USQ

AUSTRALIA

Program Revitalisation -

Technology Enhanced Learning and Flexible Delivery Project: ACODE Benchmarking

Deakin Benchmarking Activity

Final Report - 2008

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Executive Summary

In late 2007, USQ identified the need to benchmark its use of technology to support learning and teaching (L & T) based on accepted higher education sector standards. This requirement was then formalized in 2008 with a specific subproject being developed within the Program Revitalisation Project, with a series of benchmarking events being scheduled. The benchmarks selected to operationalise this project were those developed by the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning(ACODE), of which USQ is a member, and were developed for use at the enterprise level. The purpose of the ACODE benchmarks is to support and promote the continuous quality improvement in e-Learning and reflect an integration of the key issue of pedagogy with institutional dimensions such as, planning, staff development and infrastructure provision.

During 2008, as part of the Program Revitalization subproject, three key activities were conducted:

1. a comprehensive self-assessment activity conducted by LTSU, DAIS and DICTS during September/October 2008, prior to the inter-institutional benchmarking activities.

2. a site visit from Deakin University and associated activities during the week of 3-5 November 2008.

3. an activity with Central Queensland University (CQU) based on the first 3 benchmarks via teleconference on 28 November 2008 (a separate report will be prepared for the CQU activity).

This report first provides an executive summary of the recommendations emanating from the Deakin BM activity. It then provides a full explanation of this visit and a more complete disclosure of how USQ rated itself based on the ACODE Benchmarks and those of Deakin University.

Recommendations

This section contains recommendations based on the actions and recommendations that emanated from the benchmarking activity and which may be read in full on pp 5-11.

Benchmark 1: Institution policy and governance for technology supported learning and teaching

PI 7   That there are clearer guidelines established for the governance roles that surround learning and teaching, flexible learning and academic quality.

PI 8   The ICT project methodology to be adopted as the USQ methodology.

Benchmark 2: Planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for learning and teaching

PI 1   That faculties be encouraged to adopt the existing guidelines and standards for integrating technology in learning and teaching.

PI 3   DAIS and LTSU to work with the office of Planning and Quality (PQO) to include more items relating to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) in Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT)

PI 6   That the PVC Academic (Quality) take responsibility for the monitoring of evaluations.

PI 7   That the university communication plan be adopted for the circulation of bulletins from key university committees such as SLC (VCC), LTC and Academic Board.

PI 8   That PQO identify key areas to be addressed by DAIS and LTSU from the SELT data.

Benchmark 3: Information technology infrastructure to support learning and teaching

PI 2   That PQO provide relevant data relating to information and technology infrastructure to support learning and teaching. (This relates also to BM2, PI 8).

Benchmark 4: Pedagogical application of information and communication technology

PI 4 & 5 That the university make provision for the monitoring of the quality of learning environments consistent with the minimum service agreements and service standards

PI 11,   DAIS, LTSU & PQO establish appropriate questions for SELT evaluations as per
12 & 13 Benchmark 2, PI.3

Benchmark 5: Professional/staff development for the effective use of technologies for learning and teaching

PI 1   Fleximode Policy to be approved and disseminated

     Accessibility of policies and procedures needs to be improved – e.g. ICT policy difficult to locate

     LTSU and HR to develop coherent Professional Development framework across general and academic staff.

PI 4   Faculties need to utilize the learning technology support and expertise. This is being actioned through:

     - faculty support teams
     - road shows
     - learning technology workshop/matrix
     - further dissemination of support available e.g. website

PI 5   Integration of learning technology related PD:

     - quarterly meetings between PD providers
     - combined PD sessions to integrate technology/practical aspects with theoretical underpinnings/pedagogical considerations

     Mahara Open Source software to be used to facilitate staff and student ePortfolios.

PI 6   That external funding opportunities to enhance learning and teaching projects in relation to professional development be investigated.

Benchmark 6: Staff support for the use of technologies for learning and teaching

PI 1   That an audit of professional development needs be conducted of USQ staff in relation to the use of technology in learning and teaching.

PI 2   That a stronger alignment be made between the USQ Project Management Methodology and the USQ Risk Register.

PI 6   If the proposed Professional Development Survey identifies the need for more training opportunities, Budget Management Committee will need to be consulted in relation to finding funding for this professional development.

Benchmark 7: Student training for the effective use of technologies for learning

PI 5   That all areas within the university providing professional development and assistance to students be encouraged to utilize the Virtual Training environment (VTME) and the Virtual Learning Centre (VLC). This issue needs to be raised at the LTC meeting.

PI 8 & 9   Faculties who train students in the use of software meet on a regular basis with ICT training staff to ensure there is a consistency. This issue needs to be raised at the LTC meeting.

Benchmark 8: Student support for the use of technologies for learning

PI 5   ICT Student Satisfaction Survey to consider including a limited number of questions related to materials and procedures.

This should be done in consultation with PQO to ensure there is consistency between SELTS and ICT surveys.

PI 6   A regular meeting between departments offering student support to be established. The Director of LTSU will raise this at the Senior Leadership Forum.

PI 7   Standards to be developed by the committee overseeing student support once established.

PI 8   When this committee is established it should receive a summary of outcomes of SELTS and ICT Student Satisfaction Survey related to areas of improvement.

PI 9   ICT develop a student advocacy role to monitor the use of new technologies within the academic program.

PI 10   That a common area/repository be established to house training and support materials to be utilized by students and/or groups of students and staff.

The Director of LTSU to raise this as a matter of concern with DAIS and ICT management to establish a repository and procedures for the use of that repository.

Introduction

The Program Revitalisation Project (PRP), as a sub project of the Realising Our Potential Project (ROP), established a need to ensure that USQ was actively seeking benchmarking opportunities with like institutions. Unlike faculties that are required to benchmark their academic programs with other university academic departments, the Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU), Division of Academic Information Services (DAIS) and the Division of Information, Communication and Technology Services (DICTS) seek to benchmark based on accepted industry standards.

The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning(ACODE), of which USQ is a member, has developed a suite of benchmarks for the use of technology in learning and teaching (L & T). The purpose of the benchmarks is to support continuous quality improvement in e-learning. This approach reflects an enterprise perspective, integrating the key issue of pedagogy with institutional dimensions such as planning, staff development and infrastructure provision. The benchmarks have been developed for use at the enterprise level or by the organisational areas responsible for the provision of leadership and services in this area. Each benchmark area is discrete and can be used alone or in combination with others. These benchmarks can be used both for self assessment purposes (in one or several areas), or as part of a collaborative benchmarking exercise with other universities. The benchmarks cover the following eight separate topic areas:

- institution policy and governance for technology supported learning and teaching
- planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for L&T
- information technology infrastructure to support L & T
- pedagogical application of information and communication technology
- professional/staff development for the effective use of technologies for L&T
- staff support for the use of technologies for L&T
- student training for the effective use of technologies for learning
- student support for the use of technologies for learning

USQ will use these benchmarks both internally and with other like institutions to provide an internationally recognised QA standard for the provision of use of technology in learning and teaching at USQ.

Goals

The goals of this project are to:

- provide USQ quality assurance standards and processes for technologies in learning
- internally benchmark USQ's current use of technology in L&T with internationally accepted standards
- externally benchmark USQ's current use of technology in L&T with select internationally accepted standards
- provide a 'Technology in L&T framework' to be used by staff when integrating technology in their teaching
- integrate 'Technology in L&T framework' with USQ planning and quality framework
- plan and align future benchmarking activities with USQ processes

Strategic alignment

The benchmarking process established for this project is strategically aligned with the:

- USQ Learning and Teaching plan
- DAIS Strategic Plan

Project team members

USQ project team members for the benchmarking activity were:

Michael Sankey (Project leader), Janet Taylor, Romy Lawson, Linda Galligan, Alan Smith, Sue Craig, Mary Ann Lambert, Susan Brosnan and Thea Russell

Why undertake a benchmarking exercise

As part of the quality assurances processes of the university, benchmarking is seen as a key contributor to identifying areas of potential improvement. For USQ, the primary target group are those identified within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) distance education cohort group.

Deakin University, being part of that cohort group, had similarly expressed a desire to benchmark with USQ at a Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) meeting held in March 2008.

Over the next 3-4 years, USQ intends to undertake a similar activity with other universities in the DEEWR group of distance education universities and have identified Charles Sturt University and the University of New England as potential 'benchmarkees'.

The benchmarking process

The benchmarking process was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 was a self assessment exercise where USQ developed the matrix which was adopted by Deakin as the foundation for their assessment. Stage 2 was an inter-institutional comparison with Deakin University.

Stage 1

Prior to undertaking the benchmarking activity with Deakin, it was important for USQ to undertake a self assessment activity based on each of the benchmarks. This involved key staff members from LTSU, DAIS and DICTS.

The self assessment activity itself highlighted areas for improvement with the second stage of the assessment conducted with Deakin, identifying further areas.

It is anticipated that this document will be reviewed prior to other benchmarking opportunities with other universities in the future.

Stage 2

Once the self assessment activities were completed, a matrix of outcomes was developed that could be shared with Deakin University.

When comparing the respective benchmarks it became apparent that the responses for the benchmarking activities gathered by each institution were from different perspectives, something not

foreseen by USQ. Deakin had involved both users and providers in the benchmarking process while USQ conducted their activities solely from a provider's perspective.

The differing perspectives have given USQ staff some rationale for taking a wider or more user-oriented perspective and has an element of self review as opposed to how these issues are perceived by and impact on other stakeholders, particularly in relation to ICT infrastructure. The application is the area where needs are not so well matched up and one needs to look at it from the "pointy" end (the users perspective) rather than the "flat" end (the providers).

For benchmarks 1, 2 and 3, which relate to Institutional policies and governance, Deakin's input was from providers only.

Summary of benchmark comparisons

Results of the benchmarking activities are contained within the fuller documents found in Appendix 1 and include both USQ self assessments, Deakin self assessments, comparative ratings and a series of recommendations for action based on the findings.

The recommendations have also been summarized in the Executive Summary of this document.

Acknowledgements

USQ would like to gratefully acknowledge the involvement of Dr Jo Coldwell and Dr Dale Holt from Deakin University for their willingness to participate and openness in their discussions with us. We feel that both institutions have benefited greatly from this opportunity and look forward to future involvement in common quality initiatives.

Conclusion

The benchmarking activity USQ performed with Deakin proved to be a very valuable exercise. Not only did this allow USQ to align itself with industry accepted practice, but it also allowed USQ to test itself with a like institution.

Deakin University is a provider of distance education and is considered to be part of the DEEWR cohort group of distance education providers in Australia. It was important for both institutions to develop a common understanding of activities performed across the different departments undertaking similar roles and this was done with a view to strengthening the capacity of each institution by learning from each other.

The results of this benchmarking activity have led to a series of recommendations that can now be disseminated to each department responsible for overseeing the activities associated with the benchmarks. This will be done with a view to establishing an accepted process to address each recommendation within an agreed timeframe.

Based on the successful outcomes of this project, USQ will now seek to establish contact with other universities to perform similar activities over the next 3-4 years.   This will provide the LTSU, DAIS and DICTS with the opportunity to continue to benchmark against accepted industry standards and align itself with the USQ mandate to continually improve in its practice of providing a quality educational experience for its students.

Appendix 1 - Summary of benchmark comparisons

Performance indicators where USQ scored less than Deakin or had a score of less than 3 have been marked as '*Needs improvement*'. Likewise, Performance indicators where USQ scored higher than Deakin have been noted as 'Commended'.

Where there were multiple parts to a Performance indicator, these have been separated by a '|'.

Benchmark 1: Institution policy and governance for technology supported learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	4	4	-	-	
PI 2	4|4	3|4	-	-	
PI 3	3	3	-	-	
PI 4	3	3	-	-	
PI 5	3|3	3|4	-	-	
PI 6	4|4	3|3		*	
PI 7	3|2	3|4	*		*The position of PVC Flexible Learning has been removed; a clearer distinction between PVC Academic Quality and the learning and teaching side is being worked out; some of the PVC Flexible Learning position has been incorporated into the new DVC (Global Learning) position.*
PI 8	2	4	*		*Currently, only some people are using the ICT project methodology but over time, this will be adopted more widely.*

Benchmark 2: Planning for, and quality improvement of the integration of technologies for learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	2|2	3|3	*		*The guidelines and processes available need be adopted by all faculties.*
PI 2	3|3	3|3	-	-	

PI 3	3|2	3|3	*		*DAIS and LTSU to work with the office of Planning and Quality (PQO) to include more items relating to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) in Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT)*
PI 4	3	3	-	-	
PI 5	4	4	-	-	
PI 6	2	2	*		*ROP Project - PVC Academic Quality has responsibilities for monitoring these evaluations take place.*
PI 7	2	2-3	*		*There's a broader circulation now of Bulletins published by the SLC, LTC and Academic Board*
PI 8	2	3-5	*		*PQO need to identify issues from SELT data to provide DAIS and LTSU with key issues to be addressed.*

Benchmark 3: Information technology infrastructure to support learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	3	2		*	
PI 2	2	4	*		*We need statistical information from PQO that aids in decision-making - stats where we can drill down or find out more about.*
PI 3	4|3	4|4	-	-	
PI 4	4|4	4|4	-	-	
PI 5	4|4|4	4|4|4	-	-	
PI 6	4|4	4|4	-	-	
PI 7	3	2		*	
PI 8	3	3	-	-	
PI 9	4|4	5|4	-	-	

Benchmark 4: Pedagogical application of information and communication technology

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
Aligned					
PI 1	4	4	-	-	
PI 2	3	3	-	-	
Informed					
PI 3	4	3-4	-	-	
PI 4	3|2	3-4|2	*	-	*USQ has a minimum service agreement and service standard but this is also not policed. Only see if **not** compliant from feedback gained from student surveys.*
PI 5	3|2	3|2	*	-	*Need to clarify the bodies responsible for ensuring that the minimum standards are adhered To. This may include the developments of further policy*
Supported					
PI 6	5	5	-	-	
PI 7	4|4	4|3	-	-	
PI 8	4|4	3|3		*	
Deployed					
PI 9	4	3		*	
PI 10	4	3		*	
Evaluated					
PI 11	2	2	*	-	*DAIS, LTSU & PQO establish appropriate questions for SELT evaluations as per Benchmark 2.3*
PI 12	2	2	*	-	
PI 13	2	2	*	-	

Benchmark 5: Professional/staff development for the effective use of technologies for learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	2|3|2	2|3|2	*		*Fleximode Policy to be approved and disseminated* *Accessibility of policies and procedures needs to be improved – e.g. ICT policy difficult to locate* *LTSU and HR to develop coherent Professional Development framework across general and academic staff.*
PI 2	4|5	3|3-4		*	
PI 3	3|3	2-3|1-4		*	

PI 4	4	5	*		*Faculties need to utilize the learning technology support and expertise. This is being actioned through:*
					
					   - *faculty support teams*
					   - *road shows*
					   - *learning technology workshop/matrix*
					   - *further dissemination of support available e.g. website*

PI 5	3	3-4	*		*Integration of learning technology related PD:*
					
					   - *quarterly meetings between PD providers*
					   - *combined PD sessions to integrate technology/practical aspects with theoretical underpinnings/pedagogical considerations*
					
					Mahara Open Source software to be used to facilitate staff and student ePortfolios.

PI 6	3	3-4	*		*Funding will always have limitations. Looking into the possibility of applying for external funding for learning technology projects and related PD may be a way to increase finances.*
PI 7	4|4	2-3|>3		*	
PI 8	5	3-5		*	

Benchmark 6: Staff support for the use of technologies for learning and teaching

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	3|3	4|3-4	*		*There is a need to develop clearer understanding of Professional Development needs of staff in relation to the use of ICT. This may be encapsulated in a proposed comprehensive evaluation of PD of staff at USQ.*
PI 2	3|3|3	3-4|4-5| 4-5	*		*Needs identified in USQ's Project Management Methodology need to be associated with the USQ Risk Register.*
PI 3	3|3|3	3|3|3	-	-	
PI 4	4	3-4		*	
PI 5	4|3|4	4|4|4	-	-	
PI 6	3	4	*		*If the proposed Professional Development Survey identifies the need for more training opportunities, Budget Management Committee will need to be consulted in relation to finding funding for this professional development.*
PI 7	4	2		*	
PI 8	4	3-4		*	
PI 9	3	3-4	-	-	

Benchmark 7: Student training for the effective use of technologies for learning

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	4	3		*	
PI 2	3	3	-	-	
PI 3	3|3	3|3	-	-	
PI 4	4	3-4		*	

PI	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 5	2	4	*		*That all areas within the university providing professional development and assistance to students be encouraged to utilize the Virtual Training environment (VTME) and the Virtual Learning Centre (VLC).* *This issue needs to be raised at the LTEC committee meeting.*
PI 6	4|4	3|1		*	
PI 7	3	3			
PI 8	3	4	*		*Faculties who train students in the use of software meet on a regular basis with ICT training staff to ensure there is a consistency.*
PI 9	3	4	*		*This may need to be taken up initially with the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching and ICT Training.*

Benchmark 8: Student support for the use of technologies for learning

Performance Indicator	USQ	Deakin	Needs Improvement	Commended	Actions/recommendations
PI 1	4	4	-	-	
PI 2	4	4	-	-	
PI 3	5	4		*	
PI 4	5|5|3	4|4|3		*	
PI 5	2|2|?	3|4|4	*		*ICT Student Satisfaction Survey to consider including a limited number of questions related to materials and procedures.* *This should be done in consultation with PQO to ensure there is consistency between SELTS and ICT surveys.*
PI 6	3	4	*		*A regular meeting between departments offering student support to be established. The Director of LTSU will raise this at a senior leadership forum.*
PI 7	3	4	*		*Standards to be developed by the committee overseeing student support once established.*
PI 8	2	3	*		*When this committee is established it should receive the outcomes of SELTS and ICT Student Satisfaction Survey related to areas of improvement.*
PI 9	3	4	*		*ICT develop a student advocacy role to monitor the use of new*

					technologies within the academic program.
PI 10	3	4	*		*That a common area/repository be established to house training and support materials to be utilized by students and/or groups of students and staff.* *The Director of LTSU to raise this as a matter of concern with DAIS and ICT management to establish a repository and procedures for the use of that repository.*