



# AJET Activities and Services Review

**Produced by the AJET National Council**

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Opinion Exchange Meeting

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MIC ♦ MOFA ♦ MEXT ♦ CLAIR ♦ AJET



# AJET Activities and Services Review

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains a review of the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET)'s current services and performance over course of the current AJET National Council term (June 2013 - May 2014), drawing on a combination of survey data and a critical internal project review. Given that there have been a significant number of changes this year in the way AJET operates (as instigated by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR)), AJET feels that it is important to gauge how the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) community feels about its previous interactions with National AJET as an organisation and use this feedback to determine a course for the future.

This report shows that despite extensive efforts by the current AJET National Council to increase awareness about AJET and its activities, there still remains some confusion amongst the JET community and this needs to be remedied so that JET participants understand what services are available to them and are able to access these services to enhance their JET Programme experience. AJET is concerned that a lack of presence at Tokyo Orientation will have a significant negative effect on AJET's brand awareness and subsequent utilisation of AJET services; this concern was highly supported by the survey results.

Nevertheless, AJET National Council representatives remain committed to developing new communication methods and initiatives that support the current and future JET community, and have successfully achieved their overall goals for the year (except for financial sustainability, which was hindered by the significant changes implemented by CLAIR). The current Council believes that the ongoing and new projects and initiatives it has implemented provide a framework for JET participants to enjoy their JET Programme experience and successfully fulfil the goals of the JET Programme. In addition, and especially in light of the adversity it has faced this year, the Council is constantly looking for ways to improve the organisation and the ways in which it supports JET Programme participants, and will continue to do so in the future.



# Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                               | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>METHODOLOGY</b>                                | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>                     | <b>4</b>  |
| JET Community Experience with AJET                | 4         |
| <b>First Contact with AJET</b>                    | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Experience at Tokyo Orientation</b>            | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Engagement with AJET Services</b>              | <b>8</b>  |
| AJET Internal Projects Review                     | 13        |
| <b>2013-14 AJET National Council Goals</b>        | <b>13</b> |
| <b>2013-14 AJET National Council Achievements</b> | <b>14</b> |
| <b>CONCLUSION</b>                                 | <b>17</b> |

# INTRODUCTION

At the previous Opinion Exchange meeting in December 2013, the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) had extensive discussions with the Council of Local Authorities for Internal Relations (CLAIR) about the changing nature of their working relationship and a number of key changes taking place in relation to the JET Programme.

Specifically, CLAIR has indicated that at least for the next Tokyo Orientation session in 2014, there will be no information fair component, and AJET will not have any presence at the event with its usual AJET Centre or AJET Desk. In addition, with CLAIR taking over full management of all aspects of Tokyo Orientation, the content of presentations will be more work-focused, with lifestyle-oriented presentations (previously managed by AJET) expected to be covered at the prefectural level in future.

In light of these changes, AJET was keen to know how current JET Programme participants felt in relation to their own Tokyo Orientation experience. In addition, AJET as an organisation is always looking to improve itself and its services provided to JET Programme participants. As such, the spring survey was designed to collect critical feedback from JET participants in relation to its (prior) presence at Tokyo Orientation, how this impacted the experience of JET participants, and also a broader review of the services provided by AJET to the JET community.

Finally, with a view to ongoing development and improvement, the AJET National Council also underwent its usual annual review process to ascertain what projects have been completed throughout the course of the year and to what extent the Council has been able to achieve its goals set at the beginning of the period.

This report presents the findings of the AJET spring survey in addition to the critical self-review performed by the current AJET National Council.

# METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report come from a survey conducted by the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) over the period 1–18 April 2014. This survey was distributed to JET Programme participants using an online survey development tool. The number of questions depended on the job type of the respondent: 49 for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), and 11 for Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) and Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs). The formats used included 'Yes' or 'No', multiple choice and open-ended questions. This survey was implemented in English.

The survey was divided into four key areas:

- Changes to elementary school English
- English-speaking coordinators in schools
- ALTs as solo educators
- Review of AJETs services

For ease of use, a separate report has been developed for each of these four key areas. This report presents the findings in relation to AJET's activities and services, providing an assessment of survey results for each section and an analysis of the responses. The results presented in this report with regard to current JET Programme participants include both participants on their first appointment with the Programme and those on their second or more. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. These survey results are supplemented with information generated by the AJET National Council in conducting a critical review of current activities and services with reference to previously-determined annual goals.

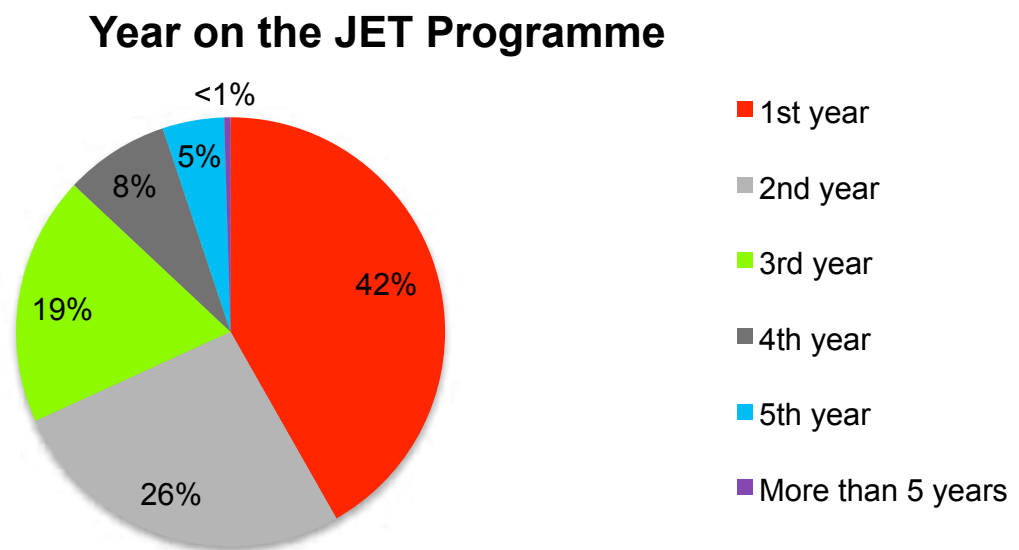
Throughout the report, the following abbreviations will be used for the common terms used in relation to the JET Programme:

- ALT: Assistant Language Teacher
- CIR: Coordinator for International Relations
- SEA: Sports Exchange Advisor
- JET: Japan Exchange and Teaching (Programme)
- AJET: The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching

## Survey Sample

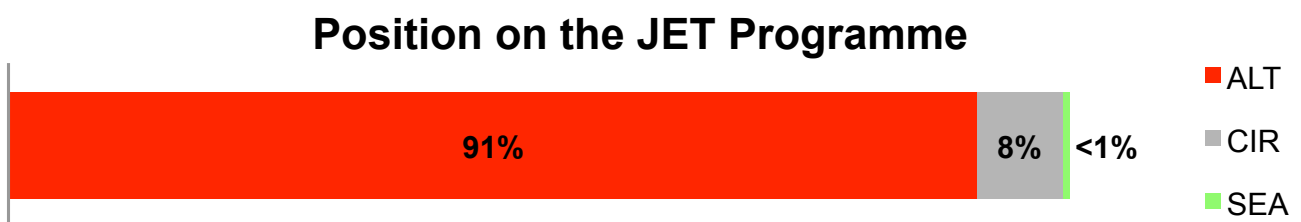
The survey collected responses from a total of 1135 JET Programme participants, or approximately 26% of the total current JET Programme population in Japan. Of these, a small proportion did not provide responses to the section of the survey relating to AJET's services, so their data has been excluded from the analysis presented in this report, leaving a sample size of 1053 respondents, or 24% of the JET population.

In terms of how long the 1053 respondents have been on the JET Programme, the largest proportion identified themselves as being in their first year (42%), with second- and third-year participants the next most populous groups (26% and 19%, respectively). The graph below shows the complete breakdown of respondents by year on the JET Programme.



*Note:* Although the maximum JET Programme tenure is 5 years, 'More than 5 years' is used to denote JET participants who have a combined total of more than 5 years over 2 or more separate appointments. With such a small sample size for these participants, their results have been left out of most graphs within the report.

As for job type, most respondents (91%) indicated that they are ALTs, 8% are CIRs and less than 1% are SEAs. These figures very closely mirror the demographics of the JET Programme population as a whole, in which 91% are ALTs, 8% are CIRs, and 0.25% are SEAs. The graph below shows the breakdown of respondents by job type.



# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

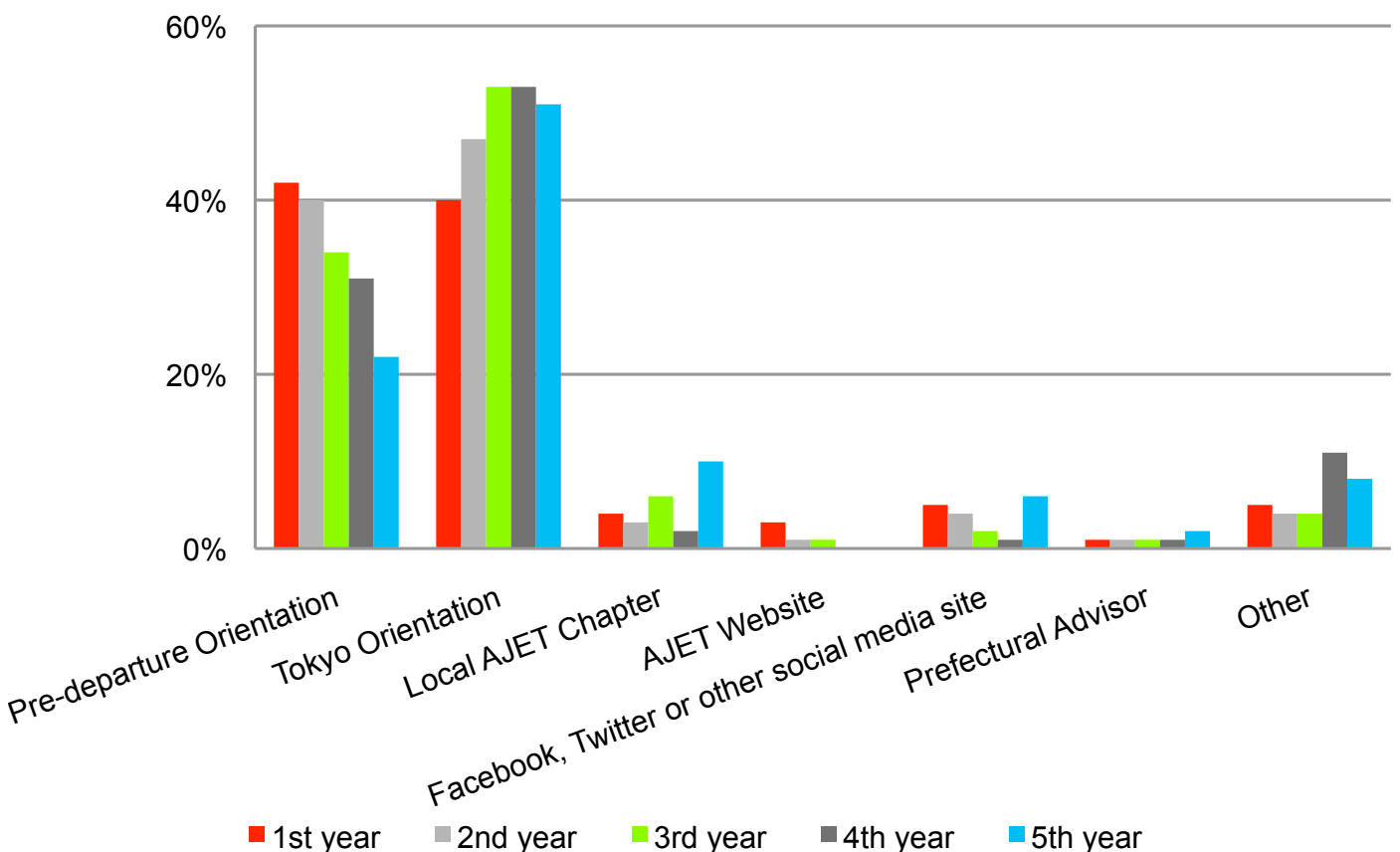
## JET Community Experience with AJET

This section of the report relates to data collected as part of AJET’s spring survey, and represents the views of the current JET community.

### First Contact with AJET

When asked how survey respondents first heard about AJET, the most common answer (selected by 45% of total respondents) was Tokyo Orientation. The loss of AJET presence at Tokyo Orientation could significantly decrease AJET’s name-recognition and branding since it is the first point of contact for a large proportion of the JET Programme community. However, many respondents (38%) indicated that they first heard about AJET at Pre-departure Orientation, with first-year JET participants more likely than other years to provide this response. In fact, the graph below shows a clear trend that AJET is becoming increasingly better promoted at these orientation sessions compared to previous years. Other points of contact such as the AJET website, social media outlets, local AJET chapters or prefectural advisors all fell within 1-5% of the total survey response. There may be a need to increase AJET’s profile via these mediums in order to make them a viable source of first contacts, especially if Tokyo Orientation will no longer be a viable alternative for AJET.

**How did you first hear about AJET?**

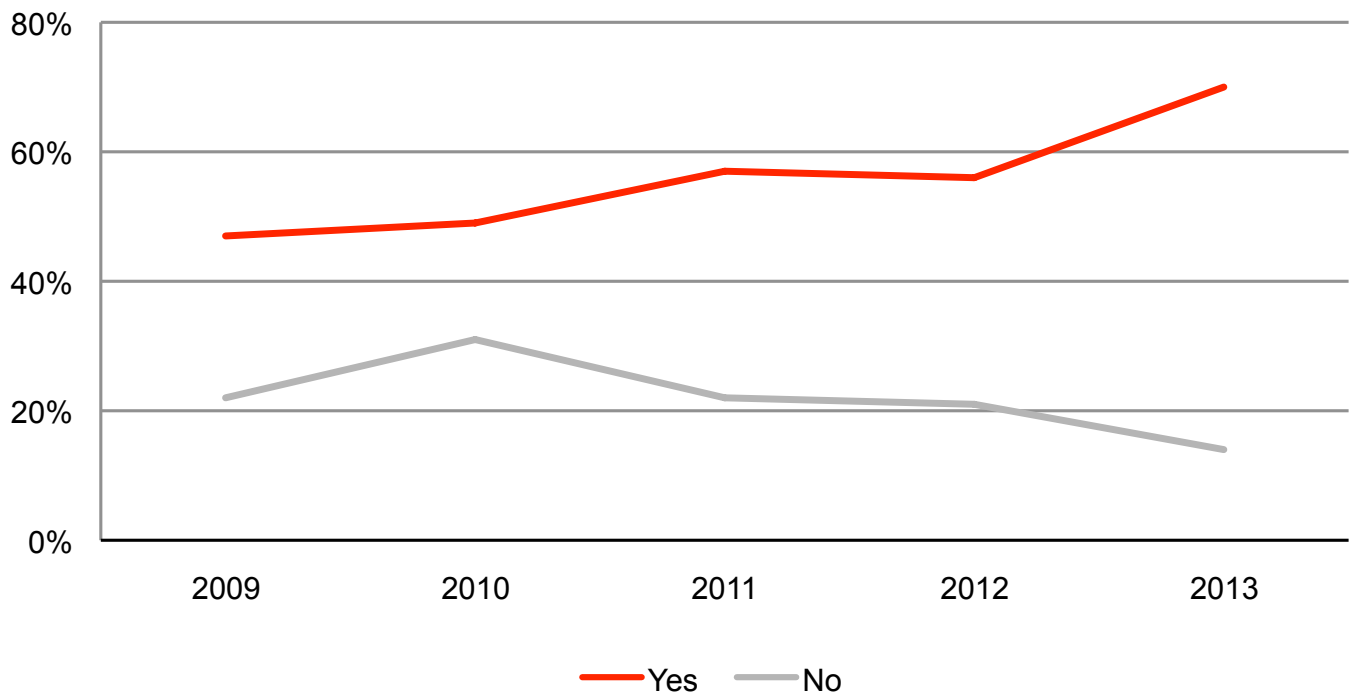




## Experience at Tokyo Orientation

In previous years, AJET was present during Tokyo Orientations via the AJET Centre and AJET Desk. Most survey respondents (61% overall) reported that they visited at least one of these two locations during their Tokyo Orientation. However, 18% reported that they did not visit the AJET Centre/Desk and 20% reported that they could not remember. Still, the majority of the respondents made contact with AJET at Tokyo Orientation in some way. In fact, this trend had been increasing from previous years: The proportion of first-year survey respondents who said they visited the AJET Centre/Desk during the 2013 Tokyo Orientations (70%) increased by 14% compared to the proportion who visited during the 2012 Tokyo Orientations (56%, second-year respondents). Similarly, the number of respondents who selected "No [I did not visit the AJET Desk or Centre]" in relation to the previous four years shows a decreasing pattern. For example, the decrease between the 2012 Tokyo Orientations (second-year respondents) and the 2013 Tokyo Orientations (first-year respondents) was 7%. These trends are shown in the graph below.

### Did you visit the AJET Centre or Desk at Tokyo Orientation?

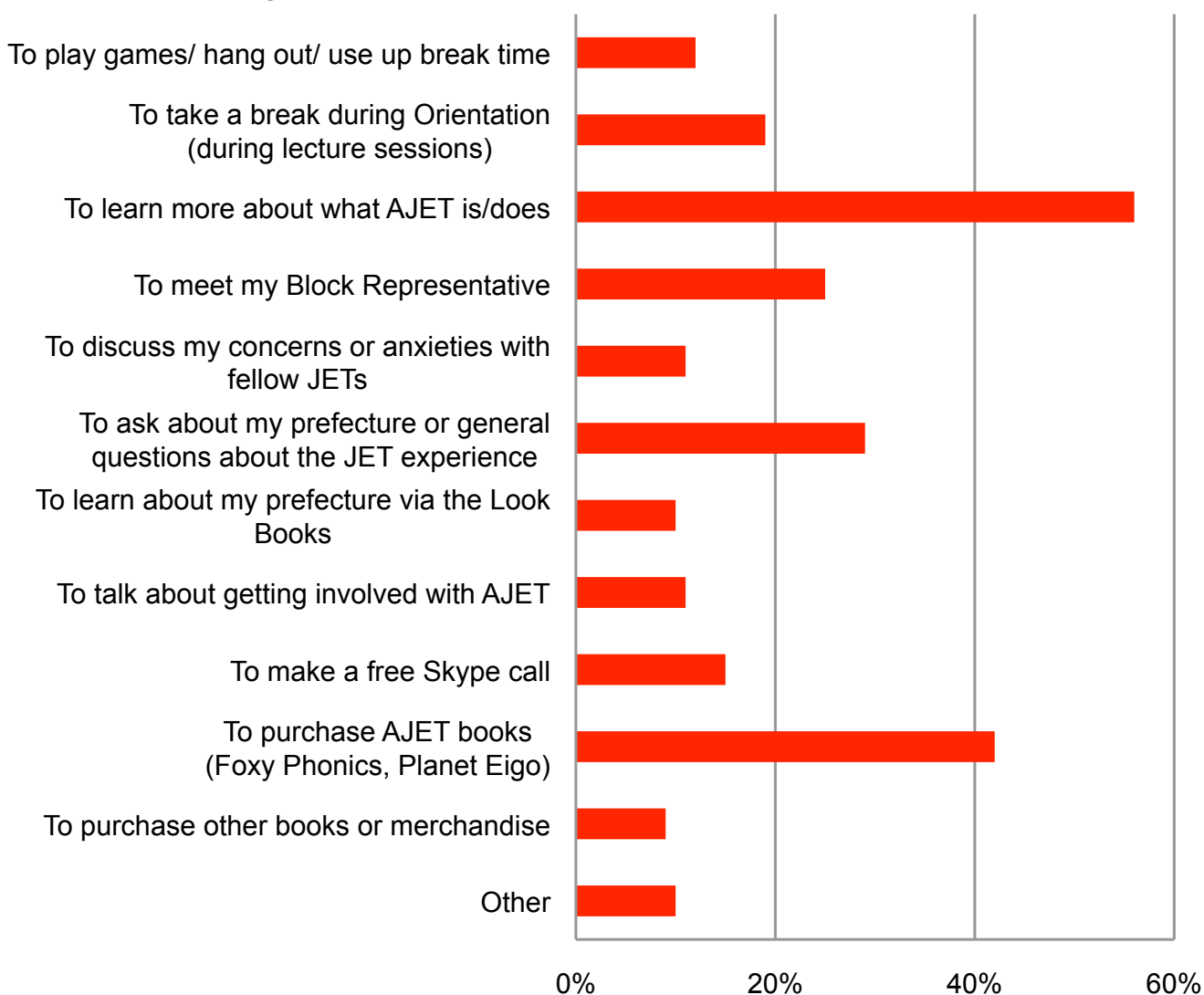


This is a positive result for AJET that suggests that brand awareness of the organisation is growing and that by providing useful resources and opportunities to connect during the Tokyo Orientation period, AJET's presence in JET participants' lives is increasing, thereby making it a significant stakeholder in the JET Programme.

If respondents indicated that they had visited the AJET Centre or Desk, they were then asked the reasoning for their visit. For first-, second- and third-year respondents, the most common reason indicated was "to learn more about what AJET is/does" (57%, 57% and 60%, respectively). For fourth-year and fifth-year respondents, the most common reason was "to purchase AJET books". This suggests that face-to-face interaction with AJET (during Tokyo Orientation) has become increasingly important to the JET community, and reflects the direction of AJET as an organisation away from a business-oriented model to one that focuses more on community and connecting JET participants around the country. This is further shown by the third and fourth most common reasons: "to ask about my prefecture or general questions about the JET experience" (29% of total respondents to this question) and "to meet my Block Representative" (25%). Most of these

reasons hinge on the face-to-face interaction that is provided early in the JET Programme experience at Tokyo Orientation. The graph below shows a full breakdown of results for the overall survey sample.

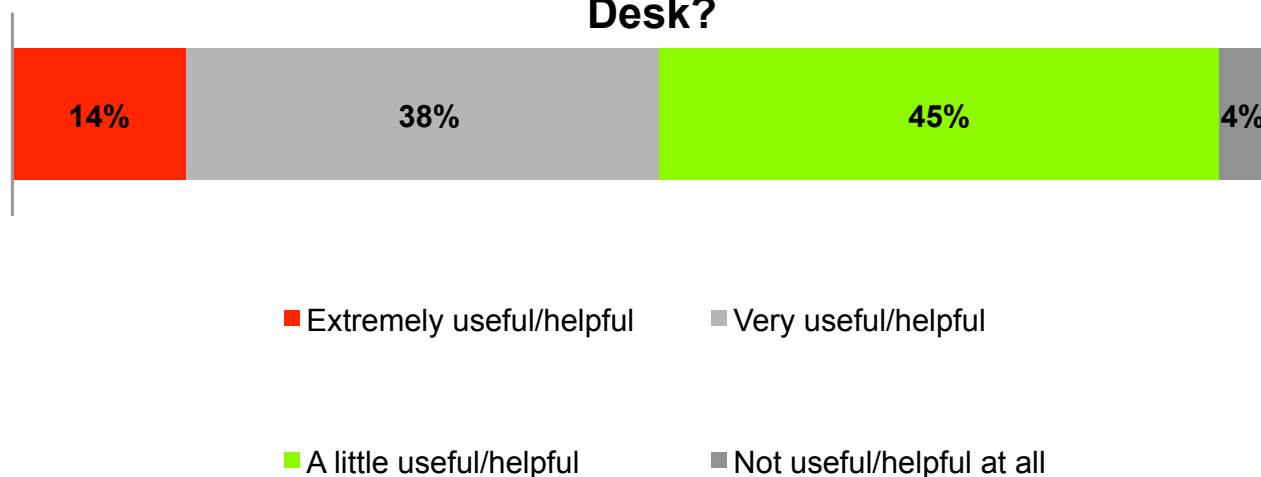
### What did you use the AJET Centre or AJET Desk for?



It is important to note that many of the 'Other' extended written responses about why people visited the AJET Centre/Desk included services not offered by AJET at the Tokyo Orientations. For example, eleven respondents indicated that they visited the AJET Desk or Centre to "iron shirts" which was a service offered by CLAIR through the Hospitality Centre. This shows that there is still confusion regarding the services that AJET provides and about who is responsible for the different elements of Tokyo Orientation, and it is important for AJET to continue to distinguish themselves and their core brand offerings.

When asked how useful the AJET Centre or Desk were at Tokyo Orientation, the most common response (45% of respondents) was "a little useful/helpful" followed by "very useful/helpful" (38%). Only 4% of respondents indicated that the AJET Centre/Desk were "not at all helpful/useful". First-year respondents were the most likely of all JET participants to report that the Centre/Desk was "very useful/helpful" (selected by 44% of this group), which suggests that while the AJET Centre and Desk have been seen as generally helpful throughout the years, it was particularly well-received at last year's Tokyo Orientation sessions. Again, the AJET National Council is proud of this result and believes it reflects the concerted efforts of the current council group to focus more on community building and improving awareness and perceptions of AJET as an organisation.

## How useful did you find the AJET Centre and AJET Desk?



Respondents were also able to report what they found particularly useful or positive about the AJET Centre or Desk in a short-answer question. Most of the responses could be classified according to the following five categories: 'friendly or helpful staff' (mentioned in 37% of the extended responses), 'useful resources' (30%), 'support system' (20%), 'availability' (8%), and 'a way to meet other JETs' (6%). 'Availability' in this case refers to responses regarding hours of the AJET Centre/Desk and ease of location. 'Useful resources' covers responses including textbooks and learning materials, wifi, Skype calls, knowledgeability of the staff on questions pertaining to the JET Programme, prefectural information and general advice about the Programme. The 'support system' category covers responses including receiving comfort or stress relief upon arriving in Japan. In fact, over 60 respondents specifically mentioned that they enjoyed asking questions, talking and getting advice from AJET representatives or veteran JET participants. This face-to-face interaction is most readily available at Tokyo Orientation at a time when new JET participants may feel anxious and nervous about their life in a foreign country. As one first-year ALT from Aomori stated: "The most important part of Tokyo Orientation, for me, was getting to talk with people who had gone through the same experiences and [...] liked it enough to continue and encourage others."

The survey also gave respondents the chance to provide an extended response regarding "What could have been improved about the AJET Centre or AJET Desk at Tokyo Orientation? Are there any services that AJET could help provide that would help JETs settle in or have a better Orientation experience?" There was a wide variety in the types of responses to this question. While a large proportion (47%) simply said they had no ideas for improvement or gave praise to the Centre or Desk, there were a number of other common suggestions. For example, around 13% of respondents requested more information about AJET resources, Tokyo or more specific prefectural information. A further 8% requested greater clarity in terms of AJET's activities, services and their role at Tokyo Orientation, and 7% of respondents requested more or better resources. There were also a handful of other suggestions relating to the nature/structure of Tokyo Orientation itself.

## How do you think you would have felt if there was no AJET Centre or Desk at Tokyo Orientation?



- It was invaluable to my experience at Orientation
- It was pretty useful to me; it would have been a shame to not have had it
- It wouldn't really have made any difference to me
- No problem; I never went there/used it
- I'm not sure
- Other

As shown in the graph above, when asked 'How do you think you would have felt if there was no AJET Centre or Desk at Tokyo Orientation?', 41% of respondents reported 'it was pretty useful to me; it would be a real shame to not have had it', with a further 27% indicating that 'it wouldn't really have made any difference to me'. Nevertheless, of the 'other' responses, the most common written response echoed sentiments made by one first-year ALT in Hyogo: "While I didn't actively utilize [it] as a resource, many did and that's a good reason for it to be there". This shows that although some JET participants did not have the time or see a personal need to visit the Centre or Desk, they still felt that other JET participants could benefit from the existence of that resource.

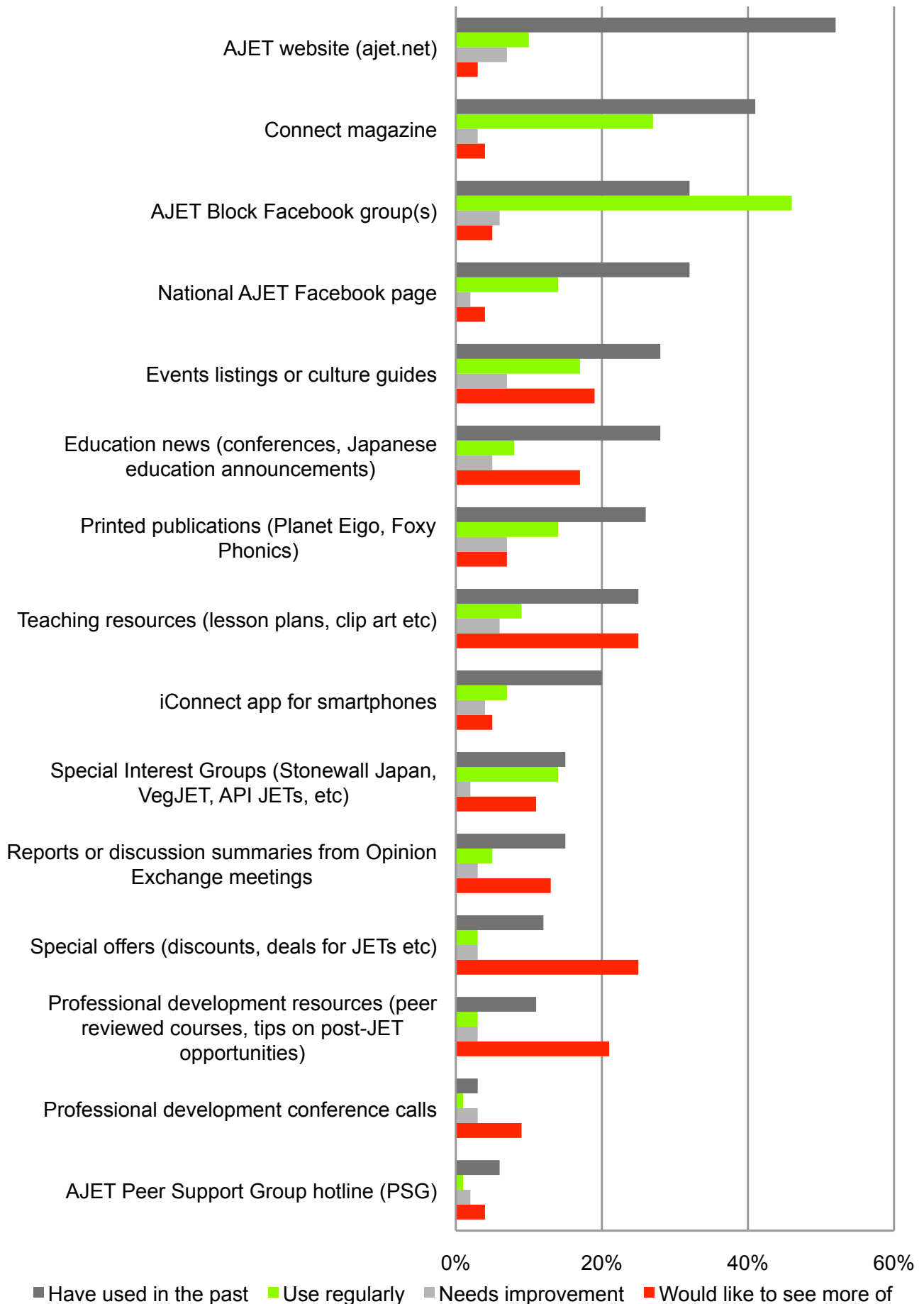
Respondents were also able to make more general comments about AJET's presence at Tokyo Orientation in a long answer format. While categorising each response is difficult and potentially subjective, many responses were very clear. The most common type of response (offered by 45% of respondents to this question) was positive; using words such as 'necessary', 'essential', 'helpful' or 'useful' when talking about AJET's presence at Tokyo Orientation. Some responses in this category also mentioned that it was unfortunate that AJET may not be present in future orientations. A further 14% of respondents used this section to urge AJET to improve services or visibility at Tokyo Orientation. Other responses (fewer in number) included both positive and negative reviews of AJET's presence at Tokyo Orientation.

Only 9 respondents to this question (2%) had strong preferences that AJET not be present at Tokyo Orientation or stated that AJET's presence was unnecessary. One respondent stated: "I was consistently lied to by various NAJET/AJET representatives [...] and [they] distribute inaccurate or potentially harmful information." Obviously this type of response is of a concern to AJET as an organisation, however it is also welcome and open to feedback and suggestions on how to improve. As a result, AJET has taken significant steps to communicate with individuals who offer these criticisms and has an open dialogue with constituents on social media platforms. AJET hopes that by becoming more transparent, open and available to constituents, it can continue to improve its relationship with the JET community.

### Engagement with AJET Services

When asked what services they make use of, would like to see more of, or feel need improvement, there were some interesting results from respondents. A summary of these is shown in the graph that follows.

## What AJET services would you make use of or would like to see more of?

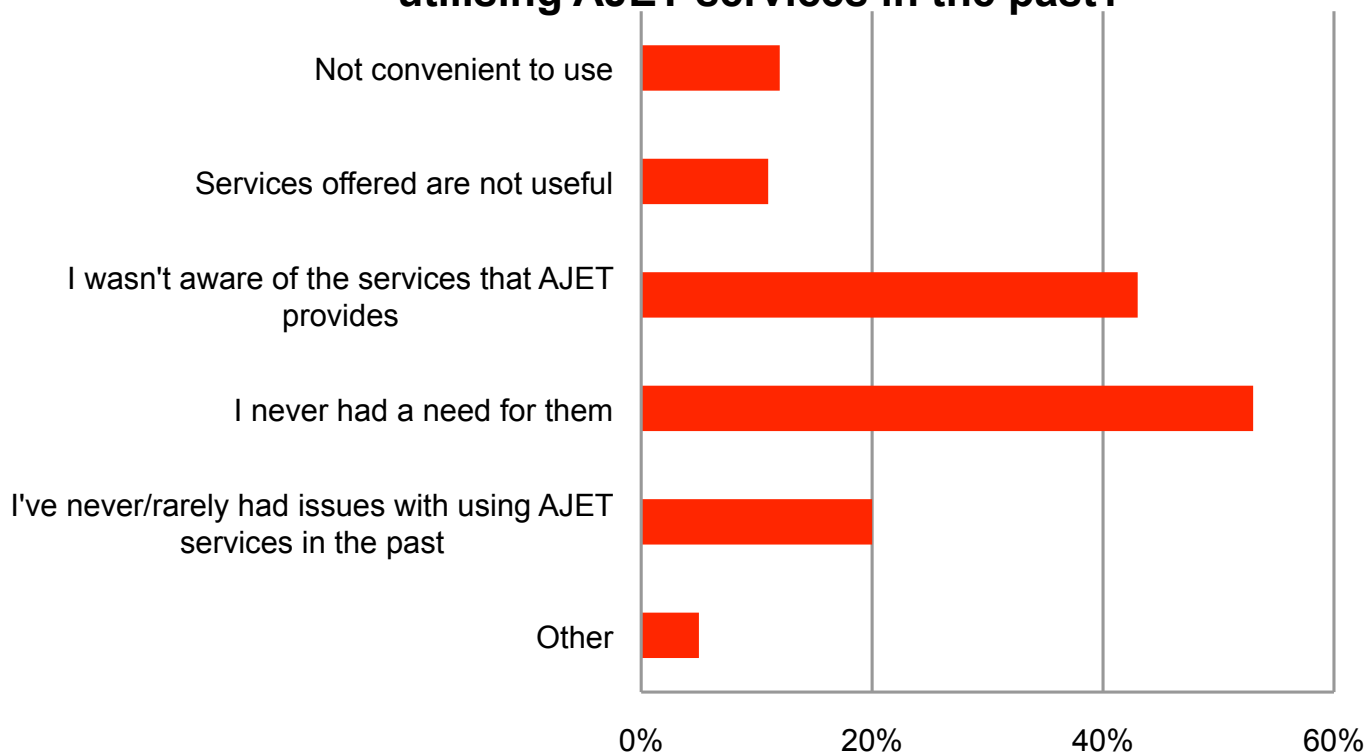


Firstly, the National AJET services that are utilised regularly by the most JET participants are AJET Block Facebook groups (46% of respondents), Connect magazine (27%) and Events listings or culture guides (17%). While seemingly content with the current volume of the first two, a significant proportion of respondents (19%) indicated that they would also like to see more of the latter. National AJET has just completed a project (started prior to the survey period) to upgrade and update its online calendar of events listings and hopes that this will fulfil this need.

Unfortunately, in relation to many other National AJET services, such as Reports or Discussion Summaries from OE Meetings, iConnect app for smartphones, Special discounts or other offers, Education news and the AJET website, although a large proportion of JETs may have 'Used [them] in the past', the number who use these same services on a regular basis is much lower. This could in part be an issue of timing, for example in the case of OE Discussion Summaries and Reports, which are only produced twice annually; or for Discounts, which are likely to only be accessed once; or may relate to the fact that JET participants simply did not have a need for these services, which was noted by over half the respondents (53%) as a key reason for not having used AJET services.

Nevertheless, 43% of respondents indicated that they may not have been using National AJET's services in the past because they were 'not aware of the services that AJET provides', and this is somewhat alarming for National AJET as an organisation because it suggests that their current efforts to promote their products and services are not fully reaching the target audience or achieving their brand awareness goals. Other reasons for the JET community not using AJET's services are shown in the graph below.

### What things/ reasons have prevented you from utilising AJET services in the past?



Interestingly, people who visited the AJET Centre or Desk at Tokyo Orientation simply to make a Skype call or purchase publications or other materials were more likely to have 'never used' many of AJET's services than those who visited the Centre/Desk for more face-to-face interactions such as 'To learn more about what AJET is/does', 'To meet my block representative', or 'To discuss my concerns or anxieties with fellow JETs'. However, even amongst those who visited the

AJET Centre/Desk 'to find out more about what AJET is/does', there was still a high incidence of '[not being] aware of the services that AJET provides' as a reason that has prevented them from using AJET services in the past, and this was similar to the result for people who simply visited the Centre/Desk to purchase publications.

Nevertheless, when asked to provide any other comments about AJET's presence at Tokyo Orientation (as discussed earlier), it was those people who were able to engage with AJET via meaningful face-to-face interactions who were much more likely to offer positive comments about the role of AJET at the Orientation than those who were there for simple transactions alone. These results indicate that AJET still has a way to go in terms of clearly explaining all the services that it provides to JET participants, but also reconfirms that AJET not having a presence at Tokyo Orientation is likely to result in a significant decline in the use of its services

As shown in the graph on the previous page, only a small number of respondents indicated that National AJET's services are 'not useful' (11%) or 'not convenient to use' (12%), which is a positive result for the organisation. In terms of some of the 'other' reasons that respondents gave for not utilising AJET's services, a number mentioned issues related to prefectural AJET chapters, which again highlights the need for National AJET to provide clearer information to JET participants about its role and the services it does and does not provide, in order to clear up confusion amongst the JET community. A number of other comments specified that the services are largely not relevant to the respondent as they are a CIR, so "many AJET things seem to be aimed at teachers and/or people who [don't] know much about Japanese life". This is another area where AJET could continue to improve in future, by providing more useful resources and services to CIR participants on the Programme.

In terms of the services that JET participants feel need improvement, the most common responses were Printed publications (7%), AJET website (7%) and Events listings or culture guides (7%). As noted earlier, AJET has just completed a project to upgrade its events calendar, and is also in the process of completing a website overhaul project, which should address some of the specific concerns of JET participants such as "I think it is confusing to navigate". In addition, AJET will continue to work hard at improving its offerings that JET participants 'would like to see more of', which included Special offers and discounts for JETs (requested by 25% of respondents), Teaching resources (25%) and Professional development resources (21%).

The only services currently provided by AJET that very few JET participants want to see more of are the AJET website (selected by 3% of respondents), National AJET Facebook page (4%), Connect magazine (4%), PSG hotline (4%), iConnect app (5%) and AJET Block Facebook groups (5%). Given that many of these services are those that AJET promotes on a regular basis, and combined with generally low frequency of 'needs improvement' responses, AJET can conclude that these services are well-known and currently meeting the needs of the majority of the JET community.

In addition, respondents were asked to identify any services that are not currently provided by AJET that would be useful to their lives in Japan. A wide range of suggestions were provided by respondents, including a large number relating to increased teaching resources or other professional development opportunities. Though these are both services that AJET already provides; of more particular note was a reasonable number of respondents requesting more information or opportunities relating to post-JET career options and advice.

Unfortunately, a large number of responses related to either the prefectural level (again highlighting either ambiguity in the survey question or confusion in the community over the difference between prefectural and National AJET), or to issues that are clearly beyond the control of AJET in its current position, such as the following request:

*"Something to show JTEs that encourages them to employ more media, pair and group activities. Communication, and creative ideas to fulfil MEXTs goals that are not adequately addressed in the textbook. Attitude, student interest, creative skills, problem solving skills, use of communication tools are areas I think need to gain greater importance in the classroom."*

There were, however, also a large number of requests for services that AJET may be able to consider implementing in the near future, such as

- More support for family JETs (potentially via a Special Interest Group)
- Translation services
- Japanese language resources such as conversation exchange opportunities
- Increased information/advice (potentially available via the website)
- Prefectural information and events listings

While the latter may be considered the domain of the prefectural AJET chapters to a certain extent, National AJET is also committed to upgrading its website as noted earlier and will work to include as much content that would be useful to JET participants as possible. Unfortunately, some of the information that respondents are asking for, such as tax information/advice may be better prepared and disseminated on a more official basis, for example by CLAIR; if this information is already available then perhaps it is not being received or fully understood by JET participants.

Even amongst the 53% of respondents who indicated that they 'never had a need' for AJET services, nearly half (47%) nevertheless acknowledged that AJET plays an important role in the community, which is a very positive result. JET Programme participants who first heard about AJET via the local AJET chapter, through Pre-departure orientation or at Tokyo orientation were far more likely to agree that AJET plays an important role in the community than those who first heard about AJET via social media, the AJET website or from a Prefectural Advisor (PA). This again reinforces the idea that face-to-face interactions that help to explain the role, purpose and services of AJET are critical to JET participants perceiving AJET's work as being useful and valuable.



## AJET Internal Projects Review

The following section is based on information collected from AJET National Council members and relates to goals set at the beginning of the council term and projects/achievements that have been completed during the year.

### 2013-14 AJET National Council Goals

At the start of the 2013-14 AJET National Council term, the Council developed the following five overarching goals to guide its direction throughout the year. Below is an assessment of how the Council has performed in relation to each of these goals.

#### 1. Increase personal and professional development opportunities offered to JET participants

This goal has been successfully met via several initiatives. Specifically, AJET has established a programme of Professional Development Conference Calls to connect current JET participants with JET Programme alumni and other professionals in various fields. AJET has also established smooth communication channels and collaborative relationships with JETwit and JETAA to forward job and volunteer opportunities for current and alumni JET participants to each other.

#### 2. Increase grassroots exchange opportunities between Japanese persons and JET participants

This goal has been successfully met via Block events organised and held in all 11 AJET Blocks around the country, where JET participants have the opportunity to interact with other JET participants and members of the Japanese community. In addition, AJET has liaised with around 30 organisations to promote localised volunteering opportunities for JET participants around the country, as a way to give something back to their communities.

#### 3. Increase awareness about AJET

Though the survey results (discussed earlier in this report) indicated that AJET still has a way to go in regards to this goal, there has nevertheless been significant progress made in terms of increasing awareness about AJET and its services. For example, the response rate for the spring surveys was 26% of the JET community - the highest rate ever in the history of AJET's surveys. There have also been significant increases over the course of the year in eConnect News subscribers (17%, or 1,108 people), Connect Magazine monthly views (164%, or 2,144 people) and Connect Magazine total annual views (149% or 13,573 people) due to the launch of a new online delivery method using ISSUU.

#### 4. Increase JET participant involvement with AJET

This goal has been successfully met via a number of initiatives, the first of which is the development of a database of skilled volunteers from the broader JET community (outside the AJET National Council) who are interested to work with AJET on various project initiatives, and the utilisation of these resources on numerous projects throughout the year. In addition, AJET has established the Race to the Top Volunteer Tracker – a national project initiative to track JET participants' involvement with their communities on a volunteer basis, highlighting their activities and involvement in Japanese society outside their normal ALT/CIR/SEA duties, and to determine the return-on-investment that the JET Programme is thus generating. Over the eight months to April 30, 2014, the Volunteer Tracker recorded over 710 hours of community service performed by JETs, and over 1.7million yen in charity money raised by the national JET community, surpassing the programme's goal of one million yen. Finally, the highest survey response rates in AJET's history indicate that more JET participants than ever before value the ability to voice their concerns and feedback on relevant issues and for AJET to act as their representatives in passing on this feedback to the Japanese ministries and CLAIR.

## 5. Increase AJET's social media presence

This goal has been exceptionally well met, with a considered and highly-successful social media strategy that focused on regular communications in a bilingual format as much as possible. A large part of this strategy included consistent posts on Facebook via the National AJET page as well as on individual Block group pages. The number of posts on the National AJET page for the 11 months to April 30, 2014 was around 120, or around 2-3 posts per week on average; these posts focused on AJET-related news or news benefitting the broader JET community. The number of people who 'liked' the National AJET page increased by 19% to 2,377 people. AJET made sure to respond to comments wherever possible, both positive and negative, and the general response was positive even from people who were at first critical of National AJET. In addition, AJET made use of Twitter to post on an almost daily basis, and increased the number of followers by 16% over the 11 months to end April 2014. Finally, National AJET has been posting a selection of news on the JET Programme Forums as appropriate, which has also served to increase exposure amongst current and future JET Programme participants.

## 6. Maintain a financially sustainable association

Although AJET had made significant progress towards this goal in the first half of the year (June 2013 to December 2014), with a successful Tokyo Orientation Information Fair, a number of changes brought about by CLAIR have necessitated revision of this goal. Specifically, changes in the nature of the CLAIR/AJET relationship have meant that AJET will no longer be responsible for Information Fairs at Tokyo Orientation or the After JET Conference, which means that two of the key revenue streams for the organisation have been eliminated. As a result, AJET's only major revenue stream that remains is the advertising relating to Connect Magazine, which means that the organisation must completely re-evaluate its financial position and viability in light of a consistent cost base. Unfortunately, CLAIR has also indicated that although AJET will be permitted to distribute a printed issue of Connect Magazine to all incoming JET participants at Tokyo Orientation in 2014, this magazine may not contain any advertisements, and as a result, there is no immediate way to offset the publishing costs associated with this issue.

Nevertheless, AJET is keen to investigate and develop new revenue streams if possible, as well as cutting costs as appropriate, in order to return to a financially sustainable organisational model. In an effort to better understand the history of the organisation's finances and communicate clearly with the JET community, the current Treasurer has been communicating with past officers to get more specific details of revenue and expenditures from the past five years. The organisation is also consulting with Japanese financial experts to better understand what national tax obligations, legality, and responsibility is involved. AJET understands that financial sustainability and transparency are paramount to the organisation's success, and believes that understanding the history and current position in detail first is the best way to then move forward.

## 2013-14 AJET National Council Achievements

In addition to these goals at the organisational level, each Council member also developed their own goals for what they wanted to achieve in their respective roles. Below is a summary of some of the key achievements of the 2013-14 AJET National Council.

### *New initiatives*

- Set up Professional Development Conference Calls, of which there have been 4 over the course of the year, where JET participants can actively participate in a Skype call with ex-JET professionals in various fields. Also made the recordings of these calls available on the AJET website
- Established a database of skilled volunteers willing to assist the council with various projects, as a way to connect with more JET participants. Have utilised the services of more than 11 different people across 5 separate projects throughout the year

- Created the first-ever independent joint event with AJET and JALT in Hokuto City, Yamanashi. The event served to educate ALTs about the latest team-teaching and English textbook research as well as allow them to interact with professionals in the education field and share lesson plans with other ALTs
- Initiated two giveaways which increased membership in AJET social media groups and gave JET participants a chance to win education-related resources
- AJET website overhaul project underway, with new design proposed, feedback received from the Council and build phase currently in progress
- New process developed to keep AJET events calendar up to date and populated with a large number of events. Making use of volunteers from the JET community to assist with this process
- Developed and distributed pre-departure information about AJET via embassies worldwide
- Launched a series of four YouTube videos to provide more information to JET participants about some of the work that National AJET does
- Via a competitive process involving JET participants around the country, established a new AJET *yurukyara* (character) to be used in branding and communications
- Created two new Special Interest Groups (SIGs) – one to connect vegetarian and vegan JET participants living in Japan, and the other to support JET participants with family members also in Japan. Also currently working on the creation of a SIG to help JET participants from Ireland and of Irish heritage share ideas and experiences in promoting Irish culture at school and in the community, while also becoming more involved in events held around Japan in March to celebrate St. Patrick's Day
- Negotiated a new deal with White Rabbit Press to provide a discount on purchases to JET participants

### ***Ongoing projects/activities***

- Lifted survey response rates to 26% of the current JET population – the highest ever in the history of AJET and around 150% higher than the previous year
- Developed an AJET report style guide to produce consistent, high-quality reports that were presented to the ministries and CLAIR and were quoted in the Japanese media
- Increased membership of the Facebook Block groups and number of people who 'liked' the National AJET Facebook page to improve AJET's ability to connect with more JET participants
- Increased number of one-off professional development opportunities offered to JET participants, including chances to present professional conferences, join business networking events and to receive discounts on educational materials or seminars
- Maintained AJET's relationship with Temple University and provided JET participants with opportunities to attend their Distinguished Lecturer Series in Tokyo and Osaka
- Maintained AJET's relationship with ITTT by continuing to advertise and work with JET participants to get discounts for the company's 120 hour TEFL course
- Worked to improve the image of AJET and the AJET National Council by focusing on grass-roots achievements and JET participant cooperation

- Continued use of eConnect news and website updates to reach out to JET participants outside of social media. eConnect is now distributed to over 7400 people, of whom around 2200 on average (7% increase on last year) read it on a regular basis
- Continued to develop a clean and consistent image for AJET, to be used in all branded material and publications
- Raised awareness of AJET and its activities amongst the CIR community by posting regularly on the CIR homepage
- Daily maintenance of the AJET website, including posting regular news and information about current events and AJET activities, making additions and changes to existing content to keep resources up to date and uploading new content as required
- Upgraded and updated the online AJET events calendar (including data input method) to contain a more comprehensive range of events around the country
- Conducted a democratic and transparent election process supported by clear information on the AJET website and by publishing key election numbers/statistics to the JET community for the first time
- Maintained a successful working relationship with JALT, including arranging an AJET representative to speak at the annual JALT conference in Kobe, and arranging a JALT speaker for Tokyo Orientation
- Maintained relationships with the majority of organisations who have previously been involved in the Tokyo Orientation Information Fair and wanted to participate again in 2013, as well as attracting two new organisations to participate

### ***Unsuccessful initiatives***

- The council's Community Team attempted to set up a programme called 'Family Link' to match JET participants with families in their community, to participate in various activities together. The idea has been successful for years in some prefectures, but the idea to spread it nationally by the AJET National Council was not successful

# CONCLUSION

AJET's spring survey has clearly indicated that there remains a degree of confusion about the role and purpose of National AJET and the services it does and does not have the capacity to provide to JET Programme participants. In addition, a large number of JET participants are unclear about the distinction between National AJET and the prefectural level AJET chapters. While AJET has made significant progress over the past year to increase the transparency of the organisation and promote its activities and services, clearly there is still some way to go to ensure that as many JET participants as possible understand the wide range of services that are available to them and are easily able to access these service offerings.

In addition, the survey found that AJET having a face-to-face presence at Tokyo Orientation via the AJET Centre and AJET Desk was not only beneficial to JET participants in terms of their overall Tokyo Orientation experience, but was also critical in spreading the name and brand of AJET as well as making JET participants aware of the services that would be available to them once they ventured out into their communities around the country. Although many JET participants may not have been fully able to grasp the extent of National AJET and its services whilst in Tokyo, there is no doubt that without this face-to-face presence and the ability to collect contact information from JET participants (via sign-ups to the AJET mailing list), there will be very limited opportunities for AJET to connect with JET participants in future and be able to promote its services once the participants have reached their local communities and workplaces.

AJET received a number of critical reviews within the survey as well as very helpful suggestions on ways to improve as an organisation and additional services that would be useful to JET participants. However even if AJET is able to action all of these requests, without a way to promote them to JET participants, it is believed there will be limited utilisation of the services. AJET believes that their upgraded website (currently in progress) may help to fill this void to a certain extent, but would also like to consider other ways that it may disseminate information to newly-arrived JET participants in future, especially those that allow for a face-to-face interaction, as the results indicate that these are highly valued. In addition, AJET believes that its current focus on community building and inclusiveness, and lack of membership fees (which were imposed in the past) will only continue to improve community perceptions of the organisation and lead to further increases in the number of JET participants who believe that AJET is a useful and worthwhile stakeholder in the JET Programme.

The successful project initiatives completed by the AJET National Council throughout the course of the 2013-14 term demonstrate that the organisation remains committed to enhancing the JET Programme experience for current and future JET participants. Despite significant structural changes that have taken place throughout the course of the year, representatives on the AJET National Council have continued to strive in improving awareness of AJET and its services, developing new valuable service offerings for JET participants and encouraging JET participant involvement in their communities. It has also welcomed all feedback with a view of constantly improving its services and methods of operation to be as transparent and useful as possible to the JET community. The AJET National Council believes that through its ongoing initiatives, it provides a valuable framework within which JET participants can not only maximise their JET Programme experience from a personal perspective, but also fulfil the Programme's core goal of grass roots internationalisation at the local level.

