

Enhancing Higher Education System Performance

**GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE
BENCHMARKING HIGHER EDUCATION
SYSTEM PERFORMANCE EXERCISE**



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**Guidelines for participating in the
benchmarking higher education
system performance exercise**

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NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

1. This document presents the guidelines for country participation in the *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance Exercise 2017-18* (the benchmarking exercise).
2. The benchmarking exercise is part of the OECD Enhancing Higher Education System Performance project, which is being developed by the Higher Education Team, Skills beyond Schools Division, Directorate for Education and Skills. The guidelines have benefited from discussion and advice from the Informal Working Group on Higher Education (IWG).
3. The document includes:
 - The timeline of the benchmarking exercise 2017-18
 - An outline of the roles and responsibilities of the OECD and participating countries
 - The process for prioritising what to include in the benchmarking exercise
 - A description of the three main phases of the project, and an idea on how the project will evolve after the 2017-18 biennium

GUIDELINES

Overview

4. The benchmarking report [[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1](#)] provides the conceptual framework and information on data availability necessary for the benchmarking exercise to commence in 2017.

5. Each country participating in the benchmarking exercise will receive a report with detailed analysis of the performance of their higher education system. A synthesis report comparing countries, analysing their performance, practice and policies, will be produced at the end of 2018.

6. The OECD Secretariat will be responsible for preparing the *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance 2017-2018* report in collaboration with participating countries and following the guidance from the IWG. The views and advice of countries will be obtained through meetings, webinars, and written communication along the way.

7. The work will be organised in three phases:

- A *data collection* phase, which will draw together the international comparable data and the relevant quantitative and qualitative data and information available at country level.
- A *data analysis* phase, which will involve the metric, practice and policy benchmarking based on the data and information gathered in the previous phase.
- A *synthesis* phase, with the preparation of the final synthesis benchmarking and country reports, where the performance of the higher education systems is benchmarked and a discussion is presented of the overall policy conclusions derived.

8. The following section provides a timeline for completion of the benchmarking exercise.

Timeline

9. A benchmarking exercise will take place every two years, providing up-to-date data and information on a constantly evolving sector.

10. The first benchmarking exercise will start in early 2017, when participating countries will be asked to send qualitative information on their higher education systems and data available at the national or relevant political jurisdictional level chosen to be included in the exercise.

11. The final draft of the *Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance 2017-2018* report is to be completed around July 2018, with publication anticipated in the last quarter of 2018. It is proposed that the main stages in the process are as in Table 1.

Table 1. Timeline

Month/ year	Action
January 2017	Send request for national co-ordinators and teams to participating countries Send guidelines to participating countries Send request for qualitative information on system structure and governance, country policies and implementation mechanisms, and country data to participating countries Collect OECD and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) data on participating countries
February 2017	1st workshop with national co-ordinators
March 2017	
April 2017	Qualitative information and country data due from participating countries
May 2017	
June 2017	Discuss outline of synthesis and country reports at meeting of the IWG
July 2017	
August 2017	
September 2017	
October 2017	
November 2017	Discuss preliminary findings from benchmarking exercise at the Education Policy Committee (EDPC)
December 2017	
January 2018	2nd workshop with national co-ordinators
February 2018	
March 2018	
April 2018	
May 2018	Circulate first draft of synthesis report
June 2018	Discuss first draft of synthesis report at meeting of IWG Commence discussions regarding participation in the second round of benchmarking
July 2018	Comments due on first draft of synthesis report Circulate second draft of synthesis report
August 2018	
September 2018	Comments due on second draft of synthesis report Circulate first draft of country reports to participating countries
October 2018	Circulate final draft of synthesis report to the EDPC to approve publication
November 2018	Circulate final draft of country reports to countries Discuss findings and policy implications from benchmarking exercise at the EDPC
December 2018	Publish <i>Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance 2017-2018</i> Publish <i>Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance 2017-2018</i> country reports

Roles and responsibilities

12. Participating in the benchmarking exercise requires countries to provide a voluntary contribution to support the country-specific analysis and an active commitment to providing relevant information and data [[EDU/EDPC\(2016\)20](#)]. The roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the participating country are set out in Table 2.

13. In some countries, higher education is, in part or in whole, a regional/ provincial/ state responsibility. Subject to the approval of national authorities, the Secretariat may carry out the benchmarking analysis at a sub-national level rather than the whole country.

Table 2. Roles and responsibilities for benchmarking exercise

OECD	Participating country
<i>Overall project management and responsibility for process and outputs</i>	<i>Project coordination</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare overall project plan and ensure sequencing and completion of project activities within an agreed budget and timeline • Advise the national coordinator on managing critical success factors for the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a national coordinator (and establish a national project team) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ liaise with the OECD secretariat ○ coordinate the collection of country data and feedback ○ ensure data and information is provided to the OECD on schedule ○ provide timely input and feedback to the OECD on draft reports • Conduct regular meetings with ministry/ ministries during the course of the project
<i>Data and analysis</i>	<i>Source of national expertise on higher education</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect comparative data (OECD and other sources) • Collect national data • Analyse data and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and expertise regarding national data and analysis on higher education • Provide guidance on international data and the experience of other countries that may be useful for the country context • Provide background information to the OECD • Ensure the OECD has access to the most recent and relevant data and information

Table 3. Roles and responsibilities for benchmarking exercise (continued)

OECD	Participating country
<i>Communication within OECD and with countries</i>	<i>Communication with OECD team</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain regular contact with national coordinator to ensure common understanding of goals, phases and progress during the project (e.g. via tele- or videoconferences) • Provide relevant and timely information about the project's progress and results through formal channels (e.g. OECD committees) • Inform and involve relevant colleagues within the OECD at each stage of the process • Promote and disseminate key project outputs and outcomes via the OECD's communication platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain regular contact with the OECD team to ensure common understanding of goals and progress in the project • Provide guidance for the design of the project process • Coordinate feedback from stakeholders to the OECD team (e.g. on workshop design or draft reports) • Inform the OECD team of any events which might have an impact on project completion
<i>Drafting and publication of reports</i>	<i>Communication within country</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and circulate draft country reports to the national coordinator for feedback in accordance with the timeline agreed between OECD team and the national coordinator • Draft a synthesis report and circulate it to national coordinators for comments • Publish the synthesis report and country reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide timely and relevant reporting to minister(s) on project progress and outcomes • Ensure relevant issues are discussed and shared within ministry/ ministries • Provide regular updates and information to national stakeholders

Areas of analysis

14. The benchmarking report [[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1](#)] provides the conceptual framework and data architecture for the exercise to undertake the metric, policy and practice benchmarking of higher education systems.

15. Each benchmarking exercise will include a baseline analysis of a range of topics for each of the key functions of higher education: education, research and engagement with the wider world. The baseline analysis will be consistent across subsequent benchmarking exercises, growing in depth and breadth over time.

16. In addition to the baseline analysis, participating countries will be able to select a number of policy themes for a deeper analysis in each benchmarking exercise. The thematic analyses may therefore differ across benchmarking exercises.

Baseline analysis

17. The baseline analysis will cover the three key functions of higher education: education, research and engagement with the wider world. Using the conceptual framework, it will also include an analysis of the full production process from input, activity, output to outcome and indicators that will allow for the assessment of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (i.e. quality and equity).

18. It is not possible or desirable for the first benchmarking exercise to cover all possible topics or metrics. However, the baseline analysis will grow in both breadth and depth over subsequent benchmarking exercises. This will allow a longitudinal analysis of the performance of higher education systems in key areas.

19. The Secretariat proposes the following baseline for the metric, policy and practice benchmarking in 2017-18 (Table 4):

Table 4. Baseline analysis for benchmarking exercise 2017-18

Context	Resources	Education	Research	Engagement
Economic, social and cultural	Economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources • Human resources 	Effectiveness of the higher education system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Equity 	Effectiveness of the higher education system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality • Equity 	Continuing education
Structure and governance		Efficiency of the higher education system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completions 	Efficiency of the higher education system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research productivity 	Technology transfer and innovation
Policies and implementation mechanisms		Participation	Internationalisation of research	Social engagement
		Diversity		Regional development
		Digitalisation		
		Lifelong learning		
		Links to the labour market		
		Internationalisation		

Policy themes

20. Each benchmarking exercise will include a deeper analysis of a number of key policy themes in addition to the baseline analysis. Countries participating in the benchmarking exercise will choose the policy themes.

21. In order to choose the policy themes for the benchmarking exercise in 2017-18, participating countries will be asked to prioritise the policy themes identified in the policies and implementation mechanisms section in Chapter 4 of the benchmarking report [[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1](#)].

22. The criterion to choose the policy themes to include in the analysis is their relevance in terms of the policy priorities of participating countries to meet identified societal needs.

Choice of metrics

23. The choice of metrics to include in the benchmarking exercises should follow a systematic procedure guided by explicit criteria.

24. For the metric benchmarking element of the exercise, the Secretariat proposes to use the following criteria: adequate coverage of all performance dimensions and all stages of performance, quality of available metrics, comparability of available metrics, and parsimony.

Coverage

25. The first benchmarking exercise should cover all performance dimensions where possible: context, resources, and the three functions of higher education: education, research, and engagement. For the latter, it should also cover all stages of performance: input, activity, output, and outcome.

Quality of the data

26. Not all metrics will be of the same quality. When several metrics for each cell exist, the highest quality metrics should be chosen.

27. Preference will be given to data with the following characteristics:

- it is collected in a consistent way across countries
- it has a good sample base,
- it uses consistent definitions
- it uses a transparent methodology
- it is collected at regular intervals

Comparability

28. When several metrics for each cell exist, the metrics with the highest level of international comparability should be chosen. National data should be used only when no international data is available, and to sustain a policy theme deemed of particular interest by countries.

Parsimony

29. From the data mapping exercise (Annex 1 of [[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1](#)]), it is clear there is an element of redundancy in available data for some metrics. A minimum number of indicators should be chosen to adequately represent each stage of performance, as each additional indicator will add less information to the exercise.

Data collection

30. All countries participating in the activity will be required to collect and send a set of information and data to the Secretariat for the benchmarking exercise. This is intended to provide:

- a description of the structure and governance of the higher education system
- a description of country policies and mechanisms to steer higher education
- the data on indicators available at the country level

Principles

31. All information and data is to be prepared within a common framework. This will facilitate the comparative analysis and maximise opportunities for countries to learn from each other.

32. Full use will be made of existing OECD statistical collections, and countries will not be asked to duplicate statistics that are already available. In order to avoid duplication of effort, the benchmarking exercise will also draw upon other work on tertiary education being carried out within the OECD, for example:

- the work of the Working Party on Indicators of Educational Systems (INES) and its networks
- the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)
- the Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry (STI),
- the Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) work HE Innovate

33. The Secretariat will be responsible for collecting international comparable data. Existing international comparable data has been mapped against the performance dimension framework (see Annex 1 of [[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1](#)]).

34. Wherever possible, countries should provide the sources of any data, e.g. legislation, policy documents, formal agreements, research articles, literature reviews, surveys, evaluations, publications, and so on.

35. Where data is provided it should be accompanied by brief notes to clarify the concepts and terms that are used, and the methodology used to collect the data.

36. In order to minimise the burden on countries where material is already available elsewhere, countries are encouraged to use hyperlinks to documents, reports and statistics already available on the internet.

37. Additional information and data sent by the countries is intended for the OECD Secretariat, which will use it in preparing the final benchmarking report.

38. Countries will not be required to duplicate common data and information required by both strands of the *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance* project.

Data and information to be collected

39. Countries will be asked to follow a common template for sending their data. The template will include the following parts:

1. Description of the structure and governance of the higher education system
2. Description of country policies and mechanisms to steer higher education
3. Data on indicators available at the country level

40. A common template to collect data and information on countries' policies and practices will help summarise and synthesise the available material on each higher education system. It will also facilitate the comparative analysis and maximise the opportunities for countries to learn from each other.

41. Data and information on the structure and governance of higher education systems will be common across both strands of the *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance* project. Countries participating in both strands will therefore only need to collect and submit this data once.

Part 1: Structure and governance of the higher education system

42. In Part 1, countries will be asked to provide a detailed description on the structure and governance of each higher education system. This section will include an overview of the higher education system structure; the degree structure and how it aligns with ISCED 2011; admissions processes; consultation process; and the role of the governance arrangements.

43. For non-European countries participating in the exercise, the Secretariat will be collecting information regarding the autonomy of higher education institutions using the *University Autonomy Tool* developed by the European University Association.

44. The University Autonomy Tool does not include information on non-university institutions (e.g. universities of applied science or polytechnics). The Secretariat will seek information on the governance arrangements for these institutions from participating countries.

45. This section is common to both strands of the benchmarking exercise and the in-depth analysis. Countries participating in both strands will only need to provide this information once to the Secretariat.

Part 2: Policies and implementation mechanisms

46. Part 2 will ask countries to provide a description of their main higher education policies and practices, and policy implementation mechanisms, organised by the following common themes:

- Academic career
- Accountability
- Continuing education
- Digitalisation
- Diversification of study provision
- Equity
- Funding
- Internationalisation
- Life-long learning
- Links to the labour market
- Participation in higher education
- Quality
- Regional development
- Research and innovation
- Social engagement
- Technology transfer and innovation

47. Countries may also provide information on other relevant policy areas that are not covered in the areas listed above.

48. Countries will also be requested to send descriptive information regarding the integration of their system in a regional higher education area (such as the European Higher Education Area).

Part 3: Data on indicators available at the country level

49. In Part 3, countries will provide data available only at national level. Data available at the national level was identified in the 2016 survey on data availability (see Annex 2 and Annex 3 of [\[EDU/EDPC\(2017\)1\]](#)). Not all data identified in the survey will be used, only the data chosen by the participating countries to integrate the first benchmarking exercise.

Processes to follow when providing information to the Secretariat

50. National authorities are responsible for the preparation of the information and data to be sent to the OECD Secretariat. Each country taking part in the benchmarking exercise must appoint a national co-ordinator. The national coordinator should be an official with subject matter expertise within the sponsoring ministry. The responsibilities of the national co-ordinator include managing the data collection at country level.

51. The national authority responsible for a country's participation in the benchmarking exercise may decide to fill in the information and data template themselves, or it may decide to commission a research organisation, a consultant or a group of consultants to do it on its behalf. Whichever decision is taken, the national co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring that the template is completed on time and that they follow the guidelines provided.

52. No single organisation, ministry or group will have all of the information required to complete the template. National co-ordinators therefore need to ensure co-operation between all relevant ministries and agencies, as well as the involvement of key stakeholder groups, such as ministries of finance, labour,

industry, research, science and technology; employers and trade unions; representatives of academic staff; student organisations; agencies responsible for funding and quality assurance; and organisations representing higher education.

53. The country may choose to assemble a national advisory committee comprised of key stakeholder groups. This committee can play an important role in ensuring that a variety of perspectives are reflected in the template. Where a country decides not to establish an advisory committee there will need to be other processes for ensuring that the template information and data adequately reflects the views and perspectives of the different stakeholder groups concerned with higher education.

54. A key task of national co-ordinators will be to consolidate these different perspectives in order to provide the OECD Secretariat with a single, integrated response to the template. The methodology used to ensure the involvement of different bodies in the preparation of the template should be noted in the answer to the template itself.

55. Experience gained in other OECD projects suggests that filling in the template is likely to take around four months to complete. This work will take place in the first quarter of 2017. However, participating countries could start work on the template as soon as they have made the decision to participate in the benchmarking project.

56. The quality of the final analysis and reports is heavily dependent on co-operation of the participating country and the information provided. Copies of (or links to) relevant up-to-date policies, data and information need to be submitted in a timely manner. If a country does not have the information to respond to questions in the template, it is more helpful to the Secretariat if they indicate that there is no information available than to simply ignore the issue.

A note on the time periods to be covered in providing data

57. Countries will be asked to provide information for Part 2 of the template (country policies and mechanisms to steer higher education) that covers a period of time. In general, a period of the last ten years is recommended. However, countries should be flexible in interpreting this. In some cases a more useful picture will be provided using a longer time period in order to capture significant reforms or changes in higher education systems.

An important general point about data

58. Countries will not be expected to collect new data, to conduct new research or to carry out new surveys in order to obtain the data needed to complete the template. The templates should be filled in using the best available data and evidence. Where evidence is missing on particular points this can be an important indicator of areas for future policy analysis.

Data analysis

59. The data analysis by the Secretariat will be an on-going task from the beginning of 2017: first of existing OECD and other international data, and then as data and information arrives from countries.

60. The Secretariat will undertake a literature review to take stock of the policy themes chosen for analysis. The review of the literature will be disseminated as a working paper. It will be used as a basis for informing the practice and policy benchmarking side of the analytical phase.

61. A workshop with national co-ordinators will take place at the OECD in Paris in early 2017 to prepare for the analysis of the data and information provided. The objectives of the workshop is to ensure that all necessary quantitative and qualitative information is gathered, to discuss in detail how the work will develop, and to ensure that the project is delivered on time and with the expected quality.

62. The analysis of data and information will continue throughout 2017, and preliminary results will be discussed at the November 2017 meeting of the EDPC.

63. The analysis will be based on the most recent available data throughout the project. It will therefore be updated as new data becomes available (e.g. when new data is collected through the Indicators of Education Systems (INES) programme each year).

Synthesis and country reports

64. The Secretariat will use the data and analysis to benchmark the performance of the higher education systems participating in the project. The synthesis report will:

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of each higher education system;
- discuss the reasons why some systems are performing better than others in different areas; and
- provide a comparative analysis to the state of knowledge reported in the review *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* (OECD, 2008).

65. In addition the country reports will:

- compare the performance of each country to its peers;
- discuss the performance of each country in different areas in relation to its context;
- offer some policy recommendations based on what the country can learn from the good practices of its peers.

66. As noted in Table 1, countries will be provided with an outline of the synthesis and country reports prior to the June 2017 meeting of the IWG. This will provide an opportunity to discuss how the analysis for the benchmarking will be presented in the reports.

67. A second workshop with national co-ordinators will take place in the OECD in Paris in early 2018 to facilitate drafting the synthesis and country reports, discuss the Secretariat's initial analysis with the co-ordinators, and ensure the project meets the deadlines and produces high quality products.

68. The Secretariat intends to circulate the first draft of the synthesis report at the beginning of the second quarter of 2018, in order for it to be discussed at the June 2018 IWG meeting.

69. The second half of 2018 will be dedicated to drafting and editing successive versions of the synthesis and country reports in dialogue with participating countries, so that final reports are published by the end of 2018.

70. Discussions regarding the second round of the benchmarking project will start at the June 2018 IWG meeting and will continue throughout the second half of 2018, so the second exercise is ready to commence in early 2019.

Beyond 2017-18

71. The strand of work on benchmarking higher education system performance will represent a significant shift from reputational and partial views of higher education performance to an evidence-based, integrative view of higher education system performance.

72. The work will develop in terms of breadth, scope and coverage with time, supported by the Secretariat's work in collaboration with countries and by a systematic stakeholder dialogue.

73. This holistic benchmarking approach will allow for a better understanding of how higher education systems work; the strengths and weaknesses of different systems; and the reasons behind differences in system performance (in terms of the policies and activities of those systems). This will help countries develop and improve their higher education system.

74. The longitudinal perspective, with benchmarking exercises taking place every two years, will enable the accumulation of knowledge over time and help the Secretariat provide policy analysis on higher education based on sound evidence.

75. The accumulated knowledge during the project will be published as working papers, and eventually commissioned papers on emergent topics of interest.

76. In the first instance the initial benchmarking exercise report will provide a comparative analysis to the state of higher education in 2008 when the last OECD thematic review of tertiary education, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, was published (OECD, 2008). Subsequent exercises will permit further trend analysis.

77. The benchmarking strand of work will also be a source of emergent topics for the in-depth reviews strand of work of the *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance* project.

78. The benchmarking strand of work will make use of synergies with other policy fields, such as upstream non-tertiary education; science technology and innovation; employment, labour and social affairs; public governance and territorial development, among others.

79. An interactive online portal for *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance* will be developed for governments, other stakeholders and researchers to use the OECD data and analyses on higher education and engage in the OECD's work on higher education. This portal will build on the current webpage for *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance*: www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/higher-education.htm.

REFERENCES

OECD (2008), *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society: Volumes 1 & 2*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.

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