



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

April 4, 2016

Sheldon Levy
Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities
Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Dear Deputy Minister Levy;

On behalf of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), I am pleased to provide a response to the discussion paper on creating an international education strategy for Ontario. The international aspects of our universities – from international students to cross-border links between academics and institutions – are an important part of our province's higher education sector.

Ontario's professors and academic librarians believe that international opportunities for our students and faculty, coupled with the presence of international students and scholars on our own campuses, are an undeniable good for our universities and communities. International students and scholars enrich the classroom experience, adding invaluable perspective and insight. Forging links between universities in different countries contributes to the dynamism and global standing of our institutions. When international students and scholars decide to stay in Ontario, they enhance our social vitality and contribute to our economic success.

However, as with all things, intentions matter when it comes to designing a new international strategy. If we consider international students or international campuses only as sources of revenue for university budgets, then the resulting strategy will not put proper emphasis on ensuring a quality experience for international students. If, however, we look at internationalization as a means to enrich the educational journey of all students – international and domestic students alike – then we are better positioned to design a strategy that achieves beneficial outcomes for all.

With this in mind, OCUFA makes the following observations and recommendations:

1. **The international strategy must not view increased international student enrolment as a means to increase university revenue.** International students pay significantly higher tuition fees than domestic students, and the level of these fees are almost totally unregulated. It is therefore tempting for universities to increase the number of international students enrolled at their campus as a means to increase revenue or fill budgetary gaps. The temptation is particularly strong in Ontario, where per-student public funding for universities is the lowest in Canada and in continuous decline. There are no shortcuts to funding our institutions – the international strategy should be accompanied by a commitment to ensuring adequate levels of per-student funding. Approaching international student enrolment as a revenue source is problematic for several reasons:
 - a. **It reflects poorly on Ontario when we view international students as "cash cows."** International students are talented individuals in search of educational opportunities in Canada. Exploiting their genuine desire for an Ontario university degree merely to increase revenue does

not reflect well on Ontario or its universities. Worryingly, the discussion paper explicitly states that “addressing gaps in shrinking domestic budgets” is an “opportunity” afforded by increased international education. This is not a healthy starting place from which to build an international strategy.

- b. **International students are actually expensive when properly supported.** To ensure a high-quality learning experience for international students at Ontario universities, we need to provide them with extensive institutional support. From language training to housing, international students often require a variety of specialized services. Focusing on the revenue potential of increased international student enrolment obscures the resource requirements these students place on an institution. Planning to increase international enrolment without making proper provision for support services is unfair to students and places a financial burden on universities.

Given these considerations, OCUFA recommends:

- a. **That international tuition fees be capped.** This would remove the incentive to recklessly increase international student enrolment without making proper provision for support services. The level of this cap should be determined by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) in consultation with student groups and sector stakeholders.
 - b. **That the Government of Ontario immediately begin to increase per-student funding for universities.** By ensuring our institutions are well funded, we simultaneously remove the temptation to view international students exclusively as new revenue sources and improve the learning experience for every student at an Ontario campus.
2. **International student enrolment should not be considered a financial stabilizing mechanism for institutions experiencing domestic enrolment decline.** In the recent review of the university funding model in Ontario, it was noted that in many parts of the province domestic student enrolment is expected to decline. This will place financial pressure on universities in Northern Ontario, as well as some institutions in Eastern and Southwestern Ontario. The programming delivered by these institutions is of great regional social and economic importance, so it is imperative that they be adequately buffered against enrolment stagnation or decline. OCUFA believes that this stabilizing mechanism should come in the form of targeted additional public funding delivered through a funding model that is sensitive to declining enrolment and recognizes the importance of access to comprehensive education across the province. International student enrolment is not an appropriate vehicle for ensuring financial stability for universities experiencing enrolment decline. In the first place, international enrolment is by its nature highly variable, and there is no sense whatsoever in an unstable stabilizer. Second, approaching international student enrolment as a way to buffer domestic enrolment decline encourages the kind of reckless recruitment that is detrimental to international students and damaging to Ontario’s international reputation. There are already examples of institutions that have aggressively courted international students as a revenue buffer, without making appropriate service and resource arrangements to support those students. The results of these activities have not been positive.
 3. **Enrolling international students should be an ongoing commitment to those students.** When a university admits international students – no matter where they are from – it is making a commitment to those individuals that they will be supported throughout their studies and that they will receive a quality educational experience. In the case of international students, this means adequate language and

settlement support. Furthermore, our communities benefit when we ensure international students have reasonable prospects beyond graduation. It is also a matter of respect and fairness that a clear pathway is available for international students to stay and work in Canada should they choose to pursue that goal. With this in mind, OCUFA recommends:

- a. **As part of any international strategy, MTCU make additional operating funding available to universities to support the specialized services required by international students.** This funding should be predictable and multi-year, and delivered through the new university funding model.
 - b. **International students should be eligible for the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.** At present, international students are excluded from Ontario's healthcare system and must rely on institutional alternatives. As a matter of fairness, OCUFA supports the recommendation made by the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario calling for OHIP eligibility to be extended to international students. This will provide needed support to international students and bolster Ontario's attractiveness as a study destination.
 - c. **OCUFA supports the creation of pathways to permanent residency for international students.** The terms of these pathways should be fully negotiated with the federal government and communicated clearly as part of international recruitment drives, as well as to international students once they have enrolled.
 - d. **Ontario has a responsibility to the countries where it recruits students.** While it is desirable to encourage international students to remain in Ontario should they wish to do so, we also need to recognize that this policy will have an impact on their country of origin. In some cases, this means removing needed intellectual and scientific expertise from developing economies. With that in mind, Ontario should explore ways of transferring knowledge and expertise back to the countries from which we recruit students.
4. **International student mobility is impaired by cost, not lack of opportunities.** Studying abroad is often an expensive proposition for both Ontario students and their international counterparts. The cost of travel and housing, not to mention higher living expenses, can be prohibitive. To encourage Ontario students to study abroad, and to encourage international students to come to Ontario, MTCU should look at providing targeted financial aid to these individuals. Specifically:
- a. **MTCU should create an International Opportunity Scholarship for Ontario students.** In MTCU's previous international strategy, launched under the auspices of 2005's *Reaching Higher* plan, the Ministry created the Ontario International Education Opportunity Scholarship (OIEOS) to support Ontario students who wished to study abroad. The amounts were modest – less than \$1500 – but helped in offsetting some of the upfront costs of international study. Such a program could be reestablished to support MTCU's goals of increasing student mobility.
 - b. **MTCU should investigate the feasibility of creating more scholarship opportunities for international students.** Such scholarships are relatively common at the PhD level, but could be extended to Master's-level and undergraduate students. These scholarships should be funded by MTCU, and will help attract exceptional students to the province.

I welcome any opportunity to discuss these recommendations further. OCUFA looks forward to participating in the consultation, roundtables and symposiums in the coming months. In the meantime, if you have any questions, I encourage you to contact OCUFA Executive Director Mark Rosenfeld at 416 979 2117 or mrosenfeld@ocufa.on.ca.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judy Bates". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Judy Bates, President of OCUFA
Associate Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University