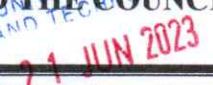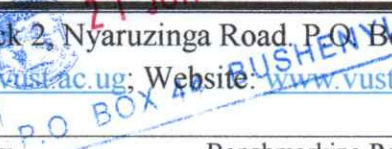# VALLEY UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

BENCHMARKING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

MARCH 2023

This Benchmarking Policy was approved and adopted by the University Council at its meeting held on .16th June 2023

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ABBREVIATIONS

ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	-	Information, Education and Communication
NCHE	-	National Council for Higher Education
VUST	-	Valley University of Science and Technology

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INTRODUCTION

The world of higher education is changing rapidly, bringing new challenges for universities and colleges and seeking of them to adapt to this new world. This creates great uncertainty for higher education institutions in seeking to respond to these changes, uncertainty about the new environment, about the choices available, about appropriate strategies and about the effectiveness of the responses which managers ultimately choose. University benchmarking is an attempt to deal with this uncertainty, and give policy makers and Higher Education (HE) managers a toolkit to help ensure that their strategic decision-making process is as rational as possible. The growth of bench marking in Higher Education reflects the search for continuous quality improvement and more effective ways of improving performance in an increasingly diversified higher education sector.

What is Benchmarking?

"Benchmarking is the process of continuously comparing and measuring an organization with business leaders anywhere in the world to gain information, which will help the organization take action to improve its performance" (American Productivity and Quality Center 1993).

The do's and don'ts benchmarking

In the face of potential confusion, a number of sources have found it easier to describe what processes characterize typical benchmarking rather than trying to define it. Thus it is generally recognized that benchmarking is a means of making comparisons of performance, usually with a view to establishing 'good' or more ambitiously 'best' practice methods, and as such it is also used to diagnose in performance and to identify strength areas.

BENCHMARKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

University benchmarking is a concept adopted from industry, where it has been used in manufacturing and services with great success for over two decades. University benchmarking, however, is currently at an early stage in its development, and there are many misconceptions about its purpose, value, potential and limitations for being a guide to improve university strategic management. Improving university performance became an undisputable issue in the increasingly open and competitive environment in which even public higher education institutions have to find their place. Benchmarking is an internal organisational process which aims to improve the organisation's performance by learning about possible improvements of its primary and/or support processes by looking at these processes in other, better- performing organisations.

The process oriented benchmarking within higher education seeks to answer some of the following questions: how well is the university or college doing compared to others? How much good, and in what areas, does the university we want to be? Across the university as a whole which part of it is doing best, and how do they do it? How can universities introduce into their own practice what is done well in others? How does an institution improve its performance while retaining its unique features? And more competitively in the longer term how an institution might become better than

the best in the context of its own mission? For many in universities such questions will be provocative, 'and a challenge to the traditionally inward looking decision making systems of higher education

Why benchmarking?
There is an increasing consensus that university benchmarking is an important instrument in helping to make higher education fit for the 21st century, and to maximise the contribution which universities and colleges make to their host societies and economies. Benchmarking also serves the needs of individual institutions to learn in order to improve, to change and to manage operations in a more professional way. Ambitious institutions choose benchmarking as a tool for improvement of their international position.

Benchmarking involves, therefore, a self-evaluation including systematic collection of data and information with a view to making relevant comparisons of strengths and weaknesses of aspects of performance, usually with others in the sector. Benchmarking identifies gaps in performance, seeks new approaches for improvements, monitors progress, reviews benefits and assures adoption of good practices.
There are a number of reasons why we benchmark:
1. It helps to establish effective goals and measures productivity.
2. It encourages striving for excellence, breakthrough thinking, and innovation.
3. It emphasizes sensitivity to changing stakeholders (internal and external) needs.
4. It creates a better understanding of competitors and the dynamics of the HEI.
5. It provides a sense of urgency for business process improvement.
6. It ensures that the best practices are included in work processes.

Policy Statement:
Valley University of Science and Technology is committed to providing a high quality education and to a continuous improvement and quality enhancement of its provision by adopting internal and external benchmarking processes and procedures.

The benchmarking policy is designed to fit with the purpose of Valley University's vision and mission. Therefore, the benchmarking policy will have a crucial role at a university level by improving and enhancing both the administrative as well as the academic practices. This will be achieved by examining processes and models at other leading universities and adopting their techniques and approaches whenever possible in order to maintain high academic standards and performance levels.

Purpose:
This policy mandates how Valley University will review and quality assure the standards of its academic programmes and its overall provision through clear and transparent benchmarking

procedures to compare its standing with other similar or leading universities. The policy will be applied in compliance with the internationally recognized Benchmarking Code of Conduct.

Goal

The main goal of benchmarking is to provide Valley University managers with information from an external standard or reference point for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal activities, practices, and processes, to make any necessary changes which lead to improve the overall performance.

Objectives:

Valley University will perform regular internal and external bench marking processes by adopting standardized benchmarking methods and practices to achieve the following:
1. Gain an independent perspective and significant insight about how well it compares to other regional/international universities.
2. Re-examine existing policies and structures and challenge the status quo.
3. Develop and articulate a standardized set of processes and performance parameters.
4. Drill down into performance gaps to identify areas for improvement.
5. Promote a culture of continuous improvement and quality enhancement.
6. Emulate the best performance indicators.

Scope:

This policy Applies to university key provisions including management structures, academic programmes, primary and support services and relevant administrative procedures.

Responsibility:

Valley University senior management and respective offices are responsible for guiding and supervising the execution of the Bench marking policy.

Approving Authority:

The University Council (UC), has the overall mandate of approving this policy.

Implementation of the Policy:

The policy is to be implemented throughout Valley University where the relevant review processes and strategic focus areas are set out along with the appropriate approaches and operational priorities for Implementation.

Monitoring:

The responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the policy lies with the University Vice Chancellor, Academic Registrar, Faculty Deans and any other officers in collaboration with the Quality Assurance unit. Respective reports are to be presented to the management, senate and or University Council (UC) for approval.

The policy will be revised and updated as per the Valley University schedule for revisiting and updating its bylaws and policies or when deemed necessary but in any case not exceeding 5 years.

APPROACH TO BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking is a valuable technique which can be used as part of a strategic improvement process. The key determinant of the success of a benchmarking process is therefore not the quality of the benchmarking activity. Rather, it is the commitment of the institution to strategic improvement, and in particular, to using the benchmarking to identify areas for strategic improvement. Benchmarking contributes to a learning process which helps to give confidence to university managers that they have correctly identified their strengths and weaknesses, to help them understand potential improvements, and to understand whether those improvements have effectively been delivered. Good benchmarking needs to be premised on strong learning environments, at three levels, within the individual institutions, within the bench marking groups, and by involving experts in the development of the group.

At the level of the institution, there are a number of features which strengthen the learning environment and the capacity of the institution to benefit from benchmarking. Higher education globally is going through a process of reform, which creates a set of strategic challenges for institutions: the themes and topics addressed by the benchmarking must therefore fit with the most imminent strategic challenges facing the institutions. There needs also to be a rational decision to benchmark, tied to understanding and improving the position of the institution in a particular thematic area. There must be managerial commitment to the learning and improvement processes, and in particular, a willingness to be challenged by comparing one's own institution against the best. Finally, there needs to be patience, because the learning process as a whole takes time to successfully achieve and embed within a complex institutional environment.

Within higher education institutions, successful benchmarking exercises are grounded on a strong institutional willingness to increase organisational performance, to become a 'learning organisation', to review processes on an on-going basis, to search for new practices and to implement new models of operation. Whether carried out at a unit level (benchmarking a department or a faculty) or at the level of the whole institution, a benchmarking exercise will only produce valuable results if placed in the context of transformation and progress.

Types of Benchmarking:
There are seven main approaches to benchmarking:
1. **Strategic Benchmarking**, which is used where organizations seek to improve their overall performance by focusing on specific strategies or processes;
2. **Performance or Competitive Benchmarking**, a process where organizations use performance measures to compare themselves against similar organizations;
3. **Process Benchmarking**, which focuses on specific processes or operations;

4. **Functional and Generic Benchmarking**, which involves partnerships of organizations drawn from different sectors that wish to improve specific activity or process;
5. **External Benchmarking**, which enable the comparison of the organizations functions and key processes against good practice organizations;
6. **Internal Benchmarking**, which establishes good practice organization wide through the comparison of internal activities or operations;
7. **International Benchmarking**, it can be undertaken internationally as well as nationally."

Benefits of Benchmarking:
- Reflect and Self-assess its performance as an institution
- Better understand the processes which support strategy formulation and implementation in increasingly competitive environments
- Measure and compare to the competition, i.e. how well are other higher education institutions in the sector performing, which higher education institutions are doing better and why
- Discover new ideas, looking out strategically; learn from others how to improve
- Obtain data to support decision-making with new strategic developments
- Set targets for improvement of processes and approaches in order to increase performance
- Strengthen institutional identity, strategy formulation and implementation
- Enhance reputation and better position your Institution
- Respond to national performance indicators and benchmarks
- Set new standards for the sector in the context of higher education reforms

Steps to follow in benchmarking process:

Plan
1. Determine the benchmark target:
Valley University has to determine first the process and/or the activity it wants to improve and the level of change. The starting point for Valley University to set its benchmark target will be the university profile and its capacity, its willingness to change, the availability of resources and data needed. All these factors impact the nature and size of the benchmarking process.

2. Determine universities to be benchmarked:
Valley University will look at competitors it wants to compare itself against by identifying the best universities working in the same filed whose practices can match with Valley University requirements and can be easily adopted and adapted by Valley University. Valley University starts by developing its competitors list, and then selects the best universities which have similar characteristics in terms of profile, size and type of activities as Valley University. This will be more profitable than comparing with totally different higher education institutions.

3. Collect data:
The implementation of this step will result in gathering data that can be used directly from other universities to enhance Valley University's performance. The data will be collected through primary and/or secondary research about the universities, being studied. At the end of this stage the Valley University will have a complete, accurate and relevant data against which it compares its own processes with the best universities.

Analyze

4. Determine the gap:
This step involves analyzing the data collected, discovering to what degree the present performance lags behind the best practice in each area and combining the best features from the best practices into an ideal process. At this point, the differences or gaps in performance between the universities being benchmarked will be identified.

5. Determine future trends:
This step allows setting a target of what Valley University wants to achieve and timeframes for getting there. During this step, Valley University team will examine the past performance in relation to its competitors, forecast potential change and project future performance. Upon completing this step Valley University will have identified the benefits of implementing the proposed benchmarking changes.

Integrate

6. Share results:
To keep the team involved, Valley University will share and communicate the benchmarking information and results with its staff in order to motivate them to carry out changes. This also helps set the standards and show the team what is expected of them in the implementation phase.

7. Establish goals:
This step involves revising goals to close the performance gap determined and achieving consensus on those goals. Valley University will establish clear goals that its management will approve and that all employees will be able to understand.

Action

8. Develop Action Plans:
Develop an Action Plan that works with the goals and timelines that Valley University has established for its team. Use the Action Plan to clarify to each member of the team what is expected of them and the critical success factors associated with these targets.

9. Implement plans and monitor results:

This step involves executing the approved best-practice procedures and the day-to-day monitoring of changes. This step will result in a closely watched process in which deviations from the plan will be corrected and the ultimate goals achieved.

10. Recalibrate benchmarks:

The purpose of recalibration is to adjust and update the benchmarks to assure that Valley University has based and used the best methods and practices in its benchmarking process.

Valley University Benchmarking Practices:

Internal Benchmarking:

Valley University will adopt internal benchmarking, by applying the good practices concept, in order to spread excellence throughout. Valley University encourages such kind of collaboration between units because it leads to exchange of experience and knowledge between staff members. In addition, it spreads the teamwork spirit across the branches and enhances collegiate cooperation among staff.

External Benchmarking:

Valley University will be involved in a number of activities of external benchmarking as follows:

1. Identifying and importing good practices from its competitors and disseminating these practices across its academic programmes and relevant administrative processes.
2. Benchmarking its Examination & Assessment strategies and the relevant practices with that of Higher Education Providers in the region.
3. Benchmarking its students' academic standards in terms of performance (progression & retention and achievements.
4. Benchmarking its overall provision across academic programmes through an annual evaluation process.
5. Mapping of its core practices for expectations with the Quality Assurance standards by NCHE and VUST Quality Assurance Manual in the following themes:
   a. Widening Access to university education
   b. Application, Admission, and registration processes
   c. Course Design and Development
   d. Concerns, Complaints and Appeals
   e. External Expertise
   f. Learning and Teaching
   g. Student Engagement and Achievement
   h. Examination and Assessment
   i. Monitoring and Evaluation of all university processes

Success Factors for proper Benchmarking

1. Determine which areas to benchmark
    a. Is this area aligned to strategic goals in priority areas?
    b. Will a major project in this area deliver significant benefits relative to the costs?
    c. Are there drivers in this area which will sustain energy for the process, and ensure that benchmarking is given priority?
    d. Is benchmarking in this area supported at the executive level and on the ground?
    e. Are there adequate human, financial and other resources to support benchmarking in this area? YES- Continue, if NO- Rethink

2. Determine types and level of benchmarking
    a) Is there broad agreement on the types of benchmarking, e.g. data-sharing, strategy-sharing, evidence-based self-review?
    b) Is there broad agreement on the level of benchmarking (e.g. policy level, discipline level, course level, unit level)?
    c) Is there agreement on the model that should be the basis for benchmarking? If no existing model can be used or adapted, are there sufficient resources to develop and test a suitable new model?
    d) Is there agreement on what is and what is not to be in scope?
    e) Is the scope realistic and achievable by the participants within the anticipated timeframe? YES- Continue NO- Rethink

3. Prepare benchmarking documents and templates including the purpose, scope of project, performance indicators, performance measures and performance data
    a) Have the indicators and measures clearly documented and thoroughly reviewed for alignment to processes and terminology?
    b) Are the indicators and measures aligned to accepted standards and good practice across the sector?
    c) Have participants who will be carrying out the benchmarking, e.g. Faculty and/or professional leaders, had the opportunity to provide feedback to ensure clarity and fit? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

4. Design benchmarking process
    a) Is there a benchmarking steering group?
    b) Have Faculty and/or professional leaders had the opportunity to comment and contribute to the design of the process?
    c) Does the benchmarking process encourage: Engagement? Sharing, both within and across areas? Reflection? An evidence-based approach? Identification of good practice? Identification of areas for improvement?
    d) Does the process minimise demands on staff time? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

5. Implement benchmarking process
    a) Is there an action plan?

b) Have Faculty and/or professional leaders been briefed on their responsibilities? Is there appropriate project management?

c) Are there clear expectations for deliverables and deadlines?

d) Is there a checking process (quality assurance)? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

6. Review results

a) Have Faculty and/or professional leaders had the opportunity to contribute to the review process? Does the review process encourage engagement, reflection and sharing, both within and across institutions?

b) Is the review process designed to produce a clear evaluation, including ratings, identification of good practice and identification of areas for improvement?

c) Is the review process carried out at multiple levels, e.g. faculty level, institutional level, across institutions? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

7. Communicate results and recommendations

a) Do reports clearly identify good practice, standard practice and recommendations for improvement for each area?

b) Within the university, is there a consultation process to obtain agreement on recommendations, e.g. through management and committee structures?

c) Were participants acknowledged and thanked?

d) Is there a process for sharing the benchmarking methodology and lessons learned with other areas of the university? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

8. Implement improvement strategies

a) Are there clearly assigned responsibilities for implementing the recommended improvements?

b) Have future collaborations between the universities been agreed, where this would assist improvements?

c) Is there a process for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommended improvements and their effectiveness? YES -Continue NO- Further development needed

Valley University will focus on its future benchmarking activities into selecting universities that are known to be the best in their class. This helps Valley University to compare its current practices and operations with leading universities to determine current and future trends in its performance.

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