

Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the English UK Enterprises Board

Held at: English UK, 219 St John Street, London, EC1V 4LY
Thursday 19 May 2011 at 13:00

Present: Graham Simpson (Chair), Shane Wilkinson, and Carmel Fyfe

In attendance: Annie Wright, Mark Rendell, Siobhan Baccas, Jodie Gray and Yvonne Bader (observer)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Kevin McNally, Andrew Waite, Sarah Schechter, Heidi Gonzales, Tony Millns and Andrew Fisher.

GS wished to emphasise that the poor attendance for this meeting and for other recent meetings was in no way a reflection on the efforts of the English UK team and that the activity and preparation for this meeting by the team was very much appreciated.

2. Minutes of the 18th English UK Enterprises Board Meeting

The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the 18th English UK Enterprises Board meeting which was held on the 8 February 2011.

3. Matters arising and updates

AW spoke to the paper.

- It was reported that the development of the English UK South regional group had stalled due to the present uncertain visa situation and the heavy seasonal workload of members, but that work was expected to resume in the autumn.
- In relation to improving participation at future meetings, GS mooted the possibility of regional groups and special interest groups having representation on the sub-board.
- JG flagged that she felt there was a low awareness among English UK members that Board positions were available. In addition to promoting these positions more, it was suggested that the pool of Board members could be expanded and a rule could be introduced stating that 3 consecutive absences would mean Board members losing their seats. It was agreed that the topic of Board attendance should be referred to the main Board for further consideration.
- AW reported that there had been no demand for a meeting of regional/national groups at this year's Annual Conference but that the option remained open for future conferences should it be desirable. It was noted that an English UK staff member was usually present at regional meetings.
- GS noted that he had gained intelligence that Peru was becoming a stronger market and therefore could be scoped by English UK.
- AW briefly reviewed aspects of the commercial strategy meeting that had been held in March 2010 and promised to circulate the minutes from that meeting once the results of the Board elections were known. One recommendation had been to secure a debt recovery partner but Tony Millns was sceptical about international debt recovery agencies in general and it was noted that English UK had tried using one several years ago but with no obvious results. The Board agreed that pressure exerted through the

Association, agencies, embassies and the media was likely to be more successful. SW stressed the importance of members sharing information about bad debtors. SW and GS also noted that they had found dialogue with students to be an effective channel for exerting pressure. AW explained that blacklisting disreputable agencies was problematic particularly when they held the British Council agent qualification. GS concluded that the issue remains unaddressed and that this item should remain on the radar of this Board. AW agreed to pick up the commercial strategy on her return from maternity leave.

- AW announced that an update on the growing membership levels of the English UK Partner Agency Scheme would become a standing item for all subsequent Enterprises Board meetings. AW outlined progress on the new online briefing course for prospective partner agencies. The course will include written and audio content and interest in the partner agency scheme is expected to increase once the service goes live. Agents have to renew every two years by providing up-to-date references. GS recommended promoting the new partner agencies through *Newsflash* and he felt that many members would be keen to obtain the agents contact information. SW noted that the partner agency scheme would lend itself to an awards scheme but that the existence of the LTM Star awards made this unfeasible.

Updates for information, discussion and decision

4. Staff matters – team restructure

AW spoke to the paper and confirmed Sharon Bignell, who was based in Japan, had left the employment of English UK and that the Association wished her well. It was explained that a new appointment would not incur any additional cost for the Association as Sharon had been employed on a freelance basis. The Board congratulated JG on her well deserved promotion and on the restructuring plans which were felt to be sound and would allow for the marketing and fairs teams to be more focused and consistent in the services that they provide. GS also pointed out the benefits of establishing a career ladder within the Association.

5. Marketing update – overview of activities since February 2011 and plans for the remainder of the year

JG spoke to the paper.

- JG reported that the visit to Kazakhstan had been productive and that a report would be forthcoming. She proposed attending a different student-facing fair next time run by KAEA, the Kazakhstan Association of Educational Agents.
- In reference to the UKBA and the English UK Fairs JG explained that the Border Agency was usually represented by a local ECM to cover local issues in addition to a member of the international group.
- The numbers of North America educators attending StudyWorld have been increasing and the team will attend this year's NAFSA event to further encourage this upward trend.
- It was explained that the main marketing collateral produced in 2010 had been planned for two-year shelf life and that future versions were awaiting the outcome of Tier 4 issues regarding accreditation, in case a re-design is necessary.
- SW questioned the concept of the postcard as a marketing tool. AW and JG explained that the promotional postcards were small promotional flyers aimed at a student audience and for distribution at student-facing events. The postcards are visually appealing graphically with information on the reverse directing potential students to the course finder on English UK website. They happen to have the same dimensions as a traditional postcard but they are not intended to be used as a postcard, rather something a student may display on their bedroom wall, for example.

- AW updated the Board on the planned refresh of the current English UK website by the end of this year and on plans for a new website by 2013. She reported that data on usage from Google analytics would be considered as well as input from Jon Aizlewood (Carbon Graffiti) on the user experience in order to help users find content more easily.

6. StudyWorld London – update

- SB spoke to the paper and noted that educators will now be targeted directly in an attempt to increase bookings for the event. She noted that the Welcome Reception/Party was being designed in conjunction with a professional party planner and that the room would be carefully designed and dressed and that there would be a good range of canapés and bowl food on offer. GS was pleased that the event would help to challenge the perception that StudyWorld was a bit serious.
- English UK will offer to advertise any events planned for the Tuesday evening. SW indicated that he may suggest to IALC that they should hold a reception.
- It was confirmed that 6 out of 7 seminar sessions had been confirmed including Mike Southon (a great success at the ELT Marketing Conference). AW suggested holding a session in reserve just in case the UKBA pulled out.
- SB confirmed that no sponsors had been attracted this year and that the sponsorship packages would be broken down if a sponsor did not come on board within the next month.
- AW attended the recent AoC International Conference and noted plenty of interest and a growing awareness of the StudyWorld brand among the UK FE sector. It was pointed out that StudyWorld was very inconveniently timed and coincided with the main student intake for FE colleges. The Board agreed that engagement with the FE sector needed to be stepped up to counter falling membership.
- A venue finder is being used to source an alternative future venue for StudyWorld but results had been disappointing to date. The investigation was in response to the fact that the split over the two floors at the Hilton Metropole had never been popular and the general location of the hotel was felt to be generally unattractive. JG pointed out that most new construction in hotels was in the boutique and high end segment. The Board suggested considering Bournemouth as a possible alternative destination.

7. English UK Fairs – updates and plans for 2012

- JG spoke to the paper and noted how useful the English UK Fairs had been in fostering relationships with agents and links to StudyWorld. The cross-promotional link between the English UK Fairs and StudyWorld would be further strengthened in the year to come. She also noted that she felt that educators found it easier to build relationships with agents over a period of days and that English UK enjoyed significant reputational benefits from these events.
- It was noted that quotas are set to achieve optimal nationality mixes of agents and that the maximum number of educators was normally 30. It was felt to be important to continue to pursue the regional hub policy in order to differentiate the brand from Alphe but also to share dates with other bodies like Quality English in order to avoid clashes.
- Panama has been selected as a venue in 2012 because of its proximity to Colombia. Colombia is perceived by other Latin American nationalities to be too dangerous.
- It was noted that the prices for the 2012 events would be higher than those recorded in the papers. Due to the fact that the Fairs were heavily subsidised at the beginning it has affected how quickly the fees could be increased in order to generate a margin. The events are currently cost neutral but it has to be pointed out that the significant human resource demands are not factored into the equation. GS suggested that the price be pushed up by a little and often.

- In light of the Arab Spring unrest, the Board enquired into the financial ramifications of an event being cancelled at short notice. JG noted that English UK was covered as the terms and conditions state that no refunds are permitted in such circumstances.
- The Board praised the concept of the fairs and had every confidence in the strategy.

8. English UK inward missions

JG spoke to the paper.

- 3-4 visits of around 15 agents to 10 hosting organisations are organised each year and are usually managed by English UK, in association with a regional group. At present, regional groups do not have the resources to run such missions themselves although central and the north do this independently. English UK contributes to the budgets of these missions but it is desirable to switch to a model where English UK members would cover 100% of the costs. This would result in a 33% increase in the price.
- Based on feedback, the standard of venue for the workshop element of the mission and the accommodation for agents have been upgraded, adding further to the cost. With over-demand for the workshop element, GS suggested that pricing was elastic and that hosting was probably worth more than the £650 currently being charged. The Board felt a nominal charge for participating agents would be deemed perfectly reasonable.
- CF suggested running a mission to Northern Ireland especially as Derry is due to become European City of Culture in 2013. The recent Welsh and Scottish visits had recently proven popular. SW suggested canvassing agents at future workshops about cities and regions of interest for future visits.
- The overall concept and programme was approved by the Board.

Matters for information and report

9. British Council and ELT promotion

- AW reported that English UK was working very closely with the British Council English and Exams team through the ELPG, thanks largely to Michael Carrier's engagement. In a positive sign for the sector, Jo Stafford has recently been appointed to the re-instated UK ELT Promotions Manager role.
- The British Council is currently providing £5,000 in sponsorship towards the English UK Fairs, a contribution of £10,000 to the jointly branded student brochure and is funding overseas staff to attend the English UK Fairs. English UK and the Council are also manning co-branded exhibition stands at student-facing events such as Expo-Belta.

10. Education UK Certificate for Agents

AW informed the Board that the British Council is in the process of reviewing its agent training scheme and English UK was invited to comment on the content of the ELT section. AW noted the content was very out of date and comments/thoughts had been submitted accordingly.

11. English Language Barometer

AW informed the Board of English UK's involvement in i-graduate's 2011 English Language Barometer. i-graduate is an organisation that conducts surveys to measure the student experience against other countries and provides data that can be used by education providers to compare their levels of service with the rest of the market.

Other business

11. Dates of future meetings

Thursday 29 September 2011

Thursday 9 February 2012

12. Any Other Urgent Business

AW reported that *Lost in London*, a new corporate member, which is also venturing out to Cambridge and Brighton, is planning a big indoor international music festival for students at Proud 2 near the O2 on 30 July. English UK has been approached to endorse the concert and invited to have its name included in the title of the event. The venue capacity is 4,000, coaches can be used to ferry in students from the regions, and member centres can sell tickets and make a commission. SW noted from the experience that he had had with smaller scale events in Bournemouth that students are usually very slow to buy tickets. GS noted that agents often say that life in UK is a rather dull so such a festival would be a welcome addition to the social calendar.

The Board endorsed the proposal.

The meeting concluded at 15:35