






**Benchmarking *Institutional Quality Management* against *European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)***

Case Study:  
University of Zadar, Croatia  
May 2012



14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 3



**Agenda**

Putting the benchmarking concept to practice

1. Why? - Aims and functions
2. Where? - Institutional background
3. How? - Methodology
4. What? - Details of the benchmarking experience


14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 4

### 1. Aims and functions

- Comply with ESG for competitiveness in EHEA
- Raise awareness for quality issues within the University of Zadar
- Harmonise quality standards at national level and within individual HEIs in Croatia
- Enhance accountability

### 2. Institutional background


- Assessments organised by national agency attached to Ministry but formally independent (AZVO), ENQUA member
- Process is mandatory for all universities in Croatia
- Legally required for institutional accreditation by the State



### 3. Methodology

- Informed peer-review
- External peers, one international
- Self-report by university, not standardised (!)
- Site-visit
- Benchmark= 100% ESG compliance („developed phase“ of ESG-implementation)
- Report on compliance with ESG
- General findings published in writing and on website
- Detailed recommendations to university possible, confidential

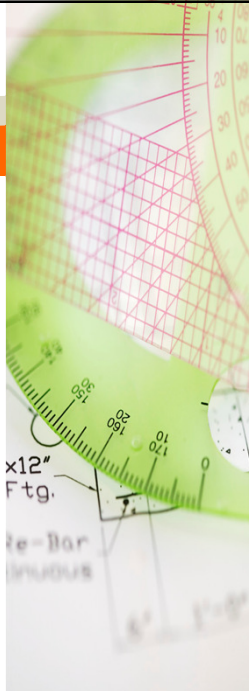
14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 7




### 4. The benchmarking experience

Problem 1: Identifying relevant data

1. Benchmarking data:
  - Types: qualitative or/and quantitative  
input – process – output – impact
2. Benchmarking standards:
  - Sources: external standards (procedures and data)
  - or: peer-group data
  - or: own data (ex post)



14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 8




The benchmarking experience

**Problem 2: Defining the benchmark:**

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance  
= external standard:

- part of Bologna Process (Berlin Communiqué 2003)
- published 2009 by ENQA
- covering:
  - external QA
  - external agencies
  - **internal QA**

14/09/2012	Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens	9
------------	--------------------------	---



The benchmarking experience

European standards for internal QA cover 7 areas:

1. Policy and procedures of QA
2. Appraisal, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
3. Assessment of students
4. QA of teaching staff
5. Learning resources and student support
6. Information systems
7. Public information

14/09/2012	Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens	10
------------	--------------------------	----

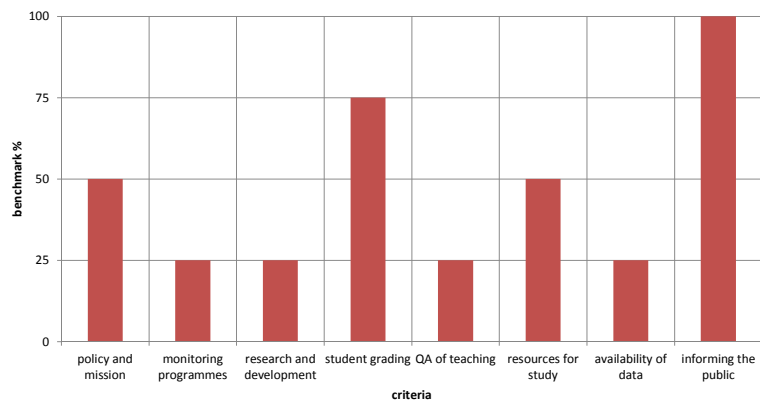
The benchmarking experience


Level of implementation of ESG in 4 Phases:

- I. Preliminary phase: some ideas on QA exist, hardly any measures taken
- II. Initial phase: first steps to implementation
- III. Developed phase: some implementation and stakeholder involvement achieved
- IV. Advanced phase: QA leads to changes, system improved

The benchmarking experience

ESG compliance benchmark by criteria




 impactconsulting

### The benchmarking experience

- criteria for quality exclusively targeted towards processes and procedures
- purely qualitative
- no quantitative indicators
- standards defined as „phases“
- benchmarking understood as a process
- universities and reviewers need to individually determine/agree indicators, both qualitative and quantitative

14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 13

 impactconsulting

### The benchmarking experience

Summing up:

- Purely procedural approach („learning outcomes have been defined“, „level of student support is systematically monitored and fully satisfies student needs“...) does not monitor impact/effectiveness of measures taken
- Benchmarking is not related to strategic targets, risks or previous performance (yet)
- HEI has no centralise strategy (for historic reasons: QA moves from dep. level to university only recently)

14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 14

### The benchmarking experience

#### Problem 3: Availability of data

- Quantitative indicators or standards not required by agency
- Some data available at department level, not coherent with other dep.s, no mutual learning
- No software at university level
- No national standard
- No reward system internally and externally = no incentive to make use of the benchmarking findings

### The benchmarking experience

#### Problem 4: accountability vs. autonomy

- QA (benchmarking) = compliance with State regulations, not used as governance-tool
- Lack of autonomy and incentives (e.g. extra funding)
- Accountability and QA not strategically linked (criteria and indicators)
- No risk management
- No reward system except internal reputation building (if at all)



### The benchmarking experience

#### Problem 5: Relevance

##### a. negative:

- Effectiveness and credibility limited
- Benchmarking need to have consequences to prove it is worth the effort
- Danger of producing report-graveyard

##### b. positive:

- B. triggers initiative and awareness, esp. at dep. Level
- Makes potential for mutual learning visible
- Involves stakeholders = reputation building
- Commitment of (some) staff surprisingly high

### The benchmarking experience

#### Problem 6: Impact

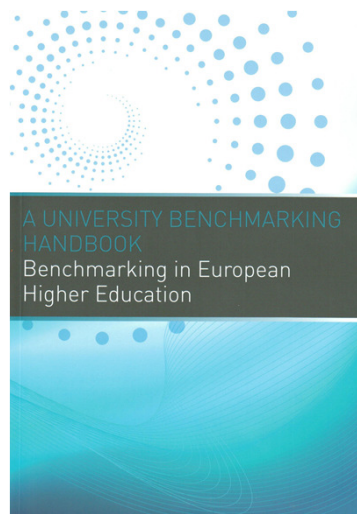
Currently little to be expected, yet may improve if:

- Systematic gathering of quantitative data is made possible
- Responsibility for QA is clearly allocated within university, including possibility to act according to findings
- Effort is rewarded: Benchmarking procedure needs to be followed by action, including sufficient funding
- All criteria and outcomes are completely transparent
- Mutual learning is encouraged
- A common standard/QA strategy is agreed within university and within national HE system

### An alternative benchmarking model:

#### The European Benchmarking Initiative (EBI)

- Benchmarking as a governance tool for universities
- Area of benchmarking, criteria and individual benchmarks defined according to strategic goals
- Based on peer groups
- Modernisation Agenda: EU funded project, 2 phases 2006-2010
- Carried out by ESMU, international expert panel and participants
- Results published in Handbook






European Benchmarking Initiative EBI

4 topics:

1. Governance
2. Bologna reforms
3. Life-long learning
4. Cooperation with business and industry

14/09/2012	Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens	21
------------	--------------------------	----



Methodology (internal steps):

1. Strategic decision (senior management)
2. Identification of peer group as database
3. Allocating funds and responsibilities
4. Criteria and indicators, database, feasibility
5. Setting the benchmarks
6. Data gathering
7. Analysing the outcomes and need for action, targets
8. Action plan: design, implementation, report
9. Continuous monitoring, next benchmarking exercise...

14/09/2012	Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens	22
------------	--------------------------	----

#### Problems:


- Trust/data sharing in benchmarking group
- General lack of qualitative information (avoidance-strategy: preference for procedural approach, good practice exchange)
- Incompatibility of national systems (terminology, governance)

#### Opportunities:


- Benchmarking according to profile
- Benchmarking as strategic governance tool (provided there is room to act accordingly)
- Autonomy
- Flexibility: benchmarking in peer groups, nationally or internationally, conclusions to be drawn individually
- Mutual learning encouraged (indicators, benchmarking process, action)

#### Lessons learnt

1. Benchmarking requires professional management and strategic leadership
2. Benchmarking is an internal governance tool, ranking is a marketing tool
3. International benchmarking is in some areas almost impossible because of incompatibility of national systems
4. Benchmarking is efficient if linked to accountability and risk management
5. Benchmarking must be followed by action
6. Benchmarking works only if there is autonomy and funding for consequences
7. Benchmarking would be easier if there were reliable national/EU-databases to benchmark against

 impactconsulting

Conclusion



14/09/2012 Dr. Christiane Gaehtgens 25

 impactconsulting

[www.impact-consulting.eu](http://www.impact-consulting.eu)