Effective approaches to benchmarking in HE learning & teaching

Addressing the new quality agenda for Higher Education

Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott
OLT National Teaching Fellow
University of Western Sydney

Key themes

- **Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas**

- **Change doesn't just happen but must be led, and deftly.**

Ensuring we are speaking a common language

University of
Western Sydney

- *Standard* – **a level of achievement with clear criteria, indicators and means of testing**

- *Quality* – **fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard**

- *Learning* – **a demonstrably positive improvement in the capabilities and competencies that count**

- *Assessment* – **gathering evidence about the current levels of capability and competency of students using valid (fit-for-purpose) tasks**

Ensuring we are speaking a common language cont'd

- *Benchmarking* – a structured, collaborative, learning process for comparing practices, processes or performance outcomes ([TEQSA Benchmarking Guide](#)). Benchmarking can be used to prove quality or improve quality and is evidence-based.

- *Evaluation* – making judgements of worth about the quality of inputs and outcomes (including the evidence gathered during assessment)

The new agenda – quality of outcomes & impact not just quality of inputs

- How best to balance growth with quality; access with excellence; mission with market

- A new consumer and demand driven system – 'user pays'

- Increased competition

- Rapid developments in ICT-enabled learning

- Impact of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – call for sustainability literate graduates

- (Re) accreditation requirements give focus to benchmarking and use of a range of external reference points

- Growing government focus on confirming for 'value for money'

The new agenda – quality of outcomes & impact not just quality of inputs

University of Western Sydney

- **Valid course outcomes – the focus is increasingly on assuring fitness *of* purpose not just fitness *for* purpose; on producing graduates who are not just work ready but work ready *plus* (quality is having more than just basic skills)**

- **Who should determine standards & decide what constitutes valid program learning outcomes in such a context?**

- **Flipping not just the classroom but the curriculum**

- **How do we determine *what* should be given focus in this new context and then *how* to make sure it is implemented consistently and effectively**

- **Need to foster effective networking for quality improvement, peer review and networking the networks**

Benchmarking for improvement UWS as a case study – improvement since 2005

University of Western Sydney

- **Overall satisfaction up 25%**

- **Retention up 4%**

- **L&T awards**

  in   **Multiple ALTC awards including Teacher of the Year both 2011 and 2012 & 3 OLT national teaching fellows in 2014 (Nil in 2005)**

- **2015 - 57th in world's universities under 50 (87th 2014)**

- **Commended in its cycle 2 audit by AUQA for its Academic Quality & Standards Framework for L&T**

- **The UWS Tracking & Improvement System for L&T on the AUQA good practice database**
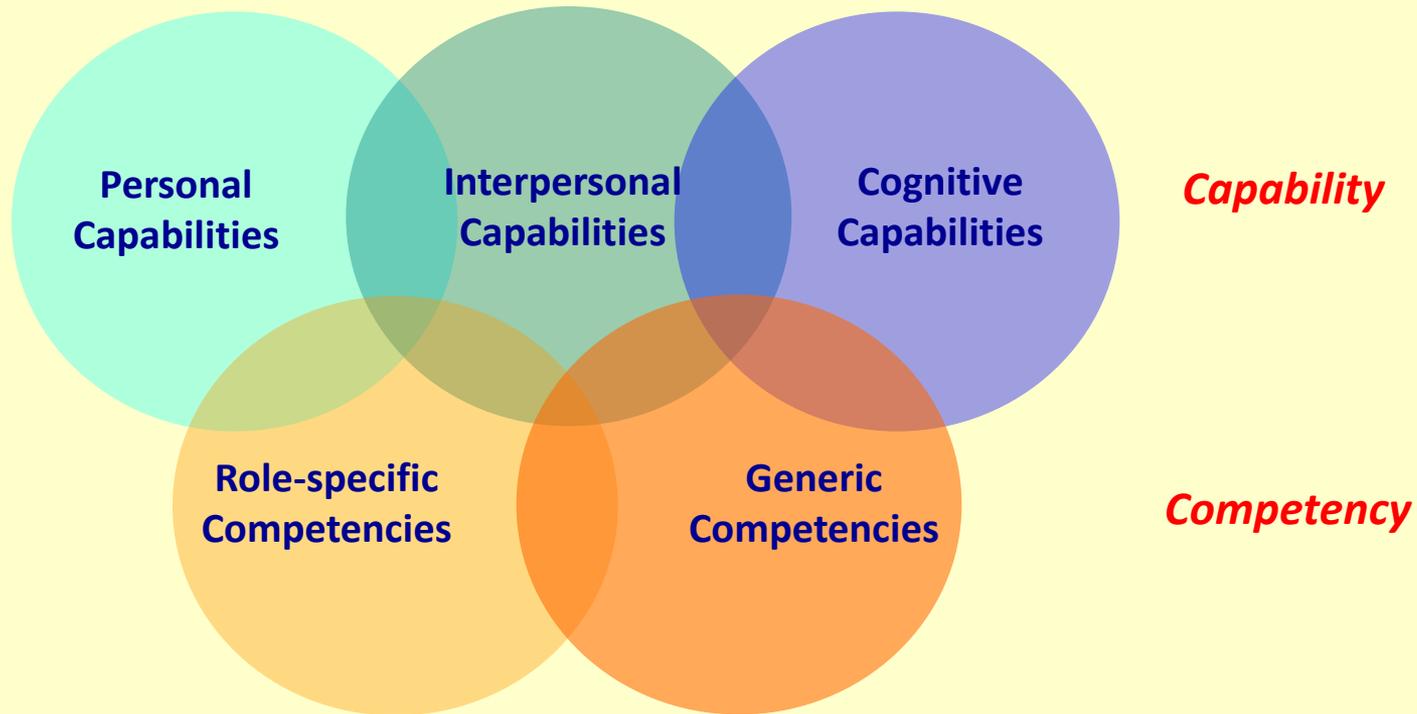
How has this improvement been achieved?

- **A focus on the right combination of 'what' and 'how'**

- **Building a change capable culture**

- **Culture = 'how we do things around here'**

- **Targeted benchmarking to compare and improve quality using a comprehensive & valid L&T Quality & Standards Framework**

Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

1. Design of core activities

2. Support & infrastructure

3. Delivery

4. Impact
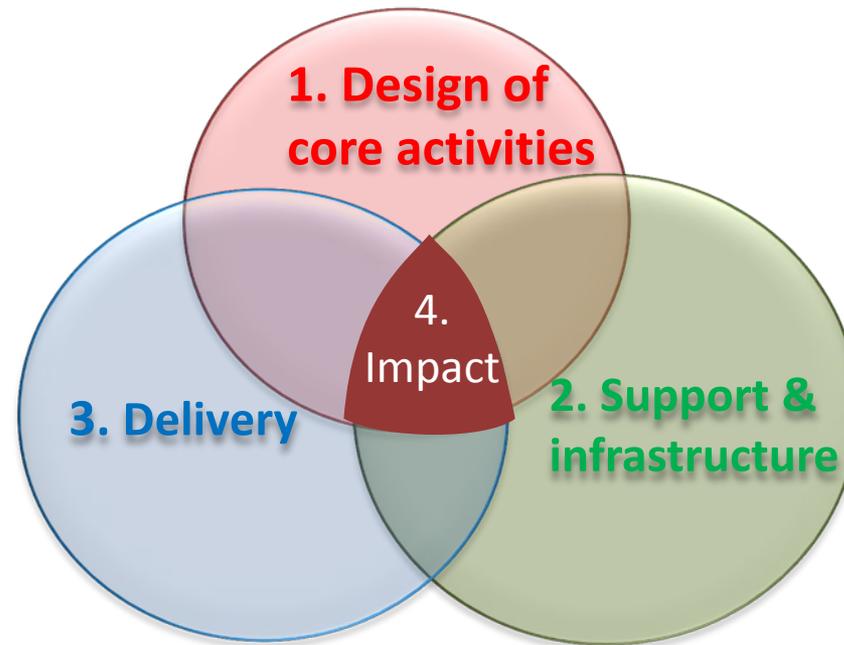
Underpinning governance, strategy, quality management & resourcing system

Ensuring Program Level Outcomes focus on what counts: Graduate & professional capability framework

University of Western Sydney

Personal Capabilities

Interpersonal Capabilities

Cognitive Capabilities

Capability

Role-specific Competencies

Generic Competencies

Competency

Professional capability subscales

Personal capabilities

- **Self awareness & regulation**

- **Decisiveness**

- **Commitment**

Interpersonal capabilities

- **Influencing**

- **Empathising**

Cognitive capabilities

- **Diagnosis**

- **Strategy**

- **Flexibility & responsiveness**

The idea of producing work ready *plus* graduates

People who are not just work ready for today but work ready *plus* for tomorrow (95% of the world's political leaders have a degree). The *plus* can include being:

- **Sustainability literate**

- **Change implementation savvy**

- **Creative and inventive not just 'regurgitative'**

- **Clear on where one stands on the tacit assumptions driving the 21ˢᵗ century agenda, assumptions like:**
  - **'growth is good';**
  - **'consumption is happiness';**
  - **'ICT is always the answer';**
  - **'globalisation is great'.**

Key reference points for validating program learning outcomes: whose voice counts most/least?

- **The Australian Qualifications Framework**
- **The University's mission and its graduate attributes**
- **Learning outcome standards determined by ALTC discipline groups the UK subject benchmark process, AHELO etc**
- **External professional accreditation standards (when applicable)**
- **Results from inter-institutional benchmarking**
- **Academic input, peer review and moderation**
- **Key capabilities identified by successful early career graduates**
- **The results of School/Department Reviews**
- **The learning outcomes for courses of the same name in other places**
- **Employer feedback; input from External Course Advisory Committees**
- **Government policy and funding incentives**
- **What parents, prospective students & others say they want**
- **Plus?**

University of Western Sydney

Benchmarking governance, resourcing, quality management & strategy

Governance

Governing body's composition; QA for this body; TORs, charter and constitution; its risk management system, liability coverage, business continuity plans; valid and effectively implemented and monitored suite of policies for core and support activities with clear accountabilities

Resourcing:

Financial viability, relationships, audited financial statements, income/expenditure, marketing

Governance, strategy, quality management & resourcing standards cont'd

University of Western Sydney

Quality management of all activities

Consistent use of a valid QM framework; tracking and improvement system for core and support activities in place and acted upon; evidence of benchmarking across the sector; third party QA; assurance of consistency & equivalence between campuses; comprehensive and effective review system; assurance of academic integrity; composition, roles, effectiveness of Academic Board

Strategy

Relevant, desirable, feasible & succinct strategic plan covering core & support activities ; all staff are clear on this & their role in implementing its key directions

Your framework for assuring standards & quality

University of Western Sydney

- **What is your framework and where is it similar or different to this one?**

- **Which aspects of that framework do you track and benchmark and with whom?**

- **How do you ensure that staff act on the key areas of improvement that emerge?**

The 'how': key lessons on the effective implementation & continuous quality improvement

- **Effective leadership – PVC (Q)**

- **Listen, link, leverage, then lead**

- **Start with Deans and the data they would find most useful , when they would like it & in what form**

- **Consensus around the data not around the table – - evidence-based decisions**

- **A small number of agreed priorities for action**

- **Accountability & support for implementing these priorities**

The 'how': key lessons on the effective implementation & continuous quality improvement

- **Students informed of improvement priorities**

- **Ready, fire, aim not ready, aim, aim, aim…**

- **Steered engagement around a small number of agreed priorities – e.g. retention**

- **'Why don't we' not 'why don't you'**

- **Change is learning – how staff like to learn is how students like to learn – RATED CLASS A – from successful travellers further down the QI path they are on**

The 'how': key lessons on the effective implementation & CQI cont'd

Learning from others – targeted benchmarking with like universities

Knowing what external auditors are looking for

- **Consistency & equivalence**
- **Outcomes not just inputs**
- **Evidence to back up claims**
- **Action on agreed improvement areas**
- **Understanding where I fit, what has been achieved and still needs to be done**
- **Using critical friends to assess the veracity of your claims**

Evidence-based benchmarking - UWS system for Tracking & Improving L&T (TILT)

University of Western Sydney

- **Items focus on what counts – L&T design and support standards**

- **Importance as well as performance (self-validating)**

- **Clear performance standard of 3.8/5 (70% explicit satisfaction); bechmarked trend data**

- **Qualitative as well as quantitative data (500,000 UWS *CEQuery* comments)**

- **Annual course diagnostic reports & action plans**

- **First class tell students actions being taken**

- **Benchmarking for improvement at the unit level with clear roles**

Effective HE Networks and benchmarking for improvement – the research

- **For video on this see:** http://youtu.be/dyLjGsCgiiM
- **A clear, shared, validated, agreed benchmarking framework**
- **Evidence-based**
- **Mutual interest and reciprocity – collaborative work for competitive edge**
- **Costs of participation outweigh the costs**
- **Sound, senior leadership locally and of the network**
- **Aligned incentives – both intrinsic and extrinsic**
- **Specific focus on engaging 'the disengaged', including sessional staff**

Effective HE Networks and benchmarking for improvement – the research cont'd

- **Clear roles**
- **Use of a nested leadership system in each HEI**
- **Valued for effective engagement with the network**
- **Peer review, support and constructive feedback**
- **Convenient, searchable access to situated, proven solutions to common quality improvement priorities**
- **External network is well located within the internal network**
- **'Lonely Planet' guides written by 'successful travellers' on how they successfully benchmarked for improvement as a key resource**

What next?

- **One key insight you have taken from this presentation**

- **One key area you would like to follow up**

\

Further reading

- **Fullan, M & Scott, G (2009):** *Turnaround Leadership for higher education*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco

- **Scott, G (2008):** *University student engagement & satisfaction*, commissioned report to the Bradley Review

- **Scott, G, Coates, H & Anderson, M (2008):** *Learning leaders in times of change*, ALTC

- **Scott, G (2013): 'Improving learning & teaching quality in higher education',** *South African Jnl of H.E.* 27(2): 275-94

- **Scott, G & Hawke, I (2003): Using an external quality audit as a lever for institutional change,** *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 22 (3)*