

28TH ANNUAL EAIE CONFERENCE

EAIE | 13-16 SEPTEMBER
2016 | LIVERPOOL

IMAGINE...

SESSION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bureaucracy vs. Adhocracy: problem solving with international students

Chair:

Laura Ripoll, Universitat de Girona, Oficina Relacions Exteriors, Spain

Speakers:

Josef Leidenfrost, Austrian Student Ombudsman, Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman, Austria

Maximilian Schachner, Head of Academic Mobility Programmes, IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems, Austria

Josef Vochozka, Head of International Office, Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic

Overview

With steadily increasing mobility numbers, the problems and concerns of international students are becoming more and more diverse. Due to cultural differences and other factors, administrators aren't always equipped to handle issues with the standard rulebook, even with declarations like the [EAIE International Student Mobility Charter](#). In many cases, *ad hoc* solutions or 'ad hococracies' help administrators and ombudsmen find flexible solutions quickly. Some institutions are having success with strategies that blend bureaucratic and adhocratic tools and programmes.

Context

Josef Leidenfrost, Maximilian Schachner, and Josef Vochozka discussed the challenges that international students face. They described how *ad hoc* and bureaucratic solutions can help solve these issues.

Key takeaways

Ombudsmen address a range of issues documented in the International Student Mobility Charter, but bureaucratic means are not always sufficient.

As higher education institutions grapple with budget cuts, they often target recruitment efforts at fee-paying international students. However, they may not always have the best interests of the students in mind. Protecting students during their time abroad should be a priority.

The EAIE has recognised this need and is part of a working group of international higher education associations. This group has developed a charter advocating international students' rights called the International Student Mobility Charter.

Ombudsmen deal with many of the issues covered in the charter, including:

- **Information.** This usually relates to finding the right institution to host students. Problems often arise because websites and online videos portray

Key takeaways

perfect on-campus environments, but the reality may be different.

- **Visas and formal requirements.** These issues often arise before departure. In some countries, agencies process student visas by the hundreds and don't follow a legitimate process.
- **Student status.** This is a concern both pre- and post-arrival. Using official procedures to screen student documents before departure is a best practice.
- **Integration of international students.** During their stay abroad, do students feel integrated with the host institution, but still feel connected to their home institutions? Special services like buddy systems can help.
- **Student rights support.** Establishing a formal contract between students and institutions is often helpful.

For many ombudsmen, adhocracies are easier to work in than bureaucracies.

Bureaucracies are administrative systems designed to maintain order, maximise efficiency, and eliminate favouritism. Some view bureaucracies unfavourably. For example, sociologist Max Weber described a bureaucracy as any administrative system governing any (large) institution, being (too) complex, inefficient, inflexible, dehumanising, a threat to individual freedom, trapping individuals in an impersonal 'iron cage' of rule-based, rational control.

Adhocracy is the opposite of bureaucracy. It is a flexible, adaptable, and informal form of organisation without formal structures. Adhocracies are characterised by adaptive, creative, and flexible integrative behaviours based on non-permanence and spontaneity. They allow organisations to respond faster than

Key takeaways

traditional bureaucracies and are more open to new ideas.

Adhocracies are appealing to ombudsmen for several reasons:

- Ombudsmen typically must deal with short response times.
- Ombudsmen are situated outside of hierarchies.
- Ombudsmen regularly look for alternative solutions that exist outside formal regulations.
- Ombudsmen seek flexible solutions.

Three case studies highlight some of the challenges faced by ombudsmen that cannot be resolved within the context of existing bureaucracies:

- **Case Study 1.** An international student applied and was accepted to study at a given higher education institution. After arriving and signing the contract of traineeship, the institution requested a standard test before extending the contract. Simultaneously, the visa authorities requested academic achievements before extending the student's visa. To resolve the deadlock, the student was asked to return to his home country to take the standard test. No solution was found. The student didn't pass the test and didn't return to the host institution. His study fees were transferred back to his home country.
- **Case Study 2.** A student got a scholarship for an internship abroad and all the necessary contracts were signed. When the issue of housing came up, the potential hosting institution told the student that it wasn't possible to get appropriate housing due to the student's self-declared, 'non-binary' gender status. Several authorities from the student's home country contacted the host institution and the issue was resolved.

Key takeaways

- **Case Study 3.** An exchange student returned from a study abroad period to his home institution. He did not receive full recognition for the study abroad academic achievements. The dean of studies refused to help and the vice rector couldn't issue a mandate to the dean. The student contacted the student ombudsman and threatened to inform the media. A solution was found and the student received full credit.

The European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE) offers support, networking opportunities, and advocacy to university ombudsmen.

The first university ombudsman worldwide was appointed in 1965 at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Today, several institutions have ombudsmen for international students. In addition, some countries have appointed ombudsmen at the national government level, eg Austria and Australia.

To support the growing network of ombudsmen in the European Union, the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education was formed. This organisation offers resources, sponsors events, and supports joint EU-funded projects. It is also involved in advocacy. Last year, ENOHE worked on the *Innsbruck Descriptors*, which outline benchmarking tools for ombudsmen.

Internationalisation strategy at universities can be made up of a blend between bureaucracy and adhocery.

The University of Applied Sciences Krems' internationalisation strategy includes Erasmus as a core element, as well as mobility, mandatory internships, and benchmarks. To support the strategy, the university has developed several tools:

Key takeaways

- **Know the World Database.** This provides information on institutions and destinations, as well as student peer reports.
- **Feel and Taste the World Programme.** These 'live' encounters include trade show visits, an exchange student fair and video session via Skype, a buddy system, and social media activity.
- **Skills Portfolios.** The University of Applied Sciences Krems tries to match the personal potential of students with the institutional profile.

The university regularly evaluates quality assurance through internal and external audits, quantitative and qualitative indicators like KPIs and SMART goals, and international accreditations. While well-defined, 'bureaucratic' tools and evaluations are essential to the success of the internationalisation strategy, the university recognises the importance of ad hoc risk management situations. For example, the institution had to respond rapidly – and in an *ad hoc* manner – during the New Delhi bombings in November 2008 and dormitory flooding in Bangkok.

Universities can develop targeted support programmes to address bureaucratic challenges faced by international and exchange students.

The Metropolitan University Prague (MUP) offers several Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral study programmes in English. Other programmes are offered only in Czech. International students at MUP face various obstacles:

- **State bureaucracy.** This is an issue primarily for home students. Common challenges include visa policy rules, police registration after coming to Prague, state rules for recognition of previous study abroad, and problems with nomination of foreigners for Erasmus study abroad.

Key takeaways

- **EU bureaucracy.** This is a hurdle for Erasmus exchange students. Common challenges include learning agreements, contracts for study abroad, language tests before and after mobility and local language tests before nomination, final report and local final reports, transcript of records, and confirmation of study period abroad.
- **University bureaucracy.** This is a problem for both home and host students. Common challenges include formalities for entrance exams, the local selection process and nomination of exchange students, the online exam system, additional information and application through the online system, and limited staff to support foreign and exchange students.

To address these issues, MUP has developed several support systems for international and exchange students. These include:

- **On-campus support programmes.** The study department explains to new home and exchange students how the university study system is organised. Accommodation support is also provided.
- **Assistance with government requirements.** To help with visa procedures, the university helps students communicate with embassies. University staff also help students with police registration.
- **Language, culture, and orientation programmes.** MUP holds welcome days for new foreign students, offers local language courses free of charge, and sponsors common cultural and sport events. The international office has language-qualified staff to assist students. Buddy team support is also offered.