

Work rights extended

FOLLOWING THE success of pilot off-campus work programmes in Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has announced that off-campus work will be an option for all students studying at institutions in provinces that have signed agreements with CIC.

So far, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and Ontario have all signed a memorandum of understanding to make the off-campus work programme a permanent feature, although at the time of going to press only students at institutions in provinces where the pilot scheme was in progress (Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick) were currently able to work off campus. Implementation of the programme in provinces where agreements have been reached with CIC will take place as soon as funding is approved.

To be eligible for the programme, international students must complete six months of full-time study at a public post-secondary institution in Canada and maintain their full-time student status, sustain satisfactory academic standing and work no more than 20 hours a week during term time.

US launches initiative to attract students

The US State Department announced in January a range of initiatives to encourage the educational exchange of its own and other country's citizens, including proactive student recruitment overseas for US colleges and universities. The measures were announced in a speech by Karen Hughes, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, at a two-day University Presidents' Summit on International Education.

Hughes announced plans for six to eight travelling delegations of American college and university presidents to promote American higher education and to recruit foreign students at education fairs this year, as well as an increase in aid to encourage the educational exchange of needy and minority students and the launch of a new International Fulbright Science Award.

The US State Department also revealed a particular interest in encouraging more international students to study in US community colleges and

announced plans to significantly expand the percentage of those studying on Fulbright or other government grants at community colleges. Hughes added that she hoped the measures would lead to a doubling of the number of foreign students attending US community colleges – 76,000 in 2004 – in the coming years.

Vince Altum from Wichita State University in Kansas, said, "I think the initiatives may have a small impact but they do not go far enough. In order to have a more measurable impact, the government has to address other issues as well such as visa processing times."

In another announcement at the summit, President George Bush revealed details of the proposed National Security Language Initiative, which, if approved by Congress, will spend US\$114 million in the 2007 fiscal year to train more Americans in critical foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese and Persian.

The focus on encouraging more educational exchange between the USA and the rest

of the world comes two months after the most recent Open Doors survey revealed that international enrolments at US universities had decreased for the second year in a row. The survey, published by the Institute of International Education last year, showed a 1.3 per cent decrease in international

student numbers in 2004/2005 compared with the previous year. Out of the top 20 student nationalities studying in the USA, 13 had experienced declining numbers in the previous year, with the largest declines shown by Pakistani, Indonesian, Brazilian, Kenyan and Malaysian students.

New work permit for students in UK

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS and those studying on an undergraduate degree in a minority sector will be able to stay and work in the UK for 12 months after completing their course, according to an announcement by Chancellor Gordon Brown in his pre-budget speech last year.

The revised working rights were part of a package of measures intended to ensure the

UK retains its reputation as one of the most attractive places for students to study abroad. Also included were plans to increase government support for the marketing and promotion of UK higher education to non-EU students by 50 per cent and plans to establish a new UK-China University Partnership Scheme, to encourage academic exchanges in science and technology. Bonus migration points will also be

awarded to people who have previously studied in the UK and the visa process will be improved.

Clare Montgomery from the University of the Arts welcomed the announcement. "Given that the cost of living in the UK can sometimes be a deterrent for students, the prospect of being able to earn a UK wage once they have graduated can only help our international recruitment of postgraduate students," she said.



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How have international enrolments fared?
A major impact on the vocational education and training (VET) sector has been the visa changes for studies in certain areas, to meet skills shortages. This has grown the sector in service fields such as hospitality, hairdressing and pastry chef training. There has also been consistent growth in demand for higher education courses with pathways from ELT and VET, mostly focused on business and IT.

What plans do you have for the future?
We plan to participate in delegations organised by Commonwealth or State government education or trade departments which demonstrate the capability of Australia and the offerings in all sectors; extend invitations to key international stakeholders to participate and present at the Acpet national conference in Cairns in August 2006; revamp the Acpet website to enable easy access to information about Acpet members' courses for education agents, parents and students; and encourage members to maintain Australia's international reputation for high quality.

What activities has Acpet been involved in recently?
We have participated in offshore government delegations to expand international understanding of the Australian education and training offerings, provided feedback to the review of Australia's international education regulatory framework, successfully lobbied Dimia for positive changes to the student visa programme and worked on national professional development programmes.

Full name: Australian Council for Private Education and Training
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Organisation's main role: Acpet is the national industry association for around 1,000 independent providers of post-compulsory education and training, delivering higher education, vocational education and training and English language intensive courses.
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Support for an international strategy for Scotland

UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND has called on the Scottish Executive to help create an internationalisation strategy for Scotland, which will include providing funds to encourage more international students to take up university places in the country.

The proposals were launched at a recent conference hosted by Universities Scotland, on the international role of higher education, and include asking the Scottish Executive for £10 million (US\$17.6 million) in a package of financial incentives to increase the attractiveness of Scotland as a study destination. Other proposals include calling on Scottish universities to take more effective control of the branding of Scottish higher education and provide help to Scottish students

to overcome the barriers to accepting placements overseas as part of their courses.

Robin McAlpine, a spokesperson for Scottish Universities, said, "International students are phenomenally important to universities as they are the ones paying the full fees. We want to offer scholarships to bright young students because you get a cascading effect. The good message spreads and will lead to more fee-paying students coming to Scotland to study."

According to figures from the University and Colleges Admissions Service (Ucas), the number of overseas students applying to study at a Scottish university increased by nine per cent in 2005, compared with the previous year.

German university investment

A RECENT INITIATIVE to increase the research performance and international competitiveness of German universities reached the end of its first phase in January this year when 319 applications from universities for extra funding were reduced to 90 finalists.

The Excellence Initiative will direct US\$2.3 billion from federal and state governments to a handful of universities who have to compete within three different categories. The first category involves the creation of graduate schools, which will each receive

US\$1.2 million annually, while the second category is for the creation of clusters of partner institutions (including other universities, research institutes, companies and government agencies) around a university, which would receive US\$7.8 million annually.

Around 20 postgraduate programmes and 15 clusters are expected to be chosen from the finalists this year, while five top universities will also be granted around US\$25.2 million annually. A second wave of grants will also be awarded next year.

Irish office in China

Ireland's links with China received a boost last year when University College Cork (UCC) officially opened an office in Beijing. Ireland's Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, had earlier announced plans to attract 5,000 more Chinese students into Ireland's higher education system by 2009, as part of the country's Asia strategy (see *Language Travel Magazine*, January 2006, page 7).

During the 2004/2005 academic year, 105 Chinese students studied at UCC and this number is set to increase to 150 in the current year.

New Cambridge exam

Plans for a new pre-university qualification, due to be targeted at private British schools and international students, were unveiled by University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) at the end of last year. The new qualification has similarities with the existing International Baccalaureate and could be called the Cambridge Baccalaureate when it is launched in 2007.

A consultation paper on the development of the new qualification criticised existing GCSE and A-level examinations in the UK and reported that British universities often find it difficult to decide which applicants to award places to.

Aptitude test for Chinese

- The Australian Council for Educational Research is currently trialling an Aptitude Test for International Secondary Students (ATISS), which will determine the suitability of candidates, particularly those from China, applying to study in Australian schools.

- The ATISS is not reliant on English competency and measures general reasoning ability in the students' own language, enabling markers to assess an individual student's aptitude for studying in Australian schools. The first tests took place in February and March this year in 13 cities across China.

US bias against three-year degrees

- A survey by the Council of Graduate Schools in the USA has revealed that out of 125 responding colleges, 22 per cent said that they had a policy of not admitting graduates of three-year degree programmes.

- The survey asked colleges to reveal their admission policies after recent education reforms in Europe resulted in 45 countries agreeing up to implement three-year degree programmes in an effort to streamline higher education opportunities across the continent. The North American higher education model requires students to complete four-year degrees.

Transnational quality strategy for Australia

- The Australian Ministers of Education and Training have agreed to the implementation of a Transnational Quality Strategy framework that will ensure the quality of education and training delivered by Australian universities in other countries. The state governments agreed to work with industry representatives and consult with Australian Universities Quality Agency and the National Quality Council to develop the strategy and discuss implementation procedures.

Toefl test troubles

- Educators and students in Europe have complained that the recent move to provide the Toefl test online only in some countries has resulted in students not being able to sit the test at all. The Internet version of the test was introduced by Educational Testing Services (ETS) to Canada, France, Germany and Italy in October last year (see *Education Travel Magazine*, January 2006, page 46).

- Educators in some of these countries, particularly France and Germany, say that as well as experiencing technical problems, there have been capacity shortfalls, resulting in availability problems. ETS have responded to complaints by reinstating the paper-based test in four French cities.