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**Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the
Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and
Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

in conjunction with the

**Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing
a Common Higher Education Area**

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Country Report
REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Country Report – Republic of Korea

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I. Introduction

There are several types of higher education institutions, which are based on the Higher Education Act, in Korea. Representative forms of higher education institutions are (general) universities, universities of education, industrial universities, open universities, and 2 or 3-year colleges. As of 04/01/2006, there are 353 higher education institutions in Korea with a total of 3.2 million students around. The summary of higher education institutions regarding the number of schools and students are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Higher education institutions in Korea 2006

Classification Type of School	Number of Schools				Number of Students			
	Total	National	Public	Private	Total	National	Public	Private
Total	353	46	18	289	3,186,163	78,0850	44,631	2,360,682
University	175	23	2	150	1,888,436	383,267	21,989	1,483,180
Univ. of Education	11	11	0	0	25,881	25,881	0	0
Industrial University	14	6	8	0	180,435	87,374	0	93,061
Open University	1	1	0	0	273,417	273,417	0	0
Two or Three Year Colleges	152	5	8	139	817,994	10,911	22,642	784,441

On behalf of government agencies, the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE), which is an association of 4-year university presidents, is in charge of coordination of higher education. The major aims of the KCUE are to enhance autonomy and accountability in the management of higher education and to promote quality development through inter-institutional cooperation.

The number of high school graduates has become smaller than the number of new enrollees since 2003. The number of new students enrolling at universities has been gradually cut and the government has executed a so-called ‘university-restructuring project’. The final goal of the ‘university-restructuring project’ is to make universities stand out from other universities and to develop the quality of higher education comparable to the global standards. Twelve national universities have been merged to six universities and twelve private universities have been merged

to six universities by 2006. Other major reforms in higher education are to incorporate national universities, to found law schools, medical and dental schools, MBA schools, and oriental medicine schools, and to amend the private school law.

Virtual universities, which are called ‘cyber universities’ in Korea, and graduate universities have been emerged as new providers of higher education. As of 03/01/2007, there are 15 virtual universities and 36 graduate universities in Korea. Most teaching-learning activities in virtual universities are accomplished on-line and virtual universities are regulated under the life-long education law, not under the higher education law. Generally, there are both graduate and undergraduate programs in a university. Only graduate programs, however, are offered in graduate universities. Even though students, especially employees, become to have easier chances to get higher education through virtual universities and graduate universities, one of the issues remaining is the quality assurance of the education offered by virtual universities and graduate universities.

II. Situation Analysis of Cross-border Education

Cross-border education has been emphasized to strengthen the international competitiveness of higher education institutions in Korea. As of 2004, 97 universities in Korea participate in academic staff exchange programs with 48 countries. Through academic staffs exchange programs 903 domestic academic staffs and 533 foreign academic staffs were exchanged in the forms of individual researches, joint researches, academic conferences, and so on. As of 2005, only 3.2% university academic staffs in Korea are from foreign countries. As of 2004, 114 universities in Korea participate in student exchange and cross registration programs with 61 foreign universities. Through those programs 9,188 domestic students and 2,006 foreign students were exchanged and/or took credits from cross registration system.

Number of foreign students studying in Korea has been increased, but the number of foreign students is still small compared to the number of Korean students studying abroad. As of 2005, 192,254 Korean students are studying abroad. As of 2006, the number of foreign students studying in Korea is 32,557 and their original county distribution is presented in Table 2. Korean government has a plan to increase foreign students to 50,000 by 2010 through a Study Korea Project.

Table 2. Number of foreign students studying in Korea 2006

Classification	Total	Language program	Universities/Two or there year colleges	Graduate Schools	Others
Total	32,557	7,938	15,268	7,356	1,995
Asia	29,148	6,919	14,246	7,504	1,479
Africa	211	28	60	122	1
Oceania	125	23	53	34	15
North America	1,743	551	604	349	239

South America	175	33	85	51	6
Europe	1,155	384	220	296	255

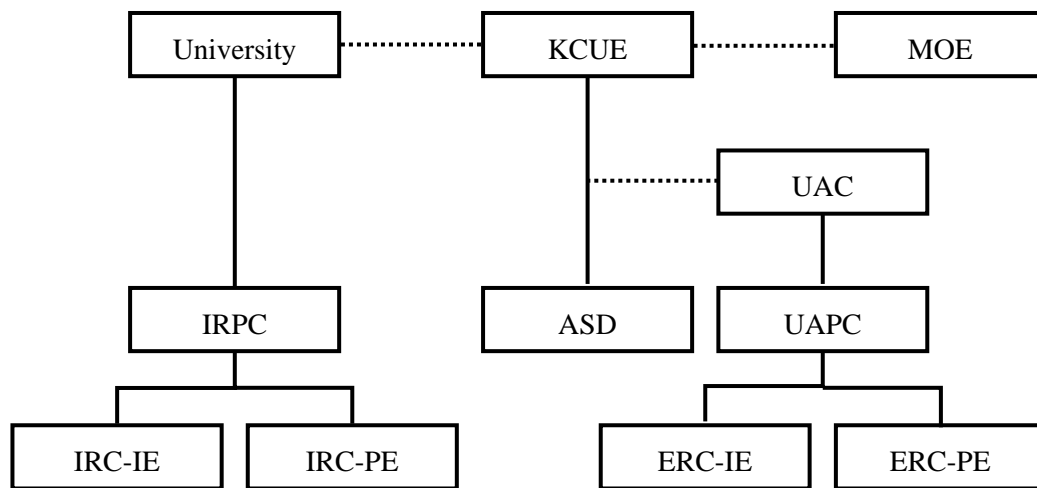
A special law was enacted to facilitate educational investment of foreign universities on Korea in 12/01/2005. Since then, one European university contracted the establishment of a branch school in Korea and four universities are under deliberation.

As of 2006, three universities in Korea offer Joint Degrees with foreign universities in the UK and Australia. As of 2005, 11 universities in Korea offer Dual Degrees with foreign universities and 212 students participated in Dual Degree programs. As of 2003, three universities in Korea have branch schools in China and Mongolia.

Traditionally, education is believed to be the most important resource for the national and personal development in Korea and people hold high priorities for getting high-quality education. If the quality of education is enhanced through cross-border education, cross-border education is an inevitable phenomenon. However, Koreans worry that Korean market of education could be under massive multinational capitals. Schools are recognized as a public property and education is perceived as a fundamental right of people, not as a commercial product in Korea. We do not establish systematic evaluation system of foreign e-learning programs, foreign educational institutes and their programs, and the quality of foreign instructors yet.

III. National Policies and Practices on Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

National framework and agencies regarding university accreditation is presented in Figure 1. Ministry of education directs overall matters regarding university accreditation and financially supports university accreditation projects. The result of the university accreditation should be reported to the Minister of Education. University evaluation practices in Korea have been executed by the KCUE since 1982. After the university accreditation committee (UAC) was established in the KCUE, university evaluation was transited to the university accreditation system (UAS) in 1992. The UAC is the highest deliberative body of the UAS and decides principal policies and projects for university accreditation. The university accreditation planning committee (UAPC) does researches regarding university accreditation and is a consultative body for the KCUE. The KCUE is a university accreditation agency and the accreditation support division (ASD) in the KCUE takes charge of university accreditation including the operation of external review committees (ERC). If a university wants to take university accreditation, there should be an internal review planning committee (IRPC) and internal review committees (IRC) in a university.



- MOE: Ministry of Education
- KCUE: Korean Council for University Education
- ASD: Accreditation Support Division
- UAC: University Accreditation Committee
- UAPC: University Accreditation Planning Committee
- IRPC: Internal Review Planning Committee
- ERC-IE: External Review Committee for Institutional Evaluation
- ERC-PE: External Review Committee for Program Evaluation
- IRC-IE: Internal Review Committee of Institutional Evaluation
- IRC-PE: Internal Review Committee of Program Evaluation

Figure 1. National framework and agencies regarding university accreditation in Korea

Two major forms of the university accreditation by the KCUE are institutional evaluation and academic program evaluations. From 2001, 190 universities have been institutionally accredited and academic program evaluations of 26 academic fields have been carried out.

As the importance of the evaluation in higher education has been increased, other accreditation agencies except the KCUE have been established. Representative agencies are the ABEEK established in 1999 for engineering education, the KABON established in 2001 for nursing education, the KIMEE established in 2003 for medical education, and the KABEA established in 2005 for business education. Recently some universities started to take accreditations by the foreign accreditation bodies such as the ABET, the AACSB, the EQUIS, and so on.

IV. International Cooperation, Bilateral and Multilateral Agreement

In the globalization era, cross-border movement of human resources and students has become accelerated and the mutual recognition of qualifications is a matter of grave concern in Korea now. Compared to lots of labor forces from foreign countries, there are relatively small numbers of foreign students in Korea. On the other hand, it's true that getting a job in foreign countries is more difficult than studying abroad for Koreans. Two types of mutual recognition of qualifications are necessary to facilitate the cross-border movement of human resources and students. One is mutual recognition of vocational qualifications and the other is mutual recognition of diplomas and/or degrees.

Even though Korean government is very interested in the mutual recognition of qualifications, actual agreements for recognition of qualifications have not been accomplished yet. However, Korean government discussed the recognition of qualifications with a few countries such as China and Australia. As one of the efforts for cross-border movement of higher education, Korea has built legal foundations. Universities in Korea can operate curriculum with foreign universities since 1997 and dual-degrees and joint-degrees can be offered to students. For example, Seoul National University of Technology operates a dual-degree program with Northumbria University, UK, in the field of engineering and Keimyung University operates a joint-degree program with Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Poland, in the field of music.

V. Emergent Issues relating to Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education

The progress of information technology has changed teaching-learning practices drastically. As of 08/2006, 114 universities out of 201 universities (56.7%) deliver e-learning programs in Korea and there are 15 virtual universities, which operates curriculum on-line.

Recently, Korea and the U.S. reached the FTA, and Korea and EU started the first round of FTA talks. As the FTAs with foreign countries are familiar, Korean educational market will share more educational contents with foreign educational programs and, especially, the market of higher education will be influenced. The quality of higher education in Korea might be enhanced through excellent foreign educational programs. There are, however, a few issues concerning recognition of foreign academic programs and those issues are as follows:

- What could be the right recognition criteria? Educational philosophy differs among nations and education is a historical product of individual culture. In addition, some people in Korea assert that educational discrimination could be deepened through the educational market opening. Under these circumstances, it's very hard to establish universe recognition criteria.
- What is the purpose of the recognition? An important purpose of quality recognition practice in Korea is to inform the result of the recognition to the public and to help students choose a right educational program. However, another important purpose is to give universities chances to identify their own problems and to fix those problems spontaneously. In the recognition of foreign academic programs, informing to the public is a more important purpose of the recognition. The challenge has been raised to develop appropriate procedures and systems to cover nontraditional providers of higher education.
- How the network of assurance agencies could be established? It's almost impossible that an agency recognizes all academic programs over the world and an assurance agency doesn't have to. More effective way is to share the roles of several assurance agencies over the world and to network those agencies. However, the KCUE does not encompass non-

traditional providers of higher education including e-education, virtual universities, corporate universities, transnational higher education providers, etc.

VI. Suggestions for the Ninth Session of the Regional Committee

In the Globalization era, it's an inevitable phenomenon that academic staffs, students, educational programs and institutions move across borders. So the mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education is necessary to facilitate cross-border education. However, it's almost impossible to establish universe recognition criteria, because education is affected by specific culture of each country. Therefore, what is necessary for cross-border education is to make general guideline to improve the quality of higher education in each country and to network quality assurance agencies in each country.

Even though each country has its own history, there is a general process of historical development. In the market economy, traditional roles of the government have been taken place by private sectors. So, not quality control but quality assurance is the right expression and the quality of higher education should be developed through spontaneous efforts of higher education institutions and non-governmental quality assurance agencies.