

Benchmarking process overview

Title: Benchmarking institutional teaching award processes across NSW/ACT universities for quality enhancement through collaborative learning.

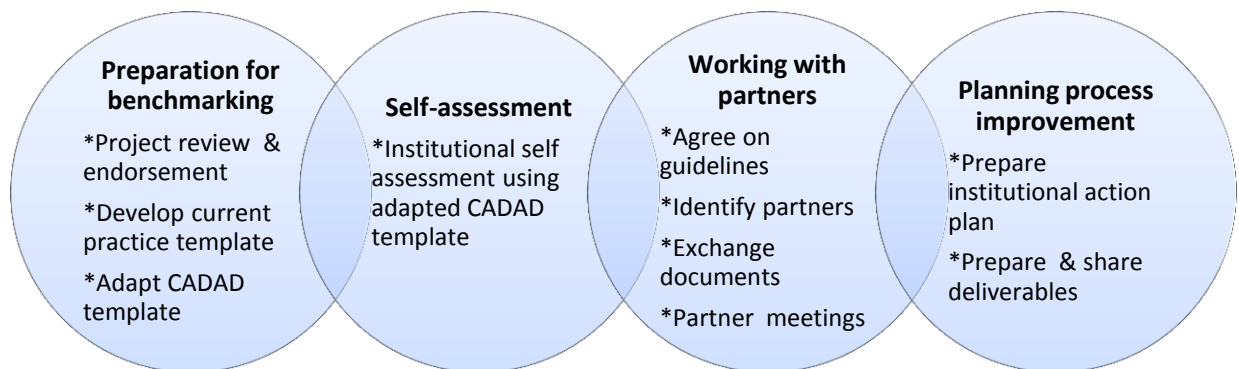
Rationale for benchmarking of award processes: Awards for teaching excellence have become part of the higher education culture in Australia, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the USA, both nationally and within institutions (Shephard, Harland, Stein & Tidswell, 2011). By 1991 approximately half of all Australian universities had some form of teaching award scheme in place (McNaught & Anwyl, 1993) and in 1997 the Australian Awards for University Teaching were established (James, Harris, Krause, Howard & Garnett, 2005). Within the NSW/ACT Promoting Excellence Network (PEN) institutional teaching awards have been established for some time at some universities (e.g., University of Wollongong (2000)). In other institutions, they are a more recent addition, often arriving as an element of the institution's Australian Learning and Teaching Council Promoting Excellence Initiative (e.g., University of Canberra (2008) and UNSW (2009)) (Nagy, Devlin, Brooker, Smeal, Cummings, Mazzolini & Lyubomirsky, 2011). Researchers have drawn attention to the benefits of teaching awards and engaged in scholarly discussion of concerns about the "effectiveness of teaching awards as a means for informing and changing pedagogical practice in higher education" (Halse, Deane, Hobson & Jones, 2007, p. 744). However, the processes that support institutional teaching award schemes have not been the focus of similar scrutiny.

Purpose: This project systematically compared institutional teaching awards processes across the NSW/ACT PEN (Promoting Excellence Network) institutions to improve institutional processes by identifying and disseminating good practice exemplars to help all institutions prioritise resources and to use their resources to best advantage. The NSW/ACT PEN, as an established promoting excellence network characterised by trust and respect among members and a sustained energy for collaborative action and sharing practices, was well positioned to achieve these aims.

Description of benchmarking process:

Four phases of benchmarking were undertaken over a year: preparation for benchmarking, institutional self-evaluation, working with benchmarking partners and planning process improvement and dissemination (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Summary of benchmarking process



Phase 1: Preparation for benchmarking (September 2012 – December 2012)

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Preparation for benchmarking involved:

- Review and endorsement of the project aims and processes. Network members endorsed the project and eleven institutions agreed to participate: Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, University of Canberra, University of New England, University of New South Wales, University of Newcastle, University of Notre Dame, University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong. The Australian National University did not have a staff member supporting teaching award applicants at this time. The University of Sydney was unable to resource a person to be involved in the project.
- Development and completion of a template to record each institution’s current practice and to facilitate later cross-institutional comparisons (see below).
- Agreement to adopt, with minor modifications, the relevant CADAD benchmarking Domain 3 (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) / Sub-domain 3.1 (Grants and Awards) for the current benchmarking project. Table 1 (below) presents the CADAD institutional benchmarking template wording and the Networks’ adaption of that wording (in italics) to increase the applicability of the template to this project. (See below for the complete template.) The rationale for the changes illustrated in Table 1 was threefold:
 - While all Network members were involved in supporting teaching awards, not all were involved in grant support and not all were positioned in an academic development unit.
 - Not all Network members were involved in support for Faculties and Schools. Not all institutions had faculty or school level teaching awards. All, however, were involved in support of institutional teaching award applicants.
 - Time and resources available to the Network could not support benchmarking of both awards and grants processes at multiple institutional levels.
- Establishment of a Dropbox (<https://www.dropbox.com/>) accessible to all Network members to facilitate efficient communication of project documents and collaborative development of deliverables.

Table 1: Network members’ adaptation of CADAD institutional benchmarking template

Domain 3: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Sub-domain 3.1: Original: Grants and Awards Adapted version: <i>Awards</i>
Scope: Original: The ADU actively contributes to the scholarship of L&T. It does this through initiating and/or participating in teaching awards. Adapted version: <i>The institution actively contributes to the scholarship of L&T. It does this through initiating and/or participating in teaching awards.</i>
Good practice descriptor: Original: The ADU supports the institution to develop and maintain a range of institutional awards and

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grants to acknowledge and reward good teaching and to encourage innovation. It provides advice about the possibilities for external awards and grants and takes responsibility for promoting these possibilities across the university as well as for providing support and advice for staff wishing to make applications. The ADU manages a website that provides information and resources to assist staff and leads events to acknowledge successful grant and award winners.

***Adapted version:** The institution develops and maintains a range of institutional awards to acknowledge and reward good teaching and to encourage innovation. It provides advice about the possibilities for internal awards and takes responsibility for promoting these possibilities across the university as well as for providing support and advice for staff wishing to make applications. The institution manages a website that provides information and resources to assist staff and conducts events to acknowledge award winners.*

Phase 2: Institutional self-evaluation (December 2012 - January 2013)

During this phase each institution completed a self-assessment using the modified CADAD template. This involved assessment of institutional performance at each level of practice using the five-point assessment scale and the gathering of evidence to support this assessment. The project members met at the end of January to share outcomes to date and to confirm the process for Phase 3.

Phase 3: Working with benchmarking partners (February 2013 – April 2013)

Working collaboratively in small groups to benchmark institutional processes involved:

1. Agreement on guidelines for working together in this phase.
2. Identification of strategic benchmarking partners. Groups formed on the basis of geographic location to facilitate face-to-face meetings. One group comprised Sydney-based partners, a second southern NSW partners and the third, northern NSW partners.
3. Exchange of documents related to each partner's benchmarking processes and outcomes to date through the project Dropbox.
4. Preparation of a comparative matrix (see below) for each benchmarking group to summarise each participating partners' self-assessment to facilitate the next step in this phase.
5. Attendance at a one day, face-to-face meeting of partners, to discuss the self-assessment process and its outcomes.

Each benchmarking partner chose two or three aspects from their CADAD template institutional self-assessment to discuss in detail at the meeting. Choice of one aspect from each of the three levels was encouraged but not essential.

Each institution took turns to discuss the first aspect they had chosen including discussion of the reasons for their choice of this aspect and for the level to which current practice had been assigned, strengths of the current practice, and aspects already identified as in need of improvement. Evidence from the sources listed on their self-assessment template was woven into this discussion. Questions and clarifications were discussed as they arose. Each institution's discussion concluded with a statement of the level they would like this aspect to achieve in the future. Partners also shared ideas about what this aspect would look like if it were performing at the aspired level, the processes/actions that could be undertaken to attain that level, and what would count as evidence of reaching it (or of movement towards it). The process continued until all the chosen practices had been discussed.

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During the discussions each partner noted 'good practice exemplars'. At the end of the day one member of the group summarised the agreed good practices and uploaded the document to the project Dropbox.

Phase 4: Planning process improvement and dissemination (May 2013 – August 2013)

The final phase of the benchmarking process involved:

1. **Planning process improvement:** Preparation of individual institutional action plans (see below for template) and making these available to others through the project Dropbox.
2. Formation of sub-groups to prepare each of the following project deliverables:
 - **Best practice** exemplars.
 - **Summary** report to the Office for Learning and Teaching and the DVEs of participating institutions presenting the benchmarking process and its outcomes.
 - The project initially proposed to develop an outline for a workshop at the 2013 Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) international conference. In the end, this was not possible as the 2013 conference did not call for workshop proposals. Instead it was agreed to write an **article** for the December issue of the **HERDSA News**.
 - **Report to CADAD** to present the collective reflections of Network members including the opportunities and challenges they faced during application of the CADAD Benchmark Domain 3.1.
3. Sharing of deliverables at a final project meeting, members' evaluation of the project processes and outcomes and exploration of on-going dissemination of project outcomes.

References

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Please use the following text to cite this document:

New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory Promoting Excellence Network (2013).
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Funding for the production of this document has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.