



Cairnmillar
INSTITUTE

Treatment | Education | Research

Quality Assurance and Benchmarking Policy

Policy name	Quality Assurance and Benchmarking Policy
Policy number	TLP003
Date approved	4 February 2015
Approving body	The Academic Board (Senatus)
Responsible officer	The Head of School
Implementation officer	The Course Co-Ordinators
Next review date	June 2017
Linked policies	Excellence in Teaching and Learning Policy
Linked forms	

Purpose of this Policy

The Cairnmillar Institute's (the Institute) Quality Assurance and Benchmarking policy and procedures are integral to the functioning of the Institute to determine to what extent teaching and learning are at industry standard and as a basis for its improvement.

- a planning framework
- a systematic planning and review cycle
- a budget model that supports implementation of the School strategic priorities
- professional accreditation
- planning, evaluation and review of programs, courses and teaching
- stakeholder surveying
- annual performance reviews of senior managers
- annual performance reviews of academic staff
- benchmarking, internal and external benchmarking

Scope

The Institute's Excellence in Teaching and Learning establishes the overarching policy, principles and practices to optimise teaching and learning. Quality Assurance is the Plan-Implement-Review-Improve (PIRI) model and consists of a series of linked elements. This policy deals with the application of those elements within the Institute's School (the School).

Quality Assurance System

1. Planning Framework

The Institute's planning framework consists of a series of linked plans and policies that guide the implementation of the School's strategic priorities.

This framework consists of:

- a) the Strategic Plan that sets targets that can be benchmarked against publicly available sector-wide performance data; and
- b) a cascading model in which the Strategic Plan is used to drive the operational plans and key performance indicators within the School's portfolios of research, learning and teaching and community engagement.

2. Planning and Review Cycle

The School has developed a systematic planning and review cycle for the review and implementation of School plans consisting of an evidence-based, strategic review of performance against key performance indicators, the identification of desirable improvements, integrated operational planning and budgeting, and implementation of strategic actions. The School segment of the Institutes strategic plan operates on a five-year cycle, whereas operational plans operate on a one-year cycle. All operational plans clearly specify actions, responsibilities and budget provisions.

The following timetable applies:

- **Review** (May-July) – the annual planning cycle begins with an annual strategic review of performance against the School's key performance indicators (KPIs). The Head of School meets with each of the Course Co-ordinators and the Executive Director, to consider areas in which there are gaps in performance relative to targets, with a view to planning and resourcing improvement actions.
- **Improvement** (July-August) – if necessary, Head of School updates its operational plans in the light of the review of performance gaps, to focus on areas where the need for improvement, as revealed in the strategic review, is greatest.
- **Operational Planning and Implementation** (September-November) – as the School budget allocations are finalised, the School must complete its operational plans for the forthcoming year. These plans implement the strategic plan, including actions designed to achieve priorities for improvement, and assign responsibilities for implementation to specified staff, provide key performance indicators against which to evaluate progress, and allocate budget resources in support of the School's strategic and operational objectives. School plans are developed in consultation with senior management.

3. Budget Model

The Institute's budget model supports implementation of the School's strategic priorities by:

- Ensuring closer alignment between resources and the School's strategic priorities and providing capacity for strategic investment for the future;
- Providing for the expansion of placement opportunities and community engagement;
- Ensuring staff, salaried, sessional, and contract staff maintain their qualifications and continuing professional development requirements; and
- Rewarding research and teaching and learning performance.

4. School Reviews

The School's strategic and operational planning is supported by the plan for detailed review of one course per year and overall course review yearly. These reviews involve self-assessment, benchmarking against comparable units, engagement with stakeholders and external peer review. A detailed review is described in the Internal Benchmarking and Competency Based Assessment document. Each review must lead to recommendations for improvement. The element being reviewed is required to complete an implementation plan for the recommendations, and to report back to Head of School and Academic Board on progress towards implementation in a six monthly progress report.

5. Professional Accreditation

Professional accreditation delivers external quality assurance for the School's programs as it certifies that the Institute graduate meets the purpose of a range of professions. Input from employers, industry and other stakeholders to program planning and review processes help ensure the relevance of the curriculum and appropriateness of graduate competencies by Course Advisory Committees. These inputs are enshrined in the planning processes set out in the School's teaching and learning policies to ensure external and internal expert scrutiny of structure, content, teaching and assessment strategies and outcomes. Each course is required to have a course advisory committee comprised of internal and external key informants and stakeholders.

6. Planning, Evaluation and Review of Programs, Courses and Teaching

The Institute, through the School, undertakes regular evaluation of programs, courses and teaching by:

- Course planning – the Course Co-ordinators convene a curriculum review strategic planning meeting annually. Present at the meeting are all the teaching staff involved in the course. In this way these meetings also undertake peer evaluation of teaching and learning within each course. This meeting must consider timeframes for course withdrawals, major changes and course reviews. The strategic priorities of the course, annual course monitoring data, relevant recommendations from staff reviews, professional accreditation processes, campus profiles and student demand. The meeting also considers flexible learning resources. The meeting aims to better align course planning and strategic objectives, improve the management of new course proposals, and the quality of curriculum development within course proposals. These course planning meetings typically take place in November of each year.

- Course development and approval – new courses approved for development are progressed in accordance with the regulatory and professional accreditation requirements.
- Course evaluation and review – each Course Co-ordinator is required to present annual course monitoring reports, assessing each course’s performance against a standard set of indicators, to an ad hoc Learning and Teaching Committee comprised of senior staff.
- Course and teaching evaluation - Online instruments for student evaluation of courses and teaching (SEC and SET) and hard copies – supports the requirement that courses be evaluated after their first offering and then every time they are taught. The School’s online course outline system contains information about how course content, teaching strategies, and assessment contribute to the course’s learning outcomes, thereby allowing students to provide informed evaluation feedback on courses through online activity monitoring. Each unit is evaluated each and every teaching period.

7. Stakeholder Surveying

Regular internal and external surveys of students, staff and employers are conducted in order to measure satisfaction and to identify areas in need of improvement. National surveys in which Cairnmillar participates include the Australian Graduate Survey, which encompasses the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) for coursework graduates and (anticipating) the Australian survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) questionnaire conducted annually in April. Cairnmillar also has plans to consider participating in the International Student Barometer at some time in the future. Internal surveys include Student Survey Experience at Cairnmillar (distributed via hotlink to SurveyMonkey). An annual survey is conducted, usually in May.

8. Annual Performance Reviews of All Staff

The Head of School is required to report annually to the Executive Director on progress towards implementing the previous year’s operational plan. This information informs annual performance review, performance planning and remuneration outcomes. The Head of School also reports to the Academic Board on the implementation of the previous years operational plan.

9. Annual Performance Reviews of Academic Staff

A framework for the allocation of academic work, performance reviews and promotion of academic staff.

This framework ensures:

- Greater flexibility in academic work allocations, allowing staff to concentrate in areas of strength and of strategic value to the Institute.
- Specification of promotion criteria that reward staff for excellence and impact in their chosen areas of emphasis; and
- Annual performance reviews against agreed performance objectives that reflect negotiated career trajectories, past performance and the strategic priorities of the School.

10. Benchmarking

Benchmarking is understood as a learning process, drawing on work by Jackson and Lund (2000:6):

“Benchmarking is, first and foremost, a learning process structured so as to enable those engaging in the process to compare their services/activities/products in order to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a basis for self-improvement and/or self-regulation (AUQA, 2010).”

Key Issues (AUQA, 2010):

Reliable comparative data. The basis of benchmarking is reliable, valid and consistent data.

Trust and building relationships. To a large degree any benchmarking relationship is based on trust and mutual benefit. Finding and establishing benchmarking relationships between providers can be a major achievement.

Benchmarking for improvement. Benchmarking needs to be undertaken with quality improvement in mind. This requires very close specification of the focus, indicators, strategies and dissemination of results, as well as tracking of outcomes.

Demonstrating improvement. A key focus of the Guidelines and of auditing for continuous improvement is the demonstrable production of results from the benchmarking process. A simple example is discipline-specific benchmarking where an external review of a discipline by peers leads to recommendations, an action plan and improvement.

Measurement of equivalence. Equivalence is multifaceted and ranges from admission requirements to staffing qualifications. The evidence for equivalence comes not only from equivalent inputs and processes but also from outcomes as measured by analysis of cohorts (e.g. international/domestic students).

Legal compliance. The policies and processes governing international students must comply with state and federal legislation relating to CRICOS, ESOS and the National Protocols and Guidelines.

Institutional academic oversight. The offering of an institution’s courses by partners or in other locations should be subject to the academic policy framework controlled by the academic board. It is highly recommended that all course approval processes follow the same mechanisms within one institution and that contracts are managed centrally for quality assurance purposes.

Types of Benchmarking

The Institute engages in five different types of benchmarking:

Sector benchmarking - a comparison with other NSAs and Universities of performance outcomes using publicly available data, or of processes and practices within the sector in selected areas, with a view to identifying areas for improvement. Public information is also used to ensure parity across course offering and facilities and services offered to students and staff. Accreditation for courses were benchmarked against other similar courses, where available. For example, the Graduate Diploma of Psychology was structured after reviews of the fourth year programs at Deakin University and Swinburne University. External criteria set by APAC were also incorporated into the structure. The Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) was benchmarked against LaTrobe, Monash and Swinburne universities.

Comparison data on staffing levels, staff qualifications etc., as publically available on university websites and sites such as MyUniversity, are regularly reviewed to benchmark the Institute's policies and procedures in this area.

- A. Whole-of-institution benchmarking** - a comparison of a range of processes, activities and practices with one or more of the Institute's partners, with a view to identifying strengths or weaknesses as the basis for improvement, or identifying those leading to excellent outcomes and exchanging information about them with a view to implementation.
- B. Discipline-specific benchmarking** - comparison of the performance of one discipline area in another NSAI or university to inform future planning and goal-setting.

The Institute courses are benchmarked against other similar courses, where available. For example, the Graduate Diploma of Psychology was structured after reviews of the fourth year programs at Deakin University and Swinburne University. External criteria set by APAC were also incorporated into the structure. The Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) was benchmarked against LaTrobe, Monash and Swinburne universities.

Similarly, students/interns are evaluated on placements by external registered psychologists and registered PsyBA supervisors regarding their level of competencies.

The Institute undertakes formal external benchmarking assessment. This is achieved by benchmarking the fourth year theses of the Graduate Diploma of Psychology. Correlations and comparison of differences (t-tests) used to estimate concordance. The patterns of similarities and differences are reviewed and feedback provided to teaching and research staff. The review and feedback is used to inform teaching and learning and a continuous review cycle. Such benchmarking takes place every three years. The results are reported to the Academic Board.

- C. Standards-based benchmarking** - analysing processes, practices and outcomes against a generally agreed set of standards, such as those set by professional bodies, national associations or international bodies.

Standards exist for the AOU (TEQSA and professional accreditation bodies such as APAC and PACFA). Specific standards apply for various sections of the AOU such as finances and library. These standards may be thresholds or ratings of quality.

The Institute has an established program with timelines to ensure these standards are acknowledged and incorporated into the governance and management. For example, accreditation of all psychology courses has been sought (and approved) by TEQSA and APAC. Originally, the institute was to be audited in 2012 by AUQA, as a Non-Self-accrediting institution (NSAI). However, as the Institute achieved regulation and accreditation in 2011 and material changes were approved by VRQA, this audit was postponed. The psychology courses have been accredited with the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council and confirmed by the Psychology Board of Australia.

The Counselling and Psychotherapy courses have been approved by The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia. The Institute has participated in a benchmarking exercise conducted by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET).

The Institute Library does not meet the CAUL standards for libraries. However, there is in place continuous improvement procedures to work towards achieving these standards and operational plans incorporate the steps needed to achieve this standard.

Finances are internally and externally audited as per legal and professional regulations.

- D. Internal and cohort benchmarking** - the choice of benchmarking type depends on the strategic objectives being served by the benchmarking activity.

The School regularly seeks formative and summative feedback from students and staff.

Each course of study has a Course Advisory Committee which along with the Head of the AOU and relevant Course Coordinator considers the distribution of results, individual student progress (including the Student Progress Review Panel) and student evaluations. The findings are reported to the Academic Board and discussed at staff meetings to inform improvements to teaching and learning processes.

A Graduate Destination Survey is conducted once a year. This survey includes the Uni Evaluation Questionnaire and as cohorts build over time, data can be compared and contrasted as a basis for quality improvement.

The Head of School regularly submits data to the Academic Board for review and feedback. This feedback is implemented and further data collected and progress reports tabled. The Academic Board is comprised of external senior academics who have worked in Higher Education and in industry and in academia. There are also student and staff representatives.

References

Academic Governance Quality Assurance: Good Practice for NSAs (Sept, 2010). Australian Universities Quality Agency.

The Office for Learning and Teaching's Resource Library. www.olt.gov.au/resources/good-practice>.

The Quality Code for providers of UK higher education. www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx

Academic Quality Agency (New Zealand) www.aqa.ac.nz/enhancing-quality/thematic-resources>.

COPHE – Australian Higher Education Teaching and Learning Standards: Checklists of inputs and outputs www.cophe.edu.au/policy/discussion-papers/teaching-learning-inputs-andoutputs-tony-shannon/index_html.

University websites: Deakin University, Griffith University