

PACE Inbound Agent Visits **A Guide for Participants**

For many years Education New Zealand (ENZ) organised groups of offshore education agents to visit New Zealand on a regular basis. These visits came under the national marketing programme, known simply as PACE, all participants shared the costs.

The user pays Inbound Agent Visits have been discontinued for PACE 2008. ENZ instead hosts a much reduced number of Agent Visits, which take place as part of generic campaigns undertaken for strategic reasons and follow the model established by the likes of the TIECA (Thai) and KOSA (Korean) Agent Association visits.

Suggestions for a successful institution visit

Background research

When hosting agents to your institution, we recommend trying to strike a balance between promoting your educational offering and research. It is fairly common for hosts to focus primarily on promoting their school and facilities, not spending enough time on asking the agents questions. Don't forget that agents are experts in their markets, they know what students are looking for, they know the local trends, and they often know why some schools are more effective than others in attracting good students. Therefore, it is recommended that institutions carry out some background research into the agents and their market prior to the visit. Reading thoroughly the comprehensive information found in the 'Nominated Agents Report' and 'Market Report' and 'Itinerary' that ENZ sends to all participants prior to the visit would be a good start. Further research could involve creating a summary of the institution's activity and results in the market. Agents will be interested in how many students have been received from the market in question over the past few years, whether those students were successful, and perhaps an indication of active marketing undertaken recently.

Checking the itinerary sounds obvious, but adding in questions like 'how did you enjoy your flight to Queenstown on Monday?' shows that you know what they've been up to and have taken an interest. Avoid asking questions like 'so, where have you been so far?' as these have the opposite effect. Knowing how far through the itinerary the agents are will also indicate how many similar schools they may or may not have already seen.

Asking questions involves the agents in the discussion and allows for very productive two way dialogue.

Possible questions you might consider are:

1. Do agents have a preferred number of their nationality students at one school? If so, what is this based on?
2. What are the current trends in market? Which countries are currently popular for offshore education? Why? Is there a general feeling of buoyancy with the economy?
3. What type of institutions do their students prefer? Sector/region/co-ed/single sex
4. Are there any market specific accommodation preferences that agents are aware of?

5. Are the agents noticing any extra-curricular activities that are currently popular?
6. What type of courses are attractive to the students they tend to meet?
7. What could a New Zealand institution do better to market/promote themselves? (e.g. emailing regular school newsletters/attending fairs/visiting agents). If planning a marketing trip, agents could advise the best time of year to travel.
8. What type of promotional collateral items (e.g. brochures/posters etc) do the agents prefer?
9. Do the students returning to their home country seem to have achieved the educational outcomes for their ongoing study/career?
10. Why do students choose NZ and do they seem to meet their expectations?

Introductions

One very important part of a visit that is sometimes overlooked is the initial introductions. Introductions should ideally be friendly and semi-formal, with the exchanging of business cards occurring at this time. In Asian cultures particularly it is important to respect business cards, hand them over with two hands, don't write on them, and make a comment on the card when receiving if possible. Please avoid sliding business cards down the length of the table if you are not sitting near the agent, it is better to get up and walk around. During the meeting, keep the cards out on the table in front of you, best not to stack them in a pile.

The group should be made to feel welcome and important; sometimes a meeting with the principal may be appropriate on arrival during the introductions. Some institutions are able to add to their school sign or staff room notice board that agents are visiting, this is always noticed and appreciated, it makes the agents feel like VIPs.

Time management

If institutions manage their allocated time effectively and don't try to squeeze too much in, it can make for a relaxed, informal and enjoyable visit. It is best to avoid planning time with the agents down to the last minute as it is easy to overlook or miscalculate the additional time it takes to have toilet breaks, morning teas, time spent speaking with students, taking photos, getting back to the car, saying goodbye etc. The ENZ staff member responsible for the visit is happy to be contacted for advice in planning the time slot for best results.

Student participation

Bringing students along to speak with agents in their native language, and allowing enough time for good discussion to occur is always popular with agents. This can be combined with a morning tea, walk around the school or whatever the school has planned to use time effectively. (Please choose the most positive, chatty students if possible).

Points of difference

Rather than showing the agents every classroom on campus, just show the areas that makes the institution unique; promote your strengths and any special features – for example a new music suite, or a drama performance, a new gym complex, etc. Avoid asking the agents on the spot what they would like to see. Agents feel like the visit is more professional if the institution has an itinerary planned, with room for flexibility if required.

Interaction with students in class

Another good way to differentiate is to take the agents into one or two classrooms during class time, to show how the teacher and students interact. This can be much more valuable to the agents than showing them through classrooms in every department, as they all tend to look similar by the end of the visit.

Gifts

Gifts are always popular with agents – nothing extravagant, institution pens, badges, posters or CDs are good mementoes of their time with you, and will fit easily into their suitcases.

Meals

If time and institution budget permits, an excellent way to extend networking time with the agents is to host an informal meal. It doesn't need to be expensive; fish and chips on the beach or a casual pot luck meal at someone's home is just what the agents appreciate during up to 10 days of eating out every night!

If possible, it works well to have a meal the night before the visit, to enable the representatives time for an informal chat about their institution with the agents. This way when the group meets at the institution the following day, they are already familiar with the representatives and pleased to see for themselves what they've been discussing the previous evening.

Another point to keep in mind if you are considering hosting a dinner is to begin early. Although agents are appreciative of being hosted for dinner, the one complaint that continually arises is that dinners go on too late, making them tired for the appointments the following day. A good time to start dinner is 6-6.30pm, as then the agents can be back at the hotel by 10pm and get a good nights' sleep for the following day's programme.

Name tags

If more than 3 staff members involved, consider wearing name tags. This assists the agents and may help eliminate an awkward moment of forgetting names.

Photos

Taking a photo during the visit to remember the group is a good way to record them, and put faces to business cards should you meet again in the future. Most agent groups love having photos taken and will be happy to oblige.

Follow up

Follow up with agents directly and soon after; a chatty email and adding them to your agent database are good starting points. If budget allows, follow up by visiting them in their offices within a year.

ENZ staff are always happy to assist with the planning of these visits. Please don't hesitate to contact any member of the marketing team for advice and suggestions, we are here to help.

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