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International Students in Alberta

Like many countries, Canada is capitalizing on a flood of international students. Globally, the number of students enrolled outside of their country of citizenship is increasing.^a In a knowledge-based and globalized world, Ottawa has caught on to the use of international education^b as a vital economy-boosting tool. By positioning itself as a leader in the attraction and retention of international students from around the world, communities across Canada and Alberta have benefited from an influx of knowledge and human capital that address population decline and labour demand.

As of 2013, Canada hosted 396, 202 international students who generate upwards of \$8 billion dollars in revenue.¹ Income from international education translates to 86,570 jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue.² The evidence speaks for itself: the growing population of foreign students represents significant and sizable social and economic impacts both nationally and provincially. In Alberta, the number of international students has nearly doubled since 2004. Last year alone, Alberta welcomed more than 23, 000 international students who are positioned to become long-term social and economic contributors to the province's competitive economy.³

Even in the wake of plunging oil prices, the provincial government continues to forecast labour shortages of more than 96,000 workers that will last several years.⁴ The pressure to meet the burdens of resource-based growth and long-term skilled labour shortages, coupled with a new immigration system, known as Express Entry, call for discussion of the substantial contributions international students can make to the province through their permanent settlement and integration, and the advantages and obstacles they face in the process.

The Benefits of International Students

Research indicates that the settlement and integration of students in Alberta communities have complementary social and economic benefits. International education fosters innovation, exchange and collaboration.^c It has been proven that knowledge and

^a The International Education Advisory Panel estimates that at the current rate of growth, international enrolment will account for 17.3% of total post-secondary enrolment in Canada by 2020.

^b International education includes foreign students studying at many levels: language training, diploma as well as undergraduate and graduate programs at universities, colleges and technical institutes.

^c In Alberta, postsecondary institutions offer and participate in many programs like Mitacs Globalink that allow international undergraduates to conduct research projects in a variety of academic disciplines such as engineering and social sciences. To date, there are 279 projects linking international students with local faculty. Although the focus of such initiatives falls predominantly on engineering and mathematical sciences, there are also numerous research projects in Social Sciences and Humanities. In the education sector, the Alberta Teachers' Association offers the International Education Exchange Programs (IEEP), which encourages language development and cultural experiences for high school students.



cultural exchange promote economic growth, job creation, increased exports and foreign investment.⁵

As it relates to economic benefits, the significance of international students in the broader immigration context is underscored by their ability to adapt to local labour markets. Labour market access is one of the defining features of current immigration policy, and research shows that students are favourably positioned to integrate into the economies of communities where they have studied.^d Labour market integration is also supported by the increased weight of the new labour market test, or Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA), and job offers in Express Entry. Additionally, the economic integration of newcomers is accomplished through numerous and diverse employment programs and services funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

Employment, Retention and Indicators of Success

When it comes to labour market integration, education is crucial. Research strongly supports the argument for welcoming international students and promoting their settlement and integration into Canadian society. Not surprisingly, Government of Canada Census data reveals that education has a positive impact on immigrant labour market outcomes. Specifically, those who have been educated in Canada have enhanced performance with regards to increased employment; these rates are similar to those of their Canadian-born peers.⁶ What is more, newcomer labour market performance improved regardless of the area of study.⁷ Attaining Canadian education is an effective pathway for newcomers to achieve success as they pursue careers in diverse fields such as engineering, technology, business and management, social science or marketing.

In order to understand the performance of graduates in provincial labour markets, the Government of Alberta conducts a survey every two years.^e According to the most recent data, approximately 9.63% of provincial graduates were international students.⁸ Alberta's international students boast an employment rate of 88.73%.⁹ Interestingly, the province reports a retention rate of 75.11%.¹⁰ This means that it is easier for employers to actively address labour shortages because international talent has been recruited and retained. More and more, Canadian educated international students are choosing to remain after graduation, settle, and contribute their skills to the provincial labour market.

Generally, the international student profile is associated with education at the university level. It should be noted that this profile is diverse and international education strategies include engaging students with trades or technical education, experience, and training. Under the Federal Skilled Trade Program (FSTP), a valuable exchange of technical and trade expertise has been facilitated by the engagement of employers and polytechnics with international students. Similar to universities and colleges, polytechnics such as Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) attract international students who benefit from apprenticeship programs and a comparable post-graduation employment rate. In fact, NAIT

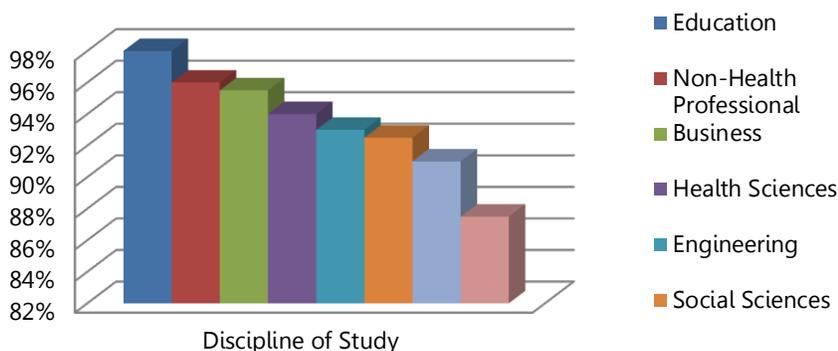
^d In their study, "Impact of Canadian postsecondary education on recent immigrants' labour market outcomes," Anisef et al. found that immigrants who pursue studies in Canada have the best labour market outcomes.

^e The intention of the survey is to help the government with institutional planning with regards to several key areas such as, but not limited to, graduate satisfaction, employment related outcomes, education financing, and the effectiveness of post-secondary institutions in preparing students for entrance into the labour market.



notes that their graduates have a 92%¹¹ employment rate whereas the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) reports 95%.¹²

Employment Rate by Academic Discipline



Source: Labour Market Outcomes: Summary Results of a Survey of 2006 and 2007 Canadian University Baccalaureate Graduates

Permanent Residence after Graduation

Beyond the period of study or exchange, the statistics speak to a mutually beneficial relationship between international students and their host countries. For example, retention rates of students post-graduation reveal that recruitment of students is a consistent way to build stronger economies and communities. For the students, the allure of a high-quality education and standard of living draw many to Canada long after an educational exchange.¹³

With this in mind, the government has designed policies to keep the talent and skills of educated immigrants in the domestic market such as a Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWPP) and pathways to permanent residence.^f With domestic work experience, immigrants are eligible to apply under three programs: the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP), and Canadian Experience Class (CEC). All of the aforementioned immigration streams require applicants to use the new points-based Express Entry system.

Of these pathways to permanent residence, the CEC stream is the most common for those studying at post-secondary institutions offering undergraduate and graduate degrees. Through the CEC stream, Canada recognizes that foreign students educated in Canada are uniquely equipped to transition, adapt, and contribute to society and the economy because of their familiarity with Canadian culture, knowledge of the official languages, and work experience. Since January 2015, Express Entry has focused keenly on skilled immigrants who will be assessed on these characteristics.

^f International students are permitted to work part-time during their studies and to apply for a 3-year, post-graduation open work permit (PGWPP). Furthermore, students can become permanent residents once they have graduated and attained Canadian work experience.



The following table summarizes the rationale and requirements for each pathway to permanent residence.

Table 1: Canadian Experience Class Eligibility ¹⁴		
Stream	Requirements	Rationale
Federal Skilled Worker Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This stream considers six selection factors; language skills, education, work experience, age, arranged employment and adaptability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attraction and retention of skilled workers. Skilled workers are individuals with skilled professional work experience that may be chosen by Canada to become permanent residents based on their capacity to contribute to the economy.
Federal Skilled Trade Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an offer of full-time employment for a total period of at least one year or a certificate of qualification in a trade issues by a provincial or territorial body. Demonstrate validated language skills through a third-party language test. Demonstrate at least 2 years of full-time work experience in a skilled trade within the last 5 years, and comply with all of the job requirements for their skilled trade set out by the 2011 National Occupational Classification (NOC). No specific education requirements but those who want their credentials recognized must present an Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) report that demonstrates equivalency with Canadian standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attraction and retention of skilled tradespeople. Skilled tradespeople are able to apply through this program if they are qualified in a skilled trades such as industrial, electrical and construction trades, chefs and cooks, and processing, manufacturing and utilities supervisors and central control operators. Each province is responsible for the regulation of skilled trades, therefore candidates must comply with the specific certificate of qualification required to work in a given trade. In Alberta, there are more than fifty (50) designated trades and occupations ranging from landscape gardeners to power line technicians.
Canadian Experience Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate Canadian skilled work experience in accordance with the National Occupational Classification (NOC). Demonstrate a minimum Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) Level 5 or 7 depending on the NOC classification. No formal education requirement for this category. However, Express Entry awards points for educational attainment which gives applicants who can demonstrate Canadian education a significant advantage.⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attraction and retention of skilled workers defined by experience in managerial jobs, professional jobs, and technical or skilled trade jobs, as well as strong language skills.

Express Entry and Employment Services

In spite of Canada's reputation for welcoming immigration policy, international student migration is a nuanced issue. Students with Canadian education applying under FSWP, FSTP or CEC face challenges but also hold advantages when they seek to migrate

⁹ In order to have foreign education and credentials recognized as meeting Canadian education standards, applicants must include an Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) report produced by an agency or organization that has been approved by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.



permanently. Some international student graduates may struggle within the Express Entry system because of the newly allocated points for one (1) year of Canadian work experience and arranged employment that they may not have in their early working years. Conversely, tradespeople may have substantial work experience and can apply through the Federal Skilled Trades Program. Applicants will be awarded points if they are currently employed, are in a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) exempt profession, or have a permanent job offer from an employer. What is clear is that under Express Entry applicants will have a pronounced advantage if they are labour-market ready.

In order to ensure that Express Entry addresses the regional issue of labour shortage, greater exposure to work experience opportunities by way of internships, career services, mentorship, and employer engagement should be supported by CIC through Alberta immigrant-serving agencies. The settlement sector can play a role in providing employment services outside of those traditionally offered at educational institutions. Working with CIC, settlement agencies can extend existing employment services, such as occupation-specific mentorship programs with local professionals, to students, and create targeted programs through improved collaboration with education partners. This will allow international students to gain the labour market integration skills that will enable them to continue living and working in Alberta communities for years to come.

Table 2: Express Entry Comprehensive Ranking System: Core/Human Capital Factor¹⁵

Factors	Points per factor-with a spouse or common-law partner	Points per factor-without a spouse or common-law partner
Age	100	110
Level of Education	140	150
Official Languages Proficiency	150	160
Canadian Work Experience	70	80

Ultimately, the implementation of new policies by CIC indicates the need to increase the skill and experience level of newcomers in response to economic pressures. At the national and provincial level, government remains committed to international education as an invaluable immigration apparatus. In this new environment, international student applications through Express Entry will likely demonstrate strong language and education profiles, but lack the experience and job offer that will set them above others in the pool. Supporting the settlement and integration of international students after graduation has immediate benefits to Alberta's economy and society. Their experience living in Canada, as well as their official language abilities, translate to an improved ability to settle and integrate. By continuing to focus on top international student talent, through welcoming immigration policy, Alberta will have another instrument to promote diverse communities and support sustainable growth and prosperity in stable and turbulent times.

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¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

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¹⁵ Ibid.