

Stakeholder Summary

Report sheds light on ways to improve the international student experience

Encouraging international students to study in Canada and become permanent residents is one way to ensure a skilled and educated labour market, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). Ontario is working strategically to make itself the destination of choice for international students, initiating provincial policies and strategies to attract and retain international students. However, little is known about the international student experience. This study examines the opportunities, challenges and gaps that exist within strategies, programs and services that support international students at Ontario universities.

Project Description

The Global Competition for International Students as Future Immigrants: The role of Ontario universities in translating government policy into institutional practice explores how provincial and national policies to attract international students are acknowledged by universities in their mission statements, goals, visions or strategic plans; the range and types of programs and services for international students; as well as the perceived factors that facilitate or hinder the transition of international students as future immigrants. Data were collected from a web scan of 11 universities, a representative sample chosen to ensure diversity in location, size and international student population, as well as a survey administered to university managers and front-line staff at six university student services offices.

Another new HEQCO report on this topic, *International Students in Ontario's Postsecondary Education System, 2000-2012: An evaluation of changing policies, populations and labour market entry processes*, explores how many international students came to Ontario between 2000-2012, their socioeconomic status and outcomes after finishing their studies, as well as the major provincial and federal policy changes that affected student immigration during this time.

Findings

There is close alignment between federal, provincial and university policies, as most institutions are committed to international student recruitment and increasing enrolments.

Most Ontario universities have invested in international student offices, separate from their central student services offices, which offer a variety of programs to support international students. Targeted services, individualized attention and a supportive environment were reported by staff as being the greatest strengths of the programs.

Most programs, however, are targeted at first-year international students, while programs that target upper year students are lacking. Professional services that promote work-integrated learning or volunteer opportunities, or those that broaden international students' social and career networks beyond the international community and campus are limited. Staff indicate that there is a need for more programs that enhance interactions between international and domestic students, as well as for programs that support ongoing language competency. Staff also note the lack of integration of programs and services, which is necessary in order to build a sense of community and belonging. There is also a lack of communication and coordination between departments so not all services are known to staff or clearly advertised on institutional websites, hindering accessibility and awareness.

While staff are unaware of how many international students pursue permanent residency after graduation, they suggest that the process could be improved through greater communication and partnership between institutions and government, particularly Citizenship and Immigration Canada, as well as providing support for international students transitioning into the Canadian labour market and to permanent residency post-graduation.

The Global Competition for International Students as Future Immigrants: The role of Ontario universities in translating government policy into institutional practice was written by Amira El Masri, York University, Melisa Choubak and Rashelle Litchmore, University of Guelph supervised by Roopa Desai Trilokekar, York University and Saba Safdar, University of Guelph.