

# University Reform: different paths to the same goal

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The papers in this volume were presented at a seminar held in Tokyo in February, 2011. This was the second *Seminar on University Reform* in Finland and Japan, an earlier session having been held at the University of Tampere, Finland in October, 2007.

University systems present an international enigma. In many ways, systems around the world are similar, but in other ways, they are also very different. Universities share common goals of being institutions of learning, institutions that undertake both disinterested basic research and highly focussed applied research, and institutions that engage with the societies in which they are situated. However, how universities tread the path towards achieving their goals varies considerably.

Higher education systems are by nature different from each other, having evolved to meet domestic needs, and each having unique origins and influences. It is possible to identify myriad similarities and differences between systems, and a number of binary or even dichotomous pairings that separate otherwise similar systems from each other. In introducing this volume, we will consider just two examples that set the university systems in Japan and Finland apart:

- unitary or binary systems;
- public or private systems.

The papers in this volume bring out these differences, and others.

Japan has a unitary system as far as the language is concerned; university, college and junior college are expressed by the same Japanese word, university or daigaku. On the other hand Finland has a binary system, based on 'equal but different' universities and polytechnics. The Finnish development of a binary system is interesting, because in is a

recent innovation (1991), and even though the role and expectations of the polytechnics was different from that of the universities, polytechnics now refer to themselves in English-language material as ‘universities of applied sciences’. This terminology does not appear in documents produced by the Ministry of Education and Culture, nor on its website. It is a nomenclature practice that has occurred elsewhere in Europe (such as in Germany and the Netherlands).

Finnish higher education, on both sides of its binary divide, is tuition-fee-free. In the Nordic welfare tradition, education is perceived as a public good, and one that ought to be funded from public sources. Until the start of 2010, Finnish higher education was free to domestic and international students alike, but the new Universities Act (2009) now permits fees to be charged under limited circumstances to students from outside the European Union and the European Education Area. This is in contrast with the Japanese case, where more than 70 per cent of students pay higher tuition fees at private universities where average charge is 10,000 euro per year.

These two system-related matters spell out the differences between Japan and Finland, and these differences are made plain by the authors of the respective papers. Teiichi Sato, Former Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO, simultaneously presents a history of Japanese higher education in his chapter entitled *Problems and Perspectives of Japanese Universities*. The chapter brings out the fact that societies value education and higher education, and discussions about the best ways forward are never far from governmental agendas. Such discussions and ruminations are part of public discourse in all countries.

Fumihiko Maruyama is a professor at the Center for National University Finance and Management, and is an well-qualified to describe the system of higher education funding that pertains in Japan. He describes the growth of funding, and provides evidence of the trends in investment and public support of higher education, and expenditure to cover university operations, research and infrastructure.

Evanthia Kalpazidou Schmidt is an associate professor and research director at the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy, Aarhus University. In her chapter, she looks at Finland and beyond, by providing a summary of university governance and policies in the Nordic countries, particularly recent funding reforms and their effects on universities. A common theme has been a shift from centralised, highly regulated to decentralised, less regulated approaches, with changes towards formula and output based funding, based on performance indicators and increased competitive funding. The reforms, are intended to improve quality, productivity, efficiency and accountability, but they might also lead to institutions having an excessive focus on outputs, quantity instead of quality, politically prioritised areas and mainstream, low-risk research.

Motohisa Kaneko is a professor at the Center for National University Finance and Management, Tokyo. In his chapter, he examines the reform that led to Japanese national universities becoming incorporated entities in 2004. As he states, 'One of the key elements of the new scheme was the 'mid-term targets' to be achieved in the subsequent six years, which functions in effect as an contract between the government and each university.... As of 2010, the first cycle of this process has been completed'. He examines the intended effects in the original design, and compares 'the intended' with 'the actual'.

Finally, Timo Aarrevaara, Acting Professor at the University of Helsinki's centre for higher education governance and management (HEGOM), outlines the major reforms that have occurred in recent years in Finland. His chapter, *Oh Happy Days! - University reforms in Finland*, provides a description of both sides of Finland's binary system of higher education, including the current university reforms and polytechnic reforms that are proposed for the next few years.

We would like to thank all who participated in the seminar, including speakers Jari Gustafsson Finnish Ambassador to Japan, Dr Turo Virtanen (University of Helsinki), Professor Seppo Hölttä (University of Tampere) and Kensuke Mizuta (Tohoku Koueki Bunnka University), and all who attended. This second seminar will not be the last. Discussions on where and when to hold the third seminar are already being held.