

# Academic Calibration Process

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Information for reviewers in the Academic Calibration Process



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# Executive Summary

This guide is designed for academics who will be calibrating a unit as part of the IRU Academic Calibration Process.

For further information on having a unit calibrated, or for any questions you may have please see:

- Guide for Unit Coordinators
- Guide for Colleges
- FAQ for Prospective Participants

## Roles and definitions

The calibration process is highly transactional, and dependent on a number of roles. It is important to be familiar with these roles as this will help you in understanding the broader process.

<b><i>Innovative Research Universities</i></b>	The IRU is a policy group comprising of seven universities around Australia: <a href="http://www.iru.edu.au/">http://www.iru.edu.au/</a>
<b><i>Calibration Coordinator</i></b>	Each IRU institution has a designated Calibration Coordinator, who is the central point of contact and facilitates all calibrations for the institution. The Calibration Coordinator manages all incoming and outgoing calibration communications for the institution.  Your CDU Calibration Coordinator is:  <b>Amanda Martin</b> <a href="mailto:amanda.martin@cdu.edu.au">amanda.martin@cdu.edu.au</a> 0889466444
<b><i>Calibrator</i></b>	An academic who has been nominated as the external reviewer of a unit from another institution.
<b><i>Unit Coordinator</i></b>	The academic who is the responsible for the unit that will be externally reviewed.
<b><i>Calibrating University/Institution</i></b>	The participating university where the nominated calibrator is employed
<b><i>Corresponding University/Institution</i></b>	The participating university where the Unit Coordinator is employed.

# Background

The Academic Calibration Process (ACP) is an external peer review process that is undertaken in collaboration with other Innovative Research Universities (IRU).

The calibration process aims to provide a comparable review and constructive feedback for selected higher education units on:

- grades awarded
- the relationship between assessment and learning outcomes
- the relationship and appropriateness of a unit, within its designated course structures
- the clarity and appropriateness of assessment design, learning outcomes, and supporting material for a unit
- the comparison of the assessment and supporting items to that of other institutions.

ACP as an inter-institutional quality process aims to:

- demonstrate the appropriateness of the standards of learning outcomes and grades awarded in IRU universities
- maintain and improve the academic standards of IRU
- enable comparisons of learning outcomes in similar subjects across IRU
- promote discussion on good practice in learning and teaching across IRU.

## IRU Development of the Academic Calibration Process

ACP supports IRU institutions in meeting the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards), in particular the requirement that:

*Review and improvement activities include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study, including... the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of study.*

*Higher Education Standards Framework 2015 (Cth)*

The 2015 standards came into effect January 1, 2017.

While ACP meets the threshold standards, after much consultation and a two year pilot period, this particular approach was developed by the IRU to ensure the process at its core is beneficial and efficient for academics, acknowledging there is existing confidence in the sector on the professionalism of academics in delivering units and grading assessments<sup>1</sup>.

IRU through its trial period received positive feedback regarding the process, as it helps academics to learn more and continuously improve their units, often from both the Unit Coordinator and calibrator perspectives.

## Academic Calibration Process

Academic Calibration has four key components

<b>1. Engagement</b>	<b>2. Preparation</b>
Each university selects units they would like to calibrate. These are distributed to Calibration Coordinators at each university to find suitable calibrators. The university having the unit calibrated will select a calibrator from the nominations provided.	The Unit Coordinator will select one assessment task from the unit, and collate student samples and supporting materials relating to the unit; Student samples are de-identified and sent on to the calibrating university.
<b>3. Review</b>	<b>4. Evaluation</b>
Once the calibrator receives materials they have a two-week window to evaluate all items provided and fill out the templated reports.  This will then be returned to the Unit Coordinator via the Calibration Coordinators to review.	Once the review process is complete, a process evaluation will be filled out by both the calibrator and Unit Coordinator to allow for continuous review and improvement of the calibration process.

<sup>1</sup> Trounson, A. (2012, July 23). IRU unis to trial external benchmarking, *Higher Education, The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/iru-unis-set-to-trial-own-external-benchmarking-system-following-on-from-go8-system/news-story/b63e64dc3863644f0530674654722879>

# The Review Process

## Calibrator Selection

Calibrators are nominated from multiple institutions, and it is the final decision of the corresponding University to make the calibrator selection.

Calibrators are not expected to have currently or previously taught a similar unit, and it is sufficient that the nominated calibrator is experienced in the discipline and has a well-developed sense of academic standards.

Calibrators are either approached, or you can register your interest with the Calibration Coordinator in advance by contacting them. If you register your interest in being a calibrator you will take preference when nominations are being sought for units in your particular discipline.

When you receive information about a relevant unit, you will also be notified of when the materials will be available to calibrate; it is important you look at these dates and ensure that you have the capacity to undertake the work, as there is a two-week window in which the report must be returned.

## Prior to the review

It is important also to become familiar with the process by reading this guide in full, and asking your Calibration Coordinator any questions you might have.

## Commencing the review

Your Calibration Coordinator will send you a set of documents for your calibration of which you will have two weeks to review and complete the reports provided. The amount of information selected for calibration has been designed to take less than one working day to review and complete the report. If you think you will require more time, please alert your Calibration Coordinator immediately so they can make arrangements with the corresponding institution.

Make sure you have read all documents and view web links provided prior to commencing your evaluation. If you have any questions about the information provided, or require more information to complete the review please contact your Calibration Coordinator. Do not re-commence calibration until the Calibration Coordinator has confirmed all information has been made available to you.

The documentation set will typically include:

- **Student samples:** a selection of de-identified marked student works will be made available to you. There should be 12 assessments, 3 from each low, mid, and high range of each grade band (pass, credit, distinction, high distinction), however this can vary.



*While you may review student samples and disagree with some of the grades provided, the calibration exercise focuses on retrospective quality verification instead of moderation, so no grades are to be modified following calibration.*

- **ACP Reports and Forms:** A set of templated calibration documents will also be made available for you to complete your evaluation.
- **Supporting documentation:** A set of documents that provide information on the course, unit, and assessment will be provided. In some instances, all information may not be available which your Calibration Coordinator may alert you to. Supporting documentation includes:

<b>University level</b>	<b>Course Level</b>
A copy of the grading nomenclature for the institution may be provided.	Information about the course structure in which the unit is located, and course learning outcomes. Please note that a unit may be a component of several courses so you may receive more than one set of information relating to course.
<b>Unit Level</b>	<b>Assessment Level</b>
<p>The full unit outline will be provided, as well as unit level learning outcomes and their relationship to course level outcomes. Grade distribution for the student cohort for that particular semester may be provided also.</p> <p>The Unit Coordinator may also provide a brief context statement to describe any context that is applicable, but may not be immediately obvious in existing documentation.</p>	Specific details of the assessment that has been selected will be provided, which will also include a marking rubric, or grading criteria such as a solutions file to assist in the evaluation.

## Writing the report

There is a group of templated reports and forms that would have been provided to you in your information package. These will include:

### *External Reviewer Declaration*

This form must be signed prior to commencing calibration to ensure you have declared any conflict of interest, and agree to confidentiality requirements. Please read all conditions as part of this form.

### *External Reviewer Tally Sheet*

This is an optional resource for you as the calibrator only and is not part of the formal documentation requirements. The tally sheet numbering is aligned to the numbered student samples, and is made available to track individual evaluations of student samples to help with tallying results for the report. Where student samples may be disagreed with, the tally sheet may be returned to the Unit Coordinator to review those specific samples that have been identified.



*Keep in mind that while the tally sheet may display the mark for each student sample, your evaluation is of the grade awarded. The mark is only an indicator of whether the sample was low, medium, or high within the grade band.*

### *External Reviewer Report*

This is the core report for evaluating the unit. It is recommended that you review questions and support information contained in the report prior to your review to assist in your evaluation. If you have any questions relating to the report, please contact your Calibration Coordinator.

### *External Reviewer Evaluation Form*

This is a short form that will allow you to reflect on your impression of the calibration process itself, and any improvements you think can be made. Once you have completed the external reviewer report, it is appreciated if you complete and return this form also.

## Returning Reports

Once you have completed all reports and forms, these can be returned to your Calibration Coordinator to deliver to the corresponding institution.



*Once reports are returned the corresponding University will own copyright of material produced in relation to the review, and you will not retain any rights (including copyright and moral rights) in connection with the materials produced for the review.*

*It is expected that when the calibration is completed, you destroy all documents and student samples provided by the corresponding institution.*



## Further Requests

In some cases your Calibration Coordinator may be in contact seeking further information or clarification at the request of the corresponding institution. It is expected that clarification or further information will be provided where the request has been deemed reasonable by the Calibration Coordinators.

## Report dispute

Where a corresponding institution may disagree with the report provided, after consultation with the Calibration Coordinators this may result in a request to discuss the calibration further, engage another calibrator, or repeat the calibration exercise the following year.

## Use and publication of reports

Reports provided may be used as part of the corresponding institutions re-registration requirements, and therefore may be made available to the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Association (TEQSA).

Reports will also often be reviewed at a course and College level, and may also be made available as part of the professional accreditation and course review processes.

# Calibrator Expectations

The standard expectations of peer review which often applies to research, are still applicable and expected in the teaching and learning context<sup>2</sup>. These include:

- Being fair, and timely in your review
- Providing feedback that is comprehensive and constructive
- Acting in confidence and not disclosing the content or outcome of the calibration in which you are involved
- Ensuring you are informed about, and comply with, the criteria being applied
- Declaring all conflicts of interest, including personal prejudice, which may influence the calibration process
- Giving proper consideration to teaching and assessment that challenges or changes accepted ways of thinking
- Not participating in calibrations where the unit is outside of your area or level of expertise, or where this occurs, declaring your limitations.



*While it is critical that a calibrators feedback is constructive so that it imparts a level of usefulness to the Unit Coordinator, the calibrator is not expected to remedy any faults apparent in the unit, nor is expected to provide future support or assistance unless agreed between the calibrator and the Unit Coordinator through their respective Calibration Coordinators*

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<sup>2</sup> Peer Review in Research Policy, Charles Darwin University (2013).