

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN QUEBEC: STATE OF PLAY, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPACT

CIRANO note written by Claude Montmarquette, January 2012

The purpose of our study is to sound out where we stand in terms of the numbers and behaviour of foreign students in Quebec, to examine the economic impacts they generate, and to reassess relevant government policy, including tuition and supplemental fee levels.

Many of the reports examined found significant shortcomings in Quebec's approach to promoting its University programs abroad. Quebec has been a straggler in the matter of recruitment, and one means of catching up could be the development of a marketing strategy to enhance the image of its education system in the eyes of foreigners.

We indentify long- and short-term economic impacts (university tuition fees, living expenses, etc.) from attracting more international students. Long-term impacts are developed around an analysis of the integration of students as future immigrants (an ideal immigration policy) and variations in the balance of trade when students opt to return to their country of origin.

We articulate positions on several policies associated with students from abroad and from the rest of Canada. These cover, in particular:

- program promotion: It is important to remain aware of the importance of undergraduate studies in the international market for education while not losing sight of the graduate levels, which are just as beneficial to the university. Strategies for encouraging foreign undergraduates to pursue their studies at the Master's and Ph.D. level must be envisioned;

- tuition fees: The level of tuition fees charged to foreign students appears optimal, or at least appropriate. They are competitive with those in other Canadian provinces, such as Ontario and British Columbia, and in other countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. A policy option would be to allow institutions to lower their fees in order to improve their competitiveness on the market;
- supplemental fees: International students constitute a formidable asset if they extend their stay in Quebec and apply for citizenship. In this event, consideration should be given to including this cost in program expenditures, since integrating immigrants who have completed their studies in Quebec yields several benefits, including better assimilation into the labour market, higher incomes, etc. Deregulating supplemental fees charged to students from the rest of Canada also merits consideration.

We believe that expertise in this domain remains underdeveloped. The fact that universities have been bound by tuition fees dictated by the MELS for so long has kept them from acquiring a strong competence in the fields of international recruitment and product differentiation.

It should fall under the purview of the university, and not the Ministry, to define each institution's optimal strategy in terms of tuition and supplemental fees.

The complete study can be found on the CIRANO Website at the following address (French only):

<http://www.cirano.qc.ca/pdf/publication/2011s-71.pdf>