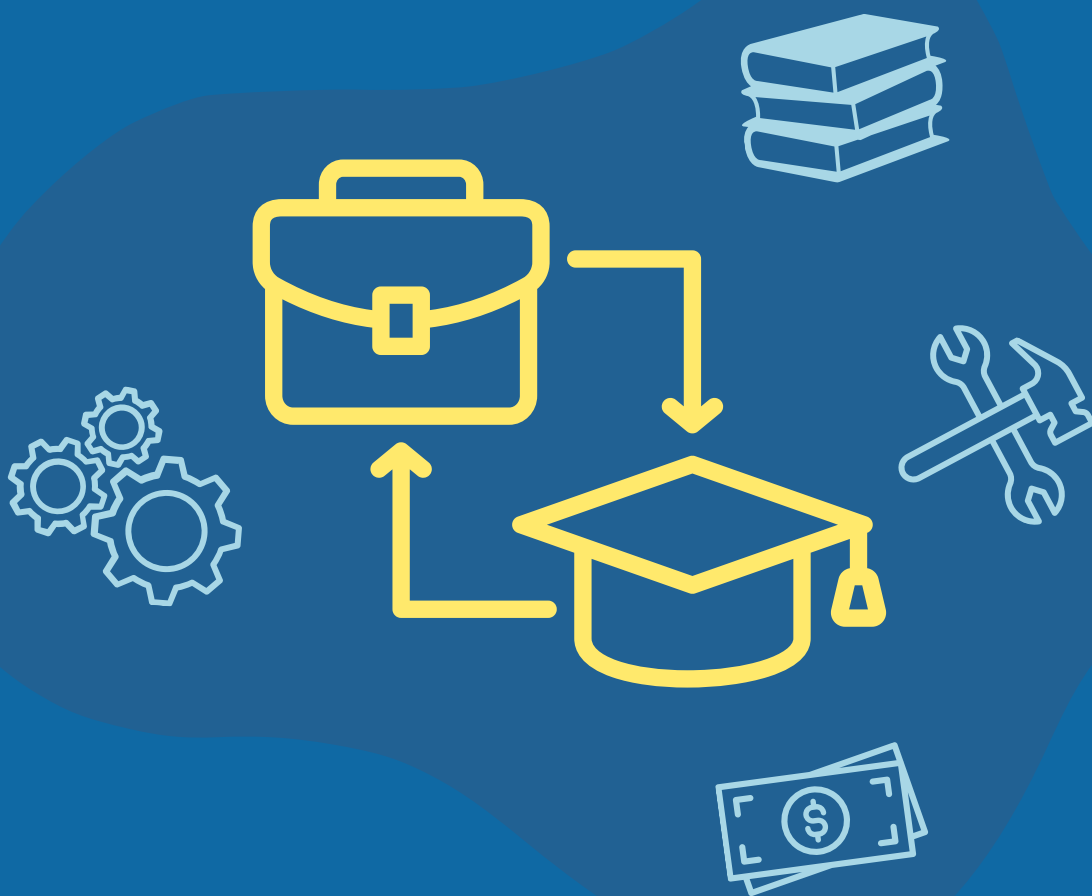


LEARNING & EARNING



**Improving Student
Employment Pathways
in Canadian Post-
Secondary Education**



CASA
Canadian Alliance of
Student Associations

ACAE
Alliance canadienne des
associations étudiantes

Learning & Earning:

Improving Student Employment Pathways in Canadian Post-Secondary Education

March 2025

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CASA Principles

CASA believes in a quality public post-secondary education system that is properly funded, effective, accountable, cooperatively maintained and enhanced by the federal and provincial governments. A crucial part of this system is ensuring that students have access to meaningful, fairly compensated employment opportunities that complement their education. **Student jobs should provide not only financial support but also opportunities for skill development, professional growth, and career readiness, helping students transition successfully into the workforce.**

CASA believes that any academically qualified student with the desire to pursue post-secondary education should not

face any barriers—financial, social, political, physical, cultural, or otherwise.

Equitable access to employment is essential in ensuring that all students, regardless of background or personal circumstances, have the opportunity to gain meaningful work experience. This includes expanding **work-integrated learning programs**, increasing access to flexible and **skills-based job opportunities**, and **removing barriers** that prevent marginalized students from fully participating in the workforce. A strong student employment system benefits not only students but also employers, communities, and Canada's economy as a whole.

Our Vision for Student Employment

CASA envisions a post-secondary system where all students have access to meaningful, fairly compensated employment opportunities that support their financial stability and career development. CASA holds the following core beliefs about student employment in Canada:

- Student employment should provide adequately-paid, valuable, career-relevant experience that enhances learning and prepares students for the workforce post-graduation.
- Employment opportunities must be equitable and accessible to all students, regardless of background or circumstances.
- Government programs should prioritize expanding work-integrated learning, part-time employment during the academic year, and support for students facing systemic barriers in the workforce.

Introduction

Canadian students balance their studies with paid employment for a variety of reasons—whether to gain valuable experience for their future careers, cover tuition and living costs, or support their families. For many, working while studying is not just a choice, but a necessity. Yet, despite their critical role in the workforce, students face increasing barriers to stable and meaningful employment.

According to a 2024 survey conducted by Abacus Data for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), 21% of students work full-time during the academic year, while 45% hold part-time jobs.¹ These figures go up significantly for students with marginalized identities. Indigenous students, for instance, had a 38% rate of full-time and 49% for part-time employment during the 2023–2024 academic year. Mature



students (those over the age of 25) also had a high academic-year employment rate of 31% full-time and 49% part-time. As **Fig. 1** demonstrates, the student employment rate during the academic year also varies by province. Our data shows that student employment often fills critical gaps in the workforce, including retail (19% of student employment), technology (12%) and healthcare or educational services (12%).² Students are also increasingly taking up Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities, with 55% of graduating students in 2024 having some type of practical program experience during their studies (e.g. practicum, co-op, internship).³

Figure 1 – Student Employment (%) by Type of Work and Province of Study (2024)⁴

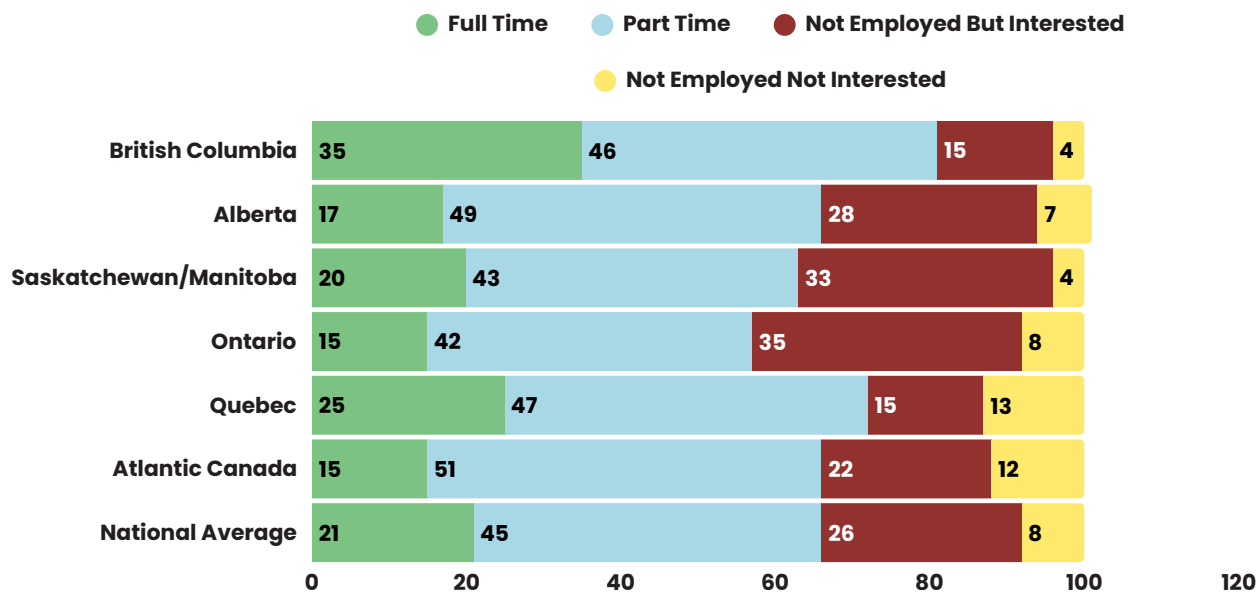
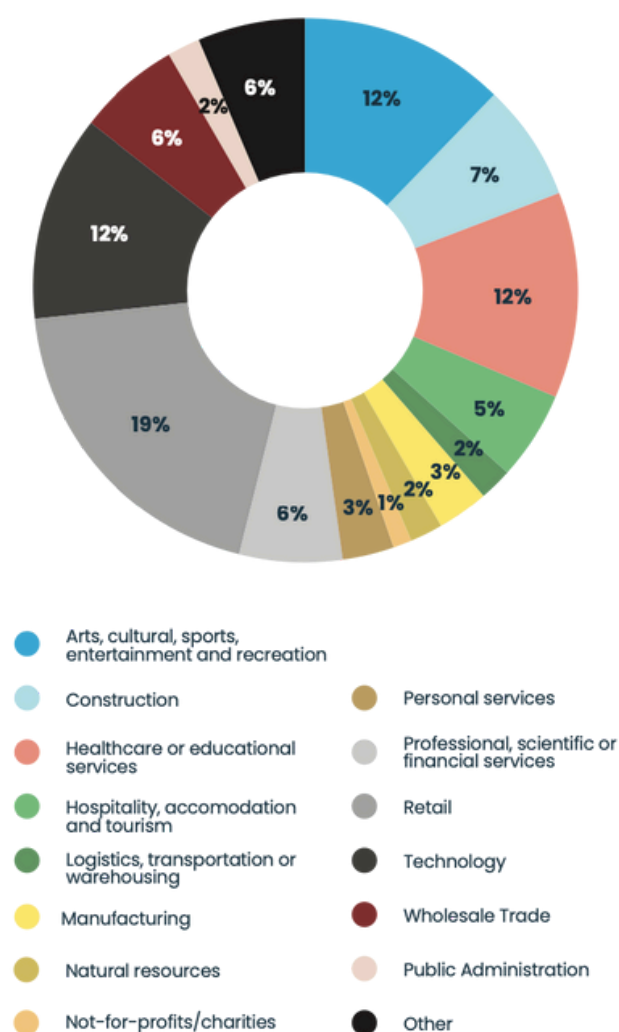


Figure 2 – Student Employment (%) by Labour Sector (2024)¹⁰



In recent years, Canada has experienced a growing crisis of youth and student unemployment. The 2024 Abacus Data-CASA survey revealed, for example, that though 66% of students had some kind of employment during the academic year, 26% of students were interested in finding employment, but have not yet been able to secure it (see fig. 1). In times of labour market precarity, young people tend to suffer the most. Current trends are no different: **while the unemployment rate for Canada at-large rose by 1.6% between 2020 and 2024, it has risen by 4.2% for people aged 15 to 24 within the same period.**⁵ In fact, when not taking into account

the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2024 youth employment reached its lowest level since 2016.⁶ Since 1997, the youth unemployment rate has consistently been double that of the rest of the working population.⁷ For students specifically, the statistics are even more shocking: excluding 2020, the employment rate for returning students aged 15 to 24 are the lowest they have been since 1998.⁸ These rates are further alarming for equity-deserving groups, including youth with disabilities and Indigenous youth.⁹ **Clearly, then, the youth and student unemployment crisis is a multifaceted and intersectional challenge which requires thorough, creative, and holistic policy responses.**

Unemployment is a critical issue for several reasons, particularly as employment helps students cope with the rising cost of living. According to the 2024 CASA-Abacus Data survey, three in four students faced affordability challenges in their previous semester, with one in five relying on a food bank. Additionally, 40% of students skipped meals due to financial constraints, 24% struggled to pay rent, and 4% experienced homelessness. These challenges were even more severe for certain student demographics—for instance, 53% of international students skipped meals compared to 36% of domestic students, and 9% of Indigenous students experienced homelessness, compared to 3% of non-Indigenous students.¹¹ Another key reason this issue of student employment is essential is that—particularly in cases of work-integrated learning—it can equip

students with crucial skills and networks, significantly improving their chances of securing meaningful jobs after graduation in an increasingly competitive market.

This publication examines student employment and its connection to student affordability, exploring various facets of the issue. It will also address the increasing importance of WIL and its contribution to skills development and post-graduate employability. Most importantly, it will propose evidence-based and innovative policy solutions to address student (un)employment.

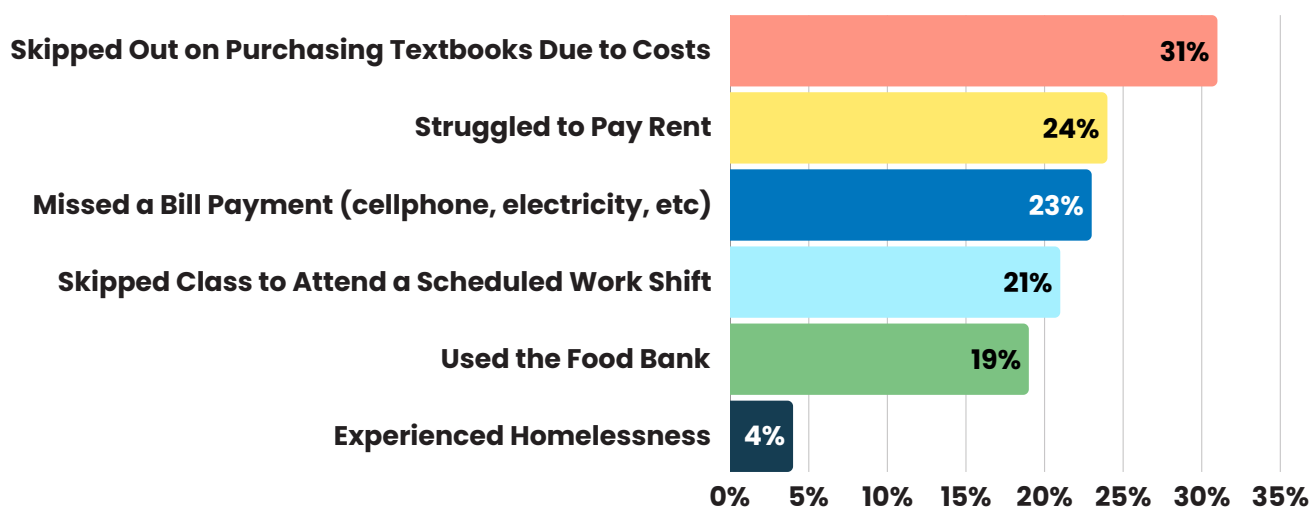
Improving youth employment is in the interest of all Canadians.

According to a recent report by King's Trust Canada with Deloitte, the result of fixing the crisis could be that "overall real GDP could increase by \$18.5 billion by 2034—more than Canada's entire arts, entertainment and recreation sector—and add an additional



228,000 jobs in the process.”¹² Youth and students are also the future innovators and leaders who will make up Canada's workforce and shape our nation's prosperity. Without early work experience, skill development, and financial security, post-secondary graduates will not realise their full potential, to the detriment of these individuals as well as their families, communities, and the country as a whole. The recommendations that follow aim to address these issues and contribute to a more secure and prosperous future for all Canadians.

Figure 3 – Poverty Indicators for Canadian Post-Secondary Students, 2024¹³



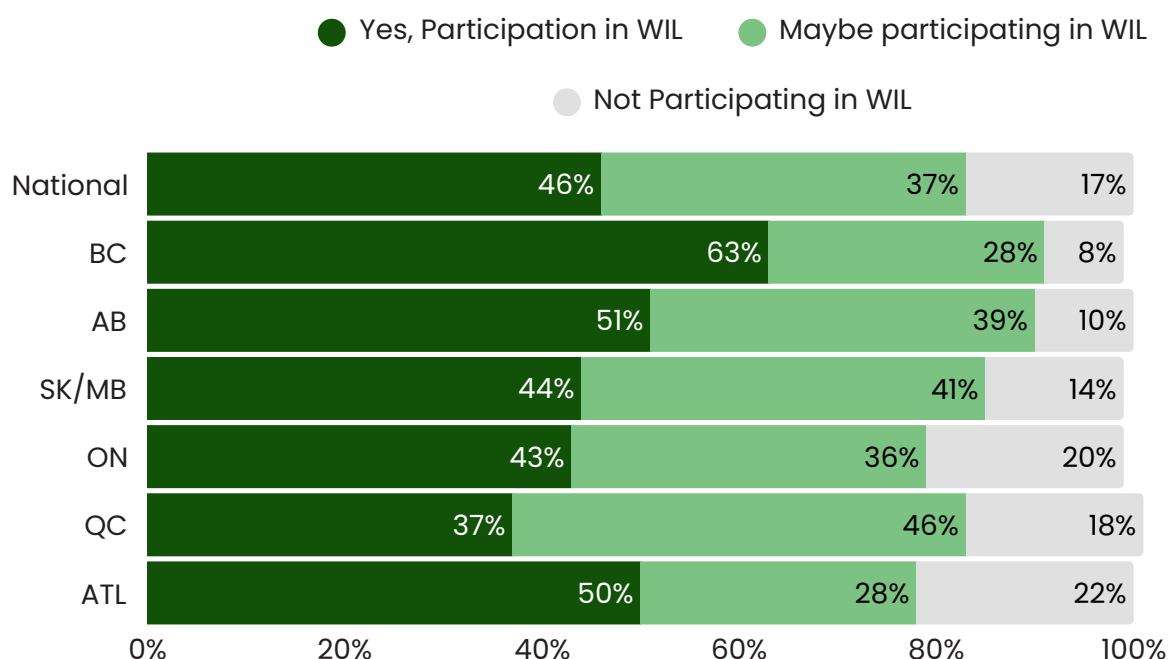
Work-Integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities are becoming increasingly vital in Canada's post-secondary landscape, offering students real-world work experiences that enhance their academic learning while improving employability. With programs like co-ops, internships, and practicums, WIL bridges the gap between education and employment by allowing students to develop practical skills, build professional networks, and gain industry-specific experience. The rising importance of WIL reflects broader shifts in Canada's labour market, where employers increasingly seek graduates with hands-on experience and job-ready competencies. Our survey with Abacus Data found that, in the 2023-2024 school year, 83% of students were either certainly or potentially planning to participate

in WIL (see Fig X). Another survey found that 55% of graduating students in 2024 had some type of practical program experience during their studies (e.g. practicum, co-op, internship).¹⁴

These data underscore the growing popularity of WIL as a means of improving career outcomes. Federal government-supported initiatives like the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) and Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) play a pivotal role in expanding access to these opportunities, particularly for equity-deserving groups. **As Canada faces ongoing challenges like youth unemployment and a growing skills gap,¹⁵ WIL has become a critical policy tool for fostering a more adaptable, skilled, and resilient workforce.**

Figure 4 – Student Participation in WIL Opportunities during the 2023-2024 Academic Year¹⁶



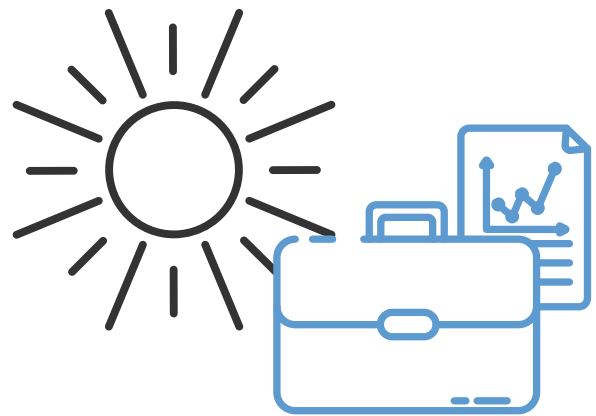
1.1 Canada Summer Jobs

The Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program is a cornerstone of Canada's workforce development, creating essential entry-level positions and high quality work experiences that might not otherwise exist, particularly in non-profits and small businesses. Beyond providing a paycheck, CSJ equips youth with transferable skills, valuable industry connections, and resume-building experience that enhances their long-term employability.

CSJ offers wage subsidies to help employers develop meaningful summer job opportunities for youth between the ages of 15 and 30. Subsidies are distributed to employers based on national and local priorities, including expanding job opportunities for youth facing barriers and advancing regional economic and social objectives. The CSJ program provides significant benefits by supporting youth employment and enhancing long-term career prospects. Participants in the program tend to earn higher wages in the long run compared to their peers who do not take part, with particularly strong benefits for Indigenous youth. Between 2019 and 2023, the program funded over 460,000 jobs, offering valuable work experience and financial support to students. In 2023 alone, CSJ helped fund over 74,000 jobs with an average wage subsidy of \$4,423 per participant.¹⁷

The program plays a crucial role in keeping youth employed locally, as well as helping small businesses and nonprofits access young talent they might not otherwise

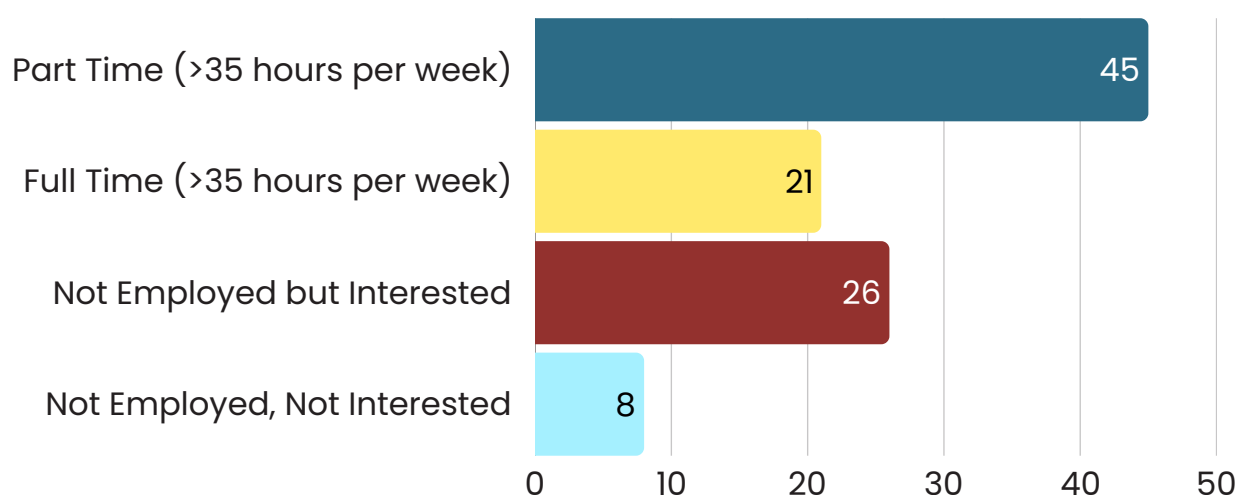
afford. CSJ is especially valuable in small towns and rural areas, where job opportunities may be limited but retaining young workers is essential for community sustainability. By reducing hiring costs, the program enables employers to grow while equipping youth with skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.¹⁸



CASA strongly supports continued investment in the Canada Summer Jobs program and welcomes opportunities to expand its funding to better serve students. While CSJ has proven to be a valuable tool in supporting youth employment, enhancing workforce readiness, and addressing financial barriers to education, there remain areas for improvement.

CSJ is highly beneficial for students in traditional academic programs with full-time coursework during the fall and winter semesters and a summer break. However, it excludes students enrolled in full-time summer programs, a common structure in many college programs, restricting access to those whose academic schedules align with the program's timeline.

Figure 5 – Student Employment Levels (%) by Type of Employment in 2024¹⁹



While CSJ has played a crucial role in helping students financially sustain their post-secondary education by providing full time summer employment, many students must also work part-time during the school year to afford tuition and related costs—yet struggle to find quality employment opportunities.

In 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CSJ temporarily expanded to include part-time positions, demonstrating the program's ability to adapt and better meet student needs.²⁰ However, part-time CSJ placements were not made permanent—with the exception of some flexibility for youth with disabilities—leaving many students unable to access meaningful, career-building work experiences during the academic year.²¹ Data collected by CASA in partnership with Abacus Data shows that 26% of students want employment during the school year but are unable to find it (see Fig 5). Without expanded access to programs like CSJ, students are often forced into

low-wage service industry jobs, unstable part-time work, and positions that offer little to no professional development—in other words, they are underemployed. Expanding CSJ to provide year-round, high-quality part-time opportunities would not only improve student financial stability, but also align with the program's core objective of equipping youth with meaningful, skills-based work experience—ensuring that more young people can gain the tools they need to succeed in the workforce.

Many youth—particularly those from underserved and underrepresented communities such as visible minorities and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth—continue to face significant barriers in securing meaningful employment. These barriers limit their ability to gain essential work experience, build professional networks, and transition successfully into the labor market. Although one of the stated goals of the CSJ program is to support marginalized students, a 2024 Auditor General's report

found that it fell short in assisting youth facing barriers—such as Indigenous youth and those with disabilities—in gaining employment experience. For example, in 2023, visible minorities made up 20% of the 16–19 age group but accounted for only 13% of CSJ participants.²² Reforms are therefore needed to ensure the program better supports youth facing barriers.

Additionally, to effectively respond to national and local priorities aimed at improving access to the labor market for youth facing unique barriers, Canada needs a comprehensive national strategy to collect and consolidate data on experiential learning participation. The 2024 Auditor General’s report highlighted concerns regarding data shortfalls, limited tracking of job creation, and poor disaggregated data collection.²³ Currently, only 34% of CSJ participants complete the end-of-program survey, making it difficult to assess long-term labor market outcomes.²⁴ Without a coordinated national framework for data collection, policymakers lack the necessary insights to ensure that employment initiatives—including CSJ—are effectively supporting youth who face systemic barriers to employment.²⁵ By improving data collection the government can develop a targeted, evidence-based approach to youth employment policy, ensuring that funding and resources reach those who need them most.

Finally, the age restrictions within the CSJ program create a significant barrier for mature students. While prioritizing youth is

important in addressing the unemployment crisis, the current eligibility cap at age 30 excludes a growing group of learners: those returning to school to retrain or change careers. These individuals are often in the same career stage as their younger peers and would benefit equally from the program’s opportunities. Moreover, as highlighted in the spotlight sections below, this restriction also presents an equity issue—particularly for Indigenous students, many of whom pursue post-secondary education later in life. Expanding eligibility would ensure that all students, regardless of age, have access to the support needed to transition into the workforce.

The nature of work and education is evolving, with traditional, single-employer career paths becoming less common. As career shifts become the norm, post-secondary institutions are expanding lifelong learning programs to help mature students acquire new skills and credentials. Federal work-integrated learning programs like CSJ should reflect these changes by supporting all students preparing for new careers—regardless of when they choose to pursue their education. Excluding mature learners from these opportunities undermines both workforce development and Canada’s commitment to lifelong learning.



Recommendations

CSJ plays a crucial role in bridging this gap by providing students with hands-on, skills-based work experiences that prepare them for the labor market. Expanding CSJ, removing barriers to participation, and improving data collection would ensure that more students can apply their knowledge in professional settings, gain industry-relevant experience, and strengthen their transition from education to employment.

CASA calls on the Federal Government to expand support for the Canada Summer Jobs Program by an additional 10,000 students, with priority given to employment related to areas of study.

CASA calls on the Federal Government to create a new stream for the Canada Summer Jobs Program creating an equal number of part-time jobs during the period from September to April, creating positions that meet the following criteria:

- Offering between 15–20 hours per week;
- Offering hours outside of a student's in-class hours;
- Offering experience relevant to areas of study; and,
- Otherwise meeting the criteria of the Canada Summer Jobs Program.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to create a new strategy to collect and consolidate data on experiential learning participation on a national scale, including long-range outcome data for Canada Summer Jobs.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to expand eligibility for Canada Summer Jobs to those above 30 who are participating in a post-secondary credential.



1.2 Student Work–Placement Program

The Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) is a federal government initiative to encourage Work–Integrated–Learning (WIL) for post-secondary students. Students employed through SWPP typically undertake a placement of four months during the academic year in a variety of different WIL models, including co-ops, internships, and practicums. In the 2022–23 program year, SWPP created 51,711 work-integrated placements for post-secondary students; since it was created in 2017, the program has created 192,000 WIL opportunities.²⁶

Through SWPP, employers receive wage subsidies to hire Canadian post-secondary students, which represents 50 to 70% of the student's wage (the rest of which is covered by the employer). The base subsidy offers up to \$5,000 to employers hiring a student as part of this program, though for students hired who are from an underrepresented group (e.g. women in STEM, students with disabilities, newcomers, Indigenous students, visible minorities), employers can receive up to \$7,000 in wage subsidies.

The increased subsidy for first-year and equity-deserving students has proven to positively influence workplace diversity. A recent survey found that 71% of SWPP employers hired WIL participants from equity-deserving

communities underrepresented in their sector, with many also making structural changes to promote inclusivity—such as adjusting mentorship and supervisory structures (21%), recognizing new holidays or traditions (12%), planning cultural safety training (11%), and introducing new workplace accommodations (10%).²⁷

SWPP is not a corporate subsidy: it is proven to create paid work opportunities for students that would not exist otherwise. In a recent survey, it was found that only a quarter (24%) of SWPP employers would still have hired their SWPP students if they hadn't received a subsidy to support the cost of their students' salaries.²⁸



The federal government's investment in SWPP has significant benefits for students, employers, and the Canadian public as a whole:

SWPP Benefit	Description
Return on Public Investment	<p>SWPP offers a high return on taxpayer investment, exceeding public funding through expanded tax revenue, increased economic spending, and improved productivity, while also enhancing education quality, post-secondary education graduate employability, and employer training capacity.</p> <p>SWPP helps to address immediate labour force gaps, such as in mining and electricity, in addition to the skills gap in Canada in the long term, including in soft skills and technical skills, leading to a more productive future workforce.^{29,30}</p>
Economic Benefits for Employers	<p>Employers gain an added value of \$401 per month per student, totaling \$3.33M per month or \$13.33M per placement period across 8,311 participating employers since April 2022. Nearly half (48%) hire SWPP students full-time post-graduation. In addition, participating employers benefit by filling short-term labour needs and assessing students for long-term roles.³¹</p>
Economic Benefits for SMEs	<p>Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) especially benefit from this program. Particularly as many faced challenges before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, "the SWPP's employer wage subsidies have offered an important lifeline. Numerous small businesses that would have not otherwise been able to hire a student and invest in talent development have done so and seen high returns."³²</p>
Economic Benefits for Students	<p>Students receive an additional financial benefit of \$1,038 per month on average (compared to the next-best alternative), totaling \$21.02M per month or \$84.09M per placement period across 20,254 students since April 2022, alongside improved employability and skills development. Participation in WIL is also associated with higher salaries after graduation.³³</p>

Other Student Benefits	SWPP enhances educational experiences, builds workplace readiness, and strengthens job prospects for recent graduates through practical, hands-on learning in real work settings. SWPP students are 10% more likely than other WIL students to feel confident about finding work in their field after graduating. Participation in WIL is also associated with higher grades, particularly for those from equity-deserving groups. ³⁴
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The first issue surrounding SWPP is that there is a lack of stability for employers. There is no stable, long-term investment in the program. Budget 2024 proposed an investment of \$207.6 million in 2025–2026, which continues the trend of year-on-year investment into SWPP. Small and Medium Sizes Enterprises (SMEs), who make up 93% of partnerships with employers in SWPP,³⁵ thus cannot reliably plan their labour models to include subsidized student internships.

Further, there is the issue of financial barriers for students. Students in Canada are struggling to make ends meet. Particularly given that participating in WIL can extend the time a student takes to complete their program, students might decide not to take these opportunities so that they can complete their credentials and enter the full-time workforce more quickly. Under current wage subsidy maximums, many students completing SWPP subsidized placements receive above provincial minimum wages, but the wages do not meet the new federal minimum wage necessary to cope with inflation.³⁶

Recommendations

CASA calls on the federal government to invest \$250 million annually in the Student-Work Placement Program through the 2027–28 program year to strengthen work-integrated learning opportunities for students in small and medium enterprises.

- An increase of 20% across the board would mean that wage subsidies could increase to \$6,000 for any student hired, and \$8,400 for students hired in their first year or from an underrepresented group. For students not in their first year or from an underrepresented group, this would encourage— but not require—employers to receive this full amount, and pay the equivalent of \$20 per hour.

CASA calls on the federal government to extend the \$7,000 SWPP wage subsidies to include 2SLGBTQIA+ students among the eligible student demographics.

CASA calls on the Federal Government to develop an outcome-based framework to evaluate the success of WIL initiatives that can be deployed as a tool to enable the continual improvement of programs.

1.3 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships provide hands-on training for aspiring skilled trades workers, with 80% of their time completed in on-the-job training under the guidance of certified tradespeople (journeypersons) and 20% in classroom technical training, which usually takes place at a post-secondary institution or union training centre. This pathway is essential for producing qualified workers in the 57 Red Seal Trades, many of which are critical to Canada's housing and infrastructure needs.³⁷

In order to undertake an apprenticeship, apprentices need to find employers who will provide on-the-job training. Employers are incentivized to provide this through grants and subsidies provided by the government. Apprentices themselves can also receive additional funding through EI and provincial incentives, grants, and bursaries. Apprentices are paid when on the job, but usually at a much lower rate than a certified journeyperson. Upon completion of

an apprenticeship, the individual achieves a certificate of apprenticeship, before passing an exam to receive a Certificate of Qualification from their province or territory. They can then take a Red Seal exam to be qualified to work in their trade anywhere in Canada.

While the federal government recognizes the importance of apprenticeships—as reflected in investments like the Apprenticeship Service and the Skilled Trades and Readiness Program in Budget 2024—the system still falls short when compared to other countries like the U.S. and Germany.³⁸ For instance, from 2012 to 2022, apprenticeship enrollment in Canada declined by 4.8%, while the U.S. saw a 64% increase in new apprentices in the same period.^{39,40,41} Without significant action to promote apprenticeship enrollment and retention, Canada will not be able to maintain the skilled workforce necessary to meet the nation's most critical infrastructure needs.

Recent federal cuts to programs like the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant and the Apprenticeship Completion Grant will likely exacerbate the apprentice shortfall. Alongside issues with the successful completion of apprenticeships, a major challenge to Canada's aspiring journeypersons and its apprenticeship system at large is the limited availability of paid employer training spots.^{44,45}



Figure 6 – Total number of apprenticeship program registrations in Canada per annum. Created by ^{42,43} CASA based on Statistics Canada data

This is particularly problematic due to the youth unemployment crisis, in addition to the:

Skilled Labour Shortage

» More than 700,000 skilled tradespeople are expected to retire by 2028.⁴⁶

» Even within the next five years, Canada will face a shortage of at least 10,000 skilled workers in Red Seal trades.⁴⁷

» The construction industry alone will face a shortage of more than 60,000 workers by 2032 due to rising home-building demands and high retirement rates.⁴⁸

Housing Crisis

» As noted in Budget 2024, “the national housing crisis presents one of Canada’s greatest social and economic challenges.”⁴⁹

» A crucial part of the government’s housing plan is to build more homes: in order to do this, however, they need a sufficient, skilled workforce.⁵⁰

» Canada needs an additional 3.5 million housing units by 2030 to close the housing supply gap, as estimated by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.⁵¹

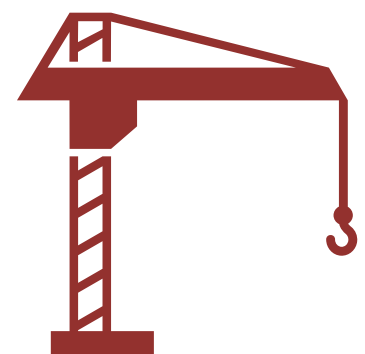
Canada’s lagging apprenticeship system, youth unemployment crisis, skilled labor shortage, and housing crisis are deeply interconnected issues. Without an adequate skilled workforce, Canada cannot meet its infrastructure and housing goals.

CASA recommends a two-part approach to better leverage these taxpayer-funded construction projects and address the challenges outlined above:

1. Mandate that contractors for federal infrastructure construction and maintenance projects ensure that 20% or more of hours worked on federal projects are worked by apprentices.

- These projects, which include highways, bridges, and government buildings, can be lucrative, long-term opportunities for the private sector.
- Current federal policy only requests contractors for these projects to sign a voluntary declaration to support apprentices. This demonstrates that the government already recognizes that these contracts can be leveraged to increase training opportunities for the future skilled trades workforce.
- Mandating apprentice hours ensures public investments actively develop the skilled workforce Canada needs.

Similar policies already exist at the provincial level for provincial government infrastructure construction and maintenance projects.^{52,53,54,55}



2. Establish a matching requirement for recipients of grants and contributions for federal housing programs such as the Affordable Housing Fund, Apartment Construction Loan Program, and Federal Lands Initiative.

- Require recipients of federal housing grants and contributions (e.g., the Affordable Housing Fund and Federal Lands Initiative) to ensure that 20% of hours worked are completed by apprentices.
- This policy ensures that taxpayer-funded housing initiatives directly contribute to workforce development, addressing both the skilled labour shortage and housing crisis.
- Focusing on federally-funded housing project, rather than other government-funded infrastructure projects,⁵⁶ aligns with the current priority to address housing affordability by ensuring the sufficient future skilled workforce engaged in this industry. This could also be used as a pilot to consider expanding this mandate to other programs in the future.
- Requiring contractors to have apprenticeship hours on all projects can help overcome the hesitance to hire apprentices for shorter-term projects.

These policies would help to overcome the issue of the limited availability of paid employer training spots in Canada, which is a key barrier to the successful completion of apprenticeships.

These policies would help to overcome the issue of the limited availability of paid employer training spots in Canada, which is a key barrier to the successful completion of apprenticeships.

Another issue to address is affordability for apprentices. Particularly now that the federal Apprenticeship Incentive Grant and the Apprenticeship Completion Grants are no longer available, students face increasing financial burdens associated with entering an apprenticeship program and the rising cost of attending post-secondary education in Canada.

One of the barriers to pursuing a skilled trade is the high cost of tools that apprentices must incur. Many programs expect apprenticeship students to supply their own CSA-approved steel-toed boots, coveralls, eye protection, and other personal protective equipment.^{57,58} These mandatory up-front costs may negatively impact a student's ability to access and/or succeed in their apprenticeship program, and present an unnecessary barrier, particularly for low- and middle-income students.

An apprentice may claim the cost of eligible tools purchased up to a maximum of \$1000.⁵⁹ While the recent doubling of Tradesperson's Tools Deduction is a promising start, a tradesperson's tools can often cost more than \$1000, and therefore expose them to undue financial hardship that may negatively impact their ability to succeed in post-secondary education.

Recommendations

CASA calls on the federal government to mandate that contractors for federal infrastructure construction and maintenance projects ensure that 20% or more of hours worked on federal projects are worked by apprentices.

CASA calls on the federal government to create a matching requirement for recipients of grants and contributions for federal housing programs such as the Affordable Housing Fund, Apartment Construction Loan Program, and Federal Lands Initiative.

CASA calls upon the federal government to permanently index the maximum amount for the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction to the consumer price index (CPI), in order to match the cost of living.

CASA calls upon the federal government to convert the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction (TTD) tax deduction into non-repayable Canada Student Grants that tradesperson students can directly use towards paying for upfront cost of tools.



Labour Market Indicators

Making informed career decisions has always been challenging for youth who are at the beginning of a career. Balancing academic interests, affordability, and job prospects is becoming more difficult in the twenty-first century workforce. Proper data is needed for young people to make informed career decisions as well as to facilitate appropriate policy at all levels of government regarding issues like quality education, precarious work, and the perceived skills gap between the needs of employers and the education of young people.

Youth employment is a multifaceted issue with several unknown and misunderstood factors:

1. Currently, there is a lack of consistent, nationwide data pertaining to the factors that influence Canadian employers' choices to hiring youth.
2. There is limited data to the breakdown of which youth populations face difficulties in finding employment, limiting the precision with which targeted social policy and relevant programs can be successful.
3. There is also missing data on local, regional, and provincial contexts that impact the state of youth employment.

While some effort has been made by various sources to quantify these data shortfalls, many important questions remain that would be critical to informing public policy on addressing youth unemployment.



The most relevant Labour Market Information surveys undertaken by Statistics Canada include: the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS); the National Graduates Survey (NGS)/ Follow-up of Graduates (FOG); Access and Support to Education and Training Survey (ASETS); the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED); and the National Apprenticeship Survey (NAS).⁶⁰ The Youth in Transition Survey was a useful tool to examine transitions in the lives of youths, especially between education or training and work.⁶¹ However, the survey was discontinued in 2009. Many labour force statistics are derived from the Canadian Labour Force Survey, a phone survey conducted monthly since 1945.

According to Statistics Canada in 2024, from May to August, the Labour Force Survey collects labour market information from students who attended school full time in March and who intend to return to school full time in the fall.⁶² According to Statistics Canada in 2024, from May to August, the Labour Force Survey collects labour market information from students who attended school full

time in March and who intend to return to school full time in the fall. The unemployment rate among returning students was 15.9% in June 2024, and was up 3.8 percentage points from a year earlier.⁶³ While this indicates that students are facing more difficulties finding work as they enter the summer job market, data does not provide information on the factors impacting student employment. In order to address the relationship between market labour and student employment, it is important to know the factors that impact a student's employment.

In 2022, an evaluation of the Learning and Labour Market Information was disseminated by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) using a web-based consolidated approach. The findings from the evaluation indicated that the learning and labour market information in Job Bank is effective in helping Canadians pursue their labour market objectives.⁶⁴ However, the evaluation also highlights several areas for ESDC to better respond to the specific needs of various users including students, youth, employment equity groups, as well as employers. Additionally, in a pop-up survey by ESDC, job seekers—including students—were largely (69%) satisfied with the job postings but less satisfied with information on career planning (55%) and labour market trends and news (49%).⁶⁵

Various target groups—including youth, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, and persons with disabilities—have different needs in

terms of accessing learning and labour market information.⁶⁶ ESDC has expressed interest in expanding client segment profiles to provide local and provincial labour market insights for specific target groups. These profiles would be visually engaging, presenting trends and narratives to enhance user engagement while also identifying barriers to labour market integration and highlighting relevant government programs.⁶⁷ However, progress in this area remains unclear, though Statistics Canada has increased its use of data visualization for the Labour Market Survey, including an interactive tool released in 2024 on labour market outcomes for college and university graduates.⁶⁸ It is uncertain, however, how aware target groups are of these tools, how useful they are, or what efforts the federal government is making to share this information in a targeted way.⁶⁹

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada has experienced a transformative shift in labour market needs. In a 2023 research summary where the Government of Canada looked at impacts of COVID-19 on Canadian post-secondary education, it was noted that unemployment rates have increased for Canadian youth and graduates. It was also noted that the number of students working in their area of study decreased.⁷⁰ While having this data is helpful in comparing student employment before, during and after COVID-19, it lacks qualitative data highlighting the factors impacting student employment post-pandemic.

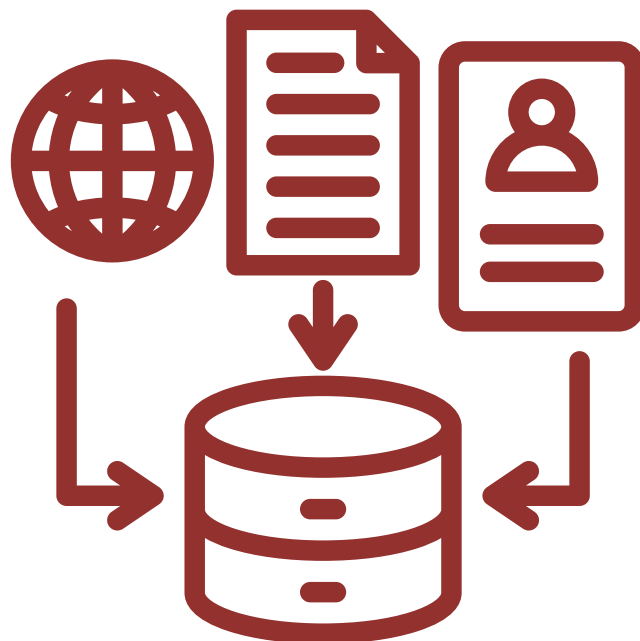
Recommendations

CASA calls on the federal government, in consultation with provincial governments, experts, and other stakeholders, to reevaluate the way it collects national data on employment for youth, in order to better capture the complexities of the state of youth employment and unemployment nationwide.

CASA calls on Employment and Social Development Canada to conduct an updated evaluation of the 2016 Evaluation of Learning and Labour Market Information.

CASA further calls on Employment and Social Development Canada to ensure that the evaluation includes a focus on collecting information on factors and variables impacting student employment during and after their studies.

CASA calls on the federal government to review the way it collects labour market information and how it establishes high-demand fields, in an attempt to help youth make informed decisions as to the programs they will pursue in post-secondary education.



Post-Graduate Employment

According to Statistics Canada, unemployment for those aged 18–14 reached nearly 14% by November 2024, marking a record high within the last 30 years outside of the 2008 Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic.⁷¹ This youth unemployment crisis has not only immediate effects on those currently graduating from Canada’s post-secondary institutions, but it also has possible lifelong impacts. There is evidence that graduation during a recession or recession-like conditions is tied to long-term negative effects that can last ten or more years after graduation.^{72,73} Although students surveyed in the 2024 CASA-Abacus Data survey generally expressed confidence in finding a job after graduation (see Figure X), this

optimism may be misplaced given the broader crisis of youth unemployment and underemployment. The situation is particularly severe for recent international student graduates, who, on average, earn 20% less annually than their domestic peers with bachelor’s degrees.⁷⁴ For all graduates, the wage premium of higher education remains significant but has declined over time. For instance, in the year 2000, workers with university degrees could expect to earn 58.5% more than their counterparts, with those with other post-secondary degrees earning 19.5% more. In 2018, this had dropped to 52.9% for university degree holders, and 17.8% for holders of other post-secondary degrees.⁷⁵

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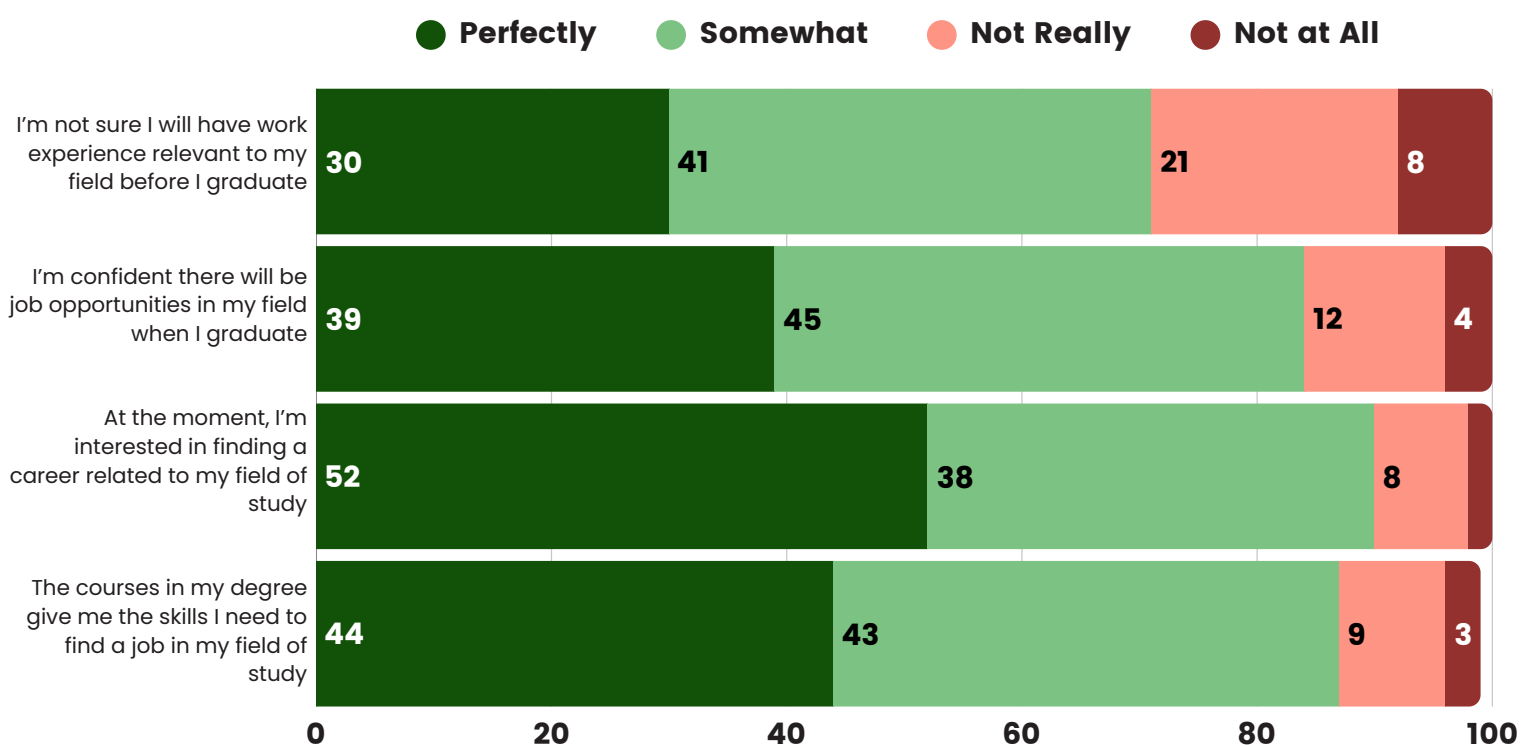


Figure 7 – Post-secondary students’ perceptions of the connection between their studies and future employment, by percentage of respondents agreeing with each statement (2024 CASA-Abacus Data Survey)

A critical step in closing the gap between post-secondary education and employment is increasing employer investment in training. Without it, students struggle to apply their broad skills and knowledge to real-world work practices, industry-specific technologies, and specialized expertise. Despite this need, the Future Skills Centre reports that young workers are often

overlooked for employer-sponsored training.⁷⁷ Alarmingly, more than half of employers invest less than \$500 per employee annually—hardly enough to equip workers with the skills needed to thrive in today’s evolving job market.⁷⁸ Greater investment in training is not just beneficial for graduates—it’s essential for building a skilled, adaptable workforce.

Recommendations

Addressing youth unemployment requires a strategic approach that bridges the gap between post-secondary education and the workforce. While Canada’s youth face significant employment challenges—especially in times of economic uncertainty—these issues can be mitigated through targeted policy interventions. A key factor is the lack of employer investment in workforce training, leaving graduates without the industry-specific skills needed to transition smoothly into the job market. By implementing a Canada Training Tax, convening provincial discussions on best practices, and developing a national school-to-work transition strategy, these barriers can be reduced. Additionally, improving work-integrated learning opportunities—as discussed in other sections of this publication—will enhance employability and ensure that graduates secure meaningful, well-paying jobs. However, it must be ensured that upskilling opportunities undertaken by young people are paid. These efforts, taken together, will strengthen Canada’s labour market and support long-term economic growth.

CASA calls on the federal government to create a Canada Training Tax, modeled after the Quebec Training Tax, to address the “employer training gap” issue in Canada.

CASA calls on the federal government to develop a well-coordinated, highly visible youth school-to-work transition strategy at the national level, with specific recommendations on international student integration into the labour market.

CASA calls on the federal government to convene a provincial roundtable to discuss best practices on the issues of youth unemployment, underemployment, and unpaid internships, and encourage provincial cooperation on the issue.

Spotlight On:

Indigenous Student Employment

The devastating legacy of Canada's Indian Residential School system, as well as ongoing anti-Indigenous racism in Canadian society and schooling, has left many Indigenous people with a deeply rooted and well-justified mistrust of educational institutions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 2015 Calls to Action emphasize that education, including post-secondary learning, is a crucial pillar of reconciliation. Notably, 19 of the Calls to Action directly affect post-secondary institutions and those who work within them.⁷⁹ Therefore, it is essential that the federal government collaborates with Indigenous and provincial governments to ensure Indigenous people in Canada have access to adequately funded, meaningful, and culturally relevant educational and enrichment opportunities, including in the area of student employment.

Indigenous students in Canada face significant affordability challenges in accessing post-secondary education (PSE) and meaningful employment opportunities. While high school graduation rates among Indigenous students have risen dramatically, university attainment remains much lower than that of non-Indigenous Canadians. Only 9% of First Nations individuals hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 27.4% of non-Indigenous Canadians.⁸⁰ Given that post-secondary credentials are a major determinant of employment outcomes, increasing investments in Indigenous PSE is critical to addressing these disparities.

Financial barriers remain one of the most significant obstacles Indigenous students face in pursuing and completing PSE.⁸¹ The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), designed to

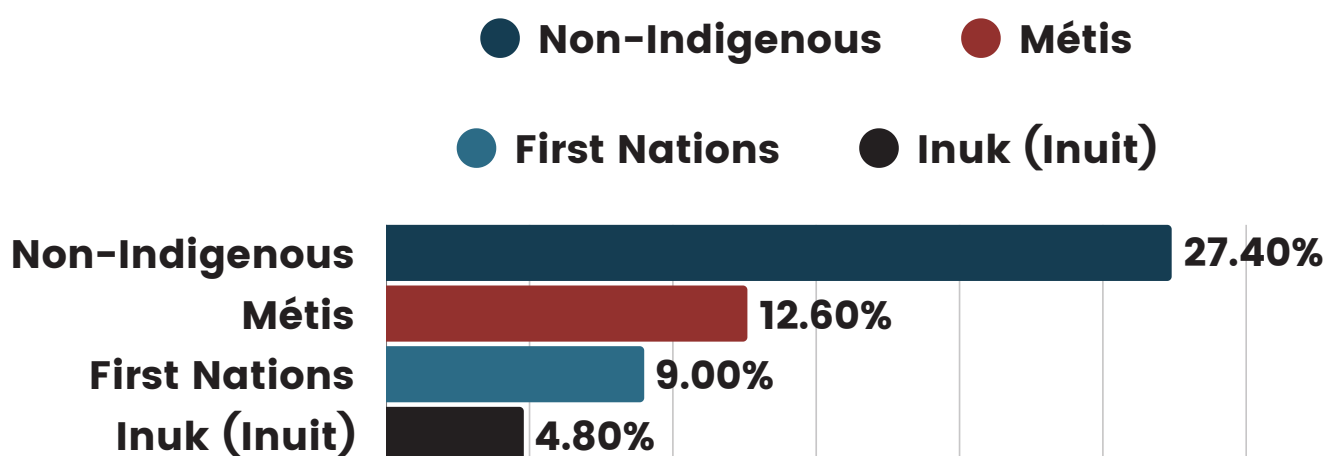


Figure 8 –Bachelor degree or higher attainment by Indigenous identity, 2021.⁸²

provide financial support for First Nations learners, has been chronically underfunded, leaving many students without the resources needed to complete their studies.⁸³ Reports also consistently demonstrate that, even for those students who are funded, the amount of funding given by the PSSSP and the Inuit and Métis Post-Secondary Education Strategies are insufficient for covering the cost of pursuing PSE.^{84,85,86} Indigenous students also face additional costs associated with relocation, travel, accommodation, childcare, and culturally appropriate mental health supports, all of which make post-secondary education even less accessible.^{87,88} As the cost of living continues to rise, Indigenous students will be disproportionately affected, often needing to take on paid employment unrelated to their studies just to afford basic expenses.

In addition to affordability challenges, Indigenous students face systemic barriers to employment and career advancement. CSJ, for example, has failed to adequately recruit and support Indigenous learners.⁸⁹ A lack of targeted outreach, barriers related to location, and limited culturally relevant opportunities are likely among the reasons that it has been difficult for Indigenous students to access the program. One key shortcoming is the program's age restriction (typically capped at 30), which disproportionately excludes Indigenous students, as a significant proportion of them are mature learners.⁹⁰ Expanding the age eligibility for CSJ would help

ensure that more Indigenous students—especially those returning to education later in life—can access these opportunities.

Work-Integrated Learning opportunities, which are critical for gaining relevant work experience and improving employment outcomes, are also less accessible for Indigenous students—particularly those in rural and remote communities. Many WIL placements are concentrated in urban centers, creating significant financial and logistical challenges for Indigenous learners who must relocate or commute long distances to participate. Expanding remote, part-time, and community-based WIL options, as well as increasing targeted financial support for Indigenous students engaging in WIL, would help bridge this employment gap.

Many students navigate multiple, intersecting identities that can heighten barriers to workforce participation. For instance, disability rates are higher among off-reserve First Nations and Métis individuals compared to non-Indigenous people—and even higher for First Nations and Métis women.⁹¹ Indigenous students with disabilities face additional barriers in accessing employment, yet federal student employment programs have not adequately addressed these challenges. Indigenous Services Canada's Accessibility Plan, for instance, commits to creating a barrier-free workplace, highlighting the need for inclusive hiring and culturally relevant accommodations.⁹² Expanding student employment programs to align with

commitments like these, through flexible work options, remote opportunities, and disability-inclusive outreach would help ensure that Indigenous students with disabilities can more equitably access meaningful career-building work opportunities. Additionally, Indigenous students are more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to be mature students, adding further challenges to their educational and career pathways.⁹³ Given these complexities, policy reform must be holistic, data-driven, and informed by meaningful consultation to ensure it effectively addresses the unique needs of Indigenous students.



International Student Employment

For international students, employment is not just about gaining experience—it is a financial necessity. On average, **international students in Canada now pay tuition that is roughly five times higher than that of domestic students,**⁹⁴ yet they have little to no access to government grants and loans, such as those provided through the Canada Financial Assistance Program. Despite the vital role that work plays in sustaining their education, international students face restrictive policies that limit their ability to find meaningful employment, both during and after their studies.

Barriers to Work Integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL), such as co-ops and internships,

is a critical component of many post-secondary programs, providing students with hands-on experience and a bridge to the workforce. However, international students are excluded from key federal funding programs, such as CSJ and the SWPP. As a result, many struggle to secure paid placements, since employers often prioritize subsidized domestic students for these limited opportunities.

Even when international students manage to secure a placement—sometimes a mandatory requirement of their program—another significant hurdle remains: work permits. Currently, international students must obtain a separate work permit to participate in a required WIL experience.⁹⁵ This bureaucratic step adds unnecessary costs, administrative burdens, and

potential delays that could jeopardize their ability to complete their programs on time. Given the importance of WIL in building a competitive workforce and connecting students with Canadian employers, removing this barrier would be a simple yet meaningful policy change.

Off-Campus Work Restrictions

The ability to work off-campus is crucial for international students, not just to pay for tuition and living expenses but also to integrate into their communities and gain professional experience. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, international students were allowed to work up to 20 hours per week off-campus, with no restrictions for on-campus work. Recognizing the need for more flexibility, the government temporarily increased this cap to 40 hours per week during the pandemic to address labour shortages. However, this measure ended in November 2024, and the new limit has been set at 24 hours per week—an arbitrary increase that fails to reflect the financial realities international students face.

For part-time international students, the situation is even worse. Those who study part-time, often due to family obligations, health issues, or disabilities, are entirely barred from working off-campus. This policy creates undue hardship for students who may be struggling with personal challenges and disproportionately impacts those who need employment the most.

Pathways to Permanent Residency

For many international students, Canada is not just a place to study—it is a place to build a future. Yet, current immigration policies create unnecessary barriers for those seeking to stay and contribute to the Canadian economy. One major issue is that work experience gained while studying does not count toward the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) Express Entry stream for Permanent Residency.

Under current policies, international PhD graduates must accrue an additional year of work experience outside their studies before becoming eligible for CEC Permanent Residency. This creates unnecessary barriers and delays for these highly qualified individuals, potentially discouraging them from pursuing permanent settlement in Canada and applying their expertise here.



CASA encourages the federal government to consider changes that would better support international students in gaining valuable work experience while studying in Canada. This could include modifying study permit conditions to allow students to participate in co-op terms and internships integrated into their programs without needing a separate work permit. Additionally, expanding eligibility for off-campus employment to part-time international students could provide greater flexibility and financial stability. CASA also suggests recognizing the in-Canada employment hours worked by PhD students during their degrees as part of the Canadian Experience Class PR stream, helping to retain top-tier talent and strengthen the country's workforce.

Employment for Students with Disabilities

Across Canada, people with disabilities face higher unemployment rates, greater financial hardship, and lower educational attainment than those without disabilities. Over a million Canadians with disabilities currently live in poverty, with those experiencing more severe disabilities earning an after-tax income of just \$12,520—well below the poverty line.⁹⁶ On top of this, the cost of specialized equipment, accessible transportation, home modifications, and medical procedures adds to the significant financial burdens they face.⁹⁷

For students with disabilities, these financial challenges are even more pronounced. They often incur additional costs related to accessibility, take longer to complete their studies, and face greater barriers to attending or finishing post-secondary education.⁹⁸ Further, **youth with disabilities are less likely than their peers to be employed while attending school** (41.8% versus 50.5%).⁹⁹ Even after graduation, they tend to earn lower wages than

their non-disabled peers, making it more difficult to fund their education and cover living expenses.¹⁰⁰

According to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), students with disabilities also experience greater difficulties in work-integrated learning (WIL). Their overall satisfaction with WIL is lower (75% vs. 82% for students without disabilities), and they are more likely to encounter challenges (62% vs. 52%). The application process is particularly difficult—23% report barriers at this stage, nearly double the rate of students without disabilities (13%). Similarly, they are more likely to struggle in interviews (19% vs. 13%). Once in a WIL placement, students with disabilities are more likely to feel ignored by colleagues (27% vs. 17%) and to report mental health challenges (73% vs. 61%).¹⁰¹

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, but one meaningful step would be for the federal government to introduce stronger incentives for employers

to hire students with disabilities in WIL programs. For instance, SWPP, which has been more successful than CSJ in creating opportunities for marginalized students, has an increased subsidy available for employers that hire marginalized students, including those with disabilities. Expanding this approach could help create more meaningful, accessible employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

Given that WIL plays a crucial role

in skill development, career readiness, and post-graduation employment outcomes, ensuring equitable access is essential. For students with disabilities—who already face systemic barriers in the workforce—WIL can provide critical experience, professional networks, and financial support to help offset the costs of education. Strengthening these programs would not only improve inclusion but also enhance long-term career prospects and economic stability for students with disabilities.

Mature Student Employment

In 2021/2022, 33.9% of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions were aged 25 or over.¹⁰² Mature students often balance work, family responsibilities, and studies, making employment both a necessity and a challenge. They take on higher levels of debt, as they are less likely to receive financial support from family, and often struggle to find flexible, well-paying job opportunities that align with their academic commitments.^{103,104}

Mature students are also a diverse group with unique employment needs:

- Mature students are more likely than their peers to have dependent children: of those students receiving the 2022–2023 Canada Student Grant for Full or Part-Time Students with Dependents, a vast majority (94.71%) were over the age of 25.¹⁰⁵
- Mature students are a growing proportion of Canada's international student population, accounting for 25% in study permit approvals in 2019.¹⁰⁶

- A high proportion of Indigenous post-secondary students are also mature students. According to Indspire, a national charity that provides funding for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, 49% of the students they fund are 25 years or older.¹⁰⁷ Of those mature students funded, 51% of them had at least one dependent, while only 7% of non-mature Indigenous students did.¹⁰⁸

A major challenge for mature students is the lack of a standardized definition, making it harder to track employment trends and advocate for better support. Definitions vary widely—some institutions classify incoming students as mature at 19, while others use 23 as the threshold. Without clear national criteria, mature students often fall through the cracks in employment programs and financial aid policies.

Many mature students rely on work to fund their education, but current

federal WIL programs are not designed with their needs in mind. Canada Summer Jobs only supports those aged 30 and below, and primarily funds full-time opportunities. Expanding eligibility for this program to include part-time work and increasing incentives both in CSJ and SWPP for employers to hire mature students could help bridge this gap.

Childcare availability is another major employment barrier. Many mature students have dependents: according to the 2011 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, 36.8% of Low-Income Mature Students reported having children or other dependents.¹⁰⁹ **Of the students receiving the 2022–2023 Canada Student Grant for Full or Part-Time Students with Dependents, a vast majority (94.71%) were over the age of 25** and can thus be considered mature students.¹¹⁰ In general, data about mature students with dependents—and students with dependents in general—is lacking, as these are not variables considered in the Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS).¹¹¹

While recent federal initiatives have made childcare more affordable, access remains a challenge—62% of Canadian parents struggled to find available spaces in 2023.¹¹² For mature students with dependents, this lack of accessible childcare directly impacts their ability to work while studying, limiting both their income and career prospects.

To improve employment outcomes for mature students, the federal government could: establish a clear, inclusive definition of mature students; improve data collection on mature student employment, debt, and retention rates; expand eligibility for CSJ and SWPP to include part-time positions; expand eligibility for CSJ for post-secondary students of any age; and address childcare accessibility to ensure student-parents can balance work, study, and family responsibilities.



SUMMARY OF

Recommendations

Canada Summer Jobs

- CASA calls on the Federal Government to expand support for the Canada Summer Jobs Program by an additional 10,000 students, with priority given to employment related to areas of study.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to create a new stream for the Canada Summer Jobs Program creating an equal number of part-time jobs during the period from September to April, creating positions that meet the following criteria:
 - Offering between 15–20 hours per week;
 - Offering hours outside of a student's in-class hours;
 - Offering experience relevant to areas of study; and,
 - Otherwise meeting the criteria of the Canada Summer Jobs Program.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to create a new strategy to collect and consolidate data on experiential learning participation on a national scale, including long-range outcome data for Canada Summer Jobs.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to expand eligibility for Canada Summer Jobs to those above 30 who are participating in a post-secondary credential.

Student Work Placement Program

- CASA calls on the federal government to invest \$250 million annually in the Student-Work Placement Program through the 2027-28 program year to strengthen work-integrated learning opportunities for students in small and medium enterprises.
- CASA calls on the federal government to extend the \$7,000 SWPP wage subsidies to include 2SLGBTQI+ students among the eligible student demographics.
- CASA calls on the Federal Government to develop an outcome-based framework to evaluate the success of WIL initiatives that can be deployed as a tool to enable the continual improvement of programs.

Apprenticeships

- CASA calls on the federal government to mandate that contractors for federal infrastructure construction and maintenance projects ensure that 20% or more of hours worked on federal projects are worked by apprentices.
- CASA calls on the federal government to create a matching requirement for recipients of grants and contributions for federal housing programs such as the Affordable Housing Fund, Apartment Construction Loan Program, and Federal Lands Initiative

- CASA calls upon the federal government to permanently index the maximum amount for the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction to the consumer price index (CPI), in order to match the cost of living.
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- CASA calls upon the federal government to convert the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction (TTD) tax deduction into non-repayable Canada Student Grants that tradesperson students can directly use towards paying for upfront cost of tools.

Labour Market Indicators

- CASA calls on the federal government, in consultation with provincial governments, experts, and other stakeholders, to reevaluate the way it collects national data on employment for youth, in order to better capture the complexities of the state of youth employment and unemployment nationwide.
- CASA calls on Employment and Social Development Canada to conduct an updated evaluation of the 2016 Learning and Labour Market Information.
- CASA further calls on Employment and Social Development Canada to ensure that the evaluation includes a focus on collecting information on factors and variables impacting student employment during and after their studies.
- CASA calls on the federal government to review the way it collects labour market information and how it establishes high-demand fields, in an attempt to help youth make informed decisions as to the programs they will pursue in post-secondary education.

Post-Graduate Employment

- CASA calls on the federal government to create a Canada Training Tax, modeled after the Quebec Training Tax, to address the “employer training gap” issue in Canada.
- CASA calls on the federal government to develop a well-coordinated, highly visible youth school-to-work transition strategy at the national level, with specific recommendations on international student integration into the labour market.
- CASA calls on the federal government to convene a provincial roundtable to discuss best practices on the issues of youth unemployment, underemployment, and unpaid internships, and encourage provincial cooperation on the issue.

Conclusion

Student Employment plays a vital role in Canada's post secondary education system, supporting students financially while equipping them with the skills and experiences necessary to transition into the workforce successfully.

However, despite the significant benefits of employment during and after studies, Canadian students continue to face major challenges in accessing meaningful, fairly compensated, and career-relevant work opportunities. Rising tuition fees, increasing cost-of-living expenses, and systemic barriers for equity-deserving students have made it more difficult for many to find and sustain employment. Furthermore, the persistent youth unemployment crisis, the decline in apprenticeship opportunities, and the gaps in work-integrated learning programs highlight the urgency for comprehensive policy reforms.

The recommendations outlined in this publication aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by students in Canada, particularly in the context of employment and financial stability. By expanding and enhancing programs like CSJ, the SWPP, and apprenticeships, we can create



more inclusive and supportive environments for all students, including those from marginalized and underrepresented groups. These changes will not only improve immediate employment outcomes but also contribute to long-term economic stability and growth for Canada. Ensuring equitable access to meaningful work opportunities is essential for fostering a skilled, adaptable, and resilient workforce that can meet the demands of the future.

Equity remains a central concern in student employment policy. Indigenous students, students with disabilities, mature students, and international students face unique employment barriers that prevent them from accessing the same opportunities as their peers. Addressing these disparities requires a holistic approach that includes targeted policy changes, enhanced employer incentives, and improved

federal data collection on employment outcomes for marginalized students. Expanding WIL and experiential learning opportunities is also essential, as these programs provide students with hands-on experience and industry connections that improve their employability upon graduation.

Additionally, this publication has explored broader labour market trends, including the importance of apprenticeships in addressing Canada's skilled labour shortage and the need for stronger employer engagement in student training. Without sufficient investments in apprenticeship opportunities, Canada will struggle to meet its growing infrastructure and workforce demands. It is imperative that students—especially those in trades and vocational programs—can access meaningful, well-supported apprenticeship placements that will help bridge the skills gap and strengthen Canada's labour market.

Beyond financial and workforce considerations, the state of student employment is ultimately about ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Without access to stable and career-relevant employment, students are more likely to experience financial hardship, delay their

graduation, and struggle to transition into meaningful post-graduate employment. Incorporating policy changes recommended in this publication allows the federal government to support students in securing better employment opportunities, reducing economic precarity, and contributing to a stronger, more resilient workforce.

Moving forward, it is essential that policymakers, institutions, and industry leaders collaborate to create a future where all students—regardless of background—have equitable access to employment opportunities that reflect their education, skills, and ambitions. This report serves as a call to action for all stakeholders to work together in addressing the evolving needs of students and the labour market.



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About CASA

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit advocacy organization representing students at 27 student associations across the country. Through our partnership with the Quebec Student Union/Union étudiante du Québec, CASA represents 390,000 students across Canada. CASA advocates for accessible, affordable, innovating and high quality post-secondary education in Canada. For nearly 30 years, CASA has done so successfully through policy and research development, awareness campaigns, government relations efforts, and partnerships with other stakeholders in the education sector. Part of this work is ensuring that conversations surrounding post-secondary education are undertaken with the most up-to-date information and with direct feedback from students and other leading advocacy stakeholders across the country.

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Together, we represent 390,000 students