

ENGLAND (APTG and The Guild)

In 2019 Blue Badge (regional) courses completed in London and the Heart of England with 35 guides passing all exams and 22 more potentially passing with resits.

Green Badge (local) courses completed in the City of London, Bridgewater Canal and Salford, and the City of Canterbury with 53 guides passing all exams.

One White Badge (site specific) course completed at Clifton House, Belfast, for 15 guides.

The training and examination of licensed tourist guides is overseen by the Institute of Tourist Guiding (ITG). Of great concern to many licensed guides is the continued growth of unaccredited training programmes. These programmes recruit and train language speakers in port cities. The training is to a level below that of the badged guides but with sufficient competencies to meet the needs of the shore excursion companies that service cruise ships. These courses enable the recruitment of sufficient numbers to enable the excursion companies to meet the needs of the cruise companies, but they are a downward pressure on payment rates for all guides working in that sector.

The impressive increases in inbound visitor numbers and spend over recent years faltered in 2018 but the government body VisitBritain predicts that figures will rise again in 2019. The low value of the pound appears to be a stronger factor than overseas concerns over Brexit.

In January 2019 the British Guild of Tourist Guides held an acclaimed two-day 'Guided to Growth' conference for its members with a focus on developing business skills. So well received was the event that it is to be repeated in 2020 with invitations to all UK licensed guides.

Alex Hetherington

NORTHERN IRELAND (NITGA)

The Northern Ireland (NI) Tourist market continues to thrive and in 2019 we welcomed the highest number of cruise ship visitors. The success of the Titanic Exhibition Centre in Belfast combined with the phenomenal success of the HBO series, the Game of Thrones, which is filmed in 26 locations throughout Northern Ireland, has seen the tourist season extend into the Autumn & Winter months.

NITGA has recognised the urgency of training new guides to cope with the influx of visitors and a Green Badge Course is planned for early 2020 along with a Train the Trainers Course. We ran our first White Badge Course (for a historic Building in Belfast) and we are proud that 22 students successfully completed the Course. We are working closely with Tourism NI and were part of a small group who influenced the new branding of NI. We continue to embark on a full programme of CPD events and this year we introduced a very successful Talk & Dine event with Guest Speakers. For the 2nd year running we undertook Cultural Walking Tours as part of the Belfast International Festival and introduced two new tours. Belfast has become a major Conference Centre and through partnership with Visit Belfast we have begun to provide tours for this expanding market. NITGA is trialling a new website which will be launched in early 2020.

Challenges include competing with the ever-increasing number of free walking tours; untrained guides not always giving the 'true historical' facts and majoring on sensationalism, and a shortage of language guides.

Catherine Burns

SCOTLAND (STGA)

The STGA celebrated its 60th anniversary this year at its conference in Dundee. Seven guides who played major roles in the development of the association were recognised on a new Roll of Honour. The association currently supports 314 Blue Badge guides, 181 Region Specific Green Badge (GB) Guides and 41 Yellow Badge Guides for Glasgow City Sightseeing.

VisitScotland reported 2018 as the most successful year in the last decade for total visits to Scotland. International visitor numbers increased by 10% to 3.5 million, contributing £2.2 billion to the economy. Cruise Scotland reported an annual growth rate of 15% and anticipates one million passenger visits in 2020. In addition, a new deep-water harbour is due for completion in 2021 in Aberdeen.

In order to keep up with this ever-increasing market demand for professional tourist guides in Scotland the STGA has moved its training programme up a gear. In partnership with the City of Glasgow College, we are now training 30-36 Blue Badge guides each year, rather than every two years. The course lasts 18 months and complies with EN15565:2008. We have also introduced a new North-East GB course specifically to meet the needs of the harbour project. Eight guides are currently in training and we aim to have 30-50 new North-East GB guides by 2022.

The STGA booking service continues to be very busy providing work for many guides. During January to October 2019 the office made 1,110 bookings and requests are still being received.

Dianne McGuinness

WALES (WOTGA)

Our main focus has been the training of 13 WOTGA guides in a FEG Art of Guiding / Train the Trainer course which took place at the end of 2018. Working with FEG, this means the new courses which will be delivered by WOTGA guides in Wales will be internationally recognised and meet in full the requirements of European Standard EN15565-2008.

Following this training, a new 'Wales Guides Training' website was developed to promote Green Badge courses in three areas of Wales - North Wales, South East Wales and South West Wales. Media coverage about this course was also achieved. As a result of this publicity, combined with contact with potential applicants that had already been established, the interviews of applicants took place during the summer months. WOTGA has now offered places to applicants and the course is due to start at the end of November 2019 and will run until the end of May 2020. This new training, in association with FEG, will put WOTGA on the world stage of tourist guiding in the future.

WOTGA officers have continued their links with the Guild and Institute of Tourist Guides. They have also developed new relationships with the Scottish Tourist Guides Association.

The 'Wales Best Guides' website, for promoting services/tours offered by established WOTGA guides is in the process of being updated to make it more effective for both guides and prospective clients.

Lynne Bellis