

## Turkish agents outline Ireland potential and visa delay fears

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### Turkish agents outline Ireland potential and visa delay fears

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Turkish agency association UED has highlighted the growth and future potential of Ireland as an English language study destination, but cautioned over the uncertainty of current applications on hold due to Covid-19 restrictions and made a number of recommendations for schools and authorities.

UED said that since introduction of faster and simpler visa processes in 2010, the popularity of Ireland in the Turkish market has steadily increased year on year, and within Europe is now second only to the UK for Turkish market share.

"For sure this is a natural outcome of the effective cooperation between the Irish Embassy in Ankara, language schools in Ireland, Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) and Turkish agencies," UED said.

Based on a survey of UED members on business between March 1st 2020 and the end of December, 28.7 per cent of clients considered Ireland as their English language study destination.



There is great potential for Ireland in the Turkish market, UED said.

However, UED said that around 30 per cent of those students shifted interest to another destination because of visa and travel restrictions for Ireland, and the association cautioned that only a small percentage of bookings have actually so far transitioned into students commencing a programme.

The member survey showed that the average number of lost weeks from cancellations for Ireland per agency was 193.7.

UED also said that currently around a third of member agencies have applications pending at the Irish embassy, with an average of approximately 200 study weeks for those agencies. Members predicted that around 60 per cent of clients may cancel within three months if they don't receive a visa.

"As a study destination for English Language Education, Ireland has a great potential in the Turkish market," the association said. "UED member agencies believe that if the key factors such as a fast and effective visa procedures and education quality in the schools can be brought together with attractions such as the ability to work during study, Ireland can easily be the most chosen country in the Turkish market for English language education."

Responding to the report, David O'Grady, CEO of MEI, told StudyTravel Magazine that the results were reassuring in terms of the demand for Ireland.

"For us in MEI, Turkey has been a great success story where we went from no international students in 2011 to 1,800 in 2019. Our engagement with Turkey from the beginning was the ideal template for industry/state co-operation, for working closely on the ground with UED to help them understand Ireland as a new destination for quality English language programmes and for doing detailed, painstaking work with immigration authorities in Ireland and at the Embassy in Ankara. Business has blossomed and friendships have bloomed," he said.

UED recommended a number of steps that could be taken by the Irish embassy to remove some uncertainties, including the opportunity to reapply without additional documentation, flexibility of financial evidence documentation, and said that the flow of up-to-date information from the embassy to agencies was "critical for prospective bookings".

It also called for schools' cancellation and refund policies to be upgraded to protect payments made by Turkish students and remove pressure on agencies.

"A possible social media campaign that brings together MEI and its members, the Irish Embassy in Ankara and Turkish agencies could create a huge effect upon the demand that is waiting at the moment," the association said.



UED added, "All of our partners in Ireland - schools and government bodies - should see how much of an important market Turkey is and should get proper information and better understanding about the market by regularly contacting the local agencies.

"Building a good reputation as a study destination in a traditional market such as Turkey is difficult, but it is always more difficult to keep it. Turkish agencies have been working for this purpose for a long time and are always ready to support Ireland as an English language study destination for the Turkish market."

David commented that as with many destinations, Covid has brought a great deal of uncertainty for the sector in Ireland, but that they were looking ahead to collaboration with Turkey.

"Once we can emerge safely from the onslaught of the pandemic we plan to engage immediately with our agent partners in UED and throughout Turkey. The concerns raised in the survey by agent partners can readily be addressed. We have stayed in contact with the Irish visa office in Ankara and we are ready to work together to get business back to the dynamic way it was before Covid.

"In our almost daily contact with Irish Government, we understand the deep public health concerns they have and we know we have to be patient for a return. But I am happy that before too long the blue skies will drive the dark clouds



away, and we'll meet again."

UED comprises of more than 30 agencies and is a member of the Federation of Education and Language Consultant Associations ( Felca ). Click [here](#) to read a recent *StudyTravel Magazine* interview with Aslihan Ozenc., President of UED.

By Matthew Knott  
News Editor

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