

focus

Summer sessions at UK high schools

Summer school programmes at UK high schools are a growing sector of the language teaching market.

The market for high school summer programmes in the UK has expanded rapidly in recent years and is showing no signs of slowing down. Robert Swan, Principal of Padworth College in Reading, speaks for many when he says, "We have experienced steadily increasing numbers of international students who wish to come to England for language holidays over the past 10 years." Accordingly, the range and number of courses on offer is becoming increasingly diverse, along with the students attracted to them.

The key to success for many schools is the range and quality of on-campus facilities available, as well as ensuring activities are up-to-date and exciting for school-aged children. The different character and facilities that various schools offer can also provide unique selling points that distinguish them from others in the summer school sector, as well as language schools. Swan notes that Padworth College "is based in an 18th-century country house set in beautiful grounds in an excellent location just 45 minutes from Heathrow airport". He adds that the school's facilities include tennis courts, an open air swimming pool as well as spacious grounds for recreational activities.

The fact that students can live, learn and undertake activities all in the same place is one of the major attractions of high school-based courses for international students and

drama, hair and beauty, yoga [and] flower arranging, which the girls love", according to Madaras.

Providing a wide range of exciting activity options is an important part of managing any successful summer school, but one school has diversified by offering extra activities of a more academic nature. Robert Price from Brooke House College in Market Harborough says that they started offering an English plus course on their summer school programme three years ago. "We run a course of 27 hours of lessons in which students learn about British society, culture, politics and history," he says. "This course is generally taken up by Russians [and] is unique to Brooke House, as far as I know."

Most summer schools identify European student markets, such as Russia, Spain, Germany and Italy, as being particularly important in the sector, although schools often strive to ensure a diverse nationality mix on their summer courses. Madaras says that they have 26 different nationalities represented in their summer school each year. "If we start to fill up on one nationality, I stop accepting students from that country."

Price adds that agents often have their own limits for the number of students sent from their country each year in order to ensure client satisfaction rates. "Spanish, Italian and Russian agents are the ones for

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their parents. Cosmo Jackson from Hurtwood House in Dorking says that they offer students the "Rolls-Royce of holiday courses". He explains, "Hurtwood House runs a very high tempo, action-packed language holiday course at the exclusive end of the market. With first class tuition in the mornings, followed by activities from golf, go-karting, horse riding and trips to the West End theatres, we aim to offer children the holiday of a lifetime."

Other independent schools, such as Heathfield School in Ascot, use their single sex status to target niche markets. "As we are the only girls course accredited by the British Council we do have a niche market and are always very popular," says Helen Madaras at the school. "The largest [student] market is Japan and we always have to turn down groups. Single sex [education] is popular with Japanese [students] and [there are] limited opportunities."

Like many other summer schools run for international students in the UK, Heathfield School provides a comprehensive schedule of sporting activities, along with "cooking, dance,

ensuring a marketing mix within the school," he explains. "They send a restricted number of students each year, always checking the number of other nationalities in the previous year."

Other schools have been developing their range of courses for international students to appeal to different nationalities and thereby ensure student diversity. Swan comments that the school has recently introduced year-round language courses that are similar in content to summer school courses. "These are of particular appeal to students in countries where their school holidays do not coincide with UK holidays and they can therefore take their language holiday when it suits them, or indeed, combine it with summer school to extend their stay."

At Brooke House College changes to the course content of their summer programmes are also in the offing, in order to cater for a newly identified target student market. "Nigeria is emerging as an enormous summer school market," asserts Price. "Our English plus course will be extended this year to cater for [this] market."

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