

How to Benchmark

There are three major steps in this benchmarking process. They are self-evaluation against the benchmarks, comparing and contrasting self-evaluations against the benchmarks with benchmarking partners, and applying benchmarking outcomes to unit improvement processes.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation against the benchmarks is the foundation of effective benchmarking and requires some preparation within the ADU, and between the Director, the university executive and senior staff. The ADU should set aside some time to ensure that all ADU staff, the university executive, and senior staff, understand the CADAD benchmarks, how they work, and how they will be used to evaluate and enhance ADU performance. This should include an emphasis on the use of evidence in the process, some of which will be generated through surveying staff. Further advice on possible types and sources of evidence will be available on the CADAD website in the near future.

Within the ADU, preparation for benchmarking could take a variety of forms. Whatever processes are determined locally, it is suggested that all ADU staff should be involved, time should be set aside for individual reading of the benchmarking document, and staff workshops should be conducted to develop common understandings of the process. Benchmarking can create concerns among staff groups because it involves questions of performance. It is important to address potential blockers such as this at the early stages of the process to ensure the benchmarking activity has the best possible chance of succeeding. The ADU will be ready for the CADAD benchmarking scheme when all members understand how the scheme treats the domains and sub-domains of academic development; the three levels of practice; the five-point assessment scale; the three phases of self-evaluation, benchmarking with partners, and implementing consequent improvement processes; and the crucial role of valid evidence.

Similarly, there are several critical elements when it comes to ensuring the university executive and other senior staff are well informed about the CADAD benchmarking approach and the ADU's purposes in committing itself to the process. Like the ADU staff, university executive and senior staff need to understand the key components of the scheme. This includes the technical aspects as well as the fundamental idea of transparently comparing and contrasting the work of the ADU with that of other ADUs within a national framework of understandings about what ADUs can do in an increasingly performance-driven sector. The university executive and senior staff will be ready for the CADAD benchmarking scheme when they share key perspectives about academic development with the ADU and have reached agreement with the ADU about what sorts of evidence provide valid information in relation to the benchmarks.

When the ADU believes the institution, including itself, is ready, it should select the domains and sub-domains that it wishes to benchmark. It is desirable for the Director to also discuss this with his or her supervisor. The ADU should then systematically apply the descriptions of levels of performance to each level of practice for the benchmarks in the selected domains and sub-domains. This process must be evidence-driven.

Typically, this process will involve the following steps:

1. Selection of the domains and sub-domains for the current benchmarking exercise.
2. Gathering of evidence about the ADU's performance in the selected domains and sub-domains. Some evidence will already be available in documentary form, e.g. policy documents, records of

various processes, quantitative data, and feedback/survey data. Where there are gaps in evidence, steps will need to be taken to generate valid evidence. This will often be in the form of surveys, which usually require some time to identify, design, administer and analyse.

3. Assessment of ADU performance at each level of practice using the five-point assessment scale.
4. Preparation of the self-assessment report.
5. Discussion, and possible modification, of the self-assessment report in meetings between the Director and his or her supervisor.

Working with Benchmarking Partners

When the self-evaluation report is finalised, the ADU is ready to compare and contrast its results with those of its benchmarking partners. This is best achieved by exchanging documentation and holding at least one face-to-face meeting of senior ADU staff from each of the partners.

Benchmarking partners may be chosen for a variety of reasons. It can be useful to compare like with like, but it can also be fruitful to compare domains and sub-domains between different types of ADUs. This stage should also culminate in a written report for each partner, whatever the basis of the actual benchmarking partnership.

Once again, this phase of benchmarking may take place in many different ways. However, the following actions are essential:

1. Identification of strategic benchmarking partners and reaching of agreement about processes.
2. Exchange of information and documents related to each partner's benchmarking processes and outcomes.
3. Meeting with partners to discuss details of all aspects of the self-assessment process, including key actions; rationales; positive, indifferent and negative experiences; characteristics of the evidence used; the reasoning behind judgements made; and overall outcomes.
4. Preparation of individual and/or joint benchmarking reports.

Benchmarking and unit improvement

The final stage of the process is applying benchmarking outcomes to unit improvement. The CADAD benchmarking scheme provides three broad types of information about ADU performance. First, it provides a national context, enabling ADUs to reflect on the domains of academic development with which they engage, potentially shedding light on the extent to which the ADU is taking on strategic roles. Second, the scheme encourages analysis of performance at three levels within institutions, supporting a systemic perspective on academic development. Finally, it facilitates opening of the work of the ADU to external colleagues, promoting peer review, which ensures the ADU is seen to respect a scholarly value that is almost universally honoured by the academic profession. These dimensions of the CADAD benchmarking scheme can combine to produce insights into ADU performance that are not necessarily gained through other forms of review.

There are no formulas for applying new knowledge about ADU performance to enhancement of that performance, but these days every university has planning and performance review processes, and good benchmarking information can enliven these for ADUs, making them more engaging and useful.

It is also important at this point of the process that ADUs capitalise on the potential of the CADAD benchmarking scheme to build a greater consensus among the Director, ADU staff, members of the university executive, and senior staff, about the roles of academic development and ADUs. This

benchmarking scheme, if effectively implemented, should create new opportunities for making explicit the arguments that link developments in individual academic performance in learning and teaching, faculty/school performance, and institutional performance, with the quality of the institution's academic development system, and the inputs of the ADU to that system.