

Finally, an Internationalization Policy for Canada

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Canada does not have a national ministry of education, a national higher education policy, or a national strategy for international education. Previous attempts to develop an international education strategy for Canada have failed, under a federal arrangement where provincial governments closely guard their constitutional responsibility for education—while the federal government has responsibility for international relations. Given this context, the Canadian federal government's 2011 announcement—to allocate Can\$10 million over two years for the development and launching of Canada's first international education strategy—was a bold step toward bringing the various stakeholders together to establish a common pathway.

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL STRATEGY

A strategic approach to international education is crucial to achieving national prosperity in a globally competitive knowledge economy. International education is now intrinsically linked not only with a nation's foreign policy but with other national policies—such as trade, economic development, labor, immigration, innovation, and research. Thus, the absence of a national policy in Canada has led to a piece meal and largely uncoordinated approach, and Canada has only a small share of the global market for higher education. Canada attracts 5 percent of all tertiary students who study abroad, much lower than other major destination countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and France.

A NEW APPROACH

The ministers of International Trade and Finance jointly announced the formation of a six-member expert advisory panel, to make recommendations on how to develop and implement an international education strategy. The panel submitted its report to the government, on August 14, 2012, after a three-pronged extensive consultative process with multiple stakeholder groups. *International Education: A Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity* is a comprehensive and expansive report, offering a total of 14 recommendations under five core themes: targets for success; policy coordination and ensuring sustainable quality; promotion of education in Canada; investments, infrastructure, and support.

One of the most-striking features of this report is that it largely defines international education as student mobility, and it emphatically sends a message that student mobility is not to be a one-way street. A central focus of the strategy

is to both attract top talent, by recruiting the best and brightest international undergraduate and graduate students, and encourage Canadian students to go abroad to develop their global perspective. The advisory committee obviously listened to a range of stakeholder organizations that have advocated for a balanced approach, and it recommends that Canada should send 50,000 students abroad each year—through an international mobility program cofunded by the federal and provincial governments and academic institutions.

The majority of the report, however, is focused on the recruitment and retention of international students, an emphasis that comes as little surprise given the potential revenue associated with expanding the Canadian market. The report recommends that Canada doubles its intake of full-time international students from 239,131 in 2011 to more than 450,000 by 2022, representing a 10 percent annual increase. Under this plan, international students would represent 17.3 percent of the total postsecondary enrollment in Canada, by 2020. This target seems modest and achievable, given the growth in international enrollment over the last decade, with minimal government support or coordination. The economic impact of recruiting international students is emphasized throughout the report. International education is valued as trade, but it is also viewed as an important “pipeline” to the needs of the Canadian labor market. Given Canada’s low birthrates, future economic development depends on immigration, and today’s international students may well be tomorrow’s well-educated citizens.

CHANGING POLICY CONTEXTS

While the report is in sync with global trends, it is striking to note the change in Canada’s position in terms of soft power relations. Canada once distinguished

itself as a noncolonial, middle power—having established international development assistance as a core component of its foreign policy. Through the establishment of the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada was once among the more generous donors of the industrialized countries. Today, the proposed national strategy identifies the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as the national leader for the new strategy, while making only a passing reference to that agency. This is indeed indicative of changed policy contexts. Canada now views international education as an economic and trade benefit. Further, it seeks to position itself competitively with other nations and vies for a leadership position to attract top talent to Canada. The report recommends a massive new investment in competitive scholarships for undergraduate and graduate international students, a positive step toward attracting the best and brightest. However, it is an approach that has little in common with earlier Canadian scholarship programs for students from developing countries.

THE FUTURE OF THE STRATEGY?

Given Canada's federal arrangements, the issue of coordination is key in any attempt to implement a national approach, and this is a major shortcoming of the report. While the report devotes considerable attention to coordination, the task force attempts to address this issue through the creation of a Council on International Education and Research to provide policy advice to the different federal ministries. The new council would include a chair, 3 deputy ministers from federal government departments, and 2 deputy ministers as provincial government representatives. The structure affirms the importance of federal

government leadership in this policy area, but it is difficult to imagine the provinces agreeing to participate in any arrangement that would not include representatives of all 10 provincial ministers of education, several of which already have provincial strategies. Canada does have a “window of opportunity” to raise its stakes in international education. However, its future is dependent on the federal government’s approach to fostering meaningful partnerships with the provinces and securing their commitment to a coordinated national strategy. Will the federal government and the provinces have a strong enough commitment to work against the inherent jurisdictional tensions in Canada’s highly decentralized system? Currently, there has been no official government response to the advisory report.