

SPEAKING NOTES

**Future of Skilled Labour Force in Canada
Attracting and Retaining International Students**

**Atlantic Research Group
Saint Mary's University: Scotiabank Theatre
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Atlantic Canada's Advantages in Attraction and Retention of International Students

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Check against delivery.

Background

Between 2013-14 and 2022-23 (the past ten-years), enrolment of international students has increased by nearly 87%!

- **From 11,690 – to – 21,800 students**

- **+160 countries represented on our campuses**
- **Among the Maritime universities, China has remained the top country of origin over the past ten years**

- **Most of the gain in recent years is rapid growth of students from India (290 in 2010-2011 – to – 3,755 in 2020-21)**
- **Over the past ten-years, for Memorial University in NL, Bangladesh has supplanted China as the top source country**

- **In this same period, recruitment of international students has become a high priority for virtually all universities**

- **Significant expansion of on-campus student services; including building out pathways to employers, settlement groups & communities for those who want to stay, live and work here**

- **Aggressive growth targets are being set: in many cases 25% - to – 30% of total enrolment**

- **CBU anomaly: 70% / 70 countries / \$200M economic impact**

- **For those with historically low #'s – less than 5% - international student recruitment has taken on a much greater importance**

- **Driven by desire to internationalize the campus: academically, socially and culturally**

- **Growth opportunity in an environment of declining domestic enrolments and stagnant growth in provincial government operating grants**

Factors that make Atlantic Canada an Education Destination

- **High quality universities; differentiated opportunities** beyond the traditional arts & science, computer science, business, engineering offerings (eg. Francophone, art & design, agriculture, theology, Indigenous, public relations & tourism, healthcare management, entrepreneurship, post baccalaureate business programs)
- **Unique graduate programs:** oceans sciences, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship to name just a few
- **Safe, secure, welcoming campuses:** both urban and rural settings and smaller class sizes
- **Competitive undergraduate tuition:** among lowest in the country (1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th lowest)
- **Lower than average cost of living** than many other study abroad destinations
- **Provincial health coverage:** competitive with ROC
- **12-month waiting period for MSI in NS, NL & NB; only three-month wait in PEI**

Other Important Regional Assets

According to Narrative Research's Atlantic Quarterly (Summer 2021):

- ***'Atlantic Canadians place an increasing level of importance on immigration to their province's economy'***
 - ✓ **83% believe immigration is critically important or important but not critical**
 - ✓ **Younger residents (18-34 years), PSE graduates, with \$50K+ incomes, more likely think immigration is important**
 - ✓ **PEI residents are less likely to think that immigration is important to their province**
- **In short, over the past decade, Atlantic Canadian attitudes about immigration have shifted significantly in a positive way**
- **Making the region a more welcoming place for international students who are interested in becoming permanent residents**

➤ **Minister Sean Fraser**

- ✓ **MP from Central Nova and Minister of IRCC**
- ✓ **Significant federal asset for our region**
- ✓ **Knows the PSE sector and understands the importance of international students to the sustainability of our universities, regional economy and population strategy**

Immigration Programs Unique to our Region

Close to 70% of international students would like to stay in Atlantic Canada post graduation!

Atlantic Immigration Program

- **Helps connect international student grads to employers**
- **Pathway to temporary work permit and permanent resident status**

Study & Stay

- **Developed by EduNova**
- **Invites international students who aspire to stay in NS to apply in their final year of study**
- **10-month program that provides career development opportunities and build community connections**
- **Has expanded across the region (e.g. Study & Succeed in NB)**

Barriers to Attraction & Retention

- **Three critical issues confronting successful international student applicants and negatively affecting the reputation of our universities and region:**

1. **Inordinate delays in visa processing**

- Has been brought to the attention of the Minister and IRCC senior officials
 - ✓ AAU has created an information form that will help IRCC anticipate visa applicant volumes by country and visa processing office for the three intake periods (January, May and September)

2. **Dual Intent**

- Concerns have been raised about students who express interest that could be perceived as a 'dual intent'. For example, students enrolling in the Study & Stay program are at risk of having their study permit application denied
 - ✓ AAU has brought this issue to the attention of the Minister and Deputy Minister as it is at cross-purposes with regional population growth strategies and provincial programs designed to attract and retain international students

3. **Visa Disapproval Rates**

- A FOIPOP request has revealed that international students visa application to our universities have a significantly higher disapproval rate compared to a sample number of universities across the country
 - ✓ The AAU has requested IRCC conduct an official review into this matter as it is negatively affecting students, the reputation of universities and region, and university revenues

4. **Connectivity to the Labour Market**

- Expansion of co-op and experiential learning opportunities
- Improved access to community networking (e.g. alumni) and employers

5. **Affordable and Accessible Housing**

- Critical issue for all students but particularly for international students who lack the community and social connections of domestic students
- Lack of understanding of tenant rights and leasing obligations

6. Accessible Healthcare

- **A critical issue for the general population but particularly international students, particularly first-year students who cannot access provincial healthcare coverage for the first 12 months of their studies**
- ***Note that, not all int'l students are aware of the processes required to access provincial healthcare coverage after the 12-month waiting period or that pre-existing conditions are not covered***

In summary:

- **Attraction of international students is a growing priority**
- **We have a lot to offer as an 'education destination': cost competitive, quality, differentiation, safe, secure & welcoming**
- **Retention is vital to the success of regional population growth**
- **Federal and provincial program pathways to citizenship**
- **Working in close partnership with IRCC to address current barriers**
- **Accessible, affordable student housing**
- **Access to healthcare coverage and services**