

MANAGING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY THROUGH PATHWAYS TO CITIZENSHIP: EARLY REPORTING AND DISCUSSION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S CRISIS STRATEGY ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY DURING COVID-19

Wided Dafri, Al Falah University Dubai
Sandra Braun, Mount Royal University

ABSTRACT

Since the onset of COVID-19, international student mobility has been interrupted. Instead of engaging in foreign travel, students have been opting to study closer to their home. This sudden change in the market poses economic threats. A combination of national policies and regulations, along with proper support packages and job opportunities are necessary to attract post-secondary international students back on campuses and to compete for this shrinking market. This is a discussion of the Government of Canada that has experimented with varying policies and packages, in a bid to regain its position among the top five destinations by international students. It examines early reporting data of student enrolment from 34 of its 96 universities and compares to enrolments in other countries, comparing and contrasting policies and approaches. The study asks: How is the Government of Canada's immigration reforms, and other measures, impacting international student enrolment? This analysis suggests that international student enrolments in post-secondary education in Canada may have not suffered as much as had been anticipated. Final data may likely, in fact, show enrolments to have been somewhat on par and within about 1% change. Relevant reforms, which included immigration considerations such as pathways to citizenship, based on available data and this analysis, have likely positively impacted international student enrolment in Canada, even in the face of extreme challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and have helped Canada re-gain its position as a top destination for study abroad.

Keywords: Crisis Strategy, Canada, International Student Mobility, Pandemic, University, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted almost every market sector, including higher education, with major disruptions in international student mobility. The study of student migration through the pandemic has opened a new stream of research as students re-evaluate when and where to take post-secondary studies. Universities will be closely following trends, reaching out to international students, and putting together plans to manage the crisis in an attempt to win students back. The literature on international student mobility and the crisis management efforts by universities is developing, with attention to Australia (Oanh & Varsha, 2020), Italy (Agasisti & Soncin, 2021), China and Hong Kong (Mok, Xiong, Ke & Cheung, 2021) and the Netherlands (de Boer, 2021). This is a discussion and analysis of the country of the country of Canada, based on available information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because of the increasing cross-border relations by universities, studies of International Student Mobility (ISM) have developed rapidly, particularly in the past 30 years (Altbach & Knight, 2007). ISM is an umbrella term used to describe the mobility of “students who have crossed borders expressly with the intention to study” (OECD, 2009). The ISM research has followed three main clusters of research activity: a) “socio-cultural, academic and emotional adjustments” involving long-term international students; b) “language, learning and intercultural competence” involving short-term study abroad experiences,” and c) the overall internationalization of higher education as a concept (involving both long and short-term groups and all types of cross-border education) (Gümüş, Gök & Esen, 2019).

Universities have also been studied within the context of neo-liberal market capitalism, with scholars noting they are subject to market economies in terms of funding (governments, tuition, private sector, corporate sector), competition in the marketplace, and sometimes needing state intervention, creating “distinctive marketization trajectories” (Jayasuriya, 2021). Market forces set the stage for the need for crisis management with decreasing enrolments because of COVID-19. The slowed, and even halted, flow of international students to many of the world’s colleges and universities, particularly in highly sought-after Western and European markets, has posed economic threats. Barriers to ISM during COVID-19 have included such things as travel bans, visa restrictions, lockdowns, health and safety concerns, and delays in testing and processing of paperwork (Mok, et al., 2021).

One of the countries with the largest source of international students is China. Mok, et al., (2021) examined how students in Mainland China and Hong Kong were feeling about study abroad, with a vast majority (84%) expressing little to no interest. The researchers noted an absence of interest by study participants to go to Western destinations such as Canada, Australia, France and New Zealand; whereas, these countries had traditionally been among top choices by Chinese students. Mok, et al., (2021) argue that “with international students becoming scarce resources, the competition for recruiting them will increase in international higher education. Moreover, the rate of recovery from the pandemic and post-pandemic governance will become a significant factor for destination countries to attract international students”. Oanh & Varsha (2020) argue that international students, in determining next steps and choices of universities post-pandemic, will go where the best conditions are available, including supports and job prospects.

This study aims to discuss the case of Canada, with its evolving policies surrounding attracting and retaining international students since the inception of the pandemic. The case of Canada is a case of flexibility and targeted efforts that include immigration services and pathways to residency and citizenship. Canada has been very conscious of its dependence on international students to shore up the sector and has been flexible and responsive in its policies.

BACKGROUND

Canada and its Post-Secondary Education Sector

Canada is comprised of 10 provinces and three territories, with a population of 38 million and covering a land mass of 9.1 million square kilometers (EduCanada, 2021). It is the second largest country in the world in terms of geographical land mass next to Russia. In Canada’s post-secondary sector, there are about 96 universities and 146 colleges. Universities are educational institutions that provide baccalaureate degrees (bachelor’s, master’s, and/or doctorates) and colleges are focused on providing certificates and diplomas. All are open to receive international students; however, universities tend to be larger than colleges, are more well-known globally, and tend to attract greater shares of international students. This study focuses on the university system.

The total post-secondary sector contributes about \$38 billion toward the Canadian economy, providing about 310,000 jobs (Universities Canada, 2018). It is important that this sector remain stable at the very least, and grow, at best. Canada's growth as a nation is primarily fuelled by immigration; international migration has accounted for more than three-quarters of the total population growth since 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Therefore, many of Canada's national, immigration and economic policies offer generous immigration and internationalization policies, including its post-secondary sector. It attracts students from some 225 countries, with over half from India and China (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Canada has traditionally held a coveted position on the world market in terms of attracting foreign students. It attracts students from some 225 countries, with over half from India and China (Statistics Canada, 2020). As of 2020, Canada had 624,000 international students at all levels of study (from primary to higher education; post-secondary can account for anywhere from 30 – 50% of that), ranking third in the world in attracting foreign students, behind only to the United States and Australia, and growing 13% over the previous year (El-Assal, 2020). Growth in the post-secondary sector of the education market, specifically, traditionally increases 10% year over year, but since 2000, it has increased dramatically “from just fewer than 40,000 in the late 1990s to over 340,000 in 2018-2019” being particularly “rapid from 2009 onwards” (University Affairs, 2021; Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2020). International students account for about 15 – 16% of all university and college enrolments. Growth in international student enrolment has largely been due to the availability of high-quality Post-Secondary Education (PSE) institutions in Canada, a diverse cultural environment (Canada has some 250 ethnicities, with 22%, or seven million, of its population being born in other countries), political stability and relative safety, an overall weak Canadian dollar, a generally welcoming environment, and very open and accessible immigration policies (Kumar, 2019; EduCanada, 2021).

International students have become critical to the viability of Canada's post-secondary sector. While many post-secondary institutions in Canada receive some measure of government-funding to operate, public funds do not cover all the necessary expenditures and the sector is unable to keep pace with spending. Increasingly, institutions have had to rely upon other sources of revenue such as increased tuition, community education programs, ancillary services, and alumni fund development. In Canada, international student enrolment now financially shores up its post-secondary system as these students can pay four to six times higher tuition rates than domestic students (Brown, 2020; Friesen, 2020). International post-secondary students infuse some \$6 billion into the Canadian economy annually in tuition alone (Schrum, 2020) and the entire international student presence, which includes kindergarten through post-secondary, adds about \$22 billion to the economy (Pie News, 2020). Therefore, international student enrolment is a key, and critical, component to the success of the educational, and particularly post-secondary, sector in Canada. These ideas form the basis of the Government of Canada's recent five-year international education policy, which calls for an investment of \$147.9 million from 2019-2024, followed by \$8 million annually in on-going funding (Government of Canada, 2019). Canada's commitment to nurturing the international student presence as part of its greater policy of relaxed immigration, form the basis of the country's strategic plan for growth in the coming decades. However, the worldwide spread of COVID-19 has massively impacted national economies and sectors and, for the first time in some 30 years, the total number of international students at all levels of study (primary school to higher education) in Canada declined by about 17% (from 639,000 in 2019 to 531,000 in 2020) (University Affairs, 2021). Data specific to the post-secondary sector is still coming in; however, of Canada's 96 universities, 51 have already reported declines in 2020 international student enrolments (University Affairs, 2021).

The results of declining enrolments like this, if not corrected, ultimately means less support for post-secondary, fewer program offerings, and gaps in the work force (University Affairs, 2021). Realizing the importance of international students to the economy, Canada began to respond to the potential crisis as early as April 2020, near the beginning of the pandemic, instituting a series of immigration reforms designed to retain and attract international students in

the face of COVID-19. This study discusses the effectiveness of those actions and reforms to date, largely through analysis of existing secondary enrolment data made publicly available on websites or through email contact with random large universities and policy think tanks (as data is still emerging). This is a preliminary analysis and discussion based on available data, which will not be finalized by Statistics Canada for at least another 18 months (Alex Usher, personal communication, August 3, 2021).

A Key Attraction – Canada’s Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP)

One key attraction designed by the Government of Canada to attract international students, historically, has been the country’s Post-Graduation Work Program (PGWP) administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It is highly coveted as it allows students to remain in the country and work for up to three years (or typically, for the same duration as your studies) after graduating from eligible institutions in Canada. There are a host of requirements, but chiefly, it requires that studying must be done physically in the country, is the primary activity during the student’s stay in Canada, that students are enrolled full-time and have completed at least eight months of study and that all documents are present within the application; these, plus other, strict eligibility criteria applied. The PGWP is highly desired by international students because, in addition to allowing for work opportunity, it also serves as a pathway to residency; that is, after working under the permit for a period of at least a year, international graduates may be eligible to apply for permanent residency (Study International Staff, 2021).

In the academic year, 2019-2020, Canada was experiencing its usual healthy international student enrolments. Then, SARS COV-2 began to circulate globally. Suddenly, new international student permits dropped in March 2020 (Schrum, 2020). By late spring 2020, Canada’s international student recruitment and market advantage was declared at risk (Schrum, 2020). Travel restrictions, visa processing delays, and legislation/regulation that limited the ability for international students to study online, posed serious threats to retaining and attracting international students.

As the summer progressed, 10% of Canadian-based students surveyed said they were no longer planning to enrol in a Canadian institution in Fall 2020, while 13% said they were undecided; 37% cited concerns around the coronavirus as one of the main reasons (Academica Group, 2020). Officials began pointing to a very uncertain fall term in 2020; there was also suggestion that the Government of Canada may need to provide emergency funding to the sector to get through the potential crisis (Friesen, 2020).

Government of Canada Immigration Reforms to Retain/Attract International Students

The Government of Canada, specifically the department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, responded to these trends and an urgent request from the post-secondary sector; they reacted quickly by instituting the first in a series of policy reforms:

- In May 2020, IRCC announced that students could register and study online from overseas and that 50 percent of such online study time would now be acceptable to be applied toward earning the PGWP (Pie News, 2020; Friesen, 2020). Prior to that, students were required to physically come to Canada and study face-to-face in designated institutions, 100 percent of the time in order to earn credit toward the PGWP.
- Later in May, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada agreed to accept incomplete international study applications for the Post Graduation Work Permit, and allow students to proceed in the process while waiting for such required documents as biometrics, medical examinations and travel documents in the face of closing centres and limited access to services (Pie News, 2020). In the past, applications with incomplete documentation, including transcripts and proof of graduation from eligible Canadian institution, were required in order to qualify for the PGWP. Without all of these documents, applications would have been outright refused.
- As part of relaxed rules, students were allowed to commence work prior to approval and without the PGWP permit in hand, while their applications were being considered (Pie News, 2020).

- In late spring of 2020, it was declared that students who were currently working under the PGWP and needed to renew, were also allowed to stay in the country while they gathered missing documents needed for the renewal; however, they were not allowed to continue working until all documents were secured and approval was given (Pie News, 2020).
- If a student's course load dropped from full-time to part-time due to school closures or class cancellations, this would not affect their eligibility for the PGWP (Pie News, 2020). Prior to that, students were required to study full-time to be eligible.
- International students were made eligible to apply for emergency government funds under Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program, a new emergency fund created to help those in Canada struggling financially because of the pandemic (Pie News, 2020).
- In October 2020, Canada opened its borders to international students by expanding certain travel exemptions to ease restrictions as long as they had a COVID readiness plan, were willing to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine and were willing to attend any of the 558 designated learning institutions who had government-approved COVID-readiness in place (ICEF Monitor, 2020).
- In January 2021, IRCC allowed former international students whose work permits had expired or were expiring, to apply for an open work permit for 18 months (ICEF Monitor, February 2021).
- In February 2021, IRCC expanded the 50 percent online study requirement to allow for 100 percent online study or remotely as eligibility toward the PGWP (ICEF Monitor, February 2021). Administrators acknowledged the need by Canada for international students as necessary to meet the needs of Canada's economy, both in the short and long-term (ICEF Monitor, February 2021).
- In May 2021, IRCC announced a new program to accept 90,000 international graduates and temporary workers for Canadian permanent residency through a one-time program for those who graduated after 2017 and were now working in hospitals, long-term care homes and on the frontlines of other similar essential sectors; this program will be open May to November 2021 and would close once targets were reached (90,000 international graduates, 2021).

RQ: How are the Government of Canada's immigration reforms, enacted progressively since April 2020, impacting international post-secondary student enrolment?

METHOD AND APPROACH

This study uses an analysis of available descriptive statistics from primary and secondary data. Data were collected from Statistics Canada, news reports, industry reports, enrolment offices, and offices of institutional analyses of various colleges and universities across Canada, think tanks, and *via* email inquiry. Most recent data on international student enrolment in Canada (2020 and 2021) are still coming in; hence, this data is preliminary and results are projected. Additionally, discussion of the data is set against Canada's evolving policies designed to adapt to and attract international student enrolment and other countries were also examined to compare and contrast policies against enrolment trends.

Universities targeted in Canada were mainly those in the provinces in which international student enrolment was highest, including Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec. Canada's post-secondary sector, while guided by federal government in some aspects, is largely controlled by provincial authorities. Enrolment data of all universities is not centralized, and data needed to be collected from a variety of sources. Ultimately, each province retains and reports its own data. Provincial data is at varying degrees of currency and universities can often be reluctant to supply this kind of data. Definitive data is usually compiled by Statistics Canada and becomes available some 16 to 18 months post-event (Alex Usher, personal communication, August 3, 2021). Therefore, this study represents data that was available at the time of investigation and that universities were willing to supply and which could be sourced by willing entities. Projections are made where needed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ultimately, enrolment data was able to be collected from 34 of Canada's 96 universities. This includes an existing dataset of all 20 of Quebec's universities (Bureau de Cooperation Interuniversitaire, 2020) and also a culled set of 14 additional universities (Tables 1 and 2). For many, information from 2015 – 2020 was retrieved and on some occasions, it was possible to

retrieve data from Winter 2021 over Winter 2020, and these are indicated (see, for example, Table 3, University of Alberta). Of the 20 Quebec universities from a provided dataset, all showed decreases of between 1.5% to 33.3% (Bureau de Cooperation Interuniversitaire, 2020). Of the 14 universities from which data was culled from various sources (online, *via* email, etc.), six were from the province of British Columbia, four were from Ontario, two were from Quebec and two were from Alberta. Once the data was organized, analyzed and ranked, it became apparent that of the 14 universities from which data was culled from various sources, nine showed increases in international student enrolment; of those, two were from Ontario, five from British Columbia, one from Quebec, and one from Alberta. (The remaining five universities showed decreases in international student enrolment.)

Table 1

RATES OF INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLMENT FROM THE SAMPLE, BY NAME OF UNIVERSITY AND IN RANK ORDER OF LARGEST RATES OF INCREASE FROM 2020 OVER 2019

Ranking by size of university in Canada	Name of University	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Rate and No. of increase	Province
#10	Ryerson University	1,251	1,499	1,885	2,448	2,997	3,411	0.138 (+414)	Ontario
#5	University of BC at Okanagan	1,072	1,250	1,477	1,819	2,185	2,414	0.105 (+229)	B.C.
#17	McMaster University	2,546	3,091	3775	4,309	5,266	5,740	0.09 (+474)	Ontario
#27	Université de Trois-Rivières - UQTR-					3,591	3886	0.082 (+295)	Quebec
#1	University of Toronto	16,052	17,452	19,187	20,930	23,019	24,691	0.0726 (+1,672)	Ontario
#6	University of Ottawa	5,013	5,584	6,273	7,148	8,332	8,653	0.0385 (+321)	Ontario
#3	York University	11,821	12,087	12,808	12,808	15,608	16,069	0.0295 (+461)	Ontario
#11	University of Alberta (undergraduate only)					Winter 2020	Winter 2021	0.0262	Alberta
						4,577	4,697	(+120)	
#16	Simon Fraser University	5,710	5,976	6,377	6,781	6,960	7,012	0.0074 (+52)	B.C.

Table 2

RATES OF DECREASE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLMENT FROM THE SAMPLE, BY NAME OF UNIVERSITY AND IN RANK ORDER OF LARGEST RATES OF DECREASE FROM 2020 OVER 2019

Ranking by size of university in Canada	Name of University	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Rate and number decrease	Province
#53	Royal Roads University	1,032	987	964	893	1,077	899	-0.17% (-178)	B.C.
#41	Thompson Rivers University	2,168	2,391	3,053	4,263	4,884	4,325	-0.114 (-559)	B.C.
#6	McGill University	10,206	10,936	12,052	12,536	12,635	12,108	-0.0417 (-527)	Quebec
#4	University of British Columbia at Vancouver	12,109	13,175	14,696	15,406	16,098	15,504	-0.0368 (-594)	B.C.
#9	University of Alberta (undergraduate only)	4,103	4,159	4,537	4,748	4,890	4,862	-0.0057 (-28)	Alberta

#59	University of Northern British Columbia	282	286	320	322	396	394	-0.005 (-2)	B.C.
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The nine universities showing increases were among Canada's top universities (in terms of size of total enrolment). The sizes of the nine universities ranked from #1 to #27. Among the top that experienced increases were #1-ranked University of Toronto, #3-ranked York University, and #5-ranked University of British Columbia. These increases ranged from 2.9% to 10.5%. The largest rate of increase was experienced by Ontario's Ryerson University, ranked #10 in terms of size of total enrolment, and experiencing a rather large increase, by comparison, of 13.8% (n=414). The next largest rate of increase was by University of British Columbia Okanagan, ranked #5 in Canada in terms of size of enrolment; it experienced a 10.5% (n=229) increase in enrolment of international students from Fall 2020 over Fall 2019. The seven remaining universities of the nine that had shown increases in enrolment only had modest increases ranging from 9% to .74%.

The largest gains in terms of numbers were by #1-ranked University of Toronto at 1,672 students (+7.2%). Other noteworthy gains in terms of numbers ranged from McMaster University with +474 (+ 9%) students and University of Ottawa with +321 students (+3.85%). Of interest to note, is that total post-secondary student enrolment, overall, dropped significantly in Fall 2020 (-925,398 or -43%) (Table 3). With total enrolments traditionally hovering a two million, Fall 2020 saw enrolments dip almost in half to 1.2 million. However, this was not primarily as a result of international student enrolment decreases; in terms of numbers, this was largely because of decreases in domestic student enrolment. In Fall 2020, domestic student enrolment decreased by 816,978 (54%) (See Table 1) over Fall 2019. Therefore, it does not appear that international student enrolment was the primary driver in these dips. With respect to Fall 2020, specifically, while complete data on international student enrolment is still coming in, there are 162,915 international university students recorded this far, with 40% of universities having reported (Alex Usher, personal communication, August 3, 2021). To carry through predictions, this could result in a total of 407,285 international post-secondary students for Fall 2020, somewhat on par with enrolment of 404,165 in Fall 2019 (El Assal, 2020). If this prediction were to prove true, it would suggest that in spite of the pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, Canada would not have experienced a crisis in terms of its international student enrolment, according to these numbers (although domestic student enrolment was problematic).

Table 3
POST-SECONDARY STUDENT ENROLMENT IN CANADA, 2014 TO DECEMBER, 2020

Status	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Total No. of post-secondary students	20,50,529	20,53,581	20,75,943	21,16,533	21,55,425	2150000 (-5,425) (-.25%)	1224602 (-925,398) (- 43%)
No. of Canadian students	18,23,007	18,03,564	17,99,922	18,04,047	17,95,749	1511040 (- 284,709) (- 15.8%)	694062 (-816,978) (- 54%)
No. of Int'l students	2,17,500	2,28,915	2,56,485	2,96,478	3,44,430	404,165 estimated	162,915 to date with 40% reporting Projected: 407,285 (+3,120) (+.7%)
Not reported	10,422	21,105	19,539	16,008	15,243	--	--

It is reasonable to assume that Canada's evolving policies of allowing international students to do online study (first at the rate of 50% of course load, and then changed to 100%), relaxed deadlines, forgiving application deficiencies, eligibility for government pandemic funds under the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), preparation and provision of specific

COVID-ready institutions, and extension of work permits in the Post Graduate Work Permit Program, could reasonably be attributed as good reasons for avoidance of a worse outcome. Another reason to suspect the more likely positive outcome of numbers of international students in 2020-2021 is that analysts have said that even though there have been challenges, “higher education performed better overall than expected” (Brown, 2021). Additionally, there is some agreement that “post-study options [are] an important factor in country of choice” (Moetaz, 2021). And most recent data indicates that Canada has gained ground against the usually-popular #1-rated United States, and is now ranked #1 in the world (Top 10 places, 2021). To compare to other countries, it appears that many in the United States are increasing their supports for international students along the vein of Canada, including allowing online testing, waiving certain portions of the application process, and increasing services such as special housing and financial aid (see Table 4) (Nietzel, 2021).

Country and ranking by education.com for 2021	2019 Int'l post-secondary student enrolment	2020 Int'l student enrolment	2021 projected int'l student enrolment	Immigration incentives per European Migration Network report (2020)
#1 Canada https://www.cicnews.com/2020/02/canada-welcomed-more-than-400000-new-international-students-in-2019-0213724.html#gs.4e9biy	404,165	407,285 (projected per this study)		Numerous: As documented in this study. Canada is named #1 by educations.com, taking the usual #1 spot of USA https://collegenews.org/top-20-countries-to-study-abroad-as-of-2020/
#2 Australia https://monitor.icef.com/2021/05/australia-large-scale-return-of-international-students-not-expected-until-2022/ https://theconversation.com/as-hopes-of-international-students-return-fade-closed-borders-could-cost-20bn-a-year-in-2022-half-the-sectors-value-159328	586,725	502,202	Projected to decrease by 210,000	Acceptance of some prior online learning; extended deadlines to produce English language test results; some easing of visa restrictions; some discretionary emergency funding; free counseling and support; working hours increased to 40 hours per week
#3 Germany https://monitor.icef.com/2020/12/germanys-foreign-enrolment-grew-again-in-2019-20/ https://monitor.icef.com/2021/02/germany-projects-year-over-year-enrolment-growth-for-winter-2021/	320,000	330,000	Projected to continue increasing	No online allowed; require proof of presence; proof of subsistence waived under certain conditions; easing of student loan re-payments
#4 United States https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/international-students-us-colleges-pandemic/2020/11/13/27e16a66-25d7-11eb-952e-0c475972cfc0_story.html	1,095,299	1,075,000	Rebound to pre-pandemic levels	Easier reporting procedures; limited online allowability;
#5 United Kingdom https://monitor.icef.com/2021/02/uk-international-student-enrolment-expected-to-rebound-in-2021/	556,625	515,650	uncertain	Leniency on application forms such as incorrect

<p>1/01/foreign-enrolment-in-uk-higher-education-reached-a-new-high-in-2019-20/ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/sep/24/uk-universities-recruit-record-numbers-of-international-students https://www.studyinternational.com/news/uk-universities-rebound/</p>				<p>dates; extended deadlines on applications; acceptance of digital copies; some exemptions in extending length of stays; limited online learning; increased the maximum working hours allowed; no health measures to check on health of int'l students</p>
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The use of appropriate immigration and post-study work policies is recognized as an important means to attract and retain international students (European Migration Network, 2019). While this is a generally-recognised principle, many countries did not, and have not, liberalised their policies to the extent that Canada has. Some in the European Union, in fact, such as Belgium and UK, have enacted restrictions (European Migration Network, 2019). Many EU countries and also many outside the EU, enacted slight modifications and helps such as increased funding, emergency aid, free computers, discounted meals, some changes to visa requirements to support international students, but, overall, “National policies... were not specifically changed as a result of COVID-19” (European Migration Network, 2020). But Canada has been responsive, flexible and proactive in keeping abreast of its flow of international students. While many countries are “still assessing whether to admit international students for such studies” (European Migration Network, 2020), Canada fully accepted this as early as February 2021, in addition to implementing on-going reforms as the situation unfolded. While many countries, specifically in the European Union and also in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (comprised of 37 non-EU members), provided some accommodations, these were helpful, but not substantial or highly significant in comparison to Canada’s on-going responsiveness and reforms (See Table 4).

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

While definitive data has yet to be officially tabulated by Statistics Canada, based on early projections from 34 out of 96 universities, and from a brief analysis of other country policies and data, this study suggests that Canada’s adaptations in the early parts of 2020, and its generous policies and accommodations will result in international student enrolments that are not as low as have been anticipated, and could likely be on par, or have actually increased slightly by .7% over Fall 2019. Most likely, it will be the larger universities that will show greater success in attracting and/or retaining international students, following available evidence and anecdotal observation (Alex Usher, personal communication, 2021). Indeed, according to some, Canada is ranked a #1 destination for study abroad (Top 10 places, 2021). Should such gains be shown in the final data, it cannot be ignored that Canada’s generous outreach in the form of its flexibility and adaptiveness to the pandemic, likely played a key role. With the on-going rollout of vaccination program, and on-going reforms (Government of Canada, 2021), it is likely that Fall 2021 will see enrolments of international students increase even further as these pathways to citizenship gain more notoriety and popularity. Future study could examine finalized data once it becomes more widely and publicly available.

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