

**Creating a *Knowledge Advantage*
through International Education**

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AUCC applauds the new government's objective, as outlined in its economic plan, *Advantage Canada* to pursue a "knowledge advantage" in which Canada will create "the best-educated, most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world." As the government recognizes in its plan; "talented, motivated people have become the world's most valuable resource."

An important means of achieving this objective is to create a two-way flow of students, both Canadian and foreign. This is reflected in the government's policy commitment in the economic plan to encourage the "best foreign students to attend Canadian colleges and universities by marketing the excellence of Canada's post-secondary education system," and more broadly in its commitment to support improvements in the quality of education for Canadians.

AUCC proposes two new initiatives that will assist the government in delivering on these commitments:

1. A national strategy to brand and market Canada's post-secondary education (PSE) system that will attract international talent to our country, with an excellence-based scholarship program as its centrepiece, an outreach and promotion program, as well as a coherent and streamlined immigration policy framework; and
2. A program of short-term study abroad grants to allow Canadian students access to international education experiences which will equip our domestic talent pool with the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to reinforce Canada's leadership in a global knowledge economy.

1. Branding and Marketing Canada's PSE System

Forecasts estimate that the number of students who will pursue their post-secondary degrees abroad in the next 20 years will triple¹. Competition for this pool of talent is expected to increase, both among leading nations, as well as from new competitors such as emerging market countries China and India.

This growing pool of global talent has the potential to bring significant economic and societal benefits to host countries as a future source for highly qualified people that can supply the labour market/workforce and feed the research and innovation pipeline.

To ensure Canada can effectively compete for the best and brightest in this growing and competitive market, it must become a destination of choice. Other OECD countries' approaches include, as essential elements in being a destination of choice, a national-level branding and marketing strategy underpinned by prestigious international graduate scholarships and aligned immigration procedures. Some examples include:

Australia has been internationally recognized for its concerted approach to attracting global talent. Its nationally-led marketing campaign is underpinned by a suite of prestigious scholarships. Known as the *Australian Scholarships*, they are valued in 2006 at over Cdn\$1.2 billion over five years, and are designed to attract more than 19,000 top flight graduates and post-doctoral students from around the world to Australian universities.

¹ According to the IDP Education Australia Report, *Global Student Mobility 2025: Forecasts of the Global Demand for International Higher Education*, demand is forecasted to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2025.

In addition to its famous *Rhodes Scholarships*, the United Kingdom began in the 1990s to put in place a range of measures, including the branding of the excellence of its institutions, to ensure its universities attract a growing share of global talent. Its flagship prestigious scholarship program, the *Chevening Scholarships*, funded at approximately Cdn \$ 70 million per year, support about 2,300 students from 150 countries each year to pursue postgraduate studies of research at U.K. institutions of higher education.

The United States government has moved in a targeted way to overcome the difficulties faced since 2001 through various initiatives that have seen its numbers of international students rebound considerably. In addition to its long-running *Fulbright* scholarships present in over 100 countries, the United States has introduced immigration reforms and aggressive outreach and promotion programs abroad to boost its numbers of incoming students.

Seizing the Opportunity

- **Establish a prestigious excellence-based scholarship program**

To be internationally competitive, a bold step is needed to address this challenge on a global scale. We propose a flagship program of scholarships which would annually offer 1000 Master's-level scholarships (each worth \$17,500 for one year of study) and 1000 PhD-level scholarships (each worth \$ 35,000 a year for up to three years.)² With these parameters, an investment of \$52.5 million would be required in year one of the program, \$87.5 million in year two, and when fully subscribed, the annual investment required would be \$122.5 million.

Another possible consideration for this program could be the strategic targeting of a portion of the scholarships to the fields of the sciences, engineering and mathematics. Targeting of this nature could also be linked to an emphasis on the highly-demanded discipline of business administration, recognising the importance of efforts in technology transfer and commercialization. This type of focus would then allow the scholarship program to reinforce the priorities of the emerging federal S&T strategy.

- **Develop a new internationally recognizable brand along with an outreach and promotion campaign**

International students tend to choose the country first and then select an institution. The need for a distinctive national brand promoting the excellence of Canada's higher education which differentiates us from other countries is as important as ever. The great advantages of Canada's international reputation as a safe and welcoming country, having consistent high quality of education in its universities, strong research infrastructure, and focus on innovation can form the core of the message that will be part of the branding and promotion strategy.

A strong and influential national brand, built to effectively promote Canada's higher education opportunities, would therefore provide us with a communications platform from which to reach our target audiences across the globe. It would involve an effective implementation of global, regional and country-specific marketing strategies developed in consultation with PSE institutions and aligned with Canada's strategic partnership goals. Elements of targeted strategies could include communications campaigns, new information tools, enhanced support for and coordination of ongoing recruitment efforts, as well as increased outreach activities by Canadian representatives abroad.

² The number and value of these scholarships is benchmarked to the Canadian Graduate Scholarships program: half the number and the same value. These figures are also comparable to what is offered by key competitor countries.

The Canadian university community is committed to continuing its considerable investments in international recruitment. Still, to put Canada on a level playing field with competitor nations and to maximize benefits from the institutions' efforts and other government initiatives such as international scholarships, we believe a bold commitment by the federal government in the order of \$8 million a year³ would provide Canada with a strong international presence resulting in a pronounced increase in international students choosing Canada as their destination for study.

- **A coherent and streamlined immigration policy framework**

The policy commitment unveiled in the Advantage Canada plan to “make it easier for Canadian-educated foreign students to stay in Canada and become Canadian citizens” is an important commitment. That said, it is only one point on a “continuum of service” that should be provided to international students in order to position Canada as a destination of choice. Canada’s recruitment efforts must be underpinned by a coherent and streamlined immigration policy framework which also includes competitive turn-around times on study permit issuance – particularly in markets where the competition is fierce – favourable treatment of graduate students’ spouses/dependents, easily accessible off-campus work permits and the opportunity to apply for landed immigrant status while on a student visa without having to return home first. Achieving this coherence in the continuum of immigration service requires that a strong priority be placed on international students, both in policy and deployment of resources. This will, however, ensure that we are positioned to maximize the benefits from federal government investment in scholarships and marketing, as well as PSE institutions’ own investment.

2. Increasing Canadian Student Mobility

The “knowledge advantage” promoted by the government in its *Advantage Canada* plan emphasizes how important it is to have the “best educated and most skilled and most flexible workforce in the world.” We firmly believe a crucial element in creating the kind of workforce that can operate competitively in a global environment is enhancing Canadian students’ capacity through international education experience.

The importance of international education is underscored by Canadian business executives who rate “a cosmopolitan world view” as one of the top three skills needed by future corporate leaders. A Conference Board of Canada study also clearly demonstrates the link between a two-way flow of students and key indicators of economic competitiveness such as trade and foreign direct investment. Recent Strategic Counsel polling data show 82 percent of Canadians agree that knowledge of other cultures and an understanding of the world are increasingly important qualities in today’s labour market and 71 percent think that more students should be exposed to student exchanges or internships abroad.

Nevertheless, access to international education opportunities offered by Canadian institutions for Canadian students from a broad range of backgrounds and from all parts of the country remains a pressing challenge. AUCC research found that in 2003, less than one percent of university students participated in short-term, for-credit international education opportunities. At the current three percent annual growth rate, it will take some 20 years to double the number of Canadian students going abroad. Students’ lack of financial resources remains the most significant barrier to addressing this situation.

³ This figure is comparable to investments for core activities in areas of promotion and branding by the governments in UK and Australia. See for example, in the UK, Phase I of the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education launched in 1999 and Phase II announced in April 2006.

Without investments to increase Canadian students' access to international education opportunities, only a small number from mainly privileged socio-economic backgrounds will benefit and Canada will fall even further behind its competitor nations in using international education as a strategic instrument for creating future political, business, and research linkages, as well as to promote international understanding.

Seizing the Opportunity

To move Canada forward and create a critical mass of highly qualified people in Canada with first-hand international experience, we believe it is important to set an achievable target of having 5 percent of Canadian university students participate in short-term study, internships, or research abroad annually.

- **A target to create a critical mass**

As an important step towards this target, we should provide an additional 10,000 Canadian university students annually with the opportunity to participate in study abroad by 2010.

Canadian universities have demonstrated their interest and capacity in moving forward on this urgent issue and are already taking steps to contribute to the overall target. For its part, the Canadian university community will help support an additional 2,000 students annually by 2010 by seeking innovative financial and other partnerships with the private sector. Further, Canadian universities will continue to strengthen their support for international education by leveraging their existing international networks.

We call on the federal government to establish a strategically important program to help an additional 8,000 Canadian undergraduate and graduate university students annually have access to study, work (e.g. co-op, internships, etc.) or research abroad opportunities provided by their institutions, particularly those students with financial need. Portions of this program could also be targeted to those countries with which Canada wants to strengthen its economic and political relationships aligned with its strategic priorities. A program of small-scale grants could be set up to achieve this target with an investment by the federal government in the order of \$25 million annually.