

# Canada's International Education Strategy Renewal

**Consultation for Global Affairs Canada  
Universities Canada  
July 18th, 2023**



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## Introduction

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Universities Canada is the voice of Canada's universities, representing public and private not-for-profit institutions at home and abroad. Our 97 universities are located in communities across Canada, serving over 1.4 million students and employing upwards of 400,000 people [1]. Our universities—through teaching, research and local engagement—transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to the most pressing challenges facing our country and the world.

Canada's universities continue to build multi-faceted and comprehensive international partnerships which include two-way student and faculty mobility, capacity-building, joint programming and research collaboration. Universities have been focused on diversifying their international student population to ensure enrolment remains sustainable and their campuses reflect true diversity. Universities Canada is leading a market recovery and diversification strategy to rebuild existing markets and expand Canada's international student recruitment efforts.

Universities Canada plays a supportive role to our members' internationalization goals. Over the past three years, we have led exploratory work in specific regions and countries identified by our membership. This includes Vietnam, the Philippines, Colombia, Morocco, Senegal and longer-term engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. During the pandemic, we adapted our international engagement through virtual activities, which included digital missions and virtual roundtables with ambassadors and our members. Our approach involves raising Canada's profile through presidents' missions and signature events, including recent digital missions in Vietnam and Morocco, the Canada-in-Asia Conference in Singapore and an upcoming in-person mission to the Philippines in November 2023.

In preparing this submission, Universities Canada conducted in-depth consultations with our member institutions to determine our sector's priorities for the new International Education Strategy. These consultations were conducted in English and French and were comprised of focus groups with International Liaison Officers and Government Relations Officers, one-on-one discussions with department heads and written submissions from institutions across Canada. From these consultations, we heard that universities look to collaborate with Global Affairs Canada on initiatives that support the EduCanada brand, such as market diversification activities, research collaboration, in-country trade commissioner support, commitments to funding mobility programs and addressing issues with study permit processing.

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## The Value of Canadian Universities

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International university students are an essential part of growing Canada's economy and strengthening its communities. Over \$40 billion in spending flows through Canada's post-secondary institutions each year, which generates over \$55 billion in economic activity. Almost 700,000 direct and indirect jobs are attributable to spending by institutions [1]. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that off-campus student spending may generate a direct benefit to surrounding communities of up to \$17.5 billion and visitor spending associated with post-secondary education (PSE) institutions adds about \$2 billion in economic impact [2].

International students make major contributions to filling talent gaps and driving Canadian competitiveness. Employers are facing unprecedented challenges in finding and retaining the talent they need during this period of economic recovery and growth. International talent accounted for 84% of the growth in the total labour force, and 55% of the growth in high- and medium-skilled jobs over the past 12 years, according to Statistics Canada. New immigrants to Canada are earning more than ever before [3], and contributing to Canada economically and socially as never before. Statistics Canada reports that one-third of international students who arrived in the late 2000s and early 2010s became permanent residents within 10 years of being in Canada [4].

Canadian universities are well regarded around the world for the quality of education they provide and for their contributions to society. Ranked against universities worldwide, Canada's universities were among the most represented in the Times Higher Education's top 100 Impact Rankings, which rates contributions to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [5].

Beyond the critical contributions of talent and research, Canada's universities and international students serve as anchors for their communities. Universities have increased student enrollment, delivered on their

educational missions, provided safe learning environments for students and contributed to their local economy. Through internationalization, universities bring diversity and new perspectives to communities outside of urban centers.

Though the investments Canada has made in students and youth are significant, they are not sufficient for developing the highly skilled workforce needed to compete globally. Canada's economy stands poised for tremendous growth, yet a shortage of skilled talent remains among the most cited impediments to Canadian business success. This last year only magnified the importance of international talent, particularly within the digital economy, which is set to lead Canada in future growth. High skilled and digital sectors such as cleantech, advanced manufacturing, agri-food, digital media, clean resources and health and biotech are forecasted to be among Canada's fastest growing, both in terms of employment and economic growth.

Although we have seen incredible growth in study permit applications received and processed in the last few years, growth in the post-secondary education sector has been very uneven. While universities have been steadily growing international student numbers by an average of 10% year-over-year—including post-pandemic—other actors within the sector have seen growth exceeding 20% year-over-year.

**Recommendation:** To remain competitive in the global race for talent, Canada must develop more robust, inclusive and accessible educational and career pathways for international students and researchers. Universities are important partners in helping Canada meet this challenge. Undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate programs generate reliable talent pipelines, and universities' international recruitment efforts and high caliber research facilities bring the world's brightest minds to Canadian shores.

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## Digitalization

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While Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is working on modernizing and digitizing the international student program, there remains a great deal of work. Universities Canada recently polled its member universities regarding their views on the temporary changes made to the post-graduation work permit (PGWP) program related to the inclusion of online learning time. In this poll, universities underscored the importance of maintaining a balance between online and in-person classes. In-person classes as a tool to help international students acclimatize to Canadian culture and set them up for success within the job market, while Online education attracts new students by providing flexible delivery structures and expanding access to those unable to easily travel.

The majority of our member universities are in favor of continuing the facilitation measures for distance learning and believe international students should be able to continue their study online on a permanent basis without this affecting their eligibility for the PGWP. We recommend the facilitative policy be extended to allow for flexible learning schedules. We also recommend the policy be reviewed in 2024 to determine if this has led to any unintended consequences now that most universities have returned to in-person classes full-time.

Many of our competitor markets have adopted this hybrid learning model. Australia, for example, is currently attempting to use online education initiatives to recruit international talent. They are doing this by offering work permit programs that lead to permanent residency for students who are enrolled in specific areas of study.

## Alumni



International alumni play a key role in Canada’s international student recruitment, as they play a connecting role between our universities and top students from their home country. Alumni act as brand ambassadors of their alma mater and, by sharing their experiences, help shape the institution’s reputation abroad. Alumni who have had good experiences may even promote the institution in a more formal manner, for instance by participating in university marketing campaigns.

Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Universities Canada have come together in the past to leverage Canada’s university alumni networks. The 2023 Canada-in-Asia Conference, organized jointly by Universities Canada and the Asia Pacific Foundation and sponsored by GAC, gathered Asia-based alumni of Canadian universities with key leaders from business, government and university sectors across Canada, Singapore, and across Asia. The focus of the event was on enhancing trade and investment, food security, the clean energy transition, building equitable and inclusive societies, higher education, and tackling climate change. Panellists included university presidents, thought leaders, and industry changemakers from Canada and Asia. They provided unique perspectives

from their institutional and personal backgrounds. Over two days, more than 585 attendees – including 330 from 17 economies across the Asia Pacific and over 400 Canadian university alumni – discussed the next phase in Canada’s engagement with Asia. International alumni connections realize the benefits of the internationalization of our education system by connecting business leaders in international markets with Canadian business and post-secondary. We need to do more events like these that connect alumni, business and education leaders.

**Recommendation:** The Canada in Asia conference, co-organized by Universities Canada and the Asia Pacific Foundation and sponsored by Global Affairs Canada, opened opportunities for Canadian students in the ASEAN region. Continuing this conference and looking for others that focus on building alumni connections will help build on that momentum. We also encourage Global Affairs to build on the alumni network as a strategy to strengthen the Canadian brand abroad through supporting institutions in their alumni events and working with prominent alumni as part of EduCanada’s marketing strategy.

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## Sustainability

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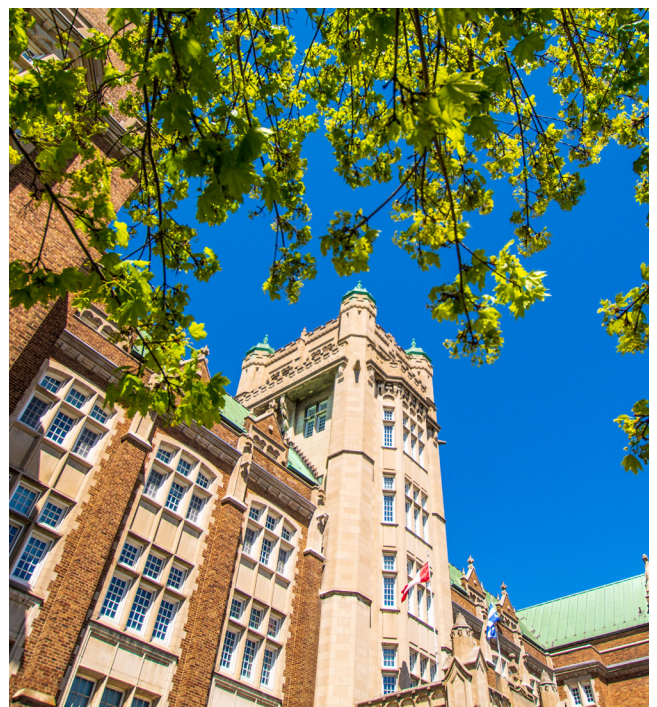
Universities are key players in protecting our planet and fighting climate change. Through cutting-edge research, Canadian universities are deepening our understanding of the environment, developing new technologies to power sustainability, and increasing our resilience against extreme weather events. Universities are educating the next generation of climate experts while simultaneously working to address their own emissions. Many institutions are using their campuses as learning labs to serve as active environments for research focused on sustainability challenges.

As of 2023, 15 of Canada's universities ranked in the top 100 in the world for their work to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, over 75% of Universities Canada member institutions have created dedicated sustainability strategies to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 [6]. Universities across the country are working to reduce travel where possible and mitigate the environmental impacts of travel when it does take place. Internationally collaborative research and learning experiences are critical to advancing knowledge and combating climate change. Many universities are creating travel policies to reduce unnecessary travel by increasingly pursuing virtual international experiences and determining whether travel should take place based on the quality, length, and intensity of the experience. In addition, they are working to reduce the impact of travel by focusing on more sustainable modes of transportation and purchasing carbon offsets. Universities play a critical role in developing solutions to help mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change through their research activities. They also help equip Canadians with the skills they need to succeed in a green economy.

Universities Canada is supporting and catalyzing this work through its Action for Net Zero initiative. Through this initiative, Canada's universities are working together and collaborating with others in the post-secondary sector internationally on sustainability to share best practises, align efforts and deepen their impact. They are partnering with the business and

community sectors as well as their local governments to tackle real world challenges and help their communities mitigate and adapt to climate impacts already being experienced from coast to coast.

**Recommendation:** We encourage Global Affairs to work with the university sector to address sustainability issues and identify best practices. Canada's universities have long been leaders in sustainability and are committed to helping the country achieve its climate targets. We encourage Global Affairs to expand its KPI indicators, such as meeting the SDG's targets and other net zero actions to measure the success of activities against the environmental impact. Our member institutions increasingly seek long-term and sustainable partnerships to build links with stakeholders and institutions in various key markets and Global Affairs Canada can encourage this by prioritizing long term partnership building around sustainability topics.



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## Indigenous Participation

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Universities have helped to advance truth and reconciliation by revitalizing Indigenous languages, ensuring Indigenous representation in governance, and bringing Indigenous knowledge and culture to campuses. Despite this, Indigenous students face additional barriers to accessing international education. Increasing the opportunities for Indigenous students to study or work abroad is essential to the reconciliation process.

Universities are also working to help international students embrace, understand, and engage in First Nations' culture through Indigenous education programs that focus on Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and history. As an example, the University of Prince Edward Island's new Indigenous teachings course, which is now a mandatory undergraduate course, focuses on lessons about colonialism, residential schools, the reserve system, intergenerational trauma, resilience and taking action to fight ongoing anti-Indigenous racism.

***“This program offers people their dignity because we know their past. We know the colonization process, that ceremonies were banned for many years.... In Quebec, there are many Indigenous communities that still speak their language and it's important to work with them.” Eva Ottawa, former grand chief of the Atikamekw Nation and law professor at the University of Ottawa, 2022***

**Recommendation:** Canadian universities continue to bring about better Indigenization education for international students and contribute to developing intercultural understanding, acceptance, and relationships. Continued funding for Indigenous outbound mobility programs through the Global Skills Opportunity program (As of March 31, 433 GSO participants self-identified as Indigenous) and Indigenous education for international students will ensure these meaningful relationships stay intact.

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## Outbound Student Mobility

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The Global Skills Opportunity (GSO) program is the Government of Canada's outbound student mobility pilot project, which is funded through Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and administered by Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan). GSO programs support students from underrepresented groups in Canada to travel abroad and gain invaluable skills that allow them to compete in an ever-globalizing world. The program aims to empower post-secondary institutions to increase the participation of young Canadians—especially underrepresented students—in international learning opportunities both at home and abroad.

As of mid-May, there are almost 5,000 post-secondary students who have participated or are participating in GSO. 75% of these participants identified as being from one or more underrepresented groups and 78% of these international experiences took place in non-traditional destinations [8]. There are currently 147 active mobility projects at 113 post-secondary institutions. As of March 2023, the top reported skill improvements among participants included an 87% increase in intercultural competencies, an 85% increase in adaptability, an 81% increase in communication, and a 79% increase in self-confidence [9].

**Recommendation:** We encourage IRCC and Global Affairs Canada to continue to bring new opportunities to Canadian students through the Global Skills Opportunity program. Global Affairs Canada can support the GSO by expanding the number of Youth Mobility Agreements to allow for more opportunities for Indigenous and other underrepresented students to live and work abroad. GSO students develop skills and connections in other countries, building people-to-people ties and bolstering trade and collaboration across borders. These engagements strengthen Canada's reputation abroad.



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## Education Agents

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International education agents are an important part of the international education landscape. Agent policies are unique to each institution, and often vary by country within an individual institution. Licensed agents can provide valuable services to students including licensed immigration consulting to help navigate a complex study permit application process. In addition, many agencies provide support in connecting with prospective institutions, finding housing, and some provide arrival services in Canada in addition to those provided by the institution. Many more do not require the use of agents at all. Smaller and more rural institutions rely on international education agents for in-country representation as they lack the in-house capacity of larger institutions.

While we welcome shining a light on bad actors and disreputable ghost agencies, we encourage cautious policy making as to not impinge on institutional autonomy nor recognize the various levels of internationalization and the challenges at institutions across Canada. Many institutions have established strong agent policies, advised by decades of experience in international recruitment. Universities Canada has met with College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants, the Canadian licensing body,

to explore options to create a training program specifically for international agents.

Agent aggregators pose an added risk to the international student program. However, they will continue to be important actors in the recruitment of international students, and we recommend that they be made part of the solution. They have resources and networks by which we can disseminate training and educational content to raise the bar for agent services. Agent aggregators and edtech more generally can be used to support a stronger agent policy that ensures students are being given reliable, transparent information concerning education and immigration in Canada.

**Recommendation:** We welcome closer consultation with Global Affairs Canada to help protect international students from fraudulent agents while still allowing licensed, professional agencies to provide valuable overseas representation. Universities have expertise in training and monitoring their agents and this should be recognized and shared as a best practice.

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## Digital Marketing

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In addition to the EduCanada website, one reliable option for digital marketing is UniversityStudy.ca. Universities Canada maintains a bilingual online directory of 97 Canadian Universities via [www.UniversityStudy.ca](http://www.UniversityStudy.ca) for several years and continues to update and maintain the database. Prior to the pandemic, a printed version of the directory was provided to embassies across the globe however this has been pivoted to an online directory to allow for more up to date information and access. The website consistently ranks as #1 in SERPs and garners just under 1 million visitors each year. 75% of this traffic is international [10].

The online database is searchable by name, province, or program of interest. The website is updated with individual institutions on an annual basis and features information about location, admissions, tuition fees, campus housing, and links to the institutions' own webpages for more information on scholarships, international resources, and application procedures. The page is currently seeking partnerships to expand their site to include more information on nationally available scholarships, up-to-date community information, as well as key resources to support student success throughout their studies.

**Recommendation:** While [universitystudy.ca](http://universitystudy.ca) does attract significant traffic from potential international students, it could be further leveraged by our sector and used as both informational and promotional tools. In addition, cross-promotion of these resources would be beneficial to Global Affairs' digital marketing efforts. To help the Trade Commissioner Service better understand the wide range of education programs available across the country, we recommend that Global Affairs connect with Universities Canada to discuss how our directory can be used to train and introduce new staff to the education portfolio.

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## Market Diversification

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In alignment with Canada's International Education Strategy (2019-2024), Universities Canada has led its own diversification and market recovery strategy to support member institutions in diversifying source markets for international student recruitment to reduce the risk associated with over-reliance on a few select markets. Recognizing international students as an important source of Canada's ambitious immigration plans, universities believe it is important to continue this diversification strategy. Bringing in top talent, not only from the main mobility countries (like China and India), but from every country around the globe is essential to meeting these goals.

Through this strategy, we have been encouraging member institutions to participate in existing international events to advance diversification objectives in target markets and lead the development of other events and missions. This creates deeper connections between Canadian universities and prospective international partners. Canadian universities should be recognized as high-quality higher education and research partners, which value reciprocity, sustainability, equity, and diversity.

Some of the target markets in Universities Canada's strategy include Vietnam, The Philippines, Colombia, Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa. Universities Canada has organized a digital mission in Vietnam in November 2021, in Morocco in May 2022, and is currently organizing a President's mission to the Philippines in November 2023. We are also looking at potential in-person activities with Colombian and Moroccan partners.

Over half of Canadian universities' international students come from China, France, and India, but our institutions are actively working to expand and diversify our international cohort. 82% indicated that they were actively looking to recruit students from African nations. ASEAN was the region with the second most active recruitment efforts at 54%, followed by Latin America at 53% [11].

Despite high interest in the region by Canadian universities, some of our most important emerging markets in Africa show significantly lower approval rates for study permits [12]. For example, the 2019 study permit approval rate for undergraduate students from Nigeria was 20%, Morocco was 55% and Senegal was 20%. Canada's universities take the time to process all applications before sending out letters of acceptance. This due diligence has generally been reflected in high approval rates for study permit applications. On average, the largest international source countries for university enrolment see an 80% approval rate, with some countries as high as 95%. This makes the African refusal rate particularly noteworthy in the context of the university sector.

Each year, 13% of international students enrolled at Canadian universities come from Africa. The latest available data from Statistics Canada showed that for 2020/2021, over 29,000 students from countries in Africa came to Canadian universities [13]. Despite this, some of the top African source countries for Canadian universities show lower approval rates for study permits, especially for bachelor's degree applications, but for master's degrees as well. Study permit approval rates for African applicants are declining. In 2018, 63% of study permit applicants from Gabon were approved for Canadian bachelor programs, dropping to just 50% in 2021. Ghana's study permit approval rate for those wanting to study in a master's program in Canada declined from 44% in 2019 to 25% in 2021 [14]. Other key markets, such as Kenya and Nigeria, are seeing exceptionally low acceptance rates as well.

Our member universities also noted that these markets have significantly longer study permit processing times than our competitors. The average processing time for a study permit for an international student coming to Canada is between 2 and 3 months, compared to the United States' average of 1 month. Long processing times are one of the top causes of Canada losing global talent to our competitors as reported by public universities.

This issue is particularly prevalent in recruiting students from Africa.

***“Nigeria is an outlier when compared with other top ten countries and this downward [visa approval] trend will impact the perception of Canada as an attractive destination for students ... Nigerian students now see Canada as a country of last resort when planning secondary, post-secondary, and graduate studies, regardless of Canada’s good educational standing.” Dr. Gideon Christian, President, African Scholars Initiative (ASI-Canada), 2022***



Quebec institutions face significant barriers in recruiting francophone students, especially from French West Africa. Not only are foreign students who aspire to come to Quebec penalized for having to obtain two study permits, but their files are also evaluated by different bodies depending on their country of origin, creating a disparity in their treatment: from the Quebec institution for acceptance into the study program, to the MIFI for approval of the CAQ and then IRCC for approval of the study permit.

The number of students who are refused a study permit by IRCC after being accepted by a Quebec educational institution and the Quebec government has risen considerably in recent years. As a result, in 2021, 47% of students admitted by Quebec universities were refused by the federal government, and the refusal rate for African students was 72% [15]. Although the number of applications has also increased in the other Canadian provinces, Quebec suffers more refusals on average than Ontario or British Columbia.

The inconsistency that exists between initiatives to attract international students and the administrative criteria governing the granting of study permits may reduce the impact of investments made to attract international students. Candidates who have been selected by Quebec institutions based on their academic merit and who meet Quebec’s criteria are being refused study permits. If this trend continues, it could tarnish Quebec’s image as a study destination and contribute to increased delays.

**Recommendation:** The presence of trade commissioners’ offices dedicated to education in specific countries would provide a solid base of operations for institutions looking to connect to stakeholders in these key regions and allow Canada to capitalize on a growing desire to study in French-language programs. An education commissioner would also greatly benefit universities that cannot have their own independent presence in the region for recruitment and reducing overall reliance on education agents. This would help in achieving Canada’s goal of diversifying study regions in Canada outside of traditional destination cities. In addition, the government must continue to work with the Ministry of Immigration, Francization and Integration in Quebec and other Quebec agencies to ensure steady recruitment and market development.

## Francophonie Outside Quebec



A recent parliamentary study conducted by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration found that the African market is essential to meet the francophone immigration goals outlined by the government. This is particularly true of francophone students outside of Quebec. According to Statistics Canada, over 20% of international francophone students studying at universities outside of Quebec applied for permanent residency. Outside of France, African nations made up many of these applications.

Latin America and South America have also emerged as an important source of French-speaking international students as interest in the language increases. In the last year, France has seen the number of students from Latin America and the Caribbean rise by 14%, while numbers from South America rose by 4%. While English is still the most common second language to study in the region, French is growing in popularity. In 2007, 9% of Latin American students chose to study abroad in a French language program. By 2021 that number had increased to 23% [17].

**Recommendation:** To meet recruitment goals from Africa, Canada must continue to invest and expand current programs for African international students, including the Student Direct Stream (SDS) for applicants from Morocco and Senegal and the Nigerian Student Express pathway (NSE).

***“The overall importance of francophone international students cannot be overstated. The importance of Africa to the Francophonie, is partly because the proportion of francophones in the world living in sub-Saharan Africa could increase from 44% to 85% by 2050. However, even though nationals from the African continent represent the future of francophone communities in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, African international students have great difficulty coming to study in Canada and may be tempted to go elsewhere, such as France, which is a big competitor to Canada in terms of attracting francophone students due to its powerful brand and historic roots.” Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2022***

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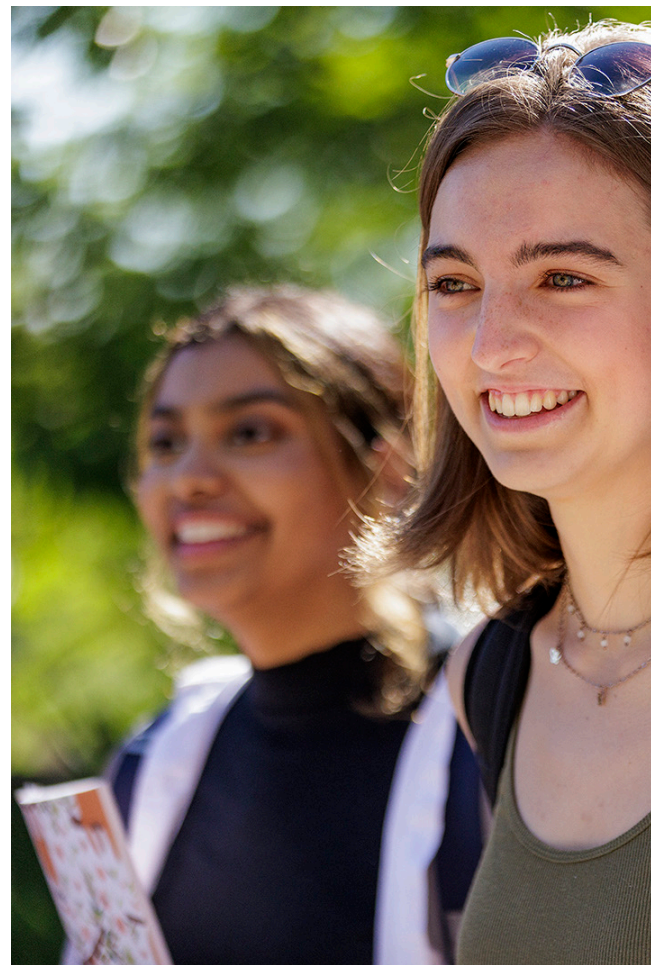
## Scholarships

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Universities Canada and Global Affairs Canada have partnered on several successful scholarship programs including the Canadian International Development Scholarships 2030 (BCDI 2030) program. BCDI 2030 strengthens the social and economic development of women and men, particularly women, from 26 eligible Francophonie and Commonwealth countries, as well as other Small Island Developing States (SIDS). BCDI 2030 has two programming streams. The first is scholarship programs for studies in Canada and the second is customized training opportunities that meet partner countries' needs. BCDI 2030 aims to ensure that students have inclusive and equitable access to a wide range of higher education, as well as professional and technical training programs in six key thematic areas including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), artificial intelligence, the green economy, climate action, health sciences, and governance.

During the 8 years of the program (2022-2030), there will be more than 7,000 direct beneficiaries, 51% of whom will be women, with 90% of the total funding going to Sub-Saharan African countries [18]. In this way, BCDI 2030 supports Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human dignity, growth that works for everyone and environment and climate action. Universities Canada, in partnership with Colleges and Institutes Canada, are well positioned to deliver this important scholarship program.

Universities Canada has proven expertise in the design, development and delivery of this unique program. We encourage Global Affairs Canada to recognize the value of working with the appropriate organizations to run each of their scholarship programs rather than trying to bundle them as one.



**Recommendation:** Global Affairs Canada should continue to ensure the success of important scholarship programs and commit to program diversity with service providers best suited to meet the needs of each rather than centralizing and consolidating all scholarship programs. This allows for the scholarships to remain dynamic and able to address changing needs and opportunities utilizing the strengths of each organization.

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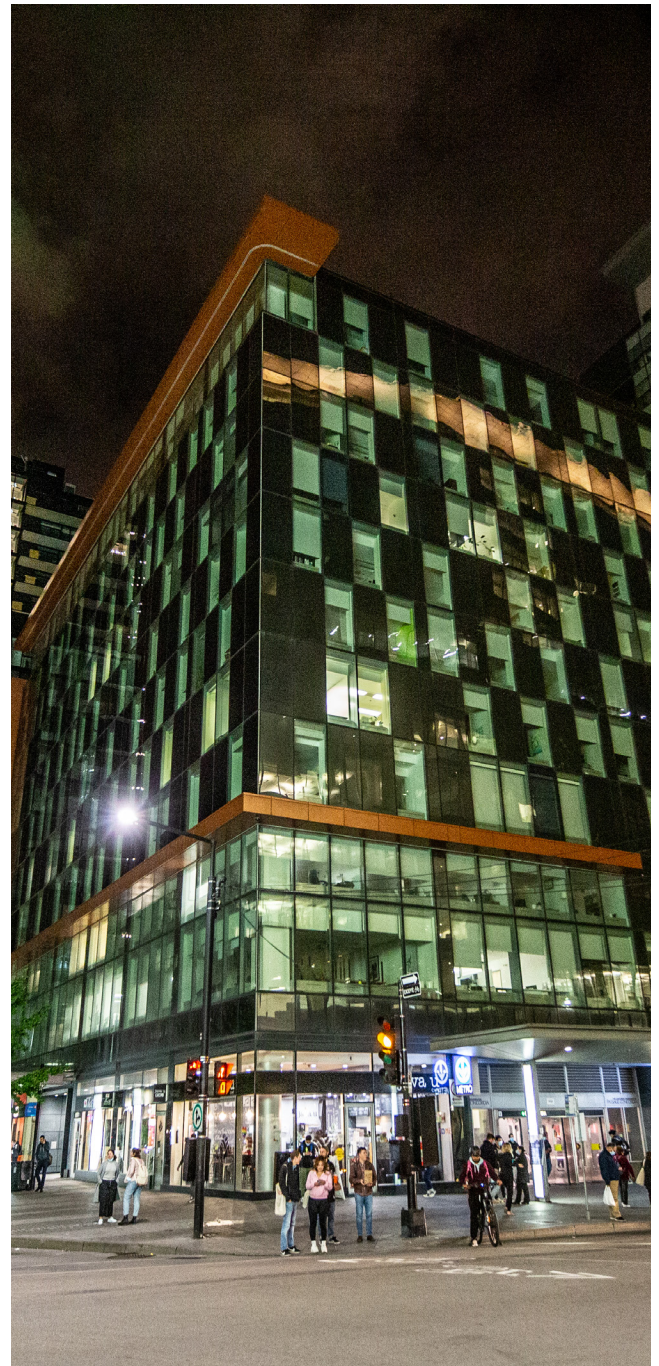
## International Research Partnerships

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World-class research is, by nature, international. Researchers around the world work simultaneously in collaboration and in competition with each other—a productive tension that leads to breakthroughs and innovations. Whether it is to gain access to specialized equipment, develop innovative ideas or tap into new sources of funding, researchers are connecting to their colleagues around the world, and their work is better for it. Universities Canada spoke to stakeholders across Canada about the internationalization of research. In this consultation, 83% of universities reported that the lack of research funding opportunities was the most significant barrier to international collaboration [19].

Research drives development and creates jobs, while also creating new breakthroughs for many of our world's most pressing issues, including climate change and sustainable development. In addition, social science research supplies the tools that societies need to tackle challenges such as inequality, misinformation and declining mental health. Research investments should also be made to support equity-deserving groups, including investment in north-south research partnerships. Each of these topics requires a global view and multiple international perspectives to bring valuable new insights to major societal issues.

For example, the Canadian Institute of Health Research's partnerships with Canadian universities allowed Canada's researchers to collaborate with researchers around the world through The Global Alliance for Chronic Disease. Our stakeholders have discussed how critical this program was to Canada's contributions to the international response against COVID-19, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.





***“Long-term investments in university research were key to our breakthrough successes in fighting COVID-19. Vaccines and other critical elements of our pandemic response were the result of decades of discovery research, proving the strategic value of pushing the frontiers of human knowledge. Recognizing this, many of our international partners and competitors are seizing the moment to build a consensus around large-scale investments in their research ecosystems.” (University Affairs, 2018)***

There are also opportunities to increase Indigenous participation in international research partnerships. One example of this is the Memory Keepers Project [20], a collaboration between Indigenous academics from Canadian universities and the University of Minnesota Medical School to study the progression and impacts of dementia on Indigenous communities and oral traditions. Research areas include Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias; Culturally Appropriate Brain Health Education and Resources; Culturally Appropriate Clinical Care and Culturally Appropriate Models of Caregiving. The project also works with other University of Minnesota faculty and researchers to address dementia disparities across the lifespan and across the disease trajectory drawing on both biomedical and social science knowledge.

Canada’s peers are recognizing the opportunities of investing in research and have made significant new commitments to increase support. In the United States, the CHIPS (Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors) and Science Act includes over \$200 billion USD in new funding for fundamental research and international collaboration. Without similar ambition, Canada risks falling behind in the competition for international research partners.

**Recommendation:** A comprehensive international education strategy should include recognition of the role of international research collaboration. To address the Canadian talent gap, it is important to recognize the importance of attracting faculty and researchers to Canada by building our reputation through partnership. International research partnerships position Canadian researchers as leaders and innovators in key research initiatives and programs attracting investment and collaborative funding channels. We must continue to broker opportunities for Canadian researchers to gain access to leading expertise, facilities, technologies, and unique populations and environments. Without dedicated and protected funding allocated for international research partnerships, Canada will fall behind.



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## Visa Processing and Canada's International Reputation

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Canada's reputation as a top destination for international talent is being impacted by delays in study permit processing. These delays will have a long-term impact on Canada's ability to recruit international students and could permanently damage the EduCanada brand. The EU, UK and United States have all made concerted efforts to increase their shares of the international student market as global borders re-open, each releasing a refreshed international education plan during the pandemic. As of 2022, the United Kingdom is processing 80% of study permit applications within 5 days, and the remainder within 16 days. The United States and Australia are also significantly ahead of Canada's processing times at an average of 14 days and 15 days, respectively. In comparison, Canada is averaging 42 days. This differential has a significant impact on Canada's global reputation, with many students pivoting to other markets rather than risking choosing Canada and potentially not being able to start their studies in a timely manner.

Globally, universities are recognized as subject matter experts in terms of high-quality academic program alignment and language proficiency. Universities are often the first step in the immigration process and are incredibly selective when issuing Letters of Acceptance to close to half of students who apply. The UK, US and Australian governments have decreased study permit processing times and improved their countries' reputations as study destinations by involving universities as trusted partners in their study permit processing systems. Universities are well placed to confirm program suitability, academic competency and language proficiency of an applicant, and should be recognized as trusted partners in the immigration journey.

**Recommendation:** A Trusted Institution designation would relieve visa officers of the obligation to check language or program alignment, eliminating time-consuming duplication in the assessment process of study permit applications. Removing this duplication of effort for institutions with an excellent track record will free up resources to focus on processing more difficult files and bring our processing times in line with our competitors. Faster and more efficient study permit processing is crucial to Canada's ability to continue to attract global talent.



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## Conclusion

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The university sector is an essential pillar of Canada's long-term international competitiveness. Continued and expanded support for the university sector in the new International Education Strategy is essential to maintaining the reputation of the EduCanada brand internationally. Australia, for example, has prioritized recruitment of students to public universities to balance their international system and encourage students to pursue longer education programs over quick entry to the labour market. We encourage Global Affairs Canada to look to our competitors for examples of effective policies and to draw lessons about the history of internationalization in Canada.

In its approach to international education, Global Affairs Canada should position Canada as a country that values reciprocity, sustainability, equity, diversity, and inclusion. It will be necessary to look beyond traditional metrics to measure the success of international education. Instead, measuring success with require a more balanced approach, considering reciprocity and establishing long-term partnerships with countries that are of strategic interest to both the Government of Canada and higher education institutions. Reciprocal agreements and international research collaborations should be considered for

purposes beyond recruitment. Knowledge exchange, innovation and international collaboration should be at the core of this approach.

International collaboration plays a critical role in the internationalization of many Canadian institutions. To advance and lead in the field of international education, we must recognize the importance of research collaboration, student and faculty recruitment and two-way student mobility. We urge Global Affairs Canada to align Canada's research agenda with international education to support research and innovation excellence. To build a successful "Team Canada", we must incorporate all facets of international education.

We recognize that many of these aspects cross departmental lines and we call on Global Affairs Canada to engage with their colleagues at IRCC, ESDC and ISED to further these priorities. Universities Canada looks forward to continuing to work closely with Global Affairs Canada to create a new International Education Strategy that ensures Canada remains among the world's top destinations for international students, faculty and researchers.

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## Appendix A

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- [1] Universities Canada, 2023
- [2] Conference Board of Canada, 2014
- [3] Statistics Canada, Research to Insights: Immigration as a Source of Labour Supply, June 2022
- [4] Statistics Canada, International students as a source of labour supply: Transition to permanent residency, 2021
- [5] Times Higher Education, 2023
- [6] Times Higher Education, 2023
- [7] Global Skills Opportunity, 2023
- [8] Global Skills Opportunity, 2023
- [9] Global Skills Opportunity, 2023
- [10] Universitystudy.ca, 2023
- [11] Universities Canada, 2023
- [12] Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2022
- [13] Statistics Canada, 2021
- [14] IRCC data on study permit approvals and refusals
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