

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Japan

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Japan

**Speech of his H.E. Mr. Teiichi Sato
Permanent Vice-Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan**

Mr President,
Mr Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I should like to congratulate UNESCO for their initiative in organizing this present conference. In preparation for this conference, it was a great honour for Japan to host the Asia and Pacific Regional Conference in July last year at the United Nations University in Tokyo. I sincerely hope that, on the basis of the results of the various regional conferences, the present conference will provide a valuable opportunity for profound debates on strategies for higher education, which has been greatly contributing to the social and economic development of our nations.

Mr President,

Today, higher education is facing a number of common challenges, namely, the expansion of higher education, the qualitative improvement of higher education, the diversified needs of students, the raising of research standards, and the need for its further internationalisation in terms of ideas, activities and research. Taking this opportunity, I should like to share our experiences in Japan with the distinguished participants.

Mr President,

In 1947 Japan introduced a new 6-3-3-4 education system. With the economic development of Japan, the needs for access to higher education have increased. In response to this trend, many new universities have been set up, and the main function of universities has gradually shifted from the training of the elite to the education of the masses. At present, besides “universities” and “junior colleges”, institutions of higher education in Japan include “colleges of technology”, which admit lower secondary school graduates and provide five-year programmes of professional education, and “special training colleges” which admit upper secondary school graduates and provide specialised vocational and technical education. As of 1998, there are 604 universities, 588 junior colleges, 62 colleges of technology, and 3,021 special training colleges. 68 percent of eighteen-year-olds enrol in higher education institutions, and the proportion of eighteen-year-olds advancing to universities and junior colleges amounts to 48 percent. Approximately 2,600,000 students, more than two-thirds of all students in institutions of higher education, are enrolled in universities.

Efforts for university reform in recent years in Japan began in 1984 with the creation of the National Council on Educational Reform, an ad hoc advisory body to the Prime Minister. The Council set forth the following three directions of reform: (1) a shift from uniformity to individualization and diversification in education, (2) the establishment of a lifelong learning system, and (3) coping with globalization and with the spread of new information technology.

Mr President,

Within the context of this overall educational reform, a number of measures have been taken in the light of the recommendations by the University Council, an advisory body to the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture. The basic aims of these reform measures are threefold.

The first basic aim is the enhancement of the educational functions of individual institutions. The expansion and popularization of higher education among the people has been accompanied by the diversification in the student body. In this context, with a view to providing relevant education programmes for students, efforts for improving the quality of teaching have been made through curriculum reform at the undergraduate level, through the preparation of well-organised syllabuses, and through the introduction of faculty development programmes. Efforts have also been made to improve the quality of education, through self-monitoring and self-evaluation by universities and the publication of these results. In addition, various programmes such as internships have been introduced to provide students with more experience of the world of work.

The second basic aim is to achieve high level research capacity internationally. Graduate schools in Japan have been developed both in terms of quality and quantity. The Government is determined to promote scientific research activities in accordance with the plan formulated under the Science and Technology Basic Law enacted in 1996. The Ministry has been making efforts to increase drastically its grants-in-aid for scientific research, to help create "Centres of Excellence", to support 10,000 post-doctorate fellows who show promise as young researchers, and to promote research co-operation between universities and industry.

The third basic aim is coping with the lifelong learning needs of the people. A number of measures are now under way. They include: the introduction of special entrance examinations by many universities and graduate schools for admitting non-traditional students; the introduction of diverse types of courses; the introduction of classes offered on a part-time basis and the improvement of credit transfer arrangements between different institutions of higher education including special training colleges. Further, the University of the Air, using television and radio for its courses, began to admit students in 1985. At present, approximately 27,000 students are enrolled in its degree-granting courses. This year, its broadcasting area has been extended across the whole country through the use of a communication satellite.

Mr President,

As I have just mentioned, higher education reform in Japan over the past decade has recorded a number of positive results. However, the higher education sector in my country is now facing a number of new challenges. The population of the higher education age group will decrease in the coming years. The eighteen-year-old population in Japan in 1992 was 2,050,000, in 2010 the number is estimated to be 1,200,000. Under such circumstances, higher education in Japan is required to ensure an "internationally high-level standard" through the betterment of university management and evaluation in order to secure the appropriate quantity of high-quality intellectual graduates, the human capital of our society. The Council is vigorously continuing its deliberation on these aspects.

With regard to financial aspects of higher education, even under the present stringent financial conditions, more support for higher education is strongly required by improving government funds and mobilizing diversified financial resources from private sector.

Mr President,

The promotion of international co-operation through student exchange and scientific exchange is quite important for institutions of higher education. Since 1983, Ministry has been making every effort to increase the total number of overseas students studying in Japan to 100,000 by the beginning of the twenty-first century. At present, approximately 51,000 overseas students are studying in Japan. In order to further promote exchange in the region of Asia and the Pacific, following the model of the ERASMUS Programme of the European Union, the UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) programme has been established. Last August, the UMAP Constitution was adopted at the sixth Reference Group Meeting of UMAP held in Bangkok. It was also decided that the international secretariat of UMAP be set up in Japan. Our Government wishes to continue its active contribution to the international exchanges of students and teachers in the region. In addition, we also wish to make more active contributions to the international exchange of researchers, as well as to international joint research projects, so that Japan may contribute to the improvement of the level of scientific research in the world, and thus to the promotion of the welfare of mankind.

Mr President,

In concluding, higher education represents an important investment in mankind's future progress and prosperity, and scientific research represents a creative intellectual activity of universal nature based on the fundamental human desire for pursuing truth. I am fully convinced that, in order to enrich higher education as the very basis for sustainable development in the coming twenty-first century, we need to share experiences from different countries, to collaborate in searching for ideal structures and programmes of higher education and to take the relevant action for realizing these ideals.