



EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

An educated risk

New Business talks to **Stephen Spriggs**, the founder and CEO of award winning education and advisory consultancy, William Clarence Education

How long did it take to get the business off the ground and what were the main challenges in the early days?

As a business owner, you never feel like you are “safe” and it’s “off the ground”. The amount of worry I’ve felt has reduced over the years but there will always remain an element there in the back of my mind. The positive side to this however is that I am never complacent. I overthink and obsess over the detail, which I am sure has helped make good decisions and contributed to the success so far.

The business became sustainable after the first year. It was at this point I could stop judging William Clarence’s performance each week, but instead take a longer term view of the business. It enabled me to make better, more informed decisions on where I wanted to steer the business in the future.

One of my main challenges was to keep focused. This was extremely difficult and at times very stressful due to the type of work coming to us constantly changing. At this point it was hard to think about where I wanted to steer the William Clarence brand, as I was so consumed with the changing clients, that I was effectively just treading water. Another challenge was to not take rejection and setbacks too personally. When you have your life invested in a new project, you live and breathe every aspect and so when clients cancelled or contacts didn’t deliver what they promised it’s easy to feel absolutely devastated. Eventually I learnt to take a step back and realised that sometimes things just happen and there is nothing I could have done differently.

How has the core business changed since we last spoke to you and why was that necessary?

When I first started the business at the end of 2013 it was off the back of my own part time tutoring. As I got busier I took on more tutors to cope with demand and began to take enquiries for other subjects – this continued for the first full year of trading and there were over 100 tutors dealing with all subjects at all ages. I didn’t realise this prior to starting the business but it is in fact a high volume, relatively low margin, transactional model. This meant it quickly became a full time job just managing the tutors and clients. This capped growth, and if you want more then you need extra people and this expands your costs.

It was around this time in the development of the business that the types of the jobs were changing. There were less hourly 1 or 2 hours a week of tutoring but more full homeschooling or relocation projects with a team of tutors, liaising with schools and universities and becoming the focal point of responsibility for a family’s educational journey. I then shifted the focus of the business towards the international market, finding schools, universities for families, constructing full educational programmes, and then fitting on the tutoring as part of that process.

‘I learnt very early on that it’s essential to build healthy relationships with everyone you work with, both competitors and partners’

In what type of situation would someone consider using the services of William Clarence Education and do you operate worldwide?

We work with families both domestically and internationally, who are looking for help and advice on their next steps in education – that could be anything from finding the right nursery in a new area, prep school, senior school or university. We have helped families needing to bridge a gap from state to private education, expat families relocating back to the UK, prepared Indian, Chinese, Nigerian and American families with entrance exams to the top UK schools, and everything in between. We have also had instances where there has been some unfortunate circumstance change within a family, maybe a problem at school or at home and we have put together a homeschooling programme to mirror a regular school, with a team of professional tutors, to help prepare the child to re-enter the mainstream education system when the time is right.

The common theme with all our clients is that they are in need of honest, impartial advice on which schools suit their child’s profile. We can promise impartiality as we do not take any fees from schools. Ultimately our focus is to ensure the child is at the centre of the process and is happy with the result – not which