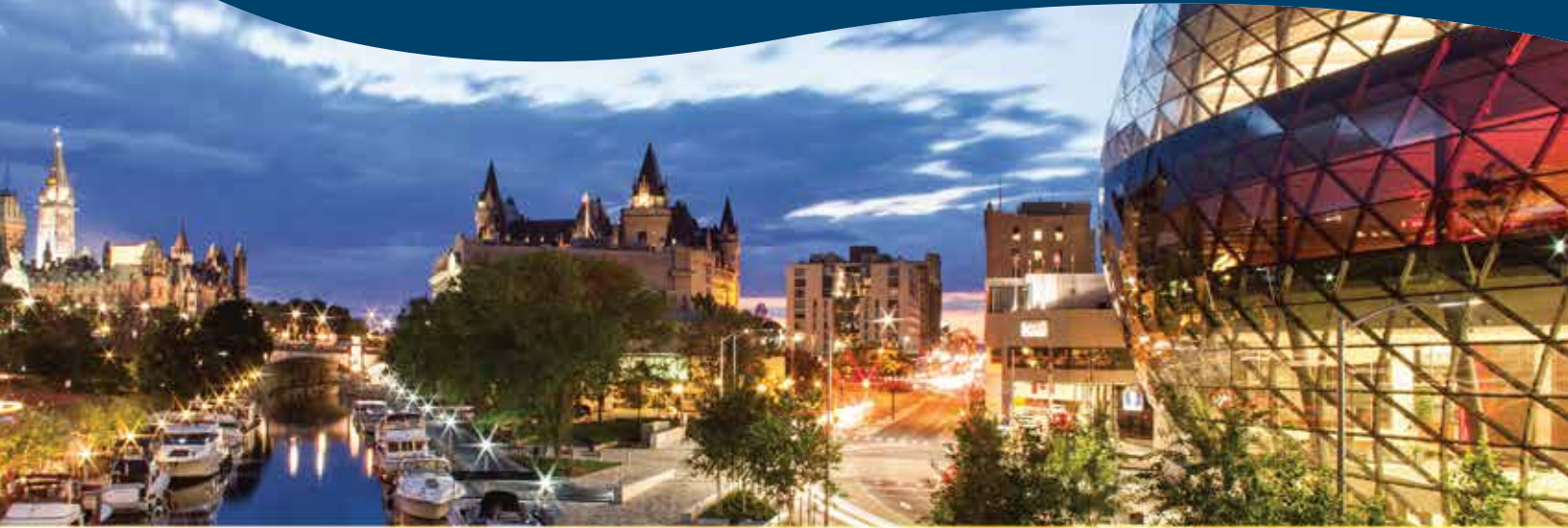




Canadian
Bureau for
International
Education

Bureau
canadien de
l'éducation
internationale

CBIE BRIEFING NOTE



An Ethical Internationalization for All

On the theme of CBIE's Annual Conference 2016

Dr. Hans De Wit

An Ethical Internationalization for All

The selection of Donald Trump as Republican candidate for the presidency in the United States and the Brexit resulting from the EU referendum in the United Kingdom have highlighted a trend already developing in other countries over the past years: the dramatic strengthening of rightwing populist parties and perceptions in Austria, Hungary, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Greece and elsewhere. Analysts and media write about a divide in the population, between highly skilled and low skilled, young and old, urban and rural, and between “global” and “local.” In the first category, people see themselves as citizens of the world, strongly committed to global and regional cooperation, diversity, the environment, and other Sustainable Development Goals.¹ In contrast, the other group appears narrow-minded and fiercely opposed to immigration, free trade, and Europe. One can question if the divide is as clear as the media suggest. After all, many older US citizens do not support Donald Trump, and many highly skilled British have voted for Brexit. This divide is not real and, if presented as such, it is dangerous and irresponsible. And it is not happening everywhere, as Canada shows.

A dividing higher education sector

In higher education, there seems to emerge also a division, one between world-class institutions—with global research, students, and scholars; competing and collaborating across the world; located in vibrant cosmopolitan urban environments; and benefiting from ample (inter)national and private resources—and others struggling with shrinking budgets, low-talented students and scholars, and located in gradually deserted rural and/or economically challenged areas. Internationalization is seen as a privileged activity for the first group, leading to increased quality and opportunities. Its students

and scholars have access to international grants and scholarships, travel around the world, and become professionals with great global career perspectives: its graduates are seen as the future leaders of the world. For the other group, internationalization reflects an unrealistic aspiration to climb higher in the rankings, to find scarce sources for grants and scholarships, and to stay in touch with the rest of the world. Institutions invest in agents, pathway programs, and recruitment of international students and scholars, they shift to teaching in the language of the cosmopolitan elite, English (instead of keeping to the mother language their staff and students are fluent in), all in the desperate attempt to become part of the world-class, well-ranked elite. These universities see their numbers of local students shrink, and pay high bonuses to agents and other commercial providers to bring in rich Chinese, Indian, and Korean students, ignoring the increasing number of cases of incompetency, fraud, and corruption that go with that trade, and ignoring the needs of international students from lower income groups. Even public universities, colleges and high schools—the new international market—are falling for this temptation for the new rich, resulting from shrinking public funding and decreasing numbers of local students.

This development is not new, and neither are warnings against its risks and dangers. In June 2016, NAFSA published a survey² indicating that 37 percent of US institutions are now using recruitment agents, a significant increase compared to findings in previous studies that showed the use of agents in the 20–30 percent range. These are remarkable, if not shocking, data. Interestingly, while the use of agents is rapidly increasing, more than 70 percent of institutions in the survey express concern about possible fraud when working with commission-based intermediaries. The top three reasons identified in the survey for *not* using agents are: a lack of trust in agents; the reputational risk posed by working with third-party agents; and financial reasons. Lack of accountability, integrity, and transparency are all seen as major concerns.

The trend towards reliance on intermediaries is evident in another NAFSA report — *The Landscape of Pathway Partnerships in the United States*.³ More than half (56 percent) of the 45 universities analyzed in this report are not ranked by the US News & World Report. Ironically, the survey indicates that 12 percent of the institutions

The current political and economic climate needs measures enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation, not a further divide.

1. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

that do not work directly with agents, are working with third-party, English-as-a-second-language providers, or with pathway providers, who in turn contract agents to recruit students on their behalf. This implies that there is a direct relation between the increase in pathway programs and the use of agents by universities, particularly those that are not highly ranked—in other words, those that are most likely to be challenged by increased demographic and economic pressures resulting from dwindling local markets, and make up for shortfalls by pursuing international enrolment.

What does this tell us?

The competition for international students is becoming more intense, more commercial, more frequently outsourced, and with increased risk of corruption. Universities and colleges, as well as students are both actors and victims of this development, in particular institutions that are not highly ranked, less competitive and lacking sophisticated international students.

The examples from the US are not unique. Ethics in higher education is under threat everywhere in the competitive, global post-secondary environment. The divide between world-class institutions listed at the top of national and international rankings, and those that are not, is not narrowing but increasing. As a result, institutions in the second group engage in desperate, expensive commercial paths to try to turn their circumstances around.

It would be in the interest of governments, institutions, and students if the participation of commercial recruiters, for-profit pathway providers, and other intermediate businesses was stopped. This is not likely to happen. An increasing number of commercial enterprises, international students, and institutions at the lower end of the higher education hierarchy are using loopholes and the current lack of oversight to engage in varying degrees of fraud, contributing to a mismatch between students and institutions and (ultimately) to the decreased quality of education at the institutions involved.

What is the solution?

In response to this development, some call for an *ethical internationalization*. Others have been calling for an *internationalization for all*. Focusing attention on an

“elitist” internationalization, affordable only for a small group of global institutions and privileged students and scholars is dangerous because it contributes to increasing the gap with the more disadvantaged institutions. Given the fact that the international dimension of higher education gains more attention and recognition, people tend to use it in the way that best suits their purposes, leading to many myths and misconceptions concerning internationalization of higher education.

It is important to highlight the fundamental point that internationalization is not an end in itself but rather a means to enhancing the quality of teaching and research and the service role of higher education to society.

In an attempt to shift the focus towards a concept of internationalization that could have wider reach and create greater impact, a European Parliament study (de Wit et al. 2015), using a Delphi Panel exercise, set out to expand Jane Knight’s generally acknowledged definition, in a way that could guide and inspire universities and colleges in their internationalization efforts, as follows:

“the **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions **and** delivery of post-secondary education, **in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society**”.

This revised definition seeks to make three key points:

1. It indicates that the process is a planned and purposeful one, which creates a framework for future direction and is designed to strengthen and enhance higher education performance and quality. An intentional process is one of consideration, decision and action.
2. It reflects increased awareness that internationalization of higher education needs to be more inclusive and less elitist and that the ‘abroad’ component is an integral part of an internationalized curriculum for all students. It also includes staff since internationalization of higher education is critically dependent on active engagement and wholehearted commitment of all higher education members, who through their various academic and management functions will be “at the coalface” of delivery.

2. <http://www.bridge.edu/Bridge-Research-Library>

3. http://www.nafsa.org/Professional_Resources/Browse_by_Interest/International_Students_and_Scholars/Landscape_of_Pathway_Partnerships_in_the_United_States

3. It re-emphasizes that internationalization of higher education is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance quality within and beyond the institution, and for that reason it should not focus *solely* on economic rationales.

One could claim that this extended definition is adding a normative direction, where a definition needs to be neutral. But in a context in which internationalization is used in broad, diverse and unintended ways, more like a globalization process with strong commercial dimensions, a more normative approach can provide a perspective in which universities prepare all their graduates and faculty to become global academics, professionals and citizens that are aware of and willing to address global challenges and issues, such as the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Focusing attention on an “elitist” internationalization, affordable only for a small group of

global institutions and privileged students and scholars, is dangerous because it contributes to increasing the gap with the more disadvantaged institutions and individuals. The current political and economic climate needs measures enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation, not a further divide. More than ever, internationalization needs to be for all — institutions and their students and staff — and it must be ethical.

References

- De Wit, Hans, Fiona Hunter, Eva Egron-Polak and Laura Howard (Eds). 2015. *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. A study for the European Parliament, Brussels.
- De Wit, Hans. 2016. Internationalisation should be ethical and for all. *University World News*, 15 July 2016 Issue No.422.

CBIE wishes to thank Dr. Hans De Wit for preparing this paper in order to initiate and enrich reflection on the theme of our 2016 Conference *Internationalization for All* with a spotlight on *Internationalization at Home*.

Published with his permission.

© CBIE and Hans De Wit

Hans de Wit is Director of the *Center for International Higher Education* (CIHE) at Boston College, USA, and professor in International Higher Education at the Department of Higher Education and Leadership of the Lynch School of Education, Boston College. He has been Director of the 'Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation' (CHEI) at the Università Cattolica Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy, and Professor of Internationalization of Higher Education at the Amsterdam, University of Applied Sciences.

He is the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Studies in International Education* (Association for Studies in International Education/SAGE publishers), member of the Editorial board of *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* (SRHE) and of *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* (Springer/Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), Associate Editor of *International Higher Education*, Co-editor book series *Global Perspectives in Higher Education* (Sense Publishers). He also publishes a monthly blog in *University World News* on internationalisation of higher education, www.universityworldnews.com.

He has (co)written several other books and articles on international education and is actively involved in assessment and consultancy in international education, for organisations like the European Commission, UNESCO, World Bank, IMHE/OECD, IAU, European Parliament. In 2005-2006, he was a New Century Scholar of the *Fulbright Program* Higher Education in the 21st Century. Hans de Wit is founding member and past president of the *European Association for International Education* (EAIE). He has a bachelor, master and PhD from the University of Amsterdam.

CBIE BRIEFING NOTE

Canadian Bureau for International Education

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.
Également disponible en français

Canadian Bureau for International Education
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9

613-237-4820
www.cbie-bcei.ca
research-recherche@cbie.ca



Canadian
Bureau for
International
Education

Bureau
canadien de
l'éducation
internationale