

Advancing Canada's
International Education Sector

Ensuring Accountability and Transparency for Students

International
students in
Canada...

Account for **18%**
of post-secondary
enrolment

Contribute **\$22B**
to the economy
each year

Support **170,000**
jobs annually

Canada is a **favoured choice** worldwide for international students because of the country's renowned education system and reputation as an **inclusive society**. However, despite rising enrolments, the country's hard-earned position as a top education destination for international students is at risk.

By the end of 2022, there were over **800,000** study permit holders in Canada, reflecting a 30 percent increase compared to the previous year. The majority of permits were issued at the higher education level. International students also contribute significantly to the Canadian economy.

The unchecked rate of growth of the international student market has enabled unethical recruitment practices to flourish. These practices are difficult to regulate, especially in the face of extra-jurisdictional realities and colleges and universities' increasing reliance on international student tuition.

Almost daily, media outlets report on student exploitation, their vulnerability to **misinformation and fraud**, and the impact of **poor and limited housing options** that leave many homeless. One result is an **alarming rise in suicide rates**. World Education Services recommends a multi-sectoral approach to supporting students and securing Canada's place as a top-tier study destination.



Access to clear, accurate, and transparent information



Enhanced accountability mechanisms and oversight in the post-secondary sector



Regulation of education agents in the post-secondary sector



An expanded scope for settlement services



Streamlined permanent residence pathways for students

International student well-being depends on:

Ensuring Canada's reputation as a top international education destination that provides integrity and accountability will require a multi-sectoral approach to design and deliver change in five key areas. All levels of government, post-secondary institutions and student organizations must come together to develop needed and meaningful interventions.

1. Students need guaranteed access to clear, accurate information.

To counter recruitment scams and other deceptive practices, policies are needed to ensure international students' access to clear, accurate, transparent information at every point along their higher education journey, from pre-arrival to time spent in Canada. This requires:

- **Collaboration among Post-secondary Institutions and Relevant Federal and Provincial and Territorial Governments** to ensure consistent and transparent information about international education opportunities in Canada.

2. Cross-sectoral collaborators must work together to enhance accountability and oversight mechanisms.

The complex nature of the international student sector requires a comprehensive accountability framework involving oversight by multiple stakeholders. This entails:

- **A Regulatory Framework:** The framework must include incentives for post-secondary institutions to invest in recruitment systems and practices that maintain the highest level of integrity. This framework must identify practices that constitute misconduct and detail consequences up to and including revocation of designated learning institute status.
- **Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Roundtable:** A collaborative roundtable must be established to design, implement, and oversee accountability measures relevant to international student recruitment by post-secondary institutions and to the provision of services once students arrive. Robust compliance, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms must be a central priority of the roundtable.

3. Education agents must be subject to regulation and enforcement in case of misconduct.

Education agents play a crucial role in international student recruitment. Nearly 50 percent of international students in Canada are referred to their institutions through agents. However, the increased prevalence of unethical practices and fraudulent activities of education agents and their subcontracted agents raise concerns about the credibility and accountability of the current system. Without robust monitoring and enforcement by a dedicated regulatory body, the existing problems in the recruitment field will persist. Change requires:

- **Establishment of a Dedicated Regulatory Body** to oversee education agent aggregators and their subcontracted agents. This body would enforce regulatory standards, maintain a registry, and require licensure for agents operating in Canada. Violations of standards of practice should result in removal from the registry and revocation of licensure.
- **Collaboration with Sending Countries:** Development of memorandums of understanding (MoU) with governments of top sending countries and Canadian post-secondary institutions can establish impactful compliance, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms. These MoUs would facilitate international cooperation and align regulatory efforts to address misconduct and maintain ethical standards.

4. International students must be included in the scope of services provided by the settlement sector.

International students and graduates have skills and training that Canada needs. They must be set up for success if they decide to stay on as potential immigrants, and be supported in the same way Canada supports other prospective immigrants in both the short and long term. A plan for success will include:

- **Provision of Adequate Resources** to ensure equitable access to settlement and employment services.
- **Collaboration among Post-secondary Institutions and All Levels of Government** to provide international students with supports including financial assistance, health services, and the other resources that are necessary for them to succeed in their studies.

5. Permanent Residence pathways for international students must be streamlined.

To fully harness the potential of international students as partners in our collective economic growth and recovery, our immigration policies need to ensure sound recruitment and retention measures that include:

- **Comprehensive Eligibility Criteria for Permanent Residency:** The government must develop criteria for permanent residence pathways specifically designed for international students and graduates. These criteria should consider factors, such as the work experience acquired by international students during their studies as well as the work experience obtained in any National Occupational Classification (NOC). This inclusive approach would reflect the diversity of skills and talents that international graduates bring to Canada's labour market. ■