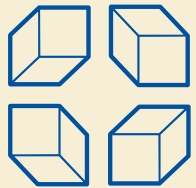


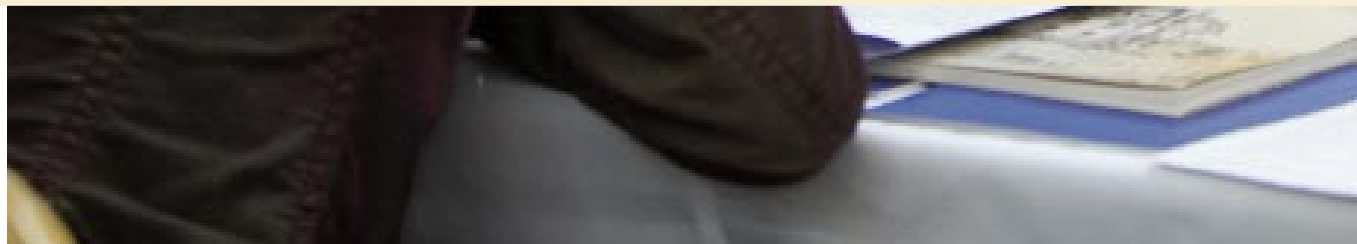
# Professional Advice for Educators



**ICEF**

Connect. Recruit. Grow.

Working with education agents to increase and improve your international student recruitment





## Why work with education agents?

Globalisation has propelled the demand for overseas education to an unprecedented level. More students than ever wish to study abroad and the growing wealth and new emerging middle classes in many economies are allowing larger numbers of students to do so.

As the number of students is growing, so is the competition among educators. International student recruitment is becoming a bigger priority for institutions all over the world as new study destinations compete fiercely for their share. New marketing initiatives are needed to retain or grow your market share.

Educational institutions wishing to recruit foreign students are faced with the same problem as any other exporting company: How do we bring what we are offering to the attention of those interested in buying? How can we successfully penetrate a market? Various possibilities come to mind:

**Advertising** can be challenging because you are often dealing with vast markets, but thinly spread targets. A successful advertising campaign can therefore be very costly, but generate few results, if you do not know the market intimately. To achieve good coverage of several countries and make any impact you would need to have vast profit margins.

**Alumni**, or former students, are often used as a form of recommendation after they have returned to their own countries. Although their input is valuable, their efforts rarely produce much in the way of outcomes, as former students cannot offer professional or constant representation.

**Student fairs and exhibitions** allow you to meet students face-to-face and recruit them directly for your programmes. However, fairs only take place once or twice a year in one location so many recruiting opportunities are lost during the rest of the year. Again, good coverage can be costly and time-consuming as it requires travelling to each fair year after year.

**The Internet** is increasingly useful for recruiting international students provided your strategy is well planned, well resourced / funded and well executed. The Internet also offers measurable results, so you can gauge the impact your efforts are having.

**Keys to success in Internet-based student recruitment include:**

- Optimising search engine rankings to achieve high Internet visibility
- Carefully planning and targeting advertising campaigns
- Ensuring your website is easy to use and navigate
- Providing highly relevant and useful content in multiple languages
- Reducing the workload of your in-house staff by forwarding some or all Internet-generated enquiries to your in-country agents for follow up and enrolment of students. This will also ensure that the student request is followed up promptly in the student's own language.

Along with an effective Internet presence, outsourcing your student recruitment to professional education agents – who follow ethical standards and recruitment practices – is a strong marketing solution. An agent will represent your institution consistently in his or her own country or region on a year-round basis.

## What is an education agent?

An education agent is an individual, company or organisation that provides educational advice, support and placement to students in a local market who are interested in studying abroad. There are different types of education agents that may be suitable for the various marketing needs of your institution.

**Educational referral representatives and agents:** This type of agent represents a selected number of educational institutions, often specialising in a number of programmes and destinations. Usually an agreement has to be in place before agents in this category will start representing an institution.

**Study abroad advisors:** These professionals work from international advising centres, providing general information about study abroad opportunities, often under the umbrella of a public organisation.

**Travel agents with an education division:** These agents will sell educational programmes in addition to other travel packages. Although many educators initially shy away from working with travel agents, they do make good educational representatives. Travel agents often have a solid and wealthy customer base, premises in good locations, good English skills and familiarity with visa administration and international currency transactions. Low profit margins in the competitive travel industry give them an incentive to invest in educational departments as a means of expanding their business.

## What can an education agent do for you?

Professional educational advising is increasingly seen as a must-have service. In many countries, it is common practice for prospective students to use an education agent when seeking placement in an educational institution abroad. In some countries, 60 – 80% of international students are assisted by education agencies and advisors.

### An education agent is able to:

- Provide fast and direct access to specific local territories with their market and language knowledge as well as cultural familiarity
- Recruit large numbers of students quickly and efficiently
- Considerably reduce your admissions department's workload by taking on significant recruitment duties without being a burden to your HR budget
- Help you diversify your enrolments from a number of countries without having to spend significant money to market your programmes in each country
- Help you improve the quality of student applicants by using specified criteria to target sources of appropriate students
- Help generate applications for specific programmes that are experiencing low popularity
- Represent you on a year round basis
- Provide you with a local infrastructure
- Provide you with local student feedback

## Advantages of recruiting students through education agents

As well as realising greater marketing efficiencies, agents can also offer counselling and value-added services which greatly assist prospective students and improve your institution's admission conversion rate.

- An agent is an accountable local person in whom students and their parents can confide and contact easily in their own country and language. This is especially important to students who are choosing a long-term study programme
- The agent will be familiar with both your institution's strengths and course offerings and the students' profile, needs, expectations and abilities, and should be able to suggest a good match
- Agents offer useful value-added services to students providing assistance with application forms, travel arrangements, insurance, accommodation, exam preparation and visa applications
- Agents also give valuable counselling, saving students' time and helping them make their decision, by providing useful information (i.e. about study location, local transport, cost of living, climate, social etiquette, cultural and social life, food, etc.)
- If needed, agents can provide telephone and email support to students once they are overseas

Agents are a low risk, low cost way of getting involved in or increasing international student recruitment. There are many advantages of outsourcing student recruitment to education agents with both you and your students benefiting. And once a good network of agents is established, it will cost relatively little to service.





## Building successful and productive relationships with education agents

You will achieve best results by building solid and long-term partnerships with the agents with whom you choose to work. You should take the same approach to agents as you do to any one of your staff members:

### Screening:

- Interview potential agents to ensure that they have the appropriate skills and mind-set
- Ask for and check their references
- Ensure that they will conduct themselves in an ethical manner and will represent your institution according to your standards
- Once they are appointed, train, compensate and motivate them

### On an on-going basis:

- Provide continuous training and constant communication in order for the agent to accurately represent your institution
- Encourage agents to visit your campus as they will find it much easier to market an institution they have seen for themselves
- Ensure that the agent's promotional materials are regularly updated and, if possible, produced in the representative's language
- Respond promptly to the agent's enquiries
- Produce an agents' manual containing relevant contact information, programme descriptions, accommodation options, details of student services and financial details
- Keep your institution's profile a priority in the agent's mind by sending regular updates or newsletters

## Compensation

As in any other business arrangement, terms and compensation can vary with agents. In general the amount of commission – which is the most common form of compensation for agents – varies according to the type and duration of courses. The percentage commission paid for university or college courses and vocational or business training courses is lower than for shorter language programmes mainly offered during vacation time and often to groups rather than individuals.

However, some universities and colleges are not able to offer a commission. This should not be a problem as alternative ways of compensation can be arranged between agents and educators.

### Most widely used forms of compensation:

- The education agent receives a percentage commission on the tuition fee. As a benchmark, the average is 10% on the first year's tuition fees, for boarding schools, vocational or university programmes, and 15-25% for short-term programmes such as language courses or summer school programmes. If a group of students is put together it is not unusual to offer a free place for a set number of students. The advantage of commission-based payment is that if the agent does not perform, he or she will not get paid. Many educational institutions (particularly those offering language programmes) offer performance-based incentives with the capacity for increases for reaching targets
- The agent receives a set fee per head as a marketing allowance. As an additional incentive, you could offer a bonus that is payable once a certain number of enrolments is achieved
- The agent is paid a retainer fee over a specified period of time to represent you abroad and recruit students on your behalf
- The agent charges the student an advising fee. The agent will work with your published fees and build them into a package offered to students that can also include travel, insurance, accommodation and visa arrangements

## Contract terms and conditions

For your mutual benefit, always make sure you have a written agreement in place that both of you fully understand and agree with and that stipulates what is expected of both partners. Your agreement should be a legal document valid in both countries. The following list is by no means complete but gives you an indication of considerations that should be included in a contract with an agency that wishes to represent you abroad.

**Roles and Responsibilities:** What should the agent do on your behalf? How often and in what quantities will you supply promotional materials to the agent?

**Business Plan:** What marketing strategy will the agent follow? What budget will be required, if any? How many students does the agent plan to send to your institution?

**Payment Terms:** Make sure these are spelled out clearly and in detail. What is the level of compensation? Are there reimbursable expenses? Who will cover the bank charges? When are payments and deposits due?

**Deposits:** Will you require a deposit at the time of booking? Is the deposit refundable? At what point will a refund no longer be possible?

**Exclusivity:** Some agents will request market exclusivity for your institution. You should be cautious before agreeing to such a request and only consider offering agents exclusivity once they have proved they can produce a large volume of business, and that they are reliable partners. Grounds for termination of exclusivity should also be clearly stated and agreed upon.

**Duration of Contract:** Your initial agreement should be for a set period of time (e.g. one year). Make sure to include how the contract can be terminated and whether it will be prolonged automatically if not terminated by one of the two parties.

Remember to have the contract validated by your institution's legal expert before you sign it.

## Where can reliable education agents be found?

Many educators believe that agents should approach them. Unfortunately, this is an ineffective strategy as competition is tough and agents are constantly offered incentives to sell programmes for many institutions around the world.

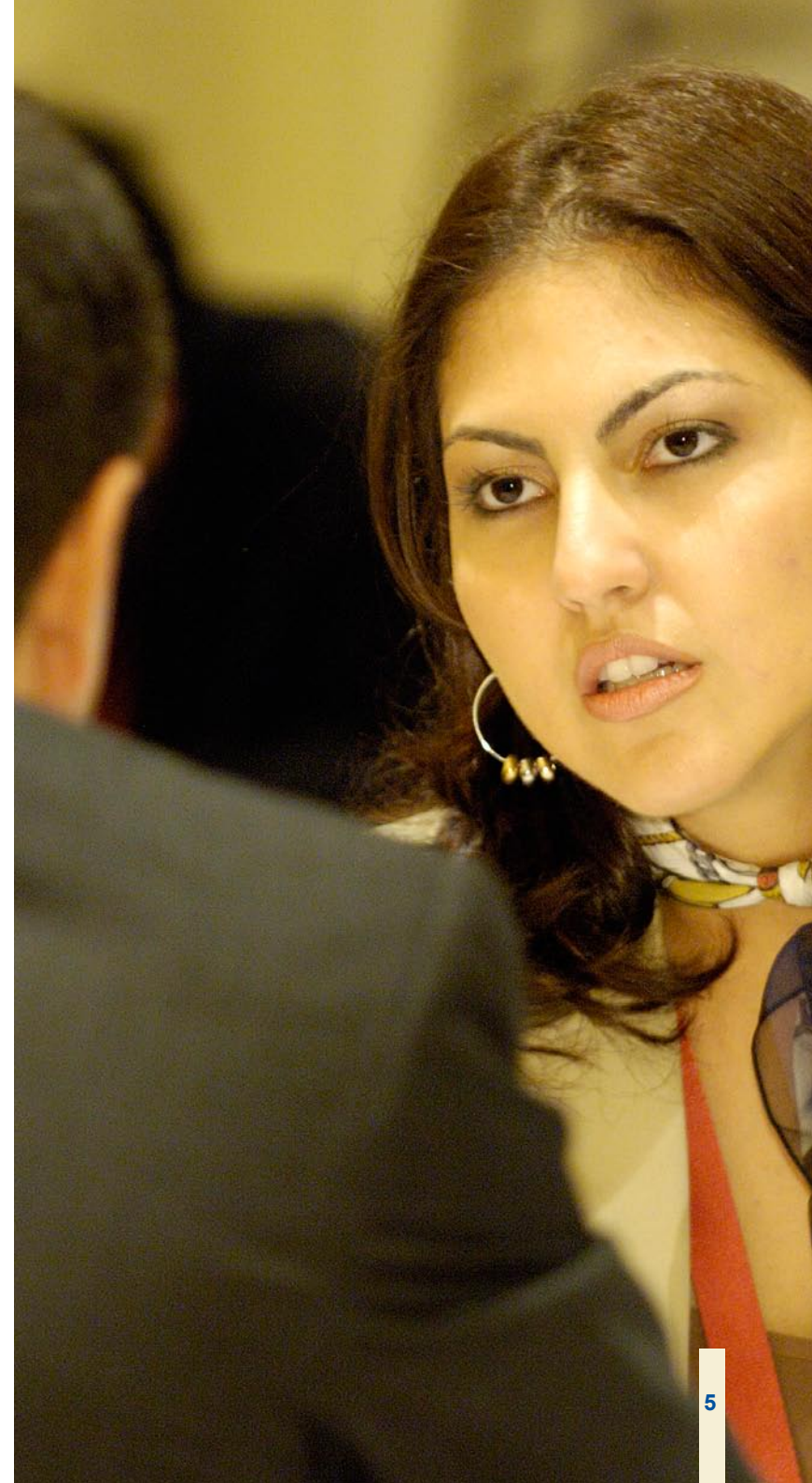
You may meet education agents at **international fairs or conferences**, but there is no way to be certain that the quantity or quality attending will meet your standards.

You can **visit agents in their own countries**, allowing you to visit their offices. However, this can be a very costly and time-consuming effort involving extensive travel and preparation time without any certainty that the agent you are visiting is an appropriate partner.

You can use **the Internet** to find agency names and contact details. **ICEF Online** ([www.icefonline.com](http://www.icefonline.com)) connects educators and quality, pre-screened agents easily, efficiently, and productively to each other and to online resources that help drive international student enrolments.

You can attend **ICEF Workshops**, which allow you to personally meet carefully screened and selected education agents from many countries – over just two and a half days, in one convenient, comfortable and central venue. ICEF Workshops offer the most time-efficient and cost-effective way of meeting large numbers of high-quality agents face-to-face. Even if only one agent sends students to your institution, you will have more than covered your participation investment.

For universities and colleges **ICEF Higher Education** offers specialised consulting and recruitment solutions including training on how to identify and work with agents. As well, the ICEF Higher Education Workshop is the only workshop in the world organised exclusively for accredited universities and colleges to meet with agents who have proven experience in sending students to Higher Education institutions.





## ICEF Workshops [www.icef.com](http://www.icef.com)

ICEF Workshops provide a means of personally meeting and appointing education agents of the highest calibre from around the world.

ICEF has a longstanding, successful history of organising agent workshops, in which we bring together international educators and education agents who have been rigorously screened on their track records and credentials. ICEF Workshops are widely recognised to be the most organised, effective and professional events of their kind and occur annually in numerous locations around the world. Visit [www.icef.com](http://www.icef.com) to view the latest ICEF offerings.

During pre-scheduled one-to-one appointments, which take place at tables allocated to educators, new contacts are established and existing business relationships reinforced.

As a rule, ICEF invites more agents than educators to ensure that educators can fill each available appointment slot with useful meetings. Further networking opportunities are possible during workshop meals, refreshment breaks and evening receptions.

With the **successful ICEF two-step appointment system** you can determine which type of agencies you wish to meet:

**Prior to the workshop:** You will be supplied with log-in details to our online scheduling system, through which you can view detailed information on all invited agents, select them according to geography and academic / programme focus, and by a simple click of your mouse, request and confirm each of your appointments. Participating agents similarly receive log-in details to their own account and will request meetings with you.

**During the workshop:** Additional appointments may be scheduled at the event: during the various breaks, lunches and receptions; on both mornings of the workshop when agents may come to your table; as well as via appointment requests placed in agents' message boxes.

This unique, proven formula requires a minimum of time and travel and offers the most time-efficient and cost-effective way to meet and keep in regular and personal contact with the world's top education agents, who will **increase your international student enrolments**.

## ICEF Online [www.icefonline.com](http://www.icefonline.com)

ICEF Online provides easy access to quality pre-screened agents whose details and references have been carefully checked. You can search for and approach pre-screened agency partners by country and specialty, be found by new agency partners and establish agency partnerships quickly and easily. This collaborative Internet platform promotes effective educator / agent relationship management, online marketing support for agents, student enquiry generation and management solutions for agents and brand management for educators.

Educator benefits include:

- **Search for new agent partners:** search by using criteria such as location, promoted study levels, annual student numbers sent abroad by study sector and level and association membership
- **Be found by new agency partners:** control from which countries you receive agent approaches and update your profile, preferences and contact details
- **Establish new partnerships swiftly and easily:** make quick contact with a click of a mouse and post your agency agreement for download and execution by agents
- **Communicate with agency partners more effectively:** manage communications through a central porthole and by accessing email history
- **Support your agents with up to date and approved marketing material:** store your materials in one central location, materials are easily downloaded by appointed agents
- **Manage your online brand easily and effectively:** your approved and up-to-date marketing content is streamed seamlessly onto agent websites and your profile can be published in the preferred language/s of each agent website
- **Empower your agents to generate and professionally manage student enquiries on your behalf:** online tools help view, sort and manage enquiries and auto-responder emails automatically follow-up with prospective students in their primary language

## ICEF Agent Screening & Selection

ICEF has an extensive database of over 25 000 international education agents. To keep our database updated, we are in regular contact with agents' associations worldwide, ministries of education, embassies as well as other relevant government agencies who deal with educational matters.

An agent wishing to participate in an ICEF Workshop or join ICEF Online must complete an extensive questionnaire (in English) providing the following details:

- Company structure
- Year of foundation
- Official registration details
- Number of staff (part-time / full-time)
- Total number of students sent abroad each year
- Four references from educational institutions with which they already work
- Promotional and marketing strategies (e.g. do they publish their own brochure? Is their website professional?)
- Details of association membership and proof of professional standards
- Accreditation by a reputed entity

We will only confirm an agency's participation in a workshop or on our online platform after verifying all these details, performing a website check and receiving **four satisfactory references** from educators.

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## Conclusion

Outsourcing your student recruitment to education agents is the most cost-effective way of establishing your institution in a specific market on a long-term basis. The agent's knowledge will help you penetrate the market, find new student sources and help you increase your student intake from these areas quickly and effectively.

Agents and educators should work hand in hand; it is important that you supply agents with needed information at all times so they can represent you competently. Please remember that agents must face parents and returning students and if their placements turn out poorly, their reputation and consequently their business will suffer. It is therefore fair to say that your success is their success, and vice versa.

[www.icef.com](http://www.icef.com)

Established in 1991, ICEF connects educators and student recruitment agents to key markets and networks worldwide, helping them achieve the results and efficiencies they require in growing international student enrolments.





[www.icef.com](http://www.icef.com)

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