

EXTERNAL REFERENCING POLICY

Policy owner	Academic Board
Policy category	Governance
Policy status	Approved
Approval body	MIECAT Council
Last amended	28 th August 2023

PURPOSE

The External Referencing Policy establishes the requirements for external referencing and benchmarking at the MIECAT Institute to provide evidence in support of its quality assurance and quality enhancement processes as they relate to academic programs, business operations and governance. As such, this policy is integral to successful realisation of the MIECAT Quality Assurance policy. MIECAT implements external referencing in alignment with MIECAT's Quality Assurance policy and procedures at a scale appropriate to the Institute.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- establish the expectations and standards to be met when undertaking external referencing and benchmarking at MIECAT
- ensure that external referencing activities at MIECAT are approached in a coordinated, considered and systematic way
- ensure that higher education operations at MIECAT compares to other Australian Higher Education Providers and MIECAT's operations meet and where possible, exceed national and international standards and expectations
- encourage continuous improvement practice across MIECAT's academic, governance and business activities.

SCOPE

The External Referencing policy applies to staff and governing bodies of MIECAT in relation to the quality assurance and quality enhancement of MIECAT's academic programs, student outcomes, business operations and governance.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Principles

1.1 MIECAT identifies and monitors standards and performance to improve MIECAT outcomes, processes and practices.

1.2 External referencing is integrated into the operations of MIECAT, with routine analysis of data collected and use of the outcomes to drive improvements. MIECAT uses a number of approaches and techniques, such as benchmarking, peer review and moderation, and uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Appropriate indicators are selected, and these are well defined, measurable, and refined to suit the MIECAT context as necessary.

1.3 MIECAT's external referencing may include activities such as:

- organisational and process benchmarking. Organisational benchmarking involves comparisons at the organisational level, for example, staff ratios, criteria for academic appointments, financial information including expected target for cost-effectiveness, student support services, etc. Process benchmarking evaluates the practices and processes underpinning MIECAT's service delivery and their efficiency.
- course and subject benchmarking, including review of course and subject design, learning outcomes, assessment construction, course admission criteria and student performance
- outcomes benchmarking relating to the comparison of outcomes data, especially student outcomes – for example, attrition, retention and completion rates
- best-practice benchmarking in which MIECAT selects comparator/s thought to be at the forefront in the area to be benchmarked – for

example, the benchmarking of policies, procedures and institute performance to determine their efficiency and cost-effectiveness

1.4 In accordance with TEQSA Guidance Note (2019), MIECAT recognises that the purpose of benchmarking is not to standardise all courses and all assessment outcomes, but to reveal variations, and establish whether those variations arise from the individual nature of the courses or the student cohorts, or from variations in quality or academic standards.

2. Informal External Referencing

2.1 Informal external referencing, through benchmarking, peer review or moderation, will occur wherever possible during the development of policies, procedures and other MIECAT documents.

2.2 Informal external referencing will include reviewing the policies, procedures and other related content from comparable higher education providers against those of MIECAT using publicly available data.

2.3 A record will be maintained of the other providers that informal external referencing was conducted against.

3. Formal External Referencing and Benchmarking Process

3.1 MIECAT will follow recognised sector best practice when undertaking formal external referencing and benchmarking.

3.2 MIECAT will adopt and adapt the six phases of benchmarking set out in Appendix B of the TEQSA Guidance Note: External Referencing (including Benchmarking), 16 April 2019, in conducting benchmarking activities.

3.3. Benchmarking Partners

3.3.1 MIECAT recognises the value of partnering with other organisations in external referencing and benchmarking activities and will endeavour to establish mutually beneficial relationships for this purpose.

Memorandums of understanding will be established to formalise these relationships.

3.3.2 The Director or delegate will lead the exploration of suitable partnering opportunities and will develop proposals for the Academic Board for consideration.

3.3.3 When MIECAT is approached by possible benchmarking partners with a proposal to partner with them in external referencing activities, the Director will review the request and develop a proposal for the Academic Board's consideration.

3.3.4 The Academic Board will take into consideration the potential benefits presented to MIECAT by the proposed partnership arrangement, the appropriateness of the organisation as a benchmarking partner, and any risks, competitive tensions or confidentiality matters.

3.4 The Academic Board or delegate will maintain a register of all formal external referencing activities.

4. Organisational and Process External Referencing

4.1 The Director and Executive Management Committee will coordinate an annual cycle of the external referencing of organisational matters, governance controls, business operations, processes and practices.

4.2 Following the collection of data, the Director and Executive Management Committee will provide a report to the MIECAT Council that:

- will review and analyse MIECAT and comparators' data, identify and investigate significant variations in MIECAT's performance and prepare and discuss initial findings and recommendations/ areas for improvement where relevant;
- will document the chosen referencing methods and partners, and
- will include specific action plans.

4.3 The MIECAT Council will note reports provided by the Director and Executive Management Committee and through them monitor progress of implementation of action plans.

5. Course and Subject Level External Referencing

5.1 Formal external referencing of courses across comparable higher education providers will be used to ensure the quality, comparability and consistency of MIECAT courses.

5.2 Formal course and subject reviews will include a component of external

referencing, with selected subjects within courses being externally referenced against those in comparable courses of study.

5.3 Feedback from external referencing will be used by the Academic Board, Education Committee and Course and Subject Coordinators to enhance the quality of teaching and mitigate future risks to the quality of education.

5.4 External referencing of teaching will:

- be used to gather evidence about the quality and consistency of MIECAT practices and courses;
- contribute to the ongoing evaluation and enhancement of learning and teaching at MIECAT, and
- contribute to the professional development of participating staff.

6. External Referencing of Assessment Standards

6.1 Assessment standards will be externally referenced as part of our relationship with benchmarking partner(s), at a minimum level with one other institution.

6.2 External referencing of assessment will be used to provide evidence that assessment methods and student grading are: appropriate; aligned to the subject and course learning outcomes, and are broadly comparable with those in as similar as possible courses offered in the Australian higher education sector and globally.

6.3 In conjunction with the five-yearly course review cycle, assessment standards for selected subjects within the course will be externally referenced against those in comparable courses of study.

6.4 The Education Committee will:

- ensure that as a minimum there is an external referencing of assessment methods and grading for subjects that assure the attainment of course learning outcomes within their course;
- identify subjects in which external referencing of assessment methods and grading will be undertaken, and institutions with comparable courses;

- manage all activities relating to the review, including communication with benchmarking partners, identification of assessment tasks for review, sharing documents, assessment of achievement standards and preparation of a report for the Academic Board;
- involve appropriate academic staff in the assessment of achievement standards and other external referencing of assessment activities as appropriate;
- report progress and outcomes of external referencing of assessment standards to the Academic Board, consider the review reports and implement modifications and changes as appropriate;
- consider the outcomes of external referencing of assessment standards in the Course Review, and
- report to the Academic Board on the use and effectiveness of external referencing of assessment in Course Reviews and recommend improvements to the external referencing of assessment and Course Review processes.

6.5 The Academic Board will report annually to the MIECAT Council on the use and effectiveness of external referencing of assessment in Course Reviews and recommend improvements to the external referencing of assessment and Course Review processes.

7. External Referencing of Student Outcomes

7.1 On an annual basis MIECAT will:

- benchmark progress rates, attrition rates and completion times/rates using publicly available data, e.g., Higher Education Statistics published by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, QILT data, and
- review and analyse enrolment and student achievement of learning outcomes, including through cohort analysis of student performance data.

7.2 The Education Committee will compare course performance as reported in the annual Course Coordinator Report against that of selected

benchmarking partners and consider other external referencing activities and prepare a report for the Academic Board.

- The scope of this benchmarking includes student performance, progress rates, attrition rates and completion times/rates.
- The report will review and analyse MIECAT and comparators' data, identify and investigate significant variations in MIECAT's performance and prepare and discuss initial findings and recommendations/ areas for improvement where relevant.
- The report will also document the chosen referencing methodology and partners.
- As a deliverable of this external referencing activity, the Education Committee will provide specific Action Plan/s to the Academic Board.

7.3 The Academic Board will review and approve the Action Plan/s as recommended by the Education Committee and monitor the progress of implementation.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. The MIECAT Council is responsible for ensuring that effective external referencing activities and processes in relation to business operations and corporate governance are in place and that these are monitored, reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
2. The Academic Board is responsible for ensuring effective external referencing activities and processes in relation to academic operations and governance are in place and that these are monitored, reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
3. The Education Committee is responsible for:
 - developing and implementing external referencing activities in relation to academic programs establishing Memorandums of Understanding with benchmarking partners;
 - reporting progress and outcomes of such external referencing activities to the Academic Board and MIECAT Council as required;
 - working with staff to monitor the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing report recommendations, and

- maintaining the MIECAT Register of Benchmarking relating to courses and subjects, assessment standards and student outcomes. This Register contains the details of MIECAT's benchmarking partners, the qualitative and quantitative data from each benchmarking meeting, the schedule of benchmarking, the outcomes from benchmarking and the improvement actions taken.

4. Course Coordinators:

- prepare proposals and reports for external referencing as required;
- lead and manage external moderation and benchmarking activities as required;
- report to the Education Committee on the progress of relevant external referencing activities, and
- cultivate an appreciation amongst staff and students of external referencing activities.

5. The Executive Management Committee is responsible for:

- developing and implementing external referencing activities in relation to business operations and governance controls and maintaining a register for these benchmarking activities;
- liaising with external benchmarking partners regarding the parameters of benchmarking;
- reporting progress and outcomes of such external referencing activities to the MIECAT Council and the Academic Board as required;
- ensuring that outcomes of external referencing activities are appropriately recorded and reported to enable informed decision-making and support effective implementation of improvements, and
- working with staff to monitor the implementation of improvements arising from external referencing report recommendations.

6. As required, staff:

- participate in external referencing activities;

- provide qualitative and quantitative data for external referencing activities, and
- prepare external moderation and benchmarking reports.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

MIECAT Council, MIECAT Director, Academic Board, Executive Management Committee, all MIECAT committees and sub-committees, all MIECAT staff

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Commonwealth)

Australian Qualifications Framework

Memorandum of Understanding between MIECAT and NIODA July, 2022

MIECAT Register of External Referencing and Benchmarking

MIECAT Quality Assurance policy and QA Conceptual Framework

MIECAT Strategic Plan

MIECAT Assessment and Moderation Policy

MIECAT Course Monitoring and Review Policy

VERSION HISTORY

Date of Issue	Version	Author	Summary of changes
9 th June 2023	1.0	J. Mitchell	Draft for approval

Document is uncontrolled when printed