

The Swedish Model of Quality Assurance at Higher Education Institutions

TAKE Hiroko *

I . Introduction

Since the reform of higher education in 1993, the circumstances surrounding higher education institutions (HEIs) have significantly transformed. The centralized higher education system has now been delegating authority (Stensaker, 2000). There have been moves to accelerate internationalization of higher education institutions. Quality assurance is also one of new streams in the field of higher education after the 1990s. From the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, Sweden developed quality assurance, which it brought into shape after Finland and Denmark. The development of exchange and cooperation between higher education within the EU's borders and acceptance of the Bologna Process carried forward the foundation of quality assurance in Sweden.

The implementation of quality assurance is described by the articles which analyze each institution's implementation. Nilsson (2010) reported from ENQA (Hämäläinen et al. 2001) and previous research about the Nordic model of quality assurance (Hansen, 2009; Smeby and Stensaker, 1999). Regarding the policy of quality assurance, Nilsson and Näslund (1997) examined its meaning and transition of policy based on their analysis of policy documents after the 1960s. On the other hand, Nilsson and Wahlén (2000) elucidated how quality assurance was implemented at the institutional level. Nilsson and Wahlén examined how Swedish quality assurance measured the process of education compared with Norway, Denmark and England. While the evaluation was based on quantitative data such as the size of teaching staff, research assessments, and degrees in Norway, Denmark and England, the Swedish evaluation emphasized the process of education such as purpose, method,

* Research Associate, Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies, Kobe University

and output. However, it indicated the deficit by which it is difficult to specifically evince the actual output of education. Nilsson and Näslund (1997) and Hämäläinen et al. (2001) elucidated the characteristics of Swedish quality assurance: its evaluation took a top-down approach on par with other Nordic countries, controlling quality of education and letting institutions improve their own educational quality.

The purpose of this article is to examine the implementation status of the quality assurance framework at higher education institutions in Sweden. It briefly presents an overview of the development and current quality assurance systems at the national level. It then elucidates the Swedish model of quality assurance.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first part of this paper, I will examine the foundation of quality assurance. This will provide insights into the roles it is expected to play. I will then describe the development of quality assurance since the 1960s. The final part of this paper describes the Swedish model of quality assurance which focuses on learning outcomes and allocation of funding.

II . Quality Assurance at the National Level

Previous studies show three points influencing how the quality assurance framework was carried forward in Sweden. First, the opportunity to access higher education was rapidly expanded. The expansion of higher education became a conspicuous phenomenon after the higher education reform of 1977. The reform aimed to build higher education institutions in each community and deliver opportunities to access higher education for all nations without any geographical conditions. Askling and Foss-Fridlitzius noted that the policy was to assure the opportunity to receive higher education without geographical, economical or ethical disparity (Askling and Foss-Fridlitzius 2000).

Second, the authority of education management was transferred to each institution. In the 1990s, massive education reform was undertaken in order to transition from an industrial to a knowledge society. The management of academic planning was considered for transferring to each institution. The reform was aimed to bring freedom and democratization to HEIs by configuration the education content and goals, selection criteria for applicants, appointive power of teaching staff, and

funding to HEIs. In conjunction with freedom to set their original education content, the government formulated an evaluation system to consolidate monitoring by audit to sustain the quality of education. The tendency was affected by the idea of New Public Management (Stensaker, 2000; Jonnergård and Erlingsdóttir, 2012). The idea was to absorb market principles in the public sector, and promote operational efficiency by evaluation. In the Nordic countries between the 1980s and 1990s, introduction of external auditing was pursued in order to reform the public sector (Brunsson and Olsen 1997). Although it was not straightforward to introduce the new public management to institutions, the movement had no small effect on them (Stensaker, 2000).

Internationalization was the third impulse. Internationalization of HEIs increased interaction among students and professors, encouraged discussion about the compatibility of degrees, qualification and credits, and assured the quality of higher education both domestically and abroad. The government noted the importance of internationalization of HEIs in the higher education reform of 1993. The government set out to develop the number of sending and accepting students, and academic exchange at the national and regional level. In the national document bill *Gränslös Kunskap-Högskolan i Globaliseringens tid* ('Boundless Knowledge-University in the Era of Globalization'), the government promoted internationalization of HEIs by increasing joint degree programs with overseas universities. To financially promote internationalization, 10 million kroner were distributed to HEIs in 2010. Taking the opportunity to become a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in 2000, the national framework of quality assurance was based on what ENQA presented. ENQA is the organization to share information and experience about quality assurance between agencies, institutions and HEIs in Europe. Sweden has accommodated the framework referring to the discussion and implementation of quality assurance in affiliated countries. The agency, for instance, deliberated on the consistency of audits, accreditation and program evaluations which were already implemented in the country with ENQA. The new quality assurance framework in 2011 focuses on self-evaluation, consistency with reliable statistics, consistency with the content of education and the social world, students' learning outcomes, and international perspectives. At the institutional level, the self evaluation system was

developed at each HEI with reference to England, the Netherlands, the U.S.A. and Australia. The national quality assurance system, therefore, used examples from those countries and paid attention to the national situation.

III . Introduction of the National Quality Assurance Framework

In the 1960s, the evaluation was introduced to higher education by a National Commission on University Pedagogy (Nilsson and Näslund, 1997; Hansen, 2009). According to Nilsson and Näslund, evaluation was not intended to assess the content of education and the educational environment but the results of students' examinations. Furthermore, quantitative data which summarized the number of teachers and students was not created. It was because the higher education policy was centralized and the size of teaching and even administrative staff, appointed by the head of the department, were defined through the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament). This caused a stir in the issue of balance between quantity and quality of data in the report from the commission in 1970.

The higher education reform of 1977 introduced self-evaluation at the institutional level. It was the time to expand higher education and its equality by building new institutions in each community. Self-evaluation at the institutional level encouraged self-management by evaluating the institutions through teachers' achievements, students' education, personnel distribution and financial resources (Askling, Bauer and Marton, 1999). Self-evaluation, however, was not compulsory so it could not improve education if institutions did not show interest. In sum, self-evaluation did not perform at the national level.

In association with expansion of HEIs, relevance between content of education and society, quality assurance, and accountability came up for political discussion. In 1989, the Ministry of Education proposed a quality assurance system to maintain quality of higher education. The Commission on University Pedagogy joined the European discussion about education, and examined the national quality assurance framework and whether education content at HEIs met social demands.

In the early 1990s, the government undertook the drastic reforms to create a knowledge society by delegating centralized management and authority of education

planning. The reform of 1993 brought freedom and democracy to HEIs by devolving authority to set education content and goals, students' screening criteria, personnel appointments, and funding. It also called for maintaining education quality by formulating an evaluation, audit and monitoring system.

After the reform of 1993, tools for self-evaluation were developed at the institutional level. The universities at Umeå, Lund, and Göteborg developed their own self-evaluation and peer review systems which responded to those of the Netherlands and the United States. Other HEIs utilized the self-evaluation system which those universities originally developed, or created their own. The tools for self-evaluation, therefore, were developed at the institutional, not the national level.

The agency implemented auditing in 1995 for the national quality assurance system. It conducted audits of all the HEIs (36 institutions at the time), employing the slogan, 'Evaluation for improvement'. Auditing was focused mainly on research content at HEIs and the degree of cooperation with the private sector.

Discussions regarding quality assurance flourished with the internationalization of higher education. For instance, the government bill *Fokus på Kunskap–Kvalitet i Den Högre Utbildningen* ('Focus on Knowledge–Quality in Higher Education') (2009/10:139) referred to the importance of quality assurance in order to increase HEIs' international competitiveness. Later, Högskoleverket (the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education) proposed the bill *Kvalitetsutvärdering för Lärande* ('Quality Evaluation in Learning') (Rapport 2009:25 R) and presented the guidelines for learning outcomes on the code of Bologna Process. Quality assurance was, therefore, closely associated with internationalization of higher education. Program evaluation and accreditation was implemented amidst this backdrop. The national evaluation framework emerged and was formulated. In 2007, Sweden incorporated the Bologna Process and undertook to formulate quality assurance by responding to what ENQA proposed. On this occasion, previous audits, accreditation, program evaluation and self-evaluation were examined for content and consistency. Through debates within the country, the new quality assurance framework was compiled in 2011. Compared with the quality assurance of 2007, it sets national criteria for self-evaluation, leading to consistency with statistics and between content of education and the social world, and focuses on learning outcomes and the international perspective.

The next section includes comprehensive information about the old national quality assurance framework to show how it was changed and what the current framework focuses on.

IV . Quality Assurance Framework 2007-2009

The quality assurance framework from 1995 to 2007 encouraged self-improvement by HEIs under control of the Högskoleverket to establish ascendancy of the agency (Nilsson and Näslund 1997). Since 2007, the evaluation process emphasized fairness and transparency by including teaching professions, students, and representatives from labour as assessors. The framework was composed of five elements: 1) audit; 2) program evaluation; 3) accreditation; 4) thematic evaluation; and 5) award of excellence in education. Högskoleverket (2008) defined the elements according to ENQA. ENQA accepted that there is no explicit definition about accreditation: '[A]ccreditation is a formal, published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a programme, following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards' (Hämäläinen, p. 7), and 'the outcome of an accreditation process is always a "yes" or "no", which is also exactly what happens in cases of approval' (Hämäläinen, p. 8). According to ENQA, accreditation in Sweden is justified as 'yes' or 'no' about programs, institutions and degrees (Hämäläinen et al. 2001). Högskoleverket said that accreditation is one of the most important elements to assure quality because it is essential to assess if degrees awarded by HEIs fulfil criteria. According to the ENQA report, Sweden attached a high value to accreditation compared to other Nordic countries; accreditation, in conjunction with auditing, served to maintain and control the quality of higher education (Hämäläinen et al. 2001).

The quality assurance framework 2007-2009 encompassed multiple elements. Högskoleverket (2008) intended that the quality assurance framework consisting of various elements would become a resource for sharing information about education practice. The aim was monitoring, development and information sharing. Audit was implemented for monitoring, accreditation, thematic evaluation and awarding excellence in education for further development, and program-evaluation for information-sharing. Program-evaluation required time, human resources and funds,

which accounts for 40% of the elements. Audit then accounted for 30%, accreditation 15%, thematic evaluation 10%, and award of excellence in education 5%. As Högskoleverket (2008) stated, framework 2007-2009 was to stimulate attitudes for enhancing education quality among HEIs, so it emphasized program evaluation.

A. Audit

Audit was designed to assess whether the evaluation system at HEIs functioned. HEIs conducted audits at department and course level, and the audit system was assessed. The content of audit evaluation was based on the seven elements described in ENQA's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. All HEIs must conduct an audit every six years. Högskoleverket analyzed the evaluation report which was assessed by third parties. About two to six fields were selected by Högskoleverket and evaluated based on their self-evaluation of the following points:

1. Content of evaluation

1. The number of students who obtained degrees (bachelor, master, doctoral), analysis of the submission status of exam and assignments, the goals of courses, teaching materials, teaching staff, analysis of education content;
2. Qualification of teaching staff, employment status of teachers, number of degrees which teachers obtained, number of research achievements, number of employees, content of research activities;
3. The content of programs, students' education environment.

B. Program Evaluation

Högskoleverket configured the target programs which conducted program evaluation. The target of program evaluation was all programs awarding bachelor's and master's degrees, and it was implemented every six years.

The process was that HEIs first implemented self-evaluation about programs, then an external evaluation group evaluated the reports from the HEIs. The external evaluation group surveyed students and teachers through the internet. Some HEIs

accepted site visits from the evaluation group. HEIs submitted quantitative data, which were the number of teachers and students, curriculum and syllabi over the five years of program evaluation. The submitted data was used to calculate the percentage of qualified teachers, students' performance and so on.

Program evaluation was assessed based on following points:

1. Condition

1. Teaching staff: the number of teachers, degrees, research achievements;
2. Education Environment: what programs were implemented, whether education was implemented with a critical and creative approach, whether there was an appropriate education environment for students to obtain degrees;
3. Facilities: textbooks, teaching materials, internet.

2. Program design

1. Regulated Paper Materials: whether syllabi indicated learning outcomes and followed the Higher Education Ordinance;
2. Education, Library Index, Examination: whether education, library index, and examinations were designed to enhance students' learning, whether examinations were based on international index.

3. Outcomes

1. Degrees: whether essential qualifications for obtaining degrees were indicated, whether required examination, credits and goals of education were indicated;
2. Quality Assurance: whether a quality assurance system at the institutional level was established.

C. Accreditation

Accreditation in Sweden was to judge if degrees awarded by HEIs met criteria as determined by the Higher Education Ordinance. In 2007, the Higher Education Ordinance was modified on the code of the Bologna Process and prescribed a new education cycle: first cycle for bachelor course, second cycle for master course and

third cycle for a doctoral course. HEIs had to apply for accreditation and conduct self-evaluation. Accreditation also included evaluation from external groups, site visits, evaluation from professions, and assessments from the University Chancellor.

The criteria for accreditation were as follows:

1. teachers' qualifications, skills and research activities
2. precise goal and structure of department, courses
3. students' participation
4. gender equality
5. approach to globalization
6. libraries and information service
7. education facilities
8. admission qualification
9. education environment.

D. Thematic Evaluation

To improve all programs at HEIs, Högskoleverket aimed to conduct thematic evaluation. Thematic evaluation was composed of five elements: 1) equality of gender; 2) effects on students; 3) diversity; 4) cooperation with local communities; and 5) internationalization. The government regarded these as essential for higher education. The aim, therefore, was to assess the status of HEIs and accumulate competent practice. Högskoleverket had an ulterior motive to share information among HEIs, stimulate each other and further improve education quality.

E. Award of Excellence in Education

As the name implies, this was to encourage educational achievements. Award of excellence in education was given to HEIs which carried forward a high level of education, while evaluation elements were for assurance of general education quality. Although Norway, Finland and England already provided awards of excellence, it was new for Sweden. It was revolutionary, because Sweden values equality of education. The purpose of an award was to stimulate quality improvement and share information about remarkable education practices.

HEIs selected programs, departments or centres which were deserving of an award, and applied. HEIs had to meet extensive criteria such as purpose of education, learning outcomes, and environment. To earn an award of excellence, consistency between education content and criteria for learning outcomes was emphasized. The process was evaluated by professions and site visits.

Unfortunately, the quality assurance system of 2007-2009 did not function well. The process strained HEIs, external auditors and Högskoleverket, according to surveys conducted at institutions.¹ Although it was supposed to be implemented between 2007 and 2012, it required tremendous time, human resources and funding, and was regarded as ineffective². Högskoleverket then established the new quality assurance framework of 2011-2014 which focused on learning outcomes that measure the impacts of the social world for quality improvement. The next section will examine the strategy of learning outcomes structured around a new quality assurance framework.

V. Quality Assurance Framework 2011-2014

1. Quality Assurance Based on Learning Outcomes

The current quality assurance framework focuses on outcomes. It is simpler than the former one, and consists of two elements: program evaluation and accreditation. Program evaluation focuses on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are assessed based on students' achievements and questionnaires. Assessors evaluate students' thesis as students' achievements at courses. Questionnaires for students evaluate whether HEIs achieved their educational goals, and whether education obtained at HEIs is beneficial for daily life.

In light of the reforms for improving learning outcomes in Europe, Sweden restructured higher education through the Framework of Qualification for the European Higher Education Area. Learning outcomes stipulate exactly what students should learn and what abilities they should acquire. The current quality assurance system aspires to improve the visibility and transparency of higher education. HEIs should follow the guidelines of learning outcomes that the government outlined and

release their own index of outcomes. Setting learning outcomes ensure HEIs follow the guideline. The announcement of learning outcomes, on the other hand, would be a worthwhile means for students to create their own learning program. It would provide students with more information about specific programs so they can decide which institution to attend. Learning outcomes should prevent inconsistencies between educational content and students' needs.

Learning outcomes contains three parts: intended learning outcomes and examination; achieved learning outcomes; and students' experience and influence. *Intended learning outcomes and examination* is composed of 'knowledge and understanding', 'competence and skills', and 'judgment and approach', which will be described in detail. *Achieved learning outcomes* evaluate students' study outcomes, such as a thesis submitted at the end of the course. The purpose is not to evaluate students' abilities but whether they accomplished the goals set for the course. *Judgment and approach* questions students' and alumni's satisfaction with education at HEIs.

Questionnaire surveys have been conducted in Australia and England as one of the evaluation methods for HEIs. Universities in Australia are expected to develop their own course experience questionnaires by using the scale created by the Department of Higher Education and Science Training. The questionnaire is comprised of 11 scales, which are: 1) Good Teaching; 2) Generic Skills; 3) Overall Satisfaction; 4) Clear Goals and Standards; 5) Appropriate Assessment; 6) Appropriate Workload; 7) Student Survey; 8) Learning Resource; 9) Learning Community; 10) Graduate Qualities; and 11) Intellectual Motivation (Aoyama, Kominato and Torii 2004). The questionnaire survey, therefore, can find how the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired through higher education are realized in life. Sweden will develop a questionnaire with adjustments appropriate for its own case. The government will investigate whether those questionnaires are administered smoothly. The requirement to use this type of questionnaire becomes effective in 2013, so further consideration will be needed hereafter.

Examples of the three learning outcomes in the 1st and 2nd cycles are shown in Table 1. **Knowledge and Understanding** aims for students to acquire basic knowledge regarding their major fields. **Competence and Skills** refers to students

Table 1: Learning Outcomes

The 1 st cycle(Bachelor's degree)	The 2 nd cycle (Magister's degree) ³	The 2 nd cycle (Master's degree)
Knowledge and understanding	Knowledge and understanding	Knowledge and understanding
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the main field of study including knowledge of the disciplinary foundation of the field.	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the main field of study including knowledge of the disciplinary foundation of the field.	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the main field of study including knowledge of the disciplinary foundation of the field.
Understand applicable methodologies and specialized study in some aspect of the field as well as awareness of current research.	Demonstrate specialized methodological knowledge in the main field of study.	Demonstrate specialized methodological knowledge in the main field of study.
Competence and skills	Competence and skills	Competence and skills
Demonstrate the ability to research, gather, evaluate and critically interpret the relevant information for a formulated problem and discuss issues critically.	Demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge and analyze, assess and deal with complex phenomena, issues and situations even with limited information.	Demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge and analyze, assess and deal with complex phenomena, issues and situations even with limited information.
Demonstrate the ability to solve problems autonomously .	Demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues autonomously as well as to plan and, using appropriate methods, undertake advanced tasks within predetermined time frames.	Demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues autonomously as well as to plan and, using appropriate methods, undertake advanced tasks within predetermined time frames.
Demonstrate the ability to present and discuss problems and solutions in speech and writing.	Demonstrate the ability in speech and writing to report clearly and discuss conclusions and the arguments on which they are based in dialogue with different audiences.	Demonstrate the ability in speech and writing to report clearly and discuss conclusions and the arguments on which they are based in dialogue with different audiences.
	Demonstrated the skills required for participation in research and development work or employment in some other qualified capacity.	Demonstrated the skills required for participation in research and development work or employment in some other qualified capacity.
Judgment and approach	Judgment and approach	Judgment and approach
Demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues.	Demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues and also demonstrate awareness of ethical aspects of research and development work.	Demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues and also demonstrate awareness of ethical aspects of research and development work.
Demonstrate insight into the role of knowledge in society and responsibility of the individual	Demonstrate insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual.	Demonstrate insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual.
Demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and ongoing learning.	Demonstrate the ability to identify the personal need for further knowledge and take responsibility for ongoing learning.	Demonstrate the ability to identify the personal need for further knowledge and take responsibility for ongoing learning.

(Source: Högskoleverket (2011b), National Qualifications Framework).

acquiring the critical thinking and enhanced information-gathering capabilities necessary for problem resolution. It is also intended to develop the skill of presentation, or writing reports in order to deliver opinions. **Judgment and Approach** aims to develop the ability to consider academic significance from various aspects. Students must acknowledge a connection between knowledge and society, and realize the necessity of continuous learning. Students are expected to acquire knowledge about major academic fields, develop an attitude to learn autonomously, cultivate abilities of critical thinking and problem resolution, and gain skills for communication through the courses of higher education institutions.

Högskoleverket said that a high value must be placed on the evaluation of learning outcomes to increase the quality of higher education. The result of program evaluation reflects resource allocation. The next section will reveal the structure of funding systems and how the result of program evaluation reflects funding allocation.

2. Link Between Result of Evaluation and Funding Allocation

Based on the results of the evaluation, including learning outcomes, Högskoleverket rates programs at higher education institutions on a three-point scale: Very High Quality, High Quality, and Lack of Quality. Evaluation occurs at three levels, which begin with the HEIs, followed by external assessors, and finally Högskoleverket (see Figure 1). HEIs conduct a self-evaluation based on the general guidelines for self-evaluation in Högskoleverket's Quality Evaluation System. External Assessors conduct a site visit and evaluate students' theses as learning outcomes in the report submitted by HEIs. This evaluation is focused on students achieving learning outcomes mandated by the Higher Education Ordinance and that the education program is connected with the labour market's demand. The result of evaluation will be addressed on the website of Högskoleverket. A positive evaluation, Very High Quality, would earn a grant. If the evaluation results in a Lack of Quality designation, the institution will be required to undergo a second monitoring. If the evaluation report is still not approved, however, the right to award degrees would be stripped from the institution. Funding allocation based on the result of evaluation will begin in 2013. Approximately 2% of the total amount will be allocated as additional funding based on evaluation.

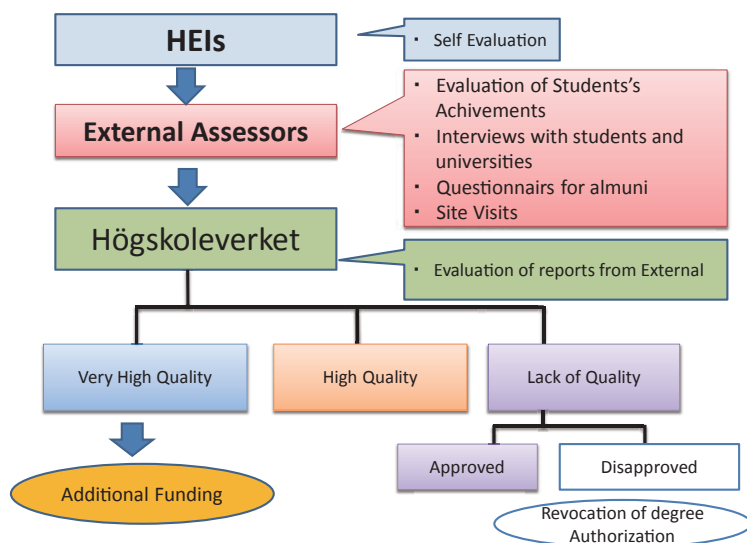


Figure 1: Quality Assurance Framework 2011-2014
(Source: Högskoleverket).

Most funding which HEIs receive follows the existing budget allocation system. The current budget allocation is based on: 1) the number of full-time students during a year; and 2) the number of credits students earned. The education expenses differ depending on academic fields, so they are calculated on the basis of enumeration data which are classified into 15 groups. The enumeration data fluctuate depending on the number of students. In 2009, the amount granted per student was 20,866kr and the amount per student's credit earning was 18,315kr in the fields of natural science, social science, theology and law; by 2011, the amounts edged up slightly to 21,614kr (per student) and 18,972kr (per credit).

The government believed that the current allocation system based on the number of students and credit earnings would ensure quality of education (Prop. 2009/10:139). The allocation system is based on quantity, such as the number of students and their credits earned. But to improve the quality of education, the content of education at HEIs, not the quantity, should be stressed. Allocating resources based on results should be important in designing effective education and enhancing competitiveness in an international society.

According to the government, Malmö and Mälardalen Universities reacted negatively to resource allocation based on quality evaluation. This is because HEIs

with fewer programs will get fewer resources, qualitative differences between HEIs will occur, and thus conditions will deteriorate further (Prop. 2009/10:139). The government proposed that a limited amount of resources should be influenced by the result of evaluation. The new allocation system requires consideration to prevent the difference in education quality between HEIs.

The current evaluation system thus supports the greater autonomy of institutions, while reinforcing evaluation by internal and external institutions. It was created with the involvement of the Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF: *Sveriges Universitets och Högskoleförbund*), the Swedish National Union of Students, labor representatives and chambers at institutions. The remarkable point is that the evaluation result is reflected in resource allocation as additional funding, even if its percentage is small.⁴ Higher education institutions are required to engage in self-evaluation of their educational content to obtain a view of their students, and they are further required to get involved in improving their education. The government insisted that assessing learning outcomes is the most important item in evaluating the quality of education.⁵

VI. Conclusion

The quality assurance framework for HEIs first appeared in the 1960s when Sweden introduced the concept of evaluation. National benchmarks and the definition of evaluation, however, was not established. Nor was there management of quantitative statistics for the number of teachers and students. This situation existed until the Higher Education Reform of 1993, when self-evaluation at the institutional level functioned as quality assurance.

The Higher Education Reform of 1993 gave institutions authority for their education and led to the quality assurance framework. Internal and external movements, such as education reform and internationalization, primed the national quality assurance framework. The agency also presented standards of self-evaluation. The current framework is concerned with consistency between education at HEIs and social demand, and knowledge and skills which are essential in the real world. The ideal for quality assurance derives from the evaluation process based on learning

outcomes.

HEIs are expected to develop students' skills and knowledge for society. As a national framework for learning outcomes, HEIs should provide an environment through which students can acquire knowledge about major academic fields; learn autonomously; cultivate critical thinking skills; gain ethical perspectives; and gain skills for discussion and communication, which are all mentioned in the Higher Education Ordinance.

Centralized education management prevented equality of education and opportunity, and it was a major impediment to closing the education gap between HEIs and students. There are, moreover, few HEIs and students compared with other EU nations.⁶ This would make it possible to allocate funding based on learning outcomes.

The Swedish model of quality assurance seeks to stimulate self-improvement by evaluation education content and students' learning outcomes through courses under control of Högskoleverket. It is the framework to assure how education content influences students and how their knowledge and skills will make an impact on society. To enhance HEIs' self-improvement, the result of evaluation reflects resource allocation which function as a control of quality. The framework is to realize self-management and authority for quality improvement.

Acknowledgement

This article was partially supported by a grant for a research trip from the EU Institute in Kansai, Japan. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who gave me the opportunity and encouragement to complete this article.

References

- Aoyama, K., Kominato, T., and Torii, A. (2004). "The improvement of higher education in Sidney university—Focusing on student course experience questionnaire: SCEQ", *Nagoya Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 4, pp. 205-222.
- Askling, B., Bauer, M. and Marton, S. (1999). "Swedish universities towards self-regulation: A new look at institutional autonomy", *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 5, pp. 175-105.
- Askling, B. and Ross-Rridlizijs, R. (2000). "Lifelong learning and higher education: The Swedish case", *European Journal of Education*. Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 257- 269.
- Hämäläinen, K., Haakstad, J., Kangasniemi, J., Lindeberg, T and Sjölund, M. (2001). *Quality assurance in the Nordic higher education—Accreditation-like practices*. ENQA Occasional Papers 2.

- Hansen, H. F. (2009). "Educational evaluation in Scandinavian countries: Converging or diverging practices?", *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 71-87.
- Högskoleverket. (2008a). *Report 2008:4R, National quality assurance system for the period 2007-2012*.
- Högskoleverket. (2008b). *Rapport 2009: 25R Kvalitetsutvärdering för lärande - Högskoleverkets förslag till nya kvalitets-utvärderingar för högskoleutbildningar*
- Högskoleverket. (2010). *Rapport 2010:10 R, Universitet & Högskolor Högskoleverkets årsrapport 2010*
- Högskoleverket. (2011a). *Rapport 2011:8 R Universitet & Högskolor Högskoleverkets årsrapport 2011*.
- Högskoleverket. (2011b). *National Qualifications Framework*.
- Högskoleverket. (2011c). *Generell Vägledning för Självvärdering i Högskoleverkets System för Kvalitetsutvärdering 2011-2014*.
- Jonnergård, K. and Erlingsdóttir, G. (2012). "Variations in professions' adaption of quality reforms: The cases of doctors and auditors in Sweden", *Current Sociology*. Vol. 60, pp. 672-689.
- Kawashima, T. (2008). "The international movement of higher education reform focusing on learning outcomes and the implications to Japan", *Nagoya Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 8, pp. 173-191.
- Nilsson, K. A. and Wahlén, S. (2000). Institutional response to the Swedish model of quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 7-18.
- Nilsson, K. A. and Näslund, H. (1997). *Towards a Swedish evaluation and quality assurance system in higher education*. Office of Evaluation, Report No 1997:107, Lund Universitet.
- Regeringens proposition 2004/05:162, *Ny värld-ny högskola*.
- Regeringens proposition 2008/ 09:175, *Gränslös Kunskap-Högskolan i Globaliseringens tid*.
- Regeringens proposition 2009/10:139, *Fokus på kunskap-kvalitet i den högre utbildningen*.
- Smeby, J. C., and Stensaker, B. (1999). "National quality assessment systems in the Nordic countries: Developing a balance between external and internal needs?", *Higher Education Policy*. Vol. 12, pp. 3-14.
- Stensaker, B. (2000). "Quality as discourse: An analysis of external audit reports in Sweden 1995-1998", *Tertiary Education and Management*. Vol. 6, pp. 305 -317.
- Take, H. (2011). "The Strategy for learning outcomes at higher education institutions in Sweden", *Kobe Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 20, pp. 1-20.
- Zineldin, M., Akdag, H. A., and Vasicheva, V. (2011). "Assessing quality in higher education: New criteria for evaluating students' satisfaction", *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 231-243.

Notes

- 1 Interview with evaluation manager at Högskoleverket, September 4th, 2012.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 There are two kinds of 2nd cycle in Sweden, Magisterexamen for one year and Masterexamen for two years. Magisterexamen is maintained after joining the Bologna Process.
- 4 The new resource allocation will be implemented by 2013.
- 5 Regeringens proposition 2009/10:139 *Fokus på kunskap-kvalitet i den högre utbildningen*.
- 6 Sweden has 14 public universities and 20 public university colleges as of 2012. The number is quite small compared with the approximately one hundred in England and ninety in France.