

## 2018 Football World Cup in Russia

### Outreach events, working with schools in the North East of England

#### Report on feedback received

The outreach events themed around the Football World Cup 2018 and Russia as the hosting country were held at **Langley Moor Primary School**, County Durham, on 9 July 2018 (*Event 1*) and at Durham University for the transition week of the **Whytrig Middle School**, Whitley Bay, on 11 July 2018 (*Event 2*).

**Event 1** (E1) comprised of a standard session introducing Russia, the Russian language, and the city of Samara as one of the World Cup sites, offered to all years from reception (aged 4-5) to Y6 (aged 10-11). The approximate length of the session ranged from 20-25 mins for Y0-Y1, to 30 mins for Y2-Y4, to 45 mins for Y5-Y6 students. The average class size was around 30 pupils. All sessions were delivered by Dr Polina Kliuchnikova.

**Event 2** (E2) hosted a group of 64 Y4 students from two primary schools of the Tyne & Wear region who spent their transition week at Whytrig Middle School but were accompanied by both their primary school teachers and their new, middle school instructors. The event included one introductory and one concluding plenary (run by the event coordinator, Dr Kliuchnikova, and lasting around 20 mins each), and two parallel workshops, each lasting approximately one hour – the one run by volunteer tutors, Svetlana Leonenko and Irina Sharonina, introduced the audience to the Russian language; and the other, run by volunteer tutor, Elizabeth Ovcinikova, focused on Russian geography and culture.

**Feedback forms** were distributed among Y3-Y6 participants at E1 and among all attendees at E2. The feedback form distributed to Y3-Y4 at E1 contained a single question with the option of either writing out a response and/or providing a drawing to the answer. A different type of feedback form, which included a series of 5 questions to respond to in writing, were distributed among Y5-Y6 pupils at E1 and all pupils at E2.

#### Event 1: Y3-Y4 feedback

The form template prompted the participants to write or draw what they liked the most about the session. (The form included a greeting in Russian transliterated in English as 'Privet!' and a picture of the World Cup 2018 mascot, Zabivaka the Dog, both relating to topics covered in introductory sessions.) 54 children attended the event and all provided feedback.

3 participants chose to exclusively draw their replies – 2 sketched a spaceship (a subject mentioned in the presentation as one of Samara's local trademarks); 1 mimicked the mascot picture on the form making it more like a football player kicking a ball.

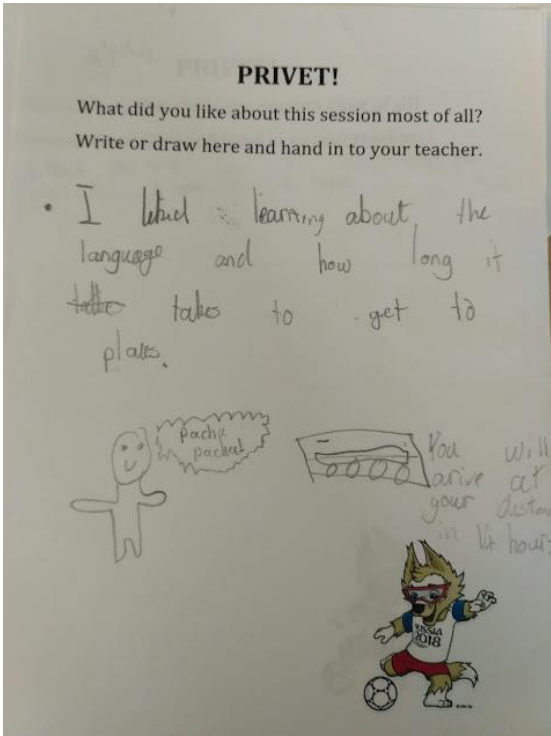
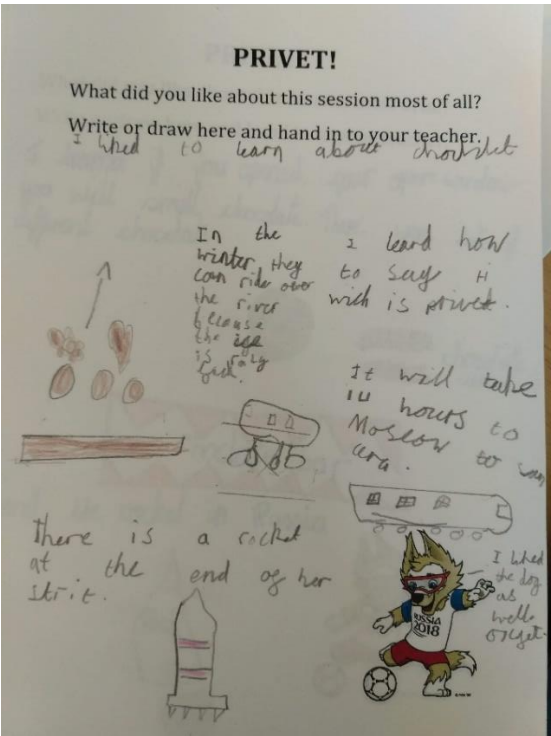
21 participants supplemented their mainly pictorial replies with short descriptions – e.g. naming objects they drew or writing short phrases like 'I [heart] X'. The majority of these respondents made references to chocolate by drawing either chocolate bars/candies or a factory that produces them (which was another particularly 'local' theme mentioned about Samara in the presentation). The words to accompany these drawings included 'chocolate', 'candy', 'sweets', 'customer', 'chocolate factory', etc. There were also references to the World Cup/football culture (e.g. copying the mascot from the feedback form with words 'Russia 2018' or depicting a stadium with an ongoing football game and a sign 'Russia scored' close to one of the gates).

2 more pupils made drawings accompanied by text in which they provided facts they had learnt at the session ('In the winter you can drive cars over the ice' [of the river Volga]) or quoting the words in Russian they had just learnt (e.g. 'paka' [пока], 'privet', 'spasibo'). Their drawings also contained a greater variety of themes when compared to the group described above.

The majority, however, namely 25 participants, based their feedback principally on written answers, supplemented by one or more drawings as illustrations to their text or additional points to what they wrote. Their answers ranged from a single line, e.g. 'I liked the spaceship' to more extended entries. 11 respondents chose to focus on a single fact they remembered and liked from the presentation (chocolate/chocolate factory in Samara being the most popular answer, but also spaceship industry in Samara, time zones across the country, journey time between Moscow and Samara). Others selected a number of facts/new words they had learnt (all above mentioned themes included and also weather/climate in Russia), while a few added their own personal impressions to the list of facts they liked. For example, one of the respondents wrote:

*I liked everything. I thought the language was interesting. The cities look beautiful. I learnt that bye is paka. It was cool about the rockets there. Volga was really nice. It was also cool when we learnt about the chocolate.*

The respondent included a glossary of Russian words learnt (bye, thank you, I am) and a selection of drawings (Russia's outline with time zones in different colours, a space rocket, chocolate with a sign 'I [heart] Russia' on it, landscape with the Volga flowing, etc.) to accompany the reply. Some other answers also included a more creative way of combining written text and pictures, or using words learnt in Russian to provide a more complex reflection on the presentations heard (see two examples below).



Three respondents only chose to write down their impressions without any illustrations. One of them based their feedback on personal observations, such as 'I liked about how the thing where you store tea it looks like a trophie' [sic].

The feedback provided by this group can help us observe how learning about a distant country/new language/unknown places/cultural objects is interpreted by children aged 7 to 9. What was presented to them in the sessions has been interpreted by the participants in the following key ways:

- as 'learning material' per se, a compendium of facts introduced, some of which sounded interesting enough to be remembered and reproduced (with minor interpretations). Here, the more surprising and unusual this presented information was, the more likely it was to get into the final feedback form (for example, the range of seasonal temperatures, the number of time zones in Russia or the length of routine journeys across it).
- as personally relevant, i.e. coinciding with the children's own preferences (e.g. references to the chocolate factory because it happens to be a favourite treat or the inclusion of football-related drawings due to their interest in the game). Here the most personally appealing themes (e.g. the chocolate factory in Samara) sometimes received further interpretations, with children building basic narratives around them (e.g. imagining a group of people buying chocolate and consuming it) or re-interpretations based on prior knowledge (e.g. the inclusion of the sign 'Willie Wonka' on the drawing of a chocolate factory). Children thereby made associations that connected the new material with their immediate knowledge, practices and familiar cultural references, trying to build new content onto it.
- as invitation for cross-cultural exploration and possible creativity within these newly acquired margins. These examples might include quoting Russian words not just in a manner of lists but trying to communicate in them, e.g. writing 'paka' (Russian for 'bye', as was introduced at the session) at the bottom of their form, as conclusion to their answer; or signing their feedback form (which was not compulsory but was still the case in many forms) by writing 'Ia [name]' (Russian for 'I am [name]', as was introduced at the session). It also included using drawing to build a proto-narrative (e.g. a sketch of someone travelling by train from 'Moscow' to the 'Volga river' or the aforementioned drawing of a stadium with 'Russia scored' on it, or a set of clocks showing different times in different time zones, with a spaceship travelling across them).

## **E1 Y5-6 and E2 feedback**

### **The Questionnaire**

For older pupils of E1 (aged 9-11) and all participants of E2 (aged 8-9), the feedback form included the following 5 questions:

1. *What did you know about Russia and the Russian language before today?*
2. *What did you like most about the session (sessions) today?*
3. *What are your associations (first words/images coming to your mind) when you hear 'Russia' now?*
4. *Would you like to visit Russia or start learning the language?*
5. *Are you watching the World Cup 2018? If yes, do you support any team?*

50 respondents completed the form at E1 and 59 submitted forms at E2. The replies will first be analysed separately, by event, not only because of the (relatively minor) age difference between the two groups of respondents, but also because of the rather more substantial difference in the volume of material and duration of presentations provided for the two groups (a 45-minute session by a single presenter in E1 vs. almost 3 hours of activities with a team of facilitators in E2).

## E1: Y5-Y6 feedback



**Q1** Out of 50 respondents 19 stated that they had had no prior knowledge about the country or language before the session. It might be argued that there might be a 'before and after' factor influencing the response – they felt they had not known as much as they got to know during the presentation – or, as a couple of respondents put it quite straightforwardly, 'before this lesson I didn't know anything' and 'not very much but now I know a bit more' [sic]. A few answers use the 'nothing, except...' formula, which first admits that the speaker does not know much about the question but then offers a bit of information which might count as a counter-example to the beginning of the phrase (e.g. 'nothing, only that Russia is the biggest country in the world' or 'I didn't know anything except the World Cup was held there'). Those who chose to answer they knew at least something prior to the session also picked from these two facts – Russia's size (5 respondents) or the World Cup reference (9), while a few mentioned its capital (3), food (2) or language. A couple of respondents said they knew a couple of words in Russian (e.g. 'because of the video game') and one child stated s/he could speak Russian fluently (because of a Russian-speaking parent).

**Q2** For the second question, most of the replies included particular facts that had been acquired during the sessions: traditional Russian food which had been introduced (or, as one respondent put it, 'learning the differences between the Russian and English food'); the football related themes – stadiums and cities hosting the World Cup (Samara being one particular example introduced at the presentation); time zones or climate characteristics; Russian language in general and specific skills acquired during the session. On the whole, the most common word used in answers to this question was 'learning' (one participant suggested 'learning new things'; another one wrote 'learning about culture'). There were a couple of replies which dealt with this on a more reflexive level, either constructing an interlocutor ('learning about your home country') or analysing the structure of the presentation ('that the session linked food, World Cup and lots more').

**Q3** The third question turned out to be the most challenging: a couple of forms were returned with this question unanswered while others responded in a wide variety of ways. The most popular reply was the World Cup (generally or with some nuances), which gives a clear idea that the recent event did put Russia on a mental map of many of the respondents. Other popular choices would include, in descending order of mentions, objects (e.g. Russian food in general or specific food items; Russian dolls or the balalaika; spacecraft); places (Moscow or Samara; or just 'cities' or 'places' as variants); facts ('how big it is', time zones or climate – 'snow', 'beach'); Russian language and particular references to it (e.g. the alphabet and different words). Most of this was covered during the presentations; thus, picking these items as their first-choice associations, children may have altered any previous associations they had about the subject (if, indeed, they had any). However, quite a significant number of replies, mentioned variants which had not been introduced in the session at all and therefore represent a more general image of the country/language which children had developed beforehand. The most popular of these choices was the Russian flag (or, as one informant put it, 'In my mind I imagine a Russian flag waving'), Vladimir Putin, and Baikonur (the world's largest space-launch facility, located in Kazakhstan, but administered by Russia). Very few responses comment on the people residing in the country (Putin excluded) or make any connections to environments of direct relevance to children; one response presents Russia as 'a quiet empty country. (No ofens)' [sic] whereas another describes it as 'a place that sounds like a great place to be'; one respondent used the newly-acquired skill of introducing themselves in Russian as their first association by putting 'Yah [their name]' as reply to the question).

**Q4** As far as preferences about visiting Russia or learning Russian are concerned, two respondents answered 'no' to the question, two left the space blank, another two replied 'no', but explained this was because of 'not liking to travel' in general or 'not being interested but having fun today'. One respondent picked learning the language but opted out of travelling to Russia, while 21 preferred travelling to learning the language (some explaining their choice as, for example, 'because there is lots to see in Russia' or 'because it is very big and warm'). The child with a Russian parent had already visited the country. All the rest, totalling 22 respondents, chose both options for their answers – one of them elaborated on their choice: 'because if I meet a Russian person I can talk to them'.

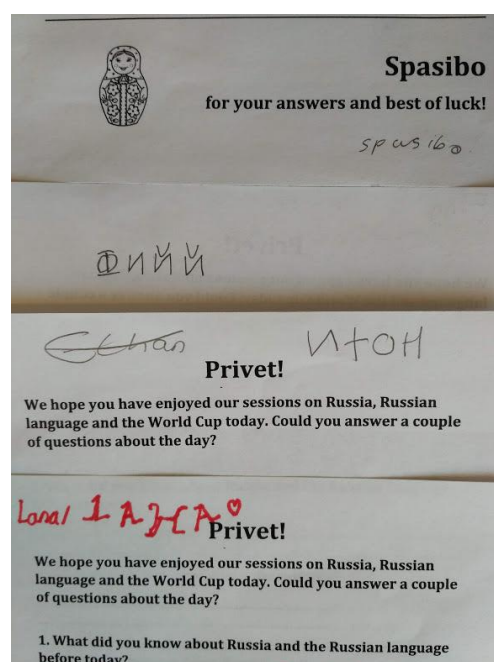
**Q5** The final question seemed to be the easiest and the responses were almost unanimous. Only 9 respondents stated that they did not watch the World Cup matches (for two of them this did not mean they did not support any team; both admitted their family members were dedicated supporters of the English team so they 'guessed' they shared the sentiment). The rest all replied positively to the question and the majority picked England as their favourite team ('because I was born here' or 'my whole family is supporting England'). Other picks for favourite team included Russia (4); Sunderland (2); France (2); Brazil (2); Italy, Portugal and Argentina (each with a single mention).

Only one feedback form contained something aside from the reply to the questions (and occasional signing on the sheet) – namely 'bye-bye' ('paka, paka') in Russian transliteration.

## E2: Y4 feedback



This format of questionnaire proved to be quite demanding for the slightly younger children who were only transitioning to middle school so there were more unanswered questions or shorter replies to most of the questions. There were, however, more examples of drawings/scribbles made outside of the space designed for questionnaire answers (see some examples below). This was also due to the fact that the children spent longer at E2 and acquired certain specific skills in the sessions (e.g. learning how to write their own name in Cyrillic script). It is also possible that because this event took place outside of their familiar school environment (namely the premises of Durham University) they saw the event as more 'informal' and 'playful'.



**Q1** Out of 59 submitted feedback forms, 34 stated no prior knowledge of Russia/the language; 13 knew Russian greetings or some basic facts about the alphabet; 6 mentioned the World Cup; 4 the size of the country; one respondent reported the fact that ‘they poured there tea on the sorsa’ [sic; ‘they pour their tea on the saucer’].

**Q2** The most popular part of the event (with 26 mentions) related to language learning, including learning the alphabet, trying to speak the language and transliterating one’s own name in Russian, or, as one respondent put it, ‘making names Russian’. Some of the children signed their forms in Russian (as in the examples above), while one participant replied to Q2 by writing their name in Russian. Another popular answer (with 14 mentions) was the folk song and dance which the pupils did at the ‘Russian culture’ workshop (Kalinka-Malinka). Others chose ‘learning facts’ (or, more particularly, ‘tea party’, ‘dinner’ etc.) or colouring the Russian doll (one of the activities at the ‘culture’ workshop). Only a couple focused on the communicative side of the event, e.g. ‘laughing’, ‘getting to now my new classmates’[sic] or ‘how we learnt something while having fun’.

**Q3** In terms of associations, the most commonly mentioned category (19 mentions) included language-related ideas – the alphabet or some single words (like ‘privet’, ‘paka’, etc), more abstract ideas like ‘to speak Russian’ or ‘learning more language’. Another popular choice (15 mentions) was the World Cup and the football theme in general; further common replies included Russia’s geography and Moscow as its capital (7); tea drinking rituals (4); Russian dolls (4); and the Kalinka song and dance (3). A considerable amount of associations was aimed at the personal experience of participants rather than the ‘facts’ they had acquired: for example, ‘I understand some of that’, ‘A lovely warm place’, ‘I know what to say’, ‘surprised’, ‘I had lots of questions’, ‘I know how to speak Russian YEY!’, etc. This may have been the result of the fact that they had spent several hours in total at the event (as compared to the relatively short, 45-minute sessions at E1) as well as the fact that they were engaged in more practical, hands-on activities during the day.

**Q4** As for the possible prospects of visiting the country or learning the language, 7 participants refused either of these options (one said, however, ‘I would not want to visit Russia but I would like to learn about Russia’); 8 respondents opted for visiting the country rather than learning the language (one of them explained it so that ‘learning the language should be pretty easy’); 12 pupils said they would prefer to learn Russian rather than go to Russia. The majority (32) chose both options (for, to quote the feedback, ‘I find it very fun and interesting’ or ‘because I would love to see what is there’).

**Q5** The World Cup was certainly the mostly relevant topic for the group. Only 13 respondents stated that they did not follow the football matches or supported any of the teams, whereas the rest expressed their interest in the event and mostly mentioned England as their favourite team at the championship. Other answers that were, however, in the small minority included Germany (2); Russia (2; including one accompanied by the comment ‘I support England and now Russia too’); France, Portugal, Poland/Croatia (1 each). It is worth noting that E2 took place on the day of the semi-final game between England and Croatia, something mentioned a considerable number of times during the event.



## General observations and recommendations

Introducing a new culture/language to pre-teen schoolchildren is a matter of balancing factual information, emotional encouragement and practical activities. As the above feedback forms demonstrate, the starting assumption of the group is one of minimal knowledge about a foreign country (here Russia). Many tended to jump to the conclusion that they knew 'nothing' about it, whereas this was, in fact, not completely true. This might be due to the lack of personal connection to the country in question or because of a generally low motivation to explore other countries and cultures at such an early age and the pupils' predominantly monocultural school environment.

The same applies to basic communicative skills in a foreign language – even though some of respondents had some prior knowledge of Russian words, they chose not to demonstrate that either during the sessions or in their feedback forms. Given the fact that the majority of attendees reported that they enjoyed the communicative part and learning about a new culture most of all, the key challenge was to maintain their cross-language competence and intercultural communicative skills, i.e. not simply teaching them a variety of 'fun facts' but prompting them to see parallels with their own everyday life.

The sessions were designed to combat some of the most widespread stereotypes about Russian culture or language (mainly, their perceived 'difficulty', 'distance' or 'strangeness'). However, what seems to be an even greater challenge was keeping their interest on the subject which might have little relevance to their own everyday environment. The World Cup provided an excellent opportunity for this – it did not simply put the hosting country of 2018 to the mental map of most fans, including still quite young children, but it also created a unique environment to exercise their active interest in other cultures, geographies and languages more generally.

Participants of the two events demonstrated that their interest is greatly dependant on two different interpretational frameworks – one dictated by the environment (the 'educational' framework) and another one based on their personal interests (the 'recreational' one). One of the strategical priorities for future outreach events is shifting the focus from the balance between the two towards developing a more creative and performative framework to interpret a new culture/language, which would also serve as a prompt for further cross-cultural experimentation. For example, some children used the new language in an environment which would not require that at all (signing their forms in Russian or communicating through them with an imagined Russian-speaking reader by writing 'hello' or 'bye' or 'thank you' where appropriate); others would project the questions into their own life situations in order to give a personalised rationale for their answers; some stated explicitly that their interests had altered after exposure to a new culture.

However, one of the areas that was poorly covered, as the feedback suggests, is the association of the country and culture with actual people and real-life stories – in their answers, respondents focused on objects and places far more than on experiences and people. Thus, to achieve the shift towards 'cross-cultural interest' at a more convincing scale, the sessions should be less content-based, or thematically relevant (e.g. in this case to the World Cup per se), but should be more practically oriented, pupils-centred and should include more activities, and more real-life stories focused on key characters with whom the audience could relate.



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