

# AIMING AHEAD

The Newsletter of Academic Institutions Management Services  
Vol. 1 No. 3 March 1999

## **AIMS (Academic Institutions Management Services):**

a Higher Education management support service, based at the University of Liverpool

created more than thirty years ago to serve the higher education sector

until recently, use of the service was restricted to its six member universities. Those services are now available to non-member institutions, who can take advantage of the specialist skills and knowledge of the AIMS consultants

non-member institutions can apply for membership of AIMS, become contracted clients or commission individual assignments

for more information about the services of AIMS or for details about membership, contracted client status or the commissioning of assignments, please contact:

**Mr Lionel Ross (Director) AIMS, The University, Liverpool L69 3BX**

**telephone: 0151-794 3132**

**fax: 0151-794 3133**

**email: [jlross@liv.ac.uk](mailto:jlross@liv.ac.uk)**

**website: <http://www.liv.ac.uk/AIMS/>**

## **Benchmarking and Business Process Re-engineering**

**In the last issue of AIMING AHEAD, we discussed the merits and potential risks of downsizing and outsourcing, and how AIMS could assist in ensuring that both concepts were properly applied. In this issue, we outline the theory and practice of benchmarking and business process re-engineering. Both techniques have been used to great advantage in recent years. However, as in the case of downsizing and outsourcing, their application can become time-consuming, costly and ineffective in the absence of suitable guidance. AIMS has the necessary experience and expertise to help clients make best use of the techniques and to avoid the frustration and disappointment that arises from their misapplication.**

### **Effective Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is essentially a comparison of the effectiveness and efficiency of similar activities through the collection and analysis of information relating to the input and output of those activities. Input can be expressed in terms of expenditure (on staffing, equipment, services and supplies) and output in terms of the services created through that expenditure.

The information arising from the analysis of the collected data provides superficial performance indicators. There is a risk, however, of misinterpretation, if the exercise is not properly designed.

An effective benchmarking exercise will go beyond the figures and identify differences of policy and procedure, which will highlight variations in the quality of the service provided by the participating institutions. That process provides a more meaningful evaluation of the cost effectiveness of the various systems included in the review and facilitates the identification of good practice. AIMS has the relevant experience and expertise to devise and coordinate really effective benchmarking exercises.

## Effective Benchmarking (continued)

AIMS has often made use of benchmarking as one element of a comprehensive review. We are now planning, however, to undertake specific benchmarking exercises in a range of areas.

Non-member institutions will be welcome to participate in those exercises. Details will be published in future issues of the newsletter.

## Business Process Re-engineering

In 1990, Dr Michael Hammer had an article entitled *Re-engineering Work: Don't Automate, Obliterate* published in the *Harvard Business Review*. That article heralded the birth of Business Process Re-engineering (BPR).

The methodology of BPR has since been documented in a book by Michael Hammer and James Champy: *Re-engineering the Corporation*.

Hammer has defined BPR as the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes. It involves a deep and comprehensive analysis of the way an organisation works and a complete revision of its processes.

BPR challenges the traditional structure and processes of an organisation by asking what is

done and how, when, where and by whom it is done. It also questions, in each case, the validity of the existing arrangements (ie why is it done at all? why is done in that way, at that time, in that place, and by that person, section or department?).

In the context of higher education institutions, a BPR review would include consideration of whether the division of work would be better organised on the basis of processes rather than functions. It would challenge conventional organisations and evaluate the benefits of other options. For example, it would question whether tasks would be more appropriately undertaken centrally or at departmental, school or faculty level.

The review would also focus on achieving an acceptable balance between efficiency (making best use of resources) and effectiveness (providing good customer service).

The successful application of BPR requires the full commitment of senior staff and the involvement of all levels of staff. Moreover, since it comprises a fundamental review of existing arrangements, it requires the involvement of an external agency to ensure that sacred cows are not protected.

AIMS is eminently qualified to provide that vital, independent ingredient. In addition, AIMS can also bring to bear an intimate knowledge of the Higher

Education sector, which will ensure that recommended structures and processes are appropriate and practicable.

## Recently Completed AIMS Assignments

Over the past year, the work of AIMS has included assignments in the following areas:

**Personnel Services: management structure, workloads and location**

**Internal Mail Arrangements**

**The Rationalisation of Faculty of Science Stores**

**Use of the Internet for the Dissemination of Information**

**Administrative Workloads of Academic Staff in a Department of Chemistry**

**Computerised Timetabling Systems**

**Firewall Security Systems**

**University Press Management**

**Management and Control of Maintenance Work**

**Purchasing Arrangements**

## Next Issue:

Timetabling by Computer

Electronic Document Management