

German gain

With many students around the globe eyeing Germany's higher education opportunities, language schools are also reaping the benefits. Growth in interest from new markets also points to continued growth for German language schools for 2002, as AMY BAKER reports.

German language teaching institutions in Germany report another successful year in 2001, with no negative effects on the market having been noted since the events of September 11. "For our tiny [business] segment of the market, we have the impression it will be a prosperous year [in 2002] and we have already [had] more bookings than we had at this time of the year in 2001," reports Doris van de Sand, Director of ISK München.

Jeannette Brecht, Administration and Marketing Officer for F+U International Academy in Heidelberg, adds, "At first, it seemed as if the number of students would decrease [after September 11], but after the first shock, even more [students booked], compared to the time before September 11."

Student markets that are performing well include Poland, which a number of school representatives highlighted as a strong source of students. "Berlin is just 80 kilometres away from the Polish border and Poland is planning to join the European Community," says Dirk Heiland of Die Neue Schule in Berlin, by way of explanation for the rise in the number of Polish students at his school. He says that Chinese and Polish students were the largest nationalities at his school last year. "2001 was the second-best year for Die Neue Schule so far, since 1993," he relates, "and we expect another record for 2002."

Other schools also point to China as a market that is gaining strength, although, for some, visa problems have restricted real growth in this market. "Chinese students had problems getting a visa, which is why [the] number of [Chinese students at our school] decreased in 2001," says Brecht at F+U International Academy. Florian Meierhofer at



BWS Germanlingua, however, agrees with Heiland that the market shows promise. He expects student enrolments from the UK, China, Switzerland and South America to rise this year due to heavy advertising by the school.

Meierhofer points to a more "intense use of very good agents" as a key part of his marketing strategy and Brecht too underlines the importance of agents in the marketing mix. "We got new agents from Russia and Israel [last year], so we got many students from there," she explains, adding, "Czech [enrolments] were good in the first semester because of a new agent." Others, such as Heiland, report that Internet bookings are becoming more important, while Hans-Georg Albers at language school chain, Carl Duisberg Centren (CDC), reports that its wide mix of marketing methods remain a key to CDC's success.

"Bookings [continue to] come through agencies, CDC offices in some countries, the Internet, brochures distributed in German tourism offices and other official or semi-official institutions, as well as recommendations by other students," he says. Albers says that while the student nationality profile differs according to each individual CDC centre, overall, the most important nationalities last year were Span-

ish, Swiss, Japanese, Korean and Polish. Despite the events of September 11, Meierhofer adds that US students are still important at his school, accounting for almost nine per cent of students last year.

In terms of product evolution, there are signs that schools are continuing to innovate and develop courses to attract the highly discerning customer. "We have streamlined our programmes and we have stopped running open intensive courses," says van de Sand. "Instead, we have concentrated solely on international companies and organisations." At BWS Germanlingua, Meierhofer says, "We have one new course, German pronunciation, which is targeted [at] opera singers."

Further study remains an important motivation for German language students, as Albers testifies. Because there are no tuition fees charged to overseas students who enter the German higher education system, students from Asian countries in particular, such as China and Vietnam, are keen to study the German language and continue on to university education. Heiland believes that students are getting younger, and coming from more diverse countries now. "[Students] come from countries further away," he says, "such as China, Vietnam and Korea. France and Belgium are losing their importance."

Internet initiative

An exciting new web-based initiative, www.campus-germany.de, heralds the start of recognition from the German government of the value of its international education sector.

The website, which aims to promote the advantages of studying in Germany to international students, is a joint initiative between the Federal German Ministry for Education and Research, the Länder (federal states), research organisations and business interests.

The site offers clear and comprehensive information in English about study opportunities in the country, with a link to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) website, which is available in English, Spanish or German. There is, however, little information displayed about language learning possibilities for the website visitor. Those looking for information about German language courses are directed to the Goethe Institut's website or to the search engine available at the DAAD site.

However, the site does raise the profile of the opportunities available for further study in Germany, cashing in on the current interest in higher education opportunities in the country (see left). It proclaims that 1.8 million students go abroad to attend a university and "nearly one-tenth of those students come to Germany".

The website also provides useful information about living in Germany, with advice available online about immigration policies, health insurance, living costs, religion, shopping and the weather. It also offers a guide to types of university, degrees, scholarships or grants, and a search engine by course type.