

BC steps up agent support

Next issue

In our February issue, **Special Report** examines specialist language and activity programmes, while **Direction** looks at the sometimes fractious relationship between agents and US schools. **Agency Survey** canvasses agencies in Germany to find out about the latest market trends there. **Course Guide** provides a listing of third-age programmes around the world and **Destination** profiles language learning opportunities in Canada.

Giving substance to its plans to work more closely with agents, the British Council launched key components of its agents' strategy in November last year. The strategy includes an agent-specific information service, agent liaison officers at British Council offices in key student provider countries, a dedicated area of the Education UK website and a gradual phasing out of the placement schemes.

Richard Law, Manager of ELT Export Services at the BC, explained that as part of the Council's role to increase student enrolment into the UK, it intended to "share knowledge, expertise and resources" with agents. "We aim to build a wider acceptance of using agents and the value of the agents within language teaching institutions in the UK," he added.

The new proactive approach is broadly divided into four areas. The BC is aiming for enhanced

agent training and information services, through UK fam trips, agent-specific newsletters, seminars and training packages. It plans to increase awareness of using agencies for both students and institutions, by maintaining a database of agents and including references to agents in promotional materials and publications.

Furthermore, the BC wants to see increased partnership between itself and agents with student referral to agents (instead of its placement schemes), display of agency brochures in BC offices, agent participation at BC events and agent-run promotions in BC offices around the world.

Finally, to help institutions work with local agencies along standard guidelines, it is planning a good practice guide to working with agents, and plans to develop model agent agreements tailored to local markets and a code of practice for agencies.

"The code of practice will be a framework for professional and ethical behaviour," explained Law, "which will be owned by agents and modelled on the BC's code of practice for education providers. It will supplement existing national legislation and association rules." Details of the code of practice are expected early this year.

The Education UK website will also support agents through a dedicated "agents' zone" which will provide information and back-up for agents and help students using the website to contact a local agency. This is also scheduled to be launched this year, and was piloted to agents in Indonesia in November.

Jane Lowther, Marketing Services Manager, explained that in markets where there is a high level of knowledge about UK education, priority would be given to developing student-fo-

Industry issues – agents speak out

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Q What are the difficulties associated with promoting non-touristic, or less well known, study destinations, and how do you overcome these?



"It is difficult to promote non-touristic destinations because of a lack of information. Many

schools we represent have centres in the same cities. In the USA for example, all of [our partner schools] promote studies in New York, San Francisco, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Los Angeles and Boston. It is really hard to find a language school in Chicago, St Louis, Charlotte or Virginia. We have lost some clients who have visited our agency and were looking for a language course in Washington, DC or Charlotte, SC. I made many contacts but finally it was not possible to give a satisfactory answer to clients [about programmes available]. However, I should point out that only a few clients are interested in these places and they normally change their minds. I think the Colombian client would consider other alternatives if they offered better prices and the possibility of

avoiding Spanish speakers. But as we don't know many schools located in non-touristic places, we do not offer them."

Henry Caro, Learning, Colombia



"Today, I find that there are too many students from Hong Kong and China going to the west coast of the USA. In a school, there may be 20 or 30 students. When these students are there, this [situation] deprives them of the opportunity to learn English. They meet with their friends and speak Cantonese after school. [If they study in less-popular locations], students will improve their English in a much shorter span of time. A problem is that there will be a few months of adaptation, getting used to using the new language. We promote high school year exchange, and usually say that after Christmas, students will like their location and make very good progress. Sometimes there will not be one other Chinese student in their school! US states we

offer include Wyoming, Missouri and North and South Dakota."

Samuel Lam, HKIEC, Hong Kong

"The problem of promoting non-touristic destinations is that in some way, the student has to change his/her mind. In my opinion, mature students are more prepared to accept the "risk" of going to a not-very-well-known place, in order to have a more exclusive experience. Our strongest selling points when



promoting this type of destination are the following: less Spanish students; an environment where it is easier to make friends and communicate; less stressed people; and the possibility to go to the tourist places in a day trip. I do not know whether we are very successful or not, but we are sending more students to places like Aberystwyth (Wales), Galway (Ireland) and Cairns (Australia)."

Angel Juanpere, Easy Idiomas, Spain

Anex holds first fair in Colombia

THE Colombian agency association, Anex, held its first international education fair in Bogota last year, which attracted 7,500 students. The good attendance figures prompted plans for more fairs next year.

Claudia Rozo, Secretary of the association, added that most of the students attending the event, held in late August, visited agency offices after the fair had finished. "We saw an increased demand for studying abroad at this event," she said.

Exhibitors included nine education institutions from overseas and 11 Colombian agencies, and the event was sponsored by British Airways and Coca Cola. Rozo told *Language Travel Magazine* that a television director interested in the Anex fair had proposed making a television programme about study abroad since the event. "The other proposal we received was about the creation of a Latin American network of 35 universities," she said. "The project name is Universias." □

cluded information to encourage greater use of agents as British Council marketing partners. In newer markets, where agent activity is at an early stage, "agent activities will primarily focus on development work", she said.

The phasing out of placement schemes is not scheduled for a specific date and will take place as a result of local office decisions. "Placement will cease in those markets where agents work with us successfully as marketing partners," said Lowther. "Current examples include Russia, where placement is now only running in Moscow and St Petersburg and will be phased out in due course, and Turkey, where placement will cease entirely from April 2003."

Mehmet Catalagac, from YES Education Services Abroad in Turkey, was surprised to hear about the local placement scheme's end. "I think this reflects on agents positively," he said. □

New moves at Alto AGM

THE Association of Language Travel Organisations (Alto) held its annual general meeting (AGM) during the World Youth and Student Travel Conference (Wystc) last year in Rhodes, Greece, and saw its membership numbers rise to over 200, with six new members voted in. Alto members now represent more than 40 countries, with a membership mix of 40 per cent agents and 60 per cent educators.



Alto's new executive body

Two positions on the executive board were also filled, and the executive body now comprises Chairperson, Michael Gerber, from Eurocentres in Switzerland; Treasurer, Santuza Bicalho, from

STB in Brazil; and members Georgia Biccelli, Linguaviva in Italy, Bernard Bianchi, Centre International d'Antibes in France and Lucia Mellone, Cosmo Educación in Mexico.

During the meeting, members welcomed Alto's new strategy to enhance its profile around the world and build relations with other industry associations (see *Language Travel Magazine*, June 2002, page 9). The association

also launched its standard questionnaire for language schools, which has been developed as a membership benefit.

"It is an effective tool to facilitate the communication between a language school and a prospective agent," explained Chairperson, Michael Gerber. An equivalent standard-format questionnaire for agencies has since been developed too by the association. Gerber commented, "Both questionnaires will help schools and agents alike to find their perfect match in business."

The management seminar held prior to the AGM was also a success, said Gerber, with nearly 30 delegates taking part in the two-day programme. "The evaluation of the seminar was very positive and all participants recommended that Alto should continue offering seminars in the future," he said. A "members only" cocktail reception for Alto was also praised by members for enabling many more formal business appointments during the Wystc conference. □

Escuela Internacional – Junior courses

We would like to point out that in our Course Guide to junior programmes in Spain (see *Language Travel Magazine*, October 2002, page 35), we incorrectly stated that Escuela Internacional offers junior courses in Madrid. In fact, these courses are offered during the summer only in Salamanca and Malaga.

On the move



Jose Mendez has replaced Tim Brickle as Marketing Manager at the Brighton-based

agency, Cactus Language, in the UK. Mr Mendez studied Business Studies at Brighton University Business School. He is originally from Gran Canaria in the Canary Islands and has three years experience in the marketing of language products in Spain, having held positions in marketing and web development.



Barbara M Godt has taken over as Marketing Director at King George International

College (KGIC) in Vancouver, Canada. Previously Assistant Marketing Director and European Counsellor, she has worked at KGIC for two and a half years. "I hope to successfully [promote] what a great place KGIC is to study," she said.



Hannah Perrett is working at Eurocentres as Area Manager for Asia, Middle East and Turkey. She

joins the sales team there from an international marketing background in the telecoms industry. Ms Perrett began her interest in international education as a student in French and Russian. She is looking forward to learning more about the industry and the challenges of developing new contacts and business marketing ideas.



Paul Menniss, formerly Chief Executive of Baselt, has taken up the post of Deputy Director

of the International Office at Anglia Polytechnic University in Chelmsford, UK. In his new role, Mr Menniss plans to focus on expanding international student numbers at the university by developing the agent network and ensuring that the university becomes a world class education centre.



Jesse Ro, previously employed at Uhak.com agency in Korea, is the new

International Marketing Manager at Zoni Language Centers in New York, USA. Ms Ro said she hopes to create a stronger and closer relationship with Zoni agents in her new role, to greater diversify Zoni Language Centers and support agencies that "support schools in a long-term relationship".



Face to face

Each month, we profile the people from language schools who deal directly with agents, in order to give you the chance to get to know some of the people you work with.

Who are you?

Toby Lindsay, Principal.

Where do you work?

Regency College, Brighton.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

After following my heart to Switzerland many years ago, I spent a year there as an au pair and private language teacher. This inspired me to come back to England and do my Celta, and the rest is history.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

We have a uniquely caring and respectful relationship with our students.

What do you believe are the challenges facing your school in the future?

We are very aware that as we grow, it is imperative to maintain academic excellence and all-round quality. The challenge will be to attract the best staff, support them and build on the reputation we have already established.

How does your school promote itself to agents?

Through *Language Travel Magazine*, various Internet agencies and forums, our own website, and the Alphe workshops and other fairs.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

Due to our high standards, many of our students find us through word-of-mouth recommendation, but the figure is currently around 50 per cent.

Has your centre introduced any new programmes in the last year?

We've introduced an academic year, university pre-sessional course, to prepare students for further education/higher education.