

Michael Sissons

Michael Sissons started studying Japanese at St Bedes College when he was in the third form in 1992. After finishing high school in 1996, he enrolled in the Bachelor of Japanese Language degree programme (now the Bachelor of Arts Japanese) at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. Michael graduated from the programme in 2001 and then spent the following three years completing a Master's degree in History/Regional Studies at Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan.

Japanese was compulsory as an option subject for a term when Michael studied at St Bedes College. He found the Japanese culture very intriguing as it was completely different from his own and he enjoyed meeting Japanese people and speaking Japanese. After studying the language for five years at high school Michael had made some Japanese friends in Christchurch and he realized that going out and having fun with them constituted study even though he wasn't physically sitting down at a desk and memorising words. Michael decided to continue studying Japanese not only because of the friends he had made, but also because he knew that Japan was a very important trading partner for New Zealand, the third largest behind Australia and the U.S. He realized that if he continued to study Japanese then there would be a variety of employment options available to him upon graduation.

Many amazing opportunities arose from Michael choosing to continue studying Japanese at tertiary level. He has been invited onto a regular talk show on a radio station in Sapporo, Japan. He has interpreted for All Blacks on a Japanese university rugby tour of New Zealand and for New Zealand dignitaries and New Zealand government officials in Japan. He was also lucky enough to be chosen to interpret at the 2002 Soccer World Cup in both Japan and Korea.

Michael could have stayed in New Zealand and worked in the tourism industry, for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or for a law firm dealing predominantly with Japanese clients. However, he chose to work for a Japanese company because they offer excellent training programmes for their staff. Furthermore, provided he had the required Japanese skills he could choose any industry regardless of what he had studied at university.

Currently, Michael is working for a Japanese firm called JGC which is an international engineering firm based in Yokohama. The company's core business is designing and constructing oil refineries in the Middle East and South East Asia. All office communication is conducted in Japanese so he uses his Japanese skills on a daily basis. Listening and speaking at meetings, writing emails to Japanese suppliers and reading documents mean that Michael is able to utilise all four skill areas regularly.

Michael doesn't profess to have any special ability for learning languages, he

simply enjoyed meeting people and that is probably the main reason why he chose to continue studying the language. His marks at high school were only ever average and he insists that as long as you have an interest in Japanese and are prepared to put in the effort to learn the language, then there are a myriad of opportunities available.

profiled by Mel Dempsey, 2004