

# NUPACE<sup>1</sup> 2020-2021: A COVID-19 Chronology

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## A. Introduction

As far as inbound student mobility is concerned, FY 2020 witnessed nothing less than a total meltdown. The comforting notion that physical student exchange would automatically steam ahead was turned on its head; Japan, in order to curb the spread of COVID-19, sealed its borders for the most part of the year and, after a long bout of self-satisfaction with regard to rising exchange student numbers, the cold realisation dawned that in FY 2020 there would be no new NUPACE intake.

This report will deviate, both in style and substance from the format of previous years. In order to keep a record of NUPACE developments in FY 2020, the author intends to divide the report into three parts. Section B consists of a chronology of actions taken over the past year; Section C elaborates upon, and ponders the ramifications of these actions, and Section D introduces the patterns of NUPACE student intake in the first half of FY 2021, as portrayers of a “With-COVID” exchange.

## B. Chronology of Actions and Events: February 2020 ~ May 2021

Timeline	Government Action	Nagoya University	NUPACE
<b>Feb 2020</b>	Entry bans implemented against foreign nationals with a travel history in/passport issued from Hubei Province, later extended to Zhejiang Province.		
<b>Mar 2020</b>	Quarantine requirements/entry bans implemented against China and Korea (ROK), later to be extended to provinces in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and all of Iceland.	3/17 Issuance of guidelines regarding the holding of orientations/classes in spring 2020. (Large-scale move to online education.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3/3 Executive decision to cancel NUPACE spring 2020 admission. Partner universities and applicants were informed on 3/6, with the 94 students affected being invited to defer entry to autumn 2020/spring 2021. Costs of flights already purchased were reimbursed.</li> <li>• 3/15 Application deadline for autumn 2020 admission. (152 new applications; 61 requests for deferral from Apr admission.)</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> NUPACE is the acronym for the *Nagoya University Programme for Academic Exchange*, Nagoya University’s student exchange programme for incoming students established in February 1996. Students enrolled in degree programmes at institutions with which Nagoya University has concluded academic exchange agreements are eligible to apply for the programme. Courses that constitute the NUPACE programme are principally taught in English; Japanese language proficiency is not a prerequisite, although students proficient in Japanese may enrol in regular university courses.

<sup>2</sup> Any errors or omissions in this article are the sole responsibility of the author. Feedback should be addressed to k46189a@cc.nagoya-u.ac.jp.

<b>Apr 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total entry bans implemented against 73 countries and regions.</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> State of Emergency declared nationwide (Apr 7~May 25).</li> <li>• Decision to provide all those listed on the Basic Register with a grant of JPY 100,000.</li> </ul>	4/17 Spring 2020 semester commences, for the most part remotely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspension of face-to-face orientations for continuing students (73→62). Remote guidance and supervision.</li> <li>• 5 NUPACE students, overseas when Japan's borders were sealed, were unable to return to Japan to physically continue their studies. 2 completed the semester remotely; 3 withdrew from the programme as of May.</li> <li>• Further withdrawals (62→56).</li> </ul>
<b>May 2020</b>			5/11 Executive decision to cancel NUPACE autumn 2020 admission. (5/21 Report to Institute of International Education Meeting.)
<b>Jun-Jul 2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departure and re-entry permitted under exceptional circumstances for foreign nationals with a residence status.</li> <li>• Negotiations to enable international students/trainees with a residence status to re-enter Japan.</li> <li>• Easing of entry restrictions for business travel (selected countries).</li> </ul>	7/20 Decision to permit international students to conduct enrolment procedures remotely (effective from October 2020).	Establishment of 'Early Departure System' for continuing NUPACE students who were expected to face difficulties in securing flights to their home countries. (6/5 Notification to all Schools; 6/18 Report to Institute of International Education Meeting.)
<b>Oct 2020</b>		10/14 Establishment of 'WG on International Education at the "With Corona" Stage'. (Report to Subcommittee for International Strategy on 12/15.)	NUPACE Online Japanese Programme (2020/10/2~2021/2/2). 42 applicants.
<b>Dec 2020</b>			12/11 NUPACE application results for spring 2021 admission sent to students. (Deadline for 'intent to participate' set on 12/18.) Simultaneously, information on immigration/quarantine requirements conveyed.
<b>Jan 2021</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> State of Emergency declared for a total of 11 prefectures (Jan 8~Mar 21), including Aichi.		
<b>Feb 2021</b>	Bans reinstated against new entrants, including students.		Deadline for Schools to provide information of online courses open to NUPACE students.
<b>Mar 2021</b>			3/24 & 26 Details of spring 2021 online enrolment procedures, course offerings and syllabi sent to prospective students.
<b>Apr 2021</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> State of Emergency declared for a total of 10 prefectures (Apr 25~), including Aichi. Extended to Jun 20.		

## C. Summary of Developments

### 1. Spring Semester 2020 – Cancellation of April Admission

COVID-19 first started attracting attention on a global scale at the beginning of 2020. Within a couple of months, infections soared and Governments, keen to stem the damage, started to tighten, to varying degrees, border controls. Japan proved no exception; at the beginning of February entry bans were implemented against foreign nationals with a travel/residence history in Hubei Province, bans that were extended to seventy-three countries and regions within two months.

At the end of February, the NUPACE Office, which had thus far been preparing for the admission of ninety-four students, was faced with the difficult decision of whether to attempt to host them. Would prospective students be able to enter the country? If so, what type of academic programme could be offered to them? Could adequate measures be taken to sustain their physical and mental health? Would an exchange under these circumstances have any value *per se*? The atmosphere was one of uncertainty and incognisance, and NUPACE staff members, feeling unable to guarantee a meaningful and safe exchange, decided it to be in the best interests of prospective students to cancel new admission outright.

At the beginning of March, following an executive decision, letters conveying that admission had been cancelled were sent both to prospective students and partner institutions concerned, with students being offered the choice of deferring their admission to autumn 2020,

or even spring 2021. Reimbursement for flight tickets already purchased was offered, a gesture also applying to cancellation fees. The response to this decision to cancel the spring 2020 intake was mixed: The majority of partner institutions demonstrated sympathy and understanding; prospective students, for their part, reacted with mixture of relief, resignation, and occasional anger.

Almost at the same time, the NUPACE Office accepted applications for autumn admission, half-hopeful that the menace of coronavirus be under control by September 2020.

### 2. Spring Semester 2020 – Continuing Students

Although NUPACE decided against any new intake to the programme in spring 2020, a sizable proportion of students who had been admitted in September 2019 decided to remain enrolled in the programme, and continue their studies at Nagoya University. Over the semester, with mounting concern over the virus, the number of continuing students decreased from seventy-three to fifty-six. Nevertheless, small as the number may be, the support of these students necessitated a multifaceted approach, hitherto not experienced by NUPACE staff.

Generally-speaking, the manifold problems encountered by NUPACE students remaining in Japan during this time probably differed little from those faced by international students in general. This should not detract from their seriousness, however. The author expects that much of the deep-seated anxiety felt by students will not have been conveyed to the NUPACE Office; nevertheless, the following concerns manifested themselves clearly:

Academic Concerns	Emotional Concerns	Financial Concerns
Stability of Wi-Fi connections.	Separation from family and friends in home country. Uncertainty vis-à-vis reunion.	Inability to find part-time work.
Ability to efficiently find information on course offerings.	Detachment/loneliness stemming from social distancing measures on-/off-campus.	Cost of return flights.
Adaptation to online class teaching methods.	Inability to find sufficient/reliable information pertaining to Covid-19, including procedures if infected.	
Adaptation to online class technology.	Difficulty in securing return flight.	
Instructor ↔ student communication.		
Amount of homework.		

With regard to academic affairs, NUPACE staff used e-mail as the primary tool for disseminating information, be it as pertains to academic policies, syllabi, or registration procedures. At the same time, a concerted effort was made to remain accessible. Students feeling insecure were welcome to visit the NUPACE Office anytime, and staff were constantly available for guidance, or even simply to chat to. In light of the anxiety felt by students, it was deemed important to keep physical connections alive. Students were assisted with application procedures for the 100,000 JPY Government grant, as well as with their search for return flights. In-person pre-departure orientations were arranged, which provided students not only with accurate information vis-à-vis procedures, but also with the rare opportunity to touch base with each other. In addition, one further development reflects rather well on the flexibility that Nagoya University can occasionally show. In view of the difficulty in securing flights, the establishment of an “Early Departure System” was approved by the University, which enabled students to return home in June or July (whenever a flight became available), and complete the semester outside of Japan, whilst retaining their student status.

Five continuing students found themselves stranded abroad, and unable to re-enter Japan in time for the commencement of the spring semester. Whilst two maintained their student status at Nagoya University and took a reduced number of courses online for credit; three students determined that continuing studies remotely would prove untenable. Needless to underscore,

all five had naturally failed to complete moving-out procedures from their residences and with the ward office; as a consequence, the packing-up and despatch of belongings, cleaning of rooms, and settling of bills required intervention by university staff. Here, the latter proved particularly complicated to calculate and process, with overseas monetary transactions, in general, being difficult to execute.

### 3. Autumn Semester 2020 – Cancellation of Admission

Not wishing to repeat a short-notice cancellation, as had been the case in spring, the executive decision to cancel autumn 2020 admission was made as early as May. Japan’s first State of Emergency was in force and, at this stage, it was already evident that procedures to have students enter the country, i.e., the issuance of Certificates of Eligibility and student visas, could not be completed in time for the commencement of the semester. Early notification was considered to be in the applicants’ best interest, with students once again being given the option to defer/reapply for Spring 2021 admission. Simultaneously, given the limited capacity of the programme, it was determined that students deferring their application/admission to spring 2021 would be given priority, and that new applications would not be accepted.

Autumn 2020 was actually the first time in the twenty-four-year history of NUPACE that the student count registered a “0”. Here, the International Language Centre generously devised a semester-long “NUPACE

Online Japanese Language Programme”, aimed specifically to engage those prospective NUPACE students who had been forced to defer their admission to the programme. The fact that extant regulations prevented remote enrolment procedures for non-degree-seeking students who had not yet been granted admission to the University, however, meant that credits could not be automatically earned and transferred. Forty-two prospective NUPACE students applied to participate in the online Japanese language programme.

## D. Looking Ahead

### The Run-up to Spring 2021 Admission

It was also in October that the so-called ‘Working-Group on International Education at the “With Corona” Stage’ was established at Nagoya University. The Working

Group’s mission was to devise the framework within which international education and exchange could operate in a With-COVID climate, and particular emphasis was placed on the reinforcement and expansion of on-line programmes and study options.

Whilst the University was moving to expand remote education, at the national level, with COVID-19 infections seen to be on the demise, the Government saw fit to slowly re-embark on managed visa issuing. During autumn 2020, MEXT scholarship recipients started trickling into the country, as did a number of self-financed students. This seeming liberation of border controls provided NUPACE staff with grounds for optimism with regard to spring 2021 admission, and an intricate array of preparations started to be put in place to welcome students in person.

### Major Preparations for NUPACE Spring 2021 Admission\*

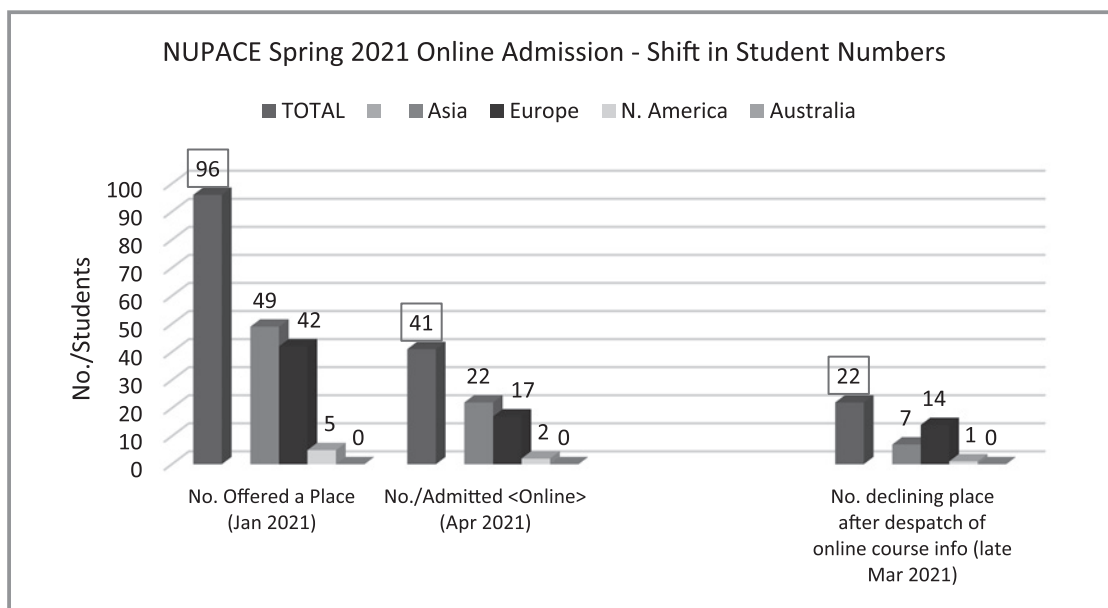
Immigration/Domestic Transportation	University Life/City Procedures	Academic Affairs
Early application for and despatch of CoEs (2020/12).	Establishment of a lifeline during quarantine (catering services, initial supply of daily necessities).	Advance request to each School for list of online courses (submission deadline 2021/2).
Detailed dissemination of information regarding immigration, quarantine, and monitoring requirements.	Information Security Check instructions prepared to enable students to access university Wi-Fi during quarantine.	Compilation/editing of online course information and course instructors’ contact details.
Introduction to flight and hotel reservation services provided by AMARYS.	Detailed, on-demand orientation video prepared, outlining ward registration procedures, application for the Japan National Health Insurance (JNHI), and pension payment exemption. (To be watched during quarantine.)	Preparation for early despatch to students of Student ID No., CAS ID and password to enable timely information security-check, procurement of NU e-mail address, and access to NUCT (the latter requiring course instructors to initially upload the student’s information).
Scheduling of bus services to transport students from airports/hotels to designated student dormitories.	Detailed slides prepared for opening a bank account. (To be read during quarantine.)	Scheduling of multiple online academic orientations, both in English and Japanese.
	Online campus tour video produced by student volunteer groups.	Creation of an online course registration form (Google), accessible off-campus.
	Student tutors recruited.	Instructions to course instructors/academic advisors regarding the course registration flow.

\*In making these preparations, the NUPACE Office was supported immeasurably by the Student Exchange Division

Whilst preparations to physically admit students in April 2021 picked up speed and intensity, the turn of the calendar year saw COVID-19 infections rising again, a development which resulted in a second Declaration of State of Emergency. When, in early February, Japan's borders were once more sealed to new entrants, it became obvious that prospective NUPACE students could not be admitted in time for the commencement of the spring semester. 'Plan B' was duly activated. The programme would commence as scheduled in April, albeit in an online format. Prospective students would be asked to enter the country, once the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) started to re-issue student visas, but no later than the end of June 2021. Participants, despite remaining overseas, would be given Nagoya University

student status, and would consequently be able to earn credits, and receive official academic transcripts.

Hardly surprisingly, student numbers nose-dived. An anticipated intake of ninety-four students dropped to sixty-seven in March, and forty-one by the end of April 2021. Naturally, disappointment at not being able to finally experience Japan first-hand is reflected in these figures; another unignorable factor, however, is the time difference between Japan and Europe. NUPACE depends on students from European partner institutions for over thirty percent of its student intake. But one can hardly expect a nocturnal study routine to be sustainable for fifteen weeks without detrimental repercussions on a student's health.



### E. Conclusion: Lessons and Prospects

Half-way through the semester, there are still no signs that student visas will be issued to the spring 2021 NUPACE cohort, nor that Japan's borders will open to them. Their experience of Nagoya University will end as it started: Online. Unfortunately for them, a host of factors, including Japan's delayed procurement of vaccines, the hosting of the Olympic Games, and the increasingly deep-seated unpopularity of the current

Government, has rendered a loosening of border restriction inconceivable.

For NUPACE, too, FY 2020 was an incredibly difficult year. COVID-19 has decimated international student mobility, at least the physical type, and left many international education educators/exchange advisors rudderless, including the members of this Office. But that is just scratching at the surface. University organisation, as a whole, hollowed out under the influence of the vi-

rus. A prolonged period of online meetings and telework have severely dented avenues for communication and co-operation; decision-making is now largely conducted behind screens, with less time for consultation, discussion, and a diminished opportunity for input.

In this atmosphere, it is difficult to predict what form post-COVID student mobility will take. Much will depend on university restructuring in the new global society, and the positioning of international education and exchange within this revamped framework. It is predicted that online education will become a staple, and there may well

be a concomitant decrease in overall physical mobility. However, “online” is not for everyone. Many institutions and Governments, most prominently those in Australia, the UK, and US, depend on physical student mobility for a substantial portion of their income. And how does one resolve the issue of time zones without simply severing relations with large chunks of the world? Nagoya University has recently unveiled a proposal for a new “Global Vision”, due to be implemented from FY 2022. To what extent the wide-reaching reconstruction inherent in this plan will provide a new paradigm remains to be seen.