

Event Report

ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit

February 16 – 17, 2025

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



Connecting education providers from around the world with scholarship providers and HEIs from the Middle East

A landmark event created in close partnership with the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the ICEF Middle East Scholarship & Partnership Summit returned in 2025 to promote international education opportunities for students in the region. Held in Muscat, Oman, the event brought together scholarship organisations, senior representatives from government entities, universities from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and over 180 representatives from higher education institutions around the world, including the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, France, Spain, and Italy.

Following an official welcome from the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, H.E. Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrooqi, the first day of the conference featured a comprehensive programme of regionally focused panel discussions, seminars, and roundtable debates designed to foster a strategic approach to recruitment across the region. With sessions led by sector experts, as well as Omani and Gulf government officials, delegates were provided with a detailed overview of the key regional visions and opportunities for international collaboration.

On the second day of the event, global educators connected with regional higher education institutions and scholarship providers, holding **1,105 pre-scheduled 1:1 meetings**, to form new partnerships that expand and enhance the range of educational opportunities available to aspiring GCC students.

Scholarship Organisations

A total of **153** representatives from **71** organisations attended the ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit. **28%** were attending for the first time.

They joined the event from **seven** countries across the Middle East: Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq.



Simon Pond (University of Nottingham, UK)

A fantastic event that provided great insight into the scope for collaboration in the region, and opportunities to meet with ministry representatives, sponsoring bodies and institutions to develop hopefully lasting connections.

Dr Talal Al-Balushi (National University of Science & Technology, Oman)

It was a pleasure to attend this very important event that linked education to community through ICEF and shows the world its dedication to improve and solve challenges world wide.

Education Providers

A total of **184** educators from **93** institutions attended the summit in Muscat this year. The importance of the event was underlined by the fact that **37%** of those in attendance held senior management positions.

Educators travelled from **15** countries, with the top five being the US (36%), Oman (27%), the UK (12%), Canada (7%), and Australia (5%).

For **16%** of educator delegates, this was their first ICEF event, and we look forward to welcoming them back in the future.



Service Providers

ICEF events represent a unique opportunity for the providers of a range of services related to international student mobility to make valuable connections.

For this year's summit, **30** representatives from **13** organisations attended. They came from **10** countries, with the top five being the UK (21%), South Korea (14%), the US (14%), Canada (7%), and Germany (7%).

They held productive 1:1 meetings with educators, government officials, and scholarship providers, collectively representing tens of thousands of students travelling abroad from the region each year.

With the industry continuing to evolve, representatives were drawn from a range of service areas including consulting, marketing services, aggregator & recruitment platforms, destination marketing organisations, government bodies, insurance emergency response, testing services, SA recruitment agencies, and travel services. They brought key industry expertise to the seminars, panel discussions, and roundtable debates held on the first day.

Great delegate feedback

In the post-event survey, the organisation of the summit, as well as the support and level of communication, were rated as good or excellent by **94%** of respondents. This feedback reflects ICEF's ongoing commitment to ensuring excellent and productive events.

82% rated the number of new contacts they made as good or excellent, while **75%** gave the same rating for the quality of the new contacts.

82% of respondents said that they were likely to attend the ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit again in the future.



Buthaina Humaid Al Jamei

(National University of Science & Technology, Oman)

The ICEF summit was fruitful in excelling the opportunity of future cooperation with the other educational institutions and open the doors for resolving the scholarship challenges.

Seminars & informal networking

Developed in partnership with the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit provided the unique opportunity for government officials, scholarship providers and HEIs from across the region, relevant service providers, and senior decision makers in international education to come together in Muscat.

With the first day dedicated to a programme of conference sessions, including **interactive roundtable discussions**, participants focused on the Middle East, working together to identify opportunities and address challenges across the region, ensuring the sustainable growth of outbound student mobility.

Following a warm welcome from H.E. Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrooqi (Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation), the sessions began with **a keynote speech** from Dr Fanta Aw (NAFSA), who provided a high-level overview of the main trends and global challenges facing international higher education. This was followed by a **panel discussion** outlining national and regional trends, responses, innovations, and next steps. Led by David Lock, it featured contributions from senior ministry and APEX body personnel from Gulf countries. This was followed by a related **panel discussion** that provided International and regional perspectives on trends, responses, innovations, and next steps.



[View photo gallery](#)

The day continued with a **third panel**, which looked at how to bridge academia and industry as a catalyst for employability. With representatives from regional universities and SMEs, it focused on developing practical training opportunities for students. The final **panel discussion** then looked at the transformative impact of cultural exchange and collaboration through scholarship and exchange programmes, and how this is achieved through student life and curriculum design.

Delegates then had the opportunity to attend **two roundtable debates**, choosing from a total of seventeen subject areas, which allowed them to learn from their peers while sharing their own experience and expertise. The sessions. The sessions were moderated by senior officials from a range of organisations, both international and regional, before the day concluded with a plenary session, in which key findings were shared.

This busy, productive day wrapped up with **a gala dinner held at the Zale Beach Club, Kempinski**. Sponsored by [St. George's University](#), it provided the opportunity for attendees to connect informally and reflect on the day's sessions. Closing day two, delegates were welcomed to **a dinner hosted by the Sultanate of Oman**, providing the summit with a memorable conclusion.

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