

Pre Departure Seminar and Alumni Evening April 15th 2016

On 15th April 2016 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 with the Japanese language class. The teacher was Mr. Makoto Netsu, Chief Japanese language Advisor at 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. Participants learned to read hiragana and katakana and were taught how to write their own name in katakana as well.

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 Kunio Takeyasu 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 Faculty of Engineering at the University of the Ryukyus in the south, to the Biotechnology Centre at Akita Prefectural 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. Chigusa Ogaya, Deputy Director of JSPS London, gave an essential introduction to JSPS, the preparation JSPS researchers need to make and kinds of assistance available from JSPS. This was followed by a presentation from Ms. Yumiko Kusune, International Programme Associate, 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. Ms. Maxine Gee from the University of York and Dr. Gorana Pobric from the University of Manchester gave very thoughtful and practical advice touching on a wide breadth of topics from etiquette and typical protocols that should be followed in the work place to access to WiFi and dealing with complex recycling systems. Dr. Pobric emphasised the importance of getting the most out of a JSPS Fellowship and how she has used several sources of JSPS funding to build productive research networks in Japan that have helped to advance her career overall. 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 an alumni evening and farewell reception for Professor Takeyasu to allow for networking among members and new JSPS fellows in a relaxed atmosphere. The evening started with a presentation from Dr. Ruth Goodridge

to explain about the recent and future activities of the UK & RoI JSPS Alumni Association, including recent awards made under the BRIDGE Fellowship and Symposium Scheme as sources of funding available exclusively to Alumni Association members. Professor Takeyasu then gave a speech thanking colleagues for their support during his tenure as Director of JSPS London and spoke of future his plans. This speech was followed by a 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.

Comments from attendees:

“The pre-departure event was a great opportunity to liaise with other nominees and to gain some valuable insights into the JSPS Summer Programme 2016. It enabled me to get first-hand practical information about the programme and learn from the experience of JSPS Alumni. I really enjoyed the Japanese language class, which included lots of everyday language hints and additional material for self-practice before I leave. Overall, a very useful experience, motivating me to learn more about Japan and reach out for the range of research opportunities available.”

Mr. Szymon Parzniewski (University of Birmingham), 2016 Summer Programme Fellow

“I thought that the event was a great opportunity to meet other outgoing fellows and get an impression of the astounding range of subjects they work on. With representatives of the Alumni Association and previous fellows attending the event, as well, it felt like a JSPS grant was more than just a fellowship one takes up for a couple of months; it was about entering a diverse community of researchers and building connections.”

Dr. Angelika Koch (University of Cambridge), Short Term Pre/Postdoctoral Fellow

“I found the pre-departure seminar and alumni evening an extremely valuable experience. It allowed me to form connections with other fellowship awardees about to depart, which allowed us to share concerns and ideas; it gave me the opportunity to ask important questions both to JSPS staff and those who had previously been awarded fellowships; and the presentations and detailed information packs also gave very useful pre-departure information. Above all, it gave awardees a warm welcome to Japanese culture as well as a strong sense that we are valued and that we have been made part of a supportive community.”

Dr. Andrew Houwen (University of Reading), Standard Postdoctoral Fellow

“In November and December 2016, I will be giving seminars in Tokyo, Tsukuba, Kobe and Kyoto, and collaborating with researchers at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, supported by a JSPS Invitation Fellowship. This will be my 15th visit to Japan, although my first JSPS fellowship. So what did I get from attending the JSPS Pre-departure seminar (apart from a nice sushi and tempura reception)? I found the event particularly useful for meeting JSPS staff, learning about the Alumni association and hearing about other funding opportunities. I was also inspired by the dedication of the JSPS in working to support research links between our countries.”

Professor Peter Holland (University of Oxford), Short Term Invitation Fellow



The Japanese language lesson



“Preparations for a research trip to Japan”, presentation from Ms. Maxine Gee



Evening reception participants



Networking time