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Best of British summer

Melanie Butler analyses the rankings of the UK's top summer school providers based on the British Council inspection results

In the eyes of the British Council inspectors the 22 summer school operators listed on this page are currently the best in Britain. All of them rank in the top 20 per cent of schools in the country based on the results of their British Council inspections.

To find them, the *EL Gazette* analysed the publishable statements of all the vacation-course-only operators and of summer schools run by schools which admit under-16s year-round. There are of course plenty of top year-round private language schools which only take under-16s in the summer, but since we couldn't be sure if their inspections included under-16s we reluctantly left them out. It is also true, as school owners who don't make *Gazette* rankings constantly remind us, that schools are inspected only every four years, and four years can be a long time in the life of a school.

However, there is no doubt that the schools listed here are exceptional. The top, St Edmund's College Ware, the oldest Catholic boarding school in Britain, gained thirteen out of a possible fourteen points in



LEARNING NATURALLY Windermere International Summer School in the Lake District mixes indoor and outdoor education

its inspection this summer. Or look at the newly accredited Windermere School, a boarding establishment in the Lake District which follows the Kurt Hahn philosophy of adventure learning and outdoor education, which achieved twelve out of fourteen points in its first ever inspection, the highest new entrant ever recorded by the *EL Gazette*.

Boarding schools

Boarding-school-owned and run courses dominate the top of the chart. All six top summer programmes are run by boarding schools, as are seven of the top ten. There are only 22 boarding schools accredited by the British Council, not all of which run summer schools, and eleven of them are listed in this ranking. All eleven are members of the Independent Schools Council, the lead association for Britain's public (i.e. top private) schools.

British parents will not be surprised about any of this. After all, British boarding schools have been educating children for centuries, are renowned for their academic standards and are governed by some of the strictest child safeguarding legislation in Europe. They also have the facilities and the expertise to run summer schools well.

British boarding schools are famous for the importance they give to ethos, the fundamental values peculiar to a school.

Private language schools

Bell Young Learners, the top-ranking private language operation, is also known for its ethos and teaching the children in its care about the vision of its founder Frank Bell. Formerly joint top of the *Gazette* centres of excellence listing and in the top 0.5 per cent of British Council schools, Bell may have suffered slightly from the 'top school curse', which sees centres falling by an average of two points on re-inspection, but it remains only one of two British chains to have its summer operation in the list. The other is Isis, which owns Bucksmore Education and UIC vacation courses.

Most of the private language school operations in the list are small, family-run businesses, such

as International Summer Club which has worked with Halebury, the famous public school, for many years, or MM Oxford, which runs only in the summer. The fact that long-established family schools such as Vacation Studies can rank alongside Harrow School's Babssco operations shows just how good private language summer operations can be. Although it is not a legal requirement, all the top private language summer schools insist of criminal record checks for all staff.

Another notable feature of the schools in this list, both boarding and private language centres, is just how many of them run operations that include native speaker English children. Heathfield, the famous British girls' school mixes the British girls from its summer camp with international girls from its summer school for evening activities. At Millfield they often mix for sports and the school also employs native speaker mentors, a little older than the students, as do Vacation Studies and Discovery Summer. For over thirty years Cambridge Language and Activity Centre has run English courses for international students along with Spanish, French and German classes for their British peers. Brighton International Summer School is based at Dorothy Stinger High School, a top-performing state comprehensive in Brighton, where international kids attend some courses with the British pupils outside the summer and both mingle for activities in the summer. ■

Top 20 UK summer schools

- 1 St Edmund's College (B)
- 2= Concord College (B), d'Overbroeck's College (B), Windermere International Summer School (B)
- 5 Bede's Summer Schools (B)
- 6 Bell Young Learners
- 7= Discovery Summer, Heathfield Summer School (B), International Language Holidays
- 10= Bucksmore Education, International Student Club
- 12= Babssco (B), EJO, International Summer School (Accord), Vacation Studies
- 15= Brighton International Summer School, Fettes CLC (B)
- 17= Absolutely English, Bedford School (B), Cambridge Language and Activity Centre, Millfield School (B), MM Oxford, Taunton School (B), UIC Vacation

B = Boarding-school-owned and run



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