



PHOTOS: LEARNING ABROAD PHOTO CONTEST 2016



# Learning Beyond Borders: A Solution to Canada’s Global Engagement Challenge

Submission to the House of Commons Standing  
Committee on Finance for Pre-Budget Consultations  
in Advance of the 2018 Budget

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Canadian Bureau for  
International Education

## Canadian Bureau for International Education

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) is Canada's international education organization, engaging our 150 member universities, colleges, institutes, polytechnics, cégeps and K-12 school boards across the country in building Canada's capacity to contribute and participate fully in the world through educational connections.

Central to our mandate is the development of Canada's young leaders through learning abroad experiences<sup>1</sup>. CBIE's national campaign [Learning Beyond Borders](#), is dedicated to increasing awareness among all key stakeholders of the significant value proposition of learning abroad – for students, businesses and government alike – and to helping its member institutions address barriers to learning abroad.

Our input to the Finance Committee will therefore focus exclusively on this current aspect of our work which is increasingly critical to helping Canada enhance productivity and competitiveness in the context of global competition and global opportunities, a key theme for the Committee's pre-budget consultations.

### Canada's Global Engagement Challenge

Canada faces a great challenge: getting more of our students to take advantage of learning experiences in other countries and preparing them to become “global ready graduates” in the range of ways that the term implies.

Why is this so important?

In Budget 2017 the federal government outlined an Innovation and Skills plan that focuses on making Canada a world-leading centre for innovation, and ensuring that Canadians are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to get good jobs and succeed in the new economy.

Yet in the context of that new economy being shaped by global value chains, international trade, and new ideas sourced from around the world, ensuring our young people are globally competent and globally connected is essential to creating the “most skilled, talented, creative and diverse workforce in the world” (Budget 2017). This is where learning abroad can make a strategic contribution to helping the government meet its objectives.

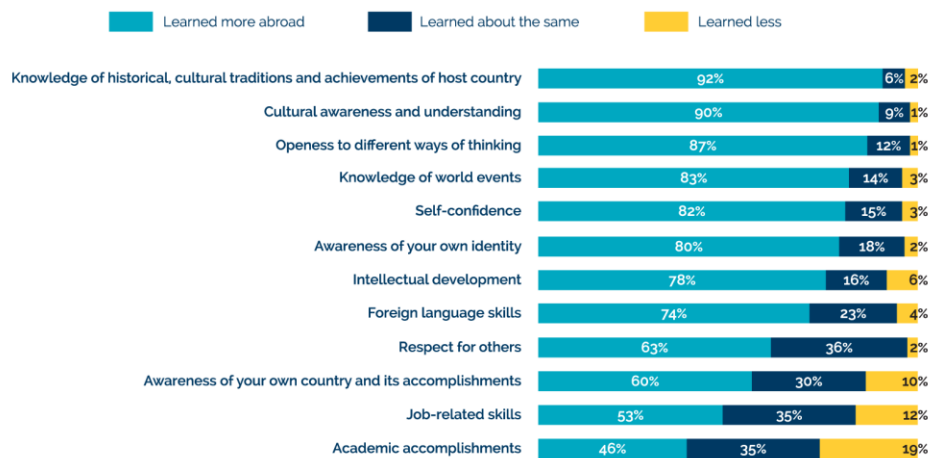
In study after study, students who have benefitted from learning abroad underscore the importance of these experiences in terms of their building their knowledge, honing their skills and shaping their

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<sup>1</sup> Learning abroad refers to study, research or experiential learning opportunities such as internships and work placements, of varied duration, which fall within the academic framework of a student's home institution in Canada, whether a K-12 school, cégep, university, or college.

attitudes. In CBIE’s 2016 survey of learning abroad alumni, for example, students report that the growth they achieved was often significantly higher than what they think they would have learned at home during the exact same period (see below table). It is notable that the highest domains of growth reflect areas that go beyond typical classroom learning such as leaps in cultural awareness and understanding, openness to different ways of thinking, self-confidence, and awareness of their own identity. In addition, almost three-quarters of students agreed that their experience abroad influenced their choice of career path (CBIE, 2016).

Growth/learning reported to take place abroad, as compared with growth/learning on home campus



It is not only participating students who value the career skills they gain. A 2014 survey of small and medium enterprises, from a broad range of industry sectors across Canada, showed that 82% believe that employees who possess intercultural knowledge and an understanding of the global marketplace enhance their company’s competitiveness, while 72% stated that recruits with intercultural and international experiences show a better performance than graduates without these experiences. Two out of three hiring managers surveyed said Canada is at risk of being overtaken by dynamic economies like China, India and Brazil unless young Canadians learn to think more globally (Léger: The Research Intelligence Group, employer survey for Universities Canada, 2014).

Moreover, there is mounting evidence that the knowledge, skills and attitudes which result from learning abroad have lasting economic benefits. In an impact study of *Erasmus*, the European Union’s long-standing learning abroad program, alumni were half as likely to experience long-term unemployment as their non-mobile peers (2% vs. 4%). Five years after graduation their unemployment rate was 23% lower than that of non-mobile students. Ten years after graduation they were 44% more likely to be employed in managerial positions. Erasmus students also show higher values for personality traits that are highly valued by employers – including the ability to work in teams, communication skills, planning skills, and problem-solving skills – than do non-mobile students (European Commission, 2014). A similar study by the UK Higher Education (HE) International Unit compared the academic attainment and employment outcomes of mobile and non-mobile first-

degree undergraduate students in the UK. Six months after graduation from an undergraduate degree program, students who spent time abroad had lower unemployment rates than their non-mobile peers (5% vs. 7%). They also had higher average salaries (£21,349 vs. £20,519), achieved higher academic scores (81% vs. 72%), and had higher employment rates within one of the top three socio-economic classifications (74.8% vs. 67.1%) (UK HE International Unit, 2016).

Beyond business, the current political dynamics playing out in the international arena underscore the significant contribution that Canada's values and proactive presence on the world stage make in fostering tolerance and social justice in global relations. Indeed Canada is uniquely positioned for even greater leadership in the years ahead and our young people are among our country's best ambassadors.

In short, at a time of increasing global competitiveness and complexity, business as usual is not an option. We need strategic and catalytic action: Canadians need to be prepared to participate and contribute as global citizens, working across borders, cultures, languages and values to mutual benefit. What are we doing to develop Canada's young leaders, the individuals who can negotiate, analyze, connect and engage in meaningful ways at the international level?

## **Making Learning Abroad a Priority**

Comprehensive outbound mobility programs with a strategic focus on regions of interest; high-level support from government agencies, institutions and industry; clear target plans; and a high visibility communications strategy now exist in a number of Canada's competitor countries, which have made it a priority to put in place learning abroad strategies and programs at the national level in support of their global engagement. In the United States, for example, there are programs such as the *100,000 Strong Initiative* with both China and the Americas, as well as *Generation Study Abroad*. The European Union's *Erasmus Program* mentioned above has been active for more than 25 years supporting learning abroad for over three million students. The Mexican government has developed *Proyecta 100.000* and *Proyecta 10.000* to deepen ties with the United States and Canada. The UK Strategy for Outward Mobility is a key element of the government's international education strategy, *Global Growth and Prosperity*. In its first four years of operation, Australia's *New Colombo Plan* will have supported 17,500 students to study or undertake work placements in 34 countries across the Indo-Pacific.

Unlike these and other competitor countries, which understand the value proposition of learning abroad, Canada has not approached the internationalization of its talent pool as a national imperative, as a necessary and intentional component of its strategy to build Canada's global competitiveness and help its youth realize their full potential in an interconnected world.

The 2012 Advisory Panel that informed the federal government's International Education Strategy recommended that for Canada to meet its competitive aspirations in the global economy and

international education marketplace, the federal government should co-fund—together with academic institutions and/or provincial/territorial governments—a major student mobility program. The idea was to create opportunities for 50,000 Canadian students per year to travel abroad for study, research, community service or other experiential learning activities such as work placements by 2022. Although the International Education Strategy discusses the importance of promoting outbound mobility and states that education abroad should be at the “very heart of our current and future prosperity” (Global Affairs Canada, 2014) to date the recommendations of the Advisory Panel have not been acted upon and there are currently no national targets or specific funding designed to help a critical mass of Canadian students take advantage of learning abroad opportunities.

Where, for example, more than 30 percent of German students go abroad during their studies – and there is a concerted effort to increase this to 50 percent – it is estimated that a miniscule 3 percent of Canadian students participate in their Canadian university or college exchange programs. The number of high school students participating is equally dismal.

Without a concerted effort to help our young people benefit from learning abroad we risk raising a generation of Canadians who lack the competitive edge that puts globally-mobile students ahead, and by extension those companies in their home countries which are able to tap into mobile students’ global competencies. Moreover, Canada risks no longer being viewed by its international partners as a country which values reciprocity, as OECD countries send their students to our shores, but we continue to put no priority on supporting our young people to experience their cultures.

Funding is key. In a recent CBIE survey of more than 7,000 Canadian students, where 86% of respondents said that they are interested in participating in a learning abroad experience, 80% indicated that they would require financial assistance to do so and of those select students who do undertake learning abroad, half require financial support from their families. In short, learning abroad is most often an opportunity open only to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

We must make learning abroad financially feasible for a critical mass of Canadian students if we are to maximize its significant value proposition.

CBIE therefore recommends that the federal government finally take action and decisively set us on the right course towards the vision put forward by the 2012 Advisory Panel, by investing in a major program that will help support a critical mass of Canadian students, across the country and across the spectrum of education, to pursue learning abroad opportunities and particularly those students who cannot afford to participate.

Let’s not allow Canada’s Global Engagement Challenge to be the Achilles’ heel in our aspirations for greater economic competitiveness and engagement on the world stage. Nor in our aspirations for our youth, whose futures will be brighter as “global ready graduates”.