

Guidelines to Effective Learning and Teaching Benchmarking

1. About benchmarking

- Benchmarking is a systematic, strategic and continuous process of improvement of learning and teaching. It is about identifying how to improve intended performance(s), make improvements, then re-measure. It involves organizational learning, collaboration and discussion among the benchmarking partners, nationally and internationally.

2. About what to benchmark

- Related to 'what' to benchmark is what is/are the performance/s to benchmark
- Decide on the performance/s that is/are in need of improvement
- The performance/s should be aligned to USQ's mission and vision, Learning and Teaching Plan, and Faculty Learning and Teaching Action Plan

3. About the purpose for benchmarking

- The purpose must be explicit and clear to all benchmarking parties from the outset
 - What to benchmark
 - Why that particular aspect is important
 - What will be done with the results

4. About deciding which benchmarking approach is best (one-to-one or collaborative approach)

- No one approach is better than the other; it depends on the specific context
- Always begin with the end in mind: *Students* - the reason your course or program exists

5. About who to select as benchmarking partners

- Firstly, select those who are recognised leaders in the area you want to benchmark
- Alternatively, select those who share similar problems, outcomes or practices as you
- The right partner or 'apples-to-apples' fit should **not** be one based on "outward" similarities such as size, type of organisation, field of expertise
- When conducting external benchmarking, in the first instance, choose partners from the Distance Education Intensive Universities (DEIU) reference group identified by DEEWR, **and** also include other national and international institutions as partners to compare with and particularly those that can provide you with stretch targets for excellence

6. About related terms used in benchmarking

- Related terms used are standards/ outcomes, indicators/ measures, criteria, and benchmarks/ targets
- Standards / Outcomes refer to statements of an expected level of what to benchmark or an expression of the outcomes expected to be achieved
- Indicators/ Measures refer to variables used to measure the outcomes
- Criteria refer to checkpoints determining the attainment of the measure, describing the measures/ indicators to a degree, with details of the characteristics of the requirements and conditions to be met. In this way, it will provide the basis on which an evaluative decision can be made
- Benchmarks/ Targets refer to the agreed values against which the quality of something can be measured, judged, and evaluated, and against which the outcomes of a specified activity can be measured

An example: Adapted from McKinnon, Walker & Davis (2000).

What to benchmark/ Performance:

Progression of students in program/ course XYZ

Standard/ Outcome:

Improved success ratio of students in the program/ course and a need to demonstrate action to remedy deficiencies

Indicators/ Measures & Criteria:

| Measures | Criteria | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Progression rate of the program/ course | Less than 70 per cent success rate | | Between 75 and 85 per cent success rate | | Over 95 per cent success rate |
| Progress ratio of equity groups | Equity groups progress substantially less than all student ratio | | Equity groups progress ratio within 2 – 3 per cent of all student ratio | | Equity groups progress ratio equivalent to all student ratio |
| Progress ratio of international students | International students ratio substantially less than all students ratio | | International students progress ratio within 2 – 3 per cent of all student ratio | | International students progress ratio equivalent to all student ratio |

7. About managing benchmarks

- Ensure that the measures/ indicators directly measure the standards or outcomes to be achieved
- Have both quantitative and qualitative data
- Avoid basing measures/ indicators on whatever data is available. The choice of measures/ indicators must be relevant to the purpose of the benchmarking exercise.

8. About collecting data

- Conduct a self-assessment first to gain a more accurate understanding or simply obtain a baseline picture (quantitative and qualitative) of the area identified to be benchmarked
- Ensure that there is a standardised format with agreed measures/ indicators if you are conducting this benchmarking activity with the 'other' partner/s

9. About learning and sharing

- When analysing the data collected, it is about sharing knowledge and learning from each other about:

- Strengths and weaknesses
- Sharing what worked with the 'other' organisation to achieve the excellent benchmarks

10. About reporting results

- Produce transparent and comparable information with the aim of organisational learning, and future target setting for stretching/ improving
- Provide the following:
 - Relevant data – quantitative and qualitative
 - Performance gaps
 - Good practices and processes learned from 'others' that have achieved excellent outcomes
 - Reflections on knowledge learned and shared
 - Changes or adaptations that will be made
 - Set prospective/ future targets and or devise an action plan for remeasure or next cycle of benchmarking

11. About an open and trusting benchmarking collaborative relationship

- Enter into the benchmarking partnership with a mutually agreed upon code of conduct or protocol which can contribute to an efficient, effective and ethical benchmarking relationship
- Sample of the code of conduct (International Benchmarking Clearinghouse of the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC)), can be obtained from the Benchmarking Framework for USQ, at <http://www.usq.edu.au/~media/USQ/learnteach/ADS/BMFrameworkOct08approvedSLCpdf.ashx>

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