

University test plan in doubt after criticism

ONESQA TO WEIGH OHEC'S CONCERNS TODAY

**SUPINDA NA MAHACHAI,
CHULEEPORN ARAMNET
THE NATION**

A KEY PUBLIC organisation has now agreed to reconsider its plan to use the University National Education Test (U-Net) in its external assessments of higher-educational institutes.

The decision follows criticism – including from some universities – that too much emphasis was being placed on “learning for tests, not knowledge.”

The board of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organisation) or ONESQA will today consider a warning from the Office of Higher Education Commission (Ohec).

“We will raise the issue at our meeting,” ONESQA director Prof Dr Channarong Pornrunroj said. The meeting will be held today and experts will be consulted.

“We will check that if the U-Net is not used, what else should be used as a criterion?” Channarong said.

After the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) revealed its plan to introduce the U-Net last week, complaints have been growing from various fronts.

Ohec secretary-general Thosaporn Sirisumphanid yesterday said he was worried the NIETS planned to have both undergraduate university students and graduate students sit the U-Net.

Available information suggested the U-Net would test students in areas like Thai, English knowledge for communication, IT and media literacy, and critical thinking.

Although the U-Net would not be compulsory, its introduction looked set to automatically require university students to take it anyway.

Thosaporn said he hoped

ONESQA would decide to drop the Thailand Qualifications Framework (TQF) from its external assessments of Thai higher-educational institutes, a move that would likely remove students' need to sit the U-Net.

“My office has prepared TQF for internal assessments, not external assessments,” Thosaporn said.

He also suggested there were other ways for ONESQA to conduct the external assessments without using the U-Net.

“In addition, the same U-Net test may cause problems because students in various programmes have far different skills,” Thosaporn said.

He said the Ohec had raised concerns with the ONESQA many times before and would do it again.

According to Thosaporn, he had found that Britain and several other countries did not have any test equivalent to the planned U-Net.

Students at Kasetsart University's Bang Khen campus have described the U-Net as something that will deepen the culture of “learning for tests”, not learning for knowledge.

In their statement through the campus' student organisation, they said the U-Net would be a redundancy given that students had already sat many other tests and it would simply waste their time.

The organisation's president, Tadchon Klinchamni, said his group would ask Kasetsart University (KU) to express its unwillingness to embrace the U-Net.

“We will also work with student groups from other universities in expressing our strong opposition against such a test,” he added.

Mae Fah Luang University president Assoc Prof Dr Vanchai Sirichana said he disagreed with the plan to launch the U-Net.

“I hope the NIETS will review its plan,” he said.