Vietnam: Influencing Education Agents to Shape HE Recruitment

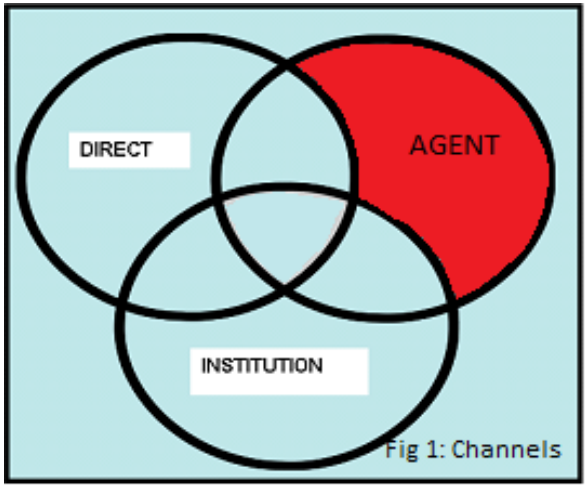
Sarah Caine – International Recruitment Manager, Asia
Richard Hucker - Masters Programmes Leader

Background to Study

- Creation of a market entry strategy for the University of Derby
- Lack of published information regarding Vietnam as a recruitment market
- Reliance on agents within Asia and Vietnam – need for an agent Management strategy

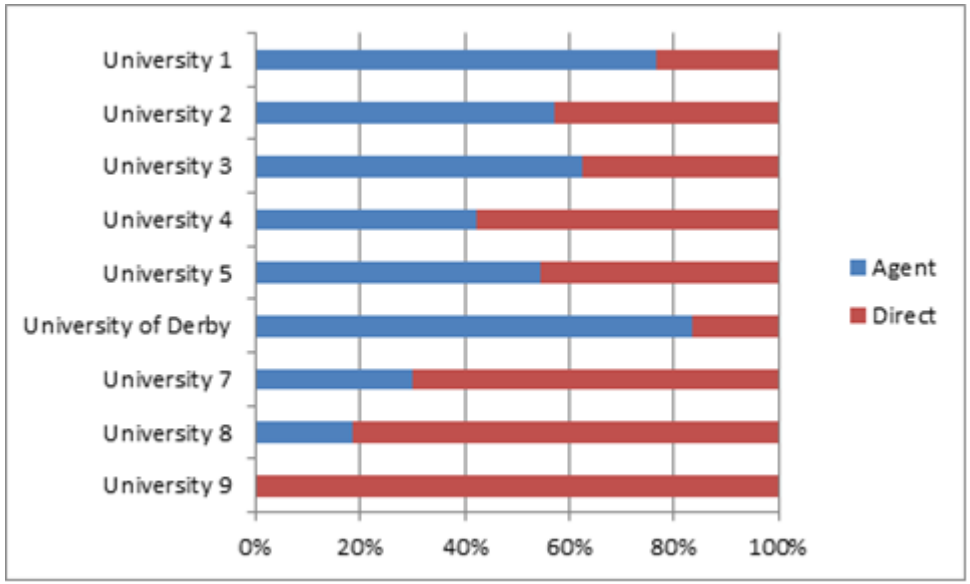
Vietnam

- Unsophisticated market; 1st generation of students studying abroad
- Price Sensitive
- Poor Quality Education System
- Channels to market



Agent Penetration in Vietnam

- Importance of agents as a channel



- Myriad of small agents with imperfect knowledge

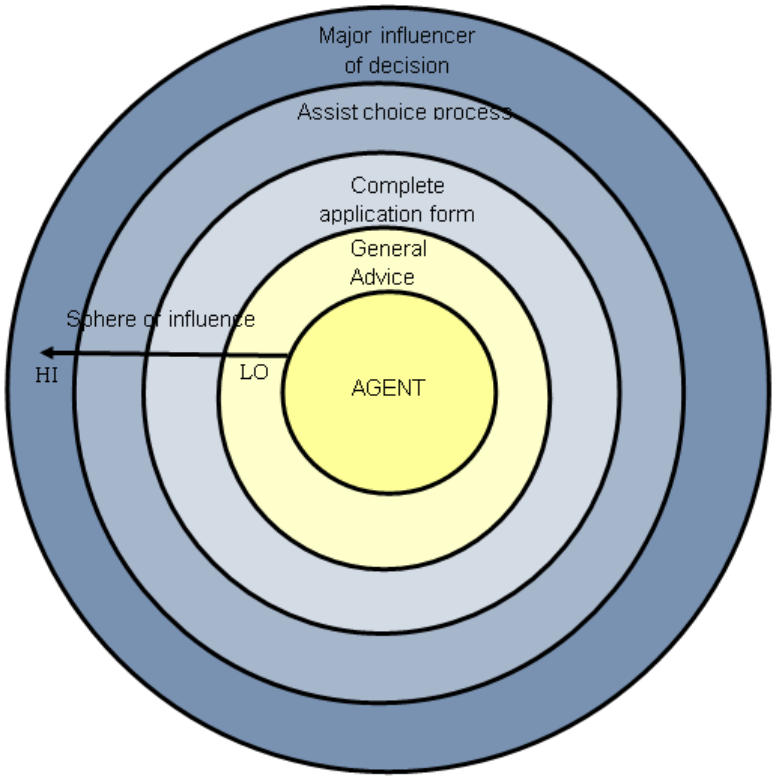
Methodology of Study

- Participants
  - Counsellors in HCMC and Hanoi
  - Students studying at the University of Derby
- Research Design
  - Counsellors in HCMC and Hanoi – interviews
  - Students – Focus groups
- Data Analysis
  - Content management

Findings - Students

- Students
  - Agents influence varied but all students consulted
  - Many relied on agents for specific information and ‘trusted’ the agent
    - *“Sometimes we get too much information from the University. Many people contact us and say the same thing. I like my agent to tell me.”*
  - Limited Influence of family and friends
    - *‘….my family have not been abroad so did not advise…’*
    - *‘my friends said x was good, but my agent said try Derby…’*
  - Decision on where to study made after application submission
    - *“I applied to 2 universities. I made my decision after I had offers. We decided to go as a group and I liked the course at derby. I was the person in charge of the group.”*

Findings – Influence of Agents



- *"… we say other university is no good. The University we use is better."*
- *"…. Students will normally go where we suggest. They trust me to help. They think I am like a teacher and very respected."*

Findings – Motivating Factors

- Speed and accuracy of offer turnaround
  - *"…. Quick offer is only one element".*
  - Seen as important but not the deciding factor
- Flexibility of course offer
  - Most counsellors saw this as a strong influencer
  - Particularly important in HCMC
- Speed of Commission
  - Few counsellors knew of the commission rates or payment of these
- Information and prospectus from the University
  - Seen as very important
- Query Handling
  - Speed of response came out very strong
- Fair Support, spot offers and interviews
  - Visits to agents seen as key, if a university does not visit unlikely to get students

Findings

- Other motivating factors
  - Vietnamese Society
    - *Some universities Sunderland and Northumbria have a strong Vietnamese community and marketing."*
    - *"some student want many Vietnam students"*
    - *"Vietnamese are too scared if no other Vietnam students"*
    - *"Student think if no Vietnamese students then it is not good course"*
  - Financial incentives
    - *" many times a student want top ranking university but I suggest other university that is more flexible and cheap for them"*
    - *"The most important - guaranteed scholarship – I am more likely to recommend a university that gives all Vietnamese students a scholarship. Vietnamese students care about money."*
    - *"Some students are excellent academically, but they do not have the fees. They prefer low reputation with reasonable fees, rather than high rep and high fees"*
    - *"Scholarship- automatic is the best. If affordable fees they don't care about scholarship, but if expensive they care very much"*

Strategic implications

- Study suggests that agents do influence students to some degree
- Role of agents – have agents become the customer?
- Unsophisticated market – role of trust
- Agent Management and Communications Strategy
- Commission/ incentives
- Scholarships
- Utilising existing students and alumni
- Investment in a Vietnamese Society

Questions?