

# CREATIVE BENCHMARKING



**Designing sustainable international cooperation  
in higher education**

**Asko Karjalainen  
Kimmo Kuortti  
Soili Niinikoski**

**Funded by FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION COUNCIL**

Asko Karjalainen

Kimmo Kuortti

Soili Niinikoski

# **CREATIVE BENCHMARKING**

Designing sustainable international cooperation  
in higher education

Cover design	Jukka Savilampi
Illustration	Katri Heinänen
Interior design	Soili Niinikoski
Proof reading	John Cowasji
Printed by	University Press of Oulu 2002
Sales	Educational Affairs and Student Services Maire Honkanen PL 8000 FIN-90014 UNIVERSITY OF OULU tel +358 8 553 4028 fax +358 8 553 4040 e-mail <a href="mailto:maire.honkanen@oulu.fi">maire.honkanen@oulu.fi</a>
ISBN	951-42-6800-8 2nd edition

This book has been produced  
as a part of a project funded by the  
FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION  
EVALUATION COUNCIL



*” To strive, to seek, to find  
and not to yield.”*

Ulysses by Alfred Lord Tennyson



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD	11
ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONALISATION	19
Sustainable cooperation in teaching	24
THE PHILOSOPHY OF BENCHMARKING?	27
TYPES OF ACADEMIC BENCHMARKING	41
Code of ethics	50
THE BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK	55
Choosing the benchmarking partner	59
Benchmarking teams	61
Content of the assessment	64
Planning the contact	65
Collecting the material to be analysed and compared	67
Assessment workshop 1	69
Assessment workshop 2	70
THE BENCHMARKING MATRICES	73
Importance of the student matrix	84
FINAL WORDS	89
EPILOGUE	95

Evaluation of the method – Experiences from three benchmarking cases	97
APPENDICES	107
APPENDIX 1. Example letter to recruit students	108
APPENDIX 2. Example letter to the partner department	109
APPENDIX 3. Example of the summary matrix 1	110
APPENDIX 4. Summary matrix 2	120
LITERATURE	123





# FOREWORD





**H**igher education is a versatile concept. Although the idea of university – and thus the original spirit of higher education – can be traced back to the early Middle Ages and to very few centres of learning, we can today present only a very general definition of the institutional and intellectual realities of higher education. It embraces a variety of scholarly and scientific practices in institutional settings, which are of different ages and traditions. In spite of its relatively uniform beginnings, higher education has evolved into various culturally and nationally characteristic forms, which sometimes seem to bear little resemblance to one another. However, the ethos is the same: the search for new knowledge.

Education in Greek, the early medieval grammar schools of France, the cathedral schools, the scholastic movement, the Enlightenment and the unity of teaching and research by Humboldt are some of the milestones in the development of higher education. We could add the numeric evaluation of learning, which is probably based on the evaluation system of the ancient mandarin schools of China. It is safe to say that today's higher education was born out of international influences, manifested per-

haps most importantly in scholars who have been eager to exchange thoughts and to take up teaching and research outside their Alma Mater.

Keeping with the tradition, we have embarked on what we call “creative benchmarking“ to exchange ideas and to consolidate the international cooperation between the University of Oulu and its partner universities. A customised benchmarking device for international educational cooperation as well as an innovative framework thinking for *curriculum comparison* have been our aims at the University of Oulu for a long time. This book has been written during the international benchmarking project, which started in autumn 2000. The goals of the project were to achieve authentic international educational cooperation and to further develop new kind of benchmarking methodology. We have viewed curriculum comparison within the framework of benchmarking specially adapted for higher education.

Our main aim is to investigate benchmarking and its applicability to curriculum comparison and to cooperation-building in higher education. Through mapping the concept of benchmarking in the higher education context we

have arrived at our own benchmarking (or benchlearning) model for exploring educational cooperation possibilities by systematic curriculum comparison. The “creative” refers to the explorative and inventive aspects of the model, which emphasise the idea of discovering something new and creating new ways to cooperate.

The tools that are part of this model are also introduced and the experiences of the departments that have been using this model are used to assess its functionality. In the pages to come, these ideas are presented as guidance and advice for any academic educational institution that wishes to adapt the idea of benchmarking in developing academic work.

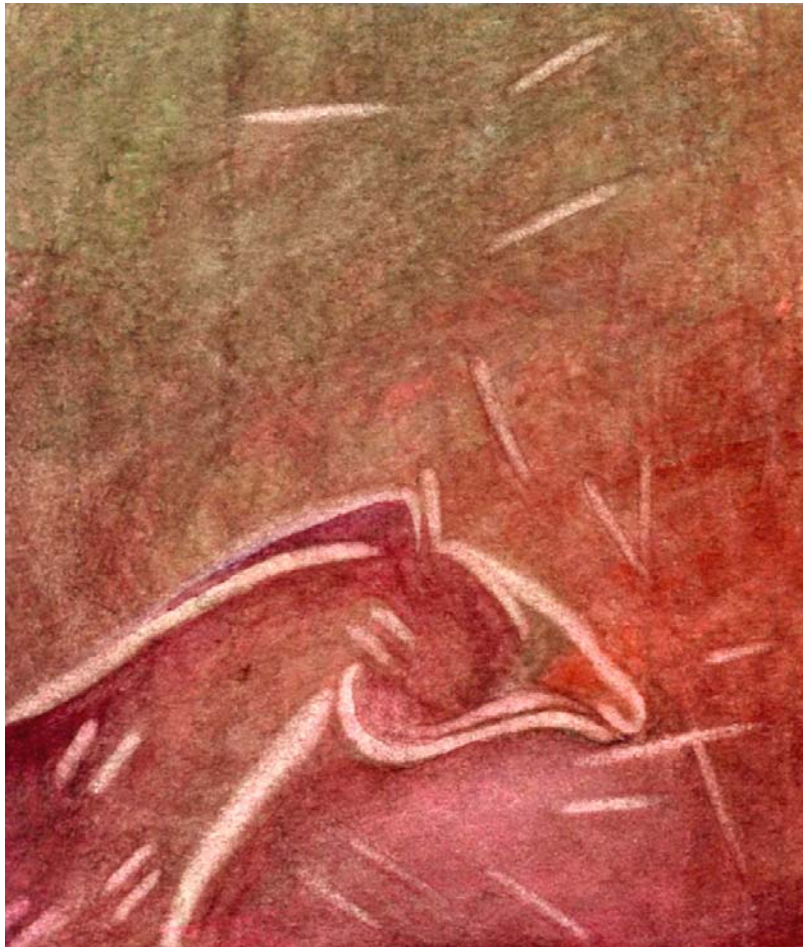
As we talk about benchmarking, we are henceforth not referring to it in a “traditional” sense, but developing the concepts of *creative benchmarking* with its subcategory or methodological application of *creative comparison* and eventually *creative curriculum comparison*. That is how creative benchmarking is put into practice in building cooperation in higher education. The concept of creative comparison is not entirely new. It was first used in a project of comparing teaching development services

in the universities of Oulu and Helsinki in 1997 and 1998. At that time this concept was not explicitly defined, but it nevertheless proved to offer an inspirational dimension in the assessment work. This time we are further developing the definition of creative comparison. One reason for developing the idea of creative comparison is that the traditional benchmarking used in business does not as such fulfil the kinds of development needs universities have.





# ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONALISATION





I  
nternationalisation can be described as a flow of people, values, knowledge, ideas, meanings, economics or technology over borders. Internationalisation is a way to work. It can also be a way to live.

The concept of internationalisation has expanded lately. At first sight, the internationalisation of higher education includes student, teacher and researcher exchange. In addition it figures in the staff development, curriculum development and in the adaptation and profit strategies of the institutions. Finally, it also includes the intercultural aspects of teaching, research and services. Although some of the above-mentioned aspects of internationalisation are products of recent developments, we can say that higher education and an open scientific and scholarly enquiry have always been international.

The most well known areas of internationalisation are still student and teacher exchanges. These exchanges have been growing in number over the past years and this tendency seems likely to continue. As a result, the question of exchange credit transfer has become increasingly important. The recognition of study credits acquired during student exchanges, or credit transfer, is

seen as a fundamental prerequisite in the creation of a comprehensive and open educational area, which imposes little restriction on student mobility. Within the European educational area a system called ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) has been introduced as a tool for credit transfer and recognition. The system offers a rather mechanical kind of common benchmark for comparing study units and transferring them from one European university to another. ECTS facilitates the planning of exchange studies but preserves the autonomy of the university in decision-making concerning credits. Similar systems exist, for instance, in the United States.

The motives behind an individual's decision to study abroad vary from cultural curiosity and learning languages to scientific challenges and long-term career opportunities. A similar variety can be seen at the departmental level where the discourses of internationalisation are manifold and changeable, and include apparent and conscious as well as tacit or even unconscious dimensions. Penninkilampi (2000) discovered several myths and beliefs connected with internationalisation at the universities' departmental level. One interesting categorisation is made between *everyday internationalisation*

and *international activities*. Everyday internationalisation is the kind of research cooperation that takes place all the time, whereas the label “international activities” is used for compulsory participation in various occasions and meetings as well as for dealing with the student exchange. International activities are initiated by the administration and they are resource-consuming activities in the hope of an extra reward while genuine internationalisation is a tool and also an important factor in work motivation.

Following Penninkilampi’s categorisation, we could speak of *instrumental internationalisation*, which are forced exchanges and cooperation agreements made in the upper levels of administration, whereas *genuine internationalisation* is authentic interaction within the scientific community and has a positive effect on teaching and research. If international activities are felt to be a result of top – down internationalisation pressure or an extra burden taking time away from the important issues, their results in view of the whole internationalisation process are not necessarily positive. Therefore, to achieve quality in the international higher education, balance has to be found between academic benefit and instrumental

motives. Based on solely instrumental motives, international activities will undoubtedly be felt to be isolated tasks that burden the teaching staff disproportionately. Unplanned and uncoordinated ad hoc teaching in a foreign language consumes teaching resources far more than teaching that is based on needs assessment and long term planning.

### **Sustainable cooperation in teaching**

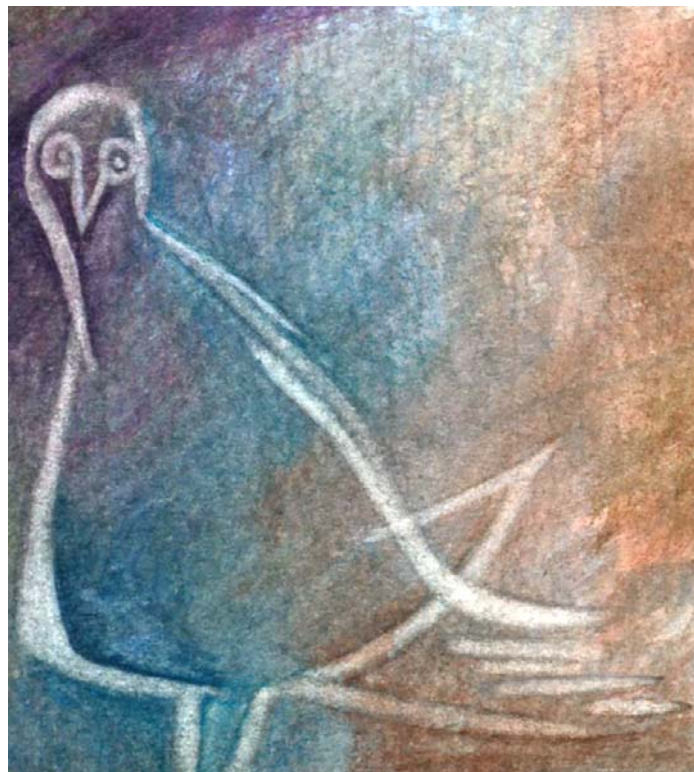
Science can be defined as an open, collaborative search for scientific knowledge within the scientific community. Therefore, the knowledge and expertise in a university are part of the knowledge capital of the international scientific community. If we are to believe what Penninkilampi presents in her study, we should be aiming at ameliorating the premises for everyday cooperation and consolidating natural interaction within the scientific community to promote its internationalisation. Apparently, this should be done so that the individual department and its staff set their goals and state their motivation-finding ways to implement required measures to achieve those goals. It seems that support is needed not only in the form of financial support for the actual mobility, but

also for the planning and defining of the goals and practices of international cooperation. Support services, such as teaching development units, international relations or career services should direct their resources at these processes.

What if every degree programme or department of the university would identify one or more international partners explicitly for comparison and development? Developing teaching is a challenge, which the whole scientific community shares. The exchange of ideas and search for new solutions in cooperation is beneficial to every university and for the worldwide scientific community. How could international curriculum cooperation based on comparative assessment be of assistance in developing the teaching and working culture of the scientific community?



# THE PHILOSOPHY OF BENCHMARKING?





One of the best-known and often mentioned examples of a company using benchmarking in the business world is Xerox, which even in 1979 was using systematic comparison to enhance its operations. Although benchmarking is most widely used in business management, it has also acquired an important role as a developmental tool in the public sector.<sup>1</sup> Definitions of benchmarking are sometimes overflowing with enthusiasm, often technically-oriented and always stressing the importance of competition:

*"Benchmarking is the continuous process of measuring our products, services, and practices against the toughest competitors or those companies recognized as industry leaders."*<sup>2</sup>

*... "the systematic study and comparison of a company's key performance indicators with those of competitors and others considered best-in-class in a specified function"...*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ammons et al. 2001, 101.

<sup>2</sup> Dervitsiotis, 2000, 641.

<sup>3</sup> Camp R C, 1989, 248.

*"Benchmarking involves analyzing performance, practices and processes within and between organizations to obtain information for self improvement."*<sup>4</sup>

*"Benchmarking is a form of a human being's natural curiosity with which s/he explores the possibilities of cooperation and friendship."*

The last definition on the list is our own. The exploration we refer to can also be seen as a form of everyday interaction. Seen from this perspective, benchmarking can be characterised as a form of qualitative assessment that has its roots in the soil of human existence and rational behaviour. Observing your colleague or master at work, comparing your own work with that of another, pondering what the other is thinking and wondering at the peculiar ways of a stranger have always been important for the development of a culture. Similarly, benchmarking, as an explicit method, can be a way to live, a way to survive and a way to develop. However, benchmarking is all too often taken merely as a technical tool. An assessment tool, which is what benchmarking can be taken for, has to be to an extent technical and carefully docu-

---

<sup>4</sup> Stetar J, 1999, 1.

mented so that the data it produces is reliable. This is not in dispute. What we would like to stress, however, are the qualitative and philosophical dimensions of the benchmarking method. Therefore, we will have to ask what kind of philosophy can be found behind benchmarking. Is there a theoretical grounding for benchmarking?

There is no deeply rooted or explicit theory about benchmarking, but instead a huge amount of practical discourse and process accounts. On the surface, benchmarking stories or narratives are mostly success stories of top performers and beneficial effects. Furthermore, there is always a vision with high expectations guiding heroic hunting for the best practices and superior performance. The method in these stories is routinely defined by using the term “comparison“, with of course, a lot of technical variations. We can reach a deeper level by asking what the basic assumptions behind the use of “comparison“ are. What must an organisation or individual unconsciously admit, believe or assume before starting a benchmarking activity? Organisations must, of course, believe that there is some profit value in benchmarking, but how does this belief in usefulness make sense?

The use of benchmarking, in the traditional sense, implies the belief that:

*There is always an organisation where they have a model, which could be the “solution” to your problems*

Is this assumption valid or is it merely a myth? Hundreds of stories supported by empirical evidence are trying to claim it is valid. Great numbers of organisations involved in benchmarking efforts have been able to improve their performance. Benchmarking really works when properly applied. In the more philosophical sense, we can, however, ask whether benchmarking is in fact “nothing new under the sun“. Someone has always already found a solution, which means that when doing benchmarking, we are searching for more or less ready-made answers instead of inventing anything new. This is perhaps what Dervitsiotis (2000) had in mind when he claimed, that benchmarking...“is not the proper tool for a reliable exploration of the future competitive landscape“. A “turbulent future“ calls for innovations and under these circumstances “the usefulness of benchmarking is seriously limited“. <sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Dervitsiotis, 2000, 641-646.

It is possible to argue that the concept of benchlearning<sup>6</sup> gives us the way to gear benchmarking into a more future-oriented method. Benchlearning focuses on creation, the development of excellence and the discovering of new ideas. While the more technical process of benchmarking opens up a channel for acquiring new information and motivates us to explore the processes that need improving, benchlearning helps to incorporate new information and transforms it into knowledge and into successful processes. As can be seen, concepts can be described in various ways and metaphors and therefore we can chart the relationship between the two terms also as follows: First it is practical to do benchmarking (systematic comparison), which opens the doors to benchlearning (discovering ideas). Benchmarking offers a chance to learn. It helps to build a systematic learning environment in the context of which inventions take shape.

We have to raise an important issue to assess the applicability of benchlearning for the purposes of higher education. Is benchlearning implying that we can be less critical, and less demanding in the choice of a partner

---

<sup>6</sup> Karlöf and Östblom, 1993, 180-187.

organisation for a benchlearning process? Learning can be seen as a careful form of invention and therefore:

*You can always learn something new from another organisation, whether they are the best-in-class or not*

Is it really necessary, or even desirable, to concentrate in seeking best-practice organisations? When your purpose is to create something new and unforeseen, any organisation can assist you. And as the old anecdote says: “A fool learns from his own mistakes. A wise man learns from the mistakes of others“. The usefulness of benchmarking may also be related to the level of cooperation and trust between partners, which depends more often on the persons involved than on certain organisational benchmarks. In any case, it is essential to define what you want to develop before you start benchmarking.

Another cluster of philosophical assumptions can be found behind the frequently mentioned motivational reason for benchmarking: competition. Benchmarking is considered necessary for staying alive in competition. To stay competitive a company needs reliable information on what and how other firms are doing. But would it

not be naive to believe that business companies were truly open to competitors: the truly new ideas and best innovations must be hidden. An organisation may compromise its competitive advantage by agreeing to be a benchmarking partner. Yet surely it must be possible that:

*Competitors can cooperate*

If this assumption were false, no one could ever find a partner. Obviously there has been enough mutual benefit between partners. Companies that are not in direct competition are more likely to be willing to cooperate. The problem of competition is much more complicated when we are dealing with the public sector and especially with universities. In most European countries there has not been much competition in higher education. In the United States, where benchmarking was first adopted in tertiary education, the situation is completely different. Epper (1999) offers a very sharp insight into competitive benchmarking philosophy: “Why should colleges and universities care about benchmarking? In a word: competition. While we once knew who our friendly rivals were and could quickly identify them, the competitive land-

scape is changing quickly. Our new rivals, especially those of the digital or profit-seeking ilk, are neither friendly nor respected. They are growing fast, are changing higher education and we can learn from them.“<sup>7</sup> In universities “friendly rivals“ and “respected peers“ can cooperate more easily than firms in business life. The critical question is, however, is it very sustainable to enhance competitive atmosphere in higher education when you could promote cooperation instead?

What if there were a strong cooperative corner stone in our benchmarking philosophy? The next assumption has not been connected to benchmarking until now:

*There is always a partner organisation you could cooperate with and get better results*

In higher education this kind of cooperative insight could lead to collaborative improvement programs and projects, shared visions and unpredictable innovations in teaching and learning environments. We believe that the roots of creative benchmarking are set here. By accepting this assumption benchmarking can be seen as a creative

---

<sup>7</sup> Epper, 1999, 26.

developmental tool for the scientific community. Hence, we will speak of creative benchmarking.

The basis of creative benchmarking resides on one hand in the philosophical connection of systematic observations and learning as described above and on the other hand in authentic cooperation between the partners. Creative benchmarking is a joint venture. Both partners must have a strong will to develop their activities and they have to have a certain level of quality or enthusiasm in their own field (or in a certain area of their field) so that a mutually beneficial process is possible. The premises, then, are more demanding than in conventional benchmarking where certain processes of the benchmarking partner are imitated only to improve one's own performance.

In creative benchmarking the partners are engaged in comparative assessment (leading to a creative process) and they try to recognise those processes that they would like to improve and to cooperate in. It is important to recognise that the partners have different working cultures and possibly different expectations. This can in fact help to recognise those aspects and processes which

in one's own department are lacking, are in the background or do not even exist. Bearing in mind the cultural differences between the partners, we will do well to notice that new ideas and working methods of the partner can seldom be copied but need to be carefully adapted to our own situation.

Creative benchmarking can in many respects be more profitable than traditional benchmarking. Creative benchmarking is more than collecting data and making comparative classifications. In the process of creative benchmarking the partners embark together on developing teaching and building parts of curriculum. The aim is sustainable cooperation through creative curriculum comparison. This establishes new and more meaningful contacts between the institutions making it possible to share important information and experiences in the everyday life of the department.





# TYPES OF ACADEMIC BENCHMARKING





**B**efore we go further, we need to clarify the particularities of creative benchmarking and to make a fundamental conceptual differentiation. Benchmarking in an academic context can be divided into four categories: benchmarking for exploration, for experience, for developmental comparison and for cooperation-building. They can be seen as separate modes of assessment or as interlinked in the category of practical assessment for creative benchmarking. The categorisation is based on the interest of assessment i.e. on how each assessment category is oriented or on what is the focal point of the assessment.

**Benchmarking for exploration** represents scientific professionalism at its best. This means ensuring the reliability of the data collected in the comparison process. The real performance level of one's self is measured as accurately as possible and it is compared to that of a partner. This kind of assessment is close to comparative cultural study and comparative education and we can make a further categorisation between qualitative and quantitative methodology and method criticism. The interest of

benchmarking for exploration is primarily technical and aims for methodological explicitness.<sup>8</sup>

**Benchmarking for experience** is characterised by unprejudiced curiosity towards a strange culture. It resembles a kind of touristic eclecticism. The important goal is to achieve an original individual experience. In this mode the comparison is intuitive and expressive. Its aim is not to explicitly improve the organisation, but to enrich the cultural capital of the person or group who is doing the benchmarking. Benchmarking for experience is not a systematic or carefully prepared measurement, but innocent learning by experience as an individual or as a group. Benchmarking for experience gives new ideas and teaches us new approaches to old tasks. The interest of benchmarking for experience is subjective. The assessment aims at an individual, authentic and often emotional experience.<sup>9</sup>

**Benchmarking for developmental comparison** stresses the point of view of the organisation. The assessment is carried out systematically and it is well prepared. The aim is

---

<sup>8</sup> To see an excellent example of this kind of study: Wan Endut et al. 2000.

<sup>9</sup> This could also be called the travellers' benchmarking method. By this rather unsystematic way exchange students and teachers get many important influences while visiting foreign universities.

to find ideas to improve one's own work. The main challenge here is how to recognise the relevant issues and to use what we have observed and learned to improve our own work. Whatever the objects of comparison, it is essential to apply the findings and good practices of the partner critically, bearing in mind one's own particular context. Benchmarking for developmental comparison is identical to traditional benchmarking. Its interest is pragmatic and more or less selfish. The aim of the comparison is, within the constraints of good manners and ethical considerations, to optimise one's own benefit.

**Benchmarking for cooperation-building** could be compared to a meticulously-prepared negotiation where the building of future cooperation is the main aim. This is the main interest area of creative benchmarking. In this mode the important factors are mutuality, respect and an enthusiasm to create something that together transcends the boundaries of cultural differences. Comparison can be seen as a greeting ritual during which we assess what kind of friendship is likely to develop between the partners. The interest of assessment is interactive and communicative. The aim is mutual understanding followed by a confidential relationship. While the foremost goal of

classical benchmarking is to learn to develop our own performance, learning in cooperation-oriented benchmarking takes place comprehensively in cooperation, which invites us to become more aware of our own actions and learn from the observations with the benchmarking partner. In this model too, discourse of the method needs to be taken to the grass roots level and it should have its basis in the international experience shared by the benchmarking partners. The following figure illustrates the aforementioned modes.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> A cooperative orientation is not very familiar in the benchmarking tradition. In the context of higher education it is nevertheless the most promising one. Epper (1999) introduces “consortium benchmarking methodology”, which has very strong secondary cooperative functions.

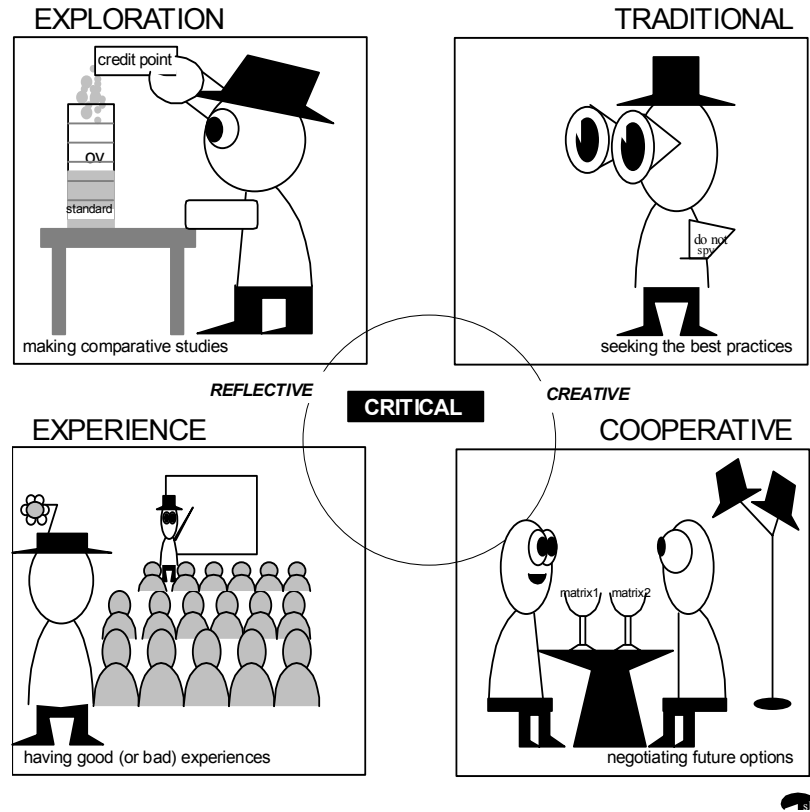


Figure 1. Academic benchmarking

In the middle of this figure we have placed the term “critical“, which describes the intrinsic approach of academic orientation. Scientific process is always critical and questioning. This fact triggers both positive and negative consequences for practical developmental work as well as for comparative assessment. Benchmarking for exploration directs its critical impetus towards the methods of the assessment, which in itself can improve the validity of

the produced information. On the other hand, the critical approach can divert the attention from the meaning of the results to contemplation of the figures and the produced data and endless criticism of the reliability of the acquired information.

In benchmarking for experience the critical attitude is needed primarily to assess one's own presuppositions and prejudices. We are often so set in our ways that we cannot see that there is something to improve. Then, it is time to look in the mirror and ask whether our way really is the best way. In raising the level of self-awareness, a critical attitude is an important factor without which the comparisons risk staying at a level of mere desultory, touristic observations. The downside of the critical attitude can be a doubtful and reserved approach to the modes of action and achievements of the other culture. Excessive criticism hampers learning and limits the range of possible experiences.

In benchmarking for developmental comparison and benchmarking for cooperation-building the critical orientation can be further defined as being creative. More precisely, in benchmarking for developmental compari-

son we observe the partner department's procedures and ways of doing things considering their applicability and innovation potential for our own department and institution. Similarly, in benchmarking for cooperation-building, the critical orientation at best can result in development solutions and procedures, which are novel and innovative for both of the participants. The process of benchmarking for cooperation-building follows the traditional communication path of scientific enquiry: developing and testing ideas collectively followed by new experiments and ideas.

The circle in figure 1 represents a possible methodological outcome of our project in relation to the four orientations described. In the procedural description, which follows, there are aspects and ingredients from all the four orientations. As in traditional orientation, our procedure is very systematic (use of framework, see page 59). Benchmarking for exploration is represented by the qualitative assessment matrices (see page 77), which lay a solid foundation for a further process. Matrices are tables for collecting carefully summarised information including questions on curriculum, organisation of teaching and learning culture, etc. It is important to notice that assess-

ment discourse in benchmarking tends to employ the vocabulary, concepts and discourse of objectivity and measurability even when dealing with a quality or qualitative assessment. Our aim is to develop a truly qualitative data collection tool, which is admittedly challenging. While the basic interest is cooperative, the process includes a lot of information exchange that enables us to identify the best practices. Seeking and adopting best practices is only a secondary goal in cooperative orientation.

### **Code of ethics**

The key to a successful benchmarking project is confidential and transparent cooperation. In benchmarking, where the project is carried out not within an organisation but with another organisation, we always have to consider the ethical questions of collecting information. These issues have merited quite a lot of attention in literature on benchmarking between rival companies. In order to avoid conflicts companies can follow, for instance, the international ethic code set by the Global Benchmarking Network ([www.globalbenchmarking.org](http://www.globalbenchmarking.org)).

In benchmarking for exploration we need not look further than good scientific practice for an ethical code. Along with the questions on the validity and confidentiality of the information we have to ask whether a comparative approach between the partners is viable in the first place. Since benchmarking for developmental comparison shares many features with traditional benchmarking, we can relatively easily apply the code of ethics set by the Global Benchmarking Network. It is necessary to discuss the issue of the confidentiality of the cooperation prior to the collection of information. A simple golden rule is never to ask for the kind of information which you would not be prepared to disclose yourself to the partner. Obviously, no information should be disclosed to a third party without the consent of the partner.

In benchmarking for cooperation-building the rules governing the assessment form an integral part of the work process. When the benchmarking partners share a common interest it is easier to agree on principles for the process. However, due to language differences it is pivotal to assure that there prevails a shared understanding of those principles. Therefore, it is important to stay communicative. This is equally important for the effi-

ciency and productivity of the process. It is important both for the ethical integrity as well as for the success of the cooperation to, for instance, always answer the questions in the matrices according to one's best knowledge and to discuss the answers openly. This lays a foundation for genuine comparison and for the development of sustainable cooperation.





# THE BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK





It is quite possible to practise creative assessment without being systematic or without a plan to guide the process. In such a case the orientation is benchmarking for experience and the process can be described as more of an adventure, the results of which and their applications remain sporadic. However, if we are to obtain the maximal benefit from the comparison and if we are looking for improvement ideas for our departmental practices, we need to plan how to do it.

A benchmarking framework is a project plan or a description of the phases of the project, which helps in planning and carrying out the assessment. The framework also provides a clear description of the process, of the responsibilities of the partners and of the financial commitments. The framework should be flexible so that it has the capacity to encompass unforeseen developments. Its primary function is to serve the purposes of the participating departments. When the plan is made cooperatively, it guarantees maximum benefit for both partners.

The project plan is important because it ensures that all the participants interpret the phases of the project in a

similar fashion and that the goals will be achieved within a realistic schedule. The project plan helps to get an overall view of what the process is all about. When aiming at concrete results it is probably wise to prepare for a lengthy process, but a plan will help to keep the goals in mind and to advance in the right direction. The benchmarking process requires seriousness of purpose and expertise, since vague content and a disoriented approach leave the partners without concrete results to assess and apply. Partners should seek to understand the importance and meaning of the different phases.

The following list should be understood as a simplified description of steps on the way to cooperation. In our benchmarking project the benchmarking framework is used relatively flexibly. We present here the viewpoint of the initiator of the process.

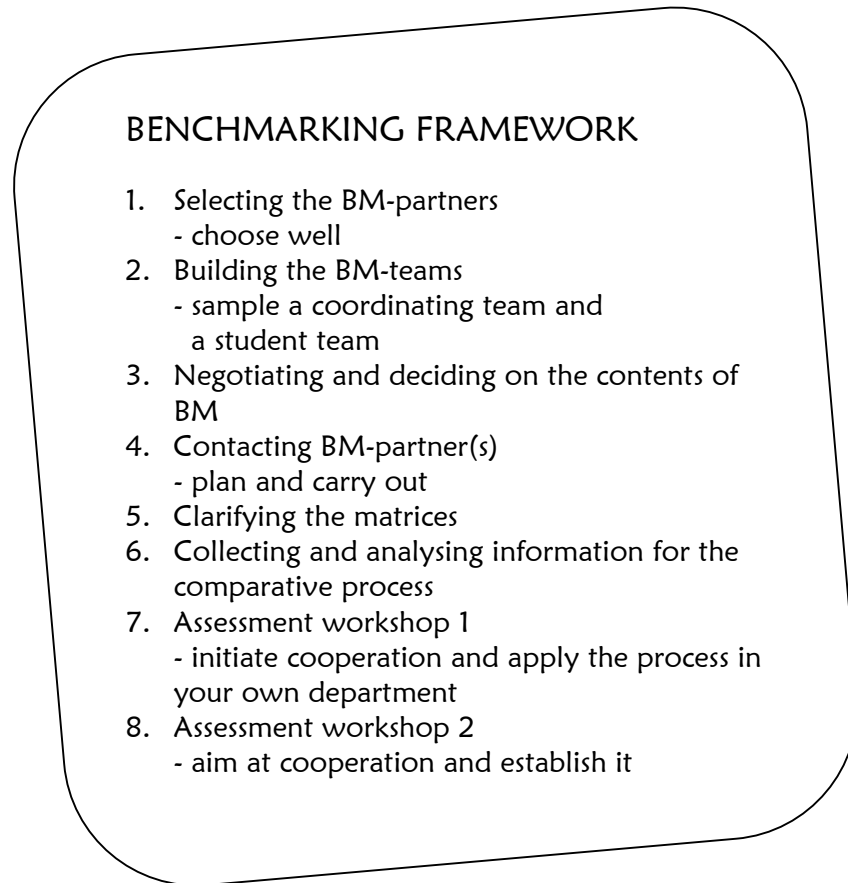


Figure 2. Benchmarking process

### **Choosing the benchmarking partner**

In the first phase of the project it is important to identify the potential foreign partners. This can be done by reviewing the list of existing contacts in staff and student exchanges for both research and teaching. It is possible

that there are several candidates for the benchmarking partner, since the one that you first contact might not see the benchmarking project as necessary or might have financial restrictions to starting a project. In this case, the project needs to be reassessed. It is necessary to consider the other possible partners and to estimate whether the focus of the envisaged cooperation needs readjustment.

Later on, as the initial project has run its course, new partners (who feel that the process is meaningful and suits their goals) can offer an interesting chance for the original participants to review and assess their project so far with the help of the perspective of the newcomers.

The participating institutions should have a vision of the kind of development that they want to start in their own department during or as a result of the benchmarking project. Benchmarking for cooperation-building with creative impetus is about symbiosis, both of the participants must be able to benefit from the results. Thus, there is an intrinsic motivational factor and a reason to be active throughout the project for both participants.

Prior to the first contact, it is useful to collect information about the potential benchmarking partner. The initiating department should make preliminary plans as to the kind of comparative assessment they envisage doing with the partner. A balance between the similarities and differences between the benchmarking partners is one of the crucial elements. Dramatic cultural differences might pose restrictions to the comparison, but a certain level of variation makes the comparison fruitful and interesting.

The benchmarking partners need to be open to new ideas, provide creative impetus, innovate without inhibitions and be open to change. Creativity is needed to build innovative solutions out of familiar and new information. Both partners should demonstrate a genuine will to develop their own procedures; the kind of which manifests itself in the commitment and motivation of all who take part in the project.

### **Benchmarking teams**

After the initial goal setting and the selection of the benchmarking partner, the selection of persons for the benchmarking teams should be made. The first team is

composed of the staff at the department and the second of the students. The teams' composition should be varied so that different kinds of knowledge and experience can be brought together to contribute to the information collected in the benchmarking process. The members of the benchmarking teams should preferably know one another so that they can collaborate efficiently.

The teams each need a leader who acts as the spokesman and who has the authority and control of resources to initiate possible developmental processes. The teams carry out the main bulk of the benchmarking work, communicate with the partner's equivalent teams and collect comprehensive data on the departments for the bilateral comparison work.

The benchmarking project will benefit from an expert in methodology and techniques who can actively offer information about the best practices and act as a support person in the various phases of the project. The expert can be from outside of the department or s/he can be a member of the team.<sup>11</sup> Figure 3 introduces the teams and their responsibilities.

---

<sup>11</sup> In the pilot projects in Oulu we have had a consultant group with three members from International Relations Office and Teaching Development

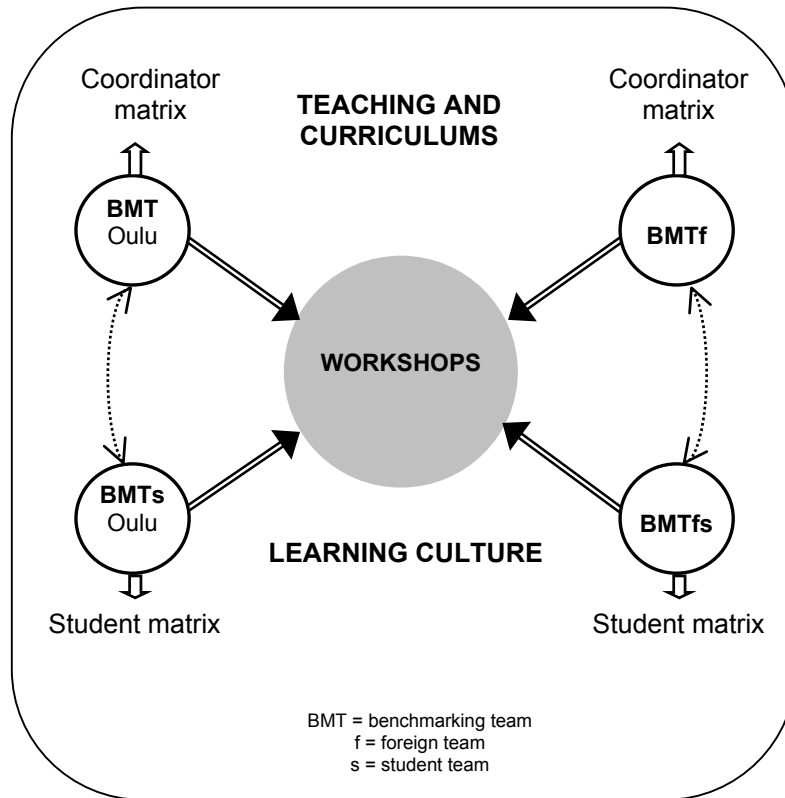


Figure 3. The structure and responsibilities of benchmarking teams

The first benchmarking team is composed of mainly teachers and other staff of the department. The team has 5 to 6 members of whom 1 to 2 are students. The student members can be students who have been to or who

---

Unit. We have offered our help in different phases of the individual departments' projects especially in contacting the benchmarking partners, planning the workshops and negotiating administrative issues concerning cooperation.

are planning to go on an exchange programme to the partner university. Tasks should be distributed among the members of the team so that it is clear right from the outset who is going to do what. Once the team is selected, it is important to clarify the department's own wishes concerning the project and to define the goals of the project and of the cooperation.

The second team is composed of students and can have 4 to 5 members. The student members of the first team are also members in the student team, thus forming an active link to the first team. The student team should be assembled only after the partner has been given the consent to participate in the project, so that the student team can be composed of students who are interested in the partner institution and its offerings. Appendix 1 is an example of a letter sent to recruit students.

### **Content of the assessment**

The third phase of the benchmarking process charts and further defines the areas in which comparative assessment is to be carried out and identifies the areas of development in the department. The potential of the comparison

depends on the compared areas. The areas of comparative analysis should be defined tentatively after the selection of the partner, but their final definition should be made together with the partner as the process advances. The aim is that the content areas of comparison interest both partners. Therefore, the assessment matrices must be flexible and they must be allowed to acquire their final form through collaborative work during the process.

### **Planning the contact**

A thought-out first contact and a clear and organised presentation of the benchmarking project idea offer a good start to the project. The first contact should include at least the following: information about the department and the institution and a description of the purpose and aims of the project. Obviously, knowledge of the organisational culture of the partner would be beneficial at this point. In some cultures it is required that contacts are made at a high level of hierarchy (as well as at the departmental level) whereas others are comfortable with contacts at the departmental and on a personal level. This depends very often on the level and nature of

the autonomy of a department and on individual staff members, but also on the often unwritten rules (a kind of tacit knowledge) governing the notions of what is official and what is the accepted official route to deal with matters.

The first contact, in addition to what was mentioned above, should state clearly and explicitly what is expected of the benchmarking project and what kind of creative comparison is foreseen. Appendix 2 gives an example of a letter to the potential partner department. As mentioned previously, these are merely examples and not necessarily applicable to every benchmarking project. The content depends on the departments' goal-setting and priorities.

The first contact should also include the preliminary benchmarking matrices, which include a tentative structuring of questions. The common knowledge base necessary for the comparison work is acquired through these questions. The matrices give the partner a possibility to estimate the scope of the comparative process while also offering a glimpse at the underlying principles for the cooperation. (See benchmarking matrices page 77.)

### **Collecting the material to be analysed and compared**

Both departments fill in the matrices (in an electronic form, if possible, in order to facilitate their further processing and sending via e-mail). At this point it is possible to redefine the focus of the questions, and to leave out or to add questions. Finally, the partners exchange the matrices with their answers so that both can familiarise themselves with the answers in order to prepare for the first assessment workshop.

Meticulous attention should be paid to the common assessment and critical comparison of the matrices' answers. It is important to realise that benchmarking between partners who are from different cultures and higher education systems will probably face problems. Comparing the answers in the matrices and the kinds of logic and measuring scales used by the partners is not always easy. Therefore, it may be necessary to accept certain differences, but essential to discuss them and to make sure that both partners understand their nature and mechanisms so that the collected information can be utilised in the cooperation process.

Important in the collection of information are visits to the benchmarking partner. In our model visits are integrated into assessment workshops, but there can be also traditional site visits guided with interview protocol. The visits should be prepared carefully so as to ensure that both partners receive the information they want. It is important that each partner endeavours to understand and describe their own processes and the rationale of their departmental and academic performances. It is equally important to become aware of and to formulate the questions that will be asked of the partner during the visit. These questions can be asked in order to clarify information in the matrices or they can include ideas for further cooperation, etc.

Keeping records or minutes of the discussions during the meetings is also important. It is very often the case that innovative ideas and the seeds of future plans crop up desultorily during conversations and their recording makes it possible to reconsider them afterwards, to formulate them further as well as to give feedback based on recorded facts. When organising the visit, a timetable or agenda should be worked through collaboratively between the partners so that both know what to expect

and that both can inform their own department of the visit and can collect extra information if needed.

### **Assessment workshop 1**

In our model assessment workshops are used to summarise and discuss the collected information and to draw tentative conclusions on the basis of comparisons. Whatever the actual content of the workshop is, it should respond to a need. The most important task in the first benchmarking meeting is to go through the information produced by the matrices. It is important to analyse the similarities and differences that come out in the matrices and to cooperatively try to understand the reasons behind them.<sup>12</sup> On this basis the likeliness of fruitful and innovative solutions increases and it becomes easier to tackle the question of possible future options.

The first benchmarking workshop is decisive in arriving at the areas of cooperation in which the project will proceed. Now it is also the time to ask whether the experi-

---

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that each individual question in the matrices should be negotiated explicitly. It is at the partners' discretion to make sure that the answers provided are understood. The purpose of the matrices is to provide

ences and visions of cooperation can include developing a joint curriculum, parts of it or some other kind of long-term cooperation. One tool for creating ideas and recording new perspectives is what we call summary matrix 2, which is presented in appendix 4.

### **Assessment workshop 2**

The task of this workshop is to reach the final evaluation and summary of the project. Since this workshop is the final stage of the actual benchmarking project, it is desirable that the former activity has already set the foundation for sustainable cooperation. After the comparative assessment the partners should now know each other thoroughly, which creates fertile soil for the development of a joint curriculum and also for research and teaching cooperation.

The second workshop concentrates on investigating the opportunities for long-term educational cooperation. If there are ideas or concrete plans about future cooperation, they should be formulated carefully and preliminary

---

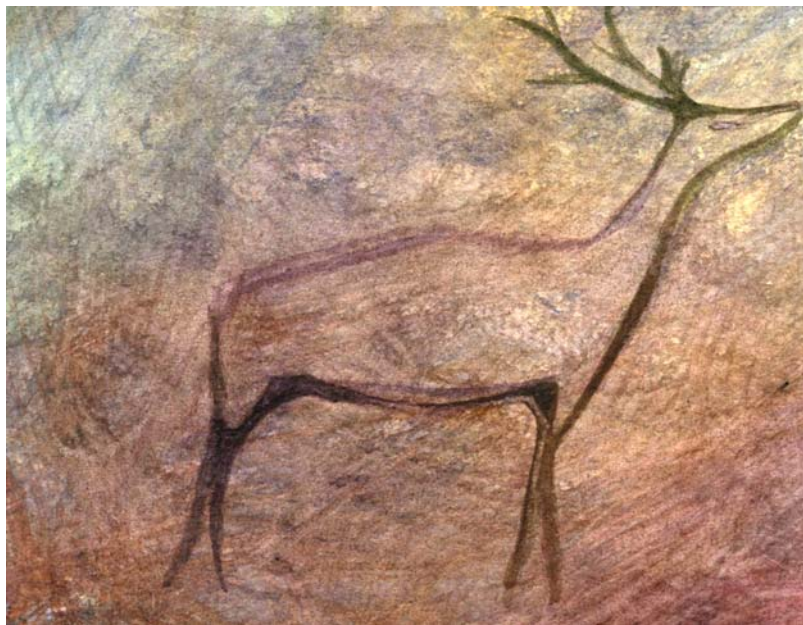
a common knowledge base for the partners so that they are aware of certain basics affecting the planning of sustainable cooperation.

schedules should be agreed on. Future cooperation should function within the existing funding programmes and other financial sources to guarantee continuity.

The experiences accumulated during benchmarking projects are valuable to other departments wishing to develop their education. Therefore, it would be useful at this stage to summarise the products and processes of the benchmarking project into reports, manuals or guidelines of good practice.



# THE BENCHMARKING MATRICES





As described previously, a department participating in the benchmarking project builds two assessment teams with representatives of students and teachers. The most important single task of the teams is to supply the answers to the questions of the benchmarking matrices, so what are these matrices like and which questions do they include?

The matrices are qualitative questionnaires for information retrieval. What is expected in every empty box, is a short carefully thought-out qualitative remark. By using a short and summarised format we can enhance the comparability of the observations.

Both departments (two teams in each) fill in the matrices on the basis of the knowledge that they possess concerning their own department. The questions in the matrices are organised in categories and all the members of teams are supposed to express their view on the issues raised in the questions. The matrix of the coordinator team includes questions on the organisation of teaching, curriculum and teaching methods. The student team's matrix includes questions on learning, learning culture and on time management and personal organisation of studies.

An essential task of the teams is to define and modify the questions so that they suit the mutual aims of both benchmarking partners and truly aid in establishing the knowledge base needed for charting long-term cooperation.

These matrices can be seen as a reflective contribution to the development of learning and teaching in the department. Therefore, it is important that the departments make the modifications they consider important from the point of view of their own goals in the benchmarking project. Naturally, the matrices can be used in their original form, too. Whatever the departments' choice, the answers to the questions should explicitly illustrate and describe the departments' view as well as the institutional aspects that are necessary for an open and functional cooperation. It is desirable that the assessment made through the matrices would develop into a shared learning process between the students and the teachers as well as between the benchmarking partners.

The general content areas that have acted as the starting point for the development of the assessment matrices are presented in the following.

<b>COORDINATOR MATRIX</b>	
<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY OF XXX</b>
<b>1. CURRICULUM</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT XXX</b>
1.1 What kind of study credit point system is used? What is the logic behind the system?	
1.2 What are the key objectives of the education? What kind of vision with regard to the scientific and professional field is there in the core curriculum, in study modules and in individual courses?	
1.3 Are individual courses connected to form larger modules? How is the succession of courses linked with the formation of coherent modules? What kind of well-reasoned and logical connection is there between the separate parts of study?	
1.4 Describe what kind of general scientific and professional abilities are being advanced? What special abilities are emphasised? Are there any particular areas of expertise that the curriculum focuses on? What are they?	
1.5 Can a student design a personal curriculum? How is this carried out?	
1.6 How does the department take into account the credits that are earned from other universities/ institutes of higher education (recognition, transfer)?	
1.7 What is the role of specific professional qualifications in the curriculum? What special qualifications are considered to be the most important? Do the students have (short or long) practical training periods (work based learning) during their studies?	
1.8 What is the role of scientific competencies in the curriculum? What special areas of science (for example philosophy of science, methodology etc.) are considered to be the most important? How much (if any) can students participate in real research projects during their studies?	

1.9 To what extent is research-based latest knowledge included in the curriculum? To what extent are the contents of the curriculum based on the departments own research activities?	
1.10 How is the curriculum being developed and updated? Describe the process of composing the curriculum?	
<b>2. TEACHING METHODS</b>	
2.1 What kind of teaching methods does the teaching staff use and how are they justified? (lectures, exercises, etc.?)	
2.2 What is the role and the importance of new information technology in teaching and in learning? What kind of teaching and learning technologies are used? Is there active distance learning, use of web based learning environments etc.? Are there any virtual university courses organised?	
2.3 What kind of exams and other evaluation methods does the department use? How are the learning outcomes being assessed and converted into grades? What kinds of problems are there in exams and in grading system?	
2.4 How would you describe the quality and the role of interaction between the students and teachers? How much (and what kind of) interaction is there inside the teaching environment and on the campus?	
2.5 What kind of new teaching methods have recently been tested and used in teaching? Are there any teaching development projects under consideration or in present effect? What kinds of projects are there?	
2.6 Can students get credits by participating in the research projects of the department? Do they have the possibility of teaching (officially) or giving guidance to the younger students? How is this organised and credited?	
2.7 How is maximal student participation in teaching ensured? What means are used to motivate students? Is there a compulsory or a voluntary participation in lectures/ practices/ laboratories etc.?	

<b>3. SUPPORT SERVICES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING</b>	
3.1 How is the high quality of teaching enhanced? How does the department make sure that the teachers have up-to-date pedagogical (didactic) knowledge?	
3.2 Does the university organise pedagogical (didactic) training or consultation for teachers in order to support the development of their teaching skills? How is this training organised? Are the teachers willing to participate in it?	
3.3 What kind of support is provided to teachers to produce quality learning material?	
3.4 How does the department support the development of the information technology skills of teachers?	
3.5 In what way are the new students acquainted with the department and with studying practices/ how does the department secure the optimal start of studies? Are there any special activities (tutoring, study skill courses etc.) for the first year students?	
3.6 How is the tutoring or other academic supervision organised during the studies?	
3.7 Are mentors or other outside experts used in student counselling?	
3.8 In what way are the students guided in efficient learning techniques, in relevant choices made with subjects and in study options during studies?	
3.9 How is the guidance of graduate theses organised? How long does it take for a student to do his/her thesis for a Masters degree?	
3.10 How are the different kinds of support services for quality teaching organised? Is there a teaching development unit or other permanent support services in the university, faculty or department?	
<b>4. QUALITY ASSURANCE</b>	

4.1 How does one monitor the progress of students in their studies? How are the functionality and the quality of the degree programme assessed?	
4.2 What kind of course evaluation is executed? Does the department collect student feedback? How is the feedback analysed and used to improve teaching and learning?	
4.3 In what way does the department utilise information technology in the collection and processing of student feedback?	
4.4 Do the educational courses offered have national or international accreditation? How is the accreditation or other public recognition of education carried out?	
4.5 Does the university/ faculty/ department use permanent quality assessment systems of teaching? What kinds of assessment methods (self-assessment, external assessment, etc.) do the above-mentioned systems include? How is the information processed and how is it used to develop the quality of teaching? Describe the structure and the functionality of the quality assurance of teaching?	
4.6 What development needs are there in the quality assurance system? How are the quality assurance activities assessed and developed?	
<b>5. INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION</b>	
5.1 What kind of internationalisation strategy for teaching is there in your degree programme/ department? How are the internationalisation of teaching and internationalisation of research interlinked?	
5.2 How enthusiastic are teachers about international teaching (teaching in foreign language)?	
5.3 Are the study programmes open to both domestic and foreign students? Do the exchange students have special tailor-made studies? In what languages are those studies being carried out?	
5.4 How is the internationalisation of teaching and learning utilised in the development of teaching?	

5.5 How do the teaching methods and teaching arrangements stimulate domestic and foreign students into collaboration?	
5.6 Describe the opportunities for students to perform practical training abroad?	
5.7 Is there an orientation (an introduction course of the local language and culture) for the incoming foreign students at the beginning of their stay? How is this counselling carried out?	
<b>6. OTHER</b>	

<b>STUDENT MATRIX</b>	
<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY OF XXX</b>
<b>1. LEARNING CULTURE</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT XXX</b>
1.1 What kind of working conditions do the students have? Describe the learning facilities (computers, libraries, lecture halls, etc.)? How user-friendly/ accessible/ modern are they?	
1.2 Describe the quality of learning materials and its accessibility? Is the material easily understandable? What kind of material costs (if any) will a student have?	
1.3 Describe the studying process? How important is it to participate in lectures and other contact-teaching situations? How many hours per day (in average) do the students have to do self-directed work (tasks, reading etc.) outside the classroom?	
1.4 Are there any study-related organised or spontaneous study group or study circle activities in the student community?	
1.5 What kind of team spirit is there between the students? Are there special social activities? What kinds of subject-specific	

clubs, students' associations or guild activities are there? To what extent are the activities connected to studies, and to what extent are they connected to hobbies and leisure time?	
1.6 Is the student appreciated as a competent (novice) member of the scientific community? How can this be seen? Is there some kind of "academic freedom" in studying?	
1.7 What are the problem areas in student work and in the learning environment?	
<b>2. QUALITY ASSURANCE</b>	
2.1 In what way can a student influence teaching arrangements and the development of teaching?	
2.2 Describe the student satisfaction in teaching and learning?	
2.3 Is student feedback collected systematically? How is it analysed and used?	
2.4 What kind of course evaluation systems does the department use? Do they work? Are they useful? (grading scale, exams, exercises, participation, etc.)	
<b>3. STUDENT WORK</b>	
3.1 Evaluate the self-directedness of students? What kind of attitude do the students have toward their studies and the quality of learning? How willing are the students to make an effort to learn things well?	
3.2 Describe the role of a student in teaching situation? Does the student have an active or a passive role? Is she/he a humble listener or a critical opponent?	
3.3 How common is it for students to work during their studies? How do students finance their studies?	
3.4 What is the normal daily schedule of students? (timing of lectures, etc.)	
3.5 Are there delays in graduation? What are the reasons behind it?	
3.6 How much leisure time do the students have? What kinds of leisure activities are there for students?	

<b>4. TEACHING</b>	
4.1 Describe the quality of teachers and teaching?	
4.2 How do the students experience the different teaching methods? Are some methods felt to be more useful than others, while some others are more laborious etc.?	
4.3 Does the department actively use new information technology and new learning environments (for example web-based) in teaching? Do the students consider it to be useful?	
4.4 How would you describe the quality of interaction between the teachers and the students?	
4.5 Define the typical role and responsibilities of a teacher and a student in teaching and learning situations?	
<b>5. SUPPORT SERVICES OF LEARNING AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION</b>	
5.1 What kind of academic counselling and tutoring are organised for students? Are they functioning and useful?	
5.2 What other student support services are used? How satisfied are students with them?	
5.3 How does the department support the development of students' information technology skills?	
<b>6. SUPPORT SERVICES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS</b>	
6.1 How does the university organise the accommodation of foreign students? (How is it coordinated, managed?)	
6.2 What kind of academic supervision and counselling are there for foreign students?	
6.3 How is tutoring or other academic supervision organised for foreign students during their studies?	
6.4 What kind of leisure activities does the university organise for foreign students?	
6.5 Do the exchange students have to give feedback? If yes, how is the feedback analysed and used for improving purposes?	

<b>7. OTHER</b>	

### **Importance of the student matrix**

Students should always have a central role in assessing the quality of teaching. Since teaching is ultimately designed and carried out in order to advance and enhance learning, students are in this creative comparison process considered as equals with the other actors. When the matrices are filled in with proper attention they can be revelatory of developmental areas in teaching, its organisation and methods. By taking heed of students' opinions, it is possible also to enhance the motivational and social factors affecting students' performance.

The assessment process of the student matrices requires enthusiastic participants who are willing to sacrifice a considerable amount of work for this project. Therefore, it may be a good idea to incorporate the student work required for the project into their studies either in the regular requirements or as a part of their exchange requirements.

The matrices, which both teams begin to fill in during the first phase, can be called raw matrices. In the second phase, as preparatory work for the workshop 1, those raw matrices are brought together. What we now get is the summary matrix 1. At this phase the usefulness of the matrix format comes to a test. It is easy and illustrative to make comparative observations and to raise relevant questions, when remarks of both organisations are on the same line. During workshop 1 the participants can compile their notes, observations and ideas onto the sheet we call summary matrix 2.

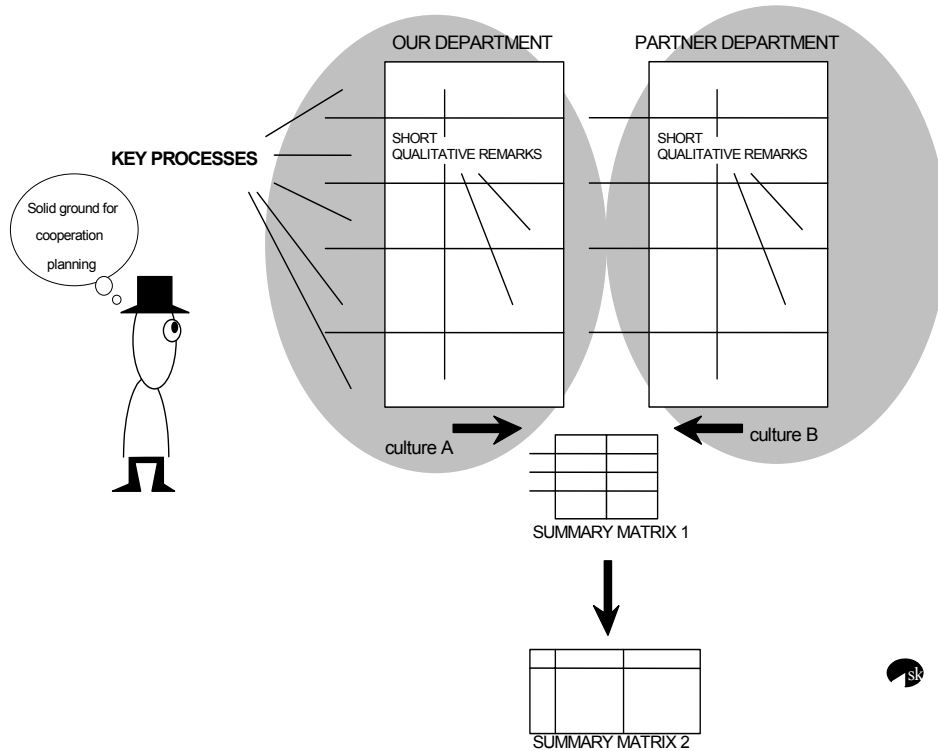


Figure 4. Benchmarking matrices

As can be seen from the figure above, matrices are planned to form the core and backbone of the cooperative benchmarking procedure. Matrices are always culture-bound. Their goal is to render the cultures of the participating organisations mutually understandable and more transparent. However, the critical question is, how these matrices can be adapted in different organisational cultures?





# FINAL WORDS





**E**ducational systems and programmes are culture bound and have evolved historically. Creative benchmarking requires a lot of work and a willingness to understand that even though we share certain common principles as a universal scientific community, there can be dramatic differences between the partners in terms of university legislation, autonomy, financial resources; let alone language and culture. Benchmarking with an international partner takes time and requires prior contact, expertise, special care and attention, but it can yield more than benchmarking with a domestic partner.

Higher education institutions engaged in creative benchmarking with an international partner gain valuable insight and experience in broader quality issues in education. In creative benchmarking we flexibly rethink the structures of our education as well as of our own conceptions of “the right kind of teaching“.

The task of a creative benchmarker can be described as a process of analysing the socio-culturally conditioned almost unconscious modes of action. It is a journey charting a new kind of thinking and we do not know where it leads. One of the most positive aspects of creative

benchmarking is that it does not aim at competing with the partner. After all, universities should be able to act as a united front establishing the global scientific community. Creative benchmarking stresses the importance of mutual learning, as science always should. This method gives also one solution to the problem of how benchmarking can be the vehicle for paradigm shift and offer tools for working in a turbulent future-oriented environment. Creative cooperation is always future-oriented.

It requires courage to offer oneself as a creative benchmarking partner. So far there are only few examples of corresponding pioneer work and even less verifiable results. Our hope is that the method of creative benchmarking will be further developed and tested widely in higher education institutions. We wish also that those endeavours will produce new pedagogical solutions and generate successful collaboration between partners. There are always things to learn from others and the fruits of scientific cooperation should be shared.

We believe, that creative benchmarking can be a powerful tool for developing and sustaining international cooperation in universities. It offers a framework, a struc-

ture and a method for creating change. It serves as a way to arouse interest, to channel communication and to establish cooperation that benefits both research and teaching.



## EPILOGUE





### Evaluation of the method – Experiences from three benchmarking cases

The preliminary results of the project are encouraging in many ways. The concrete outcome of the project can be divided into three different levels. The *first level outcome* is coordinator and student matrices that both partner departments have filled in. After doing so, the partners can start planning the workshop 1. The realization of the workshop in itself is seen as the *second level outcome*. The most important task in the workshop is to go through the information produced by the matrices and to list observations and creative ideas onto the summary matrix 2. In the workshop the partners also start negotiations on whether the experiences and visions for cooperation can include developing joint study options and/or other kinds of long-term cooperation. Sustainable long-term cooperation is the *third level outcome* of the cooperative benchmarking project.

By spring 2002 three departments with their international partners had filled in and exchanged the matrices. After only three tests in the authentic environments it seems that the matrices are working quite well. In addi-

tion, three workshops have been organised. Nevertheless, at this point it is too early to predict what kind of long-term cooperation will result. Lots of concrete plans have been made for the future, but it remains to be seen which ideas will in fact thrive and progress.

The department of Art Studies and Anthropology of Oulu University was the pioneer and organised the first creative benchmarking workshop in November 2001. The workshop was held in Italy at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. The second workshop was organised between the Marketing Departments of University of Oulu and Otago University in New Zealand in March 2002. The third workshop was held in Austria in April 2002, at the University of Leoben, between the Departments of Geosciences.

In the following pages we will review the methodology, look into the workshops in more detail and list a few developmental ideas from the point of view of these three cases.

The preparatory planning for the workshop should be started at an early stage of the project. This gives the par-

participants time for thorough planning and preparation. In our experience, flexibility is the key word. No matter how well you plan an international workshop, something is bound to go wrong (or to be done differently). This can be seen as an aspect of benchmarking for experience. The partners have to be patient; the first contact does not always give the desired response and there may be problems in keeping to the set deadlines.

The coordinator of the project should draft a tentative schedule for the workshop and ask for comments from his/her partner on the plan. It is significant that the partner knows beforehand what facilities you will require and who you would like to attend the workshop (for example, if the Head of the Department should be present). Also, you should inform the partner about who the participants from your department are. The schedule should include a detailed timetable so that everyone reserves enough time for discussion. We felt that the visit to Otago University was an ideal opportunity to get acquainted with the partner department and to also market our department and university by giving presentations to the staff of Otago University. The project was also introduced to the whole department (not just to the

project team) to get the support of everybody and thus to help the project succeed. We brought along a set of different brochures of our university, of our Marketing Department and of the project. We also had a meeting with the personnel from the local International Office to negotiate on the details of the cooperation.

The experience in Leoben showed how important it is to involve people at different levels of an organisation. In the case of this benchmarking project this meant the staff of the International Relations Department, experts from the undergraduate studies commission and the Rector of the University. Through involving of various actors maximal exposure to the project was sought. In addition, it was necessary to negotiate the increase of exchange student and teacher numbers with the representative of the International Relations Department, to ask for advice in proceeding with joint curriculum planning from the Undergraduate Studies Commission and to secure the support of the Rector for the project.

In the earlier pages we have suggested that the students should participate in the workshop and therefore give their opinions about the discussed matters. The role of

students is very important. It is desirable that the comparisons would develop into a shared learning process between the students and teachers as well as between the partner departments. However, in the Otago workshop the Otago partner requested that the students' part of the workshop would be held merely between students to produce honest and open ideas. Their opinion was that if the staff is listening, the students might hold back something worth noting. All in all, the students have been an essential part of the workshops. Generally speaking, the students have been eager to join the discussions and have given valuable insights into the departments' function models.

In all of the three workshops the discussions were carried out in a very informal manner. This created a relaxed atmosphere, and encouraged spontaneous ideas and creative thinking. It is crucial that someone leads the discussion in the workshop, i.e. the project coordinator can conduct the participants through different steps of the workshop.

It is important that the participants have time to get acquainted with the answers in the matrices beforehand

and prepare themselves for the workshop. This ensures that the discussions will be intense and that the aims of the discussions are reached more easily.

During the workshop the partners should have enough time to compare the background information collected. Firstly, they can discuss the answers in the matrices by asking questions on the points that are not understood and discuss them if they need any further clarification. The questions should be thought out before the actual workshop. There should be no stupid questions! It is important to analyse the differences that come out of the matrices and to try to understand the reasons behind them.

The coordinator matrix served as a background for the discussions in Leoben. After two days of exchanging views and meeting with different members of staff we could conclude that we had covered nearly all the areas and questions in the matrices. At that point there were only one or two things which had not become clear and which had been asked in the matrices. However, it was noted that without the information provided in the answers to the questions in the matrices, we would not

have been able to acquire the level of concrete ideas, which we now are at.

The participants carefully pondered the questions in the summary matrix 2 and filled it out together in the workshop. Summary matrix 2 raised surprisingly active and fruitful discussions, and we feel that it was and is a well-functioning concrete instrument to guide the participants through the workshop discussions. In the summary matrix 2 the “best practices“ column supports the benchmarking for developmental comparison type of academic benchmarking. During the discussions the departments have identified, for example, some particularly good procedures of the partner, which offers an opportunity to learn and to improve our own performance. The latter part of the workshop should be used to make a final decision on proceeding with cooperative planning and on the carrying out of new study programmes or other cooperation activities. The outlines of the concrete aims will be identified and negotiated further at this point. This denotes the benchmarking for cooperation-building, which is the most important aim of creative benchmarking.

As was pointed out in 'Choosing the benchmarking partner' one way to find a benchmarking partner is to consider the existing links. An example of this approach is the BM-project of the Department of Geosciences of the University of Oulu and the University of Leoben. Their cooperation has a long history. However, this cooperation has been mainly between two staff members of the respective departments. This has established an atmosphere of trust between the departments. The almost effortless concentration on concrete plans during the meeting in Leoben demonstrated how an existing personal link between the benchmarking departments facilitates the process. It helps in absorbing ideas about cooperation and ensures the commitment of the partners.

After the workshop the partners should investigate and work within their own institutions to prepare the ground for the study programmes or other activities that have been agreed on. It is critical that the partners stay in close contact after the workshop and continue the design of the collaborative process.





# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1. Example letter to recruit students

### **Needed: Marketing Students to assist in a Teaching Benchmarking Project**

The Department of Marketing of the University of Oulu will soon be commencing a teaching benchmarking project, in which it is envisioned that the department's teaching will be compared with the teaching at a foreign university. [In the e-mail notice only: You will find further information about the benchmarking project in the attached document.]

We therefore are looking for a small number of students who would be willing to coordinate the collection of students' opinions for the benchmarking project. The work entails:

1. Most immediately: Gathering the opinions of Finnish and exchange students about the department's teaching and writing a report.
2. In the future: Assistance in assessing the effect of changes in teaching, after the benchmarking work has progressed.

Students will be able to earn degree credits for the work that they do in the benchmarking project.

The students we seek to use must have the following personal qualities:

- Fluency in written and oral English.
- Ability to select a representative sample of students to interview about the department's teaching.
- Ability to interview students.
- Ability to write the interview report in a group.
- Ability to participate in the further coordination of the benchmarking project.

Furthermore we envision that this project would be of special relevance to those students considering a career at a university as e.g. doctoral student and then a professional researcher/ instructor. Therefore such persons are especially encouraged to consider becoming involved in the benchmarking process.

If you are, on the basis of the above, interested in the benchmarking project, please contact Lecturer Maria Anne Skaates as soon as possible. Her office number is HU 311, her telephone numbers are (08) 553-2952 or (040) 501-9220, and her e-mail address is [maria.anne.skaates@oulu.fi](mailto:maria.anne.skaates@oulu.fi).

## APPENDIX 2. Example letter to the partner department



FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT

### **Fax to Professor Sheelagh Matear, University of Otago – Total of 10 pages**

Oulu, Finland, March 6, 2001

Dear Sheelagh,

Greeting from Finland! I hope you have been doing well since I saw you last; I also send warmest greetings from my colleagues as well as Jaana Tähtinen, who is now general manager of Oulu's Tietomaa Science Centre.

I am writing to you because we at the Department of Marketing are commencing a teaching benchmarking project. We are very interesting in having the Department of Marketing at the University of Otago as our benchmarking partner, as this would enable our departments to get to know each other better. I therefore have enclosed an English language description of the project (3 pages) as well as a matrix of questions (6 pages) that could be asked to department staff and students in the benchmarking process. (We are however very willing to change the questions in accordance with your department's wishes and needs.)

Please therefore consider whether your department would be interested in the benchmarking project and if so, which faculty members and students would be involved in the coordinating efforts. If you have any questions, you are very welcome to contact me either at work or at home. I will try to contact you after about a week to hear if you are interested.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Anne Skaates  
Lecturer of Marketing  
e-mail: [maria.anne.skaates@oulu.fi](mailto:maria.anne.skaates@oulu.fi)  
Phone: +358 8 553-2952 (office)  
+358 40 501 9220 (home/cellular phone)

P.O.BOX 4600, FIN-90014 UNIVERSITY OF OULU, TEL +358 8 553 2905,  
FAX +358 8 553 2906

## APPENDIX 3. Example of the summary matrix 1

<b>COORDINATOR MATRIX</b>		
<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO</b>	<b>UNIVERSITY OF OULU</b>
<b>1. CURRICULUM</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING</b>	<b>DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING</b>
1.1 What kind of study credit point system is used? What is the logic behind the system?	Six credit points per semester requires students to allocate 156 hours work (e.g. 2 hours of lectures, 2 hours tutorials and 8 hours readings, assignments, course preparation & exam preparation). 120 credit points required for an ordinary degree. The logic of the system is to allow students to study a number of topics (compulsory and free choice) with equal weightings. It also allows them to consider transferring to other educational systems as part of an exchange.	One Finnish credit requires an average input of 40 work hours per student. 160 total credits required for a Master's degree. It may consist of lectures, seminars or independent study and research. The following illustrate the equivalence of the credit systems: Finnish credit 1 US credit (hour) 1 ECTS credit 1,5  The logic of the system is to make the credits easily transferable to other educational systems.
1.2 What are the key objectives of the education? What kind of vision with regard to the scientific and professional field is there in the core curriculum, in study modules and in individual courses?	Key objectives are to provide sound conceptual, methodological and practical knowledge as well as life long learning skills.  We aim to produce graduates that are equipped for various positions within the marketing profession as well as competent researchers able to pursue an academic career.  There are opportunities for 'hands-on' work where students gain practical skills and / or experience working with or for a commercial organisation.	Key objectives are to provide sound conceptual and methodological knowledge of the field of business-to-business marketing to enable graduates to generation and analysis market research data as well as manage buying and selling processes. Students are also provided with some practical knowledge about actual company environments. On a general level, both scientific and practical issues are emphasised in the curriculum.
1.3 Are individual courses connected to form larger modules? How is the succession of courses linked with the formation of coherent modules? What kind of a well-reasoned and logical connection is there between the separate parts of studying?	Individual courses are not formally connected to form larger modules. There is however a common thread that runs through the courses offered. Each year has a number of 'core' courses that all marketing students must take. Each year builds on the knowledge and skills of previous years.	Individual courses are not formally connected to form larger modules. Implicitly there is, however, some logic in the fit between the different courses, in that different aspects of business relationships and networks as well as the transactional approach are emphasised in different courses. Some teachers feel that the links between courses could be made more explicit.
1.4 Describe what kind of general scientific and professional abilities are being advanced? What special abilities are emphasised? Are there any particular areas of expertise that the curriculum focuses on? What are they?	Our aim is to provide our students with a broad understanding of the principles of marketing management as it relates to other disciplines. We nurture students and encourage them to progress and develop in an area that suits their interests and capabilities, e.g. International, Consumer, Food, Industrial, Electronic, Marketing Research etc.  We make use of New Zealand and	We want to give our students broad social science qualifications of analysis, with specific emphasis on methodologies their applications in marketing research. We use realistic case exercises, both the pre-prepared written type and the type in which the students must interview representatives of companies about a certain situation. We think that management and marketing fads come and go; therefore

	<p>overseas case studies throughout the degree program. We teach them analytical skills as well as information and data collection skills (e.g. market &amp; product information). This is used for report preparation and presentation. Both skills are introduced early on in first year and enhanced and reinforced throughout the duration of their studies.</p>	<p>fundamental methodological knowledge is most important due to its stability. Here we also especially emphasise relationship management. Students should be able to generate and critically assess market information as well as assess academic articles and professionals' recommendations.</p>
<p>1.5 Can a student design a personal curriculum? How is this carried out?</p>	<p>Yes, but within the boundaries of pre-requisites and core subjects. Thus all marketing majors will have attended the same core classes in each year but the electives and non-marketing classes will vary according to students needs. They can undertake joint degrees within the Business School or across Divisions.</p>	<p>Yes, they can to an extent, but they still have to pass the obligatory course. They can e.g. choose many different minor subjects – also in other faculties and departments. In this sense, the education offered by the University of Oulu's Department of Marketing is broader than that offered at the Helsinki and Turku Schools of Economics and Business Administration. As a small department, we have relatively few electives but we hope that this situation will change in the future. Therefore many students are able to find a wider range of electives abroad, when they study abroad as an exchange student.</p>
<p>1.6 How does the department take into account the credits that are earned from other universities/ institutes of higher education (recognition, transfer)?</p>	<p>We have agreements with other institutions and have satisfied ourselves that the credits and standard of material is comparable to our own. The same applies to students coming here from other institutions.</p>	<p>The relevant course teacher assesses whether a course taken abroad may replace one of the department's courses. If this is not possible, the student in question usually receives credit for a course entitled "Other course in marketing". So students almost always received credit for academic work done abroad as exchange students.</p>
<p>1.7 What is the role of specific professional qualification in the curriculum? What special qualifications are considered to be the most important? Do the students have (short or long) practical training periods (work based learning) during their studies?</p>	<p>Students have any practical sessions where hands-on computer skills are taught or role-playing is undertaken.</p> <p>There is an optional (compulsory for honours) all year paper in third year where students undertake a project for a firm. They are responsible for preparing the brief, conducting the research, making recommendations and presenting oral and written reports for the firm.</p> <p>Also, many of our courses include practical examples in formally presented material as well as in tutorials.</p> <p>Finally, our Mbus students are encouraged to work with a company for a major part of their dissertation.</p> <p>Many of our students undertake work to pay for their education.</p>	<p>Students do not have any practical training periods, but if they want, they have the possibility to earn 3 study weeks by writing a report of the training if they have been for example working during the summer. Additionally many of our courses include practical examples. Finally, the bachelor's and the master's theses are almost always written for companies. We emphasise that professional activities should be pursued during university studies. Familiarising oneself with industries and companies however remains the responsibility of the individual student during his or her studies.</p> <p>Due to the employment situation in Oulu, some of our students work too much during their studies, which delays their graduation substantially. This is also not the ideal situation.</p>
<p>1.8 What is the role of scientific competencies in the curriculum? What special areas of science (for example philosophy of science,</p>	<p>Courses in market research methodologies are included in the curriculum. Students progressing to honours and post-graduate are required to take such as a paper.</p>	<p>Courses in scientific methodologies that touch on the philosophy of science are included in the curriculum. The extent to which these issues interest students vary, as most students are oriented toward working in the private</p>

methodology etc.) are considered to be the most important? How much (if any) can students participate in real research projects during their studies?	We offer a third year paper (compulsory for honours) where students work hands-on with a firm for the duration of the year. They must research a business issue, make recommendations and produce a written and verbal report.	sector. However the students must demonstrate basic understanding of the points covered in their bachelor's and master's theses. Sometimes students are used as research an assistant, which enables them to take part in our research projects. (Several teachers did not like the formulation "real research projects".
1.9 To what extent is research-based latest knowledge included in the curriculum? To what extent are the contents of the curriculum based on the departments own research activities?	There is more incorporation of such material in later years as students become better grounded in principles and are seeking to specialise. We make serious efforts to offer research informed teaching. Individual members of staff incorporate their own research findings in the material they present but this would normally be done in the context of the greater body of extant literature.	To some extent, courses are somewhat based on the specific professional interests of the professors. We believe that this is positive. We also use guest adjunct professors from other universities to ensure an even broader perspective.
1.10 How is the curriculum being developed and updated? Describe the process of composing the curriculum?	There was a major undergraduate curriculum revision in 1999 with ongoing incremental improvements as a result of the work of the Undergraduate Committee (J Gnoth et al).  The postgraduate offering is due for revision in the near future.  New members of staff are encouraged to offer a specialisation paper in their area of research and expertise.  Essentially we undertake a review of competing offerings from other institutions, survey students, recent graduates and involve the business community.	The curriculum was revised majorly when Kimmo Alajoutsijärvi joined the staff. He aimed to make a curriculum based on issues relevant to marketers (e.g. relationships) as well as important research insights. The curriculum is discussed sporadically year for year, e.g. upon the arrival of new staff. New employees are welcome to redesign courses or add new courses based on their own areas of expertise. The process of development is very informal, as we are a small department. However not all junior staff know exactly what measures are being taken at a specific point in time.
<b>2. TEACHING METHODS</b>		
2.1 What kind of teaching methods does teaching staff use and how are they justified? (lectures, exercises, etc.?)	Lectures, exercises, case studies, students presenting, discussing and summarising scientific articles, exams. Lectures are more common in the basic courses, whereas the level of interactive, seminar-style increases in advanced courses and in optional courses. One course (Pricing and Distribution; 2 <sup>nd</sup> year) is organised as a problem-based learning course (PBL). The Honours stream which starts at 200 level and is a 4-year course, has a semester-long, real-life business project during year 3 of the course. Some summer school courses are on offer.	Lectures, exercises, case studies, students presenting, discussing and summarising scientific articles, exams. Lectures are more common in the basic courses, whereas the level of interactive activity increases in advanced courses.
2.2 What is the role and the importance of the new information technology in teaching and in learning? What kind of teaching and learning technologies are used? Is there active distance learn-	IT literacy is of great importance and we use the SUNY (state uni of New York) info literacy taxonomy which is built into our under-graduate curriculum. The use of power point for presentations and the use of Excel and SPSS are also part of this curricular progression. 2 years ago, Blackboard or Course Info as it is also known has	New technologies are not used to a very great extent. There are differences of opinion concerning the important of this area for our teaching. Some teachers post course plans and requirements on the web, but not a full course offering.

ing, use of web based learning environments etc.? Are there any virtual university courses organised?	been introduced and is being adopted by all courses over the next few years. No distant learning courses in our Dept.	
2.3 What kind of exams and other evaluation methods does the department use? How are the learning outcomes being assessed and converted into grades? What kinds of problems are there in exams and in grading system?	All UG courses use a mixture of exams and internal assessment. At least one uses 'terms' which means an exam half-way through the course as prerequisite for the student to finish the semester course. The 'internally' assessed parts (i.e. throughout the semester) contain essays, projects, and presentations. Currently, and in addition to our knowledge-based curriculum, we are implementing and expanding a skill progression scheme whereby we make sure that certain basic skills in the areas of communication, business and financial skills and social awareness are being progressed. – Problems usually occur in the transparency and equality of marks across courses usually solved through discussions during end-of-semester examiners' meetings.	Courses are usually evaluated on the basis of the exam and/or exercises and/or course participation. Some teachers give the students a chance to write a report instead of taking an exam as the method of final evaluation, whenever possible, yet indicate that it is not possible or good to get rid of all exams entirely. A non-Finnish lecturer wished that the Finnish Ministry of Education would publish more English-language material about the Finnish grading systems in comparison to other national grading systems. However a Finnish instructed emphasised the role of judgement in grading.
2.4 How would you describe the quality and the role of interaction between the students and teachers? How much (and what kind of) interaction is there inside the teaching situations and on the campus?	Compared to our general impression of European unis, we have close contact with students (first -name basis; open-door policy as far as manageable over and above office hours) all lecturers usually take one, if not all tutorial streams of their courses. General staff (receptionists etc.) make sure students get fair and personal attention within the department as well as university-wide. We tend to hold introductions to a new stage (Year 1-3) as students enter these and are considering the re-introduction of a 300 level 'camp' for team building and other, preparatory purposes.	The interactions are very much based on the lectures, and their intensity has decreased, as the department now admits twice as many students as five years ago. During some lectures/courses there are more interactions and during some there are less. This also depends on the language of instruction, as Finnish students seem less prone to speak in courses taught in English. After courses, feedback sessions are sometimes held to discuss course content and the learning process. However some believe we could become better at interaction.
2.5 What kind of new teaching methods have recently been tested and used in teaching? Are there any teaching development projects under consideration or in function? What kinds of projects are there?	Lectures are predominant (overall we have about 1500 students part and full-time with some 26 staff pt/ft). At 200 level we have one problem-based learning course which is very contact-intensive. Options are often in seminar style. We aspire to make more use of web-based learning and teaching methods through Course Info.	Teaching on the basis of articles summarised and presented by students is a relatively new method. Other concrete teaching development projects were not mentioned – yet it was mentioned that students have many opportunities to provide feedback.
2.6 Can the students get credits by participating research projects of the department? Do they have possibilities to teach (officially) or to give guidance to the younger students? How is this organised and credited?	As a general rule, UG classes do not do professional research. There are no credit points available in case there is a student assisting staff. Only the 300 level honours business project is a credited course that involves research, 'real' problem-solving and presentations to clients. (Usually a group of 3 students is supervised by one member of staff each).	Yes, student can in theory get credit by participating in research projects of the department, although this has not yet happened. They have not yet given guidance to or taught younger students, yet this is an area of potential development for the future due to our ever-increasing numbers of students admitted, which will stretch our few teaching resources even further.

<p>2.7 How is maximal student participation in teaching ensured? What means are used to motivate students? Is there a compulsory or a voluntary participation in lectures/ practices/ laboratories etc.?</p>	<p>Lectures usually do not encourage interaction. Seminar-based courses rely on interaction a lot. It is usually during tutorials that interaction is encouraged through group-work and project-work during which time we emphasise team building skills.</p>	<p>Through the use of case exercised during the lectures. Sometimes extra points are given for excellent contributions. Teachers, however, vary in their policies concerning compulsory participation in lectures or discussion sessions – as some point out that requiring students to attend does not insure that they contribute constructively.</p>
<p><b>3. SUPPORT SERVICES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING</b></p>		
<p>3.1 How is the high quality of teaching enhanced? How does the department make sure that the teachers have up-to-date pedagogical (didactic) knowledge?</p>	<p>Teaching evaluations are compulsory part for staff-progression but often perceived controversial. The university recently introduced a new teaching-evaluation scheme. Our Undergraduate Committee is charged with continuous development of the curriculum (Knowledge and skills) and its implementation. Staff has mixed skills in teaching and mixed convictions about the usefulness of the CU committee. Some make use of training courses offered by the Higher Education Department (up to Diplomas and degrees) while others actively participate in curriculum and skill development. We hold seminars on topics such as teaching and assessment.</p>	<p>Mainly through the student feedback systems, the professors seek to insure that the quality of teaching is good. There are little formal efforts to insure that teachers have up-to-date pedagogical knowledge, as the need for this is not perceived by the senior staff, who believe that they have hired talented and autodidactic teachers.</p>
<p>3.2 Does the university organise pedagogical (didactic) training or consultation for teachers in order to support the development of their teaching skills? How is this training organised? Are the teachers willing to participate in it?</p>	<p>As above. The Higher Education Department offers courses that are frequented by some staff. Certain introductory courses are compulsory for new staff. Within our departmental seminar schedule we sometimes invite presentations on teaching styles as with the introduction of PBL.</p>	<p>There is a number of pedagogical courses offered to the university teachers, yet the currently employed teachers are not participating. (However some former teachers did participate.) Teachers can follow through a module of approximately 15 credit units. The courses are organised by the teaching development unit and they are open to all faculties.</p>
<p>3.3 What kind of support is provided to teachers to produce quality learning material?</p>	<p>There are good funds available to buy new books and attend conferences that help enhance teaching and learning material. Good budgets are also available for hand-outs, and courses usually offer a wide variety of info-sources accessible to students. The libraries are well-equipped and students often have access to the internet. It appears that staff regularly update their teaching material.</p>	<p>Professors occasionally give hints about interesting new studies that could be used in lectures to the junior staff. A teaching forum has been provided for a Finnish instructor who is writing a Finnish language book on international business. Additionally the department's two professors are writing a teaching book. The development of teaching based on research is also encouraged. There are some courses organised also by the teaching development unit, mainly focusing on production of teaching material (Power Point).</p>
<p>3.4 How does the department support the development of information technology skills of teachers?</p>	<p>This is dealt with by each individual. The department has a generous IT budget including a departmental IT "techie" who supports staff in regularly updating programs available as well as</p>	<p>Not at all – it is assumed that the teachers, who are younger members of the "IT generation", have the ability to familiarise themselves with the necessary IT skills.</p>

	<p>updating the PCs every few years. We aspire to have a Laptop for each staff member. The department pays for courses regularly offered by the Info Tech Support Department which monitors and maintains all uni-wide IT requirements for teaching (e.g. we can download lectures from our office pc to the lecture room pc as well as access our pc's from there; they offer Black-board or 'do your own home page' courses etc.. The library offers courses in data base access as well as informs about new resources available ... all of which often require new skills)</p>	
<p>3.5 In what way are the new students acquainted with the department and into studying practices/ how does the department secure the optimal start of studies? Are there some special activities (tutoring, study skill courses etc.) for the first year students?</p>	<p>We use a compulsory English test after which students with needs are recommended to participate in certain communication classes. At each level, the first lecture is an introduction. We maintain a 'Marketing Club' run by students to support social life and interaction (parties; ski trips etc.) and consider re-establishing a beginning-of-the year 300 level student camp for team building. There are no study-skill courses per se but we attempt to further these throughout (see 3.8).</p>	<p>Through tutoring (older students and teachers), presentations and courses. Students are acquainted with reading and studying practices. However some teachers experience that 1<sup>st</sup> year students are not that interested in participating in teacher tutoring. One professor also emphasised that students should realise that they have to become master's of their own learning processes – that this is fundamentally their own responsibility and we may also do them a disservice in some ways by guiding them too much.</p>
<p>3.6 How is the tutoring or other academic supervision organised during the studies?</p>	<p>Each new student has his/her student tutor as well as a teacher tutor for the first three years. Meetings and discussions are organised between them. This is very much dependent on the activity of the students as well as the tutors. Different schemes operate at 4-500 levels.</p>	<p>Each new student has his/her student tutor as well as a teacher tutor for the first two years. Meetings and discussions are organised between them. This is very much dependent on the activity of the students as well as the tutors. Thereafter the tutoring is replaced by bachelor's and master's thesis groups.</p>
<p>3.7 Are mentors or other outside experts used in student counselling?</p>	<p>No, but, School-wide, we are working on mentoring schemes or buddy-schemes in which students team up with a business person. Little developed.</p>	<p>There has been a project in which the students have had the possibility of having a mentor from the professional life for specific case assignments. This includes discussions about the professional life and career issues.</p>
<p>3.8 In what way are the students guided in efficient learning techniques, in relevant choices made with subjects and in study options during studies?</p>	<p>Each year, at enrolment, students discuss their course of studies with staff who are manning tables at which students have their courses approved. In addition, the first years are introduced to both the first year and the opportunities for the second year. – Our newly established Skill Progression (an addition to the curriculum document) tries to establish the introduction and emphasis of certain skills. The library is offering courses and we set tasks that promote efficient study methods.</p>	<p>Information and presentations organised by the faculty and through the discussions with the tutors. Our faculty arranges a course during the first year where these issues as well as relevant choices of a minor are discussed. However, once again, some feel that students have to learn to assess these things independently – if they are guided too much, we are doing them a disservice.</p>
<p>3.9 How is the guidance of graduate thesis organised? How long does it take for a student to do his/her thesis for Masters degree?</p>	<p>Bachelors (except honours students) do not write a thesis but only smaller projects. This course takes 3 (4) years. A Master of Business (4.3 years) has a 2-part thesis (one academic and one practical and written for the business they work with), while Mcom courses</p>	<p>Graduate thesis (i.e. both bachelor's and master's) seminars are organised so that students can meet almost every week and can present their projects 2-3 times. In addition to this, they may contact the advisors to get their comments on the thesis. It usually takes</p>

	(thesis only) take 5 years. We are establishing support groups but otherwise have only supervisors to support as well as compulsory theory courses (methodology and theory of science)	approximately 1 year to do the thesis, which makes the usual total study time 5 ½ years – due to e.g. the extent of students working in companies.
3.10 How are the different kind of support services of quality teaching organised? Is there a teaching development unit or other permanent support services in the university, faculty or department?	There is a teaching development unit in the university. As mentioned previously, it is being used by some staff but treated as of little consequence by others. However, HEDC is developing and becoming stronger as well as more efficient in their services.	There is a unit for teaching development, which gives pedagogical training and consulting to all university teachers. Some faculties have their own pedagogical trainers employed by teaching development unit. However, faculty members are not very well acquainted with the operation of this unit and perceive it as being "distant" from their everyday work.
<b>4. QUALITY ASSURANCE</b>		
4.1 How does one monitor the progress of students in their studies? How are the functionality and the quality of the degree programme assessed?	The progress of the undergraduate student is monitored at various levels, formally and informally. The formal level is bounded by the university regulation for how degrees can be awarded (set number of points to be gathered by passing certain required and optional courses). Individual courses have to be headed by Course Outlines detailing content, form of assessment, due-dates, reading materials etc. Recently, the department has begun to gather such material and intensify the recording of minimum standards as well as targeted outcomes lecture –by-lecture. The reason for such detail is to be able to better co-ordinate the delivery of a minimal standard of curriculum. Over and above that, the standards to be achieved by the student are mostly left to teaching staff. Recently introduced, university-wide, self-assessment procedures as well as regularly scheduled assessment sessions between staff and HOD all contribute to the critical evaluation of teaching performance and student achievements. Examiners' meetings at the end of the semester during which marks and pass rates are discussed also form an important part to assure quality delivery to students. Lastly, the Higher Education Dept.(HEDC) is continuously building a document entitled 'Senate Policy on Assessment of Student Performance' which is gradually becoming a source for staffs' direction and ideas for assuring quality. Informal monitors are word of mouth amongst students as well as a survey run by the student union and published in the 'Anti Calendar'. The use of class representatives as 'first line of defence and warning system' also add to make sure students are satisfied with their learning.	The progress of the students is monitored through the statistics indicating the degrees awarded and – somewhat sporadically - through individual contact to students, as the department does not yet have that many students. The study secretary also monitors students' progress, identifying students that seem to be having problems meeting the requirements.

<p>4.2 What kind of course evaluation is executed? Does the department collect student feedback? How is the feedback analysed and used to improve teaching and learning?</p>	<p>The OU has compulsory course and teaching evaluations (at least once every 3 years for every course) as they also add to the lecturer's performance evaluation. (these surveys are anonymous, usually administered with the aid of the student representative and confidentially evaluated by the HEDC; staff does not have to use or advise the HoD of every survey). Both of these systems are under constant review with discussions centring around the issues of reliability and additional workload.</p>	<p>A general feedback –questionnaire (in Finnish) is available and it is recommended, that this would be used to collect course feedback. Lecturer should appoint a co-ordinator from the course, a someone who collects the feedback questionnaires and prepares a summary of the results. However, this method and/or the questionnaire is not always used. Also, couple of times per academic year, a general feedback is collected from the students which is then summarised and discussed in a faculty's feedback meeting, in which both the students and teachers may discuss about the issues. These meetings are, however, not always a complete success – as often few students attend, which might indicate that students are so satisfied that they feel no need to attend. The foreign-born lecturer has made her own evaluation forms in English.</p>
<p>4.3 In what way does the department utilise information technology in collection and processing of student feedback?</p>	<p>HEDC organises the formatting of a partly compulsory, partly staff directed questionnaire as well as the evaluation of the results which are then transferred via internal mail to staff. Staff has a confidential performance data base with HEDC and uses their resources to evaluate teaching and courses. Recently, Blackboard or Course info allows staff to get immediate and personal student feedback through this web-based intra-net.</p>	<p>General feedback (couple time in a year) is sometimes collected via email. Other ways of using information technology, e.g. statistical analysis, are not used, as teachers seem to prefer qualitative data. However some teachers feel that we might make increased use of new technologies to make the assessment processes more formal and to give busy students increased possibilities for web-based feedback in the future.</p>
<p>4.4 Does the education have national or international accreditation? How is the accreditation or other public recognition of education carried out?</p>	<p>The OU, the School of Business and the Dept of Marketing in particular collaborate with a range of universities which cross-credit our point system and degrees (e.g. Erasmus Circle unis; Otaru, Japan; Berkeley; Rotterdam, HEC Paris; Wirtschaftsuniversitaet Vienna, Budapest School of Economics; Aarhus ; St Gallen; recently Lausanne, and others) There is talk about aiming at getting a common US accreditation (AACSB; Assoc. for the Advancement of Collegial Schools of Business).</p>	<p>In Finland the universities are state universities and the Ministry of Education evaluates universities directly. Universities report their activities annually to the Ministry. Every third year Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council assesses all Finnish universities in quality teaching and so far the university of Oulu has got all the quality prizes concerning quality of education. The education is accredited by the Finnish education system. The interviewed persons were not aware of the specifics of EU-wide and other international accreditation. However a need was perceived for transferring knowledge to and from the universities where we have exchange student partnerships.</p>
<p>4.5 Does the university/ faculty/ department use permanent quality assessment systems of teaching? What kinds of assessment methods (self-assessment, external assessment,</p>	<p>Each course needs to be assessed at least every 3 years by students (teaching feedback). Courses can be assessed with the help of a (selection of) question batteries provided by HEDC. Staff performance evaluations include teaching performance assessments, self and peer-assessments (latter is optional). Progress is monitored and</p>	<p>Student feedback is collected all the time (not from every course but almost). There is Departmental Teaching Development Committee. Open workshop (=“feedback day”) is organised perhaps once a year, students and teachers have feedback discussions and other current issues are being discussed. In the university</p>

etc.) do the above-mentioned systems include? How is the information processed and how is it used to develop the quality of teaching? Describe the structure and the functionality of the quality assurance of teaching?	reported by staff themselves. Staff are now required to maintain a teaching portfolio incl. assessments, evaluations and progress reports. HEDC offers courses (and a degree) for HE teaching.	level the high quality departments are rewarded.
4.6 What development needs are there in the quality assurance system? How are the quality assurance activities assessed and developed?	The issue here is the debate as to how much students can be relied upon to help push levels of quality forward. As this is discussed university-wide, the process is dynamic. HEDC is very 'paper-intensive' and modes of monitoring and reporting are still in flux. Within the Dept. of Marketing, quality assurance in teaching and student development (et al.) is part of the Strategic Plan which is updated approx. every 2 years.	The first step would be to develop some kind of system to pay more attention on the quality assurance. However the methodology would have to be chosen very carefully. As students generally are pressed for time, some might rate demanding courses and teachers poorly – even though what the teachers are teaching is important. So this is an issue that must be addressed with great care.
<b>5. INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION</b>		
5.1 What kind of internationalisation strategy for teaching is there in your degree programme/ department? How are the internationalisation of teaching and internationalisation of research interlinked?	Each year we have a number of international exchange students from institutions we have agreements with.  All papers are offered in English.  Any collaborative agreements between individual staff members from Otago and overseas is the responsibility of that individual.	There is no specific internationalisation strategy in our department. However, many courses are held in English, so that international and exchange students can participate in them. We do not want to offer all courses in English, as we feel that Finnish students should also speak and write about marketing in Finnish. Therefore, in cases where courses are offered in Finnish, international students may negotiate with the lecturers of the courses about doing the exercises and other responsibilities related to the passing of the course in English (use of alternative English textbooks, exam questions and answers in English, etc.). Teachers have a rather flexible attitude towards such arrangements.
5.2 How enthusiastic are teachers about international teaching (teaching in foreign language)?	Whilst many staff have a foreign language capability (some as their first language), all courses are taught in English.	Some are so enthusiastic that they lecture in English although there are only Finnish speaking students present. At the moment all teachers can teach in English. However some of them may feel that as they have already prepared the lecture materials for a given course in Finnish, they have the right to lecture in Finnish.
5.3 Are the study programmes open to both domestic and foreign students? Do the exchange students have special tailor-made studies? In what language are those studies being carried out?	Courses are open to both groups of students subject to normal entry criteria.  Exchange students enrol in the same papers as domestic students.	As the regular entrance exams are in Finnish, the regular study programs are mainly for Finnish students and foreigners with good knowledge of Finnish. Special arrangements have to be made for non-Finnish speakers to enter our degree programmes.

5.4 How is the internationalisation of teaching and learning utilised in the development of teaching?	Some courses are offered by visiting foreign professors according to their specialisation and our portfolio of papers..	More and more courses are held in English and of course, through a foreign teacher working at the department, the internationalisation of the teaching has been developed. Furthermore, certain courses are conducted by visiting foreign professors.
5.5 How do the teaching methods and teaching arrangements stimulate domestic and foreign students into collaboration?	In many courses, group exercises are common, and most staff members try to mix foreign students with domestic students.	In many courses, group exercises are common, and at times, an international group may be developed. Unfortunately, however, if the students may choose the groups by themselves, often the foreign-born students are in their own groups and the Finnish speaking in their own groups.
5.6 Describe the opportunities for students to perform practical training abroad?	Many students go overseas as soon as they have graduated. As a School we have a large number of official and unofficial networks to assist in this.	Students may get a job from abroad. A variety of non-departmental information channels exist that may be used to get information about these issues. (university's career services, international relations office, AIESEC internet etc.)
5.7 Is there an orientation (an introduction course of the local language and culture) for the incoming foreign students at the beginning of their stay? How is this counselling carried out?	There is an international office which helps foreign students integrate. As a department we offer any assistance we can and students find this friendly and helpful.	At the beginning of autumn and spring semester there is a three-day orientation for the foreign exchange students. In addition to that, each exchange student receives a Finnish student tutor to help at the beginning of the stay. The international relations office carries out most counselling for the international students; however the faculty employs an exchange student co-ordinator who also may be contacted.
<b>6. OTHER</b>		
6.1 Environment	The Department strives to be responsive to the particular environment both nationally and internationally. As NZ is a poor country with special needs, universities take an active role in the advancement of secondary rather than only tertiary educational skills and knowledge. This is a contentious issue with some staff who like to remain in the ivory tower of old. However, as curricula get established and become more transparent, minimum teaching achievements, course content and development become inevitable.	

APPENDIX 4. Summary matrix 2

SUMMARY MATRIX 2 (1/2)

Instructions: The purpose of this summary matrix 2 is to bring out larger and deeper issues rather spontaneously. You should aim at forming intuitive observations based on collected information as well as creating new ideas by processing the experiences of the project. Pay special attention to the conclusions column.

<p><b>1. Best Practices</b> What best practices, innovative ideas or particularly good working procedures (for instance working habits, teaching/ learning practices, etc.) have you discovered?</p>	<p><b>CORE OBSERVATIONS</b> What are the main differences and similarities between the two departments? What are the underlying reasons (for instance cultural observations etc.) behind in these differences/similarities?</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSIONS</b> What can we learn from the foreign department? How can we improve together our working procedures? Is it useful/necessary to change our activities? Notes on further development plan.</p>

SUMMARY MATRIX 2 (2/2)

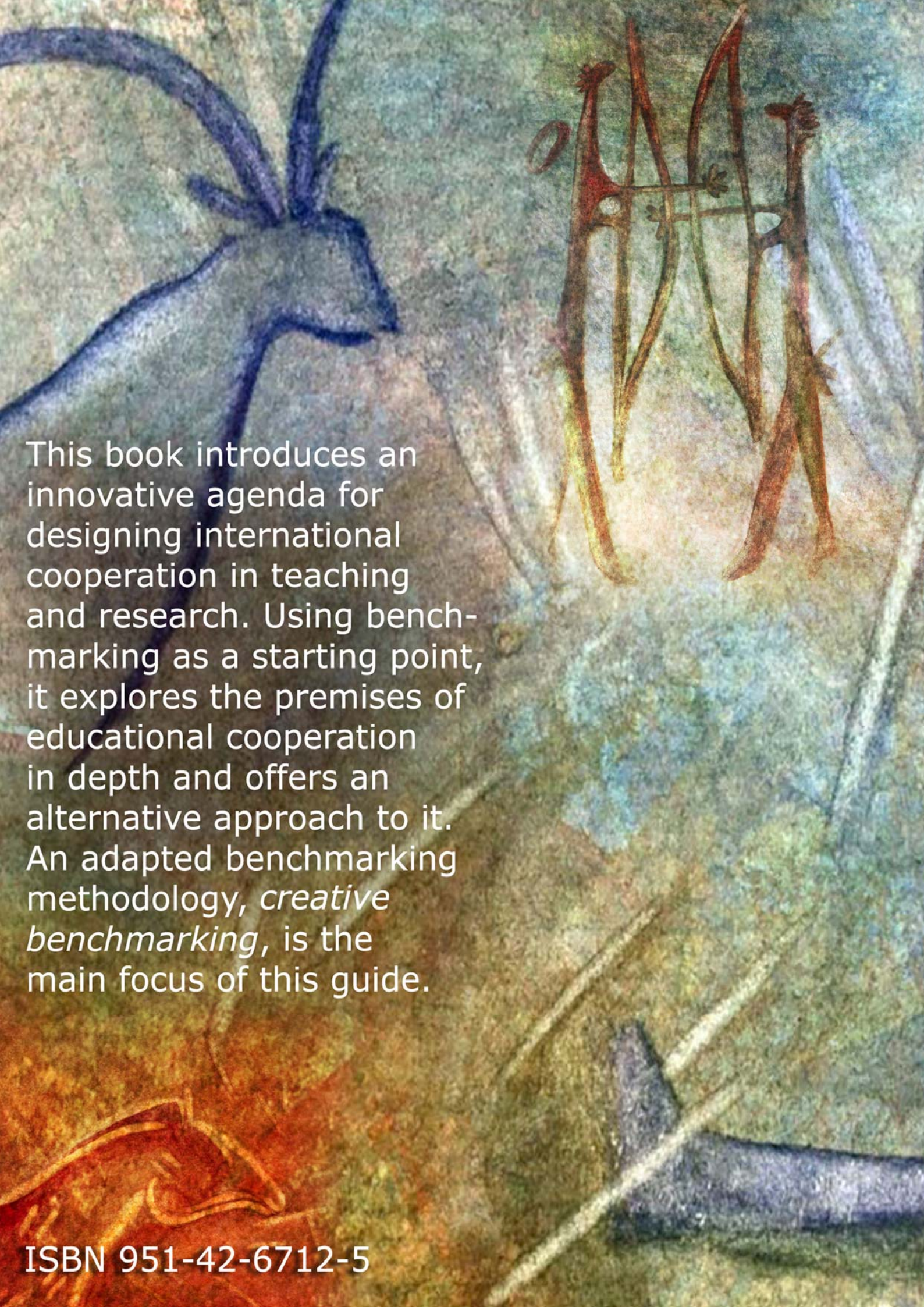
<p><b>2. Cooperation</b>          What important options have you found concerning cooperation in the future (e.g. organizing mutual study modules)?</p>	<p><b>CORE OBSERVATIONS</b></p>	<p><b>CONCLUSIONS</b>          Notes on further development plan.</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------



# LITERATURE

- Ammons, David N., Coe Charles, Lombardo Michael. Performance-Comparison Projects in Local Government: Participants' Perspectives. *Public Administration Review*. Vol 61, No 1. p.100-110. January/February 2001.
- Camp, Robert C. *Benchmarking, The Search for Industry Best Practices that Lead to Superior Performance*. ASQC Quality Press. p.248. 1989.
- Dervitsiotis, K.N. Benchmarking and business paradigm shifts. *Total Quality Management*. Vol 11, p.641-646. 2000.
- Epper, Rhonda. Applying Benchmarking to higher education. *Change*, p.24-31. 1999.
- Grue-Sørensen, Knud. *Kasvatuksen historia 1. Muinaisuudesta valitukseen*. WSOY. Porvoo 1961.
- Jackson, N. & Lund, H. Eds. *Benchmarking for Higher Education*. The Society for Research into higher Education & Open University Press. 2000.
- Karlöf, Bengt and Östblom, Svante. *Benchmarking: a signpost to excellence in quality and productivity*. Chichester Wiley. 1993.
- Kulmala, Juhani. Benchmarking ammatillisen aikuiskoulutuskeskuksen toiminnan kehittämisen välineenä. *Acta Universitatis Tamperensis* 663. Väitöskirja. Tampere 1999.
- Laatukeskus. *Benchmarking – käsikirja. Benchmarking tehokas oppiminen – ylivoimainen kilpailukyky*. 1998.

- Nurmi, Veli. Uno Cygnaeus. Suomalainen koulumies ja kasvattaja. Valtion painatuskeskus. Helsinki 1988.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Quality and Internationalisation in Higher Education. France 1999.
- PA Consulting Group Oy. Benchmarking. Painomerkki Oy. Helsinki 1993.
- Penninkilampi, Varpu. Kansainvälistykö yliopisto vai kansainvälistetäänkö sitä – tiedeyhteisön mielikuvat ja myytit. Pro Gradu tutkimus. Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta. Oulun yliopisto 2000.
- Rolstadås, Asbjørn. Ed. Benchmarking – Theory and Practice. Chapman & Hall. United Kingdom 1995.
- Stetar, Joe. Benchmarking Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Workbook. University of Tampere. June 1999.
- Suomen Laatuyhdistys Ry. Benchmarking, Työkalu oppivalle organisaatiolle käytön edellytyksistä. Jaosjulkaisu 4/1996.
- Virtanen, Aimo and Mertano, Sinikka. Eds. Learning by Comparing. The Benchmarking of Administration at the University of Helsinki. Edita Oy. Helsinki. Higher Education Evaluation Council 12:1999.
- Wan Endut, W.J., Abdullah, M., Husain, N. Benchmarking institutions of higher education. Total Quality Management. Vol 11, p.796-799. 2000.
- Zairi, Mohamed and Leonard, Paul. Practical Benchmarking. The Complete Guide. Chapman & Hall. United Kingdom 1994.

An abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. The background is a mix of muted blues, greens, and browns. In the upper left, there's a large, dark blue, somewhat organic shape that resembles a stylized animal head or a branching structure. In the upper right, there are several vertical, reddish-brown, elongated forms that look like stylized figures or structures. The overall style is expressive and somewhat somber.

This book introduces an innovative agenda for designing international cooperation in teaching and research. Using benchmarking as a starting point, it explores the premises of educational cooperation in depth and offers an alternative approach to it. An adapted benchmarking methodology, *creative benchmarking*, is the main focus of this guide.

ISBN 951-42-6712-5