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<http://www1.ipq.pt/PT/SPQ/ComissoesSectoriais/CS11/Pages/GT2-Ensino-Superior.aspx>

Title: Collaborative Benchmarking: evidence from evidence from the working group for Quality in HEI

University: Instituto Superior Técnico, Comissão Setorial para a Educação e formação/IPQ

Country: Portugal

Dimensions: Education

Categories: Quality Management

Executive summary

This practice describes the experience of **GT2 - Grupo de Trabalho para a Qualidade do Ensino Superior** (Working Group for Quality Management in Higher Education in collaborative benchmarking.

This Group was created within the **Sectorial Commission for Education and Training (CS/11)**, and its collaborative benchmarking practices are operationalized in monthly meetings, where quality management is discussed. With the involvement of 23 Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Gt2 aims to inform and to promote the implementation of good practices in the HE Quality System field, by:

- spreading the information in the academic and scientific communities;
- identifying and sharing good practices, contributions and strategic orientations regarding the HE Quality;
- creating a practice of internal debates, not only in GT2 meetings, but also in CS/11 plenary sessions;
- sharing good practices with partners and society in general, which includes a CS/11 - GT2 Annual Seminar

Implementation of the practice

The global crisis and consequently the financial restrictions, unemployment and the demographic trend, has risen the competition between HEI, which force them to increase their attractiveness in the global market and to promote quality management systems that enhance university performance and modernize university management.

According to this context, the sharing of information and the creation of HEI formal and informal networks emerges like a tool that helps find new solutions to common problems among the HEI, and implement innovative improvements.

The recruitment procedure of the members of the GT2 is made through a formal invitation, and relies on a volunteer participation in sessions together with an institution's representative.

In this regard, the GT2 was established on the basis of a vast diversity of experiences and backgrounds at different levels, including member institutions with different dimensions and missions – universities and polytechnics, public and private, professional orders, Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education– occupying different positions, with different backgrounds and experiences, namely with rectoral team members of some institutions, teachers, unit directors and senior staff that develop their professional work in HE Quality field.

GT2Coordinator is designated by all group members and promotes the annual work planning, ensuring the articulation with the CS/11. In addition, the Coordinator ensures the correct development of the duties assigned, the schedule of the sessions and the distribution of all relevant information.

The GT2 meets once a month and each session is used by the participants not only to develop the group duties assigned at the beginning of the year, but also for sharing information related to their HEI in general and/or to share problems, contributing the Group for its analysis and resolution. The group members are free to choose any subject they wish to analyze in each session, but meetings are conducted by the GT2 Coordinator and the usual procedures for the meetings are as follows:

- The team coordinator presents the topic to be discussed;
- When necessary, the group is organized into sub-teams;
- There are no formal hierarchies within the group;

- Suggestions are structured and summarized at the end of the meeting by the Coordinator;
- Conclusions are shared by all group members.

Decisions are made on a consensual basis, with no hierarchies within the Group. All members can share, for common discussion, topics of interest. It is noted that in addition to the meetings, over the years, informal networks and partnerships have been created to share good practices, develop national and international projects, and to provide mutual support among elements of the GT2.

Achieved results

In accordance with the pre-established mission for the CS/11, Gt2 is responsible for the empowerment of specific thematics about quality in higher education. Members meet monthly, and in the morning they develop their Group activities. In the afternoon, it is promoted a plenary session with all working groups, during which the work developed by the teams is shared among CS/11 and other invited stakeholders. The main objective is that all CS/11 members follow up the activities in progress and create a broader internal debate than can produce important feedback not only for the working groups but also for the institutions represented.

The themes presented by GT2 in the plenary sessions were (2011 - 2013):

- Audit Systems Quality Assurance: the experience of the Instituto Superior Técnico;
- Preparation stages of the Plan and Quality Manual in IES;
- Surveys at Universidade de Lisboa;
- Surveys in higher education institutions;
- Review of Education and Training Programs (CEF) in Three Style Figures and a Small Teaser;
- Encouraging organizational creativity;
- Fundamentals and strategies in short-term post-secondary education;
- Evaluation of the IST services;
- Quality indicators in e-learning;

- Quality in e-learning;
- Science - Connecting science / higher education from the quality perspective;
- The pedagogical model of the medical school at Universidade da Beira Interior.

The Seminars organized by GT2 were (2007- 2013):

- SWOT Analysis in HEI: opportunities, challenges, and strategies for quality
- 1st International Conference on Graduate Employability Higher Education for the XXI Century – Different Views
- Quality Management Systems in HE
- Bologna Contribution to Quality in HE
- Innovation and Quality in HE
- Best Practices for Quality in HEI

GT2 has also produced in 2012 (edited by Universidade Aberta) an eBook on “Quality in HE, examples of good practices”

<http://www2.uab.pt/producao/GT2/pdf/GT2.pdf>.

Assessment and review

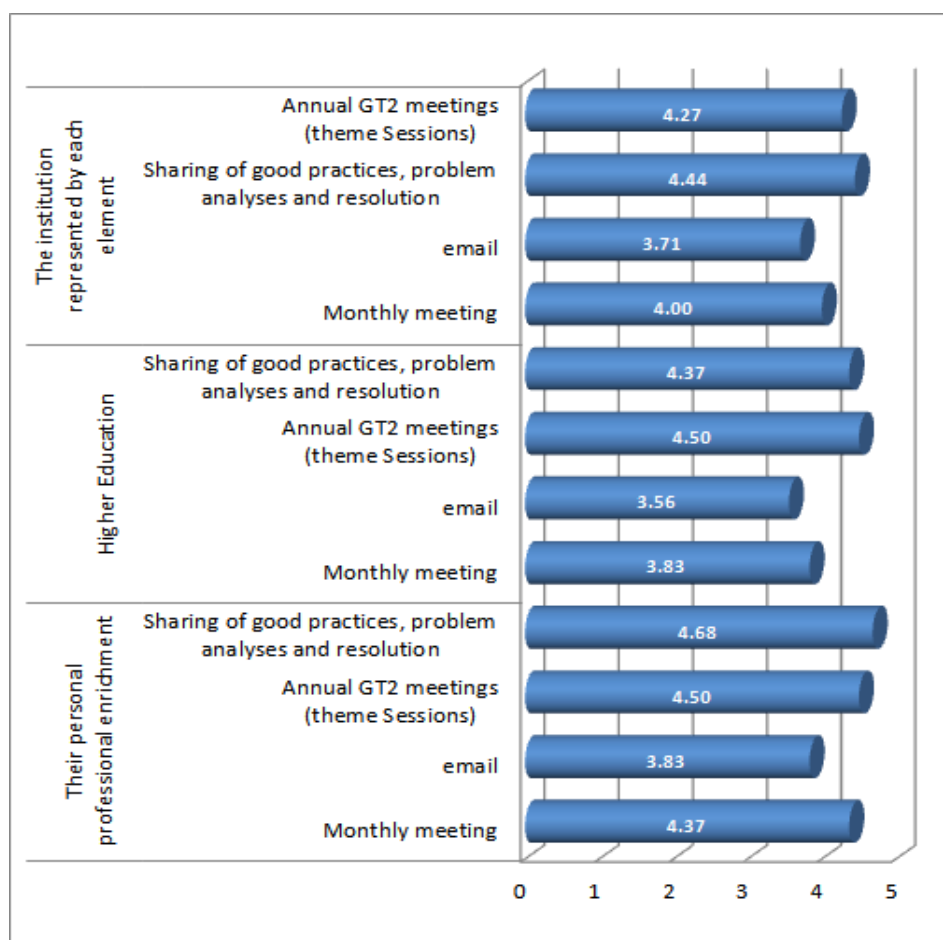
In an environment where the HEIs need to promote quality management systems that cover several challenges, and with the growth of the HE sector, the GT2 members found a way to offer a strong contribution, by using collaborative benchmarking for sharing experiences and information related to their institution or higher education in general and to share their problems, dedicating the group to its analysis and resolution.

For the success of collaborative benchmarking (Costa, 2008), the following requirements are identified at group level: environment-oriented discussion of real problems; open environment, equitable and reliable; environment that encourages observation, reflection and systematic action; alignment of individual interests, organizational and group. These requirements are identified throughout this work and it is believed, according to the last 6 or 7 years of GT2 work, that with the organization of the annual seminars and of the e-book publication, GT2 actively contributes to increase Higher Education Quality.

Additionally, with the goal of measuring the quality of the work developed in the scope of the GT2, a survey was launched to the elements that actually participate, or have participated, in the group meetings from 2006 to 2013. The survey had a response rate of 56% and participants were asked to rate the importance of the work developed by GT2 during that period (in a scale from 1 to 5).

The results showed that 90% of GT2 elements consider that the work developed in the group is recognized by the institution that they represent and that (Figure above) its work is very important in the sharing of good practices, in problems analysis and resolution (average = 4.68), in the annual meetings for the Portuguese HE (average = 4.5), and for personal professional enrichment (average = 4.5).

Evaluation of the work developed in the scope of GT2



As described in “A University Benchmarking Handbook” (ESMU, 2010) all the participants in the collaborative benchmarking exercise need to really believe that the benchmarking exercise is worth the cost and the effort, because it will

help them to improve their overall strategic performance. Based on these results, it can be concluded that both HEI represented and individual elements have found a way of collaborative benchmarking and actively contributed to increase the Portuguese HE quality.

Innovative character and transferability

GT2 is a place where Portuguese HEI can share experiences and learn with some of the experiences and good practices being developed by others. The working group is also a flashpoint for some inter-institutional projects. As such, in our viewpoint HEI find in GT2 and CS/11 a unique forum with no comparison at all in the Portuguese Higher Education System.

The work of the GT2 is a continuous process of learning, intensive and time-consuming, that involves self-learning and learning with others: learning with a practical purpose and focused on quality.

The sharing of information and the creation on HE networks emerges like a tool that help find new solutions to common problems among the HEI and implement innovative improvements.

"The systematic comparison of core institutional processes leads to innovative practice for improved performance" (Burquel and Vught, 2009 in "Benchmarking in European Higher Education: a step beyond current quality models". Paper presented in Track 1 at the 31st Annual EAIR Forum in Vilnius, Lithuania. in <http://www.eair.nl/forum/vilnius/pdf/550.pdf> , access in 29/07/2013).

"... the collaborative benchmarking is a valuable modern management tool for organizations eager to steer their institutional developments in a strategic way" (ENQA, 2011. Internal Quality Assurance Benchmarking. [report]. in http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA_wr_20.pdf. Access in 26/07/2013).