

# Centres of Excellence share the secrets of their success

This year's Centre of Excellence list has 53 entries – up for the third consecutive year. There are ten new entrants and seven centres whose scores have increased. English in Chester and English Language Centre Bristol in joint top place with nine points. D'Overbroeck's College, London School of English and University of Edinburgh with eight points each, and The English Language Centre (Brighton) and Nile with six (see pages 12–13).

But what about the new entrants? What do they have in common? By and large the long-established independent language schools predominate, although, in terms of the overall numbers of centres inspected by the British Council, both universities and FE colleges outperform the private sector as a whole. Only two language school chains improved their positions: Kaplan, which now has three Centres of Excellence among its eleven accredited schools, and Embassy, which now has three out of five, placing it just behind Bell.

Among the long-established independents, many are members of additional quality assurance schemes such as IalC, which has eight member schools in the list, and Quality English, which has seven. Half of the schools in The English Network (Ten), a newly established association, are Centres of Excellence. Indeed many of the centres are members of two or more of these schemes, suggesting that the best results are achieved by private language schools which are both independent and well networked. The more quality assurance, it seems, the better.

John Barnett of Cambridge Academy of English (CAE), one of the six new entrants we talked to for this article, agrees. 'One of the key things is having a lot of experience monitoring your own quality assurance,' and as a member of IalC, Quality English and Ten he believes that 'going through a variety of inspections and regular monitoring of all aspects of the schools put you in a good position'. He warns, however, that schools need 'a stable, well-qualified staff team to take along with you on the journey'.

Melanie Butler investigates what the UK's top-rated English language teaching centres have in common



HIGH FLYERS English Language Centre Bristol share the top spot with nine points of excellence

All the year-round centres we talked to put major emphasis on the qualifications of their staff. There are a lot of classroom teachers with diplomas in Centres of Excellence, and, above all, high teaching continuity. This is as true of the FE sector as of private language schools. South Leicestershire has staff who have been in place for 27 years. As Andy Bungay of Exeter Academy puts it, 'If you've got really good teachers, keep them.'

Most of the centres we talked to also emphasised the importance of being relatively small and of focusing on a few key areas rather than trying to offer every possible course. Outside the summer, Melton College concentrates on general English and IELTS, for which it is a major centre. CAE began to specialise in English for law in the late '80s and young learners in 1994. 'You have to take the process of developing new specialisations seriously. It takes time – you need to dedicate resources into it,' says Barnett. This evolutionary approach also applies to methodology. Exeter Acad-

emy has gradually developed a multi-skill, multi-level approach to teaching. South Leicestershire College teaches its EFL students along with its Esol intake of local second language speakers, and its students take both an Esol exam and an international one. 'The inspectors from both Ofsted Further Education system and from the British Council raise their eyebrows at first,' says Mike Barker, 'but they walk out smiling.'

But what of the summer schools? There are proportionally fewer of those on the Centres of Excellence list than any other institution type. We interviewed two of them, both well established. Vacational Studies was established in 1973, while International Language Programmes was established in 1970 and is 'a grand old lady of the industry', according to Sarah Greatorex, principal of both ILP and its sister year-round school, and fellow Centre of Excellence. Colchester English Study Centre. Both Greatorex and Ian Mucklejohn of Vacational Studies emphasise the importance of having high academic

standards in summer schools as much as in year-round schools. Mucklejohn even puts some of his summer school staff through diploma courses and both have points of excellence for teaching, management and pastoral care. As Mucklejohn explains, 'It is all down to the culture.'

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## 2012 accreditation changes

AT ACCREDITATION UK we are pleased to announce improvements to the publishable statements available after inspections taking place from 2012, writes the British Council's Elizabeth McLaren.

These changes will give providers a clearer link between the detail of their inspection report and the publishable statement as well as giving students, parents, agents and the public a more helpful summary of the inspectors' findings.

The main change involves the introduction of a new list of areas (identified by sub-headings) which the inspectors will be able to highlight as 'strengths', examples of good practice. This replaces the previous system where credit was given at either section standard level or for some sub-sections, making

it difficult to make meaningful comparisons between strengths in different reports.

Each of the areas will have at least three criteria which are eligible to be judged to be a strength, most have six. Inspectors will now include in the publishable statement any area where 50 per cent of the eligible criteria are considered a strength and no criteria are not met.

Areas of strength which can now gain a mention in the publishable statement are:

1. Staff management
2. Student administration
3. Quality assurance
4. Publicity
5. Premises and facilities
6. Learning resources
7. Academic staff profile
8. Academic management
9. Course design
10. Learner management

11. Teaching

12. Care of students
13. Accommodation
14. Leisure opportunities
15. Care of under-18s

Inspectors will also be able to indicate if any of these areas needs improvement even if the overall provision meets the requirements of the section standard.

The new wording will be used in inspection reports for all inspections taking place after 1 January 2012. New publishable statements will start to appear on our website <http://www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation-more-about-your-accredited-centre.htm> after the first committee meeting of the year, which will take place in early March. (Reports on inspections which took place in late 2011 which are moderated at the March 2012 meeting will have the old style publishable statement.)

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9 points of excellence

The British Council inspected and accredited the English Language Centre Bristol in November 2010. The Accreditation Scheme assesses the standards of management, resources and premises, teaching and welfare and accredits organisations which meet the overall standard in each area inspected (see: [www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation](http://www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation) for details). This large private language school offers courses in general English for adults.

Points of excellence were noted in: general management • premises • academic resources • academic management • teachers' qualifications • teaching • pastoral care • accommodation • the leisure programme

The inspection report stated that the organisation met the standards of the Scheme.



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Centres of Excellence 2012

A round-up of the British Council inspectors' top-rated institutions

This is the third year that the EL Gazette has run a complete Centre of Excellence listing and it is also the last year that it will take this form. Not only is the British Council changing the system of publishable statements (see previous page) but UK government changes mean that many language schools will have to be inspected by other bodies, including the Independent Schools Inspectorate, and, if they are in Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education, which have their own systems of rating schools.

The Centre of Excellence list is not really designed to be a league table because it does not include the measurement of outcomes such as exam

results, the traditional basis for school league tables in the UK. Instead it is entirely based on inspection reports and is more like a Michelin guide. Inspection reports have the advantage of being written by specialists all of whom are using the same criteria and all of whom have visited a great number of schools - these reports are far more objective than, say, student reviews, although these too can be helpful. Inspectors are human, though, and all humans, however well trained and specialised, tend to be subjective. We have noticed, for example, that when a language centre is reinspected its number of points of excellence will go up or down by an average of two points.

Publishing inspection reports

is the norm in UK education and most UK parents read these reports when looking for schools for their children, though few make the final decision on a report alone. However, very few other countries publish these reports, which means, thus far, that we have not been able to assemble lists of excellent schools in other countries.

The methodology used for putting together the current lists is very simple: we download all the publishable statements available on the British Council website and count the points of excellence of every single accredited language centre. We do not distinguish between full points of excellence and those marked as a point of excellence in 'aspects of', a distinction

which will disappear under the British Council's new system. We do not deduct points for areas where the inspectors have noted a need for improvement.

We print in our list the inspectors' publishable statements for all language schools with five or more points. The choice of the number five reflects only the space we have available in the paper. In our view centres with four points should also be seen as excellent. It is, however, worth noting that there are 53 language centres in the list, approximately 10 per cent of all British Council-accredited centres. The language centres on these pages are all in the top 10 per cent - not in our opinion, but in the opinion of the inspectors.

WHERE THEY PLACED

and what the British Council inspectors had to say about them

Key: RED=new entry this year, BLUE=increased points of excellence

9 points

**English in Chester** General management, premises, academic resources, self-access facilities, teachers' qualifications, course design, learner training, accommodation and leisure programme

**English Language Centre Bristol** General management, premises, academic resources, academic management, teachers' qualifications, teaching, pastoral care, accommodation and the leisure programme

8 points

**Concord College** Aspects of general management, premises, academic management and teaching, pastoral care, leisure programme and facilities and care of under-16s

**D'Overbroeck's College** General management, teaching, course design, learner training, pastoral care, accommodation, the leisure programme, preparation of students for their entry to further academic studies

**Language Specialists International** Aspects of general management, in premises, academic resources, self-access facilities, academic management, course design, pastoral care and accommodation

**London School of English** General management, premises, academic resources, teachers' qualifications, academic management, teaching, pastoral care and accommodation

**Sussex Downs College** Aspects of general management and premises, self-access facilities, academic management, teachers' qualifications, teaching, pastoral care and the leisure programme

**University of Edinburgh** Aspects of general management, aspects of premises, self-access facilities, academic management, teachers' qualifications, teaching, course design and aspects of accommodation

7 points

**Bell Young Learners** General management, premises, academic resources, pastoral care, the leisure programme and aspects of teaching and learning

**English Language Centre York** Premises, academic resources, academic management, course design and learner training and in aspects of general management and welfare

**Wimbledon School of English** General management, academic resources, self-access facilities, academic management, pastoral care, accommodation and leisure programme

**University College Plymouth St Mark and St John** Aspects of premises and self-access resources, teachers' qualifications, course design, learner training, teaching, and pastoral care

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Courtesy of Lake School of English

ALL SMILES The Lake School of English has repeated its success of last year with six points of excellence

## Centres of Excellence continued

### 6 points

- Bell International Cambridge** General management, premises, academic resources, aspects of academic management, pastoral care and the leisure programme
- Discovery Summer** Aspects of general management, premises, academic management, course design, pastoral care and the leisure programme
- Embassy CES London** Aspects of general management, aspects of premises, teachers' qualifications, academic management and aspects of welfare
- The English Language Centre (Brighton)** General management, premises, academic resources, academic management, teachers' qualifications and teaching
- Exeter Academy** Premises, academic resources, teachers' qualifications, course design, teaching, and aspects of welfare
- Hilderstone College** Aspects of general management, premises, academic resources, academic management, teaching and aspects of welfare
- International Language Holidays** general management, premises, teaching and learning, pastoral care, accommodation and the leisure programme
- King's College London** Aspects of general management, teachers' qualifications, course design, teaching, accommodation and leisure opportunities
- Kingston College** aspects of management, self-access facilities, academic management, teachers' qualifications and teaching.
- Lake School of English Oxford Ltd** Aspects of general management, premises, academic resources, academic management, teachers' qualifications and welfare
- Melton College** Aspects of general management, premises, academic management, pastoral care, accommodation and the leisure programme.
- Norwich Institute for Language Education (Nile)** Administration of students, academic resources, teaching, course design, pastoral care and the leisure programme
- Southgate College** Aspects of general management, self-access facilities, teachers' qualifications, academic management, learner training, and teaching
- South Leicestershire College** General management, premises, self-access facilities, aspects of academic management, teachers' qualifications and teaching
- University of Brighton** Premises and academic resources, teachers' qualifications, course design, learner training and teaching
- University of Manchester** Administration of students, publicity, teachers' qualifications, course design, pastoral care and the leisure programme

### 5 points


- BASSCO** Academic resources, pastoral care and the leisure programme and also aspects of general management and teaching and learning
- Cambridge Academy of English** Aspects of student administration, publicity, premises, self-access resources and the leisure programme
- Chichester College** Aspects of general management, and publicity, academic management, teaching and pastoral care
- Colchester English Study Centre** Aspects of general management, academic resources, academic management, accommodation and the leisure programme
- Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College** Aspects of general management and academic management, IT facilities, teachers' qualifications and teaching
- EJO** General management, premises, academic resources, course design and aspects of welfare
- Embassy CES Brighton** Aspects of management, premises, academic resources, academic management and welfare
- Embassy CES Cambridge** Aspects of general management, academic resources, teachers' qualifications, course design and aspects of welfare
- International House London** Aspects of general management, premises, academic resources and academic management and teaching
- International Summer School** Aspects of general management, premises, academic resources, academic management, and welfare
- Kaplan International Colleges Bath** aspects of management, academic resources, course design, pastoral care and accommodation.
- Kaplan International Colleges London Covent Garden** (formerly Aspect College London) Aspects of general management, self-access facilities, course design and learner training, and welfare
- Kaplan International Colleges London Leicester Square** (formerly Kaplan English Programmes, London) Aspects of general management, self-access facilities, course design and learner training, and welfare
- Kingsway English Centre for Professionals** Aspects of general management, premises, academic management, pastoral care and accommodation
- LAL UK Summer Schools** Aspects of general management, premises, academic management, pastoral care and the leisure programme
- Newcastle College** Aspects of general management, academic resources and IT/self-access facilities, teachers' qualifications and teaching
- Northumbria University** Aspects of general management, premises, academic resources, course design and aspects of welfare
- St Edmund's College** Aspects of general management, premises, course design, teaching and welfare
- St Giles Eastbourne** Premises, aspects of academic resources, academic management, teachers' qualifications and teaching.
- St Giles International Brighton** Aspects of general management, self-access facilities, academic management, teaching and welfare
- University of Birmingham** Course design and aspects of general management, academic resources, course design and of welfare
- University of Central Lancashire** General management, academic resources, pastoral care, accommodation and aspects of academic management
- University of Sheffield ELTC** Teachers' qualifications, learner training, course design, IT facilities and aspects of premises
- Vacational Studies** Administration of students, academic management, teaching, pastoral care and care of under-18s.
- Village Camps UK, York** Aspects of general management, aspects of premises and pastoral care, leisure programme and the care of under-16s

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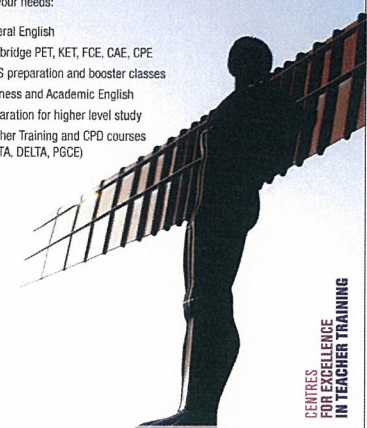




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