

January 12, 2009

Hon. Jim Flaherty, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Finance  
House of Commons  
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Flaherty:

In the run-up to this month's budget, many decisions will already have been made. However, we hope there is time to consider a matter of major importance to the social and economic well-being of the country.

We refer to international education, specifically, Canada's participation in two streams of activity:

1. Attracting international students to our shores – through promotion, work opportunities and scholarships; and
2. Retaining qualified international graduates of our institutions as permanent residents and immigrants.

The current economic crisis must be addressed, no doubt, but short-term considerations and quick fixes should not distract the Government from the positive course it has already begun to chart on both these agendas.

*Why?*

- **International students are a net benefit – socially, academically, culturally and economically**

They bring in billions to the Canadian economy. There are no recent, reliable data – a severe shortcoming – but even rough estimates put their impact at \$5B per annum. Research shows that this is compounded by the multiplier effect in the local community.

This Government has recognized the importance of attracting international students by supporting improvements in the Off-Campus Work Permit Program (OCWP), funding an important education branding initiative, continuing support for the Commonwealth Scholarships, and establishing the Vanier Scholarships. We applaud all of these initiatives. At the same time, more needs to be done.

International students continue to report delays in study permit renewals and in issuance of work permits. Their frustration diminishes the quality of their experience and, in the end, as they report their challenges at home, will work against real increases in our country's attractiveness as a destination. Resources must be applied where they are needed. Otherwise, we offer empty, or half-empty, promises.

Moreover, we understand that a substantial amount has been dedicated to the promotion file, resulting in an excellent *Imagine Education in Canada* brand. However, this funding needs to be secured and augmented. A brand is not static; it must change with the times. Otherwise, our efforts to compete with other major host countries – which invest much more and have continuously done so over a number of years – will be seriously diminished or, quite simply, fail.

Currently only the Government, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and provincial education ministries can use the brand. CBIE urges rapid roll-out of the brand for institutional and association use. Canada has long needed an education brand and the current brand and branded products are a good start, but big visibility can only be gained through education providers and the associations representing them such as CBIE.

Scholarships continue to be an intelligent investment and should be seen as complementary to branding and promotion.

Over the past two years, the Government has demonstrated its understanding of this fact and its dedication to scholarship provision.

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. This Canadian-proposed plan has supported the mobility of over 25,000 future leaders from a range of countries. Canada has both invested and benefitted substantially from participation in the Plan. Canada has also cooperated with an array of other countries under the Government of Canada Awards umbrella. Over the past three years, Canada's support to study and research programs and to one-year Post-Doctoral Research Fellowships, for both Commonwealth and GCA countries, has seen upwards of 600 top students and researchers arriving in Canada.

Canadian participation in these major international scholarships is a winning proposition for Canada in so many ways. We applaud the Government for not only retaining these programs but deepening its support in strategic fashion – enabling Canada to attract more students, researchers and fellows, some of whom may eventually call Canada home and all of whom will continue to work with Canada in the future. Our participation also in numerous cases ensures reciprocity for Canadian students seeking a globalized education.

The Government, in addition to reinforcing the Commonwealth and GCA program, has initiated the Vanier Scholarships. With regard to the latter, we are gratified that the Government has opened them to international students on a level playing field with Canadians.

In all of these programs, though, a sustained effort is key to maximum visibility and success. Guaranteed multi-year support is needed, not short-term renewable programs of varying duration.

**Recommendation One:** CBIE urges the Government to commit to sustainable, long-term support of the Commonwealth, GCA, Vanier and other major programs, with at least a ten-year lifespan.

**Recommendation Two:** CBIE urges the Government to provide sustained support to the branding initiative and to immediately provide resources to launch the brand's use by institutions and associations.

- **International graduates of our institutions make stellar immigrants**

CBIE's often-cited research report, *Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions and the National Workforce* made the link between labour market gaps and the skills that these graduates offer. It suggested ways of improving our record of retaining these grads. We are gratified that this Government has responded decisively and affirmatively to our recommendations, notably through improvements to the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWP) and implementation of the Canadian Experience Class.

But more attention must be paid to incentives that will encourage these graduates to stay here. This includes research on their needs, such as data collection on applications to the PGWP vis-à-vis potential applicants. Our report also urged an employer sensitization program on the PGWP that has yet to materialize.

Recently CBIE has attempted to identify funding for our essential research report, the *National Survey of International Students in Canada*. Since 1988 CBIE has been running these surveys every few years – currently every five years – to take the pulse of international students, their experience, their attitudes, their satisfaction levels. We are pleased that we are usually able to obtain funding from an array of departments, but are frustrated that research in this area is seen as relatively low priority and that there is no single locus of funding. The piecemeal approach we have to undertake means that a significant amount of energy is expended on start-up rather than deepening our research activity.

**Recommendation Three:** CBIE urges the Government to identify data collection and evaluation of Canada's performance in international education as a priority.

**Recommendation Four:** We urge that the Government designate CBIE to deliver an annual report on Canada's performance in international education broadly, funded by a single department. The report would cover international students in Canada and other areas of international education in which Canada should be a bigger player, but is in fact losing ground: education service exports, offshore campuses, participation in education-related international development, and so on.

The *Advantage Canada* plan and initiatives have already set Canada on a refreshing new course in international education. It is imperative that these initiatives not be pushed aside during the current economic downturn, as if they were "frills." In fact, education services are increasingly vital to our economic prosperity, preparing our own students to compete internationally and attracting new potential immigrants, as well as building our services export portfolio.

Despite the economic situation, in which some may argue for reduced spending on international education, we urge the Government to stay the course and in fact expand its commitments. Education, for our own students and those from abroad, are vital components in Canada's economy of the future.

With our highest compliments,

Jim Fox  
President