

## **McKinnon Benchmarks Assessment of their Utility & Current Use**

### **Context**

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) audits are scheduled to commence in mid 2001. The constitution of the AUQA is silent on which criteria are to be emphasised during the audit process. It is clear, however, that Universities will be expected to have set and justified the criteria against which they are tracking and improving the quality of their performance. It will be these 'benchmarks' (i.e. checkpoints) that will be used by the University when it prepares the self-assessment portfolio which will form the basis of the audit.

The Benchmarking manual produced for DETYA by McKinnon et al in early 2000<sup>1</sup> is one such source of criteria. It is comprehensive (i.e. it covers the total learning and research architecture of the university), was developed with considerable sector input and aligns fairly well with the Australian Quality Council's Business Excellence Framework and with the ATN Quality Framework.

It would be strategically wise, therefore, for UTS to have considered the utility of the benchmarks contained in the McKinnon Manual.

### **The Request**

The McKinnon Manual identifies some 67 benchmarks in 9 areas of University practice. A summary is appended (the page reference in the Manual for each of these is given in brackets):

An operational definition of various levels of performance for each benchmark is suggested in the Manual at the page indicated - from (1) - low to (5) - high. The focus is, therefore, primarily on criterion not norm referenced assessment.

In order to start the process of identifying useful benchmarks for the required AUQA self-assessment, could you please provide me with a brief report in which you:

1. Identify which specific McKinnon benchmarks are:
  - \* currently being addressed within your portfolio;
  - \* most important to your portfolio;
  - \* most important to the University overall.
2. Suggest approximately what level of performance you believe is currently being achieved in these specific benchmark areas;
3. Identify any key benchmarks which are missing.

It is intended that your response should only be indicative at this stage. The purpose is simply to consider the utility of the benchmarks provided by McKinnon and use the Manual as an *aide memoire* to identify what we currently do.

Should you wish to discuss or clarify this request further please call Geoff Scott on x1316

RJ etc.

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<sup>1</sup> McKinnon, K, Walker, S & Davis, D (2000): *Benchmarking: a manual for Australian Universities*, HED, DETYA, Canberra. Online version available at [www.detya.gov.au/highered/](http://www.detya.gov.au/highered/).

## McKinnon Benchmarks

<p><b>3. Governance, Planning &amp; Management</b></p> <p>3.1 Governance &amp; leadership (19)            3.2 University-wide planning (20)            3.3 Strategic change initiatives (22)            3.4 Equity planning (23)            3.5 Clear lines of responsibility &amp; decision-making (24)            3.6 Core business systems (25)            3.7 Risk management (26)            3.8 Tchg/Research expenditure ratio (27)            3.9 Corporate information systems (28)            3.10 Organisational climate (29)</p> <p><b>4. External Impact</b></p> <p>4.1 Reputation (37)            4.2 Competitiveness (38)            4.3 Academic staff qualifications (39)            4.4 Strategic community service (40)            4.5 Exemplary community practices (41)</p> <p><b>5. Finance &amp; Physical Infrastructure</b></p> <p>5.1 Operating result (52)            5.2 Diversity of revenue (53)            5.3 Liquidity (54)            5.4 External debt (55)            5.5 Quick ratio (56)            5.6 Academic salaries expenditure trends (57)            5.7 Commercialisation: net return on equity (58)            5.8 Strategic asset management (59)            5.9 Recurrent maintenance funding (60)            5.10 Facilities management backlog (61)            5.11 Space management (62)            5.12 Teaching space use/effectiveness (63)            5.13 Large equipment utilisation (64)            5.14 IT &amp; T infrastructure (65)</p>	<p><b>6. Learning &amp; Teaching</b></p> <p>6.1 Learning &amp; Teaching Plan (77)            6.2 Course establishment processes (78)            6.3 Scholarly teaching (79)            6.4 Teaching environment (80)            6.5 Effective academic review processes (81)            6.6 Fitness of courses (82)            6.7 Student progress ratio (83)            6.8 First to second year retention trends (84)            6.9 Equity quantitative success (85)            6.10 Student satisfaction (86)            6.11 Employability of Australian graduates (87)</p> <p><b>7. Student Support</b></p> <p>7.1 Student administrative services (93)            7.2 Student services (94)            7.3 Effectiveness of services (95)</p> <p><b>8. Research</b></p> <p>8.1 Research &amp; research training planning (103)            8.2 Proportion of staff holding NCG OPS, or industry research grants (104)            8.3 Proportion of staff with direct involvement (105)            8.4 Research students' experience (106)            8.5 Research higher degree completion rates and times (107)            8.6 Research income trends (108)            8.7 Research higher degree completions per FTE academic staff (109)            8.8 Weighted reseawrch publications per FTE academic staff (110)            8.9 Impact of research (111)</p>	<p><b>9. Library &amp; Information Services</b></p> <p>9.1 Effectiveness of information planning processes (118)            9.2 Contributions to teaching &amp; learning (119)            9.3 Provision of support for research (120)            9.4 Effectiveness of collaborative alliances (121)</p> <p><b>10. Internationalisation</b></p> <p>10.1 Internationalisation strategy (127)            10.2 Culture of internationalisation (128)            10.3 Balanced onshore international student program (129)            10.4 Financing of the international student program (130)            10.5 Students' exposure to international experience (131)            10.6 Management of offshore delivery (132)            10.7 Overseas links &amp; activity (133)</p> <p><b>11. Staff</b></p> <p>11.1 Strategic human resource planning (140)            11.2 Management of workforce (141)            11.3 Workforce diversity (142)            11.4 Career development/staff effectiveness (143)</p>
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**11/7/2000**

**Peter Rodely,  
Secretariat  
Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee,  
1 Geils Court  
Deakin  
Canberra, ACT 2601**

**Re: McKinnon-Walker Benchmarks**

Dear Peter,

The Vice-Chancellor has asked me to respond to Stuart Hamilton's Email to him on 3rd July, 2000 concerning uses of the McKinnon-Walker Benchmarking Manual.

At this stage UTS has referred in detail to those parts of the Manual concerned with Teaching and Learning (Section 6). We have found the benchmarks in this area to provide a useful set of checkpoints against which we can assess the coverage of our new Teaching and Learning Plan. In addition, the ATN Strategic Improvement Group has undertaken a preliminary analysis of which benchmarks are common to the five member universities.

The University is also currently undertaking a more systematic appraisal of the 67 benchmarks as part of the process of identifying self-assessment criteria uniquely appropriate to our mission and context. This will assist preparations for the forthcoming round of AUQA Audits.

The assessment is being undertaken in each of the University's key portfolio areas. The questions being addressed for each area are:

- a. Which of the McKinnon-Walker benchmarks are currently addressed?
- b. Which benchmarks should be addressed?
- c. What is your current overall assessment of performance against these benchmarks?
- d. Are there additional benchmarks which should be included?

It is anticipated that this process will have a number of productive outcomes:

1. It will make clear to staff that UTS is already addressing many of the key benchmarks in the ways suggested, thereby enabling them to develop an overall picture of what an audit process may give attention to.
2. The process of considering the Manual as a whole will help clarify the unique contribution of different portfolios to overall University performance and help establish the extent to which these are complementary and mutually reinforcing.
3. The process will assist the University in its continuing objective to produce a core set of agreed benchmarks, uniquely suited to its particular mission and context.
4. We anticipate that the process will complement the many other tactics being used to identify the key performance improvement areas which will be the focus of each portfolio development plan in the coming triennium.

We do not see an assessment of the McKinnon-Walker benchmarks as precluding reference to other sources. At present we are assessing the benchmarks used in the NSW Quality Accreditation System for Adult and Community Education, the AQC's Business Excellence criteria, and those used in the Baldrige 'Business Excellence' award process. We are also working closely with the Quality Managers in New Zealand Universities and I will be joining them as keynote speaker at this year's NZ AAU Quality Enhancement Meeting.

A/Professor Geoff Scott,  
Director,  
UTS Quality Development Unit