



Benchmarking in European Higher Education



USING BENCHMARKING AS A MODERN MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR IMPROVED GOVERNANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- An online tool with examples, advice and an online bibliography
- A practical handbook with a review of the literature and a step by step approach to benchmarking
- A report of extensive desk research carried out on benchmarking in higher education
- Guidelines for good practices for effective benchmarking
- An ongoing platform to promote exchange and good practices for benchmarking in higher education

CONTEXT

The European Council of November 2007 recognised the need to **accelerate reforms in higher education institutions**, yet there is little evidence of significant progress in higher education institutions towards improved governance.

The EU-funded project **Benchmarking in European Higher Education** supports higher education institutions with benchmarking, as a modern management tool to progress with institutional reforms, increased operational efficiency and the capacity for innovative changes in order to adapt to new challenges in their environment.

Although the key benefits of benchmarking are well known, there is still a significant gap in the use of benchmarking practices in European higher education institutions. Indicators and benchmarks are needed by university leaders to make informed choices for strategic developments and support the competitiveness of higher education institutions on the international scene. Benchmarking is a powerful strategic tool to assist decision-makers to improve the quality and effectiveness of organisational processes.

Ultimately, the aim is to build a European platform on benchmarking in higher education.

KEY ACTIVITIES

The **first phase of the project (2006-2008)** aimed to better understand the concepts and practices of benchmarking with a view to improving and increasing their uses in higher education.

An analysis of collaborative benchmarking in higher education, either initiated by a single higher education institution, by a European association, or a university network was carried out with extensive desk research, based on 14 criteria by which these could be characterised.

The project organised a Symposium in November 2007 to present and test preliminary project findings with representatives from higher education institutions. Three specialised practical workshops were organised in the spring of 2008 on benchmarking research, internationalisation and internal quality.

In a **second phase** these results will be taken further with:

- **Four benchmarking groups** of higher education institutions for wide exchange, advice and best practices in workshops. These groups will focus **on governance, university-enterprise cooperation, curriculum reforms and lifelong learning**;
- A broad **online collaborative learning community**;
- **Benchmarking tools** (questionnaires, reports, handbooks of good practices);
- **Dissemination conferences** associating other European networks and professional associations.

OUTPUTS – PHASE 1

The **handbook** provides a review of the bibliography on benchmarking, practical guidelines and a step-by-step approach both for those new to benchmarking and those willing to further develop their benchmarking activities. The main focus is on institutional and external collaborative benchmarking on higher education management in response to external demands for quality and accountability in an increasingly competitive environment. The approach considered that benchmarking should not be an isolated exercise of a few staff but be taken at a strategic level as a core tool to support strategic developments.

Obtaining advice on choosing the best benchmarking approach for your needs, identifying benchmarking partners and managing a benchmarking exercise: The **online tool** draws from and complements the handbook, offering practical advice, an **online bibliography**, indications on critical success factors and a list of definitions.

The **report on the project findings** of Phase 1 provides a detailed analysis of the desk research carried out in the framework of the project on collaborative benchmarking groups.

TEN GOOD REASONS TO USE BENCHMARKING AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

Benchmarking strengthens an institution's ability to successfully:

- **Self-assess their institution**
- **Better understand the processes** which support strategy formulation and implementation in increasingly competitive environments
- **Measure and compare** to the competition, i.e. how well are other higher education institutions in the sector performing, which higher education institutions are doing better and why
- **Discover new ideas**, looking out strategically; **Learn** from others how to improve
- **Obtain data to support decision-making** with new strategic developments
- Set **targets for improvement** of processes and approaches in order to increase performance
- **Strengthen** institutional identity, strategy formulation and implementation
- Enhance **reputation** and better position your Institution
- **Respond** to national performance indicators and benchmarks
- Set **new standards for the sector** in the context of higher education reforms



For further information

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