



CANADA'S SCHOOLS ABROAD: EXPANDING THE PATHWAYS

Canadian accredited offshore schools are multiplying. The cohort of offshore graduates is larger than those from the majority of public school districts in Canada, and uniquely prepared to succeed as the next generation of Canada's international post-secondary students.

A CBIE pathways study, jointly supported by the Global Opportunities for Associations (GOA) program and by CBIE, aims to support recruitment efforts by Canadian institutions in priority markets by outlining the current situation and identifying best practices for increasing the number of Canadian offshore school graduates choosing a Canadian post-secondary institution (PSI).

The study and many of its recommendations apply to school districts as well because increasingly parents are keen to ease the transition to PSI abroad by sending their child for grade 11 and/or 12 in the country of study. Many Canadian secondary schools, school districts and PSIs recognize this opportunity and have already developed a strong presence in areas with a high concentration of Canadian offshore schools (notably China) and others aspire to strengthen their presence in these markets.

CONTEXT

The objective of the study was to understand the nature of the pathway that exists between graduates of offshore schools and PSIs, and to identify opportunities to enhance it.

The study focused on China and Vietnam. China is home to the majority of Canadian offshore schools (68 of 104 in March 2014). CBIE undertook a mission to both countries in spring 2014.

Over several months prior to the mission, a combination of meetings, focus groups, teleconferences, online surveys and email feedback informed the study. Both the Canadian and international perspective were elicited.

CBIE consulted with key Canadian stakeholders to gather their feedback on the research objectives and their input into the mission itinerary. CBIE also reached out to 60 colleges and universities that actively recruit offshore graduates, and to ministries of education through the Provincial/Territorial Affiliated Schools Overseas Working Group of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

MISSION

From March 1 to 19, 2014, CBIE visited schools, trade officials and other stakeholders in 11 cities in China and Vietnam: Shanghai, Kunshan, Soochow, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Beijing, Tianjin, Dalian, Macau, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

CBIE reached out to a wide pool of stakeholders, including: parents, teachers, students and administration at Canadian offshore schools (of various locations, sizes, years of operation; affiliated with all of the participating provinces) and non-accredited schools using Canadian curriculum; Chinese and Vietnamese educational institutions (primary and secondary); Canadian PSI offices; Chinese and Vietnamese government ministries and education agencies; educational services agencies (national and sub-national levels); and Canadian consulates which interact with offshore schools. CBIE interviewed 112 institutions and over 250 individual stakeholders during the study.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CBIE's study reinforces the recommendation that graduates from Canadian-accredited or Canadian-affiliated institutions abroad are an ideal recruitment market. These students and graduates have integrated to a degree into a Canadian culture of learning, curriculum and teaching style and, on average, display a higher competency with English language fluency. French fluency is rarer but in Vietnam some public schools offer strong French language programs. In order to maximize the potential benefits of this growing educational community, CBIE offers recommendations to offshore schools and to Canadian institutions.

While not surprising, a key finding is that competition is fierce. Students in Canadian offshore schools are courted by PSIs from many other countries, in particular the United States and Australia. Given that the US institutions often have strong brand recognition, they constitute formidable competition. Nevertheless,

Canadian institutions have an advantage and if they are willing to invest in this market will overcome much of this challenge and develop their own brand. This has already been demonstrated by several Canadian PSIs including relatively small institutions.

It is also important to recognize that the Canada brand is paramount in the minds of students and parents as well as school administrators. While they are generally aware that Canadian education is within provincial jurisdiction, it is Canada that attracts them. PSIs are well advised to frame their recruitment efforts in the Canada brand.

Note that while our findings and observations hold true for many or all of the schools visited, they cannot be considered fully representative of all offshore schools. Nevertheless we believe that there is sufficient consistency to support their usefulness

Recommendations for Canadian Accredited Offshore Schools

1. Develop strong relationships

Strong relationships between the local government, owners and administration play a critical role in ensuring the school's success. Support and strong leadership translates into the ability to create a far-reaching Canadian culture of learning, to integrate substantial Canadian curriculum and ESL or FSL as well as more language-learning opportunities such as student travel to Canada (short-term exchanges, winter/summer tours) and after-school programs to utilize and reinforce language learning outside of class. Strong relationships can also translate into the budget for more Canadian teachers and support staff (for example, student leadership training, and guidance departments).

2. Identify student's long-term goals

Investing in a bilingual guidance department which is familiar with the Canadian education landscape is critical to addressing student's post-high school study and career needs/interests. Offshore schools that invest in guidance staff and hold their own recruitment fairs indicated high success rates for post-secondary enrolment in Canadian institutions.

3. Strengthen Canadian linkages

The most successful offshore schools have strong linkages with Canadian institutions to facilitate information sharing and community. They also make use of contacts with provincial/consular offices.

Linkages support Canadian teaching styles and pedagogy (moving away from learning by rote and towards presentations, group work, creativity, learning by doing). Schools which invest heavily in innovative programs, afterschool programs, student leadership, travel opportunities, exchange opportunities, and facilitating student teachers from Canada see their students becoming more engaged with Canadian culture and excelling with English language. Graduates of these offshore programs are bilingual, credit-rich, with high cross-cultural competency, uniquely prepared for post-secondary education.

4. Invest in staff

Offshore schools hire early-career or retired professionals which leads to a high staff turnover. Recognizing that offshore schools are an extension of the Canadian system, it would be beneficial to the recruitment process for there to be a framework to allow for simplified certification (rather than province-specific), recognition of experience, extended leaves or pension contributions.

Professional development opportunities for staff at offshore schools vary widely, but, overall, are minimal and reportedly not highly relevant. There should be an increased focus on ESL learning, guidance counselling and cross-cultural integration.

Recommendations for Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada

1. Developing recognizable name overseas

Institutions which are new to the market can gain legitimacy by setting up satellite campuses either in a larger overseas university or individual location. Physical presence publicizes an institution, demonstrates local commitment and brands the institution in the market. Interventions should be targeted to ensure success: offering a niche program or joint/twinned programs for the same effect.

New or student teachers are an underutilized marketing tool, as students are greatly influenced by their teachers and mentors when it comes to choosing a PSI. Facilitating practicums, internships or specialized student training programs encourage positive information about the institution to be shared with the cohort of graduates.

Colleges and technological institutes should target locations with a market for skilled professionals (trades, technology, hospitality and tourism). To combat traditional bias towards university education and lack of awareness of their expertise, colleges should ensure they invest in marketing themselves for their specializations.

Institutions should consider “familiarization tours” for students and parents. Several schools suggested that helping students and families get comfortable with Canada will lead to more enrolments, as well as great “word of mouth” at the home school.

Another consideration is bringing offshore administration/guidance staff to visit the institution and its surrounding community. This enables them to provide more accurate recommendations to their students. Investment in interacting with these schools will keep Canada as a post-secondary destination at the forefront of their minds.

2. Making the most of recruitment missions

Participating in group recruitment missions with Canadian institutions generally ensures a larger audience than individual missions. Promoting Canada as a great destination is the first step for any recruitment effort. Canada’s brand offers multiculturalism, personal safety, affordability, immigration potential and, for many, the ability to work part-time while studying.

Participating in group events that are endorsed by the Government of Canada or using Canadian Consulate officers/offices adds a level of legitimacy in the eyes of the student/parent.

Institutions should time missions to coincide with the offshore institution’s schedule and the post-secondary application cycle to avoid recruitment fatigue and garner the most interest. Fall (after mid-term grades) is typically the best time to reach grade 12 students and to offer conditional acceptances, while spring is best to reach grade 11 students as they start planning for their future.

It is worth investing in print materials for marketing and application purposes directed at the international/offshore client that are in the local language. Additionally marketing done by representatives who speak the local language or, better yet, are alumni of the targeted institution or country is helpful in gaining the interest of parents, who are the primary decision-makers in many cases. Focusing print marketing towards statistics, employment outcomes, student success and safety is also recommended.

Presentations must be dynamic to be effective. Institutions can be set apart with concrete facts and interactive presentations tailored to its audience.

The key factors in student decision-making are: academic quality/reputation; country reputation (safe, secure, welcoming); affordability; opportunities to gain full-time employment after graduation and/or to gain permanent residence; and, ability to work off-campus during studies.

3. Year-round marketing

Social media is an increasingly important platform for recruitment. It is important to invest in global and local media (Wechat, QQ, Weibo and Youku in China) and alumni sites, as well as to ensure that the institution’s website can be viewed in multiple languages.

Data is very important to international audiences in their decision-making process (rankings, success rates, graduation rates, typical employment prospects, integration success). PSIs should invest in tracking the success of students by country and or/offshore school in order to bolster their marketing materials.

Offshore students should be treated as a unique group (neither international students, nor domestic students) in databases to guide future marketing decisions and to provide data to share with prospects.

4. Getting applications and enrolment

For students, the application process is complex and stressful. Providing full or conditional acceptance onsite at events and resources for transition assistance has proven successful in attracting and enrolling students. Speedy offers of admission are also important — admitted students then become ambassadors for the institution during their final year of school.

Language test requirements are a potential obstacle for some students. Institutions can consider waiving standardized language tests such as IELTS/TOEFL if students attain a specified mark in grade 12 English.

It is ill-advised to focus only on the top students. Students do not want to be left behind when their classmates leave for PSI abroad, which means that bridging, second language and college transfer programs will be attractive to a substantial cohort. When recruiting, institutions should outline clear pathways to achieving students' academic and career goals.

Since budgeting is an important aspect to making an application decision, offer scholarships, incentives or cost-saving mechanisms to reach students with the most potential for success. Scholarships are important, not only from a financial standpoint, but as a form of recognition and commitment.

CONCLUSION

Canadian schools abroad represent a growing source of talented students for Canadian post-secondary institutions and school districts. The schools themselves are keen to promote this pathway to education in Canada.

CBIE offers this information derived from the pathways study knowing that many institutions already have substantial experience and can undoubtedly add to these recommendations and suggestions.

CBIE gratefully acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada, and the on-the-ground support of the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service. CBIE also acknowledges with thanks the contributions of provincial and territorial representatives, numerous institutions in Canada, China and Vietnam, partners and stakeholders.

Further resources can be found with the [Asia Pacific Foundation](#), [GROK Education Services](#) and the [Canadian Trade Commissions](#).

CBIE MARKET REPORT

Canadian Bureau for International Education

ISSN 2368-4801, Key title: Canada's Schools Abroad: Expanding the Pathways

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.
Également disponible en français

© 2014 CBIE

Canadian Bureau for International Education
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9

613-237-4820
www.cbie-bcei.ca
research-recherche@cbie.ca

