

FORUM

Discussing international education

ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

NEO-RACISM AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS 13

LAYERS OF DEFENCE: AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO
DETECTING FRAUD IN YOUR INSTITUTION 28

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“The total amount of money spent on international education-related fraud ranges from US\$ 2 billion to 2.5 billion annually”

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“The job market is moving so fast and universities and schools are lagging behind”

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF MICROSOFT EUROPE, JAN MUEHLFEIT



Editorial



At some point during my formative years, I somewhere came across the notion (roughly paraphrased here) that ‘manners are the behaviours we put on display when in the company of others; ethics provide the framework to guide our actions when no one is looking’. This subtle yet important distinction has stayed with me over time, particularly as my professional roles and responsibilities have become more complex and multifaceted.

Exploring the development of a purposeful sense of who I am, what I stand for, and how I can best manage to move through the world in ways that are fair and beneficial to myself and others, has provided me with an ongoing opportunity to attempt to square the work that I do with the person I am. And, despite its inevitable limitations and blind spots, my own ethical framework provides me with a meaningful foundation for making decisions and, if necessary, grounds for defending these actions as being ‘right’ for me.

These matters can be complicated enough for individuals to navigate. But how do such questions of ‘right and wrong’, along with the myriad shades of grey in-between, play out beyond the level of individuals? What do notions of ‘ethics’ mean for institutions? In what ways and to what extent do values shape the internationalisation landscape – and

to what extent should they? And – in the field of international education, which brings together stakeholders from many different cultural contexts – how, in both theoretical and practical terms, do commitments to particular principles translate across cultures?

This issue of *Forum* is dedicated largely to an examination of these important considerations, from a variety of perspectives. For example, given that student mobility remains a bedrock activity in the field, it is crucial to continue casting a critical eye on the ways that work in this area unfolds, and what ‘ethics’ means in the context of mobility. To this end, several of our contributions in this issue urge us to think more deeply about the student recruitment process as well the academic and personal experiences of internationally mobile students. We are encouraged to consider, clearly and honestly, the ways in which notions of fraud, plagiarism, commercialisation (via the use of agents), and even neo-racism may play out in the mobility cycle, with profound implications for all involved.

Mobility is clearly not the only axis on which ethical considerations turn. The wider constellation of relationships and activities in which higher education institutions may engage internationally also presents important opportunities to examine the ways, and the extent to which, values guide actions. At stake here

are such ‘bigger picture’ questions as how we may understand a shared commitment to academic freedom, what constitutes ethical partnerships, and how we may support and participate in the elaboration of broader conceptions of ethics in internationalisation – regionally, globally, and across many different types of institutions.

As always, of course, questions of reaching out to others in a meaningful way seem to hinge on a crucial first step of authentic commitment to addressing our own challenges and shortcomings (ethical or otherwise). For institutions, this means casting a critical eye internally – for example, in terms of how we educate our students around ‘ethical reasoning’ and the extent to which our own institutional governance is effective, transparent, and corruption-free. Several of our authors provide insight in these vital areas, as well.

Along with our report from the 2014 Annual Conference in Prague, we hope this issue of *Forum* will provide rich food for thought about some of the many and complex aspects of ‘ethics’ in international higher education – a topic of concern to us all.

—*Laura Rumbley*, Editor
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Contributors



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Jude Carroll holds a UK Higher Education Fellowship for her work in deterring plagiarism and promoting effective teaching practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students. She is the author of *Tools for Teaching in an Educationally Mobile World* (Routledge 2015).



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Lori Pyle serves as Associate Chair of a campus-wide initiative at James Madison University in the USA that teaches ethical reasoning skills to administrators, faculty, staff, and students. She received her doctorate in leadership studies with a concentration in post-secondary education.




 **Sinead O'Gorman**


Sinead O'Gorman is European Director at Scholars at Risk, an international network of over 350 higher education institutions in 36 countries dedicated to protecting threatened scholars, preventing attacks on higher education and promoting academic freedom.


 **Daniel Guhr** and  **Nelson Furtado** have researched and reported on fraudulent behaviour in international education on behalf of governments, associations, and educational institutions. Their focus is placed on developing analytical models aimed at detecting fraud, as well as designing process improvements and proactive policies to combat fraud.

 **Jacqueline Kassteen** is the Director of ICEF Monitor, an online resource offering news, market intelligence, research, best practice tips, and trends, all with a firm focus on international student recruitment. She has lived in eight countries and has over 15 years of marketing experience in the international education and student travel industries, as well as in publishing, lead generation, retail, and financial services.

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 **Eva Egron-Polak** has, in the past few years, coordinated an international reflection on ethics in higher education and on the need to refocus on values in internationalisation of higher education at the International Association of Universities (IAU). These exercises have increased Eva's expertise by sharing viewpoints with like-minded colleagues from around the world.

 **Marcus Tannenberg, Bo Rothstein** and **Lennart Levi** Marcus Tannenberg is working on implementing the Poznan Declaration in cooperation with the two other authors: corruption expert, Professor in Political Science and Head of the Quality of Government Institute, Bo Rothstein, and health policy expert and Emeritus Professor of Psychosocial Medicine, Lennart Levi.



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THE ETHICAL AGENT



As more and more countries race to develop their knowledge economies, internationalise their education sectors, and encourage their young citizens to study abroad, the role of international education agents in recruiting has never been more important... or scrutinised.

JACQUELINE KASSTEEN
ICEF Monitor

Central to the issue of how to work with international agents – or any partners, for that matter – are issues of ethics and professionalism. Those concerned with the sustainable and responsible growth of international education within a country need to ensure two things: firstly, that foreign students entering their country are coming as genuine students and are adequately qualified for the courses or programmes they enrol in, and secondly, all parties – institutions and agents alike – put students’ needs first and foremost.

GLOBAL USE OF AGENTS

The reality is that agents have a legitimate role to play in international recruitment: the best of them offer real value to students and institutions alike. Growing numbers of international students everywhere are relying on agents to help them with their study abroad ambitions.

For students and their parents, agents are important local advisers who provide support for the complex decisions and processes associated with study abroad in their native language. For institutions, agents represent a cost-effective way to recruit internationally and to establish a

FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS, AGENTS ARE IMPORTANT LOCAL ADVISERS

local presence in markets abroad. In many cases, they are also an important extension of institutional support services for prospective and incoming students.

A new study from the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE), ‘The agent question: insights from students, universities and agents’¹ found that

the percentage of students recruited via agents varied greatly by destination markets, for example: Malaysia (56%), Australia (53%), New Zealand (47%), Canada (41%), the UK (38%), the Netherlands (20%), the US (11%). (See further findings from the report on pages 22–23.)

Another study ‘The Role of Education Agents in Canada’s Education Systems’² from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, reported that 78% of institutions use agents. A full 90% reported that they are confident that agents provide accurate information to students, and 85% said they are confident that agents adhere to laws and policies.

AGENTS HAVE A LEGITIMATE ROLE TO PLAY IN INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT

GOVERNMENTS BEEFING UP REGULATIONS

Given the growing usage of agents in international education, national governments and institutions are beginning to respond by putting related policies and quality controls in place, but government and university policies with respect to agents are variable from country to country.

Australia has embraced working with student recruitment agencies for many years, and has well established training and guidelines for agent behaviour. However, its government, and that of the UK, is also putting more pressure on institutions when it comes to visa and immigration issues. The former assigning ‘risk ratings’³ to universities based on visa denials or incidences of fraud, and the latter lowering the threshold of visa refusals from 20% to

10%⁴ for ‘highly trusted sponsor’ institutions eligible to host foreign students applying for student visas.

Thus, professionalism, trust, open and honest relationships between agents and institutional partners are becoming more critical – universities are more reliant than ever on their agent partners to help judge the suitability and *bona fides* of prospective students.

AGENTS IN CANADA AND THE USA

Meanwhile in Canada, the government introduced changes in August of 2012 to its Bill C-35 legislation⁵ on educational agents in order to reduce fraud. It is now illegal for anyone other than an accredited immigration representative to provide advice or otherwise represent a client during an application or proceeding with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This now applies to both agents operating in Canada and those based outside the country.

UNIVERSITIES ARE MORE RELIANT THAN EVER ON THEIR AGENT PARTNERS TO HELP JUDGE THE SUITABILITY AND BONA FIDES OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

In Canada, there is no regulatory framework regarding the use of agents and neither the federal nor provincial/territorial governments accredit agents. The exception is the Province of Manitoba, whose stance on education agents is much closer to Australia’s, where the ‘Education Services for Overseas Students Act’ and complementary agent training and registration systems combine for one of the world’s most comprehensive regulatory frameworks.

In the USA, where there is no strong regulatory framework regarding the use

of agents, and where using agents in international recruitment has been less widespread than in other markets, opinion is more divided. This past decade has seen an expansion of active international recruitment efforts on the part of a wider field of US institutions, and a corresponding increase in the use of education agents by some universities and colleges. This triggered a growing debate within the National Association for College Admissions Counselling (NACAC) about a standing prohibition in the ‘Statement of Principles of Good Practice’ (SPGP), a document that effectively codifies the ethics and standards of conduct for the association.

In September 2014, NACAC modified the SPGP⁶ to specify that “members will not employ agents who are compensated on a per capita basis when recruiting students outside the United States, unless they ensure they and their agents conduct themselves with accountability,

transparency and integrity.” They have also recently released a new resource entitled ‘International Student Recruitment Agencies: A Guide for Schools, Colleges and Universities’ to help US universities engage effectively and ethically with international agents.

As these examples illustrate, governments, institutions, and industry associations all have a role to play in establishing and advancing best practices. All stakeholders have a natural interest in constructive, collaborative approaches to engaging with quality agents that

strengthen both the recruitment capacity of institutions as well as the quality of service for students.

AGENT RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION

Just as the expansion of the international education marketplace has encouraged growth in the numbers of education agents operating today, it has also necessitated mechanisms for assessing and encouraging the ethics and performance of those agents.

As always happens in any booming economic sector, the burgeoning international education sector has attracted poor as well as outstanding agencies – and, like all bad news stories, any cases of questionable conduct on the part of agents tends to capture a lot of attention. Here are some of the unsavoury agent practices that have been reported:

- Not disclosing that they’re working on commission
- Steering students to institutions that pay the most commission
- Misrepresenting an institution’s programmes of study, the credential conferred, and the portability of the credential
- Colluding with students in misusing the visa process

All of these practices are of course egregious, but they are also rare and increasingly avoidable thanks to the quality assurance mechanisms now available to institutions in leading study abroad markets around the world.

Moreover, in many countries, agencies have taken the step of self-regulation by forming national as well as regional agent associations adhering to ethical codes of business conduct and standards.

Finally, there are ways in which the marketplace naturally encourages good practices among international education agents. Unethical agents not only face stricter consequences in many countries for poor service or for breaching codes of professional conduct, they operate in an

Increasingly, professional development and/or certification courses also play an important part in reinforcing or establishing an agency's credibility in the marketplace, and illustrate the growing field of professional development options available to international education agents.

doing, to improve both the recruitment capacity of institutions as well as the quality of service for international students. **E**

IN MANY COUNTRIES, AGENCIES HAVE TAKEN THE STEP OF SELF-REGULATION BY FORMING NATIONAL AS WELL AS REGIONAL AGENT ASSOCIATIONS

environment in which word-of-mouth about sub-par agencies travels extremely fast, both among institutions and students.

FINDING QUALITY AGENTS

The most serious and successful international agents working today are well aware of the need to distinguish themselves as reliable, effective, and student-focused professionals in their sector, and there is now an increasing range of ways through which agents demonstrate their credentials and professionalism.

At one end of the scale are codes of conduct or standards of practice established by industry associations such as the Federation of Education and Language Consultant Associations (FELCA), or even governments as in the case of the London Statement,⁷ created by officials from the UK, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. This joint statement of principles for ethical international student recruitment stresses professionalism and responsible business ethics.

At the other end of the continuum are robust accreditation or certification schemes, such as the process established by the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC).

Some of the more established or successful training courses include: the ICEF Agent Training Course (IATC), the Australian Education Agent Training Course (EATC), the Canada Course for Education Agents (CCEA), the New Zealand Specialist Agent Accreditation (NZSA), and the British Council's Foundation and Advanced Certifications for Agents.

BEST PRACTICES WILL REIGN

ICEF Monitor has published extensively on the topic of best practices for schools as well as agents in international student recruitment, such as carefully screening prospective agents prior to signing contracts, sharing marketing and recruitment plans, defining roles and responsibilities of each party upfront, setting key performance indicators, creating training materials and agent manuals, providing marketing assistance, and opening up paths of frequent communication.

As the global recruitment industry becomes increasingly competitive, agents will continue to play an integral role in any international strategy. The real opportunity here is to find more constructive, collaborative approaches to engaging with quality agents and partners and, in so

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1. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/09/the-agent-question-new-data-has-the-answer>
 2. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/06/study-provides-new-insights-on-the-role-of-agents-in-canadian-education>
 3. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2012/12/the-changing-face-of-agency-engagement-with-australia>
 4. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/08/uk-introduces-tougher-immigration-rules-for-universities-and-colleges>
 5. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2012/08/canada-bill-c-35-update-for-offshore-agents-greater-scrutiny-for-student-visas>
 6. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/09/nacac-changes-code-conduct-releases-agent-guide>
 7. See <http://monitor.icef.com/2012/05/governments-crack-down-on-fraud-industry-continues-to-strengthen-standards>

AGENTS UNCOVERED

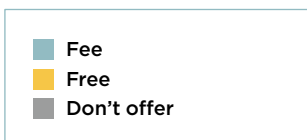
The latest report from the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) entitled 'The agent question: insights from students, universities and agents' compiled data from a range of studies, including the 2013 Agent Barometer (i-graduate and ICEF), the International Student Barometer (i-graduate) and a 2012 study by the OBHE on institutional use of agents. Here are a few key findings suggesting an overall positive impression of agents by their stakeholders.



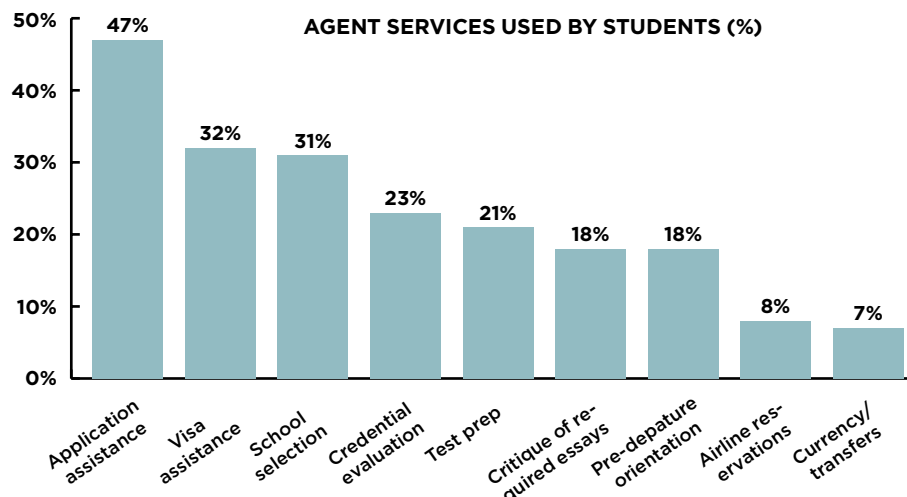
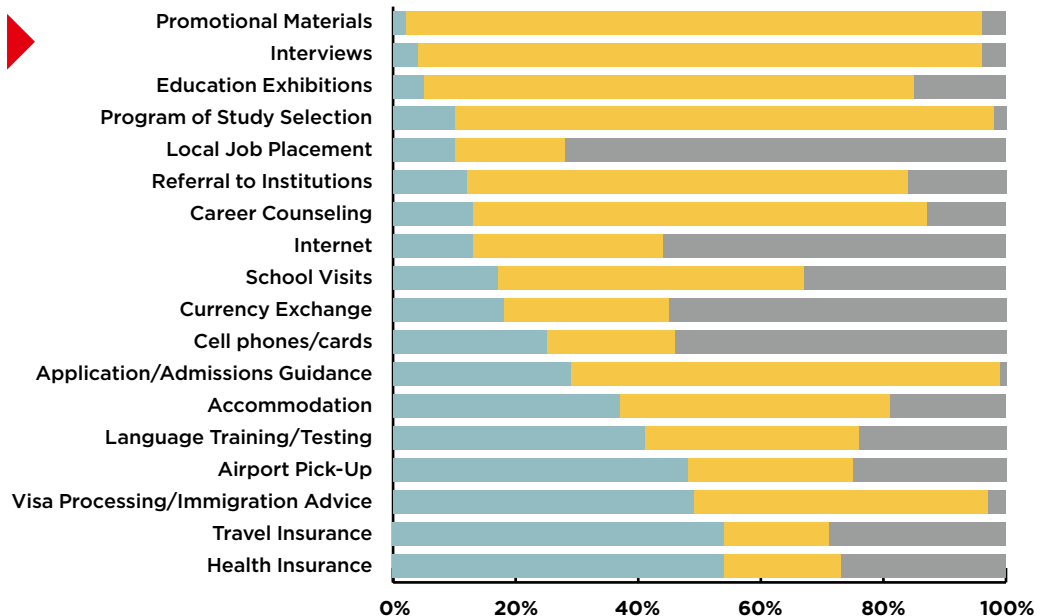
Photo: Tsyhun (shutterstock)

Services offered to students by agents: business model dependent on institutions, not students

- Most services, where offered, are more likely to be free than fee-based for the student. This suggests that most agents with a primary interest in higher education earn the majority of their income from institutions, not students.
- A large majority of these agents offer core institutional selection and application services free of charge.



AGENTS WITH PRIMARY INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION (AS OF AUTUMN 2013)

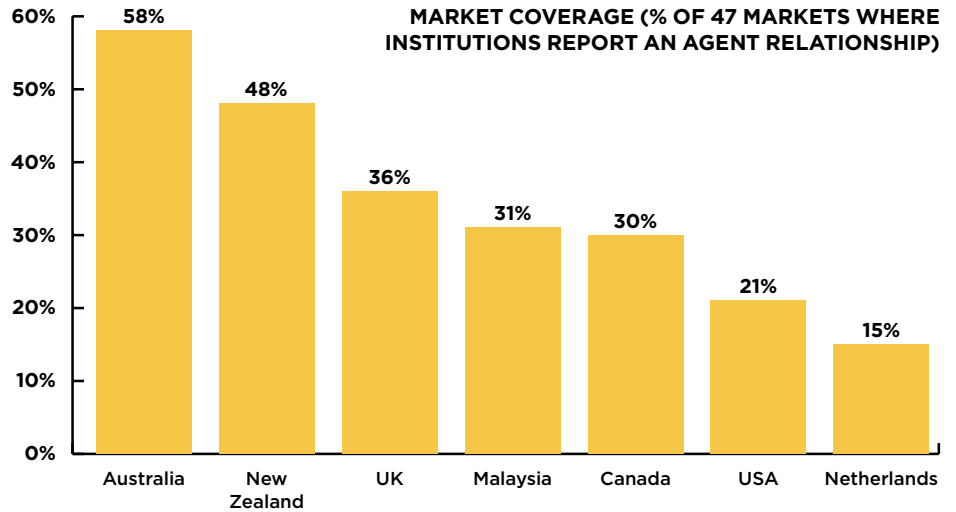


Agents offer many services; most students use few of them

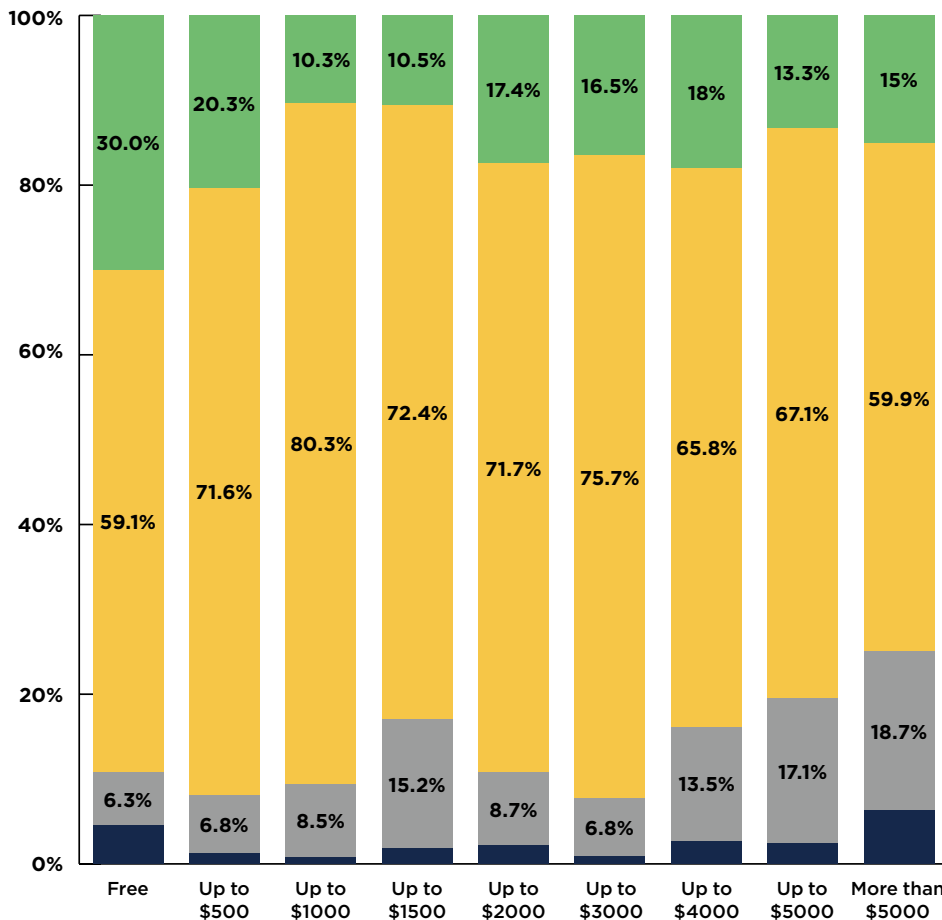
- This chart reinforces the idea that most students are recruited by rather than hire an agent. Prompting the student to apply to institution x is the core agent service (agent to institution), with other agent services used by only a minority of students.
- It is equally clear that application assistance, visa assistance and school selection - the three services most commonly cited by students - point to areas of complexity where some students find agent input helpful.

Mature users of agents exhibit breadth of market coverage

- Countries with the most agent experience – Australia and New Zealand – exhibit the widest array of agent relationships by geography.
- By contrast, countries with less agent experience or acceptance – USA and the Netherlands – exhibit much reduced coverage.

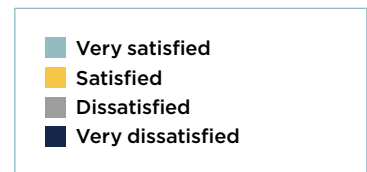


AMOUNT STUDENTS PAY TO AGENTS - RANGES IN US\$



In general, students are satisfied with agents, regardless of price

- A large majority of all students who report use of agents are at least 'satisfied', regardless of fee level.
- However, low price or zero cost does not guarantee satisfaction. About 10% of students who used an agent but paid nothing said they were not satisfied. A free service may be poor quality or under-resourced.



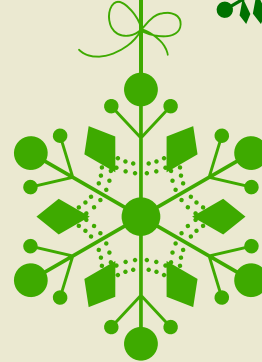
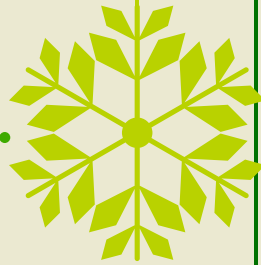
To access the full report, please visit: www.obhe.ac.uk/documents/view_details?id=953.

Text and data courtesy of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.



“Get involved!
It is amazing how quickly one can rise in leadership positions and have rewarding experiences.”

—*Robert Watkins, USA*



“As a member I get regular information about the current politics in the field of international higher education, which helps me to better understand the issues of this field.”

—*Patricia Rohland, Germany*



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—*Alva Bruun, Finland*



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FORUM BLOG SERIES: ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

A week-long series of blog posts further exploring this broad and multi-faceted theme of this issue of *Forum*. www.eaie.org/blog/forum-ethics



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STRATEGIC INTERNATIONALISATION FOR BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS

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