

# International Students and the Future of Nova Scotia's Universities

students 

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# Abstract

In this position paper, we discuss the significance of international students for Nova Scotia, their challenges and supports, and propose policy changes that would best promote their success. Nova Scotia needs international students as potential immigrants, to maintain enrolment at our universities, and for their important economic and cultural contributions. However, our province and universities currently do little to support these students' success, particularly considering the significant financial, linguistic, cultural, social, immigration and employment-related challenges they confront. We make a number of recommendations to address these shortfalls. First, the Province should develop an international education strategy in partnership with other stakeholders. Second, we should link international student tuition to the cost of supporting them and offer financial assistance to attract the best students. Third, we should guarantee that students who come to Nova Scotia will acquire the language fluency needed to succeed in Canada's labour market. Fourth, we should deliver much more adequate institutional and community supports for students. Finally, we should provide significant immigration and employment services so the interested students can succeed in our labour market and successfully immigrate.

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# Recommendations

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The Province of Nova Scotia, in partnership with international and domestic students, educational institutions, community groups and the private sector, should develop an International Education Strategy to establish coordinated initiatives and clear objectives for internationalizing education in Nova Scotia.

The Province of Nova Scotia should cap international student tuition at the sum of Canadian students' pre-bursary tuition plus the per-student university operating grant.

The Province of Nova Scotia should regulate tuition changes for international students so they can clearly understand the cost of their education when they enrol.

Nova Scotia Universities should undergo third-party reviews of spending on the education of international students to identify the appropriate caps on international student tuition and any additional costs compared with a domestic student.

The Province of Nova Scotia should remove international students from the Weighted Enrolment Grant component of the University Funding Distribution Formula in cases where their programs charge international differential fees.

The Province should provide financial and other resources to support international student recruitment pursuant to the International Education Strategy.

The Province of Nova Scotia should work with universities to introduce a combined need/merit-based Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship, thereby cancelling the international differential fee for ten per cent of international students.

The Province of Nova Scotia and our post-secondary institutions should guarantee that all international graduates of Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions have sufficient language fluency to succeed in Canada's labour market.

The Province of Nova Scotia should create a Language Education Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that is allocated among universities based on international student enrolment.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should work with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating language programs for international students.

Nova Scotia universities should not require minimum scores in language exams at admissions and instead consider language exam scores as just one component of students' full applications.

The Province of Nova Scotia should create an International Student Services Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that would be allocated to universities on a per-international-student basis and would ensure institutions have at least one full-time international student advisor for every three hundred international students.

Institutions and student unions should investigate strategies to connect all international students entering studies at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions with domestic student peers by 2015-16.

International centres should work with their university residences so that international students who do not want to live in residence may be accommodated at a reasonable rate while seeking housing.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should partner with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating international student services.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should include curriculum internationalization as a variable for measuring program quality at Maritimes universities.

The Province should provide international students at public post-secondary institutions with MSI coverage as soon as they begin their studies in Nova Scotia.

When hiring counsellors at university health facilities, experience working in multicultural environments and serving ethnically diverse clients should be

considered so that at least one in three counsellors is prepared to serve an international clientele.

The Province and institutions should work together to ensure all international students are able to access immigration and employment counselling from the start of their studies.

The Province should provide permanent funding to the Immigration Settlement and Integration Services International Graduates Pilot Project.

International and domestic students should continue being equally eligible and paying equal fees to participate in cooperative education programs.

The Province, in partnership with business associations and post-secondary institutions, should run an active campaign to spread awareness among Nova Scotia employers about the importance and ease of hiring international students and graduates and immigrants.

The Province should provide accurate information on its websites regarding all programs supporting international students and graduates and prospective employers.

The Province should continue to allow international students and graduates to be eligible for student and graduate employment programs such as the START program, the Connector Program, and the Student Employment Program.



# Statement of Values

Students Nova Scotia is built upon the belief that post-secondary education can play a fundamental role in allowing both the individual and society to realize their full potential. Students Nova Scotia's values are pillars built upon this foundation. They give direction to Students Nova Scotia's work and reflect our organizational goals.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Every qualified Nova Scotia student who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental ability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.

**AFFORDABILITY:** The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community of their choice.

**QUALITY:** The Nova Scotia post-secondary system should strive at all times to provide the highest possible quality of education to its students, fostering student success.

**STUDENT VOICE:** Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

# Our Research Process

Position papers are the primary outputs of our research. They aim to describe and clearly articulate Students Nova Scotia's *Principles* in approaching an issue, and *Concerns* that obstruct the realization of those principles. Finally, we propose *Recommendations* aimed at addressing the policy issues (and our specific concerns) in a manner that is consistent with our organization's values.

The Students Nova Scotia Board of Directors is comprised of student representatives from our six member associations. It sets annual priorities for Students Nova Scotia activities, including research. Position Papers represent formal Students Nova Scotia policy and are approved by the Board of Directors at bi-annual Board Policy Retreats, following a draft's one-month release for consultations with students.

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# List of Common Abbreviations

AAU	Association of Atlantic Universities	MSI	Nova Scotia Medical Service Insurance
APCIES	Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy	MSVU	Mount Saint Vincent University
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada	NL	Newfoundland and Labrador
CBIE	Canadian Bureau for International Education	NOC	National Occupational Classification
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	NSCC	Nova Scotia Community College
CBU	Cape Breton University	NSIES	Nova Scotia International Education Strategy
CEC	Canadian Experience Class	NSISS	Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada	NSGOV	Government of Nova Scotia
COU	Council of Ontario Universities	NSOI	Nova Scotia Office of Immigration
DAL-CCE	Dalhousie College of Continuing Education	OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ESL	English as a second language	OUSA	Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
GHP	Greater Halifax Partnership	PNP	Provincial Nominee Program
HEA	Higher Education Academy	PSE	Post-secondary education
HRDA	Halifax Regional Development Agency	SAGA	Students Acting for Global Awareness
ICG	Illuminate Consulting Group	SMU	Saint Mary's University
IGS	International Graduate Stream	StatsCan	Statistics Canada
IELTS	International English Language Testing System	StudentsNS	Students Nova Scotia
ISIS	Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services	TOEFL	Teaching of English as a Foreign Language
ISSG	International Student Services Grant	TRU	Thompson Rivers University
LEG	Language Education Grant	UFDF	University Funding Distribution Formula
LFG	Language Fluency Guarantee	UHIP	University Health Insurance Plan
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding		
MPHEC	Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission		

# 1. Introduction

Now is the time for serious thought on how Nova Scotia can support international students' success and maximize the social, cultural and economic benefits of their education in this province. International students are currently the fastest growing section of Nova Scotia's university student population and may, in fact, be the only source of enrolment increases for the foreseeable future. International students expand the cultural wealth of our communities and contribute to learning environments that prepare all students for life in our more globalized world. In the context of our serious demographic challenges, international education is attracting many prospective immigrants who can help build Nova Scotia's future communities. Finally, international students contribute significantly to the provincial economy. These realities more than justify public investments to support and attract foreign students.

International students choose Nova Scotia for many reasons, most notably the quality of education, safety, English-language immersion, possible immigration and relative affordability. To be successful, Nova Scotia must not only market these characteristics, it must work to enhance them through concrete policies.

International students in Nova Scotia face many challenges that demand attention. They pay high fees with no guarantee that the institutional funding they provide is used to support them. Many must learn a new language. They must transition to a new environment where academic and social cultures are often radically new and different. They must confront an immigration system and job market that is unfamiliar. They too frequently face discrimination. Throughout students' experience, the services that are supposed to help them overcome these challenges are consistently inadequate, despite the hard work of supportive staff members who are hamstrung by resource constraints.

The importance of international students and the significant challenges that they face demand a very different approach to their education and services in Nova Scotia. First and foremost, Nova Scotia should work with stakeholders, including students, to emulate British Columbia's comprehensive International Education Strategy. Such a strategy would help determine our approach to recruitment, international student service delivery, curriculum internationalization and overseas campuses. It should also establish appropriate linkages to the Province's immigration strategy.

Under the auspices of the NSIES, the Province should implement the following key policy recommendations:

- Ensure Nova Scotia is a fair and affordable study destination by linking international students' tuition to their cost of education and creating a combined need/merit-based Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship that eliminates the differential for 5% of international students.
- We recommend that the Province and the Universities guarantee that international students will graduate with the language skills they need to succeed in our labour market create a special funding envelope to support language education at our universities.
- The Province should create a funding envelope to support international student services and establish minimum standards, while student unions and institutions should work together to better facilitate students' adaptation.
- The Province should provide MSI coverage to international students immediately upon their arrival to improve affordability and students' access to health services.
- The Province and its post-secondary education (PSE) institutions should ensure employment and immigration counselling is available to all international students from the start of their studies and continue to include international students in employment programs (coop, etc.) on the same basic terms as domestic students.

In crafting this report, *StudentsNS* spoke with approximately 100 international students across the province, as well as domestic students and student leaders. We also met with representatives from institutions, the Provincial Government, community service organizations, academia and a private language school. This work generated an approach that would make the university system and the Province more equitable, more accepting of international students, strengthen Nova Scotia's cultural, social, and economic fabric and increase our competitiveness in international recruitment.

## 2. Bringing international students to Nova Scotia

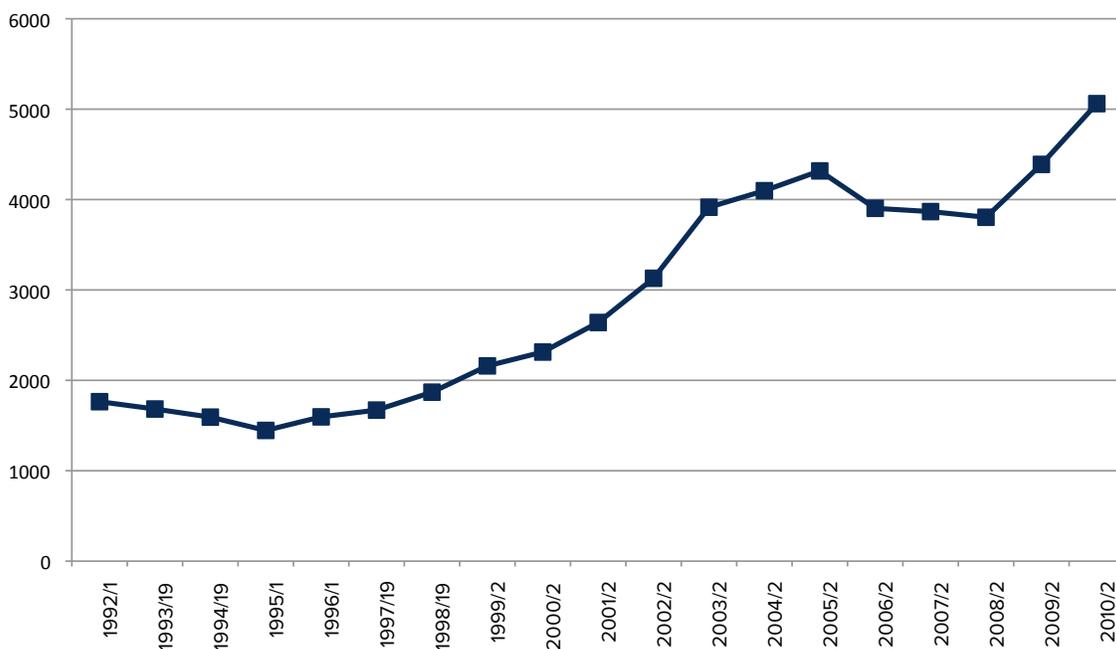
### 2.1. Why international students are important for Nova Scotia

The justification for strategic public investments in international students is simple: they have critical value for our communities. Their contributions can be divided into four distinct spheres: post-secondary enrolment, immigration, diversity and economic impact.

#### 2.1.1. POST-SECONDARY ENROLMENT

International students are a growing part of the Nova Scotia student body. Their numbers in Nova Scotia's universities has almost tripled since 2000-01 from 2039 to 5861, attaining 13% of total enrolment (MPHEC, 2012a and 2012b, see Figure 1). Total provincial enrolment in fact would have fallen since 2011-12, if not for increases in the number of full-time visa students (AAU, 2013). Overall, Nova Scotia's proportion of international students is roughly 2% higher than the national average (AUCC, 2011; MPHEC, 2012d; ICG, 2011).

**Figure 1: International enrolment in Nova Scotia Universities**



RCE: StatsCan (2013), Table 477-0019

These trends are more pronounced at particular institutions (See Table 1). Cape Breton University's (CBU) international enrolment has almost tripled since 2007-2008, while international students account for 31% of Saint Mary's University's (SMU) full-time students in 2012-13 (AAU, 2013).

**Table 1: International enrolment trends**

	INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS			PERCENTAGE OF ALL STUDENTS			VARIATION: 2007-08 TO 2011-12		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Students	%	Enrolment share
Acadia	372	71	443	11%	9%	11%	-84	-16%	-26%
AST	1	1	2	2%	2%	2%	0	0%	-10%
CBU	599	85	684	24%	13%	22%	432	171%	166%
Dal	1950	212	2162	12%	11%	12%	1033	91%	68%
MSVU	288	155	443	13%	10%	12%	95	27%	38%
NSCAD	86	5	91	11%	3%	9%	32	54%	53%
SFXU	259	15	274	6%	2%	5%	42	18%	19%
SMU	1395	282	1677	24%	21%	24%	604	56%	64%
UKC	45	0	45	4%	0%	4%	10	29%	19%
US-A*	39	1	40	10%	1%	8%	14	54%	43%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5034</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>5861</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>2178</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>51%</b>

\*No data available for 2011-12, so we use 2010-11 data instead

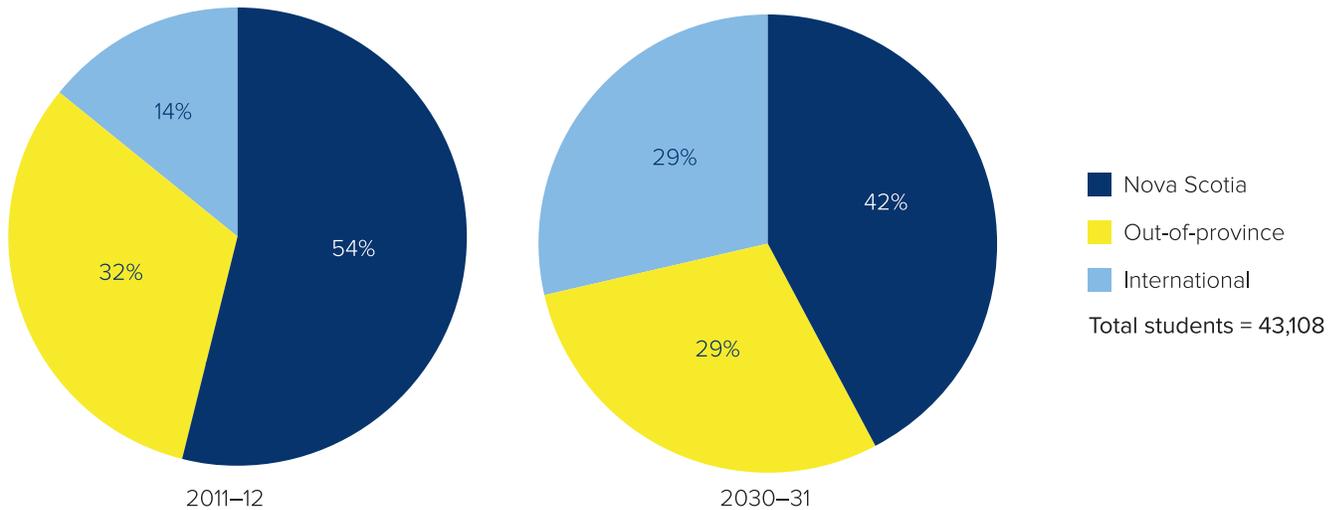
\*\* Changes in international contribution to total student population

SOURCE: MPHEC (2012)

The OECD (2009) anticipates that the number of international students globally should increase from 3.7 million to 6.4 million by 2025. Based on this projection, the Government of Canada set a goal of doubling international student enrolment in Canada by 2022, a scenario in which Nova Scotia's international enrolment would grow by over 7,000 students (APCIES, 2012).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Nova Scotia's traditional university-age demographic (18-29) is set to decline 24% between 2011 and 2031 (Akbari, 2012). StudentsNS estimates that the number of international students would need to double to maintain present enrolment in 2030-31, provided there are not significant changes to the proportion of Canadians who attend Nova Scotia universities (See Figure 1).

1 This assumes that Nova Scotia maintains our current 3.7% share of Canada's international student population (MPHEC, 2012d).

**Figure 2: Future stable enrolment by student origin**



SOURCE: StudentsNS, 2013

The volatility of international enrolment is concerning. As MPHEC (2012d) notes, “there are a multitude of factors at play on a global level that affect study abroad” and these are largely outside the control of our universities and governments (p. 2). These students are also concentrated in particular programs: commerce and administration undergraduate programs (comprising 27% of these programs’ 2010-11 enrolment) and graduate engineering and applied science programs and mathematics and physical sciences programs (44% and 37% of 2010-11 enrolment respectively – MPHEC, 2012d).

**PRINCIPLE:** Considering domestic demographic trends, international enrolment is important to the viability of Nova Scotia’s post-secondary education system.

Yet, whereas Nova Scotia has invested significantly in building our university system, with all of its related human and infrastructure capital, it would be egregiously wasteful and damaging to simply allow our classrooms and residences to gradually empty. Increased international enrolment is imperative for ensuring that Nova Scotia institutions can maintain the broad program offerings and services that would have to be cut were enrolment to decline.

### 2.1.2. DIVERSITY

International students contribute immeasurably to the cultural and linguistic diversity of our campuses and communities (Demont, Jan. 25 2013). In the Maritimes, they come from over 160 countries (MPHEC, 2012d), speak a multitude of languages and

follow many different faiths.<sup>2</sup>

**PRINCIPLE:** International students augment cultural diversity at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions, helping to build stronger learning communities.

As we face global challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like climate change, we need to think in terms of global solutions and our academic environment must support this. International students help campuses become global environments, where all students gain better understanding of our multicultural world including learning intercultural communication and how to differentiate between individual and cultural differences (Ryan & Carroll, 2005, p. 9; Sumer et al., 2008). While all students contribute ‘cultural capital’ (i.e. social and cultural knowledge), which can be used to ‘drive’ classroom learning, the cultural capital available expands markedly with more international students (Ryan and Hellmundt, 2005, p. 14). The variety of viewpoints expands. New problem-solving strategies can be shared. Building on this, some research has found that domestic and international students studying together outperform mono-cultural learning groups (McLean and Ransom, 2005).

Domestic students and other Nova Scotians are building relationships with international students, graduates, and their families. Many will visit friends that have come to study in Nova Scotia and may be encouraged and aided in learning a new language. International students help to ensure domestic students learn not just abstractly about other parts of the world, but actually create personal linkages with those places.

In sum, international students contribute immense social wealth to our province, just by bringing their unique cultural backgrounds and distinct perspectives.

**PRINCIPLE:** International students contribute significant cultural wealth to Nova Scotia communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, International students are also majority male, in stark contrast with domestic students (MPHEC, 2012d).

### 2.1.3. IMMIGRATION

The continued decline in Nova Scotia’s young population will have important implications for our society and economy beyond its impacts on post-secondary enrolment. The whole country is subject to this trend, but Atlantic Canada is being hit especially hard (Bruce, 2007). As a consequence, Nova Scotia’s labour supply faces a possible 20% decline (Akbari, 2012; McNiven & Foster, 2009). These demographic trends seriously threaten economic growth, which is important to finance social services for Nova Scotia’s aging and comparatively unhealthy population. Meanwhile, according to the Greater Halifax Partnership (GHP), local businesses already rank the availability and quality of skilled labour as their top concern.

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**Table 2: Nova Scotia population in 2026 assuming current conditions persist**

**POPULATION:** 895,000, down 4.6% from 2004

**SENIORS (65+):** up 70.8%

**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS:** down 31.5%

**UNIVERSITY-AGED POPULATION:** down 29.8%

**TRADITIONAL WORKFORCE:** three times faster drop than total population

SOURCE: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2010/02/10/ns-aging-population.html>

Nova Scotia must attract more immigrants to mitigate these trends. At the same time “immigrants [to Nova Scotia] generally earn more income, have a lower unemployment rate, and receive a lower percentage of income as government transfers than non-immigrants” (Metropolis, 2008, p. 10). Our region has been much less successful in immigration than the rest of Canada though (Akbari, 2012). Whereas, the 2006 census found “across Canada, 23.8 per cent of the population was comprised of first-generation Canadians; in Atlantic Canada, that figure was 4.8 per cent” (in AAU, 2010). Atlantic Canada’s immigrant retention rate also fell from 75 to 64 per cent between the early 1980s and 2006 (Siddiq et al., 2009). Recruitment and retention are more difficult in Nova Scotia than in larger provinces because of our smaller international diaspora, slow economic growth and limited services (Bruce, 2007; Metropolis, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

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3 This especially true in rural areas, so roughly 80% of new arrivals go to Halifax (Akbari, 2012).

Globally, international students are increasingly viewed as ‘ideal’ immigrants (Chira, 2012; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Siddiq et al., 2009; Metropolis, 2008). They have advantages for community and labour market integration because they are generally young (median age 22 in Nova Scotia), speak English (70%) and are familiar and comfortable with the local community and way of life (Siddiq et al., 2009). Research also indicates that former international students achieve comparatively strong economic outcomes as immigrants (Gates-Gasse, 2012). As graduates, they often end up working in “high-tech, science or entrepreneurial sectors”, in part because of their concentration in related academic programs (Chira, 2012, p. 129).<sup>4</sup> Their local training eliminates the need for credential recognition and should provide greater familiarity with local work environments.

The choice to study abroad is often part of a “deliberate immigration strategy” (in Siddiq et al., 2009, p. 14). Between half and two-thirds of international students in the region express hope to apply for permanent residency (Siddiq et al., 2009; Lebrun and Rebelo, 2006). Across Canada, intention to stay is much higher than our actually low rates of permanent stay among international students (Gates-Gasse, 2012).

**PRINCIPLE:** International student recruitment can contribute significantly to Nova Scotia’s immigration objectives.

Relative to other immigrants, international graduates are less likely to bring dependents and more likely to move on to another province, which does somewhat mitigate their immigration potential for Nova Scotia.<sup>5</sup> Encouraging students to settle remains a worthwhile approach though, especially when Halifax has twice as many international students as permanent residents<sup>6</sup> (Chira, 2012). According to Gates-Gasse (2012), “international students can be a creative immigration strategy to support the population and economic growth of less traditional immigrant destinations, such as the Atlantic region” (p. 272). The Province’s current immigration strategy (NSGOV, 2011) prioritizes international graduates as potential immigrants. More broadly, it aims to double the number of new immigrants and improve our retention rate to 70% (IFPress, Jan. 6 2013).<sup>7</sup>

4 Wahwa et al. (2007) found that “over half of Silicon Valley startups had one or more immigrants as a key founder” (p. 5), highlighting newcomers’ significant entrepreneurialism.

5 Personal correspondence, March 25, 2013.

6 Foreign nationals with official permanent resident status.

7 The second goal is already being reached – Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Jan. 12, 2013.

As Gates-Gasse (2012) argues: “by supporting international students with services, governments demonstrate how they value them both as individuals and as possible immigrants, therefore increasing the likelihood that they will choose to immigrate” (p. 271). There is a clear case for provincial investment to help international students succeed in Nova Scotia.

#### **2.1.4. ECONOMIC IMPACT**

Despite their promise as potential immigrants, it is inevitable that many international students who come to Nova Scotia will not stay. For some, return home upon graduation is a condition of scholarships, while others may have personal responsibilities or aspirations that call them away. However, even international students who do not settle here make a significant economic contribution to our province, on top of the socio-cultural and enrolment contributions already discussed.

In 2009, Siddiq et al. found that international students spent an average \$28,500 per year in Nova Scotia, generating a total annual economic impact of \$154 million, or \$231 million when accounting for economic multiplier effects. In other words, students spend \$3.40 for every \$1 the Province spends on their health care and education. A more recent Gardner Pinfold (2012) report found that universities are the second largest export sector of Nova Scotia’s economy, “largely [due] to differential fees for international, out-of-province enrolment and direct expenditures in the provincial economy over and above tuition fees resulting from increased out-of-province student enrolment” (p. 2). This is to say nothing of international students’ “sales taxes on goods and services, municipal taxes through rent, and, often, income tax on employment income” (Grewal et al., 2010, p. 3).

Clearly, the education of international students has become an industry in Nova Scotia. For *StudentsNS*, however, people should not be treated as commodities and public post-secondary institutions should not be viewed as export enterprises. These institutions are primarily instruments for pursuing public policy goals, especially through fulfilment of their core mandate: providing high quality education to all students, regardless of their country of origin. While economic development could be another objective, it should be viewed more holistically and cannot be pursued through levying unfair, exploitative fees on international students while failing to support their success. Foreign students’ economic contributions justify important public investments to support them.

Nova Scotia can derive the greatest economic, cultural and social benefits from supporting international students' success and treating them fairly. The benefits

**PRINCIPLE:** International students contribute significantly to the Nova Scotia economy.

from this approach dwarf any short-term benefits of maximizing revenue by charging international students as much as possible while spending as little as possible to support them.

## 2.2. Why do international students choose Nova Scotia?

Half of international student respondents to Lebrun and Rebello's (2006) survey "chose Atlantic Canada as their first choice of study destination" (p. 5), while 69% of respondents to a Nova Scotia survey (Siddiq et al., 2009) reported that they were "attending their first choice of university" (p. 34). The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2009) and Lebrun and Rebello (2005) sought greater detail on why international students choose Canada. Their findings are summarized in Table 3. Other work has also found that quality and safety are key to successfully attracting international students (APCIES, 2012).

**Table 3: Reasons for choosing university in Canada/Atlantic Canada**

	CBIE 2009*	LEBRUN & REBELLO 2006**
Quality of education	73%	
Safety	63%	67%
English program/country	57%	71%
Prestige of Canadian degree	55%	
Canada's reputation	50%	
Post-grad work opportunities	48%	
Cost of study	46%	52%
Atlantic Canada international recognition		50%
Atlantic Canada education quality		49%
Atlantic Canada culture/lifestyle		48%
Permanent residency opportunities	43%	45%
Availability of scholarships	41%	37%
Ease to get a Canadian study permit	35%	36%
Attractive admissions conditions	34%	
Off-campus work opportunities	29%	
Relative/friend in Atlantic Canada		31%
Relative/friend/teacher knew Canada	28%	

\*in CBIE 2009, figures are for Canada and we present only results for university students because of low international student enrolment at the NSCC

\*\*in Lebrun & Rebello 2006, figures apply to Atlantic Canada, items considered very important or extremely important

Canada was ranked the second safest country in which to study in a poll of international student perceptions (British Council, Oct. 11 2012). Australia, on the other hand, provides a cautionary tale with respect to safety, as racist attacks against international students there have negatively impacted the country's enrolment (Ross, Oct. 12 2012).

Students we spoke with highlighted many reasons for choosing Nova Scotia. These included family connections to Canada, particularly attractive programs, and acceptance into university without having to do high school or college preparatory classes. Some students also mentioned interest in immigrating to Canada, partnerships with institutions in their home countries (particularly China, Saudi Arabia and some Caribbean countries), and/or meeting recruiters. Students also indicated that Nova Scotia was relatively affordable compared to the US, the UK, or some other parts of Canada, although they were concerned about high differential fees, health insurance and other costs.

Our institutional and government interviewees largely echoed the literature respecting international student motivations. Quality was noted as the most important factor in students' choice of schools and it was further noted that Nova Scotia's smaller institutions are viewed particularly favourably. Safety was also stressed as the key component within a larger 'quality of life' element that also includes a clean environment. Some interviewees indicated that post-secondary education in Nova Scotia is more affordable than in other jurisdictions and that enrolment is more responsive to tuition increases than often assumed. Finally, Nova Scotia was viewed as having an advantage for English language acquisition, because students were more likely to become immersed rather than connecting with existing, large diaspora communities that speak their home language.

Of course students are also influenced by marketing. It is generally accepted that international students usually choose their country of study first and then particular institutions (APCIES, 2012). This means that pan-Canadian initiatives are essential, but also suggests our universities must differentiate themselves from institutions in the rest of Canada, which is why EduNova was created.<sup>8</sup> Nova Scotia's post-

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<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence, March 24, 2013.

secondary institutions use a variety of international recruitment techniques, including online marketing, partnerships, study tours, fairs, and overseas campuses.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the approach, the aforementioned advantages of a Nova Scotia education are emphasized, with a particular emphasis on value (see EduNova, 2013 for example).

Student motivations for coming to Nova Scotia infer important lessons about how to succeed in international student education. First, Nova Scotia and its post-secondary institutions must prioritize education quality and supports for student success to meet international students' expectations. Second, costs must remain competitive and within students' reach. Third, we must protect and enhance students' overall wellbeing while they are in Nova Scotia, to avoid incidents that undercut our reputation as a safe place to live and study. And finally, the universities, Province and private sector must continue building partnerships to ease students' entry into our institutions.

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9 In general, online promotion is increasingly recognized as the most cost-effective approach to international student recruitment. Institutional websites are the most important source of information for prospective international students (CBIE, 2009; Lebrun & Rebello, 2006). Online campaigns are much cheaper than travelling or operating satellite offices overseas, although it is certain that institutions must also be present in international markets to attract more students (COU, 2010).

## 3. Challenges and current supports

The entire student population faces many important challenges, such as financial stress, significant life-transitions, adaptation to a new environment, rigorous academic training, and preparation for the world of work. These are often especially difficult for international students, however, as they simultaneously lack local social supports and must pay even heftier tuition fees, adapt to a different culture, learn or function in a second language, and navigate complex immigration rules.

### 3.1. International student finance

**PRINCIPLE:** All residents of Nova Scotia should be treated fairly, irrespective of their origin, income, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, or other identifying characteristics.

Canada is among a limited group of countries that charge higher differential tuition to international students.<sup>10</sup> Nova Scotia's 2012-13 international student tuition fees were \$13,106; the fourth lowest fees in Canada and \$4,191 below the national average (Humanities undergraduates – StatsCan, 2013).<sup>11</sup> Total international fees amount to approximately 265% of domestic student tuition (MPHEC, 2012c).<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to estimate total university revenues from international differential fees, but they likely reached at least \$42.2 million in 2011-12.<sup>13</sup>

**PRINCIPLE:** The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student or make them financially unable to live in Nova Scotia.

10 Other countries include the UK, Belgium and Australia (Siddiq et al., 2009).

11 Manitoba and NL have lower fees and are both known for prioritizing immigration.

12 Comparing international differential fees with Nova Scotia residents' tuition after they receive the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary.

13 Estimate based on 2008-09 data, when Nova Scotia's universities collected \$19 million in differential fee revenue with much smaller international student populations and differential fees (Siddiq et al., 2009).

**Table 4: Comparing international and domestic undergraduate arts tuition by institution**

	NS	CDN	INTL	DIFF. VS. NS	%	TOTAL INTL TUITION	DIFFERENTIAL REVENUES
Acadia	\$5,775	\$6,797	\$13,993	\$8,218	142%	\$5,291,079	\$3,107,417
CBU	\$4,727	\$5,749	\$12,130	\$7,403	157%	\$6,988,477	\$4,265,103
Dal	\$5,113	\$6,135	\$14,358	\$9,245	181%	\$28,388,240	\$18,278,958
MSVU	\$4,607	\$5,629	\$11,565	\$6,958	151%	\$3,588,224	\$2,158,830
NSCAD	\$4,549	\$5,571	\$12,864	\$8,315	183%	\$977,278	\$631,690
SFXU	\$5,300	\$6,322	\$13,166	\$7,866	148%	\$3,159,781	\$1,887,805
SMU	\$4,637	\$5,659	\$11,960	\$7,323	158%	\$17,069,958	\$10,451,781
UKC	\$5,113	\$6,135	\$14,358	\$9,245	181%	\$624,538	\$402,135
US-A**	\$4,717	\$5,739	\$8,290	\$3,573	76%	\$270,162	\$116,440
Average	\$4,949	\$5,971	\$12,520	\$7,572	153%		
Weighted***	\$5,042	\$6,064	\$13,350	\$8,308	165%	\$67,772,501	\$42,178,438

\*AST not included because they do not have undergraduate arts programming

\*\*No data available for 2011-12, so we use 2010-11 data instead

\*\*\* Weighted by total full-time equivalent (FTE) students

SOURCE: Using MPHEC (2012) data

The common justification for international differential fees is that international students and their families do not contribute to the Canadian tax-base and are therefore not entitled to public subsidies that Canadian students receive as citizens. While this justification is widely accepted in our current political and economic environment, there is a strong rationale for investing in international students' education to support the four important policy goals we outlined earlier.

**PRINCIPLE:** All students should be of approximately equal value to their institution with respect to the ratio between costs to educate and revenues contributed.

**PRINCIPLE:**

International students may be reasonably expected to finance a higher proportion of their education costs because they are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

Importantly, Nova Scotia already invests substantial public money to support international students.

The University Funding Distribution Formula (UFDL) distributes the total provincial operating grant among universities, based 90% on enrolment. Institutions may receive funding for international students that equals up to 10% of their total undergraduate enrolment or 30% of total graduate enrolment. These limits are largely arbitrary, but were intended to ensure international

students do not take domestic student spaces, while recognizing that international students are especially important to many graduate programs. In total, 9.5% (\$32 million in 2011-12) of university operating grants is distributed based on their

international enrolment (Siddiq et al., 2009).<sup>14</sup>

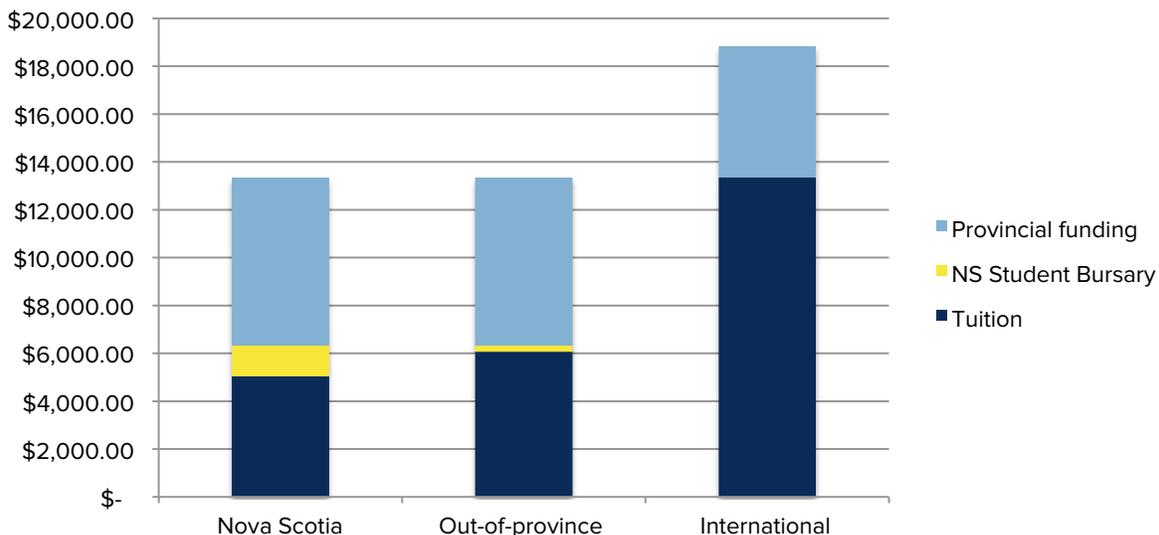
Under this system, international students contribute differential tuition to their institutions plus almost the same public money as domestic students. As a consequence each international student provides

substantially more money than a domestic counterpart, as shown in Figure 3.<sup>15</sup>

Considering the extent of public grants for international students and their economic impact, Siddiq et al. (2009) put “into question the policy basis for international student differential fees” (p. 40).

**CONCERN:** International students contribute more to their institutions in funding and tuition than their domestic counterparts.

**Figure 3: Approximate funding by student type**



In our consultations, one university representative argued that additional funding for international students is justifiable because they need targeted services and have higher recruiting costs. This assertion may have some merit, but it is difficult to ascertain how much more international students may cost to educate and there is no empirical proof to justify the

**CONCERN:** Institutions are not accountable for ensuring the funding they receive to support international students is actually spent on services for those students.

14 A complicating issue is that the funding formula's enrolment numbers have been frozen, so that funding is actually fixed at a historical distribution. Considering this, we obtained our estimate by applying the 2008 proportion of the operating grant identified by Siddiq et al. (2009).

15 This figure is intended for general illustration and should be taken as approximate. International student tuition in 2011-12 roughly matches per-student funding for domestic students, though international students also bring further public funding. The full amount of provincial funding per international student appears high, possibly far exceeding actual spending on international student services.

substantial revenue difference discussed earlier.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 5: University system operating funding for international students (approximate)**

Operating funding (total tuition and provincial operating grant)	\$641,352,736
Provincial funding to support international students	\$32,143,510
Total diff contribution	\$74,321,948
Total international contribution to universities	\$99,916,011
Provincial funding for international students as share of total	5.0%
International student tuition as share of total	10.6%
International students funding as share of total	15.6%
International students as share of total university enrolment	13.4%

As we see in Table 5, institutions received approximately \$100 million in 2011-12, through fees and public funding, to educate international students (approximately 15.6% of their total operating revenues). Importantly, whereas international students comprised 13% of the total student population, we find international student tuition corresponds to only 10.6% of system funding. Some might suggest

**CONCERN:** Deregulated international student tuition leaves international students hostage to their institutions, because they must pay whatever institutions charge while studying or else abandon the large investment they have already made in their education.

that this gap proves that international students do not pay the full cost of their education and there is therefore, room for international tuition to grow. This ignores a number of important mediating factors, however. First, you cannot necessarily

**CONCERN:** Large annual variations in deregulated international student tuition makes students unable to plan for the cost of their degree.

expect international students to contribute the same proportion of funding as their part in total enrolment because they are less likely to participate in some of the highest cost programs, including Medicine. Second,

the data used to calculate international student differential contributions is based only on tuition for undergraduate arts programming, which generally represents the lowest cost programs, although many international students register for more expensive graduate science programs. Finally, our data does not entirely separate ancillary fees from tuition revenue,

**PRINCIPLE:** If the Province wishes for post-secondary institutions to recruit international students, it should help to fund these students' education.

<sup>16</sup> The same institution whose representative justified additional funding for international students based on added costs has not tracked spending on international students' targeted services and recruitment (Personal correspondence, Feb. 19 2013).

which makes the total operating funds number slightly unreliable.

Meanwhile, the higher cost that international students pay to study in Nova Scotia has a real impact.<sup>17</sup> Differential tuition, travel costs and all other necessary expenses make studying in Nova Scotia an expensive proposition. Student assistance programs help to mitigate the impacts that increasing education costs have on domestic students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, but international students are not eligible for either Federal or

**CONCERN :** International student enrolment is more volatile, relative to domestic enrolment, making total financial reliance on their tuition risky for institutions

Nova Scotia Student Assistance. While it is often assumed that international students come from relatively well to do families in their home countries, it appears that rising differential fees without needs-based assistance is making this a self-fulfilling proposition. The proportion of Canada’s international students who report coming from low-income backgrounds has been in decline since 1988, such that CBIE’s 2009 survey found only 8% of international students report coming from families that are “considerably less wealthy” compared to others in their home country (p. 12). Ascribing particular causes for this trend is difficult, considering the vast range

of variables involved, but generally-speaking the cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia is rising at a time when many traditional source-countries of international students (like China) are dramatically expanding their local post-secondary offerings.

**PRINCIPLE:** Nova Scotia should seek to attract the best-qualified students possible to attend our post-secondary institutions and possibly immigrate.

While many Nova Scotians may see international students as wealthy, we found little evidence international students have more resources than domestic students, with the notable exception of those students supported by their home governments. In CBIE’s survey, 61% of international university students reported coming from average-income families by their home countries’ standards and middle class families in students’ countries of origin are often less wealthy than in Canada. Saudi Arabian students receive full scholarships and generous living allowances on the condition that they return home upon completing their studies, but these students

**PRINCIPLE:** Institutions should be accountable for the funding they receive to operate.

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<sup>17</sup> The focus here is purely financial, we discuss impacts on students’ academic success and wellbeing later.

**CONCERN:** International students from lower-income backgrounds are underrepresented at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions.

are outliers rather than the norm.<sup>18</sup> In most cases, international students' families are their main source of financing, followed by scholarships and personal savings/work income (CBIE, 2009; Siddiq et al., 2009). A Nova Scotia education, therefore, often represents a major family or

community investment and a pathway to immigration for not only the student but that of his or her family as well.

### 3.2. Language fluency

Language fluency is possibly the most important academic challenge affecting international students (Mori, 2000; Gates-Gasse, 2012). During our consultations, international and domestic students frequently highlighted language skills as their primary academic concern respecting increased international enrolment (Chapman Wadsworth et al., 2008). Professors also commonly highlight the language issue (Carroll, 2005), as did our interviewees from universities, government and external organizations.

**PRINCIPLE:** Admissions decisions respecting international students should be evidence-based.

There is very little variation among universities' language proficiency requirements at admission, as measured by minimum scores in standardized tests. The utility of minimum cut-off scores overall, however, is disputed. On the one hand, Illuminate Consulting Group (ICG – 2013) has suggested a strong correlation between language scores and academic performance. On the other hand, evidence from the University of Western Ontario indicates that TOEFL scores are a poor predictor of academic success. Western previously accepted students with scores below most Canadian universities' requirements and these students obtained equally strong results as their peers with higher TOEFL scores (Simner & Mitchell, 2007). Some also argue that the TOEFL exam is less effective in measuring oral comprehension and communication skills than reading skills and therefore minimum scores do not guarantee sufficient language competency (in Mori, 2000). Notably, students are not required to write

<sup>18</sup> The Maritimes hosted 645 Saudi Arabian students in 2010-11, equaling just 8.5% of all international students (MPHEC, 2012d).

**PRINCIPLE:** Institutions must ensure their graduates have attained fluency in the language of instruction upon graduation.

or read at length to attain high scores in such exams, though they must master this skill to succeed in many university programs (Schmitt, 2005). In addition to

these concerns, there is the more general concern about the suitability of exams for promoting and measuring learning. Any exam score only reflects student proficiency at a specific exam at a precise moment, whereas language fluency may vary over time and be affected by innumerable intervening variables.

Regardless of their language proficiency scores, many students experience a ‘language shock’ when they arrive in Nova Scotia. Though they may believe themselves to be fluent in English, it is not uncommon for ESL international students to struggle to adapt to native speakers’ speed of speech, “a local accent, discipline-specific vocabulary and the sheer hard work of speaking English all day” (Carroll, 2005, p. 38). At the same time, some part of the local concern about student language abilities likely stem from our region’s documented difficulties accepting a diversity of accents (see Chira, 2012). Together, these factors may quickly erode student confidence so that they quickly go from overestimating to underestimating their fluency.

The challenge of working in a foreign language affects students’ academics. It demands longer study hours and greater concentration. Students may have to read “a third to two times longer [than] first language students” to understand, making time constraints a real obstacle to critical treatment of texts (McLean & Ransom, 2005, p. 55). Students frequently have to learn a many new words, as very strong learners may enter university with as little as one quarter of native speakers’ vocabulary (Schmitt, 2005).

Also, plagiarism may be more common and easier to detect among international students because their more limited vocabulary makes paraphrasing especially difficult.<sup>19</sup> Overall, less than 50% of respondents to the CBIE’s 2009 international student survey reported “a

lot of success” in written assignments and 60% reported “some success” or “little or no success” in speaking English or French (in Gates-Gasse, 2012).

**CONCERN:** Too many international students are pursuing and completing degrees without attaining fluency in the language of instruction.

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<sup>19</sup> The issue of plagiarism is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.1.

Language proficiency is perhaps the key consideration for professors in adapting their teaching and marking to preserve fairness. They must determine to what degree language proficiency is essential to learning course material and to what extent learning may be demonstrated in different ways than we may culturally expect, while at the same time maintaining academic integrity and students' imperative to learn the language of instruction (Schmitt, 2005).

Language support services are crucially important (Gates-Gasse, 2012). Nova Scotia institutions offer various kinds of programs. These include one first-year English as a Second Language (ESL) course at SMU (SMU, 2013), short courses from Dalhousie's College of Continuing Education (DAL-CCE – Dalhousie, Feb. 21 2013) and staff or volunteer-run language courses and conversation groups within international centres or writing centres. Dalhousie's writing centre offers an ESL course (two-hour classes once-per week for ten weeks at a cost of \$100), while Acadia University's writing centre also had a full-time employee working in ESL until recently.

Most institutions also offer bridging programs for international students who do not reach cut-off proficiency scores. Generally these are offered in partnership with private language school partners, although Acadia, NSCC, SMU and U-SA operate their own language schools. MSVU and DAL-CCE offer bridge programming internally. MSVU's 144-hour Bridging Program, for example, delivers language training and academic skills training to students with IELTS scores of 5.5, at a cost of \$2900 (MSVU, 2013). One common problem for language school programs is that the length of time (and therefore the cost) to attain fluency often exceeds the expectations of many students and even of their foreign government sponsors. Pressure to complete programs too quickly can undermine learning.

**CONCERN:** There are very limited programs to support international students' language acquisition at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions.

In general, however, Nova Scotia's universities do not take a strong programmatic approach to supporting international students' language learning during their studies. This is disappointing considering the importance of language proficiency for students' success and potential immigration. Institutions elsewhere are taking a more deliberate approach to language training. A study at Memorial University in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) found that while ESL support was available, more needed to be done to support the development of language skills, such as

'sheltered' or 'adjunct' courses that combine ESL teaching with attendance in regular courses (Gates-Gasse, 2012). In this vein, the extensive French immersion program at the University of Ottawa offers one model where participating students are able

**CONCERN:** There are little or no mechanisms to evaluate the quality of programming supporting international students' language acquisition.

to access academic accommodations, including extra time with their professors, to ensure they understand the material and the possibility of selecting courses for evaluation on a pass-fail basis. These kinds of programs can and should be linked with broader cross-cultural academic support and delivered effectively at the faculty level.

It should be inconceivable that students could graduate from a Nova Scotian university without mastering the language of instruction; to allow this reflects poorly on our institutions, and all students' learning. Furthermore, language skills are so essential to successful labour market and community integration that they play a crucial role in whether graduates have both the ability and desire to successfully immigrate (Gates-Gasse, 2012). Clearly language proficiency among international students is a serious challenge, while language acquisition over the course of one's studies is a crucially important element in international education.

### 3.3. Adaptation

International students in Nova Scotia are necessarily studying in a new environment, with distinct cultural norms around academics, social relations, and more. These students must adapt to be successful. The following section reviews the academic and wellness challenges international students face, before reviewing the supports institutions and the Province provide to help students overcome these challenges.

#### 3.3.1. ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

Many different factors affect international students' academic success specifically, aside from the language challenges discussed earlier, including preparation at admissions and adaptation to local practices and norms.

Admissions standards are important because students lacking preparation may invest considerable time and funds in courses they cannot successfully pursue, while all students should expect to study in an environment where their peers

are capable collaborators in learning. Fortunately, there is little evidence that international students enrol with less academic preparation than their domestic peers. The CBIE's 2009 survey found international students were achieving "fairly high grades" in general, with over 80% obtaining a B average or better (p. 16). In Lebrun and Rebelo's (2006) Atlantic Canada survey, 80% of respondents reported good or excellent academic progress, while "most students reported that they did not find the [academic] tasks difficult at all" (p. 6). Similarly, international research

**PRINCIPLE:** The Nova Scotia post-secondary system should strive at all times to provide the highest possible quality of education to its students, fostering student success.

does not indicate differences in international students' education results once these students become adapted to local educational approaches (in Ryan & Carroll, 2005). While StudentsNS heard anecdotes about unprepared international students in consultations, interviewees also noted that domestic students may also enter classes relatively

poorly prepared and there is no evidence to show that a similar diversity of student learning approaches and outcomes does not exist among both international and domestic students.

The adaptation process does bring important challenges however. A recent Australian study (in McLean & Ransom, 2005) suggests "that international students experience three to four times more difficulties than their local counterparts in writing assignments and participating in tutorials; they mention twice as often their fear of failure, nervousness and trouble understanding lecturers" (p. 46). Another Australian study with medical students identified "issues with critical thinking, problem-based learning, English language ability, and communication styles ... as the main barriers to academic success" (in Gates-Gasse, 2012, p. 281). International students may also be unfamiliar with local reference points and examples used by teachers and other students.

In writing, international students must often adapt to very different writing styles, both within the host culture and within certain disciplines (see McLean & Ransom, 2005; Schmitt, 2005). Language fluency compounds this difficulty.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> International students often expressed greater confidence in math-related subjects in focus groups, because of the difficulties of academic writing.

Many international students must also adapt to a different relationship to authority figures in the academic environment. Specifically, some cultures emphasize respect for experts (instructors and authors) far more than is typical in Canada, where we generally place more emphasis on independent reflection and group discussion (McLean & Ransom, 2005; Chapman Wadsworth et al., 2008). International students may assume they should echo as closely as possible the views (and even words) of an instructor or author in their assignments and often feel uncomfortable participating in group-discussions. Students also may not have been trained to conduct independent library research or write essays (Mori, 2000). Meanwhile, certain groups of international students may also value collaboration on assignments more greatly.

A commonly discussed result of these differences is higher reported rates of plagiarism among certain groups of international students (see Bamford and Sergiou, 2005; Bradshaw and Baluja, Sep. 2 2011; HEA 2013). There is little evidence, however, that international students are more likely than domestic students to deliberately plagiarize (in HEA, 2013). At one of our consultations, a student spontaneously asked that those whose cultures of origin did not share the concept of plagiarism raise their hands; to widespread approval among the group. Students on a different campus downplayed this issue though.

**PRINCIPLE:** Students require preparation in cross-cultural communications and international challenges to succeed in today's globalized world.

Too often attention is focused on the 'shortfalls' of international students in adapting to Nova Scotia's learning environments. This focus on 'deficits' obscures their very real contribution and potential to broaden perspectives in the classroom, on campus and in our communities. While it is international students' responsibility to adapt to Nova Scotia's learning environments it is equally important that our learning environments adapt to the diversity of learners they host. International students often expose deficiencies in teaching and the learning environment whose impacts extend beyond this particular cohort because many of their challenges are common to other students, regardless of their origins (Ryan & Carroll 2005). In this, and many other respects, we have much to learn from our growing international student population.

### 3.3.2. EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING

All students face important psychosocial adaptations when they enter PSE, but the scale and intensity of these adaptations are particularly pronounced for international students due to “the demands for cultural [and social] adjustments” (Mori, 2000, p. 137). As a result, international students may encounter more psychological problems, including anxiety and depression, and require more assistance than the general student population.

**PRINCIPLE:** Nova Scotia must make its best efforts to support international students' personal wellbeing while studying.

The concept of ‘culture shock’ is used to describe the “collective impact of such unfamiliar experiences [as] novel social and educational organisations, behaviours and expectations” (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 63). Basic differences in social norms, cues and expectations have major impacts. The traveller must work hard to process seemingly simple information, causing exhaustion and making concentration difficult (Mori, 2000).

Cultural differences impact international students' relationships, especially when combined with limited confidence in their language skills (Gates-Gasse, 2012). Difficulty in making friends is common and among students' most pressing worries, based on our focus groups and the literature (Chiang, Feb. 14 2013; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Mori, 2000). Even successful friendships may not meet students' cultural expectations (Lacina, 2002). These challenges are especially relevant considering most international students have very limited local social supports at arrival and often feel isolated, homesick and lonely. Students often develop support networks within their own national groups and with colleagues from different countries that help (Mori, 2000; Zhou et al., 2008). However, research indicates that domestic students are the most influential support to international students. Greater interaction with host nationals correlates with “fewer academic problems, fewer social difficulties, improved communication competency and better general adaptation to life overseas” (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 70; in Gates-Gasse, 2012).

On a different note, international students are often under intense pressure to succeed. Many have been very successful before and have very high expectations (Mori, 2000; Ryan & Hellmund, 2005). Their families, communities or country are heavily invested in their expensive education, and failure for those who do not come from wealthy backgrounds would have very significant financial implications.

International students are also by definition “a group in transition for the purpose of achieving an educational goal”, and as such are often unsure what they will do next in their lives (Lacina, 2002, p. 21). At the same time, they have limited ability to act if any crises occur back home, within their family or societally, although difficulties at home may also have contributed to their choice to study abroad (Mori, 2000; Zhou et al., 2008).

Some researchers (Mori, 2000; Lacina, 2002; Collins, 2008) find that international students (especially from East Asia) are less likely to access health services than their domestic counterparts and often only as a “last resort”. These concerns may be acute with respect to mental health issues, due to lack of familiarity with therapy as a treatment, cultural stigma, or scepticism about cross-cultural therapy. Certain students may also use traditional remedies from home instead of seeking health services or avoid seeking health services because they fear being sent home (Collins, 2008). However, Russell et al. (2008) argue that many concerns about international students’ wellbeing specifically are not supported by strong empirical research.<sup>21</sup> Their study in Melbourne found international students reported not seeking help most often because their concern was not ‘sufficiently serious’ or because they lacked knowledge about services’ availability and cost, which are other issues deserving of attention. Young people in general often delay before using health services and stigma surrounding mental illness is common in Canada. This is an area that is very concerning and certainly demands further research.

The experience of international education should not be reflexively pathologized. International students are active agents in acculturation and adaptation to their new environment and adjustment is a process of managing stress. ‘Culture shock’ is a part of the learning experience that students seek through international study. Still, while the assertion that “cross-cultural contact is so stressful as to necessitate medical treatment” is obviously not applicable to all individuals (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 64), for many it may be. International students evidently

**PRINCIPLE:** International students are active agents in acculturation and adaptation to Nova Scotia.

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21 They feel the same about the assertion that international students tend to somaticize their psychological challenges, leading to ailments such as headaches, loss of sleep, stomach ailments, etc. (Lee et al., 2004; Chirkov et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2008).

do have particular needs with respect to their physical, psychological and social wellness, which must be taken into account.

### 3.3.3. TARGETED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Institutions employ various strategies to support international students. International advisors are often the chief coordinators of these efforts, often working within international centres. In general, international students understand their international advisors to be their primary point of academic and personal support when navigating university bureaucracy (Gates-Gasse, 2012).

International centres deliver a range of targeted services that include orientation events (sometimes in cooperation with student unions), academic pathways counselling, employment counselling, immigration counselling, emotional support, coordination of social events, ESL training, and more. Staff at these centres are more than service providers, however. They also frequently act as advocates for international students, responsible for seeking reasonable institutional accommodations that can include finding money to help students facing family emergencies, helping resolve conflicts with professors, connecting a student with a referee, or even directing a student suffering from mental illness to a specialist.

**CONCERN:** Peer mentoring programs for international students commonly lack domestic student participants.

International centres are especially important at the start of students' studies. Before they arrive, staff may assist with registration and immigration documents and help to find housing. When they arrive, orientations are crucial. According to the CBIE (2009), roughly half of international students attend orientation programs and about 90% of these find them at least somewhat useful. Orientation design varies by institution, but generally helps students comply with the institutional and governmental regulations, navigate their new campus and community, become familiar with campus services, feel valued,<sup>22</sup> and connect socially with peers.<sup>23</sup>

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22 At certain international centres (e.g. Acadia, SMU), staff even pick students up from the airport.

23 MSVU, for example, provides a 3-day mandatory orientation, free of additional charges. On day one, students register for courses, open a bank account, collect their student card, take a tour of campus and dine together with the university's president. On day two, students are oriented to the city and take a boat cruise with the students' union. Finally, on day three students obtain government-issued ID so they do not need to carry their passports, and then do a day trip to Peggy's Cove and Lunenburg.

Orientation also provides students opportunities to build conversational language skills and begin adapting to local accents.

International centres deliver other important programming to support students' social integration. Some offer structured peer-mentoring programs (e.g. MSVU, SMU, Dal), which the literature (Zhou et al., 2008; Sumer et al., 2008) indicates are very important, although Nova Scotian programs usually connect international students with more senior international peers and with relatively few domestic students.<sup>24</sup> At SMU the international centre pays coordinators of the international student society called Students Acting for Global Awareness (SAGA), which meets frequently, bringing together students and organizing events to encourage cultural exchange and build community. SMU and MSVU also provide lounge spaces where students can socialize.

Finally, centres are also the loci for international partnership coordination, exchange supervision and even recruitment. Overall, it's clear that international centres are the key institutional agent for supporting international student success, and it is therefore unsurprising that they have become a standard feature of institutions across Canada that prioritize international education.

There are, of course, other elements to institutional support for international students, especially at the faculty level. Professional development for instructors that focuses on teaching international students forms a key component in internationalizing a curriculum, which means integrating "a global perspective to curriculum development" (Webb, 2005, p. 111). Systematically integrating international examples into courses is also important; 'hooking' onto familiar reference points is a common learning strategy, so employing international case studies and examples can help facilitate all students' understanding of course material (Ryan & Hellmundt, 2005; Chapman Wadsworth et al., 2008). In the same vein, international work and study opportunities for faculty and all students are also important (Dunn & Carroll, 2005).

**PRINCIPLE:** The support of local peers is crucially important for international students' adaptation.

Many Nova Scotia institutions are using international partnerships or operations to help attract students.

Strong, well-structured partnerships represent important opportunities to help

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<sup>24</sup> MSVU is the exception as it connects students only with domestic peers. Acadia's program connects students with supportive local families.

internationalize curriculum, facilitate student and faculty exchanges and so on. Cape Breton University operates a campus in Cairo, Egypt: The Canadian International College. Other institutions are exploring international twinning programs, where students will complete the first part of their degree at a partner institution overseas, then the last part in Nova Scotia, or vice versa.

The evidence indicates that Nova Scotia must significantly improve its international student supports. Of respondents to the 2006 First Survey of International Students in Atlantic Canada, 35% were unaware of laboratories and mentor programs and 26% of learning support services (in Gates-Gasse, 2012). According to the CBIE, only 21% of international students at Canadian universities in 2009 used study skills/ learning support services and only 12% used language-tutoring services (in Gates-Gasse, 2012). The observation that international students use support services only infrequently contradicts the assumption that they imply higher services costs than domestic students.

Based on our focus groups with students, the international centres at SMU and MSVU stand out.<sup>25</sup> These schools provide high quality standard orientation programming. For some students, MSVU's bridging program amounts to an extended, comprehensive orientation program, with components on academic research, writing and integrity and critical thinking, a model that might certainly be worth emulating elsewhere. One concern with many orientations, however, was their additional cost in many cases, which may discourage attendance and is unjustifiable considering the substantial resources these students are already contributing to their institutions.

Students noted that finding housing is possibly the greatest immediate challenge upon arrival and they did not receive adequate support.<sup>26</sup> Students often cannot secure housing before arrival because they have no means to make a down payment or sign a lease. They must, therefore, look for housing only once they have arrived. They may incur additional living expenses (including hotel costs) while searching, although some international centres do refer students to less expensive

**CONCERN:**  
International student centres are understaffed and under-resourced.

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25 We heard stories of international students at other institutions trying to access the better SMU services.

26 All of this is generally easier for the many students who stay in residence.

options when they arrive.

Despite the strong international centres at SMU and MSVU, our research found that centres across the province were consistently viewed as understaffed, making many students feel underserved and often resentful. This supports Gates-Gasses' (2012) finding that international centres are "generally working well over capacity" (p. 282). When centres are responsible for exchange coordination and other international activities, this can shift already limited resources away from supporting students.<sup>27</sup>

**CONCERN:** Nova Scotia institutions lack adequate, public mechanisms for measuring the effectiveness of their international student services.

One does not have to look far to find substantially better-funded and -staffed international centres. For example, whereas SMU's international centre is among the best in Nova Scotia and has two full-time advisors for 1,677 international students, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in BC has eight roughly equivalent staff members serving approximately 1,675 students (TRU, 2013; RUCBC, 2012).

Our interviewees indicated that professors and institutions are not doing as much as they should in the classroom, although business faculties seem to perform better. Curriculum internationalization does not appear to be such a major priority as, again, at institutions in British Columbia and little related professional development is provided to faculty.

**CONCERN:** International partnerships and overseas campuses may imply risks with respect to admissions standards, education quality and financial mismanagement.

International partnerships pose various risks. If mismanaged, they may allow students to bypass Canadian universities' admissions standards.<sup>28</sup> Overseas campuses specifically, may also undermine institutional reputations by providing

27 Australia is a leader in international education, with a proportionally much higher international student population (APCIES, 2012). The Australian Government (2009) has identified many good practices in integrating international students that merit mention. The University of Adelaide's award-winning Peer Mentor Program provides significant training to mentors, while its Volunteer Scheme helps students find placements in the community. At the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the GLoBALL Program connects students with professional soccer players and other community cultural events. Student unions play a key role in many of the successful Australian programs.

28 Simon Fraser International College, run by Navitas, has been singled-out in particular for accepting students with inadequate academic qualifications, who are subsequently guaranteed admission to Simon Fraser University (MacKinnon and Mickleburgh, Oct. 15 2010).

substandard education quality, by hosting students and faculty in an environment that does not protect freedom of speech or by putting significant public financial resources at risk overseas (see Grewal et al., 2010; Usher, Feb. 20 2013). To date, Nova Scotia has done little with respect to establishing standards for international partnerships and campuses.

**CONCERN:** The complexities of private health coverage may affect international students' access to health services.

Nova Scotia also have very few programs to support institutions in education internationalization. By contrast, British Columbia has prepared and funded an International Education Strategy, led by the Premier, emphasizing supporting international students in BC, helping more local students to study and work abroad and curriculum internationalization (notably connected with a broader PSE quality assurance framework – Government of British Columbia, 2012).<sup>29</sup>

Health coverage represents the most noteworthy provincial programs directed towards international students in most Canadian provinces. British Columbia provides full health coverage to international students from the beginning of their studies, as do Manitoba, Saskatchewan and NL (OUSA, Oct. 27 2011). In Nova Scotia, students may receive coverage under Medical Service Insurance (MSI) only once they have been studying here for 13 consecutive months without spending 31 consecutive days away (Department of Health and Wellness, 2012). While not covered by MSI, students must purchase private health coverage through their institution or student union. SMU and the Atlantic School of Theology have the highest international health insurance costs (\$973.50 per year for individuals, \$2728.50 per year for students with families).<sup>30</sup> Due to Nova Scotia's 13-month residency requirement for MSI coverage, students also need to buy insurance at least into the second school year.

**CONCERN:** International students must currently purchase expensive private health insurance in their first year.

29 BC was already aiming to increase international students numbers by 50% between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the same as Ontario's target for between 2010 and 2015 (Smith and Kinnon, June 2012).

30 Ontario does not provide health coverage to international students at all. Instead international students at all institutions but one must enroll in the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) with Sun Life Assurance, at comparable cost to Nova Scotia's private plans (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Sep. 26 2012; Grewal et al., 2010; UHIP, Sep. 26 2012).

Nova Scotia's health coverage policies have further downsides beyond the cost. The 31-day limit on leaving the province financially punishes international students for visiting their homes while on break, which is senseless considering such visits may allow students to save money and be emotionally well and thereby increase the likelihood that they complete their programs.<sup>31</sup> Privately insured students may also be unaware of service coverage (Russell et al., 2008, p. 69) and often must pay the cost of medical services up front, which can limit accessibility of healthcare, whether through perception or reality. Students are largely responsible for informing themselves of how their health plans work, but this creates another task for already-overwhelmed students.

It is important for Nova Scotia that international students are empowered to succeed academically and socially if we want to encourage graduates to immigrate. Studies in Saskatchewan found that “all students whose average [was] above 85 [had] either strong or moderate intentions to stay permanently”, and among Chinese students “social and emotional adaptations are [as] critical as economic adaptations in facilitating intentions to stay permanently” (Gates-Gasse, 2012, p. 278; p. 280). Another Manitoba study noted that students' friendship networks significantly impact their desire to immigrate and a survey of 949 Master's students in the US and UK showed that the psycho-social adjustment process was the most significant predictor of students' intention to immigrate. On this basis, Gates-Gasse (2012) argues “successful experiences in social and cultural adaptation will increase the likelihood that international students will develop ties with a community and choose to stay” (p. 278). Meanwhile feelings of distress and alienation from local culture encourage students to leave.

Even if international students' success and basic happiness in Nova Scotia were not a key determinant for future immigration, the Province and our institutions would still have a responsibility to support these outcomes to the greatest extent possible, just as with domestic students. With their importance for immigration, however, these supports represent key elements to a larger public policy strategy.

### **3.4. Employment and immigration**

Concerns about in-study and after-graduation employment were among the most

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<sup>31</sup> Travel home also reinforces Nova Scotia's connections with students' home countries where they are ambassadors for our province and universities.

common raised by international students during our consultations. Students seek work while studying to both finance their education and gain experience to support their post-graduation job market success. As stated earlier, studying in Nova Scotia is part of a deliberate immigration strategy for many international students.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) regulates international students' entry

**PRINCIPLE:** Employment and immigration counselling are a basic necessity for international students, irrespective of whether they wish to immigrate to Nova Scotia.

and activities in Canada. As international students are temporary residents, CIC verifies if international students are *bona fide* based on their commitment to leave the country at the end of the “period authorized for their stay” (CIC, Jul. 6, 2009). Prior to regulatory changes in 2009, prospective students could be refused entry into Canada if they expressed interest in permanent residency in addition to their temporary residency (known as “dual intent”). However, CIC has clarified that international students who wish to pursue permanent residency may enter Canada provided that they will respect all laws and regulations pertaining to temporary and permanent residency. This change speaks to growing recognition of international students' immigration potential.

Other changes in entry and immigration regulations concerning international students are forthcoming (Canada Gazette, Dec. 29 2012). Only learning institutions designated by their territorial or provincial government's ministry of higher education will be permitted to accept international students for programs longer than six months.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, once in Canada students will be required to provide proof of both enrolment and their 'active pursuit of the program for which they received a study permit, such as a receipt for their tuition payment. Non-complying students will be at risk of deportation.

These changes are intended to stem abuse both by learning institutions and students (Carletti and Davison, Dec. 11 2012; Larsen, Dec. 10 2012). Ensuring institutions meet minimum standards in student supports to be eligible to host international students will eliminate “visa mills” (Canada Gazette, Dec. 29 2012).<sup>33</sup> Requisite documentation of international students' education activities should ensure they do not gain entry to Canada for other purposes. These regulations bring

32 A study permit is not required for programs of less than six months in duration.

33 Visa mills are operations that seek less to educate than to facilitate entry into Canada.

Canada closer to standards in the UK, the US and Australia.

Furthermore, under the new rules, international students will also be permitted to seek a new study permit for a further program while still in Canada. This will be very helpful for international students transitioning from secondary to post-secondary or from undergraduate to graduate studies. Ensuring international students' studies in Canada are not interrupted by this bureaucratic hoop may increase their likelihood of settling permanently.

With respect to employment, since 2007 students have been able to apply for an in-study permit to work off-campus after completing six months of their program, provided their institution has an off-campus work agreement with the Province (Siddiq et al., 2009; CIC, 2013b). Students are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours per week “during regular academic sessions academic sessions, and full time during scheduled breaks” (CIC, 2013b). In 2011, 23% of foreign students in Nova Scotia had work permits.<sup>34</sup> The six-month delay in work-permit eligibility disadvantages international students relative to their Canadian counterparts. They can fall behind in gaining experience and sometimes are even further compromised by delays in permit processing. Fortunately, in 2014, CIC will start granting work permits to students at designated institutions immediately upon commencement of studies (Canada Gazette, December 29, 2012).

Upon completing programs of at least eight months in length, international students may apply for Post-Graduation Work Permits. In 2008, CIC eliminated two more obstacles to employment for international students: restrictions by type of employment and the requirement to have a job offer to be eligible (CIC, Apr. 21 2008). Permits may be issued for up to three years, but not longer than the graduate's program of study in Canada (CIC, 2013c).

In 2007, the International Graduate Stream (IGS) was created within Nova Scotia's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP – NSOI, 2011). The IGS targeted graduates of Canadian institutions with guaranteed full-time permanent job offers from a Nova Scotia employer (preferably in their field of study) who they had worked with for three consecutive months. Successful provincial nominees are eligible for permanent

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<sup>34</sup> Information obtained from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Jan. 12, 2013. This number includes language school and P-12 students who we assume may be less likely to work while studying than post-secondary students.

resident visas for themselves, their spouse and dependents. In 2010, 126 individuals were nominated under Nova Scotia's IGS. The Federal Government, however, has expressed concerns about duplication of immigration streams and misuse of PNPs across the country (McLeod, May 30, 2012). They have pushed for changes to PNPs and streams targeting international graduates specifically. Allegedly, Nova Scotia's three-month work-experience requirement makes our PNP one of the easiest ways to gain permanent residency in Canada, thereby attracting applicants who choose to work in Nova Scotia simply to accelerate their immigration processing before settling elsewhere in the country.

The Province also believes that IGS nominees are more mobile and more likely to ultimately settle elsewhere than other provincial nominees.<sup>35</sup> The rate of retention of PNP nominees determines the number of total spaces in a PNP and is, therefore, a critical factor affecting Nova Scotia's immigration outcomes. Manitoba is similar in size to Nova Scotia, but has received dramatically higher immigration primarily through its PNP. Manitoba consistently retained more than 80% of its nominees and

**PRINCIPLE:** For most international students and graduates, successful entry into the labour market is a prerequisite for immigration.

its PNP more than tripled in size between 2004 and 2010 to reach 12,200 people, or 77% of Manitoba's total immigration in that year (CIC, Nov. 7 2011; IRPP, 2010).

Consequently, new changes in the Nova Scotia PNP require that international graduates apply for permanent residency through the Federal Canadian Experience Class (CEC) program. The CEC is designed to facilitate the transition of temporary residents to permanent residency, but unlike the Nova Scotia IGS, requires a minimum of one year of Canadian employment experience. While the change to the CEC is intended to increase retention, it will slow international graduates' process for obtaining permanent residency in Nova Scotia and the longer period before graduates can apply for permanent residency will leave less time between application and the end of the work permit, both factors that create uncertainty about residency status that can negative impact hiring decisions.

Accelerating processing while keeping sufficient checks in place is a major challenge in all parts of Canada's immigration system (Cohen, Mar. 7 2012). Interviewees at

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35 Information obtained from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Jan. 12, 2013.

international centres highlighted significant problems with CIC: applications for visas in March may not be processed in time for September classes and helping students get their visas and permits consumes as much as 30% of international advisors' time. An international graduate student we spoke with received his documents so late that he could only start class in the third week and was forced to play catch-up while facing all the usual adaptation challenges.<sup>36</sup> The adverse personal, academic and professional impacts of such delays have already been discussed in this report.

The CEC is also undergoing significant changes. On January 2, the Canadian work experience requirement was reduced from two years to one (Garibaldi, Dec. 12, 2012; CIC, 2013c).<sup>37</sup> In 2014, applicants will also need to meet new language standards, based on the type of Canadian National Occupational Classification (NOC) under which they are applying and as measured through language tests completed within two years of their application date (CIC, 2013a). Of note, these tests' required scores are generally less onerous than for university admissions, except for those working in some managerial professions (6 vs. 6.5 on the IELTS).

**CONCERN:** Many international students do not understand the Nova Scotia labour market sufficiently to plan their educational and career pathways.

Permits are not the only obstacle to in-study work for international students. Focus groups hosted by the International Student Post-graduate Employment Project in Halifax in 2006 found that the “most common difficulties or complaints identified by students included the lack of connections with potential employers, and difficulties in meeting employers; language barriers or perceived language barriers because of a distinct accent; lack of Canadian work experience; and lack of understanding on the part of employers regarding the process of would-be immigrants acquiring work permits and permanent residency status” (Gates-Gasse, 2012, p. 277).

It is a significant challenge to simply learn *how* the job market works in Nova Scotia. In international students' home countries, those who study at the post-secondary level may not be generally expected to work in-study. These students and/or their families may believe that excelling academically is the best route to

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<sup>36</sup> These delays could also have been caused by the university.

<sup>37</sup> Work experience during studies cannot count (CIC, 2013c).

successful labour market entry, whereas practical experience through part-time paid and volunteer work can be more meaningful in our job market.

Furthermore, even knowing what experience and attributes to highlight in a job application in Nova Scotia is a cultural question. Bohonos (in Gates-Gasse, 2012) notes that lack of work

experience among international students and graduates “often results in failure to understand the unwritten norms of behaviour, especially non-verbal behaviours” (p. 276). International students and graduates may not know where to find job postings, how to prepare and deliver an application, how to interview successfully, their rights as an employee, appropriate or technical workplace vocabulary, etc.

**CONCERN:** There continues to be discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in Nova Scotia, which is intrinsically reprehensible and also undercuts our ability to attract and retain immigrants.

Meanwhile, employers actually *create* a number of barriers. Many are unaware of the regulations surrounding hiring of international students and prefer not to hire these students out of fear of paperwork or other delays.<sup>38</sup> This is partially understandable

**PRINCIPLE:** International students should be empowered to work during their studies, to help finance their education, gain relevant work experience and participate more fully in Nova Scotian society.

under current work permit rules, but does not justify employers establishing policies against hiring applicants on work permits. Discrimination is at play as well, as “foreign accents” have been found to explain some employers’ reluctance to hire international graduates (Chira, 2012, p. 130).

Yet, international student and graduate employees can be strong assets for employers (Nodding, March 14, 2013). As in the classroom, they work as hard as (or harder than) Canadian students. They can communicate across cultures and languages, bringing new perspectives and engaging their colleagues in valuable cross-cultural learning processes.

Various services aim to support international students and graduates who wish to immigrate to Nova Scotia, both with respect to employment and navigating the immigration process.<sup>39</sup> Nova Scotia’s immigration strategy (2011) highlights four

38 According to one interviewee, even governments and universities hesitate to hire international students and graduates due to concerns about employment permits.

39 It is also worth noting that the Province and institutions lobbied for many of the positive regulatory changes that we have previously discussed.

initiatives to support international graduates specifically:

- Offering more information sessions at universities about work programs and immigration opportunities
- Hosting an annual welcome event for incoming students
- Expanding the Connector Program with the GHP
- Encouraging more employers to participate in co-op programs<sup>40</sup>

The GHP's Connector Program was designed to connect international students and immigrants "with local employers, civil servants and community leaders based on industry experience, professional backgrounds, or the participant's interest in a specific organization". In 2011-12 local youth were included as well (GHP, Feb. 22 2013). In 2011-2012, 366 connectors at 250 organizations participated, and 66 participants were hired. The program has been replicated in eight other Canadian communities.

The predecessor to the Connector Program was the 2006 Halifax Regional Development Agency (HRDA) international students' post-graduate employment project (Gates-Gasse, 2012). The program was carried out in three phases. It began with focus groups with international students to identify job search needs, including resume and cover letter writing, interview skills, networking skills, work permit information and general job search skills. These were followed by four workshops conducted over a weekend. Finally, a networking lunch educated recruiters about how to hire international students and students about companies that are recruiting.

There is ample evidence that these kinds of programs are effective (in Gates-Gasse, 2012). Their emphasis on networking is arguably especially important in Nova Scotia, where personal contacts play a key role in hiring decisions (Chira, 2012).

Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) offers employment counselling and career coaching to senior international students and recent international graduates. This year, from November to March, the Province is also supporting an ISIS pilot-project employment support program targeting these same individuals, provided they are interested in immigrating to Nova Scotia and are considered well-prepared for work placements. The project includes a three-week, 3-hours

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40 The Nova Scotia Office of Immigration's (NSOI) *Employer's Guide to Hiring International Workers* is also a good resource highlighting the importance and logistics of hiring international workers.

per day program of intensive pre-employment workshops (in-person and online), mock interviews, a six-week unpaid work placement in the student's field, and a mentoring program with professionals in their field. ISIS generally considers standard employment counselling insufficient as support for international graduates in light of the particular challenges they face.

Recommendations to employers are only made after completion of the pilot program. As of March 23, 90 individuals had participated in the program, 18 of whom had found jobs in their fields. Across the spectrum of their program offerings, ISIS has found that 75% of work placement participants subsequently find employment in their fields.<sup>41</sup>

**CONCERN:** There is very little programming to educate international students about immigration and employment early in their studies.

A concern with the ISIS program is the timing of its intervention with students. The literature recommends early career planning intervention, as well as immigration counseling, so that international students are better equipped to plan their academic pathways and to succeed in work and/or volunteer experiences while studying (Gates-Gasse, 2012). Furthermore, employers in certain fields commonly recruit students at the start of their last year of studies and in-study employment can provide crucial experience.

The Province of Nova Scotia also has multiple youth employment programs that are open to international students and graduates. These include START and the Student Employment Program's various different initiatives; like the Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive that subsidizes hiring of coop students.

At the post-secondary institution level, international centres are the primary access point for international students seeking immigration and employment advice. These centres provide training sessions on work permits and immigration, often in partnership with the NSOI. They often redirect international students to writing and employment centres at the university and in the community, which provide some support in job searches and interview and application preparation.

It is difficult to accurately gauge the effectiveness of the various sources of

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<sup>41</sup> Personal correspondence, March 23, 2013.

immigration and employment support services for international students. No studies have been completed in Nova Scotia reviewing the frequency at which students are receiving advice on immigration from their institution or the province.<sup>42</sup> In our meetings, international students were consistently frustrated at the inadequacy of supports to help them access the job market and successfully immigrate.<sup>43</sup> Considering that ISIS insists that it can only refer clients to employers after they complete 45 hours of preparation, in our view the current supports offered on campuses are unlikely to provide adequate assistance in our view.

With respect to cooperative education programs, information regarding their effectiveness for international students is also limited. Currently all coop programs in Nova Scotia are open to international students and, on a positive note, do not charge international differential fees. However, we have heard from program staff that international students generally do not fare as well as their Canadian counterparts for the cultural reasons discussed earlier. Dalhousie's Cooperative Education Office is taking an important first step in addressing this problem by hiring an international coordinator.

Elsewhere, some institutions and governments are pursuing interesting programming in support of international students' employment and immigration. The Université de Moncton's *Destination emploi pour étudiants internationaux* was introduced in 2008 with funding from the Province of New Brunswick (Gates-Gasse, 2012). It aims to facilitate francophone immigration by helping international students enter the labour market during and after their studies through coaching, assisting with community social integration, educating students on the immigration process and encouraging local businesses to hire participants. Program representatives meet individually with students to discuss issues related to employment and immigration, organize employment workshops, ESL instruction and job fairs, and also distribute employer fact-sheets on hiring processes. The results have been very positive: 77% of participants secured off-campus employment during their studies, 61% found postgraduate employment and 10 graduates gained permanent-residency in 2009 (compared with none in 2008). The University of Manitoba offers a similar eight-week

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42 The only research we could find was a Montreal student survey indicating that 30% of international students never received any information on immigration during their studies (in Gates-Gasse, 2012).

43 Notably including graduate engineering students who a priori would be especially economically valuable.

program to international students who wish to stay permanently: 15-25 participants come together once per week for training in job searching that includes practical exercises (in *Ibid.*).<sup>44</sup> The Chisholm Institute in Victoria (Australia) also integrates international and domestic students of its Building Design and Management program into projects with local community organizations and building companies, to learn about “construction industry culture” and “gain pre-employment experience” (Australian Government, 2009, p. 2).

Attending to the employment challenges of international students is crucial if Nova Scotia is to improve its immigration outcomes. Our review of immigration regulations and our conversations with students both demonstrated that finding a job in Nova Scotia is the key determinant in international students’ decisions whether to settle permanently. This finding is supported by external research as well (in Gates-Gasse, 2012): a strong positive association between work off-campus while studying and intention to immigrate was found among Chinese international students at the University of Saskatchewan; while research in the US has shown that personal and societal factors push students to return home while professional and economic reasons persuade them to stay. Gates-Gasse (2012) therefore argues “a greater understanding of how to support and encourage international students in pursuing work and volunteer opportunities, especially off-campus where they increase their exposure to employers, is essential to their settlement” (p. 276).

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44 This program remains limited in scope relative to the scale of the ISIS program in Nova Scotia and also intervenes late in a student’s studies.

## 4. Investing in international students and in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has a major stake in its international students. The province's success or failure in serving them will significantly impact the wellbeing of our university system, our provincial economy and our communities. We must view reasonable investments in these students as investments in our own long-term prosperity. The following proposals would be feasible, effective and mutually supportive measures.

### 4.1. An international education strategy

Nova Scotia needs a plan. The Province must work in partnership with its public institutions, but also with students, private institutions and other community groups, to ensure that we all capitalize on the opportunities presented by international education.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia, in partnership with international and domestic students, educational institutions, community groups and the private sector, should develop an International Education Strategy to establish coordinated initiatives and clear objectives for internationalizing education in Nova Scotia.*

A Nova Scotia International Education Strategy (NSIES) should include many of the same elements as BC's and support Provincial social, cultural and economic objectives, including especially the priority of attracting and retaining more immigrants.

The NSIES should explore collaboration in recruitment with the following core features:

- Clear international student recruitment targets;
- Options to diversify source countries of international students;
- A clear strategy to make Nova Scotia stand out in an increasingly competitive international market; and

- A business plan to maximize the cost-effectiveness of international recruitment.

The NSIES must also consider how best to support international students through:

- Targeted services supporting academic, social and cultural adaptation;
- Language training;
- Immigration and employment assistance and counselling; and
- Fostering inclusiveness and reducing prejudice in our communities.

Measures to promote curriculum internationalization should include:

- Sending more Nova Scotian students and instructors abroad;
- Supporting cross-cultural understanding in classrooms and communities; and
- Integrating international case studies and approaches in learning.

The NSIES should also consider the issue of overseas campuses and partnership to ensure they are not pursued to the detriment of Nova Scotia's own interests.

Now is the time to prepare such a strategy. The Federal Government is requiring that provinces set standards for institutional designation to receive international students, our international enrolment is dramatically increasing, and the Province-universities partnership must work on a Change Mandate pursuant to their 2012 MOU.

## **4.2. A fair and affordable study destination**

It is essential that Nova Scotia determine how to finance the education of international students in ways that are fair to all and support public policy objectives. We must keep education in Nova Scotia affordable to maximize the benefits that we all derive from international students coming here.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should cap international student tuition at the sum of Canadian students' pre-bursary tuition plus the per-student university operating grant.*

It is impossible to estimate the international student tuition cap amount with the data available at this time. This cap would apply differently to different programs,

just as funding per program is determined through a system of bin weights,<sup>45</sup> but we cannot even measure whether international arts undergraduates are presently paying the full cost of their education. The universities and the Province must work together to understand current costs to educate the international student population, including the extent to which international students may cost more than domestic students because of the need for targeted services.<sup>46</sup> Without this information, there is only weak evidence to inform changes to international student finances, including especially their tuition.

*Recommendation: Nova Scotia Universities should undergo third-party reviews of spending on the education of international students to identify the appropriate caps on international student tuition and any additional costs compared with a domestic student.*

Until such a review is completed, *StudentsNS*' best estimate is that per international student funding from tuition is basically equal to total per-domestic-student funding. International student tuition therefore should track changes in total funding from domestic students' tuition and the provincial operating grant.

Differential fees in excess of a student's fair share of institutional operating costs are completely unjustifiable. International students should not be used as 'cash-cows' for institutional projects or to subsidize domestic students. All students should be of more or less equal financial value to their institution, so that none provide excess funds to subsidize their peers. If this is not the case then academic integrity may be compromised, with respect to both admitting and retaining students, so as to maximize institutional revenues. We must also protect our institutions' value propositions even for students who do not have high financial need.

Fairness in all aspects of engagement with international students is essential to communicating that Nova Scotia values them, which is key to persuading them that this is a good place to settle. Charging differential tuition in excess of government grants undermines this important public policy goal. Also, more elevated costs may lead students to seek the best paying job possible to recuperate their investment

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45 See our (2013) report, *Getting the Most from Our Universities – A New Approach to System Planning and Funding in Nova Scotia*, for more details on bin-weights in the UFDF.

46 Students would expect to hold a seat on a steering committee for such a review.

quickly, and with oil-rich Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador booming, Nova Scotia is hard-pressed to compete. In sum, if institutions are permitted to charge international students any fee amounts they choose, Nova Scotia's larger interests will be compromised.

The fact that de-regulated international student tuition allows institutions to make major changes to the cost of PSE from year to year is also unfair. Our recommended cap would address this issue. Since the establishment of such a cap is likely to take time, the Province must act in the interim to protect cost predictability.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should regulate tuition changes for international students so they can clearly understand the cost of their education when they enrol.*

Deregulated tuition changes do not allow international students to plan for the cost of their education. Furthermore, institutions practically hold hostage the investments that international students have already made, since the students must choose between abandoning the time and money already invested or else pay whatever price their institution asks. Institutions have used the international differential to recoup money "lost" due to tuition regulation or government funding decisions in a way that is inequitable.<sup>47</sup> As government would never allow institutions to charge the province whatever they want for the services they deliver, nor should they allow institutions to do this to any group of students.

With respect to costs to educate international students in excess of domestic students, we believe it is appropriate for the Province to cover these costs using funds presently made available in support of international students through the UDFD.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should remove international students from the Weighted Enrolment Grant component of the University Funding Distribution Formula in cases where their programs charge international differential fees.*

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<sup>47</sup> In 2007-08, Dalhousie University increased international student differential fees by \$810, just as the Province required a tuition freeze for domestic students.

This repeats our previous recommendation from *Getting the Most from Our Universities – A New Approach to System Planning and Funding in Nova Scotia*(2013). Under the present UFDF there is no guarantee that the public funding earmarked for international students is actually spent supporting them. However, we note here that if institutions prefer not to charge differential international fees for certain programs they *should* receive public funding.

We recommend further specific provincial funding envelopes for international students supports over the course of this paper. Unless these funding envelopes exist, the Province cannot ensure institutions are investing appropriately in the services that international students need. The envelopes' value may not necessarily match the \$30 million that is currently distributed among universities based on their international enrolment. On the one hand, we do recognize that the distribution of funding under the current funding formula is largely fictional; the UFDF was built to maintain the funding distribution of the time and has not been allowed to adjust to changes in enrolment since. On the other hand, subsequent increases in international student differential tuition have meant that institutions may receive significantly more funds per international student today than they did when the formula was designed.

Institutions argue that they face additional costs with respect to the recruitment of international students. *StudentsNS* does not believe that the province should finance the full cost of international recruitment, considering that institutions finance domestic recruitment from their regular operating funding. However, in recognition that international recruitment is more expensive than domestic recruitment and may be pursued more efficiently through systemic collaboration, the Province clearly has a role to play.

*Recommendation: The Province should provide financial and other resources to support international student recruitment pursuant to the International Education Strategy.*

These resources could take different forms, including funding for EduNova,<sup>48</sup> promotion of educational institutions through Nova Scotia trade missions, or an

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48 The Provincial and Federal Governments have already provided funding to EduNova in the past (Mellor, January 12, 2012).

international recruitment grant within each university's operating grant. The NSIES should offer the blueprint for how these resources are invested.

Implementation of the above recommendations would leave international enrolment financially advantageous to the universities. Assuming public funding will increase on a regular escalator, as indicated in the 2012-15 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Province and the universities, every international student will contribute additional resources to their institutions. This is primarily because institutions will be replacing domestic students with international students who pay much higher tuition, without provincial funding being removed from the total envelope. Secondly and similarly, for every domestic student replaced by an international student, the per-domestic student funding increases and this forms the basis for determining international students' tuition. Finally, institutions have economies of scale because costs do not increase at an equal increment for every additional student.

Considering these financial benefits for institutions and the non-financial importance of international students for the universities, domestic students and the Province, it is not unreasonable to expect that universities will invest some of their own funds in these students. We would support such an investment to ensure Nova Scotia attracts the best international students while limiting the extent to which elevated fees bar the way for lower income international students to come to our universities and province.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should work with universities to introduce a combined need/merit-based Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship, thereby cancelling the international differential fee for ten per cent of international students.*

During our research, we heard multiple stories about students facing significant financial hardship, not only from students, but from university administrators. Little wonder, therefore, international students consistently prioritized expanding access to scholarships.

Again, some families pool a large share of their available financial resources to send a young person to study in Nova Scotia, often to get a foot in the door for

immigration. Approximately 8% of respondents in the CBIE's 2009 international student survey reported coming from families that were "considerably less wealthy" than others in their home country. This number may be higher in Nova Scotia because our international fees are lower than the national average, but there is only limited evidence to judge this at present. Our proposal would decrease tuition for 10% of international students based on financial need and merit would aim to support these "less wealthy" students so they can access post-secondary education, and possibly immigration, in Nova Scotia. Without the new Nova Scotia International Student Scholarships (NSISS), Nova Scotia may miss out on ambitious, innovative future leaders who would contribute immensely to our social, economic and/or cultural future.

The Province and institutions could introduce the NSISS gradually to limit the impact of this change in their cost structures. For example, implementing scholarship eligibility in 2% increments over five years would allow projected international student population growth to offset most of the expected loss in revenue from implementing the NSISS, most notably if the Province chose to mandate that institutions not collect differential fees from qualifying students rather than directly financing the NSISS' full cost.

In 2012-13, the university revenues affected by a 10% Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship would amount to roughly \$5 million, returning benefits of between roughly \$7,200 and \$9,200 for 661 international students (MPHEC, 2012c).<sup>49</sup> To the extent that the scholarship's value could be cut from university differential tuition revenues, the Province could enforce the NSISS by removing amounts from the annual provincial operating grant equal to any revenue collected from international students in violation of the NSISS policy. Universities should also not be permitted to divert funding from present scholarships and bursaries to cover the cost of the NSISS.

The scholarships would be distributed among institutions based on their international

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49 The value per Dalhousie Arts undergraduate student would be \$7,679; SMU Arts undergraduate student: \$7,203. We roughly split the difference in our cost estimate as these are the two schools with the most international students. Since our estimates are based on differential fees for undergraduate arts students, they likely understate the actual cost of the proposed NSISS, but StudentsNS is ill positioned to develop a more precise cost estimate at this time. The cost of the scholarship for graduate science students at Dalhousie in 2012-2013 would be \$9,245 and there is a particular concentration of international students in these programs.

enrolment, such that the institutions with the most students would be responsible for providing the most scholarships. Further work would need to determine appropriate allocations by program. Determining financial need of international students will remain a significant challenge due to different tax regimes internationally and language barriers. On-going work must be done to see how these barriers may be overcome in an administratively efficient fashion.

### 4.3. Sharing responsibility for language acquisition

We found that language acquisition was the most important challenge that international students face in Nova Scotia. The current situation is unacceptable. A critical part of the problem is clearly that institutions do not view the language proficiency of their students as their responsibility, but exclusively the students' responsibility.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia and our post-secondary institutions should guarantee that all international graduates of Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions have sufficient language fluency to succeed in Canada's labour market.*

The Language Fluency Guarantee (LFG) is inspired by the University of Regina's employment guarantee and would have various components.<sup>50</sup> International students whose first language is not their language of instruction would be required to complete a language exam, free of charge, at the end of their studies in order to receive their degree. The passing score would be the required score to be eligible for permanent residency under their NOC, while students who pass their exam could also receive a language fluency certificate from their institutions. Students who do not pass their exams would receive language training at a designated institution for up to six months, with tuition covered by their university. The student would be required to cover their living costs during this period, in recognition that they share responsibility for their language skills acquisition. At the end of this period, these students would be permitted to retake the language exam for free and receive the

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<sup>50</sup> The University of Regina guarantees that all students who complete the requirements of its Cooperative Education Program will secure meaningful employment within six months of graduation. If students cannot meet the commitment, the university will provide free tuition for an additional year of education (University of Regina, 2009).

language fluency certificate if they obtain a passing mark.

The guarantee would give institutions a share of the responsibility for their students' language proficiency. However, the Province also needs to ensure adequate resources are available and to support language learning.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should create a Language Education Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that is allocated among universities based on international student enrolment.*

The Language Education Grant (LEG) should ensure the financial burden of the LFG does not fall squarely on international students, since it is a commitment by the Province and the institutions and therefore their responsibility. It would support language programming during international students' studies and also cover the costs of LFG proficiency exams at the end of a student's studies.

In general, each institution would be granted the flexibility to determine how best to meet their guarantee commitment, recognizing institutional autonomy and academic freedom, but also the need for services to be cost effective. One idea would be to offer academic language courses (like ESL) without differential fees and allow these to count as optional credits towards the completion of students' programs. Institutions that already operate language schools would have an advantage in expanding programming. Universities should be required to report on how the LEG funding is being spent to support language learning among international students. They should also be accountable for the quality of their language education programming.

*Recommendation: The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should work with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating language programs for international students.*

The MPHEC review of language programs would help to ensure these are not piecemeal efforts, but well designed and effective. Reviews also present an opportunity for institutions to co-learn and identify best practices.

Our commitment to language education would help distinguish Nova Scotia as a study destination (Akbari, 2012). As already noted, the desire to learn English is an important motivation for Nova Scotia international students and the relatively small size of our diaspora communities enhances English-language learning in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia can stand out as the place to both obtain a high quality post-secondary degree and master English.<sup>51</sup>

One concern, however, is that institutions might raise their entrance language proficiency cut-offs in an effort to meet the LFG. This would be highly detrimental. As discussed earlier in this paper, the usefulness of exam scores in determining the functional language capacity of international students has been shown to be limited. Focusing on exam scores as a cut-off for admission may actually bar highly qualified students from our institutions.

*Recommendation: Nova Scotia universities should not require minimum scores in language exams at admissions and instead consider language exam scores as just one component of students' full applications.*

Fundamentally, Nova Scotia institutions should base their admissions criteria on evidence. The predictive validity of exams like the IELTS or TOEFL has not been established. We therefore recommend that institutions continue to consider students' language scores, but as only one component of international students' complete admissions applications. Doing this, and subsequently providing greater language support during students' studies, presents a more proactive strategy for ensuring students and graduates have sufficient fluency.

The University of Western Ontario, as discussed earlier, was highly successful in accepting international students' English language scores as just one part in their full application (Simner & Mitchell, 2007). Unfortunately, the institution ended this practice largely due to fear of damaging its reputation by appearing to have lower entrance standards (Personal correspondence, Feb. 13 2013). While this kind of thinking should be anathema to an evidence-based approach, such concerns inevitably surface and could be successfully challenged by referring to the presence of Nova Scotia's ambitious commitment to international students' language

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<sup>51</sup> This might also help make Nova Scotia more successful in attracting students from Quebec.

proficiency through the LFG.

#### 4.4. International centres and academic support

Of course, international students' challenges in adapting to Canada extend beyond language proficiency. Again, the Province should provide funding for appropriate university-based services to optimize international students' chances for success.

*Recommendation: The Province of Nova Scotia should create an International Student Services Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that would be allocated to universities on a per-international-student basis and would ensure institutions have at least one full-time international student advisor for every three hundred international students.*

It is difficult to suggest an appropriate value for the total International Student Services Grant (ISSG) in advance of our recommended review of university costs. However, considering the evidence that international student centres are currently significantly under-funded, it is implicit that the ISSG would reflect an expansion of funding for these services. Furthermore, it should commit institutions to providing at least one international student advisor for every 300 international students, which is at least comparable to TRU's level of service (one advisor/209 students). Another condition for receiving funding should be that standard international student services, such as orientation, be available free of charge. Peer-mentoring programs are another very important service offered by international centres. Considering the significance of relationships with domestic colleagues in supporting successful integration, these programs must include domestic peers.

*Recommendation: Institutions and student unions should investigate strategies to connect all international students entering studies at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions with domestic student peers by 2015-16.*

With greater resources, international centres could be much more effective in all areas of services, including the recruitment of domestic peers for mentoring. Institutions could also develop programs in partnership with student unions to address the gap in mentorship participation. One strategy could be to make participation in the peer-program mandatory within academic programs, thereby supporting a larger project of curriculum internationalization.

One last international student concern that universities can and should do more to mitigate is the challenge of securing temporary accommodations when students first arrive and are searching for their long-term housing.

*Recommendation: International centres should work with their university residences so that international students who do not want to live in residence may be accommodated at a reasonable rate while seeking housing.*

In the summer before the fall semester begins, residences are generally less occupied. While we recognize there may not always be spaces available, international centres and residences should seek to mediate prospective students' access to temporary spaces. Students should receive early notice of this possibility.

The Province should require that institutions report on how they are spending the ISSG funds in delivering targeted services to international students. Quality assurance measures should be put in place.

*Recommendation: The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should partner with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating international student services.*

The development of this framework would allow all interested parties to work together to establish standards that reflect the objectives and priorities identified in NSIES. The most important international student services include orientation, advising on immigration regulations, advising on employment, helping students build social networks, helping students find housing, helping students adapt to Canadian academic norms, helping faculty with professional development, providing training to all staff in cross-cultural communication and connecting students with other campus services. The MPHEC can play a similar role with respect to curriculum internationalization.

*Recommendation: The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should include curriculum internationalization as a variable for measuring program quality at Maritimes universities.*

As with language acquisition, faculty must take the lead in integrating international students effectively into the classroom (Gates-Gasse, 2012). Curriculum internationalization is relevant to all students in all contemporary university programs. Today's students need to build their intercultural communication skills and global understanding and international students should be viewed as invaluable to this effort. Curriculum internationalization would also contribute to making Nova Scotia more accepting and supportive of cultural diversity (Laesk, 2005).

## 4.5. Supporting international student wellness

Although the services discussed above can make a substantial difference for student wellness, the Province and institutions should pursue further wellness-specific policies. The cost and complexity of current private health insurance is a very important factor in international students' health and the affordability of a Nova Scotia education. This issue could be fairly easily addressed.

*Recommendation: The Province should provide international students at public post-secondary institutions with MSI coverage as soon as they begin their studies in Nova Scotia.*

During our conversations with international students across the province, we were consistently told that obtaining immediate MSI coverage was a top priority. Immediate MSI coverage would currently benefit approximately 4300 international students at public institutions and 430 of their dependents.<sup>52</sup>

This reform would support the province's higher education and immigration objectives for the relatively small annual cost to government of \$460,000. At \$97.40 per person, it is more than six times less expensive to insure international students and their dependents through MSI than through their current private providers. The Province would be delivering an efficient service that substantially expands the affordability and attractiveness of a Nova Scotia post-secondary education, keeping up with competitors that have already taken this step. Students with families would benefit the most and obviously have a greater immigration impact if they stay.

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<sup>52</sup> The Province would have to decide whether to provide MSI coverage to students at private institutions and in the P-12 system.

The elimination of bureaucratic red tape by providing immediate MSI coverage could encourage international students to access the health services that are available to them. Furthermore, facilitating access to our world-class public healthcare system enhances Nova Scotia's attractiveness for possible settlement.

In terms of improving services at the institution-level, internationalization efforts must also target professionals working in wellness services, with respect to both hiring and on the job training.

*Recommendation: When hiring counsellors at university health facilities, experience working in multicultural environments and serving ethnically diverse clients should be considered so that at least one in three counsellors is prepared to serve an international clientele.*

Cross-cultural communications skills are essential for providing good quality health services to international students, especially mental health services. We cannot expect staff to have experience with the broad range of cultural backgrounds international students bring to Nova Scotia campuses. However, staff must display sensitivity to these backgrounds and interest in learning more about and from them, including respecting diverse traditional health remedies. These skills and this commitment can help ensure students feel comfortable accessing health services and that these services are of the highest quality.

Outreach efforts to ensure international students are aware of available services are also important. The international centres, again, have a key role to play in this area. International centres may explore connecting students with peers who have accessed counselling services before, considering evidence that those whose friends have used counselling services are more likely to do so themselves (Russell et al., 2008). These efforts can ensure health services on campuses, including counselling, are perceptively accessible.

## **4.6. Supporting international student employment**

International students' immigration potential is one of the key reasons why their recruitment and success is so important for Nova Scotia. International students and graduates must successfully obtain employment in order to immigrate. As discussed earlier, many international students prioritized this issue, both in the hope of

immigrating and of earning money to help finance their studies.

*Recommendation: The Province and institutions should work together to ensure all international students are able to access immigration and employment counselling from the start of their studies.*

As Gates-Gasse argues (2012), employment and immigration services are “essential to all international students regardless of whether or not they choose to immigrate” and there should be immigration services for international students as a distinct group, as with refugees and women (p. 285). These services ought to be provided from the very beginning of students’ studies.

Across Canada and around the world, institutions and governments are developing services to help international students and graduates find work and immigrate. Regardless of whether the Province or institutions take the lead in delivering immigration and employment support services to international students, it must be recognized that *these services are essential* and must be delivered well.

The Université de Moncton’s *Destination Emploi* program provides a very useful model. In this case, the university resisted promoting immigration, but allowed the province to run the program with a location on campus. The Province is able to insist that institutions deliver immigration services, using ISSG funding, but it is worth investigating if other government agencies or partners would be better fits for providing this support. One such partner would be ISIS, which has specialized knowledge and expertise.

*Recommendation: The Province should provide permanent funding to the Immigration Settlement and Integration Services International Graduates Pilot Project.*

The ISIS pilot project is having a significant impact on graduate employment outcomes, which more than justifies its continuation. However, we would like to see the project fit within the larger commitment above and expanded to meet the imperative for employment and immigration counseling from the start of students’ studies.

Employment counseling programs should be coordinated with Cooperative

education training. In and of themselves cooperative education programs are also an important tool for supporting international student and graduate employment and immigration.

*Recommendation: International and domestic students should continue being equally eligible and paying equal fees to participate in cooperative education programs.*

It is to universities' credit that their cooperative education programs do not charge differential fees to international students. The more international students participate in these programs, the more likely they will become integrated into the local labour market.

Our proposed LFG and ISSG would help address the language and cultural understanding issues that hold back international students from succeeding in the labour market. However, more work needs to be done to address employers' reluctance to hire international graduates.

*Recommendation: The Province, in partnership with business associations and post-secondary institutions, should run an active campaign to spread awareness among Nova Scotia employers about the importance and ease of hiring international students and graduates and immigrants.*

This recommendation would fit readily within the Province's *JobsHere* Workforce Strategy (NSGOV, 2010). Domestic and international students, the Province, institutional administrators, faculty and other staff, as well as potential employers and other community organizations, must work together to spread acceptance and fight intolerance. Additionally, universities, the Province and other levels of government could demonstrate a commitment to international students by prioritizing their hiring (Gates-Gasse 2012).

The Province must ensure employers understand the programs and regulations concerning international students and graduates. Awareness and communication of existing policies continue to be problematic.

*Recommendation: The Province should provide accurate information on*

*its websites regarding all programs supporting international students and graduates and prospective employers.*

Our interviewees reported that the Nova Scotia START program is open to international graduates, though the website indicates otherwise.<sup>53</sup> Such confusion undermines the Province's efforts to increase immigration and immigrant retention and should be relatively simple to resolve. It is also essential, of course, that graduates and students can use programs in the first place.<sup>54</sup>

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53 <http://novascotia.ca/employmentnovascotia/programs/start.asp>

54 employment programs for students and recent graduates.

*Recommendation: The Province should continue to allow international students and graduates to be eligible for student and graduate employment programs such as the START program, the Connector Program, and the Student Employment Program.*

These programs help create opportunities for those looking for work in Nova Scotia as a step along the path towards immigration. Notably, the START program helps students for the exact length of time (one year) needed to become eligible for the CEC and it creates very effective conditions for permanent employment after the contract is completed.

## 5. Conclusion

The internationalization of the student body may be the single most dramatic trend in Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system. How we manage this trend will have major implications for students, our institutions, and the province as a whole. From our analysis, our province faces a choice between two competing views.

The first view holds that the education of international students should be seen primarily as an export industry. Proponents believe institutions should charge international students as much as possible in differential fees and invest in targeted services for these students *only to the extent* that these services are required to ensure more students will come. Basically, our institutions should prioritize profits in international student education first.

*StudentsNS* takes a very different view. This association believes that Nova Scotia's culture of fairness demands we treat international students not only as financial resources in "global markets, but as unique individuals who enhance the social and cultural richness of our campuses and communities. Investing in international students is the best way to support their academic, social and economic success, as well as our own as we optimize these students' contributions to Nova Scotia's social, cultural and economic development.

In reviewing current international student policies, it is clear that the Province and institutions recognize these students' importance. However, too many policies are arbitrary and uninformed, and there is an urgent need for an overall strategy that can guide the efforts and policies of all parties. We have outlined many aspects of a more effective and comprehensive strategy, including:

- Collaborating in broad partnerships to make a plan
- Protecting post-secondary affordability
- Ensuring students attain language fluency
- Supporting student adaptation and success
- Promoting international student wellness

- Providing students with employment and immigration support.

It should go without saying that international students deserve the same levels of respect and security that Canadian students can count on from our governments and post-secondary education institutions. Additionally, international students represent an opportunity that Nova Scotia cannot afford to squander. The changing face of Nova Scotia's university student population brings with it significant cultural, social and economic potential, as well as potentially far-reaching challenges that must be met head on. How international students help us succeed and grow as a province will depend on how we invest in their growth and success.

## 6. Policy Resolution

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**Whereas *StudentsNS* holds the following *Principles*:**

Considering domestic demographic trends, international enrolment is important to the viability of Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system.

International students augment cultural diversity at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions, helping to build stronger learning communities.

International students contribute significant cultural wealth to Nova Scotia communities.

International student recruitment can contribute significantly to Nova Scotia's immigration objectives.

International students contribute significantly to the Nova Scotia economy.

All residents of Nova Scotia should be treated fairly, irrespective of their origin, income, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, or other identifying characteristics.

All students should be of approximately equal value to their institution with respect to the ratio between costs to educate and revenues contributed.

The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student or make them financially unable to live in Nova Scotia.

International students may be reasonably expected to finance a higher proportion of their education costs because they are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

If the Province wishes for post-secondary institutions to recruit international students, it should help to fund these students' education.

Institutions should be accountable for the funding they receive to operate.

Nova Scotia should seek to attract the best-qualified students possible to attend our post-secondary institutions and possibly immigrate.

Institutions must ensure their graduates have attained fluency in the language of instruction upon graduation.

Admissions decisions respecting international students should be evidence-based.

The Nova Scotia post-secondary system should strive at all times to provide the highest possible quality of education to its students, fostering student success.

Students require preparation in cross-cultural communications and international challenges to succeed in today's globalized world.

The support of local peers is crucially important for international students' adaptation.

International students are active agents in acculturation and adaptation to Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia must make its best efforts to support international students' personal wellbeing while studying.

Employment and immigration counselling are a basic necessity for international students, irrespective of whether they wish to immigrate to Nova Scotia.

International students should be empowered to work during their studies, to help finance their education, gain relevant work experience and participate more fully in Nova Scotian society.

For most international students and graduates, successful entry into the labour market is a prerequisite for immigration.

**Whereas *StudentsNS* has identified the following *Concerns*:**

International student enrolment is more volatile, relative to domestic enrolment, making total financial reliance on their tuition risky for institutions.

Deregulated international student tuition leaves international students hostage to their institutions, because they must pay whatever institutions charge while studying or else abandon the large investment they have already made in their education.

Large annual variations in deregulated international student tuition makes students unable to plan for the cost of their degree.

Institutions are not accountable for ensuring the funding they receive to support international students is actually spent on services for those students.

International students contribute more to their institutions in funding and tuition than their domestic counterparts.

International students from lower-income backgrounds are underrepresented at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions.

Too many international students are pursuing and completing degrees without attaining fluency in the language of instruction.

There are very limited programs to support international students' language acquisition at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions.

There are little or no mechanisms to evaluate the quality of programming supporting international students' language acquisition.

International student centres are understaffed and under-resourced.

Nova Scotia institutions lack adequate, public mechanisms for measuring the effectiveness of their international student services.

Peer mentoring programs for international students commonly lack domestic student

participants.

International students must currently purchase expensive private health insurance in their first year.

The complexities of private health coverage may affect international students' access to health services.

International partnerships and overseas campuses may imply risks with respect to admissions standards, education quality and financial mismanagement.

There is very little programming to educate international students about immigration and employment early in their studies.

Many international students do not understand the Nova Scotia labour market sufficiently to plan their educational and career pathways.

There continues to be discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in Nova Scotia, which is intrinsically reprehensible and also undercuts our ability to attract and retain immigrants.

**Be It Resolved That *StudentsNS* makes the following *Recommendations*:**

The Province of Nova Scotia, in partnership with international and domestic students, educational institutions, community groups and the private sector, should develop an International Education Strategy to establish coordinated initiatives and clear objectives for internationalizing education in Nova Scotia.

The Province of Nova Scotia should cap international student tuition at the sum of Canadian students' pre-bursary tuition plus the per-student university operating grant.

The Province of Nova Scotia should regulate tuition changes for international students so they can clearly understand the cost of their education when they enrol.

Nova Scotia Universities should undergo third-party reviews of spending on the education of international students to identify the appropriate caps on international student tuition and any additional costs compared with a domestic student.

The Province of Nova Scotia should remove international students from the Weighted Enrolment Grant component of the University Funding Distribution Formula in cases where their programs charge international differential fees.

The Province should provide financial and other resources to support international student recruitment pursuant to the International Education Strategy.

The Province of Nova Scotia should work with universities to introduce a combined need/merit-based Nova Scotia International Student Scholarship, thereby cancelling the international differential fee for ten per cent of international students.

The Province of Nova Scotia and our post-secondary institutions should guarantee that all international graduates of Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions have sufficient language fluency to succeed in Canada's labour market.

The Province of Nova Scotia should create a Language Education Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that is allocated among universities based on international student enrolment.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should work with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating language programs for international students.

Nova Scotia universities should consider language exam scores as just one component of students' full admissions applications and not rely solely on minimum scores to determine admissibility.

The Province of Nova Scotia should create an International Student Services Grant within the University Funding Distribution Formula that would be allocated to universities on a per-international-student basis and would ensure institutions have at least one full-time international student advisor for every three hundred

international students.

Institutions and student unions should investigate strategies to connect all international students entering studies at Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions with domestic student peers by 2015-16.

International centres should work with their university residences so that international students who do not want to live in residence may be accommodated at a reasonable rate while seeking housing.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should partner with institutions, students and the Province to develop a quality framework for evaluating international student services.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission should include curriculum internationalization as a variable for measuring program quality at Maritimes universities.

The Province should provide international students at public post-secondary institutions with MSI coverage as soon as they begin their studies in Nova Scotia.

When hiring counsellors at university health facilities, experience working in multicultural environments and serving ethnically diverse clients should be considered so that at least one in three counsellors is prepared to serve an international clientele.

The Province and institutions should work together to ensure all international students are able to access immigration and employment counselling from the start of their studies.

The Province should provide permanent funding to the Immigration Settlement and Integration Services International Graduates Pilot Project.

International and domestic students should continue being equally eligible and paying equal fees to participate in cooperative education programs.

The Province, in partnership with business associations and post-secondary institutions, should run an active campaign to spread awareness among Nova Scotia employers and the general population about the importance of immigration for our Province.

The Province should provide accurate information on its websites regarding all programs supporting international students and graduates and prospective employers.

The Province should continue to allow international students and graduates to be eligible for student and graduate employment programs such as the START program, the Connector Program, and the Student Employment Program.

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