


Progress at ABLS

The Association of British Language Schools (ABLS) has succeeded in significantly raising its profile in the last year, achieving recognition from the British Tourist Authority and enhancing its reputation around the world. JOANNE ADCOCK at the association answers our questions about ABLS's evolution.

Fact box

	Full name: Association of British Language Schools	Association's main role: Ensuring excellence in the provision of English language teaching and its associated services
	Year established: 1993	Agent workshop/fam trips: yes
	Number of members: 30	Full contact details: Joanne Adcock, Secretary, ABLS, PO Box 182, Potters Bar, EN6 5ZG, UK. Tel: +44 1707 663311 Fax: +44 1707 663311 Email: info@abls.co.uk
	Type of members: Large schools, small schools, one-to-one, home tuition providers	
	Government recognition: yes	
	Complaints procedure: yes	

Q What has ABLS achieved in the last year?

A We have achieved recognition from the British Tourist Authority (BTA). Until June 2002, the privilege of promotion by the BTA was exclusively reserved for institutions accredited by the British Council (BC). The same restriction applied in British Tourist Board offices, where only BC-accredited private language schools were allowed to advertise. Last year, the BTA agreed that the high standard of the ABLS accreditation procedure made ABLS members also worthy of BTA promotion. This has widened marketing opportunities for members and given our association a higher profile. And following our second successful residential AGM and workshop at King's College, Cambridge, last year, there is now a far greater sense of cohesion among members. The stability of established ABLS members is coupled with ideas and input from new schools.

Q What plans and goals for the future were decided at the AGM?

A It was agreed at the annual general meeting last year that the ABLS committee should set up a working party to investigate the many areas involved in a major website upgrade. The committee and working party met in December and in early February. It is hoped that several quotations will be submitted in order for the new association website to be launched as soon as possible. We will also be continuing the promotion of ABLS as a professional body within the English language learning industry and [working towards] closer links with other language travel professionals.

Q Across member institutions, how have enrolment levels fared over the past year?

A There has been steady interest. ABLS has successfully raised its profile, which has led to an increase in student and agent interest in member schools. We are keen to recruit new members to the association that are able to uphold the professional standards for which ABLS has become known worldwide.

Q ABLS represents many small schools that do not always have English in Britain accreditation. What are the advantages for agents of working with ABLS members?

A The BTA recognises two accreditation schemes – the English in Britain scheme, and ABLS's scheme – which can be proved by referring to the website www.visitbritain.com/world/learn_english/learn.htm. The difference between these schemes lies not in the size of member organisations or in standards of accreditation, which are equally high, but of emphasis, with ABLS focusing on niche markets such as specialist stays and home tuition providers. Agents can rest assured that, because most ABLS member schools are owner/family run, key people in the organisation will remain constant. This means that good working relationships can be established. Also, if problems arise they can more easily be resolved. ABLS members are also extremely flexible – many members will tailor courses to the individual requirements of the client.

Q In your opinion, is student intake at ABLS member schools comparable to other schools in the UK in terms

of age and nationality, or do particular clients favour ABLS schools?

A We cater for the whole range of clients – from business travellers and professionals to au pairs, special interest groups as well as young learners.

Q How does the association promote itself to agents overseas and what other marketing strategies do members use?

A We take advantage of excellent networking throughout the membership. We also have direct links from our website to that of the BTA and, of course, to all ABLS members. We attend the Alphe workshop in London every year and are regularly quoted in professional journals.

Q How is ABLS working together with other UK associations such as Arels and Baselt?

A We have a close relationship through personal contact with the Chief Executives of Arels, Baselt and the British Council, all of whom attended our recent AGM and workshop at King's College, Cambridge.

Q How has the high value of the British pound affected business, and what other challenges face your members during 2003?

A The high value of the pound has had little or no effect on business. Agents and students are more interested in value for money and the consistently high standard of service offered by ABLS members. The challenges we face are the same as those of any business facing the possibility of worldwide recession.