

# SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADA

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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE KITCHENER-WATERLOO PARTNERSHIP MEETING

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Canada

Globally, Canada is seen as a welcoming destination for international students, offering quality education and pathways to work and residency. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada data suggests that there were 572,415 international students in Canada in 2018 (IRCC 2018). According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE 2018), Canada is the fourth largest receiver of post-secondary international students after the US, UK and China. While the gateway cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver together host over 55% of Canada's international student population, the most marked growth was recorded in Windsor (+54%) and Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo (+39%).

Every year, large cohorts of international students relocate to Canada, many with hopes of continuing to work after graduation and staying as residents or citizens. Results of the CBIE 2018 International Student Survey indicate that 60% of international students planned to apply for permanent residence and over two-thirds intended to work (70%) after graduation. Canada recognizes international student graduates as ideal potential immigrants. The International Education Strategy (IES) announced in August 2019 earmarked \$148 million to promote Canada as an attractive destination for international students. It prioritizes diversifying the source countries of international students and their destinations across Canada, while simultaneously supporting outbound student mobility. The Student Direct Stream (SDS) program, which fast-tracks study permit applications for college students from a select group of countries, was recently expanded to include university-bound students and additional source countries.

Government, educational institutions, and settlement organizations are working hard to support the growing numbers of international students. At the Kitchener-Waterloo Partnership meeting, some panelists discussed the current challenges faced by international students. All agreed that service delivery must be tailored to the diverse and evolving needs of the international student community. They made three broad recommendations to enhance current supports

## **BUILD AWARENESS ABOUT AVAILABLE RESOURCES**

Although educational institutions aim to offer a holistic array of student services, additional resources that help newcomers settle in Canada are available in the broader community. Increasing awareness of community-based and campus-based programs is a key strategy to help students feel welcome and supported. Despite various outreach and orientation efforts, panelists were unanimous that there is still work to be done to introduce the range of available resources to international students. As Candace Stewart-Smith, an International Student Advisor from Laurier International, noted “[w]e may have the right services at the right time, but these perfect offerings may be underutilized if their existence is unknown.”

Finding innovative ways to encourage newcomers to seek support was identified as an ongoing challenge. Panelists highlighted the difference between relying on individual resilience to cope with challenges versus developing institutional resilience. Many international students hesitate to disclose their needs and avoid using available resources out of fear they will burden the system or be ineligible. Alongside a comprehensive selection of services, participatory initiatives that instill an attitude of support-seeking among international students were recommended.

## **ADDRESS SERVICE GAPS AND ACCESS LIMITATIONS**

The settlement needs of international students and other newcomers to Canadian society often overlap. Based on their experience serving newcomers, settlement workers are well-prepared to help international students with all aspects of settlement. Yet, government funding often restricts students' eligibility to use settlement services. Previously, international students were expected to access education-related supports on campus, and for other needs, such as immigration or employment, to seek outside counsel or draw on their own resources and social networks.

Universities and colleges are enhancing in-house supports for international students with additional academic advising, banking and financial aid, language assistance, housing support, health services, as well as programming that advances personal and professional development and facilitates retention. Programs include immigration guidance, employment and entrepreneurship training, and experiential education via practicums, internships and bridging programs.

Nevertheless, complicated and shifting regulations mean students and their accompanying family members can have trouble maintaining status and navigating immigration requirements. Frances Hannigan, a Senior Immigration Consultant at the University of Waterloo, highlighted how changing immigration policies have affected student needs and service providers' responses. Since the passage of Bill C35 only certified immigration advisors can offer campus consultations and application support. As policies evolve, service providers, educational institutions, and other actors need additional resources to regularly re-evaluate the needs of international students and the services required to help them achieve their goals.

## **MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION**

Enhancing the study and settlement experiences of international students has long been a key policy priority for educational institutions and other stakeholders. However, coordination among stakeholders is still a work in progress. Available services are often fragmented, and made available through organizations working in silos. Strengthening partnerships between the federal and provincial governments, education institutions, and settlement sector is crucial to respond effectively to the growth of international education in Canada.

To this end, Waterloo region has partnered with universities, colleges, settlement agencies, community organizations, businesses, and government to anticipate and meet all newcomers' needs. The Waterloo Region Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) convenes council meetings and working groups to help these diverse local actors implement promising practices community-wide.

Strengthening partnerships between the federal and provincial governments, educational institutions, and the settlement sector would also improve supports and services for international students in particular. Although local collaboration is crucial to enhance services for international students, design and delivery of programs would also benefit from more collaboration across all three scales; local, provincial, and national.

As the numbers of international students increase, there is an urgent need to provide effective supports and services that will enhance students' opportunities to contribute to Canadian society. With their reflections and recommendations, the panelists have proposed a roadmap for moving forward.

For more information about the panel discussion, including videos of the panelists, press [here](#) or contact [bmrcirmu@yorku.ca](mailto:bmrcirmu@yorku.ca)

