

It's time to maximize benefits from international students

The Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade, released an important study last week that demonstrates how international students contribute significantly to Canada's economy.

The report, **The Economic Impact of International Education in Canada**, contains some remarkable numbers, beginning with \$6.5 billion – the total amount spent by the 178,000 international students in Canada last year. This figure is greater than the values of the export of coal and coniferous lumber – two of our traditionally largest export sectors. According to the report, education services are Canada's number one export to China and the second largest export to South Korea. The presence of international students at Canadian institutions provided employment for over 83,000 Canadians and generated more than \$291 million in government revenue.

The magnitude of these figures provides additional evidence to support our call for a new investment to assist our member institutions in attracting this global talent to pursue their education and research here in Canada.

These economic outcomes are only the most recent indication of the benefits associated with international students, while they are here studying and after graduation, whether they choose to return home or put their expertise and knowledge to work in Canada.

While studying here, students from abroad bring diverse perspectives, expertise and skills to Canadian classrooms and labs and contribute to creating global, 21st-century institutions of education and research across Canada. This positive effect is not restricted to just the largest urban centres. The presence of international students at our institutions in smaller communities brings together many cultures from around the world which in turn, infuses the broader community with diversity.

When they graduate from our schools and return to their countries of origin, many become business, governmental and academic leaders, creating international networks that strengthen Canada's economic and diplomatic ties abroad.

When they choose to stay here, foreign graduates bring significant economic and social benefits to Canada as an ideal source of highly qualified people for the skilled labour market – already integrated into our communities and without any of the barriers related to foreign credential recognition. A forthcoming report from the Canadian Bureau for International Education indicates that 52 percent of university students and 71 percent of college students intend to stay to work in Canada for up to three years after they graduate. Given that international students largely graduate in business and engineering, they represent a top talent pool matched to our labour market needs.

Now added to the list of benefits is this fresh evidence of the immediate economic impact of international students to Canada. As we begin to emerge from the current economic downturn, the potential of this significant sector of our economy needs to be realized.

The Government of Canada recognizes the linkages between international students and our economic competitiveness and we welcome the Minister's commitment to work with us to market Canada as the destination of choice for students. Progress has been made through recent government measures such as the development of a new education brand, improvements to immigration policies and processes, and the creation of the new Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships. Still, the efforts of other countries continue to eclipse those of Canada through major government-funded branding and marketing initiatives.

Now is the time to maximize the many benefits of bringing Canadian education to the world. On behalf of the key national educational associations representing the spectrum of institutions across the country – universities, colleges, public school boards and language schools, we are calling for a significant new government investment in an international student recruitment strategy that promotes the excellence of Canada's education system to the many talented students abroad.

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