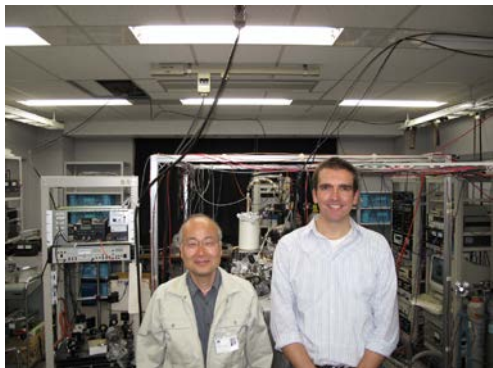


# Voice! from Alumni member

## Vol.9 Dr Andrew Pratt



In the lab at NIMS with my host JSPS researcher, Dr Yasushi Yamauchi.

Dr Andrew Pratt had his fellowship at National Institute for Materials Science in Tsukuba. He tells us about his enjoyable life in Japan and Japanese research environment as well. The relationship he developed in Japan led to his current collaborations with Japanese researchers. His story is full of tips for the future fellows who would like to make the most of fellowship in Japan personally and professionally.

I had heard of the opportunities available for foreigners to perform research in Japan under various JSPS programs from colleagues whilst studying for my PhD several years ago. With this in mind, along with a desire to internationalise my CV, I applied to the Standard program to work for one year in the group of Dr Yasushi Yamauchi at the National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS) in Tsukuba. Both the group of Dr Yamauchi and my own specialise in studying the electronic, chemical, and magnetic properties of surfaces and interfaces that are relevant to materials that show promise in the development of next-generation technologies. Prior to applying to the program, Dr Yamauchi and I had never previously collaborated although after sending an email to introduce myself and outline my intentions for the research project, he kindly agreed to act as host-researcher. His experience in hosting other JSPS Fellows and good command of English greatly helped with the application process.

I was intending to take a crash course in Japanese before the start of my contract but could not arrange appropriate tuition in

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#### Biography

1997-2001	MPhys Physics, Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield
2001-2005	Ph.D. Physics, Department of Physics, University of York
2005-2009	Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Department of Physics, University of York
2009-2013	Senior Research Fellow, Department of Physics, University of York
2009-2010	JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow (Standard), National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS), Tsukuba, Ibaraki
2013-2014	International Centre for Young Scientists (ICYS) Fellow, National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS), Tsukuba, Ibaraki
2014-	Lecturer, Department of Physics, University of York

time. However, after arriving in Japan I found onward travel to Tsukuba and my accommodation fairly straightforward with no major problems. That is not to say I didn't experience a culture shock after stepping off the plane, by no means a bad thing and completely expected. It's a sensory overload of unfamiliar sights, sounds, and tastes although, for me at least, it did not take long to embrace this new and high-quality way of life.

Tsukuba is a Science City around an hour away from Tokyo via the extremely convenient Tsukuba Express. Only around 50 years old, the city was constructed to house many scientific institutions and as such has a much higher density of foreign researchers than elsewhere in Japan, many of whom stay at Ninomiya House from where an excellent view of Fuji-san can be seen on a clear day. Possibly due to its youth, some people find Tsukuba a little sterile at times and lacking the traditional culture seen elsewhere in Japan although with Tokyo so close, I didn't feel I missed anything in this regard. In fact, I really enjoyed living in the city, in large part due to the many friends made from all across the globe.

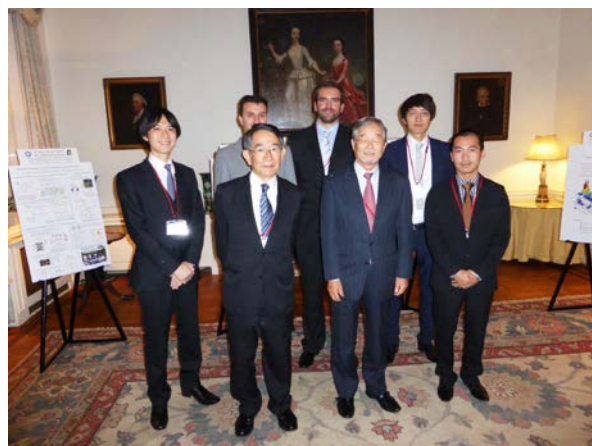
The scientific facilities at the National Institute for Materials Science are exceptional and I found my time there extremely productive. So much so, that after the expiration of my planned one-year stay, I applied (successfully) to JSPS to extend my contract for a further three months. This enabled me to complete a study on the growth of organic semiconductors on ferromagnetic substrates, an investigation that was not in my original research plan. Fortunately, the other members of my group could all speak good English preventing any language barrier in the lab. Also, despite the sometimes negative reports of the Japanese work ethic, I found the research environment to be relaxed and enjoyable, whilst at the same time stimulating.

The large budget associated with the Fellowship enabled me to present the research output from the project at two conferences in Japan and at two in the USA, whilst the stipend easily supports a good lifestyle of travelling and eating out. The holiday allowance on the JSPS program is also very generous and allowed me to return to the U.K. twice and to explore Japan when family visited. For advice on where to go and what to see, well-known guidebooks are pretty comprehensive although take in recommendations from other foreign researchers and Japanese friends and colleagues. My advice for prospective Fellows is to begin travelling and exploring the country as soon as possible after arriving. I was a little complacent in my first few months thinking that I had plenty of time to 'get in all in' but of course the list of things to do only grows and grows as your knowledge of the country increases.

Japan's reputation of being highly efficient and organised is fitting and I found various procedural tasks, such as obtaining a re-entry permit (necessary for leaving and returning to Japan multiple times), a Japanese driving licence (no test needed for U.K. citizens), and an alien registration card surprisingly simple, even with the language barrier. With so many foreign researchers based in Tsukuba, a large support network exists and so whenever problems did arise they could be quickly solved. There are many chances to enrol in Japanese language classes which are run at beginner and intermediate level at many research institutes in Tsukuba and also at Ninomiya House. I took both classes over the first six months of my stay and found a basic knowledge of Japanese genuinely helpful in everyday life. Away from the research environment, understanding of English is minimal.

I found my fifteen months as a JSPS Fellow to be immensely

rewarding, both personally and professionally. Following the end of my fellowship, I returned to NIMS as a Guest Researcher on three separate occasions and spent a further year there on a tenure-track position at the International Centre for Young Scientists. Had I not secured a permanent academic position back in the U.K. in 2014, I imagine that I would still be living and working in Japan. Due to the long-term relationships I have developed there, I will certainly be returning regularly and am currently involved in a large JSPS Core-to-Core grant that links my university with Tohoku University and NIMS. Establishing links to institutions and researchers in Japan has been extremely beneficial to my career and to couple this with the chance to experience the unique culture the country has to offer highlights the value of a JSPS Fellowship.



Dr Pratt (centre back) at the British Embassy in Tokyo at an event for young scientists in Japan.



At the beautiful Kegon falls in Nikko.