

Enhancing the Functions of National Universities  
– Pledge to the People –

Interim report

June 22, 2011

The Japan Association of National Universities

The Japan Association of National Universities has examined the key roles of national universities and how to enhance their functions while considering the results of verification for the Phase I medium-term goal period. This is an interim report on the examination results.

Based on this interim report, national universities pledge to the nation that they will strive with all their resources to enhance their functions swiftly, using their respective characteristics and distinctive features. As a result, they aim to obtain a full understanding of and strong support for their education and research activities through communication of accurate information and constant dialogue with stakeholders, thus playing a central role in building a promising future for Japan and a sustainable global society.

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## 1. Introduction

### – Responsibilities and Commitments of National Universities

#### (1) Challenges for Japan

Japan faces difficult issues such as prolonged economic stagnation, deteriorating fiscal structure, declining birthrate, and an ageing population, and it is necessary to restore the country's vitality in order to solve these issues. Japan is also confronted with the catastrophe caused by the massive earthquake and tsunami off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture on March 11, 2011, and the resulting disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The entire nation strongly hopes that the environment will be restored as soon as possible to allow people to lead a safe and secure life once again.

The great earthquake revealed that mankind's knowledge of nature and ability to harness it remains insufficient. We must prepare for natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunami, volcanic eruptions, and abnormal weather, secure natural resources, energy, and food in a safe and stable manner, and consider how social infrastructures should be. Thus, there are many global challenges that must be solved.

There are also structural problems facing modern society which directly affect the process of ensuring the security of all countries and the creation of a sustainable society. The world is keenly watching how Japan will overcome the current difficulties and whether it can lead mankind's efforts to build a society based on new values.

#### (2) Great East Japan Earthquake and the responsibilities of national universities

National universities are proud of having served as the country's knowledge base and helped modernize the country and boost its economic growth chiefly through the development of talented people, promotion of cutting-edge research, and contribution to local communities. When the earthquake and tsunami occurred, national university hospitals nationwide started working together to provide emergency medical treatment in the affected areas as the last bastion to protect people's lives, and have helped build a system for systematically providing health and medical services in the medium to long term when a disaster occurs. Furthermore, many researchers and students from national universities are using their expertise in diverse ways for rescue and reconstruction, including for disaster prevention and city planning, restoration and establishment of communication systems and environmental infrastructures, initiatives to cope with the complex problems that face an ageing society, and mental care and educational support for children.

The earthquake has clearly shown the need for further research on earthquakes

and tsunami, basic research on nuclear control and safety engineering, and studies on controlling radiation health risks and promoting organic cooperation among the humanities, social and natural sciences, not to mention science and technology. National universities have conventionally recognized that in a modern society built on science and technology, it is essential to ensure that a knowledge of cutting-edge science and technology and natural sciences permeates throughout Japan's social systems and local communities, and to allocate human resources and create environments to achieve the goal. They have also recognized the urgent need to combine humanities and sciences and to take an interdisciplinary approach, and the importance of human resource development, toward that end and have tried to attain these objectives. However, partly because national universities have not tried to establish a comprehensive system to conduct such research continuously and promote human resource development, unfortunately they could not fully display their abilities as a community of knowledge. Today, national universities fully realize their immense responsibility as a base for making Japan a country built on knowledge and an institution to develop talented leaders of the future.

### (3) Functional enhancement, a commitment to the nation

In order to overcome the harsh difficulties that Japan faces and to build a safe and secure society, it is indispensable to systematically establish and maintain public educational and research organizations that can continuously deliver innovation in knowledge in all fields of society and develop excellent human resources for the future.

In view of the serious crisis caused by the earthquake, the responsibilities of national universities, which have been established nationwide and have maintained high educational and research standards throughout the country at both the national and regional levels, are becoming even heavier. All national universities are committed to fulfilling their responsibilities and enhancing their educational and research functions to build a promising future for Japan and a sustainable global society by marshalling their collective strengths as an organic collaborative system, which enables national universities to establish diversified forms of cooperation bringing synergistic benefits.

## 2. Public Roles of National Universities

Universities have the public role of contributing to the sustainable development of Japan and human society as a whole through education, scientific research, promotion of culture, art, and sports, medical service, and contribution to local communities. The public nature of these objectives is the reason why the national government establishes

and maintains national universities. In retrospect, after they were founded, Japanese universities developed on the model of Western universities. They have since established a leading position in scientific research amid fierce international competition and played a key part in the industrial and human resource development of the country, as well as in the promotion of local industry, culture, and society. As global competition among universities has intensified in recent years, however, universities have made remarkable progress in emerging countries that have achieved rapid economic growth while European and North American countries have steadily invested in their universities, which provide the foundation for future development, despite financial difficulties. By contrast, Japan's public and fiscal investments in higher education have long remained stagnant or continued to fall, bringing Japanese universities to a crisis as their position has clearly declined in relative terms.

If this situation continues, human resource development and scientific research functions in Japan will deteriorate rapidly, which would not only hamper urgent efforts to restore the vitality of the country, but also significantly reduce vitality which depends heavily on continuous innovation.

Modern society is knowledge-based, and countries without a knowledge base will struggle to survive. Japan, which lacks natural resources, cannot survive as an independent country unless its government takes responsibility for running institutions of higher education so as to produce persons of distinguished talent. "Persons of distinguished talent" refers to people who not only possess sophisticated technical knowledge but who also can make reliable judgments using such knowledge as members of society, and who have a broad education, sensitivity, energy, perseverance, and communication skills that enable them to play a leading role in today's global society. They are also people who are deeply trusted and respected not only in Japan but also in the international community.

National universities will play their public roles by developing these persons of distinguished talent, on whose shoulders the future of the country rests; pioneering innovation in Japan and abroad as a base of continuous creation of new knowledge; promoting the health of people and maintaining and improving health care and education; contributing to the development of industry and human resources, an indicator of national power, through industry-academia partnerships and other initiatives; and strengthening their functions as centers of revitalization of local communities and promotion of culture, art, and sports. All national universities have a shared understanding of these roles and will focus on fulfilling them.

### 3. Functions of National Universities to Be Enhanced

– Enhancement of Functions as National Centers and as Regional Centers

In order to reconstruct the country and achieve its continuous development, as members of international education and research networks, the national universities established nationwide must make the utmost effort to serve as national centers of advanced education, research and innovation, while clarifying their respective characteristics and distinctive features. They must also drastically enhance their functions as regional centers indispensable to local communities in all aspects of regional promotion: regional industrial and economic activities; education, culture, art, and sports; medical service; and preserving historic and cultural heritage for future generations.

To that end, during the Phase II medium-term goal period, national universities will do their utmost to enhance the priority functions described below. In doing so, they will make maximum use of their respective characteristics and distinctive features to operate their organizations so that human and physical resources are utilized most effectively at their respective organizations. They will also combine their collective strengths as an organic collaborative system in order to tackle the problems that face mankind, create new scientific knowledge, and take the lead in recovering from the great earthquake and achieving continuous economic growth, thus responding to the nation's mandate in all areas, including crisis preparedness. These are the social responsibilities of national universities and their shared policy.

Function 1: Providing Excellent Education and Developing Persons of Distinguished Talent

National universities are responsible for developing persons of distinguished talent, who excel in intelligence, sensitivity, and energy – such as those who lead local communities, those who play an active role in the international community, and highly skilled professionals in health care, law, education, and other areas of expertise – by guaranteeing equal opportunities in education and providing a high level of education that meets international standards.

They will improve the selection system for admission as a public system to carry out their missions and serve as a bridge between latter secondary education and higher education appropriately and select new students based on their respective admission policies.

In addition, national universities will improve the quality of their general and professional education and greatly reform undergraduate and graduate education taking into consideration the demands of today's society for combining scientific and technological knowledge with social and cultural knowledge and so forth.

- Maintain and improve the system to guarantee equal opportunities in higher education
- Establish diverse and characteristic selection systems for admission based on the admission policies of respective universities
- Advance education that seeks to combine scientific and technological knowledge with social and cultural knowledge
- Reorganize curriculums to provide education that emphasizes the acquisition of culture and an international perspective
- Develop persons of distinguished talent with high ethical standards and an awareness of their duties who will play an active role in their areas of expertise such as health care, law, education, and art
- Develop persons with a doctor's degree who will play an active role in diverse fields

## Function 2: Energetic Promotion of Scientific Research

National universities have conventionally focused on conducting world-class scientific research in various fields, including basic research, pioneering and experimental research. These types of scientific research, including platform research leading to practical applications, have contributed to the development of Japan today. In the future, national universities will conduct more scientific research in the humanities and social and natural sciences, cutting-edge research which invigorates society, and encourage the transfer of research results to industry, and will strive to develop researchers who take on these responsibilities.

In particular, national universities will use their characteristic as a single organic collaborative system to enhance not only their own functions but also those of their shared organizations in Japan and international scientific research networks. They will also strive to enhance their functions as centers of innovation, including advanced research in science and technology, thus raising Japan's global status in the field of scientific research.

- Accumulate basic and platform research, a source of intellectual creation
- Promote cutting-edge research and research that combines the humanities and sciences to realize the sustainable development of society
- Develop talented people who have a deep understanding of the challenges that face human society and can manage well-balanced research activities to solve such challenges
- Develop talented people who have the ability to convey the results of academic research to the general public accurately

### Function 3: Contribution as a Center of Regional Promotion

National universities will enhance their functions as competitive centers that are indispensable to local communities in all aspects of regional promotion: regional industrial and economic activities; education, culture, art, and sports; health care; and preserving historic and cultural heritage for future generations. They will also clearly take responsibility for developing talented people who can take on these tasks, including guaranteeing access to higher education.

- Promote innovation through close industry-academia-government partnerships and contribute to the development of education and regional culture and society
- Improve the overall teaching abilities of local communities and develop talented people who can lead the promotion of culture, art, and sports
- Enhance the functions of university hospitals as centers of advanced regional health care and cutting-edge medical treatment
- Develop talented people with acute sensitivity, profound expertise, and a broad perspective who can take on the tasks of regional promotion described above.

### Function 4: Promotion of Active International Exchange and Contribution to the International Community

In order for Japan to play an important role as a member of the international community, it is indispensable to develop talented people by systematically and actively sending researchers and students to overseas education and research organizations and receiving researchers and students from overseas, to train people who meet the needs of the international community, including international organizations, to support developing countries in creating education and research infrastructures, and to develop people who can take on these responsibilities. National universities will boost their competitiveness on a global scale by making greater contributions to the international community and human resource development, thus enabling them to achieve the goals mentioned above.

- Establish an environment that enables the promotion of activities for contributing to the international community and developing people with sufficient expertise to lead such activities
- Raise the level of education and research by systematically sending researchers and students to overseas education and research organizations and establishing international human and intellectual networks
- Establish international human and intellectual networks through proactive reception



- of researchers and students from overseas and facilitation of international exchanges
- Support developing countries in developing human resources in specialized fields such as administrators and teachers and increasing their education and research capabilities

#### 4. Measures for Functional Enhancement

National universities will consider their respective characteristics and distinctive features as the basis of their competitive power and strive with all their resources to enhance their functions. To achieve this goal, they will effectively combine the measures listed below.

##### Measure 1: Clarification of Characteristics and Distinctive Features and Implementation of Ongoing Reforms

National universities have their own characteristics and distinctive features due to differences in their history and tradition, the branches of learning they focus on, their size, the functions they emphasize, and so forth, and have used such characteristics and distinctive features to meet the demands of local communities, society and the international community. In the future, based on independent decisions that determine their existence and pride, they will clarify their characteristics and distinctive features, boost their competitiveness, and clearly state their missions and visions. Thus they will establish a system that enables all their members to work as one to achieve the goals.

In order to continue to maintain and develop their social missions with limited financial resources after the unprecedented earthquake and amid the deteriorating national finances, national universities must enhance their functions by accelerating their initiatives for ongoing reforms based on their respective characteristics and distinctive features.

- Clarify the characteristics and distinctive features of each university
- Establish and clearly state missions and visions
- Ensure that all members of each university share its missions and visions and become aware of their responsibilities
- Enhance university governance functions to allow universities to display their characteristics and distinctive features

##### Measure 2: Establishment of an Internal Quality Assurance System for Education, Research, and Other Activities and Improvement of the Quality of Such Activities

In order to fulfill their functions as Japan's key education and research organizations,

national universities must carry out reforms to increase their education and research capabilities by using their respective characteristics, implementing the PDCA (plan, do, check, and action) cycle, and publicizing their achievements to society. They will thus not only create new fields of learning and develop people who play a leading role in society but also improve the quality of their education and research so that they can remain highly competitive in education, research, and contribution to Japanese society and the international community, and leave the results of their education and research to the nation's verdict.

- Implement the PDCA cycle and publicize the achievements of national universities to society
- Establish a new education and research system that combines the humanities and sciences by combining the wisdom of various fields to solve important social problems
- Improve basic research to support the development of learning
- Establish an education and research organization to realize the missions and visions of each university

### Measure 3: Ensuring Strict Self-evaluations and Active Disclosure of University Information and Fulfillment of the Responsibility to Explain to Stakeholders

As organizations that are run using large amounts of public funds, national universities will ensure accountability by carrying out thorough, responsible self-evaluations and by appropriately disclosing information to the international community as well as Japanese society.

In ensuring accountability, they will communicate information on their education, research, social contribution, and other activities supported by specific results to enable all stakeholders to fully understand and sympathize with it.

They will also establish a system to publicize the results of education, research, social contributions, and other activities based on their respective missions and visions, and accumulate experience in communicating information, thus making stakeholders in Japan and abroad more aware of the significance and value of supporting them in enhancing their functions.

- Perform self-evaluations
- Enhance self-check functions by establishing external evaluation systems
- Establish a system to communicate university information to Japan and the rest of the world
- Build a system to communicate information overseas through cooperation among

several universities

- Improve the system to communicate university information according to the characteristics of stakeholders
- Promote a better understanding of university functions through joint activities with stakeholders

#### Measure 4: Facilitation of Cooperation with Education and Research Institutions in Japan and Abroad

In order to strengthen the foundation of operation and carry out world-class education, research, and regional innovation, national universities will actively cooperate among themselves and with their shared organizations, collaborate with local governments, and promote other initiatives across the prefectural and national boundaries and the types of university and organization while revising their missions and visions as necessary and taking measures to improve the quality of education and research effectively and efficiently such as through economies of scale.

- Establish joint faculty and graduate school departments with other institutions
- Facilitate such initiatives as consortiums through cooperation among universities in particular regions
- Promote initiatives to establish closer cooperation between university hospitals and regional medical institutions
- Advance initiatives to establish closer cooperation among universities and with their shared organizations across the types of university and organization
- Promote systematic initiatives for regional innovation as well as education, culture, art, sports, and other activities through cooperation with local governments and other organizations
- Establish educational programs with overseas universities such as double and joint degrees

#### Measure 5: Making University Operation More Efficient and Advanced, and Acquiring Diverse Funds and Using Them Effectively

In order to speed up decision-making by establishing university autonomy and leadership with the president as its head and to achieve their characteristic missions and visions swiftly, national universities will jointly conduct projects such as joint use of university facilities, joint management of administrative work, and faculty development (FD) and staff development (SD). They will also strive to achieve greater efficiency in university operations, to change the attitudes of executives and personnel, and to

systematically improve their abilities.

They will step up efforts to obtain external funds from diverse sources and use them effectively to reinforce their managerial foundation.

- Promote joint use of university resources such as laboratories, libraries, dormitories, and large research facilities
- Implement joint FD and SD programs
- Manage administrative work and other operations jointly
- Ensure integrated management of university information and bolster operation systems by establishing institutional research (IR) functions
- Facilitate diverse forms of personnel exchange such as the appointment of highly skilled persons to executive and staff positions irrespective of nationality, affiliation, etc.
- Step up efforts to obtain various forms of external funding

## 5. Realizing Functional Enhancement

### – Roles of the Government

#### Role 1: Upgrading of National Universities to Lead Intellectual Innovation in Japan

Since their foundation, as national organizations, national universities have supported innovation at the national and regional levels and taken on the responsibility of systematically developing talented people for the country. Japan must overcome its current difficulties, reconstruct itself and maintain its security, invigorate local communities, and ensure its continuous, stable, and systematic development. In order to ensure that national universities help achieve these goals, the government should support national universities' efforts to enhance their functions in all respects with all its resources, as they are the source of human resources and wisdom and play a central role in bringing continuous intellectual innovation.

#### Role 2: Guaranteeing Access to Higher Education

In order to support national universities in providing equal opportunities in education, the government must not raise the standard tuition fees for national universities that are paid by students and should adhere to its current policy of setting uniform tuition fees for all undergraduate and graduate schools and areas of study. The government should also grant scholarships to a wider range of students who have financial difficulties and exempt them from paying tuition fees. It is necessary to establish new systems and environments and upgrade the existing ones even further to guarantee students with disabilities, those from overseas, etc. access to barrier-free education.

### Role 3: Improvement of Various Environments to Encourage Functional Enhancement

It is important to create the necessary environment to help national universities actively enhance their functions such as independent cooperation, joint operation, and joint facility use while paying attention to their size, the branches of learning they focus on, and the area where they are located. Examples include providing institutional support without being bound by the types of university such as flexible operation of systems to promote cooperation; reforming relevant systems so that resources freed up by improving efficiency can be used to improve the quality of education and invest in education and research as a reward for improvement efforts, rather than to reduce budget; and creating environments to facilitate the introduction of external funding.

### Role 4: Improvement of Evaluation Systems

The university evaluation systems are important for national universities to fulfill their responsibility to explain and improve their operation and education and research activities. On the other hand, their too detailed, uniform goals and evaluation methods pose several problems. One is that setting goals and making evaluations becomes an end in itself, hindering the education and research activities of national universities and preventing the results of evaluation from being effectively used to improve university operation. Furthermore, the actual condition of national universities is not fully conveyed to the nation.

While taking into consideration the significance and purposes of these evaluation systems, it is necessary to drastically review the current goal-setting and evaluation methods, including relationships with evaluations for university accreditation, through discussions and cooperation with evaluation bodies and other organizations so that they truly help develop the individuality of each university and enhance its functions, and that the evaluation results are made visible to the nation, including university personnel.

### Role 5: Stabilizing the Financial Foundation and Reviewing Financial Systems

In order to proactively evaluate and continuously support national universities' initiatives for enhancing their functions independently, the government needs to adopt a powerful policy that truly underpins their efforts for functional enhancement. Examples include maintaining financial resources, including subsidies for national universities' operating expenses, in a continuous and stable manner from a long-term perspective; upgrading facilities and equipment to increase education and research capabilities; and expanding

support for all national, prefectural, municipal, and private universities to encourage functional enhancement and reinforcing corporations that assist universities.

Moreover, in order to make education and research at national universities as well as their contribution to society even more advanced and effective, it is necessary to review the financial systems. Examples include improving methods of allocating subsidies for operating expenses to national universities; allowing national universities to execute their budgets such as personnel expenses and use their operating funds and assets in a flexible manner; and strengthening the management foundation of university hospitals.

#### 6. Initiatives of the Japan Association of National Universities

To meet the expectations of the nation and our stakeholders in cooperation with national universities, the Japan Association of National Universities collects information on the universities and provides opinions based on analysis of such information. Through this and other measures, we encourage them to enhance their functions and disclose information on their progress with self-reforms.

As a whole, national universities constitute an organic collaborative system, and so we also actively support them so that they can fully and swiftly play their expected roles. In particular, we provide effective support so that they can demonstrate their functions as the central driving force behind Japan's efforts to recover from the Great East Japan Earthquake and reconstruct itself, and can serve in the international community.

Meanwhile, in order to help create universities with a strong presence making the most of their distinctive features and encourage them to enhance their functions, while taking into consideration the tasks identified by examining the results of the Phase I medium-term goal period, we will consider increasing the flexibility of systems related to resource allocation and medium-term goal-setting, evaluations of national university corporations and those for university accreditation, inter-university cooperation and collaboration, such treatment as personnel administration and salary and wages, budget execution, asset management, and so forth, improving and reforming selection systems for admission, and taking measures to actively utilize persons with a doctor's degree in society. We will strongly urge the government and all member national universities to reconsider the existing systems and their operation.

[Reference]

Summary of Major Tasks for National Universities in Phase II

(Based on the examination of the results of the Phase I medium-term goal period)

The major tasks for national university corporations during Phase II, which have been identified by examining the activities of the Phase I medium-term goal period, are summarized below.

(1) Establishment of world-class education systems

National universities should provide high-quality education to enable students to really understand the meaning and value of learning while linking it with cutting-edge research activities organically through world-class educational systems. They should also establish the credibility of degrees under appropriate evaluation systems.

(2) Enhancement of functions as national centers and as regional centers

By playing a central role in promoting advanced education and research, national universities should upgrade their functions both as national centers, which are members of international education and research networks, and as regional centers, which meet the diverse needs of local communities in all aspects of education, research, and health care.

(3) Creation of universities with individuality and a strong presence

National universities should continue with activities to become more individual and build a strong presence by setting medium-term goals and drawing up plans using their respective distinctive features and traditions and providing education based on such goals and plans.

(4) Changing the attitudes of personnel and fulfilling the responsibility to explain

National universities should strive to improve the management capabilities of their executive officers, including the president, operate strategic administration systems that suit them, and create a greater awareness of the need for reforms among their teachers and other staff. Furthermore, they should promote active dialogue with society as their duty to explain to the nation, which may have been lacking in the past.

In achieving these tasks, the government is also urged to make constant efforts to secure financial resources and ensure stable funding; exclude national universities from its personnel expense reduction measures; apply its procurement regulations in a flexible manner; expand the discretionary power of national universities; improve the evaluation systems and revise accounting standards for national university corporations; and take other measures that contribute to reforms of national universities.

All members of national universities recognize these tasks which were identified by examining the Phase I medium-term goal period, and have confirmed that all

personnel at each university must continue striving to achieve these tasks as one, under the leadership of the president.



List of Members of the Committee on Enhancement of the Functions of National Universities

(As of February 16, 2011)

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List of Members of the Working Group

Committee on Enhancement of the Functions of National Universities

(As of April 1, 2011)

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