TAFE Directors Conference 2015

The role of international education agents

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1. International agents have driven the growth of Australia’s international education sector and are a unique feature of our engagement.

2. But, despite Australia’s pioneering practice and initiatives, our approach to agent quality assurance management is in need of repair.

3. We must make this investment now to ensure the quality and sustainability of our sector. Quality education agents should be part of our future.
Agents are not a homogenous group

- Migration Agents
- Education Agents
- Onshore Agents
- Offshore Agents
- Country specialist agents
- Institutionally owned agents
- Agents vs agency
- Sub agents
- Online agents
- Ghost agents
- Pathway agents
1. International agents have driven the growth of international education in Australia and are a unique feature of our engagement model

- **1969** – the first agency created to support students select Australia as a study destination.
- Historical accounts of international education define our agent model and approach to pathways as the **keys to our success**.
- ESOS Act and National code **enshrined the role of agents in ethical recruitment**.
- In 2005 Australia piloted the first **Education Agent Training Course** leading to recognition as a **Qualified Education Agent Counsellor (QEAC)** and now reports that 3000 agents now hold the QEAC.
- It is estimated that **more than half** of the international students in Australia are recruited by agents.
- This would be higher for TAFE and even more important as TAFE does have the large resources of universities or multinational colleges.
- ICEF and ISB Agent survey ranked Australia as the “**best destination for VET studies**”.
2. But, despite Australia’s pioneering practice and initiatives, our approach to agent management is in need of urgent repair

- Media accounts and reports focused on “perceptions of risk” rather than widespread risk
- Most cited agent issues are misinformation, supporting course hopping, student transfers, fraudulent evidentiary requirements, complex ownership structures and commissions.
- Industry and government, and quality agents, have recognised that our quality mechanisms are not working as well as they should.
- London Statement - know it? need it?
- Streamlined Visa Processing further entrenched and highlighted the issues.
- In 2015 IEAA was commissioned to research options for the development of a quality agent framework for Australia.
- Stage 1 project completed (more than 1500 responses to surveys and focus groups) and Min Pyne announced second stage last month.
- Through PRISMS and DIBP data – we have the data- but we are not taking action
3. We must make this investment now to ensure the quality and sustainability of our sector

- So what could a quality agent framework look like?
  - Australian Quality Agent Framework must work in tandem with existing regulatory context.
  - Amend the National Code and then prosecute it. Enforce through whatever means possible (Consumer Affairs, ASIC others)
  - Share and publish data on agent performance, join up current intelligence embedded in PRISMs and DIBP data
  - Reinvest in Agent Training and Certification
  - Work to showcase positive examples of exemplary agent support
  - Investigate options for transparency in commissions

(Disclaimer- my personal views, not those of the Victorian Government or from the work of the of IEAA Steering Committee to investigate an agent quality framework)
What are our competitors doing?

• The **global** ICEF Agent Training Course* (IATC) launched 4 years ago, now has 8,587 registered users with 807 qualified.

• The **Canada Course for Education Agents** (CCEA), launched around 2 years ago, has 4,366 registered users and 228 qualified.

• The **US Agent Training Course** (USATC), launched in June 2015, has 153 registered in a pilot program with 5 qualified.

• The **China Education Agent Course** (CEAC) launched October 2014, has 24 registered users and 10 qualified users.

• New Zealand’s Recognised Agency training program, **ENZ Agent Training** reports over 5000 agents completed the program.

• The **British Council** has developed an online agent training course. Over 1000 agents have completed this program and appear on the British Council’s Global List.
What are some strategies being considered by institutions?

1. **Reduce dependency on agents** – partnerships, pathways and articulations, online systems and processes, direct recruitment
2. **Reduce the number of agents** – stricter performance measures, due diligence, monitoring, sign off process, closer trust and understanding
3. **Manage internally** - more staff based offshore to support the process
4. **Focus on compliance** – spend more on compliance and management
5. **Move to lower risk markets** - where agents are not so important?
6. **Improve training and induction** - more information improves outcome?
7. **Alter incentive structures** – commission, service fees, success
8. **Differentiated approaches** for onshore and offshore agents
9. **Benchmark our agent performance** – how do we compare, how much are we paying?
10. **Ask our students** – are they satisfied with their agents?
Case Study - Victoria

- 160,000 international students per annum, international education single largest services export for the state. Contributes another $2 billion to tourism in the state.
- Onshore agents are a large part of the Victorian landscape.
- Role for government:
  - Agent Complaints - Study Melbourne Student Centre
  - Agent Awareness - My Story Campaign, regular agent comms
  - Offshore agent engagement - Education Services Managers Network
  - Capacity building with providers - support agent management
  - Advocacy to Commonwealth Government and other regulators
So back to where we started - just three things……

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Visit Melbourne:

October 2015 - Times Higher Education Summit
November 2015 - QS Best Student City Rankings
March 2016 - Asia Pacific Association of Intl Education
April 2016 Australia New Zealand Agent Workshop