

Nagaoka University of Technology vs. University of Manchester (UK)

My Name is Josef Voglmeir and I had the chance to visit the Nagaoka University of Technology this spring for four months. In this article I would like to share my impressions from Japan and compare them with my University back home in England.



Since I started my PhD studies in Biochemistry in Manchester three years ago, one major goal for me was to spend a part of the time in Japan. I was always fascinated at poster presentations and conference talks from the dedication of Japanese researchers, and I wanted to experience this way of scientific passion. Fortunately I got in contact with Prof. Kiyoshi Furukawa from the Department of Bioengineering, and he helped me to organise a research proposal about the isolation of a novel planarian protein. And a couple of months later the project was accepted by the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)!

To arrive in a strange country is always a challenge: finding directions, renting a flat, registering at the University or opening a bank account – all these tasks can be time consuming and nerve wrecking – but in contrast to my initial time in Manchester where I needed several weeks to organise these essential things, in Nagaoka most of this was already done for me when I arrived! I could start working on the project within the first couple of days.

One major difference between the two Universities is that both Bachelor and Master students in Nagaoka are much more involved in actual research topics, whereas in Manchester these courses are almost entirely based on theoretical class work. Research in England is entirely performed by PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. For me it was a huge surprise how complex and detailed the research projects for Japanese undergraduate students are.



During my stay at the Nagaoka University of Technology I had also the chance to learn about the Japanese language. Some phrases are used quite frequently in daily conversations, but I never heard the word “no”. There was not one single occasion where the laboratory members did not try to solve a problem, rather than looking for an easy excuse. I think this is key for the success of science in Japan, and I want to apply this positive approach also back home in Manchester!