

# **Japan-UK Universities Conference for Collaboration in Research and Education**

**10.00 – 17.15, Thursday 1st May 2014**

**Jeremy Bentham Room, University College London**

## **Conference Discussions – Key Points**

### **Session 1 – Japan-UK Collaboration in Education – Panel-led Discussion**

There were four key themes that emerged from the panel-led discussion on Japan-UK Collaboration in Education. These were:

1. Current challenges
2. Multilateral collaboration
3. Collaborative approaches to ageing
4. Involvement of non-university sectors

#### **1. Current challenges for universities and students**

- Culture – the difficulty in changing the curriculum at universities and the need for a cultural shift at all levels in order to achieve this.
- Language and unfamiliarity – there is still an evident need to encourage more Japanese study among UK students and improve English study ability among Japanese students. This in turn would help to increase the numbers willing to study abroad in Japan and the UK.
- Mobility funding – to increase collaboration, greater government funding is required.
- Student accommodation - the shortage of dormitories for international students and housing issues for incoming researchers in Japan was also raised as a big problem. Japanese universities need government funding to build more dormitories for overseas students and researchers.
- Credit system – the difficulty of transferring academic credits between universities is a deterrent to potential overseas students. A more systematic approach is required.
- Academic timetables – problems of term times not matching between Japan and the UK. The lengths of master's courses in the two countries are also different.

## **2. Multilateral collaboration**

- Participants agreed that a focus on multilateral programmes - both introducing new ones and expanding current ones (such as RENKEI) - is required.
- Multilateral agreements would avoid the costs and time associated with making hundreds of bilateral agreements between universities.
- Japanese and UK universities should also look to collaborative approaches with universities of other countries.

## **3. Collaborative approach to ageing**

- Ageing was highlighted as one of the key global challenges facing both Japan and the UK.
- This is an important area where UK and Japan universities really can collaborate, and the question of how we can transfer this challenge to universities is one that must be put to our governments.
- There is a need for more departmental communication as well as inter-disciplinary interactions between natural and social sciences among Japanese and UK universities on this issue.
- Important to stress that ageing is just one prominent example of a number of global challenges in which Japan and the UK should be working together.

## **4. Involvement of non-university sectors**

- It was recognised that, while the focus at the conference was on the roles of universities, cooperation with the government (and local governments) is also vital.
- Efforts focused on the problem of ageing need government assistance in engaging with non-university and non-industry organisations, such as the NHS.
- A combined assault and multi-disciplinary approach is needed.

## **Session 2 – Japan-UK Collaboration in Research – Panel-led Discussion**

A number of key points were raised regarding problems, and possible solutions, to develop research collaboration between Japan and the UK, including the four key areas below:

1. Current challenges for universities and researchers
2. Administrative staff
3. Multidisciplinary approaches
4. Involvement of other Japan-UK foundations

## **1. Current challenges for universities and researchers**

- Barriers to increasing the number of researchers exchanged between the two countries include a lack of budget at national universities, and reluctance on the part of researchers due to the competitive nature of research overseas.
- An increase in opportunities for short study visits could be useful preparation for researchers exchanged between Japan and the UK.
- The importance of going beyond just collaboration was also highlighted – an opportunity for researchers to connect with their local community and culture is also a key part of the experience, and will be beneficial in the long term.

## **2. Administrative staff**

- In order to develop collaboration in research, greater funding and training for administrative staff is required.
- As an example, Kyoto University are giving support to administrative staff by sending them overseas to develop their language skills.
- The British Council are also working on ‘capacity building’ with administration departments of universities to enable them to better assist international researchers.

## **3. Multidisciplinary approaches**

- A multidisciplinary and multi-sector approach to research is important – including government, industry and academic collaboration, synthesising natural and social sciences.
- The importance of strong government relations and involvement were also highlighted as key to forming relationships with universities overseas.
- One broader idea would be multidisciplinary efforts to tackle the challenges of ageing in Japanese and UK society – this could be a “big idea” for our governments.

## **4. Involvement of other Japan-UK foundations**

- Organisations such as the Daiwa and Sasakawa Foundations can also play a role in facilitating research collaboration between Japan and the UK.
- The number of people deciding to study Japanese is increasing again, and there are now efforts to encourage researchers to add a Japanese language element into their non-Japanese related research.

- Universities should also try to encourage more collaboration between Japan and the UK in wider fields other than research and education, including international development.

### **Roundtable Discussion**

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe participated in the roundtable discussion, and outlined the Japanese government's position on the issues raised during the discussions.

#### **1. Regarding the importance of student exchange between Japan and the UK, and concerns regarding the decrease in Japanese students overseas - in what ways are the Japanese government working to improve this, and how can UK universities help?**

- The Japanese government are very keen to encourage students to study overseas, and offer greater financial support to improve on the current situation.
- Discussions have been held with Prime Minister David Cameron regarding increasing student exchange between the two countries.
- The Japanese government are currently analysing the reasons for the decreasing number of Japanese students overseas.
- Reasons for this could include the fact that Japanese students are more inward-looking than other countries, and the benefits of studying abroad are not fully understood.
- The Prime Minister also emphasised the need for measures to make it easier for Japanese students to study abroad, such as more reciprocity of study units.
- To encourage more study abroad, it is also important to make it easier for Japanese graduates to get hired outside of the traditional April intake of graduates.

#### **2. While there are many schemes to promote undergraduate and postgraduate student exchange, what is being done to promote post-doctoral exchange?**

- Agree that it is a challenge for high calibre researchers to be hired post-doctorate.
- The Japanese government are keen to offer more help to such people, and are working with Japanese companies to understand how best to use people following their doctorates.

#### **3. The challenges of an ageing society face both Japan and the UK. Will there be opportunities for collaboration in this field?**

- This is an issue that Japan have also recently discussed with other countries including Germany, and is an area in which research and collaboration with other countries is vital.

- There is a need to research ways in which to prolong the time until nursing is required in Japan, and while an ageing society can be seen as a problem, it is also a sign that people are living longer.
- One challenge is working towards finding ways in which the elderly can continue to contribute to society.
- The Japanese government are also making efforts to encourage more women to work in Japan, and these are areas in which there has been research and cooperation with the UK.