

International Education News | The PIE News | ALTO outlines portal plan in drive to standardise study travel



"We don't promote one-week courses because we don't feel they are an academically justified course"

Bob Burger, marketing director at [Malaca Instituto](#), made the comment when posing views he said were shared by other members of IALC, an association of independently-operated language schools from around the world, during a four-strong panel debate.

Leading the standardisation charge was Thiago España, director at Brazilian agency [World Study](#) and a board member at fellow association, [ALTO](#), which represents education agencies and education providers. ALTO is championing a set of 12 guidelines that aim to help standardise definitions and descriptions of products and prices.

España underlined that ALTO is going further and building a central portal that can be used as a central repository for product data and prices. Agency members of ALTO will be able to download product information in a way that suits them avoiding errors and the time-consuming process of entering data from multiple partners.

"We have commitment from most of our [school] members [to use this]," he said.



The 12 proposed ALTO guidelines

In response to concerns, he underlined that standardisation did not mean commoditisation, and that agencies had no interest in selling by cheapest price alone.

“We make less money that way too,” he indicated, given the standard commission-based payment in the sector.

España said he represented the voice of many counselling agencies who find working with varying price structures, accommodation options and special offers presented in myriads of ways a barrier to the logistics and core business of selling language stays abroad.

The ALTO guidelines suggest standardising product terms such as programme names, accommodation description, meal plans, discounts offered (% discount is much easier than one week free), and price/length, with price per week standardised across a four-week bundle.

Krister Wiedenhielm of sizable education agency network, [ESL](#), deemed the ALTO proposals a good start, but too simplistic in some areas. He argued for a more in-depth look into the nuances of industry practices and welcomed clarity around extensions and refunds.

“I think we might be talking about the kind of standardisation which probably works for short-stay,

younger people programmes”

“Even details like airport transfers, it’s pretty vague what an airport transfer is, if we take juniors [for example],...if juniors travel together do they pay twice the price?” he asked. “It is worth digging into, particularly when it comes to price.”

Meanwhile, representing [Edvisor](#), an agency CRM that is in its beta-stage of testing compatibility with school’s operations, Nicolas Miller said he believed that integrating technology was the most seamless way to achieve standardised processes.

“An alternative is also starting to integrate the school software with the agency software directly, and having the information quickly transferred between them,” he said.

Burger gave more detail on why he was reticent to standardise or simplify too much. “We allow some agents to sell a one-week course, but don’t promote them ourselves because we don’t feel they are an academically justified course,” he explained. “We would not necessarily want prices to be expressed in weekly units because it would suggest to people that they could book a one-week course.”

He added, “I think we might be talking about the kind of standardisation which probably works for short-stay, younger people programmes, holiday language courses and that’s where [this] is easiest and possibly where the biggest volumes are. That could be an area that is more applicable to this.”

España countered: “Definitely, we’ve started with general language courses because that is easy, but we have got to start somewhere.”