

## **REPORT**

### **RIETI Policy Symposium “Seeking a model for University Evaluation: The European Experience”**

#### **Introduction**

The objective of the Symposium was to develop a “first draft” model for University Evaluation in the Japanese education system. As a basis for discussion, Professors Luc Weber (University of Geneva) and Georges Verhaegen (Université Libre de Bruxelles) presented the audience and panellists with an overview of the Institutional Review Program (IRP) managed by the European Universities Association (EUA).

Put simply, the EUA’s philosophy is that it is the universities themselves who are responsible for their own quality, and that the purpose of external evaluation is to check/calibrate the universities’ internal quality control procedures.

The Institutional Review Program (IRP) is provided as a service to member universities. Key features are:

- Voluntary: universities *ask* to be evaluated.
- Peer based: universities are evaluated by a team of rectors from other member institutions.
- Strategic: focus is on the management systems and not on education or research performance.
- Formative: Aimed at improving the management performance of universities, not ranking them.
- Broad: all stakeholders are involved in the review process.

#### **Panel Discussion:**

Having listened to the description of the European experience, the Japanese panel presented their positions regarding university evaluation, and discussed the development of a Japanese system.

#### **FORM OF EVALUATION:**

Kimura:

- Independence of NIAD from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s (MEXT) National University Evaluation Committee being formed is important.

Bando:

- Rather than individual committees in universities there will be a single national committee.

- MEXT will respect the expertise of NIAD.
- Mutually autonomous relationships should exist between MEXT, the National University Evaluation Committee, NIAD and the National Universities.

Ikegami:

- The system can be started and then developed through trial and error.
- There must be dialogue with students and the other stakeholders.

Bando:

- Each university will be evaluated against the mid-term objectives it has set itself
- A prerequisite is for universities to ask themselves what kind of institution they want to be, and to clarify their mission.

Ikegami:

- Need to develop a culture where universities discuss and articulate their own objectives and philosophies.
- Universities feel that they are being forced to go in the direction of reform – rather than it being their choice.
- MEXT must give guidance to encourage a change in universities' attitudes.

Kimura:

- Things are improving in universities since evaluations began 3 years ago – they are beginning to be able to clarify their goals.
- This is not being learnt through guidance from the ministry, but through the evaluation process itself.

Aoki:

- The diversity of universities requires an evaluation committee to be set up in each institution.
- Students are customers of the university and their opinions need to be taken into account.

Hirasawa:

- Universities' self-evaluations will form the basis of the NIAD evaluation. NIAD role will be to ensure that a consistent evaluation standard is applied to all universities.
- The National University Evaluation Committee should evaluate universities according to their mission, rather than treating them as all being the same.
- Performance may be one of the indicators within the evaluation process but the overall aim is evaluation of the complete system.
- The important thing is that the universities establish their own objectives and make use of their individual strengths.

Bando:

- Starting point is for each university is to clarify their mission, and then compare that with their achievements and perform a self-assessment. This would be the base for external evaluation.
- Quantitative objectives or numerical targets should not be the sole basis for evaluation.

#### ROLE OF STUDENTS:

##### Kimura:

- Should consider the UK example – although students do not have the final say in decision-making, they do actively participate in the management committees.
- Students could be involved with the university management council or the education and research council to have some input in the running of the university.

##### Ikegami:

- Nobody seems to be listening to the voices of students in regard to the proposed changes.

(Verhaegen comment: Don't forget that student participation in university management has educational value as well)

##### Bando:

- As part of the set-up process, approval is, of course, being sought from the universities, but recently interviews with students have also been included.
- There is the example of the Private University Association evaluation forum (concentrating on education): the university carries out primary evaluation and students, graduates and businessmen give a secondary evaluation. Student opinions will become an important factor.

#### PROBLEMS WITH EVALUATION: COST, EXPERTS and BUREAUCRACY

##### Kimura:

- Of course want to keep costs down, but this is a big challenge.
- Lack of experts in evaluation in Japan – need participation from Japanese society so that skills are developed.
- Understanding of evaluation in the business world is deepening.
- Bureaucracy is a problem in Japanese systems. Tend to stick to the rules once they are made and this makes people inflexible.
- If the system is developed whilst in constant communication with the universities, the problems of bureaucracy can be avoided to a certain extent.

##### Ikegami:

- If the profit is large then it is OK to incur a large cost. Therefore we need to make it clear what the 'profit' is in the context of the evaluation process.
- Issue of 'responsibility' of evaluators – they have to recognise that their judgements are subjective not "the voice of god".

- Bureaucracy is not a problem in itself, but only when people without ability use it as a defence.
- Cannot remove bureaucracy at the beginning, as it is an integral part of what makes an organisation work.

Aoki:

- Least cost is better.
- Japan is in a period of change from internal evaluations to open, external evaluations – it is natural that cost will be incurred.
- Need to change the system from purely administrative evaluation to an evaluation system that is open to society.

Hirasawa:

- There is a lack of evaluators – not just restricted to the university issue.
- Full-scale evaluation of all the universities cannot rely on ‘celebrities’ from academia and business. It will require an organisation such as NIAD to gather experts together and carry out intensive training.
- As there are insufficient evaluators, need to select and train new human resources.
- Criteria for evaluation should be published early so there can be a debate between the university and the stakeholders.
- Performance *and* management should be evaluated.
- There should be a department for evaluation inside the university and the people in charge should receive specialist training.
- Need to develop experts who can collect and analyse the data that will form the base of the peer review process.

Kimura:

- Universities have been competing to provide representatives to NIAD. They want to provide the people that will carry out the evaluations themselves.
- High quality human resources for evaluation *are* being developed.

Bando:

- Existing evaluation agencies such as JABEE are reliant on volunteers to enable them to manage costs. Need to recognise that expanding the evaluation system is going to cost money.
- If the system is performing a social function, it should be supported publicly.

**Comments on panel discussion from Professor Weber:**

- 1) Universities must be able to respond to change. Need good management skills in universities – especially in the Rector/Chancellor. Universities must have a mission and a strategic plan. A university association may be influential in this area.
- 2) A quality culture must be introduced. Universities must be proactive.
- 3) Social responsibility of universities is an important point. Focus should be on students’ long-term needs – fostering skills rather than just transmitting knowledge.

- 4) EUA focus is on the self-governance of universities. Take the stance that monitoring the quality of teaching and research is the university's responsibility.
- 5) Leaders of universities are more important than organisational structure – they can influence the whole culture of the institution.
- 6) Disclosure of long qualitative reports raises the question of who will read them – perhaps only a small number of stakeholders?
- 7) Students are very capable of judging the quality of the education they are receiving
- 8) Peer review problem: As long as there is contact between the universities and the outside world the 'convoy' problem (referred to by Ikegami) should be mitigated.
- 9) Difficult to identify "Return on Investment" for evaluation. Basically you need to do whatever you can to make the evaluation useful.

**Comments on panel discussion from Professor Verhaegen:**

- 1) Need to define what evaluation is to be used for – seemed to be unclear after the Panel Discussion. You will not get a good evaluation if you link it to funding.
- 2) Need to start by making universities to define their own missions.
- 3) Students give much better input to evaluation processes when they have a role in university management.
- 4) Peer review is very important. University rectors/chancellors are a good source of expertise for evaluation. Their experience means that they need very little training.
- 5) Let universities do their job and just check on their management practices.

**Comments from audience:**

- Universities don't have the ability to carry out self-evaluation.
- Need to have evaluators with experience of evaluating complex, dynamic systems.
- Can't just import systems from abroad.
- Publication of all details of the evaluation process and results will ensure the quality of the process.
- Increasing pressure on universities to give students the skills needed for their jobs (rather than companies providing on-the-job training). Need universities that reflect society's needs. Evaluation should encourage re-organisation.
- Need a system where the businesses that employ graduates have a say. This should be separate from evaluation by academics to ensure that the voice of business is heard.
- Need more discussion about the 'Why?' of university evaluation. There seems to be a focus on performance evaluation for funding purposes. The impression from the European experience was that there is a question mark over whether the state should be directly involved with the evaluation process.

**Panellist responses:**

- Have to do system based rather than performance based evaluation (Hirasawa)
- NIAD is working on moving the evaluation process from being performance based to system based (Hirasawa)

- Impression from listening to the discussion of the European experience was that whilst they were aware of the need to have an evaluation system to promote university reform, what was actually introduced was a certification system. This is basically the same as having a system where a variety of evaluation bodies are created and then selected by universities, and the results used to highlight reforms. Evaluation of the new National University Corporations (NUC) will naturally include an evaluation that leads to reform - the points to reform will emerge based on the universities' mid term objectives. We know that we cannot ignore the need to create a function that encourages university reform. We want to start in 2004 with a system that takes into account all that we can learn from the European experience. (Bando)
- Management is about 'what we should do tomorrow'. In the case of universities the important thing is funding. When universities become NUCs, the changes to the funding structure will change the management culture. (Ikegami)

***Final comment*** - Richard Lewis (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information)

Could learn a lot from the UK – have been through a long period of trial and error. System that has been settled on is a combination of **institutional audit** (state mechanism) and the **controlled flow of information** for stakeholders to use to make decisions (market mechanism).