

Think of a student or applicant you've worked with....

...who had more than one adult involved in the process

What worked well?

What was challenging?



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A Third Person in the Process

Understanding IECs, Agents, and the spaces between

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A Growing Reality in International Admissions

- More advisors involved
 - More families hiring IECs
 - More universities hiring agents
- Roles overlap
- Expectations unclear
- Students receive conflicting information



Definitions (Simplified)

IEC

Paid by family

Advises student

Independent

Agent

Paid by institution

Recruits for institutions

Represents specific schools



Four Lenses in the Room

School-Based Counselor

Transcripts, grades, references

Works within school policies

Supports entire student cohort

IEC

Works directly with families

Provides strategic guidance

Focuses on smaller caseload

Admissions Officer

Ensures fairness & consistency

Prioritizes authenticity

Represents institutional priorities

Agent

Represents specific institutions

Supports recruitment & applications

May receive commission



Different Systems, Different Expectations

Australia / UK-style

Agents are standard
Institutional partnerships
Structured pathways

China / India

High use of agents & IECs
Strong family involvement
Expectation of guidance

Southeast Asia

Mixed advising models
Overlapping roles
Multiple systems at once

U.S.-focused context

IECs more common than agents
Emphasis on independence
Holistic admissions (harder to interpret outcomes)



Naming the Tensions in the Room

School Counselor

Limited visibility into outside advising
Balancing large caseloads with individual needs

IEC

Working closely with families shapes decisions
Questions about where guidance ends and
influence begins

Admissions Officer

Evaluating fairly with incomplete context
Balancing consistency with complex applications

Agent

Balancing students, families, and institutions
Operating within different global systems and
incentives



What Each Role Wishes Others Understood

School Counselor

- We support all students, not just one
- We work within school policies
- We may not see outside guidance

IEC

- We work closely with families
- We provide individualized strategy
- We have a limited understanding of the student's school world

Admissions Officer

- We must ensure fairness
- We look for authentic work
- We see the final application only

Agent

- We operate in different systems
- We balance multiple stakeholders
- Commission-based models are standard in some parts of the world



Scenario: Communication

A student emails admissions with a question, cc'ing:

- their school counselor,
- their IEC,
- and an agent they've been working with

The IEC follows up with an email asking about admissions chances

The agent follows up an email requesting an expedited review



Making Sense When Alignment Breaks Down: A Framework

Clarity of Roles

Who does what—and where should it stop?

Transparency

Who is being paid—and is that clear to everyone?

Communication Norms

Who should be included—and when?

Student-Centered Check

Is this helping the student make better decisions?



Scenario: Conflicting Recommendations

A student is working with a school counselor, an IEC, and an agent

- The agent recommends a specific set of universities
- The IEC suggests a broader list
- The student receives solicitation emails from different universities and adds them to the list
- The school counselor feels the list is unbalanced

The student doesn't understand why the recommendations differ



Where Ethical Questions Arise

Transparency & Disclosure

Are financial relationships clear? What does the student actually know?

Student Ownership

Who is making decisions? Where is the line between support and influence?

Fairness & Access

Do some students gain advantages others don't? How do we think about equity?

Boundaries of Role

Who is responsible for what? When does support become overreach?



What You Can Do: Working Within the Framework

Clarify Roles

Set expectations early

Develop systems and policies

Center the Student

Work Together, Not in Parallel



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Final Thoughts

The third adult isn't going away

Make the system work for the student

Think about your wishlist



Questions? Further Thoughts? We'd Love to Stay in Touch!

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What is your wishlist?

