

Unit of Study External Referencing Guidelines

Section 1 - Purpose

(1) The [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) (HESF) states that review and improvement activities must include regular external referencing against comparable courses and units of study, particularly in teaching and learning, student performance, student success and the quality and currency of assessments and markings.

(2) In this context, 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 or unit of study and/or student achievement of learning outcomes with that of a course from another provider.

(3) Within the HESF there is a specific reference to the external referencing of assessment methods and grading of student performance within selected units of study (Standard 5.3.4b). The purpose of this external referencing is to ensure that assessment methods are fit for purpose in determining student success within the unit of study as well as ensuring that a student's grade would be comparable to the grade awarded to a student assessed by a different examiner as well as being comparable to a grade awarded to a student assessed within a similar course of study outside Macquarie University if this student were to undertake the same assessment.

Scope

(4) In order to effectively determine whether assessment methods are optimal, and the grading of students is valid and reliable, external referencing at a minimum will concentrate on:

- a. unit learning outcomes;
- b. alignment of unit learning outcomes with course learning outcomes;
- c. methods of assessment;
- d. alignment of assessment with unit learning outcomes;
- e. assessment criteria, standards and processes;
- f. student achievement of learning outcomes; and
- g. peer review of assessment to validate that grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment including calibration of grading undertaken by different markers (refer to Standard 5.3.4).

(5) External referencing may also include other aspects of the unit's design and delivery as determined by the Unit Convenor, Course Authority and/or Faculty Authority.

Section 2 - Policy

(6) Refer to the [Unit of Study Review Policy](#).

Section 3 - Procedures

(7) Nil.

Section 4 - Guidelines

Criteria for selecting units

(8) While external peer review of assessment is not required in all units within a course, at a minimum this activity must be undertaken at least once between formal course reviews in:

- a. at least one (1) core unit for courses with a duration equivalent to one (1) year or less; or
- b. at least two (2) core units for courses with a duration greater than one (1) year, including Capstone units in Undergraduate Bachelor courses of study.

(9) Other units that may be considered as highly desirable to undergo external referencing include:

- a. units within Foundation Zones;
- b. units within a Major; and
- c. units identified to have high levels of risk associated with assessment such as high rates of academic integrity breaches or special consideration requests, or low student success rates.

Process

Initiation

(10) Course Authorities, in consultation with Faculty Authorities, will select units for external referencing from the pool of units undergoing a Unit Review and in line with the above-mentioned selection criteria.

(11) The Unit Convenor, in consultation with the Course Authority, will identify an appropriate External Reviewer who is suitably qualified and has current knowledge and skills in the relevant discipline and experience of teaching and learning. This may involve the sharing of the unit information with the potential reviewer to confirm the suitability of the reviewer to conduct external referencing of the unit's assessments.

(12) The Faculty Authority will approve the External Reviewer proposed by the Unit Convenor and Course Authority.

(13) The external review process may be reciprocal, in which case the Unit Convenor will also review assessment from the External Reviewer's institution.

Review

(14) The Unit Convenor, in consultation with the Course Authority and the External Reviewer, will gather and distribute materials necessary to ensure that a rigorous review can be conducted. This may include:

- a. detailed assessments task descriptors that are provided to students;
- b. de-identified student work samples;
- c. supporting documentation; such as:
 - i. grading scheme;
 - ii. assessment rubrics;
 - iii. course learning outcomes;

- iv. resources and readings;
 - v. student feedback on the unit and/or course;
 - vi. student performance data within the unit and/or course;
 - vii. national disciplinary standards;
 - viii. external accreditation requirements; and
- d. [MQ External Peer Review of Assessment Template](#).

(15) Unit Convenors and/or External Reviewers may choose to use an alternative template where it is suitable to document required information.

(16) An External Reviewer may perform blinded grading of student work that is then compared against the grades awarded by the unit staff. Alternatively, they may provide feedback on the grading performed by staff, which may include commentary on the level and nature of the feedback provided to students.

(17) The External Reviewer will record the outcomes of the review using the agreed peer review template, including feedback and any recommendations for improvements.

(18) Unit Convenors will make themselves available to provide clarification and answer questions during this process.

(19) The external review template will be attached or linked to the Unit Review template in the university approved system.

Section 5 - Definitions

(20) Nil.

Status and Details

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