University of Tasmania
Strategy and Schedule for Institutional-level Benchmarking 2016-2018
May 2017
Contents

1 PREAMBLE .................................................................................................................................................. 2

2 ABOUT BENCHMARKING .............................................................................................................................. 2
  2.1 Definition .............................................................................................................................................. 2
  2.2 Aims ...................................................................................................................................................... 3
  2.3 Benefits ................................................................................................................................................ 3
  2.4 Typing by Level of Impact .................................................................................................................. 3

3 PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES .................................................................................................................... 3
  3.1 General Principles ................................................................................................................................. 4
  3.2 Exchange of Information ...................................................................................................................... 4
  3.3 Partner Choice ..................................................................................................................................... 4

4 DELEGATIONS AND APPROVALS .............................................................................................................. 5
  4.1 Role of the University Quality and Standards Committee ............................................................... 5
  4.2 Roles and Responsibilities .................................................................................................................... 5
  4.3 Commissioning, Approval, Resourcing and Reporting Matrix ............................................................. 7
  4.4 Model of the Benchmarking Process ..................................................................................................... 8
  4.5 Communicating Findings ...................................................................................................................... 9
  4.6 Related Documents ............................................................................................................................... 9

5 BENCHMARKING SCHEDULE (2016-2018) ............................................................................................ 10
University of Tasmania
Strategy and Schedule for Institutional-Level Benchmarking
(2016-2018)

1 PREAMBLE
External referencing is an important element of the quality assurance and quality enhancement activities of the University and is a required activity to meet the Higher Education Standards.

A framework has been established to describe external referencing across the scope of University activities. This framework outlines the six categories of external referencing, of which benchmarking is one.

This document defines benchmarking as a form of external referencing, lays out the principles of benchmarking adopted by the University and outlines the strategy, processes and responsibilities for benchmarking activities.

2 ABOUT BENCHMARKING
The University of Tasmania (UTAS), as a self-accrediting institution, has a responsibility to ensure that it continues to demonstrate high standards of performance in research, learning and teaching and associated institutional activities. This commitment to excellence is underpinned by a robust and efficient system to support continuous improvement of its processes and outcomes. Benchmarking with appropriate partners using external reference points, at a national and international level, enables the University to compare and evaluate its performance and in the process, monitor standards, compare good practice and make quality improvements.

2.1 Definition
For our institutional purposes, we understand benchmarking to be:

A formal process of systematic comparison of some aspect of an institution's functioning with that of other relevant 'partner' institutions. Benchmarking processes often provide richer forms of evidence for development and improvement than quality assurance, which emphasises threshold standards. Benchmarking is ideally dialogical, involving evaluative exchange with chosen partners, based on iterative reviews of data, and includes consideration of institutional processes as well as outputs/outcomes. The utility of a benchmarking process typically depends on the choice of benchmarking partners; a degree of humility and honesty in the partner relationship; inclusion of process elements in the analysis; a sound understanding of the indicators for the function/s of interest; and commitment to strategic use of the evidence it provides. (Epper, 1999; Fountain, 2015; Henderson-Smart et al., 2006)
2.2 Aims

The aim of benchmarking activities is to ensure that the University remains competitive and able to demonstrate an evidence-based approach to celebrating and rewarding good practice, identifying areas for improvement and information exchange. The high-level goal is positively contribute to the institution’s reputation both nationally and internationally. Benchmarking with appropriate partners, at the national and/or international levels, enables the University to compare and evaluate its activities and, in so doing, monitor standards, compare good practice and make quality improvements.

2.3 Benefits

Benchmarking allows us to not only monitor performance against standards in order to improve institutional outcomes, processes and practices, but also helps us to identify new ways of achieving our key objectives and targets.

It also serves to: provide evidence-based drivers for institutional change, quality improvement and quality enhancement activities; inform strategic and operational planning and goal setting; improve decision-making through referencing comparative data and perhaps most importantly, bring an external focus to bear upon internal activities.

When done well, and as part of an integrated strategy, there is much to be gained from undertaking benchmarking, and because there is so much to gain, it is critical that resources are targeted towards achieving the maximum institutional utility from benchmarking exercises.

2.4 Typing by Level of Impact

Benchmarking projects, in general occur at one of three levels, depending upon where the outcome of the project is actioned and the reach of the impact of resulting improvements.

The first type has institution-wide impact and is undertaken in response to international, national or institutional priorities, triggers and/or the identification of risk.

The second type is at organisational-unit level and concerns a practice or service that is actioned at a more local level. The focus of the benchmarking may be a new innovation, a priority area, or identified as a potential area of risk.

The third is at the level of a service that is actioned at an organisational-unit level. The focus of the benchmarking may be a new innovation, a priority area, or identified as a potential area of risk.

3 PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

Note: This section should be read in conjunction with the Guide to Benchmarking developed to assist staff to plan and undertake a benchmarking project.
3.1 General Principles

i. Benchmarking is one component of the University’s External Referencing Framework.

ii. Benchmarking activity is resource intensive and as such should be engaged in strategically.

iii. Benchmarking is characterised by a commitment to: learning from good practice; implementing potential improvements arising from benchmarking findings; and sharing of good practices including after projects are completed.

iv. Benchmarking is characterised by mutuality: the expectations of the proposed benchmarking activity need to be established prior to commencement of that activity, with a view to establishing mutual interest and benefits for all parties.

v. Benchmarking activity should be balanced in terms of the value received compared to costs involved in undertaking the projects.

vi. A register of benchmarking project reports is kept centrally and is accessible to staff.

3.2 Exchange of Information

The following should be taken into account where an exchange of information is involved:

i. Confidentiality: All benchmarking exchanges should be treated as confidential. Publication and external communication of findings should not occur without the permission of all partners involved in the project.

ii. Use: Benchmarking information should not be used for other than the express purpose for which it was obtained without prior consent of all participating partners.

iii. Exchange: The type or level of information exchanged should be comparable between the benchmarking partners.

iv. Intellectual property: All rights relating to any intellectual property developed in the course of any benchmarking activity need to be negotiated and recorded by the relevant partners.

v. Agreement: If a benchmarking agreement is entered into, issues about confidentiality, intellectual property, use and the type and level of information to be exchanged should be included in the agreement.

3.3 Partner Choice

Selecting appropriate benchmarking partners is critical for successful benchmarking. An external benchmarking partner should:

- have a commitment to quality improvement and a ‘willingness to share’; and
- demonstrate a record of good performance in the area(s) to be benchmarked.

For a whole-of-institution benchmarking project, in general a benchmarking partner should also:

- have a compatible mission, values and objectives;

---

1 While the University of Tasmania is not a member of a benchmarking consortium, it has signed benchmarking agreements with the University of Wollongong (2009-13) and Deakin University (2010-14). The University also benchmarks itself with Macquarie University, Murdoch University, and University of Technology Sydney using comparative data.
• be of comparable size; and
• have a similar discipline mix.

In addition to the above, international benchmarking partners should:
• have a Memorandum of Understand (MoU) with the University or other agreement, preferably including reference to benchmarking; and
• have English as the primary language.

4 DELEGATIONS AND APPROVALS

4.1 Role of the University Quality and Standards Committee

All benchmarking activity is overseen by the University Quality and Standards Committee. Proposals for benchmarking projects at institutional (type 1) or organisational unit (types 2 & 3) level will be considered by the University Quality and Standards Committee.

The University Quality and Standards Committee determines institutional strategic priorities for benchmarking on a rolling three year cycle. Due consideration is given to; institutional priorities, triggers for review (or areas of identified risk); and past benchmarking projects and their outcomes.

The University Quality and Standards Committee will determine who is best to lead institutional strategic benchmarking projects, and notify them in a timely manner.

The University Quality and Standards Committee will receive requests for, and approve, benchmarking activities (Types 2 & 3) in a timely manner.

Responsibility for resourcing and implementation of recommendations will be determined by the University Quality and Standards Committee prior to undertaking the activity.

Benchmarking partner institutions must be approved by the University Quality and Standards Committee.

Benchmarking reports and follow up reports are overseen by the University Quality and Standards Committee.

4.2 Roles and Responsibilities

For all benchmarking projects

The Benchmarking Register should be checked prior to commencing a project to ascertain whether similar projects have or are already being undertaken.

Benchmarking projects involving a formal request for information from another institution should be approved by the relevant Dean or Head of unit.

If the scope of the project affects more than one area, then consultation and agreement between the areas affected should precede the project’s approval and commencement.

Special care should be undertaken when projects require the sharing of corporate data with other institutions. In this case, the relevant ‘data custodian’ must be contacted and it will be his/her responsibility to ensure that appropriate approvals for the data transfer are obtained from senior management.
Written agreements with other institutions and organisations with which projects are undertaken must be vetted by the Legal Services Unit and signed in accordance with the formal delegations of the University.

Projects will be supported in the University of Tasmania’s benchmarking methodology through the benchmarking online tool and the benchmarking guidelines.

Benchmarking projects that include a research consultancy aspect in the form of a fee for service for undertaking and coordinating the benchmarking work are in accordance with the Research Office.

**For type 1 benchmarking projects**

The responsibility for running the project will be delegated by UQSC.

The benchmarking project will be supported by Curriculum and Quality (Academic Division).

**For type 2 and type 3 benchmarking projects**

The responsibility for running the project will be with the Unit Head under whose authority the project was approved or his/her delegate.

Contact with partner organisations will normally be through the responsible unit Head, unless delegated by him/her. When institutional support is needed for a project to proceed with particular partners, then the responsible manager should contact the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Chief Operating Officer.

The University expects that benchmarking projects will be funded by the area that initiates, manages and accepts responsibility for the project. If central funds are required, such as might be the case for large projects, then a submission should be made through the planning and budgeting process. If a case for special funding is appropriate and the timeframe does not permit submissions through the planning and budgeting process, then the unit Head should approach the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Chief Operating Officer.

Benchmarking projects must be recorded by name, type, objectives and outcomes on the University Benchmarking Register. These details and, where confidentiality considerations allow, the full reports should be lodged with Curriculum and Quality staff as soon as possible after the completion of the project. The register has UTAS-only access.

Each year, a summary report on benchmarking projects undertaken by the Faculty/Unit should be submitted as part of the annual Vice-Chancellor’s Review (VCAR) process.
### 4.3 Commissioning, Approval, Resourcing and Reporting Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level/type</th>
<th>Commissioned by</th>
<th>Approved by</th>
<th>Resourced by</th>
<th>Responsibility for reporting and improvement</th>
<th>Outcomes reported to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Level 1**  
Institution-wide impact, undertaken in response to international, national or institutional priorities, triggers and/or the identification of risk | Senior Executive Senior Management Team  
Other high-level University committees | UQSC  
3 months in advance of project initiation  
Normally not more than 2 per year | Academic Division  
External benchmarking partnerships and/or other organisations | Commissioning body | SMT  
UQSC |
| **Level 2**  
Local-level impact  
Concerns a practice or service that is actioned at a more local level | Organisational unit | UQSC  
3 months in advance of project initiation | Organisational unit  
Methodological support from Curriculum and Quality portfolio | Organisational unit | SMT  
UQSC |
| **Level 3**  
Local-level impact  
Concerns a service that is actioned at an organisational-unit level | Organisational unit | UQSC  
3 months in advance of project initiation | Organisational unit  
Methodological support from Curriculum and Quality portfolio | Organisational unit | SMT  
UQSC |
### 4.4 Model of the Benchmarking Process

For benchmarking activities there are five process phases which align with the Quality Management Policy’s use of the OADRI approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OADRI Phase</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
<th>Approval and Reporting Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Objective Phase | What is the purpose of benchmarking activity?  
What will be benchmarked? | Liaise with Curriculum and Quality to discuss benchmarking activity                           |
| 2. Approach Phase | Who will be in the benchmarking project team?  
How will it be measured? What will be the key performance indicators and measures?  
Who will be the benchmarking partner/s?  
- With high performance standards, the best  
- Compatible with your organisation’s culture  
- Accessible, willing and able to participate  
How will it be resourced? | Benchmarking template, including project plan and resourcing plan submitted to UQSC for approval |
| 3. Deployment Phase | Which individuals will be identified for the self-review team? Who will be institutional benchmarking coordinator? | Self-review reports submitted by individual institutions to Curriculum and Quality               |
| a) Self-Review | What evidence needs to be collected?  
Which part of the institution will evidence be collected?  
What questions in the benchmarking template need revision?  
Who will validate the self-review report? | Documentation is collated for peer review workshop, including summary of self-review documentation; traffic light system and survey data analysis |
| b) Data Collation | What comparisons can be made from self-review reports? What evidence is gathered to support self-review? | Summary of outcomes and actions are recorded at peer review workshop                           |
| c) Peer Review  | What are the areas of good practice, areas for improvement and/or development, areas for sharing? | Final Report submitted to UQSC, [including action plan] and sent to other institutions for validation and approval  
Budget submissions may result from the outcomes |
| 4. Results Phase | What are the outcomes and actions for each institution? What recommendations are put forward? Who is responsible for these recommendations? | Action plan is monitored twice a year by UQSC                                                |
| 5. Improvement Phase | What actions have resulted from recommendations? What results demonstrate improvement and impact? |                                                                                               |
4.5 Communicating Findings

The value of benchmarking is considerably enhanced if the findings are shared within the University. The University encourages the production of benchmarking reports that can be included in the Benchmarking Register for the benefit of other sections of the University. This includes externally produced reports.

Progress towards implementing improvements based on benchmarking projects, and their effect on outcomes should also be shared and areas are encouraged to submit and discuss progress with similar units, and with University committees, such as the University Quality and Standards Committee the University Research Committee and the University Internationalisation Committee as appropriate.

Ideally, implementation plans should describe the actions arising from benchmarking reports, including responsibilities, resources and timelines. Progress against these plans should be regularly monitored.

Benchmarking reports should be lodged with Curriculum and Quality staff by the areas undertaking benchmarking projects.

4.6 Related Documents

- Framework for External Referencing at the University of Tasmania
- Guide to Benchmarking
- UQSC Benchmarking Project Approval Template (includes project and resourcing plan)
- UQSC Benchmarking Project Report Template
- UQSC Benchmarking Project Outcomes Summary Template
- Sample Benchmarking Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement
## 5 BENCHMARKING SCHEDULE (2016-2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year transition and academic support</td>
<td>Assessment policies and processes</td>
<td>HEA promotion policies and processes</td>
<td>Maritime engineering course outcomes</td>
<td>Clinical placement, simulation, health literacy, Alzheimer’s</td>
<td>International student employability and industry</td>
<td>Governance and Quality Assurance of Third Party Arrangements</td>
<td>English Language Proficiency (entry and exit, domestic and International)</td>
<td>Responding to the student voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Degree Programs</td>
<td>Faculty of Education professional studies/ experience and external moderation</td>
<td>International student experience and student employability</td>
<td>Ako Aotearoa: teaching quality, student success, curriculum quality, assessment, support for academic staff</td>
<td>Course Approval, Accreditation and Review Processes</td>
<td>Work Integrated Learning</td>
<td>Better engaging and supporting online students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Department of Rural Health programs</td>
<td>Pathways, partnerships and processes</td>
<td>Higher Degrees by Research course outcomes and employability</td>
<td>Pathway partnerships</td>
<td>University Experience Survey – student support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>