

POLICY PAPER

International Students & International Education

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision, we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishnawbek, and Mississauga peoples.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International students provide unique perspectives that enrich higher education across the province. It is imperative that we give these students the support they need so that they can maintain their mental and physical health, sustain themselves financially, excel academically, and pursue their career goals. Unfortunately, international students continue to face several issues, including unregulated tuition, minimal financial assistance, expensive healthcare costs, unregulated recruitment practices, and a lack of work-integrated learning opportunities. There are also several aspects of exchange programs that need improvement, including financial aid, quality assurance, and student support services.

THE PROBLEM

Unregulated Tuition and Lack of Financial Aid

International tuition fees are often unpredictable from one year to the next, making it difficult for international students to manage their finances. The recent domestic tuition freeze, coupled with a lack of increases to provincial operating grants, has also encouraged institutions to raise international tuition at high rates. In addition, there are disproportionately fewer scholarships and bursary opportunities for international students with financial need, which prevents qualified students from studying in Ontario. International students may also face unique costs outside of tuition, increasing their need for financial aid. Similarly, there is a lack of provincially funded financial aid available to international students who display academic excellence or who wish to come to Canada as a refugee.

Inflexible Study Permits

Because of the restrictive length of study permits, strikes and other academic disruptions disproportionately affect the ability of international students to complete their studies. Extenuating personal circumstances and the availability of accommodations can also increase the amount of time it takes for an international student to complete their degree program. Currently, study permits are not designed to take these circumstances into account.

Restricted Access to Work-Integrated Learning, Labour Markets, and Residency

Work-integrated learning (WIL) gives international students the opportunity to apply theoretical principles and develop skills before entering the workforce. Unfortunately, funding for research projects, co-ops, and internships is disproportionately available to domestic students. When they do secure WIL opportunities, international students may face difficulty communicating with others and may not receive enough support from supervisors.

After graduation, complicated government policies often make it difficult for international students to gain the credentials they need to find employment and obtain permanent residency. This process has been made particularly challenging by the closure of the “Employer Job Offer: International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP), and many employers avoid hiring international students because it is difficult to follow the appropriate onboarding processes.

Limited Health Coverage and Mental Health Support

University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) costs are unreasonably high, especially when compared to fees in other provinces, and excluded services may result in additional fees for international students. Some may choose not to seek out medical care if additional costs are unknown. UHIP also operates on a reimbursement model, which requires students to pay upfront for medical expenses incurred outside of UHIP's preferred provider network. Further, the processes surrounding the UHIP Steering Committee are unclear and may not include adequate student consultation or representation.

International students also face unique mental health challenges as a result of living far from home and adjusting to adult life in a new country. Language barriers and cultural stigma can prevent these students from receiving effective mental health care, and campus mental health professionals may not be adequately trained in how to care for international students effectively.

Insufficient International Student Services

International students have unique needs that require specialized training and support. However, rising international student enrolment has not been met with increased investment in support services, and funding models vary from one institution to the next. The guidance provided by career advisors is not always informed by the most up-to-date information, and support services are not always intersectional and responsive to international students' needs.

In many cases, international students are unaware of academic support systems. These students face significant challenges to achieving academic success, and many institutions lack culturally relevant, language-specific academic resources. Further, international students often experience disproportionate barriers when attempting to access peer-to-peer support programs; this can result in a lack of social support and, in turn, increased stress and poor psychosocial adjustment.

Finally, crisis support services allow international students to receive support anonymously and without fear of stigmatization. Unfortunately, twenty-four-hour crisis support services are often available in only English and French, and international students may be less likely to visit on-campus health resources due to cultural and religious differences or barriers.

Lack of Protections for Off-Campus Housing

International students may be unfamiliar with the legal rights and obligations of tenants in Ontario, which makes them susceptible to fraud and other unethical behaviour when looking for off-campus housing. These students may also be subject to discrimination based on their ethnicity, religion, or preferred language. Some international students lack English or French language proficiency, which creates barriers to accessing government services like the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Unregulated Recruitment Practices and Limited Transition Programming

International student recruitment, through advertising and other avenues, plays a key role in where students choose to study. Prospective students deserve transparent, accurate, and ethical recruitment methods so that they can have an accurate picture of what their university experience will look like before they enroll. Unfortunately, a lack of regulation increases the risk of fraud, corruption, and unethical behavior during the recruitment process.

International students may also face greater difficulties in transitioning to university life in Canada. Many are unable to tour post-secondary institutions they wish to attend before enrolling, and international student intake periods do not necessarily align with university orientation and transition programs. Universities also differ in the amount of information they provide to students prior to enrollment, and time zone differences prevent many international students from attending information sessions and livestreams.

Limited Support for Exchange Programs

There are several aspects of outbound exchange that need improvement. First, the costs of travel and accommodation can prevent students from accessing these opportunities. Second, there is no inter-university quality assurance framework for international experiences, nor is there a centralized set of recommendations on how to maximize educational benefit for students who participate in outbound exchange programs. As a result, the quality of these programs can vary widely. Third, students studying abroad often require additional resources which support systems are not equipped to offer.

The quality of inbound exchange programs also requires improvement and additional research. International students on exchange in Canada are entitled to support to promote their academic and personal success, and their support systems should generally reflect the support offered to permanent international students. In general, more research is needed on the experiences of inbound exchange students and the difficulties they face.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regulate Tuition and Increase Financial Aid

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regulate international tuition for incoming students at a maximum of 5 percent per year and in-cohort increases at a maximum of 3 percent per year. Further, the provincial government should increase basic operating grant funding for post-secondary institutions in order to reduce universities' reliance on international tuition fees. The government should also establish an international tuition set-aside at the same 10 percent rate of the domestic set-aside, with funds directed to needs-based financial aid for international students. The government should also create scholarships for international undergraduate students, similar to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), and incentivize institutions to do the same.

To help refugees access post-secondary education in Ontario, the government should consult with the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) to develop a framework to improve recruitment, support, and retention of international students who are refugees. Further, the government should match student and institutional contributions to the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) to sponsor refugees studying at Ontario universities.

Increase Study Permit Flexibility

The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to ensure that the length of each international student's study permit matches the length of time they need to complete their degree program. This will help ensure that international students are not disproportionately affected by strikes and other academic disruptions.

Facilitate Access to Work-Integrated Learning, Labour Markets, and Residency

To increase work-integrated learning opportunities, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade should offer financial incentives to employers applicable for hiring both domestic and international students in co-op and internship positions. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should also provide envelope funding to institutions to increase the availability of paid applied research and work-study opportunities available to international students. Further, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should develop educational programs that help international students improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness through out-of-classroom and social learning environments.

To make it easier for international students to find employment and obtain permanent residency after graduation, the provincial government should reopen the “Employer Job Offer: International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP). Further, the government should include international students in the “Express Entry” streams of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, as well as develop and implement tax credits to offset the costs employers incur when sponsoring graduates through the OINP.

Expand Health Coverage and Mental Health Supports

The provincial government should allow international students to pay a fair premium to receive coverage through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Before implementing this program, the government should consult with other provincial and territorial governments and produce a report on best practices for implementing provincial health coverage for international students. To improve mental health supports, the provincial government should contract research on developing best practices to address international students’ mental health needs. The government should also provide financial incentives to universities for hiring mental health professionals with lived experiences relevant to the diverse needs of international students.

Invest in International Student Services

The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) should develop best practices for providing support services to international students, especially with respect to cultural sensitivity and intersectionality. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should use these best practices to create and implement a training module for student support service staff who work with international students. To improve peer-to-peer support programs, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) should conduct research and develop training models regarding cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism. Further, the government should provide funding to expand the Good2Talk service and equivalent 24/7/365 virtual services, to allow for the accessibility of crisis support through the addition of culturally and linguistically competent support resources.

Increase Off-Campus Housing Protections

The provincial government should provide funding for the Landlord and Tenant Board to provide interpreters for international students whose first language is not English or French. The government should also mandate the use of court interpreters in Landlord and Tenant Board hearings for a party or witness who requests it and halt proceedings until the request has been granted. Further, the government should make recommendations to post-secondary institutions on how to provide resources regarding tenant rights and housing in international student service offices and during educational training for international students.

Regulate Recruitment Practices and Facilitate Transition into University

The provincial government should fund research into international student recruitment practices in order to collect data on the frequency of fraud, corruption, and unethical behaviour during the recruitment process. The government should create an accreditation system for international student recruiting agents to establish a minimum standard for recruitment practices.

International students need comprehensive orientation and transition programming in order to adjust to university life in Ontario. To advance this goal, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should research best practices surrounding international student orientation programming. In addition, HEQCO should develop guidelines regarding what information institutions must share with potential students prior to enrollment.

Increase Support for Exchange Programs

To help domestic students afford to participate in outbound exchange programs, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an application-based bursary for students to cover expenses associated with international experiences, with a dedicated stream of funding reserved for students with demonstrable financial need. Further, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government to prioritize funding within the Outbound Student Mobility Pilot (OSMP) so that funding is given to students with demonstrated financial need. To improve the quality of outbound exchange programs, the provincial government should instruct the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to research international experiential design and outcomes. Further, the government should reimplement travel insurance coverage under OHIP and provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to train counselling services to support students on outbound exchange.

To improve inbound exchange, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to student associations and universities to facilitate peer support groups for inbound exchange students. The provincial government should establish funding available to universities to support targeted mental health and other resources available to inbound exchange students based on student experience feedback. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an optional common standard for university exit surveys on student experience for inbound exchange students.

BACKGROUND

International students provide unique perspectives that enrich higher education, and they have become an increasingly significant presence at universities across the province. As of 2018-19, there were 54,528 international undergraduate students studying in Ontario, an increase of 160 percent (more than double) since 2009-10.¹ Unfortunately, these students continue to face several issues, including rising tuition fees, minimal financial assistance, expensive healthcare costs, strained support resources, unregulated recruitment practices, and a lack of work-integrated learning opportunities.

International tuition has risen significantly in recent years. According to Statistics Canada, international undergraduate tuition in Ontario was an average of \$38,276 in 2019-20, almost 40 percent higher than just four years ago.² The recent domestic tuition freeze has arguably made institutions more reliant on international tuition to fund operating costs, especially in the absence of increased provincial operating grants. Steep tuition increases make it difficult for international students to predict their expenses from one year to the next, which prevents them from planning their finances effectively. Making matters worse, there is minimal financial assistance available to international students and a lack of government scholarships.

Further, international students in Ontario continue to pay high premiums for health coverage, relative to international students in other provinces. For example, the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) charges independent international students a minimum of \$636 per year;³ however, international students studying in Alberta (for more than twelve months) do not pay a premium for health coverage.⁴ Further, UHIP often requires that students make out-of-pocket payments and submit claims for reimbursement at a later date, and many services are not covered within the plan's preferred provider network.

Other issues persist as well. Recruitment practices remain unregulated, which means that prospective international students are not guaranteed transparent, accurate, and ethical recruitment methods when deciding where to study. These students may also face barriers to securing work-integrated learning placements, which can make it more difficult for them to find a job and pursue permanent residency after graduation. Further, international student services have struggled to keep up with increased demand over the last decade, which prevents international students from receiving support for academics, finances, or mental health.

There are also several aspects of inbound and outbound exchange programs that need improvement. For example, a lack of scholarships and bursaries prevents low-income students from participating, and there is no inter-university framework for quality assurance.

It is imperative that we give international students the support they need so that they can maintain their mental and physical health, sustain themselves financially, excel academically, and pursue their career goals. OUSA looks forward to working with the provincial government and sector stakeholders to implement the recommendations in this policy paper and advance the position of international students and international education in Ontario.

¹ "Table 6: International Students: Fall Full-time Headcounts by Program of Study (eligible and ineligible), 2009-10 - 2018-19," Council of Ontario Universities, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Table-6.pdf>.

² "Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study," Statistics Canada, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>.

³ "UHIP," Queen's University, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://quic.queensu.ca/uhip/>.

⁴ "International Student Services: Health Insurance," University of Alberta, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.ualberta.ca/international-student-services/money-insurance-permits-guide/health-insurance>.

TUITION & FINANCIAL AID

TUITION REGULATION

Principle: International students should be able to reliably estimate how much they should expect to pay in tuition to complete a program at a particular institution.

Principle: International student tuition should be used to provide supports for international students, not to subsidize the lack of government operating grants.

Concern: Inconsistent and unpredictable increases to international tuition can result in financial challenges for international students.

Concern: The reduction and freeze on domestic tuition without increases to provincial operating grants incentivizes institutions to raise international tuition at high rates.

Concern: Institutions might not explicitly state the lack of operating grants as a driving force behind increases to international tuition.

Recommendation: To ensure tuition rates are predictable for incoming students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regulate international tuition for incoming students at a maximum of 5 percent per year to match institutionally set limitations.

Recommendation: The provincial government should regulate in-cohort increases to international tuition at a maximum of 3 percent per year.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase basic operating grant funding for post-secondary institutions so that they are publicly funded in order to reduce the burden placed on universities to generate revenue through high international tuition fees.

International tuition, deregulated in 1994, has led to international fees growing at a much greater rate than domestic student tuition.⁵ The ability to increase international student tuition without government regulation has resulted in significant increases in fees over time, and subsequently, more incentive for institutions to attract international students. Tuition increases can happen quickly, and international students may face multiple tuition increases at different rates over the course of a four-year degree. In just four years, revenue generated by international student fees in Ontario doubled, from \$620 million in 2011-12 to \$1.28 billion in 2015-16.⁶ From 2010 to 2016, the number of international students at Ontario institutions rose 88.5 percent, highlighting the push institutions have made to attract students who pay higher tuition rates.

Provincial government funding for post-secondary institutions has stagnated over the past several years, with universities shifting from publicly funded to publicly assisted models. Under a publicly assisted model, student tuition fees account for the majority of institutions' total

⁵ Basen, Ira. "Ontario Colleges Need International Tuition. It Could Cost Them." TVO.org. <https://www.tvo.org/article/ontario-colleges-need-international-tuition-it-could-cost-them>.

⁶ "Ontario Universities 'Using International Students as Cash Cows,' Critics Say | CBC News." CBCnews. CBC/Radio Canada, July 12, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/international-students-universities-ontario-tuition-1.4199489>.

operating revenue, outweighing funding from provincial grants.⁷ This shift has placed a greater emphasis on student tuition fees to fund post-secondary institutions. The 2019-20 and 2020-21 Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines instituted a 10 percent reduction in tuition for funding-eligible students.⁸ Although domestic students received a reduction in their tuition costs, most international students are ineligible for operating grant funding.⁹

Faced with a shortfall in tuition revenue, institutions were forced to explore other avenues for cost-recovery. International student tuition has gone up significantly over the past several years, increasing by 68.61 percent between 2006 and 2017 (even while accounting for inflation).¹⁰ Some universities further raised international student in response to the 2019 domestic tuition reduction and freeze, sparking added concerns about affordability among their international student populations.¹¹ In some instances, institutions have proposed increases to tuition for incoming international students that are as high as 62 percent.¹² A survey conducted by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance found that affordability of post-secondary education was a chief concern amongst international students. Among those surveyed, 55 percent of international students had had difficulty affording tuition and 34 percent said they found their tuition fees to be unpredictable from year to year.¹³

In order to create stability for international students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regulate international student tuition as follows: (1) by limiting increases to incoming cohort tuition to a maximum of 5 percent per year; and (2) by limiting in-cohort tuition increases to a maximum of 3 percent per year. Allowing institutions to increase tuition rates by cohort enables them to increase fees enough to guarantee costs of education are covered while assuring international students that they will be able to predict their tuition costs as they complete their program. In other words, once students arrive at an institution, we want them to have peace of mind that their tuition in the years that follow will not be drastically higher than when they started. This recommendation gives institutions the ability to fund capital expenditures in expensive-to-develop programs while simultaneously ensuring that international tuition increases are not exorbitant. Finally, if a student extends their graduation date past that of the expected graduation of their cohort, the student should still be treated as part of their original cohort and be subject to the same rate of increase as their graduated peers had been. For example, if a cohort's increase is set at 2 percent, a student in their sixth year should have their tuition increase by 2 percent, not by the 3 percent that the following cohort may be subject to.

Creating regulations on international tuition increases transparency in fees, improves retention, and makes post-secondary education more accessible for international students. Conversely, high international tuition fees prevent recruitment markets from diversifying international student populations on campuses. If rates increase continue to increase without regulation, Canadian post-secondary education becomes unattainable for low-income students. This is

⁷ "The Ontario University Funding Model in Context," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO), June, 2015, <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Contextual%20Background%20to%20the%20Ontario%20University%20Funding%20Formula-English.pdf>.

⁸ "Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines: Publicly-Assisted Universities," Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/mteu-university-tuition-framework-guidelines-mar2019-en.pdf>.
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Ontario Universities' Increasing Reliance on International Students." OneClass. Accessed April 28, 2020. <https://oneclass.com/blog/featured/154317-ontario-universities27-increasing-reliance-on-international-students.en.html>.

¹¹ "Explainer: International Tuition Fees Rise to Offset Domestic Cuts," The Journal, accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2019-10-28/news/explainer-international-tuition-fees-rise-to-offset-domestic-cuts/>.

¹² "University of Waterloo Board of Governors, 30 October 2018 Meeting Minutes," accessed April 28, 2020, p. 104-106, https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/sites/ca.secretariat/files/uploads/files/20190205oagbog_package_o.pdf.

¹³ Tishcoff, Ryan. Affordability: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. Research Report. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019.

undesirable for a variety of reasons, including the fact that relying on a single market for international students leaves institutions vulnerable in the event of political conflict.

Ultimately, the provincial government should invest further in the post-secondary sector and restore funding such that government contributions to operating funding exceed the revenue generated by student tuition. This would ensure that international students are not viewed as a lucrative source of revenue in the absence of government funding.

NEEDS-BASED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Principle: International students bring valuable perspectives that enrich post-secondary education.

Principle: International students who meet entry requirements and demonstrate financial need should be eligible for financial aid.

Concern: There are disproportionately fewer scholarships and bursary opportunities for international students with financial need compared to domestic students.

Concern: International students may face unique costs outside of tuition, such as unfavourable exchange rates or travel costs.

Concern: Limited financial aid opportunities prevent international students from low-income backgrounds from being eligible to come to Ontario for post-secondary studies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish, in its tuition protocol, an international tuition set-aside at the same 10 percent rate of the domestic set-aside, with funds raised directed specifically to needs-based financial aid for international students.

International students “spark new ideas and... [fuel] the people-to-people ties crucial to international trade in an increasingly interconnected global economy.” The wide range of nations from which international students hail results in a diverse set of cultural experiences and perspectives, and these enrich post-secondary learning settings. However, being able to afford post-secondary education in Ontario continues to be a concern for international students, with the average international undergraduate tuition fee approximately \$6,000 higher than the national average.¹⁴ The provincial government website states that international students are ineligible for bank or government student loans, and directs students to the financial aid office at their institution for scholarships and bursaries.¹⁵ Additionally, non-credit language-bridging programs in schools, such as BASE/ELAS at the University of Waterloo or LEAF at Wilfrid Laurier University, are currently not eligible for financial assistance. International students should be able to receive financial support through the set-aside

¹⁴ Usher, Alex. “More on International Fees in Canadian Universities.” HESA, August 4, 2017. <http://higherstrategy.com/more-on-international-fees-in-canadian-universities/>.

¹⁵ “Study in Ontario: International Students.” ontario.ca. Accessed April 28, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/study-ontario-international-students#section-8>.

for language bridging programs that are prerequisites to study at their desired university. These students must also contend with financial burdens beyond tuition, including rent, groceries, and travel. Reducing the financial burden on international students is key to ensuring their academic success and ability to contribute to the province's economy.

To increase post-secondary access for qualified international students who may not be able to afford Ontario's rising international tuition rates, the provincial government should establish a separate international tuition set-aside. This set-aside should use the same formula as the domestic tuition set-aside: the prior year's tuition fee set-aside multiplied by percentage change in enrolment, plus 10 percent of the average tuition fee multiplied by the previous year's enrolment). Further, the set-aside should be put exclusively toward financial aid for international students with financial need.

SUPPORT & FINANCIAL AID FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE REFUGEES

Principle: Refugees should have access to financial assistance that gives them the opportunity to study at Ontario institutions.

Concern: Lack of financial aid restricts the number of international students who are refugees studying in Ontario.

Recommendation: The provincial government, in consultation with the Canadian Bureau for International Education, should develop a framework to improve recruitment, support, and retention of international students who are refugees.

Recommendation: The provincial government should match student and institutional contributions to World University Service of Canada (WUSC) to sponsor refugees studying at Ontario universities.

Students can seek refugee status for a variety of reasons, including to escape armed conflict, discrimination, or persecution. Refugees across the world have limited access to Ontario's post-secondary institutions, especially when compared to other international counterparts. Organizations and funds such as World University Service of Canada (WUSC)¹⁶ and International Students Overcoming War (ISOW)¹⁷ seek to address these inequities, but they are only capable of sponsoring a small number of students at a time. These opportunities give refugees the ability to resettle and pursue higher education in Canada. These students bring tremendous value through their lived experiences but may not have the means to study in Ontario without financial assistance.

In order to ensure the success of refugee students, the provincial government should consult with the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) to develop a framework for refugee student support. The CBIE can act as an independent body to conduct research into best practices for international and refugee students so that institutions may adopt these practices and provide a high level of support for their students.

¹⁶ "About, Student Refugee Program (SRP)," World University Service of Canada. Accessed December 8, 2019. <https://srp.wusc.ca/about/>.

¹⁷ "The ISOW Educational Initiative." Innovasium. Accessed April 28, 2020. <https://www.isow.ca/>.

The provincial government should also match student and institutional contributions to sponsor refugees studying at Ontario universities. While many Canadian colleges and universities partner with organizations like WUSC to provide sponsorship opportunities for refugees, their available funds are limited to student contributions.¹⁸ Matching student contributions through WUSC ensures that the students from persecuted or marginalized backgrounds have equitable access to post-secondary education in Ontario.

MERIT-BASED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Principle: International students who have displayed academic excellence and wish to study in Ontario should have access to merit-based financial assistance from the provincial government.

Concern: There is a lack of provincially funded financial aid opportunities for international students who display academic excellence.

Recommendation: The provincial government should incentivize institutions' development of scholarships for international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should create scholarships for undergraduate international students, similar to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS).

Qualified international students are eligible for financial aid through institutional scholarships, though their availability can differ at each post-secondary institution, giving some international students more access to merit-based financial aid than others. To ensure consistency, the provincial government should develop incentives to encourage institutions to create scholarships for refugee students. These incentives may take the form of matched contributions or investment in support services to support refugees.

International students at the graduate and doctoral level are eligible for scholarships through the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS).¹⁹ However, the provincial government itself does not have any direct financial aid for undergraduate international students who have displayed academic excellence. In order to attract top international talent, the provincial government should create a scholarship for which international undergraduate students are eligible. This scholarship should use the same funding model as the OGS, with the province contributing two-thirds of the award and the institution providing the final third.²⁰ Funding the scholarship in this fashion relieves the burden from institutions, who can then continue to offer their own internal scholarships.

¹⁸ "Potential Sponsored Students, Student Refugee Program (SRP)." World University Service of Canada. Accessed December 8, 2019. <https://srp.wusc.ca/students/>.

¹⁹ "Welcome to the Ontario Student Assistance Program: Ontario Graduate Scholarship." Government of Ontario, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Accessed April 28, 2020. <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR017871.html>.

²⁰ Ibid.

Such a program would help encourage highly qualified international students to pursue post-secondary education in Ontario when they might not have been able to otherwise. Further, because of rising international tuition rates in Ontario, federal government scholarships from countries like Panama (SENACYT scholarship) and Ecuador (SENESCYT scholarship) have begun to restrict the number of students who can study at Ontario universities in recent years. Merit-based financial assistance (as well as tuition regulation) would help to address this problem.

EMPLOYMENT & IMMIGRATION

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACADEMIC & CAREER ADVISING

Principle: International students have unique needs for career and academic support due to federal and provincial permit policies and legislation.

Principle: International students come from a variety of backgrounds, and as a result, they need specialized academic and career advising services.

Principle: International students need targeted academic and career guidance from staff familiar with current federal and provincial work permit policy and legislation.

Concern: The guidance provided by academic and career advisors is not always informed by the most up-to-date, relevant federal and provincial work permit policy and legislation.

Concern: Academic and career support services are not always intersectional and may not respond appropriately to the wide variety of needs of international students.

Concern: Confusion regarding federal and provincial work permit policy and legislation can create difficulty for international students seeking employment in Ontario and Canada.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, provide increased funding for academic and career advising for international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should contract research on best practices for supporting international students with respect to cultural sensitivity and intersectionality.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all academic and career counsellors be trained in research-based best practices for cultural sensitivity and intersectionality.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for international student advising services.

International students face unique career and academic support needs. Between cultural integration, academic policies, and provincial and federal permit policies and legislation, there is a plethora of complex infrastructure that new international students are expected to navigate.

Many international students rely on their institution's career services; in fact, in 2018, 54 percent reported using them.²¹ International students have unique needs for their student and career advising. The Canadian Bureau of International Education recommends that post-secondary institutions hire regulated international student advisers (RISIAs) and Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultants (RCICs) in order to help students navigate the complex realm of student and work visas which can complicate student transition periods into and out of university.²² Some Ontario universities, including the University of Waterloo, have already worked towards this goal by having a team of RCICs on campus to help students with any immigration concerns.²³ But many schools with large international student populations are still far behind. Students surveyed have expressed an explicit desire for unique supports in understanding Canadian employment and immigration practices.²⁴ These supports include understanding how to structure resumes and cover letters to fit Canadian workplace culture, how to explain work permits and status to companies, and how best to present their work and education experience from Canada and other countries.²⁵ Immigration policy changes frequently and at a relatively fast pace, so it is often difficult for non-specialized advisors to remain up to date on the most recent federal and provincial work permit legislation. This results in a lack of specialized, informed support, which can create difficulties for international students seeking employment in Ontario or Canada. Less than a quarter of Canadian universities have an immigration consultant on staff.²⁶ Immigration consultants, unlike immigration advisors, can help students apply for permanent residency status.²⁷

Improving supports for international students would help increase retention of international students after graduation. To that end, the provincial government should provide, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, increased funding for career and academic advising for international students. This funding, combined with general envelope funding for international student support services, would help increase the number of RCICs on campus and offer specialized attention to international students dealing with academic or career issues.

Finally, academic and career support services are not always intersectional and may not respond appropriately to the wide variety of needs of international students. The

²¹ "The Student's Voice: National Results of the 2018 CBIE International Student Survey," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), August 2018, cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Student_Voice_Report-ENG.pdf.

²² "Supporting the International Student in Status Transition," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), July 2016, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Immigration-RiB.pdf>

²³ "Immigration Consulting" University of Waterloo, Accessed April 30, 2020, <https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/students/international-student-resources/immigration-consulting>.

²⁴ "Retaining International Students Post-Graduation: Understanding the Motivation and Drivers of the Decision to Stay" Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), June 2018, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intl-students-post-graduation-RiB-8-EN-1.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Higher education should do more to help students with immigration: study" Polestar: Student Immigration News, May 18, 2018, <https://studentimmigration.ca/little-visa-help-for-international-students/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

provincial government should contract research, perhaps to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, on best practices for supporting international students with respect to cultural sensitivity and intersectionality. To ensure that this research is implemented at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, the provincial government should mandate that all academic and career counsellors be trained in the research-based best practices mentioned above.

STUDY PERMITS

Principle: International students should not have their study permits negatively impacted by extenuating circumstances including but not limited to academic disruptions or mental or physical health concerns.

Concern: Strikes and other academic disruptions disproportionately impact the ability of international students to complete their studies due to the restrictive length of international student study permits.

Concern: Extenuating personal circumstances and the availability of accommodations can affect the length of time it takes for an international student to complete their degree program.

Recommendation: The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to ensure that the length of each international student's study permit matches the length of time they need to complete their degree program.

Given the large economic and social costs of attending post-secondary education abroad, international students should not have their studies further disrupted or negatively impacted by strikes or academic disruptions. Unfortunately, because of the connection between study permits and course registration, academic disruptions can prevent international students from completing their degree or being able to work to save money for tuition.

During the recent Ontario colleges strike, many international students experienced this issue firsthand. As the strike went on, many domestic students accepted refunds; however, international students faced the additional consideration of their visa status.²⁸ These students were told that if they accepted tuition refunds, they risked losing their student status as a student and thus ability to work.²⁹ International students also spent much of this period confused after being told varying information on work permit extensions, status, ability to work, and more.³⁰

To prevent a re-occurrence of the confusions that arose with previous strikes, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration,

²⁸ "Options sparse for international students impacted by college strike" Toronto Star, November 24, 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/11/24/options-sparse-for-international-students-impacted-by-ontario-college-strike.html>.

²⁹ "Canada: How are International Students Affected by the Ontario College Strike?" Green and Spiegel LLP, December 1, 2017, <http://www.mondaq.com/canada/x/651738/general+immigration/How+are+International+Students+Affected+by+the+Ontario+College+Strike>.

³⁰ "How the Ontario College Strike is Affecting International Students" iHeartRadio, October 22, 2017, <https://www.iheartradio.ca/newstalk-1010/news/how-the-ontario-colleges-strike-is-affecting-international-students-1.3378295>.

Refugees, and Citizenship to tie the length of each international student's student permit to the length of their degree program, not their course registration. This structural change would eliminate much of the misunderstanding that currently exists around academic disruptions and study permits. Tying study permits to the length of each student's degree program would make it easier for them to access refunds from strikes or academic disruptions without threatening their immigration status.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Principle: Work-integrated learning promotes student development by providing the opportunity to apply theoretical principles and develop skills.

Principle: International student access to work-integrated learning opportunities should be equitable to that of domestic students.

Concern: The current lack of work-integrated learning opportunities for international students decreases their ability to gain relevant work experience.

Concern: Funding for research projects, co-ops, and internships is disproportionately available to domestic students due to existing funding eligibility requirements.

Concern: International students may face additional barriers to participating in Canadian culture and workplaces, which can result in challenges during their pursuit and completion of work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Multilingual international students may encounter barriers to effective communication during work-integrated learning opportunities and their completion of work-integrated learning assessments.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions may not have enough resources to facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities and support international students participating in those opportunities.

Concern: Workplace supervisors may not provide sufficient support to international students to facilitate effective work-integrated learning experiences.

Recommendation: To increase the retention of skilled international students, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade should create financial incentives applicable for hiring both domestic and international students in co-op and internship positions to increase the availability of work-integrated learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to institutions to increase the availability of paid applied research and work-study opportunities available to international students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should develop

educational programs that help international students improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness through out-of-classroom and social learning environments.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to retain dedicated work-integrated learning international student advisors.

Recommendation: The provincial government should contract research on developing best practices for supervisors who support international students in work-integrated learning opportunities.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a broad category of activities which integrate learning experiences between traditional education and practical settings.³¹ The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) proposes that the term “WIL” should encompass several activities, including field experience, co-op, internship, applied research projects, and service learning.³²

Unfortunately, there are proportionately fewer WIL opportunities available for international students than domestic students. Several factors contribute to this disparity, including the prevalence of financial incentives for hiring domestic students.³³ However, like domestic students, international students can gain valuable experience through WIL programs and increase their employment prospects following graduation. This increases international student retention, which provides economic benefit to Canada as well as career benefits to the student.³⁴ To increase WIL opportunities for international students (and all students), the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade should create financial incentives applicable for hiring both domestic and international students in co-op and internship positions. Such incentives could be similar to those currently provided to domestic students by Undergraduate Student Research Awards and the Student Work Placement Program.

Even when opportunities are available, international students experience numerous challenges in effectively accessing WIL programs. The foremost challenge identified by one study was the cultural difference between a student’s home country and country of study. Cultural differences can result in differing expectations, behaviours, and customs of the workplace, and discrepancies between conduct expectations and understanding of work practices can inhibit international students from succeeding in WIL programs.³⁵

³¹ Billet, Stephen. 2009. "Realizing the educational worth of integrating work experience in higher education." *Studies in Higher Education* 34 (7): 827-843. Accessed December 26, 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802706561>.

³² Sattler, Peggy. 2011. *Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

³³ Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. 2020. Undergraduate Student Research Awards. January 20. Accessed February 13, 2020. https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/UG-PC/USRA-BRPC_eng.asp; Employment and Social Development Canada. 2019. Student Work Placement Program. November 5. Accessed February 13, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/work-integrated-learning.html>.

³⁴ Esses, Victoria, Alina Sutter, Alejandro Ortiz, Ning Luo, Jean Cui, and Lisa Deacon. 2018. *Retaining International Students in Canada Post-Graduation: Understanding the Motivations and Drivers of the Decision to Stay*. Ottawa: Canadian Bureau for International Education.

³⁵ Jackson, Denise. 2017. "Exploring the challenges experienced by international students during work-integrated learning in Australia." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37 (3): 344-359. Accessed December 26, 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2017.1298515>.

Another study identified a key challenge in international students' lack of English-language proficiency and subsequent lack of professional communication skills.³⁶ International students may also struggle with conversational or written communication in English, as expectations in the workplace often differ from what they might experience at school. Similarly, international students' English-language proficiency may pose a challenge in the assessment of WIL. Often, assessment practices will include written technical or reflective reports. Depending on a student's program of study, they may lack opportunity to practice report-writing and struggle with WIL assessments as a result.³⁷

Some institutions have well-established WIL programs which can assist students in pursuing opportunities. However, others lack centralized resources such as advising services and job postings. This poses a particular challenge for international students who may struggle to find job placement opportunities due to minimal professional connections in Canada. Furthermore, a WIL supervisor may not be well-versed in the needs of an international student on a work placement, which hinders their ability to facilitate a beneficial WIL experience. This can disproportionately affect international students, largely due to cultural differences or communication barriers that may prevent them from self-advocating. For this reason, the provincial government should contract research on how best to expand existing WIL guidelines and best practices for supervisors who support international students.

HEQCO notes that one of the most effective strategies for helping international students thrive in WIL programs is to have a dedicated WIL advisor who is well-versed in the challenges and barriers a student may encounter.³⁸ In a one-on-one setting, an advisor is able to encourage students to apply for their work visa and assist in preparing them for job interviews. The same study also showed that workshops are an ineffective method for helping to prepare students for the workplace.³⁹ To facilitate the hiring and/or training of an international student-dedicated advisor, the provincial government should provide dedicated envelope funding to post-secondary institutions. Such funding could be used to support training on specific concerns that international students encounter, providing support through an intersectional lens and assisting students with work permits and other relevant regulations.

An article by an international student from China proposes that a more effective strategy for cultural integration and improvement of English-language skills is out-of-class learning in social environments, such as volunteering and leisure activities.⁴⁰ To implement this idea, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should create non-classroom learning opportunities for international students. Opportunities should

³⁶ Gribble, Catriona, Jill Blackmore, and Mark Rahimi. 2015. "Challenges to providing work integrated learning to international business students at Australian universities." *The Journal of the University Vocational Awards Council* 5 (4): 401-416. Accessed December 26, 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-04-2015-0015>.

³⁷ Jackson, Denise. 2017. "Exploring the challenges experienced by international students during work-integrated learning in Australia." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37 (3): 344-359. Accessed December 26, 2019. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2017.1298515>.

³⁸ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. 2018. *Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Liu, Lu. 2011. "An International Graduate Student's ESL Learning Experience Beyond the Classroom," *TESL Canada Journal* 29 (1): 77-92. Accessed December 31, 2019.

include social programming directed at English-language learners, because immigrants and international students may not feel comfortable accessing existing community programming. Such programming would provide be invaluable in assisting international students and other immigrants as they build a life in Canada.

HEQCO has developed resources to assist organizations in providing purposeful WIL experiences including guidelines for developing learning outcomes, assessment tools and feedback strategies for supervisors.⁴¹ WIL learning supervisors include any individual who is overseeing a student during a WIL opportunity. However, HEQCO'S guidelines do not address the specific challenges that international students may face when working in Ontario. Supervisors of international students would benefit from guidance on how to address the specific challenges that international students face.

ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKETS & RESIDENCY

Principle: International students are skilled individuals who can be an asset to Canadian companies after graduation and deserve fair access to the Ontario and Canadian labour markets.

Principle: Government policy should not overcomplicate or prevent employment opportunities for Ontario's international students.

Concern: Complicated government policies often make it difficult for international students to gain the permit-related credentials required to obtain employment and permanent residency.

Concern: The closure of the "Employer Job Offer: International Students" stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program will likely prevent international students from finding work and progressing toward permanent residency after graduation.

Concern: Many employers avoid hiring international students because it is difficult for them to follow the appropriate onboarding processes.

Recommendation: The provincial government should reopen the "Employer Job Offer: International Students" stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should include international students in the "Express Entry" streams of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop and implement tax credits to offset the costs employers incur when sponsoring highly skilled international student graduates through the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should delay the Ontario Immigrant

⁴¹ Stirling, Ashley, Gretchen Kerr, Jenessa Banwell, Ellen MacPherson, and Amanda Heron. 2016. A Practical Guide for Work-integrated Learning. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Nominee Program's \$1500 application fee for graduates of Ontario universities until one year after their initial offer of employment.

Recommendation: The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to provide international student graduates with easier access to work visas and pathways to citizenship.

Many international students who study in Canada hope to stay after graduation, either permanently or temporarily. In fact, a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) found that 60 percent of international students said they wanted to become citizens and over two-thirds said they hoped to stay to work.⁴² Many of these students desire to stay because of the job opportunities Canada has to offer; 75 percent of students surveyed by CBIE said that opportunity to work after graduation was an essential or very important deciding factor when choosing to study in Canada.⁴³

The unfortunate reality, however, is that the job opportunities international students seek are often difficult for them to access, in part due to undue hardship caused by bureaucratic complications during the onboarding process.⁴⁴ Among students seeking work, 56 percent said they were having difficulty finding opportunities.⁴⁵ With Canada's labour market expected to experience extreme labour shortages by 2050, international students are ideal candidates to help solve Canada's declining workforce.⁴⁶ These work shortages impact a number of fields, including health management, oil and gas, trades, and public services.⁴⁷ As this contribution to the work force plays an essential role in regional growth and prosperity, it is important to promote international students' employment prospects and encourage them to work in Canada.

Government should not overcomplicate the process international students need to go through to access Ontario's labour market. These students are often ideal candidates for jobs and necessary to fill current labour shortages. The unfortunate reality, however, is that overly complex government policies often hinder the ability of international students to access the labour market; examples include complicating the on-boarding process, closing immigration streams, and introducing large elements of uncertainty into post graduate work permits.

Employers perceive several onboarding challenges in hiring international students, as they feel expected to buy into the post-graduate work permit program both monetarily

⁴² "The Student's Voice: National Results of the 2018 CBIE International Student Survey," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), August 2018, cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Student_Voice_Report-ENG.pdf.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "Supporting the International Student in Status Transition," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), July 2016, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Immigration-RiB.pdf>

⁴⁵ "The Student's Voice: National Results of the 2018 CBIE International Student Survey," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), August 2018, cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Student_Voice_Report-ENG.pdf.

⁴⁶ "Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), accessed April 30, 2020,

http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/northern_lights/northern_lights.pdf.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

and in time commitment.⁴⁸ Employers may avoid hiring international students altogether, due to the complications and costs that the on-boarding process entails.⁴⁹ In a 2017 Northern Lights study conducted by the International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce, employers expressed concerns about hiring international students due to lack of information on government policy, the need to hire a lawyer knowledgeable in immigration concerns, and misinformation on the rules and regulations for hiring an international graduate.⁵⁰ Furthermore, international graduates are unable to start working when the offer is first made, delaying and complicating onboarding.⁵¹

The closure of the “Employer Job Offer- International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program presents an additional barrier to international graduates accessing work in Canada. This stream has recently been temporarily closed with no specific re-open date set.⁵² Keeping this point of entry closed will continue to prevent international students from finding work and progressing towards permanent residency.

With these concerns in mind, there are several actions the provincial government could take to help expand Ontario’s workforce with highly qualified international students. First, the provincial government should re-open “Employer Job Offer: International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. This would help recent graduates obtain the permits they need to access Ontario’s labour market.

Second, the provincial government should include international students in the “Express Entry” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. The federal government updated federal express entry in 2016 to help put international students in a better position to become permanent residents.⁵³ A large number of students had access to this new avenue, with over 50,000 international graduates receiving invitations to the program.⁵⁴ This invitation can help the applicant receive up to 30 additional points towards their permanent residency application.⁵⁵ Expanding the provincial equivalent of this program would help respond to employers’ need for a swift immigration process, thus encouraging them to hire international students.

Third, the provincial government should develop tax credits to cover the costs of immigration paperwork that employers incur when sponsoring highly skilled international graduates. Alongside this, the provincial government should delay the

⁴⁸ “Supporting the International Student in Status Transition,” Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), July 2016, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Immigration-RiB.pdf>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce,” Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), accessed April 30, 2020, http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/northern_lights/northern_lights.pdf.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP),” Government of Ontario, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-immigrant-nominee-program-oinp>.

⁵³ “Express entry reforms benefit international students seeking permanent residence in Canada,” University Affairs, November 22, 2016, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/express-entry-reforms/>.

⁵⁴ “Express Entry stalls for student immigrants to Canada,” Polestar: Student Immigration News, July 29, 2019, <https://studentimmigration.ca/express-entry-international-student-canada/>

⁵⁵ “How Canadian schools are responding to the growing numbers of international students,” CIC News: Canada Immigration Newsletter, January 29, 2020, <https://www.cicnews.com/2020/01/how-canadian-schools-are-responding-to-the-growing-numbers-of-international-students-0113639.html#gs.w7x6k9>.

Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program’s costly \$1500 application for until one year after the international student’s initial offer of employment. Requiring that this cost be met upfront presents a substantial barrier for a number of graduates, and it may hinder their ability to participate in Ontario’s economy.

Finally, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work alongside the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship to help ease the process for international student graduates to access work visas.

HEALTH SERVICES

AFFORDABLE COVERAGE

Principle: International students should have access to affordable health services in Ontario for the duration of their studies.

Concern: University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) costs are unreasonably high, and excluded services may result in additional fees for international students.

Concern: International students may choose not to seek out medical care if additional costs are unknown.

Concern: UHIP operates on a reimbursement model which requires students to pay upfront for medical expenses incurred outside of a preferred provider network.

Recommendation: The provincial government should allow international students to pay a fair and affordable premium in order to receive coverage through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

Recommendation: The provincial government should consult with the governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan and produce a report on best practices for implementing provincial health coverage for international students in Ontario.

Recommendation: In the interim, prior to the inclusion of international students in OHIP, the provincial government should work to expand the preferred provider network.

International students should have access to affordable health care services in Ontario. Currently, they are required to enroll in the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), which was implemented in 1994 after the provincial government made the decision to no longer include international students under the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP).⁵⁶ While UHIP’s main objective is to cover health services and medical

⁵⁶ “Plan Details,” University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), accessed April 30, 2020, <https://uhip.ca/Enrollment/PlanDetails>; Bobadilla, Andrea and Treena Orchard, “Oh, so We We’re Not Insured?’: Exploring the Impact of Ontario’s Health Insurance Plan on New Permanent Residents and Healthcare Providers,” Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository, Western University, September 13, 2013, <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2989&context=etd>.

treatments for those enrolled in the program, there are a few differences (relative to OHIP) that tend to impact user satisfaction with the service.⁵⁷ UHIP is funded through member fees from various institutions, rather than by the province; although the annual cost is set at \$636, there can be variation in cost between institutions.

Additionally, accessing healthcare outside of UHIP’s provider network will require students to incur upfront, out-of-pocket costs. Some international students may be unable (or choose not) to access the care they need due to the associated cost. UHIP reassures students that, as long as they use medical facilities that are within the preferred health network, they can avoid out-of-pocket costs. However, some healthcare providers do not recognize UHIP and choose to charge up front for hospital or medical services. In order to improve access to affordable coverage, the UHIP provider network should be wide-reaching so that students do not need to incur out-of-pocket costs. UHIP also allows for individuals to include dependents on their plan, so long as they meet the criteria for eligible dependents; this allows for health coverage to be extended for family members that rely on the international student for support. However, while this aims to subsidize costs of the dependents, it can be costly if the student misses the enrollment deadline, in which case they will be required to pay a \$500 late application fee. The plan also does not provide discounts for the months in which dependents did not have healthcare coverage. With that said, UHIP does provide a consistent fee for dependents, as shown in the chart below:⁵⁸

UHIP Premiums for 2019-2020
These are the rates for September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020:

Number of months Coverage	Member Only	Addition of one Dependant	Member plus one Dependant	Addition of Two or more Dependents	Member plus Two or More Dependents
1	\$53.00	\$53.00	\$106.00	\$106.00	\$159.00
2	\$106.00	\$106.00	\$212.00	\$212.00	\$318.00
3	\$159.00	\$159.00	\$318.00	\$318.00	\$477.00
4	\$212.00	\$212.00	\$424.00	\$424.00	\$636.00
5	\$265.00	\$265.00	\$530.00	\$530.00	\$795.00
6	\$318.00	\$318.00	\$636.00	\$636.00	\$954.00
7	\$371.00	\$371.00	\$742.00	\$742.00	\$1,113.00
8	\$424.00	\$424.00	\$848.00	\$848.00	\$1,272.00
9	\$477.00	\$477.00	\$954.00	\$954.00	\$1,431.00
10	\$530.00	\$530.00	\$1,060.00	\$1,060.00	\$1,590.00
11	\$583.00	\$583.00	\$1,166.00	\$1,166.00	\$1,749.00
12	\$636.00	\$636.00	\$1,272.00	\$1,272.00	\$1,908.00

To make healthcare more accessible for international students, the provincial government should give them the ability to opt in to OHIP, which should yield more

⁵⁷ “Plan Details,” University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), accessed April 30, 2020, <https://uhip.ca/Enrollment/PlanDetails>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

affordable premiums. Provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta, and Saskatchewan include international students in their provincial plan; for example, Alberta allows international students to enroll in their Health Care Insurance Plan, free of charge.⁵⁹ Under this system, the cost of providing health insurance for international students is offset by the tax revenue they generate for the province. Understanding that implementing this system would take a considerable amount of time, the provincial government should work to expand the UHIP preferred provider network in the interim.

STUDENT OVERSIGHT

Principle: International students should be represented on any committees or governing bodies that oversee their health plans and services.

Concern: The current processes surrounding the UHIP Steering Committee are unclear and may not include adequate student consultation.

Recommendation: Prior to the inclusion of international students in OHIP, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and the UHIP Steering Committee should consult with international students on changes to UHIP.

Recommendation: Prior to the inclusion of international students in OHIP, the UHIP Steering Committee should include members who represent international students from Ontario post-secondary institutions.

It is imperative for international students to be a part of any process that dictates their healthcare costs. Currently, the processes that set UHIP premiums, determine coverage, and select the in-network providers are not transparent. It is difficult to find information on the body who manages these items and, therefore, difficult for international students to self-advocate.

The UHIP steering committee is composed of senior leaders from the various schools that are a part of the program. In an interview with the manager of UHIP, we learned that consultation does happen with various members of the community, including international students.⁶⁰ The manager of UHIP told us that she regularly meets with international students to ensure that the program meets their direct needs. While this consultation is appreciated, it would be more beneficial if international students had the ability to voice their concerns and overall experiences with the Steering Committee directly. Consultation should occur regularly and in a more formal setting.

Further, the UHIP Steering Committee should include members who represent international students from Ontario post-secondary institutions. Most post-secondary institutions have elected leaders who represent students and advocate for their needs, and these representatives would be responsible for research and regular consultation with international students to ensure that their interests are supported during consultation periods for program changes.

⁵⁹ “Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP),” Government of Alberta, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.alberta.ca/ahcip.aspx>.

⁶⁰ Pamela Cant, interview with UHIP Chair, January 29, 2020.

MENTAL HEALTH

Principle: International students should have equitable access to mental health services on their campuses.

Principle: International students should feel comfortable and supported when accessing mental health services on campus.

Concern: Language barriers may prevent international students from receiving effective mental health care.

Concern: Cultural stigma surrounding mental health concerns may make international students unwilling to access mental health services they need.

Concern: International students may face unique mental health challenges as a result of living far from home and adapting to adulthood without the support that many domestic students have.

Concern: Mental health professionals on campus may not be adequately trained on the mental health needs and best practices for caring for international students.

Concern: The lack of diversity of mental health professionals may result in international students being unable to effectively access mental health services on campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should contract research on identifying and developing best practices to address the unique mental health needs of international students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Health should develop research-informed resources and fund training for mental health professionals to effectively care for international students and other immigrants.

Recommendation: The provincial government should centralize and expand telephone interpretation services to include access by on-campus mental health professionals.

Recommendation: The provincial government should integrate care for international students into their Roadmap to Wellness plan.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide financial incentives to universities for hiring mental health professionals with lived experiences relevant to the diverse needs of international students.

Adjusting to post-secondary education is stressful in its own right, and this is made worse by barriers that international students face, such as language, cultural shock, isolation, climate shock, homesickness, dealing with finances and eventually accessing

the labour market.⁶¹ International students' mental health can suffer as a result of these barriers. As a result, it is imperative that institutions have the ability to provide them with the support they need.

Three key factors impact international students' mental health outcomes.⁶² First, challenges associated with an unfamiliar academic environment and with the English language. Second, living far from home while learning new skills, such as budgeting, cooking, and managing a household. Finally, a reluctance to seek help due to stigma and cultural perceptions that they may have experienced in their home countries. These factors can lead to underutilization of mental health resources by international students. Mental health care professionals may not be able to adequately address these concerns without specific training or lived experiences relevant to international students. Professionals with lived experiences are uniquely able to provide care for students by leveraging their first-hand involvement in similar situations in order to support the student. The provincial government should create incentives that encourage institutions to hire mental health professionals with relevant experience that will improve their ability to support students. However, this should not disincentivize the hiring of other qualified professionals.

Some international students prefer to receive mental health care services in a language other than English, yet many mental health professionals in Ontario practice in English. In order to address these concerns, the provincial government should centralize and expand existing telephone interpretation services to include access by on-campus mental health professionals.

International students may experience additional barriers in accessing mental health services due to cultural stigmatization surrounding the matter.⁶³ Addressing mental health concerns in various cultures can be viewed as taboo, which leaves international students unfamiliar with how best to care for their mental health. This cultural gap can be bridged, and international students will become more likely to use services, if institutions provide cultural support through the inclusion of diverse mental health professionals. To date, various institutions across Ontario have made a commitment towards diversity and inclusion.⁶⁴ It is recommended that post-secondary institutions adhere to this commitment by supporting their diverse student populations. Further, to address this issue, the provincial government should contract research on identifying and developing best practices to address the unique mental health needs of international students. Using this research, the Ministry of Health should develop resources and fund training that gives mental health professionals the tools they need to care for international students effectively.

⁶¹ Trilokekar, Roopa Desai, Saba Safdar, Amira El Masri, Colin Scott, "Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund" (OHCRIF), and Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities." International Education, Labour Market and Future Citizens: Prospects and Challenges for Ontario.

⁶² Forbes-Mewett, H. & Sawyer, A.-M. (2011). "Mental health issues amongst international students in Australia: perspectives from professionals at the coal-face," paper presented to the Australian Sociological Association Conference Local Lives/Global Networks, University of Newcastle New South Wales, 29 November – 2 December.

⁶³ Popadiuk, Natalee, and Nancy Arthur. "Counseling International Students in Canadian Schools," *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 2004, 125–45.

⁶⁴ "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion," Universities Canada, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.univcan.ca/priorities/equity-diversity-inclusion/>.

While the provincial government has committed to improving Ontarian’s mental health outcomes through their Roadmap to Wellness plan, the plan does not address the unique challenges that international students and recent immigrants face.⁶⁵ These populations are significant contributors to Ontario’s economic success and important members of our communities. Therefore, the provincial government should include government and community-based supports for international students in their plan. International students who achieve better mental health outcomes during their studies will be more likely to stay in Canada after graduation and provide economic benefit to the province.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

BEST PRACTICE TRAINING & SUPPORT

Principle: All students should be able to feel safe and welcome on their campus and in their community regardless of their race, religion, sexuality, or gender identity and expression.

Principle: All international students in Ontario should have access to reliable on-campus resources that provide access to training and support services.

Principle: International students have unique needs that require specialized training and support services directed towards them.

Concern: International students and racialized students often face higher levels of racism and discrimination.

Concern: Though all Ontario post-secondary institutions offer services for international students, the quality of programming varies between post-secondary institutions and some do not provide critical services.

Concern: Funding models for international student services vary widely between post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Rising international student enrolment has not been met with increased investment in international student support services, leading to increased demand which negatively affects service delivery.

Concern: Student support service staff may be ill-informed of relevant international student policies.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop best practices for providing support services to international students.

⁶⁵ “Roadmap to wellness: a plan to build Ontario’s mental health and addictions system,” Government of Ontario, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/roadmap-wellness-plan-build-ontarios-mental-health-and-addictions-system>.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should standardize the implementation of best practice models used to support international students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create a training module, based on best practices, for student support service staff who work with international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to provide a robust offering of international student support services based on best practice models.

A key trend within Ontario's universities has been the idea of internationalizing the post-secondary sector. Internationalization refers to "the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of higher education at institutional and national levels."⁶⁶ As internationalization continues to be a top priority for post-secondary institutions across Ontario, it is important that these institutions expand their support services for international students.

Like all students, international students require strong institutional support throughout their studies to ensure they have the skills necessary to succeed in Ontario's post-secondary system and beyond. Without adequate support, international students may find their education to be less satisfactory than expected, and as a result, experience undue hardships.

Though all Ontario post-secondary institutions are likely to offer some degree of services directed towards international students, the degree and quality of these services can vary from one school to the next. Often, the level of support services differs based on the percentage of international students at a particular institution as well as the amount of funding available to sustain these programs. This inequality in funding particularly impacts international students who are seeking these supports.

For example, as of 2017, approximately 5,411 international undergraduate students studied at the University of Waterloo. In comparison, that same year, only 403 international undergraduate students chose to study at Lakehead University.⁶⁷ Due to the unequal number of international students enrolled at each institution, the quality and quantity of international support programs are likely to differ. The University of Waterloo offers a number of support services to international students, including immigration consulting, an international peer community program, English language and academic supports, tax and documentation assistance, health insurance aid, and an airport pick-up service.⁶⁸ In comparison, Lakehead University offers international programs which provide support for financial assistance, housing, health insurance, and

⁶⁶ Perez-Encinas, A., Rodriguez-Pomeda, J., Josek, M, "Problematic Areas of Host University Support Services for Short-Term Mobility Students," *Journal of International Students* 7, 2017.

⁶⁷ "Full-time enrollment by immigration status," Common University Data Ontario, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://cudo.ouac.on.ca/page.php?id=7&table=4>.

⁶⁸ "International student resources," University of Waterloo, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/international-student-resources>.

course selection.⁶⁹ This is a good example of how the level of international student support programs can vary greatly across Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Particularly, an inequality in funding for peer support programs greatly affects the quality of support international students receive at various post-secondary institutions. It is crucial that international students at each of Ontario's post-secondary institutions have access to the same quality and relative quantity of support services.

To date, rising international student enrollment has not been met with increased investments into international support services. This leads to negative pressures on the existing systems which aim to support these students. In a 2018 report, The Ministry Advanced Education and Skills Development predicted that by 2022, international student enrollments will account for roughly 20 percent of all post-secondary enrollments in Ontario.⁷⁰ With this estimated increase, the provincial government should support post-secondary institutions as they work towards providing adequate and accessible services to international students. Investing more heavily into international support services will positively benefit the academic success and overall well-being of international students.

In order to address the current gaps in service, the provincial government should be taking a stronger leadership role in supporting the commitment of universities to internationalization. To promote this, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) should develop best practices for providing support services to international students. Additionally, the COU should standardize the implementation of best practice models used to support international students. Additionally, OUSA recommends that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities create a training module, based on best practices, for student support service staff who work with international students. This training model will ensure support staff are providing adequate services to international students based on the best practices identified by the COU. This will also ensure international students are receiving an equitable level of support at all post-secondary institutions across Ontario.

Finally, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions so that they can provide a robust offering of international student support services based on the best practice models recommended above. Ultimately, this funding will allow post-secondary institutions to expand upon their current support services, thereby enhancing the prestige of Ontario's post-secondary institutions as competitors in the international academic realm.

⁶⁹ "International Students," Lakehead University, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/international/future/support-for-students>.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development "Ontario's International Postsecondary Education Strategy 2018: Educating Global Citizens," 2018.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Principle: International students should have access to adequate academic support resources.

Principle: Academic support systems provide students with the tools and resources needed to succeed.

Principle: International students should have access to academic accommodations.

Concern: International students are often less informed of and exposed to available campus academic resources.

Concern: International students face disproportionate challenges in regard to achieving academic success.

Concern: International students often experience a variety of obstacles that impede their integration with their domestic peers and faculty members, which hinders their ability to succeed.

Concern: Many of Ontario's post-secondary institutions lack culturally relevant and language-specific academic resources for international students.

Concern: International students may be at increased risk of discrimination from both academic staff and peers.

Concern: Many accommodation services do not accommodate international students' cultural and religious needs.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding aimed at enhancing academic accommodation support services, specifically to account for international students' cultural and religious needs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should contract the Canadian Bureau for International Education with conducting research on the barriers international students face when attempting to access academic support.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities, in consultation with the Council of Ontario Universities, should develop a best practice model for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training based on the research conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education in the recommendation immediately above.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that post-secondary institutions review their academic support structures to accommodate the best practice model referred to in the recommendation immediately above.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding aimed at increasing academic supports for international students.

Academic support systems are necessary for international students to succeed at Ontario's post-secondary institutions. These systems provide academic oversight in areas such as enrollment services, academic advising, tutoring services, study skills workshops, and career preparation.⁷¹ The academic stress international students face is often compounded by an unfamiliar culture and limited language comprehension.⁷² Unfortunately, international students are often unaware of the existence of academic support services. These services should reflect the fact that international students are a diverse group with a variety of cultural and social backgrounds, and whose learning patterns and academic expectations differ significantly from one student to another.⁷³

Language barriers account for much of the difficulties experienced by international students when navigating academic support systems. Not only must international students learn formal English, they must also be confident in conversational English. However, approximately one-third of international students rate their own English language performance as inadequate based on the Test of English as a Foreign Language.⁷⁴ This prevents many international students from communicating effectively with their professors and peers and participating in classroom discussion. Further, anecdotal reports show that international students may be at risk of increased discrimination from peers and academic staff.

While we have a general appreciation of the challenges international students face when studying in Ontario, significant research must be conducted in order to fully understand these barriers. The provincial government should, therefore, task the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) with conducting research on the barriers international students face when attempting to access academic support. After such barriers have been identified, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should consult with the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) to develop a best practice model for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training. This model should be aimed at safeguarding the learning experiences of international students and promoting international education. Additionally, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that post-secondary institutions review their academic support structures to ensure it complies with the best practice model discussed here.

Further, many academic support systems currently in place fail to accommodate international students' cultural and religious needs. To address this issue, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope

⁷¹Ragavan, S. K. (2014) Peer mentoring for international students in a UK law school: lesson from a pilot case study. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 2014 (51)3, 292-302

⁷² Huntley, H. S. (1993). *Adult International Students: Problems of Adjustment*.

⁷³ Ragavan, S. K. (2014) Peer mentoring for international students in a UK law school: lesson from a pilot case study. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 2014 (51)3, 292-30.

⁷⁴ "Providing the Appropriate Academic Support Services: a White Paper for Strategic Planning Discussion," Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/StrategicPlanning/documents/6-Goal.pdf>.

funding aimed at enhancing academic accommodation support services, specifically to account for international students' cultural and religious needs.

Finally, to help institutions to address barriers, implement training, and carry out the recommendations in this section, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding aimed at increasing academic supports for international students. Investing in international academic support systems will encourage future international students to study in Ontario and ensure that, once they arrive, they receive the support they need to excel in their studies.

PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Principle: International students should have access to support services that recognize their unique barriers.

Principle: All students, international and domestic, should have the same access to opportunities for student involvement.

Principle: Peer-to-peer support opportunities foster inclusivity among student populations.

Principle: International students bring valuable, though often overlooked, cultural perspectives to peer support services.

Concern: International students face disproportionate barriers when it comes to seeking peer-to-peer supports.

Concern: International students often struggle to integrate with their domestic peers and faculty members due to language barriers and other cultural norms.

Concern: International students face many unique challenges due to acculturation.

Concern: International students often experience prejudice and discrimination from domestic students and faculty members.

Concern: Students who lack social supports often face increased stress and poor psychosocial adjustment.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should conduct research on leading practices for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training in post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop training models regarding cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training for domestic and international students who facilitate and participate in peer-to-peer support opportunities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should consult with the Council of Ontario Universities to make recommendations regarding the implementation of the training models referred to in the recommendation immediately above.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to implement the training referred to in the two recommendations immediately above.

Due to the stress of adapting to a new culture, international students often face obstacles when engaging with their peers. These include cultural differences, lack of common interests, differing academic and social priorities, a lack of confidence speaking English, and being reluctant to reach out to others.⁷⁵ Peer-to-peer support fosters a community of inclusivity and engagement among students, and getting involved with these programs provides international students with connections to other groups and communities on campus.⁷⁶ International students also gain valuable experience by participating in peer-to-peer support programs, which allow them to gain a sense of leadership and value from teaching, learning, and integrating with their peers. These programs also teach intercultural communication skills, which help students during their studies and in the workforce.⁷⁷

Though often overlooked, international students bring valuable cultural perspectives to peer support services. Support programs developed from an exclusively North American perspective can struggle to connect with international students. By adopting a global view, peer-to-peer programs can bring together international and domestic students and create an environment of inclusivity and reduced stigmatization. However, while there is value in bringing together domestic and international students, it is also important that international students have the opportunity to engage specifically with other international students as well. In this sense, international students will have the opportunity to speak to their own personal experience of being new to Canada and adapting to university in Ontario and provide mentorship to other incoming students.

One of the most important reasons to integrate peer-to-peer support programs into student life is to create a community of acceptance. International students can face disproportionate levels of prejudice and discrimination from peers and faculty members, and students who lack social supports often face increased stress and poor psychosocial adjustment. Peer-to-peer support programs led by individuals trained to navigate conversations surrounding unique international experiences are essential to fostering a sense of belongingness for international students in Ontario.

Currently, there is a lack of research which addresses leading practices for peer-to-peer support programs. To remedy this, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) should

⁷⁵ Campbell, N. (2012) Promoting intercultural contact on campus: A project to connect and engage international and host students. *Journal of Studies on International Education*. (16)3, 205-227.

⁷⁶ Zaccagnini, Melissa and Irina Verenikina "Peer Assisted Study Sessions for post-graduate international students in Australia, *Journal of Peer Learning*, 6, 2013, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ajpl/vol6/iss1/8>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

conduct research on leading practices for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training in post-secondary institutions. Using that research, the COU should develop training models for domestic and international students who facilitate and participate in peer-to-peer support programs. Further, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should consult with the COU to make recommendations regarding the implementation of these leading practice models, which should be aimed at safeguarding the learning experiences of international students and promoting international education.

Finally, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to train domestic and international students who provide peer-to-peer support. This funding will help ensure international students feel included and are treated with respect while studying in Ontario.

TWENTY-FOUR-HOUR CRISIS SUPPORT

Principle: Every effort should be made to ensure that international students have access to crisis support services in their first language.

Principle: Health services should be accessible to all international students, regardless of their spoken language, ethnicity, or religion.

Principle: Twenty-four-hour crisis support services allow international students to receive support anonymously and without fear of stigmatization.

Concern: Twenty-four-hour crisis support services are often available in only English and French.

Concern: International students may be less likely to visit on-campus health services due to cultural and religious differences or barriers.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to expand the Good2Talk service and equivalent 24/7/365 virtual services, to allow for the accessibility of crisis support through the addition of culturally and linguistically competent support resources.

International students face disproportionate challenges in adjusting to life in Canada, which can negatively impact their mental and physical health. Living far from home means that these students are often removed from their support systems and forced to rely on a secondary language, make new friends, and adjust to a new academic setting. These are just a small number of the challenges international students face on a daily basis.

Many existing crisis-support services provided by institutions lack accessibility because they are available only during working hours and are offered only in English or French. These aspects act as a potential barrier to international students accessing mental health

supports in periods of crisis. For example, Good2Talk is a 24/7/365 support helpline which is offered by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and provided to all post-secondary students in Ontario. However, this service is only offered in English and French.⁷⁸

The keep.meSAFE model, created by Morneau Shepell, gives students of registered institutions access to immediate, twenty-four-hour crisis support. This free app specifically supports international and study-abroad students, as it includes special features such as multilingual, self-directed support and counsellors who understand specific cultural and individual challenges that international students face.⁷⁹

All students are entitled to receive adequate mental health crisis support twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Twenty-four-hour crisis support services allow individuals to receive anonymous support, free of stigmatization. To enhance crisis-support services available in Ontario, the provincial government should expand the Good2Talk crisis support service to support culturally and linguistically competent services, following the model of keep.meSAFE. To obtain a high degree of accessibility, crisis support services should be available in a multitude of languages to assist international students studying in Ontario.

ORIENTATION & TRANSITION

Principle: A sense of belonging is highly correlated with academic success.

Principle: Orientation and transition programming helps students adjust to university life.

Principle: Students should be well-informed of campus offerings prior to enrolling at a post-secondary institution.

Concern: International students may face greater difficulties in transitioning to the university lifestyle in Canada.

Concern: Many international students are unable to tour post-secondary institutions they may wish to attend before enrolling in university.

Concern: International students have varying intake periods that do not necessarily align with university orientation and transition programs.

Concern: Universities differ in the amount of information they provide to students about their institution prior to enrollment.

Concern: Due to time zone differences, international students may be unable to receive valuable information during info sessions and livestreams provided by universities.

⁷⁸ "About Good2Talk," Good2Talk, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://good2talk.ca/about/>.

⁷⁹ "Welcome," keep.meSAFE, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://keepmesafe.myissp.com/Home/SelectLocale>.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should research best practices surrounding international student orientation programming.

Recommendation: HEQCO should, based on their mandate to prioritize improving access to post-secondary education, develop guidelines regarding what information institutions must share with potential students about their university prior to enrollment.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adhere to the Canadian Bureau of International Education's code of ethics when developing policy for international students.

Orientation and transition programming plays an important role in properly integrating students to university life. Transition programs help students adapt to their new environment, while orientation programs equip students with the academic and social skills they need to succeed.

International student orientation and transition programming differs from that of their domestic peers. There are four focuses of international orientation and transition programming.⁸⁰ The first focus is on culture, which aims to familiarize students with and foster awareness of the new culture. At this stage, students come to understand the similarities and differences of their own culture and the new culture. The next focus is the cultural interaction experience, which teaches students how to interact within the new cultural setting. Next, there may be some form of culture shock; with this, students learn to adapt through coping mechanisms. Lastly, students are introduced to the opportunities and experiences of acculturation.⁸¹ In short, acculturation contributes to changes in both the culture of a group and the psychology of the individual.⁸² It is through these experiences that international students differ from that of their domestic peers.

Although orientation programming may differ between institutions, the goal of the programming is the same: to equip students with the tools and resources necessary to succeed in their first year of post-secondary education. Information provided during orientation should provide students with knowledge of academic supports, career counselling, language support, and other supports offered by their institutions. However, the information provided at each individual institution may differ.

Another issue which may arise is that, often, essential information aimed at helping international students' transition is provided only at one time of day. For example, many schools create livestream videos which air throughout the summer months. These videos allow students to ask questions prior to attending campus, and also provide

⁸⁰ Guvendir, M. A. (2018). The relation of an international student center's orientation training sessions with international students' achievement and integration to university. *Journal of International Students*. (8)2, 843-860.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaption.

students with vital information such as how to pack for dorm-living. The problem with such programming is that it is often inaccessible to students who live in a different time zone.

For example, in regard to residence, Wilfrid Laurier University posts a number of tours on their YouTube channel which highlights their residence options.⁸³ Some international students have access to these videos, or equivalent media, which allows them to tour their potential residencies. However, these resources may lack vital information, which can give potential students a false perception of what to expect upon arrival at the post-secondary institution. Additionally, YouTube is banned in many countries, such as China, and is inaccessible in others.⁸⁴ This creates potential barriers for international students as they may not have access to vital information which is shared on these media outlets. Institutions should strive to share information on websites which are accessible to their target audience, taking into account various limits on foreign media or websites.

To ensure Ontario institutions provide the highest-quality orientation and transition programming, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) should research best practices surrounding international student orientation and transition programming. Sharing best practices will ensure students across Ontario's post-secondary institutions are receiving an adequate amount of information prior to attending university. Additionally, HECQO should develop guidelines as to what vital information institutions must share with potential students about their university prior to enrollment. Developing such guidelines will ensure that all post-secondary institutions are held to the same standards of information sharing. These guidelines may include information on academic programs, campus infrastructure, and academic and peer-to-peer support programs available to international students upon arrival.

Finally, when developing policy for international students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adhere to the Canadian Bureau of International Education's (CBIE) Code of Ethical Practice, which references the admission and recruitment of international students. This would ensure that future policy is inclusive of the unique needs of international students in Ontario's post-secondary education sector.

⁸³ "Wilfrid Laurier University," YouTube, accessed May 1, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/user/LaurierVideo/videos>.

⁸⁴ "9 incredibly popular websites that are still blocked in China," Business Insider, July 23, 2015, <https://www.businessinsider.com/websites-blocked-in-china-2015-7>.

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

Principle: International students should have the same level of access to the Landlord and Tenant Board and legal aid clinics as other Ontario residents.

Principle: International students should have access to centralized information about off-campus housing, such as legal rights and obligations.

Principle: When seeking housing, international students should receive information and support that helps them avoid falling victim to fraud, discrimination, language barriers, or other hardships which may disproportionately affect international students.

Concern: International students' lack of familiarity with the legal rights and obligations of tenants creates an environment in which they may fall victim to fraud.

Concern: International students may be subject to discrimination based on qualities such as ethnicity, gender identity, religion, or preferred language.

Concern: Some international students lack English or French language proficiency, which creates barriers to accessing government services like the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Recommendation: The provincial government should make recommendations to post-secondary institutions on how to provide resources regarding tenant rights and housing in international service offices and during educational training for international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding for the Landlord and Tenant Board to provide interpreters for international students whose first language is not English or French.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate the use of court interpreters in Landlord and Tenant Board hearings for a party or witness who requests it and halt proceedings until the request has been granted.

Like domestic students, international students frequently rent off-campus living accommodations while attending university. However, international students are often living on their own for the first time, and they do not have the same familial support as their domestic counterparts. Depending on their English- or French-language proficiency, international students may experience disproportionate hardships during the accommodation search and lease-signing processes. Further, international students may experience discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, gender identity, religion, or preferred language. These circumstances, coupled with the transient nature of student rental agreement terms, put international students at risk of discrimination, exploitation, and fraud by predatory property owners.

Tenants can reach out to bodies like municipal enforcement, the Landlord Tenant Board (LTB) and the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU) when they experience legal

disputes with their landlord. However, in recent years, the LTB has experienced record delays in hearings between landlords and tenants.⁸⁵ These delays limit the ability of both domestic and international students to receive the adjudication necessary for their cases.

In order to protect the tenant rights of international students, the provincial government should make recommendations on the distribution of off-campus training and support for international students during educational and transitional training. These may include information pamphlets in the languages most frequently used by international students at an institution, referrals to legal services in their preferred language, or staff support on rental housing. Not every institution has an office or department dedicated to international student support; however, if one exists, the resources mentioned above should be delivered from there so that international students can receive support from a centralized source. These practices will ensure that international students have a better understanding of their rights and obligations as a tenant in the event that they experience hardships during the rental process. Although these supports will not be able to directly affect a legal dispute with a landlord, they can exist as a preventative measure. In case the situation requires further legal action, these supports should clearly outline the steps required to approach the LTB.

The provincial government should also provide funding so that the LTB can provide interpreters for languages other than English or French. Currently, anyone requiring language support (in a language other than English or French) must arrange for an external interpreter.⁸⁶ The Ministry of the Attorney General's Court Services Division provides court interpretation services with interpreters accredited through the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario.⁸⁷ The provincial government should fund interpretation services for languages other than English and French during LTB hearings. This will ensure that international students who prefer speaking in different languages will still be able to participate in LTB hearings and be protected from predatory rental practices.

Finally, the provincial government should mandate the use of court interpreters in LTB hearings if a party requests it. The government lists the areas during which an interpreter is provided, but as an administrative tribunal the LTB is notably absent.⁸⁸ The government should ensure that court interpreters are provided in these court hearings in order to support international students' tenant rights. In order to ensure all parties can take part in court proceedings, the proceedings should be halted until the request for an interpreter has been fulfilled.

⁸⁵ "Delays at Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board prompt ombudsman investigation," CBC News, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-landlord-tenant-board-ombudsman-1.5420860>.

⁸⁶ "Language Services," Tribunals Ontario: Social Justice Division, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://www.sjto.gov.on.ca/lrb/language-services/>.

⁸⁷ "About," Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), accessed April 1, 2020, <https://atio.on.ca/about/>.

⁸⁸ "Court Interpretation Services in Ontario," Ministry of the Attorney General, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/courts/interpreters/>.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Principle: International student recruitment, through advertising and other avenues, plays a key role in where students choose to study.

Principle: Prospective international students deserve transparent, accurate, and ethical recruitment methods.

Concern: Lack of regulation in international student recruitment increases the risk of fraud, corruption, and unethical behavior during the recruitment process.

Recommendation: The provincial government should create an accreditation system for international student recruiting agents to establish a minimum standard for recruitment practices.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a regulatory scheme and code of practice and conduct for the recruitment of international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should fund research into international student recruitment practices in order to collect data on the frequency of fraud, corruption, and unethical behaviour during the recruitment process.

There is both economic and social incentive to recruit and retain international students at Canadian universities, and so there has been a substantial growth in targeted international student advertising and the use of third-party recruitment agencies.⁸⁹ International student recruitment is a lucrative business. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 70 percent of international post-secondary students came post-secondary institutions with the help of third-party agents.⁹⁰ It is estimated that, globally, over 23,000 of these agencies exist, many of which help encourage students to study in Canada.⁹¹ These third-party agencies can help address the cultural, language, and geographical needs of prospective students, and their high usage suggests considerable benefits to both schools and students.⁹² However, with a lack of regulations on the recruitment of students, both agency-based and university-administration-based recruitment carry risks of fraud, corruption, and unethical behavior. Prospective international students deserve transparency, accuracy, and ethical recruitment methods when deciding what institution to attend. Corrupt or unethical recruitment can unfairly influence an expensive, life-changing decision.

In *New South Whales*, a report highlighted several recruitment agencies who had falsified test scores and other documents.⁹³ The United Nations Educational, Scientific

⁸⁹ "Education Quality Assurance in British Columbia," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), June 2017, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Education-Quality-Assurance-in-British-Columbia-LISA-RUTH-BRUNNER-WEB.pdf>.

⁹⁰ "Ontario colleges need international tuition. It could cost them," TVO.org, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.tvo.org/article/ontario-colleges-need-international-tuition-it-could-cost-them>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "The Role of Education Agents in Canada's Education Systems," Council of Ministers of Education Canada, December 2013, <https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/326/The-Role-of-Education-Agents-EN.pdf>.

⁹³ "Learning the hard way: managing corruption risks associated with international students at universities in NSW," Independent Commission Against Corruption, April 2015,

and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Council for Higher Education Accreditation have discussed the industry being at substantial risk for false advertising, bribery, and forgery.⁹⁴ Deceitful recruitment practices threaten the greater reputation of Ontario universities. British Columbia experienced this problem firsthand when for-profit private institutions used dishonest recruitment tactics; subsequently, the province had to reanalyze its Education Quality Assurance policies.⁹⁵

As post-secondary institutions' economic dependency on international student tuition grows and the competition for these students becomes increasingly outsourced to recruitment agencies, regulations to protect against abuse and corruption have become increasingly important. The province of Manitoba foresaw this problem and created the *International Education Act*, designed to lay out the responsibilities of schools and agents towards those they recruit.⁹⁶ These regulations help protect both prospective students and the province's reputation. The Government of Ontario should create an accreditation system for international student recruitment agencies with a minimum standard for recruitment practices and a professional code. Furthermore, the government should develop a regulatory scheme and code of practice and conduct for the recruitment of international students, similar to the one created in Manitoba.

EXCHANGE

FINANCIAL ACCESS FOR OUTBOUND EXCHANGE

Principle: Effective cooperation between post-secondary institutions, provincial governments, and federal governments is essential to the safety and quality of outbound exchange experiences.

Principle: Financial ability should not prevent willing and qualified students from accessing outbound exchange opportunities.

Concern: The costs of travel, accommodation, and additional fees can prevent students from accessing outbound exchange.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government to implement Canada's International Education Strategy.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government and the Council of Ontario Universities to identify marginalized groups and prioritize funding within the Outbound Student Mobility Pilot (OSMP) such that funding distributed under the OSMP is given to students with demonstrated

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1876030-learning-the-hard-way-managing-corruption-risks.html>.

⁹⁴ "Advisory statement: UNESCO," Council for Higher Education Accreditation, accessed March 13, 2020.

<https://www.chea.org/userfiles/PDFs/advisory-statement-unesco-iiop.pdf>.

⁹⁵ "Education Quality Assurance in British Columbia," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), June 2017, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Education-Quality-Assurance-in-British-Columbia-LISA-RUTH-BRUNNER-WEB.pdf>.

⁹⁶ "Economic Development and Training," Government of Manitoba, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ie/about/legislation.html>.

financial need.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an application-based bursary for students to cover expenses associated with international experiences, with a dedicated stream of funding reserved for students with demonstrable financial need.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop promotional materials to increase provincial programs that assist students in accessing international experiences.

Financial ability can be a major barrier to accessing international exchange or other opportunities. Students who choose to participate in outbound exchange programs typically incur substantial costs on top of paying domestic tuition rates and possibly taking a loss on their rental property. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) notes that France is the most common destination for Canadian exchange students, and based on numbers provided by Queen's University's exchange partners, expectations for exchange living costs in France can be high — in Lyon, France, exchange students typically pay 600-900 euros per month.⁹⁷ This is similar to other exchange destinations. A semester exchange to Hong Kong can cost \$5,000USD.⁹⁸ A semester exchange to Mexico can cost \$3000USD, not including flights.⁹⁹

GoGlobalCanada, a partnership between the University of Toronto's Munk School and the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa, identify that Canada's international experience rate is, at 10 percent, lower than the United States, Australia, Germany, or France.¹⁰⁰ It also notes that each of these countries have established programs to support exchange students, including the United States' 100,000 China Strong initiative, Australia's New Colombo Plan, and Erasmus in the European Union. Critically, each of these programs are connected with substantial investments aimed at reducing financial barriers. In Canada, while there is some accessibility for students from families earning less than \$40,000, the highest international attainment levels are still for the families in higher income brackets.¹⁰¹ GoGlobalCanada and the CBIE recommend investment in reducing financial barriers to increase the aggregate number of students accessing international experiences.

Currently, the federal government is establishing its Outbound Student Mobility Pilot (OMSP) and is seeking to co-operate with the provinces to identify marginalized groups

⁹⁷ "Welcome Guide: International Students," Queen's University, 2019-20, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.queensu.ca/ipo/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ipowww/files/files/pdf/exchange/fact-sheets/Welcome%20Guide%20International%20Students.pdf>.

⁹⁸ "Exchange & Study Abroad," Queen's University, 2019-20, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.queensu.ca/ipo/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ipowww/files/files/pdf/exchange/Transfer-Credit-Reports-2018/Fact%20Sheet%2019-20%2020190617.pdf>.

⁹⁹ "Fact Sheet: 2020-2021," Study in Mexico, accessed May 3, 2020, [https://www.queensu.ca/ipo/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ipowww/files/files/pdf/exchange/fact-sheets/ASC%20-Tecnol%C3%B3gico%20de%20Monterrey%20\(Mexico%20City\)%20Fact%20Sheet%202020-2021.pdf](https://www.queensu.ca/ipo/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ipowww/files/files/pdf/exchange/fact-sheets/ASC%20-Tecnol%C3%B3gico%20de%20Monterrey%20(Mexico%20City)%20Fact%20Sheet%202020-2021.pdf).

¹⁰⁰ "Global Education for Canadians: Equipping Young Canadians to Succeed at Home & Abroad," Centre for International Policy Studies, Munk School of Global Affairs, accessed May 4, 2020, https://844ff178-14d6-4587-9f3e-f856abf651b8.filesusr.com/ugd/dd9c01_ca275361406744feb38ec91a5dd6e30d.pdf.

¹⁰¹ "A World of Learning: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education," Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), 2012, <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CBIE-A-World-of-Learning-2012-EN.pdf>.

to direct funding towards.¹⁰² The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government and the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) to identify marginalized groups and prioritize funding within the OSMP such that funding is given to students with demonstrated financial need. Further, as this is a pedagogical priority in a globalizing economy, the provincial government should consider matching federal contributions to the OSMP to enhance Ontario's student access to the global education market. This could take multiple forms, including providing provincial bursaries for international access similar to the Australia's New Colombo plan, or simply partnering on the OSMP to increase the number of supported international experiences.

Finally, to promote access to outbound exchange programs, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an application-based bursary for students to cover expenses associated with international experiences, with a dedicated stream of funding reserved for students with demonstrable financial need. The Ministry should also develop promotional materials to increase awareness of provincial programs that assist students in accessing outbound exchange experiences.

QUALITY OF OUTBOUND EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Principle: Government-funded international experiences should have measurable positive outcomes on students' academic performance and professional skills.

Principle: International experiences should contribute to the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.

Concern: There is no inter-university quality assurance framework for international experiences.

Concern: There is no centralized set of recommendations on how to develop international experiences which maximize educational benefit for students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should instruct the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) to research international experiential design and outcomes, and to develop recommendations that help universities review their outbound exchange programs.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create an addition to their Quality Assurance Framework to institute review of international educational experiences within the Institutional Quality Assurance Process.

Because many international experiences exist outside of program design and are instead supported as a central opportunity provided at the university level, the Ontario

¹⁰² "International Education," Government of Canada, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>.

Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) does not extend to reviewing the quality of outbound exchange programs. This can cause issues, as the accountability for quality educational programming often relies on systematic review and the ability of external reviewers to levy unguarded opinions if there is a serious issue with a program.

Furthermore, while disciplinary education can often be guided by professors tenured within that field, international education represents an intersection between disciplinary education, the courses that students will be taking abroad, and non-disciplinary educational experiences – i.e. the broader international experiences, life lessons, and exposure that contribute to the value of a trip. Evaluation of whether these broader experiences positively contribute to a student’s overall education is not taught within any one discipline found at universities. Disciplinary research in international education by those qualified to do it, and dissemination of that research to universities and program evaluators, is key to making a review of international experiences valuable within the post-secondary education system. Therefore, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should commission research to help inform the evaluation of international experiences, drawing from the expertise of both educational psychologists and other disciplines to create evaluation frameworks.

Similarly, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create an addition to their Quality Assurance Framework, and this addition should institute review of international education experiences within the IQAP. This could be done by putting international exchange partners on an independent review cycle with their own reviewers. This process could also be supplemented by better mandated data tracking, and by mandating that institutional cyclical reporting include a review of international partnerships promoted by the program and students’ international attainment levels. Additional research from HEQCO can help inform reporting and accountability when integrated into the Quality Assurance Framework, which governs the IQAP.

OUTBOUND EXCHANGE CAPACITY

Principle: Capacity should exist to accommodate all willing and qualified students who would benefit from international experiences.

Principle: International experiences are best when purposefully integrated into educational programs by institutions.

Concern: Canadian post-secondary students have significantly less access to international experiences than students from countries with similar university systems.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding for development or capacity expansion of programs providing for student domestic or international exchange.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to hire an international experiences development coordinator.

All willing and qualified students should be able to benefit from international experiences, which operate most effectively when integrated into educational programs created by institutions. Educational programs exist because of the need for purposeful design in how students learn, and these programs allow universities to integrate breadth, depth, and skills into learning. International experiences, both outbound and inbound, would also benefit from this sort of institution-based (rather than provincial-based) implementation. The best way to do this would be for the provincial government to provide envelope funding aimed at expanding international program capacity, similar to the Career Ready Fund and experiential education. This would allow for both university-led development as well as government oversight and evaluation of proposals before funding is approved and released.

Further, regardless of other capacity expansions, it is critical that universities have the capability to make potential connections with other universities and international partners when putting together new proposals. As a provincial baseline, each publicly funded university should have at least one staff member dedicated to international outreach and development, and the provincial government should provide envelope funding to each university to fund the hiring of this staff member.

OUTBOUND EXCHANGE SUPPORTS

Principle: Students should have dedicated services and supports while studying abroad.

Principle: Student services and supports should adapt to the needs of students studying abroad.

Concern: Students studying abroad often require additional resources and pose a unique challenge for support services.

Recommendation: The provincial government should reimplement travel insurance coverage under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to train counselling services to support students on outbound exchange.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding for digital technology capacity and training for counselors and other university staff to support students abroad.

Outbound exchange can be stressful for students. While research on the topic in the student context is not readily available, culture shock and financial stress are both risk factors that would, theoretically, indicate that there is high risk of mental health concerns while on international exchange or co-op. Furthering this issue is a lack of insurance to cover medical emergencies while abroad, leading to an additional financial burden on students to purchase travel insurance. To remedy this, the provincial

government should re-establish travel insurance under OHIP, in order to cover the many students who spend short periods abroad for work and study. Furthermore, mental health supports are essential to promoting general student wellness. The provincial government should support a minimum standard of one counsellor per institution, as well as create a set envelope funding amount per university to facilitate better distance support through digital technologies.

INBOUND EXCHANGE

Principle: International students on exchange to Canada are entitled to supports to promote their academic and personal success while on exchange.

Principle: Supports for international exchange students should generally reflect supports offered to permanent international students.

Concern: Exchange opportunities give students limited time to adjust to new cultures and can pose difficulty in creating a sense of home.

Concern: There is a lack of data on the experiences of inbound exchange students and the difficulties they face.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to student associations and universities to facilitate peer support groups for inbound exchange students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an optional common standard for university exit surveys on student experience for inbound exchange students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish funding available to universities to support targeted mental health and other resources available to inbound exchange students based on student experience feedback.

Similar to outbound exchange, data regarding inbound exchanges to Ontario's post-secondary institutions is largely unavailable. Because the quality of inbound exchange does not greatly affect domestic students, research in this area has been lacking. However, in the long run, the quality of these programs has implications on university reputations, the ability to recruit exchange students, and the ability of exchange students to positively impact the learning experiences of domestic students. Direct exit surveys are one way to remedy the current lack of focus on evaluating inbound exchange programs. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should, therefore, create an optional common standard for university exit surveys on student experiences during inbound exchange programs. With this information, universities can and should improve both mental health supports and the quality of other programming. Furthermore, the stressors faced by outbound exchange students, discussed above, apply to inbound exchange students as well. To support these students, the provincial government should establish funding that universities can use to support targeted

mental health and other resources. Similarly, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to student associations and universities to facilitate peer support groups. Student associations are particularly well placed to provide this support to exchange students, as they already provide a number of more general peer-support programs.

POLICY STATEMENT

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS & INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Whereas: Inconsistent and unpredictable increases to international tuition can result in financial challenges for international students;

Whereas: The reduction and freeze on domestic tuition without increases to provincial operating grants incentivizes institutions to raise international tuition at high rates;

Whereas: Institutions might not explicitly state the lack of operating grants as a driving force behind increases to international tuition;

Whereas: There are disproportionately fewer scholarships and bursary opportunities for international students with financial need compared to domestic students;

Whereas: International students may face unique costs outside of tuition, such as unfavourable exchange rates or travel costs;

Whereas: Limited financial aid opportunities prevent international students from low-income backgrounds from being eligible to come to Ontario for post-secondary studies;

Whereas: Lack of financial aid restricts the number of international students who are refugees studying in Ontario;

Whereas: There is a lack of provincially funded financial aid opportunities for international students who display academic excellence;

Whereas: The guidance provided by academic and career advisors is not always informed by the most up-to-date, relevant federal and provincial work permit policy and legislation;

Whereas: Academic and career support services are not always intersectional and may not respond appropriately to the wide variety of needs of international students;

Whereas: Confusion regarding federal and provincial work permit policy and legislation can create difficulty for international students seeking employment in Ontario and Canada;

Whereas: Strikes and other academic disruptions disproportionately impact the ability of international students to complete their studies due to the restrictive length of international student study permits;

Whereas: Extenuating personal circumstances and the availability of accommodations can affect the length of time it takes for an international student to complete their degree program;

Whereas: The current lack of work-integrated learning opportunities for international students decreases their ability to gain relevant work experience;

Whereas: Funding for research projects, co-ops, and internships is disproportionately available to domestic students due to existing funding eligibility requirements;

Whereas: International students may face additional barriers to participating in Canadian culture and workplaces, which can result in challenges during their pursuit and completion of work-integrated learning opportunities;

Whereas: Multilingual international students may encounter barriers to effective communication during work-integrated learning opportunities and their completion of work-integrated learning assessments;

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions may not have enough resources to facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities and support international students participating in those opportunities;

Whereas: Workplace supervisors may not provide sufficient support to international students to facilitate effective work-integrated learning experiences;

Whereas: Complicated government policies often make it difficult for international students to gain the permit-related credentials required to obtain employment and permanent residency;

Whereas: The closure of the “Employer Job Offer: International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program will likely prevent international students from finding work and progressing toward permanent residency after graduation;

Whereas: Many employers avoid hiring international students because it is difficult for them to follow the appropriate onboarding processes;

Whereas: University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) costs are unreasonably high, and excluded services may result in additional fees for international students;

Whereas: International students may choose not to seek out medical care if additional costs are unknown;

Whereas: UHIP operates on a reimbursement model which requires students to pay

upfront for medical expenses incurred outside of a preferred provider network;

Whereas: Language barriers may prevent international students from receiving effective mental health care;

Whereas: Cultural stigma surrounding mental health concerns may make international students unwilling to access mental health services they need;

Whereas: International students may face unique mental health challenges as a result of living far from home and adapting to adulthood without the support that many domestic students have;

Whereas: Mental health professionals on campus may not be adequately trained on the mental health needs and best practices for caring for international students;

Whereas: The lack of diversity of mental health professionals may result in international students being unable to effectively access mental health services on campus;

Whereas: International students and racialized students often face higher levels of racism and discrimination;

Whereas: Though all Ontario post-secondary institutions offer services for international students, the quality of programming varies between post-secondary institutions and some do not provide critical services;

Whereas: Funding models for international student services vary widely between post-secondary institutions;

Whereas: Rising international student enrolment has not been met with increased investment in international student support services, leading to increased demand which negatively affects service delivery;

Whereas: Student support service staff may be ill-informed of relevant international student policies;

Whereas: International students are often less informed of and exposed to available campus academic resources;

Whereas: International students face disproportionate challenges in regard to achieving academic success;

Whereas: International students often experience a variety of obstacles that impede their integration with their domestic peers and faculty members, which hinders their ability to succeed;

Whereas: Many of Ontario's post-secondary institutions lack culturally relevant and

language-specific academic resources for international students;

Whereas: International students may be at increased risk of discrimination from both academic staff and peers;

Whereas: Many accommodation services do not accommodate international students' cultural and religious needs;

Whereas: International students face disproportionate barriers when it comes to seeking peer-to-peer supports;

Whereas: International students often struggle to integrate with their domestic peers and faculty members due to language barriers and other cultural norms;

Whereas: International students face many unique challenges due to acculturation;

Whereas: International students often experience prejudice and discrimination from domestic students and faculty members;

Whereas: Students who lack social supports often face increased stress and poor psychosocial adjustment;

Whereas: Twenty-four-hour crisis support services are often available in only English and French;

Whereas: International students may be less likely to visit on-campus health services due to cultural and religious differences or barriers;

Whereas: International students may face greater difficulties in transitioning to the university lifestyle in Canada;

Whereas: Many international students are unable to tour post-secondary institutions they may wish to attend before enrolling in university;

Whereas: International students have varying intake periods that do not necessarily align with university orientation and transition programs;

Whereas: Universities differ in the amount of information they provide to students about their institution prior to enrollment;

Whereas: Due to time zone differences, international students may be unable to receive valuable information during info sessions and livestreams provided by universities;

Whereas: International students' lack of familiarity with the legal rights and obligations of tenants creates an environment in which they may fall victim to fraud;

Whereas: International students may be subject to discrimination based on qualities such as ethnicity, gender identity, religion, or preferred language;

Whereas: Some international students lack English or French language proficiency, which creates barriers to accessing government services like the Landlord and Tenant Board;

Whereas: Lack of regulation in international student recruitment increases the risk of fraud, corruption, and unethical behavior during the recruitment process;

Whereas: The costs of travel, accommodation, and additional fees can prevent students from accessing outbound exchange;

Whereas: There is no inter-university quality assurance framework for international experiences;

Whereas: There is no centralized set of recommendations on how to develop international experiences which maximize educational benefit for students;

Whereas: Canadian post-secondary students have significantly less access to international experiences than students from countries with similar university systems;

Whereas: Students studying abroad often require additional resources and pose a unique challenge for support services;

Whereas: Exchange opportunities give students limited time to adjust to new cultures and can pose difficulty in creating a sense of home; and

Whereas: There is a lack of data on the experiences of inbound exchange students and the difficulties they face;

Be it resolved that: To ensure tuition rates are predictable for incoming students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regulate international tuition for incoming students at a maximum of 5 percent per year to match institutionally set limitations;

Be it further resolved that: The provincial government should regulate in-cohort increases to international tuition at a maximum of 3 percent per year;

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase basic operating grant funding for post-secondary institutions so that they are publicly funded in order to reduce the burden placed on universities to generate revenue through high international tuition fees;

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish, in its tuition protocol, an international tuition set-aside at the same 10 percent rate of the domestic set-aside, with funds raised directed specifically to needs-based financial aid for international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government, in consultation with the Canadian Bureau for International Education, should develop a framework to improve recruitment, support, and retention of international students who are refugees;

BIFRT: The provincial government should match student and institutional contributions to World University Service of Canada (WUSC) to sponsor refugees studying at Ontario universities;

BIFRT: The provincial government should incentivize institutions' development of scholarships for international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should create scholarships for undergraduate international students, similar to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS);

BIFRT: The provincial government should, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, provide increased funding for academic and career advising for international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should contract research on best practices for supporting international students with respect to cultural sensitivity and intersectionality;

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all academic and career counsellors be trained in research-based best practices for cultural sensitivity and intersectionality;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for international student advising services;

BIFRT: The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to ensure that the length of each international student's study permit matches the length of time they need to complete their degree program;

BIFRT: To increase the retention of skilled international students, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade should create financial incentives applicable for hiring both domestic and international students in co-op and internship positions to increase the availability of work-integrated learning opportunities;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to institutions to increase the availability of paid applied research and work-study opportunities available to international students;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should develop educational programs that help international students improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness through out-of-classroom and social learning environments;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for

post-secondary institutions to retain dedicated work-integrated learning international student advisors;

BIFRT: The provincial government should contract research on developing best practices for supervisors who support international students in work-integrated learning opportunities;

BIFRT: The provincial government should reopen the “Employer Job Offer: International Students” stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program;

BIFRT: The provincial government should include international students in the “Express Entry” streams of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop and implement tax credits to offset the costs employers incur when sponsoring highly skilled international student graduates through the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program;

BIFRT: The provincial government should delay the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program’s \$1500 application fee for graduates of Ontario universities until one year after their initial offer of employment;

BIFRT: The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should work with the federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to provide international student graduates with easier access to work visas and pathways to citizenship;

BIFRT: The provincial government should allow international students to pay a fair and affordable premium in order to receive coverage through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP);

BIFRT: The provincial government should consult with the governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan and produce a report on best practices for implementing provincial health coverage for international students in Ontario;

BIFRT: In the interim, prior to the inclusion of international students in OHIP, the provincial government should work to expand the preferred provider network;

BIFRT: The provincial government should contract research on identifying and developing best practices to address the unique mental health needs of international students;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Health should develop research-informed resources and fund training for mental health professionals to effectively care for international students and other immigrants;

BIFRT: The provincial government should centralize and expand telephone interpretation services to include access by on-campus mental health professionals;

BIFRT: The provincial government should integrate care for international students into their Roadmap to Wellness plan;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide financial incentives to universities for hiring mental health professionals with lived experiences relevant to the diverse needs of international students;

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop best practices for providing support services to international students;

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should standardize the implementation of best practice models used to support international students;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create a training module, based on best practices, for student support service staff who work with international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to provide a robust offering of international student support services based on best practice models;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding aimed at enhancing academic accommodation support services, specifically to account for international students' cultural and religious needs;

BIFRT: The provincial government should contract the Canadian Bureau for International Education with conducting research on the barriers international students face when attempting to access academic support;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities, in consultation with the Council of Ontario Universities, should develop a best practice model for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training based on the research conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education in the recommendation immediately above;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that post-secondary institutions review their academic support structures to accommodate the best practice model referred to in the recommendation immediately above;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding aimed at increasing academic supports for international students;

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should conduct research on leading practices for cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training in post-secondary institutions;

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop training models regarding cultural awareness, language support, and anti-racism training for domestic and international students who facilitate and participate in peer-to-peer support opportunities;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should consult with the Council of Ontario Universities to make recommendations regarding the implementation of the training models referred to in the recommendation immediately above;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to implement the training referred to in the two recommendations immediately above;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to expand the Good2Talk service and equivalent 24/7/365 virtual services, to allow for the accessibility of crisis support through the addition of culturally and linguistically competent support resources;

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should research best practices surrounding international student orientation programming;

BIFRT: HEQCO should, based on their mandate to prioritize improving access to post-secondary education, develop guidelines regarding what information institutions must share with potential students about their university prior to enrollment;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adhere to the Canadian Bureau of International Education's code of ethics when developing policy for international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should make recommendations to post-secondary institutions on how to provide resources regarding tenant rights and housing in international service offices and during educational training for international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding for the Landlord and Tenant Board to provide interpreters for international students whose first language is not English or French;

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate the use of court interpreters in Landlord and Tenant Board hearings for a party or witness who requests it and halt proceedings until the request has been granted;

BIFRT: The provincial government should create an accreditation system for international student recruiting agents to establish a minimum standard for recruitment practices;

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a regulatory scheme and code of

practice and conduct for the recruitment of international students;

BIFRT: The provincial government should fund research into international student recruitment practices in order to collect data on the frequency of fraud, corruption, and unethical behaviour during the recruitment process;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government to implement Canada's International Education Strategy;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should coordinate with the federal government and the Council of Ontario Universities to identify marginalized groups and prioritize funding within the Outbound Student Mobility Pilot (OSMP) such that funding distributed under the OSMP is given to students with demonstrated financial need;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an application-based bursary for students to cover expenses associated with international experiences, with a dedicated stream of funding reserved for students with demonstrable financial need;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop promotional materials to increase provincial programs that assist students in accessing international experiences;

BIFRT: The provincial government should instruct the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HECQO) to research international experiential design and outcomes, and to develop recommendations that help universities review their outbound exchange programs;

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create an addition to their Quality Assurance Framework to institute review of international educational experiences within the Institutional Quality Assurance Process;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding for development or capacity expansion of programs providing for student domestic or international exchange;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to hire an international experiences development coordinator;

BIFRT: The provincial government should reimplement travel insurance coverage under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP);

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with envelope funding to train counselling services to support students on outbound exchange;

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with

envelope funding for digital technology capacity and training for counselors and other university staff to support students abroad;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to student associations and universities to facilitate peer support groups for inbound exchange students;

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create an optional common standard for university exit surveys on student experience for inbound exchange students; and

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish funding available to universities to support targeted mental health and other resources available to inbound exchange students based on student experience feedback.