

5. Expansion of international activities based on specific transnational research projects

(1) Trends and issues

Most of the 20 institutions selected for this project are approaching it from the perspective of how the “international strategy headquarters” should promote internationalization or international deployment on a university-wide, cross-divisional basis. However, Nagasaki University, Tottori University, and Niigata University take the approach of supporting international deployment of specific research projects on a priority basis, then applying the know-how obtained through these projects to other parts of the university. At Niigata University, the “international strategy headquarters” has gone so far as to select and support one single project from among the range of existing initiatives at the university.

Hokkaido University has set a relatively broad range of target fields and focused its support on projects under the theme of “Sustainable Development.”

Although not a discrete research field, a clearly-defined “Asia-oriented” approach is the focus for international strategy at Kyushu University. This theme provides the core for development of all the university’s strategic international initiatives.

Because internationalization through these approaches is intrinsically different from the general approach to across-the-board improvement, it has been selected for specific attention in this section.

The universities discussed here adopt a strategy of focusing on research projects and fields in which they have a pre-existing specialization that may have been recognized through selection under the 21st Century COE Program. Their international strategy headquarters support international deployment of these research fields on a priority basis, making maximum use of external funding and overseas activity bases and applying the outcomes generated to further efforts in other arms of the university.

Efforts made by the National Institutes of Natural Sciences (NINS), which is the only non-university institution selected for this project, will also be described here. Although they are different from the initiatives of the aforementioned universities, they provide another example of international deployment with the focus on research.

(2) Notable efforts

Tottori University: Using a track record of joint research as a base for further international activity

Tottori University is developing international initiatives in the fields of education and research on a university-wide basis under the theme of “combating desertification”. In October 2005 the university opened a base for education and research in Mexico, which was already an established site for field research undertaken by the university. The base is located within the Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas del Noroeste, S.C. (CIBNOR), with which the university had previously collaborated in education and joint research. The base is used as a hub for student study abroad programs, research activities and technical education (with plans to extend into South America in the future). Through participation in JICA projects and the like, the university has also developed constructive relationships with other countries involved in similar activities (China, Egypt and Mexico).

Nagasaki University: Strategic leverage of external funds and development of an international activity base founded on core fields of expertise

Nagasaki University provides comprehensive support for international activities connected primarily to the university’s chief research strengths – the fields of “tropical and infectious diseases”, “radiation medical science” and “marine environment and biological resources”. This support encompasses tasks such as obtaining funding, processing accounts and

responding to inquiries. Selection under the 21st Century COE Program and the “Program of Founding Research Centers for Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases” led to the establishment of a new base in Vietnam in 2006. In particular, the university plans to support research on “tropical and infectious diseases” first and subsequently apply its results to other fields.

Niigata University: Identifying and providing priority support for internationally competitive research projects within the university

Niigata University’s approach is to use its HQ for Global Strategy, established in June 2005, to identify in-house research resources with the potential for development into international-standard academic research, launch cross-university pilot projects, and focus support on the projects. (The current keyword for this initiative is GIS (Geographical Information Systems), with horizontal development of internal education and research initiatives on uses for GIS in medical and engineering fields, and international projects encompassing the fields of medicine, urban engineering and reconstruction science promoted through the university’s international network of partner institutions). The university’s International Academic Support Office provides assistance to specific projects designated according to strategic criteria.

Hokkaido University: Aiming to create an international research “brand” in the field of sustainable development

This university’s international strategy headquarters, established under the President in 2005, selects in-house research projects that have produced results in the five characteristic research fields related to “sustainable development”: (1) global warming; (2) integrated water management; (3) establishment of a recycling-oriented global community; (4) stable procurement of food and forest resources; and (5) measures against infectious disease. Organic linkages are developed between the projects, and focused support is provided for them.

Kyushu University: Sending a clear “Asia-oriented” message and aiming to serve as a gateway to Asia

Kyushu University has proclaimed an “Asia-oriented” scheme for its future. It has hosted the “Conference of Asian University Presidents”, the “University Summit in Kyushu” and other events led by the university under Presidential initiative. The university also opened the Asia Center under the direction of the President. It is envisaged that the Center will function as a strategic education and research base capable of making policy recommendations and exercising other forms of influence in wider society.

In January 2007, the university established the “Team for the Planning & Coordinating of International joint research” within the Organization for the Planning and Coordination of International Affairs. The team is comprised of seven researchers in different fields with established track records in joint research in Asia. The researchers share examples of good practice and formulate ways to apply them to other divisions and departments within the university.

National Institutes of Natural Sciences: Creation of a trans-disciplinary international community capitalizing on institutional characteristics

National Institutes of Natural Sciences (NINS) has five independent, distinctive laboratories which deploy international academic research activities independently of one another. NINS is operated according to the basic notion that its significance lies in the circulation of academic research across a broad range of academic fields rather than confining research outcomes to the fields in which they were generated. Based on this notion, NINS aims to support the free international academic exchange of researchers in across many

different academic fields.

NINS is now considering the development of an “in-residence international joint research scheme” under which researchers from around the world would gather at NINS and engage in discussion and debate, with a view to creating new research fields and re-establishing the ideal of academism.

NINS established its international strategy headquarters in August 2005, with NINS President serving as the head. The International Cooperation Office was set up within the headquarters.

The establishment of the international strategy headquarters was used as an opportunity to develop a network of internal personnel in charge of international operations. These personnel meet regularly and share information and expertise from each laboratory for the purpose of yielding improvements for NINS as a whole.

(3) Analysis and proposals

Effectiveness of support for specific fields on a priority basis

The approach of providing support for international deployment in specialty fields may not work at large-scale universities which place importance on the autonomy of each department. However, this approach could be successfully applied in universities with limited human resources and funds for international activities.

Multifaceted utilization of “research” bases

Nagasaki University and Tottori University have established overseas bases as an indispensable part of their research strategy. It is noteworthy that these overseas bases are utilized not only for research activities, but also provide support for distinctive international education programs incorporating long-term overseas training, internships, and the like.

Important features of activities conducted by universities cited in “Notable Efforts”

Recently, domestic research funding schemes are increasingly demanding an international approach. It is notable that the universities cited above equate “research strategy” with “international strategy”, with the departments concerned collaborating under a unified approach and placing particular importance on fund-raising.

Also noteworthy is Nagasaki University’s multi-tiered approach, successfully combining several different internal and external funds.

The approaches of Nagasaki University, Tottori University, and Niigata University share a common characteristic whereby the headquarters allocate human and physical resources on a priority basis to international deployment of specialty fields. Utilizing characteristic features to promote international development in a focused manner can serve as a viable option particularly for smaller-scale universities. All the efforts cited above are designed in order that the expertise they generate may be applied to other fields of activity. It is thus important to monitor how they develop into the future.

The approaches of Hokkaido University and Kyushu University involve prioritizing a certain interdisciplinary theme that is conceived as characteristic of the university, and developing international activity around this theme. Efforts of these universities are notable in that international activity highlights each university’s distinctive character.

NINS’s “in-residence international joint research scheme” is a substantial scheme that employs an international viewpoint to demonstrate the significance of integrating five laboratories with different attributes. It is hoped that the scheme takes concrete shape in the coming years.