

No One Left Behind - Reaching the Goal

Support Systems for Students with Disabilities at The Open University of Japan

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誰一人取り残さないを目指して：放送大学の障害者支援の取り組み

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ABSTRACT

The Open University of Japan (OUJ) has been struggling to create appropriate support systems for students with disabilities (SWD) since 1983, the year of its foundation. I introduced the history of this process and the challenges it involved in the OUJ Journal of 2014¹. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the steps taken in this process between 2014 and 2022. I first outline global trends in the treatment of SWD in higher educational settings. I then focus on the development of SWD policy in Japanese universities following the enforcement of the Eliminating Discrimination against People with Disabilities Act of 2016. Finally, I review intractable problems still encountered by SWD at the OUJ and discuss strategies to make the learning environment at OUJ more accessible both to students with disabilities and other groups facing particular challenges, including senior citizens and non- Japanese nationals.

要 旨

放送大学は1983年の開学以来、障害のある学生への支援の構築に努めてきた。その変遷については、筆者は英文で「放送大学の新しい挑戦：障害者支援の現状と課題」（2014）¹という論考をまとめた。本論文の目的は2014年以降の動きを紹介するものである。

第一に国際的な動向を概観し、第二に日本において2016年に施行された障害者差別解消法が成立し、大学における障害者支援がどのように変化してきたか、について焦点をあてる。最後に放送大学の障害者支援、とりわけICTを活用した支援の進展や今後の方向性について議論する。障害者支援の構築は、少数の障害者の為だけではなく、高齢者や留学生など、学ぶことに困難を抱えている多くの学生への支援に繋がっている。

1. The Global Trend: Impact of anti-discrimination legislation and support systems for students with disabilities (SWD)

In discussing these issues, we must first be aware that systems of higher education and the assumptions that underlie them vary widely even among the nations of Europe. More significantly, societal attitudes to disability itself differ and are changing in different ways and at different rates across the global

family of nations. Relying on simple numerical comparisons alone may obscure these underlying issues.

Globally the inclusion of SWD into mainstream education is a relatively recent development. In many countries, access to higher education is contingent on specific qualifications or competencies, as assessed by systems of formal education.

According to the OECD report², the support systems for SWD in the United States and Canada, developed in the 1970s at the instigation of the civil rights movement. In countries like France or

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¹ Yoko Hirose, OUJ's New Challenge: The Supporting Systems for the Students with Disabilities in The Open University of Japan, Journal of The Open University of Japan, No.32 (2014) pp.93-99

² Disability in Higher Education, OECD, 2003

Germany, it developed more slowly. In 2001 a European Union study was published to compare the opportunities and resources for SWD in universities throughout EU member states (European Union, 2001)³.

As a catalyst to improve support systems for SWD in nation states, anti-discrimination legislation has proved enormously effective. The US was the first Western country to introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990 provided the legal basis for equal opportunity and access for disabled people. The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation and telecommunications. Universities were covered by the Act from the start. In contrast, the British Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 excluded education until 2001. The ADA has become a model for many other countries when introducing anti-discrimination legislation.

In Europe, the development of support for SWD has been somewhat uneven. Although most countries had some anti-discrimination legislation for people with disabilities this often related primarily to employment. Countries which have had comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in place for the longest period of time (the USA, Australia and, more recently the UK) have made most progress in the provision for SWD.

Let us now turn our attention to the situation in Asia, particularly in East Asian countries. Many Asian countries including China, Korea and Japan have been trying to catch up with Western countries in this field, since the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality in 1994. This established UN standard rules for “the Equalization of Opportunities for persons with Disabilities” and issued the “Salamanca Statement on Principles⁴, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action”.

China

In China, according to Wang⁵, laws regarding higher education for students with disabilities first

appeared in the official documents of the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1985, but it was the 2012 “Barrier-free Environment Construction Regulations” that initiated a major shift in policy. This ordinance required that reasonable accommodations be made for students with disabilities in nationwide entrance, employment, and qualification examinations, and that test papers in Braille or enlarged text must be prepared for students with visual impairments. As a result, in 2014, for the first time in China, students with visual impairments became able to participate in the “Nationwide Standardized Higher Education Examination” (a.k.a. Gaokao), with reasonable accommodations such as the use of Braille and enlarged text. In the six years following this (up to 2018), a total of 23 visually impaired students have participated in the Gaokao in China.

Korea⁶

According to Hyeseon⁷, the concept of “reasonable accommodation” in Korea has its origins in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was agreed in 2006. The “Disability Anti-Discrimination Act” enacted in 2007 then established fundamental laws relating to persons with disabilities in South Korea and was strongly influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a consequence of this the concept of reasonable accommodation was enshrined in the legislation.

Support for students with disabilities at universities and other higher educational institutions is provided based on the “Act on Special Education for Persons with Disabilities”. This requires each university to establish a special support committee and a support center for students with disabilities.

Hyeseon points out that what differentiates the South Korean system from other countries is that reasonable accommodations are limited to those with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and physical disabilities. Consequently, challenges remain in the provision of support for those with developmental and mental disorders.

³ European Union 2001, *Studying Abroad: European Guide for Students with Disabilities*, Brussels.

⁴ Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality Salamanca, Spain, 7–10 June 1994

⁵ Wang Xin, Takeda Kazunori (2022) Support Services for Student with Visual Impairments Offered by Inclusive Higher Education Institutions in China. *Journal of Special Education Research*. Vol.10. p83-93

⁶ Republic of Korea

⁷ Hyeseon Jung (鄭惠先), Reasonable Accommodations in Korea, Responses and educational support regarding “appropriate consideration” at universities in foreign countries: pp.84-91, Hokkaido University International Education Research Department Booklet)

Japan

In Japan, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force in February 2014. The “Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities” which took effect in April 2016 had a huge impact on the education system. It established the legal prohibition of discriminatory treatment of people with disabilities, including students. The Act also enforced the provision of reasonable accommodations. In this context, national and public institutions were legally obliged to provide reasonable accommodations, while private institutions were mandated to make an effort to provide such accommodations.

As a result of this act, national and public institutions as well as large private universities have made progress in their systems of support for students with disabilities. According to the Revised Act on Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, private schools, companies, and other businesses will be legally required to provide reasonable accommodation from April, 2024. As a result, reasonable accommodation will become integral to Japanese society.

So far we have discussed global legislative developments with respect to the treatment of people

with disabilities. I would now like to focus on one particular area of concern that is common to Japan, China, and Korea. This relates to the systems of categorization of those eligible for support. Students with developmental disorders and mental disorders have been largely neglected in comparison with those in physical disability categories, such as visual, hearing, and orthopedic impairment. Japan, Korea and China have all relied on strong medical models for the categorization of disabilities and as a result, support has tended to be primarily focused on those with physical and structural disabilities.

2. The students with disabilities in Japanese higher education

2.1 The number of students with disabilities in higher education in Japan in 2022.

In order to grasp the 2022’s situation of SWD in Japanese higher educational institutions, we shall look at the figures in the research conducted by Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO).

According to the JASSO survey, in Japan, as of May 1, 2022, the number of students with disabilities is 49,672 (1.53% of the total number of students, 3,246,852), an increase of 8,928 students from the previous survey in 2021. And the number of schools

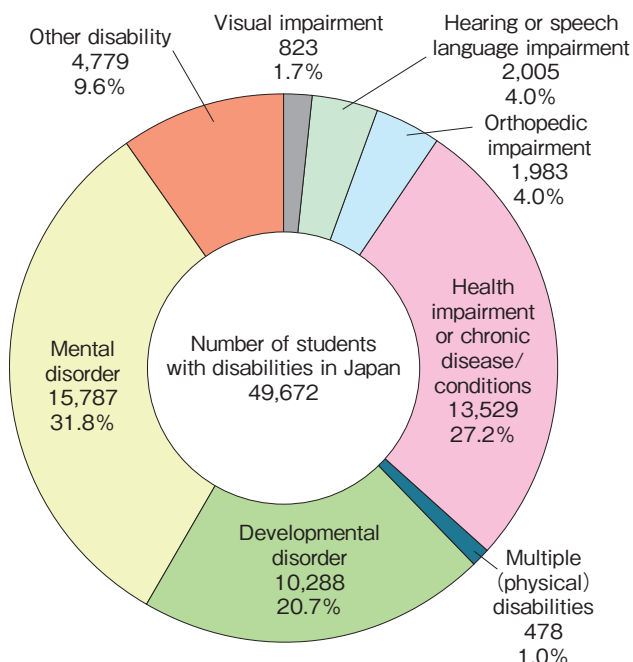


Figure 1 Number of students with disabilities, by disability type⁸

⁸ JASSO PRESS “Summary of the results of the FY2022 Survey on the Status of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities at Universities, Junior Colleges, and Colleges of Technology” 2023.5.1.
http://www.iasso.go.jp/statistics/gakusei_shogai_syugku/_icsFiles/afiedfile/2023/08/29/2023_press_1.pde

enrolling students with disabilities is 970 (82.6% of the total number of 1,174 schools), an increase of 28 schools from the previous survey.

2.2 Number of students with disabilities by type of disability in 2022

In 2022, among students with disabilities, “mental disorder” had the highest number of students with 15,787. This was followed by “health impairment or chronic disease/conditions” with 13,529 students and “developmental disability” with 10,288 students. If you add up mental disorders and developmental disorders, they account for 52.5% of the total.

2.3 Change in number of students with disabilities and their percentage of the total student population

As you can see from the graph, from the year 2009 to 2014, the number of SWD doubled in Japan, but the percentage of SWD was still very small compared to those of European countries and North America.

I discussed the common tendency of the category of SWD in Asian countries in previous chapter: the support has tended to be biased towards disabilities that are easily visible physically. As you can see from the graph, JASSO report pointed out that “compared to the physical disability categories, such as visual, hearing, and orthopedic impairments, students with

developmental disorders and mental disorders are expected to continue to account for a relatively large percentage of the total. In this way, Japan could be seen as having moved somewhat closer to the condition seen in Europe and North America.”⁹

3. The Open University of Japan (OUJ)

3.1 About OUJ: Six areas of study and Study center

The OUJ established in 1983, has grown to become the largest distance education institution in Japan. The Faculty of Liberal Arts at OUJ offers courses in a wide range of academic fields to meet the diverse needs of students and the general public, so as to broaden their education and deepen their knowledge in specialized fields related to their everyday lives. The following six areas of study are being offered.

- Living and Welfare
- Psychology and Education
- Society and Industry
- Humanities and Culture
- Nature and Environment
- Informatics

Study centers

OUJ has 50 Study Centers (4 in Tokyo), 7 Satellite Spaces and 64 Audio-visual Rooms throughout Japan.

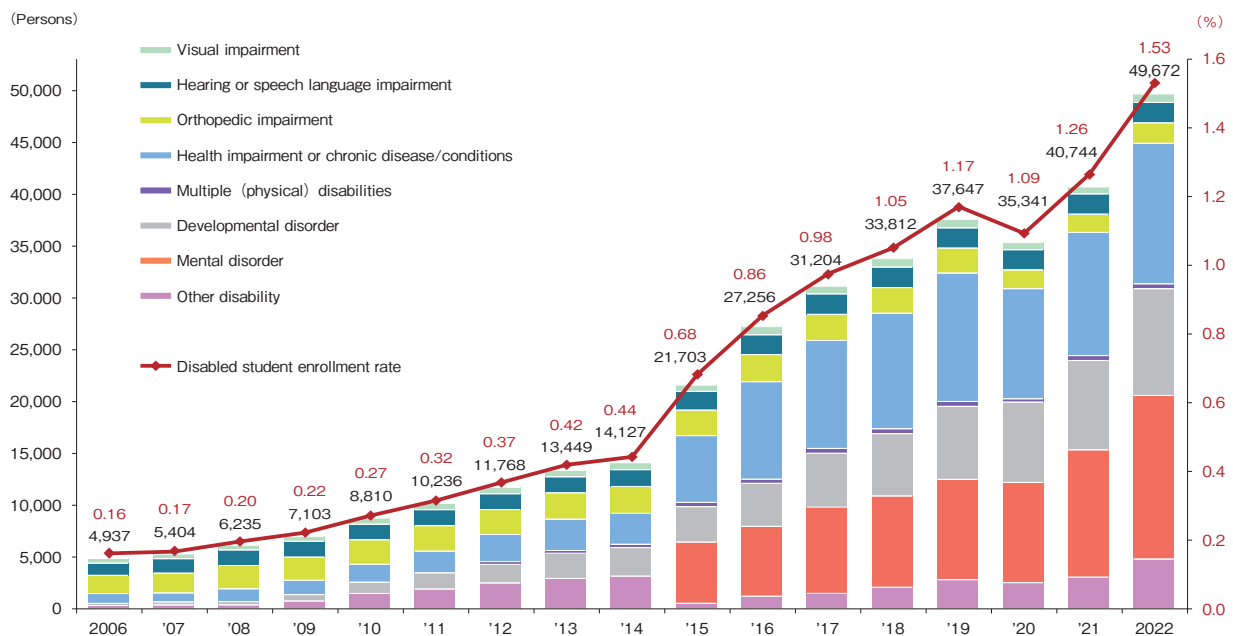


Figure 2 Change in number of students with disabilities and their percentage of the total student population¹⁰

⁹ National Survey of Supports for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Settings in Japan (Provisional Translation), p.12, JASSO

¹⁰ JASSO (2023) “2022 National Survey of Supports for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Settings in Japan” https://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/gakusei_shogai_syugaku/index.html

The Study Centers are used to conduct face-to-face class sessions and tutorials, and provide academic counseling. There are facilities for students to view or listen to broadcast lectures, and library services are also provided at the Study Centers. They also function as venues for students to hold extracurricular activities and social events. The Study Centers are located on campuses of public and private universities and in municipal facilities. The Satellite Spaces and Audio-visual Rooms are intended to provide easier access to learning activities for students who live too far away to access the Study Centers.

In conclusion OIJ students can study at home, in their own time, from a multi-media learning system which includes printed materials, radio, television and internet.

As a result, this university system has met the educational needs of SWD who would otherwise be alienated in the traditional educational systems.

This outcome has been made possible by virtue of.
 -the absence of entrance examination

-special access to university education for people without high school graduate qualification
 -the ability to study at home through TV, radio, and internet facilities and printed materials. (The digital text for print disabilities)

Internet based Testing (IBT)

Since its founding, the Open University of Japan’s credit certification exams have been held at study centers in various locations over a certain period of time. Reasonable accommodations were made for students with disabilities there.

IBT was held for 11 days in July 2022, and the number of subjects taken at the learning center during the exam period was 1,664 in total, but IBT was able to be conducted in a total of 183,043 subjects. Approximately 50,000 students have cooperated with IBT.

As it will be an experimental trial in 2022, I would like to refrain from describing the evaluation of this IBT in this paper.

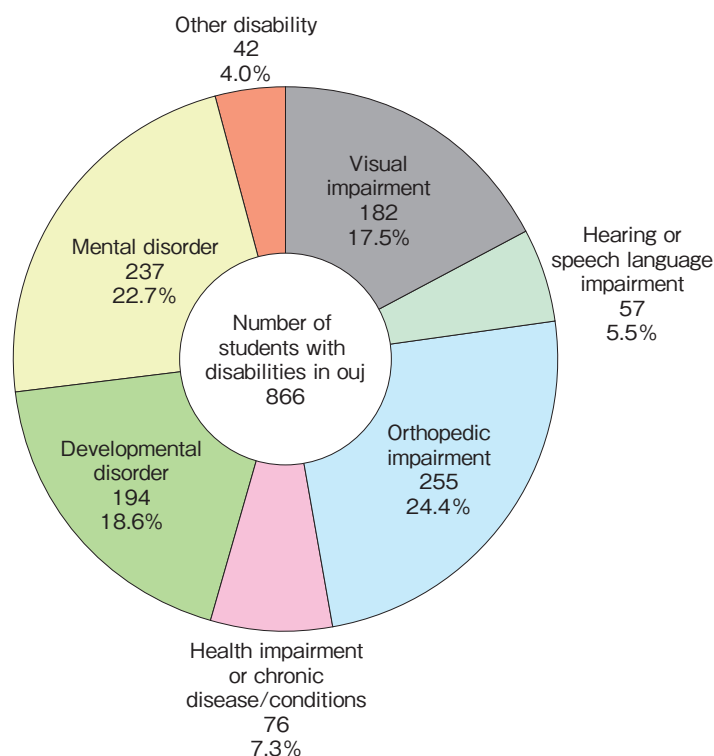


Figure 3 Number of students with disabilities by type of disability in OIJ¹¹

From the total of 866 applications for special accommodations for the second semester of 2022 from graduate and undergraduate students (as of November 1st). Total number of students is 8 3951.

- * Where applications make reference to more than one disability these are represented separately in the data.
- * It should be noted that many students do not apply for special accommodations even though they have a disability.

¹¹ Support office for Students with Disabilities in OIJ

3.2 The growing number of SWD in OUJ

The popularity of the OUJ amongst SWD is reflected by the growing number who enrolls every year. Let's compare the number of students with disabilities at The Open University in 2013 and 2022.

In the second semester in 2013, there were 90,154 students of whom 698 had been identified as disabled (0.77%):

Visual impairment: 168 students

Hearing impairment: 32 students

Physically handicapped & Sickly individuals: 331 students

Others: 167 students

In the second semester in 2022, there were 83,951 students of whom 866 had been identified as disabled (about 1 %):

Visual impairment: 182 students

Hearing impairment: 57 students

Orthopedic impairment: 255 students

Health impairment: 76 students

Developmental disorder: 194 students

Mental disorder: 237 students

Others: 42 students

Identification of SWD is done by self-declaration. Before enrolment, the university holds an assessment meeting in which each applicant is assessed with regard to their level of disability and their special needs requirements.

Data collected by this process must be treated with a degree of caution because of inherent fallibility of self-reporting. Moreover, vision, hearing, and athletic capability generally decline with aging so it can be assumed that disability support services will be more widely required especially among older students.

3.3 Special Support for SWD

• Special procedure for examination and assessments

There are special procedures for examinations and assessment which can be put into operation to benefit SWD. These procedures include: granting extra time; use of specially provided rooms; use of amanuensis; use of word processor/tape/braille/reading glass; use of typewriter/braillewriter; provision of question papers in large print/braille or on tape.

Confirmatory implementation of IBT (Internet-Based-Testing) for the Credit Accreditation Examination was carried out in the summer of 2022. Since IBT is still in its infancy, I will not discuss it in detail here.

• Special procedure for classroom lectures

Classroom instruction is carried out at the study centers. According to individual requests, the study centers provide special procedures. These procedures include: provision of parking space; the provision of sheets desired in the classroom; special contact with the lecturer in advance when special support is needed; allowing helper/interpreters for hearing impaired students; the provision of special desks for wheel chairs.

The services mentioned above have started from the beginning of OUJ. In the next chapter, I shall shed the light on the support related ICT.

3.4 The new challenges utilizing ICT; Digital text & Caption

The OUJ is one of the most advantageous Japanese higher institutions in terms of its ability to use ICT, but there still remain much to be done for SWD. OUJ lectures can be seen in TV and Radio and so that general public enjoy watching them, while the lectures via internet can be seen in the OUJ students' site to which OUJ students enter the site by their own ID number.

• Text to the students with visual impairment, and print disabilities

The OUJ delivers the digital text of printed learning materials to the students with visual impairment and print disabilities who can read the text by text-to-speech-reading equipment of computer. For brail users, digital text can be transformed into brail by computer.

• The joining to the data transmission service in the National Diet Library

As a result of many years of supporting students with visual impairments and print disability through digital texts, OUJ has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Diet Library regarding the data transmission service for the visually impaired, and has provided text data for printed teaching materials to the service since 2022.

By joining this service, regardless of whether you are a student at OUJ or not, anybody who have difficulty reading regular printed materials due to visual impairment or other reasons can download and use the text data of OUJ's printed learning materials at home, by registering as users with the National Diet Library. Even from a global perspective, being able to read such a wide range of university-level specialized books in the form of digital textbooks is

revolutionary.

Regarding to OIJ's students with visually impairment and other reasons, they can now obtain printed learning material text data for classes for which they have not registered, which was previously unavailable, through this service and can be used as a reference for selecting courses. Moreover, OIJ's students also became able to use data on books and materials for the visually impaired produced by libraries across the country that have agreements with the National Diet Library.

- **Captions of TV lectures & Internet lectures**

The OIJ delivers lectures by TV, radio, and Internet. Captions are helpful not only for the students with hearing impairment but also for elderly students and the students who have difficulties with Japanese language. The captions are available 61% of the TV lectures of OIJ (2023).

We are trying to increase captioned lectures as much as we can. The TV lectures with captions are also broadcasted on the Internet.

- **Caption of Radio lectures and Online lectures**

The OIJ delivers 332 lectures by radio (2014. 11). These radio lectures also delivered by Internet. If the students with hearing impairment request the scenario of radio lectures, in principle, lecture scrips are to be given to them. However, in reality, some scripts are incomplete or non-existent. Those requests are very rare, however, so the students with hearing impairment may avoid taking radio courses or only study by printed learning materials.

Since 2013, our university's subtitle project¹² has produced content with subtitles and still images for multiple subjects, and has begun distributing it from System Wakaba's radio program subtitle experiment site.

Subtitles were added to radio lectures on the Internet site, which was well received by hearing-impaired students. Furthermore, the lectures were well received for being easy to understand, even for general students.

Through this process, starting in 2018, OIJ began formally producing subtitles for radio lectures using its ordinary budget. Starting in 2019, subtitles have been added to radio lectures for about six subjects

every year and they have been distributed online.

Online lectures which began in 2016, were subtitled from the beginning using voice recognition technology.¹³ Although I cannot go into details here, this was made possible through joint research between our project in OIJ and Kawahara Laboratory in Kyoto University. We made to improve the accuracy of the speech recognition system.

4. The Support Office for Students with Disabilities

Since its opening, OIJ has made accommodations for students with disabilities to the extent possible. Consideration for students with disabilities has been handled by the Students with Disabilities Support Section of the Student Affairs Division.

The Support Office for Students with Disabilities was officially opened in 2016 with the enactment of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. The aim is to support efforts by faculty and staff to ensure fair educational opportunities, study and college life.

Approximately 800 students with disabilities ask for reasonable accommodation each year, and we provide support based on the contents of the "Support Menu". At the time of admission, an interview will be held at the study center to which the applicant belongs, and the specific content will be determined after consultation between the applicant and staff, taking into account the characteristics of each disability and the circumstances of the university. Individual consultations for students are conducted at each study center, and if students have specific needs, the Support Counseling Office offer consultations through the study center.

4.1 The Support Counseling Office for Students with Disabilities

I discussed the issues of students with psychological problems and appealed to the need for counselling support for students with those problems¹⁴. In response to social demands and demands within the university, In 2016, The Support Counseling Office for Students with Disabilities is made up of a total of five members: The Counseling Office Director (Vice President in Charge), a Deputy Director, one full-time faculty member, and two part-time faculty members.

¹² Yoko Hirose, OIJ's Challenge in Improving Accessibility to Higher Education Learning Environments: Capturing Lectures Using Speech Recognition Systems for the Hearing Impaired, *Journal of The Open University of Japan*, No.36 (2018) pp.157-162

¹³ Kawahara, Akita, Hirose (2015) Subtitle creation and editing system for lectures and lectures using speech recognition, *The Special Interest Group Technical Reports of IPS* 108-2

¹⁴ Yoko Hirose (2014) No.32, as mentioned above

The support Counseling Office holds regular meetings and cooperates with the Disability Support Services Section to plan and operate the Open University's support for students with disabilities.

With the increase in the number of students with mental disorder, the need for psychological support for students with disabilities increased, therefore, two counselors were assigned in 2018. For the time being, they are assigned to two study centers with a large number of students, and consultations are held with faculty and staff as well as with the students. They have been also actively involved in raising awareness by holding training sessions for faculty and staff on zoom.

5. Continuous effort to improve for SWD in OUJ

From the perspective of supporting students with disabilities, OUJ has the potential to have a major influence on support for people with disabilities at Japanese universities.

A Credit Transfer Agreement has been exchanged between the OUJ and other universities. In 2022, 439 schools enjoy this agreement. One of the professed aims of the OUJ is to cooperate with existing universities and to make full use of the latest

knowledge and newest educational technology. In order to attain this aim, the OUJ is making great efforts for entering into similar agreements with a larger number of universities. The students with disabilities in other schools can take OUJ courses which are more accessible and earn the same credits.

Distance education, as it should be practiced by the OUJ, contains significant advantages over traditional institutions when it comes to supporting SWD. In that sense, while using credit exchange systems with OUJ, the traditional institutions can concentrate on providing special support for SWD in professional or vocational courses.

The Open University of Japan will be celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Unfortunately, however, it appears that knowledge about the Open University of Japan has not penetrated Japanese society. We need to strengthen the network between universities and further emphasize that credit transfer with OUJ is a great benefit for both students and universities.

Making the learning environment at OUJ more accessible both to students with disabilities and other groups facing particular challenges, including senior citizens and non-Japanese nationals.

(2023年10月30日受理)