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External Evaluation Report for Project Results of the FYs 2018-2019

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Based on the attached Report on the Results of the Initiative for Realizing Diversity in the Research Environment (Advanced type) Project for FYs 2018–2019, the international external evaluation results for FYs 2018-2019 project results have been carried out. The results are as follows:

I Overall evaluation

1) The situation surrounding Kobe University within Japan and overseas

Kobe University is not currently leading other national universities in the promotion of gender equality. However, for the present, many active efforts are being made for the Initiative for Realizing Diversity in the Research Environment (Advanced type), which is achieving favorable results. Kobe University's efforts in these activities have been evaluated highly also from an international perspective. For future efforts, we urge the university to re-examine the agenda and the numerical targets that need to be achieved based on gender equality promotion measures in Japan and overseas, and promote and strengthen these further.

Of the United Nations SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), the fifth goal is gender equality. Overseas, there are reports of significant trouble in the research conditions of women researchers due to the Stay Home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nature). Achieving diversity, which is the axis of gender equality, is an important key for improving the research environment from an international perspective.

Within Japan, the 5th Basic Plan for Gender Equality (Cabinet decision on December 25, 2020) has the slogan of “a society in which women shine”. In the Basic Plan, the numerical targets set in 2003 were carried over, and the aim of “promoting initiatives to achieve approximately 30% of women in leadership positions in the 2020s as quickly as possible” was set. As a basic direction for measures related to expanding women's participation in science/technology and academic fields, “actively appointing women researchers and engineers in higher-ranking positions” and “supporting the development of women leaders” are specified.

Based on this national Basic Plan, the Japan Association of National Universities (JANU) set the following targets in the Action Plan (FYs 2012-2025) for the Promotion of Gender Equality in National Universities (January 14, 2021; Japan Association of National Universities Education and Research Committee): “The ratio of women faculty in national universities was 17.7% as of May 1, 2020, and we aim to raise this to 30%. In order to achieve this target by 2030, it will be necessary to increase the

percentage by 12.3 points over a ten-year period from the current value of 17.7% (as of May 1, 2020). Therefore, we will strive to increase the ratio of women faculty by six points to 24% or higher in the five-year period up to 2025.”

In FY 2019, the proportion of women faculty at Kobe University was 16.3%, which was lower than the JANU average of 17.7%. In this Project, the numerical target to be achieved by the end of the Project (FY 2023) is set at 22%. Compared with the JANU’s target of at least 24% by 2025, Kobe University’s target of 22% by FY 2023 is by no means low. However, if the university can continually achieve a retention rate of 30%, which is the challenge for this Project, it is not impossible to achieve a 30% rate of women faculty by the last fiscal year of the Project. Instead of being satisfied with the current somewhat modest target, as a management strategy by the university, we hope that the proportion of women faculty will increase under the President’s strong leadership as a management strategy by the university.

2) Overall evaluation for project results

Overall, we can highly evaluate the efforts of the Project. Above all, the following points are highly regarded. First, we can see a strong motivation to promote the agenda in the University’s actions, such as responding to the majority of items pointed out in the FY 2018 external evaluation. Second, there is an increase in achievements in areas such as internationalization and improving research capabilities, and this is certainly linking to the empowerment of young women researchers.

As cited under Society 5.0 and SDGs, which are challenges of global concern as well as academia and government in Japan, there is a need for initiatives to integrate social and natural sciences. The Basic Act on Science and Technology was revised to include fields of social science as well. Moving forward, we hope for further expansion of such initiatives to promote not just the development of women researchers in science but also realize the research environment that encourages active interaction between women researchers beyond social and natural sciences.

II Evaluation of individual agendas

1) Achieve a recruitment rate of over 30% women researchers

(1) Target for the recruitment rate of women researchers

For FY 2019, the recruitment rate target of over 30% women researchers was not achieved. This is extremely unfortunate, but it was not an impossible target. In addition, among the following five disciplines with below 10% of women faculty, Advanced Economics and Business Administration Research, Science, Engineering, System Informatics, and Maritime Sciences), Engineering Discipline have been highly evaluated for their active efforts in raising the women employment rate to 30.8% (FY 2019 data, the same below).

It is also highly regarded that various appeals have been made to the administration and faculty heads by the Gender Equality Office, and meetings have been implemented in efforts for achieving

the target. Based on negotiations like these, we hope that each faculty will consider effective employment plans and share faculty targets and results as well as good practice across the university, and by doing so visualize the targets and results.

With regard to the high employment rate of women academic researchers and assistant professors, there are both the positive aspect of active employment of young women researchers and the negative aspect of destabilized employment of young women researchers and difficulties they face in work-life balance due to life events (childbirth, etc.). As such, a courteous follow-up for each researcher after they are employed is desired.

(2) Visualization of gender statistics

Visualization of gender statistics such as retention rates of women faculty was implemented in FY 2019, and is evaluated highly. These statistics can be easily searched from the top page of the dedicated website of the Gender Equality Office, and are easy to understand with charts for each department. Further improvements would be desirable, such as adding simple explanations to the charts (targets, evaluation of achievement, comparisons, etc.), one graph that compares the proportions of both students and faculty, or graphs that show the shift in the proportion of women faculty (currently it is limited to numerical data).

2) Improve career progression/promotion rate

(1) Promotion rate of women researchers

In FY 2019, the average promotion rate of women researchers was 21.4% across the university. We highly regard that the target of 20% was exceeded, but there are concerns that the difference in job rank has not shrunk. Based on this, future challenges are as follows.

First, the issue of the rate of women professors differing significantly between departments has not been sufficiently improved.

Second, in the five abovementioned disciplines in which the retention rate of women faculty is below 10%, aside from the Science discipline (with three women professors), the number of women professors ranges from zero to one. It is necessary to strongly promote the employment and promotion of women professors across the university. In order to reflect the opinions of a minority within an organization, there needs to be representation of a minimum of 30%, or at least three people in absolute numbers. At present, the opinions of women within the faculties seem to be hardly reflected. In the Faculty of Engineering, the rate of women students is the lowest at 15.9%, and the rate of women students and the rate of women faculty are not balanced at all. For this reason, there are no role models, and it is feared that the further declining birth rate will hinder the admission of women students.

(2) Rate of women in executive positions

The rate of women in executive positions is rising, and this is overall regarded highly. We hope that the university will continue this trend and strive to increase the proportion of women even more.

(3) Overseas dispatch of women faculty

The targets for overseas dispatch of women faculty were achieved, which is very highly regarded. In particular, I would like to point out specific items that are highly evaluated, as well as challenges moving forward.

The first point that can be evaluated highly is how the university set up a Preparatory Program for Participation in the PI Training Program in FY 2018 as preparation for long-term overseas postings, and currently has eight researchers including assistant professors using this program. In addition, there is a diverse range of fields that are not biased to a specific field, and there are various dispatch destinations as well.

The second point that can be evaluated highly is that one person was promoted from a lecturer to an associate professor. This is extremely effective as a role model.

Third, in terms of future challenges, as traveling within Japan and overseas has been significantly restricted due to COVID-19, it is desirable for the university to investigate new ways of international exchange such as supporting online collaborative research.

3) **Increase the base of next-generation young researchers**

The International Human Resource Exchange Program has been steadily implemented and its results have been publicized and shared in reports. This is highly regarded. We also highly evaluate the continued efforts targeting junior high and high school girls, such as Open Campus events and the **Kansai Kagaku Juku for Female Junior and Senior High School Students**. Moving forward, we hope that the effects of these efforts will be demonstrated through data, such as pathway results.

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

In terms of enhancing the diversity environment and expanding it beyond the university, we highly evaluate all of the targets being achieved. The leaflet created, which includes the Kobe University Diversity Statement, is easy to understand and very memorable.

On the other hand, while the initiative to set up the Diversity Fund (goal of 50 million yen) to ensure the continuity of the Project is highly regarded, visualization of the results is not sufficient. For example, it was reported that the Kobe University Fund has received 6.03 million yen in donation (FY 2019), there is no link to this report on the dedicated diversity website. The actual amount of fund raised is also quite far from the goal. In order to also verify its further progress in future, we hope that the university will make the data and results of the fund visible, and appeal both internally and externally that its diversity promotion is effective in developing capable women researchers while

cooperating with companies, etc.

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

The improved research results of participants in the Overseas Dispatch Program for Women Researchers have been verified with data, which is very highly rated. We also highly evaluate that there is an article on the research reporting meeting on the dedicated website.

However, participants in the existing Kobe University Long Term Overseas Visit Program for Young Researchers were all male, and the relationship between this program and the Overseas Dispatch Program for Women Researchers, a new initiative that began in this Project, is somewhat unclear. For example, if the existing program (the former) was difficult for women researchers to be highly regarded in and so the latter was set up as a positive action for this, then it is desirable to set a target to include logical integration of the latter into the former. If the both systems are permanently in place, it is desirable for the university to clearly differentiate the objectives and effects of each system.

III Expectations for further progress in initiatives

Lastly, I will add a few additional remarks on the items pointed out and challenges proposed by the International Advisory Committee for Diversity Promotion.

1) Candidate issue

For employment and promotion, the issue is often attributed to the lack of women candidates. However, this reasoning is not appropriate when compared with the number of enrolled undergraduate and graduate students.

At Kobe University, the ratio of women students is high in the majority of faculties. Even in the Faculty of Engineering, which has the lowest ratio of women students, the rate is 15.8% (women faculty rate is 9.6%). This imbalance between the student rate and the faculty rate suggests that the training of women researchers has failed, and the possibility of women being candidates for employment and promotion is unconsciously restricted. If there are no women role models, it will be difficult to secure women students. Having a university-wide target for the women faculty rate is essential, but at the same time, an important goal is balancing the women student rate (at least the women graduate student rate) and women faculty rate in each faculty.

When considering the high rate of women undergraduate and graduate students, it is difficult to think that there are consistently no women candidates. In the case that candidates are disproportionately comprised of men, it is necessary to have a willingness to temporarily freeze hiring until a certain level of gender balance in the candidates is achieved.

2) Promoting understanding of positive action

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the positive action initiative (affirmative improvement measures) such as setting numerical targets to increase the women researcher rate and actively employing and promoting women, it is not uncommon for men researchers to feel a sense of unfairness, or women researchers to have feelings of hesitation. In terms of the effectiveness of such positive actions, it is necessary to gather good examples from both in and outside the university and share them across the university, and make efforts to obtain the empathy of faculties. In this sense, the PI Training Program for International Collaborative Research in this Project is a good example of the empowerment of women researchers. The numerical targets have been reached, and the program is going well. We hope that this will be used effectively.

For the appointment of women in upper administration, this is possible at once with the President's approval. The more women participate in the university's decision-making process, the more trusted the university will be internationally, and the more flexible the risk response will be. The proportion of women in upper administration is considered to be a reflection of the university administration's strong motivation for improvement and risk aversion, and it should be noted that this is an important indicator of international university evaluation.

3) Granting incentives

We strongly hope for the visualization of achievements and efforts, such as recognizing faculties that cooperate in the promotion of gender equality as Gender Equality Champions, which is the aim of the Project, and appealing this externally.

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