

Pre Departure Seminar and Networking Evening 21st April 2017

On 21st April 2017 a seminar combining a Japanese class for beginners and information about preparations for a research trip to Japan was organised by JSPS London. 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 Centre for Organic Photonics and Electronics Research at Kyushu University in the south, to the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University in northern Japan. 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 by Ms. Chika Itoi, Section Leader of the Overseas Fellowship Division at the JSPS Tokyo headquarters, gave an essential introduction to JSPS, the preparation JSPS researchers need to make and kinds of assistance available from JSPS. Mr Jun Hiramoto, who is in charge of the Summer Programme at JSPS Tokyo, gave the next presentation about preparations specifically for the Summer Programme and also included generic information on the procedure for booking flights, receiving funds and travel insurance applicable to all JSPS Fellows. Two JSPS UK & RoI Alumni Association members spoke next about their experiences of research environments and living in Japan. Mr Szymon Parzniewski from the University of Birmingham and a JSPS Summer Programme Fellow in 2016, gave advice about getting the most from this fellowship and being open minded to trying new things and approaches both to daily life and research. Professor Gary Stephens from the University of Reading, spoke about his long and impressive research track record with Japan and how being awarded several sources of JSPS funding has helped to build his research networks in Japan as well as the importance of being actively involved with the UK and RoI JSPS Alumni Association to maintain these links.

JSPS London was also pleased to have in attendance guest speakers Ms. Julie Anne Robb from the Japan Foundation and Mr. Rory Steele 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 the newly appointed Chair of the UK & RoI JSPS Alumni Association, Dr. John Fossey, based at the University of Birmingham, 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 a drinks reception and buffet to allow for networking and the chance for further information exchange between new fellows, Alumni and Japanese researchers in preparation for their trips to Japan.

Comments from attendees:

"I am only a second year PhD student with limited academic experience, and so I felt rather anxious about the prospect of conducting research in a foreign country. Attending the JSPS event in London in April and hearing from JSPS alumni helped me to feel more at ease with the process of moving to Japan. I am also glad to have met the other students on the program, who I plan to stay in contact with in Japan in order to exchange experiences and advice."

Mr Sam Hatfield (University of Oxford), 2017 Summer Programme Fellow

"I really appreciated this chance to make friends with fellow grant recipients as well as receive advice from former JSPS fellows about their experiences conducting research in Japan. Having lived in Japan for many years in the past, I was perhaps not the right audience for the introductory presentations. However, I found the accounts by alumni representatives both enjoyable and illuminating from an anthropological point of view inasmuch they discussed particular intercultural research environments."

Dr Lauri Kitsnik (University of East Anglia), Standard Postdoctoral Fellowship

"The Pre-departure events were a wonderful opportunity not only to benefit from very useful advice and guidance, with a first steps introduction to the language, but also to meet previous fellows who have already become members of my new network. The way in which other funding organisations may help to orchestrate my present projects immediately began to shape my future planning. Perhaps most important was the impression that we were all becoming part of and belonging to a significant body of real colleagues with shared and continuing interests."

Professor Keith Hanley (University of Lancaster), Long Term Invitation Fellowship

"I much appreciated the pre-departure seminar, and learnt a lot that will be useful for our visit. I'm past that stage of my life where the information about sources of funding and follow-on activities would be of much personal interest, but I'm sure that part of the day was valuable for the younger participants. It was also very helpful that my wife was able to take part in the seminar as well. We both very much enjoyed the Japanese food at the reception, and we talked to many interesting people."

Professor Emeritus Stephen Robertson, (City University London), Short Term S Invitation Fellow



Japanese Language Lesson



Evening reception participants