

JETAA International Meeting
November 9th to 12th, 2022
Tokyo
Matthew Gillam

2022-2023 Core Team	
Chair	Board of Advisors
Nathalie Ng	Matthew Gillam
Vice Chair	Ryan Hata / US
Laurence Inniss / Trinidad & Tobago	Xander Peterson / US
	Cheryl Phua / Singapore
Webmaster	Tomo Morimoto (Alumni Resources) / Anna Ayvazyan (Alumni Relations) / AJET (sharing seat)
Eden Law / Australia	

Wednesday, November 9th / Day 0

Pre-conference meeting with CLAIR

Members of the Core Team (Chair, Vice Chair, Webmaster, & Board of Advisors) met with CLAIR staff after setting up for the conference to talk about reviving the KenJETkai project, which had been put largely on pause during the pandemic. Topics discussed included what platforms could be used to expand KJK beyond Facebook, who could supply content from the Japanese side and what that would be, how to get the prefectures to engage with the project, and how to promote participation in general.

Laurence then introduced his idea for a video contest and talked about how it could produce content for the KJK groups and for the prefectures or JNTO to use to promote travel around Japan. There was a debate about how often to hold it, whether every one, two, or three years, and about what kinds of prizes to offer. How to utilize social media was also discussed, which raised the hurdle of KJK groups being mostly private and therefore not ideal for PR purposes.

The Core Team also asked if the CLAIR staff responsible for sister city relationships could participate in the next IM, since that was one major area of focus for further development and having CLAIR support would be incredibly helpful. The response was that, those people being in a separate department, it could prove somewhat difficult to convince them to get involved. The Chair mentioned the idea of establishing

a three-year planning period, with greater involvement by the Country Reps, to pursue more relationships. After a brief discussion about drawing up a timeline, conditions, and responsibilities, the session ended.

Note

Because the COVID-19 pandemic was still lingering, and Japan had just recently reopened its borders, participants in the IM remained masked throughout the conference sessions. Masks were removed, however, for meals and receptions. No testing was conducted. Unlike other gatherings in this period, no cases of COVID arising from the conference were reported. The conference was hybrid, with Ireland and Brazil unable to attend in person. It was also paperless, so participants were asked to log onto their devices to access documents, as well as the Zoom link.

Thursday, November 10th / Day 1

Opening

The International Meeting opened at 10:00AM with greetings from the JET Program Director at CLAIR and the Chair of JETAA-I, followed by self-intros from all attendees.

Updates

The Chair gave an update on JETAA-I, showing PowerPoint slides highlighting accomplishments such as the creation of JETAA Switzerland (JETAA-CH), joining as an Associate Member, and the many activities undertaken by chapters around the world despite the pandemic. India, Scotland, South Korea, and other countries were very active, and New South Wales receiving a special commendation from the Japanese government for their efforts. Weekly online Rajio Taiso sessions with Monica Yuki, out of New York, were also noted. This was followed by a discussion of efforts to move back to doing some in-person events and the difficulties chapters were having with getting people to volunteer. Other topics included the accelerated uptake of new tech, spurred by the pandemic, low numbers of JETs returning to their countries, engaging with new JETs at their predeparture orientations (PDOs), having alumni join the chapters both in their home countries and wherever they end up, using Laurence's World Trivia Tournament idea for community-building, and connecting with JETs on Discord. It was also agreed through a vote of the Executive Committee to bring the Associate Members into the Google Group for information sharing, although they would not have voting rights.

The Webmaster gave a separate overview of his activities over the past three years, enumerating information he'd added to the website, covering things like chapter support, COVID, pandemic activity ideas, and historical documentation resources, as well as information on the German and India chapters. He encouraged everyone to join him in boosting social media content on all the platforms (FB, IG, etc.) and to post to the Global Events Calendar. He finished by inviting everyone to listen to his After JET Podcast.

The heads of some of the working groups then reported on their activities, with Branding, Post-JET Opportunities, KenJETkai, and the Tech Helpdesk summarizing their work over the preceding three years. There was also a quick survey of platforms chapters were using, and replies included Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Discord.

Finally, sister cities and Laurence's "This Is Japan!" video contest were briefly discussed before lunch.

JOES

After lunch, Japan Overseas Educational Services (JOES) gave an overview of their work to support families with children studying abroad and Japanese education overseas in general. They also expressed their desire to partner with JETAA to strengthen their services.

Bylaw Amendments

The Bylaws for JETAA International “2.0” (successor to the original version created in the late 1990s), officially adopted by the Executive Committee in 2016, were extensively reworked and amended ahead of the 2022 IM. This was to make them easier to read and understand, and to address certain issues that had come to people’s attention over the previous few years. Among these were provisions for holding hybrid meetings and conferences, and permitting virtual participants to vote on issues before the EC. New provisions for the Officer positions also required that candidates be “in good standing” (with a definition of that) and that they could not hold any other officer position (such as chapter representative) at the same time as serving as Chair or Vice Chair. Sections were also reorganized to more clearly delineate subject areas and bring similar provisions into closer proximity (such as separating provisions concerning JETAA-I core team positions from those concerning country representatives, including their role as the Executive Committee).

All proposed amendments had been sent to EC members at least six weeks prior to the IM, as required, for review, and online feedback had been solicited. During this session, each proposed amendment was read and explained one more time, and each was put up for the EC’s approval. Once all provisions had gone through this process, the package of amendments was put up for a formal vote altogether for final adoption. The 17 Country Reps attending voted unanimously to approve them. Ireland and Brazil, who were attending virtually, also expressed approval, but were unable to vote under the existing Bylaws, as they required physical presence to vote.

Open Discussion

Topics raised during the open discussion session included how to more effectively utilize working groups, the desirability and difficulty of creating a code of conduct for the JETAA community, whether at the chapter, national, or international level, and how to encourage the hiring of more JETs from underrepresented countries (basically, non-North American, UK, or Oceania). The session was useful for raising issues and organizing thoughts, but did not produce concrete ideas or proposals.

Friday, November 11th / Day 2

Updates

Day 2 began with welcoming remarks from CLAIR and JETAA-I, and a repeat of the various updates from Day 1. The difference was that Day 1 was focused internally while Day 2 was focused externally, with the morning given over to the updates and talks between JETAA-I and CLAIR, and the afternoon to the Opinion Exchange with CLAIR & the three ministries.

Remarks by Isobe-sanyo on behalf of CLAIR included relief at seeing the alumni had been able to continue functioning and carrying on activities through the pandemic, and at being able to actually hold the IM as planned in 2022. He also acknowledged the point made in the updates about alumni contributing an estimated ¥ 5 billion in labor to Japan through their volunteer activities for JETAA at all levels. He also talked about the increased effort CLAIR Tokyo was putting into career support for former JETs, and about the work that still needed to be done for KJK.

A representative from JNTO spoke about their desire to begin promoting travel to Japan again, as the borders were being reopened, and to focus more on off-the-beaten-path tourism, which they hoped the alumni could help with, being more familiar with the local attractions beyond the “Golden Route” sites. There was no discussion or agreement on this, though.

Opinion Exchange with the Three Ministries and CLAIR

After lunch, representatives from Soumusho (MIC), Monakasho (MEXT), Gaimusho (MOFA), and CLAIR gathered to discuss issues of common interest and concern, and proposals for collaboration.

The top-ranking representatives from each organization made opening comments, mainly referencing the difficulties of the pandemic and gratitude that through persistence and hard work things were beginning to return to normal for the JET Program and life in general.

After this, the top-ranking people left and their subordinates stayed to discuss the set of topics that had been agreed upon beforehand. The first topic included details of the video contest, to be held every three years, along with various issues that CLAIR had encountered when they held similar contests in 2016 and 2017, and ideas for promoting the contest and utilizing the content created.

Career support was discussed next. Ryan Hata talked about starting the JETwit Jobs Google Group in 2015 (building off Steven Horowitz's JETwit job listings), and he asked for CLAIR and ministry support in providing mentorship and study opportunities. They also discussed CLAIR's work to connect ex-JETs with employers in Japan and whether they could do that with employers in other countries (no, unfortunately, at least for CLAIR Tokyo, although perhaps through their overseas offices). There was also a request to extend visas for ex-JETs for one year to allow them to stay in Japan, which would facilitate job-hunting. That was shelved as too difficult, for the time being. The session closed with a brief discussion of career support activities in various chapters.

The next topic was chapter support. The central complaint from many chapters was not having enough JETs invited to the Program, resulting in having too few alumni return to keep the chapters going. Everyone agreed more JETs should be recruited from less represented countries (outside North America, the UK, and Oceania), but CLAIR explained that they can only request and place JETs in response to requests from contracting organizations, and they encouraged the alumni to leverage sister city and other relationships and to talk to their embassies in Japan to see if they could help appeal to communities in Japan to request JETs from their countries.

There was a brief discussion on connecting more effectively with JETs, whether at predeparture events or through offering career support and other attractive services.

One of the Country Reps then asked an unscheduled question about JET salaries, saying the topic comes up every year and asking if there was any thought being given to raising them, given the increasing difficulties faced by JETs as inflation and the foreign exchange rate worsened. JET salaries had not changed since the beginning of the Program, but the world had, and what had been a very attractive way to earn a good living while gaining Japan experience was no longer a competitive option for many people. The government response was that MOFA and CLAIR were sympathetic, but also not optimistic anything could be done in the face of Japan's fiscal challenges.

The next topic was connecting the alumni more closely with Japanese communities. Reviving the Satogaeri Project was discussed, and CLAIR said they had considered that. Strengthening KenJETkai was the other main option, although it was noted that a lot of work would need to be done to explain and promote it to prefectures and communities. MIC and CLAIR said they could help with that.

Finally, CLAIR mentioned the request from JOES in the morning and indicated they hoped to continue discussing ways that the alumni could collaborate with them.

The CLAIR Reception was held that evening.

Saturday, November 12th / Day 3

Review and Next Steps

The day began with a review of the previous day's Opinion Exchange. Many on the EC complained it was not meaningful for them, they did not understand the expectations of the Japanese government side, and they would have appreciated more preparation for it. The Chair and former Chair sympathized, but also explained that providing information from the chapters to the government stakeholders was the primary objective and that their willingness to spend four hours engaging with the alumni was a significant demonstration of the value placed on JETAA.

Debating how to follow up on the OE, it was agreed that the alumni could not assist JOES until JOES could prove their ability to effectively utilize that assistance. Some misunderstandings about KJK and what the chapters were being asked to do were cleared up (help promote the groups, but not run them), and various ways to support prefectures and demonstrate the value of JET were discussed, including collaborating with AJET. Expectations and best practices for the KJK groups were also discussed.

Ways to improve the OE itself were discussed, including preparing the questions / topics beforehand, creating template docs for both sides to use in preparing, and designating speakers who would coordinate with each other on how to conduct the session. It was pointed out that the OE is simply the opening movement for the real discussions, which come after, and the participants needed to know how to work in the Japanese context to effectively press their points.

One issue, at least for the previous day's session, was inaccuracies in the interpretation, but it was not clear if that contributed to anyone's confusion.

Several people commented on the difficulty of suddenly being asked to become a diplomat, with the need to learn how to elicit responses from ministry officials and work within their bureaucratic structures. This led to a discussion of preserving knowledge gained and handing it on to successors, which reminded people of the Welcome Packet created for JETAA-I that everybody had forgotten about. Utilizing that, perhaps along with orientation sessions for new Country Reps, was briefly discussed.

Better communications were discussed, both through looking for alternatives to Messenger and holding virtual IMs in non-conference years. However, nobody had recommendations for new platforms, and everybody agreed on the difficulties in holding a single virtual meeting across global time-zones. Smaller regional meetings, such as the US Quarterly Forums, were proposed as a more workable solution to improve communications.

Planning & Projects

After lunch, topics discussed were synching a video contest to the anniversary celebrations for JET, on a five-year cycle. The fact that the Japanese government side effectively celebrates JET cohorts while the alumni celebrate anniversary years (resulting in a one-year discrepancy between the two) complicated that idea (i.e., the 40th cohort goes to Japan in the 39th anniversary year). The process for establishing sister cities, career fairs hosted by CLAIR, and collaboration between the Japan chapters and AJET were also discussed.

Deliverables coming out of the IM were decided upon: The video contest, in collaboration with CLAIR; collaboration with JOES depending on their final proposal; creation of an IM Opinion Exchange document; and creation of a conflict resolution framework. Timelines for the various projects were set, where possible; but since some depended on building collaborative relationships with outside organizations, those timelines were left TBD.

Inter-chapter collaboration

Ideas were shared for inter-chapter collaboration between the UK and anyone interested in doing crafts, and Tokyo and Australian chapters on helping Aussies find jobs. The US invited anyone to join their Quarterly Forums (virtual meetings that supplement NatCon), and the Caribbean chapters talked about putting together a Caribbean Conference. CLAIR support for alumni in the Caribbean, Asia, and Oceania through funding conferences was discussed, as was the possibility of CLAIR New York visiting the Caribbean, and perhaps helping see if chapters could be established in Barbados and St. Lucia.

Finally, a brief presentation encouraging alumni engagement in sister city relationships was given, with some chapters commenting on challenges they faced in that or ideas they had for pursuing it.

Sunday, November 13th

Hot wash / Hanseikai

The core team met over breakfast to go over the conference and decide what lessons were learned and how they should be carried forward into planning for the next scheduled IM in 2025. More interactive sessions for some topics, more discussion time, better prep for the Opinion Exchange, and continuing to work toward better understanding of the KJK project were all agreed upon, as well as fostering a better understanding overall in the community of the role alumni were being asked to play in supporting Japan's international relationships, on top of trying to manage the daily challenges of running their chapters. This included addressing what were perceived to be some unrealistic expectations on the Japan side about JETAA and the alumni's capabilities.