

UK workshop season busy

The Alphe UK workshop in London and the International Languages & Education UK Fair in Brighton, held earlier this year, were as busy as ever, with a flurry of last-minute agent bookings to the Brighton event, according to Tony Millns, Chief Executive of English UK. "It's reassuring that people have turned up and are talking about future business," he said, in reference to the London bombings from which the UK market seems to have recovered quickly.

The first night gala dinner in Brighton marked a change from previous years, with a chair-free buffet event. Caroline MacAndrews at English Language Centre in Brighton commented on the workshop as a whole that the atmosphere seemed quite relaxed this year. "We've had some good appointments," she added. At Bloomsbury International in London, David Anthonisz agreed. "The workshop doesn't seem to have been as intense as previous years," he said. "I don't know if that is down to the new [online] booking system." He explained that free slots were not as easy to fill with passing agents this year.

In London, delegates at the Alphe workshop were warm in their praise of the event. Svitlana Shtengelova from Enforex in Spain said, "It's quite relaxed, but at the same time, I've been busy all the time which is good." Pannipa Wongdarawan from ISTC in Thailand noted, "I like Alphe because the schedule is better, you have a longer time [with a school]." And at Eurobridge International in Spain, Tony Gamble said, "I've done a lot of business here, it just gets better and better really."

To see photos from both events, see the grapevine section (overleaf), while more Alphe UK pictures can be found on our website www.hothousemedia.com.



Business was brisk at the annual Alphe London workshop

Australia's e-visa reaches Indonesia

INDONESIA IS THE LATEST COUNTRY to benefit from the Australian government's initiative to allow selected professional agencies to submit online visa applications on behalf of their clients. Since August 19, six agencies – Alfalink, AS Student Services, Edlink + Connex, Erajasa Globalindo, IDP and Vista Education Services – have been able to use the eVisa system.

The system was initially introduced for agencies in China, India and Thailand (see *Language Travel Magazine*, February 2005, page 10) and means that clients no longer have to submit documentation to the Australian Embassy. Agents can submit the visa application online, having previously checked their clients' credentials.

The six Indonesian agencies in the trial have received training alongside Embassy staff in Jakarta, and an eVisa advocate has been appointed at the Embassy to assist with local promotion via ongoing training and information. Also included in the scheme from 1 July were registered migration agents in Australia, who can lodge applications on behalf of offshore students from trial countries.

EEC in Sweden closes

A STUDY ABROAD agency in Sweden, European Education Centre (EEC), has gone bankrupt, leaving debts to both schools and students. Two local agencies, Avista and Sprakpunken, have stepped in and agreed to help students affected by the closure of EEC.

Anders Akerlund, Director of Avista, said the action was intended to protect consumer interests and avoid a bad reputation for the agency industry in Sweden. "Clients booked for future courses had already paid about €50,000 (US\$62,324) to EEC before the bankruptcy and this amount is probably completely lost," Akerlund told *Language Travel Magazine*. "Avista and Sprakpunten are actually taking over these contracts with the schools and will cover all fees from our own means."

He said that commission payments from other students

booked through EEC, who had not yet paid, should off-set some costs incurred, but the agencies would not be able to recoup all the money.

Akerlund added that some EEC clients were already studying overseas when they discovered that school fees had not been paid by the agency, and thanked schools for their understanding attitude during continuing discussions.

Akerlund commented that in the event of a bankruptcy, it is important that swift action be taken. "In Sweden, we do not have an association of agents, but as market leaders, Avista and Sprakpunten decided to get involved, even before we knew the exact financial situation," he said. "We encourage national associations, both for schools and agents, to develop plans for how to act in situations like this."

Agency of the month



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 explain why this person/company is worthy of their nomination.



"We have been working with STA Travel Switzerland for several years now. And we still remember Michael Eck visiting us here at our school in Berlin – the first agent ever arriving at our school on a bicycle. This is a casualness we highly appreciate

This month, **GLS Sprachenzentrum** in Berlin, Germany, nominates **STA Travel** in Switzerland. **Anja Schulz-Ehlers**, Sales Consultant at the school, explains this decision:

in daily business as well. [Staff members include] Michi, Alex, Thomas and last but not least Nizar (our favourite telephone voice). STA has a charming and supportive staff so that communicating with them always is a pleasure for us.

A second thing that impresses us about the agency is its professionalism. Its catalogues and website truly represent GLS Sprachenzentrum, and whenever we have a new idea or new programme they are extremely fast with selling it via their website or special marketing initiatives. They are a perfect partner as far as we are concerned!"

Industry issues - agents speak out

January February March April May June July August September October November December

Q Is it easy to find professional staff in an agency and what is the best way to recruit new staff?



Zhazira Duisenbekora, ICC, Kazakhstan

"The main thing that we look for [in new staff] is not experience, actually we don't require any experience. Those with experience bring with them the advantage of having worked in another company but they can also bring with them problems. We look for young people who are enthusiastic, keen to learn and curious, who are really communicative. Of course, the person has to have English, this is critical, but this is not the most important thing. Experience and [a good level of] English ability can be gained. I train staff in the way I see they should be counselling people. They have to be really delicate and respect people's wishes and know how to keep secrets, such as information about finances, or fears about studying abroad – this is really important. When a candidate comes

to me, I look at their cv, qualifications, then I ask what service they think they will provide. It must be someone who says they will solve someone's problems, not someone who only thinks that they will be booking flights. Students come to us and they pay us an administration fee in order to find resolutions for their problems. Agencies must be 100 per cent service-oriented. Customer satisfaction is very important."



Hoang Lan Hoa, Pan Asia Holdings - Hanoi, Vietnam

"To find professional staff to work for an agency is a big problem with bosses at this moment in Vietnam. The main reason is there isn't a professional institution that offers courses to train people to do the job. It seems that the job "appeared" spontaneously as demand for studying overseas has been increasing among Vietnamese

students since the 1990s. In fact, the best way to recruit new staff is looking for people among relatives, friends... with experiences in the educational field and good English to work with. Insisting people have previous experience of study overseas is what we often do to recruit new staff. Advertising to recruit staff is not really the best way. Our company failed to do so when setting up the second office in 2002. Sending staff on short training [courses] organised by the British Council Vietnam is what we often do. In terms of working duration, most of our young counsellors see this job as a temporary one. Normally, one year is enough time for a counsellor in the north of Vietnam to change to another job."



Anastasia Chernycheva, Alvis-Class Education Agency, Russia

"This is a burning issue for us. When there [was] a

vacancy for an education counsellor at the agency last year, it turned out to be a problem to find the right person! We searched through a professional recruiting agency and through the web. But it was months until we got lucky after a number of interviews and cv screenings. And this was in spite of the fact that we never demand any previous experience from a newcomer. Our policy is to train a good specialist while at work. Being the only professional agency in our region, one can hardly expect experienced staff to come. If someone would like to work as a counsellor at our agency, a teacher training education and experience as a teacher would be welcome. A counsellor at an education agency should be first a specialist in study overseas and secondly a teacher at heart, as we deal with younger customers, who make up 75 per cent of our clients."

Q&A



Eaquals groups together schools in 20 European countries keen to undergo its rigorous inspections. LAURA MURESAN and BRIAN NORTH at the association answer our questions.

Fact box

Full name: European Association for Quality Language Services
Year established: 1991
Number of members: 117 (103 full members and 14 associate members) in 20 countries
Type of members: Founder members, full members, associate members. Approximately half offer intensive courses to the language travel market and half offer extensive foreign language courses to their local market
Association's main role: Promotion of quality in language teaching institutions
Membership criteria: For full members, inspection every three years with detailed quality criteria
Government recognition: Italian Ministry of Education gives credits for Eaquals courses; Swedish Board of Higher Education recognises Eaquals schools for loans and grants
Code of practice: yes
Complaints procedure: yes
Agents workshops/fam trips: no
Contact details:
 Eaquals, Via Torrebianca 18, Trieste, 34132, Italy
 info@eaquals.org
 www.eaquals.org

What has Eaquals been up to this year?

The two latest meetings were the OGM, held in Dublin, Ireland, in November 2004 with the annual conference attended by over 100 participants and Inspector Training on the day beforehand, and the AGM, held in Florence, Italy, in April 2005. We have this year promoted the European Language Portfolio – including the electronic version launched in conjunction with the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) – and have set up Interest Groups on Management Competences and a Professional Profile that teachers can use to map their increasing competences during their career.

How many members does Eaquals currently have and is this number growing?

117 members (103 full members and 14 associate members) in 20 countries. The number of members is growing, mainly due to interest in the added value provided by the Eaquals system of quality assurance.

Please tell us about the Eaquals/Alte European Language Portfolio.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is an instrument for learners to profile their competence in all the languages they speak in relation to the internationally recognised European Language Levels. The Eaquals-ALTE ELP, available in more than 10 languages, is the only international version for adults. An electronic version in English and French can be downloaded from www.eaquals.org.

What are Eaquals' plans and goals for the coming year?

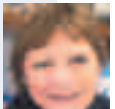
Eaquals will be holding its next General Meeting in Athens, Greece, in November this year. We are developing a new assessment approach to certificate learner progress in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference, already used by most of our members for curriculum organisation.

On the move

Having run Exsportise Sports Holidays in the UK for the last eight years, Marcus van der Gaag has joined Discovery Summer in the UK to bring a professional sports coaching element to their British Council accredited junior residential summer courses. Founder of Discovery Summer and ex-Arels Chairperson, Jane Merrick, is delighted to establish a new sector, Discovery Sports, which will include intensive sports coaching and outward bound with English.



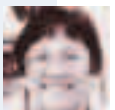
Angela Oliver (above) is the new Chairperson of English New Zealand. She comes to the position after 22 years in New Zealand's ELT industry. Ms Oliver was a teacher both in New Zealand and overseas prior to establishing Unique New Zealand on Auckland's North Shore in 1989. Meanwhile, Christine Schmidli (below) is the new Secretary of the association. She has 27 years' experience in the industry and is Principal of New Horizon College of English in Napier.



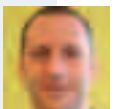
Mella Beaumont has been elected to the position of Deputy Chairperson of English Australia, the professional association for English language colleges in Australia. Ms Beaumont is the national Director of Studies for Embassy CES and has extensive teaching, teacher training and educational management experience in the UK, Australia and China. She is also an appointee of the Premier of Queensland to the Queensland Export Education and Training Board.



Sally Gardner is leaving her position as Director of the American Culture and Language Program (ACLP) at California State University Los Angeles in the USA, which re-opened as the English Language Center (ELC) in June. Ms Gardner spent 27 years working at the university and plans to enjoy her retirement. "I am proud that ACLP [now ELC] was an outstanding programme with an excellent national and international reputation," she said.



English UK has appointed Mark Rendell, Global Director of Academics at EF English First, as Deputy Chief Executive (Professional Services). He will work alongside Richard Truscott, Deputy Chief Executive (Business Services) in the delivery of the association's main services to its members, and take on responsibility for English UK's continued work on accreditation and quality assurance.



Grapevine

Members of English in London flew out to promote their city to agents in Thailand and Singapore earlier this year. After giving a presentation to members of Thai association, Tieca, the five schools attended a workshop in Singapore. Pictured here, from left to right, are four members of the delegation in front of their Visit London stand: Timothy Blake, London School of English; Jane Dancaster, Wimbledon School of English; Kevin McNally, Hampstead School of English; Judy Loren, Excel English.



The Brighton Pavilion (below) was the exciting setting for the agents' reception hosted by OISE during the English UK Fair. Agents ate in the pavilion's old kitchen, and pictured here (centre) are agents representing JDJ in Poland (left and right) with Maria Yermolova from Oxbridge agency in Russia (centre) flanked by



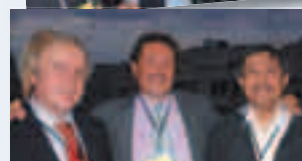
John Harrison (tall) and Geoff Hardy-Gould (not so tall) of Regent Language Training, owned by OISE.



Caught in the act of sampling the more basic English refreshments of beer and chips on Brighton's seafront (above) from left to right: Stuart Boag and Susan Sawbridge of Education New Zealand; Sue Blundell of English Australia; and Walter Denz and Jan Capper of Ialc.

The Coq d'Argent restaurant in the heart of the city of London was a big hit with Alphe UK delegates this year. Enjoying the alfresco views over London during the Saturday evening entertainment were (top) from left to right: Giovanni Pappalardo, Ethnikos Travel Club, Italy; Pier Mario Cesaraccio, Centro Soggiorni Studio, Italy and Joanna Kostecka, English Sunny School of Cyprus, Cyprus.

And also, (below) Martin von Schuppler, International Quest, UK; Francesco Caputo, Inter-studio Viaggi, Italy; and John Lin, Welcome Consulting, Taiwan.



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 - December 2005: Special Report looks back at the events of the past year • **Market Report** charts trends in Ireland • **Direction** looks at exam programmes • **Agency Survey** canvasses Taiwanese agencies • **City Focus** visits Montpellier in France • **Spotlight** profiles home tuition provision in the UK