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External Evaluation Report for the FY2018–2023 Project Results

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This document reports the results of an external evaluation of the FY2018–2023 project results based on the attached Report on the Results of the Initiative for Realizing Diversity in the Research Environment (Advanced Type) Project for FY2018–2023.

1) Initiatives aimed at achieving a recruitment rate of 30% or more for women researchers

Remarks: It is highly regrettable that the recruitment rate for women researchers did not show improvement over the project period and that even in the final year, the results were significantly lower than the target. I cannot help but be concerned about whether the retention rate and promotion rate can be improved in the long term. Unless the recruitment rate is improved first, the retention rate cannot be raised, and improvement of the promotion rate may level off too. To ensure that the project's progress in enhancing the research capabilities of women researchers is not reversed, I ask that the initiatives implemented to date be thoroughly reviewed to identify effective means for improvement.

2) Initiatives aimed at improving the percentage of women holding higher ranking positions (promotion rate)

Remarks: Although evaluation is difficult due to the significant yearly fluctuation, it is highly commendable that the final year's promotion rate almost reached the target on a three-year moving average basis. The PI Training Program for International Collaborative Research could not dispatch researchers abroad through FY2020 to FY2022 due to the COVID pandemic, and the program had to be conducted online. It was unfortunate that the initial plan did not go as expected. In FY2023, when overseas travel became possible, seven individuals applied for the program—exceeding the designated quota for dispatch—of which three were dispatched. This was a very positive sign, and I have high hopes for the program's future. (It has been reorganized under a new name: International Collaborative Researcher Training Program). Although the Preparatory Program for Participation in the PI Training Program was, in the end, only implemented in FY2018, it is deemed effective for increasing the number of long-term dispatch candidates. Therefore, it would be desirable to consider resuming a similar short-term dispatch program.

3) Initiatives aimed at increasing the base of next-generation young researchers

Remarks: It is highly commendable that the International Collaborative Early-career Researcher Training Program and International Human Resource Exchange Program were vigorously implemented during FY2018 and FY2019 and that they contributed to improving the dispatched researchers' academic achievements. These programs were virtually dormant during the COVID pandemic years of FY2020–2022, with only one dispatched participant and one online participant, respectively, but maybe this could not have been helped. Going forward, I hope the overseas dispatch programs are improved to offer more diverse options in terms of purpose, period, and age. The role model exchange meetings gathered many participants and appear to have been conducted effectively. To allow diverse role models to be featured in future exchange meetings, I would like to see the meeting developed into one that transcends the barriers between academia and industry.

4) Enhance the diversity environment and expand it beyond the university

Remarks: The creation, publication, and content of the Basic Policy and Guidelines for Diverse Sexualities and Genders at Kobe University are highly commendable. There are no short cuts in organizational culture reform; it is essential to keep thoroughly disseminating the policy and guidelines to all related parties. I look forward to the results of awareness campaigns and training activities that utilize the educational materials created by the Gender Equality Office. Additionally, it is highly commendable that the Diversity Forum was successfully held each year throughout the project period involving discussions around a variety of topics.

5) Verification of the results and evaluations of the Overseas Dispatch Program for Women Researchers

Remarks: The academic achievements of women researchers before and after their overseas dispatch under this project from FY2018–2022 were compared, which allowed the results of dispatch to be confirmed both objectively and quantitatively. This is highly commendable. There is a significant difference between young researchers dispatched abroad and those of regular female faculty in terms of the number of academic papers and that of international conference presentations, which lends hope to further improvement of academic achievements in the future. Furthermore, seven of the 24 dispatched researchers were promoted during the project period. Promotion rate improvement was difficult to verify based on figures from the entire university, but focusing on dispatched researchers allowed the results to be confirmed clearly.

6) Initiatives over the entire six-year period of the project

Remarks: The initiatives aimed at enhancing research capabilities—primarily the overseas

dispatch of women researchers affiliated with Kobe University—are evaluated as generally effective. However, there are concerns about the future since the initiatives aimed at increasing the total number of women researchers have not produced visible results. I understand that researchers could not be dispatched during the COVID pandemic years of FY2020–2022 and that planned activities had to be scaled back. I would like to learn about any activities, no matter how small, involving creative solutions that were implemented in a constrained environment.