The Standards and Key Performance Indicators of External Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Thailand*

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ABSTRACT

According to Chapter 6, Educational Standards and Assurance, of the National Education Act B.E. 2542(1999), there shall be a system of educational quality assurance to ensure improvement of educational quality and standards at all levels. Such a system is to be comprised of both internal and external quality assurance (Section 47).

The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) was established as a public organization responsible for external quality assurance (Section 49). The objectives of the office are the development of the criteria and methods of external assessment of the outcomes of educational provision in order to assess the quality of educational institutions, taking into account the aims, principles and directions for the provision of each level of education as stipulated in the National Education Act.

In this paper, the external assurance framework and the 8 standards with 28 key performance indicators for external quality assurance in higher education in the context of Thailand are presented.

1. Higher Education Reform

Thailand has a large and comprehensive higher education system, comprising both public and private sectors, and both degree granting and sub-degree institutions. At present, higher education is under the supervision of ten different ministries. Currently there are 842 institutions, not counting branch campuses. A total of 75 institutions (24 public and 51 private universities) are under the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA); 662 under the Ministry of Education (MOE) (41 degree-granting and 621 sub-degree institutions); and, 105 specialized institutions under the other eight ministries (62 degree-granting and 43 sub-degree institutions). Under the supervision of the MUA are 20 regular public universities, 4 autonomous public universities, and 51 private universities. Institutions under the MOE include 41 Rajabhats which are in the process of upgrading to join the status of public universities, and two autonomous universities for monks (See Figure 1).

In 2000, the higher education system had a total of 1,639,149 students studying in institutions classified as degree-level institutions, of whom 29 percent were studying at degree level. Nearly one-quarter of the higher education age group is enrolled in higher education institutions, not including open universities. However, following the change in economic conditions since 1997, there has been some reduction in both the total number of secondary school and higher education enrollments.

Thailand began a process of reform of higher education in the late 1980s when the MUA prepared the first 15-year Higher Education Plan covering the period 1990 to 2004. The 8th National Higher Education Plan for the period 1997 to 2001 indicated that one of the six main policy directions would relate to quality and excellence. New quality assurance policies and guiding directions were announced in July 1996, and these stipulated that all universities improve and enhance their efforts for achieving quality of instruction and an appropriate academic learning environment. One of the main principles articulated was that all higher education institutions will establish quality management systems and work consistently to improve their performance. Subsequent important steps included establishing procedures for internal and external quality assurance, developing manuals, running some pilot audits, and establishing performance indicators.

Figure 1 Number of Higher Education Institutions classified by Ministry and degree granting status.

Status	Degree–Granting	Sub–degree	Total
Ministry of University Affairs (MUA)	75	–	75
Regular public universities	18	–	18
Open public universities	2	–	2
Autonomous public universities	4	–	4
Private universities	51	–	51
Ministry of Education (MOE)	41	621	662
The other eight Ministries	62	43	105
Total	**178**	**664**	**842**

These efforts were followed by the 1999 National Education Act, which legislated for extensive and comprehensive educational reforms affecting both public and a private education sectors. The MOE, the MUA, and the Office of the National Education Commission are to be merged into a new Ministry of Education, Culture and Religion. The Commission of Higher Education, the only legal entity, shall be responsible for proposing policies, development plans and standards for higher education in line with the National Scheme of Education, Religion and Culture; mobilization of resources; monitoring; inspection; and the evaluation of the provision of higher education (Section 45). The public sector's role in higher education is to be changed from being regulatory to supervisory, while the mission of higher education is being redirected more toward societal participation, student–centered learning, and life-long learning. In 2002, all public universities will gain increased autonomy.

According to Section 36, the state educational institutions providing education at the degree level shall be legal entities and enjoy the status or state supervised agencies. These state higher education institutions shall enjoy autonomy; be able to develop their own system of administration and management; have flexibility, academic freedom and be under supervision of the councils of the institutions and in accord with the foundation acts of the respective institutions.

2. Quality Assurance Initiatives

With regard to quality assurance, the 1999 National Education Act required the establishment of a new system of quality assurance and assessment for higher education, which includes both internal and external reviews (Section 47). The recently established Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) is responsible for development of criteria and methods of external evaluations (Section 49). All educational institutions are required to receive an external quality assessment at least once every five years, and the results are to be submitted to the relevant agencies and made available to the public. Educational institutions are required to prepare appropriate documentation and evidence and arrange for their personnel, governing bodies, parents, and others to provide additional information at the request of ONESQA and external agencies certified by ONESQA for conducting external assessment (Section 50).

In case where an external assessment shows that an educational institution has not met the standard required, ONESQA must submit a report to the parent organization recommending corrective action to improve performance. In cases where corrective measures are not implemented, ONESQA is required to report details to government agencies. "Parent organizations" with jurisdiction over higher educational institutions (ministries in the case of public institutions, and owners in the case of private institutions) and the institutions themselves, are responsible for establishing quality assurance systems and undertaking internal reviews (Section 51).

While private higher education institutions will continue to enjoy independence, they will follow the same rules for assessment of educational quality and standards as those for state educational institutions.

Considerable progress has been made with implementation. ONESQA was established by a royal decree in October 2000, and senior staff members have taken up their appointments. ONESQA is required to perform a wide range of functions regarding development of the external assessment system, including establishing criteria for external assessment; development of training materials; and submission of annual reports to the Cabinet, the Minister of Education, Religion and Culture, and the Budget Bureau. While the importance of institutional autonomy and diversity of institutions is recognized, all institutions will be required to meet acceptable international standards.

3. Higher Education Quality Assurance

3.1 Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

The MUA has focused on the IQA system. It has announced 11 aspects of quality factors: philosophy; mission; objectives and implementation plan; teaching/learning provision; student development activities; research; academic service to community; preservation of art and culture; administration and management; finance and budgeting; and QA systems and mechanisms. The IQA system consists of quality control, quality audit and quality assessment. According to Section 48, parent organizations or MUA and the institutions themselves shall establish an IQA system as part of educational administration which must be a continuous process. Higher Education institutions have to prepare annual reports as the self-assessment to be submitted to parent organizations, agencies concerned and made available to the public for purposes of improving the educational quality and standards and providing the basis for external quality assurance. In order to achieve the goal, the flow of communication among the MUA, universities and the ONESQA has been enhanced to allow all involved to learn of one another's development so that proper actions can be taken accordingly (ONEC: 2001).

3.2 External Quality Assurance (EQA)

Quality assurance for basic and higher education is the responsibility of ONESQA. External quality assessment will be conducted through the initial inspection of annual reports, as well as other reports resulting from internal quality assurance of the

educational institutions. External evaluators, certified by ONESQA, will review documents, evidence and data, and visit educational institutions in accordance with the assessment processes. The experts-oriented approach, or peer review, with realistic assessment has been adopted in the EQA for higher education. (See figure 2-5)
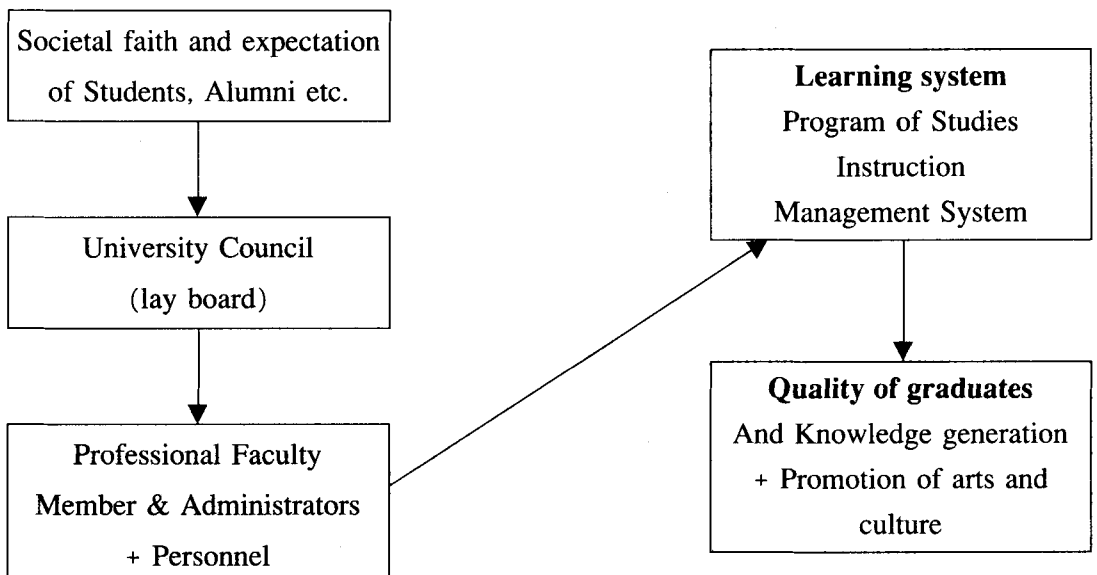
Figure 2 Chains of Quality in Higher Education


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┌─────────────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Societal faith and          │                    │      Learning system         │
│ expectation of Students,    │                    │    Program of Studies        │
│ Alumni etc.                 │                    │      Instruction             │
└──────────────┬──────────────┘                    │   Management System          │
               │                                   └──────────────┬───────────────┘
               ▼                                                  │
┌─────────────────────────────┐                                  │
│    University Council        │                                  │
│    (lay board)               │                                  │
└──────────────┬──────────────┘                                  ▼
               │                                   ┌──────────────────────────────┐
               ▼                                   │   Quality of graduates        │
┌─────────────────────────────┐                   │  And Knowledge generation     │
│   Professional Faculty       │─────────────────▶│  + Promotion of arts and      │
│   Member & Administrators    │                   │        culture                │
│   + Personnel                │                   └──────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 3 Conceptual Relationship Among Characteristics of Assessment for External Quality Assurance (EQA) in Higher Education
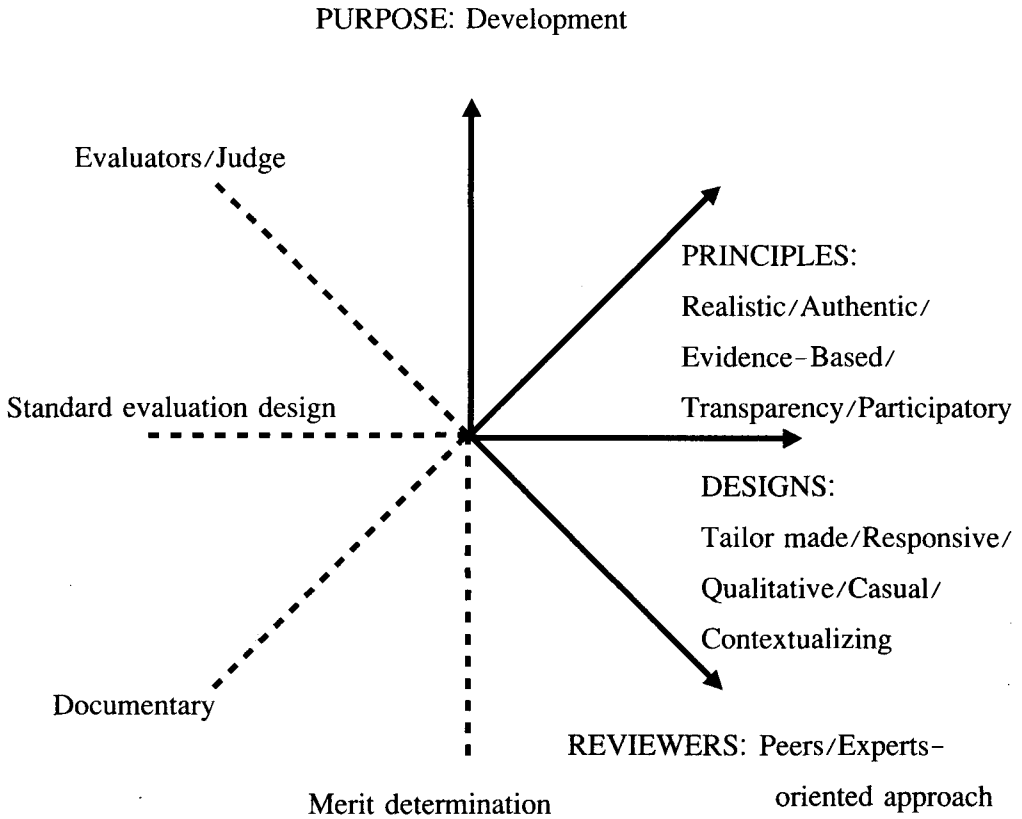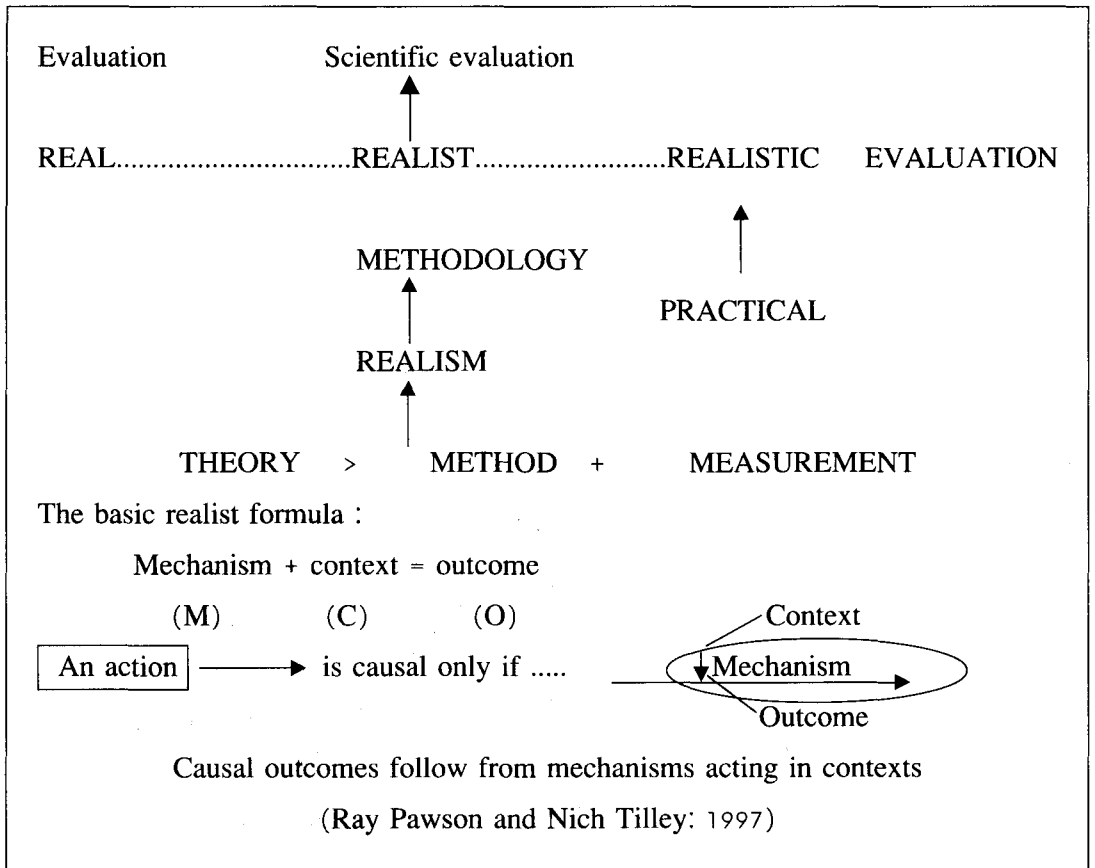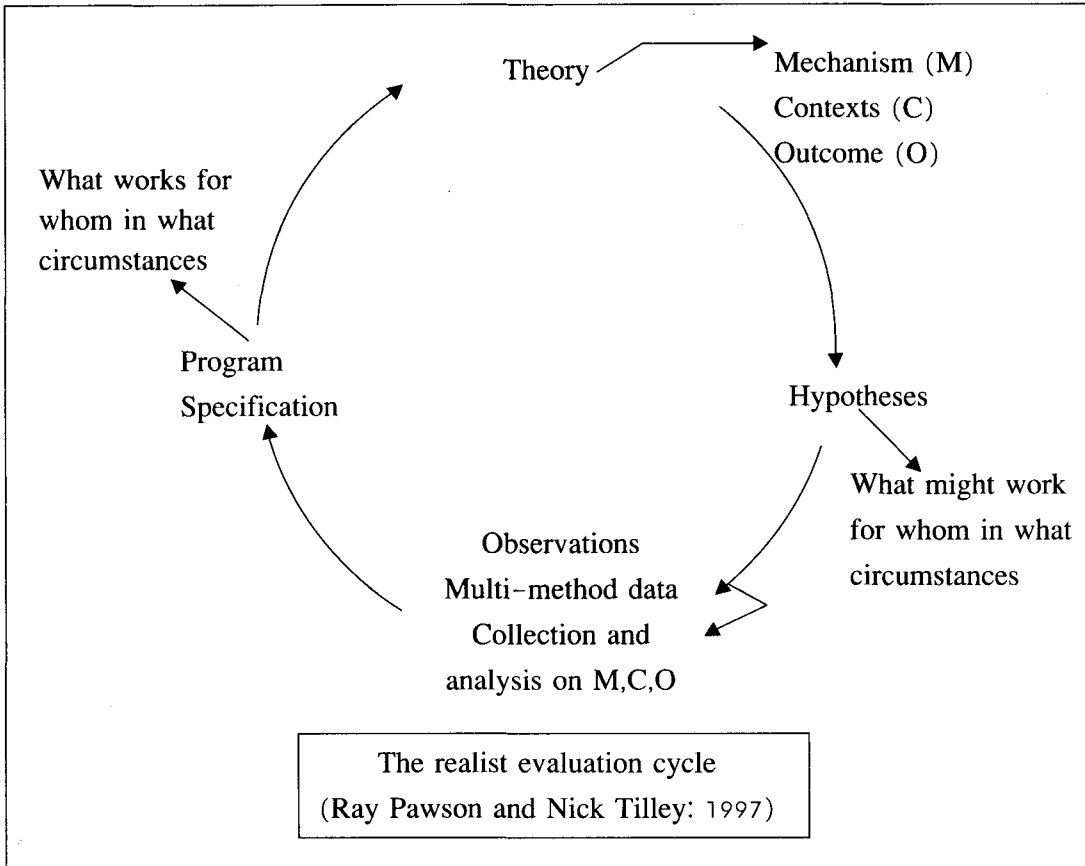
PURPOSE: Development

Evaluators/Judge

PRINCIPLES:
Realistic/Authentic/
Evidence-Based/

Standard evaluation design   Transparency/Participatory

DESIGNS:
Tailor made/Responsive/
Qualitative/Casual/
Contextualizing

Documentary

REVIEWERS: Peers/Experts-

Merit determination   oriented approach

Figure 4 The Realist Methodology

Evaluation   Scientific evaluation

          ▲

REAL................................REALIST..........................REALISTIC EVALUATION

                  ▲

       METHODOLOGY

         ▲   PRACTICAL

       REALISM

         ▲

    THEORY > METHOD + MEASUREMENT

The basic realist formula :

    Mechanism + context = outcome

     (M)   (C)   (O)   Context

 An action ⟶ is causal only if .....   Mechanism

                   Outcome

  Causal outcomes follow from mechanisms acting in contexts

    (Ray Pawson and Nich Tilley: 1997)

Figure 5 The realist evaluation cycle

Theory → Mechanism (M) / Contexts (C) / Outcome (O)

What works for whom in what circumstances

Program Specification

Hypotheses

What might work for whom in what circumstances

Observations
Multi-method data
Collection and
analysis on M,C,O

The realist evaluation cycle
(Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley: 1997)

The standards to be used for the first round of external assessment consist of 8 standards and 28 indicators for degree granting institutions, and 8 standards and 30 indicators for sub-degree institutions.

The 8 standards of the EQA for higher education are as the followings:

1. Quality Standard of graduates

2. Quality Standard of Teaching and Learning

3. Quality Standard of Academic supports

4. Quality Standard of Research and Innovation

5. Quality Standard of Academic Services

6. Quality Standard of Preservation of Arts and Cultures

7. Quality Standard of Management and Administration

8. Quality Standard of Internal Quality Assurance System

3.2.1 Criteria in developing KPI

The key performance indicators have been developed and used in External Quality Assurance for Higher Education by the following criteria:

1. They should clearly indicate successful results from management following the principles, objectives and educational management guidelines given in the National Education Act of 1999, particularly on the efforts of the university for educational reform in line with the NEA Objectives.

2. They should clearly indicate an application of the factors, processes, and results of education management which comply with the objectives and principles of the higher education standards set up by the Ministry of University Affairs.

3. They should not be numerous, but significant, clear, and widely accepted within the higher education institutions/universities as key indicators in evaluating work performance according to the mission statements in each academic area.

4. They should apply to the types and variations of higher educational institutions.

3.2.2 The Standards and Key Performance Indicators

1. Quality Standard if Graduates

Graduates possess quality, the ability to think and perform, the ability to learn and develop independently, and the ability to work and live with others happily

1.1 Percentage of graduates who can secure jobs within one year including self-employment, and the percentage of graduates who continue their studies at graduate level (Output)

1.2 Degree of satisfaction of employers as obtained from a survey within one year of course completion (Output)

1.3 The ratio of number of papers based on the theses of the Ph.D. graduates published in refereed journals as against the number of the overall Ph.D. theses (Output)

1.4 The ratio of number of papers based on the Master theses published in refereed journals as against the number of the overall Master theses (Output)

2. Quality Standard of Teaching and Learning

The aim of teaching and learning, with focus on the students with respect to interest, aptitude, practice, and learning from actual experience, ect., is to promote students' ability to develop naturally to the fullest extent of their potential.

2.1 Evidence of educational reform with emphasis on student-centered teaching and learning and the promotion of real experience (Process)

2.2 Student's view of lecturers' effectiveness on teaching and tutorials (Process)

2.3 The number of students in each activity/project in students' affair per the total number of students (Output)

2.4 Evidence of research for the development of the learning process (Output)

3. Quality Standard of Academic Supports

The utilization of resources including personnel, budgets, buildings, premises and utilities, as well as contributions from various sources both inside and outside the university for the purpose of supporting an effective management of education.

3.1 Full-Time Equivalent Students per the number of full-time lecturers at all levels. (Input/process)

3.2 Actual operational budget per one Full-Time Equivalent Student (Input/process)

3.3 Percentage of Full-Time academic staff with Ph.D. degree or equivalent (Input/process)

3.4 The number of computers used in teaching and learning per one Full-Time Equivalent Student (Input/process)

3.5 The total expense used in the system of Libraries and Information Centers per Full-Time Equivalent Student and/or the budget expense used for books/journals/information data, etc., per one Full-Time Equivalent Student (Input/process)

4. Quality Standard of Research and Innovation

The results of research work should have extensive application, and innovations of quality can be distributed for the development of society and the country.

4.1 The number of research papers published in refereed journals and creative works per full time lecturer (Output)

4.2 The percentage of research work which has been used for teaching and learning, or used in industry or in developing the nation (Output)

4.3 The amount of research funds from external sources per full-time lecturer at all levels (Input)

4.4 The amount of research funds from internal sources per full-time lecturer at all levels (Input)

5. Quality Standard of Academic Services

Academic services which are used in the development of Community/Society so that Thai Society can be inseminated with wisdom and life-long learning in the form of activities and projects which help improve society and community.

5.1 The number of activities/projects undertaken as service to society and community to the total number of activities/projects (Output)

5.2 The number of staff serving as external members of academic/professional thesis committees to the total number of full-time Staff (Output)

6. Quality Standard of preservation of Arts and Cultures

Arrangement of activities for the promotion of the arts, culture and Thai wisdom, and the development and creation of standards in Arts and Culture.

6.1 The number of activities in the Preservation of Art and Culture to the total number of activities (Output)

6.2 Evidence of development and creation of standards in Art and Culture (Output)

7. Quality Standard of Management and Administration

7.1 Percentage of salary of all personnel in proportion to overall operational budget (but not including the salary of administrators and managers in dormitories, hospitals, etc.) (Input/process)

7.2 Percentage of salary of personnel of administration and management in proportion to the overall operational budget, or the number of Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES) per administrator/manager (not including the salary of personnel in dormitories, hospitals, etc.) (Input/process)

7.3 The expenditure of the central administration and management in proportion to the overall operational budget (not including the personnel/expenditure in the administration and management of dormitories, hospitals, etc.; [use percentage]) (Input/process)

7.4 Depreciation per Full-Time Equivalent Student (FTES) (Input/process)

7.5 The percentage of non-income to operational cost (Input/process)

8. Quality Standard of Internal Quality Assurance System

8.1 Evidence of system and mechanism for continuous Internal Quality Assurance (Process)

8.2 Effectiveness of the Internal Quality Assurance (Output)

In conclusion, major efforts are currently underway to implement a new quality assurance system in Thailand for both public and private sectors of higher education. ONESQA was established by a royal decree to be responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education. The experts-oriented approach and the realistic assessment model have been adopted for the external quality assessment of higher education institutions in Thailand. The certification of quality and standards for the purpose of developing higher education institutions, based on the 8 standards with 28 performance indicators for degree-granting and 30 performance indicators for sub-degree institutions, will proceed. External reviews of higher education institution started in mid-2002, and ONESQA is required to complete the reviews of all 842 higher education institutions in 2005.

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