

INTERNATIONAL ACAC · SOUTH & CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL INSTITUTE 2026

The Last Mile: Strong Pipelines, Weak Conversions.

Deepa Dodani

Queen's University

Senior Recruitment Advisor, South Asia

Kanika Khattar

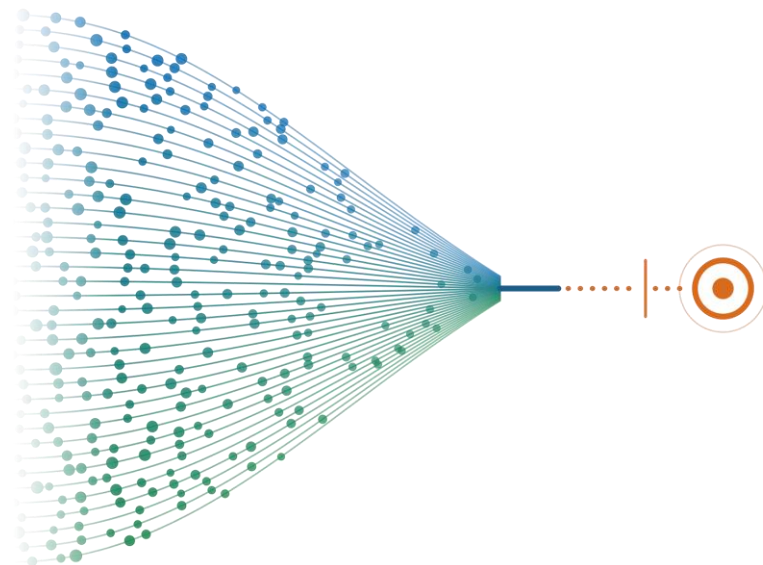
Les Roches Global Hospitality Education

Senior Regional Admissions Manager,
South Asia

Kanishka Ramani

Emerald Heights International School

Career and College Counsellor



REGIONAL INSTITUTE
South & Central Asia 2026

Today's agenda



WARM-UP

True or false, and the Why? Ladder

Five statements, then a pair activity



PART ONE

Why soft skills matter

What a conversation can and can't change



PART TWO

How we measure it

Pipeline, conversion, retention, Decision Readiness



PART THREE

How we hire, train and track it

Hiring, a 90-day plan, what to track



CLOSE

Close and questions

Truth, trust, decisions, enrolments

● WARM-UP

Five true-or-false statements

Green card for true, red for false. First instinct only.

1

Read the statement on screen.

2

Raise **green** for true, **red** for false.

3

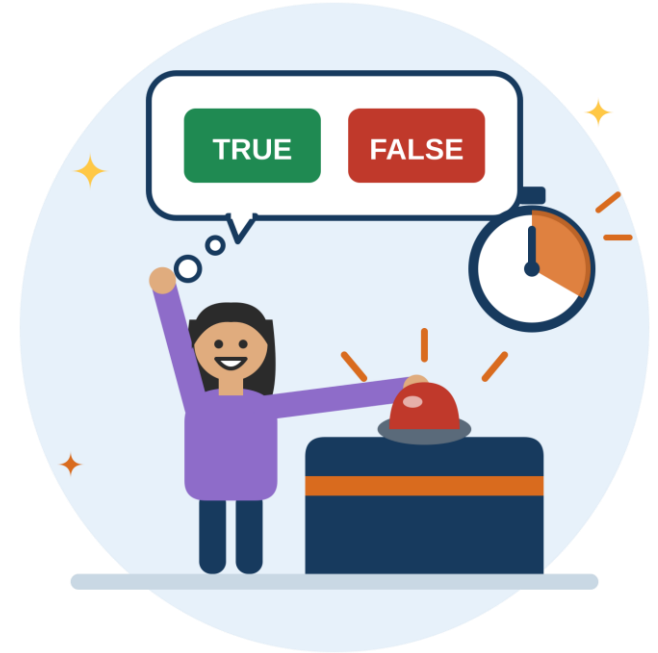
First instinct only



True or False?

Read it, pause, colours up. No explanations yet.

- 1 A parent who says “we’ll think about it” has said no.
- 2 The person who asks the most questions is the one who decides.
- 3 “That’s expensive” means the family can’t afford it.
- 4 A student who says “I want to go abroad” has already chosen where.
- 5 Until a decider hears the constraints of the family, the decision is not made.



Answers: four of the five are false.

02

Each answer turns on who is listening, not what was said.

FALSE

“We’ll think about it” is a timeline, not a no.

Ask: what would make you decide, and by when?

FALSE

The quiet one may have already checked on the information they need.

Ask: who has read the numbers before this meeting?

FALSE

“That’s expensive” usually means “show me what it buys.”

Ask: what are you comparing it to?

FALSE

Well researched Vs Inspired at fair

Ask: At what stage of decision making you are?

TRUE

Unheard constraints return as “we’ve changed our minds.”

Name the constraints early, and again before they decide.

THE MISS

01 Most of us got at least one wrong.

02 Each answer turns on what we assumed about the listener.

03 The miss is always about who is listening.

- Pair activity: reach the real reason.

THE WHY? LADDER

03

Round one: ask “why?”. Round two: find other ways to ask.

ROUND ONE · PICK ANY, OR MAKE ONE UP

“I want to go on a holiday.”

“I need \$1 million.”

“I want a dog.”

“I want to quit my job and open a café.”

“I always want the window seat.”

“I’m buying the expensive phone.”

ROUND TWO · A FAMILY SAYS · NO “WHY” ALLOWED

“We’ll think about it.”

“It’s a lot more than the other one.”

“I want to study abroad.”

Try: What would help you decide? · What are you comparing it with? · Who else is part of this decision?



Why soft skills matter

What a conversation can and can't change in a family's decision.

YOU ARE HERE



Why it matters



How we measure it



How we build it



Soft skills don't decide who enrolls.

04

They decide whether a family that could say yes gets the full picture.

FIXED

The offer and the means

Eligibility

Fee against what the family can pay

Programme and visa realities

A conversation can't move this.

MOVABLE

The full picture

Is the decider in the conversation?

Does the full picture reach them?

Are the constraints surfaced and ranked?

Is the family ready to choose?

Have we answered the "unspoken" questions?

This is the last mile.

OUTSIDE

Beyond everyone

Rival offers

Timing

Events at home

Nobody at either desk moves this.



What each desk holds

The recruiter holds the offer. The counsellor holds the family's story.

05



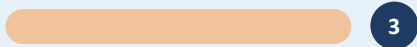
SOME OF WHAT IT MEANS

- 01** Recruiters hold the offer and choose how often to meet: a fair, a yield event, a conversion event.
- 02** Counsellors hold the family's story and are the steady touch point, before and after any offer.
- 03** Each of us holds half the picture. The decision is often made in the gap between us.

Families carry several constraints.

Six we see often, in an order that differs for every family. The list is never complete.

Money



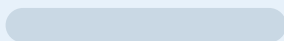
Decider absent



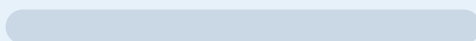
Readiness gap



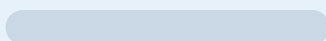
Distance and safety



Status pressure



Expectations at home



And more...



priority for this family

SOME OF WHAT IT MEANS

01 Most families carry several constraints at once.

02 Their priority order differs, and can change over time.

03 Ask which comes first, and what would move it.

Right fit meets the family's constraints, starting with the ones that can't move.

THE FAMILY'S CONSTRAINTS

WHAT THE PROGRAMME DELIVERS

1 Decider not in the room

met by

A call with the decider, before the family decides

2 Readiness gap

met by

A pathway year, with language support in place

3 Funding gap

met by

A costed four-year plan, with a backup route

One example family. Rank never appears on this page.

SOME OF WHAT IT MEANS

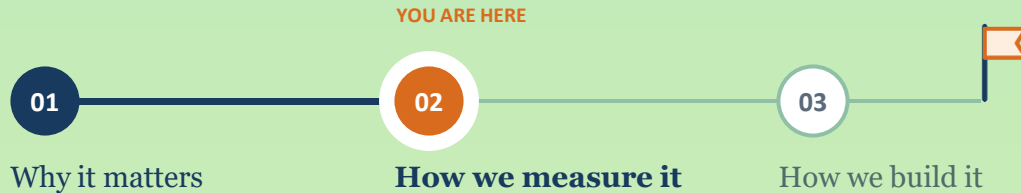
01 Right fit is the programme whose delivery meets the family's binding constraints.

02 Rank isn't the test.

03 Why this programme, and not the cheaper or closer one?

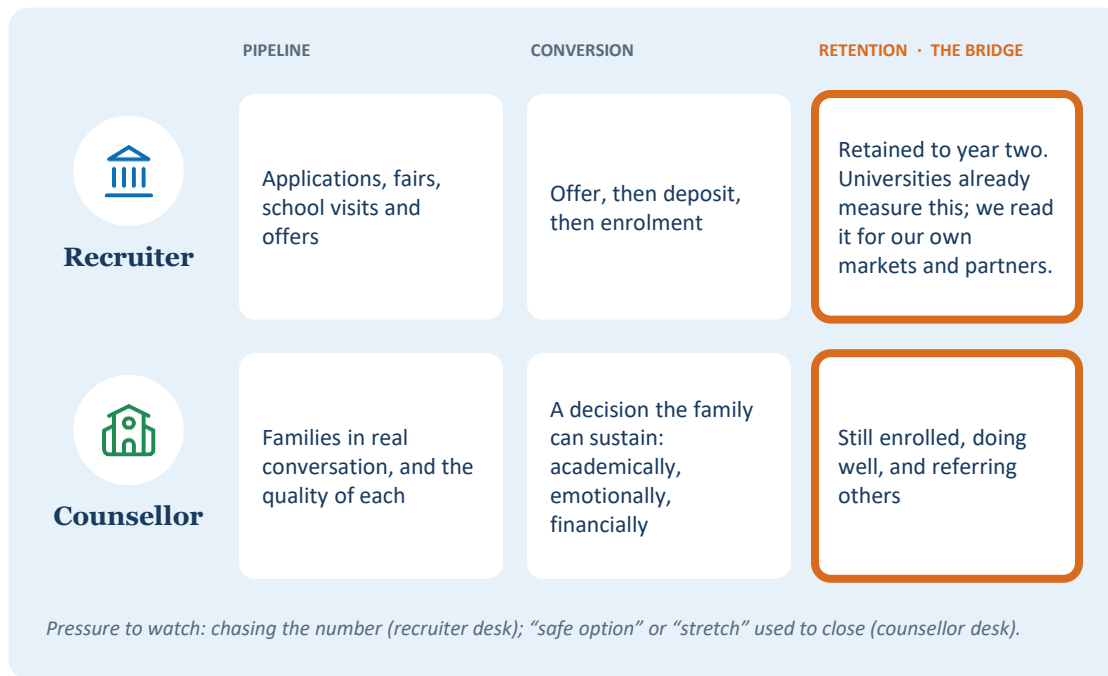
How we measure it

Pipeline, conversion, retention, Decision Readiness and a rubric for reflection.



Pipeline and conversion at each desk.

They mean different things to a recruiter and a counsellor. Retention links them.



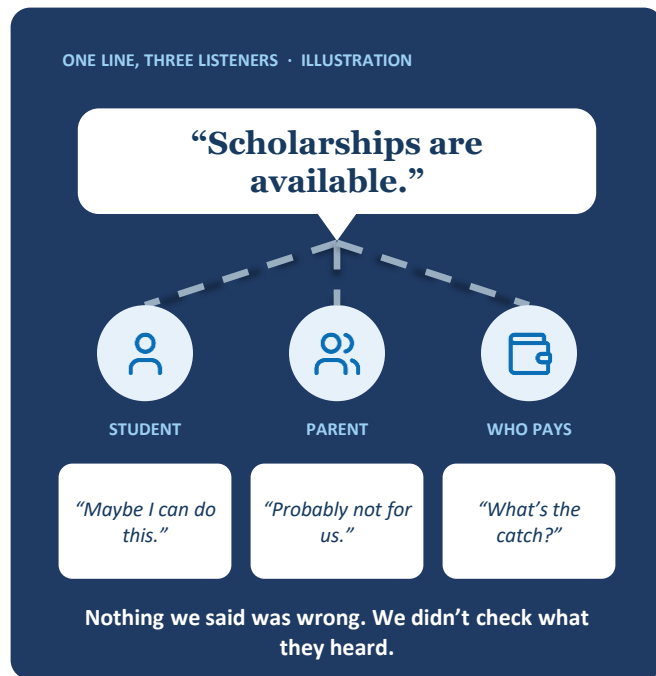
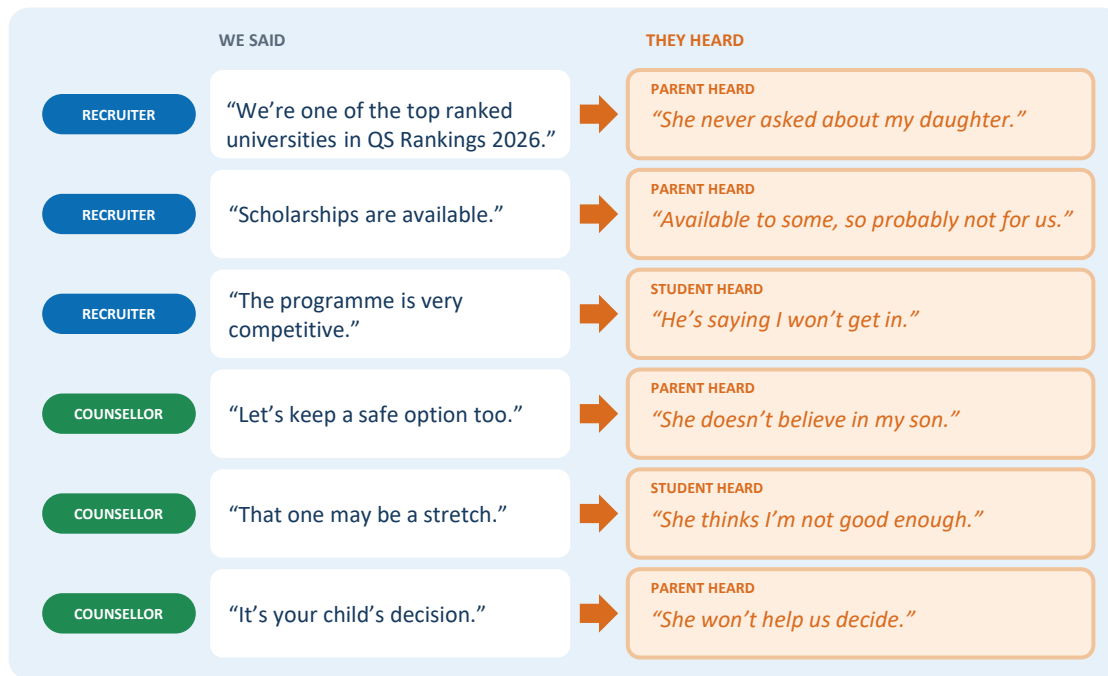
SOME OF WHAT IT MEANS

- 01** Pipeline counts reach. Conversion counts decisions.
- 02** Retention counts whether the decision held.
- 03** Retention is the bridge. Universities already report it; we read it for our own markets.

What we said, and what families heard.

09

Six lines from the two desks, and what a listener may take from each.



Decision Readiness: three checks.

10

Ready to decide well, not ready to say yes. The three words are Kanishka Ramani's.

WHO · EVERYONE WHO DECIDES OR PAYS

Ask each check of each person: the student, the parents, whoever funds the degree.

1 Choice

Each person can say what they want from this degree, and why.

THE CHECK

What do you want this degree to do for you?

2 Constraint

The limits are known: which can't move, and which could bend.

THE CHECK

Which of these can't move, and which could, for the right programme?

3 Commitment

Each person knows what they'd be agreeing to, and what would change their mind.

THE CHECK

Tell me in your words what happens next, what it costs, and what isn't refundable.

A guide for conversations, not a score. Adapted from decision-support research; not validated for admissions.



The rubric: five behaviours to look for.

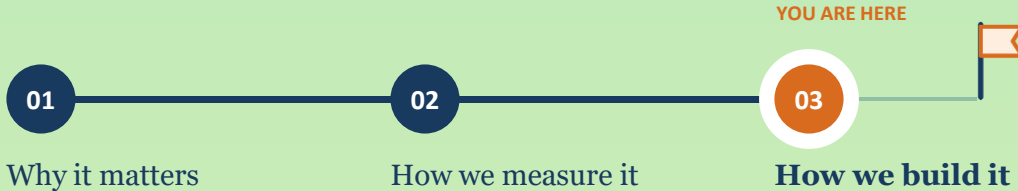
Score one conversation, not a person. A tool for reflection, not appraisal.

	● PARTLY	● FULLY	● YOU'LL KNOW BECAUSE THE FAMILY...
Asks before telling	Asks one question, then presents	Asks open questions until each person has said what they want, then summarises	Corrects or adds to your summary
Hears the parents' question	Answers the parent through the student	Names each person's question and answers both	Says "that's what we were worried about"
Surfaces the constraints	Asks about one limit, usually money	Asks about money, place, time and family, and which can't move	Tells you something they hadn't said at first
States fit honestly	Names one gap, then moves on	Says where it fits and where it doesn't, and names alternatives	Asks harder questions, or says what they would trade
Names what would change it	Asks "any concerns?"	Asks what would make them rethink, and what would change your advice	Names a specific condition

Not seen means it didn't come up. Not validated. Look at your lowest behaviour over several conversations; don't add up a total.

How we hire, train and track it

Hiring, a 90-day training plan, and what to track.



Hiring for the five behaviours.

Test for what can't be taught later. The same approach works for recruiters and school counsellors.

THE ROLE-PLAY · EVERY CANDIDATE

Interview with a family, not a pitch

A parent and a student who want different things. Score the questions the candidate asks before explaining anything, not how well they present.

THE HONESTY QUESTION

Ask the honesty question

"An eager student is clearly the wrong fit. What do you do?" Listen for the instinct to counsel, and to suggest what would fit better.

THE SCORING · TWO INTERVIEWERS

Same questions, two scorers

Every candidate gets the same questions, each tied to one of the five behaviours. Score separately, then compare. Scores guide; they don't decide.

12

WHAT GOOD SOUNDS LIKE

- 01** They ask about the student before they talk about the programme.
- 02** Asked about a family who changed their mind, they talk about what the family needed.
- 03** They can say "this isn't right for you" kindly, and mean it.

A 90-day training plan for both desks.

13

Proposed pilot: adjust after the first cohort. Nobody should learn to listen at a family's expense.

THE 90 DAYS · EACH DESK RUNS ITS OWN

Days 1–14

Watch someone senior in two meetings. Note what earned trust, and what lost it.

Days 15–30

Rehearse the hard cases with the rubric, with a colleague or on your own.

Days 31–60

Lead real meetings, then debrief each one with a senior or a peer.

Days 61–90

Sign off on one observed conversation, not on numbers.

RECRUITERS

Trained by the university: the admissions team or a senior recruiter. Watch them at fairs and school visits, then debrief after each one.

COUNSELLORS

Trained by a senior counsellor or school leadership. Working solo? Record a role-play, score it on the rubric, and compare notes with a peer from a counsellor network.

Then each desk adds one knowledge module: board pressure for recruiters, costs and visas for counsellors.

EVERY MONTH · REHEARSE THE HARD ONES

- 01** The budget nobody says out loud. Raise money early, without embarrassing anyone.
- 02** The decider who isn't in the room. Find them, and get the full picture to them.
- 03** The eager student who's the wrong fit. Say so kindly, and name what fits better.

What to track between yes and arrival.

The last mile runs from the offer to the first day. Retention after that is the university's to measure.

TRACK 1 · BY EACH DECISION DEADLINE

How many families went silent

Of the families holding an offer, how many gave a clear answer, yes or no, and how many simply went quiet? A clear no counts as a good outcome.

TRACK 2 · AT KEY CONVERSATIONS

Which readiness checks are still open

One short note per family: which of Choice, Constraint and Commitment you could answer, and which are still open. Reflection, not a score.

TRACK 3 · WHEN A FAMILY WALKS AWAY

Had we heard the reason before?

Ask what changed. Note whether it was a constraint someone named early, or one nobody asked about. Late surprises are the ones to fix.

AND ONCE PER INTAKE

- 01 A joint case review with a few priority schools or recruiters, not all of them.
- 02 One family's case. Both desks. Thirty minutes.
- 03 Nobody comes to ask for anything.

Who knows a student MORE?



Small changes, big impact

Pick one line from your column and do it this week.



Recruiters

- Ask one question about the student that isn't marks or money.
- Name the family's constraints out loud before the family decides.
- End a family meeting by asking what would make them rethink.



Counsellors

- Name the person who will really decide, out loud.
- Tell one family honestly when a choice isn't right for them.
- Call the recruiter with a curious question about their university

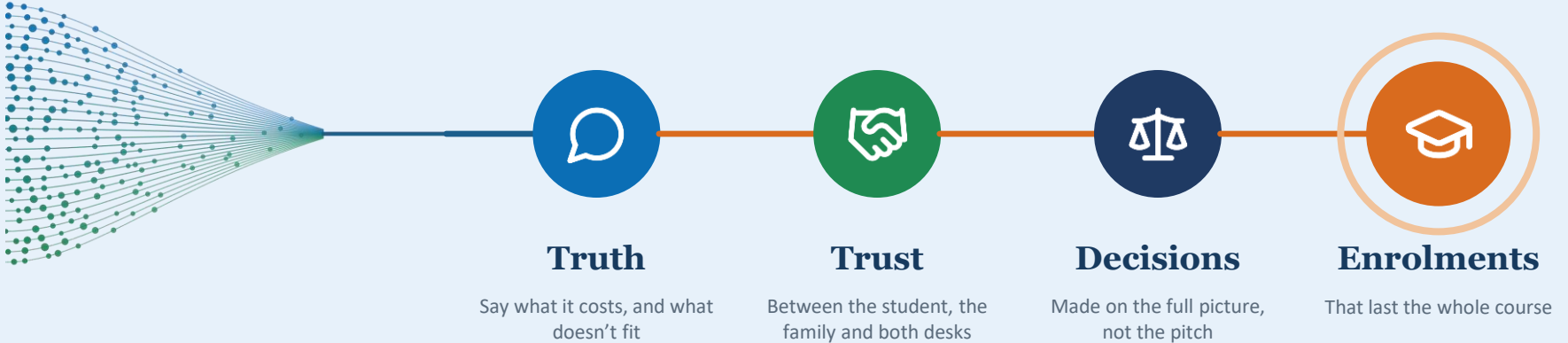
14



How honest conversations lead to lasting enrolments.

THE PIPELINE

THE LAST MILE



QUESTIONS

Thank you

Your questions, for any of us.

Deepa Dodani

Senior Recruitment Advisor, South Asia

Queen's University

Kanika Khattar

Senior Regional Admissions Manager, South Asia

Les Roches Global Hospitality Education

Kanishka Ramani

Career and College Counsellor

Emerald Heights International School



REGIONAL INSTITUTE
South & Central Asia 2026