

# BLAZING A TRAIL FOR REFORM

**KYOTO UNIVERSITY** is renowned as a research pioneer, boasting more Nobel and Fields laureates than any other Japanese institution. Now, as a **DESIGNATED NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**, it is breaking new ground with organizational and management reform.

**Selected among the first three Designated National Universities (DNUs)**, Kyoto University sees a golden opportunity to implement far-reaching reforms.

"Reform of Japan's national universities has been one of the top priorities in government policy in the past decade," says Nagahiro Minato, Kyoto University's Provost. "It is being driven by Japan's static economy, rapidly ageing population, and decline in industrial competitiveness and research and development."

To address these issues, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has launched the DNU initiative, which aims to raise education standards and innovation in Japan's national universities by relaxing regulations on tuition fee caps and business investment restrictions for selected universities.

"Based on more flexible regulations, the DNU system gets national universities to devise their own mid- to long-term plans for education, research and administration," Minato says. "This is radically different from conventional government-led reform of national universities. We think it's an inspired initiative."

Kyoto University's vision has four pillars: forging a flexible and dynamic approach to

knowledge creation; attracting top-quality scholars and staff in a diverse range of fields; exploring new forms of social engagement; and developing a world-class management style.

### Creating a flexible environment for research

The university is seeking to cultivate originality and explore new frontiers, particularly in the fields of regenerative medicine, materials science, life science, mathematical science and primatology. This requires developing a research organization that is adaptable and dynamic. For example, the Kyoto University Institute for Advanced Study provides an environment where top researchers from different fields can work together, says Minato.

### Greater global collaboration

The university is also seeking to promote collaboration on a global level through measures such as on-site laboratories in conjunction with overseas institutions. Kyoto University's office in Bangkok works with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to strengthen collaboration on a broad range of topics, including science and medical technology, culture, and history.

In terms of education, the university will offer international students the same high-quality

undergraduate programmes as those provided to local students and will offer joint Master degree courses in cooperation with key international partners (Germany's Heidelberg University has done since October 2017, and Canada's McGill University will do so from April 2018). An international student recruitment office will be set up to attract promising foreign students.

Kyoto University will explore a new form of social engagement: sharing research outcomes with industry, establishing venture businesses and promoting research cooperation between academia and industry.

"Kyoto University will enhance its research and education through these collaborations, creating a new model to lead national universities throughout Japan," says Shinji Asonuma, executive vice president for collaboration with industry and government.

### Evidence-based humanities and social sciences

Known as a major research hub for oriental culture and philosophy from the 1910s, the university was the birthplace of the Kyoto School philosophical movement. While some have questioned the value of humanities and social sciences research at national universities,

Kyoto is firm in its commitment. "We believe we need to create a new movement in humanities and social sciences and transmit it from Kyoto to the world," Minato says.

The university will cultivate evidence-based humanities and social sciences by incorporating mathematical science, informatics and genetics. Additionally, it will explore research in oriental culture and philosophy within an international network. Through doing this, the university hopes to develop guidelines for addressing pressing global issues such as ageing populations, poverty and economic disparity.

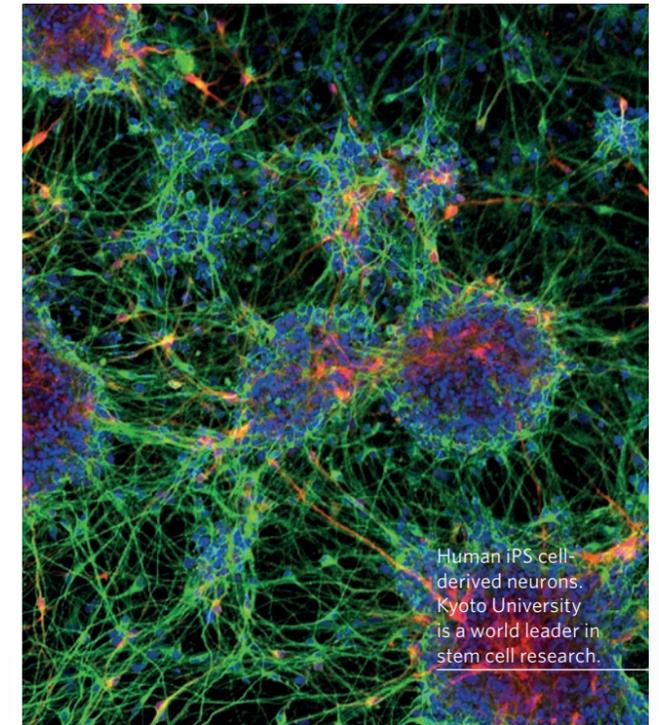
### Reforming from the bottom up

A vital aspect of Kyoto University's vision is institutional management reform. "The world now wants to know more about how Japanese management can change, rather than being merely reminded of the advanced state of Japanese science," Minato says.

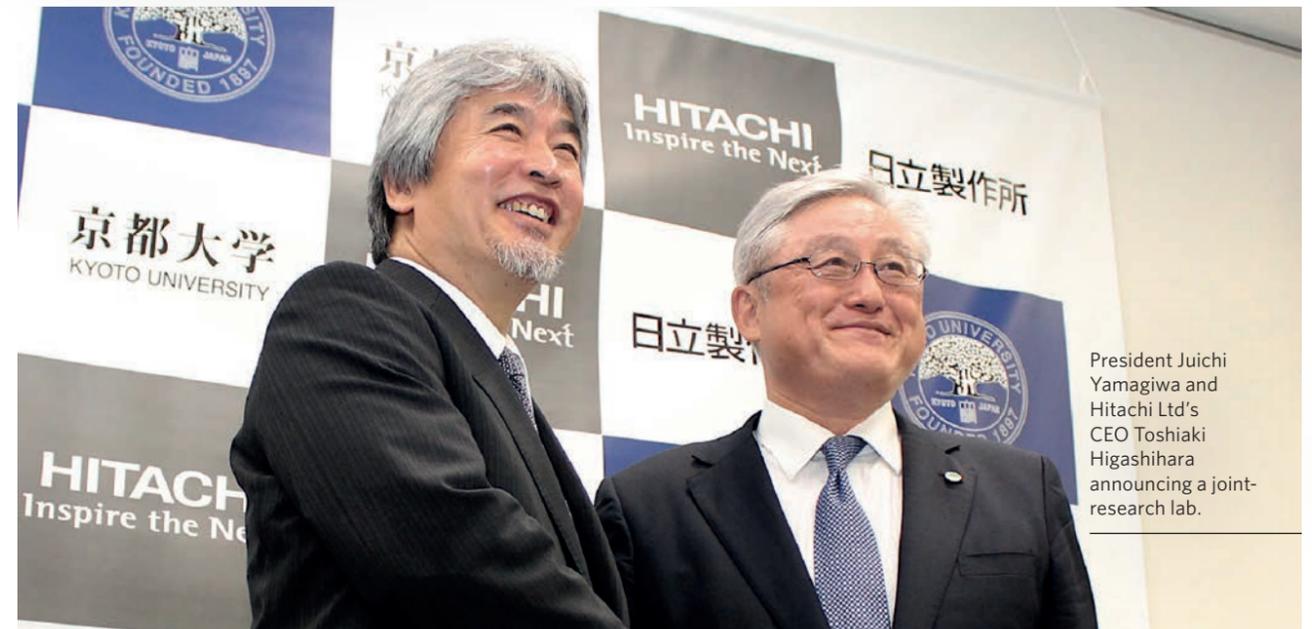
Historically, departments at Japan's national universities have been strongly independent from each other, which hindered the ability to provide top-down guidance. To counteract this, the University Strategy Council has been established to offset top-down leadership with bottom-up



Distinguished professors of the Institute for Advanced Study, clockwise from upper left: Tasuku Honjo, Tetsuro Matsuzawa, Susumu Kitagawa, Shigefumi Mori.



Human iPS cell-derived neurons. Kyoto University is a world leader in stem cell research.



President Juichi Yamagiwa and Hitachi Ltd's CEO Toshiaki Higashihara announcing a joint-research lab.

initiatives. "We believe this is an important step for helping the president and staff members in different departments to communicate, make decisions and act on decisions together when creating future strategies for the university as a whole," Minato comments.

Another vital point is Kyoto University's approach for

increasing funding. Minato thinks it is crucial to diversify and expand external funds to enable independent management of national universities. Specifically, the university is establishing three companies in consulting, technology transfer and venture support to secure income sources. Under an amended

law, it also plans to form a holding company to manage these businesses.

"Through requests to the government to implement necessary deregulation, we will realize our DNU vision," Minato says. "And by implementing these reforms, we hope to seed the emergence of a new form of national university in Japan." ■



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