

UK workshop season is upbeat

Next issue

In our December issue, **Special Report** looks back over 2003 and evaluates the highs and lows of a difficult year in the language travel industry, while **Market Report** finds out about market trends in France this year. **Direction** asks students what they think about the service they receive from agents and **Feedback** finds out what students in Malta think about their experience. **City Focus** visits Bournemouth while **Destination** reports from Germany.

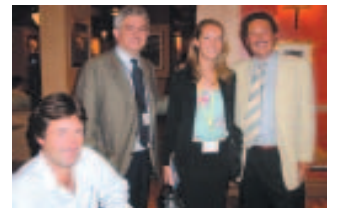
UK workshops were as busy as ever this year, with hundreds of delegates from all around the world travelling to the UK for the Alphe and Arels events. Organisers reported that attendance was good, despite agents and schools from a number of countries reporting a difficult year for business. Scott Wade, of the Alphe workshop in London, welcomed participants to the event urging them to “look forward to what we hope will be a positive year for the industry”.

This sentiment was echoed elsewhere during the workshop week, with Charles Harrison, Chairperson of Arels, pointing out that at the workshop in 2002, there were hopes of a positive year ahead, with the troubles that 2003 brought with it, including the Sars virus and war in Iraq, largely unforeseen.

At the Alphe UK workshop at the Victoria Park Plaza Hotel in



The Alphe and Arels events mixed business and social opportunities



London, 78 educators attended to meet with some of the 142 agents who registered. Jane Gilham of organisers, Hothouse Media, commented, “The workshop was as busy as ever, with participants praising our usual combination of good business opportunities, excellent organisation and enjoyable social events.”

Karin McQuaid Zimmerman, of DW agency in Brazil, said, “[Alphe] seems different from other workshops, and I think there’s a very good integration among the different nationalities. There’s a good atmosphere.”

Maria Banaszak, of LEC Centre in Poland, added, “The schools are quite different from those I know from [the] Arels [fair], with a price range that interests me.”

Exhibitors at the Alphe workshop included representatives of different school associations from around the world. Many were in attendance because of a meeting of the Global Alliance of Education and Language Associations (Gaela) prior to the event. May Arthur, representing AAIEP in the USA, said, “In comparison to other workshops I have been to, there’s been a better quality of

Industry issues - agents speak out

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Q How do you ensure that your clients have a realistic expectation of their study abroad experience?



“Be upfront, tell them there are a range of possibilities and show them if they want or expect more, they will have to pay more. I know it sounds simple and it is elementary economics. I see too many agents just go for price because they feel this is the be all and end all. Only 10 per cent of clients will ever go for the lowest price. As a leading agency, Lanacos also needs to know the product (ie course, location, country etc.) to give the client a ‘realistic expectation’. A very small percentage of clients complain, and this is usually because the school’s brochure has promised something and not delivered. Lanacos provides independent information that is not evident in the brochure. Schools should be open at their end, tell us the truth. They sometimes offer a sub-standard level of service, especially in the area of accommodation, they must take much more care in this department.

Lanacos takes great care in choosing schools and their accommodation facilities. We do not take anything for granted and the brochure is just the shop window, not the product.”

Martin Pickett, Lanacos, UK



“AB Centrum is an educational company in the southern Polish city of Katowice. Our customers are very quality conscious and price sensitive, and sometimes their expectations exceed the reality. We [have] found that the best way to avoid such situations and give the customers real life experience is to have our staff take part in ‘trial courses’ at the educational institutions that we represent.”

Karolina Osiecka, AB Centrum, Poland

“I achieve this by giving clients continuous assistance and choosing the right programme and the right type of accommodation – focusing



on their needs first. Also, I have to trust the schools. I have visited most of the schools [I work with]

personally. Above all, my concern is homestay, sometimes more than the language course itself. My aim is for students to be happy and then their language will improve. We have had some complaints about English host families. The fault can be on both sides. Students must be flexible and adaptable when living in another country. They pay, but at the same time, they are guests [in a family]. It’s sometimes difficult – I say students must inform me of problems at the time – I don’t accept complaints when they return. [In the event of a problem] I talk to the school, maybe email them first to save on the phone bill – and then try and resolve the situation.”

Bianca Bugane, STI Travels, Italy

“You must be very selective with the schools you work with and the students’ requirements. You must



know your product well. And it’s good to understand the country where you are sending

your students. Lets talk about China. Most of the agents in China do not know in-depth about their products and those countries [they represent]. All they know is to sell. Han Gao International School & Consultant is very different from them. When a student comes to us, we make sure we study them in detail, we tailor their study plan and follow by checking [details] with schools/university/colleges. This is to ensure we have the students on the correct path of study for their future. We do sometimes encounter problems with some students who are too demanding or schools that change policy. We are able to fix these problems by either changing the school for them or talking to the school.”

Andrew Chan, Han Gao International School & Consultant, China



agencies and it's been very, very well organised. I've seen many more people than I had expected to see."

Prior to the Alphe workshop, a new one-day Alphe Extra event was also arranged, for organisers of work placements, volunteer and au pair programmes. Gilham commented, "All participants reported good interest from a range of agencies attending."

In Brighton during the following week, almost 900 delegates converged on the Brighton seafront to attend what is one of the largest marketing events in the industry. "This year's fair saw

Arels strengthen its links with international language travel associations," commented Abby Penlington, ICT & Marketing Officer at the association. "There were 20 school associations and 20 agent associations represented at the event."

The fair maintained its usual format with seminar sessions on the Tuesday followed by two days of workshop activity in the Hilton Metropole Hotel. Penlington added, "This year, we welcomed new representatives from UK universities and colleges." Agencies from new markets, such as Mongolia, Estonia and Qatar, were also reported to be attending.

Carlos Lacunza, Director of Lacunza IH in San Sebastian, Spain, commented, "I have been attending Arels for five years, which is a very positive indicator. Agents are mostly interested in English, so the fact that the number of schools offering Span-

ish has grown a lot makes it more difficult to get appointments. Still, I enjoyed meeting my agents and the whole event."

In the UK, Frances Corley, Business Manager at the Manchester Academy of English, commented, "In my opinion, the Arels fair this year seemed to have a great feeling of optimism about the industry from everybody involved. As we are all aware, the industry has been hit this year by world events... it was great to see so many participants from all over the world together striving to achieve the same goal."

There were many other events organised during the workshop week, such as the official launch of the Quality English brand, the Ialc reception – complete with vodka to toast next year's conference venue in St Petersburg – and the British Council reception to highlight its "Learn It, Live It" promotional campaign. □

On the move



Kasia Koniec has taken over from Gavin Dowling as Marketing Manager at Active Learning

in London, UK. Ms Koniec has been with the school since 1995, and in fact, joined as a student. Since 1998, she has held the post of Welfare Officer at the school. "I certainly know the school inside-out and can assure agents that had I not been happy as a student, I would not be here now," she commented. "I look forward to working with agents around the world and establishing a mutually beneficial relationship".



Cam Harvey has been appointed President of Shane Global Village (SGV) English Centres in

Vancouver, Canada, moving into the position after five years as the Marketing Director. "Our industry is at a real turning point and SGV is positioned to take advantage of exciting, new opportunities. I'm very much looking forward to the challenges ahead," said Mr Harvey.



Quality English has appointed Carolyn Blackmore to the position of Chief Executive. She

has been the Marketing Manager at the Eckersley School of English, Oxford, in the UK, since 1993 and she was a full-time teacher there before that. Ms Blackmore is looking forward to the new challenge of promoting the Quality English brand.



Vanessa Milner, based at Milner International College of English in Perth, Australia, has

recently taken over the role of Marketing Director for both schools in the Milner group. Milner School in Wimbledon, UK and Milner College in Perth, Australia, are a family-owned and operated enterprise.



Ed Peters has joined St Clare's, Oxford in the UK as Head of Marketing. He was formerly

Director of Communications for Bedford School and International Study Centre, and, more recently, involved in marketing consultancy within the independent school sector. His strategic role at St Clare's is to head up the marketing team and promote the college's strengths in providing International Baccalaureat, English language and liberal arts instruction.

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?

Sheila Hoffman-Hicks, President/Co-Owner.

Where do you work?

Global Language Institute (GLI), St. Paul, Minnesota, USA.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

My doctorate is in French and Applied Linguistics, and my original career plan was to be a university professor. While in France, I was offered the position of GLI Vice President, which I accepted for a one-year period. After that year, I loved the school and the business so much that I decided to stay.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

GLI is an accredited school that has enjoyed an excellent reputation around the world as a serious academic programme with great student services. Our specialisation is in preparing students not just for university admission but to really succeed in university studies.

How does your school promote itself to agents?

Primarily through fairs and personal visits. We also have developed many strong partnerships with agents over the years, and it's important to us to nurture and maintain those relationships.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

About 30 per cent.

How do you believe your institution will develop in the future?

We have just formed a partnership with the College of St. Scholastica (CSS), a ranked and highly regarded university with a genuine interest in welcoming international students to their campuses.

UK agent wins business accolade

A SCOTTISH language travel agent, Kath Bateman of Caledonia Languages Abroad, has been named as one of the UK's top businesswomen in a UK-wide competition. Bateman was chosen to be in the top 10 of the "Women mean Business Awards" because of the success of her business, which started out in 1994 as a part-time agency.

Caledonia Languages Abroad now offers language courses and activity holidays in Europe and Latin America and deals with around 1,000 clients per year, employing three full-time staff. An awards ceremony was held in London during which Bateman was presented with a trophy and a UK£3,000 (US\$4,746) telecommunications package from sponsors, T-Mobile.

Bateman said, "We were really delighted to get through to the finals. It has raised morale in the office hugely." She added she planned to continue growing her product range and develop her range of business courses. □