

News Release
19 December 2011

Forming new language centre/agency partnerships: English UK Fair participants highlight the most important factors

Accreditation is the single most important factor which helps agents to choose an English language centre, whilst language centres look for references and recommendations.

These are the findings from a series of informal sessions held at English UK's three 2011 overseas fairs, where small groups of member centres met agents from all over the world.

Icebreaker sessions at each event, in Muscat, Singapore, and Buenos Aires, tackled the question underpinning the international student market: what factors make schools and agents trust each other enough to do business together?

"Trust is key," agreed the Argentinian group, but discussions in the three sessions looked at what helps to build that trust.

Workshops were rated the most useful way for agents to find new schools and schools to find new agencies. This was mentioned twice as often as other routes, and generally came top of the list for each group of people.

The icebreaker sessions in the three fairs were themselves rated very highly.

"The group discussion before meeting sessions is good and effective. Agents learn more lessons about how to evaluate international schools for students. On the other hand, schools also know how to judge a good agent," said Le Thi Yen Binh, of International Consultancy and Educational Development, Vietnam.

The next most important factor for agents seeking new language centres was a visit and the chance to talk to its students. In third place for this type of information are the agent associations, followed by other recommendations, the English UK website, and students themselves.

For language centres seeking new agents, recognised status-- such as the English UK Partner Agency Scheme -- was the second most important method, followed by Fam Trips and word of mouth. Feedback from students was also rated as important.

Agents and educators then turned to discussing what factors seal the deal. "What information do you need to make your decision?" they were asked.

For agents, accreditation, course options, commission and nationality mix got equal top rating. Almost as important were price, facilities and location, with hours taught, accommodation, teacher qualifications, visa support, efficiency and leisure activities also scoring highly. Among the many other factors mentioned were safety, references, personal appearance of schools and highly trusted status.

Information which educators wanted to have about new agents were led by references, the number and type of other language centres the agency worked with, recommendations and

marketing methods. Other factors mentioned included efficiency, accredited agent training, the number and type of student sent, and "gut feeling".

Educators and agents are looking for quality, but how do they judge that? Agents gave a broad sweep of factors they would look for in a language centre, led by response time, teacher qualifications and accreditation. Price, feedback, honesty, visa knowledge, sensitivity to cultural issues, honesty, the sharing of feedback and good student care were among many other factors mentioned.

For language centres, accreditation, honesty, and timely payment were at the top of the list for judging the quality for agents. Other factors mentioned in the three workshops were monitoring student progress, evidence of pre-departure counselling, knowledge, feedback, and "no surprises."

Groups were also asked what made the perfect workshop. Agents went for location, whilst educators were more motivated by price, fitting in more meetings, and the opportunity for group discussions.

Both agents and educators liked smaller workshops such as the English UK Fairs. Of less importance, but mentioned, were a good percentage of good faces, good organisation, two days maximum at the event, serious commitment and good organisation. English UK member Richard Day, known for his lively presence and presentations at the Fairs, also got a special mention by several groups.

Notes to Editors

1. English UK is the world's leading language teaching association, with more than 450 accredited centres in membership. It covers university and further education college language departments, international study centres in independent schools, educational trusts and charities, and private sector colleges. English UK is a UK registered charity (www.englishuk.com).
2. English UK organises the English UK Fairs in partnership with the British Council, UK Trade & Investment, and VisitBritain, which together form the English Language Promotions Group (ELPG). Participation is limited to just 70 organisations (30 educators and 40 agencies) and is only open to English UK member centres and selected agents.
3. For more information, please contact Jodie Gray (Senior International Manager, English UK) on jodie@englishuk.com.

English UK Ltd
219 St John Street
London
EC1V 4LY

w: www.englishuk.com
e: info@englishuk.com