

His Excellency Mr Hajime Hayashi  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
The Embassy of Japan  
  
101-104 Piccadilly  
London W1J 7JT

11 January 2022

Dear Ambassador Hayashi,

May we wish you a Happy New Year. We hope that you, your family, and the staff at the Embassy in London are well and coping with the continuing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. May we also take this opportunity of thanking you and your predecessors for all the support and encouragement that you continue to give to the enhancement of Japanese studies in the UK.

Indeed, in our capacities as President of the British Association for Japanese Studies and Chair of the British Association for Teachers of Japanese, supported by colleagues in our two associations, we feel compelled to write to you to convey the concerns with regard to the severe and detrimental effect the current entry restrictions into Japan are having on the sector. Not only are these measures adversely impacting on students of Japanese studies themselves and on their mental well-being but, it must be said, also on academics and all others working in the field.

At present, students without Japanese nationality are not allowed to enter Japan, and some of them have now been waiting for almost two years. While some Japanese universities and language schools are offering on-line provision, for people trying to study the language this is much less effective than living in Japan, and the time difference from the UK is highly problematic. It would appear that some Japanese bodies are not fully taking account of this last issue since the vast majority of foreign students in Japan are from other Asian countries (similarly some institutions in the UK are also overlooking the time zone issues in relation to Japan as the majority of foreign language students study in Europe). Many UK institutions are reporting students either requesting (another) Interruption of Study or giving up their studies of Japan/Japanese altogether. We are seeing a situation whereby many students will be graduating (again) having never been to Japan and with much lower levels of Japanese language proficiency and understanding of the country than their *sempai*.

Based on the latest data, we question the scientific basis upon which the Japanese Government's current policy has been formulated. Omicron is highly infectious and so is now spreading rapidly in Japan anyway. Since Japanese people (and foreigners already resident in Japan) are able to enter the country, they are just as likely to bring in COVID as other foreigners are. While there may be an argument to continue to restrict general tourism, restricting entry of students (and academics travelling for research) would appear

to be overly cautious. The WHO on 30th November advised that 'blanket travel bans will not prevent the international spread, and they place a heavy burden on lives and livelihoods'.

The policy would appear to be highly unfair. All other major developed countries have an entry route involving mandated testing and quarantining, normally at the applicant's expense. Many places, Madeira in Portugal being a particularly good example, have set up systems that not only look after the local population, but also visitors, and ensure that everyone is looked after well and fully respected. The UK allows visitors even from 'red-listed' nations to enter, and it certainly continues to allow the entry of Japanese students.

The policy is having a disastrous effect on Japanese studies, and this will have important knock-on effects when it comes to Japan's standing in the world. Sharp declines in student numbers may soon start to threaten the continued existence of Japanese departments in some universities, and we could well see ourselves entering a new era of 'Japan passing' in which Japan's interests are increasingly ignored in various international discussions.

While it makes sense to restrict short-term visitors such as tourists in the current environment, there needs to be a means of entry for longer-term visitors like students (who, other than research students, enter with a student visa rather than a tourist visa). There must be a sensible way to do this that presents very little risk to Japan, in the same way as almost all other countries have managed it. Typically, the requirements are (i) a negative COVID test within 48 hours before boarding the flight (ii) on arrival, quarantine in a designated hotel, for a specified period, with the hotel policed such that guests are not able to leave their rooms and (iii) a requirement for, say, two negative tests before release from this quarantine.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to raise these concerns with your colleagues in Japan in the appropriate authorities.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Christopher Hood  
President,  
British Association for Japanese Studies



Dr Miho Inaba  
Chair,  
British Association for Teachers of Japanese

Letter also signed by 120 academics and students working in Japanese Studies.