

Benchmarking

Informing principles

1. Internal environment in USQ: recognised that benchmarking activities are well in process, albeit, **informal and uncoordinated**.
2. Forces operating externally:
 - The Federal Government's shift of focus from quality assurance to quality enhancement where learning and collaboration are encouraged (Nelson 2003).
 - The Australian Universities Quality Agency's (AUQA) proposal to include benchmarking in the second cycle of audits (Woodhouse 2006), "The fitness for purpose approach will explicitly encompass standards, performance and outcomes, guided by consideration of academic risk and its management; greater emphasis on institutional standards and performance outcomes, with attention to benchmarking activities and their effect on standards and outcomes; audits will investigate how academic standards are determined, applied, maintained, monitored and met; greater use of external reference points; and evidence of relation between processes and outcomes will be sought."
3. Guided by Jackson and Lund's (Norman and Helen 2000, p. 6) concept of benchmarking for higher education where it is an organisational learning process and aims to contribute to the continuous improvement of the University's processes, performances and outcomes.
4. Guided by the USQ Quality Policy 9.2 at <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/92.pdf>

Goals

To develop a formal benchmarking system and process where it can:

1. Inform the University of its comparative performances
2. Identify areas of best practices
3. Identify areas for improvement to implement changes

Strategic alignment

USQ Learning and Teaching Operational Plan

- Curriculum Project
 - Program Revitalisation Project
- Enabling Project
 - Learning and teaching evaluation project

Details of Faculty support for an 18 month period

Embedded in a program development team approach, with supplementary support from PQO and Legal Office.

Tasks, timelines & budgets (Refer to benchmarking framework)

Tasks	Timeline	Resource
Develop benchmarking framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Level of Benchmarking ● Focus of Benchmarking ● Types of Benchmarking ● Scope of Benchmarking ● Types of Indicators 	Jan – Jul 08	0.5 staff/ academic, Jan 2008 – July 2007
Provide evidence-based approach to benchmarking which is sustainable and ensures continuous improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guidelines on benchmarking in USQ 	Jan – Jul 08	0.5 staff/ academic
A repository/ database of benchmarking	Jul 08 – Jul 09	1 staff – IT technical staff – Jan – Dec 08
A clear policy and statement of commitment , there is no such policy or statement in existence	Jan - Jul 08	0.5 staff/ academic, Jan 08 – Jul 07
Document project/ administrative support	Jan 2008 – Jul 2009	0.5 staff/ administrative (throughout the project timeframe)
Develop professional development package for benchmarking	Jul – Dec 2008	0.5 staff/ academic
Evaluate impact of benchmarking project (assessment)	Jan – Jul 09 Report by Jul 09	1 staff, Jan 09 – July 09/ an evaluator

Total Resources/ Budget Required

1 staff/ academic – for items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7

0.5 staff/ admin – for item 5

1.00 staff/ IT - for item 3

Required documentation and policy rewriting

- Develop a stand-alone, overarching Benchmarking Commitment Statement or a new Policy on Benchmarking. It is important that benchmarking at USQ have authority as a means to implement improvement, undertake development and be used as a change agent for USQ to be relevant and competitive. This will elevate the rationale for benchmarking to an ethos of continuous improvement rather than an implicit soft perception of benchmarking as an after-thought to an information gathering exercise, a good to have item.
- Benchmarking guidelines

Professional development requirements

- Information sessions about benchmarking
- Targets audience: All
- Frequency: On going throughout the year
- Professional development package on benchmarking
- Target audience: Academic staff
- Frequency: On going throughout the year

Scholarship opportunities

- Staff - Individual research and scholarship of learning and teaching in benchmarking, networking, collaborative projects and exchange programs
- University as a whole – collaborative international projects, more research and grants, external reporting purposes, strategic marketing and decision making

Communication plan

- Approval process
- A USQ statement on benchmarking
- Internal staff – information sessions, professional development packages
- External audience - USQ marketing communications platform – printed, electronic, web

Evaluation strategies

- Assessment of benchmarking project.
- Evaluation study of the benchmarking system, process and activities at USQ – i.e. a comprehensive review – after 3 or 5 year cycle.
- Feedback from internal staff and benchmarking partners.
- Benchmark the USQ benchmarking system/ process for continuous improvement – comparative indicators.
- Indicator - USQ benchmarking system and process to be identified as a good practice by AUQA and invited to contribute in the Good Practice Database – from AUQA cycle 2 2009

