

# UK Agent Quality Framework (AQF) pledge

*“The AQF is a collaborative, sector-wide initiative, delivering the tools that both students, agents and universities need to ensure that the standards associated with UK higher education are maintained and protected.” – Catriona McCarthy, Chair for BUILA*

The UK Agent Quality Framework, or AQF, was launched in 2023 at the British Universities’ International Liaison Association (BUILA) conference and represents a collaborative community of institutional, education advisors and government stakeholders with a shared commitment to a standard charter.

Numerous UK universities and education providers, including Royal Holloway, have since signed this pledge making a commitment to working together, ensuring a positive and proactive approach in supporting and managing informed relationships with our global recruitment partners and are advising and informing applicants in an ethical way.

**As part of the AQF pledge, Royal Holloway expects all recruitment partners to do the following:**

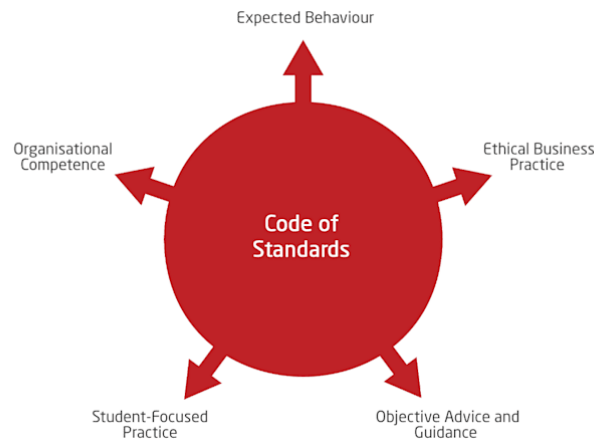
- Host the Student Guide to Choosing an Education Agent on their website
- Proactively send a copy of the Student Guide to all students who engage with the agency’s services
- Sign up and partake in the British Council’s UK education agent and counsellor training. Provide proof of completion for all student-facing staff.
- Provide and deliver a quality student experience

**For recruitment partners that work with sub-agents, Royal Holloway expects these recruitment partners to do the following in addition to the list above:**

- Be transparent around the use of sub-agents
- Train sub-agents in accordance with the National Code of Ethical Practice, holding them accountable to deliver a quality student experience

As part of Royal Holloway's pledge, we are committed to ensuring our own sales practice, counselling, and management and training of our recruitment partners and their respective advisors are operating in line with the National Code of Ethics.

The National Code is based on the underlying ethical framework and requires Royal Holloway's recruitment staff and our global recruitment partners (including sub-agents) to operate in line with the Code of Standards:



## **What this means:**

### **Expected Behaviour**

You conduct yourselves with due regard to the regulatory conditions in the market(s) in which you operate as well as complying with all applicable national laws, regulations, and official policies. Furthermore, you act with integrity and in a manner that reflects positively on the image of the profession, of your partner providers and of the UK education sector as a reliable and trustworthy provider of high-quality education and training.

### **Ethical Business Practice**

You promote yourselves and your partner providers fairly and without recourse to unfavourable or negative comparisons with other providers, or otherwise employ unfair or unprofessional practice to damage the interests of other providers. You are honest in communicating information about yourselves, your partner providers, and your students in published, oral or in any other form.

### **Objective Advice and Guidance**

You should endeavour to provide accurate advice and guidance tailored to the students' needs, wants, and capabilities. You shall not knowingly or by a failure of professional standards provide or disseminate false, incomplete, or misleading information.

### **Student-Focused Practice**

You act in the best interests of students as well as the partner providers and offer advice, counselling, and information to students, and where appropriate their parents, in a manner consistent with this Code.

### **Organisational Competence**

Our staff and student advisors at our recruitment partners maintain a good understanding of the UK and of our education partner providers, and the skills associated with delivering professional practice with a high degree of competence.

Below is a list of resources and collateral to support recruitment partners in operating in line with the AQF and Royal Holloway's expectations:

Tool	Description	Where to Find
National Code of Ethics Document	National Code of Ethics document outlines ethical guidelines for student counsellors	<a href="#">Link</a>
British Council Education Agent and Counsellor Training Programme	Free certification programme providing training for anyone who counsels students to study abroad in the UK Royal Holloway highly encourages all recruitment partners, including their sub-agents to complete this programme and show proof of certification to students, parents, and educational providers	<a href="#">Link</a>
Website and Promotional Materials Implementing Key Elements of The Good Practice Guide for UK Education Agents Partnering for Quality	This guide provides recruitment partners with the following: An education recruitment partner quality assurance framework including the Education Agent Good Practice Guide A review of the National Code of Ethical Practice for UK Education Agents Promotion of the British Council's UK Agent and Counsellor Training which includes a certificate of completion and ability to publish your name on a public-facing database An overview of <a href="#">The Good Practice Guide for Providers Using Education Agents</a> , providing guidance and standards in recruitment partner management across the UK international education sector	<a href="#">Link</a>

<p>Use and Promotion of “A Student Guide to Choosing an Education Agent”</p>	<p>A guide supporting students with the information needed and the questions they should ask, when choosing an education agent. This should be proactively shared with prospective and current students who are using an agency’s services. This includes sub-agencies.</p>	<p><a href="#">Link</a></p>
<p>Membership in Professional Associations and Networks Promoting Best Practices in International Student Recruitment</p>	<p>Affiliation with associations and networks advocating for best practices in student recruitment. (i.e., BUILA)</p>	<p>Professional association websites which may include a few of the below examples:  <a href="#">BUILA (British Universities’ International Liaison Association)</a>  <a href="#">British Council</a>  <a href="#">NAFSA (Association of International Educators)</a>  <a href="#">OACAC (Overseas Association for College Admission Counseling)</a>  <a href="#">ICEF (International Consultants for Education and Fairs)</a></p>
<p>Consumer Rights for Undergraduate Students</p>	<p>Government guide outlining consumer rights for undergraduate students</p>	<p><a href="#">Link</a></p>

Lastly, Royal Holloway expects all recruitment partners to have the following:

Resource, Policy, or Process	Description & Expectations
Protocol/Policy Documents for Managing Third Parties with Demonstrable Auditing Trail	Royal Holloway's recruitment partners should have documents outlining protocols and policies for managing third-party relationships with audit trail evidence of compliance Management of sub-agents in accordance with National Code
Including Ethical Sales and Counselling Practices in Company's Staff Handbook	Practices should be created in-house and aligned with the company's values.
Appropriate Governance and Document Management Processes/Policies	Policies and procedures ensuring proper governance and document management.
Signed Written/Digital Agreements Between Agents and Students	Agreements between agents and students containing information about fees, agency business, and a clear complaints process.
Education Agent's/Aggregator Agent's In-house Training Records	Records demonstrating staff and service delivery partners' participation in continuing professional development activities. Preference for sub-agent counsellors to complete the British Council's Education Agent and Counsellor Training Programme It is the responsibility of the agent to manage all sub-agents' counsellor expertise levels