



# Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Japan: Current State and Future Perspectives

FUKUDA Hideki, Ph.D., President  
Prof. TODAYAMA Kazuhisa, Visiting Professor

National Institution for Academic Degrees  
and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE), Japan

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# Emerging challenges for quality assurance in higher education worldwide



**Internationalization**



**Diversification**



**Increasing uncertainty**

What can we, as a member of quality assurance community, do to ensure the quality of learning in the future and now?

## A very brief history of CEA in Japan

- 2004 The revision of School Education Act  
– Undergoing CEA became mandatory
- 2004- The 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, with NIAD-UE (Currently NIAD-QE) starting a year behind
- 2011- The 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle
- 2018- The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle

\*CEA: Certified Evaluation and Accreditation



## Statutory Grounds

- School Education Act revised in 2004 (Articles 109 and 123)
  - Universities, junior colleges, colleges of technology should undergo evaluation by an organization certified by MEXT at least once **every seven years**.
  - The evaluation focuses on the conditions of education, research, management, facilities and equipment.
  - Universities with professional graduate schools should undergo evaluation at least once **every five years**

## Recent statutory changes (1)

- The 2017 revision of the School Education Act
  - A new category of higher education institutes added (i.e. Professional and vocational university (PVU))
  - Focus on practical and applied aspects of knowledge and skills expected for professional engagement
  - 30%+ teachers with professional experience required
  - As of 2022, 17 PVUs mainly in the areas of ICT, paramedic, digital entertainment, fashion *etc.*

## Recent legislative changes (2)

- The 2019 revision of the School Education Act as regards Article 109
  - Paragraph 5 added
    - “Accreditation” defined (for the first time in 20 years) clearly in terms of “meeting the standards set by Quality Assurance Agencies”
  - Paragraph 7 added
    - The Minister’s responsibility towards unaccredited HEI defined

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle CEA: its general characteristics

- The regulations on QA agencies revised in 2016
  - “Internal quality assurance” listed as a new reviewing item along with items such as curricula, teaching staff, facilities, admission, management *etc.*
  - Three “policies” are required to be more concrete and easy-to-understand, including statements on (1) the expected learning outcomes, (2) principles of curriculum structure& teaching, and (3) requirements for admissible students

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle CEA by NIAD-QE (1)

- NIAD-QE revised its “Standards for Evaluation and Accreditation of Universities”
  - Made applicable from 2019
  - Made up of 27 standards in 6 areas
  - Area 2 covers Internal quality assurance
  - 3 standards in Area 2 designated as “priority items”

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle CEA by NIAD-QE (2)

- NIAD-QE also made a major alteration to the evaluation procedure
  - Previously, required universities to present their self-assessment in unprescribed prose
  - In the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, require universities to focus more on evidential documents and submit their analyses in preset formats
  - Digitize former paper-based communication by cloud services

# Impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on HE in Japan

- Universities shifting to “online mode”
  - Remote classes
  - Penetration of LMS
  - Telework
- Universities confronted with “new” problems
  - Information security
  - Mental health
  - Evaluation of learning outcomes

## The impact of Covid19 on CEA by NIAD-QE

- NIAD-QE has been forced/encouraged to shift to “online mode”
  - Panel meetings made fully online by means of teleconference systems such as Webex and Microsoft Teams
  - Site visits made online
    - Interviews through teleconference systems
    - Online class visitations to online classes with temporarily issued IDs
    - Movie presentation of facilities

## Challenges resulting from Covid19

- Problems of the digitized review procedures
  - In general, telecommunication got in the way
    - Depend heavily on equipment and facility
    - Vary from HEI to HEI, from individuals to individuals
    - Multiple communication channels reduced to one open and transparent channel, prohibiting in-group concurrent discussions and verbal in-depth clarifications

## New ideas for year 2022 (1)

- In 2022, NIAD-QE is planning to adopt “mixed mode” consisting of
  - Physical site visit: class visitation, facility-tour *etc.* and
  - Online site visit: Interviews with president and directors, academic and administrative staff, and students

## Toward the next cycle of CEA (1)

- Starts in 2025
- In accordance with discussion in MEXT's council, the Standards for the Establishment of University was slightly revised.
- The (formal) regulations on the number of academic staff are relaxed.
- More substantive Standards for quality assurance will be required.

## Toward the next cycle of CEA (2)

- In NIAD-QE we are discussing
  - Further streamlining of evaluation procedures
  - Methodology of reviewing the quality of online mode of teaching
  - Analysis of changes in internationalization strategy of universities
  - Quality assurance of programs operated across multiple institutions
- Our answer to the increasing uncertainty issue is simply that we should prepare ourselves for whatever better or worse might happen.
- The Standards for the 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle will be drafted, implemented upon approval and made publicly available no later than 2024.