

Ohec chief takes aim at new uni test

Students sit enough exams, academics say

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The Office of the Higher Education Commission (Ohec) has criticised the controversial graduate examination, the University National Educational Test (Unet).

Tossaporn Sirisampan, secretary-general of Ohec, said Unet's purpose should be reviewed.

"We are concerned the Unet exam could become a problem as graduates' skills and competencies vary widely depending on their study programme," he said.

Last week, the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (Niets) announced it would implement Unet exams to first evaluate bachelor's degree graduates' academic performance for this academic year, before extending it to cover those at master's and doctorate levels in the 2015 academic year.

Unet comprises three main parts to assess graduates' basic competencies in Thai and English communication skills, media literacy and critical thinking; moral reasoning; and specific professional skills.

Student networks from 27 state universities have declared their opposition to the Unet exam, saying it will place more burdens on already-overloaded students. Professors have also questioned the exam's necessity.

He said Niets proposed the Unet exams because the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Onesqa) recently included central assessment of graduates' performance as one of nine indicators for its 4th round of external quality assessment of universities. But each university has to conduct internal

assessments based on the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

"Onesqa might consider the internal assessment scores to be unreliable as each university has evaluated itself, so it developed Unet to assess graduates' performance by an outsider," he said.

Although Unet planned to assess graduates on a voluntary basis as a first step, Mr Tossaporn said universities will have no choice but to force graduates to take Unet exams if they are used to assess the university's performance.

"Unet exams will eventually become compulsory," he said.

First of all, case studies from various countries must be considered before making any decision.

Mr Tossaporn gave the example of the UK. "Such exams are not implemented there as my grandchild who studies there insists there is no exam like Unet," he said.

Onesqa director Channarong Pornrungrroj said scores from internal assessments of graduates' academic performance vary. "It would be better to have the central organisation assess graduates' performance. Scores would be more reliable and reflect the overall performance of graduates in the country," he said.

The Unet exam has been widely criticised since the first day it was launched.

Sompong Jitradup, a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University's faculty of education, said Niets claimed it has a duty to assess education quality at all levels, and higher education is the last one to be evaluated.

"But it ignores the existing situation of students who have to sit exams from basic to higher education. The graduating fourth-year student was going to be freed from this hell, but they will now have to face more exams," he said.

"Unet is aimed at assessing graduates' performance to ensure university quality which is the direct duty of Ohec and

university executives. These bodies must ensure the quality of higher education without over-burdening students," he said.

Siree Chaiseri, deputy rector for academic affairs at Kasetsart University, added that more exams led to more tutors. However, the only common advantage of Unet is that it evaluates graduates' performance by the same standard and pushes universities to improve.

Prawit Erawan, dean of Mahasarakham University's education faculty, said universities have had the freedom to run their own programmes, so Unet should be implemented to reflect the work of universities and assess graduates' competencies.

However, he said Unet must not interfere in specific professional evaluations.

Rajata Rajatanavin, president of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand, said related sectors, including the CUPT, should have taken part in the Unet decision.