

Engaging with Education Agents

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Education agents are a significant group in delivering education and services to international students. They are contracted by providers with responsibilities under the ESOS Act to ensure information, advice and professional behaviour meet quality standards. Agents are frequently involved in liaising with parents and providers after a student has commenced study, and in the management of issues and incidents.

Encouraging education agents in their work includes maintaining productive relationships and ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to students. In addition, networks of agents and professional staff working directly with students can provide opportunities for mutual learning and knowledge generation.

One of the Australian Government's Study in Australia 2010 initiatives announced in March 2009 is to deliver sector support by strengthening engagement with education agents through a collaborative project between AEI and Professional International Education Resources (PIER). This involved workshops and focus groups involving around 1075 education agents based in China, India, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in May-June 2009. The project also delivered incentives for agents to undertake the Education Agent Training Course, developed in collaboration with AEI in 2005, and which provides education agents with formal training.

The purpose of the focus group sessions in particular was to consult with education agents, and listen to concerns relating to:

- student experience in Australia including safety and security, accommodation and cost of living issues
- working with Australian education providers, and identifying areas for improvement, and
- developing methods to showcase excellence in Australian education both of individuals and providers.

The presentation will provide an overview and analysis of the data gathered during the focus group sessions. Participants will be invited to provide further input and discuss the data.

Presenter

Paula is the PIER Manager at International Education Services in Brisbane, and has lead the development and delivery of the first accredited vocational courses in international education in Australia.

Paula has a background in education, and has degrees in Arts and Education, including a Master of Education degree, specialising in international education. She has experience in teaching, research, curriculum development, program management, educational administration, staff training and coordinating staff teams.

Paula has been actively involved in professional development for international educators in Australia, in universities and schools, She has delivered workshops and papers at a number of conferences, including the Annual ISANA Conference, New Zealand Association of Private Education Providers, the Australian International Education Conferences, State and National conferences of the National Liaison Committee for International Students, the Association for Independent Schools, Queensland, and the Conference of the European Association for International Education. She is a past National President of ISANA.