

Scottish cafes to host lessons with a latte

Digital learning project offering English comes north of the border as education cutbacks hit colleges — with Spanish and art set to follow

Julia Horton

Coffee has long been a key ingredient for all-night cramming sessions before life-changing exams, as many students will testify. So a new scheme offering the chance to learn at leisure at a pop-up college in Scottish cafes could be a recipe for success.

The PopUp College project, which is popular in England, is launching north of the border to give thousands of people who cannot access traditional college classes the chance to study while enjoying a latte with others.

From next week, City of Glasgow College will take bookings for an English language course at a Costa Coffee cafe in St Enoch shopping centre after Easter.

Other Scottish further education colleges that have suffered cutbacks are thought to be keen to follow suit. The move could lead to cafes hosting courses



The Costa Coffee chain is taking part in the PopUp College scheme

only software that comprehensively covers the syllabus of SQA Esol National 4, a key Scottish qualification.

"Unlike other online English learning courses, this is specifically tailored to the SQA course," she said. "It is aimed particularly at people who are perhaps a bit more serious about their learning, who want to learn to help them go into further education and work."

Klik2learn is in talks with other Scottish colleges about taking part in the PopUp College, Attridge added.

England has dozens of PopUp Colleges at Costa Coffee and Krispy Kreme stores, mainly teaching languages. Jason Elsom, the project's founder, said government cutbacks to college language programmes were driving interest north and south of the border.

"We are in geographically and demographically very different areas," he said. "We are getting some interest from learning providers in Scotland where apparently there is big demand for English... [while] in the southwest of London, a more affluent population could be learning holiday Spanish."

The initial course in Glasgow will cost about £80 for six weeks. If it is successful, the college will consider expanding it to include free courses and offer the chance to take exams to gain qualifications.

nationwide in subjects ranging from holiday Spanish to art appreciation.

Under the Glasgow college course, learners will use tailored software developed by Klik2learn, a Scottish digital education specialist, to study in their own time. They will meet a college tutor once a week at the cafe, which will open after hours under the pop-up scheme.

David Cullen, the college's joint head of curriculum for English languages, said demand for the project was expected to

be high and that it could widen access to education and reduce waiting lists.

"This is an innovative approach for us because the majority of our Esol [English for speakers of other languages] is face-to-face on campus," he said.

"This means we can perhaps tap into another demographic of people who can't study nine-to-five because they have children, work or other commitments. It is much more flexible because they can use the software any time, and

receive feedback from the lecturer once a week where they can also work face-to-face on pronunciation, for example.

"There is massive unmet demand for learning English [as a foreign language] across the city, with about 4,000 people on a waiting list for Esol courses. They are asylum seekers, refugees and, increasingly, European migrants. This might be a way to tackle that waiting list, too."

Ann Attridge, founding director of Klik2learn, said the digital course was the

Oscar-winning star backs youth theatre campaign

Jason Allardyce

Emma Thompson, the Oscar-winning actress, has called for ongoing support for Scottish Youth Theatre (SYT) after a campaign backed by The Sunday Times averted its closure.

An injection of funds saw the Scottish government provide £150,000, matching pledges of cash from private companies including Baillie Gifford, enabling it to stay open beyond July after missing out on regular funding from the arts agency Creative Scotland.

Thompson, patron of SYT, said: "I am thrilled that SYT has been offered a stay of execution and ask everyone who can to support this fabulous life-changing initiative, so vital to the cultural life of Scotland's young people."

SYT helped launch the careers of big names such as Gerard Butler and Karen Gillan, and Dunkirk star Jack Lowden, who described it as "an incredible place fit for a country with big ideas".

It has helped thousands of other young people develop life skills, including creativity, confidence and team spirit. As The Sunday Times highlighted last week, it has also supported many young

people affected by mental illness.

Other artists including Taggart star Blythe Duff, musician KT Tunstall and Lord of the Rings actor Billy Boyd have welcomed the "fantastic" news as SYT now implements a long-term funding strategy to sustain it for more than the next year.

Chief executive Jacky Hardacre voiced thanks "for the overwhelming support we have received from the private sector and the Scottish government".

Despite the good news, she said there is still some fundraising to be done. "Our commitment is to providing a youth theatre for Scotland that provides excellence for as many young people as possible, regardless of their background."

"This funding agreement only lasts a year so it is our responsibility to ensure we have a long-term sustainable business model to deliver on these aims. We will be exploring a number of fundraising opportunities and we welcome any offers of advice or financial support from individuals and the private sector."

Anyone wishing to offer support or donate can call SYT on 0141 552 3988 or see scottishyouththeatre.org



The Scottish Youth Theatre has received a cash boost

Fossil skull found in Kenya is of giant lion

Shingi Mararike

Fossil hunters have found the remains of a gigantic lion — far larger than those in Africa today — which stood close to human height.

The beast probably evolved to hunt the herds of giant herbivores roaming east Africa 200,000 years ago, according to the researchers who found its fossilised skull in Kenya.

"This skull is the first indication of the existence of a population of giant lions," they said in a paper in the *Journal of Paleontology*.

The researchers found the fossil at Natodomeri, northwest Kenya. They used the remains of its teeth and skull to calculate its size — which was far larger than modern lions.

"The skull is remarkable for its very great size,

equivalent to the largest cave lions of Pleistocene Eurasia and much larger than any previously known lion from Africa, living or fossil," they concluded.

Modern lions first appeared in south and east Africa, evolving into two groups: one lives in eastern and southern Africa, the other includes lions in west Africa and India.

In recent years, the diminishing lion population has become a matter of international concern. A 2015 study revealed that their numbers may halve by 2040.

"The image of the lion is pervasive in human culture from its earliest preserved expression in paleolithic art to more modern cultural references like Disney's the *Lion King*," said the researchers.

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