

# Management Tips for Quality Assurance in General Education Ver. 1.0

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## Preface

The English version of Tips 1.0 has been commissioned by AAC&U to be translated by Ms. Kristina Furuyama. We thank her for her work, and believe that the development of this English version will further promote partnership between JACUE and AAC&U.

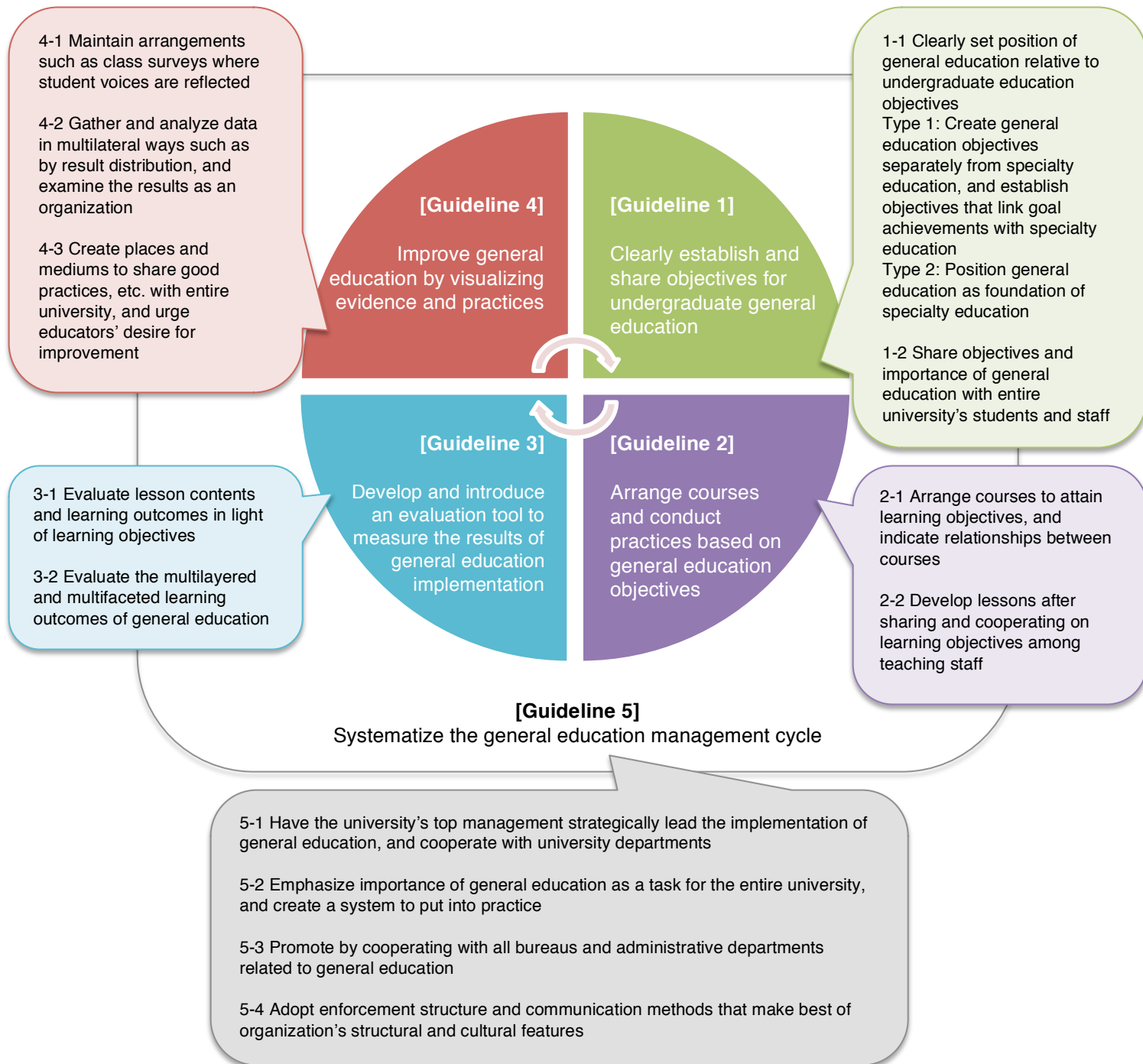
## Tips Concept and 5 Guidelines

Tips Ver. 1.0 is a summary of management methods for implementing quality assurance of Japanese universities' general education. This is based on study results of the Japan Association for College and University Education's research project "Quality Assurance of Undergraduate General Education" (2013-2015, Representative: Tetsuya Takahashi), sub theme 4 (Management for Quality Assurance of General Education). In the past, through numerous nation-wide surveys and case studies, issues and challenges with the curriculum and organizational system of Japanese universities' general education have been brought up, including educators' bias and university-wide difficulty with communication and regulation. However, from our search, we did not find any management tips regarding quality assurance of topics such as the systematicity of general education objectives in practice (e.g. the consistency and systematicity of the Diploma Policy and the objectives of general education) or systematic resolution of practical challenges related to assessment methods. On the other hand, in the United States where their universities have a long history of liberal and liberal arts education, member schools of the Association of American Colleges & Universities have cooperated to create a wide range of offerings such as the development of VALUE Rubrics, and putting together guidelines and perspectives for general education improvement (AAC&U, 2013 & 2015). While learning about these pioneering practices and results, we affirmed the importance and significance of developing tips grounded on management guidelines for quality assurance in general education, and thus it became our research topic (Torii, 2014).

Furthermore, based on the results of the nationwide university survey conducted in 2014 for this research, the scores for each step of the Plan-Do-Check-Action (PDCA) management cycle (assessed by general education supervisors on whether each phase is successfully functioning) show that for general education (liberal arts subjects, alongside 1st-year remedial subject courses), the "Check" and "Action" steps have a tendency to have lower scores than the "Plan" and "Do" steps (Okada & Takano, 2015). There were problems especially with the phases of evaluation and improvement, which suggested that those involved in general education have a latent necessity for tips. With these latent needs in mind, as well as considering the balance of each steps of the PDCA management cycle, our tips are based on the following 5 guidelines. The overall image is displayed in the chart on the following page.

- Guideline 1: Clearly establish and share objectives for undergraduate general education**
- Guideline 2: Arrange courses and conduct practices based on general education objectives**
- Guideline 3: Develop and introduce an evaluation tool to measure the results of general education implementation**
- Guideline 4: Improve general education by visualizing evidence and practices**
- Guideline 5: Systematize the general education management cycle**

Since the beginning, tips have been a collection of practical wisdom, and ours stand according to each university's trial-and-error and results. For Tips Ver.1.0, we received cooperation from schools specifically in the 2014 AP Project (combined model of "Theme 1: Active Learning" and "Theme 2: Visualization of Students' Academic Achievements"), and conducted studies necessary to collect subject matters for these tips. Individual tips are supported with representative best examples. University names for each example are kept anonymous, but we have denoted whether they are national, public, or private institutions. We also hope that the schools' general education organizational structure and culture for each example can be used as reference.



## **Guideline 1: Clearly establish and share objectives for undergraduate general education**

In order to achieve quality assurance in general education, it is important to first establish clear objectives to ensure that the management cycle runs smoothly, and to have mutual understanding between everyone involved in general education. In particular, it is essential to position general education within undergraduate education as a whole – especially clarifying its relationship with specialty (major) education – and establishing objectives. Only with clear, shared goals can general education programs/subjects and individual course management be relatively positioned. Furthermore, these goals are necessary for systematic assessment/methods of criteria to be possible. In addition to offering methods on how to position general education and set objectives, Guideline 1 offers tips on how to share these objectives with university staff.

### **1-1: Clearly set position of general education relative to undergraduate education objectives**

#### **Type 1: Create general education objectives separately from specialty education, and establish objectives that link goal achievements with specialty education**

- Ex. 1 Arrange university's foundational courses into 8 groups: "University 'A' First Year", "Humanities", "Social Science", "Natural Science", "Interdisciplinary" "Language Expression", "Teaching Profession", "Certification", and offer opportunities to learn alongside major courses (Private University "A").
- Ex. 2 Arrange general liberal arts courses into 5 groups according to subjects, individual education, etc. that go beyond the borders of introductory and career courses as well as one's own department and university (Foundational, Self-Formed [Areas: Understanding Humanity, Understanding Society, Facing Nature, Facing the World], Practical, University Department Related, University "B" Related). Over the 4 years of university enrollment, opportunities are widely offered to learn in a cross-divisional manner while also completing courses from one's major department. (Private University "B")
- Ex. 3 The Fundamental Education Department responsible for general education has their objective set as follows: "In this day in age where all-purpose abilities are in demand, the Fundamental Education Department aims to improve self-management ability by establishing independent and continuous learning and life styles, and improving fundamental knowledge as well as coordination with specialty fields. The department also practices team activities, and fosters thinking skills and the ability to take action by cultivating communication skills and logic. Furthermore, the department fosters skill management and acquiring a sense of ethics as craftsmen, and nurtures capable individuals rich in abilities who are able to aim for career development in their specialty fields." In addition, themes and topics related to both general and major education are handled in courses of both categories. (Private University "C")
- Ex. 4 Establish an 8-item learning outcome chart grounded on the ideas and objectives of the university's general education. When the time comes to create the syllabus for each general education course, the connection with each of the items are clarified (Private University "D")
- Ex. 5 Establish separate objectives for general education and specialty education, and coordinate their connection on the basis of the university's educational philosophy. Create a structure where over the course of 4 years, the university's educational philosophy can be materialized through each step and attainment level (National University "A")
- Ex. 6 General education objectives are set to be the development of basic societal skills (National University "B", Private University "E" among others)

## **Type 2: Position general education as foundation of specialty education**

- Ex. 1 The objective of general education is to develop foundational knowledge to comprehend specialty courses as upperclassmen (Private University “F”)
- Ex. 2 The objectives of general education is “to acquire foundational knowledge necessary to learn specialty education for engineering” and “to not be bound among specialty fields and instead enrich humanistic education from a wider stance” (Private University “G”)
- Ex. 3 The objectives of general education courses are learned in depth over 4 years to teach acquisition of 1) fundamental academic skills and 2) basic societal abilities (generic skills) necessary to think thoroughly (Private University “H”)

### **1-2: Share objectives and importance of general education with entire university’s students and staff**

- Ex. 1 Share in student handbook, syllabus, web, etc. (Private University “A”, Private University “F”, Private University “C” among others)
- Ex. 2 Acknowledge thoroughly during committee meetings and faculty development (Private University “B” among others)
- Ex. 3 Share at meetings, research groups, etc. for those responsible of general education courses (Private University “I” among others)
- Ex. 4 Explain to students in general education courses during class (Private University “I” among others)

## **Guideline 2: Arrange courses and conduct practices based on general education objectives**

Guideline 2 focuses on points that are essential for conducting practices to accomplish learning objectives. What first becomes necessary is to arrange courses in a way that makes possible to accomplish these learning objectives, and to distinguish how each course is situated within general education objectives. Another point to consider is whether courses should be mandatory or be an elective based on how this will influence students’ course selection and achievement of objectives. In order to achieve set goals, it is also important that every teaching staff share these general education objectives with each other, and is in a position where each is aware of their roles. With these essential points as the basis, Guideline 2 offers tips in course arrangement and practices that align with general education objectives.

### **2-1: Arrange courses to attain learning objectives, and indicate relationships between courses**

- Ex. 1 All courses have assigned numbers, and the skills that can be acquired from each class are specified. They are clearly stated in class syllabi, and are linked to class attainment objectives (Private University “A”)
- Ex. 2 Clearly state objectives to heighten motivation by creating a course model that includes general education, and also indicate necessary learning achievements and specific objective standards (Private University “G”)
- Ex. 3 Stress the importance of linkage between general and specialty education by displaying and thoroughly sharing a curriculum map indicating the relationship between courses in class guide booklets and the university’s official website. In addition, implement a “micro insertion” method that incorporates general education factors into portions of specialty courses (Private University “C”)

## **2-2: Develop lessons after sharing and cooperating on learning objectives among teaching staff**

- Ex. 1 Create mailing lists and working groups among teaching staff responsible of mandatory first-year education, in which teaching plans, creation of in-class workbooks, etc. are prepared and shared (Private University "I")
- Ex. 2 Teaching staff share the general education course objectives that are clearly positioned within undergraduate education philosophy as they create general education courses, syllabi, and texts (National University "A")
- Ex. 3 A portion of classes have a system in which students are placed as the main constituent, and they cooperate with teaching staff to create general education courses on the basis of general education objectives (Private University "B")
- Ex. 4 Committee members in charge of general education share elements of learning objectives and class content/students by thoroughly exchanging information before and after class with every general education teaching staff including part-time individuals (Private University "J")

## **Guideline 3: Develop and introduce an evaluation tool to measure the results of general education implementation**

Guideline 3 offers essential points when evaluating the results of implemented general education. First, there must be a confirmation that appropriate evaluation methods and indicators are in use in order to assess the progress of the educational courses. If the relationship between learning objectives and evaluation methods do not correlate with each other, there will be difficulties in correctly measuring results. In addition, using a single set of methods and indicators to evaluate general education is insufficient. Combining several indicators according to learning objectives and/or making evaluations according to individual course levels and general education curriculum levels will become essential. Guideline 3 offers tips on how to create and lead evaluation tools to measure the results of general education.

### **3-1: Evaluate lesson contents and learning outcomes in light of learning objectives**

- Ex. 1 Implement a self-evaluation class on the last day of every course, where students self-evaluate their efforts and levels of achievement. Based on these results, teaching staff evaluate their courses' results and objective achievement levels, which are made public within the school (Private University "C")
- Ex. 2 For all general education courses, submit a self-evaluation report at least once every 3 years regarding class achievement objectives. Specify objectives stated in course syllabus, methods attempted to achieve objectives, how objective achievement levels were evaluated, etc. Submit any rubrics or achievement level surveys as necessary for evidence (Private University "D")
- Ex. 3 Enforce a system where students and teachers evaluate levels of achievement for objectives, and are then able to compare results of both sides. Levels of achievement for objectives are related to the Diploma Policy, and results can be visualized to see to which extent each student has achieved this policy (Private University "E")
- Ex. 4 Create a system where each skill acquired from earning course credits is given a numerical value. Seeing how much students grow in relation to each objective can then be visually understood (Private University "J")

### **3-2: Evaluate the multilayered and multifaceted learning outcomes of general education**

- Ex. 1 Implement a survey for students to evaluate courses and its teachers, as well as examine their level of satisfaction at the time of graduation. A portion of university-wide mandatory general education courses uses a common rubric for evaluations (National University “C”)
- Ex. 2 Implement a survey for students to evaluate each course at the time of graduation. Additionally enforce rubric-based self-evaluation, available through e-portfolios. External tests are used for evaluation of English education, all-purpose skills, etc. (Private University “G”)
- Ex. 3 Implement a survey regarding general education in order to evaluate efforts made towards important points of education, as well as to observe changes over time and make comparisons. Also enforce rubric-based evaluations by using metarubric evaluation sheets for all-purpose skills (Private University “K”)
- Ref. 1 In order to assure quality and fairness, rubric-based evaluations are shared to offer methods reflecting each student’s standards (e.g. use of VALUE Rubric) (AAC&U, 2015)
- Ref. 2 Clearly tie assessment standards for students’ results with proficiency levels (AAC&U, 2015)

### **Guideline 4: Improve general education by visualizing evidence and practices**

There are 2 general “directions” (views) for improvement of general education, and Guideline 4 offers tips based on these 2 directions. The first is grounded on the various data (evidence) that are measured and collected from evaluation tools in Guideline 3. In order to improve the general education system where many causes are complexly intertwined, setting down objective evidence onto the table of arguments becomes necessary. The other direction is to visualize best practices. The first direction is a static factor in a sense that only the results of practices are denoted, while the second can be called a dynamic factor since practice processes can also be considered. Improvement of general education is facilitated by successfully combining both visions.

#### **4-1: Maintain arrangements such as class surveys where student voices are reflected**

- Ex. 1 Teachers directly collect students’ mid-semester evaluations, while administration collects final semester evaluations. These evaluations are then delivered to the teachers, which become useful for improving each class (National University “L”)
- Ex. 2 Introduce a useful “school affairs monitoring system” in which students are randomly selected and questioned about how they think of their courses, which is used to improve the quality of the class (Private University “M”)
- Ex. 3 Total results of classroom surveys are made public within the university intranet system, and teachers are obliged to input feedback comments regarding these survey results. By responding with comments, teachers can validate their students’ opinions towards courses, and these comments also tie into improving the quality of classes (Private University “C”)
- Ex. 4 The student assistant (SA) of the Business Administration Department’s “Fundamental Seminar” used social media to allow for students to ask questions to the course subject chief as well as exchange opinions. With this, the course subject chief can respond to opinions from the SA by putting together classroom improvement ideas, which then the SA can measure, thus making quick improvements possible throughout the semester (Private University “H”)

#### **4-2: Gather and analyze data in multilateral ways such as by result distribution, and examine the results as an organization**

- Ex. 1 After the end of every semester, the general liberal arts education promotional committee discloses a summary of grade distributions for each course. For classes with strikingly skewed distributions, upon discussion with the parent organization (e.g. academic department), improvement for the following semester is suggested to the teaching staff (Private University "B")
- Ex. 2 For courses with many "F" (failed) evaluations, these assessments' validity is examined by checking individual syllabus' contents and levels, as well as students' class evaluation surveys. If the judgment is made that there are issues, improvements are urged such as by having teachers reconsider the positioning of their course, or revising the achievement objectives (Private University "A")
- Ex. 3 All teaching staff are required to measure the level of attainment for the achievement objectives outlined in their syllabus, and put together and submit a self-evaluation report based on the results at least once every 3 years (Private University "D")
- Ex. 4 The committee of educational inspection and evaluation (primarily the deputy chief of the curriculum/subject) becomes the main constituent, and they tie their tasks to classroom improvement by enforcing classroom surveys, creating teachers' feedback comments, preserving various documents pertaining to grades, and creating/submitting classroom inspection and improvement sheets based on these documents (Private University "C")
- Ref. 1 In order to improve students' proficiency and increase transparency, teachers and management appropriately make use of study data (AAC&U, 2015)
- Ref. 2 The university widely shares evaluation reports and feedback, and uses them to create faculty development programs to improve results, as well as using results as dialogue for interactions with students and stakeholders (AAC&U, 2015)

#### **4-3: Create places and mediums to share good practices, etc. with entire university, and urge educators' desire for improvement**

- Ex. 1 After receiving identification from the evaluation office regarding the data basis, teachers hold group work and present improvements (upon the university president's orders) during university-wide faculty development meetings held 3-4 times a year (Private University "N")
- Ex. 2 At faculty development meetings held within the school, information regarding classes are shared and discussed upon through mediums such as poster sessions (Private University "I")
- Ex. 3 Faculty and student development lectures are held at least once a year, where teachers who received awards of excellence give speeches, and lectures are given that are beneficial to faculty and student development (Private University "G")
- Ex. 4 Information regarding the best educational and scholastic methods is shared at the "Educational Forum" (university-wide faculty development workshop) aimed for teachers in all departments. In addition, an education bulletin is published with the aim to improve engineering education, and best practices for improvements are shared beyond the university (Private University "C")
- Ref. 1 Faculty development's aims include part-time teachers. Faculty development strengthens the competence of all teachers at the university who work with students in the learning environment (AAC&U, 2015)
- Ref. 2 Faculty development that includes part-time teachers mainly assist students in achieving mastery, as well as create themes and assessments where students can show their abilities (AAC&U, 2015)

## **Guideline 5: Systemize the general education management cycle**

Guidelines 1-4 that have been shared so far correspond with each steps of the PDCA management cycle, and they are mutually coordinated. General education's quality assurance can be said to be finally effective when this coordination is further strengthened and the management cycle loops. In order to do this, it is important to distinguish a main constituent who will strategically turn the management cycle, as well as position general education within the institution as a university-wide educational theme. Furthermore, it becomes essential to coordinate with related departments and administrative systems for tangible management of general education. Guideline 5 offers tips on how to systematize general education's management cycle.

### **5-1: Have the university's top management strategically lead the implementation of general education, and cooperate with university departments**

- Ex. 1 The university's top management (the university vice president was appointed to be responsible of the undergraduate program's general course management) implements a pilot assessment class from the "general courses learning outcomes" development study. Furthermore, they take part in measures as well as until arriving at a point where the entire university's "general courses learning outcomes" are developed (Private University "D")
- Ex. 2 Always conduct department meetings with the university president, inspect with each committee, check during briefings with the university president, and receive directions for next steps (Private University "N")
- Ex. 3 Educational policy, objectives, etc. are implemented based on the university president's leadership, where he also takes on the role as head of the fundamental education division (Private University "C")
- Ex. 4 Skillfully functionalize the corporate governance and the leadership of the university president who has knowledge of the subject curriculum (Private University "K")

### **5-2: Emphasize importance of general education as a task for the entire university, and create a system to put into practice**

- Ex. 1 The head of the Foundational Education Center (appointed by university president) is positioned equally as the dean, and acts as an education and research trustee, and participates in strategic planning meetings (meetings for head of departments) (National University "L")
- Ex. 2 Position general education (fundamental education courses in scholastics, English, mathematics, and practical skills) as part of the fundamental education division, where the university president is also the division head (Private University "C")
- Ex. 3 By implementing an academic regional system and reformatting the separation between teachers and academic structures, an environment is fostered where university-wide common reform can be implemented in an easier way. In addition, an organization called the Higher Education Promotion Organization that is responsible of general education is put into place (Public University "D")

### **5-3: Promote by cooperating with all bureaus and administrative departments related to general education**

- Ex. 1 Value the importance of close coordination between the general liberal arts education promotion committee and the organization that administers it (Private University "B")
- Ex. 2 For general liberal arts courses, the department becomes the parent organization and makes recommendations. Not only do they recommend teachers for classes, but also under cooperation with the educational promotion department, they are proactive in improving related course content, abolishing certain courses, and proposing new ones (Private University "B")



- Ex. 3 At this mid-scale university comprised of 4 departments, there is a head of the Foundational Education Center who participates in university-wide meetings and has an understanding of the overall state of affairs. The head is in a position to make adjustments alongside the academic departments and board of directors, and they effectively share information and design solution strategies (National University “L”)

#### **5-4: Adopt enforcement structure and communication methods that make best of organization’s structural and cultural features**

- Ex. 1 For specific task solutions, the organizational structures of each project, etc. are adjusted, those responsible are clearly defined, information is thoroughly reported to the university president and dean, and progress is accurately managed and supervised (Private University “H”)
- Ex. 2 Have a progressive approach where each meeting is addressed step by step, and approach methods are shared through pilot assessments and meetings for individuals responsible of general education courses (Private University “D”)
- Ex. 3 Since there are only about 10 people who are full-time staff at the university (department), information sharing and opinion exchanges are done frequently through department meetings held every week (Private University “E”)
- Ex. 4 Once the new curriculum was introduced, those in charge of which specific courses were defined, and a mailing list has been maintained. The system is structured so that it includes full and part-time teachers, necessary information can be shared, and everyone responsible can have a sense of responsibility (Private University “I”)

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