

External Referencing of Standards (EROS) Fact Sheet



External Referencing of Standards (EROS)

What is external referencing of standards?

External referencing of achievement standards is a process that examines the quality of student cohorts against comparable courses of study at other institutions, which is a critical component of course quality confidence for students, the university, industry and the general community. The external referencing process requires academics that are external to the university and familiar with the subject matter to review and provide feedback on the quality of final year assessments where graduate level course learning outcomes are demonstrated.

What is the purpose of external referencing?

Essentially, it seeks to provide evidence that final year assessments and grading standards are appropriate and broadly comparable with those assessment practices occurring in other similar courses elsewhere. External referencing also provides:

- Affirmation that *assessment design* supports opportunities for students to demonstrate graduate level learning outcomes.
- Collaborative and *professional learning for staff* through calibration of assessment standards, which enhances the course and assessment quality for students.
- Provides *feedback to students* to improve their learning and supports future professional success.
- Assures *reliability and validity* of judgement of learning outcomes across courses.
- Complements other activities (such as internal moderation) as part of an overall *quality assurance/improvement* framework.

Why is it important to externally reference Curtin courses?

External referencing of courses across institutions helps to ensure the quality, comparability and consistency of Curtin courses, and provides useful feedback to course coordinators, which can be used to enhance the quality of the teaching program. The external referencing process also helps provide quality assurance against [TEQSA](#) standards and the [Higher Education Standards Framework](#).

External referencing of achievement standards helps ensure that:

- Curtin students obtain credible evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and supports future professional success.
- Curtin courses are relevant and of the highest professional standard to meet disciplinary expectations.
- Curtin satisfies necessary requirements set by external regulators to monitor, review and improve the quality of teaching and learning standards (Section 5.3.4, [Final Proposed HESF 2014](#)).
- Curtin meets the requirement that “the academic standards intended to be achieved by students and the standards actually achieved by students in the course of study are benchmarked against similar accredited courses of study offered by other higher education providers” (Section 5.5, [HESF 2011](#)).

What is the EROS project?

EROS is a pilot project in which four universities have agreed to collaborate in reviewing each other's coursework programs. The four participating universities in the EROS project are:

- RMIT University
- Curtin University
- Queensland University of Technology
- University of Wollongong

Who else might be involved in the process?

- Knowledgeable and independent industry and academic representatives from recognised authoritative groups external to Curtin
- Other external stakeholders (e.g. professional associations, employer groups, accrediting bodies) who are involved in calibrating standards

The purpose of the pilot project is to develop and test a comprehensive process for external referencing of courses to be implemented by each university. The process will help address quality enhancement of assessment and student achievement standards, balanced with quality assurance against TEQSA standards. EROS will focus on:

- Coursework Program and Unit Learning Outcomes
- Assessments and Student Achievement of Standards

How does the external referencing process work?

1. Curtin course coordinators are identified for participation in the process and will be connected with comparable course coordinators at partner institutions.
2. Course coordinators will select an upper level unit to be externally referenced such as a capstone or final year unit, which contains assessment tasks that incorporate *graduate level outcomes* characterising the knowledge and capabilities students should have acquired and demonstrated at the completion of their course to maximise future success. It should be noted that the process does not require all units to be sampled.
3. De-identified and previously assessed student work samples, based on the final marks submitted for the unit at the home university, should be selected using stratified random sampling to represent exemplars across a grade range, similar to that of consensus moderation. For consistency and comparability of student coursework across institutions, samples for external referencing should represent a random selection of assessed work within the sound (credit, distinction or high distinction), limited (low pass), and minimal (high fail) achievement of outcome categories.
4. Once student work samples have been selected, course coordinators will exchange the student work to be referenced with all necessary supporting documentation (unit outlines, rubrics, course learning outcomes, national disciplinary standards, external reference points etc.) and negotiate how the referencing of student work will be conducted.
5. External referencing of student achievement standards will begin, resulting in a judgement about the appropriateness of assessment practices and the intended outcomes as evidenced by the assigned grade or mark. External referencing should be completed and feedback given within six to eight weeks.
6. Analysis of external feedback received will then occur at the home institution to create an action plan, and necessary changes to the course should be implemented.
7. Course coordinators will provide CTL with feedback on the referencing process including feedback on resources used and suggestions for improvement.

What are the benefits to me to participate and what are the expectations?

Participants will be paid \$600 for their participation in the EROS pilot project. In return, participants will provide:

- An assurance of confidentiality and ethical behaviour agreement
- An appropriate unit within a course of study to externally reference
- Unit and course level supporting documentation (unit outlines, rubrics, course learning outcomes, unit learning outcomes, national disciplinary standards, external reference points etc.) to contextualise the sample assessments
- De-identified student work samples selected by stratified random sampling
- Communication with staff members from partner institutions related to the exchange and referencing of samples
- Referencing of student achievement standards for student work samples from partner universities
- Written feedback (evaluation forms) on the external referencing process including comment on forms used and suggestions for improvement
- Participation in conversations with CTL about the external review process.

What are the expected outcomes of the EROS pilot project?

- The tested application of methods for external referencing of student achievement standards that will help evidence quality enhancement and assurance of coursework programs against [TEQSA](#) standards and the [Higher Education Standards Framework](#)
- Development of academic staff competencies in external referencing of programs
- Development of a sustainable end-to-end process for external referencing that can be operationalised by participating universities
- Creation of project templates, guidelines and processes that effectively support and simplify the task for staff involved in external referencing
- Presentation of project outcomes, findings and recommendations within a formal project completion report, which will include an identified strategy to leverage project outcomes and achieve impact
- Establishment of inter-university partnerships that can be utilised on an on-going basis for future external referencing activities
- Contribution to the establishment of a sustainable sector wide model for peer review of assessment and teaching quality through establishing a College of Peers and a national online benchmarking tool
- Academic publications and conference papers.

How often does the external referencing process need to happen?

To comply with Curtin policy:

- Comprehensive Course Reviews are conducted at least every five years (Clause 5.2.1, within Section 7.1 [Course Approval and Quality Manual](#), 2013).
- *Comprehensive Course Reviews will include and consider data from external referencing* or other benchmarking activities regarding the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study. This will include assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within the course (Clause 5.4.2 within Section 7.1 Updated Course Approval and Quality Manual, 2015).

References

References

- Course Approval and Quality Manual (2013). Course Approval and Quality Manual – Consolidated Policies and Procedures. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education - Curtin University.
- Course Approval and Quality Manual (2013). Course Approval and Quality Manual – Consolidated Policies and Procedures. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education - Curtin University.
- Higher Education Standards Framework: December 2014. Australian Government – Higher Education Standards.
- Final Proposed HESF (2014) Final Proposed Higher Education Standards Framework: December 2014. Australian Government – Higher Education Standards.
- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011. Australian Government - the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.
- HESF (2011) Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011. Australian Government - the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.
- Probert, B., Sachs, J., Solomonides, I., Vaughan, S. (2013). Assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university peer review and moderation. Available online: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.
- Krause, K., Scott, G., Aubin, K., Alexander, H., Angelo, T., Campbell, S., Carroll, M., Deane, E., Nulty, D., Pattison, P., Probert, B., Sachs, J., Solomonides, I., Vaughan, S. (2013). Assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university peer review and moderation. Available online: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.
- Nulty, D., Pattison, P., Probert, B., Sachs, J., Solomonides, I., Vaughan, S. (2013). Teaching and Learning Standards Project Inter-University Peer Review and Moderation of Coursework OLT (ALTC) Project. Available Online: http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/398621/User_Guide_Oct2012Final.pdf
- the Associate Director, Academic – Real World Learning. Approved by DVC (Learning and Teaching) May 2015.
- QUT (2015). QUT Assuring Achievement Standards Guidelines. Developed through the Associate Director, Academic – Real World Learning. Approved by DVC (Learning and Teaching) May 2015.

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement

The EROS Project team acknowledges the important work of the "Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation" OLT project in providing many of the resources and methodologies drawn on for the EROS pilot project. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Mark Freeman (Achievement Matters) and the Go8 QVS project as these projects have influenced our thinking.



Curtin University



UNIVERSITY OF
WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA



RMIT
UNIVERSITY