

NZ to license most agents

The New Zealand government has decided to license immigration agents advising on migration to the country. However, all off-shore agents providing advice relating to student visas and permits will be exempt from the ruling, which is due to go before parliament in May.

Dodgy immigration agents operating without a licence could soon face a fine of up to NZ\$100,000 (US\$71,000) or up to seven years in jail, while the immigration service in New Zealand will refuse to process migrant visa applications lodged by unlicensed operators once the legislation has been passed. "We are regulating the industry to protect migrants and potential migrants," said Immigration Minister, Paul Swain. "The vast majority of advisers act professionally and ethically. This legislation sends a strong message that the government will not tolerate the small number of crooks who prey on vulnerable people wanting to live in New Zealand."

All New Zealand-based agents will have to become licensed within two years of the bill being passed, while off-shore migration advisers not dealing with education will have three years to become licensed. Prior to that, they can opt-in to the licensing scheme if desired. An independent body is to be set up to oversee regulation of the licensing law, as a division within the Labour Department.

Stuart Boag from Education New Zealand commented that the association was instrumental in ensuring that off-shore education agents were exempt from the licensing rule. "Our very strong advice was that [licensing off-shore education agents] was completely impractical and there would be real doubts over the extent to which to which NZ jurisdiction could extend off-shore and the implication for broader trade agreements. Thankfully, the government agreed with our recommendations," said Boag.

Swain said that the legislation in general brought New Zealand into line with other countries such as the UK, Canada and Australia. In Canada, legislation concerning immigration agencies was introduced in April last year and there was some concern that education agencies would no longer be able to lodge visa applications on behalf of their clients, unless they became members of the relevant authority (see *Language Travel Magazine*, July 2004, page 11).

In Australia, education agents are considered as a separate category and do not have to be licensed, but they are expected not to charge a fee for making immigration representations to the relevant authorities on behalf of their clients. However, the government was considering last year various plans to license education agents (see *Language Travel Magazine*, September 2004, pages 10-11). ●

Bank loan for NZ-bound Chinese

A NEW bank loan scheme has been introduced by the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) for Chinese students keen to study in New Zealand. The scheme enables students to take out a bank loan, of up to RMB600,000 (US\$72,500) for over three years' study, with a branch of a CITIC bank if they

are applying to study in New Zealand. They will then not need to provide any further proof of financial ability during the course of their visa application process.

Introduced in January, the bank loan scheme is only available to those students applying at the Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong branches of NZIS for their visa. The loans can last from three to six years and are aimed at long-term students planning on staying in the country for a degree programme. "The scheme will make it easier for applicants to prove their financial ability and for NZIS to process applications," stated the NZIS website. ●

Korea backs internships overseas

A DIFFICULT job market in South Korea has led the government to enlarge its overseas internship programme for young Koreans. In an announcement earlier this year, Prime Minister, Lee Hae-chan, said this would be part of a package of measures designed to relieve youth unemployment. There are an estimated 355,000 unemployed young people between the ages of 15 and 29, according to Ministry of Labour (MOL) statistics. As of October last year, 4,000 Korean students had been sent to 18 different countries on government-sponsored internships, reported the *Korea Times*.

Further details of plans for the scheme were unavailable at the time of going to press. ●

Agency of the month



This month, **Language Schools New Zealand** in New Zealand nominates **Learning International** in Thailand.

In a series appearing each month in *Language Travel Magazine*, we ask a different language teaching institution to nominate one of their preferred agencies or agent partners, and to explain why this person/company is worthy of their nomination.



Guy Hughes, Director of the school, explains his decision:

"My favourite agent in the world is Ting from Learning International in Bangkok. I met her on my first marketing trip to Thailand about 10 years ago. A while later I got a call asking about our maximum group size. Thirty, I said. 'Ah, Mr Guy, can you please take two groups in April.'

The following year, I advised Ting that I would visit Thailand and received a letter that I should have framed. 'Dear Guy, I suggest the following itinerary. Arrive in Bangkok, met at the airport, stay at hotel. Free time. Next day fly to Krabi to meet next year's group leader (who I met in a swimming pool). Transfer to Pi Pi Island for relaxing time. Then to Chumporn to meet this year's group again. Back to Bangkok to meet the Minister of Education, free time to meet other agents. It will be the pleasure of our company to cover all your expenses while you are in Thailand, flights, accommodation, everything.'

We have had good years and bad years. During the Asian economic crisis, Ting contacted me and asked me if I could take one student with teacher and we did. I believe this industry is based on such personal relationships."

Brazilian agency hosts student fairs

CENTRAL de Intercambio (CI) in Brazil, an agency with 40 branches nationwide, launches its own series of student fairs throughout the country this month. The student fairs are taking place in Sao Paulo, Campinas, Brasilia, Ribeirão Preto, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro.

Fabricia Bernardi at CI explained that the venture was being organised because "we are the biggest youth travel and international education agency in Brazil and we have great international partners". Around 100,000 visitors are expected to attend all eight shows, which start on March 30 and run until April 17.

The student fairs, profiling some of CI's international partners, will be held in shopping centres throughout the country due to a deal with a company that manages the centres. This means "guaranteed visibility of the event and partner exhibitors", said Bernardi. ●

Industry issues - agents speak out

January February March April May June July August September October November December

Q. Do you regularly seek to gain feedback from students after a study abroad trip and, if so, what is the most common complaint that students make about their trip?



"We regularly contact our students on their return from courses.

The most frequent

criticism is from juniors (aged 13 to 16), about the food on residential courses. On this issue, the schools are generally not very receptive, considering that adolescents are often difficult with their food, and they provide nourishing and varied meals. Generally, the schools say they are interested in receiving our comments. Schools should make clear to students on arrival that any complaints should be mentioned to them straight away (or a complaints box should be made available) for the problem to be dealt with quickly by the school. If they hear [of a complaint] several weeks after the student has left, via the agent, the reputation of the school has already been damaged. If a student's language level is insufficient to be able to explain the problem directly, students should get in touch with the agent."

Terri Delage-Toriel, ALEA, France



"Academia is the only language travel agent in Slovenia with an ISO9001 quality accreditation.

Consequently, it is essential that we provide a really good service. To facilitate this, we send all our students questionnaires within a week of their return. About 95 per cent of them complete the questionnaires and add their comments, which is very useful for our work. Almost all of them appraise their language trips generally as very good. When they make complaints it is mostly regarding accommodation (especially host family or residential accommodation for younger students). They hardly ever complain about either the lessons or the teachers. We always inform our partner schools abroad about problems and try to resolve them at the earliest opportunity. A problem is that some schools are very money-oriented and once they have got their money they feel their job is done. In these cases, the only thing you can do is to look for other schools for the future. Overall, however, the schools

we work with are mostly responsive and try to satisfy the students' requirements."

Vesna Košir Šalabaliija, Academia, Slovenia



"Being consultants, we always receive feedback from our clients; when they are abroad they

send us emails, so we can deal with any problem during their stay. In such situations, schools are willing to solve problems promptly. When students are back home they visit us, show photographs and have a short talk about their experience. Our clients sometimes complain about the quality of teaching in summer courses when extra staff, often non-qualified and inexperienced, are recruited. Schools are not able to face this problem since, they tell us, their regular teachers go on holiday in July and August. The only thing to do is discourage students from leaving in summer."

Gabriella Perfetti, Auriga Servizi, Italy



Q&A



ialc forsees slow, steady growth to its membership of quality schools around the world. JAN CAPPER at the association answers our questions.

Fact box

Full name: International Association of Language Centres

Year established: 1983

Number of members: 85

Type of members: 58 - full, 27 associate (branches of full members)

Association's main role: accreditation and marketing

Government recognition: not applicable

Code of practice: yes - bylaws, code of ethics, accommodation code

Complaints procedure: yes

Agent workshops/fam trips: yes

Contact details: ialc, Lombard House, 12/17 Upper Bridge Street, Canterbury, CT1 2PY, UK.
Tel: +44 1227769007
Fax: +44 1227769014
Email: info@ialc.org
Web: www.ialc.org

What has ialc achieved in the last year?

Growth and diversity - membership has grown to 85 schools in 73 destinations in 20 countries. After broadening membership in Latin America in 2003, we have added schools in France, New Zealand, the UK and USA. We have also developed our current quality assurance scheme, launched four years ago. By the end of 2005, ialc will have audited every member in the last four years.

Is membership of ialc expected to continue to grow?

We envisage slow, steady growth. We know broadly which languages and destinations we wish to add and aim to address two important missing languages and countries in 2005. There is no finite number of members in our plan.

How are ialc's quality standards promoted around the world?

We explain them in our website and other media, and feature any new developments in our web and printed news bulletins. Every ialc school displays the ialc code of ethics poster in 12 languages.

Does ialc now recognise ABLs and BAC accreditation in the UK as acceptable for membership application?

Using feedback from agents and local members, we identify and contact the private, independent language schools we would like to see in ialc. They must then pass all stages of our strict application procedure, which at present requires British Council recognition in the UK. We have not yet considered any alternatives.

What plans does ialc have for the coming year?

We have just conducted member and agent surveys, which will guide our decision-making at our AGM. Promotion will continue to focus on partnerships with agents. At the same time, we will promote ialc generically through a wider range of media, continue to recruit top schools in interesting locations and ensure the quality of our existing members.

On the move

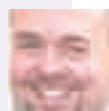
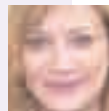
There is a new management team at Torbay Language Centre (TLC) in the UK. Alex Perkins (top) is the new Managing Director, and has been on board since November last year. Mr Perkins has been working in the ELT sector since 1988 in both the private and public sectors. He has also worked for the British Council in the Middle East. Dean Jones (below) joins him as the new Operations Manager. "This is an exciting move for me, after spending over 12 years in Asia working as first a teacher, then a teacher trainer, and finally managing a district of 48 language schools in Japan," said Mr Jones.



Suzanne Rees has become a partner and Director of Marketing for MBM International in Sydney, NSW, Australia. MBM specialises in promoting regional New South Wales to overseas visitors whether they be backpackers, language students or families. Through its educational tours, its volunteering packages and farmstay, MBM introduces undiscovered regions to international visitors. Ms Rees was previously at Magill English Language College in Gosford, NSW, Australia.



Two new business development managers have been appointed at Anglolang Academy, Scarborough, in the UK. Sarah Wall, who previously developed Anglolang's university foundation programme, is hoping to increase student numbers for this and other courses. Neil Harris (below) is taking responsibility for developing links with agents, businesses and other institutions in Europe. Mr Harris will focus on further developing the school's existing profile as a business training provider.



After 10 years with STA Travel, and successfully setting up the new STA Travel Global Languages programme, Fabian Bryner (top) is leaving the company and moving on to new challenges. Michael Eck will continue managing contracting and fulfilment in the language centre in Zurich, whilst Mathew Lewis (below) will be overseeing the project globally from the STA Travel head office in London, UK, taking on the role of Global Market Development Manager. Mr Lewis was previously based at STA's head office in Melbourne, VIC, Australia.



Grapevine

The delegates attending the Canada Language Council conference had to brave extreme conditions in January when they visited Halifax, Nova Scotia, to participate in the second conference and AGM of the newly-enlarged association. Among those wrapped up warmly are Tony Millns of English UK (centre); Debra Huber, Thompson Rivers University (hiding); Amy Baker of Language Travel Magazine (striped scarf); and Marie-Laure Lions-Olivieri of Souffle in France (far right).



Pictured here (left, above) at the CLC cocktail reception are members: David Diplock, LSC, Toronto; Virginia Christopher, YMCA International College, Vancouver; and Craig Stusiak of Hawthorn Canada Language Centre, Vancouver. And leading the ceilidh celebrations (below) is Executive Director of CLC, Jay Jamieson (right) with Sue Meesen of Bishop's University, Lennoxville, QB.



Florida Language Centre (FLC), owned by LAL, has moved into a sumptuous new location in a Marriott hotel. The Fairfield Inn is situated two miles from the ocean and five miles from central Fort Lauderdale. Nadine Zerbel at LAL said the new centre "gives students the opportunity to study, live and chill" in the same place - perfect for those students who like to live near school. FLC offers 20 classrooms, a fitness centre, games room, swimming pool and whirlpool.

If you have any lighthearted news, photos, or stories of industry interest, please contact amy@houshoumedia.com and ask to appear in the Grapevine section!

Next issue - May 2004: **Special Report** looks at the visa process worldwide • **Market Report** charts business trends in Italy • **Direction** features our spring workshop guide • **Agency Survey** canvasses Thai agencies • **City Focus** visits Brighton in the UK • **Spotlight** profiles executive courses in the US west coast