

The 2021 Survey of Japan Master's Human Resource Profiling (JM-Pro)
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ABSTRACT

In Japan, the percentage of students who enter a doctoral course after completing a master's course has decreased from 18.7% in 1981 to 15.2% in 2001 and to 10.8% in 2011, and it was only 9.7% in 2021. The "drastic reform of graduate school education with a view to 2024," summarized by the Central Council for Education's University Division in January 2019, pointed out that the number of doctoral degrees awarded per million people in Japan was half that of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The Council also noted that if this situation continues, securing "professionals of knowledge" who could lead society in the future might become a fundamental problem. Therefore, academia has proposed improvements in postgraduate education, including educational and financial support, and the reinforcement of an approach for encouraging the entry of brilliant human resources into further education. The Science, Technology, and Innovation Basic Plan, adopted at a Cabinet meeting on March 26, 2021, also pointed to the current situation in which excellent students were not entering doctoral courses due to economic concerns, anxiety about their career paths, and education and research environments that did not meet their expectations. The goal of the Plan is to ensure "an environment where talented young people can expect to become active in various fields, such as academia, industry, and administration, and where they can take pride in themselves and take on the challenge of staking their lives in the pursuit of doctoral degrees without having to contend with economic concerns."

Under these circumstances, the National Institute of Science and Technology Policy administered a survey to master's students in 2020 regarding financial support, career paths, and policies that could increase the percentage of students entering doctoral courses. The survey results were published as the 2020 Survey of Japan Master's Human Resource Profiling in June 2021. This is the second survey of Japan's master's student human resource profiling.

In this survey, the main reasons for selecting employment instead of entering a doctoral course were "I want to be financially independent" and "I want to work as a member of society." These two reasons accounted for most of the responses. Many answers also mentioned the negative effects that entering a doctoral program had on career and income, including "If I enter a doctoral course, I cannot make any financial prediction in my life," "If I enter a doctoral course, I will worry about finding employment after completing the course," and "The lifetime earnings do not compensate for the cost of completing a doctoral course (poor cost performance)." Other conditions considered important for encouraging entry into a doctoral course were "expansion of financial support for doctoral students" and "improvement of the terms of employment in private enterprises or similar organizations for candidates who have completed a doctoral course." These two conditions received high rankings.

Policies that would effectively increase the number of students entering a doctoral course, from the perspective of doctoral students, included “the stipends paid to doctoral students,” “improvement of the research environment for young researchers, including doctoral students,” and “improvement of the treatment of doctoral degree holders, such as salaries and other benefits, in industry.”