

Pre Departure Seminar and Alumni Evening on October 9th 2012

On 9th October 2012 a Pre-Departure Seminar for researchers recently awarded a JSPS Postdoctoral or Invitation Fellowship was held at the JSPS London offices.

The seminar was well attended and started with welcoming remarks from the Director of JSPS London, Professor Kozo Hiramatsu. This was followed by a short self introduction by each participant so similar areas of research and institutions being visited in Japan could be linked. In this group JSPS fellows will be visiting a varied array of departments at universities and research institutions all over Japan. From the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency to the Department of Art at the Graduate School of Letters, Doshisha University 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 Mr. Tomo Saito, Deputy Director of JSPS London gave an essential introduction to JSPS and explained about the kinds of assistance available from JSPS to support fellows, especially in emergency conditions after an earthquake and tsunami. This presentation helped put to rest any anxieties JSPS Fellows may be having about their research trip to Japan and help them get the most out of the experience.

Professor Thomas Wirth of Cardiff University and also a member of the UK-JSPS Alumni Association was invited to talk about his experiences of living and research environments in Japan and how through the several JSPS awards he has been awarded over 20 years he has built extensive research networks in Japan. He also spoke about the importance and benefits of becoming a UK-JSPS Alumni Association member which offers schemes and networking opportunities to help researchers sustain their collaborative work in Japan. Professor Wirth will be using one such scheme called the FURUSATO Award in January 2013 to such effect.

JSPS London was also pleased to have in attendance speakers from other distinguished funding organizations to speak about further funding opportunities they offer to do research in Japan. They were Dr Sophie Laurie, Head of the International Unit at the RCUK, Dr. Edward Clarke, Senior Portfolio Manager at the EPSRC and Mr. Jason James, Director- General of the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

The seminar ended with a question and discussion session, giving participants the chance to raise questions and concerns about JSPS programmes and living and working in Japan. Such issues raised included coping with the effects of a natural disaster, obtaining visas, accident and sickness insurance coverage, accommodation options and payment of allowances.



Dr. Jason Tsai, sharing details of his research plans to be carried out on a JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship

After the pre-departure seminar, the UK-JSPS Alumni Association held an alumni evening for networking among members and new JSPS fellows in a relaxed atmosphere. Dr. Martyn Kingsbury, the Chair of the UK-JSPS Alumni Association, gave an opening speech in which he talked about the work of the UK-JSPS Alumni Association for the benefit of the newest fellows present. He mentioned in particular the progress of the two alumni re-visitation schemes and the alumni symposium scheme which are funding programmes exclusive to members as well as the series of events for Alumni that JSPS London will be holding across the UK in 2012 as part of JSPS' 80th anniversary celebrations. This was followed by a drinks reception and buffet and after this JSPS London was very pleased to host a talk from the senior editor of SCIENCE, Dr Stella Hurtley, who spoke about writing and publishing primary scientific papers.



Guest speaker: Dr. Stella Hurtley, Senior Editor of SCIENCE

Comments from attendees:

“The Pre Departure Seminar and Alumni evening was a valuable introduction to what spending some time in Japan might be like and covered essential logistics, as well as some of the cultural highlights. It was great to meet other young scientists who would be in Japan at the same time, hear about their work and to have contacts to meet up with whilst out there. A really fascinating set of talks from key people in science within the UK, from funding agencies to top academic publishers, made the programme directly beneficial to my science. “

Mr. Oliver Shorttle, JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow (Department of Earth Sciences, University of Cambridge)

“I found this a very interesting and useful event. The information about visas, travel and accommodation was very helpful. I also benefited from hearing about the mission of the JSPS and other funders’ links to Japan. Finally, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet some of the JSPS staff and the other JSPS Fellows who had the most diverse research specialities imaginable.”

Dr. Becca Asquith, JSPS Invitation Fellow (Faculty of Medicine, Imperial College London)

“The JSPS pre-departure evening was a very enjoyable and a useful event for JSPS scholarship awardees. The seminar highlighted essential practical information for people who had never been to Japan, yet also managed to be relevant and of interest to people who had previously spent time in Japan. I found particularly useful the presentations from other Japan-related organisations about further funding opportunities for research on Japan.

Delicious Japanese food and drink was provided by the UK-JSPS Alumni Association, and there were opportunities to engage with past and present JSPS researchers in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. I got a real sense of community from the UK-JSPS Alumni Association and I fully intend to join the association on my return from fieldwork in Japan.

Overall the evening was a very well organised event, which I enjoyed very much. I would certainly recommend attendance at this event for anyone lucky enough to be awarded a JSPS scholarship in future.”

Mr. Robert Horn, JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow, (School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield)



Finally, JSPS London would like to wish all of our new fellows a successful research trip to Japan and we hope they will join the UK-JSPS Alumni Association on their return to the UK.