

MEI~Relsa links up

The Irish association representing the interests of English language schools, MEI~Relsa, has been consolidating its links with government over the past year and planning more marketing activities for its members. GILLIAN NOTHER, Manager of the association, answers our questions.

Fact box



Full name: Marketing English in Ireland ~ Recognised English Language Schools Association

Year established: Merger of MEI and Relsa in 2000. MEI established in 1993; Relsa established in 1969

Number of members: 57 operators of approx. 125 centres around Ireland

Type of members: Private language schools mainly, some university and third level college-based centres

Government recognition: Yes

Code of practice: Yes

Association's main role: Industry representation, industry support and cooperative marketing

Membership criteria: Recognition and regulation by the Irish Department of Education

Complaints procedure: Yes

Agent workshops/fam trips: Yes

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Q You organised a trip for MEI~Relsa members out to Russia last year. Are there similar plans for other events in the pipeline?

A MEI~Relsa has a busy marketing schedule planned for the year ahead. In the first half of the year alone we will be repeating our highly successful roadshow to Spain of two years ago, to be followed soon after by a trip to various [European Union] accession states. Also this year, a number of our members will be accompanying the President, Mary McAleese, on a trip to South America in spring. A number of Irish schools will again be present in Korea this year at the Coex Fair and at the Alphe Workshop in Seoul in March. Throughout the year, we will have several groups of agents and journalists arriving in Ireland to visit various member schools. One difference in our marketing plan this year is that the members have elected to have their next workshop in May 2005, instead of September 2004.

Q In what other ways has MEI~Relsa been working with agents?

A MEI~Relsa has an excellent relationship with individual agents and with agent

groups worldwide. With the support of the Irish Tourist Board, we cooperate with agents and agency associations by organising fam trips and press visits to Ireland for various groups. We also set up workshops in agents' markets to facilitate the maintenance and development of productive business relationships, and in certain markets, we support our agents in the organisation of Consumer Fairs and Ireland Days.

Q Has membership of MEI~Relsa expanded?

A Membership has grown mainly organically over the past number of years as existing MEI~Relsa members expand their businesses. We also have three new members this year, which is fairly typical of [membership growth patterns].

Q How did members fare in 2003, given that it was a difficult year all round for business?

A Generally our members reported that 2003 was a good year, though not as strong as two or three years ago. Ireland perhaps suffered less than many other countries, in terms of enrolment levels, as students diverted their travels in favour of Ireland [because they were] in search of a safer destination.

Q Is MEI~Relsa working with the Irish government in any way, in terms of enterprise or immigration initiatives?

A MEI~Relsa has several links with government from our visa committee, that meets almost monthly with the Department of Justice, to our representation on the Asia Pacific Strategy Committee. This committee has as its aim the development of foreign earnings in the Asia Pacific region for Irish businesses, and incorporates representatives from Enterprise Ireland, Bord Failte, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as private sector representatives. MEI~Relsa members are continually invited to participate in state and presidential trade missions around the world, and we maintain strong relationships with the Irish Tourist Board, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the overseas Irish Embassies, which provide us with excellent support in the markets.

Q How do you believe the Irish English language teaching industry will fare in 2004?

A At the time of writing this, the majority of members were reserving judgement for the year ahead.