

teamwork

There is no doubt that educator associations can be useful to agents. They all provide some arrangement of agent workshops and familiarisation trips. And as educator associations reassess their agent services. GILLIAN EVANS reports on associations' efforts to work


An air of open cooperation is enveloping the language travel industry. More language providers are joining associations of educators - the international association, Ialc, reported that it had attracted seven new members this year (see page 5) - and national associations are also increasingly working together and with their counterparts overseas. The driving force behind this trend is the general consensus that, through their combined efforts, institutions can affect change for the global industry as a whole. It may well be high time for such action. As Alessandro Adorno of Asils in Italy puts it, 'An international sector [such] as foreign language studies cannot do without internationalising.'

Language provider associations vary widely in their membership and the role they play in their markets. Some, for example, are open only to very

specific providers, such as HPA, which represents home tuition providers in the UK. Others represent language providers in a certain region, such as AEEA and Olé in Spain. Most groups were originally founded to provide a forum for discussion among providers and ensure certain quality standards - either through inspection schemes or codes of practice - and this latter role is important to agents around the world.

'We usually consider that most [educator] associations are a good source of school quality control,' reports Celso Luiz Garcia of CI - Central de Intercambio in Brazil. 'Therefore, the main use they have [for us] is as a referral source.'

Although quality remains important to them, many associations have further developed their role, and today they may play an active part in lobbying government and conduct international marketing



vide information about member schools, many ensure certain quality standards, and
ons have increasingly been realising the importance of agents, they have also been
ork together, and in conjunction with agents, towards common goals.

activities. More recently, however, many have been beefing up their agent strategies.

Focus on agents

There are, of course, educator associations that have a long tradition of working closely with agents - the main two being Arels and Ialc. 'Ialc has maintained a strong relationship with agents since its foundation in 1983,' confirms Jan Capper, Ialc Secretariat Manager. 'The majority of Ialc schools work predominantly with agents, so we focus our marketing on these very important partnerships.'

Arels in the UK was one of the first associations to organise a workshop and familiarisation trips for agents. Now, according to Tony Mills, Arels Chief Executive, 'Arels provides a point of contact for agents and agent associations that are either looking

for new schools to work with or need help in organising fam trips to the UK.'

Historical factors have, in the past, hindered some associations, particular those representing the state sector, from embracing agencies into their fold. 'Although many [Baselt] member institutions [in the UK] quickly adapted to market conditions and working with agents, others were at first a little slower in setting up the necessary mechanisms, within a state-sector infrastructure, for paying commission and adapting their course and service offer to market expectations,' admits Paul Menniss of Baselt.

According to Menniss, this attitude has changed rapidly in recent years as demand has grown for more career-oriented programmes. 'With many agents also now very concerned with responding to demand by their clients for an integrated language/education



AAIEP

Association of American Intensive English Programs
Members: independent intensive English programmes in the USA

ABLS

Association of British Language Schools
Members: English language providers in the UK

Acpet

Australian Council for Private Education and Training
Members: Private institutions offering education and training in Australia

AEAA

Asociacion de Escuelas de Espanol en Andalucia
Members: Spanish language schools in Andalucia, Spain

AEPLE

Associaçao Portuguesa de Escolas de Ensino de Portugues como Lingua Estrangeira
Members: Portuguese language schools in Portugal

Appel

Association of Private Providers of English Language
Members: private English language providers in New Zealand; includes members of Fiels and Crels

Alto

Association of Language Travel Organisations
Members: buyers and sellers of language travel products; international

Arels

Association of Recognised English Language Services
Members: private English language services in the UK that have English in Britain accreditation

Asils

Associazione Scuole di Italiano come Lingua Seconda
Members: Italian language providers in Italy

Baselt

British Association of State English Language Teaching
Members: UK-based English language teaching centres in the tertiary state-sector that have English in Britain accreditation

Capls

Canadian Association of Private Language Schools
Members: private English and/or French language providers in Canada

product, the relationship with Baselt is strengthening and deepening at a very fast pace,' he says.

UCIEP, the consortium of university language programmes in the USA, reports a similar experience. 'Our relationship with agents has developed slowly,' says UCIEP President, Mary Brooks, although she adds, 'Individual members work with many agents and respect what they do.' There has been a change in strategy at the association, according to Brooks, because the US English language teaching market has suffered since September 11 2001. The importance of proactive marketing has been pushed to the forefront and UCIEP is embarking on a marketing strategy targeting agents for the first time in its 35-year history. As part of this initiative, it sent its electronic newsletter to around 200 agents worldwide earlier this year (see *Language Travel Magazine*, July 2002, page 9).

This sea change towards agents is not limited to associations representing state-sector educators. 'AAIEP is focusing more than ever on relations with agents,' asserts AAIEP President, Peter Thomas, while he admits, 'This has not been the highest priority for our organisation in the past.'

Cleve Brown, Chairperson of Crels in New Zealand, says that there are no immediate plans to widen the scope of this association, which is currently 'a forum for schools to work with each other to help maintain and improve quality'. But he admits, 'There are certain advantages to promoting ourselves more to agency organisations to give Crels a higher profile internationally, as well as adding to reasons for newer schools to join Crels.' Brown says that he is looking at increasing the association's cooperation with agents and agent associations.

Even the European quality organisation, Eaquals, whose primary role is quality assurance, is thinking of extending its role. Although Frank Heyworth at the group says that they will mainly be concentrating on the 'development of standards', he adds, 'We're study-

ing the marketing role of the association and plan to be more proactive in the future.'

Information channel

Realising that providing agencies with brochures of their members is often not enough, a wide range of educator associations have been looking at improving and increasing their agent information flow. Ialc, Baselt, Italian in Italy, MEI-Relsa and Fiels are all planning to launch agent newsletters, e-zines and news flash services. At the same time, websites are being reviewed to ensure they provide agents with time-saving features.

Last year, Arels revamped its website to include a searchable database of services offered by member schools. Baselt, meanwhile, has developed an email service for agents wanting to place students on an English language, academic or vocational course. The specifications of the agent's client request are emailed to Baselt, which immediately distributes this to its

members by email. Those members able to supply the service requested then contact the agent directly. 'This saves time and expense on the part of the agent and allows them

quickly to find out whether a broad range of state institutions can meet the specific course programme and service requirement that their clients require,' says Menniss.

As well as providing agents with up-to-date news of members' services, educator associations can also

'AAIEP is focusing more than ever on relations with agents, although this has not been the highest priority for our organisation in the past'

Agents as members of educator associations

Some educator associations have started to offer a membership category for non-education providers, such as agents. Among those that already have such a membership category are Education New Zealand (EdNZ) and AAIEP, while Arels is planning to launch an associate membership by the beginning of next year.

As yet, Lester Taylor at EdNZ, which launched its international associate membership (IAM) category last year, reports that uptake

has been low because of a lack of promotion. Similarly, Baselt, which launched an IAM for overseas institutions last year and was hoping to expand it to agents and agent associations, has not been able to move forward with this plan. 'Up to now, we have not been able to deploy any resources promoting this,' says Baselt's Paul Menniss.

Generally, IAM status allows agents to benefit from extra services from associations. For EdNZ, this

includes leaflets, posters, videos and other promotional materials. AAIEP institutional associate membership provides a listing in the members' profile book, the AAIEP newsletter and discounted access to the AAIEP mailing list. Arels' associate membership will give benefits such as discounts on Arels products and services, promotion in Arels publications and networking opportunities. 'We are interested in developing

stronger partnerships between quality course providers and serious agents, which can only be to the benefit of students,' says Arels' Tony Millns.

However, educator associations must ensure that they are offering distinct benefits and are not just charging agents for services that they used to receive free of charge. Capper says Ialc would only proceed with such an initiative if 'it had real benefits for agents', but she does not rule it out.

Agent Nina Koltashova of Itec in Russia welcomes an agent membership for educator associations if there are obvious benefits. '[This] would be a positive development to my mind as it lets agents receive special services but I think the membership fee should be reasonable,' she says. 'One of the important services [they] could provide is statistics concerning popular courses, marketing research and [news] about new schools and programmes.'

help them stay abreast of regulatory changes. For the USA, this has been particularly important. 'Throughout the last nine months, we have sought to communicate accurate information to agents worldwide about the constantly changing US immigration regulations in the wake of the September 11,' confirms Thomas. AAIEP also presented a seminar on this topic at a recent Icef workshop.

Overseas marketing

Agent workshops have for some time been an important meeting place for agents and individual schools, but educator associations are now also increasingly taking part in workshops, which has nurtured agent-educator association partnerships. 'ABLS' relationship with agents has developed primarily through Alphe workshops,' confirms Joanne Adcock in the UK, ABLs Secretary.

AAIEP is relatively new to the international promotions circuit, but has attended the Arels Fair and Alphe workshops. 'The Alphe workshops were the first time our organisations had had a clear visual identity at agent workshops,' says Thomas.



'ABLS' relationship with agents has developed primarily through Alphe workshops'

A number of educator associations such as Arels, EA, Fedele, Ialc, MEI-Relsa, Italian in Italy and Fiels organise their own workshops and fam trips for agents. Agent Nina Koltashova, Director General of Itec in Russia, says that this is 'one of the most important things' educator associations can do for agents. 'You can meet with your partners [at such events], discuss contracts, get to know the products and so on. You may see many people from all over the world in one place - which is very important and, of course, convenient. At such events, you also meet with new partners, which means new products, new contracts, better services for the clients,' she explains.



Crels

Combined Registered English Language Schools
Members: private English language schools in NZ

CSLP

Council of Second Language Programs in Canada
Members: public post-secondary English and French language programmes at universities/colleges in Canada

EA

English Australia
Members: private- and public-sector accredited English language colleges in Australia

Eaquals

European Association for Quality Language Services
Members: private or state institutions in Europe involved in quality language training

Elite

European Federation of National Associations for Teaching Mother Tongues to Foreign Students
Members: associations of language schools in Europe

Fedele

Federacion Espanola de Asociaciones de Escuelas de Espanol para Extranjeros
Members: regional associations of private Spanish language schools

Fiels

Federation of Independent English Language Schools
Members: private English language schools in NZ

Feltom

Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations Malta
Members: English language schools in Malta

Gaella

Global Alliance of Education and Language Associations
Members: educators associations around the world

HPA

Homestay Providers' Association
Members: home tuition providers in the UK

Ialc

International Association of Language Centres
Members: independent language centres worldwide

Italian in Italy

Members: providers of Italian language and cultural courses in Italy

MEI-Relsa

Members: English language providers in Ireland that have Acelis accreditation

Olé

Organizacion de Centros de Lengua Espanol en Andalucia
Members: Spanish language schools in Andalucia, Spain, that have Ceele accreditation

Pelsa

Private English Language Schools Association
Members: private English language schools in Canada

Souffle

Members: French language schools in France

UCIEP

University and College Intensive English Programs
Members: university and college English language programmes in the USA

Many educator associations also travel overseas to meet with agents. Italian in Italy has conducted marketing trips to Germany, Japan and the USA to date, while Ialc has for some years now arranged international roadshows to meet agents. In November 2001, it held a mini-workshop in the Baltic States and Finland, and it is planning a trip to China later this year. 'Agents have busy schedules, so it's a convenient way for them to make first contact or touch base with established partners,' says Capper. 'It's also very important for schools to understand the different markets they serve.'

Fiels is also active in its overseas missions, having travelled to China, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, the French Pacific Region and South America in the past year. 'From time to time, individual member schools report a noticeable increase in

business as a result of a particular Fiels marketing initiative,' reports William

Neale, Fiels Chairperson. 'There are also many 'invisible' benefits, such as the maintenance of good relationships between member schools and agents.'

However, Garcia of CI in Brazil is critical of associations that market to students, as he believes they should concentrate on more generic marketing. '[Educator] associations should only market to agents [directly], although they should promote more the country as a destination to [encourage] travellers to choose that country,' he says. He adds that educator associations should 'pressure the government to make visa issuance procedures easier'.

Government partnerships

Indeed, educator associations in many countries have been forging close relationships with their governments. Liz Karra, Co-Chairperson of CSLP in Canada, says, '[CSLP] has ongoing relationships with various government departments and agencies, and has representation on key government committees. In addition, [CSLP] is in regular contact with Canadian embassies around the world.'

In Malta, Feltom has been instrumental in working with the government to set up the first compulsory monitoring scheme for English language providers in the world. 'Feltom lobbied the government to enact legislation to establish national minimum conditions for schools teaching English as a foreign language, and for accommodation at host families, modelled upon the Feltom codes of conduct,' recounts John Dimech, Executive Council Member of Feltom.

To ensure their voice is heard by government, some educator associations have joined forces with other associations in their country. In the USA, AAIEP is a member of an advocacy organisation, called the Alliance for International Education and

Cultural Exchange. 'This enables us to partner effectively with other international education member organisations to substantially increase our influence in Washington,' says Thomas. Sue Blundell, Chairperson of EA in Australia, mentions the Affiliation of International Education Peak Bodies in Australia, which

brings together all education sectors, including universities, private vocational providers, Tafe colleges, government and independent high schools,

and English language providers. 'In this way,' explains Blundell, 'international education provides a single sounding board for government and a strength that lies in a coordinated response to issues.'

Similarly, in New Zealand, Fiels and Crels have formed Appel, which has taken on the Auckland Regional Chamber of Commerce as its secretariat and employed a lobbyist to keep it informed of government developments. In a statement issued by the association, Appel Chairperson, Barbara Takase, said, 'In terms of revenue, the English language industry is more valuable to New Zealand than the highly recognised wine industry. It is time now for its voice to be listened to in decision-making circles.'

Cooperation among national associations can also help harmonise policy and action. According to Valerie Richmond of Capls in Canada, Capls and Pelsa have been working together to discuss issues ranging from quality standards and provincial regulations to meeting student needs during a prolonged bus strike in Vancouver. 'The associations have worked well together,' she says. Similarly, Brooks in the USA says, '[UCIEP] has been working closely with AAIEP to create position statements. As international educators, it serves us well to connect to others interested in common goals all over the world.'

International cooperation

This idea of working together with other associations to achieve common goals is not a new one. Elite was formed in 1995 between education associations in Europe to further common quality standards and provide European associations with a united voice. But, more recently, associations from all corners of the world have been coming together, through Gaella, to discuss issues of mutual concern. 'We have found it



'As international educators, it serves us well to connect to others interested in common goals all over the world'

invaluable to meet with representatives of other educator associations at Gaela events,' comments Thomas at AAIEP. 'The sharing of information raises standards for all our customers. For example, I have no doubt that immigration regulations in English-speaking countries will very gradually become more uniform as educator associations use practices in other countries to leverage changes in their own.'

Luis Carrion, Chairperson of Olé in Spain, agrees. 'School associations can work together to persuade the governments that they form part of a serious professional and reliable worldwide industry, and share information about issues of common interest such as visas and other national and international rulings that can from time to time [affect the industry].'

Gaela has also met with its language travel agent association counterpart, the Federation of Education and Language Consultant Associations (Felca). According to Capper, the meetings have been useful for all concerned. 'These are early days, but so far we've discovered some common ground with other school associations and we've learned how agents feel about certain trends and made our membership aware of it.'

Uniting both individual agents and schools, as well as their respective associations, is international association Alto. Growing numbers of educator asso-

ciations are taking up Alto membership, as they realise the benefits of greater communication between the two parties. Ialc, Arels and Capls are among the associations that are currently non-trading associate members of Alto. For Capls, says Richmond, being part of Alto has 'allowed us access to global information about our industry'.

The increasing relations between educator associations around the world, and educator associations and agent associations, can only bring positive gains for all in the language travel industry. As Richmond says, 'Any opportunity for the two parties, educator and agents, to better understand [each other] and work together, to promote the most ethical and best possible service to students, is a priority.'

□