



## WPI and the revitalization of research in Japan

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Ten years on from the launch of the WPI Program, each of the WPI centers has developed into an organization that is regarded extremely highly globally. This is all due to the deeply enthusiastic counsel and advice provided by the Program Committee, especially former Program Committee Chairperson Hiroo Imura and present Chairperson Ryoji Noyori; the committed support provided by the PDs and POs; the outstanding research capabilities and leadership of the directors of each center; and the continued assistance provided by the presidents of the host institutions, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them all for their efforts.

2016 marks the tenth year of the planned government support and there have been lively discussions amongst stakeholders in the program regarding its future direction. The discussions have covered issues such as how to maintain and further develop the outstanding achievements of each center to date; whether or not the burden placed on the host institutions is too heavy; the fact that it would be a waste not to feed research results back into the host institutions and into other universities and R&D organizations; thoughts on the establishment of new centers; how many WPI centers are ultimately necessary in Japan; and so on.

With regard to centers for which government support is ending, the host institutions have fortunately indicated their resolve to appropriately position the centers and work to maintain them. While the government will do everything it can to provide support, the government also has high expectations for efforts on the part of host universities and organizations to fully incorporate and internalize the valuable research results. The government is also planning to launch a program to create an environment for other organizations to be able to utilize the knowledge built up by each WPI center, as assets shared by everyone in Japan.

It has been noted that in the same ten-year span, the global standing of Japan's universities in general, as well as Japan's scientific, technological, and academic research environments have experienced a relative decline. There can be no doubt that that poses a potential crisis for Japan's future. It is essential that we build on the achievements of the WPI Program to overcome this situation.

In FY 2016, we have been able to earmark funding for two new centers in our budgetary request for FY 2017. Although there is a need for further discussions by the Program Committee and other bodies regarding the total number of centers that will ultimately be required, I believe that we are slowly but surely advancing to the next stage of the program.

The WPI Program is targeted at basic research in the field of natural sciences. As can be seen from the example of artificial intelligence, these days technology itself is becoming closely intertwined with the very structure of society. I realize that people are already cognizant of this fact, but it is my hope that they will value the relationship between basic research and the development of contemporary society.

Through the further advancement of the WPI Program, MEXT is aiming to enhance the standard of Japan's academic and technological research, and enhance the international standing of Japan's universities and research institutes. I would like to express once again my gratitude to everyone involved in supporting and nurturing the WPI Program and request your continued cooperation with the program's future development and expansion.