Enhancing our understanding of the potential of international peer review benchmarking for quality improvement

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Focus areas in this exercise

- Strategies for increasing participation of priority (or non-traditional or disadvantaged) learners
- Provision of professional support for teaching staff
- Teaching quality
- Curriculum quality
- Peer review of assessment
Process benchmarking why is Ako Aotearoa interested?

- Quality improvement and quality enhancement
- Repeated recommendation in Academic Audit reports conducted by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand’s Universities (Cameron, 2015)
- Ako Aotearoa wanted to trial a proof of concept benchmarking process across New Zealand, Australian and UK universities
Benchmarking: why choose this methodology?

- Highly formative
- Compliance requirements are relatively low
- International comparisons add a new dimension to thinking about the work
  - Challenge national assumptions
  - Have to take the time to explain (and think about) context
Recommendations as a result of self-review

• Developed by each institution for themselves

• Tested through the peer review process

• Modified as necessary

• Taken back to the institution for further consideration
Findings - Sample

Teaching Quality

Areas of good practice

Included:
• Resources to share
• Internal teaching awards
• Alignment of internal teaching awards to national awards
• Resources for online teaching
Findings - Sample

Teaching Quality

Areas for improvement/further development
• Reduce the number of strategies (all)
• BCU support for staff with poor quality teaching is a work in progress
• Swinburne is about to commence data modelling to identify unit metrics that can be used for course quality
• UTAS will undertake a mapping exercise with all teaching and learning policies to identify gaps
• VU needs to consolidate and complete work on policy renewal
Findings – common threads

• University strategic plans rely heavily on analysis of internal and external data with some data not available for 3 years

• Lack of consistency between strategic and operational plans

• Partnerships with schools area an important part of assisting students’ transition into university

• Focus on blended learning

• Access to teaching surveys for quality assurance purposes is a challenge

• Importance of external referencing of programs
Findings – unpacking differences

• Language in national policies on equity and access is slightly different: “priority” vs “non-traditional”

• Core professional development programs for academic staff [optional vs mandatory]

• Funding for teaching quality varies across universities [ $70K a year to $3M]

• Consistent use of external survey instruments

• Language is different [courses/programmes/papers/subject/unit/modules]

• Only New Zealand universities have a coordinated process for programme approvals
Lessons learnt

• Understanding the context of each institution is critical

• Unpacking the language in different constituencies has the potential to open up thinking

• Relies on open, collegial, reflective and safe conversation

• Relies on willingness to share good and poorer practice

• Needs good preparation beforehand

• Needs a very well structured workshop process

• Initial framing questions needn’t be too precise.