**Working with Agents: Phill Gray Deputy Director (Student Recruitment and Conversion)**

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Discussion and interactive and collaborate and share best practice regarding working with agents.

Phil – 15 years’ experience in the field. International regional manager for Middle East and North Africa. Authorising officer for UKVI.

Inherited a lot of agents – 270 in total, now have 89.

***Due Diligence, data sharing agreements and GDPR***

Policies on when an agent, speculative approach we don’t normally work with them, questionnaire goes out and market research, do they recruit at the qualification level we are looking for and build up a business case. Recruitment manager does due diligence checks. Are they reputable? Meeting the agent getting a feel for what they are like and building a relationship with them. Make sure the values match what you’re trying to achieve. How are they interacting with students? Short two side document with information and what attracts them to work with the university. Links to their privacy policy and GDPR. Ask for references and have one to one conversations. Approach an agent rather than them approach us. Data sharing agreement – student application coming to admissions does the student know which universities the agent is sending this to. York ask the student to fill in a short form to confirm this. Bath don’t talk to agents directly. Agents can be quite pushy and it saves time to talk to the student directly rather than the agent. What are the implications about that? Sharing data collected at events – contract didn’t have any statements about the agent collecting data and sharing it with the universities. In best interest is to take some of that initial enquiry and make sure the student is going to the right place. Let the student know where their data is being shared. General follow up from agent afterwards as well as the rep from the university. Put the power in the student’s hands. Sent a list of all students who attended the event – would normally delete that email.

School events they collected all the data and this was sent to the universities. Most use their own lead form.

***Legal requirements and contracts***

As part of due diligence check how long company has worked and check the website to ensure they are legitimate. Rebuilding relationships and ensuring. Solicitor to look at contract and look at what changes need to happen. Needs to be water tight. What about contract length? – Different lengths and commission rates. Tiered system based on the amount of students they get or we want – decided on how they perform and reviewed on an annual basis.

Working with UK based agents and paying double commission to pay pathway and agent? Does it have the right third party policy? Agents have a strong psychological contract with the university and they get upset if this is disrupted however this was never agreed in contract.

***Commission – what we can or can’t do***

Not allowed to talk about how much we pay in commission due to anti-competitive nature.

Going forward who makes the decision on how much you pay. Invoices to come in by set date (as outlined in contract or policy). Flex on how much you can pay and when it needs to be paid etc. Ring fenced amount link from commission to income to the university. Commission based on the agent’s involvement with that student. Defining at what point that agent has impacted the student’s journey. Commission is part of the recruitment budget.

***Representation and Marketing***

Can give agents money and budget for marketing – this can be effective. Does the university have any input in this marketing? Yes university should have final say. Stick or Carrot approach towards agents and how to support with them and work for the best outcomes. Balance is quite difficult. What is the commission for – should universities see what this is spent on.

***Counties we have worked in***

Each market is different in terms of how agents operate. China as an example has thousands. Norway have two agents and you can only work with one or the other. India

US – until recently agents were not a thing. Normally need a retainer.

Middle East and Africa – multiple offices and regional specialisms.

Thinking about agents and how you work with them. High staff turnover rate as they might have.

Working with EU Students and agents – important to still do so.

***UK International***

Working with them in the UK Agents and going to their events. If they are already in the UK visa teams need to be careful.

***Familiarisation trips***

Collaborative trips for the agents. Combined teacher’s conference with Agent events. Agent conferences with flights accommodation paid for – normally social and course information. Rewarding them somehow and what the resource should be.

***Admissions, recruitment, Visa compliance person.***

Talk to them and ensure a positive working relationship. Upskilling the admissions staff on what to check for and when she issues the CAS they are confident. Regulations change regularly.

***Relationship and benefits***

Spending money at their events – don’t get caught up in always attending. British Council events are expensive, could you do agent events instead.

***What top tips do you have?***

Agent portals? Centralised and agents can self-serve from and issue them with tasks. Dialled into communication plan with the agents. Agent portals require a lot of setting up. Stand alone for information and gives secure access, and allows access to recourses like presentations etc.

Is there any shared knowledge about starting relationships with agents?

-British Council certified agents.

- need a robust process

- contracted agents who charge the students a fee. Do you want to start working with these people?

- Provide a peer to peer mentoring service and already working with lots ok UK Universities.

***Within smaller groups – what is an agent come up with a statement and what isn’t an agent.***

Extension of the university, paid third party advocate advising students into Higher education and market specialist. Not a full time member of staff. Some may be alumni but they are not employed by the university. Not exclusive.

***Super Agents Vs Smaller Agents***

Wiseway as an example work with multiple universities so how do they know the details of that course. Or a smaller agent. Or a sub agents. Some markets that practice is deeply imbedded and they split that commission with a different agency. GDPR and 4th party providing that.   
Keep small and close nit and ensure they are trained. Policy that they won’t work with sub agents but there is a challenge that they will not tell us. Either party can terminate the contract.

You want to work with someone who you can trust.