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myriad leaves

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Autumn 2003 • Issue 42

夕夜中と夜はふけぬら
雁の音の聞ゆる空に
月渡る見ゆ

Sayonaka to yoru wa fukenuashi

Karigane no kikoyuru sora ni

Tsuki wataru miyu

The year has worn away;

Now in the dead of night

Wild geese cry

Across starry skies

Where sails the bright full moon.

Kakinomoto-no-Hitomaro

1 Nishime, Akita Prefecture



2 Jikokudani-yaenkoen, Nagano Prefecture



3 Shinjuku, Tokyo





letter from the editor

Welcome to the “new look” *myriad leaves*.

myriad leaves aims to show our readers more clearly what we do here at JLGC, and why. If you have any comments or suggestions, or indeed if there is anything you might like to read about in this newsletter which has not been covered, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the editor (robertson@jlgc.org.uk). Similarly, if you would like to know more about something in this newsletter, or are interested in finding out more about the JLGC, please contact the relevant member of staff (see back cover for contact details).

August to November is traditionally the busiest period at JLGC: the JET Programme participants have come and gone and attended their respective 'farewell' and 'welcome back' receptions; the JET Promotion tour kicks off; the Japanese lessons for ex-JET participants take place; the Japan Study Tour participants fly off to learn about Japanese Local Government in situ for ten days; our Short Term Trainee Programme participants come to the UK to study for three months; the Japan Day seminar is held; all on top of the day-to-day business of JLGC.

In this issue of *myriad leaves*, you will find articles on all of the above, as well as reports from our staff work placements, staff research, and other JLGC goings-on. We hope you enjoy our newsletter.

Angela Harkness Robertson, Editor

JLGC SHORT TERM TRAINEE PROGRAMME

Every year, a group of local authority officials from all over Japan are given the opportunity to come to the UK to learn first hand about local government here. They stay for three months, during which time they have a month of intensive English classes, three weeks of studying British local government, then a two-week placement with a local authority. Extra meetings, seminars and presentations are organised at the JLGC offices in between, so the trainees are certainly kept busy during their stay in the UK.

This year's 8 trainees arrived on August 28th, and after improving their English skills at King's School Oxford for a month, have just completed their formal studies of British local government at Birmingham University. They are now with their host authorities: Cumbria County Council, Leicestershire County Council, the London Borough of Lewisham, and Scottish Borders Council. The trainees will have a final meeting in London before flying to Paris for another two weeks to complete the training programme.



LGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN HARROGATE

Irmelind Kirchner

The annual LGA conference is a regular fixture in the JLGC calendar, as it is for many local authorities and organisations concerned with local government. JLGC attends to keep up to date with debates on current topics, and to take advantage of the opportunity to hear important speakers from the local government world, as well as from central government and related organisations. Naturally, networking also plays a role – it is good to encounter familiar faces in the crowd and renew working relationships, but also to make new acquaintances. However, the political aspect which is so important to many participants of the conference is only observed; representing Japanese local government, the JLGC maintains political neutrality.

The whole conference is very interesting from a Japanese point of view – a conference at which officers and politicians mingle is rather difficult to perceive in Japan, where on one hand local government is represented through six political organizations, and on the other hand politicians and officers are separated more than in this country. In Japan, each level of local government is separately represented: the prefectures, the cities and the smaller towns and villages have their representative organisations, which makes three associations; but then the number is doubled because there are separate organisations for Governors and Mayors (who are all directly elected) and for the presidents or speakers of the relevant assembly or council (who are elected by their peers), making six associations in total. These may join forces on important issues affecting all local government: for example issue joint statements or dispatch chosen delegates to represent them to central government. They are often referred to as “the six local government associations”. Liaising among them takes place mostly in Tokyo, because all these organisations have offices within walking distance of each other. Joint conferences, however, do not take place. Furthermore, officers are separated from the politicians and will have their own conferences, mostly held either within their prefectures, while single-issue conferences attract officers from all over the country. Contact between elected members and officers is much more curtailed in Japan than it is in the UK – therefore mingling freely at an event like the LGA conference is quite outside the Japanese experience and worth reporting home about!



AICHI



AKITA



AOMORI



CHIBA



EHIME



FUKUI



FUKUOKA



FUKUSHIMA



GIFU



GUNMA

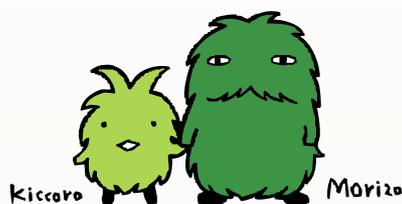
... HACKERS IN NAGANO GOVERNMENT

Last issue, we reported that the computerised resident registry was to kick off in August, with residents being issued Juki cards. The system was controversial from the outset, and a number of prefectural governments have opted out because of security concerns. Governor Yasuo Tanaka of Nagano Prefectural Government announced that Nagano would withdraw from the scheme because of fears of illegal access to the registry, and the resulting risk of leaking of personal information. He went on to say that the prefectural authorities would prove this by conducting experiments of their own. The experiments would involve Nagano Prefectural government themselves hacking into the registries, or at least trying to. There are laws banning illegal access to communications networks in Japan, so to get around these, permission had to be obtained from three participating municipal governments allowing the "illegal" experiments on their registries. In August, the then Public Management Minister Toranosuke Katayama said he would allow the experiments on condition that they abide by the laws banning illegal access to communications networks, and that personal information would be protected. Watch this space for further updates.

... BLAIR PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR EXPO 2005 AICHI



During his flying visit to Japan in July this year, Mr. Blair announced that the United Kingdom will participate in the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi. The overall theme of the project is "Nature's Wisdom," with sub themes of "Nature's Matrix," "Art of Life" and "Development for Eco-Communities." Organised by the Japan Association for the 2005 World Exposition, the project will run from March 25th to September 25th, 2005, and will be held in Nagoya Eastern Hills (Nagakute Town, Toyota City and Seto City). For further details, visit <http://www.expo2005.or.jp>



The official mascots: Kiccoro ('Forest Child') and Morizo ('Forest Grandfather')

... HOMELESSNESS A BIG ISSUE IN OSAKA

The Big Issue is a familiar magazine in Britain: it's been around since 1991, when A. John Bird came up with the idea of helping homeless people by employing them as vendors. It now sells around 250,000 copies a week in Britain, and similar projects have been introduced in 50 cities and regions in 24 countries around the world. In September, the Japanese version went on sale in Osaka, 'home' to the largest homeless population in Japan. Although some articles will be translations of The Big Issue London, it will also include

original stories, and like in Britain, can only be bought from homeless people. Each magazine will cost ¥200; the vendor will earn ¥110 per copy sold. Selling 500 copies per month will cover the vendor's monthly accommodation costs of ¥50,000. At the launch in Osaka, Bird explained that The Big Issue came about not through a charitable act, but as a business venture, and how he believes that it's important for homeless people to be given the opportunity to earn money, a way to live, and dignity. Vendors all have to undergo training, and sign a code of conduct that requires them to wear clean clothing and conduct themselves appropriately. Such a venture is extremely rare in Japan, and will certainly be a surprise to Osaka residents. It is hoped, however, that it will enjoy the success of its British edition, and help in some way to solving the huge homeless problem in Japan.

... POLITICS NOT A MAN'S WORLD ANYMORE

The seaside town of Oiso in Kanagawa has a lot to boast about: warm climate, pretty scenery, and lots of natural and historical assets. It has long been an attractive place; former Prime Ministers Hirobumi Ito (1841-1909) and Shigeru Yoshida (1878-1967) chose to spend their golden years there, as did writer Shimazaki Toson (1872-1943). This sleepy town, with its population of only 32,500, caused a bit of a stir in June, when voters elected an equal number of men and women as members of the 18-seat assembly. This ratio is way above the national average: before the spring local elections, only 7% of Japan's city, town and village seats were held by women. Many of the successful female candidates in Oiso, whose ages range from 38-64, are very active in local movements to conserve the environment, particularly in resisting changes that put the area's natural assets under threat from development. Various explanations have been put forward regarding the surge in female assembly members. An assemblyman was heard to say that the ¥240,000 net monthly salary would put most men off, particularly those with good jobs. Another theory is that many female assembly candidates decided to run in support of Mayor Tatsuo Misawa, who ran into difficulties in implementing policies to make Oiso environmentally friendly. One of the successful candidates also pointed out that women have close ties to the local communities, and are well suited to becoming assembly members as they deal with local issues.

Interestingly, many of the successful candidates (both men and women) are newcomers to local politics; the tradition of being elected to the assembly as a kind of honorary post after serving as head of a neighbourhood district seems to be on the way out, as does the conventional system of succeeding seats formerly held by retiring assembly members.

... URBAN MYTH A LOAD OF OLD CROC

Everyone's heard the one about the alligator in an urban sewer; how about the story of the crocodile in an irrigation canal? It took a team of police officers and municipal officials two and a half hours to catch the 1.5-metre crocodile in Yoro, a town in Gifu Prefecture, central Japan. Kyodo News reported in August that the snappy critter was captured in an irrigation canal just underneath the Meishin Expressway.



HIROSHIMA



HOKKAIDO



HYOGO



IBARAKI



ISHIKAWA



IWATE



KAGAWA



KAGOSHIMA



KANAGAWA



KOCHI

jet report

Angela Harkness Robertson

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme began in 1987, when it sent only 848 participants from 4 countries to Japan. It is now one of the world's largest international exchange programmes, and is also one of the top graduate employers in the UK. In the summer of 2003, 560 new participants from the UK alone set out for Japan. There is currently a total of 1,287 British JET Programme participants (JETs) in Japan.

JETs are assigned to be Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), who work in communities on international exchange activities; Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who provide language instruction in junior and senior high schools; or Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs) who promote international exchange through sport. Participants are placed with local authorities throughout Japan in every imaginable locality, from very large cities to rural villages. The contract runs from a minimum of one year, and can be extended twice up to a maximum of three years.

The JET Programme is administered by local authorities in cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs; The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; and The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). The Japan Local Government Centre is the London office of CLAIR, and as such, works closely with CLAIR Head Office in Tokyo and the Japanese Embassy, assisting with

participant recruitment and selection, preparing and conducting orientations, and JET Programme promotion. JLGC also helps support JET participants upon their return through cooperation with the JET Alumni Association (JETAA), which is run by volunteer ex-JETs, who organize events such as career information days, as well other networking opportunities and fun outings.



As the JET contract begins and ends in July/August, this is a particularly busy time for JLGC. Recent events include the pre-departure orientation and reception for new JETs, held at the Embassy of Japan on 10th July, which gave the new participants who attended the opportunity to speak to ex-

JETs in a relaxing atmosphere, and get any last-minute tips before setting off on their adventures. Then on 26th September, another reception was held, this time to welcome back returning JETs. The event, which attracted over 220 returnees, was held at the University of London's Macmillan Hall in Senate House, following a very successful JETAA-organised careers information day.



The JLGC also supports returning JETs by providing free Japanese lessons for former participants, with the aim of helping them keep their Japanese language skills fresh. Lessons are held in blocks of six weeks, and take place in the JLGC offices in January-February, June-July and October-November. There are three levels to choose from: beginner, intermediate and advanced. The lessons always prove very popular, and classes fill up long before the first lesson of each season

Next year's JET Programme is now top priority, as the deadline for applications looms. Four members of JLGC staff are lending the Embassy's JET desk a hand by helping with the JET promotion tour. Mr. Ageta, Ms Harding, Ms Harkness Robertson, Ms Imai, and members of CLAIR Tokyo staff are currently pairing up to visit the universities of Hull, York, Southampton, Middlesex, Bournemouth, Lancaster, and London's Royal Holloway, in the hope that we can attract the same high calibre of students to essentially represent the UK in Japan.

This year's new JETs left for Japan in two groups; one at the end of July, and one at the beginning of August. Before they set off on their adventures, we managed to persuade a couple of new JETs at the London pre-departure reception to write for Myriad Leaves. They will be writing short articles for us throughout their stay in Japan. For this issue, Tori, a CIR, and Roy, an ALT, write about their expectations of living and working in Japan for a year.

- 1 JET returnees eat, drink and make merry the JLGC reception, 26th September
- 2 The JETAA Desk at Careers Information Day, 26th September
- 3 JETAA Careers Information Day





When I was asked to write about my expectations of the JET programme, I realized that actually, I'm not sure what to expect. As a Japanese graduate with little idea of where the future will take me, and knowing only that I'm eager to better my Japanese, I gravitated towards the JET programme. I was made aware of JET through a friend who pointed out the diversity of a CIR's position; internationalization, event planning, teaching, and administration. I thought it might be suitable for me.

After numerous interviews and nail-biting letter openings I am heading to Yamaguchi Prefectural University in Yamaguchi, the most westerly prefecture on Honshu.

The London orientation shaped my expectations in one very important way: I came to realize that my experiences in Japan would differ greatly from the majority of people I met there. This is mainly because I lived in Kobe from age 9 to 16, seconded there on my father's job, and I spent a year in Japan as an exchange student during my degree. This isolated me from a number of ALTs, as they felt they couldn't relate to me and that I was somehow 'cheating'. This made me feel that I couldn't track down other people going to Yamaguchi for fear of the same reaction. Whilst I understand this reaction to a Japanese-speaker who has spent a considerable amount of time in Japan, I was experiencing many of the same emotions as they were; I was scared of being truly alone, anxious about moving away from home, and experiencing ever-growing trepidation about my first job and the possibility of being useless at it!

The responsibilities of the job itself seem rather wide-ranging. The first four areas are straightforward; English teaching, event organization, international exchange and promotion of cross-cultural understanding. The fifth essentially says 'you will also do anything your supervisor wants you to', so visions of being a glorified tea lady spring to mind. Having lived in Yamaguchi previously, however, I have an advantage in that I've met my predecessor and attended some local events, so I know what can be achieved with imagination and motivation.

My main concern is that being female, I will face more barriers than my male counterparts. I know that many women, both Japanese and foreign, struggle to fit into a largely male-dominated society both professionally and socially. This is, to an extent, unavoidable and something I must put up with. The other point that worries me is the frustration that comes in dealing with Japanese bureaucracy. After months of battling with banks and other Japanese systems as an exchange student, controlling my temper is something I continue to struggle with, but this I view as another exercise in self-improvement!

After running all the possibilities, including all the things that could go wrong, round my head since April, I've decided that the easiest way to deal with Japan and my first job is to not to panic about things that haven't happened (yet!). Instead of worrying about working in a strange environment, I intend to go with the system and try my hardest to achieve what I set out to do: bring an element of foreign culture and understanding into the lives of local people.

In short, when thinking about the unknown it seems wise to expect the unexpected.

Victoria Bentley

I did it! It's been a long process, taking almost 8 months since I submitted my application, but my acceptance letter and notification of my posting have finally come: I'm going to Nagano Prefecture as an ALT. I've been sent the JET handbook and language book, and I've been doing research on the internet about my region. I've been placed in Shiojiri, a small city with a population of around 60,000. It's a 20-minute train ride to Matsumoto City, the largest city in the region with a population of 360,000, and is around 3 hours by train from Tokyo. It appears to be very nice, nestled in the mountains of central Nagano, with a large farming community. It couldn't be more different from West London. Writing this, I feel slightly apprehensive as to what I'll experience there. Despite all the research I've done, and all the advice I've been given ("find a nice Japanese girl!", "learn the language!", "don't lose your passport!"), I'm nevertheless distinctly worried.

I am constantly reminded of the 'the group is more important than the individual' mentality of Japanese culture. Everything I read about Japan tells me that one has to sacrifice one's individuality and personal aims for the improvement of the group. Coming from a culture which prizes individuality and freedom above everything else, this is perhaps one of the more troubling aspects of working in Japan.

I'm also conscious of the fact that I'm not a trained teacher. I've had experience of teaching statistics at university, but never anything at elementary or senior high school level. I'll be working at an education centre for two days a week, at a senior high school (A-level standard) for two days a week, and I'll be making one-shot visits to elementary schools. It is this last aspect of my work which worries me most, and I'm further vexed when I take into account that my Japanese vocabulary currently doesn't extend further than "Dozo Yoroshiku" and "Arigato Gozaimasu".

I'm not particularly worried about the legendary cleanliness of Japanese homes. 7 years at boarding school has served me well. Also, my future home is TINY! It's the size of my bedroom in London. For all intents and purposes, it's a studio flat with the kitchen in the entrance hall. Thus my domestic life is made easier.

I'm also worried that as I'm of Chinese descent, my colleagues will have unrealistic expectations of me. This was one of my concerns about participating in the JET Programme, which was partly addressed at my interview. As I'm representing London, I'm supposed to reflect its cosmopolitan nature. Personally, I have no problems with this, but am more worried about what others' attitudes will be towards me. (Obviously I'm a worrier!)

I have no doubts that the JET experience will be one I will not forget in a hurry – I only hope that I won't let anyone down. As my Japanese friend taught me, "GAMBARIMASU!" (I'll do my best!)

Roy Fu



OKAYAMA



OKINAWA



OSAKA



SAGA



SAITAMA



SHIGA



SHIMANE



SHIZUOKA



TOCHIGI



TOKUSHIMA



Newcastle; Not So Different From Kochi

Toru Ageta

I am seconded from Kochi Prefectural Government in Japan. Kochi Prefecture, situated on the island of Shikoku, faces the Pacific Ocean and is blessed with an abundance of nature, and beautiful rivers and mountains which look like the Alps. People in Kochi are friendly and peaceful, and make the area a very pleasant place.

In June 2003, I visited Newcastle City Council to research the highly successful Regeneration policies in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, such as the Grainger Town Plan which involved reviving the city centre, and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder.

When the City Council staff explained the city background, I was surprised to find that Newcastle and Kochi have a lot of problems in common. Newcastle had been thriving in shipbuilding and mining since the industrial revolution, but these traditional industries have declined or disappeared and young people have moved to South East England. Likewise, young people in Kochi have moved into big cities like Tokyo or Osaka and the population has continued to decline. Manufacturing and agriculture in Kochi have also declined – a direct result of the growing Chinese economy, which can produce cheap high quality products. Similarly, it is a major concern that manufacturing industries in Newcastle are going to enter into tough competition with Eastern European countries (newly joined EU countries) whose economies are growing sharply.

In Newcastle city centre, most of the classical Georgian buildings are listed and as it is impossible to rebuild, black stains developed on the buildings. As a result, more and more businesses were relocating out of the city and were leaving listed properties empty to fall into disrepair. Then shoppers began to go to big suburban shopping centres. However, thanks to

During their first few months of secondment to JLGC, all members of staff have a two-week work placement in a UK local authority as part of their training. Reports on placements are published (in Japanese) in CLAIR's monthly news magazine, Jichitai Kokusaika Forum (Local Internationalisation Forum), which is distributed to Japanese prefectures and municipalities, related government ministries and agencies, international exchange associations and other organisations involved with local government. Brief accounts of work placements are also published in English in JLGC's Annual Review, and of course, here in Myriad Leaves.

This issue, we find out what Mr. Ageta and Mr. Kirino found out in Newcastle, and how Mr. Kato and Ms Tashiro got on in Durham.

Discovering Durham Daiki Kato

In May, Ms Tashiro and I went to Durham County Council for our training, which covered many topics, such as the financial system and structure, pensions, industry, education and the environment.

A visit to an industrial estate was next, followed by a trip to the Easington coast, where we saw the results of highly successful environmental improvement. This particular piece of coast was so improved that it was commended by the EU and given a regeneration award.

We were shown around a number of schools, and were especially impressed with a concert

put on by the pupils of Langley Park Primary school. It confirmed that there are no borders in music; it is indeed a universal language.

Towards the end of our training, we were invited to dinner with Mr. Kingsley Smith, the Chief Executive, and his wife; and Mr. Ken Manton, the Leader of the Council, and his wife. We were delighted especially to meet Mrs Smith, who is originally from Wakayama Prefecture in Japan! The evening was both fun and informative; Mr. Smith and Mr. Manton patiently answered all our questions.

This was my first experience of England, and through work placement training, we learned a huge amount in just two weeks. We were able to get a feel for English local government and observe the differences from Japan, as well as the many striking similarities. We have learned so much from our work placement in Durham, and hope that we can take what we have learned and experienced to Japan, and put it to good use there in the future.

All the staff at Durham County Council were very friendly and took very good care of us. We would like to thank everyone who made our training so informative and memorable.

Mrs Manton, Hitomi Tashiro, Mr. Smith, Mrs Smith, Daiki Kato, Mr. Manton.

jlgc staff work placements

Durham is an area of historical importance, and was once a prosperous coal-mining town. It shifted from coal mining to the manufacturing industry, for which it is now known. Durham struggled with, and ultimately solved, the pollution problems caused by the coal-mines, and great care is now taken to protect the environment against damage from industry. This care has resulted in successfully creating an area of natural beauty, which is also an ideal place to live and work.

During our training, we had the opportunity to listen to a cabinet meeting. In my opinion, the proceedings were very much like those of Japan; the argument under discussion became more and more heated as it developed.

We also visited one of the Council's public libraries. The libraries are open from early morning until late evening, and are aimed at offering a place for both young and old to come and talk together, as well as being a place of study.



TOKYO



TOTTORI



TOYAMA



WAKAYAMA



YAMAGATA



YAMAGUCHI



YAMANASHI



CHIBA



FUKUOKA



HIROSHIMA



RESEARCH AND POLICY ADVISER

the Grainger Town Plan, since 1997, the city centre has revived beautifully and many smart cafés and boutiques have come to the empty properties, and shoppers have returned to the city centre.

The shopping streets in Kochi city centre underwent regeneration and the old streets were also beautifully revived. However, shoppers have continued to go to a big shopping centre in the suburbs. One difference I noticed between Kochi and Newcastle is that Newcastle has convenient transportation systems. Park & ride is practiced; there are many bus lanes in the city centre and there is an underground system.

The methods employed in regeneration in Kochi are very different from those in Newcastle. The first thing is the speed of purchasing properties for implementing regeneration. It is not unusual in Japan to take 10 years to convince landlords or tenants, but local authorities in the UK can implement immediate compulsory purchase orders after only two years of negotiations with landlords. When local authorities in Japan take on redevelopment, it is usual that only the private sector deals with it, and it is constrained by lack of funds. On the other hand, local authorities in the UK make partnerships with the private sector during redevelopment, so it is easier to secure the money.

Though local authorities in the UK make much of partnership with the private sector and voluntary sector, I feel it is insufficient to form partnerships with neighbouring councils only. I think there is a lack of wider view in the planning of one-tier areas.

Now Japanese local authorities are trying to plan the cities and redevelopment projects imitating the partnerships with the private sector found in the UK. I would like to apply what I saw in Newcastle to regeneration policies in Kochi.



The redeveloped Quayside in Newcastle.
Toru Ageta and Yoshiyuki Kirino with Peter Howe,
City Centre Manager

The JLGC staff interview is going to be a regular feature of the new Myriad Leaves. Since Andrew has recently authored a book, we thought it appropriate to make him the first interviewee to sit in the spotlight.

Previously, Andrew worked as Political Adviser in the Mayor's Office of the London Borough of Lewisham. He also worked for Cleveland County Council and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council prior to attending university, where he obtained a diploma in journalism and a BSc and MA in political science. His interests are literature, film, music and history.

When and why did you first become interested in politics?

a Around the time of the Miners' strike, when I was eight. It seemed unacceptable to me that people were just expected to allow their communities to be decimated.

How did you end up at the JLGC?

a Good question! I'd been in my last post for three years and wanted to do something different, but related. The international focus appealed to me.

What are the best and worst things about your job?

a Best: varied work, no two days are the same. Worst: 9am starts.

What's the first thing you would change if you became Prime Minister?

a Abolish the monarchy. I think this would give people at the bottom the confidence to succeed. I'd also abolish selective education for the same reason.

Is there any policy that you would "import" from Japanese local government? (If so, what is it?)

a The concept of genuine autonomy and self-government.

What single thing would most improve your life?

a A Gold credit card.

Who is your political hero and why?

a Salvador Allende - for his courage and learned approach to politics.

You can invite any celebrity to dinner. Who is it, and why?

a Woody Allen - I'm sure he'd be very entertaining.

What's your greatest achievement?

a I am grateful for reaching a postgraduate level of education, despite attending a 'bog standard' comprehensive.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

a I've fluffed my lines giving a few speeches.

What is the biggest problem with local government today?

a I think a culture remains where everyone blames everyone but themselves for poor performance. I am in favour of intervention and decisive action to turn around failure.

How would you solve it?

a I don't feel qualified to answer this one!

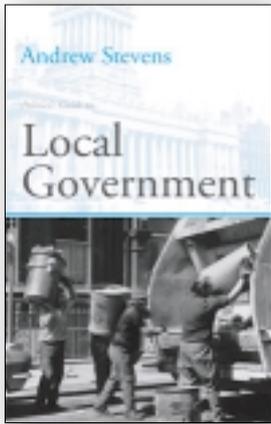
When and where are you most happy?

a In an Indian restaurant in good company.

Your house is on fire. What possession do you grab first?

a My cats - everything else can burn, I'm insured.





New Book

Politico's Guide to Local Government,
Politico's/Methuen 2003 £12.99

Andrew Stevens tells us about his new book.

The Politico's Guide to Local Government is the latest in a series of Politico's Guides (Politico's being the Westminster-based political bookshop whose publishing arm has recently been acquired by Methuen), the others being on subjects as diverse as Parliament, the Civil Service and Lobbying. So my book is in good company. While I had written a book chapter (on cross-party co-operation) and a number of pamphlets previously, it is my first book and I was able to draw on research I had undertaken as part of my postgraduate studies. However, at the time I was also in the fortunate

situation of working in the frontline of local government policy and political processes. As such I was able to gain insights and access to information denied to most academic authors. In particular, I had a ringside seat in the debate on elected mayors and I felt it necessary for people to understand the issues in context as the debate had been reported in somewhat over-emotional terms.

It occurred to me that there was a need for a book on local government that could serve as an introduction and overview to what is considered a dry topic of little political importance, so condensed relevant information and a lively writing style was of importance to me. I also wanted to prove that local government is both relevant and of political importance – people often forget that many events in 20th century political culture either happened in, or had their roots in, local government. Furthermore, I wanted to consider local government's role in the context of recent changes to the national constitution. Emerging themes and trends were also important in this – Best Value, 'new localism', regional devolution and new forms of political leadership are all topical, yet all too often are the sole domain of remote policy wonks. So I have been able to generate a resource, an overall history and a detailed consideration of the radical changes implemented by New Labour over the last six years.

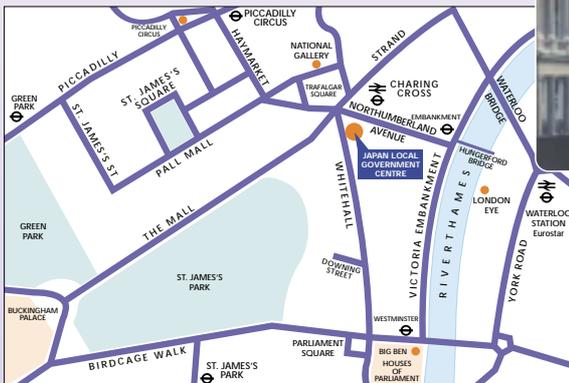
Being a novice to the publishing world, I am of course nervous as to how the book will be received. I have heard sales are healthy and have received some praise from prominent academics. However, I have spotted a number of printing errors in the work and should I ever write another book I will take the proof-reading process more seriously! That is a 'big if' however so I will wait to see how the book is received first. But I would like to think that I have made a contribution by publishing an accessible account that demystifies what is regarded by some as an obscure and irrelevant part of our democracy.

Andrew Stevens is JLGC Research and Policy Adviser



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View from Trafalgar Square
London office is on the first floor of the building which has the blue signboard on the centre of the picture



The Japan Local Government Centre is the UK office of CLAIR – the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, and is a joint organisation representing local government in Japan's 47 prefectures and 12 major cities.

With its head office in Tokyo, and branch offices in each of the 59 local authorities' International Relations Divisions, CLAIR has 7 other overseas offices – in Beijing, New York, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, Sydney and the United Kingdom.

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