

Integration in the Workplace

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INTRODUCTION

As more Contracting Organisations opt for privately-employed ALTs and CIRs, it is apparent that JET participants worry about the number of JETs being reduced yearly, as well as the Japanese government's willingness to continue the program. By analysing factors that relate to JETs and their work duties and performance, both in and outside of their contracted hours, this survey examines JETs' concerns on workplace integration. This report will:

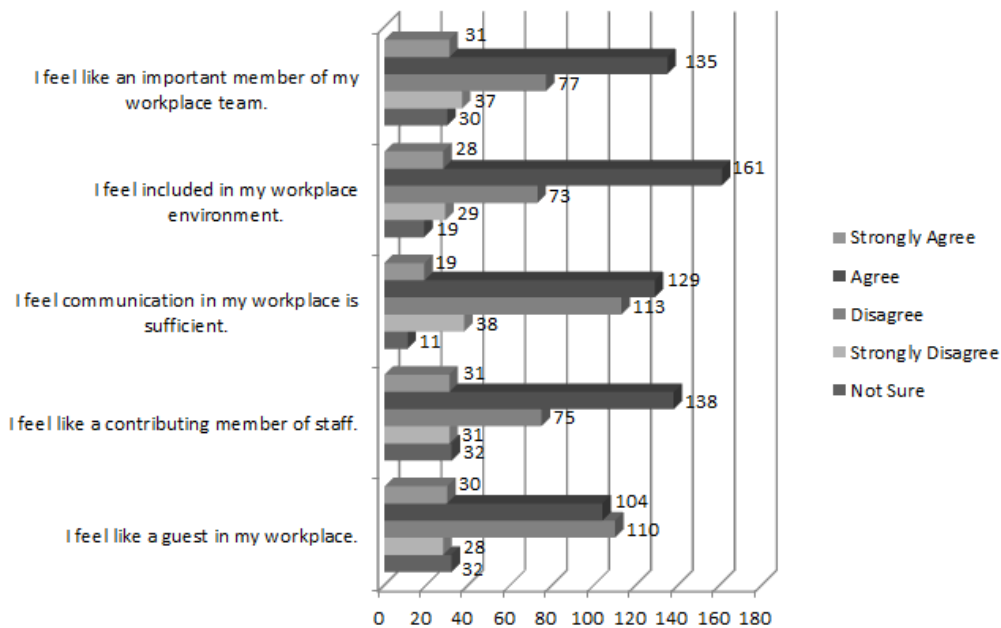
- Discuss how satisfied JETs are in their jobs and workplaces
- Determine JET participants' willingness to be re-appointed due to working conditions
- Determine the level of distinction between the JET Programme and private dispatch companies that contracting organizations and local communities possess and discuss the role this factor plays in JET integration

METHOD

National AJET created an Internet-based survey with 34 questions about the aforementioned objectives. The data and analysis for this report are based on a survey of 319 JETs (81.8% of whom fully completed the survey). Of the respondents, 90.2% were Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and 9.8% were Co-ordinators of International Relations (CIRs). No Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs) took the survey. The highest percentage of respondents, 36.4%, were first year JET participants, while 27.8% were in second year, 19.9% were third year, 7.9% were fourth year and 7.9% were fifth year. The survey was distributed by e-mail, the social networking site Facebook, ajet.net, prefectural JET websites and newsletters, and word of mouth.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Workplace Environment



The survey results were relatively positive (as seen in the chart above), with most JETs replying that they feel like a part of their workplace. Generally, JETs said they felt more included as their Japanese ability improved. Feeling like a guest in the workplace was more common with JETs who visited more than one school, so guest treatment varied depending on schools or a day-to-day basis. Others commented that co-workers hesitated to approach JETs and that they felt they were treated like “[a] pet,” “[a] mascot,” “[a] burden rather than a resource” or “ignored”, but “important [or] included at times.” A 5th year Mie ALT stated, “I feel like a dusty old book that you keep on the shelf and sometimes take down to look at the pictures,” and another ALT, a 2nd year JET in Hokkaido stated, “I feel like a dancing monkey that gets ignored most of the time, but they bring out when they need some quick entertainment.” Some JETs also expressed feeling frustrated at their lack of involvement and inability to contribute, as demonstrated in the following comment from a 1st year Chiba ALT:

Everyone is exceptionally nice to me, but they never ask me to help with things, and always say I should go home early. Which is awesome of course, but sometimes I feel like they all resent me since I'm never anywhere NEAR as busy as everyone else. I'm here to help! I tell them.

From the statistics and comments provided, most JETs feel included in their workplace. However, more than half the respondents say they are treated more like guests. This is attributable to several possible factors, such as staff lacking awareness of the JET Programme’s purposes, JETs misunderstanding of Japanese culture, the number of times a JET goes to the workplace in a given period, and the length of the JET participant’s stay on the programme.

Workplace Duties

ALT Duties: 90.6% are involved in class assistance, 77.3% are involved in lesson planning, 64.3% in speech practice, 52.7% in cleaning, 28.2% in English Speaking Clubs, and 13.7% in school lunch preparation. The remaining 8.3% were not ALTs. Other various duties included assisting other music and sports clubs, writing and grading exams, cultural exchange activities, and conversation classes outside of school on a non-paid basis.

CIR duties: 13.9% are involved in translating, 10.9% in interpreting, 10.4% in event planning, 9.4% in school visits, 7.4% in conversation classes, and 6.4% in business trips. The remaining 86.6% were not CIRs. Other duties include preparing town newsletters, Prefectural Advisor duties and administrative (“OL”) duties.

Additional Responsibilities

43.4% of the JETs surveyed said they do have additional responsibilities. 88 participants undertake these duties using their own initiative, while the remaining 86 said they have these responsibilities assigned to them. In addition to the aforementioned duties, these responsibilities include staff and departmental meetings, town meetings, special lessons for students, English seminars for JTEs, and council (“shinkoukai”) participation. 92.5% of these JETs are happy carrying out these responsibilities. Of those who were not happy, 6 JETs said they are too busy, 3 said they do not feel qualified to take on such duties, and 3 do not consider these duties as part of their jobs.

Of the 56% of respondents who didn’t have additional responsibilities, 68.7% of them would like to, implying that JETs want to be more involved in their workplace but haven’t had the opportunity to do so. One ALT from Akita commented they would like to be involved in “Anything other than just sitting in the office when I am not in the Classroom. A way to use my other skills and abilities.” Many ALTs commented that they would like to be involved in other student activities and other special classes, such as cooking or club activities, and many said they were willing to help out with other staff duties, a 2nd year ALT from Mie saying they wanted to help out with “more “real” teacher duties.” CIRs also commented they had free time to fill, one 5th year CIR from Hiroshima saying they wanted to be involved with “planning events that involve my co-workers/that my co-workers are invested in.”

To help solve this problem, National AJET could provide Contracting Organisations with a list of suggested activities a JET could be asked to take part in in their workplace. National AJET now has many suggestions, from JETs who completed the survey, as to what they would like to be involved in. National AJET is currently endeavouring to provide such suggestions to JETs through the *JETs, Be Ambitious* promotion, but keeping Contracting Organisations aware of these activities could create more positive networks.

JET-Related Activities Outside Contracted Hours

In addition to the activities on the chart, JETs also listed their involvement in: Japanese language classes; prefectural JET administration and events; Board of Education events; National AJET groups, including Peer Support Group (PSG) and Room to Read; and cultural community events, such as festivals and lectures.

67.5% of JET respondents considered these activities to be part of their professional work. 67.3% said their supervisors knew about these activities outside of their contracted hours. When asked how many workplace colleagues knew about their JET-related activities outside of contracted hours, 37.7% selected “a few,” 33.4% selected “some,” 18.7% said “no one”,

while 10.2% chose “everyone.” 67.1% of respondents said these activities generated a positive response from their co-workers, 31.0% said they generated a very positive response, 4.2% said a negative response, and 0.9% said a very negative response. Under general comments, some respondents commented that, although a some co-workers responded positively, people in higher positions “[see] anything that takes me outside of my school as a burden, despite the fact that I don’t do much at my school aside from lessons.” Several JETs said their activities generated a neutral response, “no real response” and “they [co-workers] don’t really care.” According to one JET, “Most of them hear what I do and then promptly forget,” and to another, “I don’t think [my coworkers] really understand how busy I am.” From the survey results, it appears many workplaces don’t give consideration to what JETs do outside their contracted hours. However, as many of these activities are related to grassroots internationalisation, National AJET believes more work should be done so that general workplaces realise the extra activities that so many JETs take on outside their designated hours. National AJET also agrees there should be a link between JETs and workplaces to ensure they understand what these extra activities mean as part of the JET Programme.

Re-Appointment

43.3% of JETs are willing to be re-appointed another year. Generally speaking, these JETs cite reasons such as loving their students, wanting to become more fluent in Japanese and increase their understanding of Japanese culture, and those that are having trouble in their work placements are hoping things will improve if they stay another year. A 3rd year JET wants “more time to get to know [my] students and co-workers[;] it takes sooo [sic] much time before a deep connection can be felt.” Another hoped to be re-appointed for more time to make a difference and further self-development. 34.0% of the respondents selected “unsure”, and the remaining 22.7% did not want to re-appointed.

The majority of fourth and fifth-year JETs noted that they would not re-contract for obvious contractual reasons. Other reasons for not wanting to re-contract vary in nature, but there is a trend of citing lack of continuity (as is natural with visiting multiple schools), but also problematic relations: one 3rd year Hokkaido ALT expressed frustration towards general racism and lack of challenging work, and a 2nd year Ishikawa ALT stated, although having no negativity towards Japan or Japanese co-workers, the “constant effort that is necessary to be part of a community that will never fully accept you is exhausting.” One 1st year Kagoshima ALT said they get along with all co-workers except for “my direct supervisor, who has been increasingly hostile since my arrival and has refused to help me get established here.”

Re-Appointment in Detail

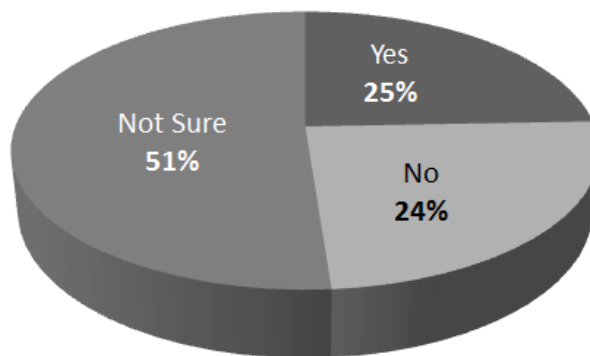
48.7% strongly agreed with the statement “I am confident in my ability to be re-appointed.” 37.6% disagreed with the statement, “I worry about my Contracting Organisation changing to privately employed workers.” 40.9% disagreed with the statement that, “Contracting Organisations are not happy with my performance.” In the respondents’ opinions, when asked if their workplaces knew about the JET Programme, 56.1% selected “yes,” while 16.2% selected “no,” and the remaining 27.7% were not sure. Under general comments, JETs explained that some of their co-workers knew of the Programme but were unsure of the the Programme’s purpose, even after looking it up online. One JET ALT also mentioned that their Board of Education was quite knowledgeable about the Programme, but not their schools. Another JET ALT stated that “their [co-workers] first assumption is JET = ALT.”

Some co-workers are familiar with the name, but are under the impression that JET is “just an ALT-dispatch organisation like any other private company.” Several JETs commented that they “assume” their co-workers know all about the Programme, and a few were a little surprised to learn that their workplace may not know.

Concerns were also raised after reading that some JETs say their Contracting Organisations are getting rid of JETs, or won’t allow JETs to stay longer than 3 years as is written in the the old CLAIR terms and conditions. This report questions whether or not Contracting Organisations read updates from CLAIR, who sometimes change certain guidelines for JETs.

Knowledge of Differences between JET and private-contractors:

In your opinion, does your workplace know the difference between privately employed ALTs/CIRs and JET ALTs/CIRs?



According to ALT respondents, Boards of Educations know the difference between JET ALTs and those that are privately employed; on the other hand, schools and co-workers, seem less familiar. The majority of JETs admitted they had not discussed this with people in their workplaces in great detail, but they did comment that their co-workers were often surprised to learn that JET is not necessarily an “ALT program.” One 3rd year Chiba ALT had explained JET to many co-workers “but they never knew [beforehand].” A 5th year Hiroshima CIR explained that co-workers also have difficulty distinguishing CIRs from ALTs: [In my opinion,] there is virtually no knowledge of CIRs and what we do in the community at large.”

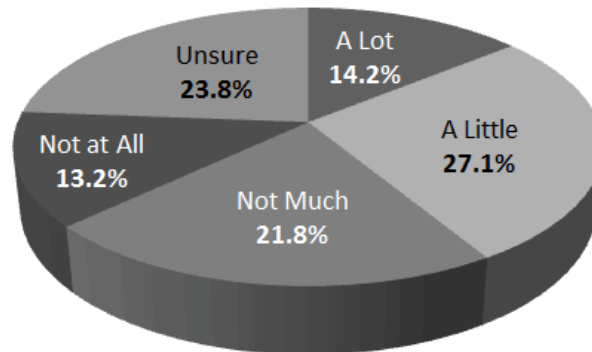
This report has found that generally, the JET and non-JET employed are generally not differentiated between in the workplace. This is a concern to National AJET, considering the JET Programme’s advantage in its versatility to promote grassroots internationalisation. AJET suggests more publicity to Contracting Organisations, as well as their consequential workplaces, to broaden knowledge and distinguish the JET from the non-JET employee.

Image of the JET Programme in the Workplace

52.1% of JETs strongly agree with the statement, “I have a clear understanding of what the JET Programme is about.” 32.0% agree with the statement, “Employees in my workplace have a clear understanding of the JET Programme.” 36.7% disagree with the statement, “people in my community have a clear understanding of the Programme.” When asked if the JET Programme has a positive image in their communities, 47.56% selected “not sure” but

48.89% selected “yes.” 3.6% selected “no.” Perceptions of the JET Programme and their effects on one’s role in the workplace are displayed as follows:

How do you think perceptions of the JET Programme affect your role in the workplace?



According to the comments, the “average person” is not familiar with the JET Programme as a grassroots internationalisation program. A 4th year Miyazaki JET wrote “even people who work directly with JET participants don't know what the program is. I find that strange.” A 3rd year Hyogo ALT asked if people in the community are “supposed to know [about JET.]” A few JETs requested more publicity about the positive aspects of JET to create a “distinctive positive measurement of our presence.”

CONCLUSION

Many comments were voiced about being treated as a guest rather an essential member of the workplace team. Many JET participants say co-workers talk to them but do not feel included as a member of the workplace team when their workload is considerably lighter and they must be very persistent in requesting more responsibilities and assisting their co-workers. The lack of responsibilities and inclusion in their workplace is also a deciding factor when it comes to re-contracting. Overall, the JETs surveyed agree the JET Programme has a positive image, but not as a program for cultural exchange and grassroots internationalisation. The best way to solve this problem is by providing JETs with the information and tools to initiate and promote internationalisation activities. Contracting organisations may know the uniqueness of JET, but JETs believe that a majority of the Japanese community is only aware of it as an ALT program. It is clear that a stronger distinction needs to be made to differentiate JET Programme participants from people employed by private dispatch companies.

DISCUSSION

There is a great divide between which party holds more responsibility in workplace integration, JET participants or Japanese co-workers. Participants who are highly active in their workplace and feel like a member of the workplace team say they had to put in time and effort to achieve that feeling. Several JETs commented that participants (new JETs in particular) should be strongly reminded to take initiative in creating a positive image that will

make them more approachable to their co-workers. A 3rd year Kumamoto ALT said, “I feel that I have been integrated so well [because]...from the beginning I made it very clear that I was willing to be a part of the work team.” Another JET was “shocked at how so many teachers chose to ignore my existence at first,” but through persistence was able to change this state of affairs.

Other JETs suggest that CLAIR should provide more information and guidance to workplaces regarding working with and supervising JET participants, particularly ALTs. Many non-first-year JETs expressed frustration that their co-workers were “still intimidated” and that they never feel like a true member of their workplaces. A 2nd year Miyazaki ALT wrote the following comment:

Integration in the workplace environment depends heavily on the teachers at one's school. Naturally, one must take initiative and actively seek involvement. At the same time, teachers, vice principals, principals, and supervisors must be aware that as JETs are representatives of their country, so too are the Japanese counterparts representative of Japan and its hospitality. I was especially hesitant in the beginning to involve myself because I didn't want to cross any cultural boundaries. Now in my second year I realize what I can and cannot do, according to the teachers.

Concerns of contracting organisations switching to private companies are relatively low; however, the low numbers of JET awareness in the community requires examination. While contracting organisations are aware of the JET Programme, this awareness does not fully translate to their workplaces or the community, which explains the lack of awareness of JET’s cultural aspects. This can cause JETs problems in the workplace when they want to take on additional responsibilities and engage in cultural activities. AJET can work to solve this issue by examining how workplaces are trained and oriented for incoming JETs in future surveys. For the time being, AJET would like to determine more ways to allow and encourage JETs to do more activities geared towards internationalisation and encourage their Contracting Organisations and workplaces to support JET activities and responsibilities.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1) AJET can encourage JETs to promote their JET-related activities to their contracting organizations and workplaces, thereby educating them about the JET Programme and its purposes; over time this will make it distinguishable from private companies; by promoting these activities under the "JET Programme" umbrella, the community will learn more about the programme and create a stronger JET presence in the Japanese community (e.g. JETs, Be Ambitious! and JET Effect)
- 2) Find the best way to inform and clarify to JETs what they are “allowed” to do in their workplace as well as the benefits of getting involved. AJET could provide CLAIR with a list of suggested activities a JET is encouraged to take part in during office hours and these could be distributed to COs
- 3) AJET created a new “Making the most of your time on JET” workshop for Tokyo Orientation. Demonstrating to new participants a variety of self-initiated extracurricular projects, this workshop showed what JETs can do in their schools and communities to

distinguish themselves. AJET would like to see this workshop added to the suggested topics for Mid Year Conferences and Seminars.

4) AJET would be happy to provide suggestions for ways ALTs can promote JET in the community or workplace, which AJET hopes would subsequently be added to the Work Duties and Workplace section of the GIH. AJET can provide JET Effect examples, ways to promote the JET Programme to non-JETs, ways of associating the JET Programme with internationalisation activities, ways current JETs have already promoted the JET Programme, and so on.

QUESTIONS

1. National AJET believes that if Contracting Organisations knew more about the internationalisation and cultural aspects of the JET Programme, they would be willing to support a wider variety of JET activities. Besides the Appointment Terms and Conditions, what specific information does CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA or MIC provide to Contracting Organisations about the JET Programme participant expectations?
2. Are Contracting Organisations mandated by CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA or MIC to provide information about the JET Programme to their schools and workplaces?
3. Will CLAIR work with AJET to create a supplement to the next addition of the GIH Work Duties and Workplace section including information about self-initiated projects as well as how to promote extra-curricular JET activities and the JET Programme in general?
4. According to the survey, many workplaces and Contracting Organisations are unaware of the grassroots internationalisation activities that JET Participants do outside of contracted hours. Does CLAIR, MEXT, MOFA or MIC have any future plans to inform workplaces and Contracting Organisations of such internationalisation projects? Do you have any suggestions for AJET to pursue?
5. Many JETs have asked permission to help with projects outside of school time, without missing lessons, but were denied permission. Would MEXT be willing to publish a list of activities that it believes are worthwhile activities for JETs to participate in?
6. May AJET still receive a copy of the CLAIR Q and A Manual to better understand what is suggested by CLAIR to COs?