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AUSTRALIA: Foreign Student Boom Could Fill the Resource Export Gap

More foreign students started courses in Australian universities, colleges and English schools in 2015 than any year in history, a huge rebound driven by the lower dollar, easier visas and a scheme that allows them to stay for 18 months after graduation. Nearly 147,000 students started courses in the first three months of 2015, above the previous first quarter record of 142,400 in 2009. Universities and other higher education institutions also took their largest ever intake of new international students this year, with 61,493 starting courses in the first quarter. Even as resource exports come under pressure, education service-based income grew 14% in the past year to be worth A\$17.5 billion (US\$13.6 billion). Education is now Australia's third-largest source of income after iron ore and coal. It is substantially larger than tourism, which is worth A\$14.5 billion (US\$11.3 billion) annually.

Source: <http://www.afr.com/news/policy/education/foreign-student-boom-could-fill-the-resource-export-gap-20150614-ghmwcy>

JAPAN: Education and Social Science Departments vs. Societal Needs

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) recently informed all the 86 national universities to review their “departments of teacher training and human & social science” to see if they meet the societal needs. If not, MEXT recommended the universities to abolish them or reform them to meet the needs. The financial resource of the Japanese national universities had long been limited to the non-competitive funds provided by MEXT. However, the epoch-making national university reform that took place in 2004 changed the national university status to independent entities. This has increased the autonomy at the national universities, but on the other hand it has meant that MEXT decreases the non-competitive funds to the independent entities about one percent every year. The decrease is still going on, while the amounts of competitive funds have been increasing. This has been a critical problem for the small universities. For example, for Shiga University, a small-sized national university that has only two departments of education and economics, the MEXT notice this time will be fatal, unless they deal with the problem strategically. Through their internal discussions on how “to meet the societal needs” they decided to establish a new “data science department to train personnel in big data era” in 2016.

Every national university is required to commence its third plan in 2016 after having two six-year plans since 2004. At the request of MEXT, all of them are required to state in the third plan that they will become one of the following three: (1) world-class university; (2) very special in one field; and (3) contributing to the local community. An example is that mentioned above at Shiga University which opted to choose (2). The non-competitive funds that have previously been calculated based on the number of faculty members and students will now be based upon how each national university designs and presents its unique feature in 2016 and beyond.

Source: A summary translation of a Nikkei article – June 22, 2015; a summary translation of a MEXT website article; a phone interview with MEXT