

Education issues in Japan

ONE of the most commonly quoted statistics about Japanese higher education is that graduates comprise only about 3% of total student numbers (compared, say, with the UK where graduates comprise 20% of all students). What is less often mentioned is that even this 3% meant 46,000 graduate students in 1973—more than in the UK. Even so, the concept of the graduate course as an integral part of the structure of a university is less common in Japan. As the table shows, half of all universities do not have such courses.

Since the Second World War the number of universities in Japan has increased enormously. For national universities the government took the view that newly established institutions should not have graduate courses; rather, the courses in the former imperial universities should be enlarged in size and scope. Some additional financial support was forthcoming for research and education, but in general staff numbers and facilities were not allowed to increase.

This selective funding, however, was seen to widen the gap between research activities in universities with and without graduate schools, so great, almost fanatical, pressures developed in the early 1960s to develop graduate courses. Originally such courses were intended primarily to educate new research scientists, but industry increasingly demanded people with master's degrees, many of which courses are now much more closely related to production processes than to research.

The market for people with doctorates is limited to universities and the research institutes of government and private industry. But enrolment in higher education seems to be reaching saturation, so universities are no longer taking on many new staff; the same is true of most other institutions, with exceptions only in the environmental and social sciences. The problem of the so-called 'over-doctors' is serious, and many have proposed an increase in the number of postdoctoral fellowships as a way of preserving a reservoir of highly qualified manpower for future demands.

The Japanese concept of the chair (*koza*) undoubtedly had its origins in the European professorial chair, although there are many differences.

It is the structural unit of the faculty, responsible for education and research in a specific subject area, and is composed basically of one professor, one assistant professor and two assistants. It is provided with its own running expenses and facilities. Although often criticised as an indestructible castle of conservation and hierarchy, it functioned reasonably well in the pre-war imperial university, and has also been fitted into the present framework of graduate education. Partly because of the rapid expansion of the size of enrolment, and partly because of the enormous development of the sciences, the idea emerged that it would be more desirable to lift the restriction that the structural unit for education should be identical with that for research. It was hoped that this would make teaching as well as research more flexible and dynamic. After lengthy discussions, the laws governing the structure of the universities, both national and private, have been modified to allow the possibility of avoiding the traditional structure of the faculty based on the *koza* system, and to admit a more flexible one. Any new venture has to be discussed with the Ministry of Education, of course.

One of the issues from a recent report from the University Council (*Daigaku-setchi Shingikai*) in the Ministry of Education is the possibility of independent graduate institutions outside the universities. Although apparently a reasonable proposal, and even though such an institution may be highly qualified in research, there still needs to be an appropriate mechanism to link research with the educational background characteristic of a university. The lack of a mechanism for encouraging interaction between research and education could be harmful. The report also mentioned that it would be worth considering associated graduate institutions administered through the cooperation of several universities. Serious efforts are being made in certain groups of universities (including cooperation between national and private universities) to encourage the exchange of teaching staffs or of student credits. These changes will be particularly useful in developing interdisciplinary courses such as information science or environmental science.

from Yoshinoku Kakiuchi, Tokyo

Anti-nuclear critic faces dismissal

by Allan Piper

A LEADING West German nuclear scientist is faced with dismissal from his chair at the University of Bremen, apparently because of his support for the anti-nuclear energy lobby. Dr Jens Scheer, Professor of Nuclear Physics at Bremen and a state parliamentary candidate for the German communist party (KPD), has claimed that the action against him arises out of his active criticism of the West German nuclear programme, and that it is not a consequence of his political affiliations, as is officially claimed.

Professor Scheer was suspended on September 23 following his alleged involvement in a disturbance on the university campus during which the officials of a civil court were attacked by egg throwers. Though he denies the charge he will now face a special disciplinary tribunal. The University authorities have stated that they are seeking his dismissal, the official reason given being that Professor Scheer, as a member of the KPD, has contravened "the code of honour which every [civil servant] must, through his whole behaviour profess and seek to maintain". Although as head of a university department Professor Scheer holds what is effectively a life appointment under existing German law, his dismissal on those grounds would be perfectly in order. A growing body of support for him maintains, however, that a little used legal clause has been invoked to mask the real reason for dismissal.

Professor Scheer's supporters, including a large number of eminent European academics and political organisations, believe that in seeking to remove him from his position at the university, the authorities hope to overcome a potentially powerful source of opposition to the West German nuclear energy programme. As yet Germany has no nationally coordinated anti-nuclear lobby but in the past Professor Scheer has often provided expert support for small, local protest organisations. Further, since his arrival at Bremen in 1971 Professor Scheer has established his department as a centre for the study of the interactions between science, technology and society, and in May this year the department published a book examining the strategy and consequences of nuclear development.

● Yesterday it was learnt that Professor Scheer's suspension has been overruled by a court of law, allowing him to resume his normal duties at the university, but dismissal proceedings will still go ahead. □

	Total no. of universities	master's degrees only	Universities offering	
			master's degrees and doctorates	doctorates only
National	81	38	26	1
Public	33	4	8	7
Private	299	37	72	12
Total	413	79	106	20