

Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the English UK Enterprises Board

Held at: English UK, 219 St John Street, London, EC1V 4LY
Thursday, 29th September 2011 at 13:00

Present: Graham Simpson (Chair), Shane Wilkinson, Kevin McNally (16.05),
Stephan Roussounis, Heidi Gon-Paz, and Tony Millns

In attendance: Mark Rendell, Siobhan Baccas, and Jodie Gray

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Sarah Schechter

Andrew Waite, Andrew Fisher and Carmel Fyfe have tendered their resignations from the Board.

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

The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the 19th English UK Enterprises Board meeting which was held on the 19th May 2011.

3. Matters arising and updates

JG spoke to the paper.

JG informed the Board of the impending arrival of two new interns, one from Finland and the other from Germany. She praised the successful track record of interns to date and outlined the channels through which English UK was able to recruit candidates to internship positions.

She confirmed that a decision on whether to initiate the English Language Barometer project had been shelved to early next year due to the anticipated high cost for member centres.

JG drew the Board's attention to the new suite of British Council (BC) marketing collateral called, Open Doors, and noted the BC's enthusiasm for taking part in more frequent inward missions for the ELT sector. The BC is only currently engaged in offering cross-sector inward missions and these are only conducted on an ad hoc basis. SW commented that it was good to see the BC working more closely with England UK and that this improvement was mainly attributable to Michael Carrier. Michael has been more successful in obtaining funding than his predecessors but it was felt unlikely that the provision of scholarships would resume in the present political climate.

JG also noted that following the successful *Fiestaval* venture, *Lost in London* was seeking to offer activity in other parts of the country.

Updates for information, discussion and decision

4. StudyWorld London 2011 attendance statistics

SB spoke to the paper and made the observation that more companies had been in attendance at this year's StudyWorld event but that there had been fewer representatives overall. She also pointed out that, 'agent no show' data was now being included in the attendance statistics.

Around a third of the membership was in attendance and the representation by English UK educators remained constant. The expanded exhibition was sold out and it was noted that a record number of corporate members had taken up the option to exhibit.

Market expansion: boarding schools and universities

Another observed trend was the rise in attendance of independent schools and UK non-member HE/FE representation. SR noted that boarding schools tended to be more parent focused than agent-focused.

The Board felt that the event may be of interest to universities that wished to promote their degree programmes in addition to their ELT provision as there is currently no StudyWorld-type event that caters for this sector. Several agents had also expressed their disappointment in the low level of current involvement from this sector at the Fair. It was also pointed out that Alphe had recognised the HE sector as a potential market with the launch of its new High Schools and Higher Education Fair in Miami.

SR explained that universities enjoyed significant budgets and resources but that the difficulty lay with identifying who to contact within the organisation. He suggested examining which markets the various marketing and sales personnel held under their remits then to draw their attention to the range, volume and quality of agents from that region that they would be likely to encounter at StudyWorld.

5. StudyWorld London 2011 feedback

SB spoke to the paper and reported that the deadline for feedback was the following day and that the feedback data presented to the Board was more indicative than complete. She cautioned that only 12 of the exhibitors had responded and that the findings from this type of participant may prove to be skewed. SB noted that feedback was being collected online and added that delegates would only be able to book online from next year.

The Board commented that they felt the event had run very smoothly. SB attributed this to the fact that the event staff had received more training and as a result had felt more confident this year. GS reported that anecdotal feedback suggested that any problems that had arisen had been dealt with very efficiently.

A Twitter feed was being updated through the day and by the end of the event had 100 followers. A few selected text messages were also sent to delegates and this seemed to have worked well and had proven to be an effective way of transferring important information.

Monday Evening

The newcomers' reception was well attended but it was noted that it wasn't just newcomers that attended.

The Board agreed that the introduction of the welcome reception had been well received and the excellent dressing of the room had created a real wow factor. SB reported that the cost of the event had proven similar to the previous year's budget. JG explained that a different theme and layout would be needed for next year in order to create a new wow factor.

Having a greater degree of StudyWorld and English UK branding was suggested although it was pointed out that a heavy English UK brand presence may diminish the international image of the event. GS raised the need for more directional signage next year in order to make it clearer where the venue was located.

The Board shared the opinion that the personal welcome extended by TM and Sue Edwards on entrance to the main welcome reception had been much appreciated. TM's welcome speech was commended and plans for the following year were announced to raise the level of the stage and introduce screens to make it easier for attendees to hear and witness the speech. GS also suggested some form of fanfare to signal the onset of the speeches.

In terms of the main sponsor, PPI seemed pleased to have raised their profile and JG commented that she felt the youthful brand to have been beneficial to English UK's image. It was suggested that clear guidelines on the desired length, content and style of the sponsor's speech be made available next year though as this year's sponsor's speech was felt to be too long.

The Board noted that the magicians had seemed popular but that either more would need to be engaged or alternative entertainment be considered such as: people in uniform (like beefeaters), lookalikes such as William and Kate Middleton or some form of Olympic theme. MR also suggested considering an ice sculpture.

In terms of catering, the Board felt that the Hilton staff had been proactive and attentive and the food was highly praised. KM suggested having more of a British theme to the food next year and GS recommended stocking English wine and British beer on draft. GS noticed that the food seemed to be mainly confined to one end of the venue.

Feedback suggested the band had been popular and it was noted that there had been a far greater footfall on the dance floor this year. Some found the volume to have been a bit high and the type of music played by the DJ wasn't to everyone's taste. However, it had been very effective in helping to recreate a bar feel and it gave the event a cutting edge young and vibrant atmosphere

Tuesday Evening

The Board were concerned that some delegates appeared unaware that the reception followed immediately after the last session. It was suggested that the name of the event should be adjusted to better reflect the spill out/post workshop nature of the gathering. There was a request that beer also be made available.

For the non-English UK events scheduled for later in the evening, GS mused that his posting for an event with a capacity of 17 on the StudyWorld website had been oversubscribed ten-fold leaving several agents disappointed. However, it was reported that Internexus London, who had also posted details of their event, had hosted around 50 agents and had been delighted with the response. Many of the events were not publicised.

General Feedback

Feedback indicated that delegates felt the Event Guide to be too big. It was suggested that an app might prove to be a suitable alternative in the future. SW questioned the need for an event guide at all and the Board agreed that all of the key information, like the floor plan, could be contained in a folded A3 piece of paper. SW suggested that the floor plans could be printed onto the bags

The USB stick seemed to be popular and contained all of the agent and educator information. SR questioned why this data could not be made available to participants all year round? It was also suggested that Google maps could be incorporated into the search functions.

Satisfaction levels with the accommodation continue to decline especially in comparison to the Westminster Park Plaza which is the new venue used by Alphe. The Tower received very poor comments although the revamped West Wing was regarded as fine. Most agents appeared relatively content with the accommodation. SB agreed to remind the venue that StudyWorld should be allocated the pick of the rooms.

It is apparent that interest in FAM trips continues to decline possibly due to pressure of time (the event directly follows on from Alphe). However there were also more FAM trips this year which may have spread out the numbers.

The Board felt very positive about the event and applauded the efforts of the team.

6. StudyWorld London 2012 promotional plan

JG spoke to the paper and discussion mainly focused on the performance of StudyWorld and its positioning in relation to Alphe UK and ICEF Berlin. KM noted that StudyWorld was retaining market position so there was no need to panic but the Board agreed that it was important to explore a range of strategic and tactical level options.

Alphe London

JG stated that based on the latest published figures from Alphe, StudyWorld was losing market position to that organisation. TM pointed out that a large number of educators at Alphe did not contribute much revenue towards the event. Around 30 organisations had been given free tables such as language associations, and educators were also utilising a 3 for 2 offer. TM also noted that many organisations would not meet English UK's entry criteria.

It was reported that Alphe London was again crowded and had only limited room for growth at the Westminster Park Plaza venue although it was pointed out that with digital file-sharing not much physical space was actually required these days. The Board conceded that Alphe were currently putting forward a very convincing value proposition.

The biggest area of superiority for Alphe London was the 144 overseas educators that they attracted as compared to the 66 at StudyWorld. This was attributed to Alphe having a more international reputation and the success of the Star Awards. TM posited the opinion that the Awards may be on the wane especially with the introduction of so many new categories and felt that the Superstar award would prove to be problematic in the longer term. JG agreed that the awards were flawed however she felt that agencies in particular enjoyed the awards and stressed that this year's event had been the best attended to date.

KM suggested offering a discount to any agent of centre that attends the Alphe fair. The Board asked for research to be conducted in order to explain why so many of the overseas educators were attending Alphe and not going on to StudyWorld.

A combined event with Alphe London

SW broached the idea of approaching Alphe with a view to holding a combined event instead of the two organisations competing against each other. Such an event would be larger than ICEF Berlin and as a result a premium could be levied to attend. However, it was

felt that there was no venue currently available in London that could accommodate such a large event. TM explained that neither party would be willing to reduce their surplus and that only 60% of attendees are the same for both events currently.

ICEF Berlin

SR noted that ICEF Berlin was regarded as the serious education fair for our industry.

The Olympics

SR voiced concerns about the effect of the Olympics on the number of students and agents from more distant destinations coming to London in the summer. He predicted that just maintaining numbers would prove a challenge and efforts would need to be taken to reaffirm the message that London is open for business.

Possible change to regularity, location and dates

SW suggested that StudyWorld be held Monday and Tuesday instead of Tuesday and Wednesday to shorten the stay of delegates but the Board felt that without the day off in the middle, four days of networking would prove to be too demanding.

A suggestion that gained a certain amount of interest from the Board was the idea of transferring StudyWorld to the weekend immediately prior to ICEF Berlin (probably 26th-27th October 2013). That way agents and educators could cover both events while in Europe. The change of date would also be more attractive to the state sector than the current September date which clashes with the main student intake period.

SR suggested looking into the feasibility of offering a second StudyWorld fair perhaps in the spring. GS suggested it could be a boutique fair.

TM noted that English UK was still assessing potential venues for the event from 2013 (the present agreement with the Hilton expires after the 2012 event). The Board suggested that the StudyWorld team consider reserving the Westminster Park Plaza during the dates for which Alphe might have a preference that year. TM felt that no other city in the UK had the appropriate standard of facilities and transport infrastructure to support the event but did admit that Frankfurt, with its excellent communications options, might be a viable candidate should an international venue be considered. GS described the excitement of following a rotation pattern for venues as experienced through membership of IALC.

KM warned that any attempt to move the Fair outside of the UK would likely be met with resistance by English UK members. He also warned that any departure from the traditional date or venue might make it appear that StudyWorld was afraid of the competition posed by Alphe.

The Role of the English UK Fairs

JG explained that the English UK regional boutique fairs had proven effective channels for raising awareness of StudyWorld among agents. SR suggested making the fairs more international by admitting international educators and not restricting attendance to English UK members. He explained that this would help StudyWorld reach regional educators in the same way that regional agents were now being reached. An increase in the scale of these events was also mooted.

Differential pricing strategy

At Alphe London, educators either have a stand or they have booths where discussions can be held. It was suggested that one hall or part of a hall could be converted to accommodate new educator booths with the remaining space dedicated to the conventional table arrangement. Booths could be acquired at a premium rate. It was noted that many of the educators had healthy budgets but nowhere to spend the money under the current structure of the event.

Sponsorship

TM noted, especially in light of the difficulties experienced in acquiring sponsorship in recent years, that he felt the time to be opportune to discuss the possibility of accepting sponsorship from both educators and agents as long as a provider was restricted to taking out a sponsorship option once every five or so years. The Board advised that such a development would not be likely to represent a problem for the membership.

The fee for agents

TM warned that it was crucial to continue to improve agency representation and the spread of nationalities. He feared that continuing to charge agents may be out of step with industry norms and that the time may have come to drop the charge. SB noted that the cost of such a move might be to the tune of £100K. The event could at least be free to partner agents or free if the agent attends a fair in another part of the world.

Profile building activity

The Board returned to the paper to consider the range of profile building activities suggested by JG. JG noted that the BC was providing more funding for overseas BC staff to travel to the event and that StudyWorld would benefit from the subsequent promotion and endorsement of the event. JG said that members would be encouraged to promote the Fair by adding details of the event to their email tags. HG-P suggested offering some form of service to those educators that could not attend the event.

The Board noted the drop off in attendance from other language associations and agreed that action needed to be taken. JG suggested that as exhibition stands were fully subscribed, associations could be offered a free table instead. A table would allow them to make appointments and continue with their networking strategies. The offer could be conditional on them bringing a certain number of their members with them and on the size of the association or it could form part of a barter agreement.

The international marketing team was grateful for the Board's input and promised to digest the proposals and formulate an appropriate response. The Main Board will need to be consulted about any substantive changes to the Fair.

7. Marketing Update – review of activities since May 2011 and plans for the next 6 months

JG spoke to the paper. JG reported that the online briefing course for partner agents went live in August and included details on study, accreditation and visas. An agent must have attended an English UK event as a pre-requisite for joining and can take the knowledge test up to 10 times. JG will circulate the test to the Board for members to sample. SW noted that members needed to be reminded to encourage all agents to join the scheme. JG will draft a news item to this affect for the English UK Newsflash.

JG also reported that English UK would be partnering with the British Council to compile market intelligence reports. English UK will produce the reports using qualified and

experienced consultants and the final reports will be co-branded. JG added that if a member of the Board wanted to be involved in producing one of these reports then he or she should let it be known to her. The BC is also planning to conduct an agent survey and the Board will be approached to contribute to a set of objectives for this research.

Finally, the English UK website is due to undergo a refresh with a view to a full re-development in 2013.

8. English UK Fairs – update and plans for 2012

JG spoke to the paper and the Board duly noted this activity.

9. Membership of the Enterprises Board

The recent resignations from the Board meant that there were a number of seats that needed to be filled. TM stated a preference for attracting people with marketing knowledge and commercial experience. SW added that it was important to have a good cross-section of the membership represented on the Board and emphasised that there was currently only one state sector representative. The Board agreed that guests could also be invited to attend meetings on a one off basis. TM will draw up a spec and send to the membership to invite applications.

SR informed the Board of the existence of an informal monthly meeting of marketing specialists in London that English UK representatives might like to attend. SR also suggested forming little working groups to focus on smaller projects. He noted that he thought that members would appreciate the opportunity to network, to improve their CV and to get more involved in the development of English UK. HG-P noted that continuity was affected by the long gap between meetings and the infrequent contact in between.

Matters for information and report

10. British Council/English UK app

JG reported that the BC was very keen to develop an App for the ELT sector. The App must be sticky (i.e. users would want to use it more than once). The BC has decided to commission a report to identify what services of this nature are already in existence in the ELT sector.

11. British Council's new working group for international education

TM reported that he was very concerned about the potential reputational damage to the UK as an international study destination with the recent spate of closures of colleges especially in the private FE sector. The BAC had reported 10 closures, ASIC must be in the same or worse position and English UK has lost two members.

A group including Universities UK, ASIC, AOC, BAC, English UK and UKCISA has been assembled on the initiative of the BC to discuss how best to deal with the displaced students. The UKBA are not being cooperative on this matter at present and it is hoped that the group will provide a mechanism for exerting pressure.

The second reason for the group's existence is that as there is no successor to the PMI there is a vacuum in the strategic promotion of the UK's international education sector and how the sector is presented to BIS, the UKBA and government in general. TM feels that such a group would be a constructive development for the sector.

Other business

12. Dates of future meetings

Thursday, 9th February 2012

Wednesday, 6th June 2012

13. Any other urgent business

TM reported that he was going to Belfast to meet the 6 Northern Ireland members of English UK. The group are interested in setting up an English UK Northern Ireland regional group.

The meeting concluded at 15.39