Benchmarking e-learning: The UK experience

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The Higher Education Academy (The Academy) is leading a UK-wide higher education e-learning benchmarking exercise and is keen to work with the sector to describe and monitor the achievement of strategic goals in e-learning and support the development of benchmarking processes and tools. 12 institutions were selected to join the Pilot Phase in January 2006 and in October 2006 another 39 institutions joined Phase 1.

What is being benchmarked has been informed by the contexts and priorities of the participating institutions. The exercise has not been prescriptive about processes and tools at this stage so during the Pilot Phase the institutions selected five differing approaches to benchmarking - see Figure 1.
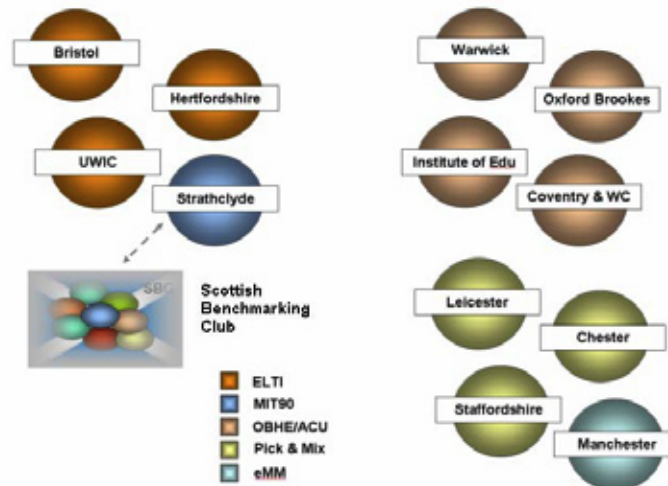

Figure 1: Overview - The e-benchmarking pilot

Some Issues in the Pilot Phase:
- To establish a common understanding, among participating institutions, about what is meant by e-learning, embedding, and benchmarking;
- Following on from this, if e-learning is embedded is it possible, easy, or desirable to try and isolate the exact contribution the 'e' made to the learning? If not, we end up not benchmarking e-learning at all, but something far broader;
- Deciding on the most meaningful organisational unit for benchmarking: is it at institutional, faculty, school level etc?;
- The extent to which the Academy should demonstrate leadership with regard to the direction of developing a diverse approach to benchmarking rather than 'champion' any single approach;
- To evaluate whether the 'constrained diversity' approach taken proved to be the correct one? The view taken was that a heterogeneous higher education sector requires some degree of heterogeneity of approach;
- The extent to which institutions have prioritised development over comparison?

Further information about the exercise can be found at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/benchmarking.htm

Or from the benchmarking weblog at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/weblogs/benchmarking/

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