



Slipping neatly into the trend towards targeted language learning, executive and business language programmes form an important specialist sector in the language teaching market. There are two categories within this sector: courses for in-service professionals and courses for recent graduates or those just starting out in the field of business. In both cases, industry sources report varying growth in demand, as new international business boundaries dictate that language skills are in demand again.

Talking of courses for working professionals, Duncan Baker, Marketing and Administration Partner at Lydbury English Centre in Shropshire, UK, states, “[Demand for] in-service courses is increasing as Europe has expanded and as our current [corporate] clients are expanding into other areas such as China.”

Karin Radtke at Berlitz in Germany also notes a growing trend towards courses for in-service professionals, following a short downturn in demand some years ago when many companies

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slashed their training budgets. “Nearly 70 per cent of our customers want a business language programme,” she reports. “After 2001

there was a decrease, but since 2004 there has been an increase as companies start to invest [in] professional training again because they know the importance of good language and cultural skills.”

However, one factor that has dampened demand for professional language training overseas is that many companies now opt to train their personnel at home. Eleri Maitland at Inlingua Rouen in France

gives this as the reason for a decrease in their executive numbers. “People have so little time and prefer to stay at home and train there,” she adds. Nigel Orr at Imaal Tutorials in Ireland, which provides home tuition programmes for executives who are mostly sent by their employers, agrees. He notes, “Companies are less inclined to send employees on immersion courses in English-speaking countries. France, in particular, likes students to learn at home.” Notwithstanding these observations, however, most executive language training providers report steady growth in professional enrolments.

#### **New generation**

Growth in demand for business courses from students yet to enter their fields of employment is also very positive. “More and more younger people find themselves with quite good general English but without the English language skills they need for work,” asserts Timothy Blake, Director of the London School of English in the UK. “They don’t want more general English [courses] but they can’t mix with experienced business people either.”

Richard Day of English in Chester in the UK also observes that there is growing

# Business edge



Demand for business language training is growing steadily, with a particular trend towards courses for students who have not yet begun their career. The corporate sector can bring rich rewards to schools and agents who get the formula right, as GILLIAN EVANS discovers.

demand "from executives of the future with a high level of English and a desire to have a short, intensive period of training in areas related to their professional expertise". Adrian Dalton, Managing Director of English Plus Language Centre in Malta says that in his

*"The style of operation has to be far less 'school' and much more 'executive training'"*

experience, the greatest demand for business courses is from full-time employed professionals. "I must say though that during 2005 we also experienced an increase in demand for business courses by young people [aged between] 20 and 25, preparing for internships in international companies."

In Canada, the Business English School of Toronto, ONT, offers a three-month diploma course in business English to intermediate students of English, and the school's Director, Edward Blackburn, reports good levels of interest in the programme. "It seems that more and more of our university-aged students need these skills to assist them in finding work post-graduation," he says.

Owing to the growth in this sector, there has been considerable product activity here. This year, Regent Language Training has launched its new Elite World programmes, designed for both in-service professionals and those about to embark upon their career. "Elite World programmes have been developed... because of the demand for small group programmes suitable for highly motivated learners and professionals," explains Paul Johnston at the school. "These clients are looking for a fast-track environment and have limited time. They wish to focus on an individual goal which may be related to their profession or career."

## High standards

As in many other sectors of the language teaching market, clients looking for business language training are becoming more and more discerning in their course choice to ensure they match their specific requirements. According to Majella Sheehan at the North Monastery Language Centre in Ireland, they have experienced an increase in demand from corporate clients who "show an ever-increasing demand for more technical and job-specific English". As a result, says Sheehan, "We now offer English for a wide range of specific needs, from pharmaceutical to air traffic control, from information technology to banking and even the manufacture of glass!"

Similarly, the London School of English, where around 65 per cent of its enrolments are for professional programmes, offers 14 courses for professionals including English for law, banking and human resources, as well as three more general business language programmes.

Another significant characteristic of this sector is the requirement for group lessons combined with one-to-one tuition. This, according to Baker, can provide executives, who are often short of time, with the best





## Agent involvement

Duncan Baker at Lydbury English Centre in the UK believes that agents are increasingly turning their attentions towards the business language sector as the trend towards targeted language learning increases. However, successful recruiting for business language programmes can mean a completely different focus for some agents.

At English in Chester in the UK, around 40 per cent of their business clients are recruited through agents, while a further 30 per cent come directly from multinational companies, 20 per cent through personal contacts and 10 per cent through the Internet. Richard Day at the school says that although agents can be extremely effective recruiters, as

evidenced by their school's experience, not all agents are positioned correctly in the marketplace to capitalise on this sector. "Some agencies specialise in the promotion of executive courses and have the right client base for effective promotion," he explains. "The position of the agency in the marketplace is important. If they are closely identified with the summer

junior market [for example] then they will find it difficult to gain acceptance as a promoter of intensive executive courses."

Those agents who are in the right position to promote this sector are invaluable to the schools they work with. "Agents are crucial to our success in the business and professional sector," states Timothy Blake at the London

School of English in the UK. "They can build strong relationships locally more effectively than we can and are always on the spot, which can be crucial."

Gavin Eyre at LAL Cape Town in South Africa agrees, saying, "Our agents are the core of our business. Some of our agents like to tailor-make packages to which we are always very open and accommodating."

possible results. "We organise the programmes, according to skills and language needs, to provide a combination of one-to-one and small group training. For example, work on grammar would be carried out in groups that shared the same needs, as would pronunciation, etc. In that way, each participant follows a truly individual course, only participating in activities directly relevant to his or her

requirements, and yet enjoying the benefits of one-to-one as well as group interaction."

Radtke in Germany observes a trend towards more private one-to-one lessons at their schools.

"According to [our

level host family accommodation is often available to professionals, although what this includes varies from school to school.

At English in Chester, executive homestays all have an en-suite bathroom or the sole use of a bathroom and, according to Day, "guests are reassured that their hosts come from a similar socio-economic background". Professionals at Regent benefit from a special activities programme, Johnson explains. "[The] executive activities programme offers events more suitable for professional and executive clients, including restaurant meals accompanied by a [language] trainer, museum and art gallery visits and theme walks," he says.

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2004 [statistics] there is an increase of 15 per cent for private instruction by corporate customers. They want short, compact and practical oriented courses and quick success," she says.

The desire for fast results has brought with it the need for shorter courses. Baker states, "We have an increasing demand for shorter courses. Our nine-day programme [which includes two weekends] is quite popular and short weeks are also popular." Alexandra Borges de Sousa at Cial – Centro de Linguas in Portugal, concurs. "Students on a tight schedule prefer very intensive programmes without much contact with other students or social activities."

Because of this, executive clients also require an environment that provides for all their needs. At the business centre at

the London School of English, there are PCs, a photocopier, fax machine and printer, as well as a wireless

computer network. This is, according to Blake, "so that there is no difficulty in staying in touch with work or home

– not exactly ideal but a fact of life

these days". He adds, "The style of operation has to be far less 'school' and much more 'executive training'."

To provide the correct environment for executive training, many language providers offer a much higher standard of facilities for their professional clients than for their general language students. For example, Regent Oxford in the UK has a dedicated teaching unit solely for the use of executives. Accommodation standards are often higher for these clients. As well as hotel accommodation, executive

### Varying demand around the world

Not all language travel destinations are as well developed in terms of executive provision as, for example, the UK and Ireland. In Italy, Andrea Moradei at Centro Koinè in Florence estimates that only around two-to-three per cent of students request business Italian. "Students have mainly cultural motivations to learn Italian, to visit the country and its historical and art monuments," he observes. In Germany, too, the main bulk of Berlitz's business clients are Germans wanting business programmes in other languages.

Where demand is low, providers tend to offer general language plus some business add-ons or one-to-one programmes for executive learners. "Since Portuguese is not a high volume language, we cannot offer year-round courses in various professional fields," explains Borges de Sousa at Cial. "We have a reasonable one-to-one rate and give students the possibility to ask for a course tailored to their professional needs."

In South Africa, both LAL Cape Town and LAL Durban offer English for business courses but these are a combination of the general English course with 10 additional lessons of business English. This, according



Marketing business English to students and recent graduates requires the agent to know exactly what the course entails, adds Edward Blackburn at the Business English School of Toronto in Canada. "Agents should emphasise the practicality of these courses for the world of work which awaits our graduates, emphasising telephone skills,

meetings, negotiations and presentations – all of which are basic to communicating for global commerce," he says. "Obviously, I feel that the internship opportunities, which await graduates of our diploma programme, should be highlighted as a major selling point!"

To target the corporate sector, Paul Johnston of Regent Language Training

in the UK advocates "in-market training manager seminars, direct marketing and mailings". But Blake believes that marketing to this niche sector requires a subtle approach and considerable patience to reap the rewards. "Business clients tend not to want a hard-sell," he explains. "They like professional agents who take the time to listen and understand

the needs of the clients and then present only solutions that they feel are really relevant to the client's needs. So patience is necessary – some companies need to be wooed over quite a long period [of time]."

Blake also stresses that it is important to work together with an agent to provide the best possible product to the client. "We

may well be involved in drawing up special proposals, which the agent then presents to the client, and quite often visit corporate clients together. We are always happy when an agent works in this way because it can be very productive all round, not least because the client usually recognises the value of this school-agent relationship."

to Gavin Eyre, suits their clients, who usually attend a course in their vacation. "We have found that the business courses have become, out of necessity, far more relaxed. We find that professionals who want to better their personal skills in English will do this in their own free time," he says.

#### **Nationality trends**

The bulk of in-service business language students are from Western Europe, with most English language schools highlighting German, Swiss, French, Italian and Spanish

as being their main nationalities. However, the enlargement of the European Union has brought with it more demand for business language courses from Eastern European executives. Day mentions growing interest from the Czech Republic and Russia, while Baker notes increasing numbers from the Baltic States.

At the Business English School in Canada, students for business language courses are predominantly from Korea and Japan. Indeed, business courses among Japanese students, in particular, are popular for graduate or postgraduate students, says Miki Harada at Ryugaku Journal in Japan, stating that many of their students are also interested in studying





## Internships and site visits

Gaining international work experience and using business language skills in real situations is important to in-service professionals as well as students and recent graduates. For the latter group, internships are an increasing trend.

In France, Eleri Maitland at Inlingua Rouen observes, "Demand is high for work experience but it is not always so easy to organise in France. We have set up a very good partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce so we are able to offer valid and rewarding work placement in a variety of fields, with their help." Inlingua Rouen also offers a programme for students, called Initiation to the World of Work, where students have French lessons in the morning and can then choose three afternoon visits to companies to see what a job there entails.

In Canada, the Business English School of Toronto has over 50 internship partners. The school's Director, Edward Blackburn, notes that interest in internships among their students is

"on the rise each year" and he believes this will continue in the future. "I expect to see a further ramping up in demand for high quality internships in 'name' companies, such as Sony, Thomas Cook and Raymond James, all of which carry added weight with potential employers back home," he says. "Demand for this particular type of internship is growing every year, and seems to be based almost entirely on the cachet such a connection affords the future job hunter."

For in-service professionals, site visits or visits to the school by relevant professionals can be useful additions to a business language course. Timothy Blake at the London School of English in the UK notes an increase in demand for site visits, but says, "This is not always easy to satisfy, especially as company people everywhere are under more and more pressure, and hosting a visit becomes more difficult to manage."

This is a problem also encountered by English Plus in Malta, where site visits are organised for

business students but the choice of company is limited by the availability of visits that the company can allocate at a particular time. Adrian Dalton, Managing Director at the school, also points out that, although site visits can be useful, too many such visits "might be perceived as a waste of time on the part of the client".

Nigel Orr at Imaal Tutorials in Ireland concurs. "In the past, we have brought some students to meetings with counterparts in Irish companies, but we thought these were ineffective because the person we met did not really understand what they were supposed to do and often spoke unintelligibly!"

At Lydbury English Centre in the UK, Duncan Baker reports that they have one company that requires its employees, while at the school, to spend a day at their UK headquarters during the two-week course, but that on the whole, "most students are here to get as much out of the course and the [teaching] environment as they can".

MBA's in the USA or the UK. But the market for in-service professionals is relatively limited, according to fellow Japanese agent, Masaya Hamabata, at D-Side Study Abroad Information Centre. "We do not offer [many] business language programmes," he says. "The reason is because many [potential business language] students do not have [good] enough English skills to learn

business language. Some want to study on a business language programme after learning general English for a while."

The outlook for business programmes, especially for students and new graduates looking to sharpen their skills for the employment market, is certainly positive. In the in-service sector, growth, particularly in the English-speaking markets, is also likely to continue if companies are able to maintain their training budgets. Radtke points out that it is not only managers who have to speak English, "nearly every employee is involved in international communication". ●