

Joint Recommendations on Canada's International Education Strategy

July 31, 2023

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) welcome the opportunity to give feedback on the renewal of Canada's International Education Strategy (IES) and offer our recommendations on how it can be strengthened and improved to benefit international students as well as Canada's post-secondary education system.

CAUT and CFS value international exchange to develop knowledge, promote cultural diversity and understanding, enrich the educational experience of students and academic staff, and facilitate international cooperation and development. We share the principle that international students should not be subjected to discrimination on any grounds and the recruitment of international students should not be motivated by financial gain.

International student enrolment has been increasing significantly in recent years along with international student fees. The unprecedented rise in both is in no small part driven by the inadequate levels of public funding to Canada's universities and colleges. This twin growth masks the precarious financial health of many of our institutions which rely on international student fees to maintain high-quality post-secondary education and research. It also has created an exploitative environment with tremendous costs, economic and social, for many students and their families. As noted in the consultation papers for the IES renewal, there are unethical recruitment practices, varied and sometimes poor quality of student experiences (pre, during and post studies), and high demand for services such as affordable housing, food banks, public transit, and settlement services, among others.

The next 5-year plan for international education in Canada should prioritize improving the quality of experience for international students and enhancing equity and diversity as a cornerstone benefit of internationalization.

This would involve:

Increasing transparency and accountability throughout the system

- Establishing information and communication standards for all levels of government, institutions, and education agents, with an emphasis on accuracy, consistency, and accessible information.
- Closing data gaps to improve student decision-making and track outcomes from the IES. These gaps include on and off-campus living and accommodation costs, college tuitions, private, institutional, and provincial student financial assistance, completion and labour market outcomes, reasons for refusal of study permit applications, and race-based data.

- Regulating transparency and accountability around the use of education agents and aggregators, and the training of agents to ensure compliance with ethical practices, including through accreditation of overseas agents.
- Developing an international student immigration and settlement strategy, with improved communication and transparency on pathways to permanent residency.

Improving quality and services

- Expanding the number and value of scholarships to improve access for students regardless of economic means. This should include humanitarian scholarships to support students at risk, particularly those whose human rights are violated or those in need due to emergencies and conflicts.
- Processing across program choices, not only for current perceived labour needs.
- Removing the dual intent provision of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, so that the intention of settling in Canada does not jeopardize an individual's chances of getting a study permit.
- Coordinating work across all levels of government and stakeholders (provinces, municipalities and institutions) to improve access to services including: health and mental health care; settlement services; housing; measures and supports to address and prevent racism and xenophobia; and labour market support post-graduation and earlier in a student's immigration journey.
- Developing national Designated Learning Institution (DLI) criteria based on opportunities for student integration and access to services, in recognition of the growth of private and private-public partnerships that warehouse international students.

The IES should be in the service of a national strategy for public post-secondary education in Canada that works to ensure universities and colleges are high-quality, affordable, and accessible for all students. This strategy should be led by Employment and Social Development Canada, building on its experiences with early learning and childcare and housing. In the absence of such a strategy to address the affordability issues resulting from inadequate public funding for post-secondary education, the financial and human cost for students, our institutions, and the people who work in post-secondary education will continue to mount.

We urge Global Affairs Canada and the collaborating departments to prioritize improving the quality of experience for international students and enhancing equity and diversity in the renewal of the International Education Strategy.