

# Spain's expansion

Despite some setbacks, Spanish language schools are looking forward to reaping the rewards of their expanding marketing strategies, says GILLIAN EVANS.

## Proof of quality

Although there is no compulsory accreditation system for Spanish language schools, there are two well developed accreditation schemes: one known as Ceele, which is administered by the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, and the other administered by the Instituto Cervantes. And more and more schools are signing up to one or both of these schemes.

"[External accreditation] is very important because it gives us more status," states Laura Galán at Caxton College in Valencia, which is planning to put itself forward for accreditation by the Instituto Cervantes. Paola Vecchi at Colegio Maravillas in Malaga, which is accredited by the Instituto Cervantes says, "It is an official recognition that guarantees the quality of the courses and services provided."

According to industry sources, there is little difference between the schemes. Clemente Sanchez at Paramo, Academia de Espanol, in Valladolid, says, "We don't find any difference between both accreditations, both quality schemes are practically the same."

Juan Manuel Sampere of Estudio Sampere agrees. "I think the only important difference is the name and the promotion of the brand," he says. Estudio Sampere in Madrid has both Instituto Cervantes and Ceele accreditation, while the other Sampere schools are Ceele accredited and are due to be put forward for the Cervantes scheme. "We applied for Ceele 10 years ago since we thought this would improve quality. Now, it is mainly because other Spanish schools are doing it too."

Overseas language travel agents are playing a key role in the expansion of the Spanish language teaching market, according to many language schools in Spain. For example, at Caxton College in Valencia, Laura Galán says their positive 2005 performance was as a direct result of their growing agent partnerships. "We went to some educational fairs [where] we had the opportunity to contact more agents," she explains.

Similarly, Erin Corcoran at the Don Quijote chain of schools - which was acquired at the end of last year by Enforex (see *Language Travel Magazine*, February 2006, page 6) - states that their 6.8 per cent increase in student numbers last year was because of "increased web sales and new agencies". She continues, "Our growth [in 2005] was clearly from gains in our most important recruiting sources/partners: the web and agencies. A number of new agencies contributed in a significant way to our 2005 growth."

Juan Manuel Sampere at Estudio Sampere, which has several schools in Spain and one in Ecuador, says that agents and word-of-mouth recommendations are their main sources of students and this has remained the same for some years. However, he notes significantly higher enrolments from more progressive agents. "Agents who know how to use the Internet are sending us very good numbers of students, while other agents only complain about the damage the Internet is doing to their business," he notes.

Despite the upbeat reports for 2005, the year was not without its difficulties. "We had strong growth in US sales, despite some regrettable reactions to world events: cancellations after the bombings in London in July, cancellation of a substantial community college study abroad programme based on concerns about terrorism and Spain's withdrawal from the US-led coalition in Iraq, and heightened concerns about safety in general from American study groups," recounts Corcoran.

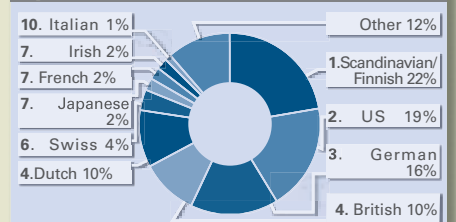
Indeed, not all schools experienced growth. Alfredo Gutierrez at Clic IH, which has schools in Seville and on the Costa de la Luz, reports a 10 per cent decrease in enrolments in 2005 because of increased competition as well as the economic downturn in Germany. Other factors that have hampered growth, according to Gutierrez, include the strength of the euro and the "lack of sensibility from the Spanish government towards the visa problem".

According to Paola Vecchi at Colegio Maravillas in Malaga, visa issuance problems have hampered students from Russia and Turkey in particular, while Gutierrez also mentions problems for Chinese students. Sampere notes that a change in visa regulations has also resulted in US students shortening their length of stay. "Some US students came for 12 weeks [in 2005] instead of 16 to avoid the recent visa procedure that requires the students to go to the Spanish Consulate in person," he says.

Although Europe and the USA continue to provide Spanish language schools with the bulk of their students, many schools have experienced considerable diversification in their nationality mix. Corcoran relates, "We are seeing a widening of our base countries - which was already quite diverse - as new markets begin to show more interest in Spain and send more students." In 2005 this trend manifested itself through increased arrivals from Australia, New



## Top student nationalities in Spain by student weeks, 2004



Source: LTM Status survey (figures rounded to nearest whole)

Zealand, China, Hong Kong and Russia, as well as other Eastern European and Asian countries in general.

Vecchi at Colegio Maravillas, where the top three nationalities are French, Swedish and Japanese, says, "This year we plan to strengthen our contacts in the USA and make new ones in the new European Union (EU) countries." Michael Warwick, Commercial Director of Link Centre in Seville, says that they have set their sights on Asia. "We are going east in our marketing strategy, mainly because students stay for longer, and there are new and exciting marketing opportunities to be had." Similarly, Sampere highlights Korea as a growth market that they will be targeting this year.

With a clear focus on developing marketing strategies, particularly those that involve agents, and spreading into an ever-increasing range of countries, Spanish language schools in Spain are confident of a good performance this year. Corcoran concludes, "We expect the strides we've made in web and agency sales to continue." ●