

News Release

Innovative education forum promotes knowledge sharing across mobility sector

Thursday 25 February 2016 – HR and employers, mobility and destination services providers, international schools, and education consultants gathered at London's Institute of Directors on 19 February to share perspectives, knowledge and best practice at *Re:locate* Global's first International Education Forum.

With cross-border working and overseas assignments increasing, and employers and employees mindful of the value of international experience, the event, which attracted more than 40 delegates, encouraged deeper understanding and dialogue around how employers, HR, mobility and destination services providers, and schools could support families in making the right education and schooling choices, whether they were undertaking an international assignment or a domestic relocation.

Highlighting the importance of this first-of-its-kind event, Fiona Murchie, *Re:locate*'s managing editor, said, "For employees with families asked to go on an international assignment or to relocate to support a project in their home country, sourcing appropriate school places is paramount.

"Global mobility surveys tell us that family issues, including education, are one of the main reasons for assignment failure. We know that assignment failure can be so costly to employers, as well as individuals and their families, and sometimes, without the reassurance of a school place, people may refuse the assignment or relocation move.

"To help employers to support families engaged in global growth, we need to understand where people have knowledge gaps, what their challenges are, and what they would find most useful. We can do this better by engaging, working together, sharing knowledge and creating solutions, as we are doing today."

Fiona Murchie pointed out that, although some parts of the world, including Asia Pacific and the Middle East, were well known to have shortages of school places, moves to destinations like Europe could present their own challenges, as the schools most popular with relocating families were often oversubscribed.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are not many international schools outside the capitals and major cities of the UK and Europe, so parents need support from their employers if they are to find appropriate schools. The services of an education consultant who knows the state and private system inside out can be invaluable in allaying parents' concerns, as Debbie Bowker, of Bowker Consulting, confirmed.

Enabling good decisions

Representatives from schools in the UK, the US, the Middle East, China, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Spain and Hong Kong joined HR and mobility practitioners to give presentations and participate in roundtable discussion based on the question 'Do we do enough to help people make decisions?'

During a day rich in insights and discussion, key topics included finding schools in the global mobility context, growth trends in the international schools market, helping parents to choose a school, international curricula, exploring education options in the Middle East and Asia Pacific, and settling children and supporting the family.

In her presentation, Diane Glass, business development director at the International School Consultancy, suggested that employers looking to ensure smooth moves should get to know schools and their unique offerings and regional variations, and develop ongoing relationships with them.

"The international schools market has almost tripled in size since the year 2000, and I foresee this figure will double again over the next ten years," said Ms Glass. "In Dubai alone, there are 255 international schools. There are 21 cities around the world that have more than 100 international schools, so there is a lot of choice."

However, as Dr Richard Pearce, a consultant in international education and former international school admissions officer, pointed out, "International education is not a system; it's an arena." Because of this lack of standardisation, particularly across curricula, and the fact that not all schools are accredited, it can be hard for HR to advise relocating parents on the best options and the calibre of the schools.

An added complexity is that, while the numbers of expatriate students in international schools continue to increase, 80 per cent of international school students around the world now come from wealthy local families. This can mean huge competition for places.

International HR and the Middle East

From the employer and HR perspective, Daphne Doody-Green, head of international employer engagement at the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which has an office in Singapore and recently opened one in Dubai, described how her organisation was working through its accreditation programme to improve HR practices, for the benefit of business, societies and economies.

Emerging markets needed support in developing HR capability, she said. Of the CIPD's 140,000 members, 30 per cent already had an international remit, and this was growing.

There is significant regional growth and opportunity in the Middle East, where the economy has grown significantly in the last ten to 15 years, and there is a thirst for increased HR professionalism in the region. The CIPD acknowledges that HR

professionals are operating in a changing context of work, workforce and workplace internationally.

This is reflected by the *Re:locate* HR readership's interest in the wide-ranging global mobility challenges facing employers managing and supporting global teams, particularly in emerging markets.

Asia perspective

China is the number-one destination for mobility in the Asia Pacific region in terms of volume, and is seen by employers as APAC's most challenging destination, so delegates welcomed the opportunity of hearing from Asia expert Avrom Goldberg, senior vice president of Lexicon Relocation, about his company's new *China Global Mobility 360 Survey Report* of mobility policy and practice.

Mr Goldberg shared insights from the survey, which was the first to examine all types of mobility in China and draw responses from foreign-headquartered companies operating in China as well as China-headquartered organisations operating internationally. He revealed that mobility inbound to China was set to stay at current levels or increase across the board. Mobility outbound from China to any location is already very well established among foreign companies operating in China, with 81 per cent already relocating employees abroad from China.

Surprisingly, 50 per cent of China companies already relocate employees from China to locations abroad, and 81 per cent expect numbers to increase.

"Global and domestic mobility, in almost all its forms in China, is on the rise and here to stay," Avrom Goldberg said. "The trend for mobility growth in Tier 2, 3 and 4 locations is strong. Don't underestimate how challenging these places can be. Look to genuine experts," he urged, and concluded, "If any one country demands an integrated holistic approach to global mobility for organisational success, that country is China."

In all cities, particularly those in the lower tiers, challenges mentioned by non-China-headquartered companies as affecting their assignees were education concerns, lack of family support, and cultural differences, as well as safety and security, transport, and career development issues.

Supporting children and families

A major theme to emerge from the sessions was the importance of schools in supporting children and families through their transitions to ensure a successful relocation. The importance of getting the right fit between children and schools was emphasised by speaker after speaker.

Dr Richard Pearce told delegates, "The most important thing is getting the fit right, because a good fit means good learning – quite apart from avoiding the problems that come from a bad fit. When a child arrives in a new country, they bring their early training with them. If it isn't recognised, there will be a bad fit. There's a risk of culture shock."

Andrew Scott, Dwellworks' vice president of account management, Europe, had a unique perspective as a provider and procurer of services. He described the role of destination service providers in finding homes and schools for relocating employees, helping to open up the dialogue about what is needed from schools in order for employers and relocation management companies to help relocating parents make choices about schools and curricula.

He also explained the importance of matching school and housing requirements and the desired flexibility around admissions and entry to meet business needs.

There were plenty of tips from employers around the role of schools in supporting children and families through transition to ensure a successful relocation, including the importance of language and cultural immersion and mother-tongue programmes, which can enable families to be globally mobile and help ensure retention.

A very successful day ended with the question 'Do internationally educated students have the edge in today's global marketplace?' There was plenty of encouragement here for HR looking for future talent to grow their organisations.

The event saw the official launch of *Re:locate* Global's new annual *Guide to International Education & Schools*, which ensures that HR and employers have enough information at their fingertips to deal confidently with parents who need school places in their new location, to understand the education and family issues involved, and to make fair and informed decisions around education provision and support for families. An order form can be downloaded from http://www.relocatemagazine.com/media/images/RelocateGlobalEducationGuideOrderForm2016_7546.pdf

In her closing remarks, Fiona Murchie said, "It is fantastic to see HR, mobility and education coming together to share challenges and solutions. It's clear from the response we've had and everyone's involvement here that there is an appetite for greater collaboration on this issue, and that employers, educators and service providers care about people and families and want to support them.

"Today is a small step towards sharing ideas about how companies can grow internationally and how important it is to support relocating employees and families."

HR delegates commented that, having attended the forum, they had a better understanding of the important part a school's location played in a relocating family's decision about where to live. Where an employee was facing a long commute so that their child could attend the right school, the company could, perhaps, be more flexible, for example by allowing the employee to work from home one day a week.

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Notes for Editors

Re:locate Global is the leading independent multimedia publisher for the relocation and global mobility market, providing thought leadership, practical information, news and features for HR, global mobility managers, global teams, and those relocating, operating or setting up new operations overseas.

It is unique in combining coverage of the hard topics, such as immigration and tax, with the softer employee support issues, from schools to property, cultural awareness and partner careers. Its media and events (which include the prestigious *Re:locate* Awards) not only showcase thought leadership across management, HR and global mobility, but also help to shape the agenda across the many sectors that contribute to managing relocation and supporting relocating employees and their families.

Underpinned by more than 25 years' experience in global mobility, *Re:locate* has been established for ten years. Its senior team combines understanding of the HR and global mobility market with business drivers and a knowledge of management thinking and the wider impacts on company and regional growth caused by changing global markets, demographics, economics and geo-political factors.

The company's mission is to make connections, build networks, create opportunities for business, and enable the successful relocation of employees and their families, ensuring that organisations flourish in a globally mobile world.

The *Re:locate* website, relocateglobal.com, is the gateway to a range of influential multichannel, multimedia products and services. Updated daily and reaching 200 countries, it includes regional and subject-specific digital magazines and is the online home of a fast-growing community of HR, global managers, relocation professionals and experts dedicated to global mobility.