

67. Expanding Options for Canada's Private Educational Institutions (Renewal)

Issue

Current federal government policy, as described in the Federal Government's Post-Graduation Work Permit Program, under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, limits potential labour force growth and creates an uneven playing field (based on enrolment appeal) between publicly funded and private post-secondary educational institutions. The imbalance is created because post-graduation work opportunities in Canada are not permitted for foreign students who choose to obtain their education through a Canadian private institution, by way of a certificate or diploma, as opposed to a degree program.

Background

Presently, foreign graduates of public institutions are eligible to work in Canada for a varying period of time if they achieve a certificate, diploma or degree from a "Participating (or recognized) Canadian Post-Secondary Institution." Foreign students are able to obtain study permits for private post-secondary institutions, provided those institutions are included on the Designated Learning Institutions List. However, foreign graduates of private educational institutions included on the Designated Learning Institutions List, with the exception of those in Quebec, are not eligible to obtain employment in Canada unless the private institution confers degrees.

If the private post-secondary institution does not confer degrees, but instead grants diplomas or certificates, foreign students graduating from these programs are not eligible to work in Canada at all; even if the program they graduated from or the skills which they developed fully meet Canada's labour needs. In short, these institutions receive provincial and federal approval to train international students, but those students are not allowed to apply for work under the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program.

Certificate- and diploma-granting private post-secondary institutions operating in Quebec attract foreign students and graduate them into work in the Canadian labour market. Foreign graduates from certificate and diploma granting private institutions in all other provinces are prevented from entering the labour market.

By practising a policy that prevents foreign graduates of private institutions from working in Canada, the federal government eliminates a potential inflow of workers with Canadian credentials who could easily transition into employment in Canada's marketplace, and help resolve labour shortages. Private post-secondary institutions can be more responsive to short-term labour needs than their public counterparts, as private programs are generally shorter and graduates enter the workforce more quickly.

Extending the Post-Graduate Work Permit Program to private colleges would yield positive employment outcomes for international students. While nation-wide data is not available, provincial figures illustrate these outcomes. A 2014 study found that 82% of Alberta graduates find employment, with 92% of those expressing satisfaction in their employment¹. These figures are roughly comparable to public post-secondary outcomes, which reported 88% employment and 89% satisfaction².

By eliminating the current policy barrier, the federal government will not only level the playing field between public and private institutions, but also ensure that foreign graduates of all skill levels have an equal chance of gaining meaningful employment upon graduating from a Canadian post-secondary institution.

¹ *Graduate Outcomes Survey – Class of 2011/12*, Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education

² *Ibid.*

A 2012 federal government report measuring the economic value of the presence of international students in Canada estimated that total expenditures by international students while they study in Canada (tuition, accommodation, living costs, travel and discretionary products and services) resulted in a \$7.7 billion infusion to the Canadian economy³. According to the report, expenditures of international education students have now surpassed exports of unwrought aluminum (\$6 billion) and helicopters, airplanes and spacecraft (\$6.9 billion). (Note that this amount does not include exports of education services, which were not part of the scope of the study). The same report also found that in 2012 these international students generated more than \$445 million in government revenue and created economic activity that sustained employment for 81,000 Canadians. The federal government understands the positive impact international students have – in 2014 it announced a goal to double the number of international students enrolled in Canadian institutions by 2022. By removing the current policy barrier, the federal government can empower private post-secondary institutions across Canada to attract more international students, helping to achieve their goal of doubling international enrolments.

Furthermore, by expanding all work permit availability to private institution certificate or diploma graduates, the federal government would put more control and responsibility for success in the hands of private small- and medium-sized businesses, which ultimately are what drive the growth of our country's economy. At a time when western Canada is striving for economic diversification, this policy shift would allow an emerging non-resource-based industry to thrive.

Recommendation

That the federal government expand the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program to allow foreign graduates from accredited Canadian private post-secondary institutions to obtain a Canadian Work Permit upon completion of their degree, diploma or certificate program.

³ *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update*, Global Affairs Canada