

Benchmarking university community engagement: Development of a national approach in Australia



Professor Steve Garlick  University of the
Sunshine Coast
Queensland, Australia

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Background

- Balancing trends in performance & 'good practice' in institutional assessment processes
- The AUQA assessment regime
 - www.auqa.edu.au
- A third stream for HEI funding?
- Research Quality Framework (RQF) – impact analysis.

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A national approach to university engagement

- AUCEA
 - 33 member universities
 - www.aucea.net.au
- Good practice & university & engagement studies (2002)
- 2005 AUCEA National conference
- Scan of international approaches
- Discussion paper (2006)
- 2006 AUCEA National Conference.

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Objectives of the benchmarking project

- To foster mutual dialogue between the university and community on issues of local and global importance
- To ensure university governance, management, teaching & research programmes & administration are responsive to community and global priorities & the 'public good'.

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Principles

- Simple, relevant & timely
- Cost effective
- Links to higher order (national) objectives
- Based on well defined, reliable & available data
- Link to strategic planning and QM in the institution
- A balance of self-evaluation and metric assessment
- Involve community in process & report on performance
- Generate improved practice
- A whole of institution approach to engagement benchmarking

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Processes

- AUCEA Conference 2006
- Benchmarking Working Group
 - Three meetings to identify goals, strategies and measures and design pilots
- AUCEA Conference 2007
- Universities Community Engagement Quality Management framework.

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International experiences

- Gelmon assessment
- Holland matrix
- Manchester University
- Scottish universities
- Committee on Institutional Cooperation
- Higher Learning Commission
- Campus compact
- Carnegie
- OECD – *Supporting the contribution of HEIs to regional development.*

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Benchmarking instruments

- University self-assessment tool
- Community perceptions survey
- 'Good practice' case studies.

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Indicator filter

Is the indicator:

- Valid (a logical measure)
- Reliable (consistency in results)
- Easily measured
- Easily understood
- Comparable across all universities (structures, spatiality, etc).

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Indicator filter Continued

Does the indicator:

- Link to other indicators clearly
- Give information about the future
- Enable trends over time
- Apply equitably to all universities
- Measure in a cost effective way.

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Indicator suite check

- Is there balance between subjective & objective measures?
- Is there balance between process & outcome measures?
- Is there sector-wide applicability?
- Are the benchmarks transparent & auditable?
- Do they enable international comparisons?

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Indicator suite check continued

- Is the process practical, 'doable', replicable & affordable?
- Are the measures consistent with sector-wide QA processes?
- Does the suite contribute to higher order objectives (national goals)?
- Are community perceptions well incorporated?

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Strategies

- 18 strategies
 - Staff are engaged in community dialogue in their work
 - Univ supports staff engagement
 - Univ governance is connected
 - Planning documents reflect commitment
 - Policy & process reflect commitment
 - Budget arrangements to support engagement.

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Strategies Continued

- Effective communication mechanisms to inform relationship
- Demonstrated community involvement in university research & innovation
- Teaching courses reflect community contribution by students
- Learning pathways
- Mechanisms for data capture on engagement activity
- Key resource to facilitate whole of university approach
- Community access to university resources.

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Measures

- University HR programs for staff (recruitment, promotion, reward & recognition, etc) & student initiatives
- Evidence in policy & planning documentation (vision, mission, strategy, formal agreements, etc)
- Dollars/ investment (budget recognition, dedicated infrastructure)
- Evidence in research publications
- Evidence in teaching courses.

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Measures Continued

- Numeric (use of facilities & activities, courses with community engagement elements, research co-authorship, collaborative grants, etc)
- Partner perceptions.

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Community perception survey

- Five point Likert
- Two broad sets of questions
- Five point Likert - university accessibility, communication, stewardship, participation, relevance, and leadership
- Two open-ended qualitative questions
 - value and contribution.

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The quality management framework

- Key components
 - A widely shared understanding of the connection between engagement and quality
 - Reviewing current situation – the audit & stakeholder input
 - Goal identification with stakeholders
 - Tools to identify and track indicators and targets linked to key university engagement development priorities and aligned resources and support
 - Implementing actions for improvement
 - Reviewing progress
 - Learning from continuous improvement.

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Piloting the tool

- Six month pilot
- 12 universities
- Data availability, consistency, etc
- Costs.

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Challenges

- Avoiding the league ladder
- Sharpening definitions
- Typologies
- Longitudinal assessments
- Linking to funding & other QA frameworks.

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