

THE AUSTRALIAN

UK firm Quacquarelli Symonds Consulting tackles recruitment

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THE AUSTRALIAN

12:00AM JUNE 15, 2011

LONDON-BASED education company Quacquarelli Symonds Consulting, known for its university rankings, has moved into the student recruitment business.

John Molony, QS vice-president, strategic planning and marketing, said it was a logical step for the company to advise students on overseas course offerings. It would offer student counselling, either itself or through agent-partners.

US-based company Hobsons had recently abandoned a similar go-between recruitment model in the US, citing it as unviable.

"As a privately held company with over 20 years' experience in the international higher education domain, QS is able to take a longer-term view of opportunities such as this," Mr Moloney said.

QS signed its first agency, the Indian-based Global Reach, in May but despite talks with several agents in China had yet to find the right "trusted partner" for that market, he said.

Tony Pollock, chief executive of recruiter IDP, downplayed QS as a competitor. "I don't see it as a major threat. I see it as another competitor entering the scene, but the agency scene is incredibly crowded," Mr Pollock said, adding that he saw some logic in the move by QS but was unsure it would work.

"They have a web presence that enables them to identify prospects - they're essentially a

prospect-identification type of organisation - so it makes some sense try to extend themselves into the agency model. I'm not quite sure whether it will be successful because I can't quite see how it will add value to the transaction."

Mr Pollock said it sounded similar to the recently closed Hobsons' model, which tried to leverage existing clients by introducing them to an agency structure overseas, through third-party agents.

"Just why an agent would find that an attractive model I'm not sure because they can deal directly with institutions," Mr Pollock said.

Hobsons blamed the closure of its go-between recruitment business partly on the view of some US colleges that paying commissions to agents was unethical.

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David Harrington, Asia-Pacific managing director for the company, said "the US process is far from transparent".

"It's cumbersome, time-consuming and risky for a student. You can easily make a mistake which can put you back 12 months."