



Who's Your Agent? The Art of Attracting International Students

Description

Universities all over the world use agents to bring in international students. The good ones are valuable allies for both institutions and applicants. But there is no shortage of tales of agents who cost too much and produced too little, in extreme cases causing reputation damage to the university itself. Now QS and its partner in India, Manya, have got together to analyse just what makes for a good relationship between university and agent.

A QS whitepaper ([available here](#)) found that over 500 US universities use agents. So do their competitors in the UK, Australia and other major destination countries for foreign study. In Asia, where time zones as well as language and culture differ from the US, they are an especially tempting option. It is estimated that 60-80 per cent of Chinese and Indian students studying abroad come via an agent.

In an analysis of the use of agents for graduate student recruitment, QS and Manya point out that agents tend to enter the frame at a late stage, once students have formed a good idea of where they wish to go. At that point, a good one becomes a trusted adviser. So it is important for them to have detailed knowledge of the institution they represent, which they may well never have visited.

This means that one key to using an agent effectively is to help them be well-informed, with a manual on the university and up-to-date knowledge of its academic offerings as well as its admissions system and its administration. It is always worth letting agents know which courses are in most need of more people.

And try to remember that agents who seem pushy are just doing their job. A university takes an average of ten days to process an international student application. However, most students accept the first offer they get. So the agent is right to press for a quick decision. In the same way, it is only reasonable for them to ask universities for fee waivers, scholarships and other sweeteners to bring in the best students.

QS and Manya also find that even without these concessions, it probably costs \$4-5,000 to recruit a student via an agent, half in the agent's own fees and half in the form of extra travel, administration and student support. If this seems like a lot, it remains true that a good agent costs less than directly employed staff, and delivers more.

Finally, do not expect your agent to be an expert on high-level academic content. While they may give good advice on an appropriate Master's course, they should never be involved in finding a PhD supervisor. Their role with PhD students should only begin once the student knows where they wish to go and who they want to work with.