

Branding Canadian education

Federal government developing 'brand' to promote post-secondary education in Canada to attract more international students

By Teresa Wright

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Canada is about to get a new brand for post-secondary education that officials hope will attract more international students to the country's universities.

International students contribute about \$5 billion annually to the Canadian economy through the tuition they pay, living expenses, travel and family members who come to visit.

But the country could be making a lot more, according to Andrea Desmarreau, of Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFIT).

She's working with Edu-Canada, a branch of the federal government that looks after international students. The department wants to promote a Canadian education brand as a way of improving Canada's market share of international students dollars.

Currently, Canada is falling behind in the percentage of students from other countries coming to the country for college or university, she said during a regional meeting of the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) held this week at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Canada has only five per cent of the world market share of international students, Desmarreau told the conference of educators and CBIE members.

The United States, on the other hand, has over 21 per cent of this market.

"Why is Canada doing so poorly? We don't have a brand for Canada," Desmarreau said.

"We're not being presented in a unified way."

That's why the federal government has contributed \$2 million over two years for the research and development of a Canadian brand of education to sell on the international post-secondary market.

This education brand has been developed in close collaboration with the provinces and territories.

But it's not ready to be unveiled quite yet.

Debbie Pineau from P.E.I.'s Department of Education is a member of the federal-provincial committee that has been working on developing the brand.

When it's officially unveiled in the fall, this brand will be complete with a unified look, a logo, a marketing strategy — but most importantly an “empowered idealism” about Canada as a good choice for post-secondary education.

“We want students to see what learning opportunities there are, whether it be at a veterinary college, at a research institute, or whatever they want to specialize in,” Pineau said.

“In a world miles and miles away from where they're from, we want them to find out what Canada is and what we have to offer.”

This national brand is an initiative that's been in development for the last two years.

Detailed research began as the preliminary step. Through this research, officials found that a country's appeal topped the list as the main factor for students when choosing where to study.

Canada is in third place in most students' perceptions of education quality, behind Australia and the United States.

Pineau and Desmarteau said they want to see Canada rise to No. 1 on that list.

“It's been proven that countries with brands in international recruitment are very successful,” Pineau said.

“If we have a brand that promotes Canada students will choose Canada, and then from there they'll do their research of where they want to go and which institution they want to study at,” Desmarteau added.

The Canada education brand is set to be launched this fall.

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