This document outlines the Benchmarking Framework used by the University Library.

This Benchmarking Framework forms part of the broader Library Quality Management Program, particularly informing the Planning and Performance Frameworks.

Responsibility for developing and maintaining the framework lies with the Library’s Corporate Services (CS) Unit under the leadership of its Associate Director (AD).

The framework is reviewed at least once every three years by a meeting of the Library Management Team.

**Approach**

The Library’s approach to benchmarking is consistent with that articulated in the Curtin Quality Framework, including its associated document Benchmarking at Curtin, and the “Benchmarking at Curtin Policy”.

These documents encourage all areas of the University to undertake benchmarking in order to achieve continuous improvement, innovation and excellence.

The Library takes as its definition of benchmarking:

> “the formal and structured process of searching for those practices which lead to excellent performance, the observation and exchange of information about those practices, the adaptation of those practices to meet the needs of one’s own organisation, and their implementation”. [Meade, 2006, pp7-8]

This definition is valuable as its emphasis is on being systematic, learning from results and applying these to improve performance. As Wilson and Pitman (2000, p.6) note, benchmarking is about more than just copying and comparison – it is a means of obtaining objective evidence about where an organisation is now in relation to other organisations, and how the differences are being achieved.

The Library's benchmarking approach makes a distinction between:

- using comparative measurement to find “benchmarks”, i.e. the best performance currently being exhibited in an area, how well Curtin Library is currently performing compared with those benchmarks and with selected comparators [Performance benchmarking]
- undertaking benchmarking as a learning process, in partnership with other libraries and organisations, to find improved ways of doing things [Process benchmarking].

Performance benchmarking gives an understanding of how the Library is performing compared with
others – what the Library can celebrate and leverage and areas where it can improve.

Process benchmarking “offers a way of not only doing the same things better but discovering new, better and smarter ways of doing things and in the process of discovery, understanding of why they are better or smarter.” [Jackson & Lund]

The Library is prepared to undertake, as appropriate:
- **Internal benchmarking** - seeking out and replicating examples of best practice within one’s organisation including other areas of the University.
- **Competitive benchmarking** – investigation of direct competitors
- **Industry** benchmarking – comparison with non-competitors in the same industry (this might be the library sector in general, or academic/research libraries, or perhaps just university/tertiary libraries)
- **Generic** – comparison with organisations outside one’s own industry, but comparable in some way (this might be commercial information providers, e.g. information brokers, search engines, bookshops, distributors, etc) (Wilson and Pitman, 2000, p.7)

As part of performance benchmarking, the Library may make comparisons between its current and its past performance to track progress/decline. This “self-benchmarking” is considered to be of limited usefulness as it does not include identification of best or better practice and the factors which are contributing to it.

As benchmarking, particularly process benchmarking, is expensive in terms of time, staff and money, the Library uses it selectively, in areas identified as being strategically important.

Consistent with University's global outlook, the Library includes in its performance benchmarking not only local but national and international benchmarks. If appropriate and possible, the Library may undertake process benchmarking with national and international partners.

Benchmarking, like quality assurance, is seen as a desirable part of the Library's culture – it is seen as everyone's business.

**Deployment, Review and Improvement**

Benchmarking is incorporated into both the Library's Planning and Performance Frameworks. This is shown diagrammatically in Appendix 1. Numbers in the margin below refer to the numbers in Appendix 1.

**Performance benchmarking**

As noted in these Frameworks, every 3-5 years the Library develops a Library Plan identifying the strategic objectives toward which the Library will work over the planning period. A Scorecard of key performance indicators, including measures and targets to be achieved over the period is also developed. Both the Library Plan and the Scorecard are informed by the University's Strategic Plan and Scorecard, and the Library’s assessment of its current and future operating environment, its performance to date and strategically important improvement areas.

In developing the Library Scorecard, as far as possible the Library uses measures which will not only enable it to track its progress toward its targets, but which will enable it to undertake performance benchmarking, i.e.
• identify the best performers and performances locally, nationally and internationally
• identify how selected comparators are performing
• identify how Curtin Library is performing vis-à-vis the best performers and comparators, including both its strengths and areas where it could improve.

Currently, the following national and international surveys are considered to have the potential to provide performance benchmarking data in a number of library performance areas:
- LibQual+
- Insync
- Voicelt Staff Satisfaction Survey
- CAUL Materials Availability Survey
- CAUL Annual Statistics

Accordingly, the Library Scorecard 2010 – 2013 draws on measures from these surveys wherever possible.

Scorecard measures to which performance benchmarking will be applied during the life of the card are noted on the Scorecard. Some targets for these measures may be expressed in “raw” terms, e.g. to achieve a score of nnn on a particular measure; in other cases relative targets may be used, e.g. to be the best ranked LATN library on a particular measure.

Rather than attempting to compare its performance with all libraries undertaking the above-mentioned surveys, “comparator libraries” are selected in order to provide focus to the Library’s performance benchmarking. A list of comparator libraries is included in Appendix 2 and appended to the Library Scorecard. When undertaking performance benchmarking, the performance of these libraries is included wherever possible.

Comparator libraries include those with whom the Library feels it is appropriate to compare itself (i.e. those which are in some senses “like” Curtin library), and those with whom others (e.g. clients, University Executive) are likely to compare it. In selecting national and international comparators, the Library looks to the University Plan and Scorecard for guidance. For example, the vision in the current University Plan is to be “Top 20 in Asia by 2020”; this suggests that Asian libraries would be useful comparators. The University emphasizes its membership of the Australian Technology Network, suggesting that Libraries of the ATN (LATN) should be included in the comparator group. The University is currently identifying other appropriate comparators, including high performing Go8 universities which are considered “role models” for Curtin (operating at a level Curtin is aiming for) e.g. the University of NSW. Where such universities are identified, their libraries will also be incorporated as comparators.

The Associate Director, CS is responsible for ensuring that the agreed performance benchmarking of Scorecard measures is undertaken. Some measures lend themselves to annual review and the data for comparator libraries is readily accessible (e.g. the CAUL Annual Statistics). In the case of surveys, data for a range of comparator libraries may only become available every 2-3 years. Results for all or sub-groups of participating libraries (e.g. “university libraries”) may be available, but results for particular comparators may not automatically be accessible (e.g. Your Voice) – comparator libraries may need to be approached to obtain or exchange their data. In some cases co-operative arrangements can be made for the collation and analysis of data (particularly within networks of libraries such as LATN and the WA Group of University Librarians), with one institution undertaking the collation and analysis for the network, either on a voluntary or contractual basis. A timetable for the performance benchmarking to be undertaken in each year of the Plan is included in Appendix 2 and appended to the Scorecard.
Both the list of comparators and the benchmarking timetable are reviewed and revised annually as required in light of developments during the year.

The results of the performance benchmarking undertaken on Scorecard measures are reported to the Special Performance Meetings of Library Management Team as outlined in the Performance Framework.

Performance benchmarking results may identify areas of strength where Curtin is performing well compared with others. This information can be fed back to clients and the University for competitive advantage. It may also be used to entice process benchmarking partners, indicating that Curtin has things to teach as well as to learn (see below).

Where it is identified that Curtin’s performance could be improved, LMT considers whether to:

(a) take immediate action to informally explore what selected better performing libraries are doing which may be contributing to their success. Such exploration would normally be the responsibility of the Associate Director or Manager of the relevant Library Unit.

(b) consider the area for more formal process benchmarking.

In the case of (a), the relevant Associate Director or Manager will recommend and/or implement changes which it is expected will lead to improvement at Curtin. Future performance benchmarking on the selected measure will indicate whether results have improved or whether further action is required.

Process benchmarking

In accordance with the Library’s Planning Framework, during annual strategic and operational planning sessions consideration is given to process benchmarking to be undertaken during the forthcoming year.

As noted above, process benchmarking is costly in the time and resources required to arrange, conduct and assess it. The Library’s process benchmarking is therefore limited to strategically important areas (areas where improvement will matter), where urgent attention is not required, so there is time to plan, deploy and review the benchmarking appropriately.

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<tr>
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<th>Low Importance; High Urgency</th>
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<td>Low Importance; Low Urgency</td>
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Ordinarily it is expected that one process benchmarking exercise per year is undertaken as a strategic initiative. Over the life of the Library Plan therefore 3-5 strategically important processes will have been benchmarked and (ordinarily) improved.

The process to be benchmarked is selected by LMT taking into consideration:

- Results of the previous year’s performance benchmarking on Library Scorecard measures
- Results of the previous year’s “continuous improvement review” of a Library unit or area
- Other emergent, strategically important issues in the environment, including University developments
Smaller scale process benchmarking may be proposed by Units as part of their operational planning but is to be kept to a minimum given the expense in resources (time, staffing and money).

[As noted in the Planning Framework, the Library is committed to conducting continuous improvement reviews annually. These typically involve a reviewer being engaged by the Library to review a unit or area of the library’s operations. They are typically relatively broad extending across a number of processes. They do not ordinarily permit in-depth assessment of processes and are “one-way”, with the reviewer assessing Curtin’s performance rather than Curtin Library staff exploring others’ processes.]

The agreed process benchmarking initiative is scoped in accordance with the Planning Framework.

The benchmarking partner(s) are ordinarily to be selected from best performing or better performing comparator libraries as identified through performance benchmarking. Negotiation to secure the benchmarking partner may be conducted by the University Librarian or another member of LMT.

Process benchmarking typically involves Curtin Library staff exploring how a process is handled by the partner library/libraries, hypothesizing what it is that is resulting in the other Library achieving a higher level of performance than Curtin, and determining what improvements could and should be implemented at Curtin. It is likely to involve some travel to the other library, which may require strategic initiative funding.

As process benchmarking typically involves considerable input from the other library, Curtin Library may need to reciprocate, sharing its expertise in areas where it is performing well.

To “close the continuous improvement loop” it is essential that the impact of changes to processes adopted by the Library is reviewed and assessed. Wherever possible this is done through repeat measurement in accordance with the Library Scorecard (“self benchmarking”) and/or repeat performance benchmarking, assessing the impact of changes introduced on the Library’s raw measures or its comparative performance vis-a-vis comparator libraries.

References:
Meade, 2006
Jackson & Lund
Wilson and Pitman, 2000

Karen Tang
Associate Director – Corporate Services
February 2012
Appendix 1: Library Benchmarking Framework

1. Select strategic areas (PLF), measures & comparators (PFF)
2. Collect data & analysis (PFF)
3. Identify better / best performers and performances (PFF)
4. Explore better practices or consider process benchmarking (PFF)
5. Plan process benchmarking (PLF)
6. Select & secure process benchmarking partners; conduct process benchmarking; implement improved practices (PLF)
7. Assess impact of changed practices on performance measures (PFF)
8. Further improvement req'd? (PFF)

PLF = Planning Framework
PFF = Performance Framework

Cycle 1
Cycle 2
APPENDIX 2:
Subject to annual review and revision – also to be appended to Library Scorecard

Comparator libraries for benchmarking

Local (WAGUL)
UWA
Murdoch
ECU
Notre Dame

National/International (LATN)
RMIT
UTS
QUT
UniSA
Auckland UT
Nanyang Technological University

National (University “role models” as identified in Ralph Wetzler Benchmarking and Strategy: Performance Indicators and the Strategic Framework 2010)
University of NSW
Monash University
University of Melbourne
University of Queensland
University of Sydney

International (Asia/Oceania)
Hong Kong Polytechnic
University of Hong Kong
University of Auckland
University of Otago (for Library as place)

Others to be determined
Warwick University?
CSIRO (for research) ?

Performance benchmarking timetable

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Endorsed by LMT 6 March 2012