

# RENKEI

# Biennial Report

April 2021 - March 2023



# Contents

<b>From British Council</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>About RENKEI</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction of the Co-Chair system</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
<b>RENKEI Member Institutions Japan</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
<b>RENKEI Member Institutions UK</b> . . . . .	<b>8</b>
<b>RENKEI activities in FY 2021</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>RENKEI Evaluation</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>RENKEI activities in FY 2022</b>	
<b>RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>
<b>Reflections from the host</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>RENKEI Tenth Anniversary Event in Tokyo</b> . . . . .	<b>13</b>
<b>RENKEI Tenth Anniversary Event in London</b> . . . . .	<b>14</b>
<b>Organising Committees</b> . . . . .	<b>15</b>
<b>RENKEI Steering Committee meetings.</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>Future directions for RENKEI</b> . . . . .	<b>17</b>

# From the British Council

## RENKEI at 10

We can look back on our celebration of RENKEI's 10th anniversary with satisfaction. Some highlights of this were a conference in Tokyo, a reception with Minister Freeman and Ambassador Hayashi at the Japanese Embassy in London, and a Climate Adaptation and Resilience project which included the Winter School for Early Career Researchers at Kyoto University. The Winter School showed that a focus on RENKEI Fellows can create exciting opportunities for our Early Career Researchers.

## 'Tilting horizons'

In July 2023, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published its latest report entitled 'Tilting horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific'. It acknowledges the huge potential for an increase in higher education exchanges between the UK and Japan and references the work of RENKEI to seed new areas of collaboration and joint research.

The statistics are now well known: student mobility is modest in both directions and while the UK-Japan research collaboration is of very high quality (at three times the world average and higher than those of the US, China, and Germany), it has been low in its volume. These trends were already apparent in 2011 when university leaders and senior academics first cast their vision for a consortium to catalyse new partnerships.

## UK-Japan: recent developments

In the last two years, there have been significant developments in the UK-Japan relationship.

During Minister Freeman's visit to Keio University in December 2022, he announced the UK Government's **International Science Partnerships Fund**, with a focus on Climate, Health, Technologies, and Talent. Within ISPF, Japan is one of the top priority countries and the programme makes available, for the first time, a significant non-ODA fund for UK-Japan research and innovation.

In Japan, the Japan Science and Technology Agency launched **ASPIRE** (Adopting Sustainable Partnerships for Innovative Research Ecosystem) to fund top-level research and promote researcher mobility. The first call for proposals was released in June 2023.

In April 2023, **Prime Minister Kishida announced** that Japan will work to double the number of international students in Japan, double the number of Japanese students who study overseas, double the number of young people who participate in short-term exchange programmes, and increase the number of scholarships available for international study.

More recently, during the G7 Summit, Prime Minister Sunak and Prime Minister Kishida signed **the Hiroshima Accord**, confirming that the UK and Japan are 'the closest of partners and will stand shoulder to shoulder in tackling the unprecedented global challenges we now face'. They also confirmed that both countries would 'cooperate to revitalise People-to-People exchanges'.

**Taken together, these developments provide a unique moment of opportunity to accelerate our higher education partnerships.**

## Future priorities

At the recent Steering Committee meetings in Tokyo and London, the consortium members discussed the future priorities for RENKEI.

- It was agreed to maintain our focus on climate change and healthcare, while also exploring the scope for new collaboration around different elements of security (climate security, energy security, cyber security, and food security).
- The Steering Committee in London acknowledged the value of maintaining RENKEI's model of convening workshops that bring together researchers around areas of shared interest and then awarding seed funding.
- The Steering Committee agreed to support Newcastle University and Kyushu University in developing a course on Intercultural Communication, to help university administrators and researchers in the sensitive task of navigating cultural differences. The resulting insights and training might be shared more widely in due course.

The next workshop is likely to take place in the Spring of 2024, hosted by one of the UK Universities. The workshop will focus on a topic around Climate Change or Health, areas in which the members of RENKEI possess a wealth of expertise. These are also areas where RENKEI can apply for new seams of funding to scale up successful initiatives.

### **Thanks and congratulations**

In 2022, we adopted a change to RENKEI's governance with the introduction of the Co-Chair model. The University of Southampton and Kyushu University took on the role and our thanks are due to Professor Peter Smith, Senior International Partnerships Manager Maria Norton, Professor Toshiyuki Kono, and Professor Natalie Konomi for their wisdom and skill in steering the consortium.

Finally, we congratulate Tohoku University on being the first institution to receive a grant under Japan's new Endowment Fund: a step change in research capabilities and an advance in a deserved international reputation for excellence.

Matthew Knowles  
Director, British Council Japan  
September 2023



The Japan-UK Research and Education Network for Knowledge Economy Initiatives (RENKEI, the Japanese word for “collaboration”), a partnership of twelve leading universities in the UK and Japan, was established in March 2012 with the British Council as its secretariat, and has now been active for over a decade.

The bilateral relationship between Japan and the UK is attracting more attention than ever from governments, industry, and higher education. The two countries have a long history of partnership and share many common interests and concerns. They each have strong economies and are among the world’s foremost producers of cutting-edge research and technology. They face similar demographic, political, social and industrial challenges, and thus are ideal partners in meeting these demands with innovative solutions.

Member universities have established a close relationship and delivered multiple international workshops in Japan and the UK. Since 2018, RENKEI has been focusing on “climate change” and “health” as its themes for research collaboration. Both of these were included in the “Japan-UK Joint Declaration on Prosperity Cooperation” released jointly by the Japanese and UK Prime Ministers in September 2017 as part of the key framework of cooperation. RENKEI continues to develop these themes and align them ever more closely with national and international priorities.

RENKEI universities are working with stakeholders in the government, industry, and non-profit sectors to develop innovative solutions to realise low carbon societies and to tackle dementia, patient safety, and other related challenges. Workshops addressing climate change and health have been held in a range of face-to-face and online formats and have sparked new collaborations, some of which have been awarded seed funding. RENKEI continues to expand the scope of its activities to address new challenges.

RENKEI’s tenth anniversary year, which coincided with a welcome relaxation of restrictions on international movement, saw the flagship RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme, a year-long initiative bringing together both early career and more established researchers from all the RENKEI members for a popular Winter School in Kyoto, as well as individual exchanges and online mentoring and partnerships. This project was highlighted as best practice by various senior government figures, and the consortium is looking to it as a model for successful hybrid collaborations as RENKEI prepares to enter its third phase. Tenth anniversary events in Japan and the UK also brought together a range of stakeholders to develop the plans for RENKEI’s next decade.



## About RENKEI



# Introduction of the Co-Chair system

A Co-Chair system was introduced in FY 2022, after consultations with members, to allow them to play a more hands-on role in the running of the consortium. Professors Toshiyuki Kono (Kyushu University) and Peter G. R. Smith (University of Southampton) worked closely with the secretariat to develop the tenth anniversary event and identify priorities and opportunities for RENKEI.

## Message from the outgoing Co-Chairs of RENKEI

RENKEI is a truly unique grouping of top universities formed between two great nations in 2012, and which has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Japan and the UK hold education in high esteem, and both nations have demonstrable excellence in higher education, reflected in the quality and reputation of the RENKEI universities. It has been a privilege to have worked as the Co-Chairs of RENKEI, particularly in the 10th anniversary year which saw us celebrate our decade of co-working with anniversary events held in Tokyo and London. These events brought together researchers, academic leaders, industry, government, and diplomats to discuss the state of global higher education, the challenges faced by our two nations, and to work out how RENKEI should go forward into its second decade. Of course, the second decade (of a human life) leads into the dreaded 'teen years', which can see conflict, confusion, and challenges. However, the 'teen years' also represent increasing maturity, growth, and confidence, and we believe RENKEI will also thrive in the coming decade, even if there are some 'teenage tantrums' on the way!

The abiding takeaway from being Co-Chairs is that the core purpose of RENKEI is to create new generations of Japanophiles in the UK, and new generations of Anglophiles in Japan. The events that RENKEI run – the projects, the winter schools, the meetings, the papers – all lead to fantastic research outputs, but just as importantly, they lead to formation of new friendships, and that is critical. And that is how we would like to finish this outgoing message: being part of RENKEI has been a privilege, and we must all thank the British Council team for their dedication and hard work, but most importantly we want to thank everyone who engaged over the anniversary year for their friendship and support.

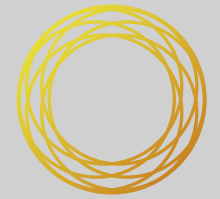
Thanks, RENKEI – you are all awesome.

Peter and Toshi

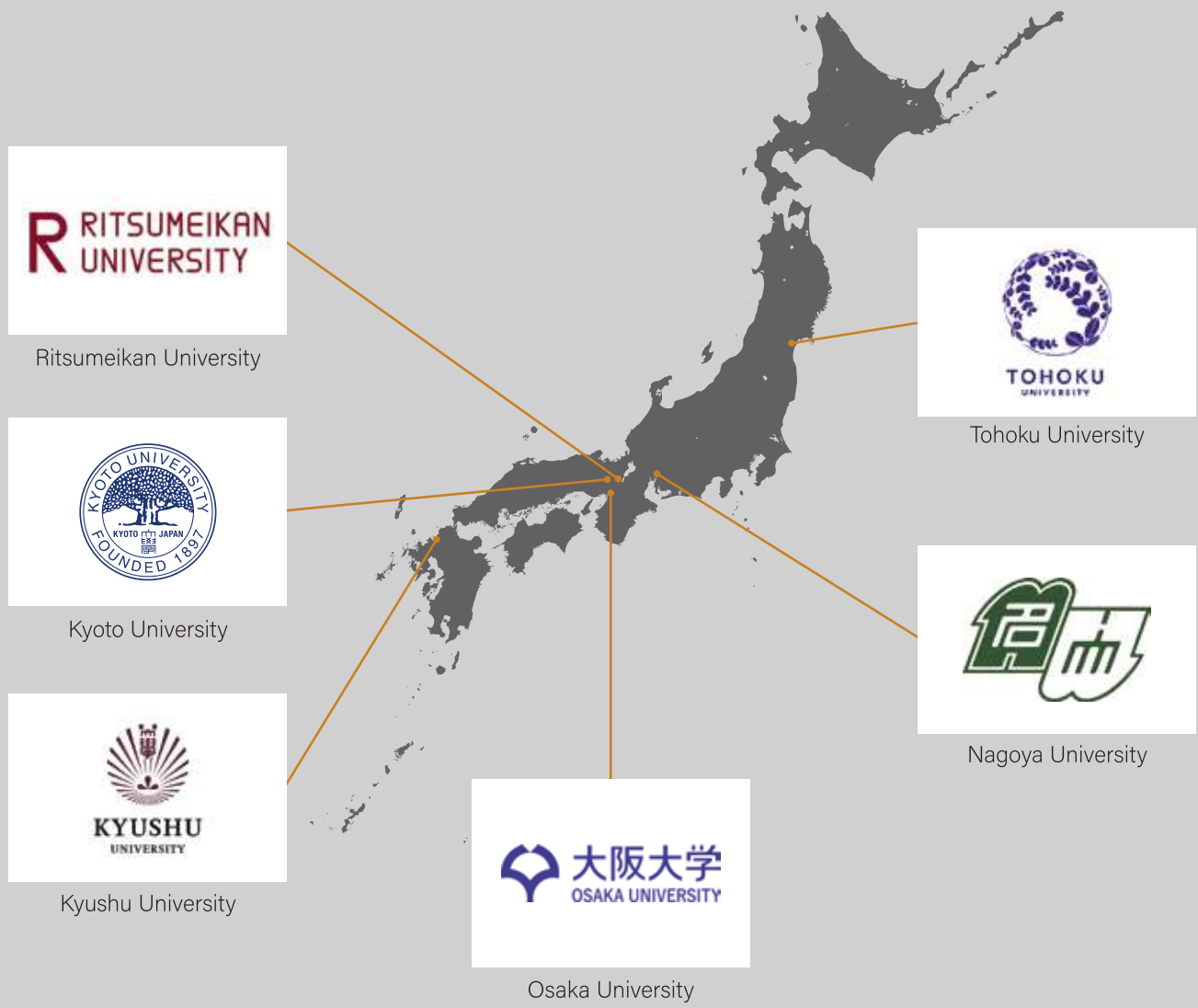


# RENKEI Member Institutions

# Japan

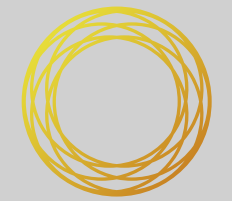


RENKEI

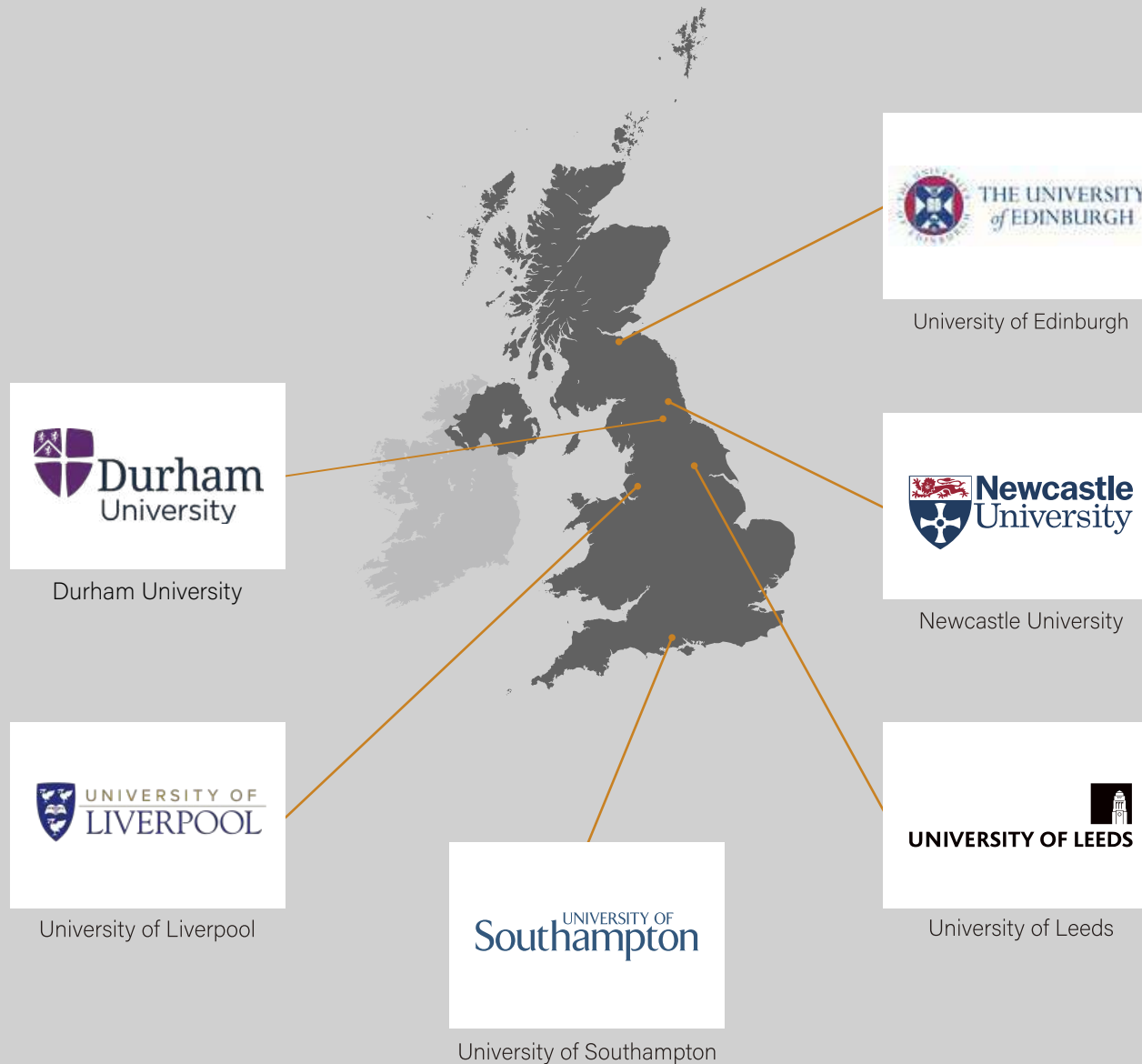


# RENKEI Member Institutions

# UK



RENKEI





# RENKEI activities in FY 2021

## RENKEI Researcher Online Workshop Exploring Japan-UK Research Collaborations in Health

The global pandemic forced the first RENKEI health workshop to move online, but simultaneously reconfirmed the importance of this strand of RENKEI's work, and of international research collaboration in this area. The workshop took place over two days, 23 and 24 June 2021, and attracted more than 70 researchers from a broad range of fields connected to health in a variety of ways.

The keynote speakers, Professor Kensaku Mori from Nagoya University and Professor Dame Louise Robinson from Newcastle University, talked about their recent research into AI-based medicine through medical imaging and into new models for dementia care, respectively. These are both topics of great interest to the two countries, and the talks laid the groundwork for productive discussions during the subsequent panel sessions.

Areas for potential collaboration identified during these sessions included maternal patient safety and no-fault compensation systems; staff wellbeing and the impact on patient safety; culture and the investigation of mistakes; data selection and quality; international standards for shared data sets; apps to promote behavioural change for better health; and measuring the neurological impacts of such interventions.

In response to requests from participants, representatives of two funding organisations, JSPS and the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, also introduced the various grants available for UK-Japan collaborations in the area of health.

Details of the workshop, including a full recording and the report, can be found at:

<https://www.britishcouncil.jp/en/programmes/higher-education/university-industry-partnership/renkei/health2021>

## Reflections from the host Professor Hideki Kasuya, Nagoya University

The RENKEI Researcher Online Workshop "Exploring Japan-UK Research Collaborations in Health" was attended by over 90 participants, including Ms. Julia Longbottom, British Ambassador to Japan, four guest speakers, 35 researchers from five British universities, 50 researchers from six Japanese universities, and members of the RENKEI secretariat.

Since the physical workshop originally scheduled for November 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the option of an online workshop was considered, and numerous preliminary discussions were held between the steering committee and chairpersons.

The three panel sessions, on "Patient Safety," "Healthcare and Informatics," and "Aging," were composed of several short presentations, a short Q&A session, and a panel discussion, in line with RENKEI's philosophy of "placing great importance on dialogue and discussion." These, and the entire workshop, were made possible by the active voices of the participants.

Although this workshop provided an opportunity for researchers specializing in the same or related fields to get acquainted with one another, it was insufficient for them to establish relationships that would lead to concrete collaborations. I therefore hope that an in-person workshop will be held in the near future to further strengthen the partnerships within RENKEI.

# RENKEI Evaluation

## RENKEI at Ten: Challenges and Opportunities

An evaluation was carried out to identify RENKEI's achievements, areas for improvement, and future directions as the consortium approached the end of the current membership term and its tenth anniversary. Following on from an online survey of all members in 2020, six member institutions, three from each country, participated in interviews with the secretariat in the summer of 2021.

The evaluation showed that the broad objectives and strategic focus of RENKEI remained as valid as ever, and that the growing political importance of the UK-Japan bilateral relationship was creating new opportunities for RENKEI to work strategically. However, designated representatives were needed to advocate on its behalf in both countries in order to take advantage of these opportunities. The evaluation thus sparked off a more in-depth discussion which resulted in the introduction of a RENKEI Co-Chair system.

Several of the other questions identified through the evaluation, such as how to collect evidence of RENKEI's impact, how best to work with industry, and how far RENKEI should be involved with student exchange, have continued to be key issues for discussion at subsequent Steering Committee meetings ([see p. 16](#)) as the consortium seeks further opportunities to support members in achieving their broad institutional objectives for UK-Japan collaboration.

# RENKEI activities in FY 2022

## RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme (Tenth Anniversary Grant)

The consortium obtained GBP 200,000 from the British Council to mark its tenth anniversary, and the members decided to use this to fund a RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme.

This project had three core concepts:

- involving all members in this anniversary event
- focusing on the future around the core theme of climate change via the next generation of researchers
- pioneering a new activity model for RENKEI to potentially roll out in other areas of work

The programme took a hybrid approach, combining both virtual and face-to-face activities.

One of the key components was the development of a cohort of Fellows and Mentors, paired across countries according to their research interests through a series of online events. In addition to learning from their Mentors, Fellows proactively set up networks in order to collaborate more widely. Mentors, meanwhile, developed connections between themselves which are more likely to remain as a legacy within RENKEI.

Together, the group worked to prepare for the very successful Winter School held in Kyoto between 28 November and 2 December 2022, which included workshops, poster presentations, and research-focused field trips organised by Kyoto University, as well as the more informal interactions which are crucial for the development of partnerships. Subsequently, participants have continued to collaborate online and through funded individual visits, and are working on three joint research projects awarded seed funding.

The hybrid programme model was an effective one, reconfirming both the importance of face-to-face contact and the additional impact provided by online wrap-around events. Participants appreciated the multidisciplinary nature of the cohort and the prestige of being RENKEI Fellows. Moreover, the programme helped to raise RENKEI's profile in both countries: Japan Science and Technology Agency Director Kobayashi participated in the Winter School, while the programme was mentioned in speeches by former British Prime Minister Theresa May and George Freeman, Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation. An independent review of this programme is planned after it concludes in September 2023 in order to inform the development of future activities.





# Reflections from the host

**Dr. Alistair Ford,  
Lecturer in Geospatial Data Analytics and Policy Academy Fellow, Newcastle University**

The RENKEI 10th Anniversary programme succeeded in developing a new Early Career Researchers' (ECR) network to explore climate change adaptation and resilience in the UK and Japan. This programme deliberately focussed on linking together ECRs, recognising that much of the cutting-edge research around responding to climate impacts is being done by PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, and new academics, and that these researchers are the future of our efforts to ensure resilience to the climate crisis.

The recruitment of 32 ECR fellows and 20 mentors from across the RENKEI partner universities in the UK and Japan, from arts, humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and engineering backgrounds, gave the hoped-for multidisciplinary perspective on the topic of climate resilience and allowed the creation of new interdisciplinary collaborations between ECRs at RENKEI institutions. Through a series of online workshops and events, ECRs and mentors were brought together to share their own perspectives and research on climate change adaptation and resilience, leading up to a week-long Winter School at Kyoto. This was a great opportunity for programme participants to come together, present their research, build connections, network, and develop new research ideas.

Three projects were supported with seedcorn funding from the programme, giving impetus to new collaborations between ECRs and mentors, with interdisciplinary research on topics such as food security, sustainable finance, and community-led resilience. ECRs were further supported with travel grants to visit the UK or Japan for bi- or multi-lateral visits at RENKEI institutions. This allowed the development of strong relationships between ECRs and mentors at other RENKEI universities, providing opportunities to share research in a wider network, give seminars, experience different research cultures, take part in field visits (and of course try new foods!).

It is hoped that the activities conducted during the 10th Anniversary programme will lay the foundations for our ECR fellows to become the new leaders in climate change adaptation and resilience research, building on the research collaborations and networks established with the support of the British Council.



# RENKEI Tenth Anniversary Event in Tokyo

To mark RENKEI's tenth anniversary, an event at the International House of Japan in Tokyo on 30 September 2022 brought members together with key external stakeholders and thought leaders to look back at the consortium's achievements, identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities, and brainstorm its future direction.

Julia Longbottom, the British Ambassador to Japan, and Yosei Ide, the MEXT State Minister, opened the event with congratulatory addresses. A video message recorded by former British Prime Minister Theresa May during her recent visit to Japan was also shared, talking about the ever-growing importance of bilateral research collaboration and academic mobility, and new initiatives in this area.

The participants looked at the achievements and future challenges for RENKEI specifically in the focus areas of climate change and health. Successes included the development of seed-funding projects, the leveraging of external funding, and the participation of more early-career researchers via online events, while the greatest challenge in the recent period had been sustaining and, in the case of health, developing new relationships entirely online. Potential for crossover between the two areas was also highlighted.

The participants went on to discuss the strategic opportunities for the consortium as a whole. RENKEI has the potential to engage with more partners, including industry, ODA funders, venture capital, and the wider public. Interdisciplinarity is a key strength, enabling the consortium to reach a wide range of researchers and topics, and making it well-placed to obtain funding. Participants reiterated that what makes RENKEI special is the UK-Japan relationship and, although additional partners could be brought in for specific activities, this bilateral relationship should remain central.

During the latter part of the event, entrepreneur Dr Tadahisa Kagimoto, Mr. Osamu Kobayashi of the Japan Science and Technology Agency, Professor Paul Monks, Chief Scientific Adviser in the UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and Chad Evans, Executive Vice-President of the United States Council on Competitiveness posed several challenges to the RENKEI members. These included developing an ecosystem of partners to identify national and bilateral priorities and ensure that funding calls address these in the right way, bridging the gap between academic and industrial timescales, including all stakeholders and gaining buy-in from society when addressing societal challenges, and moving towards systems science.

More information about the tenth anniversary event, including a video and a detailed report, can be found at:

<https://www.britishcouncil.jp/en/programmes/higher-education/university-industry-partnership/renkei/10th-anniversary-event>





# RENKEI Tenth Anniversary Event in London

A RENKEI 10th Anniversary Keynote Event and Reception were held at the Embassy of Japan in London on 28 March 2023, attended by around 40 RENKEI representatives, participants of the RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme, and stakeholders.

George Freeman, Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation, addressed the participants. He highlighted various emerging themes of interest to both countries as potential areas for collaboration, including the security of intellectual property and of the academic process, the digital measurement and communication of environmental impacts, and the life sciences and space. The hopes for an even greater strengthening of the bilateral relationship which he mentioned in his speech were also evident among the participants, who made the most of the opportunity to catch up with existing contacts and meet potential new partners.



# Organising Committees

RENKEI's activities are led by its members and, in particular, the Organising Committee for each of the RENKEI themes.

## Climate Change Organising Committee members

### Yasuto Tachikawa

Professor,  
Department of Civil and Earth Resources Engineering  
Kyoto University

### Nobuya Mizoue

Professor of Forest Sciences,  
Department of Agro-environmental Sciences,  
Faculty of Agriculture  
Kyushu University

### Daisuke Komori

Associate Professor,  
Department: Graduate School of Engineering  
Tohoku University

### Jon Turner

Director,  
Institute for Academic Development  
University of Edinburgh

### Jouni Paavola

Professor of Environmental Social Science  
at the School of Earth and Environment;  
Director of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)  
funded Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy (CCCEP)  
University of Leeds

### Phil James

Director National Urban Observatory Facility Newcastle,  
Senior Lecturer in Engineering,  
School of Engineering  
Newcastle University

### Andy Cundy

Professor,  
Director of Internationalisation / Research Director,  
GAU-Radioanalytical  
School of Ocean and Earth Science  
National Oceanography Centre (Southampton)  
University of Southampton

## Health Organising Committee members

### Jon Turner

Director,  
Institute for Academic Development  
University of Edinburgh

### Spencer Hazel

Reader in Applied Linguistics and Communication  
Newcastle University

### Atsushi Nakagawa

Director,  
Institute for Protein Research  
Osaka University

### Hideki Kasuya

Presidential Advisor (Professor)  
Designated Associate Professor,  
Graduate School of Medicine  
Nagoya University

### Seiji Sumigama

Presidential Advisor (Professor)  
Designated Associate Professor,  
Graduate School of Medicine  
Nagoya University

### Izumi Tabata

Professor,  
College of Sport and Health Science  
Ritsumeikan University

# RENKEI Steering Committee meetings

## Online meetings in FY 2021

A 90-minute meeting was held online in October 2021. Members agreed to scope out and introduce a Co-Chair system; plan a tenth anniversary event to raise the profile of RENKEI in society, showcase the consortium's achievements, and identify the next set of challenges; and put out a call for proposals for use of the GBP 200,000 anniversary grant (subsequently awarded to the RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme). A further short meeting to update members on these plans and begin to discuss the details of their implementation was held in April 2022.

## In-person meetings in FY 2022

The Steering Committee met at the British Embassy in Tokyo in September 2022, the first face-to-face meeting in nearly three years. The meeting took place the day before the tenth anniversary event. As well as going over the plans for the event, broad-ranging discussions covered RENKEI's future themes, activities, and partners. Members agreed that climate change and health should remain as core themes, but that there was room to widen RENKEI's scope. They considered how to work with partners including industry, funding bodies, other universities, and the public. Ideas for sharing intelligence among partners and for developing evaluation metrics were discussed. A consultation on whether to extend the RENKEI membership agreement for a further two years was also set in motion.

Several of these questions were discussed further at a second in-person meeting held at the British Council offices in London in March 2023. Security was agreed as a third broad RENKEI theme, and it was proposed that themes be framed more broadly, in terms of government and international priorities. The members discussed various ways to raise RENKEI's profile among different audiences and extend its reach without requiring substantial investment. The emergence of major new funding opportunities and the importance of positioning RENKEI to receive or even shape these was highlighted. Members also agreed to expand the core membership while keeping RENKEI relatively small, and to explore ways to maintain the UK-Japan focus and benefits for core members while involving other partners and countries flexibly, as warranted by a particular topic or activity. Finally, the meeting marked the end of the tenure of the first set of Co-Chairs and the handover to their successors.

# Future directions for RENKEI

Members have agreed to extend the current membership term by two years, until March 2025, taking into account the limitations on activities during the pandemic. The next two years will therefore be crucial ones in terms of consolidating and disseminating RENKEI's current achievements and developing attractive plans and activities for the third phase which match the priorities of members and stakeholders.

RENKEI enters this period with an operating surplus, but in order to be sustainable, the consortium needs to demonstrate its impact to internal and external funders. We are planning to carry out an independent review of the RENKEI Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme, and are considering extending this to look more broadly at the consortium's activities.

The external funding climate is favourable because of the growing emphasis on the bilateral relationship by governments and other partners in both countries; and RENKEI's track record puts us in a good position to benefit from the International Science Partnership Fund (UK) and reciprocal funding from Japan. Nevertheless, it is vital for the consortium to develop more efficient ways of sharing intelligence on upcoming opportunities, and even of influencing the shaping of these and future schemes. We will do this by developing our relationships with governments and other funders, as well as by aligning our priorities more specifically with those stated in national and international policy.

We are considering ways to involve other partners, from the UK and Japan or beyond, where this would enhance a project or activity and extend the consortium's reach, without weakening its focus or the benefits for core members. Working more closely with industry has long been an ambition, but one which has been difficult to realise. We will leverage the existing expertise and contacts among members to begin reaching out to prospective partners.

We also seek to raise the consortium's profile among wider audiences. The launch of a RENKEI alumni network, in which all past participants become RENKEI Fellows and are encouraged to post on RENKEI-related social media, will play a role in making the consortium better-known among the academic community. Initiatives such as encouraging co-supervision of PhD students across the network would also help to develop the next generation of RENKEI academics.

The 2025 Kansai Expo in Osaka offers opportunities to reach many stakeholders and partners via weekly forums to be held in the run-up to the main event. We are also developing a public-facing RENKEI Lecture Series, leveraging existing visits by academics at member institutions to the partner country.

In the words of one of the keynote speakers at our tenth anniversary event in Tokyo, RENKEI is "spoilt for choice". The consortium has talented people, an established collaboration, deep understanding of partners, and many challenges to choose from in order to make an impact over the next ten years, making this the ideal time to develop even bigger ambitions.

