ACODE Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning

Findings from a 24 university benchmarking exercise regarding the benchmarks' fitness for purpose and capacity to generate useful quality assurance information
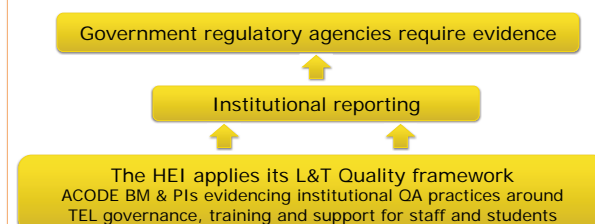
Abstract

Technology enhanced learning (TEL) has been one of the instruments used to propel the massification and the internationalisation of course offerings by higher education institutions (HEIs). Accordingly, The Australasian Council on Open Distance and E-learning (ACODE) recently undertook a robust review of their 8 TEL benchmarks to ensure their sustainability. The Benchmarks provide HEIs with chance to self-evaluate against a suite of proven Performance Indicators (PIs) to determine their strengths and challenges in TEL delivery. In part this is to help inform Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in the compilation of its teaching and learning standards, by providing a more granular level definition of good TEL practice. This poster presents a summary of: the benchmarks used, how they were applied, the results of that activity, and it proposes a potential expansion of the benchmarking methodology. Why? To better assure student engagement in a TEL.

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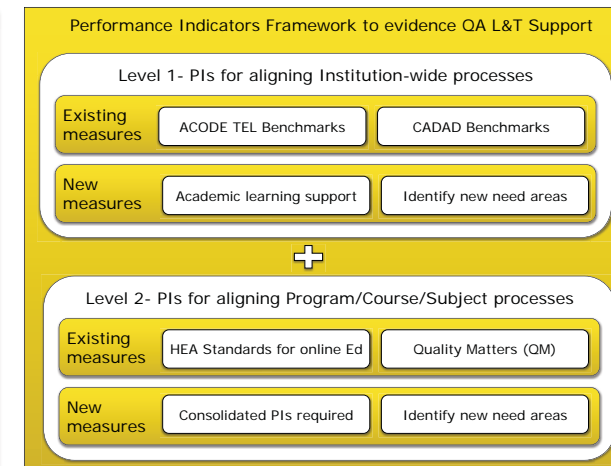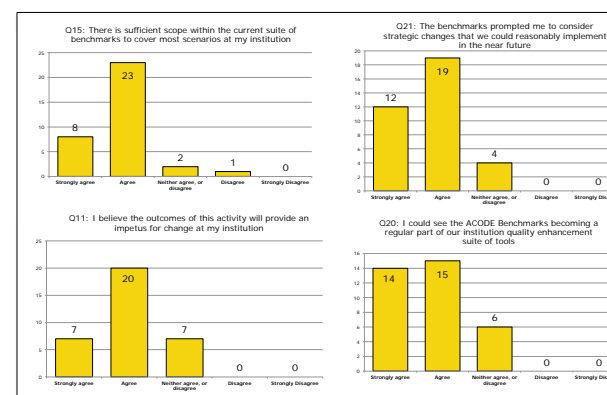
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Method

In 2014 ACODE refreshed their TEL Benchmarks. They where then applied by 24 institutions in an inter-institutional benchmarking activity. 35/38 participants completed the online survey containing 30 questions; 5 on institutional data; 20 on the activities, resources and their participation in the activity; and 5 open-ended responses seeking to elicit further direction and feedback for future activities and a possible extension of the TEL Benchmarks and their application methodology.

The benchmarks

The **ACODE TEL Benchmarks** cover eight topic areas and each contain a series of PIs designed to be used by HEIs to gather evidence of good practice for reporting purposes (ACODE 2014). They include:

1. Institution-wide policy and governance for technology enhanced learning (8 PIs);
2. Planning for institution-wide quality improvement of technology enhanced learning (5 PIs);
3. Information technology systems, services and support for technology enhanced learning (8 PIs);
4. The application of technology enhanced learning services (9 PIs);
5. Staff professional development for the effective use of technology enhanced learning (7 PIs)
6. Staff support for the use of technology enhanced learning (9 PIs);
7. Student training for the effective use of technology enhanced learning (8 PIs);
8. Student support for the use of technology enhanced learning (10 PIs).

Government regulatory agencies require evidence

Institutional reporting

The HEI applies its L&T Quality framework
ACODE BM & PIs evidencing institutional QA practices around TEL governance, training and support for staff and students

The application

ACODE facilitated a major Benchmarking Summit at Macquarie University in Sydney between 1-3 June 2014.

To participate in the event, each of the 24 institution involved had to first undertake a self-assessment of their institutions capacity in TEL against the PIs in the Benchmarks, and then be willing to share that self-assessment with the other institutions involved at the Summit.

As part of their commitment to the activity, each institution had to undertake to assess, at a minimum, two of the benchmarks, with some institutions doing three, four or five, with one institution choosing to do all eight.

Each institution was allowed to bring along two representatives to the Summit (38 in total). Institutions took it in turns to briefly describe how they came to give themselves their particular rating. This generated quite lively discussion. But more importantly, each institution was then able to then review their self-assessment and make a final determination.

The results

The benchmarks were designed to help institutions critically self-assess their capacity in TEL. In the majority, 89% of participants agreed that they were able to source sufficient and credible evidence to support their judgments around the PIs and that there was sufficient scope within the indicators to cover most of their scenarios (Q15). Q21 provides a clear indication that the benchmarks prompted some 89% of participants to consider some strategic change that could be implemented, based on undertaking this activity. While 79% agreed that this would provide an impetus for change within their institution (Q11). In Q20 we see participants clearly wanting to engage with this tool again in the future, as they (89%) see there is a real place for the Benchmarks within the suite of quality enhancement tools to be used by their institution (Sankey,2014).

Q15: There is sufficient scope within the current suite of benchmarks to cover most scenarios at my institution
Q21: The benchmarks prompted me to consider strategic changes that we could reasonably implement in the near future
Q11: I believe the outcomes of this activity will provide an impetus for change at my institution
Q20: I could see the ACODE Benchmarks becoming a regular part of our institution quality enhancement suite of tools

Performance Indicators Framework to evidence QA L&T Support

Level 1- PIs for aligning Institution-wide processes

Existing measures	ACODE TEL Benchmarks	CADAD Benchmarks
New measures	Academic learning support	Identify new need areas

Level 2- PIs for aligning Program/Course/Subject processes

Existing measures	HEA Standards for online Ed	Quality Matters (QM)
New measures	Consolidated PIs required	Identify new need areas

The next steps

Possible extensions of this work will be to provide HEIs with a workable framework that will allow them to use a range of measures to evidence good practice, at both an institution-wide level and at the sub-levels (as proposed in the above figure). This is in addition to the application of the data and practices generated from the TEL Benchmarks, in assuring quality learning environments. This is because TEL does not live within a vacuum; there are many other factors at stake that determine its success, or otherwise.

At issue is how the ACODE benchmarking methodology can be enhanced and aligned with complimentary tools and practices, e.g., using a risk-based framework (Padró & Winwood, 2014) to provide even more information on TEL activity and to provide a more holistic and detailed understanding of what an HEI does in this space; how it is comparable to face-to-face delivery; and how it aligns with the HEIs strategy, so as to evidence its success to the different HEI stakeholders, including TEQSA.

Conclusion

Many of the issues we face in our HEIs can be remediated by simply taking the time to self-assess against a set of quality indicators, like those found in the ACODE TEL Benchmarks. However, when we then look to further extend our self-reflection, by sharing our current practice with those in similar circumstances, this provides the impetus for a truly dynamic learning activity. If the data presented is any indicator, the value of this form of activity, to the HEIs involved, and ultimately the sector, is very significant. In this case, the TEL Benchmarks have provided a catalyst to help make this happen.

References

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