

**His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston  
Address at the PanIIT 2014 Conference  
Toronto, Ontario, Saturday, June 7, 2014**



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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important conference. I am delighted to be here among so many friends, both new and familiar.

I would like to take this opportunity to put three questions before you that impact learning and innovation in Canada, India and the United States.

1. Can we have equality of opportunity and excellence too in our respective countries?
2. What is the role of our post-secondary institutions in ensuring this?
3. What can we, as graduates and supporters of IITs, do to further equality of opportunity and excellence?

Note that I have said ‘we’ because I include myself as a proud IIT supporter.

I was delighted to visit IIT Bombay earlier this year during my State visit to India, and to serve as an external appraiser of its strategic plan on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Also, during my time as president of the University of Waterloo and earlier of McGill University, I had many occasions to sign partnership agreements with the Indian Institutes for Technology and gained first-hand knowledge of their outstanding quality.

My response to the first question is yes; we can achieve both equality of opportunity and excellence, and see them as mutually reinforcing qualities rather than opposing ones.

The answer is simple if by equality of opportunity you intend to ensure all members of a society can grow their talents to the maximum, and provide the chance for these empowered individuals to put their skills to work to improve the human condition.

And, of course, drawing on the talents of all members of a society—rich and poor, male and female—allows us to draw excellence from a substantially larger pool of talent.

Equally, if excellence is accentuated, the innovation yields from it will lead to better ways of extending equality of opportunity.

But it requires passionate, innovative, unselfish human leadership to achieve both outcomes. And that’s my central message to you today.

Let me move to the second question: the role of universities and learning institutes.

In Canada, the twin goals of equality of opportunity and excellence have been most effectively advanced by a public education system which is highly accessible and of high quality.

Canada's primary and secondary school systems lead the English-speaking world in the OECD PISA rankings at ages 9, 12 and 15. Canada also has the highest percentage of tertiary educated adults in the OECD and the highest participation rates in post-secondary institutions.

One OECD study that particularly interests me ranked member nations on accessibility, or the degree to which children met or exceeded the educational levels of their parents.

The rankings were measured in quintiles. For the top 80 per cent of students, Canada was ranked number one in terms of how many equaled or exceeded their parents' level of education. But for the bottom 20 per cent we are in the bottom third. This is the very good and the ugly.

In India, at the post-secondary level, the IITs are a story unto themselves. They are the most demanding institutions in the world and thus establish a unique global standard of excellence. But India needs more institutions of high quality to set a broad, high bar and much capacity building throughout the educational system to dramatically broaden accessibility.

The challenge is to achieve more of this excellence and a much greater degree of equality of opportunity.

How do we contribute to these goals for India and for North America? This brings me to the challenge facing you as IIT graduates.

I would like to make three points on this.

First, I would like to suggest that you are stewards of your respective IITs.

Let me explain. I often like to ask graduates and alumni the following question: who owns the university? The answer is: no one does. But you have spent years of your lives drawing knowledge from the university, and contributing to its well-being. You are its stewards and representatives. As stewards, it is your responsibility to improve your institution, and to give back. To make it better for the students that will follow you. Your community has supported you. Taxpayers have shown their confidence in you by making a major investment in your future. Be conscious of the public sector, vote in elections and strive to make a difference.

This brings me to my second point, which is that you can influence your institution to build capacity at home.

Firstly, by replicating the excellence of the original IITs and building other Indian institutions of excellence; secondly, by graduating legions of teachers, researchers, and academic leaders who will staff these institutions; and thirdly, by engaging them in collaborative teaching, research and technology transfer interactions so that all gain.

My next point is: promote globalization and an international outlook. Continue to seek institutional agreements between IITs and Canadian and American schools.

Capacity building, research collaboration, and technology transfer ecosystems are examples of how we can help each other. Remember how the IITs began with each adopting an international partner and taking the best comparative practices to build into their domestic experience.

Encourage ambitious international strategies. For Canada let me mention two.

The first is the report led by Amit Chakma, president of Western University and chair of the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy, which calls for a doubling of the number of international students in Canada by 2022 and a significant increase in the number of Canadians studying abroad.

Let me quote from the report: "Our vision for Canada: become the international leader in international education in order to attract top talent and prepare our citizens for the global marketplace, thereby providing key building blocks for our future prosperity."

Incidentally, Amit is a Bangladeshi by origin who came to Canada for graduate study and brought his extended family here. His first son has just published an article in *Nature*.

Secondly on international strategies let me mention Dominic Barton, a Canadian who is the Global Managing Director of McKinsey & Company. Recently he headed up a McKinsey study identifying the compelling benefits for a nation in internationalization in education, or what I call the diplomacy of knowledge.

Let me end these remarks by saying how important individual leadership is, both in the giving and receiving, in achieving both equality of opportunity and excellence in education—the ever-giving gift.

Thank you.