

STUDENT EXPERIENCE:
student community

Pilot project

This Is Me

Bridgend College



Pilot project into the
international student
experience in the UK
2017-18

**UK Council
for International
Student Affairs**

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FOR INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION**

This Is Me Bridgend College

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Project aims

'This Is Me' was aimed at raising awareness of the number of students who attend Bridgend College from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The aim was to celebrate differences and welcome cultural diversity within Bridgend College. It was also anticipated that the increase in awareness would help everyone to learn by sharing experiences of religious festivals and cultural events.

Background to Bridgend College

Bridgend College is one of the highest performing colleges in Wales and is rated as 'Excellent' by Estyn. In 2017 the College was awarded an Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Award for Leadership and Governance and is the highest ranking FE College in the Sunday Times Top 100 not-for-profit Best Companies 2017.

Bridgend has a population of 140,100 and of that population only 3,900 describe themselves as from a 'non-white' background (Statistics Wales, 2018). However, Bridgend is situated equidistant between the Welsh capital, Cardiff and the city of Swansea. Both cities have ambitious city deals and regionalisation along the M4 corridor presents both exciting opportunities and challenges for the College.

Project outcomes

There was a lot of good work already happening but 'This Is Me' has enabled us to invest in this area to ensure the College and wider community have been made aware of the cultural diversity at Bridgend. We have also been able to celebrate cultural and religious events. We would not have had the opportunity to do so, on such a large scale, if the funding had not been available.

The project outcomes include:

1. Greater knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity

Jane Richards, the tutor for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) took the lead in rolling out this project and has won a staff award for Teaching Excellence. Staff commented that Jane has been instrumental in raising awareness of cultural diversity across Bridgend College. We now have active social media streams that promote cultural and religious events.

2. A greater understanding of cultural and religious values

A series of events took place over the academic year to promote the inclusivity of Bridgend College and welcome students from all cultural backgrounds. The events celebrated their heritage and raised awareness of British values and citizenship of living in Wales.

The following activities took place:

- a languages quiz
- a Chinese New Year event
- a community cohesion event
- an educational trip to the Senedd in Cardiff Bay
- clog dancing
- promotion and celebration of successes throughout the academic year
- a multicultural bake-off

3. An increased representation of BME and overseas learners involved in Learner Voice and Learner Engagement activities

A number of Learner Engagement activities were attended by BME and overseas learners. We raised the level of participation in Learner Voice (the College student representative system) by having forums in the classroom. Staff then shared students' comments with a wider audience (this was in place of students' direct involvement as there was a lack of confidence to speak publically).

Project set up

It was strongly felt that all the good work that has been done to support students from culturally diverse backgrounds had not been promoted and shared widely enough across the College and the local community. This project and the funding enabled the ESOL team, who have the most contact with students from a variety of cultures, to raise awareness across the academic year in a variety of positive and innovative ways that fully engaged their students, as well as other students across the College.

The initial plan was to include ESOL students as part of the Learner Voice structure within the College, but due to the fact that English is their second language, they did not feel confident enough to speak in a large group. It was agreed that the curriculum staff would ask the students what events they would like to join, in order to share their experiences of, for example:

- living in their own country
- the structure of politics
- national dishes
- national folk dance

Student welcome

A banner of artwork was created to welcome all students in as many languages as possible and is on the College website as well as the top banner of the ESOL Bridgend College Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Project activities and timeline

Facebook

The Facebook page had an increased focus on cultural topics. It promoted and reminded students

of many religious festivals and celebrations and national days within the UK. We celebrated ESOL students passing the Life in the UK test. It also:

- offered volunteering opportunities,
- highlighted changes in current politics (eg the budget)
- shared information from ESOL students in London about how to stay safe online
- promoted wellbeing and focused support
- provided information on anti-slavery, drug and alcohol support
- celebrated National Women's Day

September 2017

Online quiz. To celebrate European Languages Day on 26 September, all ESOL students said 'Hello, How are you?' in their own language and participants had to identify the language.

October 2017

ESOL students celebrated Shwmae Day with mini Welsh lessons (students learned how to express likes on the topic of food).

ESOL students visited Castell Coch.

November 2017

The College received a visit from PC Dave Lawrence, the Hate Crime Officer, to raise awareness and inform students how to recognise and report a hate crime. He also promoted job opportunities to work for South Wales Police 'Working Towards a Representative Workforce' to BME / black and minority Communities. (An ESOL student responded to this and received confirmation that she has been offered a place to train as a Police Officer).

December 2017

ESOL students attended the Christmas Pantomime which was a new experience for many.

There was a Christmas party with food from each culture provided as well as cards, gifts and a quiz.

ESOL students gave presentations on:

- famous people from their country
- the political systems in their country
- famous places in their country

and they also produced posters on what to do in different emergency situations. Students voted for their favourite presentation or poster and prizes were awarded in each category.

January 2018

ESOL students celebrated Saint Dwywnwen's Day when they visited the Student Services area and had tea and Welsh cakes.

February 2018

ESOL students, Childcare and Health & Social Care students celebrated Chinese New Year and enjoyed the Bridgend International group performing plays, Korean Martial Arts, songs and traditional lion dancing. Chinese food was provided and everyone who came to watch received a Chinese calendar and a fortune cookie.

This was the first time many Bridgend students and staff had witnessed and been involved in such an event. When tutors saw the quality of the event, they contacted peers to bring additional groups of students to attend and be a part of the celebration. Following the event there were many positive



comments from students, staff and external visitors about how much they had enjoyed the experience. They were excited to be involved and we received emails from tutors expressing their thanks.

March 2018

Saint David's Day - Sut mae tywydd heddiw? What is the weather like today?

The students and staff used icons and Welsh language to describe the weather they were experiencing that day to celebrate Welsh history and language.

Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team (EYST) event to offer support and meet the needs of BME young people, families and individuals including refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales.

ESOL students took part in Welsh Clog dancing with Tudur Phillips with instructions in Welsh. Students participated in a 'twmpath' among other dances.

June 2018

ESOL students went to Cardiff Bay, saw many landmarks and visited the Senedd. They met with RAF personnel, received a speech from the First Minister Carwyn Jones AM for Bridgend and met with Kirsty Williams, the Minister of Education in Wales. Students thanked Kirsty for the support ESOL students receive from the Welsh Government.

End of term party with a traditional dish from the country of each student.

Challenges

Ensuring the project was delivered consistently and was embedded within the curriculum was challenging. Priority was always given to exams and deadlines and ensuring students completed their courses successfully. The budget (£2,000) was adequate to deliver the project which included outside partner agencies, trips for all students, transport, participating in clog dancing, hosting a community cohesion event and a prize for the languages test.

Sustainability

There is an ESOL team in the College who promote pathways (education and employment) to their students and work hard to promote cultural awareness and diversity. When the student moves onto a full time, FE course, they are encouraged to take advantage of the support from the Wellbeing Team. This is to continue to promote and encourage all students to take advantage of the student engagement opportunities such as Learner Voice, Be Active and Be Involved.



Regarding 'This Is Me' activities, we will continue with those that had an initial start up cost (eg marketing and promotional material that has been time protected). There have been positive links made within the community which has enabled us to work collaboratively with some groups in a way that is mutually beneficial, such as South Wales Police and the local Chinese community. There are new initiatives being developed within the Bridgend community to identify ethnic minority groups and to establish positive support and inclusion. The College will continue its efforts to actively raise awareness of cultural similarities and differences and to make support available to all, but also to have increased representation of international students in Learner Voice and student engagement activities.

Recommendations for other UK institutions:

- Identify staff that are equally invested / passionate in raising awareness of your project aims.
- Identify course areas that lend themselves easily to your key goal and tasks
- Identify local partners/organisations that are willing to support your project at little or no cost – they are out there!
- Work collaboratively so that the work is shared out rather than one person trying to manage the entire project and bring ideas to fruition.
- Use promotion/branding/hashtags that are immediately recognisable and encourage all involved in the project to use them, share posts or retweet to get as much coverage as possible.

Links to further information

Statistics Wales, 2018 <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Ethnicity/ethnicity-by-area-ethnicgroup>

Social media has played a pivotal part in raising awareness and sharing cultural experiences at Bridgend College.

Bridgend College Website - English for Speakers of Other Languages: <https://www1.bridgend.ac.uk/our-courses/learn-english-esol/>

Bridgend College Website - Important College Events which include Equality and Diversity events: <https://www1.bridgend.ac.uk/important-dates/>

ESOL Twitter account - ESOL Bridgend College @jerichards4

Facebook Page - ESOL Bridgend College: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Language-School/ESOL-Bridgend-College-778774598886649/>

All photos posted on the ESOL Bridgend College Facebook page promoting Religious Festivals, Cultural Events, Citizenship and Awareness weeks / months: <https://www.facebook.com/778774598886649/photos/a.778789318885177.1073741828.778774598886649/1652233251540775/?type=3>

Contact

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The UK Council for International Student Affairs is the UK's national advisory body serving the interests of international students and those who work with them.

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