
UNIVERSITIES CANADA'S GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



Universities
Canada.

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Introduction

Canada's International Education Strategy (IES), which expired in 2024, has played a pivotal role in fostering global connections through higher education. With its conclusion, there is a pressing need to reimagine and revitalize Canada's approach to international engagement. In recent years, the global landscape has evolved dramatically, with significant shifts including a reduction in international student permits, restructuring within Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and changing domestic political dynamics. These factors have complicated Canada's position in the international education landscape, highlighting the need for a more proactive and strategic approach to enhance the country's global competitiveness in higher education.

Moreover, there is no indication that Global Affairs Canada plans to issue a new IES in the near future, further emphasizing the urgency of developing a comprehensive, forward-looking framework.

As global uncertainties intensify and local political dynamics continue to evolve, the international education landscape has grown more complex. In addition to domestic challenges such as an ongoing immigration crisis, and internal reorganization within government departments, it is essential to reposition Canadian universities for success. Universities Canada, is committed to advancing a Global Engagement Framework that reflects current realities, focusing on diversifying partnerships recovering market presence, and positioning Canadian universities as key, relevant partners in advancing Canada's national interests on the global stage.

In this environment, Universities Canada's leadership is reflected through its Global Engagement Framework. Implementing this framework will be essential to strengthening members' international standing, fostering key partnerships supporting **the attraction and retention of talent, enhancing our members' reputation**, and promoting Canadian **advancements in science, technology, and innovation**. The framework considers the importance of increasing engagement and coordination with other national organizations working to advance Canada's international education agenda. This collaboration will be critical in enhancing Canada's position in the global education arena and repositioning the country's reputation as the premier destination for study abroad.

Through its Global Engagement Framework (the Framework), Universities Canada aims to cultivate an environment where Canadian universities can flourish in an increasingly interconnected world, further solidifying Canada's position as a global leader in higher education.

Universities Canada's Global Engagement Framework

Universities Canada has undertaken extensive consultations with its member institutions, in addition to reviewing and analyzing domestic policies and global trends in higher education that impact the implementation of international activities, to develop the approach to the Global Engagement Framework. These consultations and environmental scan resulted in the creation of a mission statement that will guide this framework. The framework's mission statement advances our members' objectives and prioritizes Canada's national interests.

"Ensure that our universities excel in an increasingly competitive global education landscape and secure Canada's position and recognition as the world's best destination for high-quality education by supporting the development of meaningful international partnerships."

This mission statement guides the development of our Global Engagement Framework which is focused on ensuring that Canadian universities thrive in an increasingly competitive global education landscape, while securing Canada's position as the world's top destination for high-quality education. To support this mission, the framework outlines four outcomes and identifies three key objectives designed to achieve these outcomes for our members.

These outcomes and objectives were designed with information collected from consultations with our members, insights gathered from our internationalization survey, ongoing geopolitical monitoring, and proactive engagement with domestic partners, including government and industry stakeholders.

Objectives

- Advance International Education and Talent Mobility for Canadian Universities
- Strengthen Partnerships that support Canadian Education, Research and Innovation
- Enhance Universities' Reputation and Institutional Diplomacy

Outcomes



Strengthen and Diversify Transnational Education: Universities Canada will help build a bridge for members to pursue international partnerships that support the delivery and diversification of transnational education initiatives in priority countries.



Ensure a Sustained Presence of Canadian Universities Abroad: Maintain the presence of Canadian universities overseas, despite diplomatic tensions, political instability, and rapid policy changes, recognizing education as a cornerstone of Canadian international relations.



Clarified Processes for Accessing International Opportunities: In recognition of the difficulties of identifying and accessing tangible opportunities – particularly for smaller universities – Universities Canada aims to make it easier for Canadian universities to realize their international goals.



Improved Internal Governance, Monitoring, and Tracking of International Engagement Activities: The effectiveness of the Framework relies on strong internal governance, continuous monitoring, and tracking of international engagement activities to ensure milestones are met, opportunities are maximized, and it stays responsive to fast-evolving global and local changes.

These outcomes will guide the identification of key international opportunities that align with Canada's strategic objectives ensuring the framework remains relevant and responsive to both domestic and international policy changes.

Target Markets

Universities Canada's Global Engagement Framework will consider broad, dynamic factors when determining where and how to engage internationally. As such, the framework does not identify specific countries but will instead focus on working with countries or regions that demonstrate value in addressing the pressing issues universities face in today's global landscape, such as relevance and positioning. This flexible approach allows for differentiated engagement, recognizing that opportunities vary across institutional and linguistic contexts, including for francophone universities.

Key considerations for engagement will be global demographic shifts, domestic and international policies, and alignment with Canada's international trade agenda. By factoring in trends such as population growth, domestic immigration policies, international education initiatives, and regional educational needs, we can strategically match markets that offer the best potential for Canada's international education goals. This approach allows for a more adaptable and forward-looking framework that responds to evolving global circumstances.

Flexibility will be a cornerstone of the framework, ensuring it can adjust to shifts in markets and changing geopolitical imperatives. The framework will be treated as a "living document," continuously updated based on geopolitical intelligence and the impact these developments may have on Canada's interests. Regular engagement with members will be critical in keeping the framework relevant and responsive to these changes. Additionally, Universities Canada will take a leadership role by regularly convening national partners involved in international education to collectively monitor market engagement and identify service gaps as to leverage members' resources effectively. By ensuring that the perspectives of Canada's university sector are reflected in these efforts, this collaborative approach will foster stronger partnerships and support targeted, impactful outreach in key international markets.

Tactical Initiatives & Activities

The design and implementation of initiatives under Universities Canada's Global Engagement Framework will be guided by a comprehensive, strategic approach that integrates multiple facets of international engagement. These tactical efforts will be informed by Universities Canada's ongoing advocacy, helping to frame a narrative and demonstrate how our international initiatives contribute to the broader national interest. By aligning our international efforts with Canada's priorities, we amplify the global impact of Canadian universities and contribute meaningfully to advancing the country's long-term strategic objectives.

Activities under this framework will ensure that universities are strategically positioned to make meaningful contributions to both national and global priorities such as Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, or Europe's Horizon Europe initiative. A central focus will be recognizing the critical role universities play in enhancing security, particularly through research and development. The framework will prioritize addressing urgent challenges related to major geopolitical issues, enabling universities to respond proactively. Furthermore, it will emphasize the importance of research security, ensuring that universities are equipped to meet evolving global needs while strengthening their capacity to contribute to security and geopolitical stability. These strategic priorities will guide the development of initiatives designed to amplify universities' roles in global security and research.

To effectively identify areas for growth and capitalize on emerging opportunities, Universities Canada will maintain a continuous review of current international activities. This process will reveal gaps in existing efforts and highlight new pathways for engagement that align with evolving global dynamics. In parallel, we will strengthen collaboration and coordination with both domestic and international partners to elevate Canada's global reputation and align our efforts with pressing international priorities. This collaborative approach will deepen our understanding of challenges and concerns, allowing Canadian universities to play an active role in identifying solutions and fostering innovation.

These measures will support the design and implementation of international activities and initiatives that help Canadian universities reposition themselves to thrive in a dynamic and increasingly complex international environment.

Universities Canada 's activities under this framework will include:

- **Delivery of High-Impact Events** – Ensure our events reflect the diverse geographic and demographic composition of our membership by prioritizing broad representation across regions and varying membership sizes. These events will offer members valuable opportunities for market diversification, increased networking, promotion of partnership development, and fostering of research collaborations.
- **Participation in Key International Conferences** – Actively engage in major international conferences on international education to stay informed on industry trends, best practices, and emerging opportunities. This participation will allow us to strengthen our global network, foster relationships with key stakeholders, and ensure that our members remain at the forefront of developments in their respective fields.
- **Strategic diplomatic engagement** - Engage in meetings with diplomatic representatives in Ottawa to strengthen our members' branding and enhance their reputation on the international stage. These efforts will allow us to advocate for our members' interests, elevate their visibility, and build stronger relationships with key diplomatic entities. By staying informed on global initiatives that impact our sector, we will ensure that our members are well-positioned to influence international dialogues, enhance their global standing, and seize emerging opportunities abroad.
- **Produce Market Intelligence Reports** – Collect and share valuable market insights through strategic meetings with embassies in Ottawa, Canada's Global Affairs' Trade Commissioner Service, and national organizations. This information will be disseminated to our members via the ILO's Newsletter, providing timely updates on global market trends, potential business opportunities, and emerging sectors. By leveraging these networks, we will ensure our members have access to the latest intelligence to support informed decision-making and enhance their global competitiveness.
- **Management of Programs** - Continue to actively seek out opportunities to manage and international education programs that promote faculty and student mobility such as Queen Elizabeth Scholars (QES), Canadian International Development Scholarships 2030 (BCDI), International Development Research Awards (IDRA) and the Tanaka Fund. These initiatives are vital in creating pathways for our members to engage with global research networks, build long- term partnerships, and attract top-tier talent.

Universities Canada will draft a yearly event plan to guide the implementation of this framework, allowing the International Committee to evaluate and provide feedback. This plan will outline the regions or initiatives for engagement and the activities to pursue, ensuring that efforts are aligned with the framework's goals.



Monitor and Evaluation

Given the evolving nature of global affairs, Universities Canada's Global Engagement Framework will remain dynamic and responsive. As a living framework, it will be regularly reviewed and refined to reflect emerging geopolitical developments, shifting global priorities, and the changing needs of Canada's university sector.

Ongoing engagement with members will be central to this process, ensuring that strategic priorities are informed by current realities and grounded in the collective experience of the sector. Regular mechanisms for consultation and feedback will help assess the relevance and impact of initiatives, enabling continuous improvement and alignment with member priorities.

Strategic oversight will be provided by Universities Canada's International Committee, which will serve as a forum for dialogue on emerging trends, risks, and opportunities. This governance structure will play a critical role in monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and guiding any necessary recalibration of the framework.

Through continuous evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and environmental scanning, the framework will remain agile, impactful, and well-positioned to advance Canada's role in the global higher education landscape.



Conclusion

Universities Canada's Global Engagement Framework will remain adaptable to changing geopolitical dynamics, ensuring that Canadian universities can effectively respond to global challenges and seize new opportunities. The framework focuses on safeguarding national interests by aligning international engagement with Canada's broader foreign policy goals, strengthening the country's influence on global issues, and enhancing its competitive edge in the global knowledge economy. This flexibility will allow Canadian institutions to navigate shifts in trade, politics, and education policies, maintaining Canada's position as a global leader in higher education and research.

This framework aims to enhance Canada's global reputation as a leader in higher education, innovation, and research by positioning Canadian universities as key players in international collaborations. It prioritizes building strong relationships with global stakeholders, opening doors to new markets, research funding, and talent. By fostering diplomatic ties and creating opportunities for partnerships development, Universities Canada will ensure Canadian universities remain at the forefront of academic excellence and contribute to global discussions on critical issues. This dynamic framework will guide universities through complex global challenges, ensuring Canada continues to be a top destination for international talent and a hub for world-class research and innovation.