

## **Statement of the Executive Board of Science Council of Japan**

On the Future Direction of the University: In Relation to the Departments/Graduate Schools  
of Teacher Training and Humanities and Social Sciences

23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2015, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology issued to all National University Corporations a notice entitled 'A Review of the Organization and Operation of the National University Corporations and Other Higher Educational Institutions'. This ministerial notice instructs particularly those undergraduate departments and graduate schools which are responsible for teacher training and for the education of the humanities and social sciences (hereafter HSS) , in the context of National University Corporations organizational revision to 'make every effort to draw up an organizational restructuring plan in the light of the decrease of the university-age population, the demand for human resources and the quality control of research and teaching institutions and the function of national universities.' The directive then further goes on to request taking up 'active steps to abolish organizations or to convert them to serve areas that better meet society's needs'. Science Council of Japan (hereafter, SCJ) would like to express its profound concern over the potentially grave impact that such an administrative directive implies for the future of the HSS in Japan and the very idea of the university itself, irrespective of whether it is privately or publicly funded.

1. SCJ has already issued its views on the role of the HSS in today's society in its statement, 'Recommendations on the Fifth Science and Technology Basic Plan' (released on 27 February 2015). We would like to reiterate some of the statement's key points:

It is recognized more than ever today that there is a need for the natural sciences and the HSS to work closely together in order to produce a more comprehensive knowledge base that can respond to the various challenges facing us today. The HSS are integral to such a process. They play a vital and unique role in critically comparing, contrasting and reflecting on the way in which human beings and society operate. Academics contribute to the creation of an intellectually and culturally enriched society and are hereby responsible for its transmission to future generations. We see it as our duty to

produce, enhance, and transfer in-depth and balanced accounts of knowledge about nature, the human beings, and society.

Thus, the HSS make an essential contribution to academic knowledge as a whole. The HSS are also entrusted with the role of solving – in cooperation with the natural sciences – contemporary problems domestically as well as internationally. In this light, the ministerial request to take ‘active steps to abolish organizations or to convert them to serve areas that better meet society’s needs’, with its specific focus on the HSS, raises a number of alarming questions.

2. The university is embedded in society and is supported by it. The university therefore responds to societal demands in a broad sense, and this mission should be unequivocally acknowledged. At the same time, in both the natural sciences and the HSS, it is short-sighted to demand quick-fix answers to them. There are those types of societal demands which can be effectively met by setting concrete goals and then evaluating outcomes. Meanwhile, there are other types of social demands, more latent, which should be met by universities; the university needs to articulate knowledge that is based on a long-term perspective, bolster diversity, and nurture the foundation on which creativity can flourish. If the university only concentrated on the former and overlooked the latter, it would lose its essential role of supporting the intellectual nurturing of society and the education and training in a variety of skills and talents, including economic, social and cultural aspects, which all constitute our society in a broader sense.
3. The role of the HSS in higher education is expanding as we see, for example, in the promotion of ‘global human resources’. Global human resources are not limited to talents equipped with global competitiveness, but also include such talents that can engage with and contribute to the global community while cherishing cultural diversity, represented by the difference in religion or ethnicity, based on the diverse cultural and historical background of humankind. So, along with competency in foreign languages, the HSS are needed in order, firstly, to understand the society, culture and history of Japan and other countries and areas; secondly, to have a good sense of judgement ; and, thirdly, to be able to think critically. For the scientific integrity, it is also necessary for those who engage in natural science and technology to understand the human and social contexts within which scientific knowledge operates. This is equally true of those in the HSS who need understand scientific and

technological literacy. Today, there is a growing demand for students to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to a multitude of continuously unfolding problems. Students need to broaden their horizons through dialogue with others who have different views and insights. Against this background, any disparagement of the HSS may result in higher education in Japan losing its richness.

4. The ministerial directive to review the state of departments/graduate schools of teacher training seems to emphasize the decrease in the university-age population. The demographic trend may certainly be one of the important factors identifying social demand for teacher training, but we should also take into account other factors such as the need to improve the quality of education. As the example of the enfranchisement of 18-years old indicates, expectations and needs for primary and secondary education have been intensifying. This in turn highlights the need to have a multifaceted discussion over the quantity and quality of primary and secondary school teachers. Here, again, there is no distinction to be made between the natural sciences and the HSS. Bearing in mind new needs for re-education of active teachers, enrichment of the quality of teacher training departments and graduate schools should be undertaken, only after which necessary steps for reorganization should follow.
5. The university is both an educational and research institution. Academics serve as educators in both the broader field of the liberal arts and their own specific disciplines, while striving to maintain and advance academic knowledge as scholars. In this respect, any devaluation of the HSS in higher education could result in narrowing the opportunity for academics to fully exercise their scholarly expertise. This would in turn discourage those who aspire to be academics and hereby hamper the balanced progress of academic knowledge.
6. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that academics in the HSS have clarified in full neither the vision of human resources that the HSS departments/graduate schools nurture on behalf of society, nor the potential role that the HSS could play within the overarching world of academia. HSS scholars are now asked to make every effort to deliberate upon these issues through multiple dialogues, from critical self-reflection to discussions with those colleagues in the natural sciences and other societal actors, and in so doing to improve the quality of teaching and research by taking on broad needs derived from social changes.

In the Recommendation quoted above, SCJ has acknowledged that ‘it is now time to have a thorough discussion over the entire vision of the university and other higher education institutions in Japan, including the issues concerning their forms and number, in order for them to carry on their mission in a sustainable manner’. It has also pointed out that ‘it is highly desirable that university reforms should be designed in view of the scale of their potential impact on the future of Japan and firmly grounded in a far-sighted perspective’. In addition, SCJ has long expressed its views on university education, as exemplified by the public release of the ‘Standards for Organizing the Educational Programmes with the Purpose of Quality Assurance of University Education in Each Disciplinary Area’. Finally, the ‘Committee to Discuss Teaching and Research at National Universities and Public Assistance from a Perspective of Academic Promotion’ has been set up and its deliberations are currently in progress. Upon the publication of the Committee’s deliberations, SCJ will propose a vision of the future of university, which will be informed by current pressing issues, such as depopulation and fiscal reconstruction, as well as the division of roles between public-funded and private universities.

July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Members of the Executive Board of SCJ

President Takashi ONISHI

Vice President Chiaki MUKAI

Vice President Kumie INOSE

Vice President Keisuke HANAOKI

Chairperson of Section 1 Akio KOMORIDA

Vice-Chairperson of Section 1 Atsushi SUGITA

Secretary of Section 1 Hisao KOMATSU

Secretary of Section 1 Ryoko TSUNEYOSHI

Chairperson of Section 2 Tetsuo NAGANO

Vice-Chairperson of Section 2 Kenji OMASA

Secretary of Section 2 Fuyuki ISHIKAWA

Secretary of Section 2 Hiroo FUKUDA

Chairperson of Section 3 Hiroaki AIHARA

Vice-Chairperson of Section 3 Miwako DOI

Secretary of Section 3 Hideo OHNO

Secretary of Section 3 Maki KAWAI