

English Australia

SUE BLUNDELL, Executive Director of English Australia (EA), answers our questions about the association's efforts to work with the government to influence student visa legislation and tells us about EA's plans to increase its members' profile in the future.

Fact box



Full name: English Australia (EA). Formerly known as the Elicos Association

Year established: 1980s; incorporated in 1990

Number of members: 70

Type of members: public and private colleges providing English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (Elicos)

Government recognition: yes

Code of practice: yes

Complaints procedure: yes

Association's main role: to assist members in producing high quality programmes; to promote high ethical standards; to represent the industry

Agent workshops/fam trips: SEA Workshop

Membership criteria: fully accredited by Neas; adequate public liability insurance; nomination by three EA members; agreement to abide by EA's memorandum and by-laws of association

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Q What has English Australia (EA) achieved in the past year?

A The last year has been a busy one for EA, with my appointment as Executive Director in February. One major focus for the year has been on regular meetings with the government in relation to the implementation of the new student visa programme. EA has been successful in negotiating a number of changes to the regulations in response to issues raised by our member colleges and their agents (see page 4). The second SEA Agent Workshop was a resounding success, as was the annual EA Education Conference.

Q What changes are you hoping for as a result of industry discussions with the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (Dimia)?

A One of the biggest issues for EA members is the requirement for students from so-called "high-risk" countries to have an IELTS result before they can apply for a student visa. We will be working towards removing this requirement or at least reducing the minimum levels specified. The other key area is that of the financial criteria, where we would like to see a more realistic approach to the recognition of loans and other sources of funds.

Q One year on, how do you feel the "transparent" visa legislation has affected student intake into Australia, and have particular nationalities suffered or flourished?

A The transparency and objectivity of

the new student visa regime was certainly welcomed by providers, students and agents. As with any change, it has taken time for all involved to become familiar with the new requirements and a number of unanticipated issues have arisen and been dealt with. The English [language] sector has seen declining numbers from one of Australia's major markets, Korea, however indications are that this will change from 1 November. The Chinese market has opened up considerably.

Q Have Australian schools witnessed increasing enrolments this year, as was suggested at the end of last year, because of the impact of September 11?

A International education is an extremely complex area with a number of factors influencing student enrolments. September 11 was certainly a major event, however the implementation of the new student visa regime in Australia was another strong influencing factor. The calendar year 2001 showed a 23 per cent growth in student numbers compared with 2000. The first seven months of 2002 show mixed figures from different countries, with students and agents gradually becoming more comfortable with the new visa requirements.

Q What trends, in terms of student demand, are members reporting?

A The demand for courses in English for academic preparation continues to grow as students increasingly see English as their pathway to further qualifications that will enhance their career and employment prospects. The study-

tourism market, however, also continues to grow, with students appreciating the opportunities to combine English language study with the exploration of all that Australia offers.

Q How have you adapted your services for agents?

A EA sees its primary role in relation to agents as assisting them with their understanding of Australia and Australian English language providers, so that they can provide accurate information to their student clients and promote Australia as a destination of choice. In the past, EA has organised fam trips for groups of agents from selected countries. In 2000 and 2002, the association organised the SEA Agent Workshops to introduce agents to Australia and Australian institutions. EA sees its member colleges as developing working relationships with individual agents, whereas it is important for EA to develop its relationships further with agent associations.

Q What plans does EA have for the coming year?

A EA will continue to maintain our close and regular liaison with key government departments in order to influence the legislative environment that impacts on our member colleges. We will also continue to develop ongoing strategies to raise the quality profile of EA and EA member colleges domestically and internationally. Another project we are working on is a joint marketing strategy between EA, Australian Education International and the Australian Tourist Commission to develop the study-tourism market.