



# TEQSA Standards and External Benchmarking: How Accreditation and SIA Education Awards can assist in meeting the requirements

## Higher Education Standards and benchmarking

The Higher Education Standards place an emphasis on external benchmarking, specifically in the development of learning outcomes (Standard 1.4.1) and in the review and improvement processes (Standard 5.3.4).

Standard 1.4.1 requires that:

The expected learning outcomes for each course of study are .... informed by national and international comparators.

Standard 5.3.4

Review and improvement activities include regular external referencing of the success of student cohorts against comparable courses of study, including:

- analyses of progression rates, attrition rates, completion times and rates and, where applicable, comparing different locations of delivery, and
- the assessment methods and grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units of study within courses of study.

The importance of such benchmarking has been highlighted in the recent series of workshops on peer review and assessment conducted by Higher Education Services, a not-for-profit company owned by Universities Australia. The culmination of these workshops will be the Summit on peer review and assessment to be held in Melbourne on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of September.  
(<http://www.hes.edu.au/events/assessment-and-review-summit/>)

The workshops explored the definition of what constitutes benchmarking. *Benchmarking* can be described as the comparison of the processes or outcomes of assessment activity with a view to achieving improvement in those areas. In comparison, *consensus moderation* describes how one goes about benchmarking. Moderation is the change in judgement individuals need to make if educational standards for which they are accountable are comparable with those elsewhere. *Consensus* is the outcome of making those changes, so there is agreement on what constitutes accepted educational outcomes.

Benchmarking of any kind is a time-consuming activity and external benchmarking beyond the scope of one's university can be a sensitive matter. While not fully addressing the aspirational scope of the intention of the TEQSA standards, accreditation of OHS professional educational programs and participation in the Safety Institute of Australia (SIA) OHS Education awards can be claimed as clear evidence of action towards meeting these standards.



## Accreditation of OHS professional education

Accreditation of OHS professional education programs involves assessment against criteria addressing educational aspects as well OHS content and OHS professional practice. The assessments are carried out by a panel comprising OHS educators and OHS professionals with input by the Education Advisor to the Accreditation Board. The report provided as part of the accreditation process includes the strengths and areas for improvement. The accreditation assessment and report is informed not only by the accreditation criteria but the comparison with other programs reviewed for accreditation. Once a university has their OHS programs accredited their key academic teaching staff are invited to participate in accreditation assessment panels.

Thus, accreditation is an external benchmarking process carried out by a panel external to the university involving both external academics and practicing professionals.

Accreditation requires mapping of program and course learning outcomes to the OHS Body of Knowledge<sup>1</sup> and to the OHS capability statements<sup>2</sup>. These benchmarks were developed through a workshop process involving OHS educators and OHS professionals and so provide a national comparator. The Global OHS Capability Framework<sup>3</sup> which incorporates elements of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the OHS Body of Knowledge provides an international comparator.

As part of the annual reporting process, the Accreditation Board is collating data on a student census. Due to variations in definition and data collection processes, to date this data has had a low level of reliability. As the quality of this information improves the Accreditation Board will publish benchmark data for enrolments, graduations, attrition and retention rates against which universities can evaluate their programs. These annual reports together with a summary of trends observed through accreditation assessment and annual reviews provide a benchmark for OHS education programs.

## SIA OHS Education Awards

The Safety Institute of Australia offers annual awards at the Bachelor and Postgraduate (Graduate Diploma and Masters) levels. These awards are judged on:

- Technical and theoretical knowledge
- Ability to access, analyse and evaluate information
- Ability to solve problems related to OHS
- Communication skills to transmit knowledge, skills and ideas
- Demonstrated application of knowledge and skills in practical situations.<sup>4</sup>

The university may nominate one student from each program and the judging is based on a nomination form completed by the program leader, student response to the criteria and sample assignments provided by the student.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ohsbok.org.au/resources/learning-outcomes/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.ohseducationaccreditation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/OHS-Professional-CapabilityStatements-8-10-121.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.inshpo.org/work.php>

<sup>4</sup> Drawn from AQF descriptors.



The nominations are judged by a panel of OHS educators and OHS professionals. As from this year a composite report will be provided summarizing the strengths and areas for further development noted during the judging review. The depth and breadth of the composite summary will depend on the number of nominations.

Thus, for the universities who submit a nomination, it is not just about whether their nominee is an award winner, participation in the award process is evidence of external benchmarking. While the judging panels are selected to ensure no conflict of interest, participation in the judging process is a useful comparative experience for educators.

Calls for nominations for the 2018 SIA OHS Education Awards will be made in December 2017. To ensure you receive information on the call for nominations register your email address with [events@sia.org.au](mailto:events@sia.org.au).

**See attached for the composite report from the award judging for 2017.** (The notes this year are a little sketchy but will be developed further in future years.)

Pam Pryor

Registrar



**Summary comments on nominations for SIA OHS Education Awards, 2017**

**Undergraduate**

*Developed for the purpose of providing information as part of evidence for external benchmarking OHS professional education*

Criteria		Observed strengths	Observed areas for further development
Technical and theoretical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Demonstrable familiarity with and understanding of a broad range of concepts within the OHS Body of Knowledge with depth in some hazard areas</i></li> </ul>	Academic results strong	(Assessment of breadth of knowledge limited by the nature of assessment activities submitted as evidence.)
Ability to access, analyse and evaluate information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Access, critically evaluate and analyse information from a range of sources to complete OHS activities</i></li> </ul>	Sources of information clearly identified	Quality and currency of information not overtly evaluated (in some cases research relied upon predominantly being >10 years old) . Statements sometimes made without clear justification and reference to evidence Analysis not used to draw conclusions to inform practice
Ability to solve problems related to OHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Apply information gathering and critical thinking skills to identify and analyse sometimes complex problems</i></li> <li><i>Generate practical evidenced informed solutions to OHS problems taking account of legislation and industry standards and justify the proposals</i></li> </ul>		Critical thinking and evaluation not well demonstrated
Communication skills to transmit knowledge, skills and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Select and appropriately apply a broad range of communication skills and formats to explain technical information and concepts suitable for workplace audiences</i></li> </ul>	Good skills in developing powerpoint presentations Good use of language in documents	Use of language not disciplined, sometimes emotive Need to ensure 'ownership' of presentations not only through acknowledgement of other input but in familiarity with content and customisation
Demonstrated application of knowledge and skills in practical situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Recognise the implications for practice of different work environments, work and organisational cultures</i></li> <li><i>Identify the leadership, management and support systems and processes required to ensure that recommended controls are effective</i></li> </ul>	Personal leadership within the student cohort as well as in other activities	Need to ensure that evidence provided (of practicums, etc) demonstrates a range of experience and understanding of organisational environment
<p><b>Further comments</b> Comments provided above are limited by the selection of evidence provided for the judging process. Evidence provided needs to clearly address each criterion with student response linking their comments with the evidence.</p>			



**Summary comments on nominations for SIA OHS Education Awards, 2017**

**Postgraduate**

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Criteria	AQF 8 (Grad Dip)	AQF 9 (Master)	Strengths	Areas for further development
Technical and theoretical knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Demonstrated advanced theoretical and technical understanding and ability to systematically apply a broad range of concepts and sub concepts of the OHS Body of Knowledge</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Demonstrated advanced theoretical and technical understanding and ability to draw together relevant concepts and sub concepts from the OHS Body of Knowledge</i></li> </ul>	Good technical knowledge, conference presentations	Understanding the scope and role of the generalist OHS professional and the broad knowledge base that underpins the role
Ability to access, analyse and evaluate information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Access and critically evaluate information from a range of sources to transform information as part of an activity</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Access, critically evaluate and reflect on complex information from a range of sources to generate complex ideas and concepts</i></li> </ul>		Some broad statements not justified, nor linked to the literature
Ability to solve problems related to OHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Apply information gathering and critical thinking skills to identify and analyse complex OHS problems and generate, prioritise and justify evidence-informed solutions</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Apply information gathering and critical thinking skills to identify and analyse complex OHS problems, generate, prioritise and justify evidence-informed solutions taking account of legislation, industry standards and business considerations</i></li> </ul>		Implications of recommendations not always identified and evaluated
Communication skills to transmit knowledge, skills and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Interpret and tailor information and select and apply appropriate strategies to communicate technical and theoretical concepts in a clear, concise and logical manner giving under pinning rationale</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Interpret and tailor technical information, complex ideas and theories to communicate knowledge and ideas to a range of specialist and non-specialist audiences</i></li> </ul>		Evidence provided did not demonstrate ability to communicate 'complex ideas and theories' to a range of audiences. Statements not routinely followed up, expanded on
Demonstrated application of knowledge and skills in practical situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Demonstrated capacity for planning and making independent judgements in a range of OHS technical and management activities</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Demonstrated project management skills, autonomy and creativity</i></li> </ul>		

**Further comments**

Comments provided above are limited by the selection of evidence provided for the judging process. Evidence provided needs to clearly address the specific criterion with student response linking their comments with the evidence.