

Policy Briefing University & College Research

Galvanizing a go-global education strategy

Student groups are becoming much more engaged in discussions that will affect their future.



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International education

A report this month from the Study Group on Global Education, made up of Canadian businesspeople and academics, offers some revealing insights on preparedness and potential for Canadian students studying abroad. With only 11 per cent of undergraduate students having some form of international expe-

rience, it argues that we are stuck in neutral when it comes to competing with a limited selection of peer countries, and that the country needs a pan-Canadian approach to address this issue.

“The current generation of young Canadians will need to be comfortable working with people from different backgrounds. They will need self-awareness and self-confidence, a willingness to take smart risks, and knowledge of the world and other societies,” the report says.

“These are not luxuries in the 21st century; they are vital skills.

“Global education fosters these skills.”

Solutions are suggested, such as to “significantly increase the number of Canadian post-secondary students learning abroad.” This would be done by enhancing learning abroad by setting a “national target of one-quarter of all Canadian post-secondary students going abroad on credit and non-credit learning experiences within 10 years;” and establishing a “new national initiative—Go Global Canada—to support 15,000 Canadian post-secondary students per year going abroad within five years, rising to 30,000

per year within 10 years.”

The report also outlines how Canada’s post-secondary institutions should make international education an integral and leading component of their own internationalization strategies.

We’ve seen versions of these suggestions before. Five years ago, another expert panel led by Western University’s Amit Chakma, offered a series of proposed solutions to Canada’s international education approach; that was welcomed at the time by higher education and business alike. That 2012 report made 14 key recommendations, among them:

- double the number of international students choosing Canada by 2022;
- introduce an international mobility program for Canadian students to serve 50,000 students per year by 2022;
- make internationalizing education in Canada a strategic component of government of Canada official policies and plans;
- regroup grants and scholarships available to international graduate students and post-doctoral fellows under one label/brand; and
- develop comprehensive and

multifaceted bilateral agreements with priority countries that focus on all aspects of graduate education and research, supported by appropriate levels of funding.

While it had commissioned the report, the then-Conservative government’s response was tepid at best. Like many expert panels, this one’s efforts largely disappeared, with few lessons learned.

And now there’s another effort. The 20 recommendations of the new report produced by the University of Ottawa’s Centre for International Policy Studies and the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs target responsibilities towards various stakeholders. They are anchored by a notional overarching Go Global Canada strategy and budget orchestrated via a Global Education Leadership Council.

Though there were no students in this study-group membership, the next generation must also have a say. They are potential ambassadors: our future, well-rounded citizens. Ultimately, they are the projection of Canada abroad.

Fortunately, student groups are becoming much more engaged in these discussions that will affect

their forward paths. Examples include the Science and Policy Exchange organization of graduate students making the case for support of the Naylor expert panel on fundamental science, and the student-represented group advising Quebec’s chief scientist on issues of outreach and accessibility. The Mitacs programs for international exchanges are also active on this front, and the prime minister’s Youth Council could also take some of these issues on board.

The student and youth voice—diverse and inclusive—is taking on a more activist role on social media, boards, and advisory panels as the country’s higher education and research institutions rethink how to co-produce new policies and programs for a more effective representation.

Student organizations and groups need to be given every opportunity to have a real say in international learning and experience abroad. They will control their future.

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