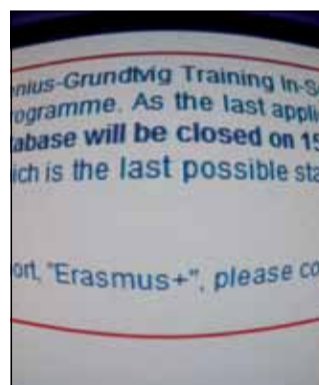


Win for Arsenal's Arsene Wenger: p3



Page 5: Major online initiative brings new opportunities for Nile



Page 7: Erasmus+ latest – keep up with the EU's revamped programme



Page 12: Interview with Irish testing guru and Aptis creator Barry O'Sullivan



8-page Middle East supplement: From Morocco to the UAE



Picture credit here

HONG KONG BUSINESS AWARDS 2013

SCMP South China Morning Post

FOR THE WIN Clarity MD Andrew Stokes (left) and technical director Adrian Raper (right) accept the SME Award for the best company in Hong Kong with fewer than 100 staff from the British Council's Nadeem Hussain (see right)

Clear win for Clarity software

A SOFTWARE company run by a former EFL teacher has won a major business award. Clarity English, set up in 1994 by Andrew Stokes, an English teacher, and Adrian Raper, a specialist in artificial intelligence, received the SME Award for the best company in Hong Kong with fewer than 100 staff (see picture on left).

'It reflects the creativity and dedication of Clarity staff,' managing director Stokes said, 'as well as the long-term support given to us by clients, especially the British Council.'

Clarity bestseller *Road to IELTS*, co-published with the British Council, now generates three million sessions a year, a far cry from their early days when Stokes and Raper produced *Tense Buster* – now their flagship grammar program – from a back bedroom. Twenty years later a tablet app of *Tense Buster* has just launched and a mobile phone version is planned. ■

EU students left in lurch as loans lopped

MELANIE BUTLER and RAFAELA PETEANU write

Unscrupulous agents have lured Romanians into the UK with promises of free money for studying at private colleges, Gazette research reveals. Our investigation followed the announcement that the UK government had 'frozen' student maintenance grants for Romanians and Bulgarians, who have been the subject of much anti-immigrant rhetoric in Britain in the run-up to the lifting of work restrictions on the citizens of the two countries.

Despite the press focus on these two nationalities, all EU students have been affected. Since last November student financial support has been suspended for all UK and other EU citizens applying for designated courses below degree level at 23 named private colleges. The suspension initially runs only for the academic year 2013–14.

Agents aggressively marketing 'free' courses may have been behind the surge in demand for loans from EU nationals. Adverts on Romanian language websites such as www.anuntul.co.uk promised that readers could 'study and live in the UK for free', invited them to 'study and get paid £10,000–£14,000 a year for two years' and stated that 'the UK government pays for the classes and allocates £10,500–£14,000 for maintenance', a Gazette search found. Only one advert made clear that the money was a UK government loan. Citizens of both countries faced restrictions on their right to work in the UK until January 2014.

In 2013 an estimated 5,500 Romanians and Bulgarians received funding from the

UK Student Loan Company compared to over 25,000 students from other parts of the EU including the UK. Funding for courses at private colleges trebled to £175 million in a year, with most of the money going to fund Higher National Diplomas and Certificates.

Despite the media furore surrounding the decision to block loans for students from Bulgaria and Romania, there is no government information available on the impact of the new measures on all students from the EU applying to these 23 colleges. The main government website on student funding (www.gov.uk/student-finance) makes no mention of any suspensions of loans and EU citizens are told only that they 'may' be eligible for loans and are advised to check with the college that the course is 'recognised'. Nor is there any mention of loan suspensions on form EU13N, which EU students are directed to download from the site. Asked to comment, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Skills did not reply.

To add to the confusion, at least five of the 23 colleges continued to advertise funding for these courses on their home pages. Contacted by the Gazette, two of them, Grafton and Churchill, had not responded at the time of going to press.

AA Hamilton College, whose home page featured a banner advertising 'full tuition fee loans' and 'non repayable grants', told the Gazette that its website is 'maintained by a third party' and that it 'had already requested for the website to be updated'. The misleading wording has now been removed. Stratford College London also changed its website following a Gazette enquiry to make clear that funding was not available until September 2014. ■

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WINNER of the 2012 English Speaking Union President's Award