

香港學術評審局

HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR
ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION

HKCAA

ACCREDIT
NOTE

ISSUE NO.13 OCT. 1995

THE COUNCIL'S FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

The Council celebrates its fifth anniversary this year. As friends and well-wishers of this Council send their congratulations, all those who have worked with the Council in the past including Council members, staff, and colleagues in the institutions and government, are heartened to see that the Council has grown from strength to strength. The Council has evolved and changed but its vitality and dedication to the enhancement of quality in education is sailing high.



Council Chairman, Dr Andrew Chuang, giving a talk at the HKCAA Fifth Anniversary Seminar

A series of activities were organized to commemorate the fifth anniversary. A forum was hosted for members from the tertiary institutions which featured lectures by the Council's members, Professor Kwong Lee Dow, Dr John Petersen, and Dr Christian Thune, and the Council chairman, Dr Andrew Chuang. They respectively talked about developments in quality assurance in Australia, the USA, Europe, and Hong Kong. The forum was followed by active discussion among participants and provided a valuable occasion for interchange among members from the many local institutions.

The Council also organized its second China delegation (following the one in 1992) to visit Beijing during the last week of June. The delegation was headed by Council chairman, Dr Andrew Chuang. (See inside report)

A number of important guests were invited to attend

the fifth anniversary council dinner held on 23 June. These included the Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, Miss Jacqueline Willis, and the Secretary for Recreation and Culture, Mr James So. The heads of local tertiary institutions and representatives from professional bodies also attended.

Below is an excerpt of the speech delivered at the fifth anniversary dinner by the Council chairman, Dr Andrew Chuang:

"It is my honour and pleasure to welcome you all to the dinner tonight, in celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation. Five years is not a very long time, but in terms of the fast pace of growth and change in Hong Kong, five years can be a long time. In terms of the development and growth of the HKCAA, these five years have been very fruitful years. The Council has grown from very small beginnings to maturity. It has undertaken a tremendous amount of work for the higher education sector of Hong Kong and it has also undergone changes itself. We must of course not forget the work of the Provisional Council for Academic Accreditation and the Planning Committee for Academic Awards which paved the foundation for the HKCAA. Without them, the HKCAA would not have been able to grow from strength to strength in the five years after its formal establishment in June 1990.

Starting in June 1990, the HKCAA took over the work of accreditation for degree programmes in the polytechnics and colleges in Hong Kong, which had formerly been performed for the Hong Kong Government by the UK's Council for National Academic Awards. There was no local predecessor to the HKCAA, and being the only organization of its nature, the Council had to build up its own procedures and criteria for accreditation work, and there was little time to do this, for within months of its establishment, the Council began its accreditation activities in earnest. The initial estimate of the Council's work was to conduct about 14 accreditation exercises each year; its workload in the first year alone turned out to be 30 validations, and in subsequent years between 40 to 50 exercises. The Council's initial years coincided with a period of fast expansion in the tertiary sector.

These initial years have forced the HKCAA to grow up very fast. Assisted by the wisdom and experience of its international members on the Council, and over a thousand

of consultants on its Register of Subject Specialists, it has carried out its quality assurance work with confidence, with integrity, and with professionalism. The Council has implemented all the guiding principles that it has set itself: it is the guardian of quality in the higher education institutions for which it has responsibility, but it is also the gate-keeper of the academic autonomy of these very institutions. In as much as the Council has guarded the quality of academic provisions in the institutions, it has also consistently and persuasively, been the promoter of quality processes and quality culture in these institutions. Thus it was with pleasure that our Council witnessed the maturing process of three institutions for which it had the responsibility for quality assurance, towards the stage of self-regulation and eventually university status.

When the Council was set up by statute in 1990, it was meant to become the flag-bearer of academic quality in the territory. But a statutory instrument does not create instant recognition. It is only through hard work that the Council's role as the purveyor of quality in education is built up and its image as such comes to be recognized, by the academic community, by government, and by the community at large.

Throughout the last five years, the Council has been approached by various government departments, organizations, and individuals, to provide advice and assessment on academic standards and qualifications, most of which relate to qualifications acquired outside Hong Kong. Such demand for our services has grown significantly over the last year or so. For the past six months alone, the Council has handled over 500 cases of qualification assessment for government departments. With regard to the professions, the Council has worked with two of the leading professional bodies in Hong Kong, sharing our experiences in accreditation and providing consultancy services as appropriate. Through the provision of impartial advice and expert service, not only has the Council established its quality maintenance role, but it has also helped to arouse and focus the attention of the community on issues of academic quality, a role which we are only too happy to shoulder.

In carrying out its quality assurance role in the tertiary institutions, in order to ensure that standards are of international comparable standards, the HKCAA has to keep abreast of developments in other places and to be in touch with educational institutions and accreditation authorities in other countries. The Ordinance of the HKCAA also requires it to "establish relationships with accrediting bodies outside Hong Kong". The Council has done extremely well on these accounts, having established close relationships with its counterparts in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, Mainland China and Taiwan, Korea, India, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and others. In addition, one important milestone in its international work was the establishment of the International Network for Quality Assurance

Agencies in Higher Education in 1991. The Network currently has over 80 members from 38 countries. Not only has the HKCAA become well established on the international scene, representing the flagship of quality in education for Hong Kong, but it is credited for spearheading the movement towards an international assembly of quality assurance agencies.

What is the task of the Council over the next few years? One significant aspect of our work, we feel, is to consolidate and continue to strengthen our links with educational authorities in China. Next week, I shall be part of an HKCAA delegation visiting the PRC, meeting with officials from the State Education Commission, the Academic Degrees Committee, and visiting a number of universities. This is but one event in our continuous liaison work with China. The Council has been establishing contacts with tertiary institutions and educational authorities since its early days of existence. A Council delegation visited China in 1992, and both prior to that date and afterwards, there have been joint seminars, reciprocal visits, and meetings. Currently, a joint conference on Quality Assurance and Evaluation in Higher Education is being organized in conjunction with the PRC under the aegis of the State Education Commission, to be held in Beijing in May 1996. We all recognize that as the fate of Hong Kong and Mainland China become more intertwined, there is increasing necessity to understand each other's education system, to find ways towards cooperation and mutual acceptance. There has been too little understanding in the past, and insufficient communication between the two territories. The HKCAA feels it is important to carry on a task it has set itself, conscious of the benefits that better mutual understanding and cooperation can bring to the education sector and also the community of Hong Kong.

On the home front, we shall continue with our quality assurance role with those institutions for which the Council still has a statutory responsibility, at the same time encouraging and assisting these institutions to develop a greater degree of maturity and eventually towards self-



Dr Andrew Chuang, Miss Jacqueline Willis, Mr James So and other guests at the Fifth Anniversary dinner

regulation. More significantly, the Council will increasingly render its quality assurance services available to other sectors of the community, including the professions, government departments, other tertiary institutions, and private organizations and individuals. The Council believes that, ways to achieve quality, and knowledge about quality in education, should not be the preserve of one sector of community alone, but should be available to the community at large, and to the consumers. The resources and expertise residing in the Council, for which the taxpayers pay, are better utilized if the Council also provides services, in the way of knowledge, advice, and consultancy, to the general public. In reflecting upon its role, the Council is convinced that this is the direction by way of which its mission ought to unfold. We are confident that we have an increasingly valuable role to play, in serving the community of Hong Kong and eventually the bigger community of China."

JUNE COUNCIL MEETING

The most recent meeting of Council was held on 23 June 1995. This meeting was used to mark the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the HKCAA, and an anniversary seminar was held. A full report of the seminar is on page 5 of the Newsletter.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

It is with sadness and great regret that we report Professor Howard Ward's death in the UK on 18 August 1995. Professor Ward died of complications arising from a serious heart condition. He bore his illness with both courage and dignity. Professor Ward who first came to Hong Kong 18 years ago held the following posts successively: Associate Director (Research and Development) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic, Principal of the Hong Kong Technical College (Tsing Yi), and Associate Vice-President (Quality) at Lingnan College. He was appointed an HKCAA Council member in June 1994.

In the passing of Professor Ward, the Hong Kong education milieu has lost an experienced and wise counsellor.

Dr Alan R King, Deputy President at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, has recently retired to the UK. Dr King served the Council since 1992. His term as a Council member was briefly interrupted when he left the Poly U at the end of 1993. After a short spell at South Bank University, he returned to Hong Kong and was reappointed as a Council member in June 1994. The HKCAA would like to thank Dr King for his helpful contributions as a Council member and wish him all the best in his endeavours.

We would like to introduce in this issue Mr Alex P H Wong, one of our local non-academic Council members appointed in June 1994 for a two-year term.

Alex Wong Po-hang, JP

Alex P H Wong, JP, graduated from the University of Hong Kong in 1967 with a B.A. (Hons) degree in English Studies. He immediately joined John Swire & Sons (HK) as an Executive Trainee. He was first assigned to Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd and during his early years with the airline, he received training in sales and marketing. He was sent to Singapore to work as Cathay's Marketing & Administration Manager, S.E. Asia, from 1977 for nearly three years before returning to Hong Kong in 1979 to become the first Chinese Advertising Manager of Hong Kong's own airline.

With the growing demand from the insurance division of the Swire Group, he was transferred to manage Taikoo Royal Insurance from 1981 and became the Managing Director of this leading insurance company from 1984 until early 1994 when he was invited to join the main Board of John Swire & Sons (HK) Ltd as one of the Executive Directors.

While in the insurance industry, Mr Wong was very much involved in industry-related matters and served as the Chairman of the General Insurance Council and the Hong Kong Federation of Insurers. He is also very community service-minded as he has served on many Advisory Boards appointed by the Government. In particular, he is very much involved with the promotion of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme in Hong Kong, the Insurance Training Centre of the Vocational Training Council and the Career Advisory Board of the University of Hong Kong.

In his spare time, he likes to read and practise Chinese calligraphy. On the sports side, his favourite game is a round of golf at weekends and swimming in summer.

VISIT TO THE PRC

A Council delegation visited Beijing over the period 26-30 June 1995. The delegation, led by the Chairman, Dr Andrew Chuang, also comprised Dr John Petersen, Dr Christian Thune, Dr Kam Wai Kee, Mr Allan Sensicle,



HKCAA delegation paying a visit to the State Education Commission and the Office of the Academic Degrees Committee in the PRC

Miss Wong Wai Sum and Miss Amanda Li. A series of meetings was arranged, contributing significantly to the HKCAA's continuing programme liaison with the PRC.

While in Beijing, discussions, and exchange of information and views took place during meetings with staff of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council, the State Education Commission, the Academic Degrees Committee Office of the State Council, Beijing Municipal Bureau of Higher Education, Peking University, Beijing University of Astronautics and Aeronautics and the Beijing Central Conservatory of



HKCAA delegation visiting the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council

Music. During these meetings the HKCAA heard progress reports of the development of evaluation and related projects in higher education in China. In particular, progress with China's P211 Project was reported. This project aims for China to have 100 world-class universities by the turn of the century. Although it is suggested that all universities can compete to be put into this category, it is clear that the present universities with graduate and other research institutes which comprise over 90 of the 1064 institutions in China, are likely to be those selected. It is understood that the 100 universities are being selected according to their strengths and the needs of society and are likely to be favoured with the best staff, students and resources once accepted.

The delegation was informed that although there were no detailed criteria for institutions to be selected, the State Education Commission had provided guidance in relation to 16 broad criteria which might be met, and have encouraged certain institutions to initiate self-evaluations in relation to them. Furthermore, it is understood that institutions could be required, once they have undertaken their self-evaluations, to be visited by a panel of vice-chancellors.

On the delegation's visit to Peking University and the Beijing University of Astronautics and Aeronautics, both institutions declared that they had been evaluated successfully in the first stage of the Project.

China values international cooperation with universities

world-wide and seeks cooperative ventures. Peking University has over 100 such ventures with overseas institutions.

The 13 institutions under the jurisdiction of the Beijing Bureau are being evaluated in terms of three disciplines, namely, language, mathematics and sciences. Furthermore, the Bureau is building up data from the institutions about student performance in order to relate this to the quality of the institutions.

In addition to these meetings three members of Council, Dr Andrew Chuang, Dr Christian Thune and Dr John Petersen gave presentations at a public seminar at the Beijing Normal University on quality assurance and higher education in Hong Kong, Denmark and the USA, respectively. The presentations were well received and followed by a lively discussion. In addition, HKCAA staff met representatives of the Chinese Society of Higher Education Evaluation to discuss aspects of the organization of the International Conference on Quality Assurance and Evaluation in Higher Education, to be held at the Beijing Normal University in May 1996, which the HKCAA is co-organizing.

The HKCAA also had an opportunity to meet Professor Wei Yu, Deputy Minister of the State Education Commission to discuss higher education in the region.

1996 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CHINA

Registration has started for the 1996 International Conference on Quality Assurance and Evaluation in Higher Education, which the Council is co-organizing with the Chinese Society of Higher Education Evaluation. The Conference will be held from May 7-9 at the Beijing Normal University, in Beijing.

The Conference will address a number of issues in quality assurance in higher education, including the accreditation of higher education institutions; the evaluation of teaching; the roles played by government, accreditation agencies, and the community in quality assurance; the international dimension of education evaluation; and professional accreditation. The Conference is now calling for papers on these and related topics, and the deadline for submission of proposals is end of November 1995.

This will be the first international conference on quality assurance to be held in China, although China has in the past organized a number of internal and regional conferences on the topic, the last large-scale one being the Pacific Rim Symposium on Higher Education Evaluation held in Hawaii in 1993. In recent years, there is growing concern with and research into education evaluation inside China, and past issues of Accreditation Note have reported various developments in quality assurance in the country.

The Conference is expected to draw participants from

Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and other parts of the world. The focus of the Conference will be regional as well as international developments in quality assurance.

There will be interesting social programmes and post-conference activities, including the inevitable tour of the historical sites in Beijing such as the Great Wall, and organized tours to the famous cities of Xian, Suzhou and Hangzhou.

For enquiries and registration please contact the Conference Secretariat at the Council (Fax: 852-28459910, Tel: 852-28017480). Participants have the advantage of a reduced fee if they register before March 1996. However, it is advisable to book early as there is keen interest in the Conference.

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

Last March, a seminar entitled *Quality Assessment of Higher Education: Learning from Experience*, was led by Professor Andy Alaszewski. Professor Alaszewski is Professor of Health Studies and Director of the Institute of Health Studies at the University of Hull. He discussed the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Teaching Quality Assessment as he experienced it both as an "assessor" and as a member of a department which has been assessed. Professor Alaszewski set the seminar within the wider context of quality in higher education and the ways in which assessment and academic audit have been developing in the UK. He examined ways in which quality can be defined and measured, and presented alternative approaches to assuring quality. Approaches such as quality audit and assessment practised respectively by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and the HEFCE were considered.

A member of staff, W S Wong, discussed the work done by the HKCAA in relation to accreditation of teacher training institutions and programmes in her paper *The Accreditation of teacher education in Hong Kong*, presented at the *Accreditation of Teacher Education Seminar* in Taipei, co-organized by the National Hsinchu Teachers College and the National Chengchi University. Apart from the stimulating exchanges with conference participants, Miss Wong also took the opportunity to visit the National Open University and meet with a senior consultant of the Accreditation Committee of the Ministry of Education.

In late March, a seminar on the nature and issues of Institutional Reviews (IR) was conducted at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. As a first seminar at the HKIEd, the programme focused on the preparatory work leading to an Institutional Review and the institution's stance during such a visit. The IR was presented as a developmental process, both constructive and positive. The external reviewer acts as an enabler rather than a judge or inspector. The principal issues usually considered

in an IR along with the procedures and stages of the IR, and the preparation of the document, were presented. The senior and middle level management's role was underlined as the most crucial one in building up an institution's quality culture and sense of ownership of its quality assurance activities. Examples of reviews at other institutions were also described.

Last May, two members of staff, Ivy Chan and Allan Sensicle, attended the Third INQAAHE meeting in Utrecht where they presented a paper titled *Institutional development following a major external review*. The authors discussed the manner in which institutions develop as a result of self and external assessments. (Report on the Third Network Conference in Utrecht appears in the INQAAHE newsletter, issue 9, August 1995)

HKCAA's Fifth Anniversary Seminar

Last June, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation celebrated the fifth anniversary of the enactment of its Ordinance. In the spirit of the celebrations, the HKCAA held a "Fifth Anniversary Seminar" on *Teaching and Learning Assessment: Experiences to Share*. The seminar focused on the developments of teaching and learning assessment in Australia, Denmark and the United States. Three distinguished professionals and current members of our governing Council presented their papers followed by questions and discussion. We are publishing a condensed version of their papers below. The complete version is available on request.

The Australian Experience

In his discussion of the *Assessments being made of the quality of learning and teaching in Australian universities: a contemporary snapshot in 1995*, Professor Kwong Lee Dow, Dean of the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne, has identified five activities which influence the quality of university teaching and learning processes and outcomes.



Professor Kwong Lee Dow sharing his Australian experience with participants at the Fifth Anniversary Seminar

a) Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE)

A report from the Higher Education Council titled *Achieving Quality* recommended the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Committee in 1992. As Professor Lee Dow explained, the CQAHE seems to derive its power and influence from: i) the annual government fund rewarding the institutions judged as having successfully developed their quality assurance mechanisms and processes, and related innovations; and ii) the ranking system which creates competition amongst the 36 universities for the best placement, deserving the highest allocation.

Conducted in 1993, the first round attached comparable importance to teaching and learning, to research and to community service. The second round conducted in 1994, focused primarily on teaching and learning, including postgraduate research supervision and training.

Professor Lee Dow remarked that the Committee reported a measurable improvement between 1993 and 1994, referring to attitude and procedural changes, and institution wide approaches to planning and to managing teaching and learning now emerging. It noted formal policies developing through codes of practice, plans with clear targets and goals, structural changes and the creation of senior appointments, and the replacing of earlier aggregations of separate policies by a systematic framework.

b) Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching

The Ministerial Committee is primarily known for its *Teaching Development Grants* awarded to "promote good teaching practice and innovation in higher education".

The 1500 applications made since 1992 represent a wide variety of disciplines and some innovative approaches to teaching and learning. At the level of departments in institutions, some parallels are seen in the processes of applying for and perhaps being successful in obtaining these grants through peer assessed competitive mechanisms.

Abstracts of projects that are awarded grants are published annually, in the hope that this will stimulate wider interest in the innovative approaches and lead to the formation of informal networks among academics working on similar projects.

c) Course Experience Questionnaire

The *Course Experience Questionnaire* developed by Professor Paul Ramsden of Griffith University has been modified and standardized by the Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and the Graduate Careers Council of Australia for a wide use across Australian universities. This questionnaire enables comparisons between fields of study and institutions. It focuses on aspects of teaching which students are able to judge: teaching, goals and standards, workload, assessment,

generic competencies and overall satisfaction.

d) Good Universities Guide

This Guide offers objective information on comparative standing of tertiary institutions pertinent to school students and career counsellors.

e) Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education

Last year, P C Candy, G Crebert and J O'Leary submitted their report *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education* to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training. It provides a detailed and factual summary of the undergraduate education in Australia and includes a range of examples of course profiles which attempt in various course fields, to show exemplary practice.

Quality Assurance in Denmark and Europe

Dr Christian Thune, Director of the Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, presented two papers: he first discussed the Danish experience in *Setting up systematic evaluation of higher education*, then *The European pilot projects for evaluating quality in higher education*, a midterm report.

The last few years have witnessed a remarkable European trend towards assessment and improvement of higher education. Government policies of decentralization, value-for-money perspective, and internationalization have all contributed. Accordingly government initiatives have caused the establishment of agencies in France (1987), the Netherlands (1988), the UK (1992) and Denmark (1992) with the task of systematically assessing all higher education in these countries. The massification of higher learning strained the tertiary sector. In order to ensure quality based on the priorities and expectations of the universities, an increasing number of initiatives have been taken by the higher education institutions (HEI). In this context it should be stressed that there need not be any simple and direct relationship between ownership of the evaluation system and the balance between quality assurance and accountability.

The Dutch system is owned by the universities and tilted towards quality assurance. In the UK, the evaluation by Funding Councils is owned by government and tilted towards accountability. In Denmark, the government owns the evaluation systems established or in planning, but the main focus is on quality assurance.

All systems face the dilemma of purpose: the dilemma between an essential quality improvement related purpose and a purpose related to external accountability. There is a conflict in terms of the differences in method which follow from differences in purpose of the quality system. However, it has been the self-chosen platform of the Danish Centre to combine both perspectives. The implications and consequences of this strategy are discussed in the paper. The paper presents the Danish context first in terms of the 1992 reform of higher

education and secondly, the mandate and procedures of the Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education.

a) 1992 Reform of Higher Education

In the spring of 1992, the then Danish conservative-liberal minority government and Parliament arrived at a number of compromises on Higher Education which constituted a reform of the entire higher education system. The stated objectives of the reform was to ensure a higher degree of institutional freedom and autonomy combined with a tightening of each institution's management structure. The government was focusing on deregulation and decentralization, combined with mechanisms to ensure quality, with the government's double target aimed at reaching the highest international standards.

The key elements in this controversial reform were as follows:

- massive authority transferral from the Ministry of Education to the HEI;
- preservation of the institutional democracy, but a reduction of the number of governing bodies and their members;
- significantly strengthened mandate and authority of rectors and deans;
- separation of management of education and research; and
- external representation in the senate and faculty councils.

Higher education institutions were from the outset certainly sceptical towards the reform. The criticism focused especially on the new uniform structure of studies and on the new university act. The seriousness of the intended process of decentralization was also questioned, as was initially the new centrally based mechanisms for accountability of quality.

b) Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education

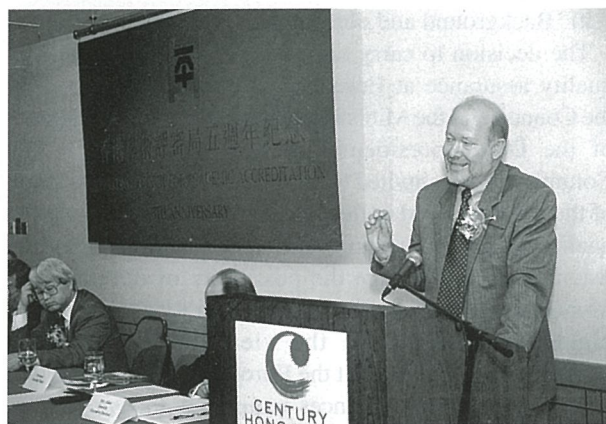
Accordingly the Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education was established by the Ministry of Education in 1992 and started operating on 1 July 1992. The Centre is funded by the Ministry and in 1995 its total grant amounts to 9.5 million DDK. The Centre is in principle an independent institution in respect of the Ministry of Education as well as of the universities and other institutions of higher education.

The mandate of the Centre is

- to initiate evaluation processes of higher education in Denmark;
- to develop appropriate methods of assessing programmes;
- to inspire and guide the institutions of higher education in aspects concerning evaluation and quality; and
- to compile national and international experience on evaluation of the educational system and quality development.

A substantial part of the Centre's work consists of regular and systematic evaluations of programmes on a rotating basis in which all programmes will be evaluated within a period of five to seven years.

By June 1995 the Centre will have concluded the first 22 full scale comprehensive evaluations. The scope of the Centre's activities covers a total of seventeen universities and university level institutions, and a substantial number of non-university institutions, especially within the health sector. The Centre plans to finish its first cycle of evaluations by 1998.



Dr Christian Thune talking about quality assurance in Denmark and Europe

Methodology

The primary task of the Danish Centre is to conduct evaluations. The Centre has decided to base its first series of evaluations on a standard method based on the following arrangement:

Phase 1: Planning

- the appointment of a steering committee; and
- the organisation of the project secretariat.

Phase 2: Self-assessment

- a self-assessment carried out by an evaluation team set up by the study programme.

Phase 3: Surveys

- surveys among users of the education;
- the students, the graduates, the employers; and
- a report from the external examiners associated with the education.

Phase 4: Visit

- a visit to the higher education institutions involved.

Phase 5: Reporting

- a conference of interested parties;
- the final report from the steering committee; and
- the process of implementation.

In conclusion, Dr Thune remarked that the proof of success will be the impact and follow-up in the longer perspective of the foundation for quality improvement launched by a successful evaluation. Procedures and methods should therefore motivate the institutions towards this end. This at least has been the ambition and intention of the Danish Centre.

In his second paper, Dr Thune presented the Midterm Report of the *European Pilot Project* in providing a short presentation of the background and objectives of the project followed by an overview of the organization of the project.

a) Background and objectives of the project

The decision to carry out pilot projects in the field of quality assurance at European level was introduced by the Council and the Ministers of Education on the initiative of the Dutch presidency in November 1991. The Commission was invited to undertake a comparative study of the methods used in the Member States to evaluate the quality of higher education. Furthermore, the Commission was invited to examine the possibility of developing a limited number of pilot projects in quality assessment in higher education with the view of strengthening cooperation in this field at the European level, taking into account concrete experiences acquired in this area.

The Commission proposed undertaking a European pilot project focused on the evaluation of teaching in a number of selected disciplines. This methodology is derived from the elements which are common to the four national evaluation systems, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Denmark, identified in the comparative study of quality management in Europe. In no way did the project aim to establish a ranking of institutions by the quality of teaching in a specific discipline, but rather to organize the transfer of experience in evaluation methods, whilst adding elements of the "European dimension". The project was approved by the Education Committee of the Council in June 1994. The EFTA/EFTA countries which had been following the preparation for the project and had expressed a strong interest to participate were invited to participate in the project as well.

b) Organization of the project

The project involves the participation of four institutions from the larger countries, and of two institutions from the other countries, that is, a total of 46 institutions. The objective is to test a methodology for quality assessment in teaching which is not specific to any particular discipline. This means that the Pilot Project should remain within reasonable proportions, while allowing all countries to participate, and enabling the projects to be completed within a reasonable time frame.

An important condition for the project is that it is carried out independently of both the governments and the participating institutions. Therefore the project is managed by the Commission assisted by the Advisory

Group consisting of representatives from all participating states (and including representatives from the Liaison Committee of Conferences of Rectors, CRE, EURASHE, OECD, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe). The Commission and the Advisory Group are assisted by a small management group. The management group's role has been to

- to prepare the self-assessment guidelines to be supplied to the institutions;
- to develop procedures to be followed during visits by the peer review group;
- to produce the guidelines for the participating institutions;
- to support the work of the National Committees and in particular to provide information and training in the participating States as necessary;
- to develop guidelines for the national reports;
- to prepare the work of the European Committee and its report on the results of the projects; and
- to provide general assistance with the management of the project.

c) Presentation of the process

One of the essential elements of the project is the preparation of a self-assessment report by the participating institutions on the basis of the guidelines for the project prepared by the management group. The self-assessment reports were submitted last March. The evaluation reports were due by the end of May so that the national reports may be finalized by the end of June.

d) The national reports and the European report

The national reports should provide an analysis of the methodological and procedural issues that have emerged in the implementation of the Pilot Project. The European report will be based on the results of the national reports, commenting on the implementation of the project and analysing the project in terms of its general and specific objectives. The European report will be presented at a final conference which should take place at the end of 1995.

Developments in the US

Dr John Petersen, Executive Director of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, discussed recent developments in the *Higher Education Quality Assurance in the United States*.

Accreditation is the system of self-regulation employed by higher education in the United States. It is a system for recognizing educational institutions and/or professional programmes affiliated with institutions that demonstrate a level of performance, integrity and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the education community and the public they serve. This recognition is bestowed through non-governmental voluntary institutional and professional associations.

Institutional accreditation, the endorsement of total

operating units, for most recognized institutions of higher education is awarded by the accrediting commission of six regional associations. Professional accreditation, also referred to as specialized accreditation, is awarded by societies and associations in fields such as medicine, law, engineering, and architecture. Accrediting commissions themselves are required to be periodically evaluated and granted recognition by the United States Secretary of Education and by the community of accrediting associations.

An institution becomes accredited by demonstrating that it meets the criteria and standards of the accrediting commission. The process entails conducting and publishing a self-study that provides evidence that the standards of the accrediting commission are met, followed by an on-site evaluation by a team of external peer examiners who validate the self-study. The external peers produce a report which is presented to the accrediting commission which formally confers accredited status. Once accredited, the institution agrees to be periodically reviewed by the accrediting agency, at intervals of five to ten years.

Institutional accreditation forms a basis for trust among institutions, an important matter in the United States where the student population is highly mobile, carrying transfer course credit from one institution to another like currency.

For many years, the system of non-governmental accreditation has been relied upon as sufficient evidence of quality, integrity, and effectiveness of higher education. Both the federal and state governments still expressly require that an institution be accredited as a condition of participating in certain programmes of support.

Reform initiatives

Leaders of the regional accrediting commissions, in concert with national higher education associations, created the National Policy Board (NPB) in 1993 in an effort to collectively organize a set of improvements in

institutional accreditation. In October, 1994, the NPB proposed a set of reforms:

- the establishment of common eligibility requirements, limited regional accreditation of degree granting institutions only;
- the adoption of Common Standards for Accreditation, with a focus on assessment of student learning outcomes;
- the issuance of public reports of institutional evaluations;
- the establishment of a non-governmental Higher Education Accreditation Board with a majority of public (non-academic) members to oversee accrediting agencies.

It was believed by the NPB that establishment of a demonstrably rigorous non-governmental system of quality assurance would deter government from efforts to control higher education.

This set of proposals, which seemed so reasonable to the sponsors, was generally supported by public institutions but was not well received by private institutions, many of which treasure their independence and fear any source of external authority.

Assessment

Critics of education, especially those critics in government, repeatedly ask institutions to demonstrate that they are achieving their intended outcomes. Accreditation agencies are asked to undertake assessment of a range of student learning outcomes. Assessment is suggested to serve the purposes of:

- public accountability or justifying public and private expenditures on education;
- institutional planning in which internal resource allocations are justified; and
- providing a basis for systematic improvement of the curriculum and services of the institutions.

Recognizing the perils of promising more than can be achieved, the regional accrediting agencies have employed the terminology of “effectiveness” rather than narrow reliance on “outcome” measures. American accreditors seem to be committed to the practice of requiring each institution to assess achievement of its own intended learner outcomes, employing methodology of its own choosing, demonstrating its effectiveness consistent with the established mission of that institution. Accreditors ask institutions to establish goals and objectives in a clear and measurable fashion, to describe the means to be employed in pursuing those goals and objectives, to identify indicators to be used in measuring achievement, and to periodically present evidence that the goals have been reached. The assessment system of the institution is periodically evaluated by the accrediting agency.

There is no academic consensus in support of the range of activities that exist under the rubric of what is called “quality assurance”. However, assessment for the



Dr John Petersen reporting the recent developments in the US

purposes of public accountability is becoming a political necessity for institutions in the United States that receive public support, either direct support, as do public institutions, or indirect support in the form of government-guaranteed student loans, which are important to almost all private institutions. Many states have adopted laws and regulations mandating some form of assessment and reporting for public institutions, and the federal government has required as a condition of recognition, that accrediting agencies in turn require institutions to undertake assessment.

Public investment in an increasingly expensive education system will necessitate institutions be held accountable for funds invested and for the return on the investment. Regulatory initiatives by governments are the inevitable result of such a scenario. If intrusive regulation of higher education is to be avoided, the community of institutions must support a demonstrably rigorous system of non-governmental self-regulation, such as that proposed by the National Policy Board for the strengthening and reform of institutional accreditation. Next year should tell us the fate and direction of quality assurance in the United States, whether it can remain as an effective non-governmental system of accreditation, or become a function of the federal and state governments.

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As an international association, it has always been the intention of the Network to rotate its administering body from one member to another at regular intervals. Having served the Network for four years, the HKCAA considered it timely to hand over the administrative work to another quality assurance agency. At a business meeting held during the recent biennial conference of the Network in Utrecht, the Netherlands, the HKCAA proposed a change of administration for the Network. Participating representatives from member organizations supported the proposal. The meeting further agreed that the New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) which had offered to take over the Network administration be appointed. This change becomes effective as from 1 July 1995. In the meantime, the HKCAA at NZUAAU's request continues to keep the accounts for the Network until such time when a treasurer is appointed under the new constitution.

The HKCAA has, in the past four years, witnessed significant growth in the Network. At the time of handing over, the Network has 80 member organizations from 38 countries. The HKCAA has also published nine issues of the QA Newsletter. Although no longer the administering body, the HKCAA will maintain an active member and will render assistance, where necessary.

To contact the Network secretariat, please write to:

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ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES GUIDE

Following the successful launch of the first issue of the Academic Programmes Guide, the HKCAA is planning to publish a second issue in early 1996. The focus of this second issue continues to be on education opportunities for school leavers at secondary level or above. However, the new Guide will be expanded to cover not only programmes offered by overseas institutions in the territory but also those offered by local institutions as well.

A main feature of the Academic Programmes Guide is the provision of guidelines and information to readers to assist them in making the appropriate choice. Favourable feedback on the usefulness of such advice has been received. The HKCAA is therefore planning to strengthen the information section in the new issue and preparation work is now underway. Those who wish to comment on the publication or make further enquiry are welcome to write to Mrs Ivy Chan.

ADVICE ON QUALIFICATIONS

The Council has assumed an increasing role in the provision of advice and information in response to demand for such services from government departments and individuals in Hong Kong.

The HKCAA has in the past years provided advice to the Civil Service Branch on qualifications on an *ad hoc* basis. Recently, the Council received formal direction from government to provide advice on the comparability of qualifications to the Civil Service Branch in relation to applications for positions in the civil service. A Qualifications Assessment Liaison Group (QALG) was formed comprising representatives from the Council, the Civil Service Branch and the Education and Manpower Branch. The first meeting of the QALG was held in June 1995. Certain criteria for the assessment of qualifications were discussed and formal procedures for providing advice to the Branch were set up.

The Council also handled enquiries from a number of other government departments, including the Social Welfare Department, the Education Department, and the Education and Manpower Branch.

The Education Department undertook its first exercise in 1994 to appoint graduate teachers to primary schools and requested the Council to assist with the assessment of candidates for these positions. The Council provided advice on the acceptability of qualifications and also the relative suitability of the candidates for the posts.

There has also been an increased number of enquiries from individuals requesting assessment of their qualifications or information on particular qualifications

or institutions. These are mostly qualifications obtained from overseas institutions by individuals seeking job opportunities in Hong Kong, while some are requests for information and guidance from potential students choosing further study abroad. In cases where the individual chooses to pursue studies in Hong Kong in a programme offered by an overseas institution, reference would be made to the Academic Programmes Guide published by the Council.

Please note that our email address has
been changed to:

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