

Pre Departure Seminar and Networking Evening 19th October 2017

On 19th October 2017 a seminar combining a Japanese class for beginners and information about preparations for a research trip to Japan was organised by JSPS London and held at the Magic Circle Headquarters. Participants included recent awardees of several types of JSPS Fellowships. The seminar started a Japanese language class for beginner's level. The teachers were Mr. Makoto Netsu, Chief Japanese language Advisor and Ms Kanako Ukai, Assistant Japanese Language Advisor both from The Japan Foundation London. This lesson covered words and phrases for practical everyday situations both for living and working in Japan including self-introductions in order that fellows are able to simply explain about their research area. Basic language to be able to shop, order food and make travel arrangements while in Japan was also taught as well as an introduction to reading hiragana and katakana.

After a short break, the next segment of the seminar began and included formal presentations on pre departure preparations from JSPS staff and Alumni. This session started with welcoming remarks from the Director of JSPS London, Professor Nobuo Ueno and was followed by a short self-introduction from each participant. The purpose of these self-introductions was for fellows to link similar areas of research and institutions being visited overall. In this group our fellows will be visiting a varied array of departments at top universities and research institutions all over Japan, from the Mathematical and Physical Ethnology Laboratory at Hokkaido University in the north to the Faculty of Philosophy at Hiroshima University in the south, with a cluster of researchers also visiting national institutes that are located in the Tsukuba Science City. The rest of the seminar was presided over by Ms. Polly Watson, International Programme Coordinator of JSPS London, who at first explained the purpose of the event and about the different presentations that were to follow. The first presentation was from Ms. Chika Itoi, Deputy Director of JSPS London, who gave essential advice about preparing for a research trip to Japan and the kinds of assistance available from JSPS. Ms Ai Ozaki, from the Bilateral Cooperation Division at JSPS Tokyo, next gave a presentation on the JSPS programmes and Alumni Association activities to consider to build future collaborations with Japan. After a break, JSPS Alumna, Ms Pola Berent, from University College London, who had recently returned from Japan on JSPS Short Term Pre/Postdoctoral Fellowship, gave a presentation about her experiences as a JSPS Fellow. She gave a lot of thoughtful advice on aspects to living and working in Japan including considerations for accommodation, using currency, mobile phone and WiFi access, research and general culture and challenges she faced and how she overcame them.

JSPS London was also pleased to have in attendance guest speakers Mr Jason James, Director General of The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation and Mr. Rory Steele, Programmes Executive from the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation. Both gave presentations on the activities of their organisations to make seminar participants aware about further funding opportunities they offer to do research in Japan.

After the pre-departure seminar, the UK & RoI JSPS Alumni Association held a networking evening to include Japanese researchers based in the UK as well, that allowed for networking among members and new JSPS fellows in a relaxed atmosphere. The evening started with a presentation from a member of the UK & RoI JSPS Alumni Association Executive Committee, Dr. John Brazier, based at the University of Reading, to explain about the recent and future activities of the Association, including recent awards made under the BRIDGE Fellowship and Symposium Scheme as sources of funding available exclusively to Alumni Association members. This presentation was followed by an award ceremony for Alumni and JBUK members granted in FY2017 either a BRIDGE Fellowship for Alumni to revisit Japan or the JBUK Japan Award for Japanese Researchers based in the UK that supports short research trips to Japan or finally the Symposium and Seminar Scheme award that supports a UK-Japan academic event at institutional level. During the ceremony, each awardee was invited to comment on their achievements made using one of these sources of funding and received a congratulatory certificate and gift. In FY2017, 5 BRIDGE Fellowships, 2 JBUK Japan Awards and 5 Symposium Scheme awards were made. This ceremony was followed by a group photo, drinks reception and buffet to allow for networking and the chance for further information exchange between new fellows and Alumni in preparation for their trips to Japan. Attendees could also enjoy sake generously donated by one JSPS Alumnus, Dr Ed Neal, from the new Craft Sake Brewery in the UK called Kanpai London and also a tour of The Magic Circle Museum containing artefacts that have been used by world famous magicians.

Comments from attendees:

"The event was extremely useful, in a whole host of ways, from gaining a smattering of Japanese to learning more about funding opportunities. The event was well-organised and really increased my enthusiasm for visiting Japan for the first time."

Dr Peter Kail (University of Oxford), JSPS Short Term Invitation Research Fellow

"What an excellent seminar and reception. It was very nice to meet the team at JSPS, and put faces to names of people who had been so helpful and clear via email. The lesson covered basics of Japanese greetings, and reached the point of describing our specific areas of research. The teachers were extremely enthusiastic, funny, and enjoyable to listen to. The talks themselves gave a good overview of the process of getting to Japan, and contemplating living there. Overall, a meeting that functioned to substantiate the process, and kick start preparations for leaving London!"

Mr Michael Shannon (King's College London), JSPS Short Term Pre/Postdoctoral Research Fellow

"I really enjoyed the Pre-departure meeting. It was held in a lovely venue and all the information received was very useful. I particularly liked the talk from the former JSPS fellow which included plenty of tips and some daily problems she faced that I had not thought about yet, but definitely I will. Finally, it is a must to add that the sushi served after, during the reception, was delicious!"

Ms Keiko Yakabi Diosdado (Cardiff University), JSPS Short Term Pre/Postdoctoral Research Fellow



Japanese lesson



Presentation from Ms Pola Berent



Evening Reception



Evening Reception Participants