

Schools likely to pay for new UK visa system

UK VISA PRICES may rise and education institutions in the UK may be burdened with additional costs as a government consultation gets underway about how best to pay for the enhanced immigration system being ushered in in the next four years. This includes the new points-based system and sponsor-tied visa issuance for international education, promised to be in place by April 2009 (see *Language Travel Magazine*, October 2006, page 6).

Immigration Minister, Liam Byrne, said, "In July, the Home Secretary announced how we will strengthen border controls with identity technology and double enforcement in the UK [by 2009/2010]. But all of these measures cost money and we think that it is right to consider who should pay for them." The consultation paper, which specifically invites comments from small- and medium-sized businesses, proposes that one way to recover the costs of the new visa scheme would be to "charge sponsors an annual registration fee plus a small charge for every certificate of sponsorship they issue". This cost may or may not be passed on to students.

At the Association of British Language Schools (ABLS), which represents mainly small, private providers of education, Diana Lowe said that additional costs were already envisaged by members for extra registrar-related duties required under the new immigration system. "Member schools will, of course, cooperate and play their part in order to make this new system viable and be pragmatic about the need to absorb any extra costs," she commented. "But it would seem unfair [for schools] to also be required to pay a registration fee [for sponsorship]."

Students in Germany under tighter scrutiny

REPORTS IN the German press suggest international students in the country may be expected to report regularly to local government offices during their stay. The move is being discussed after two failed terrorist attacks on German trains in July, thought to have been carried out by Lebanese students.

A government spokesperson said talks on the subject are "already very advanced" and new rules may also take into account visits and immigration of family members, the duration of residence permits and more careful checking of student applications and their guarantors.

Volker Beck, from the Green Party, warned, "It must remain clear that Germany wants young students from abroad. That is decisive for our exports and for Germany as an academic centre."

American Council on Education forecasts US slide but global growth

GLOBAL GROWTH IN international student mobility has been documented in a recent report by the American Council on Education (ACE), which also highlights the USA's sliding share of the market over a five-year period from 1999 to 2004.

International student enrolment in the USA peaked in 2002/03 but has declined since then, and shows the weakest growth among the top six host countries: the USA, the UK, Germany, France, Australia and Japan. "Students, who have come to the United States in the past, are now going elsewhere," announced Madeleine Green, ACE Vice-President for International Initiatives.

The ACE report identifies recruitment strategies employed by some of the USA's competitor countries and underlines those countries, Japan and France, experiencing the strongest growth rates in international enrolment.

Overall, the international student market for higher education is up 56 per cent from 1999, according to the report, which used sources including the Council of Graduate Schools, IIE and Unesco to compile the data. From 1.68 million students, the market has grown to 2.5 million students in 2004, and 7.2 million international students are predicted to be on the move by 2025.

UK and NZ are top destinations for Chinese

ACCORDING TO FIGURES released to coincide with the China Education Expo 2006 in October, the UK and New Zealand are currently the preferred destinations for Chinese students. The UK was said to be educating 60,000 Chinese students, while 30,000 were in New Zealand. The Ministry of Education in China said that in 2005, 118,500 Chinese students were studying overseas overall. Non-English speaking destinations, such as France, Korea and Italy, as well as the USA, were also reported to be rising in popularity as measures are taken in these countries to enhance visa issuance.

Zong Wa, Director of CEAIE, which organised the education expo, commented that more Chinese students were leaving for undergraduate studies overseas now, rather than postgraduate studies, and this trend would continue. An official at the British Embassy explained that being able to work after graduating in the UK was an incentive for students, and he said that the quality of students' visa applications was improving. At the EduFrance office in Beijing, Pierre Yang commented that 6,800 students went to study in France in 2005 – a rapid increase in enrolments since 1998.

Zhang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of Education, said that the number of Chinese studying abroad in 2010 is estimated to reach 200,000. Of these, 10,000 students will be state-sponsored.

Currency

1xUS\$ =currency*

Argentinean	Pesos	3.082
Australian	Dollar	1.291
Brazilian	Real	2.137
British	Pound	0.523
Bulgarian	Leva	1.528
Canadian	Dollar	1.130
Chilean	Pesos	525.50
Chinese (PR)	Yuan RMB	7.871
Czech	Koruny	22.01
Danish	Kroner	5.844
Egyptian	Pound	5.729
EU	Euro	0.784
Hong Kong	Dollar	7.777
Hungarian	Forint	203.46
Icelandic	Kronur	67.540
Indonesian	Rupiah	9,098.7
Israeli	New Shekels	4.266
Japanese	Yen	117.00
Maltese	Lira	0.336
Mexican	Peso	10.742
New Zealand	Dollar	1.489
Norwegian	Kroner	6.526
Polish	Zloty	3.032
Russian	Rubles	26.716
Singaporean	Dollar	1.560
Slovakian	Koruny	28.398
South African	Rand	7.369
South Korean	Won	939.56
Swedish	Kronor	7.226
Swiss	Franc	1.244
Taiwanese	NT Dollar	33.182
Thai	Baht	36.652
Turkish	New Lira	1.455
Venezuelan	Bolivar	2,147.3

*Rates are subject to change and should be used as indications only. 01/11/06.

The Icef Japan Workshop

Date: March 4-6
Venue: Tokyo, Japan
Email: info@icef.com
Web: www.icef.com

Aula - Educ. Opportunities Exhibition

Date: March 7-11
Venue: Madrid, Spain
Email: fitur@ifema.es
Web: www.aula.ifema.es

Expolingua Portugal

Date: March 8-10
Venue: Lisbon, Portugal
Email: info@expolingua.pt
Web: www.expolingua.pt

The Alphe Latin America Workshop

Date: March 14-16
Venue: Sao Paulo, Brazil
Email: jane@hothousemedia.com
Web: www.hothousemedia.com

Work Experience Travel Market

Date: March 15-17
Venue: Riga, Latvia
Email: mailbox@gwea.org
Web: www.gwea.org

ExpoBelta

Date: March 17-18
Venue: Sao Paulo, Brazil
Date: March 20
Venue: Brasilia, Brazil
Date: March 22
Venue: Curitiba, Brazil
Date: March 24

Venue: Porto Alegre, Brazil
Email: marketing@belta.org.br
Web: www.expobelta.org.br

Tieca Study Abroad Fair

Date: March 24-25
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
Email: admin@tieca.com
Web: www.tieca.com

The Icef Moscow Workshop

Date: March 27-29
Venue: Moscow, Russia
Email: Icef as before

MEI-Relsa Agent Workshop

Date: March 31
Venue: Dublin, Ireland
Email: info@mei.ie
Web: www.mei.ie

Kazakhstan Educational International Fair

Date: April 14-15
Venue: Almaty, Kazakhstan
Email: enquiries@intellect.kz
Web: www.intellect.kz

Ryanair bids for Aer Lingus

An Irish takeover bid by ambitious airline Ryanair could lead to the domestic air travel market in Ireland being dominated by one major player. Europe's most successful low-fares airline has bid to take a controlling stake in the former state-run Irish airline Aer Lingus.

If merged, both airlines would transport 50 million passengers a year, a size comparable to large European airline alliances such as Air France-KLM and Lufthansa-SAS-Swiss. Ryanair already owns a 16 per cent stake in Aer Lingus, and wants a controlling stake in the company. Michael O'Leary, Ryanair's Chief Executive, is aiming for 50.1 per cent ownership, but said that Aer Lingus would keep its own branding and management.

"Ryanair has grown to be Europe's largest low-fares airline by continuously lowering prices and funding these reductions through cost savings and efficiencies," he said. "We believe there is an opportunity to apply this successful low-fares formula to Aer Lingus where currently, in its short-haul operation, fares and costs remain

far too high." O'Leary added that the offer was an opportunity to form one strong airline group "for Ireland and for European customers".

Aer Lingus currently offers a mixture of long- and short-haul routes, 17 of which overlap with those routes offered by Ryanair. It is expected that the planned takeover will be subject to a competition investigation by the European Union. O'Leary said the merger should be treated in the same way as Air France, SAS and Lufthansa in previous agreements. ●

New low cost carrier from HK to London

A NEW LOW-COST carrier, Oasis Airline, has been launched, offering daily flights between Hong Kong and London for HK\$1,000 (US\$128) plus tax or HK\$6,600 (US\$849) in its business class.

Despite its competitive pricing, the new airline is offering all the frills of full-fare services such as meals and films, at a low-cost price. The company also plans to establish a cargo service and use other subsidiary airports in the future. Flights to California, Berlin, Cologne and Milan are at the planning stage.

On its current Hong Kong to London route, Oasis competes with Cathay Pacific, British Airways, Qantas, Virgin Airlines and Air New Zealand. ●

Lufthansa expansion plans

GERMAN CARRIER, Lufthansa, is planning to expand its global network in order to increase passenger capacity by 3.3 per cent overall. The airline hopes to increase services in the European market by six per cent and its long-haul services by 2.2 per cent.

On the Asian subcontinent, Lufthansa remains the strongest European airline, having recently introduced Kolkata (former Calcutta) as a new destination. According to a spokesperson from the airline, Lufthansa is resuming services to Cape Town, as well as to San Francisco and São Paulo, for its winter timetable. In the European market, the airline has increased services to Moscow, Innsbruck, Geneva, London, Palma de Mallorca and Valencia.

The carrier has also launched two new routes from London City Airport to Hamburg and Nuremberg in Germany. Dieter Grotepass, Lufthansa General Manager for UK and Ireland, said: "London City Airport has allowed [Lufthansa] to develop its offering to the business travel market and enhance its Star Alliance presence." ●

Flybe takes over BA routes

AN AGREEMENT REACHED between British Airways (BA) and UK regional carrier, Flybe, will see the Exeter-based budget airline take over most of BA's domestic and European routes that do not fly out of London's Heathrow and Gatwick.

British Airways has announced that it will sell its regional subsidiary BA Connect after a fall in operating profits for the second quarter last year. The airline suffered a downturn last year after a security scare in August forced it to cancel hundreds of flights, resulting in losses of £100 million (US\$191 million) for the quarter. BA also expects its fuel bill to be higher this year due to continuing rises in oil prices.

The deal will significantly increase Flybe's route network from 101 routes to 159 and the airline will operate from 23 UK and 36 European airports. Chief Executive, Jim French said, "We believe this announcement means that the UK regions will now have a strong and well-financed airline." ●

Travel Update

- **Ryanair** has been voted the world's least favourite airline. According to travel service TripAdvisor, 4,000 users deemed the low-cost carrier to have the most cramped seating, unfriendly staff and the most delays. Despite the criticisms, Ryanair was estimated to have carried 42 million people in 2006 and still remained popular with customers because of its low fares. Easyjet was considered to be the second worst airline in the poll.

- **Philippine Airlines** is expanding its 24 international routes to the USA and Canada and re-entering the European market after nearly 10 years. Asia's first commercial airline plans to purchase eight wide-bodied planes to enlarge its fleet of more than 30 aircraft and is currently in negotiations with both Boeing and Airbus.

- **Sweden** has been voted favourite European country to visit in a survey of *The Guardian*, *Observer* and *Guardian Unlimited* newspapers in the UK. Second- and third-place holiday destinations were Italy and Norway. Commercial bed nights in Sweden from the UK have increased by 16 per cent over the last five years, according to the Swedish tourism council, VisitSweden.

- **Singapore Airlines** has reduced its fuel surcharges from USD\$20 to USD\$18 for flights between Singapore and Southeast Asian countries, and from US\$90 to USD\$82 for flights between Singapore and the USA and Canada.

- A new Nigerian airline, **Arik Air**, started operating in October. The airline services 10 destinations in Nigeria and three international flights to African destinations. The new airline took over most of the resources of the former Nigerian Airlines Ltd and plans to expand in 2007.

- In China, **Shanghai's two main airports**, Pudong Airport and Hongqiao Airport, are being restructured to handle nearly 120 per cent more passengers and 126 per cent more cargo over the next few years. The first phase of expansion will take place in 2007 and will push the capacity of Pudong and Hongqiao to 50 million passengers and 3.1 million tons of cargo annually.

- **Malaysia** is hoping to expand tourism from Asia's two most populous nations, China and India, through a series of initiatives including sales missions to both countries. Various events are planned for the Visit Malaysia Year to attract a target of 400,000 Indian and 700,000 Chinese tourists for 2007.

- **Taiwan's Taoyuan International Airport** celebrated the introduction of a second Hello Kitty flight, run by Eva Air, last year. The first route has been running from Taipei to Fukuoka and Tokyo for over a year and is now complemented by Kitty Jet 2, flying to Nagoya, Osaka and Sendai. The jet itself is designed with Hello Kitty murals, and the staff are dressed as Kitty characters.

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