

HHRP ISSUES – A SERIES OF POLICY OPTIONS

POST-SECONDARY STUDENT APPLICATIONS: HOW TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE LINKS BETWEEN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND WORKFORCE NEEDS?

More than one million students enrolled in post-secondary education in Canada in 2004. Many others applied and were put on wait lists. And yet, not all seats in educational institutions are filled, as no mechanism exists to identify duplicate applications or to match applicants with unfilled seats. A pan-Canadian clearinghouse for applications for post-secondary education could serve to better manage Canada's educational capacity. As a policy tool, a clearinghouse can provide early warnings of workforce shortages, signal opportunities to redirect students to enrollment openings, and support evaluation of educational investments, and policy.

Canada: a knowledge-based economy

Building a strong economy depends on gaining a knowledge advantage. From the perspective of the federal government this is achieved through “creating the best-educated, most skilled and flexible workforce in the world.”¹ In the twenty-first century, excellence in post-secondary education is critical to economic development.

Current Inefficiencies

In 2004 in Canada, more than one million students were enrolled in post-secondary education. Although many others applied and were put on wait lists, not all seats in educational institutions were filled due to the inability both to identify duplicate applications and match applicants with unfilled seats.

In most provinces, the current process is based on applications to each school for each program of interest. Because students tend to send in multiple applications to improve their chances of being accepted into a program somewhere, education planners and health human resources planners can track the number of applications, but not the number of applicants.

This is an issue that extends across provincial borders. In 2004, 9.1 per cent of Canadian students studied outside their province of permanent residence.² In some provinces the outflow of students is as high as 39 per cent. However, managing or tracking the movement of students is difficult and is not done in a consistent or timely fashion across the country. As a result, it is difficult to optimize decisions about allocation of educational resources.

The United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Ireland each have national student application systems.

The Student Seats Equation

Coordination of Available Enrollment Opportunities



Redirecting Interested Qualified Applicants



Improved Production of Skilled Workers

Information arrives too late for policy-makers to anticipate and plan for shortages in human resources.

Proof of Concept

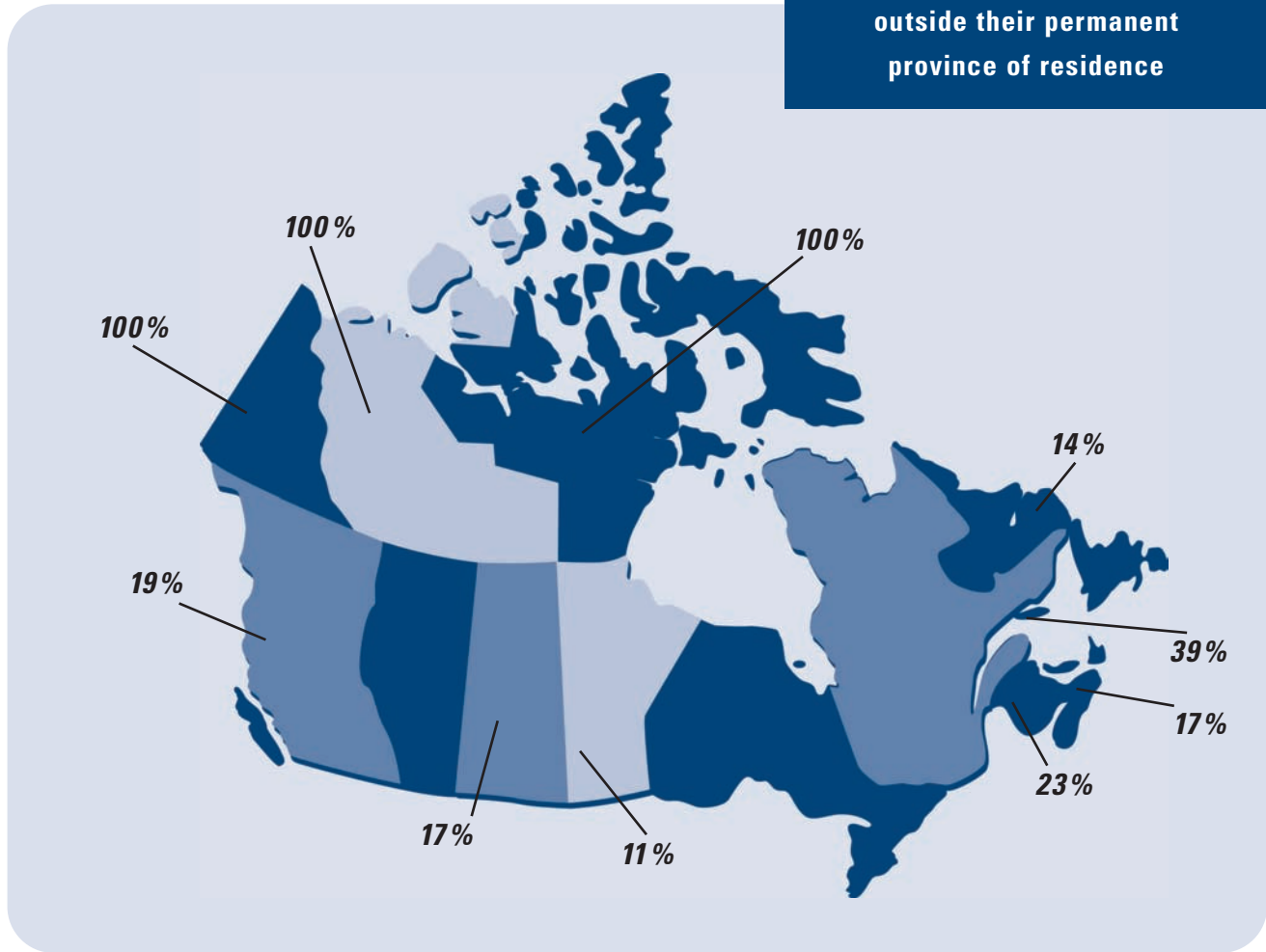
A clearinghouse system for coordinating for post-secondary education recruitment is a proven approach. The United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Ireland each have national student application systems that feature a clearinghouse function. In Canada, clearinghouses are currently being used in some jurisdictions and by some disciplines, specifically:

- the Ontario Universities Application Centre (<http://www.ouac.on.ca/about/about.html>);
- the Post-Secondary Application Service of British Columbia (www.pas.bc.ca);
- the Canadian (physician) Resident Matching Service (<http://www.carms.ca/>).

Each system is self-sustaining through a portion of student application fees, and each has been shown to offer improved efficiency and to support effective decision-making.

Applying one of these existing models, or combining their best features, could serve as a basis for a pan-Canadian student application system in Canada.

In 10 out of 13 provinces and territories, more than 10 per cent of students study outside their permanent province of residence



Advantages

A pan-Canadian student clearinghouse for post-secondary education in Canada would offer a number of advantages:

- *efficiency and cost effectiveness;*
- *a streamlined application process;*
- *identifying potential matches between interested, qualified students and available enrollment opportunities;*
- *evaluating the feasibility of increasing educational seats as a policy lever to address labour shortages;*
- *early identification of programs that are under- or over-subscribed for better planning; and*
- *providing information for measuring the impact of government educational, economic and social initiatives.*

The Case for Health Sciences

Federal, provincial and territorial governments have committed to “to enhance all jurisdictions’ capacity to work closely with employers and the education system to develop a health workforce that has the skills and competencies to provide safe, high quality care, work in innovative environments, and respond to changing health care system and population health needs.”³ A critical step is aligning the education system with health system needs and health policy.

Predicting the future supply of health professionals is done mostly by tracking admissions to health education programs and trends in student attrition. However, this information often arrives too late for policy-makers to anticipate and plan for shortages in human resources, or to make effective changes in education programs. Governments lack information about which programs are attracting the most students; what students do if they do not get their first choice of school or program; and where

students are willing to go to study. Similarly, governments and employers do not have information on where the health sciences rank among the options available to students.

A More Effective System

We need to understand students’ choices and patterns better – and the results of them – to develop excellent and responsive education programs that contribute to a stable workforce and a productive economy. A pan-Canadian student clearinghouse would improve the efficiency of the application process and produce data needed to inform policies aimed at realigning educational outputs with workforce needs.

¹ Finance Canada. (2006). Advantage Canada: Building a strong economy for Canada. Ottawa: Author.

² Statistics Canada. (2006). Enhanced Student Information System 2004 Database, Province of Residence by Province of Study.

³ Advisory Committee on Health Delivery and Human Resources. (2006). *A Framework for Collaborative Pan-Canadian Health Human Resources Planning*. Ottawa: Author.



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