

External Referencing - Peer Review of Assessment Standards Procedure

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

Purpose

(1) External Peer Review of Assessment (EPRA) provides evidence that assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes are appropriate, aligned to the unit and course learning outcomes and are broadly comparable with those occurring in similar courses offered by other higher education providers.

(2) EPRA is a key control in the assurance of learning. It provides independent validation that assessment tasks are appropriately aligned with learning outcomes and disciplinary standards. This mechanism strengthens institutional confidence that students are being fairly and consistently assessed against expected learning outcomes and national qualification frameworks.

(3) This Procedure:

- a. Sets out a process for external referencing of assessment standards, through an external review conducted with a suitable peer reviewer normally employed at another Australian university; and
- b. Supports compliance with the [Higher Education Standards Framework 2021](#) (Threshold Standards 1.4.3 Learning Outcomes and Assessment and 5.3.4b Monitoring, Review and Improvement), as well as the [Australian Qualification Framework](#).

Scope

(4) This Procedure applies to all award coursework courses offered by the University.

Section 2 - Definitions

(5) For the purposes of this Procedure, the definitions contained in the [Assessment, Teaching and Learning Procedures](#) apply. Further, the following definitions apply:

- a. Benchmarking is a structured process of comparing academic practices and outcomes with internal or external peers. Benchmarking:
 - i. aims to identify areas for improvement, share best practices, and assure academic quality;
 - ii. supports alignment with the Higher Education Standards Framework 2021; and
 - iii. informs continuous improvement across courses, assessment, and teaching methods.
- b. External referencing is a systematic process of comparing aspects of an institution's operations and processes with those of a similar institution with the aim to establish an external evidence base for monitoring, review and improvement.
- c. External peer review of assessment (EPRA) is a process used to ensure the quality of assessment by having assessment tasks and practices reviewed – either internally or externally – by academic peers, with the aim of

moderating assessment, assuring alignment with learning outcomes and standards, and maintaining fairness and consistency.

- d. Programmatic assessment is a consciously designed systemic program of assessment in which the outcomes of purposefully selected assessment tasks are collated and combined to obtain triangulated information about a student's progress.
- e. EPRA Schedule: is a Faculty/College two-year planned timetable which outlines the unit assessments that are to be externally peer reviewed and the parties undertaking the external peer review.
- f. EPRA Plan: is a University-wide plan for achieving the external peer review of assessment goals. The EPRA Plan outlines the collective units schedules to be reviewed by each Faculty/College, and specifies clear actions, risks and risk mitigation strategies.

Section 3 - Procedures

Principles

(6) The following principles should be applied to EPRA:

- a. Effective: enables the external referencing of assessment methods, grading and students' attainment of learning outcomes across comparable courses of study. Supports both the quality enhancement and quality assurance of courses and units.
- b. Efficient and sustainable: provides a streamlined, efficient, and sustainable process for external peer review of assessment that can be operationalised and used routinely.
- c. Transparent: engages multiple perspectives and facilitates critical discussion between teaching academics across comparable courses of study to support consensus building around standards of student learning outcomes.
- d. Capacity building: contributes to the professional development of participating staff and the formation of disciplinary and cross disciplinary communities of practice.

Minimum Requirements

(7) Each course must complete an EPRA grading and standards for at least two units within a two-year cycle.

(8) A course that is in teach-out and has a teach-out period not exceeding 12 months will be exempt undertaking EPRA.

(9) Inclusion of capstone units: selected units must include at least one unit that directly assures the attainment of course learning outcomes (e.g., a capstone unit).

(10) Shared units across courses: units may satisfy the minimum requirements for multiple courses, provided the intent and integrity of the EPRA process are maintained.

(11) Alignment with Professional Accreditation: where professional accreditation processes require EPRA, these activities may be counted towards meeting the requirement; however, the two-year review cycle must still be maintained.

Selecting the Units

(12) Units may be selected for external peer review based on a range of considerations, including but not limited to:

- a. identified concerns regarding academic quality, such as unusually high or low performance in internal or external metrics (for example, QILT outcomes);

- b. recent or upcoming changes to professional accreditation requirements; and
- c. feedback from students or academic staff indicating potential issues or opportunities for improvement.

Video-based Assessments

(13) Video-based assessments may be subject to EPRA for quality assurance purposes. Where such assessments contain personal, sensitive, or clinical information, students must provide explicit consent prior to disclosure, using the [Student Consent Form](#). External reviewers must be located within Australia and engaged under appropriate confidentiality and data-handling arrangements. Videos must only be used for the stated peer review purpose and not be retained longer than necessary.

Selecting an External Reviewer

(14) An external peer reviewer should:

- a. have academic expertise and hold a position of Unit Assessor (or equivalent) at a minimum;
- b. be independent - not employed at the University; and
- c. be available and have the capacity to meet the peer review timelines.

The Peer Review Process

Initiation

(15) An external peer review of assessment project may be initiated through:

- a. scheduled review: inclusion in the planned review cycle as part of the University's quality assurance processes;
or
- b. recommendation: a recommendation from the Academic Standards and Quality Committee(ASQC) or the Associate Dean (Education) (ADE) of the Faculty/College responsible for the course.

Process

(16) The Faculty/College ADE will develop an EPRA schedule which will be maintained by the Office of Business Intelligence and Quality (BIQ).

(17) Recommendations from the ASQC and ADE will be communicated to BIQ and be added to the Faculty/College's EPRA schedule.

(18) The EPRA schedule will outline the units for which peer review of assessment will be undertaken.

(19) The EPRA will be conducted in accordance with the [External Peer Review Assessment Process](#).

The Faculty Implementation Plan

(20) The roles within the Faculty are delegated by the ADE. While the following role allocations will normally apply, it is at the ADE's discretion to assign responsibilities as appropriate to the specific task and context.

(21) Each Faculty/College ADE will set an Implementation Plan, in consultation with the Course Coordinator and Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and send it to BIQ.

(22) Upon receipt of the Implementation Plan, BIQ will set up a SharePoint, upload the EPRA templates and send the SharePoint link to the Faculty/College and CTL.

(23) Upon receipt of the Implementation Plan from the ADE or Course Coordinator, the Unit Assessor will:

- a. identify assessment task/s, in consultation with the Course Coordinator, and upload de-identified student work samples and supporting documents onto SharePoint and notify BIQ and CTL; and
- b. send the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and EPRA templates and supporting documents to the Unit Assessor at the partner institution/s.

(24) The Unit Assessor will check the peer review criteria and may, after consultation with the Course Coordinator, include criteria or questions in addition to those set out in the standard report template. Any additions should take into consideration the potential increased workload for a reviewer involved in the project.

(25) The Unit Assessor (or equivalent) at the partner institution will conduct a review of assessment standards using EPRA templates developed by BIQ and shared by the SCU Unit Assessor.

(26) If the project is a reciprocal project, the SCU Unit Assessor will conduct a review of assessment standards using EPRA templates developed by BIQ.

Review Outcome, Implementation and Monitoring

(27) Upon receipt of the EPRA Report, the Unit Assessor will, in consultation with the Course Coordinator and CTL, develop an EPRA Response and Action Plan and send them to the ADE for approval.

(28) Once the EPRA Response and Action Plan have been approved by the ADE, the Unit Assessor will upload the EPRA Report, EPRA Response and Action Plan onto SharePoint and notify BIQ and CTL.

(29) The Course Coordinator will report the Faculty/College's EPRA Response and Action Plan addressing the review feedback to the next subsequent Faculty/College Board.

(30) The ADE will report the Faculty/College's EPRA Response and Action Plan addressing the review feedback to the Teaching and Assessment Committee (TAC) biannually.

(31) The TAC will monitor the Faculty/College's EPRA Response and Action Plan and notify the ASQC through the Chair's report biannually.

(32) The Academic Board will be notified of the outcome of the EPRA project through the ASQC Chair's report biannually.

Section 4 - Roles and Responsibilities

Associate Dean (Education)

(33) The ADE is responsible for:

- a. creating the Faculty/College two-year EPRA schedule;
- b. assigning responsibilities within the Faculty;
- c. ensuring that all courses comply with minimum academic and accreditation requirements; and
- d. reporting outcomes, recommendations and the Faculty/College's EPRA Response and Action Plan to the TAC biannually.

Curriculum Accreditation Coordinators

(34) The Curriculum Accreditation Coordinator is normally responsible for:

- a. managing the operational document records for the Faculty/College;

- b. ensuring records are stored appropriately in the central repository;
- c. providing support for monitoring and completion of the EPRA Schedule within the Faculty/College with oversight from the Faculty/College Board; and
- d. supporting the Course Coordinator and ADE in reporting to the Faculty/College Board and TAC, respectively.

Course Coordinator

(35) The Course Coordinator is normally responsible for:

- a. ensuring that units which assure the course learning outcomes within their course (core units), engage in EPRA;
- b. in collaboration with discipline teams, communicating with providers to identify relevant courses and discipline staff with which to partner;
- c. assisting the Unit Assessor as required, in confirming assessment/unit matches with review partners;
- d. reading the final review reports and, in collaboration with the Unit Assessor, responding to the report recommendations and identifying and implementing modifications and changes as appropriate;
- e. reporting to the Faculty/College Board on review feedback/recommendations and actions undertaken to address them;
- f. submitting the final report to the Faculty/College Board and saving the report in the central repository;
- g. using outcomes in the course monitoring and review processes; and
- h. evaluating the success of initiatives taken as a result of external peer review feedback.

Unit Assessor

(36) The Unit Assessor is normally responsible for:

- a. undertaking the review preparation and conducting the review process including:
 - i. identifying an appropriate external reviewer;
 - ii. providing the assessment task/s for review including de-identified student work samples and supporting documentation;
 - iii. confirming criteria or questions in addition to those set out in the standard report template.
 - iv. working with the external peer reviewer, and answering questions where required, to complete the project;
 - v. collaborating with the Course Coordinator to review feedback and create an EPRA Response and Action Plan;
- b. recording outcomes in the central repository; and
- c. notifying BIQ on progress.

Office of Business Intelligence and Quality

(37) BIQ is responsible for:

- a. integration with reporting processes: linking the outcomes of the external peer review process with the Comprehensive Course Review (CCR) and Annual Course Reports (ACR);
- b. University EPRA Plan development: working with Faculties/Colleges to develop the University-wide two-year EPRA Plan;
- c. EPRA Plan management: managing the University two-year EPRA Plan to ensure compliance and timely completion;
- d. procedure oversight: monitoring, reviewing, and driving continuous improvement of this Procedure and any associated documents; and

- e. repository monitoring: monitoring the central repository of completed peer review projects, including:
 - i. MOUs;
 - ii. completed EPRA Reports;
 - iii. Faculty/College EPRA Response and Action Plans.

Centre for Teaching and Learning

(38) The CTL is responsible for:

- a. providing guidance to the ADE on the creation of the two-year EPRA schedule; and
- b. offering advice to academic staff, when requested, in developing EPRA Response and Action Plans to address recommendations arising from external peer review outcomes.

Faculty/College Board

(39) The Faculty/College Board is responsible for monitoring and overseeing progress to ensure alignment with the Faculty/College's two-year EPRA Schedule.

Teaching and Assessment Committee

(40) The TAC is responsible for:

- a. overseeing progress towards the University's two-year EPRA Plan;
- b. evaluating the outcomes, impact, and value of the University's two-year EPRA Plan to ensure continuous improvement in teaching, assessment practices, and academic quality; and
- c. reporting to ASQC on the outcomes progress against the University's two-year EPRA Plan and highlighting any potential risks to academic quality, if they arise.

Academic Standards and Quality Committee

(41) The ASQC is responsible for:

- a. monitoring course performance and recommending EPRA where required; and
- b. notifying the Academic Board on the progress against the University's two-year EPRA Plan and highlighting any potential risks to academic quality, if they arise.

External Peer Review of Assessment Artefacts

(42) The following artefacts will be supplied to the partner institution:

- a. MOU;
- b. Constructive alignment mapping – showing the alignment of the course learning outcomes and the learning outcomes of the unit's whose assessment is being reviewed;
- c. Assessment mapping – showing the alignment of the unit learning outcomes and the assessment being reviewed;
- d. Unit Guide – showing the schedule of learning activities and assessments for the unit;
- e. An overall course or study plan structure which positions the Unit being reviewed;
- f. Information provided to students setting out the assessment task requirements and/or questions and the weighing of the assessment;
- g. Explanation of the grading scheme (Grade Descriptors) as it applies to the samples of student work together with explanations of nomenclature; and

- h. Samples of de-identified students' graded assessments, including comments, feedback and other notations used in grading students' work

Section 5 - References and Resources and Acknowledgement

(43) Southern Cross University acknowledges this Procedure draws on materials produced by the University of Wollongong which has referenced: Bedford, Simon; Czech, Peter; Sefcik, Lesley; Smith, Judith; and Yorke, John, (2016), External Referencing of Standards (ERoS) - An example of a collaborative end-to-end peer review process for external referencing, Curtin University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Wollongong and RMIT University, 2016, 61p. External Referencing of Standards (ERoS) - An Example of a Collaborative End-to-end Peer Review Process for External Referencing

- a. Appendix 1 - Guide to the Selection of Student Work Samples
- b. Appendix 2 - Peer Review Materials Checklist
- c. Appendix 3 - Participant Agreement
- d. Appendix 4 - Peer Review of Assessment Report Template

Status and Details

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