

Fred Van Leeuwen

Education International
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Dear Mr Leeuwen,

Thank you for your letter. We were equally appalled to discover that a gentleman was making his way into various school grounds falsely impersonating a senior Bridge International Academies staff member.

When we received word that an unknown foreign gentleman had visited a number of our academies under false pretense you can imagine our alarm and immediate fear for our pupils. We have a fiduciary responsibility to protect our children. Every parent expects that the school their children attend will protect their safety. Teachers also expect that the school at which they work will ensure that they are able to teach and lead their class without intervention.

Indeed Bridge has a civic duty to report any suspicious activity or any suspected criminal conduct to the authorities. It was the right thing to do for our academy staff to report suspicious activity to the police, and for our central team in Uganda to notify the police of this person's whereabouts when known. It is up to the police to examine the nature of the allegations, the conduct of the person and the weight of the evidence provided by the complainant to determine whether an offence has been committed and to draft the appropriate charges. Curtis Riep introduced himself to our communities and to Bridge teachers as a Bridge employee and did not announce his intentions regarding his alleged research on Bridge. Rather, he stated that he was a Bridge employee and needed to collect materials. These were direct lies. As the company had no knowledge of his true intentions, we had every right to issue a public notice and inform the police. Moreover, this is expected practice in both Uganda and Kenya, and is done by organizations in response to people claiming identities and authority that they do not have. That way the public is aware of the fraud and the organization cannot be liable for the fraudulent person's statements or actions.

What would be a school's response anywhere in the world to an unknown adult man repeatedly making his way onto school grounds and coming into close proximity with young children? I would hope that they too would sound the alarm to ensure that no harm befalls a pupil. Ugandan pupils should be afforded the same rights and protection.

Even if Mr. Riep's intentions were noble, the means in which he undertook his studies were fraudulent and counter productive. The code of ethics in conducting research requires informed consent, and does not allow lying about a researcher's identity. If the aim was objective research he ought to have approached the management of Bridge in Uganda and informed us, seeking our participation in the research, enabling us to support him and provide material and information that could have been of use. At a minimum, we are sure Education International is as appalled as we are that he lied about his identity on multiple occasions, and continued to lie about his identity even when questioned by teachers.

We note with exasperation that in seeking to address this issue you have gone to great lengths in an attempt to bring Bridge into disrepute. In addressing the email to Bridge's partners and regulators, especially from outside Uganda, you have clearly demonstrated that your motive in writing the email was not so much to seek clarification on the situation, but to cast the company in bad light. We did not publicly announce outside of Uganda that Education International's researcher had broken the law as we did not think that all of EI should be held accountable for the fraudulent actions of one affiliated person.

The situation we find ourselves in should not be construed to imply that Bridge is not open to dialogue and rigorous research. We have engaged with researchers from Stanford, Harvard, the ADB, the World Bank, the IFC, and many others over the years. As a research-based organization ourselves, we find it imperative to openly evaluate our own work and to continually improve our services. We would welcome a more forward and collegial approach in which we would work together. Bridge welcomes constructive engagements with stakeholders in the education industry and this includes institutions such as Education International, which may be particularly keen to research institutional practices that are proving to support teachers in a way that benefits children's development.

We hope that this misunderstanding can be set aside and that going forward Bridge and Education International will foster more constructive engagements intended to improve learning outcomes for Ugandan children and across the world.

Kind regards,



Shannon May

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