

Australia discusses regulating agents

Next issue

In our October issue, **Special Report** provides an analysis of the size and share of the English language teaching market in its main teaching countries, while **Market Report** finds out about recent market trends in the UK. **Direction** looks at agency marketing techniques and **Feedback** finds out what students in Malta think about their study experience. **Destination** discovers what Canada has to offer and **City Focus** visits Frankfurt. **Status** provides a US market view.

The Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs in Australia has proposed regulating the immigration activities of education agents, as well as regulating migration agents, to “protect people living overseas who apply for Australian visas”.

Minister Gary Hardgrave explained, “Currently, only Australia-based migration agents must be registered, leaving a significant group of unregistered overseas migration agents whose clients don’t have the protection available to people in Australia.”

A discussion paper is currently being circulated among industry members with various proposals offering a regulatory framework. Hardgrave said, “A pilot system monitoring the compliance profiles of education agents overseas may help address potential consumer protection issues for overseas student applicants.” He added that the

motive behind the discussion paper had the support of the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson.

The Australian government is paying increased attention to its international education industry and this latest move is part of continued efforts in this area (see page 6). “With more than 300,000 enrolments in Australian institutions, education and training is our third largest services export,” commented Nelson. “These initiatives are an important step towards further strengthening our quality assurance arrangements.”

There are currently four different suggestions for regulating education agents. One model is a monitoring scheme, whereby education providers disassociate themselves from education agents who provide false visa information on behalf of students. “This is in effect a ‘commercial out-comes’ based sanction regime,

which could be replaced by statutory regulation in the longer-term, if required”, states the paper.

The other options include encouraging education agents to become registered migration agents; adopting a new form of restricted migration agent registration; or implementing a self-regulation model for the industry, such as a proposed Education Agent Association of Australia. The paper explains, “This [latter] proposal focuses on the full range of education agent activities [which is] a matter for the Education, Science and Training portfolio and is not addressed in this paper.”

Final submissions to the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (Dimia) are not due until November. At educator association English Australia (EA), Sue Blundell underlined that EA was sensitive to the fact that agents

Industry issues - agents speak out

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

Q What are the three main reasons given by students for choosing to study in a particular country?



Burcin Turkkan, USEH-International Training & Education Services, Inc., Turkey

“The cost of living index; opportunities to combine study with work/internship opportunities; and the variety of quality schools are the three main reasons. Sixty per cent of students come [to us] with a specific country in mind and they want to stick with their choice. Forty per cent come to us with a specific purpose to either study abroad on a specific subject/ language or for an opportunity to have a paid internship. As long as the content of the programme fits their goals they remain flexible with the country and we can direct them.”



Carlos Mario Hurtado, U-Learn, Colombia

“Latin American students more often choose an academic programme based on a country’s willingness to provide them with a student visa, rather

than the reputation and accreditations of a particular educational institution. It is a fact that more countries are closing their doors to [student visa] applicants from this part of the world, due mainly to the social and economic conditions of this region. High unemployment rates, low salaries and the region’s ‘bad’ reputation created by the media encourages countries to tighten their criteria for awarding a student visa when requested. Consequently, serious students pursuing academic certifications in other parts of the world lose the opportunity to receive a good quality education due to reasons that are not within their control. Furthermore, to some embassies, academic language programmes are not a sufficient enough reason to travel abroad. They forget that the recently signed commercial agreements between the United States and several South American countries require a person to be fully bilingual.”



Diana Timofte, International Education Center, Romania

“Educational needs are in continuous change in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The educational advisers have to adapt constantly and be aware of what the main reasons for studying abroad are. Firstly, students are interested in immersing themselves in a flexible educational system that brings plenty of opportunities to continue their studies or to develop a good professional career in the respective country or internationally. Secondly, students want to have a secure return of the educational and financial investment. Therefore, they look for study opportunities that also secure a job placement, or an internship position in the same country, in international firms or even in their home country. Thirdly, and only lately in Romania, the level of economic partnerships with certain countries has become increasingly important. For example, after Renault

and Orange expressed a long-term commitment here, we found an increase in demand for French language courses.”

Sinem Sen and Sule Guvendik, Bilmerk - Center for Overseas Educational Services, Turkey

“The main reasons, in general, for choosing to study abroad are: because the education system in the country that the student lives in doesn’t satisfy their demands; the students may want to experience different cultures and meet with foreign students; and students need to improve their language skills and gain fluency in speaking and writing another language. Most of the students are not certain in which country they want to study. For that reason, it is easy to change their minds. According to their demands, we can arrange the most suitable school for them as a counsellor. We try to lead them to the best schools that suit their requirements.”

were valuable partners in the international education industry. "Our submission will focus on ensuring that any framework that may be considered adds value to the agent/industry/government relationship and does not require additional expense/resources," she said. At the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (Acpet), Tim Smith added, "We support any moves by government to ensure that agents we deal with act ethically and appropriately."

Dimia acknowledges that "the introduction of any monitoring arrangements or registration scheme for education agents would also need to be staged and sensitive to industry needs". It notes that China – with a possible 2,000 agents, according to anecdotal evidence – could be the first focus for any quality assurance action. "It has the largest number of education agents with the ma-

majority of students using them and its agents appear to be the most problematic [according to Dimia data]," states the paper.

Overall, Dimia estimates a possible 10,000 active education agents worldwide, as well as up to 3,000 in Australia. It said issues of concern in terms of education agents' immigration consulting included advertising deceptively overseas; lending money to applicants to allow them to meet financial requirements; charging students unreasonably high fees and lodging student visa applications supported by fraudulent academic records.

The number of international students moving into the general Australian migration programme on completion of their studies has also increased in recent years, stated Dimia. It underlined this factor as another reason to maintain the integrity of the student visa programme. □

Agencies to broker loans to students

FIVE EDUCATION agencies in Vietnam have teamed up with a Vietnamese bank to offer a student loan scheme that they can make available to their clients, according to the Vietnam News Agency (VNA). The main transaction office of Incombank has signed a cooperation deal with the five overseas study organisations, some of which also provide language teaching services for local students in Vietnam.

Vo Tan Thanh at Incombank explained this was the latest of many such cooperative deals, which began when the bank set up its overseas study services in late 2001. Under the deal, study abroad consultants can offer loans to students and provide a money transfer service. The interest rates offered depend on the length of the loan. □

Rumour over agent bribes in NZ

ASIAN EDUCATION agents have allegedly been offering bribes to language schools in New Zealand to enrol overseas students illegally, according to a New Zealand news source, Auckland Stuff Newsroom.

It claims that industry sources have admitted that "incentives" of up to NZ\$2,000 (US\$1,295) have been offered in some cases to allow students – mainly young Chinese – to gain a student permit, although they had no intention of studying there.

A source reportedly revealed that students overcame financial requirements by pooling their money and shifting the money from one account to another to satisfy immigration officers. Once the student permit was issued, the money would be moved.

Steve Jones, from the New Zealand Immigration Service in Wellington, said that sources from an earlier investigation by *Suburban Newspapers* into similar practices had sent him details of the allegations. □

On the move



Jérôme Serrat is the new Owner and Managing Director of École de Langue Française pour

Étrangers (Elfe) in Paris, France. With international experience and a professional background in the fields of management, training and public relations, Mr Serrat takes up the challenge of preserving the unique character of this school.



English UK has appointed Ulrike Kadritzke as Marketing Communications Manager. Her

role will be the development and implementation of an integrated marketing communications strategy for the organisation. Ulrike will be promoting the UK as the prime destination for learning English.



Paul Clark has recently taken over as Principal of Geos English Academy in Brighton & Hove,

UK. Mr Clark has worked in England, Italy and Thailand and has a background in academic management and teacher training. "I am really enjoying working with agents and staff to provide students with a first class all-round service," he said.



Newcastle College in the UK has appointed Pete Fiaschi as their new Head of International

Recruitment. Mr Fiaschi has extensive international marketing experience, having previously worked as Marketing Manager and Summer School Director at Select English in Cambridge.



Craig Wallace has taken over as Business Development Manager at Selc in Sydney,

Australia. With a career in ELT dating back to 1979, Mr Wallace has worked in the Arabian Gulf region, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, teaching or and managing both international and migrant language programmes.



Glenys Merrifield, National Manager of the National ELT Accreditation Scheme (Neas) in Australia, is

moving on after 12 years with the company. Ms Merrifield has established a consultancy, GBM & Associates, and will be specialising in quality assurance, business education, and training and communication.

Agency of the month

STA TRAVEL

www.statravel.ch

STA Travel Zurich

In our regular Agency of the Month feature, we ask a different language teaching institution each month to nominate one of their preferred agencies or agent partners, and to explain why this person/company is worthy of their nomination.

This month, Centro Culturale Giacomo Puccini in Italy nominates STA Travel in Zurich, Switzerland.



Giovanni Poggi, Director at the school, explains this decision:

"I would like to nominate STA Travel Zurich – formerly SSR Reisen – because the working relationship that we have with this agency is a true partnership, and for Swiss clients, booking through an agent in their country brings them more security. We are both focused on delivering the best possible programmes and services to the students: there is continuous dialogue about improving what we offer and coming up with ideas for new programmes and services.

We support our agencies with all the information students need and STA students receive the level of detail they expect about our school. STA is very selective with the schools they work with and the students' requirements.

Also, the staff at STA Travel are very nice, motivated and dynamic. Payments arrive when they are due! And students booking with STA tend to book for a long-term stay."