



# A Good Practice Guide to Working with Agents

FE International Network – International Business  
Development  
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# Welcome



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# Agenda

- ▶ Agents
- ▶ What UKBA expects from Sponsors
- ▶ Working with Agents?
  - Standard services and what Agents want
  - Find, Document and Select
  - Supporting, maintaining & Funding
  - Evaluation, targets and management
- ▶ All goes wrong??
- ▶ Future working and good practice
- ▶ ‘International Code of Ethics for Education Agents’ (London Statement)
- ▶ Q&A

# Agents

Education Agents are often the first point of contact between UK Sponsors and intending students and parents.

An honest, professional education agent can enhance the reputation of your institution.

Alternatively, an inappropriate choice of agent can have an adverse impact and cost you your Sponsor licence.

# UK Border Agency compliance requirements for UK Sponsors

## ▶ **Revoking your licence - HTS Sponsor (UK)**

(Tier 4 Sponsor Guidance page 67 of 72)

- ▶ o) You do not have enough control over any overseas agent acting on your behalf. For example we may find evidence:
  - of a significant increase in the volume of applications from a particular part of the world with no explanation; and/or
  - that we are refusing significant volumes of student applications from a particular part of the world.
- ▶ <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/pbsguidance/guidancefrom31mar09/sponsor-guidance-t4-060412.pdf?view=Binary>
  - ▶ Policy guidance
- ▶ This page contains the full guidance for sponsors under Tiers 2, 4 and 5 of the points-based system, and the Appendices from the guidance in separate documents.
  - ▶ Last Updated: 12 April 2012

# Working with Agents?

## ▶ Standard Services

- Identifying prospective students wishing to study in the UK
- Marketing and gathering intelligence on trends
- Providing information on institution and course provision
- Helping students to complete application forms
- Acting as a point of contact for the student and parents
- Preparing and submitting visa applications, where qualified to do so.
- Collecting deposits/fees

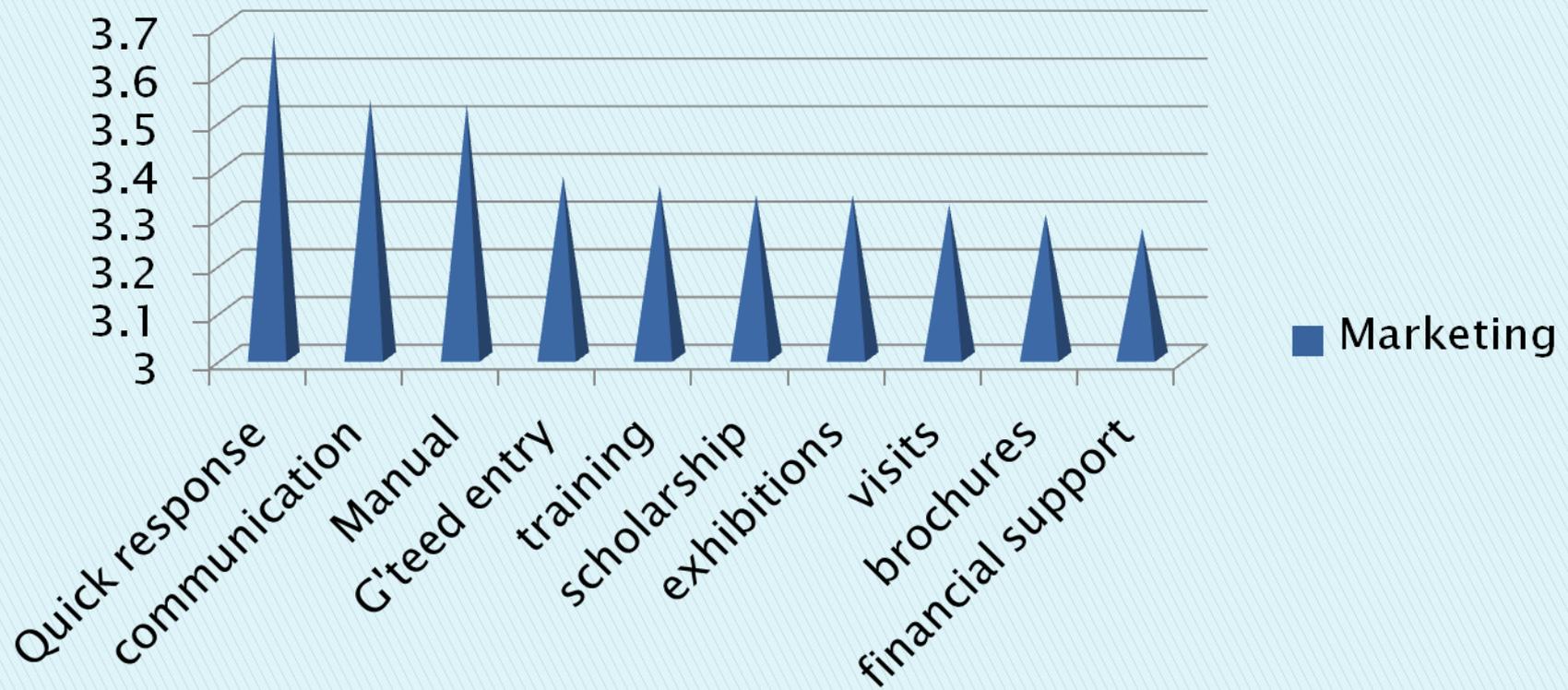
# Working with Agents

## ▶ What Agents want

- **£** – Good commission rates and ‘extras’ (on site accommodation, free laptop, free classes etc), quick processing of commission, incentives etc.
- **Easy to sell** – Good relevant information on the institute, location, facilities, etc.
- **Communication** – Speedy response times, agreed service level agreement for application processing, clear acceptance guidelines, direct point of contact, regular communication (newsletters, visits etc)
- **USP’s** – Why would they ‘sell’ your course/institute over another?

# ICEF Agent Barometer 2011/12

## Top 10 important marketing criteria



# Working with Agents

## ▶ Finding

- Newspaper advertisements in country
- British Council
- British High Commission (informally)
- Google search
- ICEF
- Study World (Agent fairs)
- Networking events (UK and overseas)
- Word of Mouth
- Student surveys

# Working with Agents

## Document

Establish a framework/Master Document for any agent communication, which should include:

- Your organisation's policy on selection and appointing agents
- Standard agency agreement
- Training and induction arrangements
- Guidelines to monitor and assess agent activities.
- Lists of current, active and previous agents

# Working with Agents

## ▶ Selecting a reputable agent

### Some approaches:

- Develop a questionnaire (including: agency details, established date, years of experience, current partnerships, staff, services and costs, references, training completed, understanding of UK education etc)
- Visit the agency or engage another organisation to do so on your behalf.
- Appoint a single point of contact in the agency linked to your UK institute
- Contact British Council/UKBA in country to see if they know the agency
- Ask for references from similar organisations (e.g HTS sponsors, UK FE Colleges etc.)

# Supporting, Maintaining & Funding

## ▶ Supporting

- Provision of up-to-date institution and course information guide. (prospectus? Course leaflets?)
- Good, well thought out 'Welcome Pack' or Agent manual including, for example:
  - clear, simple qualification comparisons (UK/overseas), Map of the UK, UK culture, costs, fees, service level agreement, processing times/requirements, USPs, points of contact in the institute, UK geography, history of your institution, facilities available, training plans, resolution and problem solving, deposit/fee refund policy, support for students, accommodation, code of conduct/ethics/principles, etc, etc...
- Immediate action on visa outcomes

# Supporting, Maintaining & Funding

## ▶ Maintaining

- Annual assessment
- Feedback from Agent/students
- Regular visits (UK/Overseas)
- Reports and development of a marketing strategy
- On going training
- Incentives
- Building relationships with key stakeholders on behalf of and with your agent: British Council, UKBA UKTI, etc.
- Continual updates from your institute, UKBA changes, policy updates etc.

# Supporting, Maintaining & Funding

## ▶ Funding

- Commission.....
  - Expected rates from 10%–25% (+) or fixed fee?
- Incremental increase, based on targets
- Year one? Year 2? Etc.– supports ‘completion’?
- Provision of Marketing budget Y/N?
  - Advertising costs
  - Exhibition attendance/speaker/sponsor?
  - Expected outcomes linked to marketing strategy
- Sponsored visit to the UK
- Review funding arrangements annually and evaluate

# Evaluation, targets and management

- ▶ Set and manage expectations
- ▶ Start small and build confidence
- ▶ Set targets (i.e. enrolments, enquiries, visa success, business strategy etc..)
- ▶ Filter direct enquiries to agents to progress
- ▶ Provide a personal service and make agent feel valued and welcome
  - They are after all an extension of your marketing team
- ▶ Provide support and motivation

# All goes wrong??

- ▶ Sub contracted agents
- ▶ Bogus agents
- ▶ Fraudulent documents
- ▶ Visa 'packs'
- ▶ Non-genuine students (missing/not attending)
- ▶ Accepting fees and not passing on....?
- ▶ High refusal rates
- ▶ Contract in place?
- ▶ What to do?

# ‘International Code of Ethics for Education Agents’

Principle 1 – Agents and consultants practice responsible business ethics.

Principle 2 – Agents and consultants provide current, accurate and honest information in an ethical manner.

Principle 3 – Agents and consultants develop transparent business relationships with students and providers through the use of written agreements.

Principle 4 – Agents and consultants protect the interests of minors.

Principle 5 – Agents and consultants provide current and up-to-date information that enables international students to make informed choices when selecting which agent or consultant to employ.

Principle 6 – Agents and consultants act professionally.

Principle 7 – Agents and consultants work with destination countries and providers to raise ethical standards and best practice.

# Future working & Good practice

## ▶ Future Working

- Institute office/salaried staff in country?
- No agents...direct applicants only
- Delivery of programmes in country
- Strong relationships with 'good and professional agents'
- Exclusivity?
- 'Super Agents' – use to train and develop a network of other consultants

# Good Practice

- ▶ Do....
  - Have a contract in place
  - Make clear the roles and responsibilities of the agent/institution
  - Keep the agent up to date on news, courses, developments in your institute
  - Respond in a timely, professional manner within agreed timescales
  - Monitor, evaluate and purge annually
  - Protect your reputation by only appointing agents that will benefit your institute.
  - Document and detail actions taken

# Verify-UK Ltd

- ▶ Company established to address UK Sponsor concerns about using 'unknown' agents
- ▶ UK Sponsors being downgraded/losing licence as they did not have a robust process for enrolling/recruiting agents.
- ▶ Protect the supply chain from Student – completion of studies
- ▶ System to recommend, develop and support agents and UK sponsor relationships.
- ▶ FREE service for UK Sponsors (Agent pays for the assessment and professional standard)
- ▶ We visit, assess and assist an agency to develop their business and introduce agents to suitable institutions.
- ▶ Current assessing agents in Pakistan and India
- ▶ Offices in India and Ghana

▶ [www.verify-uk.com](http://www.verify-uk.com)

# Q&A

With thanks!



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