

Quality Assurance in Higher Education with a Focus on Learning Outcomes:
Current Situation and Issues in Japan
Tatsuo Kawashima
Kobe University

I. Background

1. Knowledge-based society ⇒ “Ability to make use of knowledge” more valued than “knowledge” itself
2. Trend toward universal higher education + population decline in those aged 18 ⇒ Quality is hardly assured upon entrance (through the recruitment of new students)
3. Quantitative expansion of higher education + higher education budget cuts ⇒ Concerns over quality
4. Globalization of higher education ⇒ Increase in international student movement; equivalence in “degrees”
5. Shifting from a teaching to learning paradigm ⇒ From teacher focus to student focus
6. Change in definition of quality ⇒ From “input” and “process” to “output” and “outcome”

II. Ongoing Activities at the National Level

1. Idea of *Gakushi Ryoku* (Undergraduate Competencies): Guidelines for the common learning outcomes of bachelor degree programs that every student in any major is expected to achieve (see table)
Report by the Central Council for Education (in 2008) “Towards the enhancement of undergraduate education”
2. Preparing Japan’s own version of a Subject Benchmark Statement
Under consideration by the Science Council of Japan
3. Participating in the OECD’s AHELO feasibility study
4. Second cycle of certified evaluation and accreditation with a focus on learning outcomes

III. Ongoing Activities at the University Level

1. Drawing up a “diploma policy”
Clear statement on graduate attributes to be developed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes; imposing stricter requirements for graduation
2. Curriculum reform emphasizing goals and learning outcomes
Making the best use of curriculum maps (matrix)
3. Introducing active learning
4. Introducing and making use of electronic portfolios

VI. Issues

1. To seek further understanding of the approach that places focus on learning outcomes
Difficulty in the shift from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm

2. Difficulties in designing backward/downward curriculum starting with university-wide learning outcomes

Departmental and subject-related organizational barriers

3. To implement systematic assessment practice

Lack of understanding regarding what an “assessment” actually is

4. To build an internal quality assurance system centered on learning outcome management

5. To develop a national framework/academic infrastructure to support the internal quality assurance system of universities

Lack of a framework for higher education qualifications or a “standard” for degrees

Gakushi Ryoku (Undergraduate Competencies)

<p>1. Knowledge and understanding</p> <p>A student systematically understands basic knowledge in his/her respective discipline and comprehends the meaning of systematic knowledge as well as the existence of the student him/herself in relation to history, society, and nature.</p> <p>(1) Attain knowledge on multiple and different cultures and values</p> <p>(2) Develop knowledge on human culture, society, and nature</p>
<p>2. Generic skills for various purposes</p> <p>Skills necessary for intellectual activities, work, and social life</p> <p>(1) Communication skills</p> <p>Ability to read, write, listen, and speak in Japanese and other specific foreign languages</p> <p>(2) Quantification skills</p> <p>Ability to analyze, understand, and express nature or social phenomenon using symbols</p> <p>(3) Information literacy</p> <p>Ability to collect and analyze various information using an ICT to make appropriate judgment and to use the information effectively in accordance with the set morals</p> <p>(4) Logical thinking</p> <p>Ability to analyze and express information and knowledge logically and with multiple perspectives</p> <p>(5) Ability to solve problems</p> <p>Ability to find problems and collect, analyze, and organize necessary information to surely solve them</p>
<p>3. Attitude and propensity</p> <p>(1) Self-management</p> <p>Ability to develop self-discipline</p> <p>(2) Teamwork and leadership</p> <p>Ability to cooperate or work together with other people; ability to give overall direction to other people to mobilize them to achieve certain objectives</p> <p>(3) Ethical view</p> <p>Ability to act according to their own conscience and social norm as well as rules</p>

(4) Social responsibility as a citizen

Ability to exercise obligation and rights in an appropriate manner and to actively contribute to social development with a sense of being a member of society

(5) Ability for life-long learning

Ability to learn by and for him/herself after graduation

4. Integrative learning experience and creative thinking

Ability to comprehensively use the attained knowledge, skills, and attitude, etc., and apply these to challenges that were identified by him/her by working out a solution.