

Japan-Nordic Symposium
On the Frontier of University Evaluation
-Making the Most of Nordic Successes-

Welcome Addresses

Tsutomu Kimura

President, NIAD-UE

Thodur Aegil Oskarsson

Ambassador of Iceland

[Host: Toshio Kato Director, Department of University Evaluation, NIAD-UE]

Kato: I would now like to begin the proceedings of the Japan-Nordic Symposium, “On the Frontier of University Evaluation—Making the Most of Nordic Successes.”

My name is Kato, Director of the Department of University Evaluation at the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation. I will serve as your MC for today.

The schedule for today is outlined in the program that has been distributed with other materials for this Symposium. If you are missing any materials, please make yourself known to any member of staff.

Among the materials in front of you is a questionnaire sheet. Feedback obtained through this questionnaire will help us in planning future symposia. We would appreciate your cooperation in completing your questionnaire sheet and returning it to staff as you exit the venue upon completion of today’s proceedings. Alternatively, you can place it in the box located at reception on the second floor.

Kato: First of all, I would like to invite the President of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation, Tsutomu Kimura, to make some opening remarks.

Kimura: It is a great pleasure and honor for me to have this opportunity to say a few words at the beginning of this very memorable event, the Japan-Nordic Symposium, On the Frontier of University Evaluation, subtitled as “Making the Most of Nordic Successes.”

First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Norwegian Ambassador Åge Bernhard Grutle and Icelandic Ambassador Thordur Aegir Oskarsson and Danish Ambassador Freddy Svane for their participation. Your presence certainly graces this important event to a great extent.

I also would like to express my deep thanks to our distinguished guests from Nordic countries—Professor of UMB, Chair of NOKUT’s Board, Norway, Dr. Abrahamsen; Deputy Director General, NOKUT, Norway, Ms. Holmen; Director, Department of Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland, Dr. Jensdóttir; Executive Director, EVA, Denmark, Dr. Thune; Secretary General, FINHEEC, Finland,

Dr. Tuomi, and; Senior Advisor, National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden, Mr. Wahlén—who have flown a long, long way to attend this symposium.

From the Japanese side we also have distinguished guests: Dr. Kajiyama, President, Kyushu University; Mr. Isoda, Deputy Director-General, Higher Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT); Prof. Kudo, Vice-President, Keio University; Ms. Kawamura, Executive Director, Institute of National Colleges of Technology, and; Mr. Shimizu, Editorial Writer, *The Asahi Shimbun*. Now I would like to show my thanks for their participation.

To our knowledge, Nordic countries started higher education reform in the 1980s and in the year 2000 the external evaluation system was established firmly. In order to learn the outcome of this positive attitude, as many as 277 Japanese universities have signed up some sort of cooperation agreement with universities in Nordic countries.

In an attempt to raise the quality and increase the international competitiveness of higher education in the region, Nordic countries founded a network called NOQA, which stands for Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education, completely separate from ENQA, which covers the whole European region. We are extremely impressed with this effort and solidarity of Nordic countries. Our observation as a member of APQN, Asia-Pacific Quality Network, is that there are so many things to learn from experiences in Nordic efforts. This is the reason why we thought we should organise this particular symposium in Tokyo at this time. I really don't know if our side has anything to offer to the Nordic side, but my sincere hope is that the symposium will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of higher education in both regions.

The symposium starts off with a keynote lecture by Dr. Christian Thune, Executive Director, EVA in Denmark, followed by presentations from Nordic countries by distinguished speakers in each country. Then we will have two panel discussion sessions. For these two panel discussion sessions we welcome active input from the audience.

Finally, I express my sincere appreciation to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *The Asahi Shimbun*, and Embassies of Nordic countries in Tokyo which enable us to organize this wonderful symposium. Let me conclude my opening remark by praying for great success of this symposium. Thank you

very much indeed for your attention.

Kato: Thank you very much.

Next, I would like to invite the Ambassador of Iceland to Japan, His Excellency Thordur Aegir Oskarsson, to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries. Ambassador Oskarsson, the floor is yours.

Thordur Aegir Oskarsson: Prof. Kimura, President of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation, representatives and colleagues from the Nordic countries, representatives from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology, representatives from *The Asahi Shimbun*, distinguished participants, it is both an honor and pleasure to address you on behalf of the Embassies of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland on the occasion of this symposium dealing with a very important topic for modern societies: quality assurances of higher education.

The world community has in recent times been undergoing a globalization on a scale never experienced before in the history of mankind. The process has manifested itself mostly in industry and business. At the same time it has greatly influenced our societies and social life in general. This has had a profound impact on education in particular as one can argue that globalization is driven to a large extent by information business, of which education, research and innovation are important components. That in turn produces challenging demands on the educational system in order to sustain this progress.

Governments are now trying to meet increased competition on a global level by placing the onus of policy on education to produce the human capital most relevant to the global competition, which seems to have insatiable need for knowledge and information. This emphasis has highlighted and increased the importance of universities, as well as other higher education institution, as these are at the center of knowledge and innovation for societies' most important sectors.

The rapid process of globalization shows no mercy to those that fall behind. Competition in the future will be increasingly about the ability to innovate and produce value-creating solutions that are difficult for others to copy. This will require the

establishment and perseverance of a strong and innovative culture and ability to use one's own core skills. So in order to be successful at the global level, you also have to enjoy the same success on the local level. It is here that the quality of the educational system comes to play.

One of the major factors explaining the success of the Nordic countries in the modern world is without doubt the level and quality of education that the citizens of these five relatively small countries enjoy. The Nordic countries have developed social and economic systems that have created one of the most affluent regions in the world, where the five countries constantly rank among the top ten in international comparisons in areas like welfare, competitiveness, technological level and creativity, to name a few indicators.

The internationalization of the education system in the Nordic countries is not a new phenomenon, since these countries have long and tested cooperation in the field of higher education that has resulted in an extensive system of mutual recognition of conditions of access and results at the university level. The cooperation in this context of Nordic quality assurance had already started in 1992 when the relevant organizations began exchanging views and experiences on developments in evaluation and quality assurances in higher education.

As I indicated before, in order to be able to meet the demands of the globalized world, no one can rest on the laurels of past and present achievements. It is how you meet the challenges of the future that counts. All of the Nordic countries have already or are in the process of reviewing their legal framework for the level of higher education in order to be better able to adjust to and meet the new international challenges and policies facing education, while safeguarding quality.

The political leaders of the five Nordic countries are deeply aware of these new challenges. And as to higher education, the Nordic ministers of education issued a special declaration on 9 June 2004 in Reykjavik, Iceland, where they emphasized the importance of more intensive work for mutual recognition and assurances of quality of the education offered at the university level in the Nordic countries.

It is not only in the Nordic countries but in Europe in general that the focus on quality of higher education has been moved to the forefront. A critical factor was the

establishment of the Bologna Process established in 1999, now including 45 European states. Commitments under this process are not binding but the political aim is to create a pan-European educational system by 2010. This was underlined by the conclusion of the ministers of education of the Bologna member states at a meeting in Bergen in Norway 2005.

It is our hope that this symposium will result in further cooperation and coordination between the Nordic countries and Japan as to quality assurances and enhancement of quality at the level of higher education. Although our embassies can never claim to have any expertise in this field, the issue is important for our daily activities. There is a strong and growing interest for Japan in our countries and that is reflected in the number of inquiries that we get from students and also academic institutions looking for cooperation partners. We have witnessed the same interest here in Japan for the Nordic countries. In this context, it is therefore very important for the embassy staff to be able to provide basic information in this regard, being assured that the proper mechanisms for the evaluation of the educational quality are in place.

We therefore heartily welcome the initiative of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation to hold this Japan-Nordic Symposium on university evaluation and wish it every success. Thank you very much.