

# Education, Science and Labour – Perspectives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

edited by  
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# 8 Japan's University Reform: A Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

CARMEN E. SCHMIDT

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The development of the borderless economy and the necessity to mobilise human resources and to develop new industries have led to a restructuring of the higher educational systems in many countries. Historically, education has been the nation state's time-honoured domain. During the nation building period, the states took over the control of education from the churches, which had for centuries claimed to ensure children's education in the right faith. As early as in the seventeenth century, steps were taken to enforce elementary education for all children. The introduction of compulsory education under centralized secular control was aimed at creating direct links between the nation-state and its individual citizen (Lipset/Rokkan 1967: 15). Against the background of public-sector budget deficits, however, governments increasingly rely on the market to encourage greater responsiveness from the higher education system.

In Japan, the educational system is experiencing fundamental changes as well. In April 2004, all national universities became "independent administrative corporations" (*dokuritsu gyōsei hōjin*). Since the inauguration of the reform, each national university has been responsible for its own budget, staffing and other matters. Universities are required to file action plans with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which allocates funding according to each university's performance in relation to these plans. Private sector management methods were also introduced as well as a system of outside experts within the new university corporations. The transformation is expected to increase the competition between national, public, and private universities, a situation that should work towards enhancing the standards at all institutions. Even though the

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to the Japan Foundation, which granted me a short-term fellowship between July and September 2006 to support my studies on university reform at the Institute of Social Science of Tōkyō University (Japan).

majority of persons concerned with universities acknowledge that there was need for reform, there has been criticism of the reform as well.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the study is to examine the process and outcome of the university reform in Japan. Due to its recent implementation, the reform outcome cannot as yet be measured empirically, therefore interviews were conducted with experts on this issue, i.e. persons who took part in the reform processes at former national universities.<sup>3</sup>

The study will answer the following questions:

- What are the goals of the reform and the driving forces behind it?
- How was the reform realized and translated into a new university system?
- What are the reform's achievements?
- Which problems are still to be solved?

We start with an overview of the university system before turning to the reform process and its major goals. In the following section, we analyse the new national university corporations' structure and system. Thereafter we examine the experts' opinions on the reform and finally summarize and comment on the findings.

## **The Japanese university system: an overview**

### *The Japanese school system and the growth of higher education*

In Japan, a modern system of higher education was introduced during the Meiji Period (1868–1912)<sup>4</sup> when the Meiji government founded the country's first university in 1877. From the beginning of the modern education, moral values and ideology were the main goals. After World War II, the Japanese education system was entirely revised and democratised under the Allied Occupation (1945–52). Reforms were implemented to overhaul the pre-war nationalist system and to introduce democratic education. The varying types of higher educational institutions were consolidated into a single

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview see e.g. Hirowatari 2000.

<sup>3</sup> The interviews were conducted at Tōkyō and Hitotsubashi Universities in the summer of 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Name of the Meiji emperor's reign. The Meiji era began with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which marked the beginning of the Japanese society's modernisation.

four-year university system in 1949, thus making the final changes to the core of the new 6-3-3-4 education system (6 years elementary school, 3 years middle school, 3 years high school and 4 years university). The junior college system (2 years) was established on a provisional basis in 1950 and on a permanent basis in 1964, following an amendment to the School Education Law.

On the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied Powers' request, it was decided to establish at least one national university in each prefecture in order to avoid concentrating national universities in large urban areas and thereby ensuring that everybody would have equal access to higher education.

After the reorganisation during the occupation period, the 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the rapid growth of the higher education system. The percentage of pupils progressing to a four-year university course increased from 8.2% in 1960 to 26.7% in 1975. In 2004, the percentage levelled off at about 42%. Compared to other advanced nations, Japan does not maintain many graduate students. In 2004, 11.4% of the students who graduated from a university enrolled at a graduate school (*Japan Almanac 2006*: 235).

The present education system is characterized by the coexistence of the three sectors of higher education institutions – governmental (national), public (local), and private – with the government making a massive investment in the national sector.<sup>5</sup> In response to higher education's rapid growth, corresponding changes occurred within the university structure, particularly in private universities. Since the 1960s, the number of private universities and junior colleges has grown markedly. This development has led to a sharp increase in their student enrolment as a percentage of the total student population: students enrolled at private universities rose from 64.4% in 1960 to 76.4% in 1975. This percentage has remained relatively stable and accounts for 73.7% in 2005 (see Table 1).

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<sup>5</sup> Major changes occurred after the implementation of the university reform in 2004.

**Table 1: Enrolment of students at universities by category (1950–2005)**

Year	Total	National	Local	Private	Percentage of Private
1950	224,923	80,185	8,451	136,287	60.6%
1955	523,355	186,055	24,936	312,364	59.7%
1960	626,421	194,227	28,569	403,625	64.4%
1965	937,556	238,380	38,277	660,899	70.5%
1970	1,406,521	309,587	50,111	1,046,823	74.4%
1975	1,734,082	357,772	50,880	1,325,430	76.4%
1980	1,835,312	406,644	52,082	1,376,586	75.0%
1985	1,848,698	449,373	54,944	1,344,381	72.7%
1990	2,133,277	518,603	64,140	1,550,534	72.7%
1995	2,546,649	598,723	83,812	1,864,114	73.2%
1996	2,596,667	610,219	87,878	1,898,570	73.1%
1997	2,633,790	614,669	91,642	1,927,479	73.2%
1998	2,668,086	617,348	95,976	1,954,762	73.3%
1999	2,701,104	621,126	101,062	1,978,916	73.3%
2000	2,740,023	624,082	107,198	2,008,743	73.3%
2005	2,865,067	627,851	124,910	2,112,306	73.7%

Source: 1950–2000: JAPCU 2006; 2005: Bureau of Statistics 2006 and *Japan Almanac 2006*: 234.

Note: percentage 2005: own estimation.

The noticeable increase in private and local institutions during the past 10 years has been most striking. In 1995, Japan had 565 institutions of higher learning, but this figure rose to 726 in 2005, an increase of 28.5%. The number of private institutions rose by 33.3%, the number of local institutions by 65.4%, while the number of national institutions has decreased by 11.2%. In 2005, of the 726 universities, only 12% were national ones and 11.8% were public institutions. The overwhelming majority (76.2%) were private institutions of higher education (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Number of institutions (1950–2005)**

Fiscal Year	Total	National	Local	Private	Percentage of Private
1950	201	70	26	105	52.2%
1955	228	72	34	122	53.5%
1960	245	72	33	140	57.1%
1965	317	73	35	209	65.9%
1970	382	75	33	274	71.7%
1975	420	81	34	305	72.6%
1980	446	93	34	319	71.5%
1985	460	95	34	331	72.0%
1990	507	96	39	372	73.4%
1995	565	98	52	415	73.5%
1996	576	98	53	425	73.8%
1997	586	98	57	431	73.5%
1998	604	99	61	444	73.5%
1999	622	99	66	457	73.5%
2000	649	99	72	478	73.7%
2005	726	87	86	553	76.2%

Source: 1950–2000: JAPCU 2006; 2005: Bureau of Statistics 2006 and *Japan Almanac 2006*: 234.

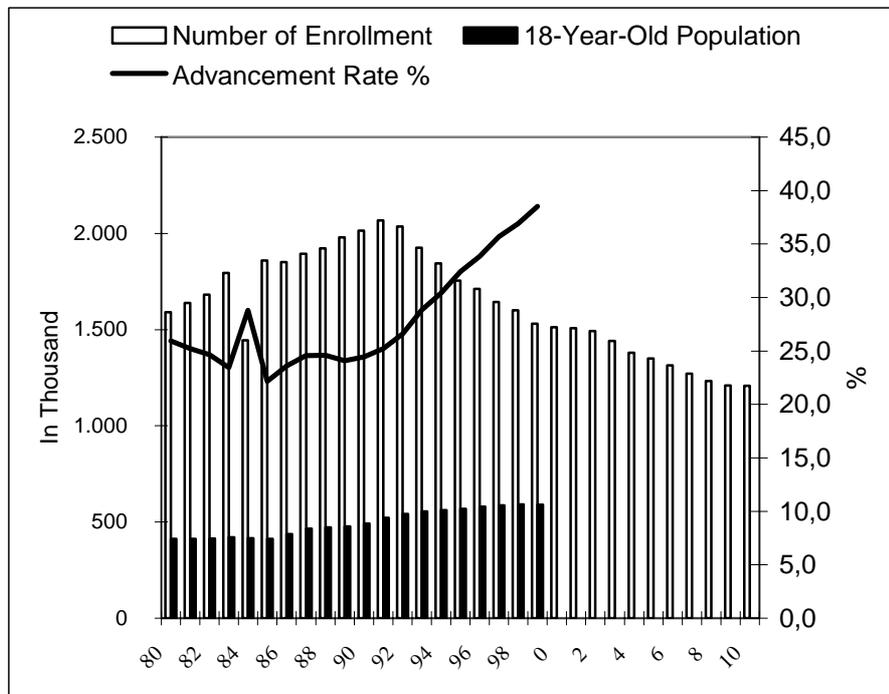
Note: percentage 2005: own estimation.

Overall, seventy percent of universities are concentrated in the three metropolitan areas of Tôkyô, Nagoya, and Ôsaka. On the other hand, seventy percent of the national universities have their campuses outside these metropolitan areas. This is rooted in the fact that national universities' locations were established by government decision (Toyama 2004: 4).

According to estimations by the Ministry of Education's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan's 1995 population of 125.57 million people will rise to a peak of 127.78 million in 2007, and afterward enter a long-term decline. This is due to the birth rate having been much lower than that necessary to maintain the population at a given size since the mid 1970s. The 18-year-old population had already reached its peak of 2.068 million in 1991, and is now falling. It is predicted that their number will continue to fall to 1.208 million by 2010, some 58% of the figure at its peak. Against this background, the number of students admitted to

university departments has increased from 412,000 in 1980 to 590,000 in 1999, an increase of a factor of 1.4, which was largely due to an increasing desire for further education as well as institutions' increased capacity, especially during the 1990s. As a result, the percentage of people going on to higher education (the percentage of the 18-year-old population who are admitted to universities) rose from 26% to 39% over the same period, an increase of 13 percentage points. However, in the long run, the number of students will decline dramatically (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Trends in the 18-year-old population and students advancing to undergraduate courses**



Notes: 18-year-old population is based on middle estimation. The ratio of students going on to higher education is the rate of the number of new university students to 18-year-olds.

Source: The Institute of Population and Social Security, "Future Population Estimates for Japan" (Jan. 1997 estimation). Ministry of Education, "Report on Basic Survey of Schools" <http://www.nistep.go.jp/achiev/ftx/eng/rep066e/html/chapter2/2-3.html>

Due to the demographic decline in the number of eighteen-year-olds in the population and the oversupply of places that developed over the 1990s, the Ministry of Education estimates that anything between 15–40% of Japan's universities and colleges will no longer exist in their current form within the next 5–10 years (Goodman 2006).

*Japan's elite universities and international competitiveness*

The growth of higher education in Japan is comparable to other advanced societies where universal literacy leads to societies of “compulsory higher education”. Here university degrees are in danger of losing their distinctive powers with respect to access to higher positions (Kreckel 2006: 11–12). Japan's educational system has, however, maintained a strict system of credentialism and there is a rather definite and well-known rank order of universities based on the specific university's reputation. With few exceptions, the most respected universities in Japan are national ones. The three top national universities with regard to status are Tōkyō University (*Tōdai*), Kyōto University (*Kyōdai*), and Hitotsubashi University. Keiō University and Waseda University head the list of the most respected private universities. The University of Tōkyō, and especially its Faculty of Law, is by far the most prestigious place for higher education in Japan. The university was founded and run by the Meiji government in 1877 for the selection and training of a modern elite, which at that time primarily meant the ministerial bureaucracy. During this time, the emperor himself appeared each year to present gifts to stress the university's importance for elite selection (Kerbo/McKinstry 1995: 138).

Entrance to one of the nation's top universities is based on strict entrance examinations, and each year only a few potential students succeed in obtaining entrance to those universities whose graduates are sought after by big companies and the ministerial bureaucracy. Students usually prepare for the entrance examinations at non-regular cram schools, and a billion-dollar business has developed in preparing students for these exams.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of universities' hierarchical order, Japanese high schools are ranked according to their record for sending students on to prestigious universities. Every spring, the weekly magazines publish a list ranking high

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<sup>6</sup> We should bear in mind that only around 40% of students go on to four-year universities, which is why approximately half of the Japanese youth go through “exam hell”. However, the remaining half does not prepare for university entrance examinations and are less achievement-driven and more practical. See Sugimoto 2003: 118–119.

schools according to their number of students entering each of the top universities.<sup>7</sup> Today the overwhelming majority of high schools with a good reputation are costly private institutions.<sup>8</sup> Similar to the university entrance examinations, students also prepare themselves for the exams at non-regular schools. This gave rise to an enormous increase in the costs of children's education. Money is therefore the most important requirement for entering a prestigious university. As the Tōkyō University Students Survey reveals, the average yearly income of students' families falls between the top 10 percent of the entire population and the next 10 percent. It can be safely claimed that the majority of Tōkyō University students come from the country's wealthiest families (Watanabe 1997: 65).

However, it is not only a family's income that determines educational opportunities in Japan but also gender. Although there is a distinct upward trend in the number of female students attending the nation's top universities, women are still underrepresented, especially at prestigious universities (Schmidt 2005a: 89–96). Entering such elite schools and universities is therefore not only based on formal objective criteria. The problem is that so-called “objective” examinations for selection create an illusion of fairness that masks the unequal advantages held by the upper classes' male children.

Large corporations – particularly prestigious ones – only consider applications from students from the most prestigious universities, thus ignoring those from mediocre universities. Corporations begin recruiting Tōdai, Kyōdai, Keiō, Waseda and Hitotsubashi students even before their graduation. Unlike with Oxford and Cambridge graduates in Great Britain, attending an elite university in Japan says very little about the quality of the education. Time spent at university is largely regarded as a holiday, and very little academic work is required to graduate. It is assumed that if students got that far on exam abilities, they have already shown the skills required to adapt to whatever their chosen career may be (Cutts 1997: 18).

Candidates for elite public service jobs and future politicians are usually also recruited from these universities (Schmidt 2005a, Schmidt 2005b). Due to the limits placed by gender and income on access to elite education, the

<sup>7</sup> For 2005 see e.g., *Shūkan asahi* 4/15, and for 2006 see *Sandē mainichi* 4/16.

<sup>8</sup> In 1957, seven of the ten top schools with the best record for sending pupils to Tōdai were public ones. In 1965, their share had shrunk to five and in 1985 only one of ten was a public school. Since the 1990s, no public school has been found among the top ten (Own estimation. Source: 1959–1995 <http://www.eonet.ne.jp/~building-pc/zatsugaku/tokyo-univ.htm>; Figures for 2005: <http://www.biwa.ne.jp/~syuichi/toudai-ranking.html>; the information on the founder was researched on: <http://www.gakkou.net/cgi-bin/koukou/src.cgi>).

elites in Japan have a narrow social base of recruitment and are characterized by self-reproduction.

Despite Japan's strict hierarchical order of elite universities, the nation's top universities scarcely appear among the world's top universities. The *Academic Ranking of World Universities*, compiled by researchers from Shanghai Jiao Tong University (2006a), lists only two Japanese universities among the world's top-50 universities in 2006: Tôkyô University, ranked 19th and Kyôto University, ranked 22nd. The ranking is based on research output, such as the number of alumni winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals (10 percent), the number of staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals (20 percent), the number of highly-cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories (20 percent), the number of articles published in *Nature* and *Science* (20 percent), the Science Citation Index, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Arts and Humanities Citation Index (20 percent) and academic performance with respect to the size of the institution (10 percent) (see Shanghai Jiao Tong University 2006b). Due to the methodology used, the list almost exclusively ranks research universities and not liberal-arts colleges. It has been criticized for being biased towards mathematics and science and for placing too much emphasis on Nobel Prizes.

*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, an annual report on world rankings, largely based on a 'peer review' system of 1000 academics in various fields and published by *The Times* of London, also lists only two Japanese universities among the top-50 in 2006: the University of Tôkyô, ranked 12th and Kyôto University, ranked 29th (The Times 2006).

The poor performance of the nation's elite universities might have been one reason for reforming the nation's higher educational sector. Another reason was the need to restructure the university system due to the decline in students and the oversupply of places of higher education.

## **History and goals of the reform**

### *History*

In Japan, modern educational reform is rooted in the late 1980s when the Ministry of Education established the University Council as an organisation to deliberate on basic aspects of the country's higher education. One of the most salient recommendations was the abolition of compulsory subject areas to enable universities to structure curricula that reflect their own educational ideals and objectives, resulting in the 1991 Amendment of University Estab-

lishment Standards, which can be regarded as the starting point of the higher educational system's reform. In 1998, the University Council submitted "A vision for the university of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and future reform measures: Distinctive universities in a competitive environment", which presented basic university reform policies from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective. Based on these recommendations, the National School Establishment Law was amended in 1999 to enhance each university's responsiveness to the society. This included the establishment of an advisory committee on administration – composed of non-university members – for each university and the building of a managerial system under the leadership of the university president (Oba 2004: 6–7; Anzai 2003: 1).

The final restructuring of Japan's national universities started in April 1999 when the "Basic plan for simple and efficient national administrations" was adopted by the cabinet. It stipulated that national universities should be transformed into independent administrative institutions. In June 2002, the Minister for Education announced the "Policies for the structural reform of universities". These policies were (1) the reorganization and merging of national universities, (2) the incorporation of national universities and (3) the use of third-party evaluations. In the same month, the cabinet decided to implement the introduction of management techniques based on private-sector concepts. In March 2002, the Study Team Concerning the Transformation of National Universities into Independent Administrative Corporations presented its "Final report of 'a new image of national university corporations'". This team comprised persons from national universities, inter-university research institutes, public universities, the business world and the press who engaged in a 20-month debate (Study Team Concerning the Transformation of National Universities into Independent Administrative Corporations 2002: 1). A cabinet decision was taken that national universities had to become independent administrative corporations and that their personnel's status would be that of non-public servants. The decision would be implemented as from FY 2004,<sup>9</sup> while previously, in July 2003, the National University Corporation Law and 5 by-laws were legislated and promulgated in October of the same year. These laws specified the structure of the new national universities, their budget and financing, their status and that of their personnel as well as the new evaluation system (MEXT 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> In Japan the government's fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.

### *Goals*

From the Japanese government's viewpoint, the change in national universities' status would overcome their "protected convoy" mentality by ensuring each university's autonomy. The choice of the non-civil servant status for their personnel would lead to a flexible personnel system based on capability and performance.

The introduction of management techniques based on "private-sector concepts" would guarantee a top management and foster efficient administration by the board of directors lead by the president. A president selection committee in which non-university experts participated would guarantee the selection of well-qualified candidates regardless of whether they came from inside or outside the university. People from outside the universities' participation in their management would reflect society's opinions within the universities.

Through the introduction of goal and evaluation mechanisms, the mission and philosophy of each university would be clarified and the individuality of each university would be extended.

The disclosure of information and the evaluation of the research outcome would ensure transparency, increase contributions to the public domain and lead to the correct allocation of resources through third-party evaluation.

Overall, the competition between the universities as a result of third-party evaluation, deregulation of the budget and personnel, the introduction of top-management techniques based on private sector concepts and goal mechanisms was expected to produce attractive education and research and to support Japan's "knowledge" infrastructure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Study Team Concerning the Transformation 2002).

According to the government, the advantages for faculties lay in the introduction of performance-based salaries, the possibility of short-term employment of excellent outside researchers and the possibility to appoint foreigners as presidents or deans. The advantages for students were the curricula's new flexibility that better met students' needs and better teaching through evaluation. The private sector would profit from the relaxation of rules that preventing academics from holding concurrent posts or performing collateral duties in the private sector. They would furthermore profit from more joint research and technology transfers between universities and companies and from academics' new freedom to provide technical guidance and advice to venture companies (Ono 2004: 21–24).

**Table 3: Overview of reform measures and goals**

<b>Reform measures</b>		<b>Goals</b>
Universities and their personnel's change of status	→	- Introduce flexibility by ensuring autonomy
Introduction of private sector management methods	→	- Foster efficient administration - Guarantee top management
Introduction of a system of mid-term goals and mid-term plans	→	- Clarify the mission and philosophy of the universities - Extend the individuality of the universities
Evaluation and disclosure of information	→	- Create a competitive environment - Increase transparency and contribution to society

Source: Own compilation.

### **Structure and system of the new national university corporations**

#### *Administrative structure of the university corporations*

The National University Corporation Law determines that each national university corporation should have the following officials: one university president and a board of directors (Art. 10), an administrative council (Art. 20), and an education and research council (Art. 21).

The president (*gakuchō*) represents the national university corporation and presides over its work (Art. 11). The president, who should be an individual of distinguished character and superior scholarly attainments, should possess the ability to direct educational and research activities at the university pertinently and effectively (Art. 12/7). He is appointed by the Minister of Education on the basis of a recommendation by the national university corporation (Art. 12). The recommendation is made by the president selection committee, which should be constituted of an equal number of (1) persons appointed (by the president) from among those who are not officials or employees of the university, but who have broad knowledge of and great insight into matters concerning the university, and (2) from among internal members of the universities such as the heads of departments, research sections or re-

search centres and other officials or employees of the universities (Art. 12/2). This new selection system replaces many universities' previous voting system and means that the president's post is open to external people as well.

The president is assisted by two auditors (*kanji*) and executive members (*riji*), and the latter should not exceed the number set by the law (Art. 10). The auditors are appointed by the Minister of Education (Art. 12/8). At least one of them has to be a person from outside the relevant university (Art. 14). The auditors have to audit the relevant national university corporation's performance and, based on the audit, may submit recommendations to the president or the Minister of Education when this is deemed necessary (Art. 11/4–5). The auditors' term of office is 2 years (Art. 15/3).

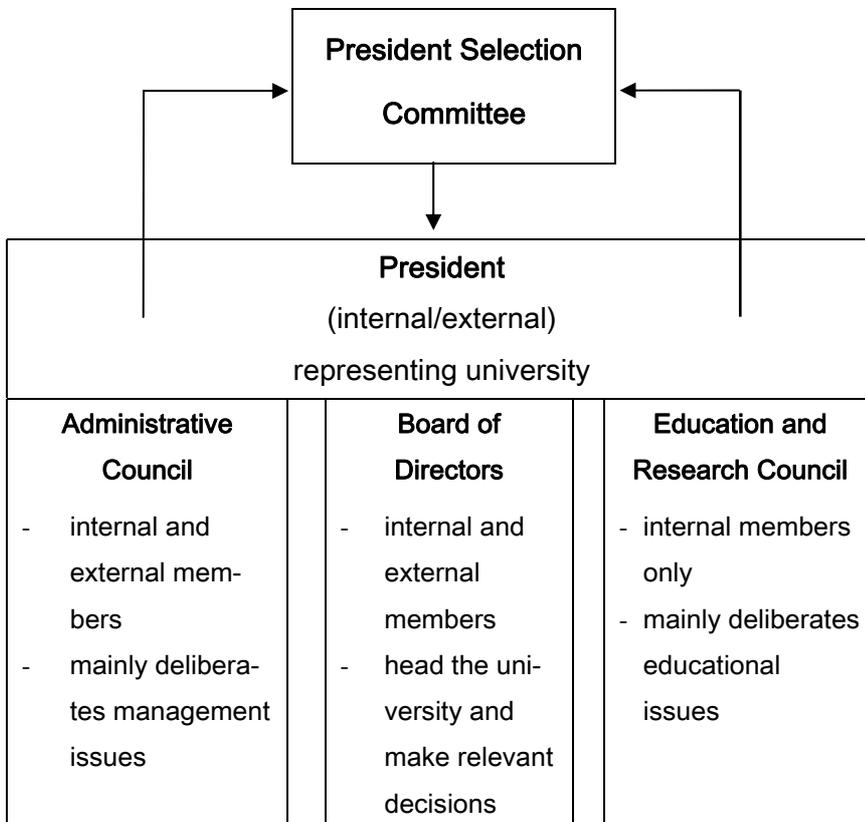
The board of directors (*yakuinkai*) is composed of the president and the executive members appointed by him (Art. 13). As with the auditors, at least one of them should be a person from outside the relevant university (Art. 14). The executives assist the president and, according to his or her instructions, execute the functions of the corporation, act for the president in an emergency, and perform the functions of the president when he is absent (Art. 11/3). Their term of office is fixed by the president, but cannot be longer than 6 years, with the last day in office being no later than the president's last day in office (Art. 15/2). The president has to consult the board before making decisions that also concern them (Art. 11/2).

Each national university corporation is given an administrative council as an organ that reflects on important questions concerning the administration and management of the university corporation such as budgeting and financing (Art. 20/4). It consists of (1) the president of the university, (2) internal members of the university appointed by the president, and (3) persons appointed from among those who are not officials or employees of the university but have broad knowledge of and great insight into matters concerning the university (Art. 20).

As the review of the outside specialists within Tôkyô University's Administrative Council reveals, the university can rely on persons such as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Toyota Motors, and the former Chairman of the Japan Business Federation (*Nihon keidanren*), who is often called the prime minister of business, and is perhaps the most powerful corporate leader in the country, if not the most powerful man in the nation (Kerbo/McKinstry 1995: 145). Further, the board includes the president of one of the most important national newspapers, Asahi shinbun, the President of Japan's national broadcasting corporation NHK as well as the president of Sumitomo Chemical Corporation. In comparison with this impressive mem-

bership, the outside members of Hiroshima University are, for example, more local elites such as the president of the local Chûgoku newspaper, the President of the Board of Education of Hiroshima Prefecture and the Chairman of the Chûgoku Economic Federation.<sup>10</sup> With regard to additional financing and industry-university co-operation, we can assume that Tôdai's situation is better than Hiroshima University's and that the discrepancies between elite and non-elite universities will widen instead of narrowing.

**Figure 2: The structure of national university corporations**



Source: Own compilation.

<sup>10</sup> For a complete list of the outside members of the Administrative Council of Tôkyô University see: Tôkyô daigaku 2006a. For Hiroshima University see: Hiroshima daigaku 2006.

The education and research council has been established as an organ that reflects on important matters concerning education and research at national universities (Art. 21), such as curricula, the enrolment policy, and the granting of academic titles. The council consists of the university president and internal members of the university, such as the heads of departments, research sections etc. (Art. 21/2).

*Status of academic personnel*

Until the reform, academic personnel were considered public servants. Article 19 of the National University Corporation Law now grants them the status of “employees who engage in official business” (*kômu ni jûji suru shokuin*). According to Oba (2004: 18), this status was adopted to:

1. introduce more flexible forms of recruitment, salary structures and working hours that would not be restricted by the National Public Service Law;
2. allow diverse forms of employment that had until then been restricted by the Law Concerning Special Measures for the Appointment of Foreign Nationals as Instructors at National and Other Public Universities, such as the appointment of foreigners with outstanding education and research capacities as university presidents, faculty deans and in other management positions;
3. guarantee flexible procedures with regard to dual employment (at universities and commercial enterprises) as based on corporation policy; and
4. allow recruitment that would emphasise the specialised knowledge and skills of each corporation's personnel strategies, without having to depend on the National Public Service Law's principle of exam recruitment.

It is worth noting that university staff has now been granted the right to strike, which was prohibited by the National Public Service Law.

**Table 4: Summary of differences between public servants and the non-public servants**

	<b>Public servants</b>	<b>Non-public servants</b>
<i>Status guarantee</i>	Stipulated by law	Stipulated by each corporation's employment rules
<i>Labour rights</i>	Labour disputes are prohibited	Labour disputes are not prohibited
<i>Recruitment of staff</i>	Selection from candidates who have successfully completed the national public service examination	According to the criteria defined by each corporation
<i>Dual employment and political activities</i>	Restricted by the National Public Service Law	Stipulated in each corporation's employment rules
<i>Foreigners</i>	Cannot be appointed to management positions	Can be appointed to management positions
<i>Salaries and working hours</i>	Stipulated by law	Determined by each corporation
<i>Medical insurance and pensions</i>	Stipulated by law	Similar to that of public servants
<i>Penal code stipulations in respect of e.g. bribes</i>	Stipulated by law	Similar to that of public servants

Source: Oba 2004: 18.

#### *Budget and financing*

Each national university has its own sources of revenue, including entrance examination fees, tuition fees, and revenues received from affiliated hospitals. Since these sources of income alone did not, of course, cover the costs of research and education, the balance was annually subsidized by the government. Under the new system, operational grants are given to the national university corporations based on their medium term plan (see next section) in order to ensure their activities. These grants are the total sum of:

1. The difference between the standard income and expenditure, calculated in the same way for all universities, and based on student numbers and other objective indicators [standard operational grants]; and
2. Amounts required for the implementation of projects and the administration of specific education and research facilities that are difficult to calculate with objective indicators [specific operational grants] (Study Team Concerning the Transformation of National Universities into Independent Administrative Corporations 2002: 54).

In allocating operational grants, the results of third-party evaluations of each university's education and research are appropriately reflected with a view to promoting each university's individualistic development and fostering a competitive environment. However, through the application of an "efficiency coefficient" that the Ministry imposes, the operational grants are in fact automatically reduced by one percent every year (Iwasaki 2004: 8).

Each national university corporation is allowed to raise tuition and entrance fees by up to 10% above the standards set by the Ministry. For the next fiscal year, the standards will be the same as this year's tuition and entrance fees, which are 520,800 Yen and 282,000 Yen respectively (*Japan Almanac 2006*: 236). Further, national universities are expected to multiply their resources for additional income by increased donations from alumni associations, to develop entrepreneurial activities, including commissioned research and adult education programmes, and so on.

Additionally, special funds are created under the "21<sup>st</sup> Century COE Programme". It subsidizes programmes proposed by universities (not limited to national universities) to fund world-class research and education centres. The proposals are screened by a committee composed of specialists from various disciplines. Under this programme, the university president submits a grant application, stating the field on which the university wants to focus. From the government's viewpoint, it offers the universities a chance to design their strategy and consider the kind of external support that they need (Toyama 2004: 5).

In 2002, 113 programmes were selected from the 464 proposals submitted, in 2003, 133 programmes from 611 proposals, and in 2004 28 from 320 proposals submitted. These programmes will be financed for 5 years. The total sum to be given depends on the nature of the disciplines and programmes (JSPS 2006). As Table 5 reveals, funds were given to various fields of research. However, technical and natural sciences dominate the

COE Programme. Of the total number of 274 projects that were supported between 2002 and 2004, only 26 or roughly 9% were social science projects.

**Table 5: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century COE Programme by fields of research 2002–2004**

<b>2002</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>in %</b>
Life Sciences	28	24.8
Chemistry, material sciences	21	18.6
Information sciences, electrical and electronic engineering	20	17.7
Humanities	20	17.7
Interdisciplinary, combined fields, new disciplines	24	21.2
<b>N=</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>in %</b>
Medical sciences	35	26.3
Mathematics, physics, earth sciences	24	18.0
Mechanical, civil, architectural and other fields of engineering	23	17.3
Social sciences	26	19.5
Interdisciplinary, combined fields, new disciplines	25	18.8
<b>N=</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>2004</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>in %</b>
New Scientific Fields	<b>28</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Percentage: own estimation on basis of JSPS 2006.

*Medium-term goals (chûki mokuhyô) and medium-term plans (chûki keikaku)*

Medium-term goals, which have to be drawn up by the national university corporations, are deemed to be one step towards achieving individual universities' basic philosophy and long-term goals. In addition to being the guidelines for developing medium-term plans for universities, they also act as the main criteria for evaluating universities' performance.

Medium-term plans are concrete plans for achieving medium-term goals. They act as the basis when budgets are requested for operational grants, and are a concrete element when evaluating medium-term goals' degree of achievement (National University Corporation Law Art. 2/5 and 6). Medium-term goals and medium-term plans have a six-year duration, with the curriculum design and terms of study taken into account (Art. 30).

According to the MEXT model of items that national universities have to include in their medium-term goals, the following should be stipulated:

- I. Period of the medium-term goals and basic organisation of university education and research
- II. Goals regarding the improvement of the quality of education, research and other university activities
  1. Education
    - (1) Results of education
    - (2) Contents of education and others
    - (3) Implementation of education and other organisations
    - (4) Students support
  2. University research
    - (1) Standards and results of research and others
    - (2) Development of the implementation of research and other organisations
  3. Other goals regarding
    - (1) co-operation with society, international exchanges and others
    - (2) the university hospital
    - (3) the attached (primary and secondary) schools
- III. Goals regarding the improvement and rationalisation of the university operations and others
  1. Improvement of the administrative organisations
  2. Review of education and research organisations
  3. Adjustment of personnel affairs
  4. Improvement and rationalisation of clerical work
- IV. Goals regarding the improvement of financial affairs
  1. Increase of own resources, including external research funds
  2. Control of expenses
  3. Improvement of the use and administration of properties
- V. Goals regarding self checks/evaluations and the provision of information on the previously mentioned activities
  1. Improvement of evaluation
  2. Promotion of information disclosure
- VI. Other important goals regarding university operation and administration
  1. Upgrading/utilisation of property and equipment and others
  2. Security management (Oba 2004: 21–22).

As the model reveals, the MEXT requires very detailed plans, therefore the presentation of a given university's mid-term goals and mid-term plans requires much work.

*Third-Party Evaluation*

In 2004, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE; *Daigaku hyōka, gakui juyo kikō*) was established as based on the Law Concerning the General Rules of Independent Administrative Institutions and the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation Law. To carry out the evaluation, an Evaluation Committee for National University Corporations (*Kokuritsu daigaku kyōiku hyōka iinkai*) was established at the Ministry of Education to verify that national university corporations comply with their duties. The Committee meets to discuss the evaluation of the education conditions and research activities at national universities and inter-university research institutes. It is comprised of 30 individuals or less, each a university president, professor, inter-university president, or person with knowledge of and experience in fields related to universities, such as society, economy, and culture.

To support the Committee, working groups are formed to undertake the actual evaluation of each university. A working group consists of experts and intellectuals in fields that are consistent with the various faculties of the university to be evaluated. Evaluation personnel from the subject university cannot be included in the working group. Evaluation staff is selected from those appointed by the Association of National, Municipal and Private Universities and business associations and approved by the NIAD-UE's Administrative Committee (NIAD-UE 2005a: 2).

The defined standards for university evaluation consist of 11 standards and optional standards according to which the subject university's educational and research activities' general status is evaluated, focusing particularly on educational activities.<sup>11</sup> The optional standards allow to evaluate the different aspects of the university that may not be fully measured with the 11 standards, which mainly relate to educational activities. These standards may be used at the subject university's request (NIAD-UE 2005a: 3).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 11 standards: (1) Mission of the university. (2) Organisation for education and research (work structure). (3) Faculty staff and educational assistants. (4) Student admission. (5) Curriculum and method for education (undergraduate degree programmes, post-graduate degree programmes, professional degree programmes). (6) Achievement of education. (7) Student services. (8) Facilities and equipment. (9) System for improving quality of education. (10) Finance, and (11) Management. For details see: NIAD-UE 2005b: 3–6.

<sup>12</sup> Optional standards: Optional standard A: Research achievements, optional standard B: Public educational services. For details see: NIAD-UE 2005b: 7.

An evaluation is mainly carried out in accordance with the following process:

(1) Self-evaluation at the subject university:

Each university carries out a self-evaluation and produces a self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation is carried out in respect of the university as a whole or, if necessary, for each faculty and graduate course, taking each of the 11 standards into account and in accordance with their directions and viewpoints, in order to examine and report on the status of the university's educational activities.

(2) NIAD-UE Evaluation:

Based on the self-evaluation, NIAD-UE decides whether or not the university as a whole meets each of the 11 standards. If the university as a whole is found to have met all of the 11 standards, NIAD-UE recognizes the university as having satisfied the standards for university evaluation and announces this. If one or more of the standards are not met, NIAD-UE will find that the university as a whole does not satisfy its standards for university evaluation and announces this. A university found not to have met the standards may become subject to an additional evaluation with separate procedures in respect of only the failed standard(s) within 2 years immediately after the first evaluation year. Evaluation with regard to the optional standards is carried out in the same manner as the 11 standards, though the evaluation is not made on whether or not those standards are met, but on whether or not the university's purposes relating to those standards are achieved (NIAD-UE 2005a: 3–4).

The evaluation is carried out by each working group by means of a documents survey and a site visit. Based on the results of the surveys and analysis, each working group makes a preliminary evaluation decision, which is then examined by the Evaluation Committee before it is adopted as the final evaluation result. The evaluation result is issued in the form of an evaluation report for each subject university and provided to the university and the representative person. It is also disseminated to the public via print media and NIAD-UE's website (<http://www.niad.ac.jp/>). The evaluation result is then used to improve the subject university's educational and research activities (NIAD-UE 2005a: 4–8).

### **Assessment of the reform**

The university reform was and is highly controversial in Japan. To obtain a first assessment of the reform package, interviews were conducted with the relevant experts regarding their experiences and opinions concerning the reform package's outcome. The interview partners were all persons who had taken part in the reform process at former national universities. The interviews were based on both the government's reform goals as well as on arguments against the reform.<sup>13</sup> Using the technique of free response interviews, the experts were asked about details concerning the improvement in *funding and budgets, educational quality, the selection and power of the president, the status of the personnel, university autonomy, the effectiveness of third-party evaluation, and remaining problems*. The interviews were complemented by data largely with regard to budgets and financing, which the universities themselves provide. Before turning to the results of the interviews, it might be informative to look at other opinions.

#### *Assessment from surveys*

According to a survey of the Hokkaidô University's academic personnel conducted by the university in May 2000, only 6% of the respondents supported the proposed reform; the vast majority (70%) opposed it (2/Q3), even though 63 percent of the interviewees expressed a need for reform (6/Q3). 42% expressed the opinion that the personnel's public servant status was the most desirable and only 16% expressed the opposite opinion (3/Q1). Only 10% said that the reform would improve or somewhat improve their research and teaching, while two-third of the respondents said it would not (6/Q7). A fully 71% expressed fears that the planned reform could be a step towards the privatisation of universities, while only 17% said it would not (6/Q14; see Hokkaidô daigaku 2000).

A survey of the 87 presidents of the former national universities conducted by the daily Asahi shinbun and published in June and July 2006 by Asahi shinbun's *Ronsa*, presented a somewhat different picture. Overall, 8% said that the reform is very advantageous and 64% said it is rather advantageous. Roughly 14% said it is rather disadvantageous and around 9% said they can't say or that it is neither. In Western Japan, 17% said it is rather disadvantageous. In judging the survey, we should keep in mind that the

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<sup>13</sup> The arguments against the reform were drawn from "The People's Network Against the Plan to Destroy National Universities" (<http://ac-net.org/dgh/e-index.html>) and Iwasaki 2004.

relevant president's name and his institution was published with his or her opinion, which might have led to a more positive assessment bias. However, overall, one quarter of the polled presidents said that the reform is "rather disadvantageous", "can't say" or gave "no answer", which means that even they are still concerned about the reform's outcome (see Table 6).

**Table 6: President's views on university reform**

		Very advantageous	Rather advantageous	Rather disadvantageous	Very disadvantageous	Can't say	No answer	Overall
East	N=	3	35	6	0	5	3	52
	in %	5.8	67.3	11.5	0	9.6	5.8	100
West	N=	4	21	6	0	3	1	35
	in %	11.4	60.0	17.1	0	8.6	2.9	100
Overall	N=	7	56	12	0	8	4	87
	in %	8.0	64.4	13.8	0	9.2	4.6	100

Source: Own compilation on basis of Asahi shinbun 2006.

*Assessment from interviews*

Most of the interviewed experts shared the opinion that it is still too early to conclusively evaluate the reform after just two years of experience and that it is quite unclear what kind of criterion should be applied to evaluate the outcome correctly.

However, the critical point is the *financing* of the universities, especially with regard to the state's system of disbursing "operational expense grants" to each national university corporation. As previously mentioned, the state does not calculate these grants automatically from the university's fixed expenditures, but by means of an "efficiency coefficient" imposed by the Ministry of Education. This means that "operational expense grants" are, in fact, automatically reduced by one percent every year. Universities therefore have to increase their additional income resources through donations and by

developing entrepreneurial activities, including commissioned research or adult education programmes.

About half of the income of Tôkyô University's Institute of Social Science came from other than government sources in the 2005 fiscal year. In 2006, government spending decreased further from 189 million Yen to 186 million Yen (see Table 7). The universities have set up old-boys clubs and other alumni associations for additional funding with which to foster private and corporate spending. These initiatives could work for top universities whose alumni are found in Japanese society's highest social positions, but might not work in the case of smaller universities.

It was furthermore argued that donations from the business world are distributed unequally among the faculties. Social science faculties are especially disadvantaged. However, it is worth noting that in 2003 Tôkyô University formulated the "Charter of the University of Tôkyô" to clarify its fundamental principles and goals. The University defines itself as a multi-faceted university with graduate schools and affiliated institutes specialising in diverse fields, all of which are treated equally (Tôkyô daigaku 2003a).

It is also obvious that the teaching and research personnel's bureaucratic tasks have increased heavily, at the expense of the *quality of teaching and research*. This is partly due to having to formulate mid-term goals and mid-term plans and the self-evaluation and partly due to the need to acquire funding projects. As can be deduced from the budget of Tôkyô University's Institute of Social Science (Table 7), specific research projects from third-party funding amounted to one-third of the overall budget in 2005. Most projects have a 2-year duration, which means that faculty members are forced to constantly look for third-party funding if they want to avoid severe budget problems. Furthermore, due to the short duration, the outcomes of these projects are short-cut results instead of long-lasting and universal expertise.

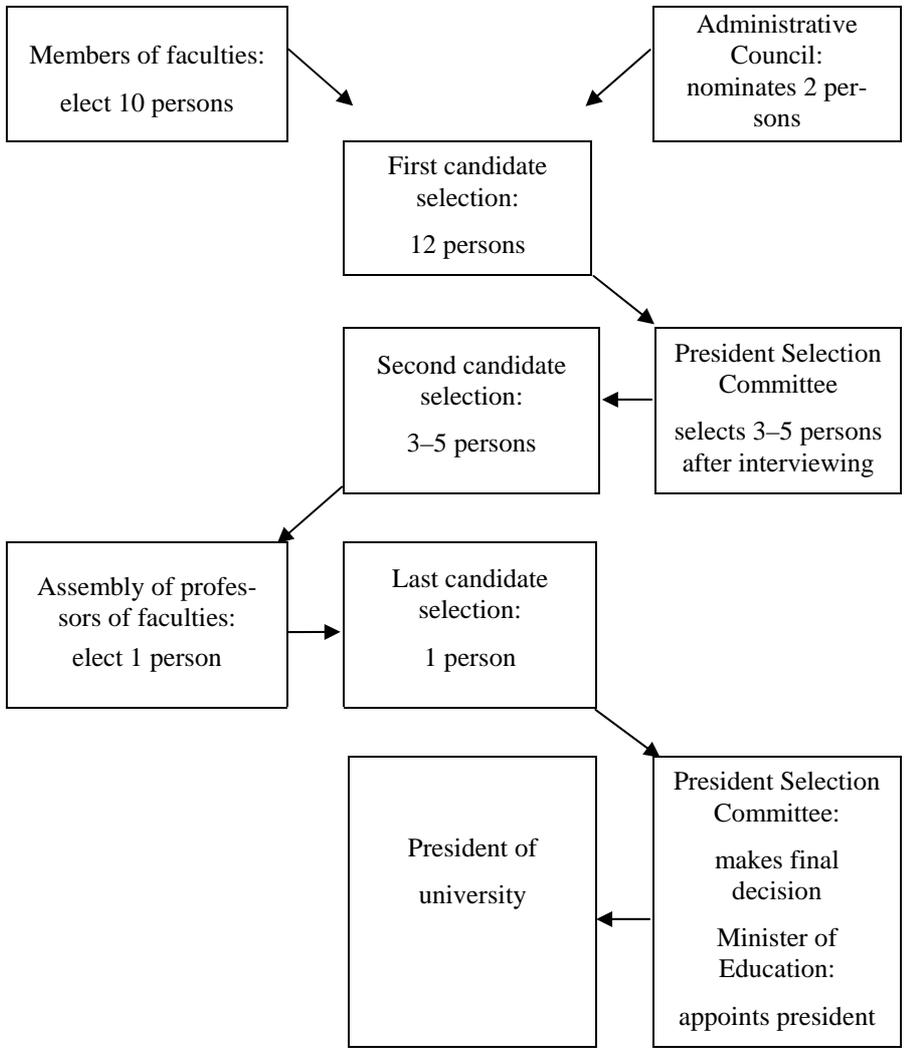
**Table 7: A comparison of the 2005 and 2006 Budget of Tôkyô University's Institute of Social Sciences (unit: Mio. Yen)**

Income from		2005		2006
		in Mio Yen	in %	in Mio. Yen
1	Operational grants	179	51.5	176
2	Specific grants	10	2.9	10
	<b>Government funding overall</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>186</b>
3	Third-party funding of projects	119.8	34.5	125.7
	<i>direct</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>33.4</i>	<i>119</i>
	<i>indirect</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>1.1</i>	<i>6.7</i>
4	Donations	39	11.2	Not yet known
	<b>Non-government funding overall</b>	<b>158.8</b>	<b>45.7</b>	–
	<b>N overall=</b>	<b>347.8</b>	<b>100</b>	–

Source: Tôkyô University's Institute of Social Science 2006.

The new process of *president selection* was also criticised. Before the reform, the president was elected by the university members, leading to the new selection process being criticised as undemocratic. In reality however, most of the universities now use a mixed system of electing and nominating the president. At Tôkyô University, for example, the faculty members elect 10 persons, two are nominated by the administrative council. From these 12 persons, the president selection committee chooses 3–5 persons in a second step. Thereafter, the professors of the faculties elect one person as the president of the university. The final decision lies with the selection committee (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Election and selection of the president of Tôkyô University**



Source: Tôkyô daigaku 2006b.

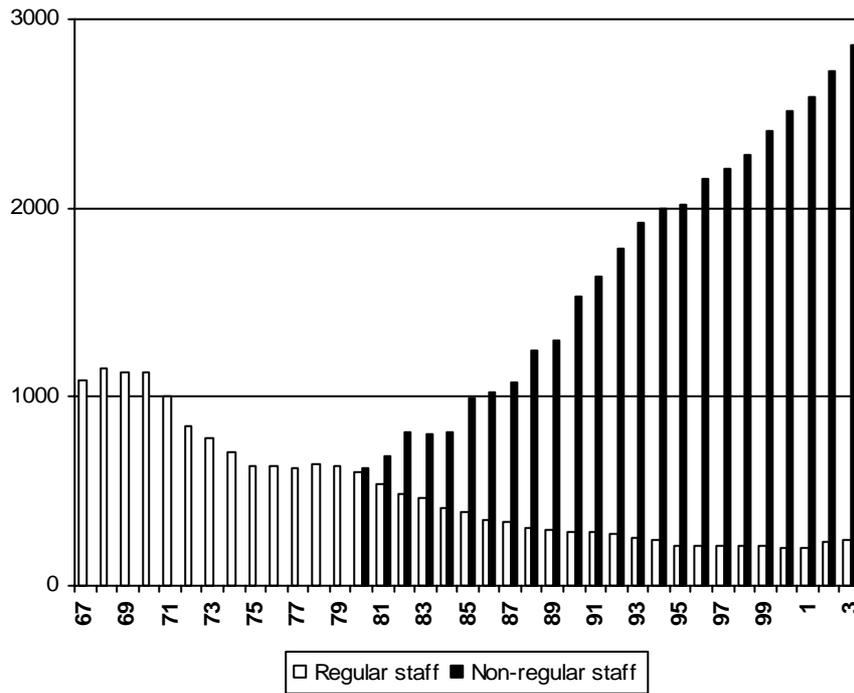
The interviews revealed that there are still many issues in need of clarification. For example, a highly controversial issue is how to *evaluate* academic personnel's work, especially the work of those in the social sciences and humanities. It is argued that the introduction of natural sciences' evaluation

methods, such as a citation index, or the number of staff winning Nobel Prizes, into the social sciences is unsuitable. Peer reviews can be costly and do not guarantee objective assessment. Nor do we find that there is an overall accepted canon of journals in respect of a citation index, because many universities run their own publications that are only available to their own university members. The number of third-party projects differs greatly per subject and project as well as regarding the energy required for application. It is therefore argued that more debate is required to find objective measures with which to assess education and research's quality objectively. The same arguments can be applied to third-party evaluation by the government.

The new *status of personnel* as "employees who engage in official business" instead of public servants has raised fears as well. It has been argued that the new "flexibility of salaries and labour conditions" will destabilize the labour environment, and that working at a university will become unattractive with faculty employment merely being short term. In contrast to these fears, most of the interview partners believed that currently not much has changed when compared to the previous status. The data on Tōkyō University employees revealed that the institution had not employed non-regular staff before 1980. Since the beginning of the 80s, however, the number of non-regular staff has increased rapidly, while the number of regular staff has at simultaneously decreased dramatically (see Figure 4). The increase in non-regular staff at national universities cannot therefore be regarded as a result of the university reform and is related to other developments.

The reform aimed at separating universities from the central bureaucracy and granting them independent juridical status. Despite the government's use of the term "independent", there are serious concerns that by placing all national universities under the government's direct management and control, the reform can bring about the exact opposite. *Autonomy* and financial support are only guaranteed to the universities as corporations. In fact, a university has to make detailed plans to carry out the six-year plan and, after that period, the government – as the supervisory authority – evaluates its activity. If the evaluation is negative, the government could abolish this university, for example, if it is not in line with government policies. It is argued that this is not in harmony with universities' mission, namely autonomous research and education activity, and could conflict with the academic freedom guaranteed by the constitution.

**Figure 4: The shift in the fixed number of Tôkyô University’s regular teaching staff 1967–2003**



Source: Tôkyô daigaku 2003b.

One more remaining problem is that the number of students will decrease due to demographic changes within the society. This may lead to an increase in competition for students among universities, resulting in mergers and the closure of smaller universities. With the reform, the government leaves this restructuring to the market and therefore ignores its responsibility to ensure that throughout the country everybody has equal access to higher education. Furthermore, it is not clear what will happen when the mid-term goals’ six-year period is over, as there are as yet no concrete follow-up plans. We can thus assume that the reform process of Japan’s universities is still under way and that further reform will be required.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to learn about the process and outcome of the university reform in Japan that was introduced just two years ago. With the incorporation of Japan's national universities, which can be regarded as the most dramatic university reform since the establishment of a modern educational system, the government aimed at strengthening university autonomy, instituting a system of responsible management, and establishing a competitive environment within the sector of higher learning. Consequently, private sector management methods were introduced to foster efficient administration and to guaranty top-management methods. The status of universities and their personnel was changed in order to deregulate budgets and to introduce flexibility in the personnel system. Further, a system of third-party evaluation and the disclosure of information were introduced to increase transparency and promote competition between universities.

As can be deduced from the experts' views of the reform, the universities' funding is the most critical issue and the government will need to pay more attention to the university funding system in future.

Moreover, whether or not the new system will improve education and research at the newly created university corporations is a highly controversial matter. Against the background of university staff's sharp increase in bureaucratic tasks because they have to participate in preparing the detailed action plans as well as the self-evaluation and the need to constantly look for project funding through third parties, some experts question whether the new system will lead to better education and research.

Also problematic is the basis of the evaluation of both the universities and their staff's performance. The use of quantitative measurement methodologies remains largely limited to specific fields, such as natural sciences and technology. Much more debate and discussion is therefore needed to guarantee the objective measurement of education and research, especially in the social sciences and humanities.

The restructuring of the university sector that is due to demographic changes is left to the market by the government, which ignores its responsibility to ensure that throughout the country everybody has equal access to higher education.

There are still concerns whether university incorporation violates academic freedom. The new system guarantees the new university corporations more freedoms concerning budget and personnel, but the universities are still subject to the Ministry of Education's authority with regard to approval of

their action plans and third-party evaluation and financing. State financing still dominates, and so does state control over university budgets, even though universities are “free” to locate other sources of revenue to avoid financial shortage.

It may be too early to pass judgement on the outcome of the reform. However, it is quite clear that universities need sustained investment to achieve high standards. They are the mainstay of the reform outcome, and any reform is destined to be incomplete if universities’ opinions are not included and will fail without their active cooperation. Through frequent and sophisticated communication and interaction between universities and the government, both the reform ideals and the reform process can be improved.

The momentum behind much that passes for educational reform is the result of economic and political pressure and not pedagogic or democratic considerations as such. Japan is embarrassed by its universities’ performance when compared internationally and there is also a need to restructure the educational system due to the demographic decline of young people. Therefore, the source of educational reform is less concerned with equal access to higher education, or what is good for the individual, but much more with the type of educational system that will sustain economic growth and international competitive advantages. However, as studies on the Japanese educational system reveal, access to elite universities still depends on families’ income as well as on gender, which means that females and lower classes young people are still disadvantaged. Equal access to higher education is an indispensable prerequisite if all human resources within a given society have to be mobilised. Much depends on whether the Japanese government is willing to promote educational reforms that not only translate into economic performance but also into equal educational opportunities.

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