

Working together

Agents form an important part of the international recruitment process for independent schools in the UK, and many offer more than just placement services.

Using international agents to enrol students from overseas is a popular method of recruitment for independent schools in the UK, and some find almost all of their international students by using professional agents around the world. "Ninety-five per cent [of our international students] come from this sector," says Chris Cullen, from Trinity School in Devon. "[Agents] know their own market and are immediately available to students or parents on a face-to-face basis."

Mary Hart, from Tasis The American School in England in Surrey, agrees that agents can form an important part of the school's selection process overseas. "The advantage of using a reliable agent is that it is the next best thing to actually opening a recruiting office in a particular country," she says. "It is important to most boarding schools that any new student should be a fit, a match, for their school community and academic curriculum."

For many agents, the high school sector may be a daunting one, particularly when compared with higher education placements. The younger age of the students involved, combined with the fact that independent schools in the UK can be quite small – the average number of pupils per independent school in the UK for 2002 was 393 – means that, for students, fitting in is an all-important factor. As Hart explains, "Recruiting students for boarding schools is not like making a hotel reservation. Many considerations come into play [such as] is there room in the classes the student will need to take, to work towards school requirements? [Does their] 'good citizenship' record match the expectations of the school? And many more."

Gina Hart, from Euro-Internatsberatung Tumulka agency in Germany, is well aware of the importance of "matching" pupils with the right academic environment. "It is important for us to identify schools of a good academic level with a wide range of extra-curricular activities and a healthy ratio of boarders," she says. Hart also adds, "It is well known that the majority of German students add a great deal to a school, both in terms of international outlook and involvement in both academic and extra-curricular activities."

In most cases, the role of agents working within this sector does not end with the successful completion of enrolment papers. "We usually take care of our student as long as he stays at the school," confirms Joe Chang, from New Ivy



PHOTOGRAPH: KENT COLLEGE

Selection of independent schools in the UK

| | Location | Use agents? | No. of students | % of students |
|---|----------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Aldenham School | Hertfordshire | ✓ | 458 | 12 |
| Ashville College | North Yorks | ✓ | 850 | 10 |
| Blundell's School | Devon | ✓ | 555 | 7 |
| Box Hill School | Surrey | ✓ | 340 | 31 |
| Christ College | Powys, Wales | ✓ | 320 | 19 |
| International College, Sherborne School | Dorset | ✓ | 140 | 100 |
| Kent College | Kent | ✓ | 450 | 30 |
| Longridge Towers School | Northumberland | ✓ | 313 | 5 |
| Princethorpe College | Warwickshire | ✓ | 650 | 4 |
| Saint Michael's College | Worcestershire | ✓ | 120 | 100 |
| Tasis The American School in England | Surrey | ✓ | 700 | 11 |
| Trinity School | Devon | ✓ | 500 | 15 |

Overseas Education Centre in Korea, while Hart at Tasis says, "The services of many consultants [while a student is at the school] are invaluable, especially when the client's family does not speak English."

Easing the lines of communication between a student's parents and the school is important, particularly when younger students are away from home for a long period of time. Many agents working in this sector offer services such as translating termly reports for parents and dealing with arrangements for a student's arrival and departure.

Janine Faulkner, from Saint Michael's College in Worcestershire, says that some of their agents have local offices in the UK which means that they can be on hand to help with arrangements for their students. "Some of the agents in the UK actually take the students to their school and pick them up on departure day," she says.

"Others will have a member of staff at the airport who is responsible for making sure that their students are met by a representative from the appropriate school. This also helps on departure day where students meet their agents at the airport to check them in."

Quality credentials

The initial contact between an agent and school can be important in determining any future working relationship. Schools often receive hundreds of requests from potential agent partners and assessing each candidate's suitability is an important task. "We have attended agent recruitment events or we reply to emails or letters requesting information," explains Chris Cullen, from Trinity School in Devon. "We usually check [the agent's] reputation by asking who else they represent, then we phone those schools, or check them out with the British Council."

The issue of ensuring a quality partner is not only confined to schools. Gina Hart, from Euro-Internatsberatung Tumulka agency in Germany, says that they are often approached directly by schools in the UK. "We use tools such as *The Good Schools Guide*, ranking lists, the Internet and articles in the press to identify potential new partner schools," she says.

For Mary Hart from Tasis The American School in England in Surrey, a face-to-face meeting with any new agent-partner is essential. "We would carefully vet [new] agents by arranging to meet them face-to-face on their own territory and making enquiries as to their track record," she says. "Much of the work with agents is based on trust and establishing a personal relationship is a must."