

CEA's slow progress

The current operating environment in the USA has meant a slower than expected pace of development for the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA). However, it continues to expand and enhance its profile within the USA. TERRY O'DONNELL, Executive Director, answers our questions.

Fact box	
	Full name: Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA)
	Year established: 1999
	Number of members: Accredited programmes and institutions become members of the Constituent Council. Now 49 members.
	Type of members: One-year accreditation, five-year accreditation, 10-year accreditation
	Membership criteria: Members must have accredited status
	Complaints procedure: Yes
	Agent workshops/fam trips: None
	Association's main role: The accreditation of English language programmes that are within universities and colleges and the accreditation of proprietary English language institutions
	Government recognition: Recognised as a national accrediting agency by the US Secretary of Education
	Code of practice: The CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions
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Q How many English language teaching institutions are now accredited by CEA and how are you continuing to promote accreditation throughout the industry?

A There are now 49 accredited programmes and institutions. An additional 20 English language teaching institutions are at some stage of the accreditation process.

Q Why do institutions choose to become CEA accredited, in your opinion?

A Among the many reasons are public recognition, programme improvement, student satisfaction and the ability to use CEA accreditation for certification purposes. CEA is a specialised professional accrediting agency that was developed from within the field of English language teaching and administration in the USA. The accreditation standards, based on best-practice guidelines in the field, are designed to ensure that students receive quality English language training no matter what kind of programme or institution they attend. Programmes or institutions that meet these standards and become accredited gain public recognition within the field and within the wider education environment on campuses and in their communities. They benefit from the accreditation process, during which they carry

out a self-study involving their faculty and staff in activities that lead to programme improvement. Students are ensured of a quality English learning experience at accredited sites, which can use accredited status as a means for student recruitment. In addition, CEA accreditation can be used by proprietary institutions as one of the means for Sevis certification. [Institutions linked up to the central web-based Sevis student tracking system, which is now mandated by law have to be certified by the Sevis-operating authorities].

Q What is the opinion of CEA regarding the Sevis fee rule, which has ushered in an additional fee payable by students, and current visa regulations for the industry in general?

A Members of the CEA Constituent Council are very concerned about the effect of the fee rule and current government [visa] policies that are affecting the flow of language students into the USA.

Q In your opinion, has Sevis in some way encouraged certification of professional standards within the industry, given that institutional accreditation is required for schools to be included in the Sevis system?

A Institutional accreditation by an accrediting agency recognised by the US Department of Education (USDE) is one – but not the only – option for stand-alone language schools that want to be included in the Sevis system. However, since the Commission received USDE recognition, CEA has received an increasing number of applications, and it appears that many schools feel that accreditation is indeed the surest means for [maintaining] Sevis certification.

Q Do you have links with accreditation bodies in other countries? If so, what has been achieved through such links?

A The Commission has no current links with accrediting bodies in other countries that accept international students.

Q Is it still the case that public sector institutions seem to favour CEA accreditation over privately-operated colleges? If so, why do you think this is?

A Currently, of the 49 accredited CE-member institutions, eight are private independent language teaching institutions. However, it is fair to say that 90 per cent of the new applicants are from the private language sector. This is probably a result of CEA's recognition by the USDE.