



Adrian at Doshisha Women's College, Kyoto

Name: Adrian Thomas

Job title: International Officer – East and South East Asia

Company and location: Lancaster University

Industry sector: Student recruitment

Background: I taught in Morioka for three years on the JET Programme and then took the Advanced Japanese Masters Degree at Sheffield University after coming home. I then worked as the Education Officer at the Embassy of Japan for a year and a half before moving to my present position at Lancaster University.

1. What does your job involve?

My job involves promoting the university and its programmes in East Asia – primarily China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea. This includes a large amount of travel to those countries to take part in education exhibitions, visit universities and meet potential applicants through companies that we work with in the various countries. Much of it is about marketing.

2. How much Japanese do you use in your job?

I travel to Japan twice a year, and on these trips I do use Japanese in business situations. I also use it to speak to potential students who are less confident about their language and to parents that are looking to find out about the university. Finally, I do use it a little through email but I usually write to our Japanese partner institutions in English.

3. What has been the highlight of your Japanese career to date?

One highlight of my previous role was working at the G8 summit when I was involved in the translation of the official Japanese press release immediately after the London bombings. It was interesting on a range of levels.

One highlight here at Lancaster was perhaps when we received a visit from a delegation from Ritsumeikan University earlier this year which included the President. As I was the main coordinator for the visit the language came in handy for the arrangements and during the visit itself.

Another, of which I am equally as proud, was when I was trying desperately to negotiate a karaoke box for some colleagues during a recent visit to Korea. The owner's English and my Korean not being the best, we were forced to conduct the entire negotiation using only our mutually cloudy knowledge of kanji. Worked a treat.

4. How has past experience helped?

When you learn Japanese you learn a whole lot more than the language, you also take in an immense amount of historical and cultural knowledge. It's always dangerous to generalize but I found that this knowledge, which was seemingly so specific to Japan, actually provided me with a solid grounding for learning about all of East Asia. So the past experience in Japan and learning Japanese has been of benefit on far deeper levels than just being a means through which to interact with the Japanese.

5. What do you enjoy most about your job?

The travel is good and you meet some sound people though it. However, I really enjoy the interaction with so many young people from all around East Asia as well. It's a similar buzz to teaching in some ways – just in small manageable doses. I'd also add that the trips to Japan are a massive relief in terms being able to communicate and help you realise just how much you've learned when you've just spent the last week using hand gestures in Harbin.

6. What advice would you give to students hoping to use Japanese in their careers?

1. Consider whether a Japanese work place is really where you want to spend your time first.
2. Make sure you get really good at it.
3. When you've finally convinced yourself all those hours of studying were a massive waste of time, try to remember just how many times a day you use what you learned through learning it.

