

UK-JAPAN SCHOOL LINKS HANDBOOK

Japan 21

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of a UK-Japan school link, as of any other international link, may appear obvious. On one level, a link will introduce students to a different culture and encourage understanding and appreciation of the way of life of young people from a different background. It can also foster awareness of assumptions based on students' own value systems, thus placing international, social, political and economic issues in perspective.

Closer to home, and school, a link can provide a useful context for work across the curriculum in areas such as, geography, modern foreign languages, art, music, ICT, food technology and sport, as well of course, as citizenship and PSHE.

However, a link involves a large investment - most importantly of your time, but also, depending on the type of exchange being planned, of money. There are also obstacles to overcome such as language issues, differences in the Japanese and British education system and school calendars.

Despite this, it is possible for schools in the UK and Japan to develop effective and long-lasting partnerships. We hope that these guidelines, drawing on the experiences of many schools over many years, will help you in your link.

DEFINING YOUR OBJECTIVES

A successful school link depends on the commitment of both school and a certain amount of give and take. If you have a clear idea of the purpose of your link, it will be much easier to motivate your colleagues and pupils. It is also important to recognise that your partners will have their own objectives and you should therefore be willing to adjust plans to suit both schools.

Things to think about:

- why have you decided to link with a school in Japan (the UK)?
- how does this link fit in with your school's overall vision for international links?
- what do you hope to gain from the link? In the short term? In the long term?
- is there any specific material or information you would like to receive from your partner school?
- what can you offer a partner school?

There are almost as many reasons for setting up a link as there are schools wanting to do so. As a general guide, some of the more common reasons and expectations are given here:

- we want our students to develop an awareness of other cultures and traditions (J, UK)
- we want our students to see their own culture more objectively (J, UK)
- to give our students a real context for using their English (J)
- to give our students a chance for using their Japanese (UK)
- to fulfil international understanding, English and ICT elements of the integrated learning curriculum (J)
- to complement a geography unit of work / primary project on Japan (UK)
- we have an assistant English teacher from the UK (J)

We look in detail at the planning of a link elsewhere in these guidelines, but it's important in the early stages to consider how the objectives of both partners can be met.

LOGISTICAL ISSUES

How will the link be administered in your school?

- Does it have the support of other staff and the school management? It is possible for an enthusiastic individual to set up and run a school link, but the co-operation of others can make your life much easier! And is essential for the more ambitious exchange or cross-curricular work.
- At the very least, you should choose a substitute contact in case the main contact teacher falls ill or leaves the school.
- Is there room for PTA involvement?
- Does your school have a student council? Can it be involved?
- What is your budget - of time and money?
- Which pupils will be involved? What year group? How many? When will they work on the link?

The school year starts in April in Japan and September in the UK. A link running over a full academic year may encounter problems as partner pupils change year group or leave the school. Plan for this by involving staff teaching other years or by working on the link as a club activity.

FINDING A PARTNER SCHOOL

Having decided what you would like to achieve through a school link and what place it will have in the life of your school, it's time to look for a partner school. There are various ways to do this:

- complete the online application at www.japan21.org.uk/teachers/schoollinks/apply.html or complete the printed application form attached to these guidelines or available from Japan 21 on tel: 020 7630 8696. Japan 21 will use the information you provide to try and find a suitable partner, so please be as specific as you can.
- visit websites such as E-Link (www.e-linkschools.org), Windows on the World (www.wotw.org.uk) or ePALS (www.epals.com) to see if there are any suitable schools waiting for links.
- follow-up on any personal contacts you have.
- find out if your town or city has any formal or informal links with a sister city in Japan.

STARTING TO PLAN YOUR LINK

When you have found a partner school and know the name of your counterpart there, what should your next step be? Both schools should have some idea of what the other is like and what your respective objectives are. However, it is safest not to take anything for granted.

a) A checklist to plan your first steps:

- Don't procrastinate! - get in touch with your counterpart immediately, preferably by email. It does not have to be long or include a detailed plan for the exchange, but simply a message saying who you are. The longer you wait to get in touch, the more difficult it becomes to break the ice.
- Begin to set the parameters for the link - in particular the type and timetable. This may involve just you and your counterpart(s), but could equally be something that pupils could be responsible for.
- Agree on the link type. The most common variants are whole school, class (or club) or individual pupil. A combination of two or more types is often the most successful.
- Draw up a rough timetable for the first year's exchange. An email exchange is likely to be more frequent than postal exchanges. If this is a club or class activity, make sure your partner school knows when pupils are likely to be online, so they do not worry if they don't get immediate replies to their messages. If you are planning a joint investigation or are preparing resources to send by post, agree when you will each do this.
- In the course of the exchange, make sure you let your counterpart know about any school events, holidays, exams etc which may interrupt the link.
- If, despite all this, you run into problems with your link, please let Japan 21 (or the person who introduced your partner school) know as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the harder it is to resolve difficulties.

b) A tool to help your exchange

As well as a general structured online exchange, Japan UK LIVE! can offer you a private area in which to work with your partner school. In the Project Pages area, you will be given your own talkboard to use to plan your link. You can set up a collaboration with your link school on any subject you choose and pupils can work with their partners to create a joint website showing what they have found out. Where necessary, Japan 21 can provide language support for schools using Project Pages talkboards. For further details of Japan UK LIVE, please visit the Japan 21 website (www.japan21.org.uk/teachers/japanuklive.html), or e-mail heidi@japan21.org.uk. The Project Pages handbook can be downloaded from www.japanuklive.org/cgi-bin/japan/student/cms.pl

MAINTAINING YOUR LINK

Different types of link have different characteristics - and both have their advantages and disadvantages. Whatever type you choose, try to put measures in place to ensure continuity and effectiveness. Don't forget that it is possible to have links between individual pupils to supplement group-based links.

links structured around group work

Group links:

- can be whole school, class or club based
- are easy to monitor and sustain
- require more planned school time
- may result in higher postal costs (though this is less an issue with email etc)
- are ideally suited to joint investigations
- can help to avoid disruption caused when partner students change year group or leave the school

Example programme for a group-based exchange

The link is developed over a series of 'parcels'. These could literally be packages to be sent by post, but equally schools could present the contents using email, web pages, digital photographs, video conferencing etc, if they have the appropriate technology.

Large groups of students can be split into smaller teams, each responsible for a different section of a 'parcel'. These can be sent in any order and content varied to suit particular interests. They are merely ideas!

Parcel 1: Our School

- plan of the school / classroom, with relevant, annotated photographs or artwork
- school / class roll and photographs or self portraits
- information about teaching and ancillary staff, PTA, governors
- a school calendar including descriptions and artwork relating to events in the school year

Parcel 2: Our Town

- annotated plans of the locality
- photographs of things seen near the school. Don't forget to photograph the mundane as well as the unusual!
- local newsletters, newspaper cuttings about the school, local celebrities
- local history / geography projects or investigations

Parcel 3: Work on a theme

- at primary level this could be cross-curricular work on a theme such as 'the environment', 'festivals', 'sport' etc. The work of each school will reflect its cultural background
- surveys on leisure activities, cost of living, local amenities etc. This may involve each school answering questions formulated by the other, which are then compared to answers collected locally. This will lead to a discussion about cultural differences.
- joint poems and stories. Pupils write one half of either a story or a poem, which is sent to their counterparts to complete and return. It is interesting to see how your culture influences the content of your writing. Schools could work on renga on a theme, either in the traditional format of a 5-7-5 syllable poem followed by 7-7 syllables, or simply responding to one haiku with another.

Parcel 4: Multimedia

- pupils exchange audio or video tapes, CDs or PowerPoint presentations etc. These can be used to introduce the sights and sounds of the local environment both in and outside school e.g school events, spoken self introductions, club activities, songs, street sounds etc

Parcel 5: Sport and leisure

- both school and home based: what do pupils do in their spare time?
- comparison of TV programmes
- book reviews. Pupils read the same book - in translation if necessary - and give their thoughts on it. (Before choosing a book, make sure it's available in both languages!)

Parcel 6: Daily routine

- school life: timetable, after school activities, getting to and from school, school lunches etc
- home life: holidays, household chores, part-time jobs, family, pets, homes etc

The programme above is based on ideas given by Mary Grace Browning based on her many years' of successful school links with Japan. Many other sites have ideas for exchanges and collaborations, including **E-Link** (www.e-linkschools.org).

individual pupil

Pupil links:

- are cheaper and less time-consuming to organise
- are more difficult to evaluate and have a mixed success rate
- enable pupils to work at their own pace and explore topics of particular interest
- may soon expose language limitations

Example programme for a pupil-pupil exchange

Pupils may benefit from being given suggested topics to write on. Photographs and other visual aids will supplement and help overcome language difficulties.

However, when using email in particular, UK pupils will need to be warned not to use text messaging styles of communication, which use 'sound'-spellings and abbreviations. These are very difficult for non-native speakers to cope with!

Me

simple self introduction with a photo

My family

photograph, family tree etc

My house

floor plan, photo - including 'my street'?

My hobbies

including postcards, magazine pictures, drawings etc

My school

timetable, plan of the school etc

Teachers may need to give occasional prods to flagging friendships. Timely suggestions can be helpful eg a reminder of a partner's forthcoming birthday, a prompt to send a postcard from holiday etc.

Pupils could be encouraged to make a folder for their link, which can be displayed on open days or in the library etc.

what method should you use for your exchange?

Most schools use a combination of methods to share a wide-range of resource materials.

Email exchange

Email is rapidly becoming the most popular method of communication. It is both fast and cheap, and gives your link the chance of a longer life by allowing regular, rapid exchanges.

All schools now have computers with internet access, though the need to book an IT suite for class work does present some limitations. At some schools all staff and pupils have personal email accounts, but this is by no means the case everywhere and it is sometimes necessary to route emails through a school gateway address.

At the beginning, it may be helpful for teachers to use private email addresses in order to discuss link content and organisation.

Postal exchange

Air mail can become very expensive when sending group packages. Try and split parcels to take advantage of 'printed paper' and 'small packet' rates. Sea mail is much cheaper, but can take 6 weeks or longer to arrive.

Almost anything can be sent by post: letters, paintings and posters, cartoons, photographs, maps, audio tapes, video tapes, CDs, stories and poems, newsletters, surveys, postcards etc - the possibilities are endless.

With younger children and where language is an obstacle, the emphasis will be on photos, pictures, tapes etc rather than on written materials. It is possible to carry out a colourful and informative exchange without written materials.

Many items which are normally text heavy, can be re-created with illustrations: maps, school timetables, introductions to the locality, surveys, family trees and so on, can all be made comprehensible with a minimum of language.

Caution Japanese and UK videos are not compatible. The Japanese video standard is NTSC, while the British system is PAL. Multi system video players are becoming more common in the UK, but are still not universal. In order for partners to view each others tapes, it may be necessary to have them converted. If you are having

difficulties, the British Council in Tokyo is willing to convert tapes and post them on to link schools.

Send the tape, with your partner school's address, to the School Links Co-ordinator, British Council, 1-2 Kagurazaka, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0825, Japan.

Video conferencing

Video conferencing has been used successfully by a number of schools, but is costly and needs careful planning.

Difficulties are sometimes experienced getting the two schools' systems to communicate, but once technical difficulties have been overcome, the immediacy of contact is effective in building motivation.

Japan is 9 hours ahead of GMT, so timing also needs thought. The most practical formula is UK students being in school, with equipment set up and ready to start by 9am and Japanese students staying behind until 6pm (5pm BST).

The content of the video-conference will depend on the aims of your particular link, but planning is needed to ensure that the video conference doesn't become an end in itself. Much will depend on your objectives: is the video-conference intended as a showcase for each school to present dance or drama? Is language practice the aim? Will one group of students be teaching something to the other? Or will they discuss findings from a joint investigation?

Involve students in planning the online session, encouraging them to plan their valuable online time and consider how they can ensure that objectives will be met.

As a cheaper, and simpler, alternative to video-conferencing, some schools in Japan are beginning to experiment with Yahoo video messaging. It has been found to be useful in a domestic context, but so far has not been tested on a UK-Japan link.

Other exchanges using computer or internet

An email link can be conducted in the same way as a postal link for class groups and individual penfriends. It has significant speed and cost advantages.

However, computers can offer many other dimensions to a link:

- creating/exchanging PowerPoint presentations. Don't forget, these can include video and sound clips as well as text and photographs.
- designing a webpage for your partner. This might comprise of introductions to pupils or the

- school. Some schools have used webpages to set interactive quizzes for their partners.
- using digital cameras or a web cam to show daily life. Digital photographs can be emailed easily. Web cams have the same time-difference problems as video-conferencing, but seem to have fewer compatibility problems. Use of this option is still in its early stages - do let us know how you get on!
- using drawing and word-processing programmes. Pupils can exchange art works, stories and poems. Joint arts projects can involve pupils at one school finishing work started by pupils at the other.

As well as a general structured online exchange, as outlined on page 7, Japan UK LIVE! can offer you a private area in which to work with your partner school. For further details of Japan UK LIVE, please visit the Japan 21 website (www.japan21.org.uk/teachers/japanuklive.html).

Using fax

In the pre-email days, fax was sometimes used when urgent contact with partners was necessary. It can still be useful as a fallback to check on the situation at a partner school should email fail, but is not available in all cases.

ORGANISING AN EXCHANGE VISIT PROGRAMME

Exchange visits are most likely to be a regular part of a school link where the UK school offers Japanese language teaching. However, some schools have taken groups on sport or music exchanges on a one-off basis.

timing

Most reciprocal exchange visits operate on a biannual cycle: the Japanese school visits the UK in one year and the UK school visits Japan the year after. A few now complete the cycle in a single year, while some visits are more ad hoc. The frequency of the exchange is usually dependent on finances.

Some visits are conducted entirely in term time, others overlap between term and the school holidays. There are no 'best' arrangements as so much depends on individual circumstances.

Similarly, there are no hard and fast rules for the time of year of the visits. Exams and other commitments in the school calendar are likely to be the deciding factors.

funding

Most exchanges work on the 'school gate' principle: that is, the host school starts paying from the point that the visitors reach the school. Working on this basis, and depending on the time of year, the distance between the schools and the nearest airports and the precise programme planned, the cost of a UK visit to Japan is roughly £1000-1200, while it may cost the Japanese visitors somewhat more.

When calculating costs, schools should bear in mind that the exchange does not end with the visit to the partner school: the cost of hosting the return leg must also be included in the budget. This will depend on the length of stay, activities undertaken and the number of incoming visitors.

Having worked out a rough budget for the complete exchange and established whether it will run over one or two financial years, schools are faced with raising the money. In most cases the exchange is funded by a combination of: individual contributions, grants and sponsorship and fund-raising activities.

Please see Funding on page 17 for further information.

selecting pupils

In both countries, the cost involved means that participants are, to a large extent, self selecting. In almost all cases, individual contributions are needed to cover most of the costs, although school fundraising can help subsidise these. Because all junior and

senior high school students in Japan study English, there is usually more competition for places on that leg of the exchange. In some cases, after negotiation between the schools, arrangements are made for more Japanese than UK students to travel. Where this is not possible, Japanese students may be selected on the basis of essays or interview.

programme for the visit

Most exchange visit programmes include a mixture of days in school, visits to local places of interest and social activities. Where language learning is the prime aim of the link, some schools organise language classes in the mornings and other activities in the afternoons.

Task driven activities are effective in building a strong group dynamic and fostering relationships between the two groups of students. Successful initiatives have involved preparing a musical or theatrical performance with the help of experienced workshop leaders, or spending a few days at an outdoor activity centre. Other groups have undertaken environmental projects in their locality.

Free time is also important - try to build in some flexibility and breathing space within the schedule.

Most exchange visits are centred on a home stay programme, with perhaps a few nights being spent sightseeing in, for example, London, Edinburgh, Tokyo or Kyoto at one end of the trip. Youth hostels are good value for money if you are thinking of doing this.

travel

There are four airlines operating direct flights between the UK and Japan: All Nippon Airways, British Airways, Japan Airlines and Virgin Atlantic. Group discounts can be negotiated.

Flights involving a connection in continental Europe (eg Paris, Amsterdam etc) are normally much cheaper, but will add around 3 hours to the journey time.

For travel within Japan, consider buying a Japan Rail Pass and, in the UK, a BritRail Pass. Whether these are worthwhile options for you depends on how much travelling you will be doing, how long you are staying and how far your partner school is from the airport etc.

The Japan National Tourist Organisation and British Tourist Authority are full of useful information. Please see the Useful Addresses on page 27 for details.

general tips

- Create a group identity by wearing a uniform. This may be a t-shirt or sweatshirt with the exchange logo, but could be school uniform.
- Keep luggage to a minimum. Remind participants that they will need to be able to carry their own luggage.
- Japan is still a cash-based society. Changing travellers' cheques is time-consuming and many ATMs do not accept foreign issue credit / debit cards. The good news is that the Japanese post office ATMs, found throughout the country, now accept overseas cards readily.
- Credit cards are a useful back up. Visa, American Express and JCB cards are most commonly accepted in Japan, while Mastercard is becoming more widely used. In the UK, all these cards are widely accepted. In both countries, youth hostels and small hotels or restaurants may not accept credit cards.
- Arrange gifts to take with you: larger ones for hosting organisations, smaller ones for host families. Co-ordinate as a group before travelling.
- Be prepared to explain your way of life. If you are hosting, there is no need to change your normal behaviour, but be aware that your guests may not be aware of customs which you take for granted. Do not be afraid tell them what you expect them to do - they would rather know than make mistakes.
- Take prompts to help. For example, a small photograph album is useful to introduce your family, school and home town, while magazines can provide many insights into youth culture and trends.

FUNDING

Funding for a school link is particularly an issue for those planning exchange visits, but any exchange will incur some kind of cost, for which you may need to seek funding.

funding organisations

It is easier to get funding to support a specific collaboration or joint project with your partner school than purely social and sightseeing visits.

Several organisations offer specific funding for projects between the UK and Japan. Every exchange is different, so you should check with the relevant organisation whether your project meets their funding criteria. All have websites with detailed information and are also always willing to answer enquiries. Please see the Useful Addresses on the page 27 for contact details.

The British Council

Funding for school links and partnerships with Japan is mainly available for schools in England. (Please contact offices in other countries in the UK to discuss other funding possibilities.)

The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation

As well as funding for school projects, the Great Britain Sasakawa Japan Experience gives young people from inner city environments in the UK unique insights into aspects of contemporary Japanese society.

The Foundation supports organisations in both the UK and Japan.

The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation

Individuals and organisations in the UK and Japan may apply for grants for education exchanges.

Japan 21 Awards

Japan 21 Awards are grants made to enable small scale projects and events related to Japan to take place in the UK. We concentrate our support on activities where a relatively small injection of funds can make a real difference. For further details, please visit the Awards section of the Japan 21 website (www.japan21.org.uk/awards/index.html).

local companies

Approach companies in your area with links with Japan or the UK. Nationwide, they may not have much funding for charitable giving, but this can work to your advantage because companies are now most likely to support projects in their local area. Once you have made contact with a company locally, work hard to maintain that link: send regular copies of your school newsletter, invite representatives to school events and so on.

Local companies and organisations unable to provide cash support may be persuaded to provide samples to take as gifts to your partner school, t-shirts for uniforms etc.

international associations

Find out if there are any local civic links with Japan/UK. These may be sister city type links, but are occasionally broader region-wide relationships. Local international associations sometimes have funding earmarked for youth exchange.

other fund-raising activities

Small scale fund-raising activities are also invaluable. Although the amounts raised may be less than those which may be received through a grant, these activities serve to give pupils a bigger stake in the exchange and help build strong relationships between members of the exchange group.

Discos, karaoke evenings, cake sales, car boot sales, dog shows, raffles etc all have their part to play.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The following are some of the most common problems encountered in developing UK-Japan links. Many can be solved or avoided if the respective contact teachers are in good, regular contact.

contact teacher leaving

If your link school suddenly goes quiet, you may find that your partner teacher has left, or gone on maternity or sick leave. While staff changes are unavoidable, their impact can be limited. Ideally, both schools should have at least one alternative contact who is aware how the link operates and is committed to its success.

In reality, however, many links are the result of one person's vision and are difficult to sustain without them. If you are leaving, please notify your partner school so that they are aware of the situation. Make sure they know who has taken over your end of the link and encourage the new link teachers to begin communicating before you leave. It may be a busy time for you, but this will at least give the link a chance of survival or, at worst, mean that your partner school understands why the link fails. Alternatively, after some discussion, you may both decide that it makes most sense for the teacher leaving to take the link with them to their new school.

pupils leaving

It is inevitable that there will be some changes as pupils leave or move up through the school and encounter exam pressures etc. However, you can reduce the likelihood of problems by considering these points:

- If your link starts part way through your school year, don't base it solely around pupils who will leave at the end of the year.
- Inform your counterpart if a key group of pupils is about to leave. If you plan to start again with a new year group, warn the teacher that there may be a short pause in correspondence.
- A class-based link can be revived with a new class of younger pupils.
- A school links club will provide encouragement and assistance for pupils, and will also enable you to make substitutions when necessary.

lack of response from the partner school

An email link may suffer should school servers break down or when networks are being upgraded. If you are not getting responses to emails, try sending faxes or telephoning. Contact Japan 21 if you would like us to try and help ascertain the problem.

The vagaries of the postal system are beyond any school's control, but if you have agreed on a timetable for parcel exchange, try and keep to it. If there are delays at your end, email your counterpart to let them know. Email is always a useful back up: a quick message to let partners know that a package has been sent, or to acknowledge receipt, will keep the link ticking over.

different expectations

Organisations such as Japan 21 try to link schools whose stated aims and preferred types of link match. We discuss details with schools before making the link. However, sometimes difficulties only become apparent once embarking on the link.

- Let your counterpart know if you find you are unable to maintain the planned level of exchange. They may be willing to amend the programme until your problems are resolved. At least they will have the chance to look for a second, or supplementary, link which may more closely meet their requirements.
- Conversely, if you want to expand the scale of your link, give your counterpart time to discuss things with colleagues and get any necessary approval from their school management.

cost

The development of internet and email has brought the cost of exchanges down considerably. However, some costs will inevitably accrue, be it for postage, digital technology or computer storage media. It is not easy to get funding for incidental expenses, although one school managed to get their local post office to help with postage costs. See Funding for more information.

language

There is no denying that language problems exist in developing UK-Japan links. A limited, though increasing, number of UK students or teachers have any knowledge of Japanese, so links are usually conducted in English. Although English is now taught in some Japanese primary schools, the emphasis is on oral communication and lessons are often taught by visiting specialists. Full-time staff may not be sufficiently confident in their English to organise the link.

At primary school level, it is possible to develop exchange using primarily visual resources, but the planning of a link requires close teacher communication. Enlisting the assistance of a British participant on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme can help with this. International Associations in Japan may also help. Alternatively, the Japan UK LIVE website offers language support for both staff and pupils. For the information about Japan UK LIVE, please visit www.japan21.org.uk/teachers/japanuklive.html

Students need to make a conscious effort to use standard English / Japanese when writing to partners for whom this is not their native tongue. Spelling mistakes and text message style messages etc can make life very difficult.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After the first flush of enthusiasm or inspiration which has started you thinking about a possible link with a school in Japan (or the UK), you may be beginning to wonder whether it really is that simple. Certainly there are differences between the education systems and obstacles presented by language, lack of funding and so on. But don't be disheartened! If you understand how your partner school works or know about funding and other organisations that support links you will find ways to make your link run smoothly.

The UK school

The education of a child in the UK is roughly divided into three stages: primary school, secondary school and sixth form. The age at which children change school varies according to the region and the type of school. There is no single organisational system in the UK. There are different curriculum guidelines for each of the UK countries.

The age range of pupils in the UK partner school is likely to be 5 - 11, 11 - 16 or 18 (or 13 - 18) or 16 - 18+. The academic year in the UK starts in September. Education is compulsory to age 16 and is free at all levels. There are both state and private schools.

In the National Curriculum for England and Wales, Japanese is included on the list of foreign language options. Many of the specialist language colleges (secondary schools which have an emphasis on teaching of modern foreign languages) offer Japanese. In the UK as a whole, some 8,500 students at 260 schools currently study Japanese.

Outside the language classroom too, schools have opportunities to teach about Japan. KS3 Geography (12 - 14 years), often includes study of Japan as an example of a more economically developed country (MEDC). There are also opportunities to study about Japan in the history curriculum. In primary schools, where Japan is an optional topic, some schools regularly include cross-curricular work on Japan. Lessons such as music, art, food technology and English can also include work on Japanese themes at the discretion of the teacher. Even with the National Curriculum, teachers have quite a lot of flexibility.

The Curricula in Scotland and Northern Ireland are different from that in England and Wales. In Scotland, many pupils learn about Japan within the 5-14 Environmental Studies curriculum and secondary Geography curriculum. Japanese history may be studied in Modern Studies at secondary school. There are fewer direct curriculum links in Northern Ireland, although there is great emphasis on international awareness and ICT use in schools is advanced.

PSHE (personal, social and health education), Citizenship and Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU, in Northern Ireland only) all offer opportunities for international linking. In Scotland, Citizenship is not a separate subject, but schools aim to integrate its themes throughout the curriculum.

If your partner school teaches Japanese, students' ability will depend on the place of Japanese in the curriculum. Some schools teach Japanese to GCSE level and above, others offer shorter 'taster' courses. Age is not a reliable guide to the length of time students have studied Japanese: 16 year olds may have been studying for five years, while 17 year olds may just have had a 20 week taster course.

Students studying towards an exam will first learn hiragana, then katakana and some kanji. The GCSE examination tests students on approximately 200 kanji, this rises to 600 kanji for A level. Students who do short courses will probably not learn any Japanese scripts, but may know romaji.

The Japanese school

A Japanese child's education is divided into three stages: 6 years' elementary school, 3 years' junior high school and 3 years' senior high school. There are both state and private schools and education at state schools is free until the end of compulsory education (15), though a nominal fee is charged thereafter. The school year starts in April and ends in March.

The age range of pupils in the Japanese partner school is likely to be 6 - 12 (elementary school), 12 - 15 (junior high school) or 15 - 18 (senior high school). Private schools may encompass both junior and senior high schools.

Most students begin to study English in the first year of junior high school at age 12. However, there is a new government initiative to introduce English in elementary schools, so the situation is changing. The emphasis at elementary school is on the spoken language, concentrating on listening and speaking skills.

Most Japanese schools will be looking for a link to give students an active context for their study of English. Others, particularly at elementary and junior high school level, see a link as a complement to work through the Integrated Learning Curriculum, fulfilling international understanding, English for communication and ICT requirements.

By default, English tends to be the main link language between Japan and the UK. On the whole, if your link school is:

- an **elementary** school, the pupils will have limited or no knowledge of English. All Japanese teachers will have studied English at some point and some may be quite fluent. However, many will lack confidence in their ability to administer a link in English. Some elementary schools have regular visits by native speaker English teachers who could be involved in the link. Local international associations may also be able to help. Alternatively, consider making use of the Japan UK LIVE! Project Pages, where language support can be given.
- a **junior high** school, the pupils will have a little knowledge of English. Most new first years will be studying the language for the first time, but usually have enormous enthusiasm and desire to communicate. By the third year, the most common grammatical structures have been covered and a good, basic vocabulary acquired
- a **senior high** school, the students will have a reasonable level of English, especially written. They may be less fluent speakers than continental European students of the same age. They will be studying fairly complex grammatical structures and learning advanced vocabulary, but may have few opportunities to speak the language.

A year in the UK

The basic outline of the school year will be the same throughout the UK, although details will vary from school to school and region to region. Throughout the year, secondary level pupils may be involved in subject based field trips especially for geography, modern languages or sport, as well as year group trips, particularly for younger students. Primary pupils may take part in outings to museums, activity centres etc in their year groups.

The timing of school holidays varies considerably in different parts of the UK.

September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> beginning of the school year (around 4 September in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; mid August in Scotland) INSET for teachers (about 4 days spread throughout the year)
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> half-term holiday end of October baseline assessment of 4-5 year olds
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock exams for GCSE, AS and A level students (16, 17 & 18 year olds); or Standard & Higher Exams in Scotland (16 & 17). In January in some schools university application process begins secondary school open evenings for primary pupils; parents & pupils select the secondary schools they wish to attend
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> nativity (or other seasonal) play (primary schools) end of term concert / pantomime etc (in many, but not every school) Christmas bazaar end of term (around 20 December)
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> start of new term (around 6 January)
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> one week half term holiday towards the end of the month
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two week spring holidays. The timing varies to coincide with Easter, varying from end of March to end of April. preparation of course work for GCSE exams etc
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> start of final term school play (varies from school to school, sometimes in May or December)
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KS1, KS2 and KS3 Standard Assessment Tests for Years 2, 6 and 9 parents' evening, to discuss pupils' progress (timing of this varies depending on year group, eg Year 7 may be earlier in the academic year, to discuss how pupils are handling the transition to secondary school and Year 11 in January to discuss career/A level choices) half term holiday end of May study leave for GCSE, AS and A level students; exams begin
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCSE, AS and A level exams: these students may not return to school until September end of year exams for other secondary school pupils Sports days / Swimming galas Work experience for Year 9, 10 or 11 (varies from school to school, in some schools takes place in autumn) end of academic year at the end of June (Scotland, Northern Ireland)
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work experience (as above) activity weeks / multicultural weeks end of academic year around 24 July (England, Wales)
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> summer holidays. Students and most staff do not come to school Scottish Standard and Higher results published early August GCSE, AS and A level results published at the end of August

A year in Japan

The basic outline of the school year will be the same throughout Japan, although details will vary from school to school and region to region. When an activity refers to a particular year group, every student in that year is usually involved. Activities usually involve the whole student body.

April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ceremonies to mark the start of the academic year (around 5 April) outing (sometimes 1-2 day residential) for new intake (sometimes also with other year groups to help students get to know each other) home visits. Form teachers are required to visit the homes of each of the students in their class. level assessment tests for 3rd grade (junior & senior high) students, to help decide which school / university they should apply for. These are held periodically through the year. Golden week holiday (a number of days off between 29 April - 5 May)
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mid-term tests school trip. Usually 3 - 4 days, for 6th grade elementary, 3rd grade junior high and 2nd grade senior high students. Timing varies eg some senior high schools have ski trips in winter instead.
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inter school sports tournaments
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inter school sports tournaments choir concert (each class performing) term end tests end of term (around 19 July)
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> summer holiday. Staff still attend school regularly. club activities continue some school trips
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> beginning of term ceremony (1 September) level assessment tests (most high schools) sports day (May in some regions)
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mid-term tests discussion with students / parents about senior high school or university choices culture festival (June in some schools)
November	
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> term end tests end of term ceremony (around 23 December)
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> beginning of term ceremony (around 8 January) university entrance exams
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> end of year tests (except 3rd grade junior & senior high) university entrance exams entrance exams for private senior and junior high schools
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> state senior high school entrance exams graduation ceremony (6th grade elementary, 3rd grade junior high and 3rd grade senior high) end of year ceremony (around 25 March)

Useful addresses

<p>Japan 21</p> <p>Swire House 59 Buckingham Gate London SW1E 6AJ tel: 020 7630 8696 email: education@japan21.org.uk website: www.japan21.org.uk www.japanuklive.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help finding partner school • ongoing support • Japan UK LIVE! website • funding for projects in the UK
<p>British Council</p> <p>World Links & Partnerships 10 Spring Gardens London SW1E 6AJ email: worldlinks@britishcouncil.org website: www.britishcouncil.org www.e-linkschools.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help finding partner school • project ideas on e-link website • funding for schools in England
<p>Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation</p> <p>(UK) Daiwa Foundation Japan House 13/14 Cornwall Terrace London NW1 4QP tel: 020 7486 2914 email: office@dajf.org.uk website: www.dajf.org.uk</p> <p>(Japan) TBR Building 810 Nagata-cho 2-10-2 Chiyoda-ku Tokyo 100-0014 email: dajftkyo@qa2.so-net.ne.jp</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grant funding
<p>Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation</p> <p>(UK) Dilke House 1 Malet Street London WC1E 7JN Tel: 020 7355 2229 email: grants@gbsf.org.uk website: www.gbsf.org.uk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grant funding • Japan Experience programme

<p>(Japan) 4 Floor Nihon Zaidan Building 1-2-2 Akasaka Minato-ku Tokyo 108-0073 email: gbsf@spf.or.jp website: www.spf.org</p>	
<p>Japan National Tourist Organisation</p> <p>Heathcoat House 20 Savile Row London W1S 3PR Tel: 0202 7734 9638 website: www.jnto.go.jp/eng www.seejapan.co.uk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • travel information for visitors to Japan
<p>British Tourist Authority</p> <p>website: www.uknow.or.jp/bta</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • travel information for Japanese visitors to the UK
<p>Youth Hostels</p> <p>(UK) Youth Hostels Association website: www.yha.org.uk www.syha.org.uk</p> <p>(Japan) Japan Youth Hostels Inc website: www.jyh.or.jp</p>	
<p>Airlines</p> <p>All Nippon Airways Website: www.ana.co.uk</p> <p>British Airways Website: www.ba.com</p> <p>Japan Airlines Website: www.jal.co.jp/enl</p> <p>Virgin Atlantic Website: www.virgin-atlantic.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • these four carriers offer direct flights between the UK and Japan. It is possible to negotiate group discounts. • cheaper fares are often available with carriers involving a stop at another European hub e.g. Paris, Amsterdam. Though in this case journey times will be longer.