

Executive Summary

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1. Background

The theme of the 2001 NIME International Symposium — ‘How can IT help universities to globalize?’— derives from one of the recommendations of the Discussion Group for International Educational Cooperation report, ‘Educational Cooperation in response to IT Revolution’, published in July 2000. Worldwide, the IT revolution is bringing about dramatic changes in work, trade, communications, society and education. IT and related issues featured strongly in the Okinawa Summit and were given high priority in the subsequent policy-setting. The Discussion Group was established to advise the then Minister of Education on ways in which Japan could assist developing nations in their human resource development through IT. Its final recommendations were that Japan should provide educational advisors to help developing nations adopt IT for education and training, develop and assist in the development of international distance education programs, support foreign students in Japanese universities and conduct international symposia on education by IT. The final recommendation led NIME to organize and host this event with the Ministry of Education and Science as the co-sponsor.

2. Summary

The symposium opened with an address by Tetsuhisa Shirakawa, Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, delivered on behalf of the Minister by Atsuko Toyama.

Professor Takashi Sakamoto, Director-General of NIME, then described the policies, provisions of technology and infrastructure and applications of IT that are helping Japanese higher education meet the challenges and opportunities of the information age.

The keynote address by Dr Takuma Otoshi, President of IBM Japan, covered global economic trends, the dramatic changes in society wrought by technology, Japan's decline in global competitiveness, the stakeholders' changing expectations of Japanese universities, the graduate/labour market mismatch and the failure of higher education to change (a theme also taken up later by Professor Arimoto). Dr Otoshi concluded that higher education needed to create change rather than respond (or not respond) to change and

promote educational innovation, e-learning, company-university cooperation and international collaboration

The first speaker in Session 1, *IT and Higher Education: An Overview*, was Professor Halimah B Zaman, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Having discussed the implications of IT for education for the knowledge economy, she explained how the Multimedia Super Corridor, the smart school project and other initiatives by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia were laying the foundations of an integrated e-Education system. This system was designed to help the nation achieve its '2020 Vision' of being a developed country with 40% of its people in post-secondary education within two decades.

Professor Georg Anker of Innsbruck University, Austria then provided the 'implementation roadmap' for moving his institution from traditional to flexible learning. His overall conclusion was that the key to change is not gaining funding for the technology but support for organizational and faculty change.

Professor Xuewei Sun of Tsinghua University, China described IT-based development in higher education at the national and the institutional level and how China was striving to maintain or enhance its leadership in distance education and planning to extend its programs throughout China and across South East Asia.

Alan R Seid, Chair of the Micronesia Investment and Development Corporation, Palau, presented an end-user's perspective on the kinds of educational, technological and economic benefits that Japan provide in assisting the use of IT for the social, educational, healthcare and economic development of small Pacific island nations such as Palau.

Session 2, *Globalization and the Role of Japanese Universities* opened with Dr Jiraporn Intrasai, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Thailand providing some critical perspectives on collaborating transnationally with Japanese universities. She argued for international students to be seen as major stakeholders in such initiatives and for Japanese higher education to be more oriented towards internationalization

Professor Akira Arimoto of Hiroshima University then discussed the knowledge-based society, universal access and lifelong learning, and the failure of Japanese universities, to adapt to changing circumstances. He argued that their teaching is inadequate, that there is a widening gap between university and student expectations and that there Japanese higher education is in need of radical and urgent reform.

Dr Koichi Miyoshi, Deputy Managing Director, JICA, discussed IT and the role of donor agencies in international development. Having described JICA's new approaches for introducing IT, he discussed the possibilities of universities contributing to the new areas of technical cooperation and collaborating with the aid agencies.

In Section 3, *Building International Learning Communities*, Professor Insung Jung, Ewha Womans University, Korea, described government, institutional and intersector initiatives in establishing a national virtual university system in Korea. As part of its reform and expansion of the higher education system, the Ministry of Education has encouraged the creation of nine 'cyber-universities' to provide lifelong learning and vocational education. Professor Jung stressed the importance of quality assurance, instructional design, staff development, cost reduction and incentive policies by government.

Professor William Busch, University of Maryland, then described the Virtual University Education (VIRTUE) program. VIRTUE an example of what can be achieved in collaborative virtual education by merging and focusing the best faculty, research and resources of three preeminent universities. In this case, the partners were the University System of Maryland, Göteborg University, Sweden, and University of Bergen, Norway.

Colin Latchem, Visiting Professor at NIME, outlined the commercial and equity imperatives driving the establishment of international consortia, virtual universities, networks and online learning communities. He stressed that internationalization calls for major transformational change far beyond the current vision of most institutions and required major investment in human resources as well as technology.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

NIME and the symposium organizers are to be congratulated on organizing such a timely event on such an important topic. The sessions were well structured, the presentations were well received, and there was lively debate and exchange. The venue, organization and simultaneous translation were excellent.

Japan is slowly providing the policies, technology, and infrastructure for e-learning but the universities are slow to change. Few faculty are aware of, or sympathetic to, the radical changes needed to confront the challenges of the post-industrial, knowledge-based global economy. Faculty also lack the training and technical support to adopt new methodologies and technology. Japanese performance in university teaching and research is declining by comparison with countries whose economies and higher education Japan wishes to emulate

or surpass, such as the US. Japanese universities are also failing to keep pace with industry's expectations of their graduates. And while Japan may be a world leader in developing technology, it is being overtaken in the systemic application of e-learning by countries such as China, Malaysia and Korea.

Efforts are also needed to bridge the digital divide between and within advanced and developing countries and help learners take advantage of IT regardless of income, status, age, or educational background. One way of doing this is to provide IT-based learning and information centres customized to the needs of remote and otherwise disadvantaged communities. Japanese technology innovation could be harnessed to educational and socio-economic development expertise to help those denied access to education and training.

It is vital to promote IT-based distance education in the Asia-Pacific. It is also important to ensure that the content and delivery reflect local needs, circumstances, cultures and indigenous ways of knowing. At present, the global initiatives in e-learning emanate mainly from North America, the UK, Australia and New Zealand and are driven by commercial rather than equity interests. It is therefore vitally important that Asian universities collaborate in establishing consortia and networks for virtual staff exchanges, virtual learning, and virtual research.

Providing the technology and infrastructure is important but not an answer in itself. What is needed is envisioning and enlightened leadership in government and higher education, and new ways of conceiving, organizing and delivering higher education.

NIME symposia provide an invaluable platform for debating such issues. In their planning for future events, the organizers might consider focusing on: training academic managers and staff in new technology and new ways of teaching and learning; establishing and sustaining IT-based international networks; and how Japan can help developing nations access education and training through IT. To gain maximum strategic leverage in these events, the organizers might also consider whether continuing with open invitations is the best policy, or whether there could be greater merit in targeting invitees with the authority and capacity to create the policies and environments necessary for such changes.