



# CEENQA

## Experiences with benchmarking

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# Benchmarking Definition

Benchmarking is an internal organisational process which aims to improve the organisation's performance by learning about possible improvements of its primary and/or support processes by looking at these processes in other, better-performing organisations.

# Benchmarking in HE

- Improving performance by collaboration or comparison with others is nothing new.
- New is the increasing interest in the formalisation of such comparisons
- Benchmarking has proved to be an effective method for identifying the best practices and improving the quality and processes in an organization.

Literature supplies some useful other definitions. The most interesting among them have some elements in common:

- It is about a voluntary and internal process (in contradiction with ranking);
- It is about collaborating and comparing; the final goal has to be to learn from each other and to improve the process.

# Types of benchmarking

1. Internal benchmarking in which comparisons are made of the performance of different departments, faculties, campuses or sites in order to identify best practices in the institution.

# PROZA-PROSE

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- Instruments for internal evaluation in higher education based on EFQM
- <http://www.prose.be/eng/index.htm>

- Cobweb diagrams
  - Different staff members of same study programme
  - Study programme level
  - Different study programmes
  - Same study programmes of different universities
  - Faculty Level
  - Different faculties
  - Same faculties of different universities
  - University level
  - Different universities

2 External competitive benchmarking where a comparison of performance in key areas is based upon information from institutions. Although initiatives of this kind may be potentially very valuable, and have a high level of validity amongst decision makers.

- Evaluation reports from externals based on framework
- Flemish evaluation system
- ESABIH



3 External collaborative benchmarking usually involves comparisons with a larger group of institutions. Such an initiative is reported below, and the methodology is usually open and collaborative. Such schemes may be run by the institutions themselves on a collective basis.

- KONDOR project BIHTEK Project
- ESMU strategy

4. External trans-industry (best-in-class) benchmarking seeks to look across multiple industries in search of new and innovative practices, no matter what their source. Amongst some practitioners this is perceived to be the most desirable form of benchmarking because it can lead to major improvements in performance

- ESF quality audit

# Kondor BIHTEK

At the start of the exercise, participants were asked to sign a code of conduct. This ensured everybody was aware of the conditions. It also created a 'safe' environment where participants could exchange information without any risk of it being misused by other participants or by the project leader. All parties agreed upon the text of this code of conduct.

# The benchmarking process

PHASE 1: Define the theme and translate into indicators and benchmarks

1. Defining the theme and determine sub-themes
2. Make a list of possible indicators
3. Selection of indicators

# The benchmarking process

- Criteria for the selection of indicators:
  - All members of the benchmarking group experience the list of indicators as **relevant**.
  - The indicators are **clearly** defined
  - Indicators are sufficiently **specific** to an institution
  - The indicators can be used to illustrate **relative performance levels**.
  - It is clear **how and where** the data for the indicators can be collected.
  - The aim is a good mix of **qualitative and quantitative** indicators.

# The benchmarking process

## 4. Operationalization of indicators

The 'indicator card' contains several sections that help to clearly define the indicator:

Importance of the indicators

- Benchmarks for the indicators
- Levels of the indicators
- Possible data sources for the indicators

## 5. Determine benchmarks

# The benchmarking process

PHASE 2: The 'score' of the institution: data collection and interpretation

At this stage of the benchmarking process, the participants gather in their own institution data (qualitative and quantitative) and they assess their own performance and operation.

It is important that the collection of data and the review happens as objectively as possible

# The benchmarking process

## PHASE 3: Analyzing the data and drawing up an action plan

1. Diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution
2. Compare with other institutions
3. The preparation of an action plan



# Action plan

In an action, different elements are addressed:

- What does the institution want to improve?  
What is the purpose?
- What are the possible steps to reach the goal?
- Who is responsible?
- Which resources should be provided?

# The benchmarking process

## PHASE 4: Implementation and reflection of the action plan

1. Implementing of the action plan
2. Reflection on the benchmarking

Benchmarking should always lead to action. In a quality driven exercise the action plan is aimed at improvement. Because of the confidential character of a quality driven exercise it is not possible to use the results of the exercise for accountability reasons or external quality assessments.

# Learning outcomes

In 2003 → “Structural Decree” (for higher education)

**QF for HE in Flanders** (based on Dublin descriptors)

## Impact on degree programmes

- Programme goals were re-written in terms of competences based on the level descriptors
- This work was done at the *institutional level* and at *the level of the association KULeuven*
  - No guarantee for international benchmarking (except at moment of external quality assurance visit)

# Now

- Universities and university colleges write **domain specific learning outcomes** together  
(5 = short cycle; 6 = Ba; 7 = Ma)
- NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) validates these descriptions

[http://www.nvao.net/overzicht\\_domeinspecifieke\\_leerresultaten](http://www.nvao.net/overzicht_domeinspecifieke_leerresultaten)

# Domain specific learning outcomes

- Coördinated by VLUHR (= VLIR & VLHORA)
- In line with the Dublin descriptors and with the Flemish, Belgian, European and international regulations about access to a profession
- **Does not lead to common programs or course units!**
- A lot of work has been done
  - each HEI has defined LO's for each discipline and each course unit/module [as the result of the Structural Decree / in the framework of the external quality assurance procedures]

# Domain specific learning outcomes

Basis for **Quality Assurance**

**Distinctive**

Basis for **international comparison**

⇒ 12 to 15 LO's per study program

## Domain specific learning outcomes

- Steering committee (benchmarking group)
  - 1 person per HEI per discipline (study program)
  - 1 chairman
  - Consultation of colleagues inside each HEI
  - Consultation of stakeholders (students, employers, social partners)
  - Comparison with international examples
  - An agreed methodology (tuning, ...)



- Thanks!
- Questions!

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