



The Archipelago Group

# How to go to a Direct ALT contract

By Shibata Ryunosuke, Corbin McCoy, Javin Forest & Slick Tanaka

# What is a direct ALT contract?

## Long-term Stability

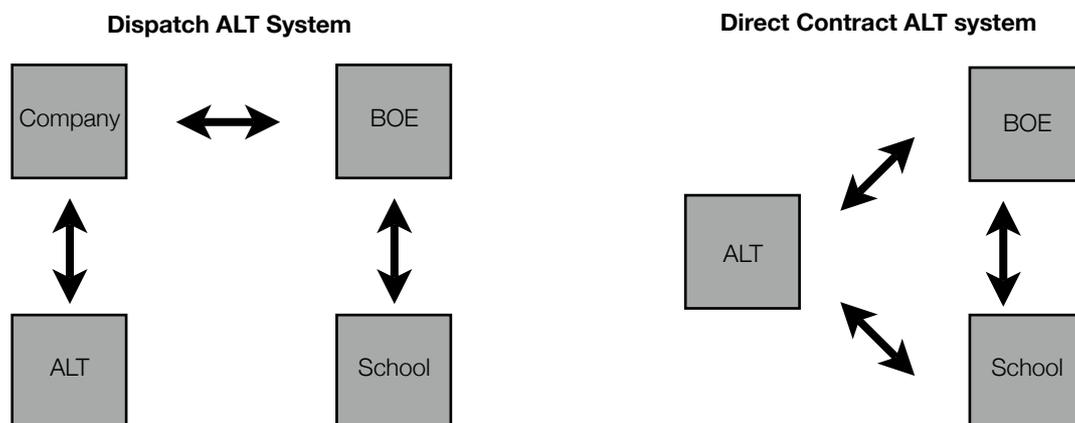
Having a direct ALT contract is about having job and life stability as a teacher in Japan. Unlike working for a dispatch company where contracts and positions vary from year to year. A direct contract ALT is working under a Board of Education (BOE) and is immediately counted in yearly budgets. That is to say person is counted in the budget and not a company. The dispatch ALT has no direct relationship with the BOE and as a result is fairly unknown to the people in the office. Thus when a contract is awarded to a company it is based on the price and then the overall performance of the company. Sometimes the individuals are taken into consideration but more often money takes priority.

In a direct contract the ALT basically can have a job for life if they want. Of course there are rules about quitting and retiring but that is for another section.

## Communications

A direct ALT mingles with all levels of municipal government and may have duties above and beyond that of a dispatch ALT. The dispatch ALT has really one job; show up. They do not have a responsibility to the school, the teachers, the community or the board of education. They are hired by a company and sent to a school to do a job. Technically under the dispatch law, the dispatch ALT can only take direction from their company. In the most literal form that means that if a teacher says, "sit over here" or "read this section" the ALT can ignore the teacher until the company confirms the request. Of course as we all know ALTs just do what needs to be done.

The dispatch system requires communications to go through the company and the BOE. That means that if there is a



change in schedule or a special request, the school or BOE must go through the company. Of course ALTs will get requests directly from the school but legally it should all go through the BOE. A company cannot call a school if there is a need to clarify something with the school. They can call the school to clarify something with the ALT. All other communications must go between the contracting and contracted organizations.

The Direct Contract ALT can call or be called by the school or BOE to clarify schedules, class content or for special requests. As a result of direct communication, Japanese language skills are needed. If you are in a direct situation and do not speak a lick of Japanese, you will be unable to deal work efficiently with the system. This is one way that the dispatch companies retain business. They provide the Japanese-English work so that ALTs or BOEs or schools do not have to.

## Salary & Benefits

Possibly one of the biggest differences between a direct hire and a dispatch is operational costs and salary.

Starting in the fall, dispatch companies put in bids for ALT contracts. In the date submitted to BOEs, they state the cost of one ALT and then the total cost for a set BOE-requested number. BOEs usually submit budgets for the next year in October using not the most recent number from the companies but a slightly updated number based on the previous year. Then there is a lot of refinement and debate in the city council and on other review boards. Then in February, the final budget is release. At this point BOEs can give out contracts to companies. Companies that had contracts could loose them and some that had few contracts could gain more just on their cost. Not quality but cost.

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Direct hire ALT
<b>Cost per ALT</b>	¥ 4,250,000	¥ 4,900,000	¥ 4,200,000	¥ 3,800,000
<b>Overhead cost</b>	¥ 1,050,000	¥ 1,600,000	¥ 1,050,000	¥ 200,000
<b>Pre-tax Year Salary</b>	¥ 3,200,000	¥ 3,300,000	¥ 3,150,000	¥ 3,600,000
<b>Pay out</b>	60% in summer	100% year round	60% in summer	100% year round
<b>Pay increase</b>	low	low	low	high - increases with age from start pay
<b>Work Hours</b>	Max 30 week	Max 30 week	Max 30 week	Unlimited
<b>Vacation</b>	40 days + National	40 days + National	40 days + National	20 regular, 5 summer + all national
<b>Insurance</b>	National health	National health	National health	National health National retirement Unemployment
<b>Transport cost</b>	provided	provided	provided	provided
<b>Vehicle provided</b>	yes	yes	yes	no
<b>Retainment</b>	50% chance	50% chance	50% chance	100% chance
<b>Housing provided</b>	yes	yes	yes	depends on situatio

The Direct Contract ALT has security, stability, and a foundation for greater life in Japan. Though a dispatch gets more vacation time, they do not have secure retainment and a guaranteed chance for a pay increase. The one downside the people like to point out is that direct hire ALTs have to work when there is no school. This is true but during the summer direct hire ALTs provide training programs for Japanese teachers of English, Homeroom teachers of the 5th and 6th grades, and will support city events such as speech contests, conferences, summer camps and other events. In most cases summer work hours are reduced from an 8 hour day to a 7 hour day. Some BOEs will even extend the ALT's summer vacation days especially if the ALT is really going "above and beyond" the call of duty.

Even though BOEs do not provide a car or housing, it is assumed that the direct hire ALT is living in Japan and therefore is using the car not only for work purposes but personal use. Therefore it is the ALTs choice to own a car and maintain it. The BOE will provide transport for travel between work and home based on the shortest route at a set rate per kilometers.

Housing can be provided if there are absolutely no places available but more often it is preferred that the ALT find their own housing and take care of it themselves. The BOE may assit the ALT with their search if needed as some apartment owners, though illegal, will discriminate against foreigners. With the BOE as the hiring organization, they can vouch for the ALT. What the BOE will not do is deal with key money. This is why having a support person in Japan is critical. This can be a host family, a spouse's family or a good Japanese friend. If you are already well known in the community and have established a good

reputation, then even the stingiest apartment owner will bend. After all you are teaching the children of Japan so they can compete in the global economy.

Pay increases for a direct hire ALT are based on your start pay and increased for every year you work. This is similar for Japanese teachers with the difference being that a Japanese teacher starting at 25 years old will make more than one who is 22 years old. The direct ALT system follows on a path of years of contract. Below is an example of how the pay increase can work. Each BOE does this differently and increases could be annual or bi-annual, large amounts or small amounts. It is at the discretion of the city budgetary office and the board of education.

EXAMPLE	ALT A (28)	ALT B (33)	ALT C (39)
Direct contract start age	28	33	39
Starting salary	¥3,600,000	¥3,600,000	¥3,600,000
Years of service	just started	2	6
Current salary	¥3,600,000	¥3,700,000	¥3,900,000

Some BOEs will also take in the ALT's training and experience to for the increase but usual starting salaries are inline with the national starting salary for an ALT (JET scale). Now if an ALT was hired during the economic boom of the 1990s and was making more than the starting fee of an ALT in a direct contract, the BOE may adjust this to help retain quality staff.

## Responsibilities

The direct hire ALT may have far more responsibilities than that of the dispatch ALT simply because they are working in a government office.

Some responsibilities that may fall in the lap of the ALT are:

- Summer language and cultural training programs for JTEs and HRTs
- Assistance with summer programming (camps, exhibits, etc)
- International relations events (sister city programs, study abroad programs, etc.)
- Community outreach, education and volunteerism (Mother/baby classes, environmental education, beautification projects)
- Supporting ceremonies, conferences and lectures
- Helping the city in choosing technology to be used in the schools (testing electronic white boards, software, gadgets, etc)
- Developing ideas and tools for improving local education
- Editing locally produced class materials (local history books, eikaiwa books, etc.)
- Giving presentations to local business organizations, NPOs and or teaching groups
- Orientation and management for new ALTs in the direct situation
- Approved Projects that the ALT feels might be beneficial to the community
- Attend regional, prefectural, national or even international meetings as a representative of the community

All of these make the job far more exciting and fulfilling. Even though you don't have the entire summer to lounge around, there are challenges waiting for to be tackled with a different method that one that the Japanese know. The direct ALT can bring in concepts and ideas that would only come from someone with a truly outside view.

One other major benefit to all the direct hire ALT responsibilities is resume building and networking. A regular dispatch ALT contract gives you experience in teaching English as a foreign language in a limited form. A direct hire ALT is challenged to use every skill set to do the job. In one day an ALT might have to manage an ALT's schedule, create a flyer for an event, support a meeting, and teach a class to 2 year olds and their mothers.

Of course the core job of a direct hire ALT is to assist the Japanese Teachers of English and Elementary school Homeroom teachers with the instruction of English, providing cultural depth to the content and expanding on the skills of the team teacher.

# How to go direct

## Are you qualified?

What? Qualifications? Yes there are qualifications. Municipalities don't hire people off the street or off the plane. They are hired because they come highly recommended and ready to stand on their own two feet.

Here are some qualifications as set by one community for a direct hire ALT.

- Currently living in the community
- Desire to reside in the community for an extended time
- Has 3 or more years experience as an ALT
- Has obtained a license or certification for teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language
- Speaks English as a native tongue or has a TOEIC of 850+ or TOEFL of 600+
- Has a person who will assist with daily life (tax forms, visas, large transactions, etc.)
- Currently holding a spousal visa preferred but not required
- Has obtained a level 3 or higher in the Japanese Language Proficiency Exam or can carry a conversation for 15 minutes or more in Japanese in a topic related to the job.

If you do not meet these qualifications, does this mean you cannot go direct? No. But it helps.

It would be difficult to convince a Board of education to hire you if you had only one year experience, were planning on going back to school in a year or so to study business and spoke no Japanese. If being an ALT is about having good pay, lots of free time and little responsibility, then direct is not for you.

If you are truly dedicated to teaching, have a good amount of experience and skills, needing stability due to a change in your life (marriage or children), tired of not knowing if you will have a job come April, then direct hire is for you.

## Going direct from JET

Going direct from JET is easy. JETs are already hired in a board of education so all the BOE has to do is cancel all future JET contracts, and set the budget to pay directly. The downsides are that the first contract will be from the summer to the next spring with a new contract starting in April for 1 year and you have to make your desires known more than 1 year in advance so that the BOE can decide on hiring you directly, canceling a JET contract and transferring a budget mid year.

## Going direct from Dispatch

This is the tricky one. The ALT hired by a company is a company employee and not a city employee. So if a BOE were to offer an ALT a contract starting the following spring, it can be regarded as poaching ing by the company. The company can then press charges against the BOE or the ALT for violation of contracts.

There are three safe options for going direct from dispatch to direct; hakken, in and out or application.

### Hakken

Hakken is a process in which the company and the BOE enter an agreement where the ALT will work from April to around January. Then will quit the company and be replaced by a temporary ALT to finish off the year. Then after a 3 month cooling period has passed, the Hakken ALT will enter a direct contract with the City. The downsides to this is that you will be without an income for three months and the board of education has to choose a hakken system.

## **In and Out**

This is a process of suffering like a good Buddhist. What this involves is expressing your desire, quitting your company, getting a job with a NON-ALT company in the area, keeping close relations with the city and negotiating your return as a direct hire in 1 year. The up-side to this is your company cannot take action against you or the BOE and if you keep up your desire and the BOE understands and supports you, you are in. The downside is that you may have to take a job suffering at an Eikaiwa just to keep your head above water.

## **Application**

The law regarding hiring directly has a nice little loop hole. Say ALT A wants to get direct hire position with his BOE but he works for All Japan Dispatch ALT Inc. He has made his desire known, the BOE loves him, everyone loves him, but the BOE is cornered by the contract and relationship with ALT A's company. So what the BOE does is puts out a "want ad" for a direct hire ALT that just by chance can only end up being you.

By doing this the BOE has stated that they will be pursuing direct hire for some of their ALTs and dispatch for other positions. They set the budget for this and create the application and interview process. Just by chance ALT A is the only person who qualifies. ALT A tells his company he quits as of the end of the contract. Then on April 1st begins his new life as a direct contract ALT.

This has the least problems in regards to legal issues and downtime. It does not require a cooling period as it was the ALT's choice to leave the company and take a job that they applied for. The company cannot protest against this as the BOE has made a decision on how they want to use ALTs. If this means one less contract for the company, they can get angry but cannot take any action against the ALT or the BOE.

The only possible downside is if there ends up being another person apply who might have an edge on you. But then again the BOE would prefer people they know over people off the street. It is not impossible that someone off the street could get the position but it is unlikely.

## **Make it known**

Once you are sure you are qualified it is important to make your desire for going direct known first to the principal of your base school sometime between May and July. Earlier is better but too early and it might fall through the cracks in the business of the new year. Even better is making it known even a year or two in advance so that everyone from the principal to the city council has a chance to look at you, look at contract conditions, determine a budget and vote on it.

After it has been made known to those immediately above you. It is important to go to the next level. The main job of a Principal is to manage a school and its teachers. The ALT's request can sometimes fall in the cracks. So after talking a few times to the principal about the idea, make an appointment with the head of the division in charge of ALTs at the Board of Education.

It is in this situation that they might first be learning about who you are. So you will have to take steps to not only express your desire but also introduce yourself.

There is a progression that starts with getting to know each other and creating trust and a base relationship and ends with them being 100% confident that you will be able to do the job well and not be too much of a burden on the system. Burden on the system means simply that they will not have to do much except give you a year schedule, a contract, rules, a monthly paycheck and benefits entitled with the job. BOEs do not want people who cannot handle their daily life and schedule.

You will need to show the BOE your accomplishments, your skills, and why you are the "Best damn person they will ever hire". This is not just a job with a board of education but an investment by a city in a person. You will want to prove to them that you are an amazingly good long-term investment.

Most importantly...you will have to do this all in Japanese and on your own. Do not rely on a girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse, best bud, other direct hire ALT or host family to set things up. It is your life and your choice so you have to do it. People can support you along the way but in the end it is all you.

## **Promoting yourself**

You get on an elevator in a building where you will have a job interview. Standing next to you is Steve Jobs. It is just you and Steve on the elevator. You press 5. He presses 10. So you have 5 floors to convince one of the greatest sales and idea man in the world to hire you. What do you say?

This is called an elevator speech. What is your elevator speech?

When you go to the BOE to meet people and convince them you have to make a splash without coming off as cocky. If you come off too strong they may see you as reckless or too in-your-face and become nervous about the situation. If you come off as too weak, then they will question your dedication and become nervous about the situation. So the thing you don't want to do is make them nervous about the situation.

The secret is to be witty, modest, knowledgeable without being a smart ass, take time to formulate your answers to questions without wasting time, and show your highly developed understanding of Japan, Japanese culture and language. It is a happy medium between west and east; "Wa".

To develop "your elevator" speech, make a list things you think would be important to mention about yourself...besides your name, age and where you are from.

- What is your position on Gaikokugo Katsudo (ES English Activities in the 5th and 6th grades)
- What is the purpose of the ALT in the public educational system
- Why it is important for children to learn foreign languages (not just English, what about Korean or Chinese)
- What will you provide to the BOE and community at large that a dispatch ALT cannot?
- What skills make you not only someone who can teach English but assist in a wide range of activities?
- Why do you want to live in your city?
- Why do you want to stay in Japan for an extended time?
- What one thing do you feel you could only accomplish by being direct?
- How can the city use you other than as an ALT?
- Are you independent enough to handle your own scheduling, your own daily movement and your own life issues?

Also be ready for questions about the political/governmental system. Here are some things to think about.

- Do you understand the Japanese educational system?
- Do you understand the Foundation Education system?
- Have you ever read Japanese educational policy? Can you talk about policy with confidence?
- What cultural aspects of Japan do you apply to your own teaching or life style?

Of course if you can't answer these things, you can always say, "I still have many things I need to learn but feel I can only learn them in the capacity of a direct hire. I will be inside the system and be able to ask questions freely and tap the resources available to me in ways that being a dispatch would not allow." Nice, modest and political.

## **Are you ready?**

So you made your desires known. You talked to the BOE multiple times. You made amazing presentations. You and BOE determined a method for you to go direct. If you have dotted every "i" and crossed every "t" in the process, from an April 1st in the near future, you will be a direct contract ALT.

Good luck