

Best Practices in Using Agents: Stories from the field

University of Warwick: UK Perspective

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History of UK Recruitment

- 1983. Appointment of Marketing Advisor in British Council. Production of video: “Degrees of Excellence”
- Pressure applied by UK Vice Chancellors to increase promotional efforts, including from Jack Butterworth (Warwick) and Ray Rickett (Middlesex)
- 1984. BC sets up Education Counselling Service. Subscription service.
- ECS began as a placement service, but not successful
- 1985 – One of first ‘agents’ launched – MABECS Malaysia
- 1986. First exhibitions on British education held in Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong, attracting a combined total of nearly 100,000 visitors
- 1999. Prime Minister's Initiative launched
- 2000. Education UK brand launched in 20 countries
- 2006. PMI 2 launched

UK Context: PMI 2 – Agreed Strategies

- **Brand:** development of umbrella brand under which all educational institutions could market themselves and their products more effectively;
- **Website:** development of website accessible to millions of students and their influencers around the world to market UK institutions and the courses they provide;
- **Publications:** a number of guides and magazines to provide advice and profile and showcase UK education providers;
- **Campaigns:** to celebrate and raise the awareness of UK education, e.g. the International Student Awards and Real UK;
- **Working with agents:** working with education agents as marketing partners and developing services to increase the number of agents working for UK education providers

Results of these strategies

Sector wide use of:

- Education UK Partnership resources, including market intelligence
- British Council exhibitions
- British Council network of overseas offices
- Agents – used extensively by vast majority of universities

British Council Agent Strategy

- Position the British Council in a supporting role for quality agents
- Build agent capacity to work on behalf of UK education
- Increase the number, effectiveness and quality of agents working on behalf of UK providers
- Main priority is to develop student information. Agent certificated training programmes
- In the UK: use of agents is supported amongst UK education providers and aim is to develop a wider acceptance and understanding of the role and value of agents in student recruitment

British Council Services to agents

- **Guide to Good Practice**
In order to encourage agents to adopt ethical and professional standards of conduct
- **Agents newsletter**
- **Education information sheets**
Provide guidance to popular subjects for study and application
- **Agent Zone**
Agents can register their information on the Education UK website Agent Zone, such as contact details, size of company, services, charging structures, institution references and types of products they are seeking to represent.
- **Inward visits**
Agents can familiarise themselves with UK institutions and the wider aspects of studying in the UK by participating in an inward visit.
- **Certificated agent training**
Agents can undertake our 'Promoting UK Education and Training' certificated on line training, which includes the Essential Guides for Education Agents publications

British Council Services to institutions

- **Training workshops**

We regularly run professional development training courses for institutions using agents in recruiting international students. These include advice on: selecting and managing agents; understanding the wide and diverse markets; developing effective agreements; and maintaining effective agent-institution relationships.

- **Agent seminars**

- **Agent zone**

UK institutions can search the Education UK website Agent Zone for agents in specific country markets. In countries that have not launched the Agent Zone, a list of agents is often kept as reference material

- **Guide to Good Practice**

In order to encourage agents to adopt ethical and professional standards of conduct,

- **Inward visits**

British Council Guidelines and Training

Training and manuals containing guidelines on the following:

- The Agency Relationship
- The Agreement between the Principal and the Agent
- Types of Agreement
- Recruitment Agents
- Obligations Arising from the Agency Relationship
- Terms of the Agreement
- Termination of the Agency Relationship
- Recruitment Agents who are not Agents
- Sample Clauses for Agency Agreements

University of Warwick

- Founded in 1965
- Approximately 21,000 campus based students
 - 12,500 Undergraduates
 - 6,000 Masters
 - 2,000 Research students
- Approximately 8,450 new intake in 2009 entry
 - 4400 UG, 3800 Masters, 650 Research
- Approximately 3,145 new intake of non-EU students
 - 275 HEFP, 890 UG, 1820 Masters, 160 Research
 - Represented over a 30% increase in overseas intake on 2008 entry

Overseas Office Network

- First office started in 1998
- Sole representatives of Warwick
- Several alumni
- Recruitment focus but also work on broad range of International Office responsibilities
- Superb support to prospective students, current students, and alumni
- Line managed from the UK
- Annual visit to university

Location	Region
Lahore	Pakistan
Delhi	India
Mumbai	Mumbai
St Petersburg	Russia, Kazakhstan
Beijing	North China
Shanghai	Central and West China
Hong Kong	Hong Kong, South China
Singapore	Singapore, Brunei
Damascus	Syria



Pakistan Office Activities

- Individual guidance & counselling
- Info sessions:
 - *General, Departmental, Visa, Pre-departure*
- Counsellors training
- Warwick Advantage Seminars
- Institutional visits
- Assessment of local institutions:
 - *Equivalences and language*
- Close relationship with BC
- Liaison between Warwick and applicants
- Follow up on applications
- Document attestation
- Interviews
- WELT, DLMBA Exams etc
- Career Guidance
- Warwick alumni networking and placement
- Close relationship with Pakistani Student Society



Intake from Pakistan

Year	HEFP	UG	PG	Total
1999-00	0	4	2	6
2000-01	0	3	9	12
2001-02	0	6	10	16
2002-03	1	5	20	26
2003-04	6	10	15	31
2004-05	0	19	37	56
2005-6	5	26	50	81
2006-7	7	28	53	88
2007-8	5	32	58	95
2008-9	5	21	56	82
2009-10	3	28	64	95

Agent Network

- Since 1985
- Consortium approach
- Outsourcing of services
- Very close relationship with long established agents. Highly trusted
- Annual visits
- Some provide basic services: visa obtainment (for both staff and students), fee payment facilitation
- Annual visits to University

Long established	Recent additions
Taiwan	Turkey
Malaysia	Nigeria
Thailand	Kenya
Jordan	Iran
	Japan

Agent profile: Taiwan

- Identifying career objectives
- Verifying language proficiency and academic standing
- Providing accurate courses information
- Aiding students in their applications
- Forwarding applications to schools/universities of students' choices
- Following up the applications and liaising with schools
- Assisting students with their accommodation, visa and travel
- Holding pre-departure briefing
- Organizing student groups to guarantee a successful airport transfer to the destinations
- Liaising with Taiwanese Student Society for local support for our students to ensure a successful acclimatization in the target city/campus
- Extending after services to graduates, i.e. annual welcome party, job hunting

Case Study – Factors for consideration

Against	For
Why pay agent to arrange school visits, etc when can be done by international office	Office not resourced to arrange such individual visits. Not large enough presence to get entry to all. Better to work in collaboration with other Russell Group universities as schools prefer this.
Warwick will bring a lot to agent but agent cannot bring a lot to Warwick because working with so many institutions	Warwick was founding member of mother company (Bridge). Warwick would be given priority and would be mutually beneficial
Why not use British Council?	Agent increasingly replacing role of British Council. Have used BC activities in past and recruitment has remained stagnant.
Why pay commission on students we would have received with increased focus on region anyway (i.e. full time member of staff)?	SLO can assist with increased applications and focus, but conversion is essential. Students require high level of guidance, especially with regards to English language provision and application process
Potential for high commission payment	True, but hopefully can provide strong case to Finance to make provision for this if evidence of significant increase in numbers. Would start coming out of 08-09 budget
Quality of provision to student varies between offices/countries.	This may occur, but each office has member of staff with strong credentials. Contract only issued on one year basis initially. Performance and student feedback will be closely monitored.
	Securing of visas in certain countries (British Council cannot provide visa for non UK nationals, need local company)
	Cannot visit all countries regularly, so agent will provide coverage where international office cannot.
	Recommendations from other Russell Group Universities

Reasons for letting go...

- Results
- Well organised, but expensive fairs, whereby universities pay to attend and then may also end up paying for commission
- Marketing impact diluted due to being promoted alongside many other universities
- Lack of institutional specific knowledge
- Variable quality of support staff dependant on the location

Agent Training and Management

- Contract
 - Confidentiality
 - Code of conduct
 - Service level agreement
- Training
 - Familiarisation visits
 - In country training and updates
 - Regular updates
- Performance management
 - Tracking of quantity and quality of applications
 - Enhancement of intake; quantity, quality, diversity
 - Student and staff feedback

Overseas Office vs Agent

Advantages

Office	Agent
Reputation	Quick and easy market access
Sole representation	Low initial investment
Better service to applicants	Larger pool of applicants
Wider range of activities	

Challenges

Office	Agent
Finding the right person	Management
Significant initial investment	Tailored service
Premises	Reputation management
Depends on market	Spiralling commission costs

Our experience

Where it goes well for us

- Offices are flagship operation for Warwick, including within sector
- Offices provide outstanding service to applicants
- Established agents provide high level of service and performance
- Offices provide broad range of service to different university departments

Challenges

- Offices are very expensive – particularly premises
- Legal and taxation complications with offices
- Commission can spiral if successful. VAT implications
- Reputational management with newer agent relationships

Thank You

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