



# Team building

Recent years have seen the birth of brand new educator associations, while some of the more established groups have merged to form a united voice for the industry. Quality standards, government lobbying and agent-focused promotions are areas in which many associations have been concentrating their efforts.

GILLIAN EVANS takes a look at the latest association developments.

Educator associations have witnessed many developments in the last couple of years. Some established associations have reassessed their quality criteria and membership, expanding and fine-tuning their provision, while new associations in emerging markets have sprung up.

Emma English at Beta believes associations help schools of all sizes to have an influence in the marketplace. "School associations play a crucial role in a large, sometimes unregulated and fragmented industry, allowing small players to express opinion and be heard and big players to realise there are opportunities at all levels that can raise awareness and demonstrate variety and professionalism to potential clients." She adds, "Associations can also help smaller enterprises to grow through acquisition of industry 'know how', network contacts and ideas that otherwise would be unavailable to them."

For the vast majority of schools, the advantages of working together towards common goals outweigh any concerns of working with the "competition". For example, University English Centres Australia (UECA) groups together university-based English language centres throughout Australia, and has invested considerably in promoting its members. As a result of this, states UECA Chairperson, Mark Gordon, "UECA's major success has been in positioning university English centres as the natural gateway to study at Australian universities."

While sector-specific associations continue to thrive, there is a move towards a more integrated approach. English UK was formed in 2004 when the private-sector association, Arels, and the state-sector group, Baselt, merged. According to Tony Millns, this has created a "stronger voice" for the industry and "greater transparency" as students and agents have to approach only one association to find out about all types of language learning opportunities.

In New Zealand, English New Zealand (formerly FielsNZ) is also opening up its membership to state-owned English language providers after conducting an in-depth review of its purpose, goals and vision for the future. "This is an important breakthrough for English New Zealand and reflects our commitment to lead the way for the best English language schools in this country," explains Chairperson, Angela Oliver. "We see this as an opportunity for different sectors to actively work together to uphold and promote quality standards far in excess of the legislated requirements." Its first two state-sector members are the University of Otago Language Centre and Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology School of English.

### Options for all

There is a definite move towards more inclusive membership criteria. English Australia has amended its membership to "ensure that providers of all shapes and sizes have access to EA's services", says EA's Sue Blundell. New categories of membership have been added including reduced fees for colleges with small numbers of students and a new introductory membership category for new colleges that are going through their provisional year of accreditation.

Then there are associations that unite a whole range of different sectors of the language travel industry, the most well known being

Alto, a Fiyto-member organisation that currently has 185 members, including language schools, language travel agents, industry associations and suppliers such as insurance companies. A similar national organisation is Beta in the UK. Established in 2003, it already boasts just over 100 members, who come from various industry sectors such as language schools, universities, work exchange programme organisers, tour operators and accommodation providers.

"Beta was founded by a group of operators that felt that there was a need for a representative umbrella body that could coordinate the many segments which make up youth, student and educational travel," explains English. "It was recognised that to effectively raise the profile of the youth sector and lobby government on issues affecting the industry there needed to be more joined-up thinking among industry and a forum where competitors could comfortably sit alongside one another and share information."

While in some markets, associations are polarising, in others they are becoming more fragmented. In South Africa, for example, there are two language schools

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associations, Eltasa and English South Africa, and in Ireland, IEAI was founded this year despite the existence of MEI~Relsa. However, as Brian Burns, MEI~Relsa's Director, told *Language Travel Magazine*, "MEI~Relsa welcomes any new group or organisation committed to the development and promotion of quality education in Ireland. It is important that we all work together with our common objective of promoting Ireland, and attracting students here."

### Quality assurance

Making themselves stand out as quality providers is one of the main driving forces for educator associations. As Blundell at EA says, "Associations provide [a] 'badge' that differentiates members from non-members who are not willing to meet the same



## Snapshot of some associations\*

### AAIEP

Association of American Intensive English Programs  
Established: 1986  
Number of members: 275

### ABLS

Association of British Language Schools  
Established: 1993  
Number of members: 36

### Acpet

Australian Council for Private Education and Training  
Established: 1992  
Number of members: 750

### Alto

Association of Language Travel Organisations  
Established: 1998  
Number of members: 185

### Asils

Associazione Scuole di Italiano come Lingua Seconda  
Established: 1991  
Number of members: 32

### Beta

British Educational Travel Association  
Established: 2003  
Number of members: 100

### Capls

Canadian Association of Private Language Schools  
Established: 1997  
Number of members: 100

### CLC

Canada Language Council  
Established: 1979  
Number of members: 105

### EA

English Australia  
Established: 1980s  
Number of members: 82

### Eaquals

European Association for Quality Language Services  
Established: 1991  
Number of members: 117

### Eltasa

English Language Teaching Association of South Africa  
Established: 2003  
Number of members: 7

### English New Zealand

Established: 1986  
Number of members: 27

### English South Africa

Established: 2004  
Number of members: 7

### English UK

Established: 2004  
Number of members: 340

### Fedele

Federacion Espanola de Asociaciones de Escuelas de Espanol para Extranjeros  
Established: 1999  
Number of members: 7 associations (67 schools)

### Feltom

Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations Malta  
Established: 1989  
Number of members: 17

### Gaela

Global Alliance of Education and Language

standards." Oliver at English New Zealand adds that an association of quality providers can also "act in a monitoring capacity to ensure poor quality providers are encouraged to exit the industry before they damage national reputations".

To ensure quality standards, Eltasa launched an accreditation scheme in 2004, while Capls in Canada introduced its scheme at the beginning of the year. In the USA, AAIEP is planning to make it compulsory that members are accredited by either Accet, CEA or that a programme is under the governance of an institution that is regionally accredited. Discussion is currently ongoing as to levels of quality assurance and preferred models (there is concern that regional accreditation may not be adequate).

Even where national regulations exist, some educator associations work to enhance their members' quality credentials above and beyond those stipulated by the authorities. Feltom in Malta was instrumental in helping to set up the EFL Monitoring Board, which is responsible for ensuring standards in English language schools. Although Feltom already has its own academic and student welfare codes of conduct, the association decided to raise its quality stakes even higher by creating an accreditation scheme to be administered by a third party (see page 19). Feltom hopes "that authorities will follow its lead", explains President, John Dimech, and enforce these new standards on a national level.

At English New Zealand, since 1998 members have undergone an additional quality auditing process of "SGS Brewster Standards", in which all marketing, premises, facilities and accommodation provision, policies and procedures are scrutinised. Meanwhile, the state sector schools are regulated and monitored by their own inspection bodies. "We are now moving towards setting consistent quality standards across the board," says Oliver.

### Marketing benefits

Joint promotion is another important role of many educator associations. It is not only cheaper to undertake group actions but can also make a bigger impact. As Jay Jamieson of CLC in Canada succinctly puts it, "Together we are stronger and more visible than we would be as individuals."

Greg Rosenstock at IEAI in Ireland highlights the advantages of association promotional activities. "School owners are well aware that in marketing you can never take your foot off the pedal. Travelling, advertising and promoting can be very costly, particular to small to medium-sized language schools. Associations can pool resources like research on targeted marketing destinations, agencies, teachers, ideas and materials and the outcome is positive for all concerned."

Within associations' marketing strategies, agents are often an important target. Agent workshops are organised by English UK, EA, MEI~Relsa, Ialc, Italian in Italy and Fedele in Spain, and

inbound and outbound agent missions feature heavily in the diaries of most language school associations.

Keeping agents regularly informed of association and market developments is another role that many school associations are taking on. English UK recently launched English UK News, an e-newsletter for agents, while the CLC is just starting to look into developing agent services. "We are planning to develop a newsletter for agents, providing regular updates on the CLC," reports Jamieson. "To help agents identify CLC programmes we will soon have an easy-to-download directory on our website and we also plan to have a 'Questions and Answers' forum on the site. This will allow agents to direct questions on the Council and its quality assurance scheme straight to a central source."

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### Working with government

While quality assurance and marketing are important jobs for most associations, lobbying government is, as Millns says, "one of our main services to members". The same is true at EA. "Each year, EA conducts a survey of members' satisfaction with EA services and each year government lobbying ranks as number-one in both importance and satisfaction," says Blundell. "The domestic regulatory environment plays a critical role in determining the opportunities that are available for the sector and it is essential that providers can influence decision makers via their association."

May Arthur, Vice-President of Standards at AAIEP, says they are currently working with government agencies on areas such as enabling short-term English language study on a tourist visa and reducing the Sevis fee for short-term study. "Through advocacy, AAIEP is able to educate government agencies about the needs and concerns of

its members. As a result, AAIEP is able to influence public policy to secure economic benefits for its members," says Arthur.

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Capls has also been active in lobbying government. According to Linda Auzins at the association, they have notched up many successes, the most recent being the changes to the visa regulations that "meant students coming to Canada could now study with only a visitor visa for up to six months [instead of three]," she explains.

CLC says it works closely with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and other government departments to "better understand the needs of the language training sector", says Jamieson. "We sit on the Advisory Committee on International Students and Immigration which meets twice a year to discuss immigration issues related to international students studying in Canada. The CLC makes every effort to keep government abreast of and sensitive to the needs of students and language providers," he relates.

Asils in Italy also counts lobbying as one of its most important roles. The association's Secretary, Matteo Savini, says, "Lobbying government is fundamental, especially for visa problems – it's hard to enter Italy with a study visa even [for students] from the USA, Japan and other countries with no immigration risk – and it's also important for issues related to the national teacher's contract with private schools."

Associations  
Established: 2000  
Number of members: n/a

**Ialc**  
International Association of  
Language Centres  
Established: 1983  
Number of members: 91

**IEAI**  
International Education  
Association of Ireland  
Established: 2005  
Number of members: 22

**Italian in Italy**  
Established: 1997  
Number of members: 21

**MEI-Relsa**  
Established: 2000  
Number of members: 56

**QE**  
Quality English  
Established: 2003  
Number of members: 19

**Souffle**  
Established: 1990  
Number of members: 17

**UECA**  
University English Centres  
Australia  
Established: 1995  
Number of members: 30

**UCIEP**  
University and College  
Intensive English Programs  
Established: 1967  
Number of members: 69  
\* as of 08/2005



## International cooperation

While national language school associations in many countries are well developed, it has taken a little longer for associations to join forces on an international level. The first international group of associations, Elite, was established in 1995 by European school associations that wanted to further common quality standards. Then, in 2000, the Global Alliance of Education and Language

Associations (Gaela) was born; an informal group of national schools' associations from around the globe.

Explaining the benefits of Gaela, Tony Millns at English UK says, "Gaela meetings give us the opportunity to discuss industry issues with other countries' associations. It is good practice to share knowledge and experience, for example, looking at models of regulation in other

countries, learning from this for our own work in the UK." He adds, "We [understand] how world market trends affecting other countries enhances understanding of our own market."

Sue Blundell at EA agrees. "It is easy to feel isolated in some of the 'battles' that we have, for example, to gain recognition with our respective governments. It is comforting and sometimes inspiring to share issues."

Gaela also provides school groups with one way in which to meet its agency counterpart, Felca. "It is interesting to hear the issues agents want to discuss in the Gaela/Felca sessions," states Jay Jamieson of CLC, which is the current Chair of Gaela. "It is all information for our members back at home."

There has also been more synergy between national associations. CLC invited spokespeople from

French association, Souffle, and English UK to speak at its annual general meeting earlier this year. "It was extremely useful to have the international contact and context," says Jamieson. "There is nothing truly new out there but finding out how others are dealing with similar problems to ours, what stage their quality assurance schemes or lobbying efforts are at, for example, is very instructive and encouraging."

Similarly, Fedele provides its industry with a united voice when dealing with the government. "Among the main objectives of Fedele is to represent the second language

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Spanish teaching sector in negotiations with the Spanish government," says Astrid Verlot, the group's Executive Secretary. In New Zealand, English New Zealand

leaves the lobbying side of things to the Association of Private Providers of English Language (Appel), a kind of mouthpiece for the industry. As Oliver puts it, "The relationship [between us and Appel] is symbiotic: Appel clears the way for English New Zealand to concentrate on marketing and quality standard projects."

It is clear that the grouping together of schools has not only significant benefits for association members, but also for agents and students, as they generally provide information, have quality standards and sometimes complaints procedures, and can advise government on industry issues. As Stuart Boag, Communications Director at Education New Zealand affirms, "Well organised and supported associations are very important. The collective approach enhances advocacy and allows for more efficient and better targeted use of resources. It's all part of the increasing maturity and professionalism of an industry."