



Message from the President

More than a year has passed since the COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the world and its damaging effects continue at an unprecedented level. With vaccination programs underway across the world, the momentum of the pandemic appears to be slowing in certain countries. In Japan, however, the vaccination rollout is still at a relatively early stage and it will take time for normality to return. In addition, the virus is mutating and explosive growth in infections in the Kansai region is a source of concern. Last year, Akita University faced an unprecedented situation because of the pandemic, and we had no choice but to cancel the graduation and entrance ceremonies. This year as well, the new semester began in circumstances that are far from normal. In particular, because of the risk of variants, students are still being asked to refrain from going out other than for essential reasons, and teaching is based on a combination of face-to-face and remote learning. Therefore, student activities remain subject to considerable restrictions. Media coverage has highlighted how some people have been reluctant to follow the official guidance and to comply with the current restrictions. However, we take pride in the fact that the students of this University understand the purpose of these rules and are fully compliant with them. On the other hand, the impact of the pandemic in terms of economic recession, shifts in industrial structures and knock-on company bankruptcies has been well-publicized. It is also abundantly clear that our post-pandemic society and lifestyle will be vastly different compared to before. Unemployment is an urgent issue that will have a direct impact on our students. We have already begun

our assessment from an academic perspective of the outlook for society post-COVID and we remain fully committed to helping our students to deal confidently with the challenges that face them.

The principles of Akita University can be summarized in the following vision: 1) To develop far-sighted leaders for the world and the region; 2) To build for the future with our sights set on both the local community and the wider world; 3) To construct a rich and plentiful society in co-existence with the local area; 4) To aim for a world which has its roots in the local community. The foundation of this vision is our leading edge research which contributes on both a local and a global basis and the development of the talent which can carry out this research. In order to fulfill the mission of our institution, as expected by society, Akita University has established a system that promotes leading-edge education and research. In recent years, as the demands of Society 5.0 on young people have increased, concerning the utilization of big data, the expansion of the IoT and the development of artificial intelligence, there has been a growing need to produce students who have adapted to this new society. Using the 70th anniversary of the founding of the University the year before last as a springboard, we have begun the process of restructuring our undergraduate departments with an eye on the next 10 years. While the outlook remains uncertain, we recognize that our priority is to educate students who are fully confident in their own abilities to embrace the challenges ahead as they set out into the world. Based on the motto, "The student comes first" our faculty members are fully engaged with the task of stimulating the intellectual curiosity of our students and providing them with a comprehensive educational environment for all their learning needs. Here at the leading edge of education and research into the COVID-19 pandemic, we are still formulating a view of the world and society that will emerge at the end of this crisis. In the next paragraph we provide an overview of the characteristics of each faculty based on the traditions of our University. For now, we still do not know whether the activities of our faculties can resume as they did before, or whether major changes in our approach are required. We remain in the early stages of considering the ramifications of our world and society post-COVID and adapting as effectively as possible to this new outlook.

The four faculties of the University are grounded in the Akita region but offer a perspective on the world as a whole. This is the History and Proud Tradition that we have cultivated here.

The Faculty of Education and Human Studies has a reputation for having the brightest high school and elementary school students in Japan. The faculty has a strong track record of training staff who will become the lynchpins of the educational system. We are developing teacher training focused on traditional formats for the school curriculum, in addition to detailed educational programs. We aim to nurture and develop students who will be "able successors", taking on responsibility for future generations as they are sent out into the world. These students act as the link from generation to generation. In the Department of Regional Studies and Humanities, our aim is to provide support for all students in the face of an uncertain outlook, providing them with an education to ensure they can cope with any challenge, nurturing the notion of flexible thinking and developing their ability to solve local problems from a global point of view,

Here in Akita we are proud to have such an abundance of natural resources, something which connects us with the world at large. This is the thinking behind the name of the department, the Faculty of International Resource Sciences. Originally starting out as the Mining College, the Faculty has developed as a faculty of mining and a faculty of engineering and resource sciences, and has become world-renowned for its research achievements and expertise. We are laying the foundations of a framework for comprehensive education and research into resource sciences, the first of its kind in the world. When students reach 3rd grade, they are divided into small groups of four to five people and are given the opportunity to participate in field work on overseas resources. They get the chance to visit places that their high school contemporaries at other universities have never traveled to themselves. Here students can experience resource sciences on the ground. By having the opportunity to participate at the leading edge of Japan's academic achievements worldwide, they

can appreciate for themselves that learning and scholarship are “alive” and constantly evolving.

The Faculty of Engineering Sciences was established as a faculty of resources, and then developed from the Faculty of Engineering and Resource Science into a faculty that also incorporated elements of science. Akita is the University’s laboratory, continuously producing research results of which we are justifiably proud. An example of this is our research on composite material molding made from metal nanocoils. The aim of this research is to reduce the weight and cost of composite materials. The expectation is that this technology will, in due course, be applied to aircraft fuselages in future. The eyes of the world are upon us as we conduct this research. Furthermore, we are building a research framework to help take the education of science and engineering and associated areas to a new level, focusing on the technology that is central to the fourth industrial revolution, such as IoT, AI and robots.

In the Faculty of Medicine, we can cite the results of educational research that can be shared worldwide and the contribution this makes to regional medical care. In particular, as a leading institution in Akita Prefecture, we have played a key role in controlling the spread of COVID-19, while contributing to local health care as a major provider of medical treatment in Akita. Our annual pass rate in the National Medical Practitioners Qualifying Examinations is amongst the highest in the country. This year it was 99.2%, placing us 5th out of all universities. This bears testament to the comprehensive nature of the education that we offer. In the School of Health Sciences, our pass rate in the National Nursing Examinations, National Physiotherapist Examinations and National Occupational Therapist Examinations is extremely high. It was 100% in the Nursing and Physiotherapist exams and 95.5% in the Occupational Therapist exams.

Furthermore, we remain fully focused on education and research activities that contribute to the community. The Center for Regional Development was established in 2016 for the purpose of consolidating our contribution to regional revitalization in Akita. It consists of two divisions, Community Cooperation and Disaster Prevention and Regional Industrial Research. Three branches of the Community Cooperation and Disaster Prevention Division have been established in the prefecture. The local community, students, and faculty staff come together to farm rice or to make local “iburigakko” (smoked daikon pickles). These are typical of the initiatives we undertake to ensure the merits and virtues of Akita are recognized more broadly. We are continuing our initiatives to expand our sense of pride in our hometowns. These include activities aimed at helping and encouraging aspiring teachers, such as the “Mini Education Practice,” which is an initial step on students’ road to the realization of their dreams and ambitions. The Regional Industrial Research Division is responsible for the development of research projects linked to important policies in Akita. We believe that by aiding the development of industries in the prefecture, we can contribute meaningful solutions to regional issues. In addition, the whole university is focused on research and development of human resources to contribute to the realization of a green society. Last year, we were selected for a grant from the Cabinet Office to develop a system for the electrification of aircraft using next generation motors and to promote R&D and the development of human resources related to this. In April, we established the Joint Research Center for Electric Architecture in collaboration with Akita Prefecture and Akita Prefectural University. Moreover, we will work on other renewable energy sectors, such as offshore wind power generation and surplus electricity utilization, which are also focus areas for the prefectural government.

In order to promote collaboration between medicine, science and technology more effectively and vigorously, we have also relaunched the Medical, Science and Engineering Collaboration initiative, “Yume wo kataru kai” (Dreaming Out Loud), and are focusing on ways to create and promote local industries, for example through the development of equipment and drugs for medical treatment and nursing care, or development of health foods. Akita is one of the most advanced prefectures in Japan in responding to the issue of the declining birthrate and aging population. The prevention and treatment of complications caused by this phenomenon demand urgent attention. We believe Akita University can make a significant contribution to mitigating this situation. With the help of the prefectural government, we have set up the “Advanced Research Center for Geriatric Medicine” as a research base specializing in medical care for the elderly. In addition to pursuing cutting-edge research on geriatric medical care, and promoting interdisciplinary research based on our knowledge of regional sociology, we are also conducting research on the effects of the pandemic on mental and physical health. In April of this year, we established the Research Center for Suicide Prevention with support from Akita Prefecture to engage in a broad range of research across the University into suicide prevention in cooperation with industry, academia, and government, amid growing concern about the impact of the pandemic on physical and mental health.

In this way, Akita University is working to fulfill its role as the “center of All Akita.” Last year, many of our activities were curtailed by the pandemic, but we are ready to start making a contribution again as and when the situation allows.

Our University offers a smooth and seamless progression from undergraduate to post-graduate education. Each research center has a clearly defined mission and objectives. These can be said to be the cornerstone of Akita University’s mission of “repaying society through the contribution of outstanding alumni and the delivery of excellent research.” In Nikkei HR’s “University Employability Rankings 2018”, Akita University achieved the honor of being nominated in first place by Japanese companies among “universities that we would most like to recruit from”. Our graduates’ “dynamism” and “interpersonal skills” were particularly commended. It goes without saying that such personality aspects are innate in the students themselves, but I would like to think that this offers proof that the University provides its students with an environment that brings these qualities to the fore. As a result, this year, we were honored to achieve 46th place in the World University Rankings for Japan.

With Akita University as the “alma mater”, it is our heartfelt ambition to continue to send forth outstanding students into society, and thereby contribute to the growth and greater good of the Akita region.

We remain committed to maintaining our position as a leading academic institution in the post-COVID society, staying nimble and agile in our response to the drastic and dramatic changes that are upon us.

Akita University President

Dr. Fumio Yamamoto, M.D.