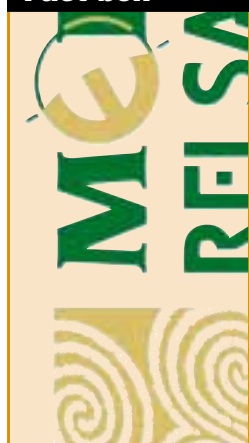


# MEI~Relsa's efforts

MEI~Relsa is continuing to work with member schools and the Irish government to ensure that schools offer a high quality language learning experience and that this message is being heard around the world. Gillian Nother, MEI~Relsa's new Manager, answers our questions about the association's efforts.

## Fact box



**Full name:** MEI~Relsa

**Year established:** January 2000

**Number of members:** 55 organisations and 125 centres

**Type of members:** private English language centres; executive language training centres; summer schools; university language centres

**Association's main role:** the cooperative marketing of English language centres in Ireland in order to maximise impact, raising Ireland's profile as a quality language destination; serving as the trade association for the English language teaching sector in Ireland

**Membership criteria:** government recognition and nomination by two member schools

**Government recognition:** yes

**Code of practice:** yes

**Complaints procedure:** yes, contained in the Code of Practice

**Agent workshops/fam trips:** yes

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**Q** MEI~Relsa organised a successful fam trip for members of Kosa last year. Do you have any similar plans for 2002?

**A** We organise single-country fam trips once or twice a year, as in the case of [Korean agency association] Kosa in 2001. Plans for 2002's fam trip schedule depends on market conditions, and in the post-September 11 world, we need to allow more time to pass before planning.

**Q** What was MEI~Relsa's most significant achievement last year?

**A** Over the past 18 months, awareness raising in Korea has been very successful, yet this is just the beginning. We would never view our achievements over a 12-month period since so much of what we do is the creation of long-term quality relationships all over the world. Our annual workshop [in September] was again highly praised by agents and members alike. Also, after two years of negotiation with our Department of Justice, the first visa officers were deployed in Beijing, China and Moscow, Russia, in January. This will speed up the processing of visas for student applicants.

**Q** How are you aiming to improve membership benefits?

**A** MEI~Relsa has worked very hard on teacher-development pilot programmes. Developments include a framework for teacher development that covers three levels: national, regional, and school/college; a mentor training programme, which will run until the end

of March this year on a pilot basis; a novice teacher support programme, to commence this year; and other programmes for summer teachers and specialising teachers. We are also organising national teacher development conferences (the most recent one in October last year attracted 158 teachers from 34 member schools) and we held two training days last December, one for directors of studies and the other for teacher trainers.

**Q** What do you see as the key challenges facing Irish schools at the moment?

**A** The main challenge will be access routes [via air] into Ireland and how our member schools will be affected by the downturn [in airline business].

**Q** How is MEI~Relsa continuing to work with the Irish government?

**A** Our three main areas of cooperation are: continuing close involvement with the Advisory Council for English Language Schools (Acels) on all aspects of our recognition programme as well as standards in schools; a liaison with the Department of Justice; and on-going participation in the People & Place programme run by the Department of Tourism, which is a project that aims to protect the core values that attract tourists to Ireland. The programme emphasises the importance of the quality of our environment and the Irish welcome, for example, through a series of education projects, environment initiatives and industry partnership projects.

**Q** According to MEI~Relsa members, have the new part-time work rights for all students in Ireland, which were introduced last year, significantly affected business?

**A** The main impact [has been] in extensions of stay for students already in the country. There is no doubt however, that it has been a valuable marketing tool. Agents are delighted to hear that students can work for 20 hours a week without a work permit and there's certainly enough work in Ireland!

**Q** Were members affected by the foot-and-mouth scare in the UK, which meant many touristic areas of Ireland were also temporarily closed?

**A** One of our members had to close a rural residential centre and we certainly noticed some confusion in our core European markets early on, but the members report no significant impact on business. I think the message got through eventually that after just one case, Ireland remained free of foot-and-mouth disease.

**Q** Is membership increasing at MEI~Relsa, and if so, does this reflect a wider increase in the number of language teaching centres in Ireland or not?

**A** No, membership, numerically, is static, although we do have new members every year. There isn't a significant increase in new schools but rather an expansion of existing operators.