Enhancing our understanding of the potential of international peer review benchmarking for quality improvement

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International Peer Review
Benchmarking for Quality
Higher Education

Proof of Concept 2015 – An overview
of the process and illustrative outcomes

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Process benchmarking why is Ako Aotearoa interested?

• Quality improvement and quality enhancement

• Repeated recommendation in Academic Audit reports conducted by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand’s Universities (Cameron, 2015)

• Ako Aotearoa wanted to trial a proof of concept benchmarking process and making this an international event has appeal in the New Zealand context.
Benchmarking: why choose this methodology?

• Highly formative

• Compliance requirements are relatively low
  - Bench-marking in NZ is usually thought of as data intensive comparative resource or expenditure analysis

• International comparisons add a new dimension to thinking about the work
  - Challenge national assumptions
  - Have to take the time to explain (and think about) context
Focus areas in this exercise

• Strategies for increasing participation of priority (or non-traditional or disadvantaged) learners

• Provision of professional support for teaching staff

• Teaching quality

• Curriculum quality

• Peer review of assessment
Recommendations as a result of the exercise belong to each institution participating

- Initially developed by each institution for themselves
- Tested through the peer review benchmarking process
- Modified as necessary
- Taken back to the institution for further consideration
Findings – Sample: Teaching Quality

Areas of good practice

Included:
• Resources to share
• Internal teaching awards processes and their alignment of internal teaching awards to national awards
• Approaches to online teaching
Findings – Sample - Teaching Quality

Areas for improvement / further development

• Reduce the number of strategies
• Fragmented policies in T & L
  o UTAS will undertake a mapping exercise with all teaching and learning policies to identify gaps
  o VU needs to consolidate and complete work on policy renewal
• Support for staff with poor quality teaching is often a work in progress
• Swinburne is about to commence data modelling to identify unit metrics that can be used for course quality
Findings – common threads in T&L quality

• University strategic plans rely heavily on analysis of internal and external data with some data not available for 3 years

• Lack of consistency between strategic and operational plans

• **Hot topic:** Partnerships with schools area an important part of assisting students’ transition into university

• **Hot topic:** Focus on blended learning - using the LMS as more than just a resource library

• Access to teaching surveys for quality assurance purposes is a challenge

• Importance of external referencing of programs
Findings – unpacking differences

• Language in national policies on equity and access is slightly different (and unpacking it is valuable): “priority” vs “non-traditional”

• Core professional development programs for academic staff [optional vs mandatory]

• Funding for teaching quality varies across universities [ $70k a year to $3M]

• Consistent use of external survey instruments

• Operational language is different (and unpacking it is necessary) [courses/programmes/papers/subject/unit/modules]

• Only New Zealand universities have a coordinated process for programme approvals
Lessons learnt

• Understanding the context of each institution is critical

• Unpacking the policy language in different constituencies has the potential to open up thinking

• Relies on open, collegial, reflective and safe conversation

• Relies on willingness to share good and poorer practice

• Needs good preparation beforehand

• Needs a very well structured workshop process

• Initial framing questions needn’t be too precise.
Have a look at the report

https://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/ako-aotearoa/Peer-review-benchmarking

www.akoaotearoa.ac.nz