

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

3-4 December 2019

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## Agents & Ethics 2.0

How our profession has evolved and how to get the best out of agents in 2020

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# Agents & Ethics 2.0

*How our profession has evolved and how to get the best out of agents in 2020*



# Study Experience

- French & Belgian agency founded in 2009
- Specialised in higher education **counselling** & **recruitment**
- Local representative for 44 UK universities in 2019
- British Council trained since 2012

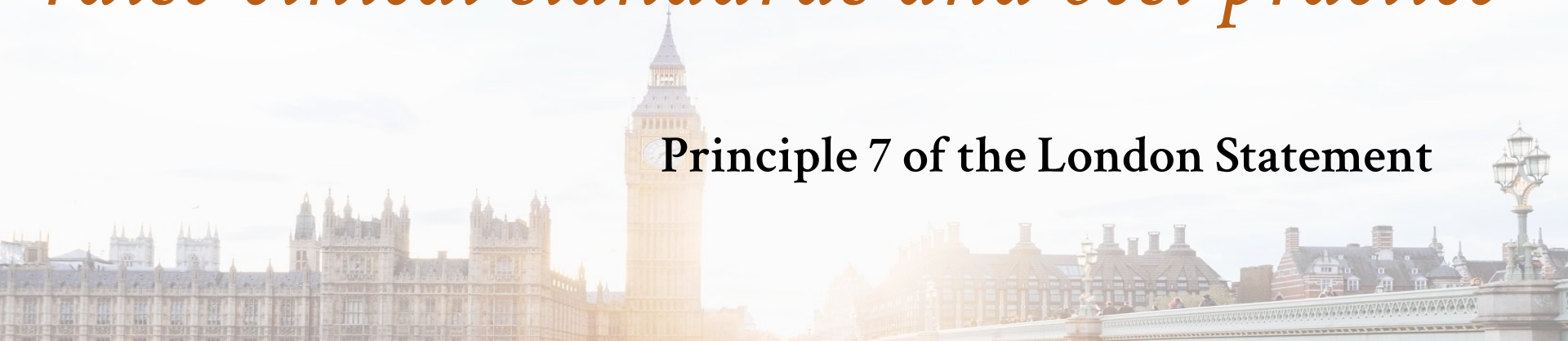


# Our Story

- We only have our own story to tell !
- Express some concerns about contemporary student recruitment
- Initiate a dialogue between all actors present

*“Agents and consultants work with destination countries and providers to raise ethical standards and best practice”*

**Principle 7 of the London Statement**



# IMPORTANCE OF AGENTS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION INDUSTRY

## Example 1: Market development (Australian case study)

Sector	Total % of enrolments by sector in 2017	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)	2016 (%)	2017 (%)
		410,925				693,750
Higher Education	44	61.2	64.6	67.5	70.2	71.0
VET	27	62.6	66.8	70.8	70.9	72.9
ELICOS	19	78.6	81.5	82.8	83.8	85.1
Non-Award*	6	49.0	49.6	48.3	53.5	52.0
Schools	3	72.7	72.7	74.5	74.5	76.2
<b>All Sectors</b>	<b>**99</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>71.2</b>	<b>72.4</b>	<b>73.6</b>

Percentage of student enrolments facilitated by education agents, by sector

*Source: DET, PRISMS*

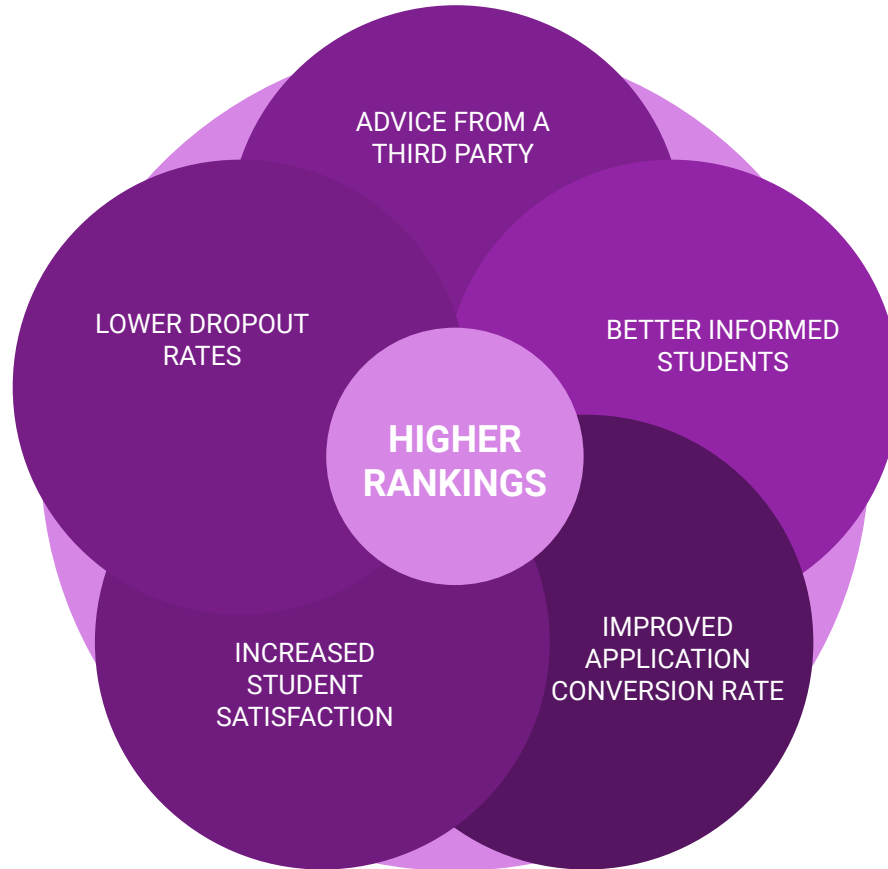
## Example 2: Effective local recruitment

- Culturally sensitive marketing
- Cost-effective way of promoting within different markets
- Reduced need for frequent travel
- Improved quality of applications
- Representation on a year-round basis





# Example 3: Student Satisfaction & Rankings



**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF  
OUR AGENCY**

# Counselling services

- Understanding student profiles and best outcomes
- Assessing academic ability and potential
- **Enabling students to make informed decisions by themselves**
- Coordinating the application process
- Help with pre-departure

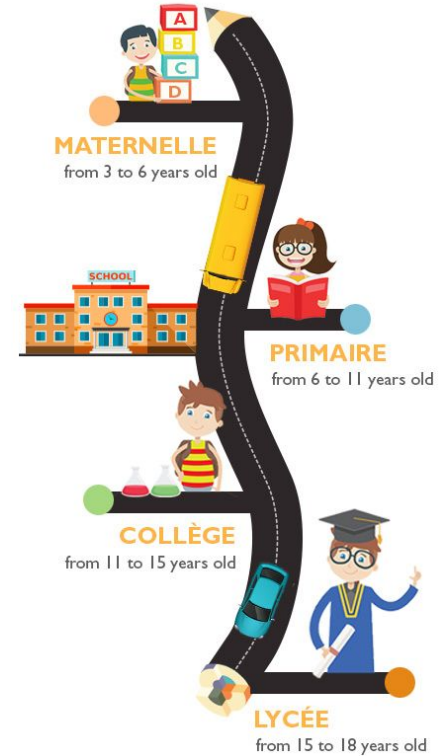
# Application support - Personal Statement case study



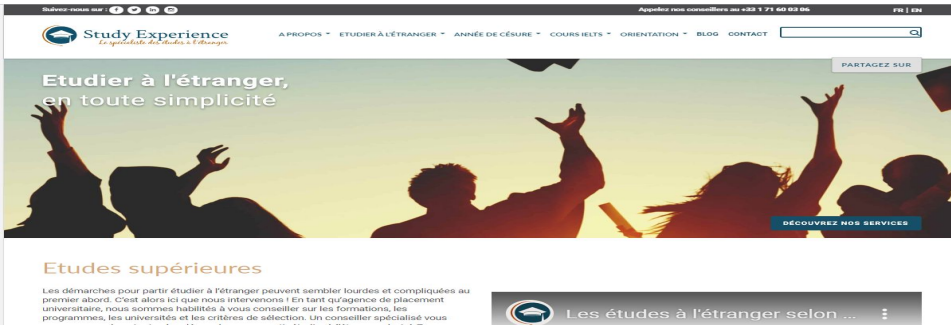
- **We do not write personal statements for students**
- Provide context and insight into what the expectations are
- Cultural differences in academia - eg. promoting the self in French schools
- The challenge of encouraging “original” work
- The importance of a personal statement when understanding the student
- **This kind of assistance is standard practice in a UK high school!**

# Helping universities understand the local education system

- Context of the local education system (qualifications, grades...)
- Identifying new opportunities (eg. Top-Up market in France)
- Local student feedback (Student Ambassador network)



# Local Marketing



1

Local online presence

2

School & university partnerships

3

ELEVATE Student Conference

**ETHICS &  
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

## A brief word on definitions...

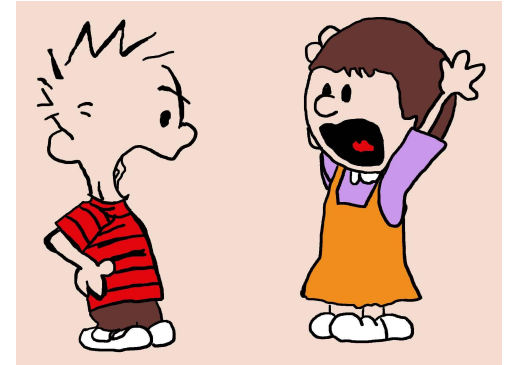
**Ethics** : *“The principles of conduct governing an individual or a group” (Webster’s) or “Moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity (Oxford Dictionaries)”*

**Conflict of interest** : *“A conflict of interest is a situation in which a person or organization is involved in multiple interests, financial or otherwise, and serving one interest could involve working against another” (Wikipedia)*



# The genesis of our in-house debates

- Cohabitation of commercial and educational backgrounds
- Partner vs. non partner universities
- Commercialisation of the higher education sector
- Unease surrounding some common industry practices



# Case Study 1: The practice of withholding information



- Hybrid nature of our business model means students can pay a premium to apply to non-partner universities
- Alternatively, they pay a low administrative fee to apply to partner universities only (commission based partnerships)
- *Best practice question: if a student elects to apply to partner universities, should we withhold information about non partner universities ?*

## Case Study 2: Double-dipping vs. Free(ish) services



- The “plan B” problem - fair remuneration if a student decides not to enroll
- What constitutes a reasonable administrative fee and should there be an industry cap?
- Within reason, fees levied help mitigate conflict of interest by maintaining the focus on the student as a client.

## Case Study 3: Commission rates & targets

- Issues with non-standardised commission rates
- The flawed rationale behind performance based commission
- *Best practice question: should performance based commission rates be eradicated in favour of an industry-wide standard?*



## Case Study 4: The debate surrounding potential “bribery”

- It would be unethical for an agency to offer students a reward in exchange for selecting a specific institution
- What about these examples though, which are common practice among institutions?
  - Scholarships/incentives in exchange for early decision
  - Conditional unconditional offers
  - Fictitious early deadlines

## Case Study 5: Marketing & instagramization of the student experience

- In 2012, the University of Phoenix (USA) spent 2x more on marketing than it did on teaching (Sold Out, Stefan Collini 2013)
- Representatives are not travel agents
- Universities are not holiday destinations
- *Best practice question: should there be a discussion on the “tone of voice” used to promote higher education on social media?*

**NURTURING ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS & AGENTS**

# The importance of dialogue

- A richer institution <-> representative relationship to improve student outcomes
- Hard work only starts after an agreement is signed
- Exchanges should not be restricted to quick updates and invoice processing
- Include representatives in some of your general decision making processes. For example :
  - *Entry Requirements*
  - *Admissions process*
  - *Fees*
  - *New programmes*
  - *Marketing campaigns*



# Agent or local representative?

- Agent vs. representative
- Your local office or branch
- Importance of training and certification
- Systematic campus visits and training
  - *What constitutes a successful familiarization trip?*
- Support of local marketing efforts to avoid dormant relationships



# Evaluating a successful relationship

Should student numbers (applications and enrolments) be a criterion when judging agent performance?



## Other possibilities to measure ROI

- *Brand visibility in country (take direct applications into account)*
- *Caliber of student*
- *Student satisfaction (with both agent and university)*

Don't forget to take local differences into account !

# The result of our in-house debate

- Focus on the students and on how we can work together to accompany them on their educational journey
- Review of our sales strategy (social selling?)
- “Renewal of vows” with our current partners
- Present a new paradigm for potential new partners



# What could a new student focused paradigm look like?

01	AGENT CERTIFICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• British Council training for counsellors</li><li>• British Council audit for agencies (AIRC example)</li></ul>
02	AGENT TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider compulsory campus visits</li><li>• University contribution to BC training &amp; certification</li></ul>
03	DIALOGUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include agents in strategic decision making</li></ul>
04	LOCAL OFFICE STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognition for brand development in-country</li><li>• Active marketing support</li></ul>
05	REMUNERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review how we measure agent performance</li><li>• Standardised commission rates</li><li>• AND/OR better commission for BC certified agencies</li></ul>

# Thank You!

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