

Immigration overhaul promised in the USA

New plans to improve the student visa process in the USA have been unveiled, which include allowing students to enter the country 45 days ahead of their intended course start date, rather than 30 days. Information technology will be trialled to investigate the possibility of allowing some visa interviews to be conducted remotely, thereby saving a long journey for the thousands of visa applicants who live far from an embassy and are required to undergo an interview. A paperless system of applying for a visa online is also being discussed; a huge potential change to the current system, according to officials.

Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, also announced earlier this year that student visas would be issued 120 days prior to study rather than 90 days. Michael Chertoff, Department of Homeland Security Secretary, who jointly announced these efforts, said the changes would strengthen border security "while keeping the welcome mat out for those who want to travel from overseas".

Earlier this year, the US government underlined that it has already turned a corner in terms of expediting visa processing. Speaking at the US University Presidents' Summit on International Education, Rice claimed that 97 per cent of visa applications were

now processed in two days. She added that the security screening process for the 2.5 per cent of applicants subject to special visa requirements typically took up to two weeks only.

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Maura Harty, also at the summit, added, "We will continue to hone our efforts so that visa services are provided in a timely and courteous manner. And we will devote ourselves to getting this message across to prospective students."

Harty noted that other measures already taken had improved visa issuance, such as the creation of 500 new consular positions since 2001, the directive to put student and exchange visitors at the front of the queue in embassies (see *Language Travel Magazine*, September 2003, page 4) and the extended reciprocity agreements, which mean some students do not need to renew their visas as regularly (see *Education Travel Magazine*, September 2005, page 41).

Despite assurances that the system is increasingly robust, however, there are still complaints from within the ELT community of visa denials on the grounds that studying English can be done in an applicant's home country. The immigration department needs to address not only visa issuance, but reasons for visa denials too. ●

Accreditation UK aims to be more inclusive

THE ENGLISH IN BRITAIN Accreditation Scheme is being rebranded as Accreditation UK and updated under a new five-year agreement between the joint owners of the scheme, the British Council and English UK.

The overhauled scheme is now being made available to English language teaching (ELT) institutions on a tiered payment

basis, with hopes that this will encourage even more institutions to sign up to the scheme. In another change, those schools in operation for just one year can now become an accredited school.

Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK, explained, "We have tried in the review of the scheme to reduce or remove any barriers in terms of process and costs for centres seeking first accreditation. So the application fee has gone, the eligibility criterion is reduced to one year of operation, and the annual fee will be banded according to the size of centre, with the smallest ones that are English UK members paying only UK£600 (US\$1,043)."

He continued, "Together with the wide-ranging promotional services provided to accredited centres by the British Council and English UK, we are confident that this makes an unbeatable offer. There is now no reason why any UK ELT centre should not be accredited by Accreditation UK."

The accreditation scheme is the industry's largest and has been managed on a five-year term by both parties since 1982. David Green, Director General of the British Council, said, "We are delighted to be signing this agreement with English UK to establish a new partnership for the management of Accreditation UK. Together we will continue to promote the UK to international students as the best place in the world to learn English."

The British Council hopes to become a bigger name in English language teaching in the world and has recently published a manifesto spelling out its plans to build its brand awareness. It aims to increase visitors to its free online English resources from two million a year to 10 million by 2010 and make the UK the first choice for students considering studying English. ●



Terry Toney (left) of the British Council and Tony Millns of English UK toast the new deal

Calendar	APRIL	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	MAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	JUNE	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	JULY	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	AUGUST	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
		29	30	31				

Expolingua Madrid
Date: March 31 - April 2
Venue: Madrid, Spain
Email: info@expolingua.es
Web: www.expolingua.es

ExpoBelta
Date: April 1 - 2
Venue: Sao Paulo, Brazil
Date: April 4
Venue: Curitiba, Brazil
Date: April 6
Venue: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Date: April 8

Venue: Recife, Brazil
Date: April 11
Venue: Goiânia, Brazil
Email: mgabarra@belta.org.br
Web: www.belta.org.br

MEI-Relsa Agent Workshop and Fam Trips
Date: April 2-7
Venue: Cork, Ireland
Email: info@mei.ie
Web: www.mei.ie

UIEF Education & Career 2006
Date: April 7-9
Venue: Kiev, Ukraine
Email: veronika@dteducation.com
Web: www.dteducation.com/en/

International Education Fair
Date: April 8-9
Venue: Taipei, Taiwan
Email: fair@ecatpe.org.tw
Web: www.tosa.org.tw/en

Kazakhstan Educational International Fair
Date: April 8-10
Venue: Almaty, Kazakhstan
Email: marina.khan@intellect.kz
Web: www.intellect.kz

Int. Education Fairs of Turkey
Date: April 16-23
Venue: Adana, Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul - Turkey
Email: info@ieft.net
Web: www.ieft.net

New mobile phone service targets schools and agents

A NEW COMPANY in the UK language travel industry is promoting convenient and cheap mobile phone calls through specialised SIM cards. Aimed at agencies as well as language schools, the SIM cards available from GSM International promise to reduce phone bills significantly for students.

Agencies can buy the SIM cards and sell them on to their UK-bound clients, who use them in their own mobile phones once in the UK to eliminate tariffs for receiving a call. They also benefit from a low rate for making calls overseas.

GSM International is the brainchild of Marco Travaglia of Business Class Education. He explained that he got the idea for the company because of his experience with foreign students, who would normally buy a local SIM card for their mobile phones once in the UK, instead of using international phone cards. "I thought, 'why not get the schools to offer this and make it a profitable service'," he said.

Language schools or agencies buy SIM cards from GSM



GSM International offers SIM cards for students in the UK to make cheap overseas calls

International, which is working in partnership with a leading UK mobile phone retailer, and mark up prices to receive a "commission" for offering the service to their clients. "Our agents currently make up to 40 or even 50 per cent commission," related Travaglia.

The service will shortly be expanded to other countries too. "We will soon be providing "country specific" SIM cards for other popular language destinations such as Italy, Spain, France, the USA and Canada," said Travaglia.

Open Doors IEP survey shows sign of hope in USA

THE LATEST OPEN DOORS report relating to trends across US Intensive English Programmes (IEPs), published by the Institute of International Education, reveals a nominal increase in overall student numbers at IEPs in the 2004 calendar year – 44,565 students recorded in the survey – compared with the previous year's figure of 43,003.

However, the total student weeks figure of 490,122 was just below the 495,939 total recorded in 2003, indicating that the overall volume of the market has not increased year on year. Last year, there had been fears that the 2004 data would be even worse than this, as the US\$100 Sevis fee was introduced during this year, and commentators feared that this would further deter students from studying in the USA.

In fact, the figures indicate a static performance only in 2004, and subsequent testimony from IEPs suggests that 2005 was a much-improved year. The Open Doors survey, produced annually, also indicates nationality trends across IEPs in 2004. The top two nationalities, in terms of student weeks, remained Korea and Japan, followed by Taiwan, Thailand, Mexico and China.

Currency

1xUS\$ =currency*

Argentinean	Pesos	3.068
Australian	Dollar	1.357
Brazilian	Real	2.150
British	Pound	0.575
Bulgarian	Leva	1.641
Canadian	Dollar	1.154
Chilean	Pesos	531.70
Chinese (PR)	Yuan RMB	8.047
Czech	Koruny	23.89
Danish	Kroner	6.270
Egyptian	Pound	5.729
EU	Euro	0.840
Hong Kong	Dollar	7.761
Hungarian	Forint	211.17
Icelandic	Kronur	63.817
Indonesian	Rupiah	9,232.6
Israeli	New Shekels	4.715
Japanese	Yen	117.39
Maltese	Lira	0.360
Mexican	Peso	10.544
New Zealand	Dollar	1.485
Norwegian	Kroner	6.830
Polish	Zloty	3.188
Russian	Rubles	28.189
Singaporean	Dollar	1.627
Slovakian	Koruny	31.50
South African	Rand	6.169
South Korean	Won	971.11
Swedish	Kronor	7.833
Swiss	Franc	1.307
Taiwanese	NT Dollar	32.297
Thai	Baht	39.346
Turkish	New Lira	1.328
Venezuelan	Bolivar	2,147.3

*Rates are subject to change and should be used as indications only. 14/02/06.

OISE buys two more UK schools

THE EMERGING SUPERPOWER of UK ELT, OISE, has bought up two more schools in the UK, adding further to its portfolio. SES Folkestone was sold to the group in September and Scanbrit School of English in Bournemouth joined the company stable in January.

The Scanbrit School of English is becoming part of the Regent group, itself under the OISE umbrella. Geoff Hardy-Gould, Managing Director of Regent, told *Language Travel Magazine*, "We feel the school has a very good fit with Regent in many ways. In particular, it has a very agent-friendly ethos and values excellent customer service to agents and students. For Regent, it provides another top quality destination for our clients to choose from." The school will continue to be called the Scanbrit School of English and Robin Garforth, former Sales Manager with Regent, has been appointed as Principal. Former owners, Andrew and Janine Hardy, have retired.

In Folkestone, SES Folkestone was acquired by OISE when Una O'Connell, former owner, decided that she had "taken the school as far as she could go", reports Martin Browne, Acting Principal. Ms O'Connell took over the school from her father, Peter, who started

it in 1957. "Ms O'Connell felt the time was right to sell the school to a company that would respect the achievements of her father," commented Browne.

As in the case of Scanbrit, no changes are planned, the school maintains its name and continues its support of agents. "OISE plans to revitalise SES and grow the number of students [attending]," said Browne. "SES agents will notice no difference in their relationship [and] the school is already benefiting from the contacts and support it now receives as part of a larger group."

English Australia Agents' Workshop

Date: April 20-22
Venue: Melbourne, Australia
Email: easesc@englishaustralia.com.au
Web: www.englishaustralia.com.au

Ialc Agent Workshop

Date: April 27-30
Venue: Madrid, Spain
Email: info@ialc.org
Web: www.ialc.org

The Icef London Workshop

Date: May 4-6
Venue: London, UK
Email: info@icef.com
Web: www.icef.com

IH Agent Workshop 2006

Date: May 6-8
Venue: San Sebastian, Spain
Email: affiliates@ihworld.co.uk
Web: www.ihworkshop.com

Nafsa Annual Conference

Date: May 21-26
Venue: Montreal, Canada
Email: conference@nafsa.org
Web: www.nafsa.org

The Alphe Canada Workshop

Date: May 27-29
Venue: Vancouver, Canada

The Alphe USA Workshop

Date: May 31- June 2
Venue: Miami, USA
Email: jane@hothousemedia.com
Web: www.hothousemedia.com

Italian in Italy Workshop

Date: June 8-11
Venue: Rome, Italy
Email: p.foti@italianinitaly.it
Web: www.italianinitaly.it

QS Asia Pacific Professional Leaders in Education

Date: July 12-14
Venue: Singapore
Email: simona@qsnetwork.com
Web: www.appleqs.com

The Alphe UK Workshop

Date: August 26-28
Venue: London, UK
Email: jane@hothousemedia.com
Web: www.hothousemedia.com

International Languages & Education UK Fair

Date: August 29-31
Venue: Brighton, UK
Email: fair@englishuk.com
Web: www.englishuk.com