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

One page of a document with the following content:

**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.

**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.

**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’.
**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

**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.

**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.*

**Benchmarking instruments**

- University self-assessment tool
- Community perceptions survey
- ‘Good practice’ case studies.
**Indicator filter**

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

**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.

**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?

**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?
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.

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.

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.

Measures continued

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

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.

Piloting the tool

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

Challenges

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