



Innovative  
Research  
Universities

# FAQ for Prospective Participants

Information for academics who are interested in having a unit reviewed or becoming a reviewer.

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Roles and definitions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Why do IRU institutions calibrate?	
Academic Calibration Process	
<b>Having a unit reviewed</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Why would I have my unit reviewed?	
What are the benefits of having a unit reviewed?	
Am I eligible to have my unit calibrated?	
How can I get my unit calibrated?	
How much time does it take?	
Who pays the calibrator?	
Is the information I provide protected?	
Who will see the report?	
What do I do with my report once I've received it?	
What if I don't understand or agree with the report?	
What if I get a 'bad report'?	
Can I ask questions outside of the calibration report?	
Can I speak with the calibrator directly?	
Can I have more than one calibrator review the unit?	
<b>Becoming a Calibrator</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Why would I become a calibrator?	
Am I eligible to be a calibrator?	
How can I become a calibrator?	
How much time does calibration take?	
How do I get paid?	
What is expected of me as a calibrator?	
Who sees the report I write?	
What if I review the unit it and have concerns?	
What if my report is questioned or disputed?	
Can I speak with the unit coordinator directly?	
How many units can I calibrate?	

## Executive Summary

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This document aims to respond to some common questions relating to calibration to help understand the details of the process.

For more detailed information on the end to end process for unit coordinators and calibrators, please see:

- Guide for Calibrators
- Guide for Unit Coordinators

## Roles and definitions

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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.

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

# Background

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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.

## Why do IRU institutions calibrate?

ACP supports CDU 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. IRU ACP is overseen by the IRU DVC(A) group.

## Academic Calibration Process

Academic Calibration has four key components

<i>1. Engagement</i>	<i>2. Preparation</i>
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.
<i>3. Review</i>	<i>4. Evaluation</i>
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.  The payment calibrator process between universities will also begin.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

## Having a unit reviewed

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### **Why would I have my unit reviewed?**

Motivations for having a unit reviewed vary. In some cases, academics may want some constructive feedback to improve a particular unit, or they may wish to generally evaluate the unit to ensure it is on track. External calibration can help unit coordinators where a unit may have many markers to provide a level of cross marker evaluation, and can help to provide a 'third party voice' to any questions or concerns that may be present in the unit, for example whether to have a marking rubric for a particular assessment.

In all cases, feedback from calibration is intended to be collegial and constructive, and you will receive an evaluation that either affirms your work, or provides some feedback on how you could improve.

### **What are the benefits of having a unit reviewed?**

The benefits of evaluating and improving units is at its core of benefit to students who participate in the units.

Calibration is a good opportunity to reflect on your unit and assessment outside of standard information gathering, metrics, and internal evaluation processes by having the opportunity to seek external feedback from a discipline based colleague at another institution.

Calibration also demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement which is beneficial for professional development, and may positively support existing processes such as professional accreditation of courses.

### **Am I eligible to have my unit calibrated?**

Nearly all undergraduate and post graduate units are eligible to be calibrated, with the exception of research based units that do not have assessment tasks, or some work integrated learning units that contain third party involvement or commercial in confidence information where approval may be required, or the amount of de-identification affects the readability of assessment samples.

Typically, units must meet these general guidelines for unit selection:

- There are at least 12 students for student sampling
- There is an assessment type that is approximately 2000-4000 words, or equivalent.

The aim is not to restrict units from being calibrated so you can discuss options further with your calibration coordinator if you are unsure whether your unit is eligible. Some previous modifications to be able to include units include calibrating a unit over two semesters to increase the student amount, or calibrating less assignments where the assignments are large (5,000+ words).

### **How can I get my unit calibrated?**

We welcome academics who are interested in having units calibrated. If you would like to submit your interest in having your unit calibrated you should first discuss and seek approval from your course coordinator and head of school. If the unit is approved for calibration, then you can contact your calibration coordinator to start the process. They will either request information from you via email, or send you a link to fill out a web based form.

### **How much time does it take?**

The most time consuming part of calibration for a unit coordinator is the collation of materials, and the de-identification of student samples.

To reduce the burden of materials collation you can take a phased approach to building your document package. For more information on what information is required please see the Calibrator Guide.

You can also enquire with your calibration coordinator if they offer any services to help you with materials collation, or de-identification of student samples.

## **Is the information I provide protected?**

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.

## **Who will see the report?**

Reports are returned to the unit coordinator, and are often also sent to the course coordinator and head of school. Statistical data on calibration may be reported by the calibration coordinator to relevant Learning and Teaching committees.

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 may also be made available as part of the professional accreditation and course review processes.

## **What do I do with my report once I've received it?**

Depending on the institution, what happens with the report may be at the discretion of the unit coordinator, or there may be standard requirements and processes e.g. all reports must be part of course review processes.

It is up to the unit coordinator to clarify whether you are required to submit your calibration report as part of professional accreditation.



### **What if I don't understand or agree with the report?**

Unit Coordinators are able to ask questions or seek clarification on the report if they require it. This is to be communicated to their calibration coordinator who will forward this on to the calibrating university.

After questions or clarification, if the report is still not agreed with, this will be discussed amongst the calibration coordinator, unit coordinator, course coordinator, and head of school 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.

### **What if I get a 'bad report'?**

There's no such thing as a 'bad report'. Calibrators are advised to provide reports that are collegial and constructive so they impart a level of usefulness to the unit coordinator, and they are checked by the calibration coordinators to ensure this expectation is met. With this in mind, where reports may return feedback indicating improvements could be made, this can be taken as an opportunity by the unit coordinator to evaluate suggestions and consider for implementation in their internal evaluation cycles.

### **Can I ask questions outside of the calibration report?**

No, the IRU calibration process was designed by academics and learning and teaching professionals with the intent of effectively moderating and providing valuable qualitative feedback for units, while still maintain process efficiency, understanding the comprehensive workloads of academics.

### **Can I speak with the calibrator directly?**

No, as this is an exercise in quality verification the aim is to keep the process as objective as possible utilising existing materials that are provided to students.

For information that may be important to a particular calibration that is not immediately obvious in the documentation, there is the option to develop a context statement, that has a set of parameters of what can be included.

Where there is a report dispute, or a specific request to make contact with your calibrator after the calibration is complete, you can discuss this with your calibration coordinator as approval will need to be sought from the calibrator.

## **Can I have more than one calibrator review the unit?**

This is not part of the standard IRU ACP Process, however if you require more than one calibrator to review your unit you can discuss this with your calibration coordinator.

## **Becoming a Calibrator**

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### **Why would I become a calibrator?**

Becoming a calibrator is notable as request for nominations go to all IRU institutions, and you are selected based on your experience in the discipline and your well-developed sense of academic standards.

Calibrating is also an excellent form of professional development, and gives you the opportunity to experience and evaluate a unit from your discipline from another institution. 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.

### **Am I eligible to be a calibrator?**

Calibrators are typically Academic Level C and onwards, however there may be exceptions for Academic Level B in specific disciplines where the academic has a lot of demonstrated experience. You can discuss your eligibility with your Calibration Coordinator.

### **How can I become a calibrator?**

If a unit from another institution is up for calibration that relates to your discipline you may be asked to nominate by the calibration coordinator or your head of school.

You can also express your interest in advance by contacting your calibration coordinator, so they can add you to the IRU Calibrator Register. Your calibration coordinator will either request information via email, or send you a link to the web based registration form.

## **How much time does calibration take?**

There are guidelines in place relating to the size of student samples provided, and the amount of supporting information provided, so the entire review and report writing process should take less than one work day to complete. See the 'Calibrator Guide' for more detail on materials provided.

When you receive all the materials for calibration, you have two weeks to complete the review and send the report.

## **How do I get paid?**

If you have an ABN you will be able to generate an invoice to receive payment. If you do not have an ABN please talk to your calibration coordinator, as each institution has varying processes where you may be paid directly, or may nominate an institutional account to contribute funds.

## **What is expected of me as a calibrator?**

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

- 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 declare their limitations.

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

## **Who sees the report I write?**

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.

Your report will be returned to the unit coordinator, and is typically also given to the course coordinator and head of school. Reports may also be made available as part of the professional accreditation and course review processes, depending on the institution.

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).

An institution may publicly publish their involvement in IRU Academic Calibration, and your brief biographical information may be made available, but the detailed report will not be made available publicly.

## **What if I review the unit it and have concerns?**

If you suspect there is information missing, or would like some information clarified please contact your calibration coordinator to get feedback from the unit coordinator.

If there are still concerns these can be expressed in the report, keeping in mind that they should be expressed constructively to ensure the feedback is of use to the unit coordinator.

## **What if my report is questioned or disputed?**

A unit coordinator may have a question or request clarification in relation to feedback provided in the report. In these cases, if the request is considered 'in scope' by the calibration coordinators they will send on the request to you to respond.

It is extremely rare to have a report disputed. If this occurs you will be asked if you are willing to participate in a facilitated discussion, or alternatively plans will be made to have a second calibrator review the unit, or a request that the unit is re-reviewed the following year.

### **Can I speak with the unit coordinator directly?**

No, if you have questions relating to the materials you have received you can direct these to your calibration coordinator who will follow them up on your behalf.

Where there is a report dispute, or a specific request to make contact with your unit coordinator after the calibration is complete, you can discuss this with your calibration coordinator as approval will need to be sought from the unit coordinator.

### **How many units can I calibrate?**

There is no limit to how many units you calibrate, as long as the units relate to your discipline.