Funding the Crowd: Processes of Internationalisation at a Japanese University

Grant Black, University of Tsukuba, Japan

Abstract
These research notes will discuss the organisational context of restructuring processes in internationalisation at a Japanese university. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has put forth a series of funding projects designed "to nurture internationally competent individuals by creating an academic environment where international and Japanese students can learn from one another and build lasting international bonds that will propel them into the international scene" (MEXT, 2012). The most recent phase of funding projects to promote internationalisation began in April 2014 with the Super Global University project. This newest funding program seeks to narrow the focus at a select few top institutions for the government's internationalisation goals at the tertiary level. As reiterated in the recently released National University Reform Plan, MEXT focuses on internationalisation of the university in Japan at multiple levels, including the following: Japanese students studying overseas; Foreign students studying in Japan; Increasing full-time foreign faculty; Reforming the wage system; Placing at least 10 Japanese universities in the world rankings of top 100 universities within 10 years; Strengthening governance; and strengthening the assessment system. The author argues that two key processes are at the root of the restructuring of Japanese universities 1) accountability in the form of applying the practices of international quality assurance standards to tertiary education, 2) organizational management systems with the efficacy to implement the large-scale change processes internationalisation requires. To explore these processes, the presentation considers first-hand practical applications of organizational operations at a large national university in Japan.

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

I. Introduction

University reform and global human resources development are a policy focus of the Abe government. On the one hand there is a concern for sustaining Japan's economic competitiveness by establishing Japanese universities as competitive centers of research and innovation capable of producing global-skills-ready graduates, while on the other hand there is a desire to assert Japan's presence in the world education market. From the perspective of international politics, the importance of education as a soft-power influence is well understood. Akihiko Kawaguchi, as vice-president of the National Institution for Academic degrees and University Evaluation, noted that "[n]o country can win hearts and minds with superior economic or military power alone anymore" (p. 77). With these considerations in mind, the Japanese government Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has set a defining goal of achieving world rankings in the top 100 for ten Japanese universities over the next ten years. Toward this end a new funding project – Super Global University Project – has been launched in 2014 to provide additional educational funding support up to ¥5 billion to ten selected elite private and national universities.

The demands on the university to cater to divergent "customers" are greatly at odds. The university is called upon to prepare students for the domestic workforce, accommodate government aspirations for internationalization, become centers for innovation and research excellence, be a positive force in the local community while restructuring organizational operations to accommodate harmonization with elite international networks. Two key processes are at the root of the restructuring of Japanese universities 1) accountability in the form of applying the practices of international quality assurance standards to tertiary education, 2) organizational management systems with the efficacy to implement the large-scale change processes internationalisation requires. The incongruity of these processes with the existing operational structure result in a system that incentivizes procuring funds and spending them.

II. Super Global University Project

The Super Global University project provides incentive funding to help achieve the goals of the 2012 National University Reform Plan, albeit at only a few selected elite institutions. In the National University Reform Plan, MEXT focused broadly on internationalisation of the university in Japan at multiple levels, including the following: Japanese students studying overseas; Foreign students studying in Japan; Increasing full-time foreign faculty; Reforming the wage system; Placing at least 10 Japanese universities in the world rankings of top 100 universities within 10 years; Strengthening governance; and strengthening the assessment system. These Reform Plan targets form the founding rationale for the Super Global University Project.

The project offers two tiers of support, Type A and Type B with different scope for the targets.

> Type A
> Project aims:
>   - to be classified in the top 100 world ranking within 10 years
> Funding:
>   - ¥500 million per year for up to 10 years

Type B
Project aims:
- to help gain traction supporting globalization in society
Funding:
- ¥300 million per year for institutions with >1000 students
- ¥200 million per year for institutions with <1000 students

The Type A funding will be awarded to ten universities, while Type B will go to twenty different tertiary education institutions.

More specifically, Super Global University target plans include reforms in four main categories with various sub-points, as noted below:

1) Globalization
   a) Diversity (Faculty, Staff, Gender, Student)
   b) International Exchange
   c) Study abroad support system
   d) Language skills (foreign language instruction, English-language degrees)
   e) International standards (GPA system, AOL, harmonization)
   f) Level of internationalization
2) Governance reform
   a) Personnel
   b) Governance
3) Education reform
   a) Quality control
   b) Entrance exam reform
   c) Academic flexibility
4) Others
   a) Disclosure of education outcomes (graduation rate, dropout rate, employment rate, etc.)

Although the Super Global University document itself purveys relatively directed targets, these are still generally in an outline form.

III. Quality assurance – output vs. outcome

Nonetheless, a difference in performance measurement implemented in Japanese national university corporations and in U.S. and British governmental institutions needs to be pointed out; as stated above, objectives are, in practice, set by the national university corporations themselves, and although MEXT presents several objectives concerning education and research that should be part of the midterm objectives (Table 3-1), no details are given. Thus it would be appropriate to say that MEXT only provides an outline (Kawaguchi, p. 58-59).

Performance measurement is defined as setting indices to indicate outcomes and measuring them regularly. According to this definition, objectives need to be explained using such outcome indices. In reality, however, many national university corporations use qualitative descriptions rather than numerical

targets to explain their midterm objectives. As well, many objectives contain outputs, implementation processes, or inputs rather than outcomes (Kawaguchi, p. 59).

At the Quality Assurance International Conference held in Brussels, Belgium 14 December 2011, Dr. Akihiko Kawaguchi, then vice-president of the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) gave a presentation entitled "Globalizing Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Japan". He discussed the standards for the evaluation and accreditation of universities with a view to making a comparison of the old and new standards. In the shift from the First cycle FY2005-2011 NIAD-UE reforms to the Second cycle FY2012-2018, three new points in particular were highlighted by Kawaguchi:

> 6. Learning outcomes
> 8. Internal quality assurance system of teaching and learning
> 10. Public information on teaching and learning

The Super Global University targets follow from the National University Reform and likewise are in line with these long-term plans articulated by the national accrediting agency, NIAD-UE. This makes clear the intention to pursue tertiary education practices focused on learning outcomes, assurance of learning and quality assurance systems at least in part as a means to achieve harmonization with elite international networks.

IV. Type of university in contention
Previous funding projects have contributed to reinforcing the elite tertiary institutions in Japan. MEXT funded projects such as Research University 11, Global 30, and the Project for the Promotion of Global Human Resource Development have singled out a select few dozen or so elite universities among the 800+ tertiary institutions in operation in Japan.

V. Funding process

Essentially what this means is the government allocates funding resources for internationalization projects, and the money is dispersed through various grants and award mechanisms, with the net result that lots of people get extra money with which they travel, buy computers, change the name of things to "global something something", and one way or another the money goes back into the economy. To what extent institutional reform occurs as a result is highly questionable as the form of accountability in place continues to be outputs, implementation processes and inputs rather than outcome based. In practice these amount to a box-checking exercise. At all institutional levels from individual researchers, to groups, to large-scale departmental programs, the system incentivizes procuring funds and spending them. It's not that nothing happens, but nothing is required to happen.

VI. Conclusion

These two key processes are at the root of the restructuring of Japanese universities 1) accountability in the form of applying the practices of international quality assurance standards to tertiary education, 2) organizational management systems with the efficacy to implement the large-scale change processes internationalisation requires.

A fundamental incongruence is that the function of the university as an institution in Japanese society only partially corresponds to the elite international networks in tertiary education. The core operational systems at root of the functioning of the organization are output oriented. Again, it is not that nothing happens, but systematically nothing of any great consequence is required to happen. The requirements amount to a box-checking function. A meeting took place. Yes. The students attended 15 classes for the course. Yes. A new building Global Something was opened. Yes. The operational arms of Japanese society have spread out grand funding projects with the nominal task of enticing a few elite universities to implement accountability practices and new organizational management systems. These projects are driven primarily top-down to satisfy the government's political and economic aspirations. To date, essentially what this means is the government allocates funding resources for internationalization projects, and the money is dispersed through various grants and award mechanisms, with the net the result that lots of people in the education sector get extra money with which they travel, buy computers, change the name of buildings and operations to "global something something", and the money goes back into the economy. At present, the processes of internationalization at a Japanese university might best be summarized as funding the crowd.

On a final note, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (the operations wing to the executive MEXT) renders into English the Japanese katakana script sounds of 'Super Global University' (スーパーグローバル大学) as "Top Global University". In the Japanese, 'super global' is in katakana (スーパーグローバル) and 'university' is in kanji characters (大学). The point here is the katakana, one of three Japanese scripts. It is primarily used for expressing non-Japanese words into Japanese syllabary. Though beyond the scope of this paper, that foreign words adopted into the language may be used for naming a project focused on internationalization yet when translated back into English are perhaps better expressed with different terms is a point worth commenting on here in passing. This case of adopted language is not unique; however, it is suggestive of broader challenges of internationalization. Not least of these may be in terms of the impact of language use on identity, and the potentially dangerous currency of power implicit in the adoption and use of popular terms and ideologies.

References

Jones, R. S. (2011). Education reform in Japan. *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 888. OECD Publishing.

Jones, R. S. & Urusawa, S. (2011). Labour market reforms in Japan to improve growth and equity. *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 889. OECD Publishing.

Kawaguchi, A. (2012). Quality assurance for higher education in Japan. *National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation.* International Affairs Division, NIAD-UE.

MEXT (2014). Top global university application guidelines. Retrieved from *www.jsps.go.jp/j-sgu/data/download/01_sgu_kouboyouryou.pdf*

Newby, H., Weko, T., Breneman, D., Johanneson, T. & Maassen, P. (2009). *OECD reviews of tertiary education: Japan*. OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2000). *Japan, country note:Thematic review of the transition from initial education to working life.* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). Internationalisation of higher education. Policy Brief, OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008). *Japan could do more to help young people find stable jobs.* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009a). *Assessment of higher education learning outcomes.* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009b). *Jobs for youth: Japan.* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009c). *Supporting Japan's policy objectives: OECD's contribution.* OECD Publications.
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011a). *Employment outlook2011—how does Japan compare?* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011b). *Babies and bosses Policies towards reconciling work and family life.* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011c). *OECD economic surveys: Japan (overview).* OECD Publications.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011d). *Education at a glance 2011: Note on Japan.* OECD Publications.