

In 1979 Clive Barrow found himself out of work in Bournemouth with a wife, child and mortgage. Undaunted he decided to open a language school in the town. But what had attracted him to EFL and to Bournemouth?

'I had begun teaching in Spain, after trying several careers, and found the work so interesting that I returned home to re-qualify. I headed for Bournemouth because it was where all the methodology and course materials were being developed. People like Robert O'Neill, Leo Jones and especially Peter Viney and Bernard Hartley were changing the whole landscape. The atmosphere was electric!'

After working some years in the private and state sectors, Clive started BEET, the school which recently hit *Gazette* headlines as one of only two centres – the other being the Lake School in Oxford – to have scored fourteen out of a possible fifteen 'strengths' in the British Council inspections. These two top-scoring schools have a lot in common.

'We both opened in church halls and both have cava at the ready! Also, the original idea behind BEET was to be a cooperative, but that never took off. However, we have always been a team school. Perhaps the biggest challenge is making sure you get the right people and have a clear idea right from the start of where you want to go.'

From the outset Clive's vision was to create a sort of 'mini uni-

And the BEET goes on ...

Melanie Butler asks managing director and founder Clive Barrow how the Bournemouth school has kept moving forward for over thirty years to reach the top of the rankings

versity', offering teaching and teacher training, and encouraging materials production and new ideas. Equally important was introducing students to an international environment. The school's motto is 'bringing the world together', and to this day Clive tells all new students that making friends with students from other cultures, friends they will keep for life, is just as important as learning English.

'One of many satisfying outcomes was a girl from a small, Swiss farming community who arrived nervous and rough around the edges, and left an elegant young lady able to communicate with grace and charm with the friends she had made across the world.'

From the very beginning the school had a team spirit. Staff such as EFL author Guy Wellman, who joined in 1980 and is still a director, Alan Tankard, Mark Long and Richard Davies have helped shape the school with their 'generosity, enthusiasm and good driving ideas'.

'However, it is everyone who creates the students' experience. We have amazing teachers, who contribute the lion's share, but without my wife Judith our third director, and the staff in admin,



Courtesy BEET

TEAM SPIRIT Clive Barrow believes that when the school does well, the staff should too, by sharing in the financial rewards

accommodation, marketing, the canteen and elsewhere, and of course our wonderful host families, we could not complete that experience.'

BEET has always been involved in teacher training, but in 2001 it merged with teacher training specialists ITTC and now runs one of the largest

training centres in the UK. As well as certificates and diplomas, it offers in-service courses for many of the local language schools. 'Our trainers regularly return to teaching, to create and examine new ideas, and to remain grounded in the practical. The minute you stand still, you are in trouble.'

And, Clive believes, when the school does well, the staff should too, sharing in the financial rewards. No wonder BEET is famous for having a committed and stable staff.

Clive himself derives a lot of benefit from being in associations with other independent

schools. 'English UK is invaluable, however IALC puts me in touch with other schools from all around the world, and generates lots of new ideas. Quality English was a breath of fresh air. But for me The English Network, TEN, has been brilliant: it is so useful and people are so open with each other, so free with advice, letting each other into the innermost secrets of how they function as a school, and all are very good friends. We all improve, and we all move forward.'

For Clive, the best change in recent years has been the move towards transparency. 'I am delighted the British Council has become transparent, publishing

the full inspection reports. I also think the influence of the ISI has been good overall, forcing us to think in new ways, to look at areas in a more critical light.'

The downside is the emergence of over-bureaucratisation, form-filling and box-ticking. 'If you're not careful it can take

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the joy out of the job. A pity, because I have always thought of teaching as the most rewarding of professions.'

His answer is to streamline – short effective meetings based on action plans, no minutes, no fuss. 'I never forget this is a business too, and it must be efficient and ethical.'

His greatest joy is the community of students they have built at BEET, students who now send their children. 'I can be sitting in my office and hear a voice I recognise and think, that's Barbara, she was here 25 years ago. And I go into the corridor and there she is standing with her seventeen-year-old son. That is a real joy.'

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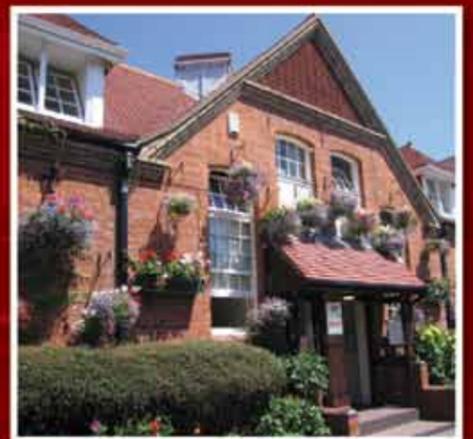
"BEET is ranked joint first British Council accredited school in the UK based on the new inspection system"

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ITTC:

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