

# RENKEI Annual Report

April 2013 – March 2014



RENKEI

# RENKEI

## *Defining Tomorrow*

### Strategic Collaboration between the UK and Japan in Academia and Industry

#### Background to the launch of RENKEI

The Higher Education sectors in the UK and Japan are looking to expand their engagement with both industry and the community in order to redefine the role of the university in an increasingly globalised and competitive 21st century. The UK and Japan are both recognised globally as amongst the very top producers of cutting edge research, with similar approaches and values but perceived as complementary in their respective strengths. Furthermore, the relative size and structure of both Higher Education sectors are such that collaboration in this area holds great potential for increasing prosperity in both countries. Leading institutions from both the UK and Japan have expressed commitment to working in this area.

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010, Rt Hon William Hague, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Japan and delivered a speech at the British Embassy entitled “Britain’s prosperity in a networked world”, in which he talked about the need to develop education partnerships in order to boost the world economy. He announced that the British Council would hold dialogues for British and Japanese university leaders to share best practice in internationalisation, and would promote exchanges of students and researchers.

In the same year, following on from Rt Hon William Hague’s visit, Jeremy Brown, former Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, came to Japan. On September 11 in Osaka, he led a round table discussion with university and industry representatives on the realisation of strategic partnerships between institutions of higher education in the UK and Japan.

The first concrete step in the development of the scheme took place at the Second Japan-UK Higher Education Symposium, hosted by Kyushu University on 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> November 2010. Participants identified the need for a new model of international university-industry partnerships as one of the action points. The British Council was appointed as the coordinator for ongoing activities aimed at the establishment of a new partnership scheme.

Since this Symposium, the British Council and a group of representatives from UK and Japanese universities who recognise the importance of setting up new models of international university-industry partnerships have met several times to discuss the nature of such partnerships.

The first meeting of the UK-Japan joint core members’ group took place at the British Council’s international education conference, Going Global 2011 (held in Hong



Kong on 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> March 2011). The discussions centred on the framework of the UK-Japan partnership scheme. Rt Hon David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, joined the meeting on the second day and gave a speech on the importance of strengthening links between the UK and Japan; two countries with proud research traditions.

At Going Global 2011, UK and Japanese participants affirmed the importance of sharing information on international university-industry partnerships and discussing their respective values, through topics such as the internationalisation of universities, joint research, personnel development, and social and public engagement. They also reaffirmed the need for a formal network enabling the development of a programme for these international partnerships.

Between March 2011 and February 2012, representatives of UK and Japanese universities, the industrial sector, and related public organisations with a shared aim of improving the functioning of higher education institutions continued their preparations for the establishment of a scheme. This will function as the infrastructure permitting the exchange of information and opinions, as well as enabling joint

activities between the UK and Japan. Representatives agreed to name the new scheme “RENKEI (Japan-UK Research and Education Network for Knowledge Economy Initiatives)” and it was launched on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012 at Going Global 2012 in London. The current RENKEI member universities from the Japan side are Kyoto University, Kyushu University, Nagoya University, Osaka University, Ritsumeikan University and Tohoku University. Member universities from the UK are the University of Bristol, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, Newcastle University, University of Southampton and University College London (UCL).

RENKEI is a new platform for a dynamic partnership between the UK and Japan in industry and higher education and will promote the development of innovative solutions to the challenges facing knowledge-based economies by bringing together talented individuals from the respective nations and diverse backgrounds. RENKEI will also create an environment that will allow such individuals to share their knowledge, skills and experience towards shaping the future world. In 2013, the first RENKEI working group “Researcher Development School” was delivered by the University of Bristol, Newcastle University and Kyoto University.



# RENKEI Researcher Development School

Do early career researchers in the UK and Japan have the necessary skills to collaborate across cultures and research fields?

## Challenge

In order to be successful as future research leaders who are actively engaged in solving the grand challenges ahead of us, early-career researchers need to develop broader skills than those traditionally learned as part of their Ph.D. or post-doctoral work. These skills include the need to work across cultures in an increasingly globally orientated research environment, as well as the ability to work across disciplines. Many of the grand challenges will require input from researchers from diverse fields, and will draw on perspectives and approaches from different countries in order to find globally-relevant solutions. Therefore, the ability to communicate and work effectively with people from different disciplines and cultures will be vital to the research leaders of the future. In addition, it is important that perspectives, skills and knowledge in other sectors are drawn upon, and for researchers to collaborate effectively with industry and the wider society. This is again a situation where communication and cultures can be very different and the ability to successfully work across these domains will be of great importance in their future careers.



## Purpose

To design and deliver a Researcher Development School with the following aims

1. To develop future research leaders with the skills to lead in collaborations between different disciplines, cultures and sectors.
2. To facilitate the formation of collaboratory activities between participants to achieve tangible outcomes.
3. To develop a sustainable network of researchers across Japan and the UK.





# Overview



The Collaborating Across Cultures RENKEI Researcher Development School took place in two parts. The first two week long programme ran in Bristol in July 2013, with the second two week programme in Kyoto in December 2013. The theme of the School was 'Urban Sustainability and Resilience'. These two cities were specifically chosen to enable participants to explore the theme from both a UK and Japanese perspective.

In Bristol the activities focused on skill development workshops, with topics such as communication, teamwork, presentations, an entrepreneurial mind-set and working with industry. Participants also heard from a number of speakers working in the field of urban sustainability in Bristol and other parts of the UK. In week two they took part in a World Café to generate project ideas based on the School's theme. The cross-cultural teams that formed to work on these ideas presented their initial plans on the final day of the Bristol School.

In Kyoto, the teams presented more fully-formed solutions, which they had developed since the Bristol School, to industry representatives and the RENKEI organisers. They then went on to explore both Japanese culture and the theme of 'Urban Sustainability and Resilience' from a Japanese perspective during a series of workshops and talks. This then led to a second World Café, which encouraged them to come up with new ideas and solutions to the theme, based on what they had learnt in Kyoto. They presented these ideas on the last day of the Kyoto School.

\*World Café is an innovative approach to large group dialogue and brainstorming about key issues. The participants move around café style tables and their conversations with different people leads to a cross pollination of ideas. Ultimately, possibilities for innovative action can emerge from these discussions.



# Outcome



The main aim of the School was to develop interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research skills among the participants. In addition, the School aimed to support the participants in working on viable 'solutions' to the real and pressing challenge of 'Sustainability and Resilience,' as well as to create a sustainable network of researchers. These ambitious aims were achieved to a greater degree than the organisers had anticipated at the outset.

Four teams were arranged around shared 'responses' to the 'Grand Challenge,' although every participant commented that they could have worked with anyone – a testament to the strong connections formed. Each team developed a unique working pattern, and all the teams were effective in developing their creative ideas, initially through a UK lens in Bristol and subsequently through a Japanese lens in Kyoto.

Each team planned and gave a series of presentations in Bristol and Kyoto, which were delivered professionally and with great clarity and confidence. The informal feedback from the audience of academics and business representatives was extremely positive, and many said how impressed they were with the quality and comprehensiveness of the presentations. Participants also reported that their confidence in giving presentations was greatly increased during the School.

In terms of formal feedback, the participants were asked to complete online feedback forms both before and after the Bristol leg of the School, and after the Kyoto leg. On a range of measures, dramatic and significant positive changes in perception, knowledge and skills had taken place as a result of their participation in the School.

Specifically, the participants felt that they were significantly more able to work across disciplines, with people from different organisations, and across cultures. They felt more able to work effectively in teams, take creative and innovative approaches, develop collaborative approaches, understand what was needed for an idea to be commercially viable, pitch an idea to industry and present their research to a range of audiences. They were also significantly more able to identify their own strengths and weakness, and understand personality differences and how these may affect working in a team. They felt significantly more confident about networking with people from different disciplines, with more senior researchers and with people from industry. Everyone said that they felt more able to participate in a UK-Japanese project in the future.

The personal testimonies were profound: many said that the School had been a life-changing experience, which had expanded their horizons and broadened their career paths. One typical response was: "I thought it was fantastic. Without exaggeration it was the best [four] weeks of my life! I learnt so much ... the way it was delivered ... was so much better than I have ever experienced before. The organisation of the event was excellent, the facilitators were all inspiring and the other participants were inspirational. It really was a fantastic and invaluable experience for me". There was a shared belief that the relationships forged during the School would never be broken, and could be called upon at any point during their careers.





# Comments from the participants and organisers:

## Dr David Hong

Postdoctoral Researcher in Medicinal Chemistry

University of Liverpool



Reflecting on my RENKEI experience, it was a revolutionary journey exceeding all expectations. Firstly, I have discovered the true meaning of collaboration across cultures, nationalities, disciplines and even the boundary of academia and industry. 'Collaboration' does not simply mean that each participant provides input in order to complete a task. Rather, true 'collaboration' is when everyone in the team seeks to understand themselves as well as others, form bonds, and through contributing our individual knowledge, experiences and energy we inspire each other to achieve the common goal. The RENKEI experience has also given me an awareness as a researcher in an academic institution, that an entrepreneurial mind-set is vitally important for career development. Becoming an 'enterprising researcher' doesn't necessarily suggest starting one's own business or commercialising one's research results. I have come to understand that an entrepreneurial mind-set means developing a set of behaviours, attributes and skills that allow one to create change and stimulate innovation, cope with, and even enjoy, higher levels of uncertainty and complexity.

Finally, I had the invaluable opportunity to befriend a group of excellent researchers from some of the top universities in the U.K. and Japan. I am confident that these experiences and connections will become one of the most important assets throughout my career and life. I am very proud to be a part of the RENKEI programme as well as a member of the wider RENKEI family. I will highly recommend the RENKEI programme to my colleagues and students, and hope to remain an active member of the RENKEI community in years to come.

## Yuta Kimura

PhD Student in Environmental Studies

Tohoku University



A Ph.D. student's main channel for accessing information and furthering one's knowledge is either through lectures or academic conferences, but as these are often field specific there are far too few opportunities to exchange knowledge and information across disciplinary boundaries. Being conscious of this challenge prior to my participation in the RENKEI School helped me to really see the benefits of exchanging ideas across disciplinary lines and with researchers from different fields of specialisation who I wouldn't otherwise have the chance to interact with.

In particular, the 'World Café' style discussion forum really left an impression on me. The World Café gave us the opportunity to freely express our ideas and opinions related to the School theme 'Urban Sustainability and Resilience,' the connection between the various group projects and the issues surrounding them.

These discussions were extremely inspiring. I was able to gain totally new perspectives, as well as see the interconnectedness of the issues at hand that I had not previously been aware of.

At the same time, I realised that when approaching abstract and complex issues such as 'Urban Sustainability and Resilience,' it is vital to explore these challenges collaboratively and across disciplinary boundaries.

I really felt that I personally benefited from the chance to learn first-hand how to express my opinion within groups made up of members with different cultures, languages and fields of specialisation, as well as facilitating the group as a whole to work constructively.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for making this invaluable opportunity possible.

## Dr Alison Leggett

Head of Academic Staff Development  
University of Bristol



Being involved in RENKEI has been a fantastic and unique experience for me. Although I have been working in researcher development for a number of years, RENKEI gave me the opportunity to work with colleagues to design and deliver something innovative and outside of the usual boundaries of our work.

It is clear that the Researcher Development School has had a profound impact on the participants in terms of what they feel they can achieve in their future and it has been really rewarding to have played a part in that. It has been a privilege to get to know the participants on an individual level and it has been amazing to see how much they have grown since the first day that we met them in Bristol.

At times it has been challenging working across cultures and at a distance ourselves, and to deliver something so intensive was sometimes exhausting. However, I truly believe that anything that is worthwhile is challenging and RENKEI has proved that - the outcome far outweighed the challenges. I have made friends and colleagues for life through this experience and I have learnt a huge amount myself, a lot of which is hard to put into words. The support that we as organisers were given by the participants was brilliant and the group were an absolute pleasure to work with.

To sum up, it has been a truly remarkable experience and one which I will never forget. I hope that I can be involved in future RENKEI ventures.

## Professor Tetsuo Sawaragi

Professor and Assistant to Executive Vice President for International Affairs

Kyoto University



Kyoto University is highly esteemed for its excellence in research. However, from the perspective of a faculty member, when it comes to developing human resources who can tackle the real global issues in today's society, I believe that a gap exists between the academic specialists that we train, and the type of human resources that are actually needed within society. Within this context, the chance to plan and execute the RENKEI Researcher Development School was extremely timely, and offered me a valuable opportunity to reconsider the skillset necessary for human resource development. I especially found that the theme of the working group, 'Urban Sustainability and Resilience,' was expertly chosen.

Presupposing that the UK and Japan are different socially and culturally, the Kyoto school allowed those on the Japan side to share the unique aspects of Japan that are distinct from the UK with the British students, through which I believe they were able to increase their mutual understanding. Japan is certainly demonstrating its 'Resilience' in the post 3/11 reconstructions, while the city of Kyoto faces its own particular 'Urban Sustainability' challenges in the preservation of the *machiya* (classical townhouses) and the traditional townscape. The school offered all the participants an opportunity to consider these pertinent issues together. We must provide solutions to these issues that are developed through cross sector collaboration between universities, government and industry. The experience of the school gave each of the participants the chance to look at their field of research from a broader perspective, as well as consider the role that their research can play in society.

It is my sincere hope that RENKEI and similar initiatives will continue to develop innovative themes and run schools in new places.

## Jane Nolan

Teaching Fellow in Enterprise, International Centre for Music Studies, School of Arts and Cultures

Newcastle University



We hoped to provide opportunities to engage with a wide range of skills, people, organisations and new experiences which would help the participants' ongoing development as future leaders, working in the uncertainty and complexity of a fast changing global world.

The profound impact of RENKEI has gone beyond our hopes. The engagement and commitment of everyone involved made the programme really special. Participants were willing to work outside their comfort zones, learning through experience, building their confidence and reflecting on their capacity to create impact at a personal, societal and international level.

The participants created collaborative projects in response to challenging real world issues. The impact, viability and sustainability of their proposed solutions were maximised by bringing together interdisciplinary research, business skills and the needs of communities. The participants became adept in the use of tools and techniques which can be applied in business, in projects or in research. The results were inspiring and the testimonies of the participants show that this experience helped them see the social value of their research, opening up their horizons to future possibilities.

It has been a great privilege being involved with designing and delivering the RENKEI programme. It has been inspirational working with the amazing group of people who came together to make it such a defining experience in our lives. As a member of the RENKEI family, I wish to continue to support the participants of this inaugural School, and those who join future programmes. They have the potential to change the world and to make a real difference.

## Dr Robin Humphrey

Director of the Postgraduate Research Training Programme

Newcastle University



At the outset, we were hoping that we would develop the researchers to work across disciplines, across cultures, and span the divide between academia and business, and we were trying to provide a programme which could help them make these disciplinary, cultural and sector-spanning leaps so that they could communicate effectively within a real research team.

That was what we were hoping, but we didn't know what was actually going to happen. We were entering into the unknown, as I don't think anyone had tried something quite so ambitious before.

At the end of the Bristol leg of the School, we were incredibly pleased by how it had gone, and we were delighted by how this extraordinary group of researchers, chosen from each of the RENKEI universities, had thrown themselves into the workings of the School with such enthusiasm and energy.

The groundwork was prepared in Bristol, where the creative seeds were sown, but the flowers grew and grew and were so well rooted by the time the four teams presented their work in Kyoto that we were all astonished by what they had achieved. The presentations were far better than we could have ever hoped for.

The experience of delivering the programme has been extraordinary for myself and my co-organisers, as much as for the participants. As one of the participants, Martin Rivas, said at the end of his presentation, 'We are RENKEI'. I think everyone here forged lasting relationships from which we can all draw for the rest our lives.

# RENKEI

## Member Universities

### UK



RENKEI is the Japanese word for ‘Collaboration’, and is an acronym for Research and Education Network for Knowledge Economy Initiatives.

### Japan





RENKEI

[www.britishcouncil.or.jp/renkei](http://www.britishcouncil.or.jp/renkei)  
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