

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

BRIEFING NOTE (CIMM@parl.gc.ca)

Study on recruitment and acceptance rates of international students - Étude sur le recrutement et les taux d'acceptation des étudiants étrangers

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

“International education makes a large and growing contribution to Canada’s prosperity. International students in Canada spent an estimated \$22 billion on tuition, accommodation, and other expenses in 2019 and sustained close to 219,000 jobs for Canadians in 2019. Educational expenditures by international students have a greater impact on Canada’s economy than exports of auto parts, lumber, or aircraft. Between 2014 and 2018, the number of international students in Canada increased by 68%. In 2018, a total of 721,205 international students at all levels studied in Canada—the largest number ever.”([Building on Success: Internationalization Strategy 2019-2024](#))

According to Canada's International Education Strategy, international students in Canada provide immediate and significant economic benefits to Canadians in every region of the country. Data for 2019 shows that more than 642,000 international students spent a total of more than \$22 billion in communities across Canada, helping sustain 218,577 Canadian jobs. Additionally, the direct and indirect activities of international students helped generate more than \$3.8 billion in federal and provincial tax revenues ([Global Affairs Canada, 2020](#)).

International education is vital to Nova Scotia as, on the economic side, it’s Nova Scotia’s second-largest export. In a province of under a million people, there are ten degree-granting universities and a 13-campus community college system, so Nova Scotia has more educational opportunities per capita than almost anywhere else in the country. With an ageing and shrinking population and migration from rural to urban communities, welcoming international students is essential. Nova Scotia hosts the country’s third-largest public school international K-12 program, and many public schools continue to be viable because of the international students they host. Students at Nova Scotia universities and colleges contribute 61% of spending (\$291million) per year. International students spend approximately \$36,400 per year in Nova Scotia ([Gardner Pinfold’s Economic Impact of International Students in Atlantic Canada report](#), p.18).

“Attracting and retaining greater numbers of international and out-of-province immigrants is critical to overcoming the economic and demographic challenges Nova Scotia faces” ([We Choose Now](#), p. 38). International students contribute to our communities and workplaces, pay taxes, pay living expenses, and share their cultural knowledge. Through the growth of international student enrolment and retention, Nova Scotia’s communities have been strengthened.

The Government of Canada recognizes that international students play an integral role in strengthening the Canadian economy. To this end, the Federal Government and the four Atlantic provinces have been working together “to enhance the region's capacity to develop, deploy and retain a skilled workforce by addressing persistent and emerging labour market needs and making Atlantic Canada a destination of choice for immigrants” ([Atlantic Growth Strategy website](#)). Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada as a whole have seen success working together, including the success of the [Nova Scotia Study and Stay ProgramTM](#), the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP), the Atlantic Immigration Permanent Program (AIP), the temporary resident to permanent resident pathway (TR-PR) the new expedited provincial immigration streams targeted at international graduates, and the willingness of engaged employers to work with post-secondary institutions to develop the workforce in our region.

In addition to the successes we have seen, there are also urgent challenges that now face us. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the education sector in Nova Scotia particularly negatively, and travel restrictions imposed by governments around the world resulted in an immediate reversal of very positive growth trends in international student mobility to Nova Scotia over the past decade. In 2018 and 2019, the number of international students studying at universities in the province increased by 18% and 24.2%, respectively. In 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend reversed itself with a decline of 10.8%. ([Association of Atlantic Universities – Survey of Preliminary Enrolments](#)).

Another significant challenge many universities are facing is low study permit approval rates. Nova Scotian universities have historically had low visibility, coverage and prominence in global markets compared to larger, well-known Canadian institutions located in bigger urban centres. This lack of understanding and status may also be borne out in the low study permit approval rates when comparing Nova Scotian post-secondary institutions to institutions in other provinces in Canada (IRCC data, 2018-2019). Recent IRCC data indicates that Nova Scotia universities convert study permit applications to approvals at roughly 55%, versus the Canada-wide average of 69% (IRCC data, 2019). The difference is stark when comparing Nova Scotia’s study permit approval rates to well-known Ontario and British Columbia institutions that convert more than 90% of study permit applications (IRCC data, 2019). We see high refusal rates in key markets that directly impact our international student recruitment efforts and Canada’s global brand.

There are additional provincial, regional, and national concerns about Canada’s competitiveness in international student mobility. Overall, as a country, we assert these challenges are significant enough that we need to come together as a nation to work together to find solutions to overcome them, including challenges related to: (a) visa processing times across the country causing Canada to lag behind our competitor countries; (b) concerns over perceptions of bias in acceptance and rejection rates (including against African countries); (c) concerns about ‘decision by spreadsheet,’; and (d) the fundamental problem of treating international students as temporary visitors rather than a sustained national approach to attracting global talent for Canada’s future.

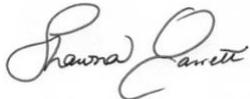
We recommend:

- Submitting a joint request to IRCC requesting comparative application data, rejection rates and processing times, at a minimum by country or VAC, all with a view to this data-gathering exercise would lead to an evidence-based approach to:
 - Upgrade the online AI system (Chinook).

- Recommend additional staff resources be deployed to Canadian processing centres and VACs as borne out by the data; and
- Recommend in addition to benchmarking between Canadian offices, benchmark Canada's outcomes with major international competitors, specifically the UK, Australia, and the US – all of which advertise and guarantee much faster processing times than Canada.

We must come together to find solutions to reverse some of the declines we have seen in international student mobility trends in Canada. We need to ensure Canada's immigration system remains competitive and develop a sustained national approach to attracting global talent for Canada's future.

Sincerely,



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