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Understanding and Working with Overseas CIC Offices / International Students CIC Ottawa Update

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ARUCC 2006, Montreal, Quebec**

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Understanding and Working with CIC Offices at Home and Abroad



Introduction

- Most of the last six years spent directly "engaging" CIC
- Participation on ACISI and CIC Working Group on Regulations
- Previously at Foreign Affairs in Thailand, Iran, UK, Singapore, Australia, Brunei
- Two-year assignment with CIC in Sydney, Australia



Context and Background

- A difficult and thankless portfolio
- Recent Ministers: Robillard, Caplan, Coderre, Sgro, Volpe and now Solberg
- Politically sensitive: visa issues involve MPs, Minister's office, CIC officers
- Considerable political/legal pressure
- Minister Solberg enthusiastic and a quick study
- No major policy changes expected on international students



Recent Department History

- Extensive transformation/organizational change
- Downsized by 25% in 1999
- Two years ago, lost significant staff/responsibilities to Canadian Border Services Agency
- Difficult environment
- Main concerns are immigration and refugee issues
- Students only tiny part of Ministry but...
- Growing priority as potential skilled workers, immigrants



Global Context

- No exit controls in Canada so higher risk assessment overseas
- Students generally not enforcement problem
- Ongoing concern to maintain "integrity of the system"
- 9/11 created additional level of concern for CIC
- USA immigration reform debate has policy impact for Canada



Work Environment

- Rotational foreign service
- Administers and interprets Immigration Act and Regulations: defined regulatory framework
- Integral part of Canadian diplomatic mission but operates independently under authority of Act and Regulations – June 28, 2002
- Much of work is repetitive and predictable



- Smaller missions have one or two home-based Canadian staff who do everything
- Almost all overseas CIC offices have locally-employed CIC staff including those that can interview and issue or deny visas
- Regional offices (London, Paris) and difficult to get precise student figures
- CIC officers governed by Canadian privacy legislation



Overseas Offices and Corruption

- In many countries, visa applications inflated or totally fraudulent
- Transparency International: leading NGO devoted to combatting corruption (www.transparency.org)
- International Corruptions Perception Index 2005:
 - Iceland 1
 - Canada 14
 - Korea 40
 - Brazil 62
 - Mexico 65
 - China 78
 - India 88
 - Nigeria 152
 - Bangladesh (last) 158



- High levels of corruption in many markets where Canada is represented
- The environment raises levels of suspicion on part of visa officers



CIC-Related and Other Information Sources for International Education Marketers

Basic information on CIC websites

- Information on Study in Canada
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/index.html>
note - get to know all parts of the website well
- Who Needs Temporary Resident Visas?
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/visas.html>
- Who Needs Medical Examinations?
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/dcl.html>



- Statistical Information on Students
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/monitor/current.html>
note - not very comprehensive but indicative – 3 or 4 times a year
- CIC Media Releases
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/press/05/index.html>
note - usually of limited interest but major announcements including on students
- CIC Student Policy Manual (OP 12)
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/op/op12e.pdf>
note - guidelines for CIC line officers; key information source – 42 pages
- CIC Foreign Worker Manual
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/fw/fwe.pdf>
note - reference to students and work are in 5.35 to 5.39
- section 5.39 outlines off campus employment guidelines



- CIC Manuals Updates
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/updates.html>
note - pending manual revisions information
- Overseas Visa offices
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/offices/missions.html>
note - view neighbouring countries if no visa office where you are looking
- Gardiner Wilson's Quarterly Immigration Reports
Distributed electronically by CEC Network to clients
note - updates on immigration policy and operational developments including input and comment from CECN offices abroad.



Useful Government of Canada Websites

- Details on Canadian missions (Canadian Representation Abroad)
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/world/embassies/cra-en.asp>
note - Canadian staff in order of precedence. CIC officers can usually be identified
- Canadian mission websites
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/world/embassies/menu-en.asp>

example: Bangkok

<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/bangkok/menu-en.asp>

note - information on visa requirements in English, French and local language



- Canadian Trade Representatives

<http://www.infoexport.gc.ca/ie-en/EServices.jsp>

example - Chile (The Team)

<http://www.infoexport.gc.ca/ie-en/OurTeamInfo.jsp?oid=14>

note - trade officer roles listed including whether education is market priority



Engagement with CIC Offices in Canada and Abroad

- Establish "bona fides" with CIC abroad
- Be in regular contact with CIC offices but don't overwhelm them
- Notify Immigration Program Manager when new programs developed or changes to letterheads or institutional documentation
- Keep up to date on CIC staff changes in your markets (CECN can help)
- Do not be discouraged if CIC can't meet when you visit the region (eg China)



- Meeting with visiting schools means less time processing study permits
- Write/email immigration section if you think error has occurred with application (keep CECN in the picture)
- CECN makes representations on policy or operational guidelines, not individual files
- Privacy legislation may prevent CIC from saying or doing much
- Make representations to Ambassador only if merits attention (CECN can provide advice)
- Keep correspondence polite and provide specific details



- Where CIC has done a good job send letter of thanks
- Get to know your local CIC official responsible for students
- Keep in mind value and integrity of institutional letter of acceptance
- Good practice to notify local office if student is a no-show, withdraws after arrival or subsequently (but consider institutional privacy issues)
- New phone number for “non-compliance” 1-888-502-9060 (This is CBSA office)



Positive Study Permit Developments

Improvements to visa situation over last 3 years:

- June 2002 - SP exemption from 3 months to 6 months
- June 2002 - Exemption category from language sector to all sectors
- March 2003 - Monitor publication - info on student flows



- January 2005 - More flexible policy for post-secondary students to change institutions
- April 2005 - Secondary school SP for full four years
- May 2005 - Ability to directly email most CIC offices abroad
- May 2005 - Expanded work provisions (outside MTV) for public post-secondary graduates
- May 2005 – Off-campus employment pilots underway; discussions with other provinces to establish nationally
- April 2006 – Implementation of off campus employment



Other Positive Developments

ACISI

- More timely statistical information
- Establishment of Working Groups (on Regulations), on minors
- Much more collegial and productive sessions

CIC

- Now view international students as potential immigrant source
- Greater emphasis being given within CIC



Areas Where Improvement Needed

- More transparency particularly in respect of refusals
- More engagement with education agents (i.e. training programs)
- Change of status in Canada allowing TRV holders to obtain SP
- Stronger capacity to deal with in-Canada questions (i.e. domestic delivery)

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International Students – CIC Ottawa Update



Off-Campus Employment

Importance

- Marketing advantage as Canada more attractive destination
- Positions Canada on same basis as major competitors
- Officially implemented 27 April 2006

The Players

- CIC
- Provincial and territorial governments
- Educational institutions
- International students



The Process

- CIC with the provinces, the provinces with the institutions, the institutions with students

Eligible Institutions

- Publicly-funded PSE
- Private PSE with 50% gov't support in Quebec

Ineligible

- Private universities, career colleges, language schools or programs at PSE which are substantially ESL/FSL
- Secondary schools



Province's Role

- Signs MOU with CIC on compliance and must report annually based on reports from eligible institutions

Institution's Role

- Must have signed MOU with Province/CIC agreeing to provisions
- Designated Institutional Representative (DIR) has institutional oversight and administration of program
- Must report annually to provincial government which in return reports status to CIC (usually in October/November)



Student Eligibility

- Complete one term (i.e. 6 out of past 12 months) before applying
- Full-time (as defined by institution)
- Good standing (as defined by institution)
- Not holder of GoC or Commonwealth Scholarship
- Must sign consent form for info to be passed to province thence GoC
- Onus very much on student to do the work



Work Permit

- Will be open (i.e. not restricted to course of study)
- Valid for length of program + 90 days post-graduation
- Allows 20 hours per week during school year; full-time during holidays including reading week

Paperwork

- Overview of Off-Campus Work Permit Program (7 pages)
- Guide for Designated Institutional Representatives (15 pages)
- Student Guide - Application for Work Permit (8 pages)
- Info will be placed on CIC website - Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines:

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/manuals-guides/english/fw/index.html>



Second Year Post-Graduation Employment

- Still only available outside MTV
- Some criticism from college and university community
- Will be reviewed by CIC in two years



Private Universities, Career Colleges and Work Provisions Eligibility

- International students currently not eligible for off-campus
- International students eligible for post-graduation employment (I.E. Devry)



CAQ

- CAQ must be presented with study permit application; usually no concurrent application possible



Flexible Letter of Acceptance

- Can be accepted but best to include firm final date



Incorrect Decisions at POE

- Can be dealt with in Vegreville and using Call Centre access



Encouraging Development II

- Discussions have begun amongst Federal and Provincial Immigration Ministers to allow international students to apply from within Canada I.E. in Canada landing
- Discussions have begun on increased occupational flexibility for post graduation employment



Enquiries to CIC

- Vegreville no longer accepts fax request (CECN has notified)
- Call Centre staff have been increased and are important first point of contact
- CIC working on web-based standardized enquiry form for use with overseas offices



International Student Flows

- Numbers of Study Permits – 62,149 (2004) vs 64,534 (2005)
- Numbers in Canada increasing – 144,245 (2003) vs 153,638 (2004)
- Applications Received and Acceptance Rates (2005)
 - Beijing 10,836 Acceptance 63% = 6,794 SP
 - Seoul 14,892 Acceptance 93% = 13,830 SP
 - Delhi 5,797 Acceptance 31% = 1,852 SP
 - Paris 5,210 Acceptance 95% = 4,958 SP