

**CBIE MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Canada lags in competition for talented foreign graduates**

**As baby boomers retire en masse, Canada should be keeping the international students who graduate from its institutions – but complications here and competition from abroad get in the way**

*Ottawa, October 30, 2007* – Evidence shows that Canada will soon experience major labour market shortages. The OECD warns that the proportion of our population aged 65 and over to the working age (24-65) population will rise from 20% in 2004 to 45% by 2050.

Efforts to keep baby boomers engaged in the workforce past retirement age are underway, coupled with measures to attract skilled professionals from abroad – many of whom, however, will not be permitted to practice in their fields until they obtain Canadian accreditation.

At the same time, Canada is not the only nation trying to fill skills deficits and other countries are more aggressive. As well, some of our top trade competitors are recruiting international students very effectively, to Canada's detriment – Canada has dropped out of the top five preferred study destinations and now ranks 14<sup>th</sup> in the OECD in terms of percentage of foreign students studying at its institutions.

Moreover, Canada is not very successful at retaining the international students it does manage to attract.

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) today released the first national study of the experience of international graduates who attempt to enter the national labour market. The research was conducted on behalf of CBIE by a team led by Dr. Sheryl Bond of the Faculty of Education, Queen's University and with support from the Canadian Council on Learning. "CCL is pleased to have provided funding support to the Canadian Bureau for International Education. In contrast to other reports on this topic, the CBIE report relays the barriers to work faced by international graduates from their own perspective," said Paul Cappon, President and CEO, Canadian Council on Learning.

The objective was to learn how well Canada is doing in engaging international graduates in the labour force and how Canada's approach to attracting international students to work here compares to what is being offered by other countries with which Canada competes in the global marketplace. The results were startling.

Researchers surveyed 900 international students and recent graduates, and interviewed students, advisers and employers. Expecting that a majority of international students would be keen to work in Canada post-graduation, they discovered angst and cynicism concerning their chances of gaining employment. The research team found that fully two-thirds do not intend to pursue this option, despite improvements in government policy, that is: increased duration of

post-graduation work, from one to two years (with the surprising exception of the most populous cities); and off-campus employment, up to 20 hours per week, during academic study.

“We’re missing out on a golden resource if we don’t encourage more of our international graduates to stay,” said Jim Fox, CBIE President.

Key findings of the report, entitled *Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce*:

- Only a third of international students graduating from Canadian post-secondary institutions plan to stay in Canada to live and work. Another third plan to go home: students from powerhouse economies such as India and China say they will get better employment in their own country. Finally, a third plan to study or work in a different country, most frequently the United States.
- Despite improvements, students find policies and practices — not to mention application forms — inconsistent and confusing. Some feel that Canada isn’t serious about wishing them to work here. They find it ironic, given that the country continues to encourage immigration and spends a lot of energy on foreign credential recognition, that foreign graduates with Canadian credentials face so many roadblocks.
- Students in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver — where many jobs are located — are frustrated that they are excluded from the second year of post-graduation work.
- Employers are often unaware that they can hire international students and graduates. Those who are aware tend to be reluctant to do so. Employers with US interests said that hiring international graduates is not an option since these individuals cannot cross the border freely.
- The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand are aggressively working to retain their international graduates. Their efforts include five-year permits in the UK and, in Australia, assigning immigration officers to regional locations to speak to employers about hiring foreign graduates. Beginning in November 2007, foreign graduates in New Zealand will be able to spend up to a year finding work there, instead of the current six months. In Canada, foreign graduates have only 90 days to find a job and get a work permit.
- If Canada wishes to attract and retain more international students, it must invest in the dissemination of knowledge to stakeholders, including employers, officials, institutions and students themselves.

The study sounds a call to action. Jim Fox said, “These “northern lights” in Canada’s midst are a talented group who like living here, but do not feel welcome in our labour force. Improvements must be made quickly if Canada is to capitalize on this resource.”

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