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Global market hots up as US gets its act together

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The growth of an organisation set up to help US institutions compete in the global market could be a sign of the nation's growing interest in overseas students.

The American International Recruitment Council (AIRC) this month reached the milestone of 100 institutional members, two years after it was established. It is seeking to "develop standards of ethical practice pertaining to recruitment of international students", and provide "best practices and training to assist overseas student recruitment agents and institutions themselves to better serve students seeking admission".

According to official figures, the US had 623,800 overseas students in 2007-08, compared with 389,330 in the UK. However, a report published last year by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education warns that while the US remains the most popular destination globally, "other countries with more aggressive recruitment strategies have steadily cut into the US market share in the past decade".

When the AIRC was established, it said international recruitment would be stepped up through the increased involvement of agents.

Mitch Leventhal, the AIRC's president, said of its growing membership: "The startling growth ... is testament to the urgent need for professional standards in the field of international student recruitment, as well as the imperative for non-governmental leadership to initiate more effective global marketing practices."

Institutional members of the AIRC include Ohio University, the University of Idaho and the University of Illinois, Springfield.

Agency members include Australian company IDP Education, China's EduGlobal and Study Overseas UK.

The American academy traditionally has had ethical reservations about the use of agents. The US is the world's leading draw for foreign students, but until recently had not taken an active or commercial approach to recruitment.

Agents are now viewed as a key element in this process, as they can make recommendations to students choosing their destinations.

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