

# Academic Calibration Process

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Guide for Unit Coordinators



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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 units calibrated, becoming a Calibrator, please see:

- FAQ for prospective participants
- Guide for Calibrators
- Guide for Colleges

## 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>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<b>3. Review</b>	<b>4. Evaluation</b>
<p>Once the Calibrator receives materials they have a two-week window to evaluate all items provided and fill out the templated reports.</p> <p>This will then be returned to the Unit Coordinator via the Calibration Coordinators to review.</p>	<p>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.</p>

<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

## Unit Selection

Units are selected differently at each institution and there is no set method. For example, it may be by a set unit type e.g. capstones, expression of interest, or determined by a learning and teaching committee. If you have been selected through a process your Assistant Dean Learning Futures or Calibration Coordinator will advise you. If you are interested in calibrating, you should seek approval first from your College Dean.

## Assessment selection

One assessment task from your unit will need to be selected for calibration. When considering what assessment task is most important to calibrate, please consider:

- Student sample amount – 12 are required for review across the grade spectrum
- Format – written word is preferable for de-identification and evaluation purposes
- Word length – assessments are required to be 2,000 to 4,000 words, or equivalent
- The amount of learning outcomes the assessment addresses – the preference is for this to be as high as possible, or to cover the most critical
- The percentage of grading the assessment accounts for – the preference is for this to be as high as possible
- The style of assessment and level of de-identification required – avoid where possible assignments that have too much personal or commercial in confidence information so de-identification does not affect their readability.



*These parameters have been set to try and keep the evaluation time for a Calibrator to a maximum of a single working day. We try to accommodate all units and alternative arrangements may be made to suit your unit, for example: For very small class sizes you can calibrate more than one semester in one calibration to increase the sample size; For post graduate units with large assessment tasks, you may be able to reduce the amount of student samples but increase the word count; For the required grade distribution for student samples, you can get as close as possible to the recommendation.*

*If you are having trouble selecting an assessment task based on the above parameters, please discuss options with your Calibration Coordinator.*

## Finding a Calibrator

Once an assessment task has been selected, your Calibration Coordinator will collate details into a form to be sent to other member institutions to seek nominations.

You will need to let your Calibration Coordinator know some additional detail relating to the selected assessment task, in particular the date when you think you will have materials collected, including selected marked student samples, as this helps potential Calibrators check their availability and plan when they will need to undertake the calibration task.

This form includes:

<b>Unit Code</b>	
<b>Unit Name</b>	
<b>University</b>	
<b>Related Course(s)</b>	<p>In some cases, your unit may be aligned to more than one course. In these cases you can list more than one course, and may wish to cite a dominant course, based on unit placement within the course, and student cohort distribution.</p> <p>Course information can be provided as a web link, or document.</p>
<b>School/Faculty</b>	
<b>Unit Web Link</b>	
<b>Unit Summary</b>	
<b>Assessment Item Selection</b>	<p>This field will provide brief detail e.g. <i>Written report, 3,000 words, 40%</i></p>
<b>Assessment Item Information</b>	<p>This field will provide some more descriptive information about what the assessment is about e.g. <i>Students will work in groups to evaluate [x] and write a report about [y]...</i></p> <p>This can be added to the table as text, or be an attachment, such as the assessment information provided to students.</p>
<b>Materials Availability Date</b>	<p>This date field is typically broad e.g. <i>Late November 2017</i>, but can be specific e.g. <i>24/11/2017</i>.</p>

Once this is completed the information will be distributed to other IRU institutions' Calibration Coordinators to seek out potential Calibrators for nomination.

## Reviewing Calibrator Nominations

When other member institutions find potential Calibrators, they will forward on the academic's CV that are reviewed by the Unit Coordinator, and may also be reviewed by the Course coordinator, Assistant Dean Learning Futures and College Deans.

It is good to keep in mind that 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.

Once you have made a decision, you can convey this to your Calibration Coordinator, who will then let the calibrating university know.

## Collating Materials

To prepare for calibration a number of documents will need to be collated. Your Calibration Coordinator will advise if they offer any support for collecting materials.

Items that need to be collated include

### *Student samples*

It is preferable that student samples are ones that are marked and contain any comments made relating to the evaluation of the assessment item, or an attached summary assessment sheet.

Selection of student samples should be done so using the following low/med/high distribution within the grade:

<b>Pass</b>			<b>Credit</b>			<b>Distinction</b>			<b>High Distinction</b>		
Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High

Where this is not possible, please provide a distribution as close as possible to this, or discuss a different distribution approach with your Calibration Coordinator.

Your Calibration Coordinator will typically de-identify samples on your behalf, or will let you know if you will be expected to.

### Supporting documents

A number of supporting documents are required also to inform the evaluation and provide context to student samples. This can be in the form of documents, web links, or a combination of both.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Document</b>
<b>University</b>	Grading nomenclature (CDU Grading Policy)
<b>Course</b>	Information about the course structure(s) of which the unit is a part of
<b>Course</b>	Course level learning outcomes
<b>Unit</b>	Unit outline provided to students
<b>Unit</b>	Unit Learning Outcomes, and how they relate to course learning outcomes
<b>Unit</b>	Grade distribution for the particular semester being evaluated.
<b>Unit</b>	Context statement – optional documentation you can use to comment on additional factors not present in standard documentation.
<b>Assessment</b>	Details of assessment task
<b>Assessment</b>	Grading criteria/marking rubric for the assessment task

There can be a number of variations to this list:

- One document may cover multiple requirements, for example a unit outline may also contain the unit learning outcomes, assessment task detail and grading criteria
- You may have already provided some of this information in the 'Finding a Calibrator' phase
- You may not have some particular documentation, such as a marking rubric.

For all cases please alert your Calibration Coordinator when sending through materials so they are made aware and can forward the information onto the corresponding institution.

Once all materials have been collated, please send onto your Calibration Coordinator and they will cross check and send onto the calibrating institution to commence the review.



*The Calibrator is required to sign an external reviewer declaration which means they must: Declare any conflicts of interest; Comply with confidentiality requirements; And accept that once reports are returned they retain no rights (including copyright and moral rights) in connection with the materials produced for the review.*

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

## Receiving the Report

A report will be received within two weeks of being sent out. If there is any variation to this date your Calibration Coordinator will advise you. You may be asked to clarify or elaborate on any information provided within the review timeframe which will be conveyed through your Calibration Coordinator.

When the report is received it will typically be sent to the Unit Coordinator, Course coordinator, Assistant Dean Learning Futures and College Dean.

### *Further Requests*

It is important you read through the report immediately, and provide any questions or feedback to your Calibration Coordinator so it can be conveyed to the calibrating university as soon as possible. If there are no issues still let your Calibration Coordinator know you have accepted the report so they can finalise the process.

### *Report Dispute*

If the report is not agreed with, this will be discussed amongst the Calibration Coordinator, Unit Coordinator, Course coordinator, and Assistant Dean Learning Futures to review the dispute against internal data that may be available. Options for remediation include facilitating a discussion with the Calibrator, engaging another Calibrator, or repeating the exercise the following year.

### *Use and publication of reports*

Reports provided may be used as part of your 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 school level, and may also be made available as part of the professional accreditation and course review processes.

## Filling out the process evaluation form

When the calibration report is sent to you, you will also be asked to fill out an evaluation form about the ACP Process. 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. It would be appreciated if this form is filled out and returned to your Calibration Coordinator.

## Unit Coordinator Expectations

To make the calibration of your unit as constructive as possible, it is imperative that you provide as much information as possible for the calibration document set within the timeframes agreed to.

One of the aims of ACP is to support academics by providing an opportunity to receive collegial feedback from external discipline based reviewers to help them reflect and improve their learning and teaching. It is with this in mind we hope Unit Coordinators engage with the process in a positive and proactive manner.



*Calibration reports are usually considered 'supporting documents' that can be used with a suite of existing information and metrics to inform unit or course review in their existing cycles. Ensure you adhere to all existing policies relating to changes being applied to units, if you intend to modify the unit based on feedback received.*

*Please also check whether you have any direct expectations from professional accreditors to provide calibration reports as part of your accreditation cycle.*