education Committee will review the benchmarking outcomes report and recommendations. The Executive Management Team will approve the action plan.

4.29   The Academic Dean will oversee the implementation of the action plan.

Policy and procedure development and review

4.30   The development and review of the Institute's policies and procedures as set out in the ***Policy Development and Review Policy*** and the ***Procedure Development and Review Policy*** include
- review of publicly available information and undertaking comparisons against both peers and other providers to establish good practice;
- internal and external stakeholder feedback; and
- outcomes for internal and external reviews..

Course Development and review

4.31   All Institute course development and review processes include benchmarking as set out in the ***Course and Unit Development, Approval and Review Policy and Procedure*** including:
- course proposals include publicly available information and market intelligence about the proposed course;
- the Institute's academic staff establish comparative practices when developing and reviewing accredited courses;
- the Institute appoints independent experts with suitable higher education industry knowledge and expertise to assess and benchmark new courses and conduct comprehensive course reviews;
- course reviews consider the results of benchmarking and external referencing.

Assessment moderation

4.32   The Institute's assessment moderation process includes external moderation as set out in the ***Assessment Moderation Policy and Procedure***.

Benchmarking records

4.33   Staff must ensure that benchmarking records are maintained as set out in the Records Management Policy and Procedure.

Reporting and monitoring

4.34   The Academic Dean prepares a benchmarking report annually for the Education Committee and the Academic Board that includes:
- benchmarking activities and information
- findings, recommendations and actions to address key issues; and
- progress reports on the actions taken.

4.35   The benchmarking report will be presented to the Education Committee for discussion and endorsement of proposed actions and to the Academic Board for approval.

5.   QUALITY ASSURANCE

To ensure that this procedure is fit for purpose and meets the requirements of the HESF Threshold Standards, the procedure will be:

5.1   internally endorsed by the Executive Management Team on development or review, prior to approval by Governing Board, or the Academic Board or other delegated authority;

5.2   externally reviewed as part of any independent review of the HESF Threshold Standards approved by the Governing Board;

5.3   internally reviewed by the Responsible Officer every three years from the date of approval (if not earlier); and

5.4   referenced to the applicable HESF threshold standard and/or other legislation/regulation.

6.   FEEDBACK

Feedback or comments on this procedure is welcomed by the listed responsible officer(s) of the Institute.

7.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This procedure was developed with reference to the following:
- Charles Darwin University, Benchmarking and External Referencing Policy and Procedure, 2022 (Benchmarking and External Referencing Policy and Procedure / Governance Document Library (cdu.edu.au))
- Kaplan Australia, Benchmarking Policy, 2021 (https://www.kaplanprofessional.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Kaplan_Benchmarking_Policy_Oct_2021_Final.pdf)
- RMIT University, Program and Course External Referencing and Benchmarking Procedure, Not dated (https://policies.rmit.edu.au/download.php?id=252&version=1)

- S P J Global, Benchmarking Policy and Procedures, 2023 (Benchmarking-Policy-and-Procedures-29-04-20.pdf (spjain.edu.au))
- The University of Notre Dame, Guideline: Benchmarking, 2019 (GUIDELINE-Benchmarking.pdf (notredame.edu.au))
- University of Adelaide , Benchmarking webpage, 2023 (https://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/quality-assurance/benchmarking#guidelines)
- University of the Sunshine Coast, External Referencing: Program Benchmarking – Procedures, 2021 (External Referencing: Program Benchmarking - Procedures | UniSC | University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia (usc.edu.au))
- Victoria University, Courses Lifecycle - External Referencing Procedure, 2021 (Courses Lifecycle - External Referencing Procedure / Document / Victoria University Policy Library (vu.edu.au))
- TEQSA, Guidance note: External referencing (including benchmarking), 2.5, 2019 (Guidance note: External referencing (including benchmarking) | Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (teqsa.gov.au))

8. VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date approved	Description	Approved by
1.0	August 2018	Initial version	EMT
2.0	November 2021	Internal review	EMT
3.0	August 2023	Internal review	EMT
Related legislation/ regulation/standard	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Act 2011 (Cth) Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth) 5.3 (Monitoring, Review and Improvement)		

Note. EMT = Executive Management Team.