

LAL is looking to enlarge

Next issue

In our November issue, **Special Report** looks at how trends towards economising are impacting on products and services in the industry. **Market Report** talks to Canadian English language schools to gauge current business trends and in **Direction**, agency associations update us about their activities. **Feedback** finds out what students studying in Ireland think about their stay. **City Focus** visits Valladolid in Spain and **Status** brings us market information from NZ.

One of Germany's largest language travel organisations, LAL Sprachreisen – which has a number of agencies representing its school network around the world and four language schools of its own – is moving its operations to new Munich-based headquarters and focusing on expanding the business by recruiting more agents.

Peter Cassalette is now acting as Central Marketing Officer, operating out of Munich, replacing Gary Neale, who previously worked from the Torbay Language Centre in the UK. According to LAL, Cassalette is charged with overseeing its "international commercialisation".

Walter Niggel, Managing Director of parent company FTI Frosch Touristik – of which LAL is a division – commented, "On the basis of the new organisation structure, we are planning to expand the sector of language

holidays." He added that LAL would now be more closely connected to FTI.

Cassalette told *Language Travel Magazine* that LAL is particularly looking to recruit more agents in China and Eastern European countries to sell LAL language products.

So far this year, LAL reports that there has been significant interest in language travel products, especially from the Polish, Russian and Czech markets, with English language holidays being most requested. Malta is growing in popularity with Russians and

Chinese, said Cassalette. He added that business English courses have also been highly requested. "In difficult times like these, a lot of people want to perform better in their jobs," he said. "Therefore, they decide to refresh their business English skills, which benefits us."

LAL estimates that 35,000 customers book a language travel course through the company each year. Its four own schools are situated in Torbay in the UK, Cape Town in South Africa, Fort Lauderdale in the USA and Sliema, Malta. □

Talk to us

Do you have many clients that request distance learning programmes? And do you find it difficult to accommodate their requests? Are you able to gain commission for placing clients on to a distance learning course? We would like to hear about your experiences of

working in this sector. We are also interested in your views on exclusive representation of a school in a geographical area. Is this something that you expect or that schools offer you? Please email mail@hothousemedia.com and let us know your thoughts.

Industry issues - agents speak out

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Q Do you have any direct contact with embassies or consulates in your country and if so, how do they help simplify the visa issuing process?



"Frankly speaking, the only place where I feel comfortable [among the many consulates and embassies I visit] is the Consulate General of the UK. There is extremely good [visa] processing with very polite, very quick staff. No embassies or consulates actually contact us, with the exception of the UK consulate in St Petersburg. They always invite us for any celebrations of the Queen's Birthday and other days. Many embassies, like the US Embassy in Moscow, try to avoid any contact. They do not reply to emails [or] faxes, and it is absolutely impossible to speak via telephone. At the French consulates, they do not want to work with education agencies at all. They always require parents or students to come to the consulate in person."
Vladimir Yankin, Fasel Tour, Russia



"We do have a steady contact mainly with the Canadian and Australian embassies and consulates. The Australian Consulate holds seminars on visas once a year or so. They also held a fair early this year where agents could have a booth and promote Australian schools. [However] they do not simplify the visa issue, visas are not easy to get. The Canadian Consulate does not hold seminars but they are available whenever we do need something. [Canadian] visas are not that difficult, providing we give all the supporting documentation."
Veronica Cartagenova, Northampton Institute, Argentina

"We have direct contacts with all the St Petersburg consulates and Moscow embassies. [The level of help] depends on the country – we get a lot of assistance and understanding from the consulates of

Great Britain, France, Italy and Switzerland. The British Council is most helpful in sending representatives to our office, organising workshops and fairs. There is an indifferent attitude from the Spanish, German and Austrian embassies. There are not even any special conditions for travel or education agencies from the US embassy – clients have to apply personally [for study visas] with documents we provide them and sometimes stand in long queues."
Tatiana Pavlikova, Tour Prestige, Russia

"A close relationship with embassies keeps us informed about changes in all visa issues, which helps the visa administration process. Furthermore, not having administrative problems before departure [means] a client receives a positive image of a country of his choice, which may influence his attitude to what appears



around him while staying there. Most embassies respect agents and are willing to be of assistance. Especially I would like to stress the caring relationship of the British Embassy in Bratislava and Australian Embassy in Vienna – this is maintained in a direct way via agent meetings, mailings, a presence at in-country educational fairs, etc. Communication with the US embassy has developed since September 11, 2001, into a well-functioning relationship. The only embassy with a negative approach to agencies, according to our experience, is the Canadian Embassy in Vienna. Our effort to enter into a dialogue with them has remained without reply [despite us having] the highest rate of visa refusals to Canada. This, of course, is not a motivating reason for us to send clients to study in Canada."
Anna Jackova, Bakalari, Slovakia

New association on the cards for South East Asia

A NEW agency association is in the pipeline in South East Asia, as a company with agency branches in four different countries has set up an initiative to form national councils of agencies in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Mohammed Zakir Hossain, of Transglobe Consultants in the UK, runs the Professional Development Academy in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. He told *Language Travel Magazine* that he has been in discussions with other agencies in these countries and formed national councils, with a view to uniting them in a regional association.

"Current membership [of the national councils] stands at 20 agencies in Bangladesh, 10 in Nepal, 19 agencies in Pakistan and 45 in India," related Hossain. "[Members of the national coun-

cils] believe that we should do business, but fair business."

He explained that the ministries of education in each country had also been approached and were planning to work with the national councils and enforce membership by forbidding agencies that have not joined from advertising in the press.

"All [agencies will have to] be verified by the ministry of education," said Hossain. "An agency's trade licence, their applications, tax papers and service policy – everything must be presented to the [relevant] ministry [to be approved] and be able to advertise in the newspaper." An annual membership fee will fund the checking on quality standards, he added.

Hossain said he had faced some resistance from agencies in developing such a quality model,

but believed that quality agencies needed to be able to distinguish themselves from unreliable operators. "There are a lot of agencies misleading students," he said. "They do not have proper information about studying abroad and [staff] have not had proper training." He underlined that education ministries supported this view.

At the time of going to press, the national councils were planning to unite and form the South Asian International Education and Language Travel Association (Saielta). The slogan that the association plans to adopt is "fair trade in education promotion".

Hossain explained that the idea for Saielta had been born at an Alphe workshop in London two years ago following a meeting with Albert Lee, of Taiwanese agency association, Tosa. □

On the move



Gonzalo Peralta has been appointed as Vice President of Language Training at

BabelFish in Canada. The Babel Fish Corporation, which provides a wide range of multilingual services, including language training and software products, merged with Living Language Services (LLS) in Ottawa, Canada, earlier this year, where Mr Peralta spent 20 years working. Although BabelFish currently has only one language training location, through its merger with LLS, it is actively expanding. "We are in expansion mode, not only in [terms] of locations, but also infrastructure and products for the language industry," said Mr Peralta.



Claire Hegarty has been appointed as Marketing Coordinator for the Clare

Language Centre in Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland. She will be in charge of working with agents on a daily basis and marketing the school in conjunction with the Director, Muireann Neylon.



There have been staff changes at the British Council. Barbara Wickham, former Director English Language Teaching Group, is moving to



Venezuela as Director, while Peter Upton, former Director of the Education and Training Group, is moving to Thailand as



Director. John Whitehead (top) joins the English Language Teaching Group as Director from November. He has worked for the British Council since 1990 in posts in Colombia, Poland, Tunisia and the UK and has led on several of the British Council's English 2000 initiatives, including the development of the Getis market intelligent service and a global strategy for promoting the UK ELT sector. Mary Stiasny (not pictured) takes over as Director of the Education and Training Group in October. This group's responsibilities include the Prime Minister's Initiative to recruit more international students to the UK. Greg Selby (middle) has joined the UK team as Communications and Marketing Manager, Enterprises. He has worked for the Council since 1997 in posts in Japan and Tunisia. And Angela Sexton (below) has also joined the English Language Teaching Group as Communications Manager.

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?

My name is Eleri Maitland.

Where do you work?

Together with my husband Tom and two of our three daughters, we run Inlingua French in Rouen, Normandy. We run a language learning centre in the true sense of the word, not just teaching one language in summer but teaching seven languages on average every week.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

Tom and I started the school soon after moving to France 14 years ago as we wanted to work together. I had a background as a language teacher in the British state system and Tom in management.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

Agents choose to work with us because we are reliable. If we say that we will do something then we do it. Furthermore, we are flexible and we prefer to run an extra group than to fill groups to their maximum of eight and to have a wide level of disparity [in language level].

How does your school promote itself to agents?

We don't have an enormous budget for advertising but we do regular mailings, phone [calling], attend language fairs and visit agents when possible. We also have a new website where students can register for language courses.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

So far this year, about 50 per cent of our annual intake has come from agents and we rely on our good reputation being spread from agent to agent and student to student.

Brazilian agency looking for partners

CENTRAL de Intercambio (CI) in Sao Paulo, a Brazilian language travel agency that deals in inbound and outbound bookings, is looking to recruit other agencies around the world to promote its Brazil-based programmes.

Its high school programme, launched last year, enables students to enrol for one or two semesters in private day schools for students aged 15 to 18 years old. Another recently launched programme is a residential football camp, where the official language spoken during the classes is English. Students can enrol at the camp for anything from one week to a year.

Amalia Quiroz at CI explained, "We believe in the potential of our incoming programmes and therefore we need to increase promotion through a number of agents worldwide."

CI is also promoting an internship programme that has run since 1988. Quiroz said the programme had received more than 500 foreign students so far. □