

## Effective Use of Benchmarking: The Context of the Centre for Preparatory Studies in Oman

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### Abstract

This paper examines the importance and the process of developing benchmarks for the courses offered at the Centre for Preparatory Studies, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. Benchmarks are necessary for improving the quality of instruction. Considering the importance of benchmarking and taking it as a point of reference, a small study was undertaken at the Centre for Preparatory Studies to develop benchmarks for each course offered in the General Foundation Program. One of the aims of developing benchmarks was to make it clear to students what is expected of them at the end of each course. The study draws on some examples of benchmarking models to draft benchmarks for the purpose of study. The exploratory method was followed for gaining insights to write benchmarks. Literature review showed that course objectives are used synonymously with benchmarks. The outcomes of the research project played a significant role in designing curricula for the GFP courses though it was quite a challenging task. It is important to draft concise and clear benchmarks, which are accessible and comprehensible for students and teachers. So, using the level-specific proficiency descriptors, can-do statements for each skill benchmarks were written to make it comprehensible for students to know what is expected of them by the end of each course. Benchmarks used in one context may not be effective in other contexts. One important insight gained was what benchmarking is and what it is not.

*Key words:* benchmarks, challenges, implementation, objectives, standards

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