

Open Application Guidelines for Accreditation of  
Universities for International Research Excellence and  
Approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans for  
Universities for International Research Excellence



文部科学省

MEXT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,  
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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY-JAPAN

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## Introduction

The guidelines describe the procedures required for accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of Research System Strengthening Plans for Universities for International Research Excellence (hereinafter referred to as “Research Systems Strengthening Plans”) based on the Act on Strengthening Systems for Leveraging Research and Research Results of Universities for International Research Excellence.

In order to conduct reviews for the accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans in an integrated manner, the operators of universities applying for the accreditation are required to submit a draft Research Systems Strengthening Plan together with the accreditation application form.

Applicants are first required to submit a statement of letter for accreditation of University for International Research Excellence (hereinafter referred to as “Letter of Intent”), outline and video of the first draft of their Research Systems Strengthening Plan, and the first draft and supplementary materials of the plan by March 31, 2023. Upon preparation of submitted documents, check the following laws and regulations and documents as well as the guidelines, and submit them before the due date.

- Act on Strengthening Systems for Leveraging Research and Research Results of Universities for International Research Excellence (Act No. 51, 2022, hereinafter referred to as " Act")
- Regulation for Enforcement of the Act on Strengthening Systems for Leveraging Research and Research Results of Universities for Research Excellence (2022, Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Order No.37, hereinafter referred to as “Regulation”).
- Basic Policy on the Promotion of Strengthening Systems for Leveraging Research and Research Results of Universities for International Research Excellence (November 15, 2022, Decision by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, hereinafter referred to as “Basic Policy”)
- Policy on the Method, Conditions and Other Matters Necessary for Implementing Funding for Universities for International Research Excellence (November 15, 2022, Approved by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, hereinafter referred to as “Funding Implementation Policy”)

Applicants are required to submit an application form for the accreditation of University for International Research Excellence after the screening process, receive an accreditation by the Minister of MEXT as a University for International Research Excellence, submit an application form for the approval of their Research Systems Strengthening Plan, and receive approval from the Minister of MEXT. Once it is approved, funding by the Japan Science and Technology Agency (hereinafter referred to as “JST”) will be released based on the Research Systems Strengthening Plan.

# Application Details

## 1. Basic concept

In recent years, world-class research universities in other countries have been enhancing their research capabilities with the support of generous funding, while Japanese universities have been sluggish in both the quality and quantity of their research papers. One of the key factors underlying this is that these universities in other countries have created a virtuous cycle of intellectual value creation whereby they enhance their research environments by taking advantage of diverse sources of funding—including public financial support, partnerships with private-sector companies, donations, and asset management—and they invite world-class research personnel to their universities, which in turn attracts new research personnel and investment and donations from the private sector.

In Japan too, as we promote the expansion of university functions—with a sense of urgency for universities to improve their research capabilities through friendly international rivalry—we must make efforts not only to attract world-class researchers, but also to make bold resource allocations to foster independent young researchers who will lead the next generation and enable them to play an active role, to lighten the administrative burden on researchers so they have sufficient time for research, and to value the intellectual resources possessed by universities.

Therefore, universities that are considerably expected to advance internationally outstanding research and to apply the outcomes of that research to effect socioeconomic changes are to be recognized as Universities for International Research Excellence, and subsidies through the University Endowment Fund are to be provided for Research System Strengthening Plans prepared by them.

This initiative will facilitate the enhancement of research environments and the acquisition of excellent human resources at Universities for International Research Excellence, and form a virtuous cycle of intellectual value creation, thereby leading Japan's academic research networks and helping to realize research universities that rank among world-class research universities in other countries.

Universities for International Research Excellence shall aim to realize the following through their Research Systems Strengthening Plans.

- Enhance their capabilities to attract the world-class researchers from various fields and foster the next generation of researchers (become a world-class research university globally regarded as leading models)
- Realize attractive research environments that ensure diversity and inclusion to appeal to young researchers from throughout Japan and abroad and lead the academic research networks
- Play a central role in the innovation ecosystem while remaining in constant dialogues and collaboration with diverse stakeholders in society

To achieve these aims, there is no single means or path for achievement. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Based on a strong desire to rank among world-class research universities in

other countries, each University for International Research Excellence is expected to create and present to the world an image of a university with distinctive characteristics and features, and to formulate a Research Systems Strengthening Plan by incorporating ideas not bound by conventional approaches without hesitation.

We will approve challenging Research Systems Strengthening Plans that allow the entire university to extend their features and characteristics to become a world-class research university, not those that are only an extension of existing initiatives or those that only involve a part of the university, and also support universities to realize the plan through subsidies by the University Endowment Fund, and deregulations.

## 2. Accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans

The accreditation of a University for International Research Excellence and approval of its Research Systems Strengthening Plan is not based solely on its past achievements and records but on the presentation of its vision and commitment for “transformation” toward realization of a world-class research university. Also, taking into account the objectives of the system and the burden on universities, the accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of their Research Systems Strengthening Plans are reviewed at the same time from the following perspectives:

- 1) Research capabilities for international excellence
- 2) Business and financial strategies
- 3) Autonomous and responsible governance structure

### (1) Applicant bodies

University operators.

### (2) Accreditation subjects

Public and private universities with the potential to become world-class research universities.

### (3) Number of accreditations and approvals

Considering the objectives of the system, the number of universities to be accredited is limited to a few.

### (4) Accreditation requirements

The criteria for the accreditation are based on the items of Act 4-3, provisions of the items of Regulation 2 and items (1) to (7) in Basic Policy 2-2 and satisfying all the criteria shall be the requirements. Upon application, please submit documents that prove your university fulfills all the criteria. To be more specific, fill in the Letter of Intent by following the

guidelines.

In the accreditation review, we will utilize quantitative index combined with qualitative information, considering the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics<sup>1</sup>, and strive to ensure the neutrality, transparency and verification opportunity of our analysis. We will also endeavor to capture not only numerical values in a certain point of time but also historical changes in the values as well as the university's management efforts, from the perspective to accredit universities with the potential to become one of the world-class research universities.

#### (5) Period of Research Systems Strengthening Plan

Considering the objectives of the system of Universities for International Research Excellence, since Research Systems Strengthening Plans will need to have a degree of longevity, universities are to set the period of their Research Systems Strengthening Plan themselves, up to a maximum of 25 years.

Also, progress of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan shall be assessed for the continuing eligibility for the subsidy every fixed period of time (approximately 6 to 10 years), so the period of the plan must be divided into fixed sub-periods, "Phase 1", "Phase 2", and so on, and achievement goals must be set for each term. The period of the plan and the duration of each term are determined in the review process based on the application submitted by the university.

As for the universities whose Research Systems Strengthening Plan is approved this time, we aim to start the funding in FY 2024. Therefore the plan must be prepared, setting FY 2024 as the preparation period<sup>2</sup> and FY 2025 as the first year.

#### (6) Approval requirements

Based on the items of Act 5-3 and items (1) to (3) in Basic Policy 3-3, satisfying all the criteria shall be the requirements for the approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plan. Please note that achievement of the following three goals within the period of the plan will be needed.

- i. Achievement of research capabilities and other targets set by the university (E.g., High-profile papers (the number and share of the top-10% cited papers) have become comparable to those of world-class level research universities)
- ii. Sustainable business growth<sup>3</sup> (the average annual expenditure growth rate of about 3%)
- iii. Building of the university's own endowment fund of sufficient scale to produce the investment profits necessary for sustainable growth

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<sup>1</sup> Released in 2015. Consists of 10 principles and describes points of note concerning the use of weighing data for research evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> The amount of the grant given in FY 2024 will be for both the preparation period (FY 2024) and the first year of the plan (FY 2025). The last grant will be paid one year before the final year of the plan, and no grant money will be paid in the last year of the plan.

<sup>3</sup> For the definition, refer to the preparation guidelines for the First Draft of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan for Universities for International Research Excellence.

(7) Method for calculating subsidy amounts

The total amount of subsidies to be provided each fiscal year from the University Endowment Fund will be decided at a meeting of relevant ministries and agencies, while taking into consideration the status of investment profits of the University Endowment Fund and ensuring its financial health.

From the viewpoint of encouraging universities to improve their autonomous management capabilities and secure diverse sources of funding, within that total amount of subsidies, the amount of subsidies to each university will be determined, in part, according to its performance in obtaining external funding and its contribution of funds to the University Endowment Fund, and based on its Research Systems Strengthening Plan and its progress thereof.

For important notes on the grant and information on contributions to the University Endowment Fund, refer to Basic Policy 3-9 and Basic Policy 3-2 (5), respectively.

< Formula for calculating subsidy amounts >

The amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems is calculated according to universities' performance in obtaining external funds (excluding public funds). In addition, the amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth shall be granted from the perspective of the enhancement of the university's own endowment fund and ensuring the future stability of the system through strengthening the investment principle of the University Endowment Fund. The total amount of subsidies to be provided each fiscal year is calculated using the following formula.

Amount of subsidy

$$= \boxed{\text{Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems}} + \boxed{\text{Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth}}$$

$\boxed{\text{Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems}}$

$$= \text{Five-year average of the university's amount of external funds acquired (excluding public funds)} \times \text{Coefficient } \alpha^{*1}$$

$\boxed{\text{Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth}}^{*2}$

$$= (\text{Amount accumulated by the university in its own endowment fund from its own financial resources}^{*3} + \text{Amount contributed by the university from its own financial resources to the University Endowment Fund}) \times \text{Coefficient } \beta^{*1}$$

\*1 The calculations are based on the values of  $\alpha=1.0$  and  $\beta=2.0$ . However, they will be set in the review process based on the contents of the applied Research Systems Strengthening Plan, with considering the necessity and grounds and taking into account

the high probability of realizing sustainable business growth and building the university's own endowment fund. Also, in the review, we will check the effective and efficient use of the funds to become a world-class research university, because of the limitation of the amount of funds within the range of the total amount of funds based on the investment profit of the University Endowment Fund.

\*2 It will be added from the 3rd year as it is calculated based on actual performance during the period of the plan.

\*3 University's own financial sources refer to the amount of acquired external funds (excluding public funds).

### <Maximum subsidy amounts>

The maximum amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems is limited to approximately 25% of the business size.

As for the cumulative amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth, the upper limit of the ratio of the contributions from subsidies to the accumulated university's own endowment fund shall be 67% at the end of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan.

**Approach to funding Universities for International Research Excellence from the University Endowment Fund (image)**

**<Prerequisites for subsidies (from the Basic Policy)>**

- The total amount of subsidies to be provided each fiscal year is to be decided at a meeting of relevant ministries and agencies, while taking into consideration the status of investment profits of the University Endowment Fund and ensuring its financial health.
- From the viewpoint of encouraging universities to improve their autonomous management capabilities and secure diverse sources of funding, within that total amount of subsidies, the amount of subsidies to each university is to be determined, in part, according to its performance in obtaining external funding and its contribution of funds to the University Endowment Fund, and based on its Research Systems Strengthening Plan and its progress thereof.
- Based on the acquisition of external funds (average annual increase of about 5% or more):
  - Financial strategies should have a high probability of realizing sustainable business growth (average annual expenditure growth rate of about 3%)
  - The university building its own endowment fund of sufficient scale to produce the investment profits necessary for sustainable growth should be highly feasible.

→ Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems

→ Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth

◆ Formula for calculating subsidy amounts (image)

Amount of subsidy = Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems<sup>\*1</sup> + Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth<sup>\*2</sup>

**\*1 Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems**  
 = (Five-year average of the university's amount of external funds acquired (excluding public funds)) × Coefficient α (matching coefficient)

**\*2 Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth**  
 = (Amount accumulated by the university in its own endowment fund from its own financial resources + Amount contributed by the university from its own financial resources to the University Endowment Fund) × Coefficient β (matching coefficient)

○ Configuration

- Amount of external funds acquired = 100
- Of this, 30 is accumulated in the university's own endowment fund or appropriated to contributions from its own financial resources

- Amount for promoting the strengthening of research and other systems =  $100 \times \alpha$
- Amount for promoting the strengthening of the university's foundations for growth =  $30 \times \beta$
- Total amount of subsidy =  $100 \times \alpha + 30 \times \beta$

Amount of external funds acquired (100)  
\* Calculated on 5-year average

Amount of subsidy from University Endowment Fund (Total =  $100 \times \alpha + 30 \times \beta$ )

Accumulated in the university's own endowment fund or appropriated to contributions from its own financial resources  
\* If contributed, also recorded as business growth

\* The configuration has been set purely for simulation purposes.  
 \* From the viewpoint of future sustainability, maximum subsidy amounts will be set as a percentage of the scale of the university's initiatives.  
 \* The above coefficients (α and β) will be set in consultation with relevant ministries and agencies.

(Source: Material 1 for the Committee Meeting for Strengthening University Research Capabilities, Council for Science and Technology (9th))



#### (8) Use of subsidies

Expenses that can be incurred with the subsidies shall be those associated with the initiatives (items listed in (a) to (e)) in (2) of Basic Policy 3-2) listed in the Research Systems Strengthening Plan, under the autonomy and responsibility of the University for International Research Excellence. It is not expected that the subsidy given every fiscal year would be directly accumulated into the university's own endowment fund. However, the grants can be used for contributions to the University Endowment Fund and funds reimbursed after the conclusion of the subsidies can be incorporated into the university's own endowment fund.

Also, the subsidies can be carried over to the following fiscal years or later at the discretion of each University for International Research Excellence without the prior involvement of JST, except during the end-term (milestone) evaluation period of whether or not support will be continued.

As for findings from the University Endowment Fund, as the organization issuing the subsidies, JST will not specify in advance how the funds will be divided for use, nor will JST's prior involvement be required in execution of the subsidies in principle, provided that conformity with the Research Systems Strengthening Plan is ensured. Therefore, each University for International Research Excellence needs to be appropriately accountable for their respective use. MEXT is also to promptly disclose the summary of reports on their use of subsidies and ensure ex-post transparency. For more details, refer to the Funding Implementation Policy.

#### (9) Revision of Research Systems Strengthening Plan

Please note that any revision to the Research Systems Strengthening Plan must be approved by the Minister of MEXT based on the provisions of Act 5-6 and 5-7.

#### (10) End of the subsidy

As the subsidy is given based on the Research Systems Strengthening Plan, it will terminate at the end of the plan period described in (5) Period of Research Systems Strengthening Plan. Also, it will be ended even within the plan period if the goal of the plan has been achieved.

Also, if the operator of a University for International Research Excellence falls under any of the items in Act 11-1, the Minister of MEXT can withdraw the approval on Research Systems Strengthening Plan based on the provisions of Act 11 and the subsidy will terminate accordingly.

The funds contributed to the University Endowment Fund from universities during the period of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan are not expected to be refunded to the contributor due to its nature as a donation. However, when the subsidy terminates, the amount of refund is determined up to the amount of the contributed funds based on the percentage of the contribution in the net assets of the University Endowment Fund at the time of the refund and will be refunded in stages according to the terms when the contribution was raised. Contributed funds are refundable only when the capital adequacy ratio of the University

Endowment Fund exceeds the expected one separately determined.

### 3. Review

Review for the accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans will be performed in an integrated manner. It is performed in stages based on not only the submitted documents and interview but also inspections of the research institute and careful dialogue with the university.

#### (1) Review method

Review is held at meetings by intellectuals (hereinafter referred to as “Advisory Board meeting”). A mechanism is to be created enabling the Council for Science, Technology and Innovation and the Council for Science and Technology to collaborate appropriately, such as through the sharing of information, and while also taking into account the special characteristics of academia, an appropriate system that includes foreign experts is to be created so that advanced and specialized insight from an international perspective can be considered. Review will be performed according to the following procedures with collaboration from domestic and international reviewers as needed:

##### 1) First screening

In the first screening, documentary review is performed based on the documents submitted.

##### 2) After passing the first screening

The review will be performed in various ways with inspections of the research institute and careful dialogue with the university, including interview, onsite inspections, and refining of the draft of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan through a hands-on approach.

#### (2) Documents

The following documents must be submitted in a digital format (in both PDF and editable formats). Prepare and submit the following application documents in each review step, considering the objectives of the system. In principle, both Japanese and English versions of documents are required.

##### 1) First screening

- Letter of Intent
- Outline and video of the First Draft of Research Systems Strengthening Plan
- First Draft of Research Systems Strengthening Plan
- Supplementary materials

2) After passing the first screening

Detailed document requirements such as format will be provided separately after the first screening is passed.

- Revised version of Research Systems Strengthening Plan
- Draft of Phase 1 implementation plan
- Explanatory material for revisions
- Document for interview
- Revised supplementary materials

Submission of additional materials might be required in the review process.

(3) Submission due dates/ Schedule

Friday, December 23, 2022	Start of applications
At 3 p.m. on Friday, March 31, 2023	Deadline of document submission for the first screening (Japanese version) *English versions are accepted by 3 p.m. on April 10. *Document submission or change is not accepted after the deadline.
Around spring to autumn	Review is performed in stages in various ways including not only the submitted documents and interview but also onsite inspections and refinement of Research Systems Strengthening Plan through a hands-on approach.
From autumn	Preparation for changes in university governance including establishment of a consultative body Accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence Approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans
In FY 2024 (Scheduled)	Start of funding

(4) Destination of submission

Upload the documents to the following URL link. Also, send an email to the email address provided in 5. (4) in this document to confirm the submission.

○URL link for document submission

<https://mext.ent.box.com/f/a36d0340ba3b4be1b722d08c01f750a7>

(5) Publication of review status

The names of the applicant corporations and universities will be disclosed after the application deadline. Also, the status of each review stage will be notified to the applicants and publicly disclosed, if necessary.

The names of the universities, legal names of the operators, and accreditation date will be immediately released on MEXT's website after the accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence.

Also, the names of the universities, legal names of the operators, approval date, and outline of Research Systems Strengthening Plans will be released on MEXT's website after the approval of Research Systems Strengthening Plans.

(6) Elimination of stakeholders

The policy of the elimination of stakeholders relevant to the review is as follows.

The member of the Advisory Board and reviewers who fall under the following 1) to 3) shall not perform reviews concerning the applicant corporations and universities.

- 1) If the person belongs or has belonged within the past three years to the applicant corporations or universities (including those who are scheduled to be hired).
- 2) If the application documents state that the person will participate in the plan in some form.
- 3) If the person has other reasons judged difficult to perform review in a fair and neutral manner.

#### 4. Report and evaluation

Reports that are necessary to be submitted by the Universities for International Research Excellence and evaluation that they receive on a regular basis after their accreditation and approval are as follows.

(1) Annual report

The operators of Universities for International Research Excellence are required to submit the following documents 1) to 3) to the Minister of MEXT every fiscal year by the deadlines.

Documents	Submission deadline
1) Updated versions of the documents submitted upon the application to evaluate conformance to the accreditation criteria	Every year starting from the fiscal year when accredited, by the end of June of the following fiscal year

2) Report on the use of the subsidy in each fiscal year	By the end of June of the following fiscal year of each fiscal year when the subsidy is used
3) Overview of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan's implementation status	Every year starting from the end of the fiscal year of the approval date, by the end of June of the following fiscal year

As for the first schedule of annual reports, if the accreditation and approval are granted and the subsidy starts in FY 2024, documents 1) and 2) must be submitted by the end of June, 2025. As for report 3), the implementation status for the two fiscal years 2024 and 2025 must be submitted by the end of June 2026. Also, the document 2), the outline of the report on the use of subsidy, will be publicly released by MEXT.

(2) Progress check (monitoring)

MEXT checks the progress of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan using the submitted annual reports. In order to support the university's efforts and activities over the long term without being swayed by an emphasis on short-term results, monitoring of Research Systems Strengthening Plans is to focus on confirming, based on objective indicators, the progress of commitments to business growth and to strengthening research capabilities so as to realize the vision presented by the university, and if there are no particular problems, support is to be provided in a stable manner.

However, additional submission of reports or materials may be requested when the university is found not to meet the accreditation criteria or when thought to be needed to ensure smooth and reliable implementation of the Research Systems Strengthening Plan.

(3) End-term (milestone) evaluation

From the viewpoint of strict responsibility requirements, responsibility for results is to be questioned from a medium- to long-term perspective, with evaluations to be conducted every fixed period of time (approximately 6 to 10 years) to determine whether support will be continued or not. The period will be determined during the review process based on the application.

End-term evaluation of each term (such as Phase 1, Phase 2, and so on) is performed based on the engagements and commitment achievements in the term and detailed implementation plan for the next term.

In the evaluation, if the university is found continually not to have met the accreditation criteria, we may withdraw the accreditation based on the provisions in Act 4-6 and 4-7. Changes to the Research Systems Strengthening Plan may also be needed as a result of the evaluation. Please note that any changes in the plan must be approved by the Minister of MEXT in accordance with the prescribed procedures based on the provisions in Act 5-6 and 5-7. In addition, if it becomes clear that the university's commitment, which is a prerequisite

for receiving support, has not been achieved for a continuous period of time due to a significant gap between the Research Systems Strengthening Plan and reality, pursuant to the provisions of Article 11 of the Act, the MEXT will revoke the approval.

## 5. Others

### (1) Promotion of deregulation

In order to promote the objective of the system, promotion of strengthening systems for leveraging research and research results of Universities for International Research Excellence, MEXT will consider deregulations concerning universities based on discussions by the Advisory Board. We will develop an environment for interactive communication by providing universities with opportunities to allow them to propose deregulation ideas, while understanding needs from the field in a concrete form through the review process and opinion exchange with universities.

Also, in view of Article 3 of the Act's supplementary provisions, consideration will be given in accordance with the contents described in "Summary of Issues for System Reform" (Review Conference for System Reform, etc. toward Building World-class Research Universities, December 2021) to allow national university corporations to establish a consultative decision-making body. In addition, from the viewpoint of enhancing managerial and financial autonomy, consideration will also be given to deregulation matters such as the accumulation of funds in an endowment fund, the easing of requirements for long-term borrowing and bond issuance, and the relaxation of procedures for asset utilization, and amendments will be made to the National University Corporation Act<sup>4</sup>.

### (2) Important notes on the subsidy

The subsidy amount will be determined within the range of the total amount of subsidy for the fiscal year determined at a meeting of relevant ministries and agencies as described in (7) of Section 2. Submission of provisional values of the acquisitions of external funds (excluding public funds) in the previous fiscal year is needed in late May every year, for estimation of the subsidy amount for each University for International Research Excellence. Please provide them accordingly by following the instructions provided by MEXT. The subsidy will be provided by JST. Please check the Funding Implementation Policy for details as the subsidy will be given based on the policy.

Universities for International Research Excellence are required to appropriately manage and fairly, effectively and efficiently use the subsidy, in the same manner as other public funds.

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<sup>4</sup> As for public universities, deregulation will be considered based on the progress of the considerations for national universities.

(3) Schedule of the next open application

The accreditation of Universities for International Research Excellence and approval of their Research Systems Strengthening Plans are conducted in stages, taking into consideration the operational status of the University Endowment Fund and other factors. The next open application is scheduled to commence after FY 2024.

(4) Contacts

Research Capability Enhancement Promotion Unit, Office for University Research Capability Enhancement, University Research Facilitation Division, Research Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

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