



Innovative
Research
Universities

Guide for Academic Areas

Information for Academic Areas having units reviewed in the
Academic Calibration Process

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Executive Summary

This guide shows where an academic area may have a role in the calibration process, and how they can contribute.

For more detailed information on the calibration process for units being calibrated, or as a reviewer, please see:

- Guide for Calibrators
- Guide for Unit Coordinators
- 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.

Innovative Research Universities	The IRU is a policy group comprising of seven universities around Australia: http://www.iru.edu.au/
Calibration Coordinator	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.
Calibrator	An academic who has been nominated as the external reviewer of a unit from another institution.
Unit Coordinator	The academic who is the responsible for the unit that will be externally reviewed.
Calibrating University/Institution	The participating university where the nominated calibrator is employed
Corresponding University/Institution	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.
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IRU Development of the Academic Calibration Process

ACP supports IRU 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 assessments¹.

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.

¹ Trounson, A. (2012, July 23). IRU units 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>

Academic Calibration Process

Academic Calibration has four key components

1. Engagement	2. Preparation
<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>
3. Review	4. Evaluation
<p>Once the calibrator receives materials they have a four-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>

Having units calibrated

Calibration was developed by academics and learning and teachings professionals. It is a proactive and time effective process, aiming to add value for students and academics beyond the regulatory environment.

There are many benefits to having units calibrated across your school or faculty:

- Calibration contextualises the assessment and grading of units in a broader context.
- Calibration is documented endorsement of the consistency and reliability of assessment and grading methods, comparative to the sector
- Calibration benefits students and academics as it is a collegial and constructive process that can continually improve learning and teaching quality
- In association with other quality processes such as course review and professional accreditation, calibration demonstrates that persistent engagement in comprehensive improvements, continually raising the standard of learning and teaching

Unit Selection

Calibration was derived from an ongoing legislated requirement and institutions are expected to participate on an ongoing basis. Academic areas can play an active role in calibration by being part of the unit selection process.

To build consistency in calibration amounts, and the range of units calibrated across your portfolio of courses you may wish to develop a process to determine how many units you will calibrate per semester or every year, and how the selection will be distributed.

Some example methods may be:

1. Developing a relationship between calibration and existing quality processes

You may wish to base the amount and selection of units to be reviewed based on upcoming quality processes, such as course review, or professional accreditation cycles.

2. Sum and distribution structure

Selecting a set number of units to be calibrated in a cycle, and using a set distribution method to spread across disciplines or courses to create a proportionate sample.

3. Thematic selection

You may want to target specific units based on a particular parameter, for example selecting capstone units, discipline based selection, new units that have been in place for 12 months, or particular unit types. You may also want to target specific units based on other data and metrics for example, internal moderation issues, negative student feedback.

4. Expression of interest

Often schools and faculties may send out information to their academic cohort to seek interest in having units calibrated.

You can discuss your ideas for unit selection with your calibration coordinator.

Once you have decided on a distribution method, you can discuss with your calibration coordinator whether they will collate the information on your behalf, or supplying you with a link to a web based unit registration form.

Selecting Calibrators for units

The Head of School (or equivalent) may be part of the review and selection of nominated calibrators for units. It is important to clarify your expectations with your calibration coordinator so they know if you want to be involved.

Reviewing reports

The Head of School (or equivalent) will be sent a copy of calibration reports relating to units in their school, as well as the unit coordinator and course coordinator. The Calibration coordinator may also provide statistical information to relevant learning and teaching committees.

Unless there is an institutional level process in place, the Calibration Coordinator typically has no role in seeing the results of the report actioned or managing the feedback loop following any changes made based on calibration results, and it is the determination of the academic area to develop a process to review and action reports received.

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. Where critical changes may need to be applied to a unit, it is important that existing institutional accreditation policies and procedures are followed.

Unit Coordinators are advised that it is their responsibility to follow up with any professional accreditation requirements where calibration reports may need to be provided.

Calibrating units

Increasing the number of academics selected as calibrators in your academic area is notable and demonstrates the high regard of your academics in their discipline experience, and well-developed sense of academic standards.

The calibration process is an excellent form of professional development, and in many cases in the pilot phase calibrators reported there was a cross-pollination of ideas, and they too learnt how they could improve their units from the evaluation of others.

Nominating calibrators

When universities have selected the units they would like to have calibrated, a request for calibrators is sent to all IRU calibration coordinators to distribute at their institutions. There is no discipline alignment in calibration so there can be no prior determination of what disciplines will be covered in a given semester.

Depending on the institution, possible methods for academics to be selected include:

- Requests being made individually between calibration coordinator and academics when IRU institutions send out requests for calibrators
- Academic areas sending out requests to their academic cohort for nominations when institutions send out requests for calibrators
- Academic areas recruiting potential calibrators in advance so they can be contacted immediately when discipline related units are available for calibration.

The selection process has no set time frame, so each time an academic receives a calibrator nomination they will evaluate it for suitability. With this in mind the shortest length between receiving the request and providing a nomination is your best chance of having an academic calibrate a unit.

The IRU Calibrator Register

The IRU has also developed a central register of academics who have expressed interest in becoming reviewers. It is hoped that academic areas promote this option with their academic cohorts as it increases their chances of being selected as Calibrators for reviews. The calibration coordinator can supply you with a link to the web based registration form, or will collate materials on your behalf.

Expectations of Schools and Faculties

To make ACP as constructive as possible for your students, academics, school and faculty, it is important that academic areas encourage academics to engage with calibration, and support and reward the efforts of participants.