The modern education system in Japan was inaugurated in 1872 and has a history of over 100 years. The system underwent a major reform in 1974, when its present framework was formulated. As it is seen from its being often referred to as the 6-3-3-4 system, it consists of 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of lower secondary (middle) school, 3 years of upper secondary (high) school and 4 years of college or university. The nine years of elementary and lower secondary schooling are compulsory. However, the high school education is so prevalent that it seems compulsory; over 97 percent of the lower secondary students go to the upper secondary schools. Higher education is also popular among young people, more than 50 percent of that age group are enrolled in colleges, universities and junior colleges.

Higher Education

There are four types of institutions of higher education in Japan: junior colleges, universities, colleges of technology and specialized training colleges. The foundation for qualification to apply for admission to universities and junior college is to have completed twelve years worth of primary and secondary education. Such a qualification also applies to applicants from abroad who have completed a course of 12 years of formal education in a country other than Japan.

1) Universities

Universities are centers of learning where students broaden their knowledge, learn in various specialized fields, and engage in research. The requirement for admission to universities is the completion of the upper secondary schooling or its equivalent.

A university has one or more faculties. It takes 4 years to complete an undergraduate course for most disciplines (6 years for medical and dental: the courses aiming at cultivating the practical capability applied to clinical among the courses studying pharmacy and veterinary courses). The students who have successfully completed the undergraduate course are bestowed with the bachelor's degree.

Many universities also have graduate schools where advanced study and research are conducted. The requirement for admission to the graduate school is graduation from an undergraduate course or its equivalent. There are two study tracks in the graduate schools: a master's course of two years of study and a doctoral course of five years. The doctoral course consists of two parts: the 2-year first part equivalent to a master's course and a 3-year upper course. The graduate schools in medical and dental which courses aiming at cultivating the practical capability applied to clinical among the courses studying pharmacy and veterinary courses...
courses studying pharmacy and veterinary courses, and veterinary sciences offer no master's
courses and have 4-year doctoral courses only. Those who have completed graduate courses successfully are awarded master's or doctor's
degrees. Moreover, from 2003, a system of professional graduate schools is being arranged to specialize in
cultivating high-level professionals. A professional degree program based in a two-year completion
standard has been established at the professional graduate schools, and professional degrees are to
be bestowed upon those who complete the program.

2) Junior colleges
At a junior college students learn about various specialized subjects, either related to their future
careers or useful in actual living. Requirement for admission to a junior college is the same as that to
a university: completion of upper secondary schooling or its equivalent. Junior colleges graduate's
degree is awarded to the graduate from a junior college in October 2005 and afterwards. Junior
colleges offer both two-year or three-year courses, depending on the discipline.

3) Colleges of technology
A college of technology is an educational institution that offers courses in specialized subjects and
helps students to develop the abilities required for their future vocational lives. A college of technology admits graduates of lower secondary schools and offers both five-year
courses and five-and-a-half-year mercantile marine courses.