Benchmarking: An overview of current work and challenges

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A lot is happening . . .

- AAC&U
- AHELO
- ALTC
- AQF
- AUQA
- CALD
- CLA
- GQS
- GTS
- GSS
- LTAS
- NILOA
- OECD
- QAA
- TEQSA
How did you do?

- AAC&U: Association of American Colleges and Universities
- AHELO: Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
- ALTC: Australian Learning and Teaching Council Limited
- AQF: Australian Qualities Framework
- AUQA: Australian Universities Quality Agency
- CALD: Council of Australian Law Deans
- CLA: Collegiate Learning Assessment
- GQS: Graduate Qualities Scale
- GTS: Good Teaching Scale
- GSS: Generic Skills Scale
- LTAS: Learning and Teaching Academic Standards
- NILOA: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- QAA: Quality Assurance Agency
- TEQSA: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Organisation
Areas for Consideration

- **What are we benchmarking?**
  - Knowledge or Skill/Graduate Attribute Based (within the discipline context)

- **How are we benchmarking?**
  - Internal/External; Criteria Reference/Quantitative

- **Who are we benchmarking for?**
  - External bodies – AUQA/TEQSA; Internal – Program Accreditation/Continual Improvement

- **When should we benchmark?**
  - Throughout program/On graduation
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- When should we benchmark?
  - Throughout program / On graduation
- Identification of teaching and instructional issues and opportunities for the architecture and associated disciplines (2006)
- Work integrated learning (WIL): a national framework for initiatives to support best practice (2007)
- Benchmarking archaeology honours degrees at Australian universities (2006)
- Developing an integrated national curriculum for the education of the social work and human services workforce (2007)
- The role of honours in contemporary Australian higher education (2007)
- Business as usual? A collaborative and inclusive investigation of the existing resources, strengths, gaps and challenges to be addressed for sustainability in teaching and learning in Australian university business faculties (2006)
- Re-conceptualising tertiary science education for the 21st century (2006)
- Practicum partnerships: exploring models of practicum organisation in teacher education for a standards based profession (2007)
- Managing educational change in the ICT discipline at tertiary education level (2006)
- Learning and teaching in the discipline of law: achieving and sustaining excellence in a changed and changing environment (2009)
- Learning and teaching for interprofessional practice in health (2007)
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- Developing our staff: an eight university collaboration for mapping and delivery of a shared professional development program for tertiary educators (2007)
- Forging new directions in physics education in Australian universities (2006)
- Facilitating the integration of evidence based practice into speech pathology curricula: a scoping study to examine the congruence between academic curricula and work based needs (2007)
- Extending teaching and learning initiatives in the cross-disciplinary field of biotechnology (2006)
- Professor Angela Brew (2008)
- Professor Ian Cameron (2006)
- Developing primary teacher education students’ professional capacities for children’s diverse mathematics achievement and learning needs (2008)
- Professor Erica McWilliam (2006)
- Designing a diverse, future orientated vision for undergraduate psychology in Australia (2006)
- Teaching and assessing meta-attributes in engineering: identifying, developing and disseminating good practice (2006)
- Identification of teaching and instructional issues and opportunities for the construction management, quantity surveying and building surveying disciplines (2007)
- Curriculum development and assessment of methods to enhance communication and life skills in veterinary students (2007)
- Quality indicators for best practice approaches to experiential placements in pharmacy programs (2006)
- Taking clinical psychology postgraduate training into the next decade: aligning competencies to the curriculum (2008)
- Ensuring the supply and quality of engineering graduates with attributes for the new century Accounting for the future: more than numbers (2007)
- Facilitating national benchmarking of achievement of graduate attributes and employability skills at course level Generating academic standards for planning practice education (2006)
- Addressing the on-going English language growth of international students (2007)
- Integration and assessment of graduate attributes in curriculum (2007)
- Ensuring quality graduates of pharmacology (2007)
- Safeguarding Australians: mapping the strengths, challenges and gaps toward sustainable improvements in learning outcomes from diverse models of OHS education (2007)
- Supporting student peer assessment and review in large groupwork projects (2006)
- The B Factor: understanding academic staff beliefs about graduate attributes (2007)
- Dr Roger Moni (2007) Programmatic approach to developing scientific writing embedded in BSc courses
A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (Project Leader), Professor Geoffrey Scott, Professor Stuart Campbell, Associate Professor Martin Carroll, Professor Elizabeth Deane, Dr Duncan Nulty, Professor Pip Pattison, Professor Belinda Probert, Professor Judyth Sachs, Professor Stephen Towers

AIM – To implement a national model of expert peer review for benchmarking learning outcomes against nationally–agreed threshold learning outcomes developed under the LTASP.

METHOD –
2 Assessment tasks and specifications, chosen to evidence two threshold learning outcomes, will be peer reviewed by:
   recent accounting graduates
   professional bodies
   two senior academics from ten participating universities.

Following calibration activities, random samples of completed student work will also be double–blind reviewed by academic peers.
Challenges

- Establishing consensus as to what constitutes a “valid assessment task” that enables students to demonstrate the threshold learning standard.

- Identifying assessment tasks which are concise so that reviewers are not overburdened.

- Developing a shared understanding as to what reviewers consider to be an appropriate standard of student work in relation to a specific threshold learning standard.

- Engaging accounting higher education providers beyond those directly participating.
The role of standardised testing in the assessment and assurance of graduate learning outcomes? (CLA)

- Benchmarking
- It is not the instrument itself that needs examining but the way it will be used in the Higher Education sector
- Embedding standardised tests into the curriculum through teaching and assessment

- Platform for students to demonstrate their competencies in a flexible manner – does not encourage “teaching to the test”
- Standalone standard test that do not have a direct relationship to the program of study it will not be:
  - valued by students or teaching staff
  - framed in a manner that makes in authentic to the discipline involved.
A collaborative, confidential, course-level benchmarking process (Benchmarking with a Focus on Graduate Employability) has been developed and 24 course leaders from 13 institutions.

The outcomes include the assurance of learning for graduate employability framework a 360-degree evidence-based approach to curriculum enhancement which includes:

1. determining the capabilities and standards;
2. knowing where they are developed and assessed by mapping the curriculum and
3. mapping WIL; gathering evidence that the capabilities are achieved at the appropriate standards in
4. student portfolios and
5. course review portfolios,
6. benchmarking with similar courses.
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Findings

- Academic staff have ownership of the benchmarking process (if it is seen as a silo activity or not rewarded and recognised, benchmarking is likely to be superficial and seen as ‘just another task’ that academics must squeeze into their busy schedules)
- It is kept relatively simple and used as a trigger for internal review and improvement, rather than external accountability or an indicator of competitiveness
- Universities should seek partners beyond those institutions that most resemble themselves within a sector or discipline
- It is a continuous process of learning from others even though it is labour-intensive and time-consuming rather than a quick and easy process
- It is focused on the potential benefits of improvement rather than measurement: information has to be the basis for action, particularly in enhancing student learning
- It is developmental rather than regulatory
Hunters & Gatherers: Strategies for Curriculum Mapping and Data Collection for Assurance of Learning
This project aims to support the process of curriculum mapping and data collection across Australia by:

- sharing good practice
- examining common challenges and possible solutions
- developing an online resource kit, including a review of current tools used to assure graduate attributes (assuringlearning.com)
Findings . . .

Leximancer Map
All had a mapping process in place to identify where graduate attributes were being assured in a degree program.

Responsibility for mapping the graduate attributes into the curriculum varied:
- 64% teaching
- 36% faculty management (for example ADTLs, Program Directors)

Level of mapping also varied:
- 40% mapping to subject only
- 60% mapping to specific assessment tasks within a subject
The Use of Rubrics in Assuring Learning

- 80% used rubrics in their AoL process
  - 11 of these 20 institutions used standard rubrics across programs to ensure consistency of criteria and standards

- The development of the rubrics varied across institutions:
  - 48% developed by the teaching staff
  - 16% by educational experts
  - 16% developed by faculty management
Although mapping and the use of rubrics was common practice across the sample, 60% of respondent institutions had not yet collected AoL data.

Of the ten institutions that were collecting data different approaches were taken:
- Capstone subjects alone
- Collected data across the whole program to obtain measures of students’ achievement throughout their degree.
- One institution had chosen to use a stand alone testing method where students sit an exam that is independent of their individual subjects.

Type of data being collected varied:
- 12% collected overall marks for the specific mapped assignment
- 28% were using the marks for the criteria that related to the graduate attribute only.
Main Challenges

The main challenges identified were:

- **Staff Workload**
  - “staff looked upon AoL as extra burden” (D)
  - “time consuming, academic staff see it as imposition on their time” (B)

- **Staff Engagement**
  - “challenge to get beyond that this is more than ticking box, it’s about improving student learning outcomes” (B)
  - “it took me six years to get staff buy-in” (F)
  - “we have achieved staff acceptance, not buy-in” (Q)
  - “the ones that are really hung up on the content are the ones that the most difficulty accepting a different way of thinking about their course and their assessment” (O)
Main Challenges

- Scale
  - The size of the challenge to curriculum map and data collect over a number of programs in a faculty was seen to be daunting by a number of the respondents, especially those universities with large student populations, for example, universities with intakes of over 1000 students in undergraduate programs.

- Technical
  - All the universities wanted to have a streamlined, efficient system to assure learning but achieving this provided some technical problems.
Best Practice Examples

- **Leadership**
  - “It’s important that the dean and other top leadership are clearly and vocally supporting AoL.” QUT

- **Inclusion**
  - “This can be achieved by developing the AoL process together with academics and when they are comfortable with it and see its worth and workability they become champions for AoL.” UNSW

- **Embedded (to reduce work burden)**
  - “I said to them realistically what do you really think could fit in your subject? Then I said okay, let's actually look how you assess students. Let's see how those things that you've put in that list could actually fit into an assessment without you doing anything much different.” UTS

- **Resources, Support and Training**
  - “Staff pay attention to how much resourcing is given to AoL and how much training they get is an indicator of how serious the institution is about AoL.” QUT