A Benchmarking Exercise for Quality Blended Learning. A Challenge for European Universities in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper shares the experiences of 5 universities involved in a benchmarking exercise on e-learning in 2009 through ESMU. A total of 9 European universities participated in the exercise with the purpose of evaluating their existing e-learning practices and policies and getting advice on which areas to improve and how.

Initially, the paper discusses the benchmarking concept and reasons why institutions should engage in benchmarking exercises. Benchmarking is viewed as a method for quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. Self-assessment is involved at the participating institutions, which leads to a high level of awareness and understanding of existing practices and policies at different levels of the organisation. Benchmarking is thus an efficient self-improvement tool.

In chapter two, the planning of the benchmarking exercise is outlined. A combination of an individual, collaborative and expert approach to benchmarking was chosen.

Chapter three deals with the creation of the benchmarking questionnaire which was a collaborative effort between all nine participating universities, ESMU and EADTU. Taking their starting point in the online E-xellence benchmarking tool developed by EADTU, participants reformulated, deleted and added benchmarks within the following six categories: Strategic management, curriculum design, course design, course delivery, staff support and student support. An effort was made to translate the E-xellence questions to the blended learning context of the participating universities.

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