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HALIFAX, NS – International student graduates describe an overwhelmingly positive experience during their studies at the region's universities and colleges. Indeed, the majority feel welcomed in their province of study, enjoyed their time in the region and made close friends in the community.

This was just one of the key findings of a research study conducted among recent international student graduates by the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU), released at the **Atlantic Leaders' Summit** (the Summit) here today.

The study, **'2017 International Graduate Experiences One Year Later'** (<http://atlanticuniversities.ca/policy-advocacy/2017-atlantic-leaders-summit>) was undertaken by Corporate Research Associates (CRA) on behalf of the AAU.

The follow up research was conducted among all international students who previously completed the 2016 AAU Graduate Retention study. A total of 102 international graduates took part in the study. Of note, two thirds of international graduates remained in Atlantic Canada following graduation and, of those, the vast majority (79%) are currently employed in the region.

The Summit theme, ***The International Student Experience***, attracted a wide range of participants representative of recent international student graduates, higher education leaders, the private sector, governments, and regional special interest organizations.

"The purpose of this Summit is to identify collaborative strategies that enable universities, governments and employers to reduce barriers facing international student graduates seeking to stay in the region following their graduation", said Dr. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz, President, University of Prince Edward Island.

Dr. Abd-El-Aziz, Chair, AAU, added that, "We learned from our 2016 Graduate Retention Study that 75% of our international students would like to stay in the province they studied in following graduation. That's an enormous pool of highly motivated and qualified future citizens for Atlantic Canada".

There are currently more than 14,000 international students studying at universities and colleges across the region.

The Summit's keynote speaker, The Hon. Ahmed Hussen, M.P. (York South-Weston), Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, addressed the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Project.

The annual event included a regional panel of recent international student graduates who shared their experience in finding employment and navigating Canada's immigration process and, a regional employers' panel that provided advice to recent graduates seeking to start a career in the region.

The Summit concluded with an address by Mayor Mike Savage, Halifax Regional Municipality, who spoke of the importance of international student retention as a key factor in the city's growth strategy.

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