

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Colin Busby and Parisa Mahboubi
To: Federal and provincial ministers of immigration; provincial ministers of postsecondary education
Date: August 29, 2017
Re: **CHALLENGES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADIAN**

The Government of Canada would [like to increase the number of international students](#) that migrate to Canada. International students are attractive because they have demonstrated language skills and education credentials that Canadian employers recognize.

Canada screens applicants for immigration using points system, which awards a points based on level of education, language, age and work experience. New pathways – such as the [Canadian Experience Class](#) (CEC) and [Express Entry](#) system – were created to, in part, allow international students to earn extra points and improve their chances for to qualify for immigration. International students can apply to these programs usually once they work full-time – with a [post-graduate work permit \(PGWP\)](#) – for a year or more to gain extra points.

These efforts, so far, have had limited results. PGWP holders have more than quadrupled from 2009 to 2016, but their admissions to permanent residency have not matched pace. Plus, international students [struggle to find well-paid employment](#) after immigration. We highlight two areas for improvement: 1) poorly designed incentives for work permit holders to look for high-skilled, high-paid jobs and 2) limited access to work permits among all international students.

Although Canadian-educated immigrants do better than foreign-educated immigrants in the labour market, a large earnings gap relative to Canadian-born persists. This wage disparity can be partly explained because immigrants may struggle to find employment due to limited domestic networks or hiring discrimination. However, another reason is because bonus points are awarded mainly on length of employment – up to 15 bonus points for six years' experience – and having a job offer – up to 10 extra points – does not emphasize job quality.

Consequently, international students would likely be more willing to take a lower-paying job after their graduation than their domestic counterparts. Although the current rules award points for Canadian work experience in [certain occupations](#), the points weights could further encourage international students to work more closely to their field of study.

Although more work permits are being awarded compared to a decade ago, the potential pool of international students is limited because international students in private career colleges cannot obtain a work permit. This is mainly because the federal government [has expressed doubts](#) that international students at some private career colleges receive a high-quality education or use attendance as a way to enter Canada to work.

The federal government issues student permits based on a list of qualifying institutions provided by the provinces. So far, the provinces seem to list nearly all institutions – universities, community colleges and private career colleges – even if there are concerns about some career colleges. This issue should be resolved and provinces should list only career colleges that they feel meet acceptable education standards to when granting education permits to international students, which then let the federal government extend work permits to all international students.

The government made changes in [November 2016 to improve pathways for international students and acknowledged that more work is required](#). We should get moving.

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