

Host – Professor Kaoru Iwai of the Department of Chemistry at Nara Women's University

I became aware of JSPS and the summer program through my PhD supervisor, who has had experience working with the JSPS and the British Council, as well as having collaborated with some Japanese researchers. I contacted one of these researchers, Prof. Kaoru Iwai, to see if he would host me during the summer of the final year of my PhD, and he was more than happy to do so.

My research in Nara focussed on the design, synthesis and testing of a thermo-responsive fluorescent polymer. The idea was to make a polymer whose fluorescence would be dependent upon the temperature of its environment i.e. at low temperatures the polymer would be non-fluorescent and at high temperatures the fluorescence would 'switch on'. It was this 'switching' of fluorescence that tied in with my own research that I had performed for my PhD, which mainly dealt with fluorescence switching upon chemical input. Although this type of polymer research was known, we also wished to incorporate another functional group to the polymer that would allow to be attached to a solid object such as a silica particle.

The laboratory in Japan was wonderfully equipped and allowed me to carry out research and characterise my materials in a way that I could not have done in my own lab. My research was successful as I achieved all the objectives that I had set out to do. Equally as important as the research, however, was the experience of living in Japan and being immersed in an unfamiliar culture. Like everyone, I had my own preconceptions about what Japan was going to be like – the people, the food, the work and the language (I would advise having a basic knowledge of Japanese before going to Japan, as it will be a great help).

While some of these ideas were accurate, many were not, and I quickly got to understand the way of life through my wonderful colleagues and my host professor. It was this part of the experience that I enjoyed most – getting to know my fellow researchers, who had great insights regarding my work and who were able to approach problems in ways I may not have previously considered.

As much work as I did, I also had a lot of fun in Japan, both with the girls from the lab, and other JSPS Fellows. The latter in particular were great to travel with, as we all had a great desire to explore this beautiful country. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to see much of Japan, from the busy metropolis that is Tokyo to the wilderness of Hokkaido, and many places in between, and I heartily thank JSPS for giving me this opportunity.

Please feel free to contact me on gwright04@qub.ac.uk if you have any questions about my experiences with the JSPS Summer Program, as I will more than happy to help in any way I can.

Glenn Wright