



Program Revitalisation -
Technology Enhanced Learning and Flexible Delivery Project:
ACODE Benchmarking

CQUniversity benchmarking activity
Final Report - 2009

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Introduction

The Program Revitalisation Project (PRP), as a sub project of the Realising Our Potential Project (ROP), established a need to ensure that USQ was actively seeking benchmarking opportunities with like institutions. Unlike faculties that are required to benchmark their academic programs with other university academic departments, the Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU) Division of Academic Information Services (DAIS) and the Division of Information, Communication and Technology Services (DICTS) seek to benchmark based on accepted industry standards.

The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE), of which USQ is a member, has developed a suite of benchmarks for the use of technology in learning and teaching (L & T). The purpose of the benchmarks is to support continuous quality improvement in e-learning. This approach reflects an enterprise perspective, integrating the key issue of pedagogy with institutional dimensions such as planning, staff development and infrastructure provision. The benchmarks have been developed for use at the enterprise level or by the organisational areas responsible for the provision of leadership and services in this area. Each benchmark area is discrete and can be used alone or in combination with others. These benchmarks can be used both for self assessment purposes (in one or several areas), or as part of a collaborative benchmarking exercise with other universities. The benchmarks cover the following eight separate topic areas:

- institution policy and governance for technology supported learning and teaching
- planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for L&T
- information technology infrastructure to support L & T
- pedagogical application of information and communication technology
- professional/staff development for the effective use of technologies for L&T
- staff support for the use of technologies for L&T
- student training for the effective use of technologies for learning
- student support for the use of technologies for learning

In late 2007, USQ identified the need to benchmark its use of technology to support learning and teaching (L & T) based on accepted higher education sector standards. This requirement was then formalized in 2008 with a specific subproject being developed within the Program Revitalisation Project, with a series of benchmarking events being scheduled. The benchmarks selected to operationalise this project were those developed by the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE), of which USQ is a member, and were developed for use at the enterprise level.

During 2008, as part of the Program Revitalization subproject, three key activities were conducted:

- 1 a comprehensive self-assessment activity conducted by LTSU, DAIS and DICTs during September/October 2008, prior to the inter-institutional benchmarking activities.
- 2 a site visit from Deakin University and associated activities during the week of 3-5 November 2008.
- 3 an activity with Central Queensland University (CQUniversity) based on the first 3 benchmarks via teleconference on 28 November 2008.

This report first provides a summary of the recommendations emanating from the CQUniversity BM activity.

USQ will use these benchmarks both internally and with other like intuitions to provide an internationally recognised QA standard for the provision of use of technology in learning and teaching at USQ.

Goals

The goals of this project are to:

- provide USQ quality assurance standards and processes for technologies in learning
- internally benchmark USQ's current use of technology in L&T with internationally accepted standards
- externally benchmark USQ's current use of technology in L&T with select internationally accepted standards
- provide a 'Technology in L&T framework' to be used by staff when integrating technology in their teaching
- integrate 'Technology in L&T framework' with USQ planning and quality framework
- plan and align future benchmarking activities with USQ processes

Strategic alignment

The benchmarking process established for this project is strategically aligned with the:

- USQ Learning and Teaching plan
- DAIS Strategic Plan

Project team members

USQ project team members for this benchmarking activity were:

Alan Smith, Sue Craig, Mary Ann Lambert, Susan Brosnan and Thea Russell

Why undertake a benchmarking exercise

As part of the quality assurance processes of the university, benchmarking is seen as a key contributor to identifying areas of potential improvement. For USQ, the primary target group are those identified within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) distance education cohort group.

CQUniversity, being part of that cohort group, had similarly expressed a desire to benchmark with USQ at a ACOE meeting in November 2007.

Over the next 3-4 years, USQ intends to undertake a similar activity with other universities in the DEWR group of distance education universities and have identified Charles Sturt University and the University of New England as potential 'benchmarkees'.

The benchmarking process

The benchmarking process was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 was a self assessment exercise where USQ developed the matrix which was adopted by CQUniversity as the foundation for their assessment. Stage 2 was an inter-institutional comparison with CQUniversity.

Stage 1

Prior to undertaking the benchmarking activity with CQUniversity, it was important for USQ to undertake a self assessment activity based on each of the benchmarks. This involved key staff members from LTSU, DAIS and DICTS.

The self assessment activity itself highlighted areas for improvement with the second stage of the assessment conducted with CQUniversity, identifying further areas.

It is anticipated that this document will be reviewed prior to other benchmarking opportunities with other universities in the future.

Stage 2

Once the self assessment activities were completed, a matrix of outcomes was developed that could be shared with CQUniversity. These were then discussed and analysed by participants from both institutions via a series of teleconferences.

Summary of benchmark comparisons

Results of the benchmarking activities are contained within the fuller documents found in Appendix 1 and include both USQ self assessments, CQUniversity self assessments, comparative ratings and a series of recommendations for action based on the findings.

Acknowledgements

USQ would like to gratefully acknowledge the involvement of Mr Graham Black and Mr Sean Sinclair from CQUniversity for their willingness to participate and openness in their

discussions with us. We feel that both institutions have benefited greatly from this opportunity and look forward to future involvement in common quality initiatives.

Conclusion

The benchmarking activity USQ performed with CQUniversity proved to be a very valuable exercise. It allowed USQ to test itself with a like institution.

CQUniversity is a provider of distance education and is considered to be part of the DEWAR cohort group of distance education providers in Australia. It was important for both institutions to develop a common understanding of activities performed across the different departments undertaking similar roles and this was done with a view to strengthening the capacity of each institution by learning from each other.

Based on the successful outcomes of this project, USQ will now seek to establish contact with other universities to perform similar activities over the next 3-4 years. This will provide the LTSU, DAIS and DICTS with the opportunity to continue to benchmark against accepted industry standards and align itself with the USQ mandate to continually improve in its practice of providing a quality educational experience for its students.

Action:

Exchange governance documents.

Benchmark 2: Planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	CQU	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	2 2	2 2	-	-	
PI 2	3 3	2 2		*	
PI 3	3 2	3 2	-	-	
PI 4	3	2		*	
PI 5	4	3		*	
PI 6	2	2	-	-	
PI 7	2	2	-	-	
PI 8	2	2	-	-	

- Both institutions scored a number of ‘2s’ in this benchmark, namely 2, 6, 7 & 8.
- Both have planning and quality documents they can access – not right across the institution – but fall down on the latter part of that process. USQ do not have a process for reporting and feedback.

USQ -

- *Variation exists between campuses (work on different funding models)*
- *Lots of variations between partners which means multiple versions of courses*
- *Partner agreements negotiated by Faculty (through international office) and some negotiated centrally*
- *Now taking a more uniform approach and have reduced the number of ways we deliver from 8 down to 3.*
- *Some standards exist but no uniformity right across the institution. There are some areas where it is embedded but still some way to go.*
- *Evaluation tools at USQ are now centrally co-ordinated*
- *Have a standard Teaching and Learning Questionnaire – used to be faculty-based but is now centralized (Issue: Our questionnaire doesn’t include technology specifically – it does not ask whether it’s the teaching or the technology)*

CQU –

- *Rely heavily on electronic delivery – more standardised*
- *Some have ‘silo’ quality measures but these are also not across the board*
- *Nowhere is it fully effective – difficult to get engagement until the ICT review has been put into effect.*
- *Partner agreements are negotiated centrally*

Action:

Need to look at this area together. CQU pointed out that there was a lack of time available for evaluation and reporting outcomes.

We agreed to share instruments

Benchmark 3: Information technology infrastructure to support learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	CQU	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	3	2		*	
PI 2	2	2	-	-	<i>We need statistical information from PQO that aids in decision-making - stats where we can drill down or find out more about.</i>
PI 3	4 3	4 3	-	-	
PI 4	4 4	4 3		*	
PI 5	4 4 4	3-4 3-4 3-4		*	
PI 6	4 4	3 3		*	
PI 7	3	3	-	-	
PI 8	3	3	-	-	
PI 9	4 4	3-4 3		*	

Both institutions had similar scores for this benchmark.

USQ -

- *a little better resourced – e.g. Moodle better resourced than earlier LMS, better advertised, better uptake*
- *trying to maintain a balance between implementing innovative measures and keeping Moodle ‘vanilla’*

CQU –

- *Resources allocated for upgrade and maintenance but there is a downsizing of staff managing those projects*
- *Financially better resourced but not staff-wise – no backup. Hence not enough time for evaluation*
- *Re Staff PD – invest in technology development for infrastructure but do not invest in emerging technologies. Need to change focus and application of those technologies.*

re: new/emerging technologies:

*USQ has put together group (ex RUBRIC + others) called **Australian Digital Futures Institute** where emerging technologies can be piloted, provide a ‘sand box’ and offer some technical support. This team investigates Learning and Teaching technologies – report to Alan.*

Because these new and emerging technologies can be used outside the infrastructure (rather than within the current LMS environment) this group is able to do testing, do pilots etc. and see how this technology can become mainstream. (It may be that USQ could offer CQU that space to play in to do some Learning and Teaching activity.)

- *Currently have no MOU but do have SLA for mainstream technologies and verbal agreement from VC that we need this area.*
- *If located within ICT, faculties would prefer it to be more 'neutral'.*
- *If 'it' works, it is put to the ICT strategy committee. For USQ, this fills that gap.*

At CQU, staff who could investigate emerging technologies are now in ICT.

At USQ, the ADF Institute has emerged out of a similar conflict

Action:

Send CQU the link to the ADFI website - <http://www.usq.edu.au/adfi/default.htm>

Benchmark 1: Institution policy and governance for technology supported learning and teaching

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT USQ

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT CQUniversity

Scoping Statement: This applies to institution level planning, policy development and implementation in relation to the application of technologies for learning and teaching. It includes the delegation of authority and responsibility for developing, implementing, evaluating and responding to results of policies and strategic and operational/functional plans.

Good Practice Statement

The institution has established, well understood governance mechanisms and policies that guide the selection, implementation, utilisation/deployment, and evaluation of technologies to support learning and teaching.

Performance Indicators

1. Institution strategic and operational plans recognise and support the use of technologies to facilitate learning and teaching.
2. Specific plans relating to the use of learning and teaching technologies are aligned with the institution's strategic and operational plans.
3. Planning for learning and teaching technologies is aligned with the budget process.
4. Institution policies specify the use of technologies to support learning and teaching covering all aspects and stakeholder perspectives.
5. Policies are well disseminated and applied.
6. The institution has established governance mechanisms for learning and teaching with technologies that include representation from key stakeholders.
7. Clear management structures identify responsibilities and authority.
8. Decisions regarding new technology adoption are made within current policy frameworks.

Performance Measures

- 1. Institution strategic and operational plans recognise and support the use of technologies to facilitate learning and teaching.**

1. No current strategic or operational plans
2. Strategic or operational plan but no recognition of use of technologies
3. Strategic or operational plan includes some recognition of use of technologies
- 4. Strategic and operational plans both have some recognition of use of technologies**
Strategic and operational plans both have some recognition of use of technologies
5. Strategic and operational plans both have clear recognition of use of technologies

2. Specific plans relating to the use of learning and teaching technologies are aligned with the institution’s strategic and operational plans.

Existence	Alignment
1. No specific plans	Not aligned to institution strategic and operational plans
2. Immature plans	Aligned with either institution strategic or operational plans
3. Some specific plans	Aligned with both institution strategic and operational plans
4. Numerous specific plans	Aligned with either institution strategic or operational plans
5. Comprehensive suite of plans	Aligned with both institution strategic and operational plans

3. Planning for learning and teaching technologies is aligned with the budget process.

1. No alignment
- 2. Limited alignment**
- 3. Moderate alignment**
4. Considerable alignment
5. Complete alignment

4. Institution policies specify the use of technologies to support learning and teaching covering all aspects and stakeholder perspectives.

1. No institution policies
- 2. Limited range of policies**
- 3. Some policies are comprehensive**
4. Most policies are comprehensive
5. All policies are comprehensive

5. Policies are well disseminated, and applied.

Dissemination	Application
1. No dissemination	Not applied
2. Poorly disseminated	Limited application
3. Moderate dissemination	Partial application
3. Moderate dissemination	Partial application
4. Substantial dissemination	Moderate application
5. Widely disseminated	Full application

6. The institution has established governance mechanisms for learning and teaching with technologies that include representation from key stakeholders.

Governance	Stakeholder representation
1. No governance	None
2. Planning for governance	Limited
3. Immature	Moderate
4. Developing	Substantial
5. Well established and mature	Comprehensive

7. Clear management structures identify responsibilities and authority.

Management structures	Responsibilities and authority identified
1. No formal management structures	None
2. Limited	Limited
3. Partial but unclear	Moderate
3. Partial but unclear	
4. Partial and clear	Extensive
5. Comprehensive and clear	Comprehensive

8. Decisions regarding new technology adoption are made within current policy frameworks.

1. No reference
- 2. Limited reference**
Limited reference
3. Moderate reference
4. Substantial reference
5. Comprehensive reference

Benchmark 2: Planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for learning and teaching

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT USQ

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT CQUniversity

Scoping Statement: There is a need for institution wide quality assurance processes to ensure the appropriate use of technologies in learning and teaching. This will include planning, implementation, evaluation and feedback loops.

Good Practice Statement

Institutions support and encourage the appropriate use of technology in learning and teaching through strategic planning processes at all levels of the institution. The focus is continuous improvement through systematic and regular evaluation of implementation strategies and outcomes. Such evaluation will in turn inform future planning.

Performance Indicators

1. Institution wide processes for quality assurance are in place and in use to integrate technologies in learning and teaching.
2. Institution and Faculty plans are aligned with institution policy for the use of technology in learning and teaching.
3. Operationalisation is planned and evaluated.
4. Planning and quality improvement is resourced.
5. Collaboration for integrating technology in learning and teaching occurs across key functional areas.
6. Evaluation cycles are in place to measure key performance indicators for all key stakeholders.
7. Outcomes are reported to all levels of the institution.
8. Evaluation feedback is integrated in planning for continuous improvement purposes.

Performance Measures

1. Institution wide processes for quality assurance are in place and in use to integrate technologies in learning and teaching.

Process in place	Usage
1. None	None
2. Limited Limited	Occasional/infrequent Occasional/infrequent
3. Moderate	Moderate
4. Extensive	Frequent
5. Comprehensive	Systematic

2. Institution and faculty plans are aligned with institution policy for the use of technology in learning and teaching.

Institution plans	Faculty plans
1. No alignment	No alignment
2. Limited	Limited
3. Moderate	Moderate
4. Considerable	Considerable
5. Optimal	Optimal

3. Operationalisation is planned and evaluated.

Planned	Evaluated
1. None	1. None
2. Limited	2. Limited Limited
3. Moderate Moderate	3. Moderate
4. Substantial	4. Substantial
5. Optimal	5. Optimal

4. Planning and quality improvement is resourced.

1. No resources
2. **Inadequate resources**

3. Moderate resources

4. Substantial resources
5. Comprehensive resources

5. Collaboration for integrating technology in learning and teaching occurs across key functional areas.

1. No collaboration
2. Infrequent collaboration
- 3. Occasional collaboration**
- 4. Frequent collaboration**
5. Comprehensive collaboration

6. Evaluation cycles are in place to measure key performance indicators for all key stakeholders.

1. No evaluation cycles
- 2. Limited evaluation cycles for some key stakeholders**
- 2. Limited evaluation cycles for some key stakeholders**
3. Evaluation cycles for some key stakeholders
4. Evaluation cycles for all key stakeholders
5. Comprehensive evaluation cycles for all key stakeholders

7. Outcomes are reported to all levels of the institution.

1. No outcomes are reported
- 2. Some outcomes are reported to some levels**
- 2. Some outcomes are reported to some levels**
3. Outcomes are reported to the majority of levels
4. Outcomes are reported to all levels
5. Comprehensive outcomes are reported to all levels

8. Evaluation feedback is integrated in planning for continuous improvement purposes.

1. No integration
- 2. Limited integration**
- 2. Limited integration**
3. Moderate integration
4. Extensive integration
5. Comprehensive integration

Benchmark 3: Information technology infrastructure to support learning and teaching

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT USQ

OVERALL CONSENSUS – SELF ASSESSMENT CQUniversity

Scoping Statement: Information technology (IT) infrastructure describes a range of information and communication technologies that are used to support learning and teaching. This can include the use of: productivity software; learning management systems; library systems; the World Wide Web; mobile technologies. It also includes hardware (computers, telecommunications and ancillary equipment) and networks, both internal (LANS and WANS) and external (eg AARNet) which are used for the purposes of learning and teaching. These technologies support learning on and off campus.

The topic can also include audio visual equipment*. Also included is support and training in the use of the technology by students and staff, individually and in groups, both on and off campus, noting that these issues are dealt with in more detail in Topics 5-8.

Decisions about the selection of IT infrastructure for learning should refer to directional/ policy statement(s) about the learning and teaching environment of an institution (for example distance education, or blended approaches). Once a technology is selected it is important that an institution has robust and accepted processes for trialling and rolling out a new technology, that involves all key stakeholders.

* In order to keep the exercise manageable, it is recommended that the focus be on either infrastructure that is part of the IP network or not (for example audio-visual infrastructure).

Out of scope

The pedagogical issues relating to the use of infrastructure is the domain of other benchmarks.

Good Practice Statement

Technical infrastructure is aligned with institutional learning goals and the technologies are resourced, support staff are trained and the infrastructure is implemented, maintained, administered and supported efficiently and effectively.

Performance Indicators

1. Evaluation processes are in place to generate data to support decision making.
2. Evaluation processes are comprehensive.
3. Responsibilities and processes for maintenance and administration are effective and efficient.
4. Responsibilities and processes for support and training are effective and efficient.
5. Project management processes are in place, responsibilities defined and processes applied.
6. Resources are allocated for maintenance and upgrades of existing equipment.
7. Implementation is well planned.
8. Implementation is resourced.
9. Professional development occurs for staff managing infrastructure (including new and emerging technologies).

Performance Measures

1. Evaluation processes are in place to generate data to support decision making.

1. No evaluation processes
2. **Some processes generating limited data**
Processes generate some useful decision making data
3. **Processes generate some useful decision making data**
4. Processes generate comprehensive data
5. Processes generate regular, timely and comprehensive data

2. Evaluation processes are comprehensive

1. No processes
2. **Limited processes**
Limited processes
3. Some integration of complementary processes
4. Substantial processes
5. Comprehensive, integrated processes

3. Responsibilities and processes for maintenance and administration are effective and efficient.

Responsibilities	Effective and efficient
1. Nobody identified/allocated	Not at all
2. Ad hoc	Marginally
3. Allocated but unclear	Somewhat Somewhat

4. Sound practice emerging	Generally
4. Sound practice emerging	
5. Clearly defined	Extremely

4. Responsibilities and processes for support and training are effective and efficient.

Responsibilities	Effective and efficient
1. Nobody identified/allocated	Not at all
2. Ad hoc	Marginally
3. Allocated but unclear	Somewhat
4. Sound practice emerging	Generally
4. Sound practice emerging	
5. Clearly defined	Extremely

5. Project management processes are in place, responsibilities clearly defined and processes applied.

Processes in place	Responsibilities defined	Processes applied
1. Absent	Absent	Not applied
2. Ad hoc	Ill-defined	Unevenly applied
3. Limited	Somewhat defined	Limited
4. Extensive	Substantially defined	Generally
4. Extensive	Substantially defined	Generally
5. Comprehensive	Clearly defined	Systematic

6. Resources are allocated for maintenance and upgrades of existing equipment.

Maintenance	Upgrades
1. No resources	No resources
2. Inadequate resourcing	Inadequate resourcing
3. Moderate resourcing	Moderate resourcing
4. Substantial resourcing	Substantial resourcing
5. Comprehensive resourcing	Comprehensive resourcing

7. Implementation is well planned.

1. No planning
2. Limited planning
- 3. Moderate planning** Moderate planning
4. Extensive planning

5. Comprehensive planning

8. Implementation is resourced.

1. No resources
2. Inadequate resources
- 3. Moderate resources Moderate resources**
4. Substantial resources
5. Comprehensive resources

9. Professional development occurs for staff managing infrastructure (including new and emerging technologies).

Existing infrastructure	New and emerging technologies
1. Does not occur	Does not occur
2. Occasionally	Occasionally
3. Sometimes	Sometimes
4. Usually Usually	Usually
5. Systematic	Systematic