



External Review of National Institution for
Academic Degrees and University Evaluation

Review Report on International Activities

based on the Self-Assessment Report of
the National Institution for Academic Degrees and
University Evaluation (NIAD-UE)



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Contents

Preface

Executive Summary	1
1 Findings	3
1-1 Attainment of Mid-term Objectives and Plans for International Collaborative Activities	3
1-1-1 Research Activities and the Work of NIAD-UE	
1-1-2 International Collaborative Activities	
1-2 Next Step: Further Developments and Future Challenges	7
1-2-1 Strategic Activities: Basic Research	
1-2-2 International Collaborative Activities	
2 Appendices	8
2-1 List of the International Experts	
2-2 Dates and Places of the Interviews	

Preface

This is the report on the review findings given by international experts appointed as members of the External Review Subcommittee on International Collaborative Activities, set up under the External Review Committee of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE).

The External Review Committee was established in 2012 for the purpose of conducting a review on the activities carried out by NIAD-UE during the second mid-term objective period since 2009, and offering opinions on further developments and future challenges toward formulating a plan for the third mid-term period starting from 2014. This committee consists of external experts and has three subcommittees focusing on the major roles of NIAD-UE: the External Review Subcommittee on Awarding of Degrees, the External Review Subcommittee on University Evaluation, and the External Review Subcommittee on International Collaborative Activities.

External review was undertaken by the External Review Committee and the three subcommittees during the period between September 2012 and March 2013, based on the self-assessment report prepared by NIAD-UE.

With the aim of making a review from an international perspective, the External Review Subcommittee on International Collaborative Activities requested cooperation and opinions from current or former representatives of overseas quality assurance agencies. Review by these international experts was conducted through the following process. NIAD-UE staff visited three experts, Dato' Dr. Syed Ahmad Hussein (on October 12, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), Dr. Peter Williams (on October 19, London, the United Kingdom), and Dr. Judith Eaton (on December 4, Washington D.C., the United States), and interviewed them with regard to NIAD-UE's international collaborative activities, including research activities and projects that would be helpful for its international activities, using the self-assessment report and reference documents having prepared by NIAD-UE. Subsequently, NIAD-UE received review reports from these experts.

This report has been compiled by the External Review Committee by summarizing the international experts' opinions on its own responsibility.

March 2013
External Review Committee



Executive Summary

Overall Findings

Through the self-assessment report prepared by NIAD-UE and the interviews with the three international experts, it is confirmed that all of these experts appreciate NIAD-UE's strengths and the effectiveness of its activities, as well as its contribution to the Japanese and international quality assurance communities. In conclusion, the experts assess NIAD-UE to be a highly professional quality assurance agency that undertakes high-quality work in evaluation, research and international collaboration, and recognize it as playing an ambassadorial role for Japan's higher education systems in the wider world. They also mention that the extent of its work is remarkable and is characterized by an openness and willingness to learn and evolve which is exemplary.

The international experts pay attention to the fact that NIAD-UE has its own research department and its research activities contribute to the development of its evaluation and degree-awarding activities. In particular, they emphasize NIAD-UE's framework wherein higher education institutions are required to make changes and the quality assurance agency then monitors and evaluates the resulting changes, which ensures a "virtuous spiral" of improvement for both the agency and institutions. NIAD-UE engages in not only analyzing its own work but also publicizing research results on quality assurance programs in other countries. The international experts view NIAD-UE as making a great contribution by informing Japanese higher education institutions of the global movements and approaches in quality assurance.

With regard to international collaborative activities, the experts find that NIAD-UE has carried out a wide range of activities, thereby contributing to the international quality assurance community. They especially expect its expansion beyond the international networks such as APQN.

At the same time, the experts point out that since NIAD-UE has carried out a wide range of activities, it is important for the agency to review the range and effect of the activities and to address the matters considered important by those engaged in higher education in Japan as well as Japanese society and students. They advise that the agency should ascertain how its activities are related to its mission and objectives and set a few but clear strategies.

Recommendations for Further Developments

- ♦ NIAD-UE should explore more deeply the net effects of its work to date, taking a view on how far their activities have been beneficial to the higher education institutions it serves and to what improvements either in quality or standards these have led. This should allow the agency to clarify its overall strategy in light of both economy and effectiveness.



- ♦ NIAD-UE may wish to reflect on the level of its public awareness and on whether it needs to devote more time to promoting its work more widely. In particular, the agency will need to make more efforts to promote the worth of the thematic assessments, which have the potential to become power drivers in the general enhancement of higher education in Japan.
- ♦ NIAD-UE should consider expanding the CAMPUS Asia* monitoring project to include additional countries.
- ♦ In the field of international networks, NIAD-UE is expected to take the leadership beyond APQN and contribute to the further development of quality assurance for higher education in Asia.
- ♦ In the field of research, NIAD-UE might give some thought to additional research attention to such areas as education and employment, international measures of student achievement, emerging innovation and the growing role of private higher education, in addition to publication of research achievements in English to the world.

* CAMPUS Asia:

'Collective Action for the Mobility Program of University Students in Asia.'

This government-led initiative seeks to strengthen exchange and cooperation among universities in Japan, China, and Korea. Aimed at developing collaborative educational programs, each project is implemented by a consortium of universities from the three countries. So far, 10 projects have been selected via joint screening by the three countries.



1 Findings

1-1 Attainment of Mid-term Objectives and Plans for International Collaborative Activities

1-1-1 Research Activities and the Work of NIAD-UE

Evaluation and Accreditation

NIAD-UE does an admirably sound, rigorous and thorough job of providing an open and evolving evaluation and accreditation system. The self-assessment report and the interview confirm that the results of the annual self-scrutiny are given careful attention and used to further enhance evaluation and accreditation activities.

In particular, NIAD-UE's fundamental policies are sound and the changes that have been made from the first to the second cycle of Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA) clearly show an intention to develop both the expectations placed on institutions and the concept of quality management. In choosing to add learning outcomes, public information on teaching and learning, and internal quality assurance systems to its standards, NIAD-UE has responded creditably to international movements in quality assurance. Equally, the way in which its reports are published and contain both positive and more negative judgments is likely to be helpful to those who need or wish to know about individual institutions. The proposed overview in English of each report will help to reinforce the international credibility of NIAD-UE.

NIAD-UE has also developed the thematic assessment program, a voluntary exercise undertaken at the request of individual institutions. At present NIAD-UE offers three topics for these assessments: research activities, community engagement and internationalization of higher education. The choice of topics for the thematic assessments obviously reflects NIAD-UE's view of what are more important areas for development by Japanese higher education institutions. This program has the potential for further development of higher education in Japan.

Recommendations

Building on the work already underway, NIAD-UE is expected to keep developing and sustaining a dynamic evaluative regime responding to constant changes in higher education environment.

For further developments, NIAD-UE might consider the following actions.

- ♦ The principal tool for verification of the evaluation work of NIAD-UE is a questionnaire sent to all institutions and evaluators which is essentially concerned with matters of process. By employing this tool, NIAD-UE has



successfully reduced the administrative burden of quality assurance reviews. However, in verification, it is more important to identify the effect rather than the process of the evaluation work. It is recommended that NIAD-UE might attempt to discover what improvements have been made to the quality and standards of learning and teaching in Japanese universities as a result of its work, and explore a more effective evaluation system. It is equally important to ensure that the very act of conducting an annual enquiry does not itself add to the burden on universities or evaluators.

- ♦ In its process of evaluating individual institutions, NIAD-UE requests that in the second evaluation cycle, the institutions should make the improvements that they were notified of in the first evaluation cycle. This follow-up approach does not seem to be so well developed. Rather than completing the evaluation process just by preparing a report, it is more important to ensure that the evaluation will contribute to making constant improvements to the internal quality assurance systems of the respective institutions. To achieve this, NIAD-UE might consider incorporating a follow-up procedure into its CEA process, which asks institutions after a fixed time how they have responded to their reports and what actions they have taken to address the matters raised in them.
- ♦ The thematic assessment program will lead the future development of higher education in Japan. NIAD-UE should perhaps devote more resources in attempting to persuade institutional policy makers of the central significance of the topics covered by the thematic assessments, namely, research activities, community engagement, and internationalization of higher education.

International Compatibility of Evaluation and Academic Degrees

NIAD-UE's attention to a new framework for assessing internationalization of higher education is timely and a model for other countries, especially the emphasis on student learning outcomes. The Japan-China-Korea trilateral CAMPUS Asia monitoring project is especially valuable.

Recommendations

For further developments, NIAD-UE might consider the following actions.

- ♦ The thematic assessment on the internationalization of higher education developed by NIAD-UE has the potential to become powerful drivers in taking strategic action to make widely known the fact that Japanese higher education institutions provide internationally compatible education and further enhancing their activities overseas. As mentioned above, a considerable effort will need to be made to persuade institutional leaders of their significance.
- ♦ NIAD-UE might consider expanding CAMPUS Asia joint monitoring project to include additional countries as an activity to provide international quality



assurance of degrees.

Dissemination of Information on Quality Assurance

NIAD-UE's research covers a wide range of activities, including not only carrying out analyses of the agency's own work but also collecting information and conducting comparative studies of quality assurance in other countries. These generally lead to publications which make important contributions, not only to the better understanding within Japan of current international practices, but also to a wider awareness within the global higher education community of the variety of approaches being used by different higher education systems.

NIAD-UE also plays an ambassadorial role for Japan's higher education system in the wider world. Its publication—*Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Japan*—includes both positive improvements and limitations to further progress in regard to the validity of certified evaluation and accreditation, as clarified by the questionnaire, and in this respect, it is a model for quality assurance agencies throughout the world.

Recommendations

NIAD-UE's research program is one of its strengths. Few countries had devoted the time, resources and talent to produce the value of publications that NIAD-UE has provided. It is recommended that the agency might continue this fine work.

1-1-2 International Collaborative Activities

Participation in the International Quality Assurance Network

NIAD-UE plays a prominent role in the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). It is an international leader in quality assurance, and more importantly for its partners outside Japan, it connects its shared quality sentiment with the international community.

Recommendations

NIAD-UE offers a model of assessment and international activity that is of great value to other countries. It is recommended that the agency might consider expanding its leadership role beyond APQN to take an even more active role internationally, further engaging additional networks beyond its current extensive participation, and contributing to the further development of quality assurance for higher education in Asia.



Partnership and Collaboration with Overseas Quality Assurance Agencies

NIAD-UE has made a considerable effort to engage with the international quality assurance community, which is most visible to the world outside Japan. There are three types of international engagements undertaken by NIAD-UE, that is, capacity building, capacity sharing, and capacity recognition. This takes many forms, for example: participation in the work of international networks; formal links with other quality assurance agencies; study visits to other countries; published comparative analyses of international practices (Information Package); joint QA activities with other countries (CAMPUS Asia project); training personnel from other agencies in the Asia Pacific area; publication in English of documents about higher education and quality assurance in Japan.

Recommendations

NIAD-UE can be proud of its achievements in addressing the organic, dynamic and globally communicative nature of quality assurance in Japanese higher education.

For further developments, NIAD-UE might consider the following actions.

- For example, NIAD-UE might consider signing a statement of confidence on quality assurance outcomes or a degree compatibility agreement with appropriate counterparts.
- NIAD-UE might seriously consider arranging collaboration between the Japan-China-Korea Quality Assurance Council and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) and take the leadership in this initiative.

However, considering that NIAD-UE has carried out a wide range of projects thus far, it may now be appropriate to take stock of all these projects with a view to establishing what has been achieved and what direction should be taken for the next few years.

Japan-China-Korea Quality Assurance Council

The NIAD-UE participation in the Japan-China-Korea Quality Assurance Council is a creative approach to promoting international cooperation. The emphasis on joint guidelines and joint monitoring is important to the promotion of student mobility.

Recommendations

A special note is given to the active participation of NIAD-UE in the Council and positive outcomes are anticipated. It is recommended that NIAD-UE might consider expansion of the Council at some point, involving additional countries, as suggested above.



1-2 Next Step: Further Developments and Future Challenges

1-2-1 Strategic Activities: Basic Research

One of the particular strengths of NIAD-UE is its research department. Its research activities have enabled it to enjoy the credibility of its QA practices as well as the value and clarity of its degree system. Plans for basic research on evaluation, degree-awarding methods and international compatibility should reflect the issues of greatest importance to quality assurance today, including building capacity for quality assurance, non-traditional degrees and effective practices in collaborative programs.

Recommendations

- ♦ It is recommended that NIAD-UE might give some thought to additional research attention to such areas as education and employment, international measures of student achievement, emerging innovation and the growing role of private higher education.
- ♦ It is important that NIAD-UE make its publications on various overseas approaches accessible to a wider readership through translation. It is also recommended that NIAD-UE should translate its key documents on research results into English and made them available to the international quality assurance community.

1-2-2 International Collaborative Activities

The planned intensification of distribution of information of Japan's quality assurance initiatives, sustaining the NIAD-UE University Evaluation Forum and further enhancing international compatibility, will all increase the visibility and influence of NIAD-UE's work in quality assurance.

Recommendations

- ♦ The proposed additional activities for future developments stated in the self-assessment report, including those on basic research, are considerably valuable. Consistent with several recommendations above, NIAD-UE can expand its leadership role in these activities as well, positioning itself even more firmly as a major leader in international quality assurance.
- ♦ However, it is hard to perceive a unifying rationale or aim for all these proposed activities. NIAD-UE might wish to consider identifying, from among those areas of its work over which it has discretion, a limited but challenging range of objectives which would meet more clearly the intentions of its mission or, indeed, to look again at its mission to ensure it remains valid, useful and achievable.



2 Appendices

2-1 List of the International Experts

Name	Affiliation
Dr. Judith Eaton	President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
Dato' Dr. Syed Ahmad Hussein	Chief Executive Officer of the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA)
Dr. Peter Williams, CBE	Former Chief Executive of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

2-2 Dates and Places of the Interviews

Date	Place	International experts interviewed
October 12, 2012	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Dato' Dr. Syed Ahmad Hussein
October 19, 2012	London, the United Kingdom	Dr. Peter Williams, CBE
December 4, 2012	Washington, D.C., the United States	Dr. Judith Eaton

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