



GENERAL ACTIVITIES REPORT

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This General Activities Report includes an update on recent National AJET activities, an assessment of the National AJET Self-Evaluation Survey, and a discussion of our goals for the future.

RECENT NATIONAL AJET ACTIVITIES

National AJET Earthquake/Tsunami Response

Using our website, Facebook page, newly-launched Twitter account, and network of Block Representatives, we were able to quickly disseminate information about the situation in Tohoku and Kanto after the March 11th earthquake. AJET provided translated Japanese news so that JETs could access that information sooner, opportunities to contribute to the relief effort, and support for other JET-initiated relief projects.

The response from JET participants and friends was overwhelming. In the month after the earthquake, there were nearly 5,000 active AJET users on facebook. We also feel we have been successful in tapping into the greater JET community – including current JETs, JET alumni, various AJET and AJET-affiliated groups, and JET's local communities and friends from outside the JET Programme – to share information and help with the relief effort.

See the AJET Around Japan Supplement for more information about JET relief efforts.

AJET's Online Presence

Even though there were major changes last year, AJET's presence online is still evolving. The new website is as useful as ever, with more information, services, and useful downloads for JETs planned in the near future. A twitter account was also made for faster communication.

We've recently launched the new AJET SIG Forums so that JETs can have one place to go for all their Special Interest Group needs at <http://sigs.ajet.net>.

We have also recently moved our Tatami Timeshare service to CouchSurfing.org in order to better serve the JET community. This was due to too many former JETs not updating their information and causing confusion with people trying to use the service.

Career and Information Fair at the Conference for Returning JETs

National AJET held their annual Education and Career Information Fair at the Conference for Returning JETs on Tuesday, February 22nd at the Pacifico Yokohama. 30 companies, universities and NPOs attended.

Publications

2,000 copies of the second edition of *Planet Eigo* were printed in December 2010. All pre-orders for the publication have now been filled with the exception of a few JETs who have yet to provide mailing addresses but these are being pursued.



Sales of both *Planet Eigo* and *Foxy Phonics* have been steady since the new edition has become available, with purchases made by JET participants, Genki English (<http://genkienglish.net/>) and several Boards of Education.

2010 Technology in the Workplace Survey Results and Applications

In September 2010, National AJET conducted a survey asking JETs both how they use technology at work and how aware they are of the technology policy at their workplace. 271 JET participants in 27 prefectures, including 250 ALTs and 21 CIRs, responded.

According to the survey, 62.4% of JETs have restricted Internet access at work. Of those with restricted Internet, 59.5% felt that those restrictions hindered their ability to work productively. A common restriction is the inability to search for images, which makes it difficult it for ALTs to create original worksheets. One or two JETs mentioned that they worked around this by creating “image packs” on a CD at home and using that at school. AJET has begun creating downloadable sets of images, to be available for free on the AJET website in color and black and white, for common English class themes to make this easier. In addition, we plan to sell pre-made CDs with clip art at cost at Tokyo Orientation for ALTs who may not initially have Internet at home.

Artists are currently being recruited, with several having already started producing the clip art. The rights of these artists will be protected by a Creative Commons license which will acknowledge the artist while still allowing free distribution to National AJET members.

AJET Peer Support Group

Peer Support Group (PSG) is a listening and referral service offering support for all JET Programme participants, 365/6 days a year, from 20:00 overnight until 07:00.

PSG is managed by the National Coordinator (NC), Ms. Emily Collins. The Volunteer Coordinator (VC), Mr. Kieran Murphy, supports the NC and maintains the scheduling and coordination of the service's 23 volunteers.

Call volume statistics:

| | 2009-2010 | 2010-2011 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| October | 11 | 11 |
| November | 5 | 17 |
| December | 3 | 6 |
| January | 8 | 7 |
| February | 7 | 11 |
| March | 5 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 39 | 63 |

This past year has seen a steady increase in the level of call volume at PSG. It is likely safe to assume that such an increase is due to a greater publication of the PSG service across the JET Programme community in recent years through intensified communication between PSG members and Prefectural Advisors (PAs) and word of mouth as the service usage increases.

PSG continues to work within a steady budget. The 2010/11 PSG budget report is due for release in May 2011.

THE NATIONAL AJET SELF-EVALUATION SURVEY

In order to evaluate our services, we conducted a Self-Evaluation Survey. 334 JETs took the survey between February 22 and March 11, with JETs from 42 prefectures reporting.

This year's self-evaluation survey focused on three things. We attempted to gauge JET participants' understanding and perception of National AJET, to find out how JETs are currently receiving information from AJET and how they would prefer to receive that information, and to find out what kind of information JET participants want from AJET. We identified several problems that we can work to resolve in each of these three areas.

JET Participant Understanding of AJET

Of JETs who said they had a clear understanding of AJET, 88.9% believe that AJET plays a positive role, stating that AJET helps create a JET community, shares valuable information, and serves as a connection to CLAIR and the ministries. However, only 84 of 334 survey takers (25.1%) believe that they have a clear understanding of what AJET does. So while our services do not appear to need a major overhaul, we need to improve how we present our message. Confusion appears to come from two main sources: 1) the lack of a concise explanation of AJET; 2) general explanation of National AJET is limited almost exclusively to Tokyo Orientation, where there is too much other competing information to be effective.

Problem 1: The Lack of a Concise Explanation of AJET

Many survey respondents expressed frustration that there isn't a good, brief explanation of AJET. As one respondent said, JET participants are instead asked to "read the next 8 pages of literature and take the following 6 surveys to understand what [AJET does]." Most JET participants do not sift through that much information, resulting in confusion. As a council, we need to refocus on AJET's broader goals – as opposed to just individual projects – and clearly communicate those goals to JETs.

After reviewing our current services and the benefits of National AJET according to survey respondents, we believe that our services generally fall under one or more of these categories: Information (i.e. the monthly eBulletin, JET Effect, Life After JET, and our facebook page), Representation (the AJET Surveys and Reports), and Support (i.e. PSG, SIGs, AJET sponsorship of special projects). We will try using "Information, Representation and Support for JET participants" as a slogan and as a means of organizing information that we present to JETs. We will continue to search for other ways to clarify our purpose.

Problem 2: Little general explanation of National AJET after Tokyo Orientation

Currently, the most basic AJET information is explained to JET participants at Tokyo Orientation, in the AJET Tokyo Orientation Guidebook and at the AJET Centre. However, so much other information is presented at Tokyo Orientation that, as one JET said, "we got information [about AJET] at orientation but by that stage I was so overwhelmed it got pushed to the back and I didn't think about it again." We need to reinforce our basic message throughout the year, in a variety of ways to reach as many people as possible, including:

- Coordinating with Prefectural AJET Chapters so that they can explain the relationship between National AJET and Prefectural AJET at Prefectural Orientations. We can provide a powerpoint presentation available for download from our website with a very brief explanation of National AJET and how Prefectural AJET Chapters fit into the AJET network.
- Creating a short and interesting "ad" introducing National AJET.



- Starting a series of National AJET Officer vlogs to personalize and further introduce what and who National AJET is.
- Reviewing our website's content, ensuring that is easy to understand at a glance.

AJET Communication with JETs

AJET's direct means of communicating with JETs (the eBulletin, facebook and twitter) have grown significantly over the past year. However, we need to improve the use of Prefectural AJET Chapters to spread National AJET information.

The single most likely place that JET participants heard about the AJET surveys was from a prefectural AJET officer (31.7%). In addition, many noted that they found out about the surveys via their prefectural JET/AJET website or forum, their PA, a friend, or other sources within their prefecture. Furthermore, of JETs who did not have a clear understanding of National AJET, 55.3% said that more integration with local chapters would make National AJET more accessible to them because "each prefecture's leaders know the best way to spread the word in their prefecture."

In addition, many JETs do not currently feel a personal connection to National AJET. One JET said, "AJET is a very remote, non-present body for me, where I am located in Japan." It is a challenge to communicate personally and stay relevant to a diverse group of people spread out over Japan, and nearly impossible without tapping into local AJET networks.

In all five prefectures that had no response to any of the AJET surveys, there is either no AJET Chapter or that AJET Chapter is mostly inactive and completely unresponsive. So, strengthening local AJET Chapters would not only increase our relevance to JET participants, but also improve our ability to collect meaningful survey data.

We believe possible challenges to local AJET involvement on a prefectural level include very small or spread out JET populations, proximity to a large city that provides an outlet for some of the same services that local AJET Chapters provide, polarized JET populations (either due to multiple Contracting Organizations or geography), and JET apathy.

In order to promote the creation of AJET Chapters and the strengthening of existing AJET Chapters, we will create a new Prefectural AJET Resource Centre on our website. It will feature an updated version of the Prefectural AJET Handbook. In addition, we will collect short essays/how-tos from current prefectural AJET officers about a variety of topics, especially focusing on ways to overcome the challenges listed above (i.e. how to start a new chapter, different niches that AJET Chapters can fill, and different models for local AJET communication). We hope that these resources will make it easier for JETs who wish to start a new chapter or who are taking over a weak chapter.

At the National AJET level, there is currently little focus on communication with prefectural groups other than a short meeting at our Changeover Meeting and while AJET Surveys are live. However, to make real progress, there needs to be an ongoing discussion about the relationship between Block Representatives and their Blocks, including:

- More comprehensive reviews of survey response by prefecture, analysing why some prefectures are unlikely to respond and using that analysis to improve future response.
- Stressing the importance of Block Representatives meeting Tokyo Orientation Aides (TOAs) from their Block and pursuing personal relationships with JET participants, AJET officers or otherwise, within their Block and *using* those contacts productively.

- Pursuing other policies that will foster good relations between Block Representatives and their Block and support for local chapters.

JET Participant Information Needs

When asked what kind of information they would like to receive from AJET, post-JET career advice (80.3%), events (78.1%), workplace tips/advice (60.0%), general AJET announcements (59.7%), and tips for living in Japan (58.7%) proved most popular.

In the past year, we started Life After JET, a monthly interview with former-JETs, in response to the request for more information about post-JET career advice on the last Self-Evaluation Survey in January 2010. We will continue to develop those resources in the future. We have also tried to incorporate more event information in the monthly eBulletin newsletter, including a monthly Block Focus (information about events/places to visit in two Blocks per month) and festival guides. AJET announcements are already covered in depth. So, of the information most requested by JETs, we currently offer the least information about living and working in Japan.

JET ALTs want more tools to do their job better. Featuring JET-initiated projects in JET Effect is a start, but many are looking for more education-specific information. In addition to the 60% of the ALT respondents who wanted to receive information about workplace advice, 42% also wanted information about opportunities in the field of education. Many of the write-in responses also focused on getting information to become a better ALT. ALTs asked for, “examples of successful teaching and collaboration and advice for problem solving”, “news on current events affecting language education”, and “lesson plans of the month”, for example. AJET is working on several new projects to meet this demand.

- We are currently building a new Teaching Resources Centre on our website. For the time being, it includes links to Prefectural AJET Teaching Resources and basic information on the Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT). There are plans to expand it to include free, downloadable clipart and SIG-themed cultural English activities.
- For JETs who wish to take a course to improve their teaching ability and further their teaching credentials, we now have a list of JET-reviewed courses available on the website. JETs who have already taken a CELTA, TEFL or Masters in Linguistics/TESOL can now fill out a simple form to help other JETs choose the course for them.
- The National AJET facebook page has a new monthly feature offering advice about living and teaching in Japan from experienced JETs. We have already covered connecting with the other staff at your workplace and with your students. Future topics will include English Language Board ideas and how to overcome technology limitations at work, among others.
- We will soon be starting an English Activity of the Month on National AJET’s facebook page.
- We hope to continue to strengthen our relationship with JALT. Many of their services, including access to JALT publications and conferences, would be very beneficial to JET ALTs, however, most JET participants remain unaware of these services. We will be featuring one JET’s JALT involvement in JET Effect to increase awareness of JALT and encourage other JET participants to try to improve their teaching ability.

There is significant ALT demand for more – and more effective – teaching resources, so we

will continue to work to provide more teaching resources, in addition to *Planet Eigo* and *Foxy Phonics*.

AJET GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

Based on feedback from JETs, we believe that the demand for core AJET services for Information, Representation and Support remain constant. Specific needs within each of those categories may change over time, but AJET will continue to adjust to any changes by listening to JET opinion in yearly Self-Evaluation Surveys and making it easier for JETs to get in touch with National AJET. We plan to continue to develop each of those core areas, as well as two secondary AJET goals: contributing to earthquake relief and good publicity for the JET Programme as a whole.

Information Goals

AJET hopes to provide high-quality information for JET participants and promote exchange between JETs. In the next year, we plan to:

- Launch AJET's original clipart and new teaching resources for JETs.
- Simplify AJET's basic message, increasing JET understanding of AJET and use of AJET services.
- Continued expansion of AJET's facebook presence, reaching 2,000 members and increasing the number of JET participants sharing information there.
- Increase individual JET participant contributions to AJET Press (<http://press.ajet.net>), allowing JETs to showcase their creative talents and share them with other JETs.

Representation Goals

AJET would like to improve the quality of our reports. In addition, we will closely follow changes in government policy that affect JET participants so that we can effectively serve as a bridge between JET participants and JET Programme sponsors. In the next three years, we will try to:

- Review AJET's timeline and report writing process and alter it as necessary to increase the quality of reports.
- Increase JET survey response so that every prefecture is represented.
- Create an easy method for JET participants to anonymously submit ideas at any time for an AJET Report on our website.
- Increase JET awareness of our reports.
- To more carefully and publicly track and follow through with promises made at Opinion Exchanges

Support Goals

AJET hopes to strengthen Prefectural AJET Chapters, thereby strengthening local support networks for JET participants. In the next year, we will:

- Update and make available the Prefectural AJET handbook, and create other resources for Prefectural AJET Chapters.
- Create a SIG for Prefectural AJET Officers to share ideas and work together through problems.

AJET will also continue to revitalize AJET Special Interest Groups, to create support networks for JET participants with very specific needs. We will:

- Increase awareness of the new SIG forums.

- Create a SIG handbook.
- Identify potential SIG leaders, through the Self-Evaluation Survey and the network of Block Representatives.

Continued Earthquake Response

AJET will continue to support the earthquake relief effort. We have already created a new liaison position for the 2011-2012 AJET Council to ensure continuity in our earthquake relief efforts.

In the next year, AJET plans to:

- Fairly and efficiently allocate the [755,847 yen] collected by the AJET Relief Fund to financially support JET participants directly affected by the disaster. JET participants can apply to receive funds to replace personal possessions destroyed or damaged by the natural disaster, assist with repair and reconstruction of residences in affected areas, or any other expenses incurred as a result of the disaster.
- Continue to support JET-organised earthquake relief efforts, by promoting JET projects; connecting JETs with other individuals or organizations that help their project; providing some basic technical support for building websites, etc; and, occasionally, providing direct funding from National AJET.
- Set-up or support additional volunteer opportunities in Tohoku, primarily through our non-Profit Group Associate Members (GAMs) and AJET SIGs.

In the next three to five years, we will continue to evaluate how AJET can best help the relief effort in Tohoku, especially as it relates to rebuilding English language education infrastructure in schools destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami.

General JET Programme Promotion

Primarily, we hope to support and promote local projects and help them to get local coverage to contribute to the positive perception of JET from a very grassroots perspective.

In addition, we would also like to launch a regular newsletter in the coming year, including excerpted JET Effect articles and some basic information about other AJET projects in Japanese. This newsletter would primarily be targeting staff at Contracting Organizations and Boards of Education across Japan. We hope to create a simple sign-up system, similar to the AJET eBulletin, to receive this newsletter about three times a year. We would appreciate your help in finding the best way to disseminate this information.

QUESTIONS

1. Do MEXT or CLAIR have any suggestions or comments regarding how AJET can better support JETs in the classroom? What would you like to see JET ALTs achieve in the next few years?
2. Do you have any suggestions regarding the best way to allocate the AJET Relief Fund in the long-term? Can you share any information about CLAIR funds that are available to JETs?
3. CLAIR, can we advertise the new Japanese AJET newsletter in the CLAIR newsletter? What other means would you suggest to let members of the Japanese community, especially Contracting Organizations, Boards of Education and JTEs, know that this newsletter is available?
4. How many JETs should we expect at Tokyo Orientations A, B, and C?