

# ALTIA CENTRAL RECRUITING

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## Something New & Exciting!

### New job, new students, new experiences!

By Graham Van Zwoll, Recruiting Division Manager

Welcome to our first Recruiting Newsletter for our 2019/20 recruiting season. Things start to get busier now, especially for overseas recruiting. Though most of our contracts for the next school year won't be officially decided for several months, we are still going to be very busy though the autumn so once they are all confirmed, we will be ready with great new recruits to fill the gaps.

We are now in the process of setting up interviews overseas in the UK and various cities around North America, so now is a great time to apply if you think you can attend a face-to-face, one-on-one interview in one of our interview locations. This is just the very beginning of a fairly lengthy process, as we aim to have most decisions on overseas hiring made

by about January and on specific placements made by late February/early March. Of course, in-country recruiting only really gets going in January and February so that makes it doubly busy at that time of year for us. One of our goals though is to let you know as early as possible about your interview, reference check, approval and placement so you can start to plan for your new adventure.

Starting afresh in new schools, a totally new part of Japan, or coming from half way around the world can be a very exciting time. But applying for various jobs, interviewing and considering different offers can be a tough experience of course. We feel that you are interviewing us as well, so communicating with you and being open and honest with you is very

important to us. We want to earn your trust and want you to be comfortable with both the job you are applying for and also our company, so that you have a good feeling saying, "Yes! I accept!" We aim to get you as much information as possible and give you an idea for how we communicate and how we run our company. This is your experience, and because you are a foreigner in a foreign land, we think you should be choosy about who you work for, and it's up to us to deliver on our promises and uphold our strong reputation as the best company in this industry.

Inside this and other newsletters you will find information about who we are at ALTIA CENTRAL, what we expect and what we offer. We hope it's helpful and answers some questions for you. Enjoy.



**“Our ultimate customers are the kids of Japan!”**

-Utano (Uti) Oishi  
President, ALTIA CENTRAL

**Creating a company with a level of support that very few other companies in this industry can offer**



## Meeting The President

### ‘Just call me Uti!’

Scattered under the plastic protective cover on Utano Oishi’s desk are various photographs and samples of currencies from dozens of countries around the world. Two years living in Australia, a year in the UK and experiences of living in both India and Hong Kong brings us a Company President, or *shacho*, who understands what it feels like to be the *gaikokujin* in a different land. Utano Oishi is the President of ALTIA CENTRAL, and she insists that we call her by her nickname, ‘Uti.’ This applies to all of our head office staff and you the ALTs as well.

These factors are just some of many differences which set the tone for a very unique style of Japanese company. Uti started as the office assistant at an *eikaiwa* school more than twenty years ago. As requests for the *eikaiwa* teachers to go to Elementary schools grew, ALTIA Corporation was born and Uti did practically everything; liaison and sales with the schools and Boards of Education, administration, problem solving and support and even recruitment of ALTs (the hardest job, she says). After some years, ALTIA Corporation was restructured into the company we are today, ALTIA CENTRAL, and Uti became President, a position that she never intended on doing. She is still one of the youngest female company presidents in Japan in a

business world heavily dominated by men. When asked what is important to her, Uti points out that our ultimate customers are the kids of Japan. She says that finding great people who can give their students the most positive experience possible, we can hopefully help the children understand and accept each other better and open up a world of opportunities for them.

Furthermore, she wanted to create a company where all the staff have a voice and where our teachers feel they have a level of support that most companies in this industry don’t offer. By being honest, open and by giving just a little more, she hopes that we can have a more stable, more harmonious company where our employees and customers are much happier and content. Does she think we have achieved that? To quite some degree, yes! We have relatively low turnover rate of both contracts and employees but, she feels, we can always do better. The challenge is do it within our limits and in a way that the company remains financially healthy and stable for all of our employees. We have seen what can happen to other companies in this industry over the past few years and Uti is determined to ensure that ALTIA CENTRAL remains healthy, stable and secure for years to come!

## How We Get Contracts The Business of Education

We think it's important for you to understand the process the company must go through to secure a contract with our clients, the various city and town Boards of Education (BOE). Let's look at how they go about making a decision as to which company they will choose.

The simplest option for many BOEs is to ask companies to bid for the contract, basing their decision on the cheapest bidder. This is called a **nyusatsu**, or blind bid, and as we tend to offer a higher overall level of quality and support, we usually bid relatively high and thus don't often win. It's a quick process, and we often find out the result of the bid on the day of the bid itself. In many cases, the bidding process is held very late in the season and very close to the starting date of the contract, so overall, not the best option for us but fairly common.

The best chance we have to win a contract is at a Presentation, or **purezen**, when we, along with other companies, make a sales pitch for the contract to the BOE members and possibly a few representatives from the local schools. Each company will usually be given about 15-20 minutes to present and appeal to their own company's strengths. We take the time to talk about our philosophy on what an ALT's role is, and to present the



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(Approx. 80% of the time at a **purezen**, we win!)

quality of our training and support systems for both ALTs and the schools. Often, we are asked to do a lesson demonstration as part of our presentation, thus at least one of our Supervisors will often take part. No matter what the quality of the company or the presentation is though, town budgets and therefore price is always a factor. One frustrating aspect of the **purezen** is that we generally have to wait around several weeks or more for the outcome to be announced.

Occasionally, the BOE will do neither of these, and will simply base their decision on the price quoted along with the printed information presented by the company. This is called a **mitsumori awase**. And in other rare occasions, if we have had the contract for a long time and satisfied the BOE's needs, the BOE

will simply roll over the contract for another year. This is called a **zuii keiyaku**. These are becoming more and more rare to be honest, as the BOEs, being publicly funded (under the auspices of the town or city council) need to be transparent and to fairly consider all private contractors, and not favoring any one company. Thus we often have to re-earn contracts we have already had for several years in a row, as any company would for any service to the town or city, from road construction to tree trimming. We are even sometimes forbidden from showing or saying our company name so our score will be based purely on the merits of the **purezen**, and not on our successes or reputation of our current ALTs, ensuring more transparency. It's a busy and complicated process for everyone but this is the nature of the business we are in.



# Japanese Public Schools

## Knowing the Basics

By Karen FUKUYAMA, ALT Admin

Working in the Japanese Public School System can be a very rewarding experience. It will of course be different from the system you are used to in your home country, but by being flexible, understanding and getting to know the environment you are going to work in, it will be an experience you will never forget. Let's look at a brief explanation of how it works.

There are 9 years of compulsory education in Japan. Even before compulsory education begins at the age of 6, over 90% of Japanese children attend either kindergarten or nursery school. At this level the students mostly play and learn how to get along with their classmates. Following 3 years of kindergarten, students begin 6 years of Elementary school beginning from the 1st of April after they have turned 6 years old, and this in turn is followed by 3 years of Junior High school. After completing their 9 years of compulsory education, most students continue on to optional high school education which consists of a further 3 years. Which high school they go to is determined by the dreaded entrance exams and is a rather stressful period for many students. It's the first time the students have had much choice in where to go to school and after taking buses to kindergarten, walking to ES, walking or riding their bikes to JHS, many students now take the train or ride their bikes long distances to their high schools.

Before the school day even begins in Elementary school, students congregate at various designated meeting points along the route to school and walk to school together. The students must not veer from this route. The students are easy to distinguish by their traditional backpacks and bright yellow hats. Once the students arrive at school, they have homeroom time, which can vary in length. It starts at around 8:30 and is about 15 minutes long on average. During homeroom time with their homeroom teacher the students do a variety of things, including checks on their daily health, reading, visits by guests who read to them and singing to name but a few. Japanese students mainly study the same subjects as we did when we were at school. Homeroom time is followed by 2 class periods of 45 minutes (sometimes shortened to 40 minutes), and between periods 2 and 3 there is a long recess time of between 20 and 30 minutes. At this time the students go outside and play. This is then followed by two more 45-minute class periods. Then comes lunchtime, which the students help serve, another longer playtime and then cleaning time where the students and teachers all help in sweeping and cleaning the school. After this there is a 5th period and sometimes a 6th period in the afternoon. The school day usually ends between 3:30 and 4:00, sometimes depending on the grade, and all the students then go home to complete their hour or two of homework. There are always extra things happening during school hours, as well as some

weekends, like medical and dental checks, school assemblies, field trips, sports days, teacher visits with parents, opening and closing ceremonies etc.

Junior High School is three years and the students are generally very serious about this level of education as their main aim is to pass an entrance examination to a good high school. At this level the students wear school uniforms, but unlike elementary students they don't go to school in groups. If the local school is far away, they have the option of cycling to school. A typical school day starts at about 8:30 again starting with homeroom time, followed by 4 periods of classes in the morning followed by lunchtime and then 2 periods in the afternoon. There is usually a 10 minute break between classes. A class period is 50 minutes in length, but can be shortened to 45 minutes if there is a special event scheduled on this day or during the whole week. Lunchtime is very similar to ES, but is shorter. At the end of the day the students then clean the school, have an end of the day

“For the ALT, awareness and flexibility are the keys to success and enjoyment.”

-Karen Fukuyama

homeroom time and then attend club time. Club time at this level is very important and most students are members of a club, most often a sports club of some kind but other clubs do exist as well. Club time is often their favorite part of the day. A junior high school student's day can finish as late as 6:00. A typical junior high school student's day is very busy, non-stop, and after club many students spend time at a cram school to finish off the day on top of their several hours of school homework. There are numerous events which take away from class time like a school festival, sports days, chorus concerts, overnight trips, test weeks, PTA lessons, etc. and there are uniform checks, bicycle checks, morning greetings checks, dental and medical checks, eye checks and a few other checks just for good measure. Needless to say, life in JHS is rather busy for both students and teachers.

The teachers in this system have huge responsibilities. At the Elementary level the homeroom teachers, or HRTs, teach their class most subjects, therefore stay with the students most of the day in the same classroom. At the Junior High school level they are more specialized, usually in one subject, and teach only that subject, moving from classroom to classroom throughout the day with the students mostly staying in the same classroom. The teachers at both levels are almost a 2nd set of parents to their students over and above their teaching responsibilities, and they often look after a club and deal with a lot of administrative duties as well.

The system is obviously different, but if we learn to understand it and accept it, we can very much enjoy working within its boundaries. For the ALT, awareness and flexibility are the keys to success and enjoyment.