

# **The Internationalization of Post-Secondary Education in Manitoba: A Critique of Two Government Policy Approaches, 1999 - 2021**

Kimberly Browning and Abdelhady Elnagar

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Article abstract

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## **The Internationalization of Post-Secondary Education in Manitoba: A Critique of Two Government Policy Approaches, 1999 - 2021**

Kimberly Browning<sup>1</sup> & Abdelhady Elnagar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Winnipeg, <sup>2</sup>University of Manitoba

### **Abstract**

International education has become a policy sector of increasing importance to the Canadian province of Manitoba. Provincial governments with opposing political ideologies can impact international education policy differently. Using narratives as an analytical framework, we identify themes by examining the approaches taken to the international post-secondary education (PSE) sector in Manitoba under the last two governments that held office. The analysis reveals that while both governments' policies are underpinned by neoliberalism reflecting the economic benefits of international student recruitment and retention, key differences are identified. While cultural diversity and global understanding, policy coordination and collaboration, associated leadership, strategy, and a regulatory framework were important components of international PSE policy, there has been a discernible shift towards an austerity agenda, free market policies, and a reconceptualization of international PSE as an immigration-focused policy. The paper concludes that the current government's focus on labour markets and immigration when it comes to international PSE means that other aspects of internationalization are little understood and supported.

*Keywords:* Manitoba internationalization of post-secondary education, international students, political ideology, neoliberalism

### **Introduction**

Notwithstanding the damaging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on international student mobility trends that continue to unfold, Canada, until recently, had seen exponential growth in international student enrolment. As of December 31, 2019, Canada's international student enrolment at all levels of study<sup>1</sup> soared to a record high of 638,960 international students (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). But as of December 31, 2020, there were 530,540 international students holding Canadian study permits, a 17% decrease from the same point in 2019, and the first decline in Canada's foreign enrolment in 20 years (International Consultants for Education and Fairs [ICEF] Monitor, 2021).

Before the pandemic struck, Canada's international student enrolment growth was strong and steady, far surpassing the federal government's stated goal in its first International Education Strategy, *Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* (Government of Canada, 2014) of

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<sup>1</sup> All levels of study refer to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's categories of "secondary or less", "post-secondary", "other studies" and "study level not stated".

enrolling more than 450,000 international students in Canadian educational institutions by 2022. By 2018, as the government stated in its five-year strategy that commits \$148 million with \$8 million per year of ongoing funding, *Building on Success: International Education Strategy 2019-2024* (Government of Canada, 2019), international students in Canada contributed an estimated \$21.6 billion to Canada's GDP, and in 2016, supported almost 170,000 jobs. In both international education strategies, the federal government promotes an economic rationale for internationalizing education in Canada and quantifies the benefits of recruiting international students as a source of revenue generation, prosperity, and desirable future immigrants. Underpinning the federal government's international education strategies is the belief that international education is a tradable commodity supported by the refreshed EduCanada brand, "Education au/in Canada", launched in 2016.

In addition to the federal government's 2019 International Education Strategy, two other educational organizations released international education strategies further supporting Canada's intention to advance as a key player in the international education global marketplace. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) released an *International Education and Engagement Strategy (2019-2022)* (CMEC, 2019), recognizing Canada's need, through interprovincial engagement, to remain competitive in international education and to diversify countries from which to attract international students. In November 2019, at its annual conference, the Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE), a national member-based non-governmental organization for post-secondary institutions that promotes international education in Canada, unveiled its *Strategic Plan 2020-2025* (CBIE, 2019) stating that it will continue to work to recognize the importance of making Canada a world leader in international education – both to ensuring future prosperity and by maintaining its enduring commitment to global citizenship.

With the release of international education strategies noted above, international education has become a core public policy focus for the federal government and also a number of provincial governments (Trilokekar et al., 2020). With policies and practices varying considerably by jurisdiction, Trilokekar et al. (2020) argued there is need for "a more comprehensive understanding of how those governmental policies have emerged, how they interact and shape internalization processes, ... and how they (re)shape and (re)define the purposes, functions, and roles of education and higher education in Canada" (p. 7), and, we argue, at the provincial level as well. This paper attempts to contribute to that understanding.

Globalization, massification and privatization have contributed to internationalization policies and processes that have radically changed PSE systems. Neoliberal interpretations of internationalization have become drivers and structuring forces influencing development of educational policy globally and locally (Al-Haque, 2018; Garson, 2016; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Robson & Wihlborg, 2019; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020; Viczko & Tascón, 2016). Governments with different ideological backgrounds can greatly impact international PSE policy. Using the province of Manitoba as an example, we employ thematic analysis to examine how international PSE has been shaped and influenced by political neoliberal ideology over the course of the last two provincial governments.

While the impacts of globalization were first felt in the 1980s and 90s and had important ramifications for PSE among the Anglo-American democracies, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, Manitoba's PSE policy was also impacted by globalization. Amid a global economic recession, PSE institutions were expected to engage in economic reconstruction and contribute to their respective economies by responding more nimbly to the needs of industry, widening access, and developing closer ties with the private sector (Saunders, 2006). In an analysis of PSE policymaking in Manitoba from 1988 to 1999 under the Progressive Conservative government of Gary Filmon, Saunders (2006) found that the impact of globalization on the government's thinking about PSE was clearly evident. Given the poor state of the province's finances at the time and the challenges posed by globalization, PSE was viewed as "an extension of the government's economic agenda" (p. 269) that required a "fundamental reorganization of the province's PSE system if it was to continue to play a crucial role in shaping Manitoba's future economic success" (p. 287). Additionally, the government's creation of the Council on Post-Secondary Education (COPSE)<sup>2</sup> a PSE intermediary agency in 1997, ensured better coordination between the PSE system and the province's economic priorities (Saunders, 2006; Smith, 2011). Since

<sup>2</sup> COPSE was dissolved in 2014, ending 47 years of intermediary agencies as the model for governing PSE in Manitoba (see Smith, 2015).

1997, Smith (2011) observed that Manitoba's PSE system has undergone extensive structural change that supports concepts associated with globalization including greater focus on internationalization, strengthening of private providers, and more attention paid to labour force development. Thus, Manitoba's PSE system has historically been strongly influenced by globalization and closely tied to the economy, thereby reflecting elements of neoliberalism.

Scholars (Tamtik, 2018, 2020; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020) have argued that Manitoba provides a unique study of internationalization approaches that stand out for progress made in creating significant policy support and coordination among stakeholders in the international education market, and for its strong regulatory framework ensuring quality programming and protection for international students. It is further argued that Manitoba's steady growth in international education can be partly explained by strong policy support of the New Democratic Party (NDP) government until it lost power to the Progressive Conservative (PC) party in April 2016 (Tamtik, 2018; Tamtik & O'Brien-Klewchuk, 2020). Although the K-12 international education segment in Manitoba has an established presence, e.g., increasing student enrolment, well-developed international student programs, and off-shore partnerships involving affiliate schools teaching the provincial school curriculum (Elnagar & Young, 2021; Tamtik, 2020), the focus of this paper is the PSE sector. International education is "a multi-layered complex political process" (Tamtik & O'Brien-Klewchuk, 2020, p. 4) and we examine how changing political ideology has influenced international PSE in Manitoba.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse international PSE policy developments in Manitoba in relation to neoliberalism by examining how the last two provincial governments: the NDP Party from 1999 to 2016 and the sitting PC Party from 2016 to spring 2021 (up to the time this paper was written) viewed international PSE and developed their policy platforms. Considering these developments over time, we argue that (a) both governments presented the dominant theme of international PSE in economic terms (consisting of elements of trade and immigration/citizenship) – a neoliberal vision – but that within this dominant theme (b) it is possible to recognize significantly different sub-themes consistent with the broad political ideologies and platforms of the NDP and PC governments, and that (c) these different sub-themes are evident in specific initiatives, actions and practices undertaken by each government.

The paper begins with a brief overview of neoliberalism and internationalization as pretext to understanding how these terms have emerged in the international PSE literature. Next, we discuss the Manitoba context, followed by the methodology. We examine policy documents, strategies, government reports, news releases, newspapers, and media items to identify international PSE themes and sub-themes consistent with the broad political ideologies/platforms of the two provincial governments. Next, we compare their overall approaches to internationalization and analyze how their contrasting ideologies have impacted international PSE and international students. In the conclusion, we consider the implications, the intended and unintended consequences of these different policy themes and suggest further critical analysis of international PSE policy and strategy in light of the necessary intercultural and global knowledge aspects as part of policy and practice.

## Neoliberalism and Internationalization

Neoliberalism has multiple meanings within various political and academic contexts. Means and Slater (2019) defined neoliberalism as "a socio-political rationality and historical phase of capitalism that works to transform all aspects of state policy and social life in line with the imperatives of the markets and elite corporate and financial interests" (p. 164). At the policy level, this includes the commodification of education services, and the role of PSE as an economic driver of growth and innovation through the production of competitive human capital and resilient market-ready skills and dispositions (Means & Slater, 2019). Central tenets of neoliberalism in Canada and elsewhere have led to erosion of government funding for PSE, rise of the student as consumer (Rigas & Kuchapski, 2016; Saunders & Blanco Ramirez, 2017), and the associated privatization of costs suggesting a shift from PSE as a collective public good to a private good (Garson, 2016; Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

Internationalization is not a new phenomenon, nor is the debate about its meaning, but its popularity in the PSE sector has soared since the early 1980s (Knight, 2014). Before then, according to de Wit (2014), there was already a substantial tradition of research and practice on the international dimension of PSE, in general under the term 'international education' or under terms reflecting some kind of international activity. Traditionally, these terms were either related to mobility, such as study abroad,

exchanges, international students or academic mobility, or related to curriculum, such as multicultural education, international studies, and peace education. While it is unclear when the transition from ‘international education’ to ‘internationalization of (post-secondary) education’ took place, it was in the 1990s that the term ‘internationalization’ really took over from ‘international education’ in describing different ways the international dimension, particularly in the PSE field took shape (de Wit, 2014). The literature on internationalization has since evolved to reflect two overlapping but also separate discourses: an economic or market-oriented interest, and a learning-driven conceptualization (Elnagar & Young, 2021). The focus of this paper is on the internationalization of PSE policy.

Jane Knight’s (2004) definition of internationalization of PSE is perhaps the most widely accepted: “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 11). More recently, Knight (2012) expressed concern about the different ends (rankings, profit, soft power) and some of the values (competitiveness, commercialization) now linked to internationalization. Knight (2014) later reflected that internationalization of higher education is having an identity crisis and “has become a catch-all phrase to describe anything and everything remotely linked to the global, intercultural or international dimensions of higher education and is thus losing its way” (p. 76). Knight (2014) called for a reconsideration of “the fundamental values underpinning it” (p.76). Other scholars have argued that internationalization should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means to enhance the quality of teaching, research and service role of PSE to align more closely with social, cultural and intellectual objectives (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; de Wit, 2014; de Wit et al., 2015; Garson, 2016; Wilborg & Robson, 2018; Yemini, 2015; Yemini & Sagie, 2016).

Since the mid-1980s, the forces of globalization, massification, and privatization have shifted international education away from the primary pursuit of academic exchange and promotion of international cultural relations to a greater focus on national competitiveness and commercial and economic considerations (Al-Haque, 2018; de Wit et al., 2015; Trilokekar, 2010). PSE has become increasingly commodified by governments in Canada and elsewhere as a service industry with national policies that regard internationalization as a means for growth and income generation in the PSE sector (Bamberger et al., 2019; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Robson & Wihlborg, 2019; Viczko & Tascón, 2016; Wihlborg & Robson, 2018). Neoliberalism is associated with economic practices affecting international PSE and is often employed when rationales for internationalization are portrayed as moving away from humanistic motives to those of a more commercial nature. In their critique of the term, Bamberger et al. (2019) argued that neoliberalism is often drawn upon as a loose rhetorical device for encompassing features that do not align with normative perspectives of what internationalization *should* be. Thus, internationalization of PSE has become increasingly aligned with economic and commercial motives which internalize neoliberal categories and assumptions.

Canadian scholars have been critical of the recent framing of international education as a revenue-generating industry that prioritizes recruitment of international students as the sole basis of internationalizing (Guo & Guo, 2017; Knight, 2014; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Tamtik, 2018; Tamtik & O’Brien-Klewchuk, 2020; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016; Viczko & Tascón, 2016). As Trilokekar and El Masri (2016) cogently summarized, “as international education becomes increasingly linked to immigration, recruitment and retention of international students, it cannot just be about numbers” (p. 558) but should focus more on fostering social cohesion as a society through promoting a sense of shared citizenship.

Two research questions guided this study: (i) what are the main themes that characterize the approaches of Manitoba’s last two provincial governments towards international PSE? and (ii) what are the intended and unintended consequences of their respective approaches to international PSE? Using a thematic approach, this paper examines the dynamics in which various actors such as educators, politicians, bureaucrats, practitioners, researchers, and the media were engaged in internationalization policy processes. The paper highlights the impacts of a shifting discourse that normalizes and advances a neoliberal version of international PSE in Manitoba over the last two decades with implications for the reconsideration of internationalization policy and practice.



## Analytical Framework

Narratives are frameworks or stories constructed to allow people to make sense of the world, policies, events, and interactions. Narratives are not only ‘representations of a sequence of events and identities,’ but are also used as ‘communicative tools through which political actors - usually elites - attempt to give determined meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives’ (Yang, 2021). The role of narratives and narrative processes in public policy is a well-established theme within policy studies. Narrative policy analysis is useful when political ideology issues show points of convergence and divergence with a neoliberal policy model (Marontate & Murray, 2010). The focus on narratives regarding international PSE in Manitoba constitutes an examination of the political discourse of that policy. Garcea and Kikulwe (2019) referred to political discourse as “a process centred on the communication of ideas of political situations, policy options, or intergroup relations and identities articulated by anyone within the polity” (p. 89) for example, political parties, governments and media, as important elements of particular political strategies. Such discourses may entail political narratives and counter-narratives related to one or more public policies (Garcea & Kikulwe, 2019).

Policy narratives become important in situations of uncertainty and in complex policy matters. Narratives are created and promoted by various policy actors (McBeth et al., 2007; Shanahan et al., 2011) with the intention of providing a legitimizing discourse for a certain course of action. But the key elements of these narratives are strategically constructed stories as they are intended to persuade the public and stakeholders about the need to take a certain course of action to address a policy issue. All policy narratives make some key assumptions (Shanahan, et al., 2011) such as their centrality in the policy process, the broad set of actors that can generate policy narratives, or that policies constitute translations of beliefs conveyed through policy narratives (Iusmen, 2018).

Before constructing the policy narratives in the context of international PSE in Manitoba, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by ‘policy narratives’ in this paper and how we propose to examine them. Maags (2020) defined policy narratives as “intentionally constructed stories that include information concerning why policy problems exist and how they can be solved” (p. 275). Policy narratives commonly appear in the process of political agenda-setting and problem formulation and have a significant impact on policy implementation (Maags, 2020).

The process begins with our construction of the dominant narrative and a counter-story that is significantly different to the dominant narrative (Hampton, 2009; 2011). A policy narrative is not decided in an instant, but always has a history that evolves and develops over time (Rickinson et al., 2018), and can help explain the evolving story of international PSE policy in Manitoba under the two provincial governments. We postulate that both governments revealed a neoliberal approach by presenting international PSE in economic terms, including elements of trade and immigration and that themes could be identified in certain initiatives and actions undertaken by the NDP and PC provincial governments. In this context, policy narratives play a crucial role in justifying and legitimizing the actions taken by policymakers and politicians more generally in order to achieve specific policy outcomes (Shanahan et al., 2011), and may reflect “attempts by actors to develop plausible interpretations of complex phenomena or events” (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 4).

The power of narratives in shaping beliefs, debate and policymaking is supported in a variety of academic literature contexts including the PSE context, for example, Salajan (2018) examined rhetorical devices in policy narratives created by the European Union around the establishment of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. Hatfield Price (2019) looked at how advocacy groups, policy makers, and the media influence PSE completion rates through prior learning assessment policy narratives. Policy narratives have also been used to analyze dominant education themes under PC and NDP governments in Manitoba during the period from 1990 to 2003 (Sutherland et al., 2007), but there is no known application of this attempt to create a coherent explanation of international PSE in Manitoba over the last two decades.

## *The International Post-Secondary Education Context in Manitoba*

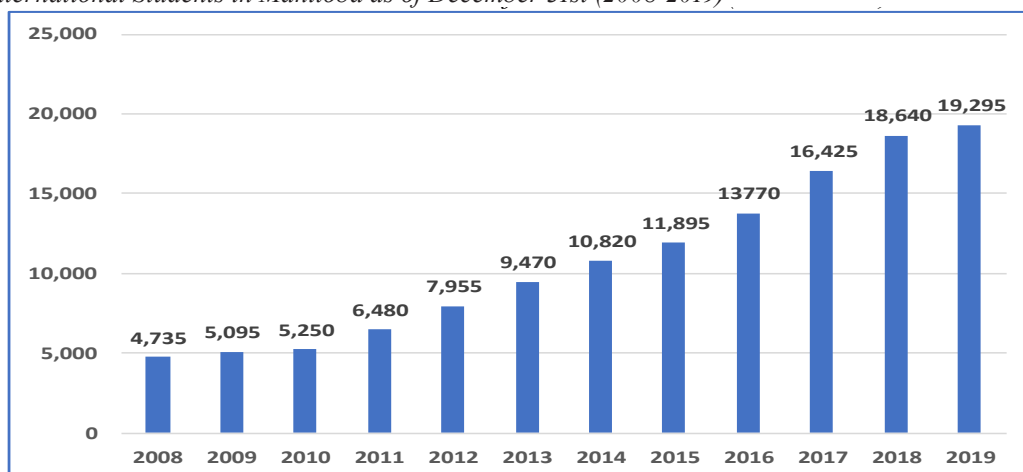
In some respects, 2019 was a banner year for international education in Manitoba. The keystone province’s capital city of Winnipeg hosted annual conferences for three major associations including Languages Canada, the Canadian Association of Public Schools – International (CAPS-I) and, for the first

time, the CBIE that attracted 900 participants from 40 countries. In recognition of those achievements, the Minister of Education declared 2019 as the “Year of International Education in Manitoba”, while acknowledging the province’s growing reputation as a destination of choice for international students (Government of Manitoba, 2019).

As the education minister pointed out, international education is extremely valuable to Manitoba’s economy and labour market (Government of Manitoba, 2019). It has a strong base of support from the Manitoba Council on International Education (MCIE), a voluntary member-led organization comprising the K-12, post-secondary and language sectors that consistently advocates for positioning Manitoba as a study destination in view of increasing competition and the need for government and business to recognize international education as a significant contributor to the economic and future development of the province (Gervais, 2014; Gervais & Fraser, 2017; Munro, 2018).

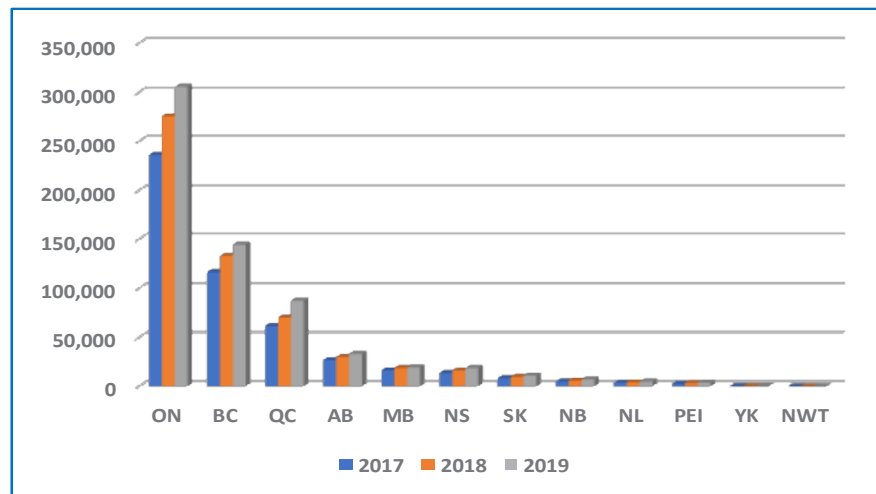
**Figure 1**

*International Students in Manitoba as of December 31st (2008-2019)*



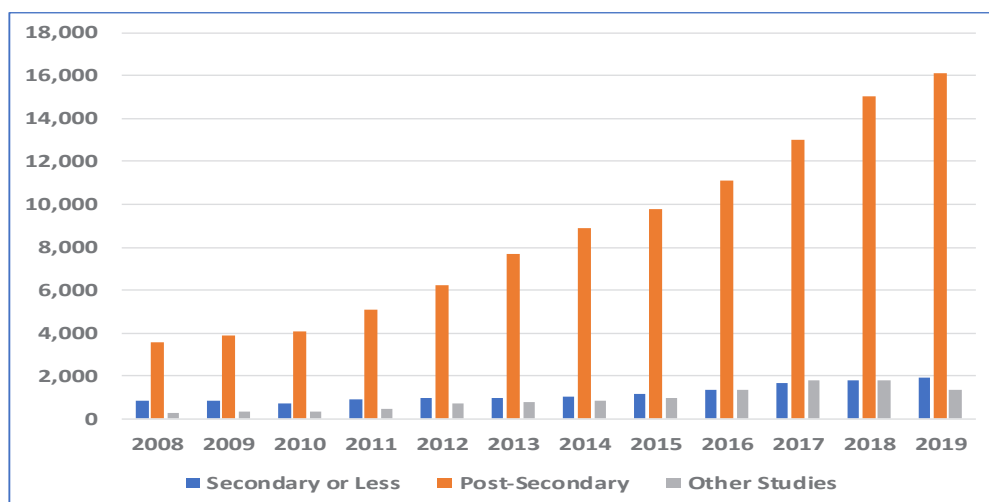
*Source.* Data is extracted from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8facaee>.

International student enrolment growth has been strong in Manitoba. An examination of data in Figure 1 above shows that based on the number of study-permit holders as of December 2019, Manitoba’s international student enrollment rose continuously over the last decade. Year-over-year growth has been steady, rising by double-digit increases for most of the last decade. Enrolment more than doubled between 2013 and 2018, surpassing Nova Scotia in 2015 to become the fifth largest recipient of international students among Canada’s ten provinces and three territories (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020) (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***International Students in Canada by Province/Territory*

*Source.* Data is extracted from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8facee>.

Further analysis (Figure 3 below) shows that international student enrolment at the secondary level or less (K-12) more than doubled over the last decade to account for almost 10% of enrolment. But it is at the PSE level where international student enrolment has soared - more than quadrupling over the same time span to reach 16,120 students or 83.5% of the total international student population in Manitoba. Students enrolled in other studies account for the remaining 7% of the population.

**Figure 3***International Students in Manitoba by Study Levels as of December 31st (2008-2019)*

*Source.* Data is extracted from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8facee>.

In addition to enrolment growth, there is significant positive economic value associated with inter-



national students studying in Manitoba (see Table 1). Data show the combined direct and indirect impact of international students on Manitoba's economy more than doubled over the last five years, with total annual spending in 2018 reaching a high of \$522.8 million, contributing \$460 million to the province's gross domestic product and supporting more than 5,000 jobs.

**Table 1**

*Direct and Indirect Economic Impact of International Students in Manitoba*

| Year | Total Annual Spending (millions) | Output (millions) | GDP (millions) | Labour Income (millions) | Employment (Jobs) | Total Tax Revenue (\$000's) |
|------|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2014 | \$220.8                          | \$324.9           | \$190.9        | \$110.6                  | 2,575             | \$43.3                      |
| 2015 | \$287.8                          | \$400.0           | \$238.8        | \$143.3                  | 3,321             | \$53.9                      |
| 2016 | \$374.8                          | \$510.8           | \$306.3        | \$183.5                  | 4,250             | \$69.3                      |
| 2017 | \$430.5                          | \$587.9           | \$376.8        | \$220.7                  | 4,400             | \$77.1                      |
| 2018 | \$522.8                          | \$713.1           | \$460.1        | \$269.4                  | 5,340             | \$90.2                      |

*Source.* Numbers are extracted from Canmac Economics Limited. (2020, August). *Economic impact of international education in Canada: 2020 update final report*. [https://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/economic\\_impact\\_international\\_education\\_canada\\_2017\\_2018.pdf](https://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/economic_impact_international_education_canada_2017_2018.pdf)

Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc. (2016, July). *Economic impact of international education in Canada: An update final report*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>

Roslyn Kunin and Associates, Inc. (2017, December). *Economic impact of international education in Canada: An update final report*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/index.aspx?lang=eng>

There is a broad policy coherence between the federal government and the Manitoba provincial government when it comes to retention and recruitment of international students. Both levels of government largely quantify benefits of internationalization in terms of recruiting international students as a source of highly skilled labour to the economy. Like most provinces, Manitoba's immigration policies align with the federal government's immigration strategy in that the province works cooperatively with the federal government to attract and retain international students through immigration streams such as the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP)<sup>3</sup> (see for example Carter et al., 2008; Carter et al., 2010; Seidle, 2013). Moreover, from the inception of provincial nominee programs, most provinces developed streams targeting international graduates from post-secondary institutions (Brunner, 2017). Both federal and provincial governments value international students as future immigrants that are highly skilled and can meet specific local labour market needs.

Between 1999 and 2019, education in Manitoba experienced different organizational restructurings, with international education being shuffled among different ministries. Early in the NDP's mandate, K-12 and PSE operated as two separate departments until 2013, when both ministries were combined to become Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. During the PC government's first term in office, the province continued to have one department, Manitoba Education and Training, to administer both K-12 and PSE. In October 2019, following re-election the month before, the PC government announced changes to education governance. There would be an Economic Development and Training department that has since been renamed to Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration (as of January 2021) to house advanced education, immigration and workforce/labour, while K-12 remained intact as a separate entity. International education had earlier ties to the trade industry as a branch office in 2000 under the Manitoba Competitiveness, Training and Trade Ministry and was housed on the premises of the gov-

<sup>3</sup> The MPNP was established in 1998 under a federal/provincial government agreement as an application and immigrant settlement program that selects applicants with the training, work experience, language ability and investment potential to work in Manitoba and contribute to the provincial economy.

ernment's Trade Unit (later named Manitoba Growth, Enterprise and Trade) (Elnagar, 2019; Trilokekar & Tamtik, 2020). Since then, international PSE has moved to the Advanced Education Ministry and is closely integrated with the Immigration and Economic Opportunities office (Government of Manitoba, 2018-2019).

## Methodology

This paper draws on an extensive literature review and document analysis totalling approximately 100 items including government strategies, annual reports, books and dissertations, academic articles, research and data reports, news releases, media items, transcripts from the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (Hansard), and websites to examine key initiatives, strategies and policy positions on internationalization undertaken by both governments. The selection criteria for documents and data sources involved: 1) most recent strategic plans, policies and initiatives governing international PSE federally and provincially in Manitoba; 2) direct relevance to international PSE (including trade policies and strategic plans); and 3) public accessibility (publicly available online). Using a qualitative case study approach, the case was bounded by jurisdiction (Manitoba) and time period (from 1999 to spring 2021) and captured international PSE policy orientation over that time.

The following documents found to have the most relevance to international PSE in Manitoba were reviewed: 1) *Reaching Beyond our Borders: The Framework for Manitoba's International Activities* (Government of Manitoba, 2005); 2) *International Education Strategy of the Province of Manitoba 2009-2013* (Government of Manitoba, 2008); 3) *International Trade Strategy for Manitoba* (Government of Manitoba, 2011); 4) *The Guide to the Code of Practice and Conduct Regulation for Manitoba Designated Education Providers, Their Staff Recruiters and Contracted Agents* (Government of Manitoba, 2015a); 5) *The International Education Act and two Regulations*; 6) *Manitoba's Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy* (Government of Manitoba, 2021a); and government annual reports and news releases.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting a rich and detailed account of data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). A theme captures something important relating to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is a coherent integration of the disparate pieces of data that constitute the findings (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Our aim is to present the findings and create a coherent story in which themes are described and connected (Vaismoradi et al., 2016), driven by our interest in comparing the two provincial governments' approaches to international PSE and students.

Analysis involved reviewing relevant documents and making notes to keep track of initial impressions and patterns. The coding process involved classifying textual data into manageable categories grouped together for generating emerging ideas, building descriptions, and searching for recurring patterns (Creswell, 2013). A short list of tentative codes was developed, expanded to several categories, then reduced and combined to a manageable number of themes. As a fundamentally interpretative approach, an important component of thematic analysis is the researcher's personal insight that provides contextualized and comprehensive understandings to interpretation of data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). As researchers, theme development was thereby influenced by the combination of our scholarly research, publications, knowledge, and direct experience working in the field.

There are some limitations to this study. As a single jurisdiction and single-issue study, its applicability to other jurisdictions and policy areas is unclear. Also limiting is the comparison of an NDP government in power for 17 years versus a sitting PC government for four and a half years where a longer time in power for development and scrutiny of policies under the former may be advantageous. It could be argued that there has not been sufficient time for international policy development under the PC government, which explains our almost exclusive reliance on news releases and media items to decipher policy. We also recognize that political and economic ideologies related to neoliberalism have become increasingly hegemonic over the last 30 years to explain many areas of internationalization policies and practices and is made visible through propagation of free market policies, competition, deregulation, and instrumental framing of education for individual economic gain (Bamberger et al., 2019). This raises the question of what the international PSE narrative would look like if a longer time horizon of the sitting government is considered. Future research might consider analysis of the ongoing influence of neoliberalism on international PSE government policy in conjunction with international student enrolment trends in Manitoba.

## Findings

The findings present insights from document analysis to reveal themes that emerged from constructing the narratives based on different policy environments through time as the governments changed. In the analysis of international PSE during the NDP's years in power, followed by the PC government's first and early second terms in office, the data revealed noticeable differences in how both governments addressed internationalization and developed policies pertaining to international students. The following themes were identified: The NDP government's approach to internationalization was characterized by policy coordination, facilitation and collaboration through establishing the International Education Branch office, developing and implementing an international education strategy that realized the economic benefits of international student recruitment and retention, as well as the importance of cultural diversity and global understanding as key rationale; and protection and regulation of the international education industry through legislation to standardize the provision of international education services. Under the PC government, analysis suggests a dramatic shift in direction with the dismantling of a director-led government office responsible for policy coordination and implementation of strategy, with no new strategic plan pertaining to internationalization, the reconceptualization of international PSE as an immigration-focused policy, cuts to PSE funding and international student services, and ultimately, disengagement with the sector.

### *Internationalization of PSE under the NDP Government (1999-2016)*

Upon taking office, the NDP government adopted a *Third Way* approach modeled on the British New Labour Party under former Prime Minister, Tony Blair that sought to blend classical social democracy and neoliberal values, and to balance "an acceptance of the necessity of a market economy with efforts to ameliorate its impact on those most vulnerable to its fluctuations" (Woolford & Thomas, 2011, p. 115). By importing neoliberal policies, the government increasingly employed the private sector and markets as a means of promoting productivity and creativity, which was evident in its support for expansion in international trade (Elnagar, 2019; Wiseman, 2012). During its almost 17 years in power, the NDP offered strong policy support for international education to the elementary, secondary and PSE sectors in Manitoba (Elnagar, 2019; Tamtik 2018). This is evident in documents linking international education to trade, economic development and immigration; releasing an International Education Strategy (2009-2014) (Government of Manitoba, 2008) establishing an International Education Branch (IEB) Office; and passing legislation (the *International Education Act* and Regulations).

Although the government's approach to international education was market-driven, based on economic impact, there were important social democratic aspects as well, for example, the granting of free health care coverage to international students with a valid study permit after living in Canada for six months. The NDP envisioned international education, and in particular, international students as key participants in its *International Trade Strategy for Manitoba* (Government of Manitoba, 2011) that would enhance Manitoba's profile internationally, and support its immigration strategy as potential immigrants through either encouraging immigration from their home country or immigrating themselves. The Trade Strategy focused on international students' contributions to future trade capabilities to "help open doors for future trade and investment" (p. 12), and to boost immigration and growth.

### ***Policy Coordination, Facilitation and Collaboration***

Early in its mandate in 2000, the NDP established the International Education Branch (IEB) office largely to coordinate international education efforts between other provincial government offices, the federal government and local education stakeholders (Elnagar, 2019). The idea of creating an IEB evolved from a series of policy documents articulating the importance of linking international education with the economy, trade, immigration, and labour. The government recognized international education as a common thread weaving through these areas and created an office to provide a leadership role and coordinate international education policy among departments.

A small government office with a director and staff, but no legislative authority or governance structure, the IEB covered a vast mandate with a wide array of roles and responsibilities (Government of Man-

itoba, 2014-2015; Savage, 2009). Chief among these was coordination of international student recruitment missions primarily to Asian and South American countries to promote Manitoba's cross-cultural education opportunities, and market the province as a provider of high-quality education with competitive tuition fees, and a safe and affordable lifestyle. The IEB also performed important coordination and collaborative functions, for example co-organizing International Education Week with the MCIE each November, to celebrate international education and international student scholarship in Manitoba.

The IEB assumed the official role of facilitator and supporter of international education activities in Manitoba, both provincially through collaboration with the MCIE, and inter-provincially and federally through CMEC working groups, the Provincial Territorial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities (PTCCERIA) and the Federal Provincial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities (FPCCERIA). The IEB also worked closely with the MCIE to host Familiarization tours, an initiative to bring education agents from priority foreign markets to tour the province's leading educational institutions to promote cultural and educational opportunities for international students. Additionally, the IEB was responsible for achieving the goals of the *International Education Strategy of the Province of Manitoba 2009-2013* and worked closely with the government and education stakeholders to develop international education-related legislation.

The IEB served an important communications function with development of orientation booklets in several languages including English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Mandarin (Government of Manitoba, 2014-2015) for current and prospective international students, e.g., *Study in Manitoba: Your Passport to Success*, and *Education Excellence: All you Need for a World-class Education* (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). It also hosted an informative website specifically directed toward the international student market in both Manitoba and abroad. A valuable resource was an annual report, co-produced by the IEB and the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics of international student enrolment data by three sectors (K-12, Post-secondary, and Language/English as a Second Language) with detailed analyses by area of study, country of origin and world region. These reports provided value-added knowledge about Manitoba's international student population facilitating not only detailed sectoral analysis by post-secondary institutions, public school divisions, independent schools, and language centres, but year-over-year comparisons to chart enrolment patterns over time. These reports were published over a 12-year period from 2004-2005 to 2015-2016 and are still posted on the government's website but are no longer being published ([https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ie/study/st\\_rep.html](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ie/study/st_rep.html)). Additionally, the IEB was responsible for implementing the *International Education Act* and associated regulations.

### ***Developing and Implementing Strategy***

The NDP issued two key policy documents concerning international education. The first, *Reaching Beyond our Borders: The Framework for Manitoba's International Activities* (RBOB) (Government of Manitoba, 2005) was a strategic framework to promote Manitoba's economic interests and to achieve greater prosperity by maximizing international opportunities. The Framework outlined the government's vision to advance its international activities in several areas including international education and immigration. The government recognized significant benefits to the economy from attracting more international students to Manitoba, but clearly acknowledged the social and cultural benefits as well: "International learners enhance our social fabric, bring unique perspectives to our classrooms, and contribute to our economic and community development" (p. 21). International education could also benefit both developing and developed countries with its "vast potential for promoting global understanding and cooperation" (p. 21).

The RBOB document was the foundation for the second policy document, the *International Education Strategy of the Province of Manitoba 2009-2013*, or 'IES' released in 2008, and to date, Manitoba's only international education strategy, that reflected a "whole-of-government" approach by facilitating coordination among stakeholders both within and outside government. The government envisioned its key role in implementing the strategy to promote international education activities by working with K-12 and PSE institutions in attracting international students and enhancing intercultural awareness of Manitoba.

The IES adopted Knight's (2004) definition of internationalization as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of ... education" (Government of Manitoba, 2008, p. 5), with the intent to "play a role in addressing global issues and



engage in meaningful international co-operation” (Government of Manitoba, 2008, p. 2). The Strategy outlined five goals that complemented each another as a holistic approach to international education: 1) international student programs; 2) international projects and contract training; 3) offshore and international collaboration; 4) international mobility of Manitoba students, teachers, and other educational staff; and 5) internalization of teaching and learning. With these approaches, the IES was contextualized as important for the province to be competitive in the global marketplace, and viewed international students as valuable to the economy, but also emphasized the relevance of internationalization to increasing cultural awareness, enhancing international development projects, promoting global understanding, and engaging in collaborative cross-border education. As stated in *Manitoba's Post-Secondary Education Strategy* (Government of Manitoba, 2015b), the NDP government was planning to release a new international education strategy however this did not come to pass due to its electoral defeat in April 2016.

### ***Protecting and Regulating International Education***

The *International Education Act* (IEA) (Government of Manitoba, 2016) was developed in Manitoba to accomplish policy objectives at both the federal and provincial government level. In 2014, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) made amendments to the federal *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (“the Regulations”) requiring foreign nationals applying to study at a learning institution in Canada for six months or more to meet a number of study-permit conditions. The amendments also required that all learning institutions be designated as Designated Learning Institutions based on a common set of principles implemented across Canada. All public primary and secondary schools were automatically designated, but designation status did not extend to post-secondary institutions, language schools or private vocational institutions. Developing the IEA created a process for Manitoba to meet federal requirements to designate learning institutions.

At the provincial level, the IEA was developed for two stated reasons: 1) to protect international students in Manitoba from potential fraud and negligence, and 2) to promote the province’s reputation as a destination of high quality for international students and in the international education community. During second reading on the IEA Bill, then Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy, Hon. Erin Selby, told the Legislative Assembly, the Bill would “provide a legislative framework to regulate education providers that want to enrol international students, codifying best practices for ensuring their welfare, safety and protecting the integrity of Manitoba institutions that provide international education programs” (Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 2013, p. 1671).

On January 1, 2016, the Manitoba Legislature proclaimed the following legislation<sup>4</sup> *The International Education Act (IEA) (Bill 44)* and two regulations: *The International Education Regulation 218/2015* and *The Code of Practice and Conduct Regulation 1/2016*. An accompanying *Guide to the Code of Practice and Conduct for Manitoba Designated Education Providers, their Staff Recruiters and Contracted Agents (CPC)* included suggested best practices for implementing sections of the IEA and Regulation. The IEA was not the NDP’s first efforts to pass legislation concerning the international market for students. In 2006, the government passed the *Degree Granting Act* to not only establish controls over the power of institutions to grant degrees, and ergo, a more robust system of quality assurance, but also to protect the reputation of Manitoba’s PSE system when it came to international students (Smith, 2011).

To date, Manitoba is the only province to enact legislation to regulate the international education service provider industry. International students interested in coming to Canada have, at times, been subjected to exploitation through recruitment by unscrupulous agents (Tomlinson, 2019). A unique feature of the IEA is that no other provincial legislation offers consumer protection to international students proactively by containing provisions for pre-screening agent/recruiter ethical practices, training, and credibility *before* service engagement rather than after the fact when exploitation may have occurred.

The IEA also set provisions for the content and purpose of the *Code of Practice and Conduct*, designed to enhance security and safety of international students in Manitoba and to impose ethical standards on recruiters and recruiting agencies. This is another consumer protection feature linked to the federal *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* that requires anyone providing Canadian immigration or citizenship advice or representation for a fee or other consideration to be a member immigration consultant in good standing with the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council

<sup>4</sup> The *International Education Act* was passed by the Manitoba Legislature on December 5, 2013. The Act and Regulations were proclaimed on January 1, 2016.

(ICCRC)<sup>5</sup> Exceptions are members in good standing of a law society in Canada or the *Chambre notaires du Québec*.

Led by the IEB and developed in collaboration with a working group of educational stakeholders (the International Education Act Working Group), the *CPC* includes best practices to assist designated education providers, their staff recruiters and contracted agents in complying with the IEA and regulations. In addition to the *CPC* and *CPC Regulation*, the IEA also requires designated education providers to be responsible for ensuring their recruiters comply with the *CPC*. Among other provisions is the appointment of a Director of International Students with responsibility to administer and enforce the IEA. The Director has extensive powers to conduct inspections, evaluations and if required, to impose sanctions should there be reasonable grounds to conclude serious deficiencies, or lack of compliance with the Act or *CPC*, as well as potential actions that may be taken to redress or penalize those in violation. Other obligations under the IEA include an international student fee collection from institutions and extensive data collection and reporting. The *IEA Regulation* elaborates further on application requirements, record keeping and reporting obligations.

Each of these developments, the establishment of the IEB, the launch of the IES, and the enactment of the IEA and Regulations reflected a vision of international education as seamless, integrated, coordinated, and regulated, covering K-12 and PSE, with responsibilities for international education falling under a single entity. But there would be significant implications on the horizon for international PSE and international students with the election of a new provincial government in Manitoba.

### ***Internationalization of PSE under the PC Government (2016-Spring 2021)***

The political ideology in Manitoba moved sharply to the right with the election of the PC government under former Premier Brian Pallister<sup>6</sup> in April 2016. The PCs won a record 40 out of 57 seats, one of the largest majorities in Manitoba's history. Having won four back-to-back majority governments since 1999, the NDP became politically unpopular following an internal power struggle and deep divisions within the party. The PCs campaigned on change and the need to return to "fiscal sobriety". The government set out to implement a neoliberal platform of free market economics, limited state intervention through reduced funding to the PSE sector, and deregulation and privatization of education services (Bamberger et al., 2019; Means & Slater, 2019). Following their first electoral victory, the government adopted what Kavanagh (2017) described as a "laser-like focus" on the economy with its "all hands-on deck" plan (Kavanagh, 2017, p. 1) to eliminate the province's estimated \$872 million deficit by 2024. The PCs were re-elected in September 2019, in a snap election called by the Premier a year before the date required by the province's fixed election law.

### ***Budget Cuts and Impacts on International Students***

Acting on a series of recommendations from the KPMG<sup>7</sup> Reports (2016, 2017), the PC government soon made privatization, consolidation, contracting out, and budget cuts the cornerstone of its fiscal policy. Impacts to the PSE sector were being keenly felt as funding to universities was frozen in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 and cut by 0.9% the following year. In November 2017, the government passed Bill 31, the *Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act* to allow tuition fee increases at post-secondary institutions of five percent per year plus inflation amounting to a 6.6% increase<sup>8</sup>. One month later, the Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate that encouraged graduates to remain in Manitoba with a 60% tuition tax rebate over six years capped at \$25,000 was eliminated. Also removed was the Advance Tuition Fee Tax Rebate that provided tax relief to students while still in school.

To offset the effects of ending the tuition freeze, and, in accordance with the KPMG recommendations, the government expanded the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative in 2017/2018 by increasing their one-third share or \$6.75 million of matching funds, and changing the ratio of funding,

<sup>5</sup> The ICCRC is the national regulatory body that promotes and protects the public interest by overseeing regulated immigration and citizenship consultants and international student advisors.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Pallister resigned as Premier of Manitoba on September 1, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> KPMG is a professional audit, tax, and advisory services firm.

<sup>8</sup> The NDP froze tuition fees for a decade starting in 1999 and later limited increases to the rate of inflation.



so the private sector and post-secondary institutions would contribute more (Garber, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. The government also increased funding and streamlined changes to Manitoba Student Aid to provide help to more indigenous and low-income students. Although the average undergraduate tuition fees for students remain well below the national average, fees for international students are deregulated and are three to four times higher than for domestic students. Rising fees increase barriers, especially for students from marginalized and under-represented communities, thus becoming increasingly unaffordable for international students.

In March 2018, international students were further impacted when the *Health Services Insurance Act* was amended, requiring the purchase of private health insurance, amounting to \$3.1 million in savings. The government justified the cuts by explaining that it offered lower tuition rates and an affordable cost of living compared to other provinces, and that international students did not need any additional incentives to come to Manitoba to study. The comments provoked an angry reaction from the Canadian Federation of Student Manitoba representatives, calling it a “betrayal”, and a form of exploitation (Ojewole, 2019), declaring that: “international students pay taxes, inject money into local economies and bring valuable perspectives to universities. They are growing tired of being seen as mere cash cows” (Glowacki, 2018). The following school year, PSE institutions collaborated to offer alternative health care plans developed with insurance providers, waiving costs for the first year to help students adjust to the change.

In fall 2020, the government proposed another change to *The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act* that removes the legislated tuition formula and instead, issues guidelines concerning tuition fees and student fees charged by universities and colleges. While the government has argued that under the proposed changes, fees set by student unions or associations are excluded and students are protected from overly large tuition and student fee increases, thus keeping them affordable (Government of Manitoba, 2021b), critics have charged that the legislation will do the opposite as PSE funding has already been cut by 13% and tuition has risen by 18% since the PCs took office in 2016 with indications the trend will likely continue (Chernomas & Ives, 2021).

### ***Dismantling and Disengagement***

International education continued to feel the sting of budget cuts when approximately one year following its first electoral victory, the government dissolved the IEB in spring 2017 (Elnagar, 2019; Tamtik, 2018). The IEB’s responsibilities were subsequently distributed among three division offices within Manitoba Education and Training: (a) Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Development, (b) Immigration and Economic Opportunities, and (c) Healthy Child Manitoba Office and K-12 Education. Most responsibilities were transferred to the Immigration and Economic Opportunities Office that also had responsibilities for operating the MPNP that included developing new streams and managing immigrant integration services (Government of Manitoba, 2018-2019). Dismantling IEB and shifting responsibilities to the Immigration Office signalled two developments: a) that cost savings would be realized by closing a government office, and b) that international students were being recruited specifically as potential candidates for immigration through the MPNP as highly educated, skilled labour. This latter point is supported by the government’s announcement of two MPNP permanent residency pathways for international students: the International Student Entrepreneur Pathway and the Graduate Internship Pathway (Government of Manitoba, 2018) further solidifying the narrative of international students as ideal immigrants, entrepreneurs, and economic contributors.

With the announcement of a newly created department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration in January 2021, the former Premier, Brian Pallister remarked that the focus would be on “aligning advanced education institutions with the needs of the labour markets of today and tomorrow by giving young Manitobans the skills they need to succeed and new immigrants the job opportunities our province can offer” (Government of Manitoba, 2021c, p. 1), that again, reinforced the government’s intent to align advanced education with labour market needs and immigration. But critics have questioned the fate of those programs that do not “align” with current government priorities especially university programs in the arts, humanities and social sciences that teach essential critical thinking, communication and problem-solving “power skills” that are in high demand in the workplace (Clarke & Forbes, 2020) but appear to be subordinated to job training.

<sup>9</sup> The MSBI was increased to just over \$20 million, with one-third of that – up to \$6.75 million coming from the province if the post-secondary institutions managed to fundraise the remaining \$13.5 million.

In February 2021, the PC government released *Manitoba's Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy* with the goal of ensuring there are “people with the right skills, talent and knowledge at the right time, to rebound from the effects of the pandemic and support economic resilience and growth” (Government of Manitoba, 2021d, p. 1). Key objectives include anticipating skills needed for the future, aligning education and training to labour market needs, fostering entrepreneurial skills, and growing, attracting and retaining talent. As for international PSE, the linkage with the economy and meeting labour market demand was clear, as the strategy seeks to “align Manitoba’s international education and economic development priorities and encourage international students to enrol in programs that align with Manitoba labour market needs and make Manitoba a destination of choice” (Government of Manitoba, 2021c, p. 10). Additionally, the strategy implies international students are being valued primarily as potential immigrants as the aim is to attract and recruit international talent by promoting the province as an immigration destination of choice. Unlike provinces such as Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2018) and Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2020) that released international PSE strategies, Manitoba has not, as yet, identified goals, action statements nor future directions pertaining to international PSE.

The shifting policy discourse has significant implications for PSE and international students in Manitoba: the steep tuition and course fee increases, the removal of tuition fee rebates and discontinuation of free health care coverage suggest that Manitoba’s long-held reputation for affordable post-secondary education (Rounce, 2013) may no longer be a key draw for international students and they might be driven away to other provinces (Garber, 2017; Glowacki, 2018; Hoyer, 2018). A further clue to the government’s plan for internationalization was in the Premier’s mandate letter issued to the Minister of Economic Development and Training in spring 2020 (Government of Manitoba, 2020) that referenced international students near the end of the four-page letter within the context of increasing recruitment through a new provincial international education strategy that “targets increased global competitiveness for students in areas of high labour force demand” (p. 4), again reinforcing the dominant trope that highly skilled international students are increasingly sought after and valued primarily for their contributions to the labour force and provincial economy. Thus, while an increasing emphasis is placed on the economic benefits of recruiting international students, a significant gap separates this rhetoric from the actual experiences of students (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2018). Tuition fees for all PSE students have risen in recent decades and this is particularly true for international students. Funding for PSE has declined, and post-secondary institutions have correspondingly increased the proportion of their revenues from tuition.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding discussion highlighted the thematic areas based on construction of narratives showing clear differences between the NDP and PC governments’ approaches to international PSE in Manitoba and the role that political ideology played in the process. The NDP’s *Third Way* approach of blending social democratic values and neoliberalism quantified the economic benefits of recruitment and retention as a future source of skilled workers and immigrants contributing to the economy. But it also reflected a humanitarian vision of internationalization emphasizing values of mutual understanding, intercultural awareness, global citizenship, promoting intercultural student exchange, and outward mobility, while fostering collaboration and cooperation between government and education stakeholders. For example, the strong leadership and involvement of IEB had a significant impact on advancing the IES goals (Tamtik, 2020), having oversight of the provincially affiliated schools overseas program, managing a unique loan program (the International Education Incentive Loan Fund) to support school divisions in starting up their international school programs, and working closely with local education stakeholders, the MCIE, and federal counterparts (FPCCERIA and PTCCERIA) (Government of Manitoba, 2014-2015; Tamtik, 2018, 2020; Tamtik & Trilokekar, 2020). The passage of the IEA, regulations and development of the *CPC* document embodied elements of consumer and ethical protection of international students by regulating education providers and requiring their recruiters to comply with legislation. Under the legislation, education providers are prohibited from knowingly permitting recruiters from violating the IEA or the *CPC*.

Under the PC government’s approach to international PSE and international students, there is a progressively stronger shift towards a normalizing of neoliberalism with a sharp turn to budget cuts and

a decidedly market-oriented perspective. Dismantling the IEB and distributing international education responsibilities to other government offices as budget-saving brought unintended consequences with no formal mechanism for a cohesive approach to policy coordination. Without the IEB, there was no longer a single voice or presence to represent international education in the province or on the national stage. The discontinuation of published international student data reports brings a lack of transparency about provincial enrolment patterns. Without an updated international education strategy as of the time of writing, details such as the government's vision and goals for international education, priority markets, timelines and implementation plans are largely unknown.

The findings also reveal that the current government's approach to international PSE and particularly international students reinforces the dominant discourse of international students as economic or "ideal immigrants", as evidenced by the redirecting of international student recruitment activities to the Manitoba Immigration and Economic Opportunities Office. In addition, the government's creation of the Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration Ministry in January 2021 was intended to house PSE, immigration and workforce/labour and international education together in order to link training and skill development with economic growth and immigration strategies. Supporting the transition of international students as "ideal immigrants" is a public policy area that has resulted from close cooperation between the federal and provincial governments (Brunner, 2017; Dam et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Tamtik, 2018; Tamtik & O'Brien-Klewchuk, 2020).

The PC government's neoliberal policies of deregulating tuition fees, removal of graduate fee rebates, and privatization of health care coverage reflect the reconceptualization of international students as consumers of PSE education. This finding is corroborated in the literature where the marketization and rise of the student consumer coincide with the shifting of PSE funding away from the state and onto students as customer beneficiaries (Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Saunders & Blanco Ramirez, 2017). As Usher (2020) pointed out, international students have become a "tidal force" of funding for Canadian post-secondary institutions by "keeping the system afloat in the absence of either more government funding or concerted institutional cost-control" (p. 11). International students have expressed anger and frustration at being viewed as "cash cows" and questioned Manitoba's long-held reputation of affordable post-secondary education, while the government takes credit for receiving record numbers of international students, revealing the gap between government rhetoric and actual student experience. As Brennan et. al., (2021) reported, the framing of international students being brought in for the benefit of the growth of economic indicators is "dehumanizing" (p. 24) and negates the very principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.

Under the PC government, international student numbers in Manitoba have steadily increased, but this appears to have not only persisted but risen even as governments shift policy direction and implement changes that are ostensibly less fair to international students than previously. Thus, our findings support the Sá and Sabzalieva's (2018) assertion that "growth in international student mobility numbers appears to occur *despite* rather than *because* of political and policy changes" (p. 244). One explanation for this trend is that international students are attracted to Manitoba because of the quality and affordability of PSE, and the pathways to obtaining permanent residency following graduation. But the government's exclusive reliance on immigration-focused international PSE policy reveals that aspects of internationalization such as the maximizing of global opportunities are little understood and supported, and its withdrawal from playing a central coordinating role in international PSE means that its efforts are effectively managed as an immigration-focused policy. The exclusive immigrant attraction policies have formed a narrow vision that largely rely on the support and resources of post-secondary institutions for implementation. Given the steady enrolment increases and significant benefits of international students to Manitoba's economy, cultural and linguistic diversity, the dissolution of a provincial coordinating unit with associated leadership, funding, and strategy forms a gap that obstructs the establishing and maximizing of Manitoba's international PSE policy that reflects disengagement with the sector, and ultimately, raises questions about its future.

While the role of PSE institutions was not the focus of this paper, the growing importance of internationalization at both the government and institutional levels is widely recognized (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016; Viczko, 2003, 2020). Under Manitoba's NDP government, colleges and universities were an integral part of international PSE policy. The IEB consulted regularly with the institutions to organize re-

cruitment missions, conduct familiarization tours, and to provide data for provincial enrolment reports. The IES was designed to serve as a model for institutions to follow in developing their own strategies. Each of the five goals referred to earlier include elements of government and educational institutions working together in furtherance of the strategic goals. Additionally, the IEA and the *CPC* were each developed through a consultative process of engaging with the institutions. Contrastingly, with the absence of an updated international education strategy, and lack of central coordination of internationalization activities under the PC government, PSE institutions are quite likely pursuing these more independently and deciding where they are placing international PSE on the agenda.

The government's reconceptualizing of international PSE as immigration-focused policy is supported by Trilokekar and El Masri's (2016) contention that as PSE institutions, universities, in particular, are responsible for recruitment, admissions, education and retention of international students as an important pool of future immigrants, they have become "non-state actors" (p. 542) in this policy context, and, as Viczko (2020) argued, "agents of the neo-liberal state rendered nearly silent in debates of internationalization..." (p. 314). More research is needed to better understand the relationship between changing government neoliberal ideology in relation to international PSE and the role of institutions as policy actors.

In conclusion, we return to our earlier comments about the growing debate on the influence of neoliberalism on the purposes and processes of internationalization and join other researchers in the call for re-examination and rethinking of the public role of PSE and the approaches to internationalization necessary for students to participate as professionals and citizens in increasingly multicultural and global contexts. While COVID-19 will likely have ongoing devastating effects on international student mobility for the foreseeable future, perhaps it is a time to rethink internationalization as a broader strategy than merely the recruitment and retention of high-income international students. As Knight (2014) reminded us, understanding internationalization as a process of change and a means to achieve stated goals ensures that the international dimension is integrated in a sustainable manner into the purposes and major functions of PSE. From this perspective, to focus primarily on economic imperatives is to lose the unique opportunities that international PSE can offer, to enrich the educational and research experiences of students, and catalyse meaningful contributions to global society.

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