

Memorandum of the AY2022 Plenary Council

This Memorandum of the AY2022 Plenary Council of the University records the deliberations on future university development conducted in the process up to and including the Plenary Council, centering on the discussion at the first open session of the Council in AY2022.

The memorandum is composed of two chapters, in line with the agenda set by the Council itself.

Chapter I is titled “Progress of Discussions since the AY2019 Plenary Council and Future Discussion of Academic Affairs and University Development,”

while Chapter II is titled “Further Initiatives under the R2030 Challenge Design.”

The memorandum concludes with an account of the significance of the Plenary Council and outlook for the future, as confirmed in the course of deliberations throughout AY2022.

What is the Plenary Council?

The Plenary Council of the University (hereafter, simply the “Plenary Council”) is an organ established in order for all members of the Ritsumeikan University learning community—undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, administrative staff, and the university authorities—to discuss and engage actively in improvements and reforms to various conditions of education, research, and campus life. Sessions of the Plenary Council are conducted in line with the principle of self-government by all constituents of the university, and are attended by representatives of four primary parties: the Student Union as the

self-governing body for undergraduate students, the Graduate Student Council as the self-governing body for graduate students, the Faculty/Staff Union, and the university authorities (the Executive Board of Trustees, of which College Deans are members). The Ritsumeikan Co-operative, which provides support for campus life, participates as an observer.

In the lead-up to the open sessions of the Plenary Council in AY2022, representatives of each party attended a Plenary Council Representatives’ Meeting on June 3, 2022.

The Ritsumeikan Academy’s Medium-term Plan and Plenary Council Discussions

Ritsumeikan University has been pursuing qualitative enhancement and diversification of its education and research on an ongoing basis, with a view to creating universal value and solving problems confronting humanity.

The R2020 Medium-term Plan was formulated in 2010 under the theme of “Creating a Future Beyond Borders: Go Beyond Yourself and Create Your Own Future.” Throughout the plan period (AY2011 to AY2020), progress was made on qualitative shifts in teaching and learning, academic development around the theme of globalization in the colleges and graduate schools, graduate school and research enhancement initiatives, and the development of educational infrastructure. Open sessions of the Plenary Council were held in four years during this R2020 period: AY2011, AY2016, AY2018, and AY2019. Discussions in these sessions focused on “learning and growth” that fosters students’ initiative and proactiveness. Even in the context of student fees and finance policies, in addition to discussion of the medium-term plan and changes in the social climate, a key theme was how students themselves experience “learning and growth” in practice and the implications of this experience when considering the burden of tuition.

The Academy Vision R2030 launched in AY2018 declared “Challenge Your Mind, Change Our Future” as the theme for the new medium-term plan period beginning in AY2021. In AY2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought great change and uncertainty to society and lifestyles across the board,

the R2030 Challenge Design was formulated to give shape to the Academy Vision. COVID-19 upended previous assumptions and made it difficult to draw up a stable vision for the future. At the same time, the formulation and execution of the new medium-term plan needed to reflect the imperatives of planning for new developments unlike anything envisioned previously.

The AY2020 and AY2021 Plenary Council Representative Meetings sincerely acknowledged feedback from undergraduate and graduate students regarding the difficulties faced in learning and student life during the COVID-19 pandemic, and discussed strategies to enable continuity of learning in such emergency situations, and the university’s basic outlooks and approaches on which such strategies are based. These discussions furnished an opportunity to deepen the parties’ awareness of the value that Ritsumeikan can offer as an institution of education and research, and the importance of continuing to learn and grow together in an era of uncertainty. They were also an opportunity to reconsider the significance of the Plenary Council and its approach to discussion, as a key issue relating to the nature of the university, its education and research.

Informed by these discussions, the AY2022 Plenary Council was charged with formulating directions toward the concrete realization of the R2030 Challenge Design, and considering the best approaches to take to academic affairs and university development moving forward.

Chapter I. Progress of Discussions since the AY2019 Plenary Council and Future Discussion of Academic Affairs and University Development

1. The AY2019 Plenary Council and Plenary Council Representatives' Meetings Held in the COVID-19 Pandemic (AY2020 and AY2021)

A major theme at the previous Plenary Council, held in October 2019, was how students gain a tangible sense that they are learning. This sense is the wellspring of motivation to take on new challenges and pursue new goals. In discussions at this Plenary Council the university authorities (hereinafter referred to as "the University") confirmed the following approaches: (1) to place even greater emphasis on enabling each and every student to lead a fulfilling university life with a solid sense of learning; (2) to enable students, faculty and staff to work together to create opportunities both on and off campus for students to experience a sense of enjoyment and achievement; (3) to implement measures that lead to further enhancement of graduate school education, based on a complete grasp of graduate students' circumstances and needs. In addition, the Student Union stated its view that policies for student fees and financial affairs should be discussed in the context of academic affairs, student life, and other aspects of academy development, and made demands for: (1) adequate efforts in disclosure and provision of information relating to academy finances and the like, in preparation for future discussions of tuition and fees; (2) opportunities such as workshops and discussion meetings on financial affairs, based on the information disclosed; (3) concrete development of initiatives (donations, asset management, etc.) to lower the degree of reliance on tuition and fees in the medium-term plan toward AY2030. The Graduate Student Council strongly endorsed the maintenance of graduate school tuition levels since they were reduced significantly in AY2017, and called both for this approach to be continued, as well as for further enhancement of career path support

programs.

At the end of AY2019, shortly after these discussions took place, COVID-19 swept the world rapidly and triggered a global crisis. The university declared that it would institute emergency measures to ensure continuity of learning for students, and quickly pursued the development of online and hybrid learning and teaching environments, access to library holdings off campus (at home, etc.), provision of facilities and infrastructure to prevent the spread of infection, and financial support measures for students at all levels.

As the pandemic began to have serious effects on social and economic activity, as well as on learning and student life, Plenary Council Representatives' Meetings were held in AY2020 and AY2021 as means to hear students' experiences and gain a direct understanding of the conditions they faced, and as forums for dialogue between students and the University. The President also attended these meetings. An open session of the Plenary Council was originally scheduled to be held in AY2021, but in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed to extend the student fee policy and tuition revision formula applicable up to AY2021 for a further one year, and hold the Plenary Council open session in AY2022 instead.

Discussions at the Plenary Council Representatives' Meetings AY2020 and AY2021 addressed the difficult circumstances facing students, as evidenced in university-wide questionnaires (organized by the Student Union), which included some calls for tuition and fees to be refunded in light of the changes and confusion surrounding learning and student life in the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking these findings to heart and seeking to tackle the root causes

of students' concerns, the Student Union and University agreed on the importance of sustaining students' motivation for learning by considering in substantive terms what kinds of teaching will satisfy students, and the need for further discussion directed to the enhancement of learning at university.

These discussions can be said to have connections with the discussion of "tangible sense of learning" at the AY2019 Plenary Council. The Plenary Council's discussion of academic affairs and student fee/finance policies was pursued from the standpoint of a university's mission and value as a place of lifelong learning, based on a renewed acknowledgment of the fact that a university and its academic programs are operated along a chronological axis of past, present and future, and of the importance of continuing to learn and grow in pursuit of a better self and better society. The University provided the other parties with an explanation of approaches to academic affairs that reflect the burden of tuition on students. In response, the Student Union expressed its understanding that student fee/finance policies are formulated in order for the university to continue providing value through learning, and to maintain support that fosters students' sense of growth on an ongoing basis. Further, at the AY2021 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, the Student Union suggested that before determining student fee/finance policies, the University should furnish a detailed explanation of the thinking behind its decisions and the conditions that inform them, and provide an opportunity for the other parties to understand them fully.

2. Positioning of the AY2022 Plenary Council in Light of the AY2022 Representatives' Meetings

In response to the Student Union's demand at the AY2021 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, the University held a number of discussion meetings on student fees and financial affairs with the Student Union prior to proposing and determining the student fee/finance policies to apply from AY2023 onward. Following four separate meetings, the University and the Student Union reached a shared understanding

standing on two points: (1) the nature of tuition and fees in private educational institutions, and (2) based on this understanding, the student fee/finance policies in place at Ritsumeikan University. In the context of fundamental contradictions in public funding for education, tuition and fees provide a key source of revenue enabling private institutions to pursue a variety of educational activities for current students,

while fees and finance policies are operated from the standpoint of sustainable provision of educational conditions and environments on a long-term chronological axis encompassing past, present, and future. The discussion meetings also confirmed that in the context of a financial structure in which tuition and fees provide the greater part of the revenue base, Ritsumeikan University has achieved, as a

result of its fees and finance policies, a sound revenue/expenditure balance and share of tuition and fees as a proportion of overall revenue (degree of reliance on tuition) that is relatively low compared to other universities.

In the Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting held on June 3, 2022, the University explained the content of the student fee/finance policies for AY2023 and beyond that were in the process of development and deliberation at the time, and discussed them with the other parties at the meeting. These policies were then ratified by the university on June 15, 2022. Following the Representatives' Meeting, the University pursued several exchanges of opinion with the Student Union in order to disclose and render more visible its financial management approaches, and used the opinions expressed by the Student Union to inform the renewal of web pages introducing the R2030 finance policies and financial conditions. A

wide range of undergraduate and graduate students were asked to view these pages and adjustments were made to render them more comprehensible to students.

Through the Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, the University and Student Union confirmed that discussions at the open session of the Plenary Council would focus further on the programs in academic affairs and student life that are financed by student fees. The Student Union requested that in preparation for the open session of the Plenary Council, opportunities be provided for discussion and substantive exchange of opinions on current issues in student life, as well as approaches to academic development and improvement for the students of the future—in other words, the future vision for the university through the implementation of the R2030 Challenge Design. Meanwhile, the Graduate Student Council requested that the AY2022 Plenary Council focus on discussions

relating to graduate student career paths, a topic that is ongoing from previous years. In response, the University committed to organizing meetings to continue discussions with each party.

Following the Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, the University and Student Union established discussion meetings on academic affairs, developing a common understanding of the R2030 Challenge Design, and presenting their opinions on specific topics suitable for discussion at the open session of the Plenary Council. The University also held repeated discussion meetings with the Graduate Student Council to resolve practical issues, in parallel with considering the topics for discussion at the open session. Chapter II contains a summary of discussions on the topics identified through this process.

3. Involvement of Students in Academic Affairs and University Development Going Forward (AY2022 Plenary Council Discussion)

Discussions in the meetings held following the AY2021 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, at the AY2022 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting, and at the first open session of the AY2022 Plenary Council provided opportunities for exploration and early deployment of approaches to university development that involve formulating and giving concrete shape to university policies in consultation with students, and of models for involvement of undergraduate and graduate students in university development going forward, toward the realization of the R2030 academy vision.

At the first Plenary Council meeting of AY2022, the Student Union tabled three demands regarding its involvement in discussions on academic/university development and student fee/finance policies: (1) to establish a forum for discussion with the Student Union prior to determination of future student fee/finance policies; (2) to guarantee the University's provision of explanations to and opportunities for discussion with the Student Union when assessing the outcomes of academic programs and the like, and when applying the Academic Maintenance and Improvement Fee in light of such assessment; and (3) to involve the Student Union in ongoing forums for information-sharing and discussion regarding policies and programs in academic affairs and university development that make use of student fee revenue, rather than simply seeking the Student Union's consent to decisions made by the University.

Meanwhile, the Graduate Student Council expressed an understanding of the Plenary Council as a forum for making progress on issues in the development and enhancement of the research environment that cannot be addressed by the Graduate Student Council alone. It also stated that progress on such issues in the Plenary Council should not be limited to specific solutions to discrete problems, but also include discussion of medium-term policy approaches such as balance between student fees and the provision of academic conditions.

In light of these demands, the University declared its intention to (1) establish a forum for discussion of student fee/finance policies with the Student Union, based on the outcomes of discussion at the open sessions of the AY2022 Plenary Council, and (2) provide forums at multiple levels for all students to become involved in academic affairs and university development (College-level five-way discussion meetings, forums for discussion with various university organs). The University also confirmed that the discussions in these forums are intrinsically connected with the involvement of students in future academic affairs and university development, and that the Division of Student Af-

fairs would play the central role in coordinating them.

University development in an era of uncertainty requires the creation of new values that do not hinge on preexisting methods and frameworks. This means that rather than debating the merits of new programs and initiatives prepared in advance and presented by the University, the University and its students need to engage on a more equal footing in a process of exchanging ideas and opinions on what students really need, and applying them to the consideration and concrete development of programs and initiatives.

AY2022 Plenary Council discussions, includ-



ing the various discussion meetings that were held in association with it, involved exchange of opinions on future programs based on shared understandings informed by a range of evidence regarding current conditions and challenges, including surveys conducted by the Student Union and data provided by the University. This exchange of opinions could be described as a constructive dialogue on the future shape of Ritsumeikan University, based on deep mutual understanding, with students and university authorities working together to create a process of intellectual activity befitting a university.

With its long history, the Plenary Council is a precious asset that Ritsumeikan can be truly proud of. Discussion and consultation with the Student Union and Graduate Student Council

in the Plenary Council was recognized in the course of Ritsumeikan University's external certified evaluation by the Japan University Accreditation Association (AY 2018) as a significant mechanism for the promotion of quality assurance from a learner-centered perspective. Naturally, the Plenary Council's format has evolved and changed over time, and will surely do so in the future as well. Held at a time when Ritsumeikan is confronting a wide range of challenges and possibilities in the post-pandemic era, this year's Plenary Council addressed the realization of R2030—in other words, academic development for the students of the future—through discussion of the conditions and challenges facing the students of the present. This was surely a first step toward the establishment of a new approach to dialogue



between the University and students, and a new approach to collaborative academic development and student support, founded on the experience and distinctive features nurtured at Ritsumeikan thus far.

4. Points Confirmed in the AY2022 Plenary Council for Future Academic and University Development

The AY2022 Plenary Council was a historical one in two ways. Firstly, all parties were involved directly in exploratory discussion on the future-oriented task of achieving the R2030 vision. Secondly, there was a renewed acknowledgment of the role, functions, and value of the Plenary Council, which has been a cherished feature of Ritsumeikan for so long.

The Student Union declared it had reconstructed and renewed its awareness of the following points relating to its responsibilities in the Plenary Council:

- To discuss ideals for learning as one of the uses of student fees, based on an understanding of the University's approach to policies on student fees and financial affairs;
- To work together with the University to formulate ways of building a better institution, taking into account both present conditions and future predictions.

President Nakatani Yoshio stated that the discussions since the AY2021 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting have substantially raised the value of the Plenary Council system fostered at Ritsumeikan from a contemporary standpoint, and expressed his gratitude for the sincere efforts of the Student Union and Graduate Student Council in shaping these discussions.

Moreover, the University summarized the following approaches to academic and university development which are possible precisely

because Ritsumeikan University possesses the distinctive Plenary Council system, and these approaches were confirmed with the Student Union.

- (1) While it is assumed that the University will determine and take responsibility for policies pertaining to academic affairs, student fees and the like, in the process of formulating and reviewing such policies, each party to the Plenary Council has a direct role to play in university development.
- (2) Based on this acknowledgment of the parties' roles, the Plenary Council should be an opportunity for the parties to participate substantially in the development of the university, engaging in "dialogue" that respects one another's views and thereby discovering new values and shared challenges.
- (3) Ultimately, the utilization of these roles and functions of the Plenary Council to think collaboratively about university development policies, and to evaluate the initiatives pursued under these policies from each party's standpoint, is a means to support proactive and autonomous quality assurance in the development of Ritsumeikan University.

In AY2022, the Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting was situated within the actual process of determining student fee policies, rather than simply being consulted after the policies had been decided by the university, as was the case in previous years. Instead of simply discussing the merits and demerits of the tuition revision formula and student fee levels per se, the Representatives' Meeting was an

opportunity to deepen the parties' awareness of the social climate, financial conditions, and approaches to financial management that provide the context for development of student fee policies, and their understanding of the intent of these policies in context.

While maintaining the principle that the University is responsible for the determination of policies in areas such as student fees, the Plenary Council confirmed the following matters regarding discussion with students prior to such determination.

- (1) When assessing the effects of academic policies, and when deciding how the Academic Maintenance and Improvement Fee should be used, the University will organize forums for explanation to the Student Union at appropriate times, and guarantee opportunities for discussion.
- (2) In the course of implementing policies and programs in academic affairs, university development and the like, the practice of holding Representatives' Meetings for information-sharing and discussion among the parties shall be continued into the future.

This was a highly significant shift in the approach to student fee policy discussions in the Plenary Council, and a major outcome of the AY2021 Plenary Council Representatives' Meeting and the series of discussions and exchanges of opinion on student fee/finance policy that took place thereafter. The shift was re-confirmed at the open session of the Plenary Council as well.

Chapter II. Further Initiatives under the R2030 Challenge Design

The discussions at this Plenary Council are a starting point, not a goal, in the university's future development: an important milestone toward realization of the R2030 Challenge Design. Based on the discussion meetings and other prior forums for exchange between the University, the Student Union, and the Graduate Student Council, the Plenary Council's open session discussed the topics shown below in particular. This involved exchanging opinions with students on questions such as how to position each topic in the context of initiatives under R2030 Challenge Design, and the status of discussions on the topic to date and points for future discussion, thus enabling the parties to deepen their understanding of the university's direction going forward. This chapter summarizes these discussions.

[Major Discussion Topics Tabled by the Student Union]

- How to conduct English language education not simply to equip students with English language proficiency, but also to enable them to gain confidence through a tangible sense of growth.
- Prospects for the pursuit of Digital Transformation (DX) in academic affairs, taking into account the utilization of ICT tools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the degree of progress made thus far on the development of educational environment, while clearly distinguishing future DX initiatives from the "emergency" measures adopted as part of the pandemic response.

- Prospects for the development of learning and careers, particularly in the undergraduate programs, toward the realization of the R2030 Challenge Design goal of a "next-generation research university."

[Main Discussion Topics Tabled by the Graduate Student Council]

The Graduate Student Council demanded ongoing discussion of language learning courses, including the uptake of the goFLUENT program initiated by the University in AY2022, with a view to promoting research activities by graduate students and young researchers in the context of globalization. On this basis, the Council tabled the following key points for discussion.

- How to enrich the research environment, based on a renewed awareness of issues relating to the appropriate scale of and access to research facilities and equipment in the context of globalization—issues which

have been discussed for some time, but whose nature and background have changed through the COVID-19 pandemic. (Especially issues such as information and communications infrastructure, usage hours, seating availability, etc.)

- How to approach issues relating to graduate student career paths, given both the positive appraisals of the University's recent initiatives (such as NEXT Student Fellowships and RARA Student Fellowships) and the goal of building attractive graduate school research environments with conditions that compare favorably to other universities. Priorities here include the establishment of more sophisticated research support and financial support programs, the relaxation eligibility conditions for existing programs, and the promotion of on-campus employment that is a source of both financial support and career experience for graduate students.



1. English Language Education and Globalization

1

Undergraduate teaching and learning of the English language

The fact that the improvement of English language education and issues related thereto was adopted as a major point of discussion at this Plenary Council reflects the University and Student Union's shared concern regarding the nature of university learning in light of the challenges of the era that lies ahead. This concern is framed by awareness of the need to develop students' capacity to take initiative in a global context and collaborate with people with diverse value outlooks, in order to survive in an era where the future is uncertain and dramatic changes abound in areas such as globalization and rapid advancement of ICT. The University and Student Union are united in acknowledging

that today, English language is an essential basic tool, and that it is no longer sufficient for university education to rely on the conventional framework of the "four skill areas"—reading, listening, writing, and speaking—and seek only to raise students' proficiency in these areas.

The English proficiency levels and learning needs of students at Ritsumeikan University are diverse, ranging from students who have already achieved a degree of proficiency in the four skill areas mentioned above prior to admission, through to those who first need to acquire and improve foundational skills in the use of English. It is now possible for students to learn online as needed to acquire these foundational skills and in accordance with these diverse conditions. Some Colleges of the University also offer Project-based English Programs (PEPs). In relation to these PEPs, the Student Union raised the question of why practical En-

glish learning programs have only been adopted in four Colleges, and why they are not being considered for adoption in the other Colleges. It is true that there is not a great need to use



English in some cases, depending on the nature of the College and academic discipline and the characteristics of the individual subjects offered. There are also cases where there is just as much, or more, emphasis placed on foreign languages other than English. On the other hand, English is a universal tool in the world of academia, and mastery of English is preferable for students in all academic disciplines. Taking a holistic view of English language education at Ritsumeikan University, which aims to become a “next-generation research university,” it is clear that students are looking to acquire and improve their proficiency in English as a practical and effective tool, and hoping that doing so will add depth and breadth to learning in their fields of specialization. The University accepts the Student Union’s position on this point and needs to work on formulating and implementing English language education for the future.

As has been discussed at the Plenary Council Representatives’ Meetings each year since the AY2019 Plenary Council, a considerable number of students are not gaining a tangible sense of progress in their English language learning, despite the fact that Ritsumeikan University students’ English language proficiency as a whole is improving in the sense that more students are attaining levels of B1 or higher in the CEFR, which provides a measure of practical English proficiency. One means of raising students’ tangible sense of learning is to provide inquiry-based English programs. In response to the Student Union’s calls for better English language education, the University declared an intention to enter into College-level consideration of the educational effects of inquiry-based English programs and concrete discussions, led by the Academic Affairs Division, regarding the provision of university-level support for Colleges to trial such programs. The University also resolved to investigate possibilities for using inquiry-based English programs as a bridge between English language education and major education, for example by introducing mandatory English language stud-

ies linked to students’ majors in third year and above. The University expressed its awareness of the challenges relating to this kind of linkage between English and major education, as well as the upgrading of academic guidelines to reflect not only appropriate class formats and sizes, but also the advancement of educational DX.

2

Graduate students’ foreign language education and globalization

In the AY2019 Plenary Council and other forums, the Graduate Student Council has been highlighting the importance of English and other foreign language education. One of the challenges in language education is that English is now a common tool regardless of the academic discipline, and it will be essential for graduate students and young researchers to strengthen their capacity to communicate in English as globalization advances. In this context, there are also cases where a foreign language other than English is essential for a certain discipline or research topic, and even cases where such a language is the primary language used in research. Based on this understanding, and taking into account the Graduate Student Council’s demands, in AY2022 the University introduced goFLUENT, a tool for self-directed foreign language study. It is important as a starting point to provide all graduate students with learning environments and opportunities that are easily accessible to anybody, anytime. In individual cases where students wish to learn more, schemes such as the CLA foreign language course fee subsidy and on-line individual guidance for English-language thesis-writing can be combined in order to enable as many graduate students as possible to improve their proficiency in foreign languages. At this Plenary Council, the Graduate Student Council expressed its positive appraisal of the University’s initiatives in this area, while also

calling for more discussion of ongoing improvements, informed by factors such as goFLUENT usage trends. The University declared that it would listen to feedback from graduate students as it works on improvements to enable more effective use.

In the area of 24-hour access to facilities in line with globalization, there are a variety of issues, including graduate student security,



facilities management, and preservation of the local environment, which under current conditions are difficult to resolve on any of Ritsumeikan University’s campuses (with the exception of research labs at BKC). Meanwhile, in anticipation of involvement in academic conferences and research workshops online, the University is developing on-campus information and communications infrastructure as well as providing support for students to enhance the information and communications environment in their own homes and other locations (provision of low-cost communication services). The University confirmed that it would continue discussing these issues, including problems of seating and individual-use spaces, taking into account the Graduate Student Council’s calls for problems relating to the use of facilities, information infrastructure, seating and the like to be incorporated into a wider discussion of the extent to which research environments should be guaranteed by the University, and the need for the Graduate Student Council and University together to confirm a general direction with regard to these matters.

With regard to English language education and globalization, in the area of undergraduate English language teaching and learning the Colleges will explore the educational effects of inquiry-based English programs and the University will enter into concrete discussions, led by the Academic Affairs Division, regarding the provision of university-level support for Colleges to trial such programs. Moreover, the University will pursue improvements as necessary to enable more effective use of graduate student programs in foreign language education and globalization, in consultation with graduate students themselves. The University will also continue discussions in the area of facilities access in line with globalization, taking into account the Graduate Student Council’s calls for problems relating to the use of facilities, information infrastructure, seating and the like to be incorporated into a wider discussion of the extent to which research environments should be guaranteed by the University, and the need for the Graduate Student Council and University together to confirm a general direction with regard to these matters.



2. Digital Transformation Initiatives in Academic Affairs

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 brought major changes to our world. Confronted by challenging circumstances, people altered the ways they work and interact with one another dramatically, and the use of online meetings, classes, and other digital work tools expanded rapidly. Most of these new modes of behavior and ways of thinking are expected to remain even after the pandemic is over. In this context, the University is considering the best ways of leveraging the scope and depth of the online mode together with the strengths of the face-to-face mode, exploring ways to maximize the value thereof. Digital transformation (DX) of academic affairs will certainly be a prerequisite for universities in the post-pandemic era, and universities will need to build on this to demonstrate more proactively the value of learning in diversity and the contingencies of human growth and knowledge advancement in new technological environments. It should be noted that Plenary Council Representatives' Meetings in previous years have already noted the desirability of pursuing discussions with a clear distinction between DX to support new academic approaches post-pandemic, and the use of information technologies as part of the "emergency" response during the pandemic itself.

The University needs to exert all its energies to advance DX in order to realize the R2030 Challenge Design. Educational DX is an indispensable prerequisite for the R2030 vision of "a next-generation research university" and the "expansive recoupling of research and education" necessary for it, as well as for the inquiry-based learning reforms that hold the key to achieving this vision. DX is also essential in order to achieve more success in the above-mentioned foreign language education reforms, and in the reform of liberal arts education. The University moved quickly to develop classroom environments to enable online teaching during the pandemic, and has since formulated guidelines for conducting classes using media tools with a view to the post-pandemic era, paving the way for the pursuit of DX. In terms of specific initiatives for teaching and learning support, there are still many items that have not yet reached the implementation stage, and others that are yet to be approved at the university-wide level, but the University is working day by day toward realization of these initiatives. For example, the relevant committees and task forces are already deep in discussions regarding the adoption of a new LMS (Learning Management System) to replace manaba+R, and the development of the Ritsumeikan Data Platform to bring together a variety of data to underpin learning and teaching support. In

terms of specific initiatives, an educational development DX pitch competition was held with a view to generating new teaching methods utilizing digital tools, and the winning ideas are now being developed toward implementation: one is "Ri:write," an AI system for providing feedback on reports and the like, and another is an inquiry-based AI concierge that supports students in formulating their own pathways forward. Progress is also being made on the development of virtual reality (VR) teaching materials and VR environments using the budget allocations for post-pandemic educational enhancement. Moreover, the College of Image Arts and Sciences and the College of Information Science and Technology, which are relocating to OIC in April 2024, are promoting a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policy. BYOD and ICT-driven learning support are also playing a major role in the inquiry-based English language education initiatives described earlier under foreign language education.

One simple example is the potential of educational DX to yield an effective solution to the problem of having registration for some courses determined by lottery—which, as noted by the Student Council based on survey results, is a source of dissatisfaction among students. A wide variety of factors are at play in making lottery registration unavoidable at the present time, including student numbers, availability and size of classrooms, instructor availability, fluctuations in class sizes on different days/periods, and individual instructors' teaching responsibilities. There is considerable potential for DX to enable more students to take the courses in question—essentially to make courses accessible to all students as a part of respecting "freedom of learning"—especially in terms of achieving an optimal combination of face-to-face and online delivery modes. Unlike courses delivered face-to-face only, for which there are physical limits to the availability of classrooms, the use of the real-time online delivery mode, or a combination of face-to-face and real-time online delivery, can expand the capacity of a course to accommodate students, or alter the concept of capacity itself. Even online, however, there are limits in terms of the optimal number of students per instructor, and there is a need for careful assessment whether the nature of the class is more suited to face-to-face or online delivery, or what proportion of



students to allocate to each of these delivery modes.

As conditions surrounding class delivery mode evolve to incorporate the hybrid use of both face-to-face and online formats or a choice between them, and possibly the adoption of digital twinning technologies in the future, the simple face-to-face versus online framework will be replaced by a new set of conditions. When considering these developments, it is essential to give serious thought to the benefits and standpoints of learners engaging both face-to-face and online. From the standpoint of achieving individually optimized learning for every student, consideration must be given to individual student needs when determining the delivery mode of a class. Attention must also be given to the fact that a single course offered in both face-to-face and online modes may offer students different kinds of value depending on their mode of participation. Another important perspective is the suitability of grade evaluation methods in the context of educational DX. As classes that were predicated on face-to-face delivery prior to the pandemic change and grow more diverse in their delivery modes, there is a need to consider how to ensure rigorous grade evaluation, which is a major precondition for internal quality assurance and substantiation of course credit, as well as being connected with the issue of enabling students to gain a tangible sense of learning and growth. This academic year, some large-scale lecture courses have been offered in full on-demand distance education mode, and the University has expressed its intention to review these pilot cases in detail and give concrete consideration to how to ameliorate current "limitations" in delivery.

In relation to DX of education, the Student Union noted that from the perspective of fostering independent and autonomous learning

at university, there is a need to consider the use of AI and other tools in learning and student support, and that this should be an important part of the approach to inquiry-based learning that Ritsumeikan University is aiming to achieve. The Faculty/Staff Union acknowledged the importance of issues such as building connections with major education within the English language education curriculum and combining face-to-face and online modes, but suggested that the key to advancing and realizing goals in these areas is “people”: it is essential to provide people with support at the same time as verifying the effectiveness of initiatives making use of new tools and methods.

It is important to pursue learning in which each individual student explores what they want to become and works toward that ideal, through a process of tackling problems for which there is no preordained answer and no single absolute solution, and developing the ideas and outlooks needed to pose new ques-

tions. Ritsumeikan University already has a diverse and extensive range of scholarships, systems and programs designed to support learning, but the University expressed its desire to combine and utilize these more effectively to design approaches to student support and DX that promote the development of autonomous learning.

As it works toward achieving these aims, the University is also exploring issues in the area of faculty workloads. There are many concerns from the faculty perspective, such as the possibility of being required to conduct classes in unfamiliar formats and an increase in the range of issues that need to be addressed in the course of teaching duties. The key question is how to re-configure existing resources. For example, in a full on-demand course with a large number of students, it is often difficult for a single faculty member to perform all course operations from class design to implementation and grading. It will be necessary to devise ways to

alter the structure of course responsibilities in line with the parameters of each course.

In the area of educational DX, the University will appropriately combine and utilize its diverse and extensive range of scholarships, systems and programs designed to support learning, in order to design approaches to student support and DX that promote the development of autonomous learning. The aim here is to achieve individually optimized learning for each and every student. Additionally, the University will give further consideration to two important issues: (1) the appropriateness of grade evaluation in the context of educational DX (how to ensure rigorous grade evaluation—which is a major precondition for internal quality assurance and substantiation of course credit—as class delivery modes previously predicated on face-to-face delivery change and grow more diverse, and with a view to providing students with a tangible sense of learning and growth), and (2) faculty workloads.

3. The R2030 Goal of a “Next-Generation Research University”

1

The idea of “(inquiry-based learning in) a next-generation university”

Firstly, the university provided an explanation to all parties with the aim of building shared awareness and deeper understanding of the concept of “(inquiry-based learning in) a next-generation research university.” (“For more details regarding the “next-generation research university” concept and the “expansive re-coupling of education and research” designed to achieve it, please refer to “3. Concrete Initiatives under R2030 Challenge Design” in Chapter II of the RS Academy Report: Toward the AY 2022 Plenary Council.)

In this era of uncertainty, it is important to be capable of creating one’s own future. This requires a capacity for ongoing, autonomous

learning, and opportunities to pursue further learning whenever necessary. In this context, “learning” does not mean learning with the aim of acquiring knowledge or deriving correct answers. It means learning by confronting and exploring irresolvable problems, and elevating one’s own goals, ambitions, and motivations through such learning. Having students, faculty and staff engaging in this process from a common standpoint is the essence of “inquiry-based learning.”

There are at least two different types of “inquiry.” One involves inquiring into all types of phenomena and seeking the truth. What does it mean to be human? What is the nature of our minds? What is love? What does dopamine do? These kinds of questions are asked in the pursuit of fundamental truths. The other type of inquiry involves envisioning ideals worth striving for and pursuing their realization. This could also be described as a process of “co-creation” of ideals, harnessing the knowledge of a variety of experts and stakeholders—“knowledge convergence,” to borrow a contemporary term. What is needed today is the development and enhancement of learning that inquires into these “ideals,” building on the value of approaches and activities in the pursuit of fundamental truths. We must explore how to systematize such learning and create an environment that allows all Ritsumeikan students to experience it. From this standpoint, in order to expand its initiatives for inquiry into

ideals in addition to the pursuit of fundamental truths, Ritsumeikan envisages the “expansive re-coupling of education and research” and seeks to establish a consistent style of research and education framed by the concept of an “inquiry-based academy.” The academy as a whole will co-create inquiry-based learning opportunities that can be accessed by many of its 30,000-plus primary and secondary school pupils, undergraduate and graduate students, and faculty and staff members.

2

Practical steps toward Ritsumeikan University becoming a “next-generation research university”

During discussions toward a shared understanding, the Student Union expressed the view that in order for the Academy as a whole to develop its capacity for inquiry as a next-generation university, it is important to give attention to students who struggle to take on challenges autonomously and those who are unsure what they want to do, and that there is a need for university teaching to draw out the talents and interests of such students.

One key approach in relation to this point is individual optimization, and Ritsumeikan University is committed to offering “inquiry-based learning” for all its students. An inquiry-based approach will be adopted not only by students





but also by faculty and staff members. Moreover, the fields in which this approach is applied will not be limited to classes and research. It is important to re-position all of the university's activities—including extracurricular activities, study abroad, community partnerships, and entrepreneurship—as opportunities for inquiry-based learning. From a student perspective, a wide range of potential pathways lie ahead of such inquiry-based learning, including graduate studies, startups, international cooperation in NGOs and NPOs, and social and community engagement. In other words, ongoing inquiry-based learning at university opens up a variety of pathways for each student to follow. The quantitative and qualitative enhancement of the graduate schools is another goal of R2030, and this is connected to inquiry-based learning in the sense that a shift in the approach to undergraduate learning will produce more students with the desire and motivation to continue their journey of inquiry at graduate school. Moreover, graduate schools are now extending beyond their conventional roles of cultivating researchers and professionals. Graduate schools can provide career development options to a variety of people, for example by offering recurrent education and opportunities for re-skilling that can be pursued by people while remaining in the workforce. The University wants to create graduate schools that are places where people pursue deeper learning and return to for further learning at a variety of turning points in their lives. These places exemplify Ritsumeikan's role as an alma mater (motherhood) of learning.

These ideas signal a turning point, a shift to a new phase distinct from the approaches to university education taken thus far. The University is aware of the need to accelerate this shift, informed by discussions in this Plenary Council.

The kind of inquiry-based learning described above is already being pioneered in activities such as EDGE and RIMIX. We believe that in order to meet the learning aspirations of Ritsumeikan University students, it will be essential to create systems that enable such

of interest becomes the entry point for combining two or three different learning activities. Rendering such learning more visible and communicating it more widely will help inspire other students and create a positive cycle of growth. Another priority is the provision of a one-stop service for supporting students' learning and growth through these systems. Moreover, the sense of growth that students gain through such activities is not limited to their time at university: students should be able to make use of their inquiry-based learning experiences five or even ten years after they have graduated. The University will work to enable more students to take up the challenge of inquiry-based learning and to create their own individually optimized learning experiences.

3

Graduate student career paths in a next-generation research university

The University will pursue a shift in direction when formulating the next round of career path support programs, toward an increase in on-campus employment and more generous financial support. For example, the University is considering the continuation of fixed-sum academic conference scholarships, the integration of the English-language manuscript submission support scheme into foreign language support, and the introduction of a basic research subsidy scheme for graduate students. Other changes under consideration include the establishment of a dedicated doctoral career support service, the introduction of a basic research environment support program (foreign language translation system), the creation of new opportunities for graduate students to present their research, and the introduction of a graduate student mentoring scheme.

The Graduate Student Council expressed its awareness of the importance of these financial support and basic research activity support schemes in expanding the scope for students

activities to emerge in a wider variety of fields and situations, not only conventional extracurricular spheres such as sporting, cultural, and artistic pursuits, but also social collaborations, community partnerships and the like. To date, the pattern has mainly involved a single learning activity based on a single topic of student interest, but we now envisage a more coordinated approach in which a single topic

to pursue graduate studies, and welcomed the establishment of new programs equivalent to the JSPS Research Fellowship for Young Scientists, such as NEXT Student Fellows and RARA Student Fellows. The Graduate Student Council then identified a challenge for doctoral programs that are adopting a stronger focus on the training of academic researchers: the fact that the value of the financial assistance offered under current support schemes is not adequate when compared to the incomes of other individuals of similar age already in employment. The Council acknowledged that such comparisons cannot be made simplistically, given the need to take into account conditions such as social insurance, welfare and benefits, but argued that even so, there is a need for a "high-profile research support scheme" that provides focused, intensive support at a higher level.

Discussions held between the University and the Graduate Student Council during AY2022 evidenced basic agreement on the importance of improving financial assistance for graduate students. The University understands that the Graduate Student Council's call for a "high-profile research support scheme" outside this financial assistance framework is made with the intention of both encouraging and motivating current graduate students and making the prospect of entering graduate school and working as a young researcher more attractive to prospective students and wider society. In reality, however, it is often difficult to provide such schemes in combination especially with those offered by external bodies, such as the JSPS Research Fellowship for Young Scientists. The University acknowledged the Graduate Student Council's call for the establishment of a new "high-profile research support scheme" that provides enhanced payment conditions and value, aligned with the approaches to research depth and innovation in a next-generation research university as envisaged in R2030, and committed to continuing discussions with the Graduate Student Council taking into account the overall approach to career path support going forward.

The University confirmed that it would continue to exchange opinions with students and consider the directions and challenges going forward in relation to issues such as how to position topics related to future R2030 activities in relation to the various programs already being pursued under the R2030 Challenge Design, and the current status and future directions of discussion with regard to each of these topics.

The process for giving concrete shape to initiatives will be established through "forums at multiple levels for all students to become involved in academic affairs and university development (College-level five-way discussion meetings, forums for discussion with various university organs)," as confirmed in Chapter I.

Summary of the AY2022 Plenary Council

The AY2022 Plenary Council provides a model for the pursuit of university development in the future, with undergraduate and graduate students participating in discussion of university development through dialogue with the University, with all parties conscious of their respective roles. Other outlets for discussion, such as the five-way discussion meetings and forums for discussion with various university organs, similarly furnish opportunities for student involvement in university development. The pursuit of ongoing dialogue through these opportunities will be a source of strength for Ritsumeikan going forward, and will support the learning and growth of Ritsumeikan students long into the future.

Based on the outcomes of discussion in the AY2022 Plenary Council, the next open session of the Plenary Council is scheduled to convene in AY2026.

January 25, 2023

Chancellor, The Ritsumeikan Trust

Chair, Central Standing Committee, Ritsumeikan University Student Union

President, Ritsumeikan University Graduate Student Council

Executive Committee Chair, Ritsumeikan University Faculty and Staff Union

Executive Director, Ritsumeikan Cooperative (observer)



Representatives of each party at the signing ceremony for the Memorandum of the AY2022 Plenary Council of the University.

Glossary of Terms

EDGE

The EDGE+R Program, a co-curricular practice-based program designed to foster a new generation of innovators. EDGE is centered on project-based learning (PBL) in diverse teams of students participating in the program, who work closely together and experience the fascination of creating new forms of value (innovation), using practical activities to develop the mindset and skills required to create, execute, and achieve goals.

RIMIX

An abbreviation of Ritsumeikan Impact-Makers Inter X (Cross) Platform. RIMIX is designed to provide a single platform to showcase initiatives pursued in the Ritsumeikan Academy ranging from startup support to development of talent and mindsets for the resolution of social problems, and to expand collaborations both within and beyond the Academy. Connecting with Ritsumeikan's practical education programs that foster individuals committed to achievement of the SDGs, RIMIX aims to realize dynamic social change by developing qualities and capabilities required for participants to become "impact makers."

NEXT Student Fellows

Graduate (doctoral) students selected for the Ritsumeikan University NEXT (New Educational Cross-Training) Fellowship Program. This program has been in progress since AY2021, following its selection under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's University Fellowship Founding Project for Innovation Creation in Science and Technology. The program provides an environment enabling fellows to devote themselves fully to interdisciplinary, innovative research, supporting their development of the attributes of highly skilled professionals (with research skills plus transferable skills that can be applied in business and other settings) by the end of the doctoral degree program, as well as providing fellows with research focus support funds of 180,000 yen monthly (2.16 million yen annually) and research subsidies of up to 340,000 yen annually, both available over three years.

RARA Student Fellows

Graduate students selected to join the Ritsumeikan Advanced Research Academy (RARA). RARA is pursuing fundamental improvements to the research environment aligned with the career paths for researchers ranging from graduate students and other young researchers through to established researchers. As members of RARA, RARA Student Fellows are provided with opportunities to develop the capabilities essential for young researchers of the future (including the RARA Colloquium and RARA Commons). Moreover, the University provides fellows with research focus support funds of 180,000 yen monthly (2.16 million yen annually) and research subsidies of up to 340,000 yen annually.



Ritsumeikan University

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