# UOW Benchmarking Policy

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<th>Date approved:</th>
<th>15 October 2010</th>
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<th>On Approval</th>
<th>Date of Next Review:</th>
<th>Currently under review</th>
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<th>Approved by:</th>
<th>University Council</th>
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<tr>
<th>Custodian title &amp; e-mail address:</th>
<th>Director, Academic Quality and Standards Unit <a href="mailto:quality@uow.edu.au">quality@uow.edu.au</a></th>
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<tr>
<th>Author:</th>
<th>Senior Officer Quality, Strategic Planning and Quality Office</th>
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<tr>
<th>Responsible Faculty/Division &amp; Unit:</th>
<th>Academic Quality and Standards Unit Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) Portfolio</th>
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<tr>
<th>Supporting documents, procedures &amp; forms of this policy:</th>
<th>Guide to Benchmarking</th>
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<tr>
<th>References &amp; Legislation:</th>
<th>UOW Strategic Plan UOW Quality Framework</th>
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<th>Audience:</th>
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## Contents

1. **Background and Context**  
2. **Purpose of Policy**  
3. **Definitions**  
4. **Application & Scope - Exclusions or Special Conditions (if any)**  
5. **Benchmarking Principles**  
6. **Benchmarking Projects**  
7. **Policy Oversight**  
8. **Roles & Responsibilities**  
9. **Version Control and Change History**
1 Background and Context

1. As a self-accrediting institution, the University has an obligation to ensure that it continues to demonstrate high standards of performance in learning and teaching, research and associated activities. This commitment to excellence is underpinned by a robust and efficient system to support continuous improvement of its processes and outcomes. Benchmarking with appropriate partners, at a national or international level, enables the University to compare and evaluate its performance and, in so doing, monitor standards, compare good practice and make quality improvements.

2. Biannual audits of benchmarking activity across the University have been conducted since 2005. The 2009 audit report, while noting that benchmarking activity was on the increase, recommended that UOW “develop an integrated benchmarking framework including clear definitions of the purposes and processes for benchmarking”. The University Planning and Quality Committee determined a need for a university-wide approach to benchmarking, integrated with the University’s quality improvement system.

3. Benchmarking and AUQA Audits: AUQA Cycle 2 Audits focus more explicit attention to performance standards and outcomes, including the use of external reference points and benchmarking to enhance outcomes.

4. AUQA states that institutions should place their “objectives and … achievement within a broader environmental context, through the use of benchmarking information and comparative data on processes and outcomes. … Institutions must … be able to assess how well they are performing in comparative, as well as in absolute, terms.”

2 Purpose of Policy

1. UOW encourages benchmarking with comparable institutions nationally and internationally as a means of improving performance and assuring standards. This Policy aims to ensure a more coordinated, considered and systematic approach to benchmarking; one that support institutional planning and the setting of performance targets and is linked explicitly with the University’s quality improvement system.

2. The associated Guide to Benchmarking has been developed as a resource for staff in faculties and professional units. It details the steps involved in planning and implementing a benchmarking project.

3 Definitions

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<th>Word/Term</th>
<th>Definition (with examples if required)</th>
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<td>Benchmarking</td>
<td>A learning process structured so as to enable those engaging in the process to compare their services/activities/ products in order to identify their comparative strengths and weaknesses as a basis for self improvement (Jackson and Lund (2000)). The Guide to Benchmarking describes different types of benchmarking and includes a glossary of common terms used in benchmarking.</td>
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4 Application & Scope - Exclusions or Special Conditions (if any)

1. This policy applies to benchmarking projects undertaken by faculties and units of the University. It sets out the process to be followed in undertaking any benchmarking project which involves a formal arrangement with one of more partner organisations. It includes projects initiated by this University as well as external benchmarking projects in which the University is involved. It does not cover informal benchmarking activities such as a desktop survey of relevant websites, or the use of publicly available comparative data.
2. While there is no prescribed methodology for conducting benchmarking exercises, the University expects staff to comply with the core principles and management procedures described below.

5 Benchmarking Principles

1. Benchmarking projects undertaken by Faculties and Units of the University will:
   a. support the University's mission, goals and strategic priorities
   b. be characterised by a commitment to: learning from good practice; implementing potential improvements arising from benchmarking findings; and sharing of good practices including after projects are completed
   c. be characterised by mutuality: the expectations of the proposed benchmarking activity need to be established prior to commencement of that activity, with a view to establishing mutual interest and benefits for all parties
   d. be balanced in terms of the value received compared to costs involved in undertaking the projects
   e. have the approval of the relevant Dean or Head of unit.

1. The following should be taken into account where an exchange of information is involved:
   a. Confidentiality: All benchmarking exchanges should be treated as confidential. Publication and external communication of findings should not occur without the permission of all partners involved in the project.
   b. Use: Benchmarking information should not be used for other than the express purpose for which it was obtained without prior consent of all participating partners.
   c. Exchange: The type or level of information exchanged should be comparable between the benchmarking partners.
   d. Intellectual property: All rights relating to any intellectual property developed in the course of any benchmarking activity need to be negotiated and recorded by the relevant partners.
   e. Agreement: If a benchmarking agreement is entered into, issues about confidentiality, intellectual property, use and the type and level of information to be exchanged should be included in the agreement. A sample Memorandum of Understanding can be obtained from the Strategic Planning & Quality Office spq@uow.edu.au.

6 Benchmarking Projects

Note: This section should be read in conjunction with the Guide to Benchmarking developed to assist staff to plan and undertake a benchmarking project.

Selecting Benchmarking Partners

1. Selecting appropriate benchmarking partners is critical for successful benchmarking. An external benchmarking partner should:
   a. have a commitment to quality improvement and a ‘willingness to share’; and
   b. demonstrate a record of good performance in the area(s) to be benchmarked.

2. For a whole-of-institution benchmarking project, in general a benchmarking partner should also:
   a. have a compatible mission, values and objectives;
   b. be of comparable size; and
c. have a similar discipline mix.

3. In addition to the above, international benchmarking partners should:
   a. have a Memorandum of Understand (MoU) with the University or other agreement, preferably including reference to benchmarking; and
   b. have English as the primary language.

4. While the University is not a member of a benchmarking consortium, it has signed benchmarking agreements with the University of Tasmania (2009-13) and Deakin University (2010-14). The University also benchmarks itself with Macquarie University, Murdoch University, University of Tasmania, and University of Technology Sydney using comparative data available through the Institutional Assessment Framework (IAF).

Project Initiation

5. The Benchmarking Register should be checked prior to commencing a project to ascertain whether similar projects have or are already being undertaken.

6. Benchmarking projects involving a formal request for information from another institution should be approved by the relevant Dean or Head of unit. In the case of any large-scale University-wide benchmarking, prior approval must be obtained from the Vice-Chancellor or relevant member of the Senior Executive.

7. If the scope of the project affects more than one area, then consultation and agreement between the areas affected should precede the project’s commencement.

8. Special care should be undertaken when projects require the sharing of corporate data with other institutions. In this case, the relevant ‘data custodian’ must be contacted and it will be his/her responsibility to ensure that appropriate approvals for the data transfer are obtained from senior management.

Project Management

9. The responsibility for running the project will be with the Unit Head under whose authority the project was approved or his/her delegate.

10. Contact with partner organisations will normally be through the responsible unit Head, unless delegated by him/her. When institutional support is needed for a project to proceed with particular partners, then the responsible manager should contact the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Chief Administrative Officer.

11. Written agreements with other institutions and organisations with which projects are undertaken must be vetted by the Legal Services Unit and signed in accordance with the formal delegations of the University.

12. The University expects that benchmarking projects will be funded by the area that initiates, manages and accepts responsibility for the project. If central funds are required, such as might be the case for large projects, then a submission should be made through the planning and budgeting process. If a case for special funding is appropriate and the timeframe does not permit submissions through the planning and budgeting process, then the unit Head should approach the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Chief Administrative Officer.

13. Benchmarking projects must be recorded by name, type, objectives and outcomes on the UOW Benchmarking Register. These details and, where confidentiality considerations allow, the full reports should be lodged with the Strategic Planning and Quality Office as soon as possible after the completion of the project. The register has UOW-only access.

14. Each year, a summary report on benchmarking projects undertaken by the Faculty/Unit should be submitted as part of the annual Faculty Review Report.
Communicating Findings

15. The value of benchmarking is considerably enhanced if the findings are shared within the University. The University encourages the production of benchmarking reports that can be included in the Benchmarking Register for the benefit of other sections of the University. This includes externally produced reports.

16. Progress towards implementing improvements based on benchmarking projects, and their effect on outcomes, should also be shared and areas are encouraged to submit and discuss progress with similar units, and with University committees, such as the Quality Assurance Subcommittee (QAS) of the University Education Committee, the University Research Committee and the University Internationalisation Committee.

17. Ideally, implementation plans should describe the actions arising from benchmarking reports, including responsibilities, resources and timelines. Progress against these plans should be regularly monitored.

18. Benchmarking reports should be lodged with the Strategic Planning & Quality Office by the areas undertaking benchmarking projects.

Integration with Quality Improvement Systems

19. Benchmarking projects are most successful when they are integrated with other initiatives and processes designed to improve outcomes within the University. Consequently, the University expects that project findings and implementation plans will be reflected in Faculty, Unit and/or committee operational plans and reports.

7 Policy Oversight

1. Overall authority for the development and maintenance of the Benchmarking Policy rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). Responsibility for all operational tasks related to the Policy rests with the Strategic Planning and Quality Office.

8 Roles & Responsibilities

1. Faculties and Units are responsible for conducting benchmarking activities in accordance with this Policy and for lodging benchmarking reports with the Strategic Planning and Quality Office.

2. The Strategic Planning and Quality Office is responsible for monitoring, coordinating and providing operational advice on benchmarking activities.

9 Version Control and Change History

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<thead>
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<th>Version Control</th>
<th>Date Effective</th>
<th>Approved By</th>
<th>Amendment</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>15 October 2010</td>
<td>University Council</td>
<td>First Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21 Dec 2012</td>
<td>Vice-Principal (Administration)</td>
<td>Updated to reflect title change from DVC(A) to DVC(E).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11 September 2013</td>
<td>Chief Administrative Officer</td>
<td>Updated to reflect title change from VP(A) to CAO.</td>
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