

## Outline of the recent trends and developments in higher education system of Japan

Universities are facing higher expectations from society amid intensified international competition toward fully-fledged knowledge society, and it is indispensable for universities to foster human resources in various areas through ensuring quality assurance of education. Along with the advance of globalization in every field of society and economy, international cooperation and competition are advanced in university education. Cross-border higher education has also grown considerably, and therefore enhancing quality assurance internationally is an essential step toward better cross-border cooperation and exchange between universities.

This paper outlines quality assurance system of higher education in Japan at first. Then it describes international activities of Japan's higher education institutions and their efforts for internationalization. At the end, it introduces Japan's movement toward constructing the framework for exchange among universities with proper quality assurance in East-Asian region.

### 1. Quality assurance of higher education in Japan

The quality assurance framework in Japan has both the advantage of the prior regulations that assure proper quality in advance, and the checking afterwards that constantly assure quality constantly while respecting the diversity of universities. This assures that universities continue to assure quality internally while respecting the principle of independence and autonomy. Three key elements are;

#### i) Standards for establishing universities

This contains the minimum standards and desirable goals and duties of universities by various regulations. This helps all the stakeholders understand how Japanese universities should be and what they are like. This also makes general public believe that approved institutions are trustworthy organizations.

#### ii) Establishment- approval system

In order to establish a university or to change academic organizations with regard to changing fields or types of degrees issue, the proposer must submit an application for approval to the Minister of MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). The Minister commissions the Advisory Council for University Establishment, founded in the Ministry. Peer review by specialists is conducted until first set of enrolled students are to graduate. This assures that application to establish universities meet the Standards for establishing universities, have enough possibility to accomplish what it states, and continue to provide programs.

#### iii) Quality assurance and accreditation system

All universities in Japan have to receive certified evaluation by one of the accreditation organizations certified by the Minister of MEXT once in 7 years. These organizations evaluate the systems of management, educational and research activities by peer reviewing based on the universities' self-examination and evaluation. This system confirms whether the universities meet the Standards for establishing universities as well as encourages universities to improve its education and research quality.

The National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) was established to contribute to further development of higher education in Japan. In order to raise the quality of higher education institutions, it acts as one of the accreditation organizations as well as an institution to offer information about Japanese reliable quality assurance system to the world. For example, it produces the Information Package which provides both basic and specific information on the Japanese quality system of higher education in an integrated way including glossary or overview of the system.

In Addition, NIAD-UE strengthens partnerships with overseas quality assurance organizations to provide helpful information about quality assurance and accreditation in the world for Japan's education institutions, and also to assure and enhance its evaluation activities to an internationally acceptable level. For example, NIAD-UE works together with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

(QAA) in the United Kingdom and the Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education (HEEC) in China under the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding. NIAD-UE will also organize a conference among leaders of quality assurance agencies of Japan, China and Republic of Korea.

## 2. International activities of Japan's higher education institutions and their efforts for internationalization

### i) International activities of Japan's higher education institutions

Japan's higher education institutions are playing important role in international cooperation in higher education. Among their activities, one of the most remarkable projects is the Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (SEED-Net) Project, in which Japanese member universities support ASEAN member institutions to produce graduates with master's and doctoral degrees of international standard in the engineering field in order to promote sustainable social and economic development in ASEAN countries.

Also, in the area of engineering, Japanese "Kosen" (college of technology), which has successfully fostered practical and creative engineers through internationally unique five-year engineering education from 15 years old and two-year advanced course, is highly admired both in Japan and internationally; the Kosen also focuses on international activities such as the project in Turkey to develop education and training system of automatic control technology.

In terms of multilateral cooperation, UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) promotes mobility of university students and staff in Asia and the Pacific region utilizing UCTS (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme), which aims to make international student exchange more effective by ensuring credit compatibility. UMAP is a voluntary association of government and non-government representatives of the higher education sector in Asia and the Pacific consisting of 34-member countries and regions. In Japan, UMAP Japan National Committee, which consists of representatives of Japanese member universities, served as UMAP International Secretariat by 2006, and JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization) supports UMAP through scholarship which is offered to the students who study abroad under short-term study abroad program utilizing distinctive credit transfer system including UCTS.

### ii) Project for establishing core universities for internationalization ( Global 30 )

MEXT has launched the "Global 30" Project for Establishing Core Universities for Internationalization, for the purpose of selecting universities that will function as core schools for receiving and educating international students. These core universities will play a major role in dramatically boosting the number of international students educated in Japan as well as Japanese students studying abroad.

#### <Details of Implementation>

- Teaching in English
  - To develop a system in which degree courses can be offered entirely in English: establishing 33 undergraduate courses and 124 graduate courses over the next 5 years
  - Internationally open recruitment of staff to teach specialized subjects in English
  - Assignment of teaching staffs from overseas with fixed term
- To improve the environment to accept international students
  - Support by specialized staff to international students in their daily life, employment search, and supplementary education: increasing the number of international students in selected universities to over 50,000 in 2020 from 16,000 as of 2008.
- To promote strategic international cooperation
  - To establish an "Overseas Office for Shared Utilization by Universities" as the liaison for Study in Japan: establishing 8 cities in 7 countries; Russia, Tunisia, India (2 cities), Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Egypt, and Germany
  - To expand student exchange programs based on exchange agreements between universities

In 2009, the following 13 universities were selected as Core universities.

Tohoku University, University of Tsukuba, The University of Tokyo, Nagoya University, Kyoto University, Osaka University, Kyushu University, Keio University, Sophia University, Meiji University, Waseda University, Doshisha University, and Ritsumeikan University

### iii) International student policy

As a part of the “global strategy” to open up Japan to the whole world and expand flows of people, goods, money and information between Japan and countries in Asia and other regions in the world, Japan aims to accept up to 300,000 international students by the year 2020. Efforts should be made to strategically acquire excellent international students, as well as to accept highly capable students, while giving due consideration to the balance of countries, regions and fields of study. Japan also continues to make intellectual contributions globally to other countries, including Asian countries. For this purpose, measures are taken systematically so as to rouse international students’ interest in studying in Japan. The plan is promoted through comprehensive and organic coordination among related ministries and agencies. Five categories of the measures are as follows;

- a) Inviting international students to study in Japan – Offering incentives to study in Japan and providing one-stop service –
- b) Improving introduction of entrance examinations, enrollment, and entry into Japan – Facilitating procedures for studying in Japan –
- c) Promoting globalization of universities and other educational institutions – Creating attractive universities –
- d) Improving the environment for accepting international students – Efforts to create an environment under which students can concentrate on studying without anxiety –
- e) Promoting acceptance of international students in society after their graduation or completion of courses – Globalization of society –

### 3. Promoting exchange among universities with proper quality assurance

With regards to international quality assurance, in Europe, each country has made efforts to deepen social and economic cooperation and integration through building framework among European universities with quality assurance. UNESCO and OECD, on the other hands, endorsed “Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education”, which aim to provide an framework for quality assurance in cross-border higher education based on mutual trust and respect for quality assurance system of each country. In Asia, discussion for effective exchange among universities begins in the countries including China, Korea and the ASEAN. In such a situation, Japan recognizes the necessity to begin high-level discussion for building framework in Asia for exchange among universities with quality assurance, considering the variety of universities and educational systems in Asia and the possibility that exchange among universities might contribute to the enhancement of regional cooperation in the East Asia.

On October 10, 2009 the 2nd Japan-China-Republic of Korea Trilateral Summit was held in Beijing, where the leaders adopted the joint statement on trilateral cooperation including exchanges among universities and agreed with Japan’s proposal to set up an inter-government committee with experts from Japan, China and Republic of Korea for investigating issues in promoting cooperation among universities with quality assurance, and to hold an international symposium on discussing quality assurance in the Asian region. Also, in the Chairman’s Statement of the 12th ASEAN Plus Three Summit (Cha-am Hua Hin, Thailand, 24 October 2009) and in the Chairman’s Statement of the 4th East Asia Summit (Cha-am Hua Hin, Thailand, 25 October 2009), the Leaders welcomed Japan’s proposal to hold the international symposium. These projects were also included in the New Growth Strategy (Basic Policies) (Cabinet decision) in December 2009.

In line with these agreements and plans, MEXT, along with authorities of China and Republic of Korea, is to hold the first meeting of the inter-government expert committee among Japan, China and Republic of Korea. In Addition, MEXT is to prepare for holding the international symposium.