Benchmarking Procedure

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to outline the procedures involved in the design, implementation and review of benchmarking activities. It should be read with the *Benchmarking Policy, Academic Quality Assurance Framework,* and *Course and Unit Review Policy,* which provide details on benchmarking requirements, including timing and areas specified for compliance.

This document applies to the Institute as a whole, including all of the Institute's academic and operational units, staff, and functions.

2. PROCEDURES

2.1 Principles Underpinning Benchmarking Procedures

- All benchmarking activity that focuses on academic quality assurance must have prior approval by the Academic Board. Approval is contingent upon consultation and agreement of all areas affected by benchmarking activity and approval for sharing corporate data and information.

- The specific purpose of a benchmarking project must be identified at the outset. The support of the Institute's mission and strategic priorities is critical to the purpose of any benchmarking activity.

- The expected value of a benchmarking project must be balanced with the project's cost.

- Where a benchmarking project is to be undertaken with an external partner, the objectives of the benchmarking project must be explicit and understood by both parties.

- All parties involved in a benchmarking partnership must sign an agreement which ensures that:

  a. Information is only used for the express purpose agreed upon at the outset;
  b. Exchange of types and levels of information is comparable between partners;
  c. Confidentiality is maintained with no publication or exchange of information without permission; and
  d. Rights to Intellectual Property developed during the benchmarking project are negotiated.

2.2 The Specific Process

Benchmarking is a collaborative process that aims to compare practices, processes and performance outcomes to develop improvements in academic quality. Benchmarking activities go beyond the simple comparison of data. Compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 requires consideration of areas for improvement and good practice, reasons for variations, improvement strategies, action plans, and outcomes of action plans. There is also a requirement that the Institute's governance bodies consider reports of benchmarking results.

To successfully achieve these aims, benchmarking projects need to be carefully structured. To that end, this document maps a procedure involving seven stages that the Institute considers essential in implementing benchmarking projects. Within these seven stages, details should be provided as guidance throughout the project. It is expected that, as well as the guidance provided, other unique factors relevant to the benchmarking will be considered to enable individual projects to be tailored to achieve the project's objectives most effectively.

Stage 1 – Concept and Scope of the Benchmarking Activity
- What *areas* are to be benchmarked? Is this a theme, process, performance, organisational behaviour or compliance requirement?
- What is the *nature* of this project? Is this a data comparison project, a detailed investigative project, or a mixture of both?
- Will the *level of application* of the activity apply to the whole organisation or specific organisational units?
- Has the Academic Board reviewed and endorsed the benchmarking activity?
- Is this an *internal or external* benchmarking initiative?
- Identify the *type(s) of benchmarking* that is to be applied

Stage 2 – Select Benchmarking Partners (if relevant)
- Who are the *benchmarking partners* subject to this partnership agreement? Key factors to note in identifying a partner include similar problems faced, similar outcomes and processes, similar sizes of organisation and similar disciplines taught.
- What is the *nature of the partnership agreement*? What is the nature of the agreement? Has a formal agreement been formulated and signed by all parties?

Stage 3 – Develop a Project Plan
- What are the project's objectives?
- What is the benchmarking project's proposed schedule, timeline and due dates?
- What is the budget requirement, if any?
- Is there a best practice statement in place for the project?
- Who are the staff members forming the benchmarking project team? Who is to coordinate the project? Who will be the key contacts liaising information between providers? Have internal departments, i.e., Student Support Services or Legal been advised of the project and their required contribution?
- Is there academic oversight of operations?
- What is the communication plan?
- What is the scope of the project?
- What methodologies will be used? e.g., workshops, questionnaires?
- What performance measures are to be put in place?
- What are the performance ratings and the rationale behind them?

Stage 4 – Internal Self-Review of Benchmarking Project
- What is the plan for self-review activities?
- What variations are revealed, and what are the explanations for variations?
- What has been established as an area of improvement?
- What are recognised as common areas of good practice?
- What strategies will be implemented to address deficiencies?
- Report of findings is presented to the Academic Board for review.

Stage 5 – Peer Review and external validation
- What data and self-review findings (if any) will be shared with the benchmarking partner?
- How will the peer review workshop occur, and who will coordinate the workshop?
- What strategies and promising practices are identified and to be put in place? What good practices or areas for improvement are identified?
- How will the findings be reported?

Stage 6 - Implementing identified improvements and reporting results
- What are the identified improvements to be implemented, and how will this be done?
- Who will this be tasked to?
- What are the due dates for this task to be completed?
- How will potential barriers to implementation be managed?
- Are there any budgetary implications?
- What are the outcomes/strategies to be adopted by the Institute?
- Have findings and outcomes been communicated to other staff?
- Have outcomes been documented in a report to the Academic Board?

Stage 7 - Evaluation and Review
- How effective was the benchmarking exercise?
- Were suggested improvements implemented?
- What were the outcomes of implementation?
- Were outcomes beneficial?
- Is there a commitment to longer-term processes of change for sustainable improvement?

3. RELATED DOCUMENTS

i. Academic Quality Assurance Framework
ii. Benchmarking Policy
iii. Course and Unit Development Policy
iv. Course and Unit Review Policy and Procedure
v. Moderation Policy and Procedure

4. VERSION CONTROL

Historical Version	Approved by	Approval Date
2021.06	Provost	24 June 2021

The Deputy President (Education) oversees the implementation and compliance of this policy.
Please contact the Deputy President's office for any enquiries or clarifications related to this policy.