



Canadian Bureau for
International Education

ACTION PLAN AND SUMMARY REPORT

National Dialogue on International Students

*Charting a path forward for a sustainable and
responsible international education sector*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
International Education Sector Action Plan	4
Thematic Recommendations - Community Integration	8
Thematic Recommendations - Labour Market Integration	10
Thematic Recommendations - Mental Health	12
Thematic Recommendations - Accommodations Needs	14
Annex 1 - Background - Framing the Discussions	15
Annex 2 - Event Agenda	19
Annex 3 - Event Summary	25

INTRODUCTION



In late May 2024, the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) hosted a National Dialogue on International Students in Ottawa. The Dialogue focused on charting a path forward for a sustainable and responsible international education sector and its support to international students. Discussions centred on what we collectively have done right, where and when things started to go wrong, and where we go from here as a sector.

CBIE convened a range of both traditional and non-traditional actors in this sphere to delve into the complex issues faced by the sector. Over 225 participants from across Canada's international education community participated in the event, including senior officials from relevant federal and provincial ministries; leaders from educational institutions; business associations; community service providers; researchers; student associations; national and regional educational associations; and a representative group of international students.

The National Dialogue was the first major multi-stakeholder event convened since the federal government announced a series of measures in January 2024 affecting international education in Canada, including a two-year cap on international student enrolment. Participants were invited to exchange information on the impacts of these measures and to provide advice and share best practices for resolving the underlying problems that resulted from the federal decision to impose the cap. These include the difficulties some international students are facing vis-à-vis community and labour market integration and access to mental health supports and suitable housing.

The National Dialogue provided an opportunity for a frank and long-overdue assessment of Canada's recent performance in attracting, welcoming and integrating international students into our institutions, communities, and labour market. New data from CBIE's 2023 International Student Survey (ISS) presented to participants illustrated a significant erosion in how international students rate their experience in Canada.

This summary report outlines key recommendations that emerged from the event discussions regarding actions required to support the success of international students and uphold the integrity of the EduCanada brand moving forward. The report and its action plan will be shared with all event participants and relevant federal/provincial/municipal governments, national and provincial education associations, educational institutions, community organizations and business associations. CBIE engages with a wide range of actors in order to encourage support for shared responsibility and implementation of initiatives and actions which are necessary for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Canada's international education sector in an ethical manner.

The event was made possible with support from key sponsors, including the **College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants (CICC)**, **EduCanada (The Government of Canada)**, and **World Education Services (WES)**. CBIE would also like to acknowledge the support of our partners including our Data Partner, **ApplyBoard**, our Student Insight Partner, **IDP**, and our Community Connections Partner, **guard.me**, for their dedicated collaboration.

International Education Sector ACTION PLAN

The detailed policy discussions that took place over the two days of the National Dialogue resulted in a broad consensus on actions needed to chart a path forward for a sustainable and responsible international education sector. Comprehensive multi-stakeholder leadership and efforts will be required to achieve these ends.

1

ESTABLISH A PAN-CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION COUNCIL

Creation of a dedicated International Education Council intended to convene key sector stakeholders in order to strategically review and advance key issues flagged during this Dialogue to federal and provincial governments.

There is a need for a pan-Canadian focal point to convene key sector stakeholders in international education on issues and opportunities of strategic importance to the international student file in Canada. The Council would set realistic goals and priorities, with unambiguous expectations and clear lines of accountability for results. Regular meetings of working groups would be an ongoing component, as well as ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue events.

2

CREATE A NATIONAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Creation of a national-level International Student Advisory Council to ensure more frequent and systematic engagement with international students on an ongoing basis to better understand their challenges and successes, and to provide them with the level of welcome and support which consistently delivers on the promise of the EduCanada brand.

3

FORM A CENTRE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

Formation of a centre of IE excellence to gather and share IE data for decision-makers and share best practices from at home and abroad.

The absence of timely, complete, and comparable data on international enrolment and education has been and remains a longstanding problem. More complete international education data will inform sector-wide policy and program decisions and can draw on multiple existing sources including but not limited to StatsCan, IRCC, GAC, ESDC, provinces, JobBank, business community, etc. IRCC sharing of real-time data on provincial & DLI processing times, LOA verification data, and updates of allotments under the national cap on international students will be important components moving forward, as well as post-graduate pathway flows.

4

DEVELOP A NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN TO REFRAME THE NARRATIVE

Development of national communications campaigns to build a new narrative on the value that international students bring to Canadian campuses, businesses and communities as both temporary residents and prospective future citizens.

There is a need to re-frame the domestic narrative on the value of international education in Canada to counter emerging anti-newcomer narratives prevalent across and within Canadian communities. A series of independent, but complementary communications initiatives undertaken by institutions, education associations, governments, businesses and communities can serve to advance a new narrative on the value of IE.

5

DEVELOP A NATIONAL GLOBAL EDUCATION BRAND STRATEGY TO ATTRACT GLOBAL TALENT

Development of a coherent and integrated national effort to rebuild Canada's global education brand and secure our long-term position as a top destination for global talent.

There is a need for a concerted communications and marketing effort on the part of IE sector stakeholders to win back the trust of prospective international students in order for them to see Canada as a viable, stable choice for international education. Information will need to be clear on what has changed, what the current offer is, prospects for permanent residency, and why Canada is still a top-quality destination for learning despite recent policy turmoil.

6

DEEPEN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR A 'WHOLE-OF SECTOR' APPROACH

Deepening federal-provincial government engagement to create better integrated "whole-of-government" approaches at both the federal and provincial levels to inform decisions on goals, targets and priorities related to international education.

This would also include more systematic processes to link enrolment decisions to short and longer-term labour market and demographic needs at the community level. Through this engagement, Canada's skills-specific needs can be identified, but broader capacity-building of talent with transferable skills and global competencies for an evolving and globally interconnected knowledge economy will also need to be addressed.

7

CREATE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE FEDERAL INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY

Canada's next International Education Strategy (IES) needs to include an expanded focus on the sector's comprehensive approach to international education that goes far beyond inbound student mobility.

Further federal government/Trade Commissioner Service support for diversification of inbound student mobility, outbound student mobility, research partnerships, Trans-National Education (TNE) and other innovative programming options to facilitate reciprocal two-way mobility and collaboration will be imperative for creating a more representative, sustainable and ethical approach moving forward.

8

ENSURE SUFFICIENT FUNDING OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Commitment by provinces and territories to properly fund post-secondary education in Canada to ensure a high-quality offering for Canadian students which is not reliant on revenues from international student tuition for operational survival.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION



Key Recommendations

- 1 EXPAND LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**
Expand language training opportunities and encourage international students to pursue official language training to facilitate transition and integration.
- 2 EXPAND INTERCULTURAL TRAINING FOR STAKEHOLDERS**
Expand intercultural competency training at all levels within institutions and government, including for IRCC officers.
- 3 EXTEND SETTLEMENT SERVICES**
Extend IRCC funding of settlement services to include international students.
- 4 CREATE CROSSECTORAL AND COMMUNITY LINKAGES**
Develop more partnerships/engagement opportunities between institutions and settlement agencies, community organizations, NGOs, ethnic and diaspora groups, and business organizations – all which play an important role in supporting international students/immigrants during their studies and post-graduation.
- 5 CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT CONNECTIONS**
Institutions can focus on creating opportunities for domestic and international students to make connections through events, a buddy system, peer mentoring, or through projects such as the University of Toronto's *First-48 hours in Canada*.

6

DESIGN PROGRAMS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS

Institutions can design programs that will attract both international and domestic students to ensure diversity and provide opportunities for interactions and connection building in the classroom.

7

DEVELOP LOCAL CHARTERS

Develop local charters to foster greater linkages between international students, institutions and their communities such as the Brampton Charter, or Durham Region International Community Partnerships (ICP).

8

PLAN COMMUNITY INTEGRATION INITIATIVES

Convene education associations, municipal and provincial governments, business and community organizations together to plan community integration initiatives and share best practices.

9

FOSTER INTEGRATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Municipalities across the country can replicate the approach of the City of Hamilton toward international students; or create new innovative approaches to forging connections and fostering integration of international students.

LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION

Key Recommendations

- 1 LABOUR MARKET PATHWAYS TO PERMANENT RESIDENCY**
Define provincial/regional/municipal labour market needs to feed into IRCC visa permit processing and facilitate targeted pathways to permanent residency.
- 2 RECOGNIZE FOREIGN CREDENTIALS**
Expand efforts to recognize foreign credentials.
- 3 EXPAND WORK RIGHTS TO LANGUAGE SECTOR STUDENTS**
Allow language sector students to work in order to fill many service sector gaps and provide practical/useful experience.
- 4 FACILITATE LINKAGES AND UNDERSTANDING WITH EMPLOYERS**
Institutions can facilitate linkages to prospective employers and employer groups and serve as an access point to international students; help employers to understand how to engage with and hire international students; and provide tools/support for on-the-job orientation.
- 5 INCREASE WORK-READY SUPPORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**
Institutions can also support international students in preparing for Canadian workplaces – including through cultural training, job application and interview skills, education around workplace norms, and informing them of their labour rights.

6 EXPAND WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Facilitate more coop and work-integrated learning, mentorship and internship opportunities for international students through institutional program design, government and NGO programs, and collaboration with community/industry groups.

7 EMBED COOP WORK RIGHTS INTO STUDY PERMITS

IRCC can remove the coop work permit as a requirement and embed it in study permits for international students.

8 INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO ENTER THE TRADES

Expand recruitment of international students into trades programs and allow international students to pursue apprenticeships.

9 EXPAND THE CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Expand eligibility and funding for the Canada Summer Jobs program to allow international students opportunities to work and build connections to transition to work after graduation.

10 PROVIDE CLEAR COMMUNICATION ABOUT PATHWAYS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Provide clear communications to international students about pathways to permanent residency (including managing expectations that not all can stay) – before, during, and after their studies.

MENTAL HEALTH

Key Recommendations

1 EXPAND PROVINCIAL HEALTH CARE COVERAGE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Expand provincial health care coverage to international students and/or require all institutions to have a provider for private health insurance for international students (most providers include mental health benefits now). This is already mandatory for all K-12 public schools in the International Student Program.

2 IMPLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO FACILITATE A SENSE OF BELONGING

Institutions can implement deliberate opportunities to facilitate a sense of belonging for international students and general support to stave off homesickness, loneliness, and isolation.

3 INSTITUTIONAL HOLISTIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Institutions can implement holistic mental health services for faculty, staff and students (domestic and international) and integrate mental health into all services, including career services etc. Expansion of institutional opportunities for peer mentorship, including training and workshops, around mental health support will also be helpful. Institutions can also take the approach of establishing teams of local wellness advisors on campus.

4 PROMOTE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

Institutions can provide and promote multilingual, culturally safe and accessible interventions, and conduct regular check-ins with international students (via app, email, texts and/or phone calls including around certain geographic events such as an extreme weather event, war etc.).

5 UTILIZE EXISTING RESOURCES AND TOOLKITS

Institutions can implement the use of toolkits available at [Campusmentalhealth.ca](https://campusmentalhealth.ca).

6 COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

Institutions can collaborate with community mental health providers and take inspiration from existing approaches/resources such as Soch Mental Health in Toronto and Upstream Ottawa mental health community support.

7 IMPLEMENT NATIONAL STANDARDS

Institutions can implement The National Standard of Canada for Mental-Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students, which is a set of flexible, voluntary guidelines to help post-secondary institutions support the mental health and well-being of their students & The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) – which is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.

8 POST-GRADUATION SUPPORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Institutions can collaborate with community mental health organizations to hold off-campus events, foster connections, and ensure support of international students post-graduation.

ACCOMMODATIONS NEEDS

Key Recommendations

1

PROVIDE TAX CREDITS FOR HOMESTAY

Provide tax credits for individuals who open their home to international students for homestays.

2

RECOGNIZE A MULTITUDE OF HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Develop and recognize a multitude of housing solutions specific to local communities and the needs of a diverse population of students (domestic and international) such as community/private partnerships, shared buildings, homestay, host families, bedroom rentals, building secondary suites in homes, and doubling up residence rooms.

3

WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITIES

Work with communities to reduce rent inflation and help residents see that supporting and renting to international students is an investment in their community.

4

RAISE AWARENESS OF TENANCY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Institutions can raise awareness of tenancy rights/responsibilities, landlord obligations, occupancy limits etc. and provide connections to legal aid supports where required.

5

CONSIDER CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Explore the real needs and desires of international students in the kinds of affordable housing and living situations they seek. Recognized that communal/shared living often has many benefits and may be more of a cultural norm than in the North American context.

BACKGROUND - FRAMING THE DISCUSSION



In preparation for the National Dialogue on International Students, CBIE produced a discussion paper that was shared with participants and posted on the CBIE website to help conceptualize and shape the discussions for the two-day event. The content of that discussion paper follows.

NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Charting a Path Forward for a Sustainable and Responsible International Education Sector

May 22-23, 2024

Canada's international education sector is at a crossroads. Canada's success in growing its international education sector has brought immeasurable benefits- not just for international students who study at our high-quality institutions, but for domestic students and the institutions and the communities that receive them.

The terms of the bargain have always been clear.

- In exchange for their tuition, international students receive a high-quality international education experience in a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment. While here, they enrich the quality of life on campus and in their host communities. After completing their study programs, they emerge job-ready with first-rate qualifications that are globally recognized.
- Host institutions provide incoming students with appropriate, culturally sensitive wrap-around supports that allow for a successful, high-quality education experience (i.e. orientation, access to housing, health, mental health, job search and other services). They also facilitate and support mutually beneficial academic and research exchanges.
- Communities and businesses that host or rely on international students to address demographic imperatives or to bridge labour market gaps, provide them with opportunities for personal and professional growth and ensure their access to necessary health, social and community services.
- Governments welcome and sometimes directly support incoming international students to achieve a variety of public policy objectives, to: enhance the quality and sustainability of institutions; foster people-to-people connections that advance global understanding and solidarity; meet United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; advance foreign policy and trade interests; strengthen competitiveness by attracting and retaining the best global talent; and, to counter population decline.

Done properly, this virtuous circle is a win-win for everyone.

ANNEX 1 | BACKGROUND

However, with the sector's unprecedented growth, pressure points have been building in select regions, institutions, programs, and communities. The number of international students opting for Canada has increased sharply. And against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, inflation and insufficient access to health care and affordable housing, consensus for how to address these pressure points is proving elusive.

Moreover, there are growing instances of international students reporting negative study experiences while in Canada. These include, among others: shortages of adequate, affordable housing; mental health issues; lack of diversity in classrooms; oversaturation of certain programs and destination cities; financial and work challenges; racism/intolerance and lack of integration into Canadian communities; etc.

These trends culminated in January 2024, with IRCC's announcement of a temporary intake cap on new international study permit applications. This was in addition to other recent new requirements that prospective students prove increased financial capacity to afford their studies in a context of more limited options for working part-time, off-campus.

Implemented unilaterally with limited notice, these measures were a jolt to Canada's international education sector. These policy instruments- admittedly among the few available to the federal government to calibrate the rate of international student enrolment- have had deleterious consequences. For some institutions, these abrupt changes pose an existential threat. They also risk eroding Canada's hard-won global brand as a destination of choice for international education and our ability to attract the best and brightest international students that our businesses require. Furthermore, the abrupt changes have left many international students- who were encouraged via the EduCanada brand to study in Canada and despite following all the rules - in limbo. Given the uncertainty and confusion, these students may choose other study destinations.

Provinces and institutions- especially those with the highest levels of international student enrolment- are working hard to adapt to these new measures. With the implementation of this cap, the number of allocated study permits is now significantly lower than the supply of international students who (prior to the cap at least) were interested in studying in Canada. Jurisdictions are struggling to make difficult decisions on how to allocate them between universities, technical colleges and degree programs, and how to remove bad actors from the equation altogether.

As Canada embarks on a new chapter in international education, we have an opportunity to reflect and strategize - to get it right - and design an ethical and sustainable IE framework for Canada. A more strategic, agile, inclusive, and better-informed approach to international education planning and priority-setting is required and must involve a wider range of actors.

ANNEX 1 | BACKGROUND

As a sector, we must ensure that we live up to the commitments and values we promote to international students under the EduCanada brand. To provide international students with a positive study experience in Canada, we need to support them from the time they choose to apply to study with a Canadian institution to post-graduation and transition to work.

Doing so, will ensure not only the successes of individual international students, but will enable Canada to benefit from their training and skills, and secure our long-term position as a top destination for international education.

FOR DISCUSSION

At a time when solidarity and consensus for how to move forward is critical, public squabbling between sectors and institutions on how to balance these alternatives is making headlines and has the potential to further erode the EduCanada brand. Instead, the collective focus of IE practitioners, policymakers, institutions and stakeholders should be on reimagining IE in Canada.

There are big questions and wicked problems:

- How do we revitalize the IE sector to ensure it clearly and unambiguously contributes to specific public policy objectives?
- If the rationale for the temporary cap on international enrolment is to allow time to “realign policies and programs to maintain a welcoming and supportive environment for international students”, what precisely does “welcoming and supportive” mean in policy and programmatic terms? And who is accountable for setting that threshold and assessing if it is being met?
- What does this mean in regard to individual, institutional and jurisdictional roles and accountabilities for delivering and maintaining quality IE?
- How do we set realistic and realizable priorities within and across sectors in the absence of timely, consistent, comparable, trustworthy and complete data on IE progress and outcomes? Too much is at stake to continue to allow IE decision-makers to make policy and program decisions in a vacuum. Indeed, the current crisis in the sector is arguably the result of a failure of the policy-making process in the absence of a fulsome data picture. Why was it suddenly a surprise to learn that investment in core capacity for accommodating the needs of international students was not keeping up with enrolment growth? Where were the forecasts for planners to make the right investments?

- Most importantly, how do we ensure international students get the quality IE experience they paid for, and host institutions, communities and employers derive the myriad benefits smart IE programming can deliver?

As Canada embarks on a new chapter in international education, we have an opportunity to reflect and strategize – to get it right – and design an ethical and sustainable IE framework for Canada. A more strategic, agile, inclusive, and better-informed approach to international education planning and priority-setting is required and must involve a wider range of actors.

As a sector, we must ensure that we are living up to the commitments and values we promote to international students under the EduCanada brand. To provide international students with a positive study experience in Canada, we need to support them from the time they choose to apply to study with a Canadian institution, to post-graduation and transition to work.

Doing so, will ensure not only the successes of individual international students, but will enable Canada to benefit from their training and skills, and secure our long-term position as a top destination for international education.

A NATIONAL DIALOGUE

This national event will focus on charting a path forward for the Canadian international education sector and its support to international students. Discussions will focus on what we have done right, where and when things started to go wrong, and how, as a country, we can chart a sustainable path forward.

To that end, we will convene a range of both traditional and non-traditional actors in this sphere to delve into the complex issues faced by some international students and explore how best to support them in areas such as labour market and community integration, housing and mental health.

Following the event, a summary report of the key recommendations that emerge from the discussions will be produced and shared with relevant federal and provincial governments and other key stakeholders.

This report will endeavour to provide recommendations about necessary leadership, structural, policy and programming changes, the development of new strategic partnerships and coalitions, mechanisms for sharing and scaling up best practices, along with additional research, data and knowledge mobilization required to support the sector's continued efforts to support the success of international students and uphold the integrity of the EduCanada brand.

Annex 2

EVENT AGENDA

May 22, 2024

8:30 AM - 8:45 AM

Land Acknowledgment and Opening Remarks

Speaker

Claudette Commanda

Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder, and Chancellor, University of Ottawa

8:45 AM - 9:15 AM

Opening Remarks and Results from CBIE's International Student Survey

Speaker

Larissa Bezo

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE

9:15 AM - 10:45 AM

Policymaker Perspectives on Ensuring a Welcoming and Supportive Environment for Canada's International Students

Speakers

Larissa Bezo – Moderator

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE

Atiq Rahman

Assistant Deputy Minister, Learning Branch, Employment and Social Development Canada

Mark Wyatt

Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy and Sector Relations, Ministry of Advanced Education, Government of Saskatchewan

Sara Wilshaw

Chief Trade Commissioner, Global Affairs Canada

Zoë Kroeker

Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Planning, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Government of Ontario

France Haché

Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education, Government of New Brunswick

11:00 AM - 12:15 PM

The View from the Frontlines: Responsible International Education Leadership

Speakers

Vinitha Gengatharan - Moderator

Assistant Vice-President, Global Engagement & Partnerships, York University

François Gélinau

Vice-Rector, International Affairs and Sustainable Development, Université Laval

Janet Morrison

President and Vice-Chancellor, Sheridan College

Patricia Gartland

CEO and Superintendent of Schools, School District No. 43 (Coquitlam)

Robert Summerby-Murray

President and Vice-chancellor, Saint Mary's University

Sean Kennedy

President, Niagara College

12:45 PM - 1:15 PM

Strengthening the Integrity of Canada's International Student Program

Keynote Speaker

Senator Ratna Omidvar

Independent Senator, Senate of Canada

1:15 PM - 2:30 PM

Community perspectives on ensuring welcoming and supportive integration for Canada's international students

Speakers

Shamira Madhany – Moderator
Managing Director Canada and Deputy Director, World Education Services

Daniel Bernhard
Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Canadian Citizenship

Marshia Akbar
Research Area Lead on Labour Migration, Toronto Metropolitan University

Roopa Desai Trilokekar
Associate Professor, Department of Education, York University

Samina Sami
Chief Executive Officer, COSTI Immigrant Services

Stefa Sokolowski
Business Development and Global Hamilton Officer, Invest Hamilton

2:45 PM - 4:00 PM

Business Perspectives on Ensuring Welcoming and Supportive Labour Market Integration for Canada's International Students

Speakers

Isaac Garcia-Sitton – Moderator
Executive Director, International Student Enrolment, Education and Inclusion, Toronto Metropolitan University

Christina Santini
Director of National Affairs, Canadian Federation of Independent Business

Diana Palmerin-Velasco
Senior Director, Future of Work, Canadian Chamber of Commerce

Valerie Walker
Chief Executive Officer, Business + Higher Education Roundtable

Kelly Archer
Director, Employment and Social Development Canada

4:00 PM - 4:55 PM

Student Perspectives on Study, Life and Work in Canada

Speakers

Carole St. Laurent – Moderator

Associate Vice President, International, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Ailin Barzegar

International Student, University of Windsor

Carla Castilho Simon

Recent International Student, Université de Montréal

James Nguyen

International Student and International Student Assistant, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Juan Carlos Magsalin

International Student, Niagara College

Norland Dean

International Student, College of the North Atlantic

4:55 PM - 5:00 PM

Closing Remarks

Speaker

Larissa Bezo

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE



May 23, 2024

9:00 AM - 9:05 AM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Speaker

Larissa Bezo

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE

9:05 AM - 10:20 AM

Supporting the Mental Health and Well-being of International Students

Speakers

Larissa Strong – Moderator
Director, International, College of the Rockies and CBIE Board member

Beamlak Tareke
International Student, Toronto Metropolitan University

Marija Padjen
Director, Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health

Michel Rodrigue
President and CEO, Mental Health Commission of Canada

Wasiimah Joomun
Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

10:45 AM - 11:45 AM

Meeting the Accommodation Needs of International Students

Speakers

Chris Busch – Moderator
Associate Vice President, Enrolment Management, University of Windsor and CBIE Board member

Graham Barber
Assistant Director, International Relations, Universities Canada

Jean Lamirande
Director General, Housing and Community Policy Directorate, Infrastructure Canada

Michael McDonald
Director, Government Relations, Colleges and Institutes Canada

Rylan Kinnon
Chief Executive Officer, SpacesShared

12:15 PM - 1:15 PM

Ministerial Visions for the Path Forward on International Students

Speakers

Larissa Bezo

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE

The Honourable Marc Miller

Minister, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

1:30 PM – 4:00 PM

Where Do We Go from Here? Implementing a New Path Forward on Canada's International Students

Speakers

Larissa Bezo – Moderator

President and Chief Executive Officer, CBIE

Andrew Champagne

Manager, Student Mobility, Colleges and Institutes Canada

Graham Barber

Assistant Director, International Relations, Universities Canada

Jean-Philippe Tachdjian

Executive Director, International Education, Global Affairs Canada

Julie Spattz

Senior Director, International Students Policy and Programs, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

EVENT SUMMARY



The National Dialogue endeavoured to cover a range of important topics related to Canada's international education sector and its support for international students. CBIE also aimed to include a diversity of perspectives from both traditional and non-traditional actors involved in some capacity in international education. CBIE sees this initial high-level set of discussions as a starting point and fully acknowledges that there are numerous more issues to address and nuances to unpack – particularly at the sub-sector and regional/community levels as we all collectively work to chart a path forward for the sector. CBIE recognizes that the experiences of both international students and international education actors vary by level of study (K-12, language, Cégep, PSE – undergraduate and graduate), size/type of institution, and regional/community-specific realities.

A one-size-fits-all approach is not the answer to such a multi-faceted and complex sector. Further dialogue on these nuances will be needed, but for now given the state of the international education sector, there is an urgent need to come together for the survival and sustainability of the EduCanada brand.

Below is a high-level overview of the discussions that took place.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & OPENING REMARKS

The event was graciously opened by Claudette Commanda, Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder, and Chancellor, University of Ottawa who set the tone for collaborative and collegial discussions to follow with a focus on the value of education, the wellbeing of international students, and in the spirit of ongoing work to build reconciliation with Canada's First Nations peoples.

Larissa Bezo, President and CEO, CBIE provided opening remarks to set the stage for discussions for the following 2 days. In her remarks, she acknowledged that recent decisions that the Government of Canada felt were imperative to take in order to address a complex and intertwined set of public policy issues have had a destabilizing effect on international education in Canada. The sector is facing much uncertainty with respect to the future of the cap on international student enrolment and other anticipated forthcoming policy measures that will further impact Canada's International Student Program.

She suggested that all players in the sector have been complicit in some way for not doing enough to flag problems in the evolution of Canada's efforts to recruit, welcome and support international students, that we all intuitively knew were on the horizon.

ANNEX 3 | EVENT SUMMARY

Rather than assigning blame, or finger-pointing, the aim of this event was to encourage all to contribute to building a better, smarter and sustainable international education policy framework that is fit for purpose, that is ethically sound and that advances Canada's domestic and international priorities.

To further frame the discussions and to get to the nub of the issues, she suggested that we collectively need to shed light on three key questions:

1. *How do we express in policy and programmatic terms to the goal of ensuring capacity to provide a "supportive and welcoming" environment for international enrolment in Canada?*

She acknowledged that for years now, CBIE and other partners and institutions have been advocating for an ethical international education framework for Canada which explicitly advances these objectives and includes sanctions for "bad actors". She suggested that if the current cap on international student admissions is based on building this capacity, we need to decide three things:

- Who and how to decide what success looks like;
- How do we measure and report to decision-makers and Canadians on an ongoing basis if it is being met; and
- What happens if it is or is not being met?

There is nothing new here; CBIE and Canada's IE sector have been asking for this for years.

Today's IE challenges result in part from our inability to break down silos and gather and share complete pan-Canadian information and data about Canada's IE sector. We collectively lack the data necessary to make informed IE decisions- at the community and institutional levels, among our key business and R&D enterprises, and, certainly, at the provincial/territorial and federal levels.

Indeed, how could the current IE crisis have come as such a surprise? These gaps have been flagged repeatedly. The current crisis gives us a chance to take a bold step forward and finally get this right.

2. *What is a sustainable level of international enrolment for Canada? What is the target, and how do we arrive at it?*

She noted that everyone acknowledges that the previous approach was untenable and that it represented a failure of foresight, of policy, of intra-governmental and inter-jurisdictional coordination, and frankly- a failure of respect for international students. There is no going back. We get it; the sector gets it. Canadians want it and get it. But what is the right level to target?

3. How can we work quickly to articulate a comprehensive pan-Canadian IE vision, with clearly defined roles and accountabilities?

She concurred that a new, “tough love” approach to DLIs was overdue and a temporary enrollment cap is part of the hard reality we need to manage. The full impacts of the current uncertainty are still being assessed by institutions- and clearly, for some, they are an existential threat. But what do they signify for what we want to achieve as a country through International Education? Because neither of these measures alone will help us reconcile such key issues, as:

- **The impact on Canada's R&D and productivity.** The current policy changes create restrictions for our institutions in fully harnessing mobility (short-term research exchanges). Exchanges are vital for research in many key emerging sectors. If we do not have sufficient space to host the best global talent, we are also not in a position to send out our best Canadian talent. And these measures do little to address the disconnect between supply and demand of skilled talent. The impacts of these recent decisions will ripple across Canada's R&D enterprise for years; they won't be fixed overnight.
- **The impact on skills shortages.** How do we calibrate our processes to ensure timely access to the global talent pipeline our industries need to survive? How do we balance enrolment between universities and colleges that provide the skilled workers we need- today and tomorrow? One merely needs to look at the skilled talent that will be required to deliver on Canada's ambitious new housing plan to recognize that we need a mix of both domestic and international talent to deliver on the plan.
- **The impact for Canadian diplomacy and Canada's international brand.** What do the proposed caps mean for Canada's suite of international scholarship programs, for our ability to achieve UN Sustainable Development goals and for the new Indo-Pacific strategy, for our place in the world, which we know has been in decline for some time. How does it affect our global engagement and soft power? What do these changes mean for us as the number of international student alumni declines? Over the past 10 years, a significant proportion of students who studied in Canada returned home or have gone on to other jobs. Yes, they create important connections for our businesses, but they are also part of the informal network we rely on to be our champions and advocates when geopolitical tensions arise - as happened in the past with Saudi Arabia and more recently with India. What will having fewer numbers of international students who return home after their studies, mean for our future prosperity?

- **The impact on communities that host international students.** What will they need to do to support institutions? How do they communicate to decision-makers their demographic and labour market imperatives? What will be the economic and social impacts of lower enrolment? Will the purported benefits of these changes be realized? How do we avoid smaller communities and jurisdictions, in particular, in rural and remote areas, from being disproportionately impacted?
- And, finally, **the impact of these change on international students** themselves.

RESULTS FROM CBIE'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY - PRESENTATION

As an informative foundation for the discussions, Larissa Bezo, President and CEO, CBIE provided a summary of the results of CBIE's latest International Student Survey (undertaken in November 2023). The preliminary results showed that while Canada continues to enjoy a strong global international education brand and that most international students are generally satisfied with the quality of their experience in Canada, a few concerning trends have emerged. These perceptions of course pre-dated the major policy changes that were announced in early 2024.

A growing number of international students report experiencing instances of discrimination and of feeling unsafe; or have considered leaving their institution because they felt isolated or unwelcomed. Sixty percent of surveyed students had challenges finding and securing accommodation on arrival.

Among those working part-time to finance their studies, an increasing number report being under-employed, having difficulty understanding employer expectations and having to deal with employers unfamiliar with the rules for engaging international students.

Student intentions to apply for permanent residency and stay in their province of study have increased in most provinces, with the exception of Ontario and PEI. Interestingly, 33% of respondents are considering becoming entrepreneurs in Canada.

Lastly – and more concerning- a growing number of international students say they are less likely to recommend Canada as quality study destination to their peers. It is clear that there is much work to be done to reverse this gradual unravelling before Canada's global reputation in international education is tarnished irreversibly.

POLICYMAKER PERSPECTIVES ON ENSURING A WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - PANEL DISCUSSION

Event delegates heard from senior federal and provincial officials about how they are responding to the immediate and ongoing impacts resulting from the temporary cap on international student enrolment and what the decision has meant from a policy and programming perspective. They also acknowledged the multiplicity of policy objectives at play related to international education including diversification and labour market needs in the context of Canada's International Education Strategy, and issues with funding for post-secondary education in Canada.

On one hand, from their respective vantage points, each of the panelists acknowledged the positive and intrinsic value of international education for Canada. What emerged from the discussion, though, were five themes:

- First, each of the panelists recognized the challenges of delivering sound policy in this complex and interconnected domain. While it was heartening to hear that the three main federal departments are engaging in policy dialogue at multiple levels, this collaboration appears to be ad hoc and episodic, rather than as a result of a deliberate and structured process of policy development and priority-setting.
- Second, and more importantly—there was also an implicit acknowledgment by panelists that this siloed approach makes it hard to realize international education's full potential. Instinctive approaches by smart, committed public servants absolutely helps, however empirical ones that are evidence-based are clearly superior.
- Third, from the perspective of provinces, the federal decision to cap international enrolment was an unwelcome surprise. The failure to consult with jurisdictions, or to calibrate the cap and other measures impacting international enrolment to local needs and priorities, was described as profoundly disappointing.
- Fourth, there was consensus that coherent and consistent international education policy and programming are crucial. Disconnects between announced government policy priorities and investment in the capacity to meet them, risks eroding Canada's credibility in global markets.
- And last, everyone acknowledged they had a contribution to make to ensure a more robust, strategic, and welcoming policy environment for sustainable international education.

ANNEX 3 | EVENT SUMMARY

What became clear from the discussion is that durable solutions need to be holistic, flexible and involve multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions. This is not a federal problem; there are only so many levers the Government of Canada can pull. It is a pan-Canadian challenge that requires all the partners in this domain to work collaboratively to preserve the advantages international education provides for Canada. Decision-makers within and across jurisdictions need to align their efforts. Working in silos and using "one-size-fits-all" solutions will not suffice given how interwoven today's international education challenges are in a country where jurisdictional roles and accountabilities are as diffuse as they are in Canada.

THE VIEW FROM THE FRONTLINES: RESPONSIBLE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP - PANEL DISCUSSION

Institutional leaders shared the devastating impacts of the IRCC decision to cap international student enrolment - how it came as a shock, that it failed to acknowledge the economic value-add the sector provides, and that it poses an existential threat to some host institutions.

Noteworthy efforts to deal with some of the challenges - like the Brampton Charter, which commits partners to higher standards for meeting the needs of international students, and Quebec's attestation process, that allows prospective international students to apply to as many as three programs within a single application and provides for more hands-on engagement with prospective candidates - were noted as best-practices to emulate.

Panelists suggested that progress clearly requires a better integrated, consistent, and supportive policy environment around issues like post-secondary funding and community and business supports for international students. Furthermore, timely access to critical information on international enrolment trends and results to inform these decisions is imperative moving forward. Neither of these conditions will evolve spontaneously and will by necessity be the result of an inclusive, thoughtful, and deliberate process of long-term planning and strategic investment.

STRENGTHENING THE INTEGRITY OF CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM - KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Senator Ratna Omdivar provided a compelling and sobering presentation on the Senate's research into the challenges some international students in Canada have experienced. She reminded us that we are not dealing with abstractions, but with real problems being experienced by real people- here and now in Canada. She also made it clear that international students - by in large - are not here to game the system.

She stated our moral duty to provide them with the high-quality international education experience they were promised and that they paid for. She also pronounced our collective responsibility to weed out the bad actors - however we define them.

In the current context, she recognized that we need to work hard and fast so that prospective international students do not interpret the failures of process they have witnessed of late, as failures of respect. Because we absolutely need a successful and robust international education sector to build a stronger Canada. Underpinning this is the fundamental necessity of stable funding for post-secondary education in Canada.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON ENSURING WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE INTEGRATION FOR CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - PANEL DISCUSSION

Participants heard how communities are stepping up to deliver practical solutions to the challenges that gave rise to the decision to cap international student enrolment. Panelists shared compelling examples in the delivery of critical supports that better meet the needs of international students.

A range of approaches and supports to more fully integrate international students into their host communities were discussed. The role of institutional-community partnerships was highlighted with a view to colleges and universities taking a community development approach to welcoming international students – which goes beyond the boundaries of the institution.

The important role and capacity of settlement agencies to take on more of a role with international students was discussed, along with other community-based organizations. The impact of ethnic and faith-based organizations in the integration of international students was also noted. Panelists noted the importance of all of these services during international students' studies, but that these supports need to continue post-graduation to support an effective transition out of the institutional bubble and into the community and labour market.

Participants learned about the City of Hamilton's approach to international students which includes direct engagement, introducing them to employers and advocating on how to hire them. The Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council connects newcomers (including international students) to settlement services. The city also runs communication campaigns such as Hamilton Employers Hire Immigrants – which raises awareness about the opportunities and benefits of hiring newcomers and immigrants. Through Hamilton International Students, volunteers work to help international students thrive in all aspects of life through various weekly and monthly events and providing connections to other service-providers. The example of the deliberate efforts of the City of Hamilton to engage and integrate international students is a highly effective model that could be replicated in other communities across the country.

BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES ON ENSURING WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION FOR CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion providing a business perspective on how to leverage the economic and labour market benefits of international education in Canada was very instructive. There was wide recognition of the sector's potential value and no shortage of goodwill to be active in supporting a win-win solution for international education.

Panelists discussed some of the real and perceived barriers to effective private sector involvement in hiring international student talent- whether for meeting short-term labour market needs or for developing and recruiting longer-term highly skilled talent. Issues with a mismatch between skills in demand and the programs from which international students are graduating were also noted as leading to less successful outcomes for permanent residency.

Panelists noted the importance of expanding coop, work-integrated learning and mentorship opportunities for international students to foster post-graduation labour market integration. Employers, institutions and international students all have a role to play in preparing for successful hiring. Making these types of efforts the norm rather than the exception, will require a deliberate, multi-faceted strategy and access to timely and complete data on international student enrolment and labour market outcomes in a variety of fields.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON STUDY, LIFE AND WORK IN CANADA - PANEL DISCUSSION

The lived experiences shared by the international student panel, including their reasons for choosing Canada, their arrival on campus and experience in the community and on the job market, provided a much-needed reality check for all participants.

The international student panelists provided a timely reminder of the challenges they confront on arrival and valuable insights into the types of programs and interventions that matter. More than that, they demonstrated their creativity, resilience and willingness to contribute to their host communities and institutions and to serve as peer mentors to smooth the path forward for other international students.

Panelists noted the importance of supports not only before and during their studies, but with immigration and labour market transitions post-graduation for those who stay in Canada. For support during their studies, they highlighted the important role of student associations and involving domestic students directly in supporting the integration of international students.

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS- PANEL DISCUSSION

Panelists discussed the increased conversation around mental health, the decreased stigma, and the increase in students (domestic and international) seeking mental health supports. The challenges faced by many international students including financial and housing insecurity, world events, the pandemic, culture and learning shock, isolation and loneliness, were all noted.

Panelists described the importance of a whole-of-campus approach to creating a psychologically healthy workplace in tandem with embedding student mental health support into every staff role on campus – to create a healthy environment for staff and students. Adapting approaches to be culturally tailored, appropriate, accessible and safe for a wide diversity of international students is a fundamental step in facilitating greater uptake of services. Working with international student associations and community partners are both important elements in supporting international students' needs both on and off-campus – and both during and after the completion of their studies.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada shared information about The National Standard of Canada for Mental-Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students, which is a set of flexible, voluntary guidelines to help post-secondary institutions support the mental-health and well-being of their students. The use of Stepped Care 2.0© (SC2.0) was also noted as a highly effective model for organizing and delivering evidence-informed mental health and substance use services.

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health shared a number of examples of their robust and comprehensive toolkits for supporting student mental health which are available on their website. Soch Mental Health – which is a nonprofit enhancing the mental health literacy of South Asians through education, prevention, and resilience-building initiatives in Toronto – as well as Upstream Ottawa mental health community support, were cited as highly effective and replicable service support agencies.

The panelists underscored that accountability for mental health supports must be widely shared by institutions, by faculty, by the host community and by international students themselves. Increasing mental health literacy and building bottom-up and top-down capacity to meet these challenges and reduce stigma must be an ongoing priority for all.

MEETING THE ACCOMMODATION NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - PANEL DISCUSSION

Panelists discussed what constitutes “suitable” housing for international students, how their accommodation needs and expectations may differ based on source country, how other countries are addressing this issue and the wider policy environment that is arbitrarily constraining the supply of housing stock. These constraints ranged from regulatory issues at the community level that limit the availability of housing, limited access to financing for construction of residences, to caps on the number of skilled trades people necessary to build housing.

Panelists noted that solutions require long-term systemic reforms affecting a wide variety of actors beyond institutions themselves. New forms of partnership between institutions and communities, between the public and private sectors, between homeowners and students, are essential to achieving progress in creating a sustainable student housing strategy.

As an example, participants heard from SharedSpaces about its innovative approach which pairs students looking for safe and affordable housing with hosts (often seniors) who have a spare bedroom. From this perspective, there are 5 million empty bedrooms in Ontario which could serve as a solution to the current student housing issues. It is a solution which also benefits older adults by allowing them to stay in their home, addressing loneliness and creating a sense of connection and community.

Federal and provincial governments need to establish collective priorities for investments in housing and infrastructure to address long-term needs in terms of different types of housing (for workers or students for example) and creating multi-purpose spaces. A robust immigration and education system will be needed to support faster and more innovative building to address Canada's short to long-term housing needs. International students are part of that solution.

MINISTERIAL VISIONS FOR THE PATH FORWARD ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - FIRESIDE CHAT

The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, joined Larissa Bezo, President and CEO, CBIE for a fireside chat to discuss his vision and leadership on Canada's approach to international education through immigration policies and programming in the context of broader federal priorities.

Minister Miller outlined his focus on addressing the vulnerabilities that some international students have faced as a result of the large increase in the volume of inbound students and bringing more integrity to Canada's International Student Program. He suggested that the laissez-faire era of international student enrollment has run its course and that quality of

ANNEX 3 | EVENT SUMMARY

international enrolment and alignment with labour market needs will be the focus for IRCC moving forward. He acknowledged that recent policy changes will make for a turbulent year in post-secondary education.

He acknowledged that accountability for progress at the federal level pertaining to international students is shared by IRCC, GAC, ESDC, and ISED and that a more coordinated and coherent federal approach to these issues is needed. But he underscored that provinces and territories have an equal responsibility to get their houses in order - to define more clearly what it is they want and expect international education to deliver for them and for their institutions, communities, and businesses. Provinces and territories need to work collectively and collaboratively to make the case for higher and more sustainable levels of international student enrollment and ultimately address the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education which has led to the current situation with international students.

Finally, he indicated that he remained in active listening mode regarding criteria for Designated Learning Institutions, defining sustainable international enrolment levels and supportive community capacity for welcoming international students and encouraged ongoing dialogue with his team and the department on these objectives.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PATH FORWARD ON CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS - PANEL DISCUSSION

Dialogue participants held rich discussions to outline key recommendations to include in a sector action plan to address the key thematic challenge areas of the event and broader goals to create a sustainable and responsible international education sector. Consensus on recommendations that emerged from these table discussions as well as the closing panel session are included in the action plan above.

In the closing panel, IRCC provided an update on its vision in terms of current and future policy reforms to ultimately maintain Canada's status as an attractive market to international students. A detailed update on plans and thinking for the Recognized Institutions Framework was provided.

GAC provided a helpful historical overview of Canada's series of International Education Strategies (IES) – with the ultimate GAC mandate of bringing prosperity to Canada. Early aims were focused on growing the number of international students. This was achieved and the focus moving forward needs to be more selective and strive to bring the best and brightest to stay and address Canada's labour market gaps.

ANNEX 3 | EVENT SUMMARY

The important role of alumni who return to their home countries was also acknowledged. In anticipation of the next iteration of Canada's IES, it is clear that diversification, labour market needs, and addressing integrity issues in use of agents, will be key themes. GAC also signalled that innovative approaches to international education beyond traditional recruitment of international students, such as Transnational Education (TNE), dual degrees, licensing curriculum, and campuses abroad are all opportunities which the Trade Commissioner Service can support institutions in pursuing in markets around the world.

CBIE, Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada all offered perspectives on a strategic, intentional, collaborative and ethical approach to international education which serves Canada's interests and secures global recognition of our phenomenal education system. They also highlighted the strength of 'coopetition' – cooperation and competition in our work with each other – to advance the sector's objectives.



Canadian Bureau for
International Education

Canadian Bureau for International Education
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5Z9
www.cbie.ca

©2024 CBIE