

Incorporated Status for Japanese National Universities

The 89 national universities in Japan have long been a vital underpinning for the growth of the country, serving as centers of intellectual leadership in society through the development of human resources and academic pursuits. However, as the Japanese society has undergone major transformations, there have accordingly been changes in what is expected of national universities. Therefore, the issue of necessity of reforms in national universities has been attracting increasing attention, while administrative and financial reforms have been of growing importance as a political issue facing the Japanese government. Against this background, a comprehensive review was undertaken to examine how Japanese national universities had been functioning over the past few years, resulting in the decision that from April 2004 all national universities in Japan would become independent administrative institutions.

All Japanese national universities, which used to form part of the central administration of the state, have been incorporated as independent institutions, in compliance with the National University Corporation Law, which was enacted in July 2003. This means that national universities, which had been nothing more than internal organizations of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, have begun to be run independently and autonomously by their own management, led by their respective President and Chairman of the Board.

In response to this change in the management of national universities, an "Administrative Council" and an "Education and Research Council" have been set up in each national university to discuss managerial issues and to discuss issues concerning education and research,

respectively. Each national university has thus assumed a duty of accountability to society, as well as the responsibility to appropriately reflect the voices of society. This is why it has been stipulated that people from outside the university must account for at least one half of the members of the Administrative Council in each university. The aim of this is to infuse those traditionally closed organizations with private-sector vitality and thereby let the market mechanism work.

The National University Corporation Law clearly provides that the Japanese government shall continue to assume responsibility for the implementation and financial aspects of education and research at national universities. Each national university is obliged to pass a financial audit by a third party, while being given considerable discretion over budget allocations, promotion of industry-university collaboration, etc. Their medium-term operating goals and plans are more specific than those in the past, and their performance is now subject to assessment by a third party, such as the "National University Evaluation Committee."

The incorporation of Japanese national universities this time is expected to encourage competition between university teachers, for example, through the fact that as a result of this reform, inventions made by academic and research staff will belong to their institutions. Particularly, less renowned national universities are actively setting out clear policies to "survive in competition with other universities by developing their own distinctive strengths." This reform is generally highly regarded as the right move to make for national universities in the face of intensifying international competition in the 21st century.



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