Foreword

Four Universities Benchmarking Consortium

Beginnings

Following participation in the SCONUL Benchmarking pilot projects co-ordinated by Stephen Town (Cranfield University), four Universities agreed to form a Benchmarking Consortium for an initial period of two years. In 2002 the participants agreed to extend this period for a further two years.

The participants are:
University of Derby
University of Huddersfield
Leeds Metropolitan University
Staffordshire University

The partnership between these institutions exists to allow beneficial cross University analysis of processes, statistical information and service outcomes. The objectives of each academic year’s benchmarking programme is mutual support in the assessment and evaluation of service provision and the production of practical comparative benchmarking data.

At the outset all the participants agreed to sign a formal document including a confidentiality agreement protecting individual information from any one institution from being identified to any organisation outside the agreement. As such all the data in this publication are masked behind pseudonyms.

After an experimental period of approximately six months, the partners began benchmarking together in earnest in November 2000. The Benchmarking programme is overseen by an Operations Group chaired by Liz Hart.

Operations Group membership

Liz Hart (Chair), Staffordshire University  Pat Johnson, University of Derby
Carolyn Barton, University of Derby     Jane Keeling, University of Derby
Kirsty Bower, Leeds Metropolitan University  Chris Martindale, University of Derby
Julie Brett, Leeds Metropolitan University  Kathleen Morgan, Staffordshire University
Janice Broad, Staffordshire University     Lorraine Noel, University of Huddersfield
Margaret Cadman, Staffordshire University  Antony Osborne, University of Huddersfield
Lou Charnley, Leeds Metropolitan University  David Potter, University of Derby
Katherine Everest, Leeds Metropolitan Univ.  Francis Upson, Leeds Metropolitan University
Sarah Hall, Staffordshire University       Janet Weaver, Staffordshire University
                                     Sue White, University of Huddersfield

The individual elements of the programme for each academic year are managed by a series of sub-groups. Each of the sub-groups is led and co-ordinated by a particular University with appropriate staff participating from all other institutions. There is no commitment to actively participate in all the sub-groups as it was anticipated at the outset of the agreement that practical difficulties, such as building work or the implementation of new systems, would mean that not all partners within the consortium could commit resources to every benchmarking initiative.
Outcomes and Benefits

The primary purpose of our work was to provide comparative data to support decision making and a process of continual improvement. As a result of the work there were a number of additional benefits gained:

- Establishment of best practice
- Process improvements (large and small)
- Continued evaluation of customer opinion and needs
- Identification and validation of clear trends
- Networking between groups of staff involved in similar operations (quoted by many as “invaluable”)
- Exchange of views (and the generation of new ideas!)
- Staff development including learning new analysis methods such as process improvements and activity based costing (ABC).
- Greater local ownership of processes and tasks
- Changing perspectives about individual roles and also overall purpose (both for library and academic staff and students)
- University recognition by establishing a solid reputation for the active use and implementation of benchmarking performance measurement methods. The work undertaken has proved to have considerable “political” value.

The Four Universities continue to Benchmark each academic year, much of the process having now become embedded in our routine yearly operations. We are also building up a substantial amount of series data allowing us to compare and contrast our operations and services over a period.

In this publication the Consortium has provided detailed information on four projects, some of which have been ongoing for more than one academic year. The Projects are:

- Off Campus Services (led by the University of Huddersfield)
- Shelving processes (led by Leeds Metropolitan University)
- Advice Desk (led by University of Derby)
- Short Loan operations (led by Staffordshire University).

We hope you find the work and its outcomes useful.

Liz Hart, Director of Information Services, Staffordshire University. November 2002
(email: l.hart@staffs.ac.uk)

On behalf of:
Gordon Brewer, University Librarian, University of Derby
Phil Sykes, Director of Computing and Library Services, University of Huddersfield
Philip Payne, Head of Learning Support Services, Leeds Metropolitan University