

# Intelligence MEMOS



From: Tingting Zhang and Parisa Mahboubi  
To: Canadians Concerned About Immigration Policy  
Date: November 16, 2022  
Re: **THE RECENT IMMIGRATION POLICY CHANGE, HOW SHOULD WE NAVIGATE IT?**

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As of yesterday, international students are permitted to work more than 20 hours a week off campus, as the federal government tries to [address](#) Canada's labour shortage.

This policy change can be a double-edged sword for international students.

On the positive side, they can earn more money to cover their tuition and living expenses, seek opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge, and gain the Canadian work experience to help pave their pathway to permanent residency.

Historically, international students have been less likely than domestic students to study and work at the same time even after the 2014 decision to allow them to work off campus without a work permit. Only [about half](#) of international students worked while studying, compared to 86 percent of Canadian citizens in 2015, a percentage that has [little changed](#).

The temporary removal of the 20-hour cap gives international students more choices if more decide to work while studying.

Working is one way to help international students to get familiarized with the Canadian culture and build [local social networks](#), which is key for their future job search and labour market outcomes. The Canadian work experience can also help them get ready for the labour market and [improve](#) future earnings.

On the negative side, the entire objective of the study permit may be undermined.

The 20-hour restriction was intended to ensure study permit holders [prioritize](#) education. Without the cap, it is possible that some international students will be motivated to work more and study less. They may choose easy courses to prop up their grades, which may lower the quality of education and ultimately affect Canada's economy. This is because the quality of education is a major determinant of the integration success of international graduates.

Furthermore, international students will be more vulnerable to exploitation by [education agents](#). These agents chase commissions by recruiting more international students to Canada, and can now offer poorer applicants the possibility of earning more money while they study, which can lead to a debt trap.

International students face a huge financial burden – paying [two to nine times](#) more than domestic students on tuition – to study in Canada, on top of language school fees, application fees for agents, airline tickets, housing, and food. Those without savings or family financial support need to work to pay those expenses.

International students are likely to work in low-paying sectors – accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, and other business support services – that have little [relevance](#) to their skills or ambitions. With no Canadian experience, they are also more likely to be taken advantage of by local employers. Therefore, they would need to work more hours to be able to cover their expenses.

Governments and educational institutions need to be aware of the negative side effects of the rule change to make sure we are extracting its benefits and helping international students navigate such changes.

Among the policy changes that would help is [regulation](#) of immigration agents who recruit international students for Canadian universities and colleges. Tales of false promises and over-charging are a staple of news stories in India and other nations.

The federal and provincial governments also need to be more rigorous about the educational standards required to host international students. Currently, most provinces list nearly all institutions – universities, community colleges and private career colleges – as eligible to be listed as a [qualifying institution](#).

Canada offers great opportunities for international students to work during and after their studies so they can apply for permanent residency. This is a competitive advantage in the global competition for talent and we should maximize its benefits for international students. When they students thrive here, our economy will also prosper.

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