International Education Agent Management

A Best Practice Guide for the Queensland VET Sector

Prepared for the VET Export Office and the Queensland VET Working Party

July 2009

Department of Education and Training
Queensland Government Australia

Queensland Government

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Acknowledgments

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	Jack Stathis, International Manager	Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
	Janelle Chapman, Manager of International Sales	Southbank Institute of Technology
	Phillip Charlton, CEO	Hospitality Training Association
	Jeremy Butts, Principal and Kellie Jewell, Director of Marketing and Student Services	Viva College
	Alan Tham and Susan Doherty	Sarina Russo Schools, Australia
	Peter Harber, Manager International Relations	Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE
Agents		
	Go Maeda, Manager	IDP Brisbane
	Jazz Wong, Manager	AusEd Brisbane
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	Warren Walmsley, Director	Think Education Group
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	Russel Welsh, Chair International	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
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Requests for Information

For more information on this Guide please contact the VET Export Office.

Email: **exportoffice@deta.qld.gov.au**

The Guide is available on the Queensland Department of Education and Training website:
www.training.qld.gov.au/international

Disclaimer

This Guide, 'International Education Agent Management: A Best Practice Guide for the Queensland VET Sector', has been developed to provide ideas and examples on recognised industry best practice in international education agent management. It has been developed in good faith to support the Queensland VET sector and is intended for use as a source of ideas and options that can be adapted and customised for a provider's unique situation. The Queensland Government recommends you obtain legal advice before proceeding.

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1. Introduction

International education in Australia is a $15.5 billion industry, with a reported 'value-added' effect to the Australian economy of over $12 billion. The Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector has contributed significantly to these results. The sector has experienced in excess of 290% growth in international student enrolments over the last five years and now accounts for over 37% of Australia's international student population. While these outcomes are impressive, global competition is responding to this market opportunity and many of Australia's source markets are becoming key competitors. In order to maintain market share and grow the Australian VET sector internationally, education providers need to be increasingly savvy in their approach to business development.

International education agents play a significant role in the international education sector. In fact, International Benchmarking research conducted by Alan Olsen in 2008 indicates that on average over 50% of student enrolments were referred by international education agents to the Queensland public VET sector in 2008. Working effectively and efficiently with agents will be crucial to ensuring the Queensland VET sector can sustain and grow its share of the international education market.

The VET Export Office (VEO) in the Queensland Department of Education and Training aims to support the activities of the Queensland VET sector's international engagement and recognises that developing and maintaining strong relationships with agents is vital. To support Queensland VET providers to build their capacity to effectively partner with international education agents, the VEO has undertaken this research into agent good practice and prepared this Guide.

The specific aims of the research were to better understand good practice in agent management and share the findings with education providers and international education agents so that Queensland can continue to improve operations and build a better understanding of the roles and activities that both providers and agents play in the international education industry. Based on the research this Guide has been developed to provide practical tools and techniques for providers to work more effectively together with agents to continue to achieve significant growth for the Queensland and Australian international education industry.

1.1 Methodology

The research was developed in four key stages to ensure examples of good practice were captured and tested against Australian and international standards.

Phase 1: Queensland, Australian and international desktop research

This phase aimed to identify current good practice and process in effective international education agent management through desktop research. A range of articles, presentations, conference papers and international education providers' websites were reviewed to determine unique processes.

Phase 2: Interviews with targeted VET providers in Queensland

Based on the research above, a discussion framework was developed for face-to-face interviews with a targeted group of VET providers in Queensland. The targeted providers covered a mix of public and private institutions at various stages of their internationalisation. The interviews aimed to identify: current agent management practice for VET providers in Queensland; gaps between this and identified good practice from the research; and what providers felt was needed to advance or improve their agent management activities. Providers were also asked to provide examples of forms, processes and systems that could be used to inform the creation of the Provider Resources.

Phase 3: Interviews with targeted International Education Agents in Queensland

The findings from Phases 1 and 2 were used to develop a discussion framework for interviews with a targeted group of international education agents in Queensland. These agents were sourced from those VET providers interviewed in Phase 2 and were seen as highly effective and knowledgeable about the industry and current trends in agent best practice. The aims of this phase were to:

- identify what agents believed was best practice in agent management for the Queensland VET sector, the Australian international education and training sector and internationally
- test the activities of providers against those of the agents to determine if there were real or perceived gaps between the providers and agents' process and practices.

Phase 4: Consultation and Review

Results from Phases 1, 2 and 3 were used to inform the development of the draft Guide. This was then distributed to a broad range of industry stakeholders and specialists for feedback. Following is a list of those stakeholders that have been interviewed and/or consulted in the development of this Guide.

- Alan Tham, Sarina Russo Schools, Australia
- Angela Maclaine, Education Queensland International
- Diana You, Manager, Marlin Overseas Student Agency
- Go Maeda, Manager, IDP Brisbane
- Irene Kwok, Manager, City Smart Education
- Jack Stathis, International Manager, Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
- Janelle Chapman, Manager of International Sales, Southbank Institute of Technology
- Jazz Wong, Manager, AusEd Brisbane
- Jeremy Butts, Principal, Viva College
- Jo House, Executive Director, DET International
- Johanna Castellaro, Director, Market Strategy, Queensland Education and Training International
- Kay Ganley, Chair, Queensland VET Working Party ACPET State Chair and CEO Charlton Brown Group
- Kellie Jewell, Director of Marketing and Student Services, Viva College
- Ken King, Director, Queensland Education and Training International
- Marcel Creed, General Manager, Sarina Russo Schools, Australia
- Michael Hall, Executive Officer, ACPET Queensland
- Paula Dunstan, Manager, International Education Services
- Peter Harber, Manager International Relations, Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE
- Phillip Charlton, Chief Executive Officer, Hospitality Training Association. Inc
- Rebecca Biazos, Director International Engagement, Gold Coast Institute of TAFE
- Russel Welsh, Chair International, ACPET
- Sharon Harris, Queensland and Northern Territory President, Migration Institute of Australia
- Susan Doherty, Sarina Russo Schools, Australia
- Warren Walmsley, Director, Think Education Group
- Yini Reptis, Manager, AMET Education

1.2 Scope of the Research

Whilst there are different types of international education agents, including in-bound student agents and partnership agents, the scope of this research was to focus on relationships and practices with 'in-bound student' agents.

2. What is an International Education Agent?

An international education agent is often seen as a 'bridge' between the many people involved in international education—including students, parents, providers and homestay families—providing a pivotal link between them. Agents can be found across the world with many offering services to the full range of providers including Language Schools (ELICOS), Schools, Colleges, TAFE Institutes and Universities.

The specific activities of an agent vary based on provider and student needs, but their core activities are generally targeted towards students and providers as follows.

Core International Education Agents' Services

Targeted to Students	Targeted to Education Providers
• providing information on the range of education options, courses and pathways • providing information on the preferred countries—travel, lifestyle, etc. • providing education counselling for students to ensure the most appropriate course selection • processing applications to education providers • processing visa applications	• recruiting suitable students for the provider • processing student applications • offering a translation service • providing market intelligence on changes to demand for courses • marketing and promoting education providers

The education agent industry is not regulated in Australia. Agents are not required to be a member of any particular body, or have any specific training or minimum business requirements. However, there are a number of quality controls and systems that can assist providers in determining whether they should enter into a partnership with a particular agent. More detail on this can be found in the Agent Management section of this Guide. It should be noted that an education agent cannot provide migration advice to a student but can provide advice regarding student visa types and assist with the completion of visa applications.

2.1 Types of International Education Agents

There are two key types of agents. These are in-bound student agents and partnership agents.

2.1.1 In-bound Student Agent

In-bound student agents focus on recruiting students to study in Australia. These agents may be based either in Australia or offshore or they may have branches in a number of locations. Most often these agents work on a commission per student recruited.

Providers should be aware that some agents may use the services of a sub-agent—that is, an agent that feeds students through a lead agent to a provider. As the National Code (2007) prescribes that all providers must have a written agreement with an agent, providers should seek clarification from any agent if this is practice for that organisation and how the process is managed. This can be clarified during the agent application stage.

While not common, some agents may request to be a sole/exclusive agent in a particular market. Providers should carefully consider the pros and cons of such an agreement and ensure they are not limiting their options.

2.1.2 Partnership Agents/Business Brokers

These agents focus on developing partnership programs between international providers and/or industry. Often these agents work on a retainer or commission per project.

2.2 Migration Agents vs Education Agent

A migration agent is an individual who has met the minimum requirements to be registered with the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA). This registration allows them to legally provide immigration assistance and advice. For more information and a list of Australian registered migration agents visit. (www.themara.com.au)

With an increased number of international students considering migration opportunities in Australia, many migration agents now also offer the services of an international education agent. Agents with both the education and migration skill and knowledge in their organisation may add value to an agency partnership if your clients are requesting these services. Providers should ensure they understand the primary focus of the agency and their strengths as different management styles and approaches may be needed for agents with different skill sets. For example, a migration agent may need more support in educational knowledge, such as knowledge of AQTF or the ESOS Act (2000).

3. Why use an International Education Agent?

The international education agent industry is highly competitive and working with a good agent can be very lucrative for an education provider. While this is the case, the decision to employ an education agent should be considered carefully to ensure agents are used most effectively for your organisation. The pros and cons of using an education agent are listed below.

3.1 Reasons to Partner with International Education Agents

- Agents can provide innovative marketing and promotional ideas that may be highly relevant to the target country.
- Agents with offices or contacts in offshore markets can provide first-hand information on trends and opportunities.
- Agents with offshore offices can provide on-ground support and thus reduce the need to travel as frequently to markets, reducing the overall business development costs and increasing profitably.
- Agents provide local expertise and have local language and cultural understanding and knowledge.
- Agents can provide access to high-risk markets that may be costly, difficult or dangerous to access.
- Agents can provide a one-stop-shop for students, which may increase students' overall satisfaction with the experience.

3.2 Reasons not to Partner with International Education Agents

- Agents are not regulated in Australia and as such a greater onus is on the provider to select quality agents.
- Under the ESOS Act, there is a requirement to manage agents and adhere to minimum management requirements, using staff resources that could be used for other activities.
- The industry standard commissions paid to agents are significant and providers need to assess these costs against direct student recruitment.

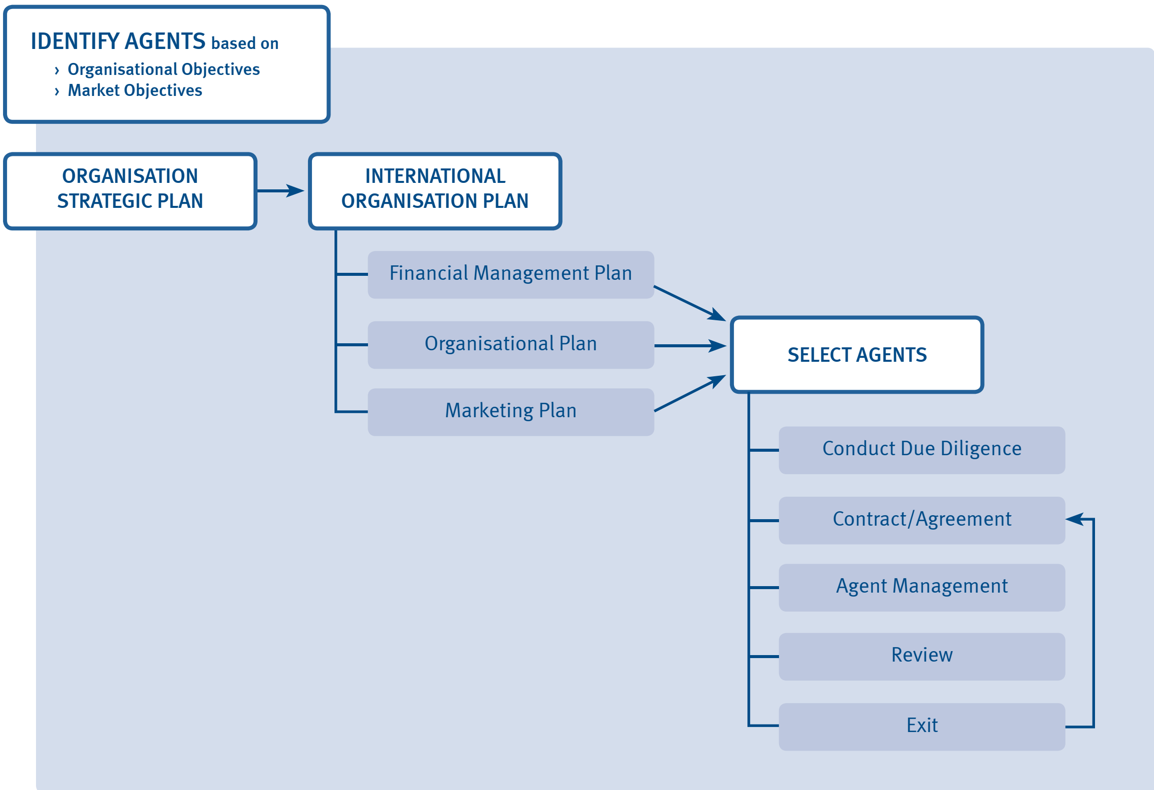
4. Strategically Managing Your Business

Strategic management is a key element in the success of any business or project. The purpose of this Guide is to provide practical advice and tools to optimise the provider-agent relationship. Understanding your organisational objectives and operating environment, and identifying strategic activities, leads to establishing a transparent strategy that can be adopted by the whole institution to drive successful provider-agent projects. Identifying, appointing and managing agents should be identified as a key strategic activity for your organisation.

The following diagram is one example of how agent management can fit into your organisation's strategic framework.

- The types of agents are identified on the basis of your organisational and international objectives. This should be considered and finalised during the strategic planning process. What kind of agent do you need to appoint in a particular market to assist in meeting market objectives?
- Agents are selected on the basis of 'best fit' in meeting your goals in a particular market. Does the agent being considered offer skills and services that are needed to meet market objectives?
- Agent management is built into your international plan and internal management model with:
  - internal positions/staff designated for the ongoing identification, recruitment, management and review of your agent network,
  - information management systems identified for the ongoing monitoring and record keeping involved in managing agents,
  - the costs of managing agents included in your financial management plan.

Agent Management within a Strategic Framework

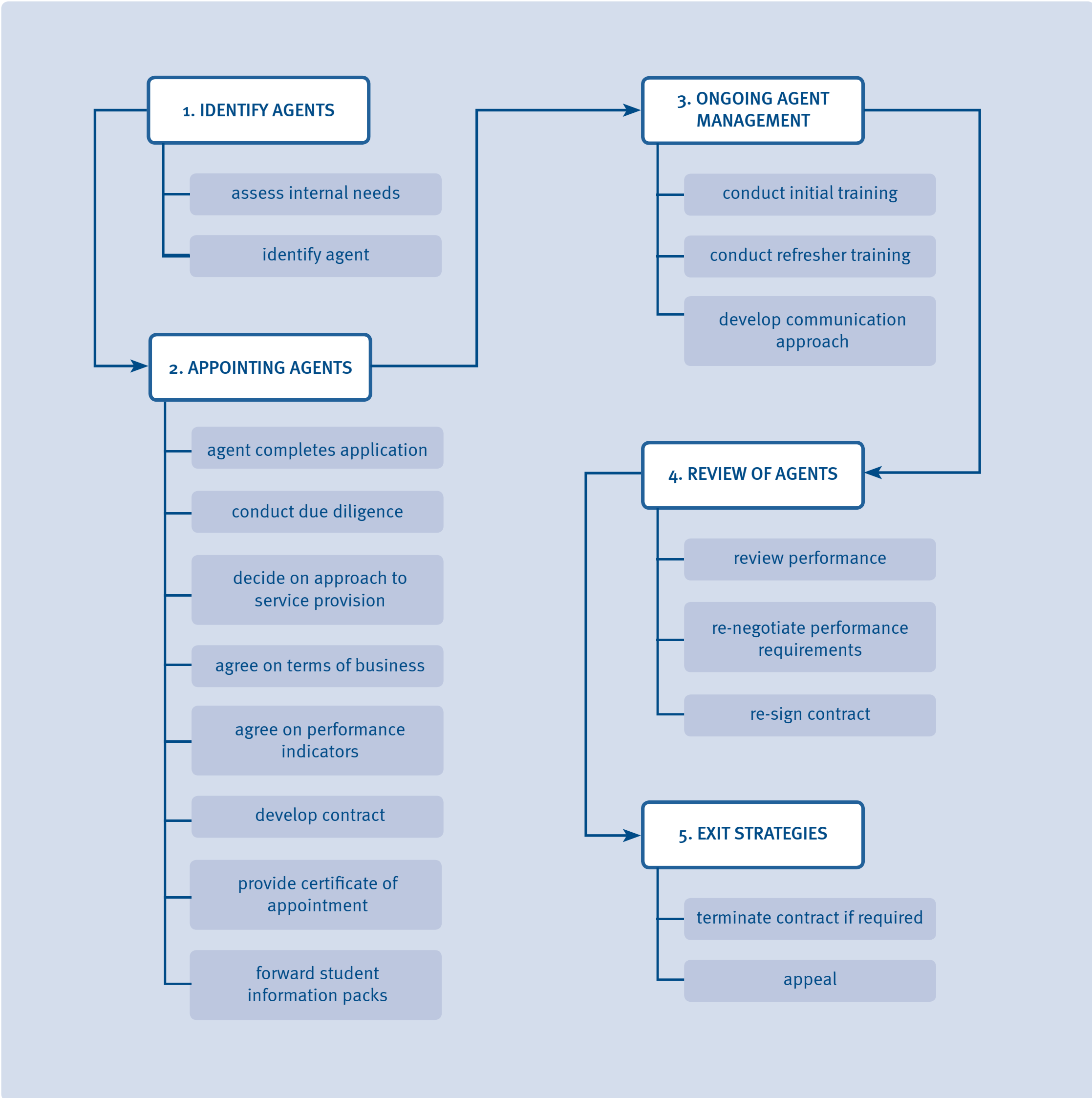


5. Agent Management

The following table describes the key activities involved in agent management. These key steps are:

1. Identify agents
2. Appointing agents
3. Ongoing agent management
4. Review of agents
5. Exit strategies

The Steps of Agent Management



5.1 Identifying Agents

There are numerous types of agents and hundreds of different businesses operating as agents internationally and locally. If you are a large, well-established provider to international students, in many instances agents will seek you out. Smaller providers however, or those new to the international education industry, may have to actively search for agents to appoint. No matter which category your organisation falls into you need to have a clear understanding of agents and their role in each market.

You should consider:

- market alignment—the market objectives and client needs that the agent will service
- agent alignment—your business needs or objectives that the agent will service.

Investigating these questions at a macro level will assist in identifying agents that align with your business needs and objectives in a market as well as market-specific issues that may need to be addressed.

5.1.1 Market Alignment

Every market is different and should be approached in a unique way. Agents may have different roles, offer different services and operate at different levels of accessibility in different countries. You need to research the market in the context of the needs of the students and the services offered by agents, as well as other market issues such as visa processing, the relationship between agents and governments, and regulation of agents.

In investigating the market you should consider the following:

- Is the use of an agent an effective market strategy to meet your organisational objectives?
- What are the particular market trends? Are they whole-of-country based or regionally based? Large countries such as India, China, and Russia have niche regional markets and may require different strategies and agents to be employed in each one. In other markets, such as Scandinavia, it is the accepted practice to employ and work closely with only one agent. The Scandinavian market, although covering several countries, tends to be more similar than many regional markets within the same country.
- Where is Australia placed competitively in the market? Is Australia's market share large or small? Does this affect the agent-provider relationship? For example, in Malaysia and China there may be agents that focus solely on Australia because of the size of Australia's market share. In other countries, such as Russia, Australian agents will service a number of different markets so providers may have to maintain these agents more to gain some competitive advantage.
- Are there any particular market issues affecting agents? For example, in countries where there is a high corruption index this may affect a particular agent's ability to process student visa applications or affect your management of an agent.
- Are there any in-market government regulatory requirements concerning agents?
- More agents are employing an ongoing-care strategy with students, which does not necessarily end when their commission is paid. Agents sometimes provide support, advice and services prior to, during and following students' first qualifications.

Investigating these areas and others will help you build a profile of agents' roles in each specific market and assist you in targeting your search if you do identify agents as a key strategic activity.

Approaches to Agents by Market

Working with agents requires a unique approach for each market to ensure the local needs, regulations and customs are adhered to. It is recommended that the legal, financial, institutional and cultural considerations be addressed for each market you intend to work with. Understanding and flexibility are required. It is also important to consider the timing adopted for each market. As outlined below education and training dates vary for different markets.

Indicative timing of key term dates for selected markets

Market	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	School Year Finishes
Australia	February	April	July	October	December
North and Central America	September	December	February	April	July
Continental Europe	August	October	January	April	June
Japan	April	September	January	-	March
South America	February	April	July	October	December

Implications for providers and agents:

- Have material ready.
- Negotiate the strategic use of conditional offers to fit into timing i.e. give a conditional offer on the basis of incomplete results.
- At peak times ensure you are well resourced to respond to demand.
- Have appropriately trained staff, eg culturally aware staff.

Case Study

In China the Ministry of Education (MOE) has stipulated agent regulations. There are currently four nationally approved organisations allowed to establish agencies for the direct recruitment of students. Each approved organisation can operate as an agency because they have paid a required minimum reserved fund and registered their businesses with the local industry and commerce. More information on the current list can be sourced through the Queensland Government Trade Office and Austrade in China.

The Russian market is not large enough for any one agent to focus exclusively on the Australian market. It is therefore essential to build and maintain strong relationships with Russian agents to ensure a flow of students. For example, Students International, one of the largest agents in Russia, also represents New Zealand, UK and USA institutions. If strong relationships are not maintained (given the small number of Russian agents focusing on Australia) it is possible for agents to withdraw from the Australian market. Unverified reports from industry suggest that this was one of the reasons why the ELICOS sector's share of the market went from 388 enrolled students in 2001 to 55 in 2002[1]. It is also difficult to recruit agents in the Russian market. Given the size of the market, agents prefer to maintain current relationships rather than build and establish new relationships with Australian providers.

1. AEI Statistics: www.aei.dest.gov.au

5.1.2 Agent Alignment

Assessing the market will provide you with a clear understanding of whether your business objectives will be met by appointing an agent in-market or whether other strategies would be a better use of resources. It will also provide you with information to select agents that align with your objectives in-market, specifically:

- the type of agent required,
- the client maintenance expectations of the market, which will determine whether you should appoint an agent onshore or offshore,
- how agents monitor the market trends and demand for your product, and how competitive the market is,
- the number of agents needed to service the country, given regional niche markets. Does each region require a different agent or can one agent, through their networks, service the whole country?

Onshore vs Offshore

An increasing number of agents are establishing offices based in Australia to provide ongoing service for their students and to establish a stronger relationship with providers. Most Australian-based agents have affiliated companies based in their target market. They usually travel offshore to recruit students on your behalf. The advantage of an onshore agent is that they have a high level of accessibility to you and your organisation. An offshore-based agent however may have more accessibility to in-market information and potential partners. An agent who has a large network both in Australia and offshore would have both benefits.

A simple matrix of the markets you wish to target and the number of agents you have servicing that market can help you manage and plan the search for agents. Note that markets can be as dynamic as they are diverse, so an agent environmental analysis should be conducted regularly to ensure your agent management strategy is following market trends.

Market	Number of Students Targeted	Number of Agents Contracted	Number of Agents Needed
China	30	0	2
Japan	20	2	1
India	50	3	4
Total	**100**	**5**	**7**

Quality vs Quantity

It is important to know your agent market and plan as much as possible. However, the decision to appoint a certain number of agents in a market is not always a strategic one. There are generally two approaches within industry to selecting and appointing agents:

- appointing a minimum number of agents with whom you build quality relationships. These agents usually refer large numbers of students to your institution,
- appointing a large number of agents in a market. This strategy involves appointing several agents who each refer small numbers of students to your institution. Collectively they make up your country enrolment target. It is much more difficult to manage large numbers of agents effectively or to build strong sustainable relationships in using this strategy.

There are benefits to each approach. It is probably a natural progression that a smaller Registered Training Organisation (RTO), starting out internationally, would initially appoint a larger quantity of agents. As they grow and establish strong relationships with key agents, they reduce the number of agents working with them. This progression is not always strategically driven: as an RTO grows internationally and establishes a brand in-market this places them in a better position to negotiate and establish a quality relationship with the more successful agents in-market.

5.1.3 Sources of Agent Contacts

International education agents can be found in countries throughout the world. Following is a summary of some possible sources of agents you may consider.

Sources of agent contacts

Source	Description / Example
Australian Education International - (AEI)	• www.aei.gov.au • counsellors
International Education Agents Fairs	• ICEF: http://www.icef.com/
Local onshore Agents	• Trade Queensland • Australian-based, country-specific associations: for example, the Singapore Malaysian Association of Australia • telephone books / web searches • Chamber of Commerce and Industry • other providers
Internet	• web searches
Networking with other Providers	• other registered training organisations • other sectors
Web search Provider Agent Lists	• many providers publish a list of their educational representatives either on their websites or through their international prospectuses
International Education Student Fairs	• Austrade Fairs
Queensland Government Offices Offshore	• http://www.export.qld.gov.au/178.html
Professional International Education Resources (PEIR) Online	• www.pieronline.org • for a full list of Qualified Education Agent Counsellors: http://www.pieronline.org/qeac/mobile.aspx
Direct to you	• internet site • secret shopping
Offshore providers and agents	• introduction via networks in different markets
Advertising	• expressions of interest/tender
Agent Associations	• The Federation of Education and Language Consultants has a world wide network of Agents Associations (FELA): http://www.felca.org/ • Association of Australian Education Representatives in India (AAERI): http://www.aaeri.org/

5.2 Appointing Agents

At this point you have assessed the market, identified the use of agents as a key recruitment strategy, and determined the type of agents you require. You now need to select specific agents to implement your strategy.

Appointing and using agents as a recruitment strategy can be very effective; however, it is not without its risks. It is essential that appointed agents act ethically and professionally. From a marketing point of view agents are generally the first point of contact clients have with your organisation. A bad first impression can damage your in-market reputation. Also, there is a legal obligation through the National Code (2007) for providers to ensure that agents are honest.

The National Code (2007): Standard 4 – Education agents, Outcome of standard 4

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 agents who are dishonest or lack integrity.[2,3]

5.2.1 Application Process

The appointment of an agent involves three steps:

1. undergoing due diligence through an application process
2. establishing the kinds of agent management models you are going to use
3. formalising your partnership through a contract.

To reduce the risk associated with partnering with a non-desirable agent, many providers have implemented an application process during which due diligence of the agent is conducted. The application process is also an opportunity to identify agents best suited to your organisation's needs in the market: you can find out how far their networks reach and potential market strategies they are going to implement. It is recommended that your agent application form be divided into four sections:

1. **Due Diligence**—where the corporate profile, organisational structure and referees are established
2. **Training and educational qualifications**—where potential agents' knowledge of the Australian education industry and training qualifications are established
3. **Market information**—where knowledge of the target market, services being offered and in-market strategies are established
4. **Services** they will offer.

[2] http://aei.gov.au/AEI/CmsTemplates/GeneralTemplates/LandingPage.aspx?NRMODE=PublishedandNRNODEGUID=%7b2F9C1196-4B2B-49A8-A64A-67B003520F81%7dandNRORIGINALURL=%2fAEI%2fESOS%2fDefault.htmandNRCACHEHINT=ModifyGuest

[3] http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/NationalCodeExplanatoryGuide/PartD/Standard_4.htm

Due Diligence

The main purpose of due diligence is to ensure the agent you are appointing is honest and professional. There are two reasons to conduct due diligence on any potential agents:

1. Under Standard 4 of the National Code (2007), providers must not make an agreement with an agent who has been engaged in dishonest and unethical practices or who has provided unauthorised migration advice.
2. Agents are usually the first point of contact between you and your potential students. The agents' professional conduct is essential to maintain the integrity of your reputation as well as, more generally, Australia's reputation as a quality provider of international education.

You should thoroughly investigate the potential agent before appointing them. Most due diligence can be conducted through use of an application form, filled out by the agent, and contacting referees. Information sourced directly from the agent should be collaborated by other sources such as government agencies, referees, agent associations and networks as well as your own industry networks.

Areas for consideration in due diligence are:

- the company profile
- the owners and executives involved in the company. Pay particular detail to establishing whether anyone connected with the company has been involved in any bankruptcies, legal proceedings or liquidations.
- any sub-branches or affiliated companies, if the company is registered
- the company's financial probity
- how long the company has been established
- at least two educational referees, preferably Australian-based
- possibly two student referees to ascertain the level of service the agent provided them, although this is not common practice within the Australian international education industry.

See the Provider Resources document for an example of an application form and items for consideration at www.training.qld.gov.au/international

Training and Educational Qualifications

This section of the application form should establish the agent's knowledge of the Australian education industry. It should assess:

- their familiarity with the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)—the visa application process and where to find changes to student visa requirements.

- their familiarity with the ESOS Act (2000) and associated National Code (2007) through the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (DEEWR) website.

- whether they are Qualified Education Agent Counsellors (QEAC). The Education Agent Training Course (EATC), delivered online by PIER is the result of collaboration between Australian Education International (AEI), the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and Australian international education peak bodies. It is part of the Business Services Training Package, and comprises two units of competence: BSBIND302A Work effectively in the international education services industry and BSBEDU301A Assist with monitoring compliance in international education; these are part of the Certificate III in Business Administration (International Education). The EATC covers four areas: Australia, the AQF and Career Trends, Legislation and Regulations, Working Effectively in International Education and Professional Standards and Ethics. The EATC provides free online access to the course for registered education agents. The online formal assessment test carries a fee of $AU400. Qualified agents are listed on the Qualified Education Agent Database at http://www.pieronline.org/qeac/default.aspx

- whether they are qualified Migration agents under the Migration Act (1958). If not, do they understand what they can and cannot promise regarding Australian residency?

- whether they hold any other relevant memberships or licenses. For example, you would ask agents from China to provide a copy of the Chinese Ministry of Education Registration Certificate with the agent registration number; alternatively, if the agent is based in Australia, ask for evidence that they are partnering with a registered Chinese education agent based in China.

Market Information

The application should also allow agents to show their knowledge of their geographical territory or market. Ask for details of:

- the potential market
- the geographical area the agent will service and how they will service it
- the agent's strengths in these areas
- the number of students they handle each year
- their proposal for promotion and marketing in the territories, including the events they will organise and attend on behalf of your organisation

Services

Finally you should ask for details of the services the agent is prepared to offer as part of the agency agreement. The range of services will depend on the type of agent, their qualifications, market demand and the facilities they have in-country. All agents should offer the following services as a minimum:

- basic promotion and marketing
- providing information to prospective students on your courses, campus, facilities and other information required under Standard 4 and 5 of the National Code (2007)
- assisting in the recruitment of prospective students by providing advice on completing application forms and submitting them to your organisation
- arranging for English language testing of prospective students
- assisting prospective students with completing and submitting Australian immigration visa applications with the Australian Embassy

Additional services may be negotiated depending on the market, and the agent's qualifications and licences. For example, if the agent is located in Australia and is registered as an official migration agent, they may be able to provide a migration advisory service to the student. If they are a travel agency, they can organise airfares and accommodation in Australia. If one of your goals is to form partnerships in the target market some agents may act as a partnership broker between you and other overseas institutions. Services can be defined in more detail within the agreement. However, the application form will provide some information on the potential services the agent could offer.

Note: The most successful agent-provider relationships are based on mutually-beneficial and equal partnerships. Therefore it is important to provide information on your organisation to the agent when asking them to complete the application form. You should also encourage them to complete their own due diligence on you. The partnership will only work if there is a genuine alignment of business objectives and ethos.

The best way to establish the scope of an agent's services and market knowledge is to ask for a promotion and marketing plan for their specified territory. The plan could be seen as a Capacity Statement demonstrating what the agent knows, will do and can do to meet your business objectives. It should cover the following:

- this is what we know about you
- this is our understanding of your needs
- these are the services we will provide you to assist in meeting those needs.

5.2.2 Agent Management Models

After identifying an agent you want to appoint, and before contracting them, you need to decide on the scope of their appointment, specifically:

- **the service provision**—what roles and responsibilities will they have?
- **commission structures**—how will they be remunerated?
- **Incentive management models**—are there rewards for exceeding goals and obligations?

The Service Provision

What services will the agent offer? What role will they play in promoting, marketing and recruiting for your organisation? The roles and responsibilities should be based on your business's strategic objectives and priorities. You should keep in mind why you are appointing the agent in that particular market and the services the agent offers, and align the service provisions accordingly.

If the agent is newly appointed, you may wish to enlist them to provide only minimum services to the market. As the relationship grows you could increase the service provision. You should note that the more high-level services you require, the more your responsibilities towards the agent will increase, such as training, monetary support and time. The table over shows suggested service provisions and examples of the level of service that an agent may offer.

Service Provision Categories

Services	Basic	Intermediate	High
Promotion	Easily available and accessible in shop front.	Joint promotions such as interviews when provider is in market.	Regional advertising campaigns; agent representing provider at events.
Marketing	None	Translating marketing material. Provider involvement in the agent's marketing plan.	Exclusive marketing plan organised by the agent including marketing events and advertising.
Market Research	Basic information on market features.	New market trends and demands as they come to light.	Follow-up in market for students who have not converted into enrolments.
Customer Service	Student counselling. Advice on educational application. Assistance with visa application. Pre-departure orientation.	Advice on migration and visa application (if the agent is a registered Migration Agent). English language testing.	Issuing offer letters and Confirmations of Enrolment (COEs) on behalf of provider.
Alumni	None	Alumni events and follow up.	Maintaining in-country alumni database.
Business Development	None	Introduction and advisory service for partnerships in education and industry.	Partnership brokering and negotiation on behalf of provider.
Servicing for regional areas	None	Through regional events and promotion.	Through regional offices and sub agents.

Remember that, like in any relationship, you need to build trust with the agent and the agent with you. Only appoint agents for services you are comfortable with them performing. As the relationship develops the service provisions can be changed and expanded.

Remuneration

The most common way for the remuneration of agents is through payment of a commission. The agent is paid a percentage of the tuition fee once the student has paid their fees and commenced their studies. The industry standard is 15% for a formal qualification and 20% for ELICOS[4]. Some organisations, in an effort to gain the competitive advantage over other providers, have offered up to 40% commission. Careful consideration needs to be given to the long-term economic viability of this approach, as opposed to using that money in marketing support for the agent. The biggest advantage of payment by commission is that the agent does not get paid if they do not recruit any students. However, a disadvantage is that, usually because agents work for a number of different providers, if they are recruiting large numbers for your competitor there is no incentive for them to re-route those students to your organisation. They get paid either way.

[4] As per advice from industry 2009

Other payment models include:

- **set fee per student.**
- **retainer.** The agent is contracted to represent your organisation over a specified period of time to recruit students. It is recommended that this type of financial model be used more as a consultancy contract for a specific objective rather than a long-term market strategy.
- **agent administrative fees.** The agent charges the students a fee. This is usually packaged and may include tuition fees, air flights, accommodation, etc. This method of payment is rarely used. However, some agents do charge the institution a commission fee and the student an administrative fee. You need to clarify whether an agent is charging students fees in addition to your commission payments. If they are, what added value are they providing the students? Associating yourself with an agent who is charging students additional fees can damage your reputation as well as expose you to non-compliance of the ESOS Act. It is essential you are clear on your agent's services and payment methods.

When considering which approach to use, look at the environment and assess which model would provide you with a competitive edge while taking into consideration the long-term effects of any strategy you employ. One strategy employed by a number of organisations is to couple the payment of a basic commission with an incentive management model.

Incentive Schemes

As the international education industry becomes increasingly competitive, agents are a major source of student recruitment for providers. To manage agents more strategically, reward agents who are working well, and gain a competitive advantage over competitors, many organisations are using incentive schemes.

Incentive schemes can take many forms and may include financial or non-financial incentives. Types of incentive schemes include:

- **discounting.** Agents are offered reduced tuition fees for the students they recruit. Discounting is used by some providers to encourage the agent to route the students to their organisation rather than a competitor. Careful thought needs to be made before offering this incentive. Discounting can seriously undermine your position and attract students who are not necessarily part of your target market. Discounting can lead to a reduction in the quality of student being referred and devalue your courses.
- **variable commission rates.** Additional commission is included as an incentive for your agent to perform better for you. For example, if they have completed the ETAC they get an additional 1-5% commission above their basic rate. This can be an effective tool to encourage your agent to perform better services for you. However, effectiveness will depend on the agent, the size of your organisation, and the number of students the agent is sending to you. This strategy may be less effective for smaller organisations where the number of students being sourced through one particular agent can vary significantly.
- **scholarships.** Scholarships are offered to high-performing agent counsellors in the form of certificates, diplomas, short courses or even the ETAC. These can be particularly effective for building relationships between you and the agent. Offering a scholarship or other professional development opportunity will also increase the skills and knowledge of your agent.
- **familiarisation visits.** Pay for your agent to visit your institution and meet relevant staff face-to-face. This increases your agent's knowledge of your institution and personalises the professional connection by allowing your admission officers to meet the agents.
- **additional marketing support.** This could be financial or physical support, whether by organising more joint promotions in-country or providing more financial support for marketing activities.

You may want to use one or a combination of these incentives to motivate your agent—a combination of financial and non-financial incentives seems to be most effective.

The decision of whether to use an incentive scheme or whether you can engage and motivate your agents one-on-one will depend on your resources, size and long-term growth plans. For example, if you have appointed a small number of agents they might be easily managed personally; however, unless you have a dedicated agent manager as you grow and appoint more agents, you might want to consider managing your agents within a management model.

Many larger RTOs and universities are now using Incentive Management Models to strategically rank and provide incentives for their top performing agents. Agents are categorised and ranked against selection criteria based on performance and the provider-agent relationship. The selection criteria again should be based on your institutional objectives and should be at a macro level to account for market level diversity.

For example, the matrix below illustrates how agents may be ranked into four levels depending on their performance in recruiting and their length of association with the organisation. Agents are recruited as bronze agents and then, through consistently achieving and exceeding their key performance indicators, can be recognised and rewarded for their loyalty and hard work.

Indicative Incentive Scheme Structure

Rank	Description	No. of Students	Revenue target
Bronze	New agents	< 20	_
Silver	Existing agents demonstrating growth in student numbers and meeting minimum targets	> 20	_
Gold	Key agent in targeted markets Use of sub-agents to recruit large numbers of students	> 40	_
Platinum	As above plus Business development activities for industry and institutional partnerships	>50	$ 500,000

Each agent level offers incentives and rewards to encourage progression to the next level.

Agent Incentive Structure

Relationship Structure	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
Length of Agreement	1 year	2 years	3 years	3 years
Performance Review	6 months	1 year	1 year	1 year
Monthly report			✓	✓
Incentive / Benefits				
Commission rate - ELICOS	20%	20%	20%+3% over target revenue	20%+ 4% over target revenue
Commission rate - Diploma	15%	15%	15%	15%
Commission rate – Other (Study tours, etc)	-	-	10%	10%
Commission rate based on revenue	-	-	-	1.5% revenue generated
Familiarisation visit – assistance arranging visits	✓	✓	✓	✓
Partner Certificate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regular newsletter	✓	✓	✓	✓
Listing on website	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training support – web based	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scholarship scheme		✓	✓	✓
Familiarisation visit - paid visit to Queensland			✓	✓
Promotional Budget (eg. $2000)			✓	✓
Agreement administrative/marketing expenses paid			✓	✓
Training support (in person)			✓	✓
Signage on site				✓

5.2.3 Contracting Agents

Standard 4.1 of The National Code (2007) states:

The registered provider must enter into a written agreement with each education agent it engages to formally represent it. The agreement must specify responsibilities of the education agent and the registered provider and the need to comply with the requirements of the National Code. The agreement must include:

a. processes for monitoring the activities of the education agent, including where corrective action may be required, and

b. termination conditions, including provision for termination in the circumstances outlined in Standard 4.4

In addition to compliance with the National Code (2007), the contract provides a document of reference to manage your relationship with the agent and the agent with you. As a minimum the agent contract should include:

Service Provisions

- Roles and responsibilities of each party
- A clear indication of the territory or geographical area the agent is responsible for

Key Performance Indicators

- Key performance indicators including student targets, processing times and partner introductions

Incentives

- Incentive schemes
- Commission structures

Basic Contractual Concerns

- The duration of the contract and termination clauses
- Provision for the document to fall within Australian legal jurisdiction whenever possible.

As with any legal document it is essential this be reviewed by your organisation's legal representatives.

The Service Provision

The roles and responsibilities should be based on your business strategic objectives and priorities. You should keep in mind the reasons why you are appointing the agent in that particular market, the services that the agent offers and align the service provisions accordingly.

If the agent is a new agent you may wish to appoint them to basically serve the market. As the relationship grows you could increase the service provision. You should note that the more high level services you require will increase your responsibilities towards the agent, such as increase in training, monetary support and time.

Clearly Defined Territories

It should also be made clear which territories the agent is servicing. This will make it easy for you to manage your agents as well as stay focused on your organisational needs and objectives. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Different markets may need different approaches. The agent you have appointed for a particular market may not be suitable to meet your objectives in a different market.
- An agent expanding or encroaching into another territory may have implications on your relationship with existing successful agents or partners in that territory.
- You may not have the resources to service another market.

To clarify this, it should be noted that agents' territories might be defined but not the nationalities they can recruit. For example, an agent servicing Slovakia would be able to recruit a Korean student if they were recruited within that territory. A Taiwanese agent based in Brisbane might have a defined territory of South East Queensland and Taiwan. The size of the territory would be up to you and the nationalities of those recruited within the territory would not be restricted.

Key Performance Indicators

Once the services have been decided and documented, KPIs should also be established with the agent so that they have ownership over them and they are realistic. There is no point setting a KPI of 50 students when you are a small RTO with a population of 100 international students. If the KPIs are unrealistic then the agent will not work productively for you and the partnership will not reach its potential.

Examples of KPIs include:

- number of student applications sent by agent
- conversion percentage of applications to enrolments
- length of application processing time
- number of partnership introductions made.

As mentioned, KPIs will depend on the agent and the market. An agent who primarily provides business development services and recruits students through these opportunities would have different KPIs to an agent who primarily recruits students through a number of promotional and marketing activities such as student recruitment fairs. Ranking and incentives schemes can encourage agents to work above and beyond their KPIs.

Remuneration and Incentives

Payment procedures and incentives should be clearly stipulated in the contract and strictly adhered to. If using incentives or an Incentive Management Model these should be clearly documented either in the body of the contract or in the form of an attached Schedule.

Basic Contractual Concerns

As per all legal documents, the following should be included in any agent contract:

Length of the agreement

Most providers have a basic 12 month validation period from the time the agreement is signed. The length of the contract will depend on a number of factors including: your relationship with the agent; the resources you have to conduct a review and renewal of agreement; and your positioning in the market place.

If you are using a management model and you have a long and established relationship with your agent, the term may be three years. If it is a new partnership, you might want to have a probationary period of six to twelve months.

If you are a small provider you need to consider the resources you have to conduct reviews and renewals of agents. If you have over 50 agents and all agreements expire at the same time it might be a large job to review and renew all of them. If this is the case you may want to consider a management model and ranking your agents.

Your position in the market also needs to be considered. What are your long-term strategies in the market and where does the agent fit into this. Is it a new market you are entering or an established market? You need to consider your strategies, the performance of your agent and the performance of the market.

Terms of termination

The circumstances that will lead to the termination of the agreement need to be clearly stated. Standard 4 of the National Code (2007) provides some guidance for this.

The National Code (2007) Standard 4

4.3 The registered provider must not accept students from an education agent or enter into an agreement with an education agent if it knows or reasonably suspects the education agent to be:

a. Engaged in, or have previously been engaged in, dishonest practices, including the deliberate attempt to recruit students where this clearly conflicts with the obligations of registered providers under Standard 7 (transfer between providers).

b. Facilitating the enrolment of a student which the education agent believes will not comply with the conditions of his or her student visa.

a. Using Provider Registration and International Students Management System, (PRISMS) to create Confirmation of Enrolment for other than a bona fide student

OR

b. Providing immigration advice where not authorised under the Migration Act (1958) to do so

1.4 Where the registered provider has entered into an agreement with an education agent and subsequently becomes aware of, or reasonable suspects, the engagement by that education agent, or an employee or sub-contractor of that agent, of the conduct set out in Standard 4,3, the registered provider must terminate the agreement with the education agent. This paragraph does not apply where an individual employee or sub-contractor of the education agent was responsible for the conduct set out in Standard 4.3 and the education agent has terminated the relationship with that individual employee or sub-contractor.

1.5 The registered provider must take immediate corrective and preventative action upon the registered provider becoming aware of an education agent being negligent, careless or incompetent or being engaged in false, misleading or unethical advertising and recruitment practices, including practices that could harm the integrity of Australian education and training. [5]

You should also include any organisational termination clauses. For example, if you do not want the agent to charge the student any additional fees to the commission they are receiving this should be clearly stated.

The procedures for termination should also be stipulated. See Exit Strategies for more information.

Australian legal jurisdiction

It is highly recommended that you include the applicable law and jurisdiction that the contract will fall within. That is in accordance with the law in Queensland and Australia and under the jurisdiction of the courts of Australia.

It might also be a good idea to develop a summary of the agreement for the agent's information. This document would include all information pertinent to the agent's performance and how their performance will be measured. For example:

- compliance with the ESOS Act (2000)
- compliance with your Code of Conduct
- specific KPIs, if that is what you are going to use to measure their performance.

[5] http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/NationalCodeExplanatoryGuide/PartD/Standard_4.htm

5.3 Ongoing Agent Management – Relationship Building

5.3.1 Ongoing Agent Management

The agent agreement states the responsibilities and obligations of the agent and your institution, is required by the ESOS Act (2000), and is also a risk minimisation strategy to protect your organisational integrity and brand. However, the contract does not guarantee the success of the partnership. The importance of building a strong partnership cannot be underestimated—you and your agent need to work together in order to achieve outcomes and objectives.

Legislative Requirements

Section 4.2, Standard 4 (Education Agents) of the National Code (2007) states that *'registered providers must ensure that its education agents have access to up to date and accurate marketing information as set out in Standard 1 (Marketing information and practices).'*[6]

This means that, at the very least, agents should have access to your marketing material. Examples of available material might include:

- International Prospectus
- Program Guides
- Web page.

This information is required by the ESOS Act (2000) and National Code (2007); however, this will not achieve the desired outcomes without ongoing relationship building from both you and your agent. The most successful agent-provider relationships are established when agents are considered an extension of your organisation's staff. This can be achieved through a number of strategies, as described below.

Training

When appointing an agent it is important they get as much information about your organisation as possible in order to counsel students and promote your institution offshore. Induction training can be conducted in a number of ways including through an agent manual, familiarisation tour or personal visit and seminars.

At the very least, the agent manual might include all information necessary for the agent to advise students, submit applications and then invoice for the necessary commission. It is a document that is used as a training resource for agents to get to know your organisation. If possible, always deliver the agent manual personally and conduct a seminar for the agent and their staff, going through the manual step by step. The more personal contact and rapport you establish with your agent the more they will remember you and your institution.

Other initial training strategies include inviting your agent to your organisation for a tour, providing an introductory seminar and meeting their contacts face to face. These strategies are more common for agents that are appointed onshore in Australia; however, they could be considered for offshore agents (such as a familiarisation tour) at a later stage of the relationship or as an incentive.

See the Provider Resources document for examples of an Agent Manual contents page at www.training.qld.gov.au/international

International Prospectus

Ensure your agent has received your International Prospectus. A prospectus is an essential tool for agents to easily guide students through your organisation's capabilities and facilities. A well-prepared and organised International Prospectus makes an agent's job easier because it means they have the knowledge to inform the student they are counselling immediately. If the agent does not have the information the student (your potential client) needs they are less likely to refer students and you might have a harder job of building a

[6] http://www.aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/ESOS/EasyGuide_ESOS.htm

relationship with them.

It is important to note the issue of listing your agent in your prospectus. The main purpose of having an agent is as a student referral. Students are sometimes more comfortable applying to Australian institutions through an agent who speaks their language and is a local. It is highly recommended, although not common practice within the VET sector, to list your agents in a prospectus or on a website. The reasons are:

- Your agents become more accessible to the student as students can see which agents represent you.
- You are building the relationship with your agent by making their job easier. Your prospectus can be used by students interested in your organisation as a referral to a local person who has knowledge of your institution.
- If all RTOs advertise their agents, then this can benefit the Australian VET sector as a whole. In selecting agents you can select those who work with other RTOs and are familiar with the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Many RTOs do not advertise their agent representatives due to the competitive nature of the international education industry. However, this risk can be mitigated through maintaining a strong working relationship with your agent. This strategy has worked well for the Higher Education sector and the ELICOS sector.

See the Provider Resources document for an example of a prospectus contents page.

Agent Events

Occasionally, government agencies supporting export of Australian education organise agent familiarisation tours. By keeping in contact with your local, state and federal government agencies you can become aware of and involved in these tours. The tours are designed to improve agents' knowledge of Australia as an educational destination and individual visits to educational institutions are usually organised. If you are aware of such an event encourage your agents to become involved themselves.

Ongoing Training

Ensure you have effective communication channels to update the agent on your institution; the ESOS Act (2000); immigration requirements; when you will next be in the region; or how many places you have left for a particular course in a particular semester. A non-invasive method for communicating these requirements is through an agents' portal. This portal can also become a training tool for agents who have a high turnover of staff.

5.3.2 Communication

Establishing a communication plan for each of your agents can ensure they are kept informed of your institution's activities. The communication plan should identify a clear strategy and channels for exchanging relevant information—quality of information is far more important than quantity, particularly for busy agents. It is also important to note that you are not your agent's only client and that they may not have time to sift through mountains of information.

Communication Strategies

A communication strategy identifies your approach to keeping your agents up-to-date on institutional information, activities, changes such as staff turnover, when staff will be in the region, marketing activities and events. A strategy is best implemented through the use of one or more communication channels.

Possible strategies include:

- building a personal rapport with the agent and their staff
- making agents an extension of your organisational staff.

Communication Channels

Agents' portal

Many institutions are establishing an agents' information portal as the main channel for updating agents on institutional activities. The portal is especially useful as a resource for agents who you are unable to visit frequently. The portal can include:

- information on:
    - courses
    - recognition of prior learning policy
    - fees
    - international scholarships
    - agent training initiatives
    - application submission (specifically online)
    - application tracking facilities
    - marketing initiatives
    - events and exhibitions
    - the ESOS Act (2000) and DIAC
- an up-to-date list if institutional contacts
- an e-newsletter.

Face-to-Face

The most effective way of building rapport with your agent is face to face. Ensure you visit your agent whenever you are in the region. Even if it is not an organised event drop in and say hello. While you are there, check they have up-to-date marketing information and give the counsellors the opportunity to ask questions. Other activities may include:

- inviting the agents to visit you whenever they are in Australia
- taking your agents out for a coffee or a meal to discuss any issues or to get to know them better
- conducting agent familarisation tours on a regular basis

Sometimes, because of geographical constraints, it is not practical to meet with your agents face to face; however, communication and relationships can be built through other channels such as:

- an agent portal
- email, telephone or skype regularly to touch base. See if they need any updated material, if they have any questions and how they are progressing towards their targets. When communicating with agents keep in mind the time differences and cultural holidays and take this into consideration when expecting a response
- ensure you respond quickly to the agents' enquiries

See the Provider Resources document for an example of a communication plan.

5.3.3 Marketing and Promotion

Conducting joint marketing and promotional events assists in building a relationship between you and your agent while you assist each other in reaching student recruitment targets. These joint activities can take many forms including:

- **educational exhibitions**. Recruit your agent to work with you on an exhibition stand. This is not appropriate for some exhibitions; for example, it would not be appropriate to invite an agent to attend an IDP exhibition with you. You should check before extending the invitation that agents are not barred from the exhibition. The benefits of having an agent assist you in these events include:
    - additional training opportunities for the agent: as they hear you counsel students they can gain additional knowledge of your institution.
    - the agent can follow up locally on student enquiries from the exhibition after the event.
    - the agent can provide ongoing support for students who applied during or because of the exhibition.
- **provider interviews.** When you are in the region the agent can organise specific institutional interviews in their offices. This is where the agent advertises that you, as a representative of your institution, will be available through appointments to offer advice to potential students. The agent can then provide ongoing support for students when you leave. Organised interview sessions of this kind send a strong message of cooperation and support between you and your agent to the market and potential students.
- **client events.** The agent can act as an event organiser for client events such as graduations, alumni functions, pre-departure seminars offshore, and parental dinners.
- **translation of promotional material.** The agent can organise translation of promotional flyers and prospectuses.

5.3.4 Record Keeping

Keeping accurate records of the interactions between you and your agent can assist in planning and developing your strategic documents and individual country plans, reviewing and improving your relationship with an agent. There is specific information you need to capture to effectively manage an agent:

- agent's main business address and addresses of sub-agencies
- territories the agent will cover
- contract start date
- contract expiry date
- interactions with the agent
- number of applications the agent has referred
- the conversion percentage of those applications
- the targeted number of students.

A basic Agent Register / Database will enable you to keep track of how many agents you have, the territories they cover and when their contracts are up for renewal. If this is created in an Excel spreadsheet you can easily search for agents by territory, address, contract expiry date, etc.

An Agent Diary sheet is very useful in recording your interactions with agents including any issues; feedback from students, parents and staff; joint promotional activities you have conducted with them; and requests for additional information. The Agent Diary can be referred to during the review period to assess factors such as the level of support the agent received and any gaps in the agent's training.

Assigning an Agent ID code to applications being referred by specific agents allows you to keep track of the number of applications referred by a specific agent and the number converted to enrolments. This is useful information to have during the review period to assess how effective the agent/provider has been in meeting objectives and goals. It is also required to check the validity of commission invoices received from the agent.

Many educational institutions are now looking at Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems to assist in application processing. These systems can record, report and analyse data such as students' applications from enquiry to enrolment. They are effective in agent management as they can be used as a tool for the agent to apply online and then track their student's application form as it is being processed by the educational institution. These systems are advantageous for the provider as they can track the agent's referral of applications. Two examples of companies providing CRMs to Australian educational institutions are Studylink (www.studylink.com) and Hobsons (www.hobsons.com).

See the Provider Resources document for an example of an Agent Register / Database and Agent Diary at www.training.qld.gov.au/international

5.3.5 Managing Issues

It is highly recommended that as part of your agent management process you include procedures for managing issues and complaints regarding your agent. These issues might come in the form of complaints about:

- the agent from the provider
- the provider from the agent
- the agent from the student
- the institution from the student.

Instructions and procedures regarding these issues should be transparent and easily accessible to all possible parties either through the contract in regards to agent issues and through your website to deal with student grievances.

Procedures for managing complaints by the agent or provider regarding the other should be detailed in the contract. For example, if there is a non-compliance issue then a letter should be sent advising of the issues and allowing the relevant party a certain amount of time to respond.

5.4. Review of Agents

The expiry and renewal of an agent's contract is an ideal time to conduct a review of the agent-provider relationship. The timing of the review will depend on how long your agent's contract is for. A new agent might be reviewed six monthly, a continuing agent annually and a key agent every twenty four months.

The objective of a review is to assess the success of your partnership by rating your agent's performance (and your performance) against certain KPIs and/or criteria. You should conduct the review within the context of your goals and objectives in the market. When conducting the review, you should keep in mind how much you have supported the agent. If the agent has not met certain expectations and goals, objectively look at your role in the partnership. Did you do everything you could have done to support the agent? Did you respond to their enquiries quickly? Did you send promotional and marketing material when requested? Did you visit the agent whenever you could? How much contact did you have with the agent over the contractual period?

Following are some examples of internal documents that will assist you to review:

- agent contract
- country plan for the relevant territories the agent covers
- agent's diary
- agent's communication plan
- statistical data on applications referred by the agent and the conversion to enrolments.

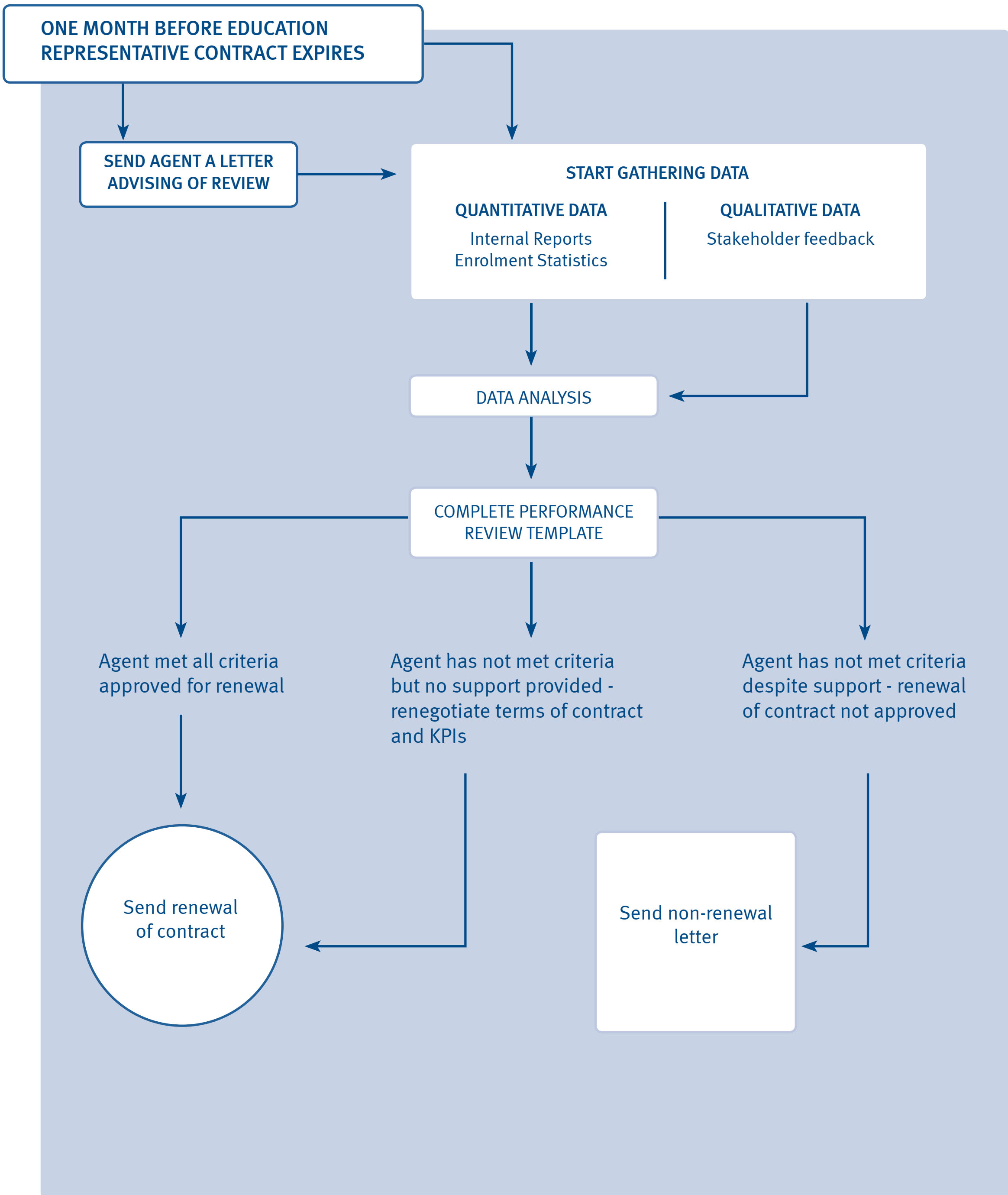
As part of the review it is also useful to conduct some qualitative research such as:

- talking to stakeholders including students, parents, admission staff, marketing staff and the agents themselves.

After gathering all the information you can assess the data through a performance review template. This template provides a summary of your findings and documents the outcome of the review process.

See the Provider Resources document for an example of a Performance Review Template at www.training.qld.gov.au/international

Agent Review Process



5.5 Exit Strategies

As with any partnership or international engagement activity exit strategies should be devised and documented at the commencement of the partnership. There might be several reasons you and an agent part company. Examples include:

Non-compliance

- legislative non-compliance by the agent
- contractual non-compliance by either the agent or you as a provider

Non-renewal

- the agent not wishing to renew your contract
- you not wanting to renew your contract with the agent due to market prioritisation or other partnerships in the market.

5.5.1 Non-compliance

The consequences of non-compliance with the ESOS Act (2000), the National Code or other contractual arrangements should be specified in the agent agreement. The agreement should document the following:

- timeline for terminating the agreement
- channel of communication to be used to terminate the agreement
- implications for the students and services that are being offered through the agent
- circumstances under which the agreement will be terminated.

Sample Statement: Termination of Agreement

This agreement terminates all prior agreements between the provider and the representative for the recruitment of overseas students, including as to any matter covered by this agreement.

This agreement will end if:

- Either party gives the other party 30 days prior written notice; or
- The provider gives notice to the Representative that the Representative has breached a provision of this Agreement or if the Provider is directed or required to do so by a relevant Australian government department. In such cases, termination will be effective immediately

Notification of termination will be sent to the Representative and the nearest Australian Diplomatic Mission and other relevant government bodies.

If the agreement is ended by either party, the Representative must:

- Submit all applications and Program fees from prospective students received up to the date of termination; and
- Cease to use any advertising material supplied by the institute and return such material to the institute by registered mail or by a reputable international courier.

This Agreement will lapse if there is no activity by the agent to refer overseas students to the Institute within the first 12 months or such other time as agreed in writing by the provider.

See the Provider Resources document for an example of an agreement termination clause.

When terminating an agreement with an agent you need to consider the consequences and the ripple effect. Who do you need to contact? The Australian government? Students whose applications are in the system? Under the National Code (2007) you are obliged to report agents guilty of non-compliance with the legislation to DEEWR. It is in all Australian providers' interests to ensure that agents working to promote Australian educational institutions are ethical.

If the termination is due to non-compliance with other issues you may have to consider how to handle the media and the damage the non-compliance has done to your reputation in-country. How widespread is the damage? What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the damage?

Whatever the circumstances, it is essential that your clients (students) are kept up-to-date and are not unduly disadvantaged by the dissolution of the agent partnership.

5.5.2 Non-Renewal of Contract

If your partnership with an agent has ended for other reasons—for example non-activity or a change of country strategic direction— transparent arrangements are also important. However, a reasonable amount of time needs to be given for exit strategies to come into effect. As in non-compliance, other considerations include:

- giving the other party written notice of the intention to exit
- giving the reasons for exiting
- giving a reasonable amount of time to exit (one month)
- advising stakeholders, specifically potential students. Where there has been no legislative non-compliance it is not necessary to inform government departments or the local Consulate of the dissolution of the partnership
- making arrangements so stakeholders are not unduly disadvantaged by the dissolution.

6. Concluding Statement

International education is an extremely lucrative industry that provides a substantial contribution to the Queensland and Australian economy. It is highly competitive and becoming increasingly sophisticated. Education agents play a significant role in the sustainability and growth of Australia's share of this market. It is hoped that this Guide provides practical information, tools and techniques for training providers to advance their activities with education agents.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AEI	Australian Education International
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
COE	Confirmation of Enrolment
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Student Act *(2000)*
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LOE	Letter of Offer
MARA	Migration Agents Registration Authority
PIER	Professional International Education Resources
PRISMS	Provider Registration and International Students Management System
QEAC	Qualified Education Agents Counsellors
QETI	Queensland Education and Training International
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
VEO	VET Export Office
VET	Vocational Education and Training