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# High school summer

Using their own teachers, premises and resources, a number of high schools around the world offer high quality short-term summer courses, either for those planning on long-term enrolment at the school or those on the lookout for a unique summer study experience. **AMY BAKER** reports.

Those coming to Clifton take the course in order to acclimatise and settle into living and studying here more quickly when term starts in September," relates Tony Evans, Marketing Manager of Vacation Courses for Clifton College in Bristol, UK. "Others choose this course because it is a serious and valid summer programme compared to many others on offer and their parents see it as a valuable investment in their child's education."

Evans recaps the *raison d'être* of the high school summer programme – an acclimatising preparation for continuing students or a serious study experience in suitable surroundings for short-term enrollees. And according to high school professionals, it seems that more and more parents are considering a short-term high school programme, delivered by the school itself rather than a third party, because of the perceived academic standing of such a course.

Michael Bartlett at All Saints Anglican School in Merrimac, QLD, Australia observes, "Our programme pretty much mirrors a typical local high school student's daily programme, but delivered in an ESL context. I think the days of just offering less academic "activity-based" summer programmes are becoming more a thing of the past. Parents want more academically focused, serious language programmes for their children."

For agents and parents keen to find out about the academic credentials of any summer course available, Blair McDonald of Braemar College in Toronto, ONT, Canada underlines the main differences between high school delivery and language school provision, in terms of teacher qualifications. "Because we are a high school, all our teachers hold degrees in education, and are members of the Ontario College of Teachers," he relates.

"This is the key difference with language schools who are not as picky with regard to teaching credentials. This is a key selling point for agents. Our curriculum is based on the Ontario Ministry of Education's guidelines and all our teachers and staff are used to dealing with teens – and hence know how to handle sticky situations. This is the factor that prompts agents to refer groups to us rather than language schools – which typically deal with adults, not teens."

Robert Price, Head of the International Office at Brooke House College in Market Harborough, Leicestershire in the UK, makes the same observation. "We do not let our premises to a summer school organisation and, therefore, students enrolled here are taught by full-time, 'career' English language teachers," he underlines.

McDonald relates that significant progress can be made by teenage students in as little as four weeks in his experience, and if they study at Braemar College, entrance and exit test results are given to students to take home and show their parents.

At Bedford School Study Centre in Bedford, UK, Olive Heffill points out other advantages of a short-term high school study programme. Maximum class size is six students. "We therefore provide an experience which is very structured and secure, and very suitable for first-time attendees," she says, adding, "Our summer course is more academic than most, though still a lot of fun."

In terms of fun, which is of course important, there is a high level of planning, it seems. Most schools list many activities being available to clients, not to mention trips to visit places of interest nearby and further afield. "Extra-curricular activities include a wide range of outdoor pursuits:

hiking, rappelling, camping, surfing, kayaking, swimming are just a few examples," says Dawn Wilson, Director of Education Extension & International Programmes at St Michaels University School in Victoria, BC. Also in Canada, McDonald mentions three-day adventure camps in central Ontario with campfires, etc, as particularly popular.

Prue Kelly at Wellington High School in Wellington, New Zealand, meanwhile, observes that students studying there may have the chance to do courses that their own school does not offer "like: hospitality, digital media, film and TV, journalism, electronics, carpentry, tourism. Plus music lessons and groups, drama, and all sports that are in season."

While some high schools organise specific short-term courses, others like Wellington simply accept international students for a shorter time during (New Zealand) term time. Kelly explains, "Even though our main clients come for a year or longer, we offer programmes to suit the student requirements usually geared to meet the length of their school holidays. For example students from Italy can be here for seven to 20 weeks depending on their needs – we make sure they get excellent English lessons supplemented by an interesting active programme in the wider school."

There is a lot of availability out there if agencies are keen to expand their range of summer programmes on offer. Many high school operators offer unique programmes, given their location and/or specialisation as a normal high school. These programmes are particularly relevant

for students embarking on a high school education overseas, although interesting for all.

For example, Richard Jackson, Headmaster at Hurtwood House in Dorking, Surrey, in the UK, says of their summer programme: "Ours is an unusual combination of English as a Foreign Language and Performing Arts – acting, dancing and singing. Our main school is widely regarded as having the best Performing Arts department in the UK so it is natural for us to use our performance facilities and teachers in the summer and to offer short courses in acting, dancing and singing – all of this combined, where required, with English tuition in small classes and a full programme of social, cultural and sporting events."

The crossover rate of students transferring into the main high school from a summer programme does tend to vary widely depending on the school and, perhaps, its history of marketing its short-term courses to a separate target audience. Jackson says between 15 and 30 per cent of summer course attendees join the main school later. In Bristol, Evans says the figure is more like 10 per cent while Heffill cites 12 per cent. In other cases, as at All Saints Anglican School, up to 80 per cent of students will go on to assimilate into the mainstream programme.

At Cambridge Education Group, which offers summer programmes at its Cats Cambridge and Cats Canterbury schools, Pete Shemilt also attests to 90 per cent of enrollees staying on at the school. He points to over 60 nationalities likely on such courses, while other schools testify to a range of nationalities, such as Spanish, Italian, Mexican, Brazilian, Chinese, Japanese and Russian, as among those who see the value in intensive summer study. ■



PHOTOGRAPH: BEDFORD SCHOOL STUDY CENTRE