

# British Council sets up agent group in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is the latest country to have created its own national agency association, joining the ranks of an increasingly large group of countries, including more recently, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Venezuela and Chile.

As in Chile, Bulgarian agents joined together to form an association with the help of a third party – in this case, the British Council. Yana Docheva at the British Council in Sofia told *Language Travel Magazine* that new association, Prospera, was registered in the summer of 2005 as part of a British Council Bulgaria project.



Members of the new Bulgarian agency association, Prospera

The new association currently has 12 members, who meet regularly at the British Council offices in the capital, where UK-oriented events are organised, such as business skills workshops, teambuilding and specific agent training. At present,

Prospera remains a UK-centric association. "We believe that through Prospera we could make the UK the preferred place of study for young people from Bulgaria," said Docheva.

Members of the association received financial support to attend the English UK fair in Brighton in August and have participated in an English in the North fam trip. Docheva related that all 12 members had agreed to abide by a code of practice. "The last phase of the project will focus on promoting the association and setting up its own website," she said.

The members of Prospera are: Avo-3, Bels & Belin, Best Co., BB Centre, Inforteach, ESH, Alexander Language Schools, Integral, Skylines, Cosmos, Euroschool and Usit Colours. Vladislav Roulinksi from Best Co., said that Prospera represented a great opportunity for professional exchange. "All members have to adhere to a unified code of practice, which, I believe, will ensure that both clients and schools get the same good quality of service," he added.

He said that members of Prospera continued to deal with bookings to other countries and predicted that Bulgaria's entire study abroad market would increase in time. "The forthcoming European Union membership of Bulgaria in 2007 will make it possible for a larger number of people to study abroad," said Roulinksi.

PHOTOGRAPH: BRITISH COUNCIL BULGARIA

## EduWow's new approach to marketing

A NEW AGENCY in Russia, trading as EduWow, was launched earlier this year offering not only agency services but also marketing assistance, providing services of all kinds for language schools and institutions keen to succeed in the Russian marketplace.

EduWow, which was set up by Vasily Tyukhin, previous co-owner of Oxbridge agency in Russia, will offer services such as translation, mailing and printing. It also offers to find reliable agents in more remote areas for institutions, if required, and undertake the introduction and negotiations necessary for further collaboration and partnership.

Most interesting, however, is the venture that EduWow has set up with bookstores in Moscow, St Petersburg and Novosibirsk to sell its school catalogue to bookshop clients, as well as distribute it free from the local agency office. The 160-page catalogue is being sold for between 35 and 55 roubles (US\$1 to US\$2).

Tyukhin explained that the catalogue, which contains general information on education abroad, is supplied to a wholesale trader who then selects the bookstores to stock it. "In St Petersburg, it is being sold in university bookstores, business press bookstores and in some shops downtown," he said.



The EduWow catalogue is being sold in bookstores across Russia

## Agency of the month

**Canada live**  
www.spracherlebnis.ch

This month, **River Echo Language School** in Quebec, Canada, nominates Canada Live in Switzerland.

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.



**Kerstin Petersson at the school, explains this decision:** "Canada

Live from Solothurn, Switzerland, wins this contest hands down. Founder and owner, Mary MacKay Vilén, has played an important part in the growth of my company. I was new to the language industry when I opened River Echo in 1999. At first I was

a little wary of working with agents. City-based schools can be suitable for students of all ages with a wide range of interests. This is not true for us. What we have to offer are our glorious outdoors and a community that takes an active part in our school. I was afraid that agencies might send me students who would not be happy here.

Mary, and her staff, Marianne, really care about each individual client and spend a lot of time determining which school would be the right one. Every student that Canada Live has sent us fits our client profile to a T. I can trust Canada Live: they care, give feedback, good advice and communicate. And they know we will take good care of their clients. This makes for an excellent working relationship."

## Industry issues - agents speak out

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### Q How much attention do you pay to whether language school teachers are permanent staff or temporary and likely to change year on year?



**Lucy Crosara, STB-Uberlandia, Brazil**

"In fact, this doesn't matter to me because I only work with trustworthy schools and I think they choose their staff well. I think that having permanent [teaching] staff may help achieve a higher level of quality at a school, and an indication of this is word-of-mouth recommendation. If the quality decreases, we don't have satisfied clients. Schools must plan well and pay attention to teacher training, and take care when hiring teachers. Agents should consider this because we are responsible for what we offer to our clients."



**Veronika Kustenka, Domar Travel Education, Ukraine**

"Half of our staff (including myself) are teachers by background with BA and MA degrees, which means that from our partner schools we would expect very high

standards of teaching. From a methodological point of view I think that a teacher with longer experience in one place is more likely to become an expert [in their field]. High staff turnover reveals instability in any business, but it can be a real disaster for a language school. It is the teacher (not the school or even the course) that students are ultimately buying after all. I know cases, both in the Ukraine and abroad, when a group tutor changed or a teacher left [suddenly] and this affected overall attendance and decreased sales. I believe teachers should be considered the main asset of a language school and the top management should have a clear strategy for how to keep them, such as training/refresher programmes, flexible working hours, loyalty programmes and payment structures. If, as agents, we want to deliver a good service and have our clients recommend us to their friends or relatives, we definitely should pay

attention to teaching issues and be aware of any changes in our partner school. A lot of our students – and their parents – are keen to know who will teach them, what the teaching approach will be."



**Rui Souza, Bridge Education International (BEI), Brazil**

"As an agent for BEI, which also runs English schools in Brazil, we are keen to observe excellent quality in teaching. BEI embraces qualified professionals and ensures that the quality of our teaching stays high through a variety of means, besides an annual evaluation of personnel. We have a distinctive academic ethos. Good schools dedicate attention to teaching issues and have strategies to keep good staff, offering them training and an annual review. So we give special attention to find out if the staff abroad, where our students will follow their courses, are permanent or temporary. We

believe it is our responsibility as an educational institution to know this. We let the students consider the cost-benefit relation. For example, there are some schools in London that offer courses in the afternoons with lower fees, and usually the teachers are beginners and temporary."



**Alberto Orillac, ELS Language Centers, Panama**

"I definitely believe that agents should be responsible for finding out if schools are concerned about the quality of their teachers and have a high percentage of permanent teachers to ensure this quality. Our students in Panama demand high quality teachers. We make sure that the schools we send students to have developed incentive programmes for their teachers because we think that highly motivated teachers provide our clients with the best possible customer service."

# Q&A



The American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP) is becoming a consistent voice of the industry and is helping to improve US market conditions. ANN FRENTZEN, President of AAIEP, answers our questions.

## Fact box

**Full name:** American Association of Intensive English Programs  
**Year established:** 1986  
**Number of members:** approximately 275  
**Type of members:** Intensive English programmes in the USA  
**Association's main role:** Promotion of ethical and professional standards, advocacy, and member services  
**Membership criteria:** Accreditation by CEA, Accet or regional accreditation institution  
**Government recognition:** No  
**Code of practice:** All institutions are bound by the government's mandatory code of practice  
**Complaints procedure:** Yes  
**Code of practice:** Yes  
**Agent workshops/fam trips:** Agent fair at Nafsa Conference in May  
**Contact details:** 229 N. 33rd St., Philadelphia, PA, 19104-2709 USA  
 Tel: +12158955856  
 Fax: +12158955854  
 Email: info@aaiep.org  
 Web: www.aaiep.org

### What has AAIEP achieved in the last year?

AAIEP has continued to strengthen its ability to advocate effectively with the US government, it has explored the most effective means to ensure quality standards among members and it has developed and begun to implement its 2005-2007 Strategic Plan.

### I understand AAIEP is considering making accreditation a condition of membership. Why and how will this process work?

The membership did vote on by-laws changes which, with a period of transition, will require that all members be either accredited by CEA or Accet or be under the governance of an institution that is regionally accredited. The Executive Board recommended this change in order to build on the association's already strong credibility as it advocates with government and recruits students for member programmes.

### Does AAIEP liaise with government on behalf of the industry? If so what has it achieved?

Yes. A current effort underway involves allowing short-term students to study on a tourist visa in the USA. Language developed by AAIEP is in a bill currently before the US Senate and support for this is being solicited.

### What specific issues are facing the short-term ELT market?

The visa issue already mentioned above, as well as a lingering perception among those students abroad that obtaining a visa to study in the US is much too difficult.

### Do you work with fellow US association, UCIEP, at all?

Yes, particularly in the area of government advocacy. More recently we were coordinating communication involving offers of assistance to the IEP programmes and international students impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Nafsa estimates that up to 3,000 international students were affected by the hurricane.

## On the move

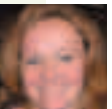
Susan Bisschoff is the new Principal of Dominion English Schools in Auckland, New Zealand. Ms Bisschoff has a Masters Degree of Applied Linguistics and was a lecturer in English at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, before moving to New Zealand in 2001. She has been at Dominion since 2001, formerly as an Assistant Director of Studies.



United International College (UIC) in London, UK, has a new Principal. David Wilkins, formerly of Oxford Media and Business School, has re-entered the world of EFL. He has 25 years in the business and was formerly Director of Shane and Principal of Marble Arch Intensive English (part of the Skola Group).



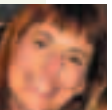
Karen Bowring has set up her own work placement company, Professionals UK, after being Principal at UIC Language School in London, UK, for six years. The company focuses on internships for foreign students with quality companies and accredited educational institutions.



Robin Adams (top) has taken on the role of Managing Director at Global Village English Centres. He succeeds Cam Harvey (below) who spent 10 years working for the GV network of schools and has assumed the newly established role of Director of Sales for Red Leaf Student Programs, specialising in junior placement. With his wife, Jodi Hosking, he will also focus on the outbound business with their new company, The Learning Traveller, in cooperation with Red Leaf.



Ella Tyler (top) and Deborah Tyler are the new owners of Moutlands Language School in Exmouth, Devon, UK. It is a small, family-run school, which has been going for nearly 20 years and specialises in junior group courses. Ella comes from the retail sector where she worked previously as a Sales and Marketing Manager and Deborah has spent 15 years working in the travel industry. They hope to double the size of the business in the next three years.



Paula Holloway, formerly head of the prestigious Letifa school in Dubai and Ashford School in Kent, is the new Principal of St Clare's Oxford in the UK. She was attracted to the school by its mission "to advance international education and understanding" and is a keen enthusiast of the IB diploma.

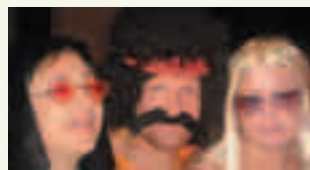


## Grapevine



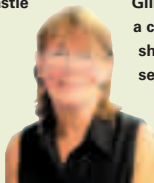
St Giles International has reached the venerable age of 50 – probably. At a gala dinner in a central London hotel to mark the event, Managing Director, Mark Lindsay, admitted there had been some confusion during the party preparations as to the actual date that the company was registered! The landmark birthday

was marked by a dinner and party attended by almost 300 guests. Pictured here, Paul Lindsay (centre) who set up the first St Giles school in London with his wife, Diana, in 1955. On his left, Caroline Fox of Twin Training in London and on the right, Jane Gilham of Alphe workshops.



English Australia's annual general meeting was not all work, work work, as these pictures prove! A 70s-themed party was held in the evening to take delegates' minds off visa legislation and other issues of the day. The Aussies got into the spirit of the evening and pictured left, sporting a realistic afro (her) and a decidedly dodgy one (him), two revellers known only as Ella and Geoff. Above, Joseph Herschel of Worldcare Travel Insurance with two 70s - or 60s? - chicks.

Gill Mitchell (right), owner of International House Newcastle in the UK since 1978, has transferred ownership of her school to her "right-hand men", Trevor Udberg (centre), and Patricia Mullen (far right), both of whom have worked



at the school for a number of years. Gill will remain at the school in a consultant capacity and said she decided to take a back seat because "at my stage in life there are other things to do!". Mr Udberg said, "Now the executive and



controlling interests of the school are in the same hands, we anticipate being able to initiate change more easily. This is a vital component of a modern forward-looking school."



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

Next issue - January 2006: **Special Report** looks at agency marketing techniques • **Market Report** charts student trends in Australia • **Direction** looks at the junior sector • **Agency Survey** canvasses Polish agencies • **City Focus** visits Tokyo in Japan • **Spotlight** profiles business language programmes in the USA