

JET Programme Orientations

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INTRODUCTION

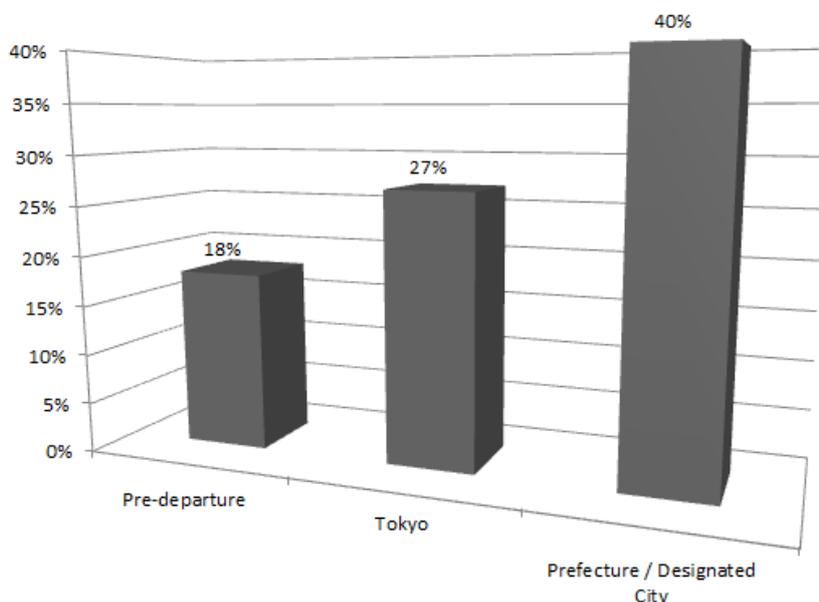
Most JET Programme participants attend three orientations prior to and just after their arrival in Japan. Participants usually attend their consulate's pre-departure, Tokyo, and prefectural or designated city orientations. These orientations provide information regarding a typical JET Programme participant's workday, Japanese customs and culture, culture shock, lesson planning and development, as well as other topics. Although a lot of topics are presented at the orientations, JET Programme participants often don't feel adequately prepared for their first day on the job. This report will discuss suggestions for improvement for each orientation.

METHOD

The data and analysis for this report is based on an on-line survey distributed to 321 people with a 71% completion rate conducted in October and November of 2010. Of the respondents, 297 were ALTs and 23 were CIRs. The highest percentage of respondents, 39.4%, were first-year JETs, while 26.3% were in their second year, 17.5% were in their third year, 8.4% were in their fourth year and 8.4% were in their fifth year. There were no SEA respondents. The types of questions asked were multiple choice, open-ended questions, and lists. The distribution methods were via e-mail, the social networking site Facebook, ajet.net, prefectural JET websites, and word of mouth.

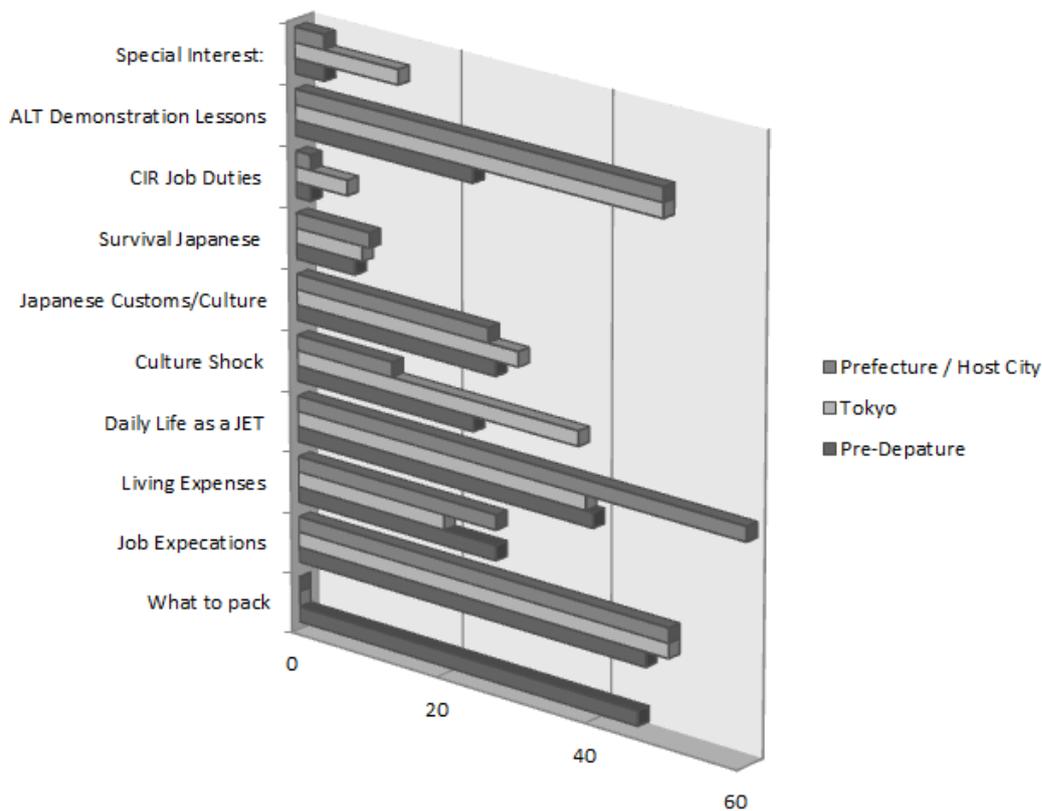
RESULTS

Which orientation was the most useful?



A plurality of JETs who responded felt that their prefectural/designated city orientation was the most useful. Factors that contributed to the effectiveness of these orientations are the subsidence of jet lag and the chance to adjust to their life in Japan before attending the orientation. Several respondents, however, stated that their host prefectural/designated city orientation was held before the arrival of Group C. They did not feel adequately prepared for their job and life in Japan because of the condensed Group C Tokyo Orientation and the missed prefecture/designated city orientation.

What were the three most useful workshops at each orientation?

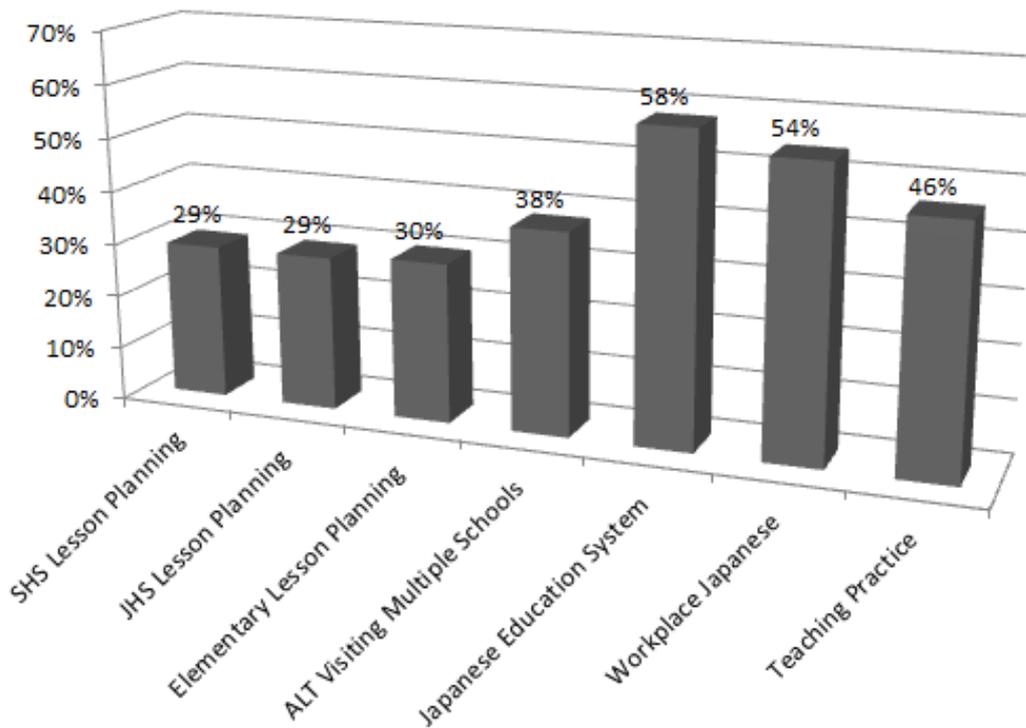


At Tokyo Orientation, JETs thought that more emphasis should have been put on job performance and duties rather than how to personally adjust to life in Japan.

"I thought demonstration lessons were way too situation specific and did not give more general advice on how to be a better ALT. I thought it would have been more helpful to give ways of doing things that happen in every class and are a part of the MEXT curriculum guide rather than telling me about one game or one lesson plan. (i.e. ways to make reading, listening, writing activities more fun). " - 1st year ALT, Akita

The prefecture and designated city orientation provides specific information in terms of situations that participants might experience or encounter. The orientation gave participants a clearer understanding of job expectations. The ALT demonstration lessons which were presented gave more realistic ideas and helpful hints for the upcoming lessons or self-introductions they had to do. The orientation answered the participants' questions with more specific details by experienced JET Programme participants with similar situations. It also gave the new participants a sense of community in their new environment.

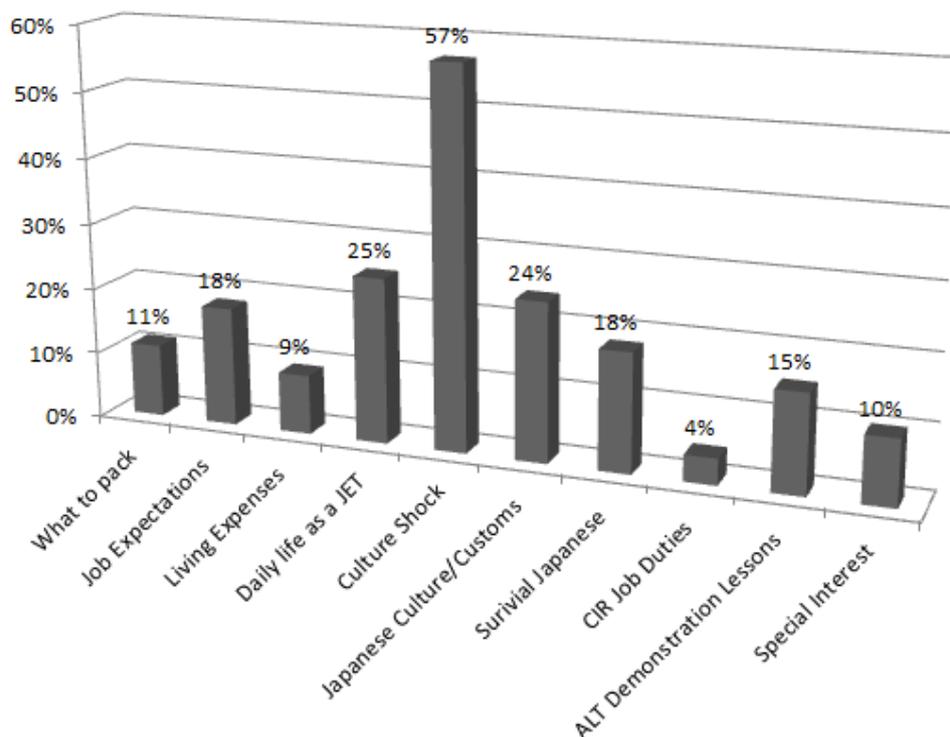
If you are an ALT, which content would you have liked to see more of in workshops at your orientations?



Of responses to the above question, there was an equal distribution of learning about the Japanese education system, workplace Japanese and teaching practice/mock lessons. In response to not being prepared to teach in the Japanese education system, a second-year JET from Ehime prefecture stated:

"I had absolutely no clue about the day-to-day education system and the national bureaucratic policies. It would be extremely helpful to talk about that at orientation and discuss our role as ALTs."

Which topics do you think were presented too often?



When the JETs were asked "Which topics were presented too often?" the most frequent response was "Culture Shock" along with "Daily Life as a JET" and "Japanese Culture and Customs." JETs felt that while culture shock was important to mention, it came up too often and there were few constructive and healthy ways to deal with it. A first year ALT in Shimane states:

"...I thought that there was too much emphasis placed on the discussion of culture shock. I feel that if you tell people they are going to get depressed in December, then they will always attribute a bad experience or a bad day to culture shock, and instead of trying to find constructive ways to get out of their rut, they will simply try to wait out 'stage two'."

Based on the survey comments, JET participants wrote positively about the culture shock presentation at Tokyo Orientation, however negative comments were received about prefectural/designated city orientation culture shock presentations.

DISCUSSION

Pre-departure Orientation

One of the difficulties of pre-departure orientation is the wide variety of placements and work environments that new JETs will soon be sent to; thus, providing specific and useful information can be challenging. Some programme participants wrote that the information

that didn't apply to them was not useful, especially those who had prior experience in Japan or with the Japanese language. However, a greater number remarked that it was helpful to hear specific examples from presenters and former JETs.

AJET Suggests

Job training and job expectations were topics that JETs consistently stated they would have wanted more information on throughout the orientation process. Because a large number of programme participants have little previous teaching experience, it can be useful to provide more information on team teaching, classroom activities, and other job-related information. Although work environments will ultimately differ, such information is beneficial for two reasons: it can be utilized by JETs regardless of previous experience in Japan or language ability, and it helps reduce the anxiety felt by new JETs.

Culture Shock

When JET participants first arrive in Japan, they often spend a lot of time with other programme participants while they are settling into their life in Japan. According to the survey comments, newly-arrived participants often experienced a type of culture shock within the multicultural JET participant community. For example, one JET participant is the only Australian in a prefecture with over 80 JET programme participants. As well as adjusting to life in Japan, the stress of adjusting to culture shock within the JET community can be overwhelming.

AJET Suggests

In the workshops and presentations about culture shock, discuss other aspects of culture shock that JET participants may experience, especially concerning shock within the multicultural JET participant community. Present resources and tools that JETs can utilize to help cope with culture shock, such as calling the Peer Support Group hotline.

Tokyo Orientation

The 2010 Tokyo Orientations for Group A & B have had workshops on topics unrelated to work such as *Japanese Etiquette for Beginners*, *Independent Japanese Study*, *Life as a JET of Asian Descent*, *Life as a JET of African Descent*, *Driving in Japan* and *Thriving as a Rural JET*. Although the workshops are informative, many JETs commented that other information presented at the orientations was more useful, especially information concerning their working life. Also, they had received the lifestyle lectures and workshops at the pre-departure and prefecture orientations.

AJET Suggests

Instead of devoting the afternoon of Tokyo Orientation Day 2 to lifestyle workshops and prefecture/designated city meetings, AJET recommends adjusting the workshops to focus on job training. AJET could present the lifestyle workshops while the CLAIR workshops focus on job training.

Teaching Demonstrations

AJET received several comments about the teaching demonstrations at Tokyo Orientation. JETs thought that they were not an efficient use of their short workshop time because, while they demonstrated an excellent lesson and/or a good team teaching relationship,

they didn't teach new JETs how to create their own lesson plans or build good workplace relations. After arrival at their schools, many JETs felt that the teaching demonstrations did not apply to them at all.

AJET Suggests

The workshop time slots for teaching demonstrations should be two hour time blocks and focus on teaching theory and lesson development. Potential lesson activities, tools and resources should be discussed and shared during the workshop.

Suitable workshops might be:

- *English Activities for Elementary, Junior High school and High School*
- *How to use Eigo Note in the 5th and 6th grade classrooms*
- *Foreign Language Teaching Theories, Methods, and Pedagogy*
- *Lesson Planning Methods*
- *Classroom Management and Relations with Students*

Japanese Education System

According to the survey, 58% of ALTs said they would like to receive more information about the Japanese education system: more specifically, the ALT's role in the system, and how the system differs from the education system in the participants' home countries. The MEXT *Handbook for Team Teaching* is a resource that is distributed to all ALTs, however it is underutilised.

AJET Suggests

In the MEXT presentation, better explain the role of the ALT in the school system and the benefits an ALT brings to the system. Aside from publishing the MEXT *Handbook for Team Teaching Revised Edition*, create a PDF file that can be accessible on the JET Programme website. Encourage prefecture/host city orientations to reference the book, otherwise the book may get misplaced or overlooked by most ALTs.

Coordinator for International Relations (CIR)

Because of the wide range of duties covered by CIRs, some expressed frustration at orientations that focused on one duty (e.g. translation) that they do not perform at the expense of one they do (e.g. school visits). However, specific information JETs would have liked at Tokyo Orientation include workshops for translation and interpretation and information on telephone skills; such topics would have been particularly helpful for April arrivals who must wait seven months until the CIR Mid-Year Conference for such information. One fourth-year CIR in Toyama suggested that, while culture shock is covered at April Tokyo orientations for JETs from Brazil, China, Peru, and South Korea, explanations could be tailored towards the countries of origin for the JETs involved, since "Chinese will be shocked with some things in Japan," and "Peruvians [and] Brazilians would be shocked with other things."

AJET Suggests

Because of the condensed schedule for April orientation and the multiple nationalities present, AJET suggests that nationality-specific information on culture shock and cultural differences be addressed at pre-departure orientations in participants' home countries. This culture-specific information can give participants better preparation to handle the cultural differences upon arrival. This can be especially useful for CIRs

who arrive in April because of the longer amount of time they must wait until the November CIR Mid-Year Conference.

Prefectural/ Designated City Orientations

Independent Japanese study is useful to learn at the prefecture and host city orientation rather than at Tokyo Orientation because new arrivals will have a little more time to adjust to their new life in Japan.

AJET Suggests

Independent Japanese study can be a challenge for new JETs that have limited Japanese skills. AJET suggests that the *CLAIR Japanese for JETs* should be heavily promoted at prefectural/designated city orientations as a valuable resource to study Japanese until the *CLAIR Language* course books arrive. As well as promoting the already available materials, host prefectures/designated cities could set up a *Sempai/kohai* system as demonstrated in Kumamoto prefecture.

Handover Procedures

In November 2008, AJET presented a “Handover Procedures” report. The report resulted in “Essential Information for Incoming JETs” being added to the JET Programme General Information Handbook on pages 287-293. However, current JETs are not aware that the form exists and there is also not a version available for JET to complete electronically. If current JETs were more aware of the form and were able to complete it electronically, it would be easier to facilitate communication between predecessor and successor prior to new JETs' arrival in Japan. By finding out/learning more about their future situation, new participants' anxiety and stress can be reduced and they can choose Tokyo Orientation workshops more relevant to their circumstances.

AJET Suggests

CLAIR could distribute a electronic editable file of Essential Information for Incoming JETs attached to *CLAIR News* in spring 2011.

QUESTIONS

1. Does CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA, or MIC plan on making any changes or adjustments to the next Tokyo Orientation, for example, guidelines for workshop and seminar presenters, changes in workshops or different time slots for workshops and presentations?
2. Would it be possible to make guide the “Essential Information for Incoming JETs” an electronic editable file and include it in the CLAIR News sent via e-mail?
3. Does CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA and MIC inform prefectures and designated cities about the information that is covered at the Pre-departure and Tokyo orientations?
4. If AJET were to further explore what JETs wanted from each workshop, would CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA or MIC use the information to create more detailed guidelines for pre-departure and Tokyo Orientation workshop and presentation content?
5. Are workshops at the any of the orientations, especially Tokyo Orientation, followed up at the prefecture mid-year seminars for ALTs and CIRs?
6. Does MEXT have plans to make their *Handbook for Team Teaching Revised Edition* available on-line or improve their promotion of information to JETs beyond Tokyo Orientation?
7. JETs that arrive in Orientation C often feel that they do not receive as much information as JETs in Groups A and B. Is it possible to request that prefectural/designated city orientations be held after the arrival of Group C?