



Best Practices in Using Agents: Stories from the Field

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Australian Government

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Best Practices in Using Agents: Stories from the Field

AIEA National Conference

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UC Overview

- Public, urban university with 37,000 students
- Top 25 public university for research funding
- Founding member of AIRC
- Pioneer in the agent recruitment movement

UC overview (cont'd)

- Until 2003, UC had around 2,000 international students but no international strategy
- First agents hired in China and India in 2003
- Strategy was heavily reliant on Australian model and working with ethical agents
- Agent efforts are focused on undergrad programs and select grad programs

Things to consider before entering the “agent world”

- 1) Who to trust?
- 2) How to manage relationships?
- 3) What resources are you willing to commit to your agent network?
- 4) What are your internationalization goals?
- 5) How do you define enrollment success – quantity vs. quality?

Secret Is Out: Universities use agents

- *Articles regarding agent recruitment have appeared in :*
 - **Times Higher Education (London)** - Sept 4, 2008
 - **Chronicle of Higher Education** - Sept 10, 2008
 - **The Economist** - December 30, 2008
 - *Recruiting's Brave New World* - **International Educator (NAFSA)** - November/December 2009

Overview of UC's Agent Network and International Recruitment Effort

- Representatives in 25+ countries, including:
 - China
 - India
 - Korea
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Thailand
 - Turkey
 - United Arab Emirates

International Student Growth

	Fall 2007	Fall 2009	Change
Total Int'l Students	1846	1976	+ 130
Int'l Grad	1587	1486	- 101
Int'l Undergrad	259	490	+ 231

Choosing the Right Agent

There are three types of Agents:

- Those working on behalf of educational institutions on a commission/fee basis
- Those whose business is driven by collecting fees from students
- Dedicated representatives paid by the institution and who recruits exclusively for that institution – usually manages an agent network

Agents as Partners

- Agent-University relationship is promoted (university website, marketing materials, etc.)
- University sees agents as instrumental to marketing and admissions efforts (and provides necessary training, site visits, etc.)
- Universities work together with same agents – strength in numbers and “co-opetition”

Benefits to Agents as Partners

- Empowers the student – students know who to trust
- Empowers the university – they have trusted representatives acting on their behalf
- Pay on a commission basis – compensation is based on performance
- Use of agents offsets many of the initial costs of international student recruitment (keeps staff costs down)

Agent Selection: Who To Trust?

- Take agent signing serious
- Right agents can build your brand; wrong agents can kill your brand
- Maintain a network big enough to produce but small enough to monitor and support
- Consider variety of facts when signing agents

Factors UC Considers When Hiring Agents

- AIRC Certified
- Australian and/or US *experience*
- US enrollment *success*
 - Especially at undergrad level
- Whether or not agent charges fees
- Referrals from US universities
- Other memberships, such as regional agency membership (UED in Turkey, AAERI in India, etc.)

Factors cont'd

- Too many or too few agents in the market
- Diversity vs. Practicality
 - Is it a logical market
 - Sri Lanka vs. Denmark
 - Is it convenient to other markets
 - Netherlands vs. South Africa
 - Can students afford our tuition and expenses
 - What other resources exist in the market (such as potential university partners)

Changes UC has made in support of our agent network

- Created standard agent contract and standard commission rate for agents .
- Implemented a new Application Fee structure.
- Developed our first International Student Prospectus – currently on third version.
- Developed a comprehensive representative manual – requires frequent updating.
- Developing communication plan to keep agents updated and motivated

Cont'd. ...

- Hired two Country Coordinators – one in India and one in China
- Conduct regular site visits for training and recruiting at agent offices and host country coordinators for on-campus training
- Goal of holding an annual on-campus training for representatives.
- Engaging the entire university in the recruitment strategy – taking advantage of opportunities from student and faculty travel

Tracking Results

- Developed tracking mechanism for commission payments
- Calculate net tuition for the university
- Interview/survey newly arrived students for agent feedback
- Track academic progress of students by agent office
- Track mobility of students by agent office



Issues

- Hiring, Training, Supervising, and Paying agents is very time consuming
- Constant struggle between quantity and quality of students
- Hard to know the right size of the agent network
- Treating agents fairly
- Avoid being over-reliant on agent network

The Cincinnati Principles v1.0

- 1. Partner with well-established commission- based agents who already work with Australian universities and follow the “agents as partners” approach.*
- 2. Refuse to work with agents who exclusively charge students.*
- 3. Always check the references of agencies under consideration.*
- 4. Demand that agents operate as though the ESOS Act applies to your US institution.*
- 5. Embrace best practices that are already in place and do not re-invent the wheel.*
- 6. Utilize the Australian agency agreement with as few modifications as possible.*
- 7. Work within the established operating framework with which agencies are familiar and comfortable – adapt your admissions and marketing practices to the new reality.*
- 8. Establish a dedicated international admissions office to coordinate agency relationships and support their efforts.*
- 9. Do not appoint more than three agents in any given country, and avoid appointing fewer than two.*
- 10. Collaborate with your local competitors – embrace co-opetition – the result will be economies of scale in an expanding market with accelerated benefits for all.*

Questions? Comments?

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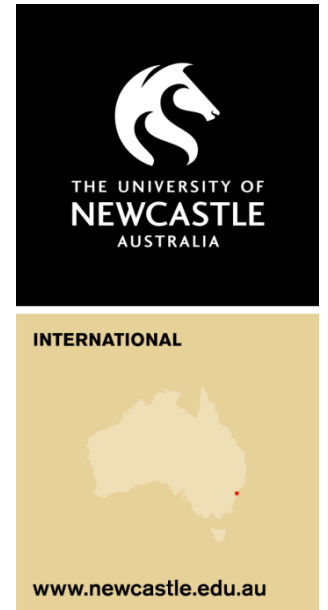
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Best Practices in Using Agents: Stories from the field

Tracy McCabe
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Academic and Global Relations Division

February 2009



University of Newcastle Agent network

- The University of Newcastle has 113 contracted agents globally
- 60% of our commencing coursework students said that agents assisted them in their decision to come to Newcastle
- 50% of those students paid an agent for their services
- In Australian Universities nearly A\$72million was spent on commission payments to agents
- The global commission cost per student has risen from around A\$600 per student in 2002 to A\$1000 per student in 2008
- The more students you have the lower the cost of recruitment although cost per commencement does not have the same relationship

Global Reach, 24/7, Multilingual and Multicultural, Locally Responsive



The Education Services to Overseas Student Act 2000 – Amended 2007

Commonwealth of Australia

www.aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS

- **Proposed revisions to the Act introduced in August 2009 include:**

‘Providers to be required to list the names of education agents who represent them and promote their education services and to require providers to comply with any matters prescribed in the regulations concerning their agents’

- **The Baird Review of the ESOS Act**
- **Universities Australia ‘10 Point Plan**

7. Cooperate with authorities in student source countries to ensure that university recruitment agents accurately represent all aspects of the international student experience, including safety aspects and the cost of living...’

Standard 4 – Education Agents

Registered providers take all reasonable measures to use education agents that have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the Australian international education industry and do not use education agents who are dishonest or lack integrity.

Compliance – who judges?

- In July 2006 The University of Newcastle, Australia is commended by the **Department of Education, Science and Training** on its agent agreements.
- 80% of 2009 **International Student Barometer** respondents said that the services received from agents and representatives was Good or Very Good.
- In June 2008 the **Australian Universities Quality Agency** reflected that the University of Newcastle's approach to due diligence processes, contracting and management of offshore partners "appeared very sound"

Why are agents so important to our business?

- 25% of Newcastle students surveyed in 2009 considered a country other than Australia as their FIRST CHOICE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION
- Teaching quality, personal safety, cost of study, reputation and social life were the top 5 factors influencing their decision to study in Newcastle
- Friends, parents and the University website were the only sources of information and advice which ranked ABOVE AGENTS in their decision making processes

Appointing Agents -The contract process

(required by Standard 4 The National Code)

Due Diligence



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Building a relationship

What can agents expect?

What the contract says

Newcastle commits to:

- Give agents up-to-date information
- Help agents to access information about visa processes
- Advise of changes to the regulations relating to students in Australia
- Process all applications and advise of outcomes
- Monitor the performance of agents
- **Make agreed payments for services provided on behalf of the University**

Building a relationship

What can agents expect?

What we offer

- Marketing budgets
- Incentive programs
- In Australia intensive training programs
- A dedicated relationship manager
- Annual targets and marketing plans
- Pre-departure briefings
- Commitment to a regular series of visits
- Access to core University systems

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Building a relationship

What does the University expect?

What the contract says

- Accurate, honest and truthful promotion of the Universities programs and facilities
- Uphold the reputation of the University
- Undertake training module
- Transfer of all fees and charges collected on behalf of the University
- Translation of official documents
- Forwarding all correspondence from the University to applicants/ students
- Undertake promotional activities as authorised by the University
- Comply with the requirements of the Code

Building a relationship

What does the University expect?

What we get

- Market intelligence
- The ability to navigate through unfamiliar bureaucracy and business practices
- Advice on product development
- The ability to compare our services with that of our competitors
- Informed input to the Universities business development
- Identification of a wide range of opportunities to engage with overseas education systems
- The capacity to test our technical platforms in non-Australian environments

Working with agents - Challenges

- Crossing the linguistic and cultural divide
- Getting the commitment to achieve for Newcastle
- Managing staff turnover
- Fraudulent documentation
- Managing expectations of students
- Competitors and priorities

A Case study of success Agent Training workshops

- Small Groups
- New and mature markets
- Diversity of locations
- Incentive and encouragement
- Annual events – all of University involvement, all International Division staff participating
- Key partners identified and invitations issued by Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Global Relations)
- All costs covered by the University
- Familiarisation with the University AND the region

Features of the program

- One week including travel to and from Sydney and a half day on Ourimbah campus
- Forums with each Faculty and with Service areas such as the Office of Graduate Studies, Accommodation Office, Employment Office, English Language Centre
- Training on University systems such as admissions
- Various informal occasions to get to know key staff – lunches and hosted dinners
- Walking tours and scenic tours of the city and tourist locations nearby
- Meeting with students
- Free time to shop and sightsee

What agents say about our annual training workshops

“Cannot get better than this”

Accommodation was ‘Simply the best’

“Great admissions staff”

“Informative and well organised”

“Certainly one of the better one’s I have attended so far”

“It was informative, the pace was good with some free time, the people very helpful and friendly”

“Thank you to Professor Ellak for his impressive briefing”

“Case study on Student Services includes ALL important areas – Excellent”

“Q&A round table discussion on admissions is Good!”

What did agents want to see more of at these workshops

- Discussion on commission payments and invoicing
- More time to explore the city
- Less presentations – more interactive
- Time to access the internet
- More time to talk to students
- See what a REAL class looks like (ELICOS in particular)
- Included some case studies regarding admissions processes and decision making
- Make more time to look at accommodation available to students
- Less food

The Ultimate Objective



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THANK YOU

DISCUSSION

A presentation to the AIEA Conference, Washington DC
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**Best Practices in Using Agents:
Stories from the field**

University of Warwick: UK Perspective

Simon Hall

Head of International Student Recruitment
Assistant Director – International Office

February 2009



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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