

Dr. OIKAWA Mami

Could you tell me about your research?

Sperm and oocyte carry the genetic information that is required for proper embryonic development. However, recent studies suggest that sperm might also influence embryonic development through the transmission of additional, non-genetic (epigenetic) information to the next generation. The aim of my project is to investigate whether sperm epigenetic information is really inherited in the embryos after fertilization and how it may participate in the embryonic development.

Could you give me some advice on preparing to go abroad?

The UK visa system is frequently amended and therefore you should check the latest version before applying. Most JSPS Overseas Research Fellows apply for a Tier 5 (Temporary Worker – Government Authorised Exchange) visa. If you have been offered employment with a UK research grant, you can apply for a Tier 2 (General) visa. Before applying for this visa, you may need to prove your knowledge of the English language. If one has taken a series of English-proficiency tests since the time s/he started contemplating studying abroad, this testing should go smoothly. Fortunately, my acceptance procedure went smoothly. That's because I had already been employed at the same UK institution whose admission office had much experience in accepting Japanese scientists, including JSPS Overseas Research Fellows. In addition, I think it might be a good idea to visit your preferred laboratory in advance. In my case, I visited Cambridge and became acquainted with Japanese researchers working at the university when I was PhD student. This was very beneficial to me because I was able to communicate with them via email and get advice about daily and research life in the UK before my departure. I was able to leave Japan without any worries.

Could you give me some advice on problems that may arise while living abroad?

It is important to clearly state what you want to do in both your daily and research life in the UK. Though the language barrier may make it difficult to assert yourself, the things will get better as you overcome the obstacles. One of the difficulties in daily life is finding accommodations. Since it is difficult to find reasonably priced flat in the UK, many people live in shared housing. It is important to find out about your flatmates and utilities and whether they are suited for you before you move in. In the case of my former house, the water heater didn't work well so I caught a cold at the end of the year. If you have any problems, it is best to get advice from a British or Japanese person who

has been living in the UK for a long time. Another point of concern is that dental treatment in England is very expensive. It would be best to have a dental checkup before leaving Japan, and to take extra care of your dental health during your stay in the UK.

What is it like living abroad?

Cambridge is a relatively safe town. There are some supermarkets and banks in the city centre and enough stores are open at reduced hours on Sunday. You can also find many relaxing places in the city such as a park near the River Cam. There are cute cows and sheep roaming freely. My working time is from 9 am to 5 pm on weekdays. If something needs to be done in the lab such as changing the water in the tadpole tank, I also work on the weekends. After work, my colleagues enjoy personal time. Some of them engage in sports or their favourite pastimes, and others like to spend time with their family. I have learned how to balance my work and personal life from them.

What was good about your receiving an Overseas Research Fellowship?

I am very grateful for this fellowship because I could develop my own research and it gave me the opportunity to work with my colleagues longer. Receiving a fellowship is very important for both postdoctoral researchers and their laboratories as it saves them money for research grants. I have gained greater confidence in my research ability since having been selected as a JSPS Overseas Research Fellow. I wish to express my appreciation to JSPS for the support I received from this fellowship. It has allowed me to gain both valuable professional and personal experience in a superb research environment.