

# Working After Retirement—Age

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This paper summarizes the author's experiences with negotiating the changing rules of Japanese universities (mainly national), and their individual faculties, regarding retirement age.

Though my chronological age is 74 I like to say that my heart age is 47. I am a positive person. I have been fortunate; sometimes even imagining that I have been guided by the Gentle Hand of the Lord. This piece is high on positivity and optimism. But before entering that blissful environment, allow me one paragraph of caution and negativity.

## A Note of Caution

Retirement is a passage, a finishing of a race, a relief. A time to cast one's fate to the wind. To enjoy. To let one's guard down a bit. Yes. But a time to be scammed. The soon-to-be retiree may brag about the coming retirement bonus/退職金, a coming trip abroad, a new car; not realizing how this makes one vulnerable; a target. The scams may sneak up in different ways; bursts of attention from new friends, financial offers, accusations of harassment, shakedowns. Caution. Awareness.

## Age

What is the retirement age? Ask 10 people in Japan and you get 10 different answers. Ask me, and depending on where my mind is, you may get 10 different answers. This piece is a short journey through the valley of retirement age. Sit back. Enjoy the ride.

I had started as a Part-timer at the University of Tsukuba in 1990. Even after I had gotten a full-time position at Tsukuba University of Technology (much smaller national institution) the next year I

continued; always the first class on Wednesday. The retirement age was 63. On my 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday I visited the UT Foreign Language Center. I told them, sheepishly, “I am 63.” They laughed. The age had changed to 65. Realization--things change; mostly for the better; accept it and adapt.

I wished to/needed to continue working after 65. I was on a list called JALTTALK where people exchanged information about employment. I learned of opportunities in Tokyo (Science U) and Mito (Tokiwa U) which had age limits of 70 or 71 for PT work. Appealing; but a long trip. And nothing in Tsukuba. But suddenly (like magic?!), at the age of 65, U of Tsukuba changed its age limit for part-timers to 70!! I could roll out of bed to get to work. (Slight exaggeration.) Changes.

## **After 70**

But what happens after 70? Again, winds of change and flexibility. In the 2023 Academic Year I will be 75 and will be working at 3 institutions. The key phrase here is “Smaller--Better than Bigger,” i.e., the bigger the institution, the bigger the faculty or center, the stricter and less flexible.

One example is the U of Tsukuba. I had long taught at the Center for Global Communication/Foreign Language Center; and was grateful that I could continue until 70. I mentioned to my supervisor, “Do you realize that I will be over the age next Academic Year?” He assured me that there would be no problem with continuing. But a few weeks later he told me that a few steps up the command chain the continuation was not approved; that they would strictly adhere to the age limit. The Center is big, with three sections; Foreign languages, Japanese as a Second Language, Japanese/Kokugo and with hundreds of employees.

But at the same university, at an individual faculty, i.e., Faculty of Information and Library Science, where I had been teaching PT for a few years, I was allowed to continue. And while typing this in December 2022, I just received an email from my supervisor at the U of Tsukuba, Information & Library Science Faculty. He is inviting

me to continue in the 2023 Academic Year, in which I will have reached the age of 75! This is significant because in the not-so-distant past the retirement age was 63!

## **Experiences/Pickups Along the Way**

### **Sharing Ideas**

The JALT Zoom Professional Development (ZPD) Online Meetings began during the Pandemic. One of the Breakout Rooms is Working After Retirement. Sharing our situations and concerns validated much of what I have said. Good to share. Many have similar experiences.

### **Date of Birth**

At national institutions if your DOB is March 31<sup>st</sup> and you reach 65 on that day (And the age limit is 65.) you must retire. However, if your DOB is April 1<sup>st</sup> and you reach 65 on that day you are allowed to continue until the end of that Academic Year!! As my birthday is in May I was pleasantly surprised that I could continue working almost one more year!

### **Small Private Institutions**

Before formal retirement my employment had been mainly at large national institutions. After, I was fortunate to be employed at a nursing college and a nutrition college. Many of the part-time colleagues are also retirees, e.g., medical and legal professionals, computer specialists. One institution serves us hot green tea and bottled water before the class; hot coffee and cookies after. Bit of a culture shock; a pleasant one I must say.

High ranking administrator comes to the parking lot to say thank

you. A colleague reveals that she is two years older than me. My take is that if the institution wants you, they will be flexible with the age-limit rules.

## **Hiring**

Hiring is a dreaded task. To hire a full-timer requires time and energy of faculty and staff. Hiring a part-timer is not as tough; but not easy. Holding onto who they have, even if he/she is over the age, is a time saver. Age is sometimes an advantage.

## **Conclusion**

Attitudes have shifted and actual implementation of changes in age limits at institutions of Japanese higher learning institutions have happened in the past 20 years. Positive changes mind you; a sea change. And I, and I hope you, will be riding the wave.