

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration  
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March 16, 2022

To the Members of the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), representing 72,000 academic and general staff who work at more than 120 colleges and universities in every province of Canada.

CAUT applauds the Committee for recently undertaking this important study examining the recruitment and acceptance rate of international students in Canada.

International student enrollment has been increasing significantly in recent years but is set against the backcloth of a chronically underfunded Canadian post-secondary education system. CAUT estimates that Canada's post-secondary education system needs an increase of core operating funding of at least \$3 billion to make up for funding cuts, inflation, and increased enrolment from Canadian students. This funding could be provided through the Canada Social Transfer when it is re-negotiated in two years, with funds specifically earmarked for post-secondary education. Alternatively, another federal transfer mechanism could be created to support investments in post-secondary education. Recent federal transfers to the provinces for mental health and childcare serve as models for how this might be accomplished.

Because of chronic public underfunding, universities and colleges have increasingly sought largely deregulated and differential tuition revenue from international students to make up revenue shortfalls. This trend has created both an exploitative environment that carries a tremendous human cost and is masking the precarious financial health of many of our institutions.

The recruitment and retention of international students has important educational benefits. However, some institutions seem interested in the revenue streams generated by international students to the point where they have become dangerously dependent on international student revenue. For instance, in 2019 Cape Breton University recorded that two-thirds of its student population were from abroad.<sup>1</sup> This level of dependency on international student fees means that the university is extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of global events. For example, when diplomatic tensions recently resulted in Saudi Arabia threatening to pull its students from Canada, several institutions reported the move would jeopardize their ability to maintain some programs and current operations.

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<sup>1</sup> [In Cape Breton, a dramatic rise in international students has transformed a school and a community - The Globe and Mail](#)

The recruitment and retention of international students should be guided by educational principles, rather than the bottom line. Many of our members' scientific research relies on the contributions, insight, creativity, and dedication of international students. Similarly, their contributions to classroom discussions bring an important international perspective. Enhanced public funding and more financial support for students should be provided to improve affordability and access for all those who wish to learn and study in Canada, whether domestic or international students.

The lack of sufficient support for international students has been highlighted by recent stories of their exploitation. Too often recruiters are not honest in what they tell potential students, students and their families take on tremendous debt, and culture shock leaves many students in mental health distress. CAUT's members have seen the personal toll this takes. CAUT recommends that the government alleviate some of these challenges by better regulating international recruitment agencies to ensure they abide by ethical practices, and providing funding for specialized support services within the international student offices of universities and colleges.

CAUT is also concerned to learn of suggestions that there is inequitable acceptance rates and/or issuing of student visas between different global regions. We recommend that the government take all steps necessary to ensure systemic racism is eliminated from student visa application and acceptance processes.

The recruitment of international students, when done right, can foster the international exchange and development of knowledge, promote cultural diversity and understanding, enrich the educational experience of students and academic staff, and facilitate international cooperation and development. In short, the recruitment of international students should be based on educational values, and not be motivated by financial gain. This requires sustainable public funding from both provincial and federal governments, more direct supports for international students, and greater regulation of student recruitment agents.

CAUT would welcome an opportunity to speak to you directly on this issue.

Respectfully,

David Robinson