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 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.

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 (6 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).

The application

ACODE facilitated a major Benchmarking Summit at Macquarie Uni 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).

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).

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.