

BENCHMARKING IN PASCAL UNIVERSITIES AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

1. INTRODUCTION

The PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement (PURE) project was established by the PASCAL International Observatory to identify policy initiatives that would enable more effective engagement by universities with regional authorities. PURE is based on the view that universities are an important resource for enhance economic and social development.

The PURE project has adopted a multi-faceted methodology including use of university and regional benchmarking instruments to complement the more directly qualitative processes of consultative development groups and associated project activities. The focus of the benchmarking was not on comparing performance in different settings, but rather seeking to build a database which could be used to share learning amongst institutions and regions, a method for facilitating a consistent conversation across different regional and national settings. Both instruments were designed first and foremost as learning resources, to facilitate reflection and discussion both within institutions and comparatively about their current aspirations and current arrangements, and how they might be enhanced. In this sense, the conversations were more important than the ratings themselves (SEE Appendix 1 for more detail on the instruments).

Implementing the benchmarking process has been a challenge in some regions. Undertaken under the auspices of each regional coordinating committee, it has been difficult for some institutions to see the potential benefits and to allocate the resources necessary.

2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF BENCHMARKING, RANKINGS AND PROJECTS (EG. EUROPEAN INITIATIVE)

Benchmarking is a concept surrounded by confusion. At one level, it has been used to refer to the comparison of statistical data about various dimensions of organisational performance. As a resource for learning, however, benchmarking has involved the application of a comparative framework to set goals for the continuous improvement process (see Camp 1989). Spendolini (1992) examined the meanings attributed to benchmarking in more than fifty companies in the United States and constructed a definition which emphasised certain key elements and processes:

Benchmarking, a method for organisational improvement that involves continuous, systematic evaluation of the products, services and processes of organisations that are recognised as representing best practices (Spendolini 1992, 9).

Benchmarking is based on the assumption that factual data collected in different sites can be used comparatively to understand organisational strengths and weaknesses, and to identify areas in which change ought to be a priority. Macneil et al distinguished between three types of benchmarking:

Internal, which involves benchmarking of internal operations, between divisions or sites of the same organisation;

Industry or competitive, against other companies in the same industry which has the advantage of comparing firms with common technological and market characteristics; and

Generic or process, which involves comparisons of specific processes (e.g. billing, or perhaps debt collection) with international leaders irrespective of industry.

Governments have sought, at least from time to time, to encourage comparative benchmarking as a means of driving cultural change within workplaces, enabling their public sector agencies or private enterprises to better understand their own processes, and encouraging a strong external focus'. Typically, this has involved a model of benchmarking in which teams compare data about 'critical points for improvement' and analyse differences in processes in order to identify the 'best practice' for achieving particular objectives. This has raised issues about both the comparability of different kinds of sites, and of the reliability of the data used.

Similar issues have been brought home to the higher education sector in recent years with the increased profile of various international rankings of universities. There has been an increase in the number of rating sponsors using a varied range of methodologies, although research output and its perceived quality has been a key indicator in the more highly regarded rankings. Regional engagement has rarely featured although perceived relationships with industry have been included in some rating frameworks. The increased attention to the apparent implications of the rankings has been driven largely by the anticipated consequences for attracting outstanding academic expertise and international students.

There has been increased research activity on benchmarking in higher education. The OECD has initiated one project, while another has been sponsored by the European Commission. Its initiative began in 2006, with a focus on using benchmarking more effectively to modernise European higher education management. The project is now reaching the end of its second phase, having moved in 2008 to a strong focus on implementation of better practices (see www.education-benchmarking.org/projectbackground.html). Similarly, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) and the Australian Universities Procurement Network have sponsored initiatives to use benchmarking consistently as a management resource. However, none of these projects or initiatives have paid attention specifically to questions of engagement, nor specifically at the regional level.

Why use benchmarking as a method? The PURE project incorporated this resource partly to assist the key stakeholders *within* a region to explore their universities' current approach to regional engagement, and to provide a common language and framework for grounded comparison of university approaches to regional engagement *across* regions. The purpose of this report is to summarise the progress made in PURE in its first two years.

3. LEARNING ABOUT BENCHMARKING

In these first two years, the benchmarking method has contributed to significant outcomes. These have included learning about:

- a) mechanisms for enabling the universities to develop sufficient trust to participate in project activities and to refine priorities, at a practical level;
- b) the instruments themselves, especially that related to university benchmarking, and their process of implementation;
- c) how different universities within a region will rate their practices differently, partly because of differences in mission, as well as because of their level of achievement on an indicator;
- d) the gap between regional aspirations and the apparent priorities in university engagement; and
- e) the value of universities developing clear structures and policies to support their preferred priority on engagement as a key element of their strategic approach.

Despite methodological differences and difficulties, interesting insights still emerged. In Melbourne, for example, there was a distinct pattern across the universities, notwithstanding individual differences, which reflected that certain aspects of engagement were a higher priority than others.

Priority-Setting

In a project like PURE, with multiple stakeholders and an agenda which seeks to link local projects with comparable interests and initiatives in quite divergent regional settings, there is a clear need to establish points of focus for bringing the parties together. While the Regional Coordinating Group (RCG) is the formal mechanism for this to occur, the two activities which have forged some consistent coherence to project activities were the visits of the Consultative Development Group (CDG) and the benchmarking. Getting both universities and regional stakeholders to get involved with the benchmarking required significant energy from the RCG and especially the Regional Link Person, but once achieved, it provided a focus for discussion and priority setting that proved important in generating subsequent project

activities. A critical issue in many regions has been the challenge of building sufficient trust in each other and in the process for them to share their ratings with each other, and to engage openly in the subsequent discussion.

The Instruments and Implementation

There was some feedback that the university benchmarking instrument itself needed refinement. This reflected concern about scale (it is an 80-page document), that still reflects its British origins (which led some to question its relevance).

In relation to the instrument, the consistent message was the need to ensure simplicity, clarity and ease of use, especially in 'non Anglo-Saxon' settings. It became apparent also that it was important to ensure quality assurance through not only the design of the benchmarking tool, but a consistent methodology in application across a cohort of universities for example.

After some initial concern, the response to the instrument in a range of regions has been generally favourable. It has become recognised as a resource in which universities (and regions) can use for their own benefit, adapting the task to suit their own circumstances.

Similar comments were made in relation to the regional instrument. The Helsinki Link Person reported that some questions and answer options were somewhat difficult to understand and/or to interpret due to local conditions. Due to this, international benchmarking or some other comparative use might remain limited. The scale of the questions (from 1-5) was sometimes difficult to follow. On top of this, the concepts in many questions were seen as representations of an Anglo-Saxon operating environment, instead of a large, public welfare state model as in the Nordic countries.

Difference in University Practices and Achievement

As the Introduction to the instrument indicates, it is not expected that all universities would rate equally across all indicators. This is very much a matter of individual universities' own strategic priorities, and how they can learn from their ratings of current practice and performance. However, this is one example where regional differences must be taken into account. The situation, and variations in university missions, are likely to contrast significantly between those circumstances where there is a single university in a region (Varmland or Darling Downs), compared with 'multi-university' regions (such as Melbourne or Flanders, for example).

This has particular implications for the analysis and interpretation of the benchmarking data. The simple dictum to describe the PURE approach is: 'you can't compare, but you can share'. Partly because of methodological inconsistency and partly because of institutional sensitivities, there was a need to balance the review of individual ratings with aggregated regional pictures. In the end, Melbourne was the only region to use a numerical template and produce a mean rating on each of the indicators which are

covered in the benchmarking instrument. It was also the only region in which several institutions undertook the benchmarking twice, allowing some comparison across the two years. This data is reported in the Appendix.

Melbourne's aggregated data was helpful in prompting discussion amongst the RCG members about the reasons why the universities did deliver this pattern. It was interesting also that more or less the same result was achieved across the two years, even when individual universities refined their rating method. However, the regional results from Flanders, Glasgow and Helsinki also generate interesting discussion about the patterns in those regions, prompting a range of thoughts about potential opportunities for more effective engagement.

Regional Aspirations and University Priorities

Very few efforts were made to trial the regional benchmarking instrument. It required regional stakeholders to consider their achievement on a number of areas that are central to regional development. It seemed that in some settings, implementation was some confusion over whether the instrument was designed to enable regions to offer their rating of the universities' engagement, or the state of development in the region.

In Helsinki, the regional instrument was the focus rather than that for universities. The Helsinki RCG brought together a group of representatives from the Cities and from regional development companies.

In Melbourne, the Victorian Government provided an extensive body of formal reports, but found the political sensitivity which would have been associated with the rating element of the benchmarking to be rather difficult to manage. Two other regional stakeholders did complete the instrument, demonstrating reasonable consistency in their responses. Comparison of the regional ratings with the university ratings was also interesting, raising the question of whether the areas in which the regional stakeholders identified relative weakness could be seen as areas that should be priorities for the universities.

University Strategy

In at least three of the universities, the process did generate internal initiatives in which they refined their overall strategy to engagement. One of these examples, Monash, was subsequently documented as a case study. A subsequent step would be to consider whether one or more institutions consider themselves to be very strong in relation to one or more of the key dimensions evaluated through the instrument, such that other institutions might learn from them should they consider this to be important to their strategic priorities; this was not addressed formally.

The challenge for many universities is that they are large and diverse in their internal operating arrangements, often operating across several campuses. This has meant that the apparent pressure to choose a single rating on a

particular indicator was too difficult. Nevertheless, the instrument does provide extensive descriptors which do assist an institution to explore carefully where their current performance is positioned, and whether their policy and strategic orientation does support effective regional engagement.

In conclusion, three key principles might be considered to be essential in the ongoing implementation of benchmarking, either as part of PURE, or indeed, as a general strategy by universities. There are:

- a) developing trust amongst the participating parties is crucial to achieving the commitment to use the instrument, and to engage fully in the subsequent discussion of the analysis;
- b) the value is not just in the 1-2 year application through the PURE project, but ongoing application as part of self-assessment and continuous improvement; and
- c) one of the key values of benchmarking is that it can identify evidence-based examples of good practice to assist in communication of university contribution and engagement.

4. EXPERIENCES IN THE REGIONS

4.1 Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne was the first of the regions to implement the benchmarking activity. All nine universities participated in the process in the first year, and six in the second. This provided some opportunity for identifying both patterns across the higher education sector, as well as differences within it, and following the second iteration, to do so with the benefit of a year's transition. Three regional stakeholders responded to the regional benchmarking instrument in the first year, one of which provided formal quantitative data, while two provided ratings as required by the instrument.

All of the Victorian Universities bar one have their base in metropolitan Melbourne. Three also have a strong provincial presence, while two have some rural activity. All have multiple campuses. Each university has completed the ratings against the indicators as a single institution, meaning that in some cases, judgements will have been made about the overall balance of activity across quite different local settings. Each university adopted a different process for completion of the instrument, adapted to their circumstances and capacity at the time. The universities undertook the ratings at different times over a period of several months, meaning that some had longer to reflect on their circumstances than others.

As a simple summary, the results were:

Indicator Groups	Mean ratings		Lowest ratings		Highest ratings	
	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010
'Enhancing regional infrastructure'	3.3	3.6	2.5	3.8	2.8	4.2
'Human capital development processes'	3.7	3.9	3.4	4.0	3.8	4.3
'Business development processes'	3.0	3.2	1.6	3.8	2.6	3.5
'Interactive learning and social capital development processes'	3.4	3.6	2.6	3.9	3.0	4.0
'Community development processes'	3.7	3.6	3.2	4.3	2.3	4.5
'Cultural development'	3.0	2.9	1.7	3.7	2.2	3.7
'Promoting sustainability'	3.2	3.6	1.7	4.1	3.1	4.5
'Promoting engagement'	3.8	4.1	3.0	4.7	3.7	4.7

Note: 9 responses in 2009; 6 responses in 2010

In both years, the strongest ratings were given to the work of promoting engagement within the universities, and lesser scores to the other dimensions of contribution to regional development. This in itself is an intriguing finding which raises questions about either the effectiveness or the orientation of the engagement focus.

With respect to the regional stakeholder benchmarking in 2009, the strongest ratings were given to cultural development, whilst 'Framework conditions' (infrastructure) received the lowest rating. The relative ratings were:

- Cultural development (4.9);
- Human capital development processes (4.3);
- Interactive learning and social capital development (3.9);
- Business development processes (3.6);
- Understanding the region (3.5);
- Promoting sustainability (3.5); and
- Framework conditions (3.2).

At a regional level, building on Melbourne's strengths and 'filling the gaps' in lower ranking areas were key observations, including how university engagement at the regional level could be improved.

4.2 Flanders, Belgium

The higher education institutions in Flanders provided detailed, somewhat general but very grounded responses to each of the indicators. However, they did not provide specific rankings, making it difficult to get a clear picture of relative areas of strength in engagement. A number of institutions provided responses, so that the report provides a rich overview of the kinds of practices supported in different institutions.

[Can we get 1-2 paragraphs from Jan Geens in Flanders to summarize their experience and outcomes? Perhaps Barbara McLure can also comment as she went through the Flanders document in some detail.]

4.3 Glasgow, UK

PURE Glasgow provided a significant amount of data on each of the indicators for the major institution, the University of Glasgow, with some commentary which provided specific examples. The data suggests an engagement profile across the main domains of engagement as follows:

Domain	Rating
Regional infrastructure	***
Human capital development	****+
Business development	****
Social capital development	****
Community development	***
Cultural development	***+
Sustainability	***
Management	n/a

There can never be a complete statement of engagement across an institution as large and as complex as Glasgow University, so the above is based on judgements from what is available. Strengths appear to be in human capital development, business development and social capital development. The less well developed areas would appear to be engagement with regional infrastructure planning, community development and cultural development. It is for debate as to if and how these aspects should be developed and sustained as part of the university strategy and mission.

[Can we get comments from Glasgow as well?]

4.4 Jamtland, Sweden

Both the region and the University in Jamtland used the benchmarking tools. However, the tool was filled in by very few people and was not discussed thoroughly. The instructions given to the region and to the university was that

they should gather a group of people and discuss the questions, with one representative of the RCG present as observer or to clarify things about the PURE project. Nevertheless few people were involved in the benchmarking.

At the university the different parts were handed out to different people, which gave a result which was at times contradictory. In the region one person was made responsible for answering, but with some help from other people on some questions. The answers of the benchmarking were discussed with representatives from the region and the university during the second visit of the review team. This discussion made both the region and the university realise that this tool could be useful within their organisations if a group of people were gathered. The discussion also made clear that there are some differences between the region's and the university's views on their cooperation and involvement in the regional development. The benefit of the benchmarking was that it created discussion on each partner's view of things and some self-reflection.

4.5 Lesotho

The PURE benchmarking tool was used as a baseline against which to assess the nature or extent of community service activity being undertaken. The benchmarking tools classified the university's involvement in community service across five levels. Level one indicated that the main form of activity was through isolated individuals 'acting from a mixture of altruism and desire to access resources'. Level three indicated 'Some institutional commitment but tends to be restricted to key departments and focused around core research roles', while level five indicated:

Strong institutional commitment with wide-ranging involvement from across the university, including students. University is a key stakeholder in the initiative and seeks to enroll other agencies and facilitate collaboration across traditional boundaries.

On this basis we were able to make some initial assessments about the current level of activity in the university. They could be broadly categorized under four headings: individual initiatives to set up community based organizations (for example setting up a pre-school or self help HIV/AIDS support group); departmental activities involving students in capacity building or discipline specific education projects (such as new farming techniques or family health assessment and diagnosis; theatre for development project); ad hoc involvement by departments when requested by external agents (such as participating in cultural activities, assisting in environmental policy formulation); and finally, community focused research (such as action research into learning support for vulnerable children; a survey of the financial activities of pension recipients). None of these activities was identified as multi-disciplinary, though some were directly linked to teaching programmes. Their level, in benchmarking terms, therefore, ranged from level one to level three.

4.6 Gaborone, Botswana

The benchmarking tools were extremely helpful. Although we did not use them wholesale, we were able to adapt them to our situation. For example,

- a) we used them to identify the four areas for our PURE Project;
- b) they served as a reference point when we constructed data collection instruments for our the self reflection and needs assessment study; and
- c) we used them as resource material for our UB/PURE stakeholders workshops and research teams training workshops.

4.7 Helsinki, Finland

The PURE Regional Benchmarking Tool was utilized in an expert discussion group in summer 2010. The other benchmarking tool, targeted at higher education institutes, has not been processed thus far. The HEIs in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area have expressed that they do not need the specific tool at present, as numerous national and international evaluations have been done recently in the region's universities and universities of applied sciences. In addition, the new Aalto University (merged from three universities 1.1.2010) is still developing internally, such that any analysis at this point was considered too soon.

The memo of the regional benchmarking discussion (in Finnish, 17 pages) has been delivered to the board of a regional development company (Culminatum Innovation Oy Ltd). These results might also have a role in future seminars or workshops concerning societal interaction between regions and HEIs.

A specific expert/task group processed the regional tool in June 2010. Altogether nine persons took part in the work. The participants represented the cities of the Metropolitan Area and two regional development companies. Due to this, the task group handled only the qualitative part of the tool. The group evaluated especially the following four thematic topics: a) Understanding the region, b) Human capital development, c) Business development processes and d) Interactive learning and social capital.

Strengths and opportunities

The general confidence level is high in the region, because the actors in the different fields in the region generally know each other well. In addition, centers of expertise and clusters are far advanced. The population in the region is very highly educated. There is significant investment in the employment of young people and entrepreneurship is promoted in many ways, recognizing the needs of business and education. Acknowledging this is important, so that young people are educated to fields that actually offer work. On top of this, it was remarked that Finnish leadership is based on accuracy, sticking to timetables and to a low level of hierarchy. This Finnish way of leadership could even be exported elsewhere.

Weaknesses and threats

The group stressed that interaction amongst the different regional partners could be increased. This would make the grass-roots level more visible in decision making. The role of the third sector could be improved for example through regional development company cluster functions. It could also be possible to draw up a regional strategy for learning regions,.

There continues to be some need for further improvement in the Metropolitan Area's international competence (in attracting foreign investors, top experts etc.) and business positioning in the international market. The following issues were seen as challenges: small market, high taxation and low wage level of executives as compared to international level. The education level of immigrants needs to be improved. It is also important to make it easier for immigrants to be recognized for their earlier education and degrees.

For entrepreneurs there are many good services, both for startups and acting entrepreneurs. There exists several service providers (on consultancy, training etc.), which might be confusing for an entrepreneur to know about all the different services available. The group also thought that the public sector could outsource some services for the benefit of private companies. However, this needs decisions by the City Council. It was also stressed that academic entrepreneurship should be promoted.

In Finland research units are often small. Some research fields can be only in hands of few people, as for example research on urban studies or municipal financing. In any case it is important to secure multifield top research.

The discussions at Helsinki were a very good example of how the instrument can prompt conversation and discussions which lead into further initiatives. For example:

Understanding the region: MEAN 4

- Are there currently too many definitions of the boundaries of the region?
- Regional forum for organizations is still missing. Interaction between social partners in the region should be increased to get more ideas and influences from grass-root level to decision making level. The importance of third sector could be improved for example in the work of Culminatium Innovation's clusters.
- There are several different strategies in the region that could be strongly connected.
- In Finland research units are often small. Some research fields can be only in hands of few people as for example municipal finances development research. In any case it is important to secure multifield top research. How can we make sure that research information is

available and that scientific and social discussion is broad enough also in the future?

Human capital development: MEAN 4.5

- Encountering business life's needs and supply of education demands good anticipation and co-operation. Acknowledge of this is important so that young people are educated to fields that can offer work.
- Desirability of the region must be improved to get more international talents to move into the region.
- Preventing youth unemployment and raising the education level of immigrants is invested.

Business development processes: MEAN 4

- Will business life find its place in international competition? Can we find new fields that can succeed internationally? What kinds of actions are needed in public sector to support this trend? Should resources be focused better?
- Should entrepreneur services be coordinated better in the region? Are there too many service providers from entrepreneur's point of view?
- Finnish leadership is an asset that could even be productized and exported elsewhere.
- Is region's innovation policy somewhat scattered?

Interactive learning and social capital: MEAN 4

- Should municipalities invest public money also in experiments that might be risky to succeed, in seek for new expertise and innovations?

5. CONCLUSION

With the benefit of hindsight, the inclusion of benchmarking as such a key part of the PURE methodology was ambitious, and was always going to be problematic. The diversity of regions, and of agendas and resources within those regions, posed considerable obstacles to the aim of being able to generate sufficient insights to share learning on a systematic and comprehensive basis.

Nevertheless, the experience in several regions has demonstrated that the instruments themselves are useful, and have considerable potential to assist this kind of international project. This reflects, perhaps, the depth of experience of the initial design team in work with universities and regional engagement. However, it also indicates something of the enthusiasm of both university and regional stakeholders to use a resource which provides them, at the very least, with opportunities for reflection on their own arrangements and practice, and for seeing how the experiences of others might be useful.

Of course, in the current stage of development of methodology, the process relies heavily on the self-perceptions of stakeholders and participants, whether in the universities or the regional authorities. This has been inevitable in PURE, given both the project design and the resources available. In this instance, where the benchmarking has been implemented with serious intent, the issue of self-perception could be said to have become a strength, insofar as it has engendered a degree of commitment on the part of the stakeholders, and hence, some commitment to subsequent action.

With the benefit of the experience of the past few years, it seems to be likely that this method requires more than the two years nominally available for the PURE project. It takes time to build the level of trust amongst partners for genuine sharing of data, and then being willing to have one's ratings scrutinised in terms of the possible reflection on performance. However, once the trust develops, it is clear that fruitful conversations can occur. Even in the case of regional stakeholder benchmarking, which is undeveloped relatively, it seems that there could be useful scope for representatives of Melbourne and Helsinki to begin to share their ratings, to explore the reasons for the difference, and to engage in debate over the kinds of questions signalled by the Helsinki group.

APPENDIX 1: THE PURE BENCHMARKING INSTRUMENTS

Two discrete instruments were provided. The universities' instrument was prepared by Professor David Charles at the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne, following earlier work that he and Paul Benneworth had done for the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Copyright of the instrument is retained at the University of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

University Benchmarking

It focuses on a higher education institution's (HEI) contribution to various aspects of regional development. It is organised around a series of 'practice' (processes) and 'performance' (past achievements) indicators and sub-indicators, with a rationale provided for each indicator. The instrument also includes a brief account of 'good practice' and seeks the university's ranking of itself on a scale of 1-5. Each sub-indicator has a few words which attempt to indicate the circumstances which would warrant a 1, 3 or 5 rating. For example, with the 'practice' sub-indicator 'University participation in provision of public transport or other services', the following advice is provided:

Levels

1	No support or investment from the university. Complete reliance on the public or private sector to provide services used by staff and students, or else services are restricted to university users only.
2	
3	University gets involved in the provision of services and tacitly allows the community to make use of services.
4	
5	University engages in a strategic dialogue with the local community over the demand and provision of services.

Overall, there are eight key indicators, seven of which are derived from a theory of regional competitiveness. The eighth relates specifically to the engagement processes within universities themselves:

- a) **Enhancing regional infrastructure** - supporting the regional infrastructure, regulatory frameworks and underlying quality of environment and lifestyles. This includes the HEI helping the region to identify where improvements can be made, or providing direct input to the quality of the local environment.
- b) **Human capital development processes** - supporting the development of human capital through education and training

both within the HEI and in other organisations. The emphasis here is on how the HEI adds to the stock of human capital by facilitating the development of people in the region, and retains both local and non-local graduates. (The education of people from outside the region who then leave it does not add to the stock of human capital in the region, and therefore is not relevant for this process. However it may be important at national level, and it does add to regional GDP.)

- c) **Business development processes** - the creation and attraction of new firms, as well as support for developing new products, processes and markets for existing firms.
- d) **Interactive learning and social capital development processes** - encouraging co-operation between firms and other institutions to generate technological, commercial and social benefits. Regional collaboration and learning between organisations are important in regional success. HEIs can promote the application of knowledge through regional partnerships, and encourage networking and the building of trust.
- e) **Community development processes** - ensuring that the benefits of enhanced business competitiveness are widely shared within the community, and that the health and welfare of the population are maximised.
- f) **Cultural development** - the creation, enhancement and reproduction of regional cultures, underpinning the other processes above, and interpreting culture both as activities that enrich the quality of life and as patterns of social conventions, norms and values that constitute regional identities.
- g) **Promoting sustainability** - long-term regional development must be underpinned by processes seeking to improve sustainability, even though some of these objectives may appear to conflict with business development objectives (from the Introduction to the instrument, *Benchmarking the Regional Contribution of Universities*).

Regional Benchmarking

The second instrument was designed to support thinking amongst regional authorities/stakeholders that would complement the benchmarking by universities. It is a new instrument, developed by Professor Charles, specifically for use in PURE, and hence, its initial use has been very much in the spirit of 'road-testing' its value.

It was intended as a means of gaining an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the region's development, and of identifying the challenges facing a region that might assist a university that wanted to have an impact in its region to focus its efforts. This was differentiated, in planning PURE, from

an exercise in which the regional authorities would assess the current contribution of the universities.

The instrument acknowledges the rather extensive list of quantitative indicators that are used by the European Union, national governments and the OECD to compare regional performance. However, it also includes a qualitative component which proposes a similar process to that offered to universities. It sets out a series of indicators and sub-indicators, with options for ranking the perceived status of regional development. The groups of indicators are:

- a) Understanding the region;
- b) Framework (or 'infrastructure') conditions;
- c) Human capital development;
- d) Business Development processes;
- e) Interactive learning and social capital;
- f) Cultural development; and
- g) Sustainability.

Under each of these headings, there is a set of sub-indicators with options for coding responses from 1-5. For example, in relation to sub-indicator 7 in the 'Framework Conditions' section, the following options are offered:

7) Effectiveness of regional strategic planning

Responses	Non existent	code 1
	Emerging regional planning framework - elements in place but poor integration.	code 2
	Regional strategic planning framework, but static and unresponsive to competitiveness agenda	code 3
	Planning framework is responsive to competitiveness strategy but tends to be reactive	code 4
	Planning is integral to competitiveness framework, and interactive	code 5