

# POINTS WELL TAKEN

**Highly skilled foreign professionals and their employers are reaping the advantages of Japan’s points-based system for preferential immigration treatment.**

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THE number of foreign people who work in Japan is increasing each year. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the number has reached approximately 1,080,000 (as of October 2016), about a 19 percent increase compared to the previous year. Under such circum-

stances, the Points-based System for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals was introduced in Japan in 2012 in a bid to attract highly skilled professionals.

“The system was implemented to promote the acceptance of highly skilled foreign professionals who possess capabilities that are expected to contribute to the

innovation and economic growth of Japan,” says Junji Ito of the Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice. “It allows them to receive preferential immigration treatment.”

The activities undertaken by highly skilled foreign professionals can be categorized into three areas; Advanced academic research activities, Advanced specialized/technical activities, and Advanced business and management activities. Those involved in Advanced academic research activities are chiefly university professors and researchers. Those involved in Advanced specialized/technical activities are chiefly employees who work for a private company using specialized knowledge (such as engineers), and those involved in advanced business management activities are chiefly company directors and executives. Under the points-based system, applicants are given points for items including academic background, professional career and annual salary. For example, those involved in advanced academic research activities receive 30 points if they have a PhD, and those involved in advanced business management activities receive 25 points if they have a professional career that spans at least ten years. Those who have passed the N1 level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, the highest level, receive 15 points. Those who have acquired a total point value of at least 70 are recognized as highly skilled for-

## Examples of points awarded

<b>Advanced specialized/technical activities</b>		
Academic background	Holder of a doctor’s degree	30
	Holder of a master’s degree	20
Professional career (Business experience)	10 years or more	20
	7 years or more	15
Age	Up to 29 years of age	15
	Between 30 and 34 years of age	10
Bonus point	Holder of a Japanese work-related qualification	10
	Person who has earned a degree at a higher education institution in Japan	10
	Person who has passed Level N1 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test or has been approved through another test as having equivalent or higher language proficiency, or the person who majored in Japanese language at a foreign university and graduated from the university.	15

**Note:** Points are also awarded according to the applicant’s salary level. See more detail: [http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/newimmiact\\_3/en/index.html](http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/newimmiact_3/en/index.html)

eign professionals and given preferential immigration treatment to allow them to enter the country and become residents.

Examples of specific preferential immigration treatment include permission for multiple activities during their residency. During their residency, foreign people are typically only allowed to be involved in the type of activity stipulated in their status of residence. However, if recognized as highly skilled foreign professionals, they can also take up other types of activities. For example, it is possible to pursue research activities at a university, while managing a related business. In addition, highly skilled foreign professionals are uniformly given the longest period of stay legally permitted, which is five years. Under certain conditions, their parent is allowed to accompany them as well as their domestic worker. Their spouse may also be employed.

As of October 2016, approximately 6,300 people have been recognized as highly skilled professionals, and the government's intention is to increase that number to 10,000 by 2020.

"Immigration and residency procedures normally take approximately one month. This can be reduced to within ten days if the individual is recognized as a highly skilled foreign professional; therefore, the system also offers a great advantage to companies," says Ito.

Preferential immigration treatment for highly skilled foreign

professionals, including the points-based system, is being implemented not only in Japan, but also in many other countries such as the U.K., France, Canada, Germany and South Korea.

"In order to promote the further acceptance of highly skilled foreign professionals, the government is currently discussing measures including the introduction of a new, easier to use points-based system and further relaxation of the requirements for highly skilled professionals who wish to apply for permanent residence," says Ito.



Courtesy of Ministry of Justice

### Utilization of Highly Skilled Professionals

Nomura, a Japan-based global investment bank, is one of the companies which has adopted this system. Seventy four employees who acquired their status of residence as highly skilled foreign professionals currently work for the company.

"Nowadays, money travels across world markets instantaneously. We are in a completely new era. As part of the solution to this situation, we recruit highly skilled foreign professionals from overseas, bring them to

Japan, and they lead and contribute to our global businesses," says Masahide Hoshino of the Human Resources Department of Nomura. "With Tokyo becoming a truly global financial center, the expansion of this system provides us with advantages. We benefit from it greatly."

John Gorman, who arrived from Singapore in 2014 to work for Nomura Securities Macro Trading Department in Japan, is one of the

people who used the system.

"The points system was very useful for us," says Gorman. "There wasn't a lot of paperwork involved or a lot of questions. We [just] worked through the list and figured out how many points we had and whether or not we could use the visa."

"Another thing about the system that helped us was that while we had a baby [in Singapore] we hired a domestic worker. One of the benefits of the 'highly skilled professional' visa was that it meant we could bring the domestic worker to Tokyo with us." 