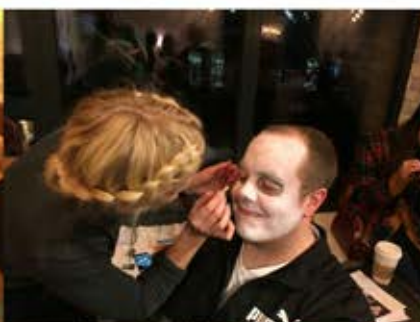


## Grassroots internationalisation created by students for students York St John University



# Grassroots internationalisation created by students for students

## Global Campus at York St John University

### Background

#### International context at York St John

York St John University (YSJ) is an institution of approximately 6,000 students of which roughly 500 are identified as international students studying on site. These are predominantly students of East Asian origin and exchange students who, in the main, are from North America.

#### Global Campus at York St John

Prior to the commencement of the current project, Global Campus existed with the main aims of:

- celebrating the diversity and experience of the student community
- fostering inclusion, friendship and cultural understanding

Global Café, day trips, a weekly bulletin and celebration events form the events and activities in the Global Campus project. The project is led by the Student Success and Engagement Team (SSET) within Student Services.

Engagement with Global Campus has traditionally been low with the number of students averaging 10 per Global Café and 25 per Saturday trip. Home students have not engaged and see Global Campus as “international”.

#### The aim of the project

The SSET believe strongly that for projects like Global Campus to develop and succeed the student voice needs to be represented and therefore needs to engage students as

co-creators. For this project, we aimed to employ students to design, develop, run and evaluate the series of weekly Global Cafés, since co-creating all Global Campus activity would be too large a task. By using students as co-creators the aims of the project were to:

- increase the number of students – both home and international – attending the café;
- improve the student experience and cultural connectedness between students;
- build the Global Campus brand
- provide opportunities for students to develop their employability skills; and
- improve links between the University and the Students' Union (SU), presenting the union as an inclusive space for all students and not just a bar.

#### Summary of outcomes

The cafés have been a success and have seen an increase in numbers. We averaged 30 students attending the weekly café across the year, with an especially high attendance in the second semester. Our most successful café was our Halloween-themed event which was attended by 80 students. Attendance by home students has increased but it is still a challenge to attract them, and they only account for 4 out of 30 students on average.

There have been challenges in the practicalities surrounding the café and the relationship between the university and SU. Some of these challenges



have been outside the control of either party but can be worked on for future years. These challenges, however, do not detract from the success and the café will run again in the academic year 2017-18.

### Delivering the Global Café

#### The Steering Group

A steering group was set up to help direct the project. The group had members from the SSET, SU, Equality and Diversity, and Chaplaincy. The aim of the group was not to initiate ideas for the café but to support the student co-ordinators and provide guidance where appropriate. The members of the group were also chosen to help prevent silo working, build relationships, and share resources, ie



space and advertising. The student co-ordinators were responsible for the café on a day-to-day basis.

### Timing of the project

The Global Cafés run every Monday during term time. We were notified of our successful application for a UKCISA grant in August therefore there was little time to do much planning, or to recruit student co-ordinators before the start of term in mid-September.

As a result, the first café which was run and delivered by the student co-ordinators was not until 3 October 2016, three weeks after the start of term. In total, 23 cafés were run by the co-ordinators.

For future years the student co-ordinators will plan and run the cafés from the start of term and their recruitment will be completed prior to the end of the previous academic year.

### Recruiting the student co-creators

The SSET already engaged students through the Student Services Representative programme to assist with various activities including the Global Guide (GG) activity. GG support international students throughout their lifecycle at YSJ. Students have already been through an application and interview process in order to be selected as a GG. In order to make the process as quick as possible student co-ordinators were chosen from the GG pool (20 students). Applications were open to all GGs however only three candidates applied from which two were chosen.

This process worked well to select the students in a short space of time; however, having only a small pool of three students to choose from was disappointing. In developing the programme, future recruitment will be part of the general Global Guide recruitment in March and April.

### Location, location, location

A key aim of the project was to build links between the University and the SU. It was accepted early on that the SU was not a space that international students engaged with, one reason being the prevalence of alcohol and the SU being seen as a bar. To challenge these barriers the event was to run in the café area (separate from the bar) of the SU as this would be an alcohol-free space.

The SU space proved to be problematic throughout the project. While some of the issues were unavoidable, others have given incentives for improvement. The first issue was the building itself. The SU building was demolished over the proceeding summer and was set to be replaced for Welcome Week. However, the work was not complete until late October resulting in the early cafés being held in the dining room.



An unforeseen complication was the relationship between the SU and the external contractor who runs the Starbucks café which prevented us from ‘booking’ the space. Although the SU were aware a group of students would be coming every week for the cafe, there was no formal agreement so we did not have exclusive use. If we could have guaranteed greater attendance (40+) exclusive use would have been an option. Exclusive use would have allowed us to have more control over the audio visual equipment and run the café in an alcohol-free space rather than an alcohol-free event within a space where alcohol could be purchased.

This caused tensions between all three parties which continued throughout the year.

### Planning and ideas generation

The essence of the development of the Global Café was for the students to be co-creators. Once recruitment was completed, an ‘ideas generation’ session was held to identify numerous ideas and themes for the cafés, which did not take into account practical considerations such as the budget. (It was felt that at such an early stage we did not want to stifle the creativity of the co-ordinators by constraining them with budget considerations). Budget and other practical considerations, such as space usage and health and safety, were taken into account when refining ideas from the session and finalising the semester plan.) A summary of this session can be found below:

Under the guidance of the SSET these were refined to a programme of events for Semester One which was then presented to the steering group for comment. The same process was followed for Semester Two. The themes for the resulting programme of events were as follows:

Semester One	Semester Two
Pub quiz	Welcome Week semester two
Origami	Speed meeting
Show Me International – this focused on students sharing and celebrating something about their home country. Activities included show and tell about objects from their country, language taster and sharing traditions.	Lunar New Year
Halloween	Show Me International
Dance taster – Stress reliever	Language taster
LGBTIQ+	Pub quiz
Thanksgiving	LGBTIQ+
Season's greetings – Goodbye	International Pot Luck
	Holy Festival
	Earth Day
	Easter
	Cultural show
	Farewell Café

With a large proportion of our cohort on short term courses/exchange some of the more successful cafés from Semester One were re-run in Semester Two.

With the programme finalised the student co-ordinators had to plan each weekly café. To assist, the SSET developed a pro-forma for the co-ordinators to work through covering:

- Target audience
- Objectives
- Activities – approximately five activities for each café
- Resource requirements
- Promotion

To plan the café the co-ordinators had set office hours within the SSET office each week. This worked well; however, it was a great deal of work for the co-ordinators to plan a different café each week.

### Budget

As an existing project Global Café already had a modest budget which covered staffing at the event and some basic catering. The UKCISA funding covered co-ordinators’ salaries and an operating budget for putting on activities.

The initial plan was to have a set budget each week for the activities, but it became apparent that different cafés had different requirements. The student co-ordinators, therefore, managed their budget differently, running most of the cafés on a smaller scale and saving for bigger cafés, such as Halloween and Lunar New Year.

The co-ordinators were extremely effective at budgeting wisely but felt they could have achieved more. Existing partnerships between the University and contractors meant there was little scope for shopping around for best prices on items such as catering.

### Capturing feedback

Evaluation was within the remit of the student co-ordinators and formed part of each café via an anonymous feedback exercise where positive feedback was left on green cards and negative on red. The co-ordinators also completed feedback for each event, looking for successes, challenges and areas for improvement.

Gaining feedback at the café worked well, proving accurate feedback with time to implement changes for future events. A more detailed feedback form would, however, enhance this and not be a binary response such as good/bad. For example, we could ask more focussed questions: did the café help students feel part of a diverse university community; did the activities make them think differently about a subject; and what activities and themes would resonate with them as suggestions for future events.

## Outcomes and reflections on the project

### Successes

Throughout the year the number of students has increased and our average attendance is up by 20 students per café to 30. Semester Two saw the biggest increase with

numbers averaging 37 per café. This fantastic result provides a great foundation for developing the café and justifies the use of students as co-creators.

The feedback from students who attended the café also shows that the café was successful in reaching its other aims. Below is a selection of quotes taken from the comment cards left by attendees.

**The café was really interesting and inclusive**

**The global guides are really friendly and make me feel included and I always have fun**

**I enjoyed the multi-cultural experience and learning about a different celebration that I did not know existed, it was fun to try it [calligraphy] out myself**

**I like meeting people from all over the world and learning about their culture and what they eat**

**I like the global café because I can communicate and talk with people around the world. And also I can learn a lot of culture – it is a great opportunity**

**I have made amazing friends from different cultural backgrounds which is brilliant for someone who loves culture**

The café has been a success for those students running the café. The skills they have developed will stand them in good stead beyond York St John and their university experience has been enriched greatly. The success of the café can be attributed to the students who were the driving force behind it and completed the tasks required with minimal guidance from the SSET.

## Challenges

As detailed above there were challenges with space availability and usage along with the need to keep within budget whilst being restricted to certain suppliers due to existing university contracts.

The student co-ordinators found it a challenge to manage their workload within the set office hours. Planning a café every week placed a heavy burden on the students who also had academic commitments. To mitigate this, the café will have double the number of co-ordinators for 2017 working in two teams of two.

The challenge to engage home students with the café and Global Campus in general continues. In the coming year more work will be done to try and break down this barrier. Such work has included embedding Global Café and Global Campus into a centralised induction talk giving all year one students an introduction to the activity. Additionally, having a presence at the Success Fair (similar to a Freshers' Fair but for central university services) allows the promotion of the value to UK students of having an international outlook and to show how they can get involved.

## The future of Global Café

The increase in numbers and the benefit gained for the students involved has only served to strengthen the position of Global Campus and reinforce the need for students to lead the café into the future.

The areas for improvement centre around our preparation time as we felt we were playing catch-up from the start of 2016. Steps have been taken to avoid this happening again:

- The co-ordinators for 2017 have been recruited and initial planning meetings for ideas generation have taken place
- We are working with the SU and external contractors to reach a resolution over the use of space in time for September.

## Tips for other HEIs

If you are looking to set up a similar scheme our advice is:

- Formalise your relationship with external stakeholders who could have an impact on your ability to run your events.
- Trust your students – give them the space to generate their own ideas.
- It is a rewarding experience for all involved and can be a success.

## Further information

**The project was run by Simon Ganderton**, Student Success and Engagement Team Manager  
**Contact:** [s.ganderton@yorksj.ac.uk](mailto:s.ganderton@yorksj.ac.uk)

