

Feltom's focus

Feltom is debating a bold new plan to create an accreditation scheme that would become compulsory for all association members. JOHN DIMECH, President of the association, answers our questions.

Fact box



Full name: Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations Malta (Feltom)

Year established: 1989

Number of members: 17

Type of members: Full (12), associate (3) and affiliate (2)

Government recognition: yes

Code of practice: yes

Complaints procedure: yes

Association's main role: to set, improve and ensure standards in all aspects of English language stays in Malta, and to develop cooperation among licensed language schools

Membership criteria: membership is attained by application and after rigorous evaluation. Full members run courses year round

Agents workshop/fam trips: fam trips

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Q What has Feltom been up to in the past year?

A Feltom is very proud to have been at the forefront when presenting itself to the English language teaching world (ELT) and turned Malta into a very respectable and suitable ELT destination. After Malta was established as an ideal English language learning destination in the late 1990s, Feltom felt that it was time to raise the standards further to portray Malta as a destination of quality.

Q How is the English language teaching industry developing?

A The industry has benefited from consistent increases in student enrolment in the past five years, from 31,000 students in 1996 to 57,000 students in 2003 and Malta has developed into a popular ELT destination among new emerging countries from the Eastern European bloc and China.

Q Please tell us about plans for an accreditation scheme in Malta.

A The Executive Board has appointed a quality assurance director who will work closely with the membership sub-committee to update the code of conduct, written 13 years ago, and develop a new system for ensuring quality standards – reflecting modern developments in the EFL market in Malta. With this goal in mind, the quality assurance director has come up with a proposal for an accreditation scheme, which would involve more detailed site visits, and heightened scrutiny for new membership as well as periodic site visits for existing member organisations. The quality standards demanded would be the same for both new and existing member organisations.

This scheme will be put forward for debate, and subsequently put to a vote at the next Feltom AGM. If the accreditation scheme is accepted, adherence to it will become mandatory for all Feltom members.

Q What do you believe an accreditation scheme would mean for members?

A Feltom introduced the Code of Academic Conduct and Code of Conduct on Student Welfare in the early 1990s, which are reviewed from time to time. It was through such review that we felt the need to lobby the government to enact legislation to establish national minimum conditions for schools teaching English as a foreign language modelled upon the Feltom Codes of Conduct. The legislation was enacted in April 1996. The codes of conduct are the philosophy of practice for schools and during the review last year it was determined that Feltom needed a framework for enforcement. In the long run, our goal is to move our sector a step further by improving overall quality.

Q What will be the effects of European Union (EU) enlargement for Feltom members?

A A Feltom-commissioned professional study on the effects and consequences of Malta's access into the EU saw opportunities, with appropriate safeguards, for continued progress. Currently, there is no EU standard on English language teaching but a lobby group for a voluntary standard finalised its proposals in Vienna, Austria in May, to be promoted throughout the enlarged EU. Feltom has contributed towards these proposals and intends

to endorse these standards as its minimum expectations of service.

Q Is the profile of the typical English language student in Malta continuing to evolve?

A Regrettably, we do not have statistical data as yet as this type of research is still being carried out. However, various members have reported that the average duration of course per student is on the increase as Malta becomes more and more popular with students for English for Special Purposes courses such as business English, English for tourism, banking, finance, medicine, law, engineering, marketing, and the academic semester and academic year programmes.

Q How does Feltom work with agents?

A Feltom is equivalent to Arels in the UK [now English UK] and MEI~Relsa, to mention two other European associations, however Feltom does not have a direct function with agents as yet. In Spring 2000, Feltom was formally recognised by Arels as the sole Maltese association of English language schools that promotes quality and customer protection, and invited to participate in the annual International Languages & Education UK Fair.

Q What are Feltom's future goals?

A Feltom's primary target is to introduce the accreditation scheme on a mandatory basis to enhance its hallmark of distinction. Feltom's other ambition is to provide Malta with a marketing platform to promote itself as an English language learning destination that offers quality schools.