
Benchmarking Procedure

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to provide details of the processes for benchmarking. This procedure is to be used in conjunction with the Course Review and Quality Assurance Policy and Procedure for benchmarking higher education courses.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all members of the Engineering Institute of Technology's (EIT's) higher education community.

3.0 Objectives

Benchmarking is a key part of EIT's quality assurance processes and it is critical to consider and evaluate the quality of outcomes achieved (including rates of student retention, graduation, and employment or transition to further education) where appropriate by benchmarking these against appropriate comparators' (Academic Governance and Quality Assurance: Good practice for NSAs, 2010, p.25). EIT has responded to this consideration by drawing on a range of external stakeholders with considerable engineering experience and expertise.

4.0 Implementation

Benchmarking will generally be undertaken as a comparative analysis in the first instance. The results of this analysis may require EIT to embark on a more investigative approach to understand the reasons for the level of performance and prepare an adequate response to the areas that require improvement.

4.1 Benchmarking Activity Scope and Type

Taking account of the objectives for benchmarking, the scope of the activities must be determined in the first instance. A Benchmarking Proposal should consider the following:

- The nature of the benchmarking activity and whether it will form a comparative data analysis or investigative approach
- Whether there are themes to be benchmarked or specific areas of performance or compliance.
- Whether EIT will form a partnership with another institution to conduct the benchmarking exercise
- Resources to be used to conduct the exercise.

4.2 Process

The Governance Board sets the schedule for benchmarking non-academic activities, other than those already accounted for in the Strategic Plan.

The Academic Board sets the schedule for benchmarking activities outside of the normal process for continuous improvement, but may also accept proposals from the Dean to undertake special benchmarking exercises.

The Dean must develop a Benchmarking proposal that outlines the scope and type of activity and submit it to the Academic Board for approval. Once approved, a Benchmarking Project Plan should be developed which will:

- Set the objectives for the exercise
- Determine the proposed time and communication strategy
- Outline resourcing, persons involved and their responsibilities, and set a budget
- Plan the approach to be used, including detailed plans and methodology
- Develop performance indicators
- Implement the benchmarking exercise after receiving the relevant approval; and consult with identified stakeholders; and collect comparative data
- Assess and evaluate the findings
- Prepare a report outlining the findings, recommendations, and an action plan to implement improvements.
- Submit a report to the Academic Board for their consideration and approval. Identifying the responsible persons for implementing endorsed improvements.

4.3 Challenges

The key challenges that need to be considered for benchmarking activities are:

- **Reliable comparative data.** The data from the benchmarking process must be reliable, valid and consistent.

- **Trust and building relationships.** It is vital to establish long term mutually beneficial relationships between higher education providers; even if there is an element of “co-competition” (competition-co-operation) in the relationship. The key principles in establishing collaborative relationships include: collegiality, reciprocity, respect and trust, transparency, openness to learning and openness to change.
- **Benchmarking for improvement.** The end product of benchmarking has to be an improvement in overall quality of EIT. This requires an understanding of key performance indicators which can be improved and tracking of the results to ensure that changes do indeed result in an improvement in quality.
- **Demonstrating improvement.** A demonstrable improvement in quality of results at EIT has to be the end result of the benchmarking process from identification of the appropriate key performance indicator, comparison with another similar institution, recommendations, an action plan and finally demonstrated improved results against that before the benchmarking process.

4.4 Performance Areas

EIT will use the benchmarks recommended by McKinnon, Walker & Davis (2000) as a basis for continuous quality improvement.

- Governance, planning and management (Governance & Leadership / University-wide planning/clearly defined lines of responsibility/organisational climate)
- External Impact (reputation/competitiveness)
- Finance and Physical infrastructure (operating result/commercialisation: Net Return on Equity/Strategic Asset Management/Space Management/IT&T Infrastructure)
- Learning and teaching (learning and teaching plan/Fitness of course/Student satisfaction/Employability of Australian Graduates)
- Student support (Student Administrative services)
- Library and information services (Contribution to teaching & learning/Provision of support for research)
- Internationalisation (culture/balanced onshore international student courses)
- Staff (Strategic HR Planning/Career Development & Staff Effectiveness)

4.5 Considerations for different modes of delivery

EIT will need to collect separate data for students studying in online and on-campus delivery modes. Comparison of outcomes for each mode will need to be considered internally for potential differences in student performance data, teaching, learning and resourcing compared to those of residential type higher education institutions, considering that students enrolled, particularly online students, may be:

1. Studying part time

2. Older and more mature
3. Probably already employed
4. Physically isolated
5. Internationally based

This will mean that some performance indicators such as participation/access; completion/retention; financial ratios; space utilisation; student satisfaction; community service and economic impact may be different.

Specifically, some issues need to be examined carefully. These include student contact hours (SCHs), which may need modification to student effort hours (SEHs). Indicators of cost should be differentiated due to the different cost structures in an online and on-campus learning environment. Participation and access need to be examined, as online learning provides easy access, in some cases, to many previously disadvantaged groups.

EIT will also need to consider seeking benchmarking partners for both delivery modes to enable comparisons of outcomes for both online and on-campus modes of delivery.

5.0 Definitions

Benchmarking: is a learning process structured so as to enable those engaging in the process to compare their services/activities/products and thus identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a basis for self-improvement and/or self-regulation.

Benchmark: A point of reference against which something may be measured.

6.0 Related policies, procedures and documents

- EIT Strategic Plan
- Course Review and Quality Assurance Policy
- Course Review and Quality Assurance Procedure
- TEQSA Benchmarking Guidance Note

References: *Academic Governance and Quality Assurance: Good Practice for NSAs*. (2010). Melbourne, Australia: Australian Universities Quality Agency.

- McKinnon, K.R., Walker, S.H. & Davis, D. (2000). *Benchmarking: A manual for Australian Universities*. Higher Education Division. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- *Guidelines for Improving learning and teaching through collaboration, benchmarking and alliances*.(n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2010, from
- http://sydney.edu.au/learning/quality/docs/guidelines_for_benchmarking.pdf



7.0 Accountabilities

The Governance Board has oversight of non-academic benchmarking activities.

The Academic Board has oversight of academic benchmarking activities and the quality of higher education courses. It may decide to delegate benchmarking activities to the Board of Studies or Course Advisory Committee on an as need basis.

As a general rule, the Board of Studies will undertake any ongoing benchmarking activities and the Course Advisory Committee will undertake specialised benchmarking exercises, such as those conducted for renewal of registration and accreditation with TEQSA.

The Dean will ensure that all academic staff participate and cooperate with the relevant committees as required.

The Governance Board is responsible for review and approval of this policy.

The policy is to be implemented via induction and training of staff and distribution to students and EIT's community via the website and other publications.