

# Higher Education: More than a Degree

## Online Student Communities ► Extra-Curricular Communities

### Case Study 5: Winter Wonderland 2020

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#### What was the issue?

In a climate where students started their academic year with online learning, and unable to attend any of the traditional in-person events that are usually organised by students' associations, the FCSA felt that students were missing out on the opportunity to engage with extra-curricular activities.

The positive response from students to the online events organised for Freshers in September 2020 gave the FCSA the idea of increasing the opportunity for engagement by reaching out to other colleges and universities, who may be experiencing the same lack of interaction with students.

#### How was it solved?

Jade Burnett, the FCSA President Welfare & Equality, reached out to sabbatical officers of students' associations across Scotland to coordinate running a series of online events and competitions aimed at college and university students. Five students' associations (SAs) took on the offer: Edinburgh Napier, Abertay University, Scotland's Rural College, Borders College and Glasgow Clyde College.

The events were designed to engage students who were struggling with the pandemic restrictions, to help provide them with an outlet for their practical skills and a fun distraction. There were eight competitions: Great Winter Bake Off; Ice-olation Olympics; Creative Writing; Festive Beauty Competition; Art-tic Attack; Gamers Tournament; Video Recreation and an Online Quiz with a special host. Each competition included a £100 prize. Each organisation was then able to offer a large competition to their students with only inputting £100. Each SA had a local champion who was then judged alongside champions from the other SAs.



The events were advertised on FCSA social media and on the FCSA Digital Office on Teams, to reach as many students as possible. Each event was introduced by a different sabbatical officer to highlight collaboration with other institutions and to spur the competitiveness spirit in students.

A survey submitted to students ahead of the competitions collected positive feedback with 72% students replying they were interested in taking part. The FCSA received a total of 120 entries across all the competitions, and all SAs had entries for every competition. The local and national winners were celebrated on the social media channels of all the SAs, showcasing and recognising their efforts to a national audience.

Student feedback shows that such competitions are more inclusive and attract a wider range of students, including part-time or evening students who would not usually be able to attend on-campus events. The events were also designed to give students the possibility to put their course skills to use - for example, culinary arts students, computing students, beauty students - linking the competitions to the knowledge they gained during the year.

By teaming up with other SAs and SUs we also increased social media presence across several platforms, and shared the cost of the prizes. From a sabbatical officer perspective, sharing the workload with other officers helped in achieving more events and attracting a wider range of businesses who might sponsor an event (for instance, the Quiz celebrity host).

## What comes next?

Feedback from students on the FCSA Digital Office showed that students appreciated the opportunities to engage with other students across the country and class rep feedback at meetings strengthened this position, with students asking for similar events to be organised in the future.

The FCSA strategic goals include working with communities, therefore, in the future there will be more focus on similar events, as they engage a wider population, including potential students, promoting awareness of the role of the FCSA not only within the college environment, but as a constructive force for change within Fife.

In line with the Scottish Funding Council's coherence review and its recommendation for cross-institutional collaboration, the FCSA will reach out to other SAs to capitalise on joint events and increase student participation, widening the range of activities to provide an inclusive calendar of events, where all students can find something they can engage with.

An evaluation of the best attended events will inform the planning for the upcoming calendars, keeping a pulse on students' feedback to steer the FCSA offer in the direction indicated by our students.



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