

EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

Bridging Gaps: From Post-Secondary to the Workforce



Land Acknowledgement

The Home Office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River and is covered by Treaty 13 of the Upper Canada Treaties.

Our member institutions exist on Lands that have been the homes of Indigenous Peoples for time immemorial and have remained homes despite efforts of the settler-colonial state we know as Canada. As a coalition of student unions, we are also aware that all levels of education have a long history as violent tools for assimilation and as disseminators of settler-colonial practices.

As this issue of Educated Solutions aims to explore the relationship between employment and post-secondary education in Ontario, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the interconnected nature of all the systems that disproportionately disadvantage Indigenous Peoples across the province. Settler-colonial practices are dependent on the systemic exclusion and disenfranchisement of those deemed as other, and it is vital that work is done to break down these harmful cycles.

Some institutions are taking steps to improve access for Indigenous students - for instance, Queen's University offers Indigenous students exclusive employment opportunities throughout the academic year and the summer months. Some are also attempting to meaningfully support Indigenous students, like Brock University, which has implemented Indigenous Plus, a four-year co-curricular program that provides Indigenous students access to unique opportunities, such as learning from community Elders and Knowledge Keepers, job shadowing opportunities, mentorship, and more.¹ However, there needs to be more targeted and sustained efforts across all educational institutions to address the historical and ongoing disparities faced by Indigenous communities.

We recognize that the path to true reconciliation requires more than symbolic gestures; it demands systemic change, respectful engagement, and an unwavering commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices. In honouring the past, acknowledging the present, and committing to a more just future, we recognize that we must create meaningful opportunities for marginalized communities to develop diverse skills and knowledge at our post-secondary institutions while also prioritizing anti-oppressive practices, equitable hiring, and culturally informed supports in the workforce.

We also recognize that this responsibility must be intertwined with reconciliation efforts. We implore all settlers to critically engage with the specific histories of the Land you occupy. Learn about the injustices that have and continue to occur where you are, and get to know the Indigenous communities near you – engage in dialogue, learn about what you can do to support these specific communities, and commit to tangible action.

As we move forward towards decolonization in the face of a rapidly changing labour market and policy landscape within the post-secondary sector, we must ask ourselves: How can we entrench care into the system at hand, in a way that supports empowerment of Indigenous People and creates equitable opportunities for all marginalized graduates entering the workforce?

¹ Brock University. 2025. "Indigenous Plus." Co-op, Career and Experiential Education. Accessed September 5, 2025. <https://brocku.ca/ccee/studentsandfaculty/plus-programs/indigenous-plus/>



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Minister's Foreword

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, congratulations to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) on the 2025 edition of Educated Solutions. This year's theme—transitioning from post-secondary education to employment—reflects our shared focus on equipping students to be with the right skills, experiences and opportunities to succeed in their career.

As Ontario's labour needs shifts, our government is ensuring that students have access to post-secondary programs that will set them up for successful careers upon graduation. That is why we've invested nearly a billion dollars this year to expand enrolment in labour market driven programs such as nursing, teaching, skilled trades, and STEM. We know Ontario needs these types of workers, and with expanded enrollment, we can educate more students to launch fulfilling careers to meet that need.

Our government also understands that when students are provided with the skills and knowledge that employers are looking for during their education, they can hit the ground running after graduation. That's why our government continues to invest in work-integrated learning. With nearly \$40 million invested to facilitate thousands of internships through Riipen and Mitacs, we're ensuring students are getting real world experiences that will prepare them for their future careers in Ontario's key industries.

To support learners in making informed decisions about their post-secondary education and career pathways, our government launched My Career Journey earlier this year. With a focus on priority sectors such as health care, skilled trades, construction, technology, education and engineering, My Career Journey gives students the tools they need to connect education choices to real-world careers so people can plan their future with confidence.

As we look ahead, it's clear that Ontario's post-

secondary students are eager to enter the workforce and make meaningful contributions to their community. Our government will continue be there for our students by making the critical investments that ensure students are given the skills and experience they need to thrive in their future careers, protecting Ontario for decades to come.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nolan Quinn", enclosed in a white rounded rectangular box.

The Honourable Nolan Quinn
Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research
Excellence and Security

Editor's Note

In the past five years, employment has been top of mind across Ontario. As the province has navigated COVID-19, national conflict, ongoing trade agreements, and the rapid introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), students and recent graduates have been finding their footing within the workforce.

Recently, the provincial government has made targeted efforts to combat rises in youth unemployment rate, layoffs, and competition for entry-level jobs through targeted investments, such as into skilled workers in trade and healthcare. In the face of these challenges, educators and sector partners have found ways to employ innovative teaching practices to meet the needs of their evolving student populations. Student and institution-led initiatives have also aimed to meet the needs of this growing population through various programs.

For the 19th Edition of Educated Solutions, our sector partners explored the role of higher education in shaping workforce readiness and economic growth. Labour market outcomes vary across industries, and the types of experience available to students also span a wide range across disciplines. This edition aims to explore those many nuances through the wide range of organizations we worked with this year. Educated Solutions includes articles from labour market experts, college and university student advocacy groups, higher education policy groups and post-secondary improvement organizations, all of whom illuminate the many ways employment can be approached.

Our intention is to share valuable insights into how diverse post-secondary pathways, such as work-integrated learning opportunities and micro-credentials, can equip new graduates with invaluable skill sets, as well as discuss the barriers students may face in accessing them. By engaging in innovative and equitable teaching and training models, experiential learning, and diverse academic disciplines, all students, including marginalized student populations, can have dynamic future careers.

We are grateful to all of the authors who contributed to this year's edition of Educated Solutions. OUSA deeply values the diversity of perspectives and fresh insights you bring forward, which undoubtedly enrich the ongoing conversation around supporting all students as they transition into the workforce. It is our hope that this edition inspires meaningful discussions and innovative approaches to sustainably supporting our education system as a place for not only student learning but also diverse educational pathways that help students become well-rounded candidates. Through this, we strive for continued commitment to building a high-quality and equitable post-secondary experience that supports all students in shaping their future.



Octavia Andrade-Dixon (they/them)



Abishane Suthakaran (she/her)

President's Note

As we navigate a rapidly evolving labour market, new graduates and post-secondary students are experiencing a unique transition into the workforce. In this edition of Educated Solutions, experts from across the post-secondary sector explore how employment and post-secondary education intersect to shape Ontario's future.

Students of all disciplines are eager to support Ontario's labour market and economy, and have much to contribute in terms of skill, knowledge, and fresh perspectives. A thriving Ontario means one that provides purposeful opportunities for students to contribute to the workforce, both through work-integrated learning and employment opportunities post-graduation.

While targeted efforts have been made to promote employment in various sectors, there is a need for consistent investment into diverse education pathways to equip students with the necessary tools for becoming well-rounded candidates in an ever-changing job market.

Currently in Ontario, there is increased demand for skilled workers in trades and health, while also combating an unfortunate rise in unemployment rates, layoffs and competition for entry-level positions. Now more than ever, it is essential that our institutions, educators, and sector partners collaborate to create diverse, equitable, high-quality education experiences that help all students gain invaluable skills and knowledge for their entry into the workforce.

The articles in this publication reflect on the relationship between employment and post-secondary experiences as a site of training, innovation, collaboration and support. As you read through these articles, I implore you to

consider the ways in which we can help students and new graduates prepare for the workforce and achieve success in Ontario. It is my hope that we can continue to build a comprehensive approach to a more equitable and supportive environment for all students.



Sayak Sneddon Ghosal (he/him)



CANADIAN ALLIANCE OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS (CASA)

The Growing Crisis: Student Unemployment Across Canada

Abdul Abbasi (he/him) and Wasiimah Joomun (she/her)

Canada's post-secondary students are facing growing challenges within an increasingly unstable and precarious educational environment. Rising economic pressures have made it increasingly difficult for students to afford even their basic needs while pursuing their studies. According to the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) and Abacus Data's 2024 survey, 40% of students reported skipping meals due to financial constraints, 31% were unable to afford textbooks, 24% struggled to pay rent, and 19% relied on food banks.¹ These findings reflect a broader national crisis in youth affordability and well-being. Compounding these issues is a growing youth employment crisis: in May 2025, the youth unemployment rate reached 14.2%, double the national average. Among returning students aged 15 to 24, the rate rose to 20.4%, the highest level since

1 Trevor Potts, Alex Nguyen, and Hannah Hunter, *Walking the Tightrope: Students Struggle for Balance in Canada's Precarious Post-Secondary Landscape* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025).

the mid-1990s outside of the pandemic.² Together, these statistics illustrate the increasingly difficult conditions under which students are expected to succeed, therefore highlighting the urgent need for responses that prioritize affordability, access, and support in post-secondary education.

The alarming trend of youth and student unemployment is largely driven by economic uncertainty both domestically and internationally, particularly stemming from instability in the United States economy.³ Such uncertainty has substantially eroded business confidence, resulting in fewer job opportunities for young Canadians, particularly in entry-level roles.⁴ This

2 Statistics Canada, "Labour Force Survey, May 2025." 6 June, 2025. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250606/dq250606a-eng.htm>

3 Bank of Canada, "Monetary Policy Report – July 2024," Bank of Canada, July 2024, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2024/07/monetary-policy-report-july-2024/>.

4 Canadian Federation of Independent Business, "Business Confidence Hits Multi-Year Low Amid Economic Uncertainty," CFIB News Release, March 2025, <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/>

decline in opportunity poses significant challenges for students striving to gain essential work experience and financial independence.

Post-secondary students help address labour shortages in Canada. According to a 2024 Statistics Canada survey focused on returning students aged 20-24, 20.9% of female students and 27.2% of male students secured summer employment in the retail trade sector. Health care and social assistance (15%), and accommodation and food services (23-24%) were also key fields of employment.⁵ Although Statistics Canada does not publish broad industry shares of student workers, seasonal labour patterns indicate that the sectors above are heavily reliant on student labour during summer months.

Beyond short-term income, summer jobs offer crucial experience, transferable skills, and industry exposure that support both academic and post-graduate success. 63% of youth aged 15–29 reported being full-time students in May 2024, and nearly two-thirds of returning students aged 20–24 were employed that same month, reinforcing the prevalence of balancing work with academic responsibilities.⁶ Among these employment scenarios, more than half held part-time positions, reflecting the common model of combining study with work.⁷ This contribution is even more evident among international students, with a majority having Canadian work experience, often in high-demand fields such as technology, health care and education.⁸ Collec-

media/business-confidence-hits-multi-year-low.

5 Statistics Canada. "At a glance: University students and the summer job market." July 2, 2024. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/6570-glance-university-students-and-summer-job-market?utm>

6 Suzanne Spiteri and Laura Adkins-Hackett. "The state of youth employment in Canada." Labour Market Information Council. August 9, 2024. <https://lmic-cimt.ca/the-state-of-youth-employment-in-canada/?utm>

7 Ibid; Standing Committee on Finance. "Chapter Three: Youth as Potential or Current Employees." House of Commons Canada. June 2014. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/41-2/FINA/report-6/page-123?>

8 Trevor Potts, Alex Nguyen, and Hannah Hunter, Walking the

tively, employed students contribute significantly to Canada's workforce, delivering vital services to support education, housing, and basic living needs while pursuing their academic goals.

Contrary to common perception, post-secondary education involves far more than lectures and textbooks. The majority of students have substantial work responsibilities alongside their academic pursuits - be it to earn an income or to gain work experience. In fact, 76% of current Canadian post-secondary students reported balancing paid employment with their studies, an indication that working while studying has become the norm rather than the exception.⁹ This is not only for pocket money: It is about affording education alongside food, shelter, and daily necessities.¹⁰ Over two-thirds of students' education costs are covered by a combination of parental savings, personal savings, and earnings from employment.¹¹

The rising cost of living is the primary factor driving students' increasing reliance on employment and contributing to growing economic precarity.¹² For many, obtaining a Canadian post-secondary education resembles walking a tightrope where essential needs are compromised to stay enrolled. This reality worsens by a 41% year-

Tightrope: Students Struggle for Balance in Canada's Precarious Post-Secondary Landscape (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025).

9 Studiosity. "2022 Canadian Student Wellbeing Study, Chapter 1: Student Commitment, Motivation, & Engagement." October 2022. [https://www.studiosity.com/hubfs/2022-STUDENT-WELLBEING-CANADA%20\(print\).pdf](https://www.studiosity.com/hubfs/2022-STUDENT-WELLBEING-CANADA%20(print).pdf)

10 Brock University. "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs." Accessed August 20, 2025. https://foundations.ed.brocku.ca/winter_term/week15/4/

11 Embark Student Corp. "Over 1-in-4 (26%) Canadian post-secondary students said they have considered dropping out of their program because of money, new poll finds." Cision. August 14, 2024. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/over-1-in-4-26-canadian-post-secondary-students-said-they-have-considered-dropping-out-of-their-program-because-of-money-new-poll-finds-831703839.html>

12 Ryan Romard. "When it comes to higher education costs, tuition is just the tip of the iceberg." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. July 10, 2023. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/when-it-comes-to-higher-education-costs-tuition-is-just-the-tip-of-the-iceberg/>

over-year increase in other living expenses, including groceries, utilities, and transportation.¹³ For students without part-time employment, the pressure to meet basic needs intensifies, often leading to severe trade-offs that affect both their well-being and academic success. Faced with rising costs, some forgo purchasing textbooks or required course materials, a decision rooted not in choice but in necessity. This compromise on their academic success is driven by a 12.8% increase in school-related expenses.¹⁴ Some find themselves in the unenviable position of struggling to meet their most basic needs. With 23% reporting missing a bill payment, and transportation costs have increased by 20%, students are increasingly forced to make difficult decisions about how to afford essentials such as housing, utilities and transit.¹⁵ These figures underscore a deeper truth: the cost of education now extends far beyond tuition.

The absence of a steady paycheck significantly reduces the financial resources available for covering tuition and essential living expenses. For many, this shortfall leads to heavier reliance on student loans or credit, deepening their long-term financial burden.¹⁶ Currently, more than two-thirds of students expect to graduate with student debt, with one in five expecting that amount to exceed \$20,000.¹⁷ Notably, financial support from the federal Canada Student Financial Assistance (CSFA) Program has not kept pace with inflation.¹⁸ Thus,

¹³ Trevor Potts, Alex Nguyen, and Hannah Hunter, *Walking the Tightrope: Students Struggle for Balance in Canada's Precarious Post-Secondary Landscape* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10

¹⁶ Embark Student Corp. "Over 1-in-4 (26%) Canadian post-secondary students said they have considered dropping out of their program because of money, new poll finds." Cision. August 14, 2024.

¹⁷ CIBC Capital Markets, "CIBC Poll: Canadian post-secondary students will spend \$14,000 per year and owe \$30,000 by graduation, but is it enough?," Newswire.ca, <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/cibc-poll-canadian-post-secondary-students-will-spend-14000-per-year-and-owe-30000-by-graduation-but-is-it-enough-642324413.html>

¹⁸ Canadian Federation of Students, *Here's How Inflation is Impacting Students Across Canada*, accessed with reference to rising costs and stagnant aid levels, 2024.

the current combination of loans and grants is often insufficient to cover the full cost of a post-secondary education, leaving many students dependent on employment income during their studies.¹⁹

These impacts compound, creating a cycle of precarity and disproportionately affecting students from low and middle-income backgrounds.²⁰ Unemployment can severely impact students, compromising both their academic success and basic living standards. Unemployment, or even underemployment, deeply undermines a student's ability to afford not just their education but also the fundamental basics of living, pushing many to the brink of poverty in their quest for a degree.²¹ For instance, 24% of students struggle to pay rent, thus facing housing insecurity.²² In effect, limited income during studies does not just impact quality of life; it shapes long-term economic outcomes and widens existing inequalities across Canada's post-secondary system.

The pervasive financial stressors are not isolated; they profoundly impact students' mental well-being. One in three (32%) students rated their mental health as "poor" in their previous semester, a 13% increase compared to 2021.²³ The con-

¹⁹ Department of Finance Canada, "Government of Canada helping students return to school with \$7.3 billion in grants and interest-free loans," September 10, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2024/09/government-of-canada-helping-students-return-to-school-with-73-billion-in-grants-and-interest-free-loans.html> ; Employment and Social Development Canada, "Government of Canada improves access to and affordability of post-secondary education," September 3, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2024/09/government-of-canada-improves-access-to-and-affordability-of-post-secondary-education.html>

²⁰ Ryan Romard, "Student Debt Is a Gateway to Lifelong Financial Instability" Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. July 13, 2023. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/student-debt-is-a-gateway-drug-to-lifelong-financial-instability/>

²¹ Trevor Potts, Alex Nguyen, and Hannah Hunter, *Walking the Tightrope: Students Struggle for Balance in Canada's Precarious Post-Secondary Landscape* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025).

²² Trevor Potts, Alex Nguyen, and Hannah Hunter, *Walking the Tightrope: Students Struggle for Balance in Canada's Precarious Post-Secondary Landscape* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025).

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

nection between financial insecurity and declining mental health is clear: 15% of students cited their inability to pay bills, and 28% identified precarious housing situations as factors negatively impacting their well-being.²⁴ Yet, these burdens are not experienced equally. Certain groups are disproportionately affected, including students living with disabilities, low-income students, LGBTQI+ students, and students from visible minorities, who reported the lowest mental health outcomes.²⁵ Despite these challenges, students continue to persevere in their academic pursuits, demonstrating both resilience and commitment to their education in the face of immense pressure.

For many students, work experience gained during their studies is essential in shaping future career aspirations. However, concerns about post-graduation employment remain widespread. While securing a job post-degree is a top priority, students often worry that their skills and limited experience will not be enough in today's highly competitive job market; a concern that persists even as Canada faces a growing labour shortage. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)'s June 2025 survey, labour shortages are consistently among the top issues facing small and medium-sized businesses, with skilled labour shortages being the second most significant obstacle to sales and production expansion.²⁶ Likewise, in a recent Talent Shortage Survey conducted by the ManpowerGroup, 77% of Canadian businesses reported having trouble finding qualified employees, underscoring the disconnect between student preparedness and labour market demands.²⁷

To ensure students are equipped to contrib-

24 Ibid., 12.

25 Ibid., 13.

26 Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). "Monthly Business Barometer.", June 2025, <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/hubfs/research/mbb/june-2025/Business-Barometer-Canada-2025-06.pdf>

27 ManpowerGroup, "2025 Canada Talent Shortage Survey." Accessed July 29, 2025 <https://www.manpowergroup.ca/talent-shortage> .

ute fully to Canada's future as skilled workers, innovators, and leaders, we urge the federal government to consider the following:

1. Permanently increase Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) positions from 40,000 to 60,000 to help businesses plan workforce training.
2. Extend the \$7,000 SWPP wage subsidies to include 2SLGBTQI+ students.
3. Expand the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) Program to provide part-time opportunities during the academic year to meet labour demands.
4. Add 10,000 CSJ positions, prioritizing roles related to students' field of study.
5. Expand CSJ eligibility to students over 30 pursuing post-secondary credentials.
6. Amend study permits to allow international students to participate in co-op and internships without separate work permits, easing barriers and retaining talent.
7. Establish an outcome-based framework to evaluate work-integrated learning (WIL) programs for continuous improvement.
8. Collaborate with provinces and stakeholders to improve national youth employment data collection to reflect labour market realities.
9. Introduce a Canada Training Tax modelled on Québec's to address employer training gaps.
10. Convene provincial roundtables to discuss best practices on youth unemployment, underemployment, and unpaid internships, encouraging cooperation.
11. Develop a coordinated, highly visible national youth school-to-work transition strategy, with specific recommendations on international student labour market integration.

Student employment is essential, not only for financial support but for developing the skills and experience needed for long-term success in the

workforce. Yet, the rising costs, systemic inequities, and limited access to quality job opportunities continue to hold students back. This is more than a fairness issue: it is a structural challenge that reflects a broader structural issue that demands urgent and sustained federal action.



Abdul Abbasi

Abdul Abbasi is the Chair of the Canadian Alliance of Students' Associations and also serves as the Vice-President External of the University of Alberta Students' Union. He is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology at Augustana Campus!



Wasiimah Joomun

Wasiimah Joomun is the Executive Director for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). Wasiimah obtained her undergraduate degree from St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 2020. Wasiimah has been passionate about advocating for a more accessible, affordable and high-quality post-secondary education for all students since she was elected as the International Student Representative in her first year of University in 2017. Wasiimah is originally from Mauritius and moved to Canada in September 2016 to pursue her studies. Wasiimah prides herself on her journey through the education system in Canada and has firsthand experience with how post-secondary education advocacy is important in improving the lives of students. Through her work, her involvement in the community and her personal life, Wasiimah strives to ensure that a safe, inclusive environment is fostered; guided by her communication, teamwork, critical thinking and consensus skill sets.



LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION COUNCIL (LMIC)

Boom or Bust? The Opportunities and Risks in Ontario's Youth Labour Market

Ken Chatoor (he/him) and Peter Nelson (he/him)

Introduction

The world of work is changing. Increasingly complex artificial intelligence (AI) systems are affecting how post-secondary students learn and how new or recent graduates are expected to work.¹ Economic uncertainty has heightened

1 Kristyn Frank, Zhe Yang, and Marc Frenette, "The Changing Nature of Work in Canada Amid Recent Advances in Automation Technology" (Statistics Canada, January 7, 2021), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021001/article/00004-eng.htm>;

Tahsin Mehdi and René Morissette, "Experimental Estimates of Potential Artificial Intelligence Occupational Exposure in Canada" (Statistics Canada, September 3, 2024), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2024005-eng.htm>;

Aidan Pucchio et al., "Exploration of Exposure to Artificial Intelligence in Undergraduate Medical Education: A Canadian Cross-Sectional Mixed-Methods Study," *BMC Medical Education* 22, no. 815 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03896-5>;

Ryan Tishcoff et al., "Using Generative AI to Make Learning More Accessible: Insights from Ontario PSE Students and Staff" (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, November 20, 2024), <https://heqco.ca/pub/using-generative-ai-to-make-learning-more-accessible-insights-from-ontario-pse-students-and-staff/>.

because of recent turmoil in the global trade environment.² Underlying forces like an aging population, the growing practical impacts of climate change, and shifting immigration patterns are also affecting Canada's future of work in Ontario.³

These rapid and concurrent changes can feel noisy and confusing. But one common thread among all these changes reveals an important truth for both Ontario and Canada: the future will depend on the success of young people.

2 Frances Donald et al., "Canada's Economic Outlook: Shifting Tides as Tariff Threats De-escalate," *RBC Economics*, June 13, 2025, <https://www.rbc.com/en/thought-leadership/economics/economy-and-markets/macroeconomic-outlook/canadas-economic-outlook-shifting-tides-as-tariff-threats-de-escalate/>.

3 Laura Adkins-Hackett and Anne-Lore Fraikin, *Labour Market Resilience in the Face of an Aging Population* (Ottawa: Labour Market Information Council, 2024), <https://lmic-cimt.ca/labour-market-resilience-in-the-face-of-an-aging-population/>; Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Green Work-Integrated Learning: Growing Skills Solutions for Canada's Net-Zero Economy," n.d., <https://bher.ca/resource/green-work-integrated-learning-growing-skills-solutions-for-canadas-net-zero-economy-2>.

Why?

As the population ages, new graduates and youth will become ever more essential as replacements for retiring workers. Their successful integration into the labour market will prevent labour shortages and support sectors that will increasingly cater to an aging population.⁴ New graduates entering the workforce will be at the forefront of adopting new technologies—tools that could redefine what work looks like. On another front, the provinces and Canada as a whole will need new graduates and youth to build and renew local and national infrastructure in response to climate change and shifting global trade patterns.⁵ To put it bluntly, for much of what Ontario and Canada face, youth and new graduates will be at the front lines of meeting challenges.

For Ontario’s youth to succeed, they need the right information to cut through the noise of a nebulously evolving world of work. This infor-

4 Robyn Gibbard, *Meeting the Care Needs of Canada’s Aging Population* (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2018), <https://www.cma.ca/meeting-care-needs-canadas-aging-population>.

5 N. Lulham, F. J. Warren, K. A. Walsh, and J. Szwarc, *Canada in a Changing Climate: Synthesis Report* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2023), <https://changingclimate.ca/synthesis/>; OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Canada 2025* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1787/28f9e02c-en>; Infrastructure Ontario, “Market Update June 2025,” Government of Ontario, June 5, 2025, <https://www.infrastructureontario.ca/en/news-and-media/news/market-update/june-2025-market-update/>.

mation will help them make informed and strategic decisions. Knowledge is power, especially when it comes to labour market decisions.

At the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), we work to improve the reliability, accessibility, and timeliness of labour market information (LMI) for policymakers, researchers, educators, and ordinary Canadians. LMI is more than just numbers that might appear in a report. LMI can influence decision-making around education programming and curriculum design (to ensure these respond to workforce demand), the development of targeted programs for smoother school-to-work transitions for new graduates, and the decisions new graduates make about what occupations to pursue.⁶

LMIC’s work is focused on helping young people in Canada (those aged 15 to 24 years) make empowered decisions about their careers. This also means equipping those who support our youth with the best tools and information available. In this article, we explore the types of LMI that youth and their supporters can use to better understand the labour market and make smart, informed decisions.

6 Andrea-Rosalinde Hofer, Aleksandra Zhivkovikj, and Roger Smyth, *The Role of Labour Market Information in Guiding Educational and Occupational Choices*, OECD Education Working Papers, no. 229 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1787/59bbac06-en>.

Labour market information Ontario’s youth need to know

Table 1: Ontario’s youth labour market indicators highlight concerning trends

Indicator	Value and/or trend	Commentary
Unemployment rate for youth aged 15–24 years	15.8% (vs. 14.2% nationally)	The rate has been rising steadily since 2022’s historic lows; the trend is consistent across Ontario’s census metropolitan areas.
Unemployment rate for youth with a bachelor’s degree	11.8% (vs 9.2% nationally)	Ontario’s unemployment rate for young graduates is not only higher than the national average, but its rate of increase is steeper.

Youth aged 25–29 years not in employment, tertiary education, or training	7% (vs. 6% nationally)	This is the highest proportion on record (excluding 2020); it suggests new graduates face mounting employment challenges.
Unemployment rate among students returning to school	19.6% in May, 12.8% in June	May's spike was concerning, but June's decline brings the rate below June 2024 levels.
Job vacancies in youth-focused occupations (undergraduates)	Down 20% year over year (although up 5% in Toronto)	This is a substantial decrease, although vacancies remain above long-term averages. Toronto shows relative resilience.
Wage growth in youth-focused occupations (undergraduates)	Up 1.7% year over year (up 4.7% in Toronto)	This is modest growth overall. Toronto outpaces provincial trends.
Job vacancies in trade war-exposed occupations	Down 32% year over year	This is a sharp drop, marking the lowest vacancy level in nine years.
Wage growth in trade war-exposed occupations	Up 0.5% year over year	The growth in nominal wages is flat, and after adjusting for inflation, real wages are declining.
Job vacancies in AI-exposed occupations (those vulnerable to automation)	Down 10.7% year over year (down 13.3% in Toronto)	This is a notable decline, falling below long-term averages. It's potentially an early signal of softening demand.
Wage growth in AI-exposed occupations	Up 1.2% year over year	This growth is tepid. In real terms (adjusted for inflation), it's a decline.
AI impacts on new graduates	Data still emerging	Job vacancy and wage patterns suggest challenges, but broader economic factors and trade dynamics make interpretation complex.

Demand for skilled trades	High	This is a key opportunity area amid youth labour market challenges.
Policy opportunity	High	Information campaigns and early intervention could steer youth toward skilled trades, easing unemployment and addressing labour shortages.

Source: LMIC calculations using StatCan tables 14-10-0458-01, 37-10-0196-01, 14-10-0286-01, 14-10-0372-01

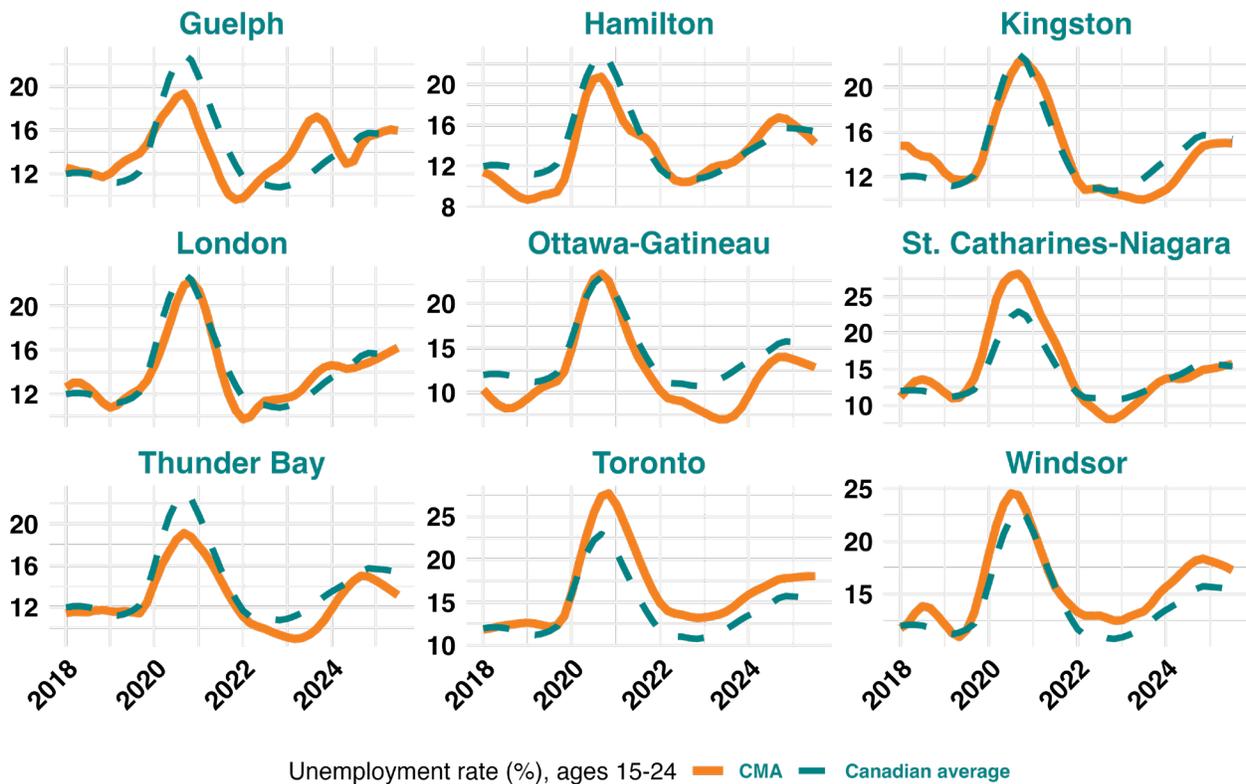
What does this mean?

Ontario’s youth labour market is flashing amber. The unemployment rate among Ontarians aged 15–24 years stands at 15.8%, well above the national average of 14.2%. Among those aged 25–29 years with post-secondary education, the share who are not in employment,

education, or training (NEET) has climbed to 7%—the highest level on record outside the pandemic. Although unemployment among students planning to return to school fell to 12.8% in June from 19.6% in May, the elevated NEET rate signals the difficulties graduates face in securing stable work after leaving education.

The kids aren't alright

Youth unemployment is elevated again across Ontario CMAs



Source: Statistics Canada (2025), seasonally adjusted (LMIC calculations)

Data from Statistics Canada’s Job Vacancy and Wage Survey, disaggregated by occupation group, paint a nuanced picture for Ontario’s younger workers, particularly recent graduates. LMIC examined job vacancies and wage growth across three broad occupation groups: those most likely to hire recent graduates, those most exposed to AI,⁷ and those most exposed to trade dynamics. As shown in Table 1 above, the results are telling.

For youth-focused occupations—typical landing spots for graduates—vacancies have fallen 20% year over year across Ontario. Toronto is an exception, posting a modest 5% increase. Wage growth in these occupations is subdued: 1.7% overall, with Toronto again outperforming at 4.7%. Even so, these gains are barely keeping pace with inflation.

Trade-exposed occupations tell a sharper story. Vacancies in these sectors have plunged by nearly one third, reaching their lowest level in nearly a decade. Wage growth is virtually flat, up just 0.5% year over year—meaning real earnings (adjusted for inflation) are falling. Ontario’s ongoing entanglement in global trade tensions is leaving a clear imprint.

⁷ Occupations are considered AI-sensitive because they consist largely of routine cognitive, analytical, and communication tasks that recent advances in large language models and generative AI can perform with increasing accuracy (Brynjolfsson et al., 2023; Eloundou et al., 2023).

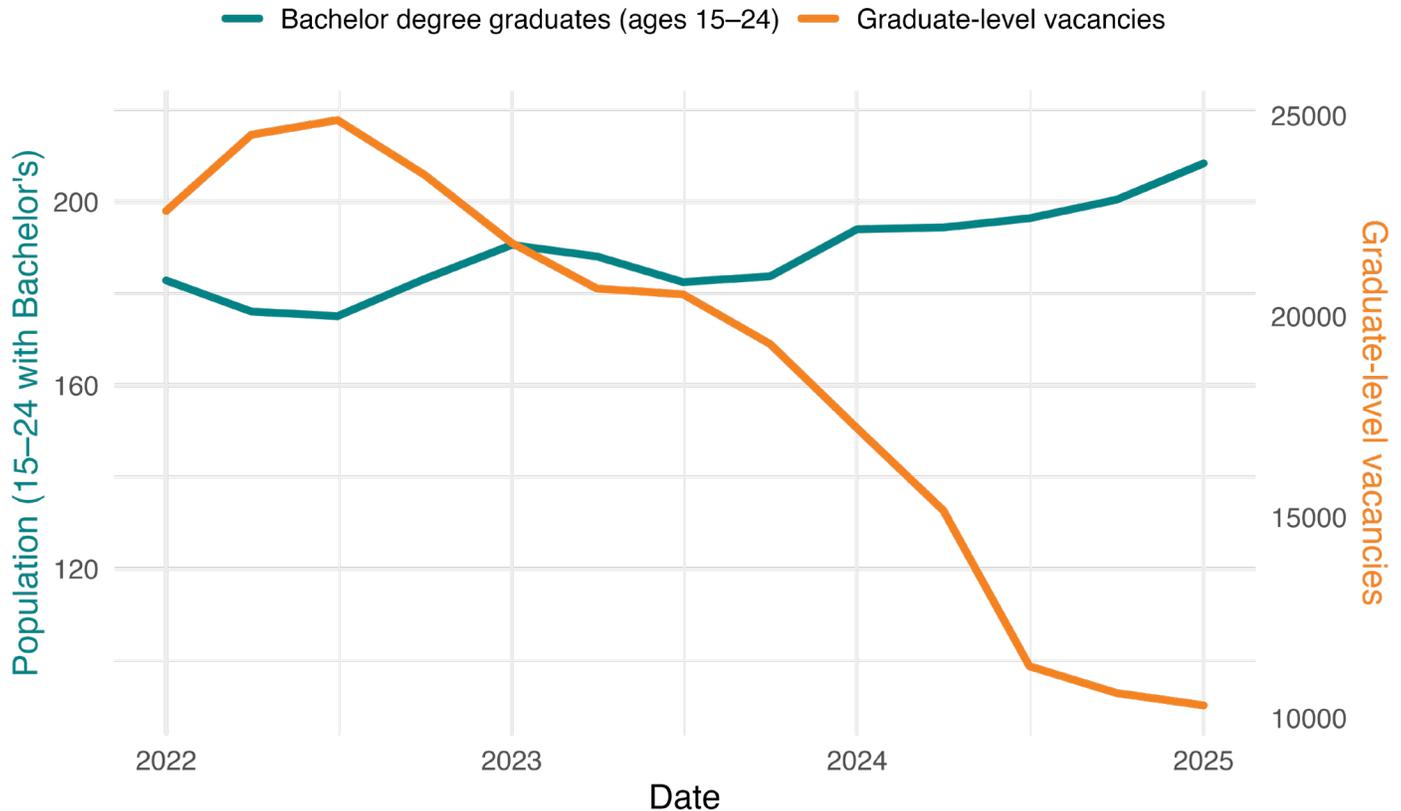
Meanwhile, AI-exposed occupations—those vulnerable to automation—have seen vacancies decline by 10.7% province-wide, with a steeper 13.3% drop in Toronto. Wage growth in these roles is similarly sluggish : just 1.2% year over year, negative in real terms. While it is too early to draw firm conclusions, these patterns suggest AI may already be tempering the demand for human capital in certain roles. That said, broader economic malaise and complex trade dynamics in Canada cloud the picture, making it difficult to isolate the specific impact of automation.

What is Driving These Shifts

The answer is unlikely to be a single factor. Ontario’s labour market is absorbing multiple simultaneous shocks: the accelerating impact of AI, intensifying global trade frictions, and extraordinary population growth that has expanded the province’s labour supply. Ontario’s youth population has increased in recent years (see chart 2), driven by high levels of immigration. This influx has likely softened wage growth and amplified competition for entry-level jobs, especially among younger workers. The interaction between these three shocks—technology, trade, and demographics—makes for a labour market that is unusually dynamic, shaped by multiple overlapping pressures that compound rather than offset each other.

Supply, meet demand

In Ontario, graduate-level vacancies have fallen while the number of bachelor's degree grads continues to rise



Source: Statistics Canada (2025), LMIC calculations

At first glance, the combination of rising unemployment, record-high NEET rates, and falling job vacancies paints a bleak outlook for Ontario's young graduates. Yet there are reasons for optimism. Trade tensions will not persist indefinitely. Over time, AI may well create as many roles as it displaces.⁸ Most immediately, the strong demand for skilled trades offers a practical pathway for those struggling to secure employment after graduation. This is not an uncommon pathway, since many of those who pursue the trades have already completed a post-secondary credential (Chatoor and Kaufman, 2021). The trades can

⁸ World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025, (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025), https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf.

be a complex pathway for those unfamiliar with it, with unique barriers and challenges distinct from college and university pathways. There are also unique equity challenges and cultural perception barriers that contribute to the challenges in recruiting and retaining all Canadians into the trades. Addressing these barriers and challenges will be key to addressing shortage and recruitment challenges in the trades.

Supporting youth in a shifting labour market: Aligning information with opportunity

The data we've shared suggests that Ontario's youth and new graduates will need strong support to navigate a challenging labour market. Nota-

bly, government and post-secondary institutions are already aiding labour market transitions for youth through work-integrated learning opportunities, strategic workforce planning, and occupation-specific career counselling.⁹ These programs work best when policymakers, students, and their supporters are equipped with robust, reliable data.

LMIC encourages Canadians to use LMI not just to identify problems, but to navigate them and craft solutions. With the dynamic trends and challenges we've identified, access to reliable and trustworthy data will be key for smart decision-making that moves young Canadians forward along their career paths.

To that end, LMIC is conducting work in several areas of the labour market that directly affect youth. Over the coming months and years, we will be demonstrating different ways to use LMI effectively for policy and programming, sharing LMI resources, and providing education on LMI resources, including how to use and interpret them. This will include working on pathways for youth to join the trades, supporting small and local economies, identifying new and emerging occupations, and exploring the impact of AI on the way we use data to make decisions. By doing so, we hope to provide some clarity for—and build confidence in—those entering the labour market. also unique equity challenges and cultural perception barriers that contribute to the challenges in recruiting and retaining all Canadians into the trades. Addressing these barriers and challenges will be key to addressing shortage and recruitment challenges in the trades.

These trends present policy opportunities. As job vacancy patterns diverge across occupational groups, governments and labour market institu-

⁹ Ken Chatoor et al., "Navigating the Transition From School to Work: The Impact of Career Development Activities and Services on Graduate Labour Market Outcomes," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, October 23, 2024, <https://heqco.ca/pub/navigating-the-transition-from-school-to-work-the-impact-of-career-development-activities-and-services-on-graduate-labour-market-outcomes/>.

tions can play a more active role in helping young workers navigate the evolving landscape. Targeted campaigns guiding youth toward in-demand sectors (such as skilled trades) could help ease both unemployment and persistent labour shortages. It's equally vital to ensure that LMI is readily accessible and reliable, equipping young job seekers and those who support them with the insights needed to make informed, strategic career decisions. For many, aligning aspirations with opportunities may simply mean looking in new directions—and being armed with better information.

Supporting youth in a shifting labour market: Aligning information with opportunity

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Ken Chatoor

**Director of Research
and Strategic Foresight**

Ken leads the development and implementation of LMIC’s research vision to meet the data needs of Canada’s evolving labour market. He brings a rich background in education, labour market outcomes, and equity research, having published work on topics such as mental health, government service funding, Work-Integrated Learning, and graduate transitions. Before his policy career, Ken conducted biomedical research in spine regeneration and brain cancer therapies. Outside of work, he enjoys travelling, film and pop culture, and spending time with his Shiba Inu, Kobe.

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Senior Economist

Peter is an experienced economist with over a decade of expertise in market analysis, modelling, and strategic storytelling. He has led impactful work in securities regulation, housing policy, and behavioural science—translating complex findings into clear, actionable insights for senior leaders, stakeholders, and the public. He brings this multidisciplinary lens to support LMIC’s mission of delivering comprehensive, high-quality labour market information across Canada. Peter holds a master’s degree in economics from Simon Fraser University and a bachelor’s degree in mathematics from the University of Lethbridge.

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HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COUNCIL OF ONTARIO (HEQCO)

What Do International Students Need to be Successful in the Labour Market?

Khadijat Babatunde (she/her), Alexandra Macfarlane (she/her), and Elizabeth Agoe (she/her)

Canada hosted 996,000 international students in 2024, and 48% of them (482,000) were studying in Ontario. These international students represent a valuable source of labour, given their Ontarian education and eagerness to join the workforce. In a 2023 survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), 70% of international students expressed plans to apply for a post-graduate work permit (PGWP), allowing them to work in Ontario after graduation. Amidst shortages in Ontario's labour market, international students' successful transition into the workforce will be critical for the province's economic resilience.¹

Better understanding the role international students play in the labour market and what they need to succeed in the province's workforce is crucial to enhancing Ontario's capacity to thrive. To do this, we draw insights from four projects from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario's (HEQCO) Consortium on International Education, which provide evidence-based research to assist institutions, communities and government in enhancing international education in Ontario. The four projects under examination were submitted by the research teams at The Dais (a public policy think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University), Medow Consulting, CBIE, the

1 Ontario Newsroom, "Ontario Continues Allocating International Student Applications to Support Labour Market Needs," January 23, 2025, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005623/ontario-continues-allocating-international-student-applications-to-support-labour-market-needs>.

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and Fleming College.² The Dais studied the importance of work-integrated learning for international learners in Ontario. CBIE used Hamilton as a case study for interventions that best support international students in transitioning into and thriving in the labour market. SRDC analyzed the labour market outcomes of Ontario's international students using more than a decade of data spanning 2010 to 2022. Fleming College mapped out the connection between the labour market outcomes of international students and graduates from Fleming College and their programs of study.

What Role Have International Students Played in Ontario's Labour Market?

SRDC's study used tax data as a proxy for labour market entry and found that 79% of international students who graduated from publicly assisted institutions between 2010 and 2020 filed taxes one year after graduation.³ Students who completed a credential in health (87%) and engineering (85%) were the most likely to have tax data one year after graduating, filling job vacancies in STEM and healthcare roles.

2 "Consortium on International Education," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, accessed July 23, 2025 at <https://heqco.ca/research/consortia/international/>.

3 "Post-secondary Pathways and Outcomes of International Students in Ontario," SRDC, accessed July 23, 2025 at <https://www.srdc.org/project/post-secondary-pathways-and-outcomes-of-international-students-in-ontario/>.

The research team at Fleming College surveyed 3,919 international students, of whom 2,317 (59%) were working while completing their studies. Among those not working, 95% were actively looking for work. Some of the students surveyed worked in Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes, Port Hope, Coburg and other smaller towns in the region. After graduating, 60% of Fleming students surveyed said they planned to work in Ontario, and 14% wanted to seek employment in their local campus community of Peterborough. This commitment and eagerness to work when granted the opportunity is an asset in smaller Ontario regions outside of the Greater Toronto Area. Despite their potential to close employment gaps, international students are at a disadvantage in the labour market compared to their domestic counterparts. Statistics Canada's 2023 National Graduates Survey results highlighted disparities in international students' earnings, employment rates and qualifications in the workplace. International student graduates who remained in Canada in 2023 were employed at a lower rate (88%) than their Canadian counterparts (91%). Three years after graduation, international student graduates earned up to 20% less than domestic graduates and were more likely to feel overqualified in their roles (31% compared to 21% of domestic graduates).⁴⁵

What Do International Students Need to Succeed in Ontario's Labour Market?

As other reports in this issue highlight, work-integrated learning experiences provide important opportunities for international students to gain work experience in the Canadian context. In this section, we highlight additional consor-

4 Brittany Etmanski, "International Student Graduates' Labour Market Early Outcomes: Results From the National Graduates Survey," Statistics Canada, February 5, 2025, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2025001/article/00002-eng.htm>.

5 The methodology employed in this Statistics Canada study has limitations. Research utilizing regression techniques to control for relevant covariates suggests that international student outcomes are more context dependent.

tium project findings related to institutional and employer support for international graduates.

Transition Support from Graduation to Workforce

The immediate post-graduation period is key to retaining international students in Ontario's workforce and communities. During this specific period, most international students confirm their decision to stay in Canada or not. This decision is based on several factors, such as familiarity with the Canadian labour market, knowledge of employment factors and financial considerations.⁶

During their studies, students can access support through colleges and universities. But the transition into the workforce leaves international students without a support system and graduates as an immigrant category are at risk of "falling through the cracks"⁷: campus services are often ill-suited for international students seeking immigration information, and new graduates lack the newcomer status required to access most community settlement programs.⁸

At the institutional level, many international students in CBIE's study felt that career services provided useful resume-building support, however, they would have also liked more access to information about immigration resources and services available outside the institution, especially regarding PGWPs. In Fleming College's survey, 71% of international students considered immigration services a "very important" support. During the critical transition period, institutional support (both direct support for ca-

6 Sarah Wayland and Ilene Hyman, "Growing Impact: Post-Secondary International Students in Toronto" (Intergovernmental Committee for Economic and Labour Force Development in Toronto), June 2018, <https://www.icecommittee.org/reports/Final-Int.-Stud.-Report-June-15-2018-final.pdf>; Nancy Arthur and Natalee Popadiuk, "International Students' Views of Relationship Influences on Career Transitions," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 3, no. 7 (2013): 274–275, <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n7p273>.

7 Wayland and Hyman, "Growing Impact," 25.

8 Wayland and Hyman, "Growing Impact," 26.

reer services and references to external immigration resources) should be available to accompany students in their transition pathway.

A significant portion of respondents in the CBIE survey (25%) also expressed a need for better guidance in navigating the Canadian labour market. Many international students stated that they were eager to learn how to position their diverse skillsets effectively and identify roles that match their strengths. This presents an opening for career service offices to deliver tailored employment prep and mentorship programs.

Institutions could also leverage community resources to enhance international students' transitions into the labour market. The "Hamilton Workforce Ready" pilot, led by Global Hamilton, is an initiative designed to retain international talent to help address labour market needs in the city's eight key economic sectors.⁹ The pilot supports international students by providing education, career resources, community connections, one-on-one consultations, events and immigration coaching to help them pursue a career in the city. The program works closely with local employers to align graduate skills with workforce needs and offers training to help businesses better understand how to hire and support new graduates. Post-secondary institutions and community initiatives, such as the Hamilton Workforce Ready pilot, could be beneficial in matching international students with the business community.

Supportive Hiring Practices

There is also an opportunity to enhance employer understanding of the various immigration pathways and regulations related to hiring international talent.¹⁰ Nearly 40% of Hamilton

⁹ The key sectors are life sciences, agrifood and food processing, manufacturing, goods movement, information and communication technology, finance, insurance and real estate, creative industries and tourism.

¹⁰ "Strengthening Canada's Skilled Workforce," The Conference Board of Canada, January 2025, https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/strengthening-canadas-skilled-workforce_

international students in CBIE's study identified employers' reluctance to hire them due to their lack of Canadian work experience or uncertainty around their long-term stay or future plans. This sentiment was echoed in The Dais' student focus groups. While many students viewed Canada as a pathway to career success, policy shifts, lack of support, employer hesitancy and preference for domestic experience prevented many from transitioning into meaningful jobs.

Another form of support that can go a long way is educating employers about the benefits of hiring international students and the diverse perspectives they can contribute to the workplace.¹¹ The Hamilton Immigration Partnerships Council (HIPC), Workforce Planning Hamilton and post-secondary institutions are beginning to address these issues by organizing workshops that help employers understand and adapt to students' cultures and practices, embrace diversity, develop inclusive hiring practices and raise awareness about biases in Canadian workplaces. The HIPC program also provides resources on the benefits and steps of hiring new graduates. There is still work to do to change the narrative and showcase the value of hiring international students, but Hamilton is taking an important first step that other regions can follow.

Conclusion

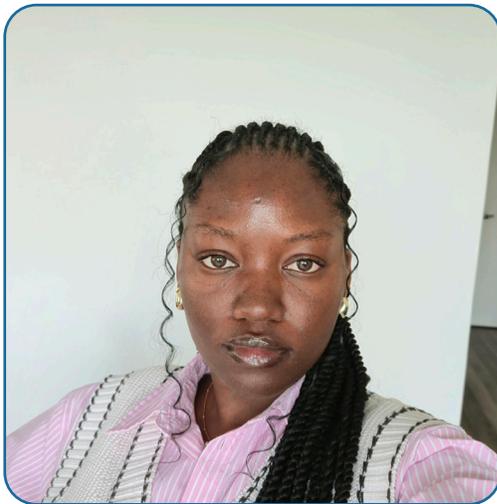
International students are not just learners. They enrich Ontario with diverse cultures, fresh perspectives and meaningful economic contributions, which are particularly impactful in smaller regions. Many international students work while studying, and most are employed within a year of graduation, yet they face persistent barriers to securing jobs that match their skills and education. To bridge this gap, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, employers and the various levels of government must collaborate to offer mentorship, connect students to immigration

jan2025.pdf.

¹¹ Arthur and Popadiuk, "International Students' Views," 280.

support and help employers understand the value international students bring to their workforce. Ontario is facing labour market shortages that demand bold, inclusive solutions. International students are a ready-to-work population that has historically wanted to stay, contribute and build a future in Ontario. If we want to retain international talent to help address today's and future shortages, communities and post-secondary institutions must work together to ensure that students have the supports they need to succeed. To explore international education in Ontario and delve deeper into the research highlighted in this article, visit HEQCO's Consortium on International Education webpage.¹²

¹² "Consortium on International Education," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.



Khadijat Babatunde

Khadijat is a Master's student in Economics at the University of Ottawa with a focus on social policy analysis. At HEQCO, she contributed to papers exploring international students' post-secondary outcomes, played a key role in launching HEQCO's Consortium on Artificial Intelligence, and collaborated with sector partners to deliver engaging knowledge dissemination events.



Alexandra Macfarlane

Alexandra (she/her) manages internal and external projects at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) with a focus on quality in the post-secondary education system. Her research focuses on skills assessment, international education, AI, and work-integrated learning. Building on her experience teaching at the primary, secondary and college level, Alexandra is interested in evidence-based research that improves the student experience. Prior to working at HEQCO, Alexandra taught, developed courses and conducted research at two Ontario colleges.



Elizabeth Agoe

Elizabeth (she/her) is a Researcher at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario where she works on projects focused on AI in higher education, skills assessment and labour market outcomes of post-secondary students. Her experiences as an international student and student mentor fueled her passion for equitable access to post-secondary education, resources and support, as well as ways to improve the student experience. She holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and a graduate certificate in Research Analysis.



THE DAIS

Investing in Potential – The Case for Improving Work-Integrated Learning for International Talent

Mahtab Laghaei (she/her) and Sara Ditta (she/her)

Introduction

Earlier this year, a study on international students' early labour market outcomes revealed lower employment rates and wages than domestic students three years after graduation, and that international students were more likely to work in jobs unrelated to their field¹. The findings suggest that international students face unique obstacles in postgraduate employability, and question how institutions prepare international students for job success. With concerns about the overall quality of education and affordability challenges, it is unclear whether international students still view Canada as an attractive study destination. These concerns are especially salient in Ontario, where the majority of international students are and where institutions have faced scrutiny over education quality and student support.

Our research shows that international students and graduates remain committed to Ontario due to its diverse, competitive post-secondary programs, a varied job market, and better quality of life. This is the case despite affordability and housing challenges, insufficient sup-

¹ Brittany Etmanski, International Student Graduates' Labour Market Early Outcomes: Results from the National Graduates Survey (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, February 5, 2025), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2025001/article/00002-eng.htm>.

port mechanisms, and rising discrimination.

Realizing the potential of international students depends on enabling access to meaningful work-study opportunities. Addressing current constraints—like labour market inaccessibility, inconsistent institutional policies on work programs, and financial pressures—can position international students to gain relevant work experience and contribute more fully to Canada.

Rooted in the lived experiences of international students, this article highlights the benefits and obstacles of work-integrated learning (WIL) programs in Ontario. It underlines that WIL programs can be more effective by 1) setting a minimum standard for WIL across institutions; 2) reducing financial and bureaucratic barriers to partake in WIL; and 3) improving institutional support on WIL programs. Expanding access and bolstering WIL is a key piece of the puzzle in maintaining Ontario's position as a leading destination for international talent while maximizing the social and economic benefits for everyone. Strengthening the levers that provide pathways to work can improve the experience, quality, and benefit of Canada's international student program.

These findings are informed by focus groups

with in-study international students and graduates, used in a broader study by the Dais and Medow Consulting on international student experiences in WIL, funded by the HEQ-CO, to be published in the fall of 2025.

The Ontario Opportunity

Recent coverage has drawn attention to how the promise of a Canadian education remains unfulfilled for many international students. Key factors behind this reality include shortcomings in the quality of education, recent changes to study and work permits, and overall lack of support for international students. The results of our focus groups produced a mixed image of how current and former international students felt; for many, Ontario's post-secondary system and labour market were able to provide them what they had sought out to accomplish. However, employment expectations often didn't match with the realities of the job market, which was also difficult to access.

Ontario's strong labour market in fields like technology, healthcare, and supply chain management, and the quality and accessibility of education, are also drivers for students choosing the province. Some indicated that their expectations of a high-quality Canadian education aligned with their experiences, particularly in education that supports their careers. Many participants cited university rankings, faculty expertise, and program reputation as key factors in their decision.

Now that I'm older and I got to travel a lot, I realized that Toronto is a really diverse city and I really don't feel isolated, even though I ... might not look like a Canadian, whereas UK or even like some cities in the US, yes, they are diverse, but I always felt kind of othered.

How WIL Prepares Students for the Job Market

Maintaining Ontario's status as a desirable destination depends on equipping international students with tools for success. WIL provides hands-on experiences for students, who are then able to leverage it to transition into the labour market and other pathways. For international students, WIL is a valuable way to receive relevant Canadian work experience to aid their search for employment, build industry-relevant connections, familiarize themselves with the context and culture of Canadian workplaces, and to financially support themselves.

We heard from international students that WIL employers can and have extended full-time contracts for students post-graduation. This is especially critical for graduates' financial stability.

Students shared that participating in applied discipline-relevant WIL strengthened their understanding of in-study material. In turn, this also increased the value they brought to their WIL experiences and their workplace communities.

Participants who secured paid WIL positions valued the financial incentive on top of the hands-on experience they were able to gain. When positions are available and sufficiently paid, it reduces the need for students to juggle multiple jobs and allows them to focus on their studies.

I don't have the connections and the support system that I will have back home. This ... might be my chance to [start] to build connections in the field that I want to work on or also just like get closer to my ideal or like my dream job.

WIL Obstacles for International Students

Not all international students benefit from WIL. While many focus group participants valued and expressed interest in accessing WIL, they highlighted the lack of opportunities available and the difficulty accessing them. Key govern-

ment programs that fund WIL, such as Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) and Canada Summer Jobs Program, exclude international students as eligible applicants. Without funding support, some employers may be less willing or able to hire international students. Focus group participants also shared that certain post-secondary institutions require an additional fee to apply to WIL, which present a significant barrier on top of their already stretched financial resources. Paying additional fees also does not guarantee a WIL experience. As a result, part-time work unrelated to the field of study was valued more over full-time, unpaid, or pay-in WIL positions.

Opting for paid work unrelated to study or career goals limits international students in the long term, reducing their chances of medium-to-long-term career success after graduation. Statistics Canada highlights that lower involvement in WIL among international students was one of factors accounting for differences in earnings and work experiences before graduation between international and domestic students, due to the program's effectiveness in skills development and connections to employers.²

What if my next job depends on this unpaid position? But also, if I don't have the choice to like to afford my living, it's not even an option to go do unpaid work.

Some focus group participants also voiced their frustration for the lack of support and oversight ensuring students succeed in applying to and participating in WIL programs, including lack of quality placements available. As a result, some students secured placements independently. Many indicated they wished for more support and guidance in navigating the WIL process and that their institutions had established stronger partnerships with

industry players that could provide WIL positions.

Participants also frequently cited confusing or incomplete information about WIL eligibility and processes, which are more pronounced for international students who face additional requirements. These inconsistencies impeded individuals' ability to access WIL in a timely manner or even prevented them from participating in a WIL experience.

So the college was pathetic for us. They did not help us with anything with the course ... with our jobs, with our resumes... And we being ... from the same field and we having the same kind of experience from our whole home country, we knew how to make the resumes, but still we were not getting the interviews.

Overall, we heard that in-study work and WIL experiences are integral for international students to gain employment in their field. For Canada to benefit from the skilled labour potential of international students, it is crucial to ensure that international students have access to well-supported and financially feasible in-study employment options as part of their schooling. Ultimately, the problems highlighted can be remedied through policies and institutional changes that target the unique barriers that prevent international students from reaping the full benefits of WIL.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Post-secondary Institutions

The lived experiences of international students highlight that WIL can truly empower their aspirations with the right resources. We propose three recommendations that can enable broader access, and address the challenges we heard most in our focus groups.

- 1. Establish minimum standards for WIL processes across institutions.** A unified, transparent WIL application and selection

² Choi, Y., Hou, F. and Chan, P. C. W. (2021). Early earnings trajectories of international students after graduation from post-secondary programs. Statistics Canada. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021002/article/00004-eng.htm>

system would make navigating opportunities more straightforward for students and employers.

2. **Reduce financial and bureaucratic barriers.** International students should have access to government-funded WIL programs and work permits that allow them equitable employment opportunities.
3. **Improve institutional support and clarity.** Post-secondary institutions should streamline WIL eligibility requirements and offer targeted support to help international students secure placements and transition into the workforce

The post-secondary system, employers, and policymakers can take steps to improve WIL and work opportunities for international students, allowing newcomers to achieve their goals and contribute to their new home. By building on the lived experiences of international students to inform policies impacting the next generation of newcomers, we can better support international students at every stage—from arrival, study, to life after graduation—and ensure that Canada remains a place where students are welcomed, supported, and can thrive.



Mahtab Laghaei

Policy and Research Assistant

Mahtab is a Policy and Research Assistant at the Dais, motivated by her interest in the innovation economy and the interplay between geopolitics and tech policy. She recently received her Masters in Global Affairs from the Munk School at the University of Toronto.



Sara Ditta

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Sara has a strong background in research, policy analysis and communications. Since 2012, she has led several evidence-based research projects, working in policy and research roles at federal and provincial levels of government, and a think tank.



ONTARIO STUDENT VOICES (OSV)

Trained but Unprepared: Closing the Job-Readiness Gap in Ontario Colleges

Alex Nguyen (she/her), BA, MPP

About Ontario Student Voices

Established in 2022, Ontario Student Voices is a non-profit provincial advocacy organization representing over 160,000 college and polytechnic students across Ontario. Our mission is to engage, connect, develop and refine research-driven policy and amplify student voices through advocacy at the provincial level. We champion student concerns by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and advocating for meaningful policy changes.

Our vision is a post-secondary system in Ontario that prioritizes success, accessibility, affordability and quality for all students - domestic and international. We are committed to ensuring that student voices shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives and education.

Introduction

Amidst ongoing labour shortages, public discourse on skills gaps has come to dominate both headlines and policy debates in Canada, with Ontario being no exception.¹

But what is actually meant by a “skills gap?” Al-

1 Borwein, Sophie. 2014. *The Great Skills Divide: A Review of the Literature*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

though the terms are often used interchangeably, **labour shortages** and **skills gaps** refer to distinct phenomena.² A labour shortage arises when there are simply not enough workers available to fill roles, whereas a **skills gap** occurs when there is a mismatch between the competencies employers require and those that job seekers actually possess.³ Hence, this definition reflects a **quality mismatch** in the workforce, rather than a lack of people.⁴ As a result, individuals may be hired despite being **under- or over-qualified**, either lacking essential skills or having skills that are not aligned with job requirements.⁵

Across the country, employers and business leaders consistently **report a mismatch between the skills they need in employees and those possessed by job seekers**.⁶

- According to the Survey of Employers on Workers’ Skills (2021), over half (56.1%) of businesses reported having employees who were not fully proficient to perform their jobs at the required level.⁷

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 Fissuh, Eyob, Kodzo-Kuma Gbenyo, and Andrew Ogilvie. 2022. *Determinants of Skill Gaps in the Workplace and Recruitment Difficulties in Canada*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 18-001-X, no. 2022-2E. <https://publications.gc.ca/>

- Among these businesses, the most commonly cited skill gaps were technical, practical, or job-specific skills (57.5%), followed by problem-solving skills (46.2%).⁸

These concerns have prompted questions about whether the post-secondary system is adequately preparing students for the workforce.⁹

This issue is not only recognized by employers, but also by students themselves.¹⁰ In the spring of 2018, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) surveyed over 6,000 post-secondary students.¹¹ While students are expected to possess transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem solving, many reported that these essential skills were underdeveloped during their programs.¹² Students further identified the most significant gaps in their skill development being in areas such as creative and innovative thinking, business etiquette, leadership, and teamwork.¹³ As a result, graduates may leave college with credentials, but without the full range of abilities required to succeed in an increasingly competitive and evolving economy.

This gap not only limits graduates' ability to secure meaningful employment, but also represents a broader economic challenge for the province, especially amidst the ongoing labour shortages in high-demand sectors.¹⁴

- At the national level, the skills gap was es-

timated to cost Canada \$25 billion in unrealized economic value in 2020, or 1.33% of national GDP.¹⁵

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Biss, Danielle, and Jack Pitchette. *Minding the Gap? Ontario Post-secondary Students' Perceptions on the State of Their Skills – Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*. January 11, 2019. <https://heqco.ca/pub/minding-the-gap-ontario-post-secondary-students-perceptions-on-the-state-of-their-skills/>.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Future Skills Centre. *Future Skills Centre • Centre Des Compétences Futures*. n.d. Accessed August 6, 2025. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/references/the-need-to-make-skills-work-the-cost-of-ontarios-skills-gap>.

timated to cost Canada \$25 billion in unrealized economic value in 2020, or 1.33% of national GDP.¹⁵

- In Ontario, an earlier estimate by the Conference Board found that the province may have lost up to \$24.3 billion in forgone GDP in 2013 as a result of too many Ontarians lacking the education or training needed for available jobs.¹⁶

Together, these figures underscore the long-standing and ongoing economic cost of underdeveloped skills across the workforce.

Ontario Student Voice believes that all students deserve access to a high-quality post-secondary education. This includes not only academic learning, but also equitable access to high-quality, inclusive, and accessible career preparation and skill development opportunities. To ensure graduates are prepared for the demands of the workforce and close the skill gaps, systemic barriers to these opportunities must be identified and addressed.

Key Concerns

Barriers to Equitable Access to Experiential Learning and Skill Development

Experiential learning opportunities facilitated through work-integrated learning (WIL) placements including, but not limited to, internships, co-ops, practicums, field placements, applied research, and service learning, are critical for developing both soft and technical skills.¹⁷ These opportunities allow students to gain re-

¹⁵ The Conference Board of Canada. "Economic Cost of Skills Vacancies." The Conference Board of Canada, March 22, 2022. <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/focus-areas/canadian-economics/economic-cost-of-skills-vacancies/>.

¹⁶ Stuckey, James, and Daniel Munro. *The Need to Make Skills Work: The Cost of Ontario's Skills Gap*. The Conference Board of Canada, 2013. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/references/the-need-to-make-skills-work-the-cost-of-ontarios-skills-gap>.

¹⁷ McDonough, Laura, and Steve Richter. *Work-Integrated Learning*. Future Skills Centre, 2025. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/work-integrated-learning>.

al-world experience, apply theoretical knowledge, and build the competencies employers increasingly expect of new graduates.¹⁸¹⁹ However, many students continue to face substantial and systemic barriers to accessing these experiences, undermining their career readiness and deepening the skills mismatch.²⁰²¹

Students from equity-deserving groups, including low-income, equity-deserving, marginalized or first-generation students, often face greater challenges accessing work-integrated learning due to financial barriers, limited social networks, and institutional capacity constraints.²²²³ These systemic barriers disproportionately impact the very students who stand to gain the most from participating in experiential learning outcomes such as extended professional networks and industry-specific capital, especially when they already had limited opportunities prior to entering post-secondary education.²⁴ Other logistical barriers that hinder students' ability to participate include having to arrange their own place-

ments and delaying graduation due to poor coordination between institutions and employers.²⁵

Additionally, inconsistent access to opportunities, especially in smaller communities or under-resourced programs due to institutional constraints, means that students are not equally supported in acquiring workplace-ready skills throughout the province.²⁶ These inequities extend to access to high-quality skill development resources such as career advising, professional mentorship, and networking opportunities.²⁷ As a result, many students may graduate without the full range of experiences or tailored support needed to transition successfully into the workforce, further deepening the skills gap, reinforcing systemic barriers to employment and hindering students' ability to successfully complete their respective programs.

Meanwhile, international students continue to face disproportionate systemic challenges when attempting to participate in experiential learning. These include navigating complex and shifting eligibility rules, language barriers, inconsistent institutional support, limited access to clear program information, and bias in the hiring process.²⁸ As a result, their ability to develop workplace skills and gain Canadian work experience is often constrained, despite paying higher tuition and facing greater pressure to secure post-graduation employment. These structural inequities undermine the capacity of experiential learning to serve as a pathway to equitable career

18 Universities Canada. "How Work-Integrated Learning Could Boost Canada's Economy." Universities Canada, October 21, 2024. <https://univcan.ca/news/how-work-integrated-learning-could-boost-canadas-economy/>.

19 Cukier, Wendy, Mark Campbell, and Lauren McNamara. Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario. Toronto: Diversity Institute, Ryerson University, 2019. https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/Ensuring_Equitable_Access_to_Work-Integrated_Learning_in_Ontario.pdf.

20 R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018).

21 Chatoor, Ken, and Lena Balata. Student Identity and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): A Data Brief. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, August 2023. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Identity-and-WIL-Data-Brief-FINAL-ENGLISH.pdf>.

22 Ibid

23 Chatoor, Ken, Hagar Effah, and Elizabeth Agoe. "Graduates' Unmet Labour Market Expectations Reflect Unequal Realities – Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario." Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, January 15, 2025. <https://heqco.ca/graduates-unmet-labour-market-expectations-reflect-unequal-realities/>.

24 Cukier, Wendy, Mark Campbell, and Lauren McNamara. Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario. Toronto: Diversity Institute, Ryerson University, 2019. https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/Ensuring_Equitable_Access_to_Work-Integrated_Learning_in_Ontario.pdf.

25 Cutean, Alexandra, Letitia Henville, and Faun Rice. "The Impact of Workforce Integrated Learning on Student Success and the Canadian Economy: A Case Study of Canada's Student Work Placement Program (SWPP)." Ottawa, ON: Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), August 2023.

26 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018. https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Formatted_Barriers-to-WIL_FINAL.pdf.

27 Chatoor, Ken, and Lena Balata. Student Identity and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): A Data Brief. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, August 2023. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Identity-and-WIL-Data-Brief-FINAL-ENGLISH.pdf>.

28 HEQCO Research Consortium. International Student Experiences in Work-Integrated Learning 2025 (slide deck).

readiness and contribute to the province-wide skills gap observed among recent graduates.

Financial Constraints Limit Students' Ability to Develop In-Demand Skills

Financial insecurity can severely limit students' ability to access opportunities that build workforce-ready skills. While tuition, textbooks, and housing costs are immediate concerns, indirect financial barriers, such as unpaid internships, relocation costs for placements, or taking time away from paid work, can prevent students from participating in high-impact experiential learning.²⁹

As many skill-building opportunities, particularly work-integrated learning placements, remain unpaid, students without financial safety nets may be forced to choose paid work in unrelated fields over unpaid or low-paying placements aligned with their career goals, limiting their ability to develop job-specific competencies.

- According to the Information and Communications Technology Council's 2023 study, cost was the most significant barrier to participation, particularly for students not receiving federal wage subsidies through the Student Work Placement Program. Secondary deterrents for students who had never participated in WIL included the need to delay graduation and the challenge of managing a heavy academic workload.³⁰

Additionally, in some cases, students are required to pay for unexpected placement-related expenses with little notice, such as vaccines

29 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018. https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Formatted_Barriers-to-WIL_FINAL.pdf.

30 Cutean, Alexandra, Letitia Henville, and Faun Rice. "The Impact of Workforce Integrated Learning on Student Success and the Canadian Economy: A Case Study of Canada's Student Work Placement Program (SWPP)." Ottawa, ON: Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), August 2023.

or police record checks, especially when their placements are in sectors not typically aligned with their academic program. These cumulative costs can delay entry into the workforce as students may need additional time to save for or finance these mandatory fees, or may defer certification and licensure until they can afford them.

The financial barriers are particularly acute for low-income students, students with dependents, first-generation learners, and international students, who often have fewer funding options and flexibility. In turn, these financial constraints can perpetuate unequal access to career preparation and contribute to a lack of preparedness when entering the labour market.

Recommendations

Without targeted intervention and meaningful action, our students will continue to graduate without the full range of skills needed to succeed in today's economy. At the same time, Ontario cannot afford to bear these economic losses, especially amid the urgent need to fill labour shortages in high-demand sectors to protect our province from ongoing economic uncertainty.

Hence, to bridge the skills gap and ensure all students have equitable access to quality career preparation, Ontario Student Voice strongly advocates for the adoption of the following recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, in collaboration with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, should collect, standardize, and publicly report province-wide data on curriculum design, skills training, and work-integrated learning (WIL) to strengthen quality assurance processes and inform improvements in access, equity, and educational outcomes.
2. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities,

Research Excellence and Security should require post-secondary institutions to transparently disclose the full range of additional costs associated with work-integrated learning (WIL) and career preparation, including fees related to certification, licensure, and placement-related expenses within program fee information, to ensure students are fully informed and prepared, in accordance with the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024.

3. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security should provide targeted funding to incentivize local work placement opportunities for community organizations and employers by offering wage subsidies for hiring post-secondary students in work-integrated learning (WIL) placements.
4. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security should increase and sustain annual investments in campus infrastructure and training equipment, including the College Equipment and Renewal Fund and the Facilities Renewal Program—at a level equivalent to at least \$222 million, ensuring that post-secondary institutions can continuously modernize facilities and equipment to provide students with hands-on experience using industry-relevant technology and certifications, while improving access to high-quality, local work-integrated learning and career preparation opportunities.
5. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security should designate funding to expand on-campus career support, including hiring more coordinators, career guidance counselors, and providing targeted assistance for marginalized students.



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Research & Policy Analyst

Alex Nguyen holds a Master of Public Policy from the University of Calgary and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from St. Thomas University in New Brunswick. She has extensive experience in student government, policy research, and advocacy at the student, provincial, and national levels, with a strong passion for advancing higher education policy.

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BROCK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION (BUSU)

Bridging the Gap Between Academic Enrichment and Workforce Preparation

Aaditya Gupta (he/him) and Tinashe Buckenham Dziva (he/him)

University is widely regarded as a place where students grow, explore ideas and disciplinary knowledge, and develop the capacity to engage with complex theories. At the same time, it is also expected to serve as preparation for the job market. Although not mutually exclusive, these two goals do not always fit together neatly. Students are encouraged to focus on learning for its intrinsic worth, yet are simultaneously placed under pressures to demonstrate practical application of their knowledge and to acquire job-specific competencies demanded by the labor market - which are positioned as essential for distinguishing themselves from other graduates.

Thus, students are often forced to make decisions between courses that spark genuine intellectual curiosity and those they believe hold great workplace value. One Brock student recounted

transferring out of General Humanities because he saw few career-relevant opportunities and limited access to experiential learning. He chose to enter a STEM program despite it being outside his main academic interests, because it appeared more likely to enhance his employability. Such decisions are not uncommon. At Brock University, students, particularly those in the humanities, face the task of reconciling their academic interests with the perceived demands of the job market, especially when the link between what is taught in class and how to translate that to the workplace application feels tenuous. It is not that students dismiss the value of theoretical learning; rather it is that they also want to feel prepared for what comes next. These trade-offs highlight a broader issue: the uneven distribution of work-integrated learning opportunities across disciplines, which leaves some students with

fewer ways to integrate their academic interests with meaningful career preparation.

Across Ontario, disciplinary gaps in access to work-integrated learning are widening. Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada data (Ontario, Bachelors, 2021–2024) showed that of 7,442 CEWIL experiences funded in Ontario (2021–24), 20% went to Business, 20% to Health related programs and around 20% to other STEM programs. Liberal arts and humanities programs accounted for 2%.¹ This reinforces perceptions that career-relevant, experiential opportunities are far less accessible outside professional and STEM programs.

Additionally, Research from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance points to a few key problems: there are not enough experiential learning opportunities, skill development is uneven, and students outside of business or STEM programs often lack support when it comes to entrepreneurial opportunities.² Even in the programs where there are opportunities, many students do not know what kinds of options or outcomes to expect after graduation.

At Brock, these same issues arise. Although the university promotes experiential learning in every program, the term can vary in meaning. In some cases, it means a full co-op placement; other times, these opportunities are limited to case studies or lab projects. Only a few humanities programs, like History and Dramatic Arts, offer a co-op option. Most others do not, and their courses tend to stay focused on theory and developing skills through intensive, embodied, and

1 Data gathered applying Ontario, Bachelor's degree, and 2021-2024, "CEWIL Canada Work Integrated Learning iHUB," CEWIL Canada, n.d., <https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/Resources/IWIL-Hub/iHUB-Reporting-Dashboard.aspx?h-key=2f98068c-aca5-4fee-a2bf157a7db93bfd>

2 Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, "Student Entrepreneurship, Employment, and Employability," Toronto: OUSA, Fall 2022, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/ousa/pages/35/attachments/original/1671207711/Student_Entrepreneurship__Employment__and_Employability_2022_document.pdf?1671207711

practice-based experiences.

Brock offers a platform called CareerZone for career education and employment support, where they also showcase the co-op program. CareerZone offers a suite of services and resources, including career exploration, resume and cover letter feedback, job search resources, mock interviews, and access to both on-campus and external job postings. However, CareerZone does not reach all students equally. If a program does not offer co-op or if a student does not qualify, options can feel limited.

Julia Zhu, the Director of Co-op, Career & Experiential Education (CCEE), and Chair of Accreditation Council, CEWIL Canada, overseeing the national accreditation process for co-op programs, spoke more about the experiential learning disparities at Brock. She explained that co-op programs were originally built for larger, professional programs, such as Engineering, where the path from classroom to career is more direct and clearly defined. In the humanities and social sciences, it is harder to draw a line between a degree and a job, as the career path is often nonlinear. By participating in co-op it helps students from these Faculties recognize their transferable skills.

At Brock, co-op is a fully integrated part of respective degree programs, requiring students to alternate between academic terms and full-time work placements with qualified co-op employers. This structure demands flexibility and mobility from students. Recognizing not every student can fit into this model, Brock introduced a more flexible and less intensive alternative work-integrated learning mode called "work experience." It is meant to give students a chance to get real job experience without needing to complete several work terms. The idea was to make it to students in programs that do not have traditional co-op options. The program, however, was suspended due to funding and staffing shortfalls. From identifying eligible students, recruiting participants,

preparing them for the job search competition and ensuring they succeed during a work term, it requires dedicated resources. Co-op students typically receive support and training from the beginning of their time at Brock, which helps them be more aware of the labour market, while students in the Work Experience pilot had the challenge of catching up quickly. Based on feedback and resource limitations, the Co-op Education Office has paused the program and is now exploring a more sustainable model that better supports both students and staff. Julia mentioned one key take-away: all students, regardless of program, should begin engaging in career development conversations as early as their first year. Yet Brock is still working to meet that ideal.

Julia also discussed the importance of reflection. She said, “Experiential learning without reflection is not experiential learning”. Beyond completing a placement, it is essential to reflect on what one learned and how it can be used in future roles; a step that is often overlooked.

She mentioned that students in the humanities and social sciences often have a great deal of potential to be entrepreneurs, but they are not always given the tools to think that way. With the right support, these students could build businesses, freelance careers, or launch independent projects. But they need access to training, resources, and mentors to make that happen. Programs like Brock Learn Ideate Navigate Collaborate (LINC) have started to help by providing support for research commercialization, entrepreneurship, and industry partnerships, with a focus on helping Brock ideas and technologies get to market, but more support is needed.

At Brock, the building blocks are already there, but they need more attention and investment. People like Julia Zhu are asking the right questions. Now it is about making sure the answers lead to real change. Students should not have to choose between learning what they care about

and getting the experience they need to move forward after graduation.

To improve the distribution of co-op opportunities for undergraduates across Ontario, OUSA recommends:

1. The provincial government should revitalize the Career Ready Fund to provide post-secondary institutions with funding to increase work-integrated learning in disciplines where such opportunities are currently lacking. The provincial government should also work with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable to conduct research and establish best practices on incorporating work-integrated learning in the arts and humanities, and other fields of study where such opportunities are limited.
2. The students recommend that the different stakeholders within the post-secondary sector (Council of Ontario Universities, HEQCO, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations) collaborate to develop models to develop and promote experiential learning experiences for all students. This should be supplemented by providing funding to increase experiential learning opportunities. Furthermore, the provincial government should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to implement a needs-based bursary to increase access to experiential learning opportunities for students with financial needs.
3. If universities want to prepare students for what comes next, they cannot treat academic and career preparation as two separate pursuits. Students want the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the workforce. To do that, they need direction, opportunity, and support. To meet these needs, schools need to find how to be more responsive and meet students where they are and help them build a future that feels real

and possible.

4. This is not just Brock University's challenge, and it is not only on students to figure it out themselves. The entire post-secondary sector, including institutions, government, faculty, employers, and policymakers, needs to work together to close the gap between learning and doing. Students are ready to build meaningful futures. The system must be ready to support them.



Tinashe Buckenham Dziva

Tinashe is a fourth-year Research Psychology student and policy writer at Brock University. His work focuses on community-based research addressing healthcare access and zoning law inequities, with a strong emphasis on policy implementation and advocacy. He is interested in how structural barriers shape community well-being and how evidence-informed research can guide policy reform.



Aaditya Gupta

Aaditya is the Vice-President of External Affairs at Brock University Students' Union and serves as a Steering Committee member for the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA). He is currently pursuing a degree in Business Administration Co-op program at the Goodman School of Business.

In his role, Aaditya advocates on behalf of students at multiple levels of government and works closely with external stakeholders to amplify student voices. His mission is to empower students with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Looking ahead, Aaditya is committed to continuing his work in advocacy and is passionate about making a meaningful impact in people's lives through community engagement and policy development.



ONTARIO COUNCIL ON ARTICULATION AND TRANSFER (ONCAT)

Helping Ontario’s Learners Find Their Way

Dr. Adrienne Galway (she/her) and Nick Hanson (he/him)

Ontario’s post-secondary institutions have attracted international attention for their forward-thinking spirit of innovation: trailblazing research activities that produce breakthroughs in human knowledge, as well as creative teaching practices that inspire students to succeed. Although campus labs and classrooms have embraced new ideas and approaches, many administrative structures of Ontario’s post-secondary system are still grounded in a traditional model that expects the majority of students to enter directly from high school and exit straight into their chosen career. Learners entering post-secondary education directly from high school face enormous pressure to choose a program and potentially a career before they have had an opportunity to explore and understand a rapidly changing labour market. At the same time, learners are also being told that they will shift careers multiple times during their lives. The reality is that the education-to-em-

ployment journey will rarely follow a straight line; in many cases, pivoting in new directions may require additional education and credentials. Ontario’s post-secondary institutions have a core responsibility to empower learners with the confidence, skills, and tools they will need to thrive — no matter which personal and professional goals they choose to pursue in the future.

A recent report suggests that many individuals interested in Ontario’s colleges and universities are “mobile learners” — people moving between post-secondary studies and work experiences, as well as students transferring between programs or institutions.¹ Statistics from the 2024 University/College Applicant Study (a national survey of 40,000 applicants

¹ Napierala, Jeffrey, and Nick Hanson. “What Post-secondary Institutions Should Know About Ontario’s Mobile Learners.” *Academica Forum*, June 2, 2025. <https://forum.academica.ca/forum/what-post-secondary-institutions-should-know-about-ontarios-mobile-learners>.

to Canadian post-secondary institutions conducted by Academica Group) highlight the prevalence of people returning for additional education at Ontario’s post-secondary institutions:

- 48% of applicants had previous post-secondary experience
- 24% of applicants had already earned a university degree and 15% had completed a college credential
- 54% were over 20 years old and more than one-third were older than 24²

The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) collaborates with post-secondary institutions to help learners find their way. Through collaborative initiatives that improve processes for awarding transfer credits and recognizing prior learning³, the publicly assisted colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes in Ontario are making it easier for learners to access the education they need to build a rewarding career. ONCAT advocates for broader implementation of evidence-based policies and practices that will not only strengthen the connections between Ontario’s post-secondary sector and the labour market but also support learners at every step of their education-to-employment journey.

Expanding Course Equivalency Databases

The requirements to earn an Ontario Secondary School Diploma — the official high school diploma awarded by the Ministry of Education — are the same across the entire province. If a student moves to a different high school, they can easily continue earning credits from a standardized catalogue of courses. At the post-secondary level, many institutions use different systems for credit hours, grading schemes, and program requirements. As a result, learners in-

terested in transferring between institutions or returning to school after a pause can struggle to understand their options. Plus, administrators at the receiving institution may require substantial time to assess transcripts and other materials that use a different system from their own.

To facilitate more seamless post-secondary transitions, ONCAT manages ONTransfer — an online resource that provides information about credit transfer and academic pathways at colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes. Collecting this information in one place makes it easier for both students and administrators to identify ways to leverage previously earned credits, particularly for programs and credentials that lead to careers in sectors with high labour market demand.

A 2021 report prepared by Higher Education Strategy Associates highlighted some administrative inefficiencies in credit transfer processes; they suggested that a centralized database of course equivalencies would greatly expedite the reviewing and awarding of academic credits.⁴ To that end, ONCAT is enhancing the functionality of ONTransfer with a more robust database, developed in partnership with the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer, that will allow institutions to track course equivalencies between external institutions. Decreasing the duplication of administrative labour should result in faster decisions about credit transfer, which, in turn, will provide learners with more time to consider post-secondary pathways that align with their career aspirations.

As an added benefit, new digital platforms can map connections between Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes and National Occupation Classification (NOC) codes. These large-scale datasets track which programs at post-secondary institutions can lead to specific

² Ibid.

³ Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). “ONCAT Funds Innovative Projects to Support Post-secondary Learner Mobility.” Toronto: ONCAT, June 4, 2025. <https://oncat.ca/news+article+ONCAT-2024-25-funding-announcement>.

⁴ Higher Education Strategy Associates. “Mapit 2.0: Reviewing Transfer Credit Processes at Ontario Post-secondary Institutions.” Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, 2021. <https://oncat.ca/publications+detail+mapit-reviewing-transfer-credit-processes-at-ontario-post-secondary-institutions>.

occupations (i.e., these datasets could highlight that careers in nature conservation could be achieved via a college diploma in Environmental Technology, a university degree in Wildlife Biology, etc.). Eventually, the ONTransfer system will link post-secondary programs to specific occupations, providing learners with essential information to plan their pathway to the labour market.

Developing Pathways That Allow Learners To Earn Additional Credentials

When learners consider exploring new directions, they often discover that some careers may require additional education and credentials. Ontario's post-secondary institutions have developed numerous pathways that allow learners to leverage their prior learning — saving them time and money to earn additional credentials.

As one example, Queen's University recently welcomed the inaugural cohort of students in the Smith Engineering Bridge.⁵ Through this pathway, college graduates with advanced diplomas in Engineering Technology can transfer into the third year of a Bachelor of Applied Science (BASc) in Engineering. The Smith Engineering Bridge — which was developed with the support of ONCAT — not only helps learners continue their academic journey, but it also broadens opportunities for students from more diverse backgrounds to pursue careers as professional engineers. In 2025, the program will expand to include the participation of two additional universities and more than 10 colleges.

Although many post-secondary partnerships support college-to-university pathways, growing numbers of university graduates are enrolling in high affinity college programs that provide practical skills and improve employment prospects. For instance, one ONCAT-funded project is develop-

5 Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). "ONCAT Funds Innovative Projects to Support Post-secondary Learner Mobility." Toronto: ONCAT, June 4, 2025. <https://oncat.ca/news+article+ONCAT-2024-25-funding-announcement>.

ing course materials that allow graduates of Ontario Tech University's Bachelor of Health Science (Honours) in Kinesiology to gain advanced standing into Durham College's Advanced Diploma in Massage Therapy. This new pathway provides an equitable, cost-effective opportunity for learners to train in this important area of healthcare.

Scaling Prior Learning Assessment And Recognition (PLAR) Processes

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) represents a third way that Ontario's post-secondary institutions can effectively support learners' education-to-employment journey. As defined by the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, "PLAR offers learners the opportunity to earn credit for college courses based on formal demonstration of prior learning usually acquired through study, work, and other life experiences that is not recognized through formal credit transfer mechanisms."⁶ PLAR programs can significantly reduce the time and cost required to earn post-secondary credentials and pursue meaningful careers, especially for underemployed adults, military-connected learners, newcomers, and people with previous work experience. Administratively, any process to award academic credits based on a person's competencies and experience must be comprehensive enough to maintain the academic integrity of the post-secondary credentials. As a result, the review processes typically require substantial time and subject matter expertise. For learners who may already experience challenges finding the information they need to apply for PLAR⁷, any delays in the assessment

6 Government of Ontario. "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Guide for Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology." Accessed August 29, 2025. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/prior-learning-assessment-and-recognition-guide-colleges-applied-arts-and-technology>.

7 Missaghian, Rod. "Prior Learning Assessment in Ontario: An Online Scan of PLAR Information for Ontario's 24 Publicly Funded Colleges." Toronto: Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), January 2022. https://oncat.ca/sites/default/files/media-files/missaghian-plar_56914588_0.pdf.

process can negatively impact their ability to confirm course enrolment, secure financial assistance, and organize family responsibilities.⁸

In a 2018 ONCAT-funded research project, Mary Harrison noted that automating or digitizing some components of PLAR assessments could improve the transparency and speed of evaluation processes.⁹ More recently, ONCAT has been supporting pilot projects that test the potential viability of AI-powered assessment processes. Interim reports from these projects indicate that AI-powered tools could review an applicant's experience — via a combination of transcripts, résumés, portfolios, or interviews — and rapidly generate a preliminary list of academic credits that could be awarded by the post-secondary institution. Recent research studies have raised concerns that AI-powered tools used by post-secondary institutions may apply algorithmic biases that exacerbate existing inequalities.¹⁰ To mitigate potential issues, post-secondary institutions should ensure that human oversight would always be involved to ensure the accuracy and equity of the process.¹¹

As an additional way to expand PLAR opportunities, ONCAT is conducting a study to investigate the viability of a centralized, sector-wide PLAR assessment and administration platform to provide two benefits:

- Reduce application costs and waiting time for students, empowering them to make informed decisions about post-secondary opportunities
- Streamline administrative processes and minimize duplication of services for post-secondary institutions, incentivizing the cost-effective expansion of PLAR-eligible programs and courses

Preparing For Uncertainty By Facilitating Greater Flexibility And Accessibility

For many adolescents and young adults in Ontario, the COVID pandemic significantly restricted opportunities to take courses with practical elements, participate in co-op and intern programs, and visit professional workplaces. As a result, learners made important decisions about their future plans without the benefit of experiences and perspectives that typically shape career interests, options, and goals. Pivoting to new directions may require that learners not only reframe their sense of self-identity but also return to school for additional education and credentials.

Over the next few years, the jarring changes caused by the COVID pandemic may pale in comparison to the ways that the AI revolution might transform school, work, and society. Computer systems might be able to perform tasks that previously required human-like intelligence, reducing the need for professional and administrative employees; plus, autonomous robots might develop enough proficiency to displace workers from jobs that rely on physical labour. We cannot accurately predict the future of employment, but we can help prepare for uncertainty by facilitating greater flexibility and accessibility for people interested in upskilling, retraining, transferring, and pursuing additional credentials. Ontario's post-secondary institutions are bastions of innovation for research and teaching. As a sector, we need to expand that spirit of ingenuity to our academic policies and

8 Ray, Lana, and Anita Vaillancourt, with Celine Wick and Lajja Beaulieu. "Indigenous Prior Learning, Assessment and Recognition: Discussion Paper." Toronto: Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), November 2024. https://oncat.ca/assets/oncat/ONCAT_IndigenousPriorLearningAssessmentandRecognition_2024.pdf.

9 Harrison, M. "Best Practices in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in Ontario Colleges and Universities." Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, 2018. https://capla.ca/rpl/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MaryHRResearch-Report_Best-Practices-in-PLAR2019_PDF.pdf.

10 Gándara, Denise, Hasti Anahideh, Melissa P. Ison, and Luca Picchiarini. "Inside the Black Box: Detecting and Mitigating Algorithmic Bias Across Racialized Groups in College Student-Success Prediction." *AERA Open* 10 (2024). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23328584241258741>.

11 Ibid.

administrative processes. By working together, we can build a system that better supports all phases of a person's education-to-employment journey — not only for the economic realities of today, but for all the uncertainties of the future.



Adrienne Galway

Dr. Adrienne Galway is the President and CEO of ONCAT (the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer) and a distinguished senior leader in post-secondary education. Prior to joining ONCAT, Adrienne spent over 10 years serving in several senior positions at George Brown College — most recently as the Associate Vice-President of Government and External Relations. Before joining George Brown, she served as the Senior Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities and as the Education Policy Advisor to the Leader of the Official Opposition of the Government of Ontario. Adrienne has extensive experience working with governance boards in the university, college, and not-for-profit sectors.

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Nick Hanson

Nick Hanson is the Vice-President of Programs, Research and External Relations at ONCAT (the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer). Nick's research career spans academic projects related to government policy, practical resources for arts pedagogy, and contributions to public inquests that attracted national media attention and sparked new legislation. Over the last 20 years, Nick has delivered more than 500 storytelling workshops for audiences of all ages and backgrounds — across Canada, the United States, Europe, and Africa.

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ENGINEERING STUDENT SOCIETIES' COUNCIL OF ONTARIO (ESSCO)

Tailoring Support: The Importance of Industry-Specific Resources in the Co-op Job Search

Aidan Dearlove (he/him) and Zachary Scott (he/him)

Introduction

Ask any new grad how their job search is going and they'll tell you that it's a hard market right now. Competition is fierce for entry-level jobs. The application process is often drawn out, stressful, and missing critical feedback to help applicants on subsequent searches.¹ This has created challenges in transitioning from academia to the working world. An increasing number of students are therefore looking to move up the start of their career through undergraduate work-integrated learning opportunities, such as co-ops or internships, to accumulate relevant industry experience and enter the workforce straight out of graduation.

Co-op programs are a valuable resource, but

¹ Fernandes, Jason D., et al. "Research Culture: A Survey-Based Analysis of the Academic Job Market." *eLife*, June 12, 2020. <https://elifesciences.org/articles/54097>

they are only able to exist with administrative support from our universities. However, many post-secondary institutions only provide degree-agnostic co-op programs, offering very similar workshops for all students regardless of field of study, discipline, or industry, even though each industry has its own set of ever-changing standards. As a result, these resources can be overly generalized or outright unhelpful for students in more technical or niche industries. This places a greater burden on co-op administrators, while leaving students feeling unsupported or misled. Robust co-op programs are a valuable tool for assisting students in transitioning into the professional world, but there is room for improvement in the way they are structured.

The Case for Co-op

Co-op placements are extremely popular with undergraduate students, many of whom look for programs with co-op options, for their effectiveness in securing early work experience prior to graduation. There are many benefits that students can take away from co-op work terms, many of which revolve around gaining direct experience in a field they want to work in. For many, a co-op placement allows the student to develop industry-specific skills that employers look for in the industry that aren't taught in undergraduate programs. Developing these skills during the course of study is closely related to employability in a related field of study for students directly after graduation; with studies showing a 16% increase in students finding a job closely related to their field of study between co-op and non co-op courses.² On the other side, a co-op position gives students the opportunity to explore a career in their field of study to see if it's what they actually want to pursue. In fields such as engineering, with many career options, having an early opportunity to learn that you may not like a certain aspect of the career allows a student to make the necessary changes to their studies to set themselves in the right direction. It is also important to note that for engineering students hoping to obtain licensure after graduation, work experience during an undergraduate degree can account for up to 12 months of the 48 months required to become a P.Eng, a distinction required to practice engineering in Canada.

Co-op programs offer benefits not only to students, but to their employers too. Taking on co-op students can often be quite expensive, but there are programs, both provincially and federally, that can help employers subsidize these costs. In Ontario, employers are able to claim up to \$3000 in

2 Wyonch, Rosalie. "The Role of Co-Op Programs in Labour Market Success." C.D. Howe Institute. Accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.cdhowe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Commentary20562-3.pdf>

tax credits for each student hired.³ The federal government has its own multi-million dollar initiatives with the goal of creating job opportunities and developing Canada's workforce. Furthermore, by hiring students in their early career, employers have the opportunity to develop specific skills in students, leading to opportunities to hire said students after graduation, already equipped to succeed. From a survey of employers, it was found that 52% of employers offer graduates employment if they have completed a work-integrated learning (WIL), such as a co-op, at that company,⁴ showing a direct return on investment for employers.

As a result of these many benefits, demand for co-op and WIL programs has increased significantly. The University of Waterloo, for instance, has seen a 43% increase in student co-op participation over the last 10 years, with its co-op program boasting a 92% graduate employment rate within 6 months of graduation;⁵ per an economic impact assessment conducted by Deloitte Canada, Waterloo's co-op program contributed \$410 million to Ontario's GDP in 2018/2019, mobilizing \$525 million in total employer gains across over 60 countries.⁶ When properly supported, Ontario's co-op programs represent a significant source of economic growth while contributing to Ontario's workforce by producing industry-ready graduates.

Administrative Shortcomings

While co-op programs have a proven impact on students when they look to transition from academia to industry, these initiatives hinge on stu-

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ivković, Shabnam, Christine Moresoli, and Norah McRae. "Co-Op Education with a Sustainability Lens: A Case Study from University of Waterloo." In 2024 IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON), 1–4. May 8, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1109/educon60312.2024.10578745>

6 University of Waterloo. University of Waterloo Economic Impact Assessment. Accessed August 23, 2025. https://uwaterloo.ca/about/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/university_of_waterloo_economic_contribution_analysis_2019.pdf

dents being given proper support before and during the application process. These supports often take the form of resume workshops, mock interviews, general best practices, and more that can help a student find success in the job search. While these supports are critical for supporting students in searching for what is likely the first job of their careers, many post-secondary institutions struggle to meet students' needs. Due to the high volume of students in these programs and their wide range of backgrounds and programs, many institutions have resorted to providing generic, non-program-specific resources with little nuance for specific schools and departments within an institution. In a preliminary student sentiment survey conducted by ESSCO to gauge student satisfaction with their co-op experience, respondents often indicated disappointment with the way their co-op programs were administered. Commonly perceived sources of friction included overly-generalized supports, outdated workshops and resources, and school job boards not properly separating postings by degree or discipline, leading to students being served job postings well outside of their field of study.⁷ Furthermore, due to some of the outdated and generalized resources which students are compelled to use, some students indicated that using those resources directly harmed their search for a co-op. Considering that many co-op programs carry additional tuition costs, some being upwards of nearly \$500 per term,⁸ these shortcomings can leave students feeling neglected or underserved.

Existing Supports

Although the current state of co-op leaves some room for improvement, several solutions and supplementary resources already exist. At Queen's University, for example, engineering stu-

7 ESSCO. Unpublished data from preliminary engineering co-op feedback survey.

8 Carleton University. "Program Cost." Carleton Co-operative Education, May 30, 2025. <https://carleton.ca/co-op/program-cost/>

dents are required to write a resume targeting an existing position in the industry as part of their APSC 103 Engineering Client-Based Design Project course.⁹ Student leaders at many of ESSCO's member schools offer support through student-run groups such as annual resume roasts hosted by the Carleton Student Engineering Society in collaboration with alumni organizations, teaching students how to better tailor their submission materials to their field, ensuring their application materials contain what the industry wants to see. Potentially the best-known instance of tailored co-op support is the University of Waterloo's previously mentioned work-integrated learning program, wherein co-op is a core element of many students' undergraduate pathway.

Next Steps

While the efforts of faculties and student-led organizations are commendable, students deserve to feel that they are receiving appropriate value from their tuition payments and other ancillary fees. Co-op programs should strive to incorporate more faculty and industry-specific resources into their student supports to ensure that all career paths are adequately represented. To aid schools in improving their programs, ESSCO will be working with our partners across the province to guide these necessary changes, which will help support our students in the early career job search. While ESSCO is primarily dedicated to bettering the experiences of engineering students, we encourage co-op programs across Ontario to consider how they can better support students from all faculties and backgrounds. We further recommend that schools consider allocating further resources to their co-op programs. Improvements to existing programs may require an increase in both working hours and expenditures, but as demonstrated by Waterloo's excellence in the field, investments in work-integrated learning often yield significant returns. To that end, we also urge public sources

9 Queen's University. APSC 103 Syllabus. January 2025.

of funding, prospective donors, and employers to examine their position in post-secondary co-op programs and consider how collaboration can lead to an avenue for growing Ontario's workforce.

Co-op and work-integrated learning programs are already helping students across Ontario and beyond to secure critical work experience and graduate ready to work. With increased support, current and future students will be even better equipped to navigate their industries and bolster Ontario's workforce.



Zachary Scott

Zachary (he/him) the VP Advocacy at the Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario (ESSCO), where he works with partners and stakeholders across the province to promote the interests of Ontario's undergraduate engineering students. Zachary strives to build on his previous advocacy experience in other organizations by strengthening ESSCO's external partnerships and solidifying their place in Ontario's advocacy landscape. Zachary is in his fourth year of his aerospace engineering undergraduate program and found his advocacy passion by seeing the direct impact of advocacy work on the people he interacts with every day.



Aidan Dearlove

Aidan Dearlove (he/him) is the Sustainability Commissioner at the Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario. As the head of ESSCO's Sustainability Working Group, he strives to advocate for engineering students' educational experience while improving the resource efficiency of Ontario's co-op programs. Aidan is completing the 5th year of his civil engineering undergraduate program at Queen's University, having completed a 16-month co-op placement with the City of Ottawa. Post-graduation, Aidan aims to pursue a career in geotechnical engineering with a focus on the longevity of infrastructure under climate change.



COLLEGE STUDENT ALLIANCE (CSA)

The Cost of Experience: Student Voices on Unpaid Work-Integrated Learning at Humber Polytechnic

Olivia Villeneuve (she/her) and Zehra Hussein (she/her)

Introduction

Work-Integrated learning (WIL) is a crucial component of post-secondary education in Ontario, bridging classroom education with real-world practice. In 2020, 46% of Ontario college students participated in WIL (co-ops, internships, clinical placements, and practicum), with 90% being a requirement for their program and graduation.¹ However, only 31% of college graduates report being paid for these placements.²

While these opportunities have proven to be valuable with hands-on experience and preparing students for career-focused pathways, they often come with uneven access to compensation. Historically, WIL placements in health, so-

1 Statistics Canada, Table 37-10-0249-01 Work-Integrated Learning Participation during Post-secondary Studies, by Province of Study [data table], 2025, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710024901>.

2 Ibid.

cial services, and education sectors have been unpaid, justified as hands-on experience. However, there are growing concerns about financial strain, equity, affordability, support, and mental health. Conversely, paid WIL opportunities are reserved for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), IT, and business fields, yet remain limited and competitive.³

This growing divide has drawn increasing concern throughout Ontario as students already face significant financial hardship and are recognized as an economically vulnerable population. Unpaid WIL not only emphasizes financial strain but also raises questions about the value of student contributions, labour, and fair compensation to further advance the future of experiential learning. One ini-

3 House of Commons, Exploring the Impact of Experiential Learning and Work-Integrated Learning, Report No. 12, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), 2017, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/42-1/HUMA/report-12/page-48>.

tiative that amplifies advocacy for students struggling with WIL placements is the *Time is Money* campaign, which obtains firsthand accounts from students about their placement experiences.⁴

Time is Money Campaign

Student narratives were collected through IGNITE Student Union's *Time is Money* campaign, advocating for paid WIL opportunities. The campaign team engaged in direct outreach across all four Humber Polytechnic and University of Guelph-Humber campuses. Each interaction began with a brief five-minute information session outlining the campaign's purpose and goals.

To emphasize the campaign's message that student time is valuable, participants received \$2 for attending the short session. Students were then invited to share their WIL experiences through an open-ended question and entered into a draw for \$500. Campaign visibility was reinforced through trained IGNITE staff distributing flyers and information at student service points. Outreach was proportionally distributed across campuses based on population size, without targeting specific programs or courses.

Data collection occurred over 2.5 months, with the goal of gathering at least 500 stories. The questionnaire captured limited student details (student name, program, campus) and included a single open-ended item prompting students to describe their WIL experience.

CSA Research

Methods

IGNITE provided the CSA research team with 889 student story submissions. Before analysis, data were cleaned to ensure relevance, completeness, and confidentiality, excluding entries that:

⁴ IGNITE Student Life, "*Time Is Money – Don't Spend It for Free!*" IGNITE, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://ignitestudentlife.com/leadership-advocacy/timeismoney/>.

(1) lacked program information; (2) contained ≤5 words; (3) were unrelated to WIL; (4) came from non-Humber/University of Guelph-Humber students; (5) were from students without WIL experience; or (6) were duplicates. Program names were mapped to the 2021 CIP Canada Variant for grouping (e.g., Personal Support Worker under "Health Professions and Related Programs")⁵. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted in Dovetail, where anonymized data were iteratively coded, refined into major themes and subthemes, and quantified to calculate the proportion of students reporting each experience.

Results

Following exclusions, 487 reliable students' stories were used in the analysis, with notable variation across programs and campuses. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the distribution of programs and campuses. Combined, Humber Polytechnic represented 84% of all responses, with limited participation from the University of Guelph-Humber. Differences in participation across campuses and programs may reflect self-selection or simply the larger population sizes in North Campus and top programs.

Key Takeaways

Financial Barriers

Financial compensation emerged as a critical concern for students participating in WIL, with 84% expressing frustration with unpaid WIL. Over half of these individuals highlighted the burden of unpaid placements on their ability to cover basic living expenses. The extensive time commitment for placements limits opportunities for part-time employment, making it even more difficult for students to afford rent, tuition, and daily necessities. Moreover, WIL-related expenses such as transportation, food, and necessary

⁵ "Variant of the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Canada 2021 Version 1.0 for Alternative Primary Groupings." Statistics Canada, <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=1486506>.

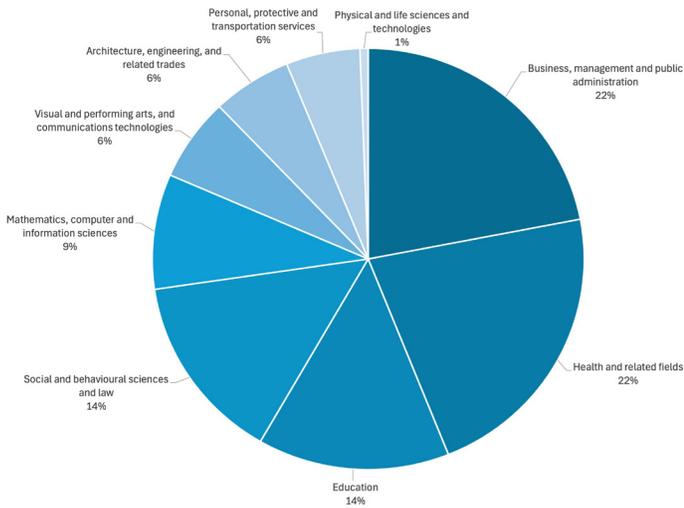


Figure 1. Distribution of programs in sample (N=487)

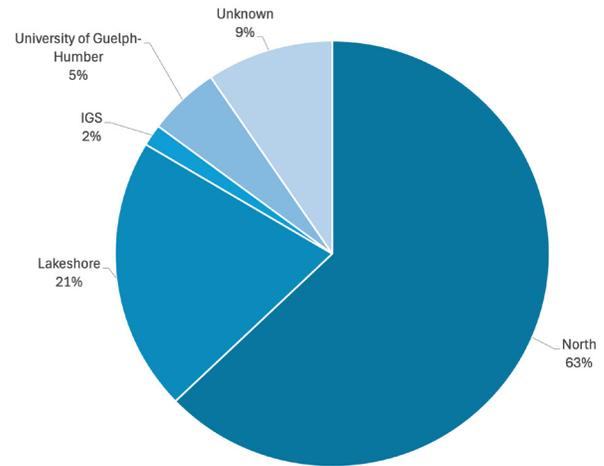


Figure 2. Distribution of campuses in sample (N=487)

A detailed breakdown of themes, tags, and response counts is shown in Figure 3.

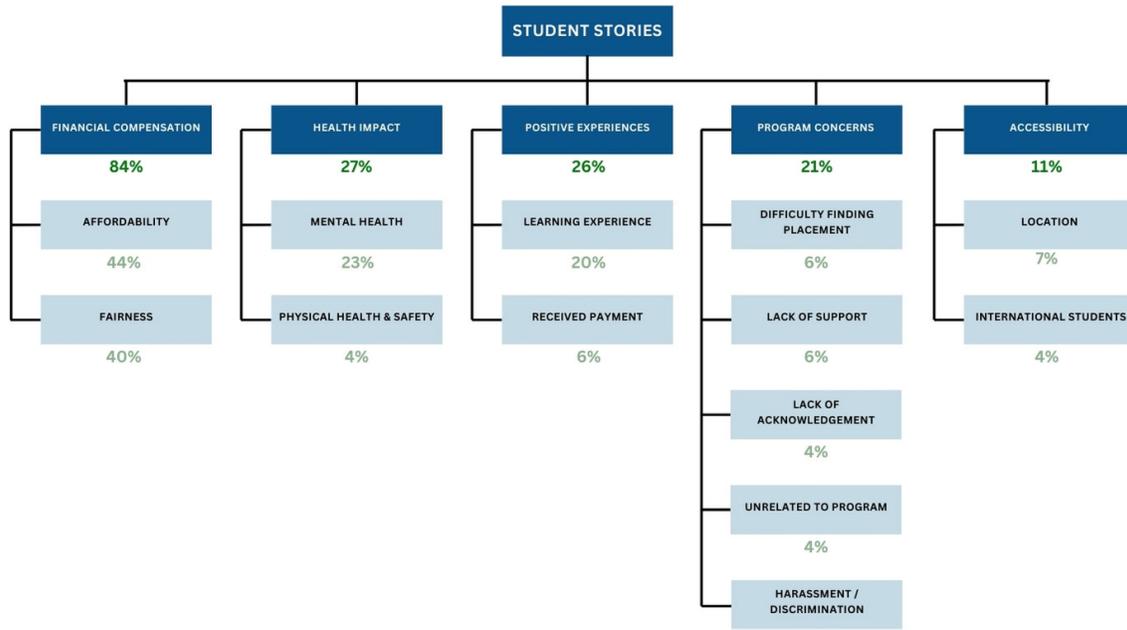


Figure 3. Prevalence of themes (dark blue) and sub-themes (light blue) identified in student stories for IG-NITE's Time is Money campaign, shown as the percentage of total responses in which each appeared (N = 487).

materials add to the strain, especially for international students and those with family responsibilities. Many students view unpaid WIL as ‘unfair’ and ‘exploitative’, feeling they contribute work equivalent to paid employees without compensation, devaluing their efforts and creating financial hardship. These findings align with existing literature noting that the percentage of students struggling to pay for necessities rises dramatically during placement periods, with additional WIL-related costs exacerbating financial stress.⁶

Inequities were especially pronounced for low-income students, who often cited declining unpaid internships due to the inability to afford the time commitment. Unpaid placements reinforce class-based privilege, as students from wealthier backgrounds are better positioned to absorb the financial costs of unpaid work, including wages, transportation, and living expenses.⁷

One student reflected:

“Only people who can afford to work for free get to take advantage of these roles... it deepens inequality and closes off opportunities before people even get a fair chance.”

This sentiment echoes broader evidence showing that unpaid internships disproportionately benefit students from wealthier backgrounds who have financial support and networks to access these opportunities.⁸

6 Deanna Grant-Smith and Laura de Zwaan, “The Impact of Financial Stress and Hardship on Work-Integrated Learning Wellbeing,” QUT Centre for Justice Briefing Papers 46 (2023): 2, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/246642/>.

7 Alyssa Bosley, Shoko Harada, Talia Tailleir, and Christina Vallender, “Unpaid Journalism Internships: Education or Exploitation?” *Facts & Frictions: Emerging Debates, Pedagogies and Practices in Contemporary Journalism* 2, no. 2 (2023): 61, <https://doi.org/10.22215/ff/v2.i2.05>.

8 Rebecca Montacute and Eliza Ekinsmyth, “Pay as You Go? Internship Pay, Quality and Access in the Graduate Labour Market,” *The Sutton Trust Research Brief* (2019): 4, <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Pay-As-You-Go-1.pdf>; Sally Smith, Colin Smith, and Martha Caddell, “Can Pay, Should Pay? Exploring Employer and Student Perceptions of Paid and Unpaid Placements,” *Active Learning in Higher Education* 16, no.

While the nature of this campaign focusing on paid opportunities may have influenced responses, these shared experiences reflect genuine struggles and underscore the urgent need to address financial barriers in WIL to ensure equitable access for all students.

Student Well-Being

A significant portion of students (22%) reported feeling stressed or overwhelmed during their WIL placements, with many linking directly back to financial pressures. This strain not only affected their mental health but also had negative consequences on their academic performance and social lives. Students expressed that unpaid placements made them feel undervalued, which lowered motivation and engagement. As one student shared:

“Balancing part-time jobs, classes, and the unpaid placement created significant financial and emotional stress... which led to burnout and reduced academic performance.”

These findings align with research showing that programs with intensive WIL requirements expose students to heightened psychological distress.⁹

Learning Experiences

About one in five students highlighted the meaningful value of WIL placements, emphasizing the chance to apply their education in real-world settings and learn directly from professionals. Many expressed gratitude for these opportunities, feeling they gained valuable skills and clearer career direction.

2 (2015): 149–164, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787415574049>.

9 Jenna Gillett-Swan and Deanna Grant-Smith, “A Framework for Managing the Impacts of Work-Integrated Learning on Student Quality of Life,” *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 19, no. 2 (2018): 129–40.

While students appreciate WIL for its educational and professional benefits, financial challenges associated with unpaid placements were cited to limit their ability to fully benefit from the experience. Students with paid placements noted that receiving financial support allowed them to fully engage and focus on their work without added financial stress.

“They offered a small stipend... it meant I could cover my bus fare and lunch...I felt valued.”

“Despite gaining some experience and insight into my industry, the overall impact of the WIL was mixed...the lack of compensation turned it into a burden.”

Support and Guidance

Thirteen percent of students reported a lack of guidance and support from their college, both during the placement search and when challenges arose on-site. Students cited little to no assistance from their school when facing issues such as unsafe working conditions, injuries, or mental health struggles. Poor communication, minimal supervision, and feelings of being undervalued were common, with students describing their experiences as isolating and unsupported. Attempts to seek help were sometimes dismissed, as one student recounted being told to “*suck it up*” before their advisor finally intervened.

“This was particularly exhausting during Ramadan when I was fasting and had lower energy levels. Instead of offering any form of support or accommodation, he showed complete disregard for my physical and personal situation.”

“There was no growth, no learning path, no career direction... it felt like I was sent into a void with no accountability.”

Literature has noted gaps in resources and training for academic advisors, especially re-

garding international students and those with mental health issues.¹⁰ Many institutions rely on less resource-intensive strategies due to budget constraints, and administrative burdens often limit the support advisors can provide.¹¹

Conclusion and Recommendations

The *Time is Money* campaign brings significant attention to the financial strain and barriers faced by students participating in WIL. As students are expected to balance academic responsibilities with unpaid labour, often at the expense of their mental well-being and financial stability, it is clear that systemic change is needed. Humber Polytechnic has taken steps in response to IGNITE’s *Time is Money* campaign, showing how student input can drive meaningful improvements. By acknowledging the struggles that students face and initiating conversations around compensation, support, mental health, and accessibility, Humber is laying a foundation for more equitable WIL opportunities in the future.

1. Increase bursaries to help students cover out-of-pocket WIL costs, such as Humber Polytechnic IGNITE Unpaid WIL Bursary and More @ Georgian, to improve equity and strengthen institutional reputation by attracting diverse, high-performing students¹².
2. Promote paid WIL placements and remove unpaid WIL language in course requirements.

¹⁰ Kathryn E. Wenham, Faith Valencia-Forrester, and Bridget Backhaus, “Make or Break: The Role and Support Needs of Academic Advisors in Work-Integrated Learning Courses,” *Higher Education Research & Development* 39, no. 5 (2020): 1026–39.

¹¹ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018), <http://www.heqco.ca/enca/Research/ResPub/Pages/Barriers-to-Work-integrated-Learning-Opportunities-.aspx>.

¹² Craig Cameron and Anne Hewitt, “Designing Financial Support for Students in Australian Work-Integrated Learning Programs,” *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 23, no. 3 (2022): 359–73.

3. Improve cost transparency by providing estimates of WIL-related expenses at the start of programs. *The Minister's Directive on Educational Material Costs* requires disclosure of course material costs; however, placement expenses often remain unclear, causing unexpected financial burdens. Some colleges offer partial guidance, but more consistent reporting is needed.



Zehra Hussein

Zehra is a fourth-year nursing student with a strong foundation in health sciences and a growing passion for advocacy, research, and systems-level change. As a student leader and mentor, Zehra has consistently worked to uplift the voices of her peers and foster inclusive, supportive environments within post-secondary education. After attending CSA's recent MayCon conference, Zehra was inspired to further engage in national-level advocacy—and is now excited to deepen her impact through research that drives meaningful change across Ontario. Zehra's lived experiences as a college student, newcomer, and future healthcare provider have shaped her strong commitment to equity and social justice. She believes that student-informed, evidence-based policies are key to creating real and lasting improvements in education and beyond.



Olivia Villeneuve

Olivia (she/her) is the Policy, Research and Advocacy Lead at the College Student Alliance (CSA), where she supports Ontario college students through evidence-based policy development and provincial advocacy. She has a strong background in the non-profit sector, including previous roles in adult literacy programming and front-line crisis support for survivors of sexual violence. Her research spans mental health, gender-based violence, early childhood education, and primary healthcare, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Olivia holds a Master's in International Development and Public Policy.



ECAMPUS ONTARIO

Micro-credentials, Durable Skills, and the Future of Lifelong Learning in Ontario

Iris Elliott (she/her) and Michael Chrobok (he/him)

Navigating a Changing Career Landscape

In a world where global trade disruptions, gig work, and artificial intelligence are reshaping many entry-level jobs, the path to future roles can feel uncertain. It is easy for students to wonder: *“Will this credential lead to a job I’ll actually want – or one that will even still exist?”*

Recent reports suggest that artificial intelligence (AI) is accelerating workplace changes, with many employers automating routine tasks.¹ This shift has created what some call an “experience paradox”, where new graduates are expected to demonstrate job-ready skills without access to entry-level opportunities

1 “Why Workers Must Upskill as AI Accelerates Workplace Changes.” World Economic Forum. (April 2025). <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/04/linkedin-strategic-upskilling-ai-workplace-changes/>

to gain them.² As the nature of work evolves, the ways we prepare for it must evolve too.

Ontario’s post-secondary institutions are supporting lifelong learners as they navigate these uncertainties. Through tools like micro-credentials, programming embedded with durable skills, and foresight integrated reflective practices, Ontario’s post-secondary institutes are helping students build flexible, resilient, and personalized career paths.

Where You Are and Where You’re Going

Whether entering post-secondary education for the first time, returning after time in the workforce, or engaging in continuous professional learning, each path is unique. Educa-

2 Larry English. “AI and the Vanishing Entry-Level Job: The Changing Future of Work.” Forbes. (August 12, 2025). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/larryenglish/2025/08/12/ai-and-the-vanishing-entry-level-job-the-changing-future-of-work/>

tion today is not a one-time event; it's a lifelong process of learning and relearning through moments of skill development (like upskilling or reskilling) that unfold over a lifetime.³

With more visible career options and diverse representation in roles that did not exist a decade ago, learners face not just the challenge of choosing a direction, but of imagining futures that have yet to take shape. This is where reflection and future thinking become essential.

Future thinking is the practice of envisioning how changes in the world today might shape tomorrow's possibilities and identifying the skills and values that align with those emerging contexts.⁴ It is not about predicting a single outcome but about cultivating awareness of change and adjusting one's path with curiosity and intention to align with what matters. The OECD recognizes this as a core competency for resilience in lifelong learners.⁵

Skills can be likened to building blocks, with each course, experience, or credential adding new blocks to one's collection. Reflection helps make these skills flexible and allows learners to ask: *"What do I value? What am I good at? What other skills should I add? What credentials show these skills?"*

Each imagined future helps clarify how existing skills might fit together in new ways⁶ and which ones are still needed. Modular courses

3 "Lifelong Learning 2021 Foresight Report." eCampusOntario. (December 2021). <https://ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/TAGGED-ENGLISH-Lifelong-Learning-20211208-1453.pdf>

4 "Strategic Foresight: Identifying Signals of Change Micro-Credential." eCampusOntario. (August 2025). https://learn.ecampusontario.ca/catalog?pagename=Identifying-Signals-of-Change-Micro-Credential&cm_locale=en

5 Roza Gyorfi and Shizuka Kato. "Key Findings from the OECD-EC Micro-credential Implementation Project." NA-KVIS. (November 2023). <https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Key-findings-from-the-OECD-EC-Micro-credential-Implementation-Project-Kato-Gyorfi.pdf>

6 Alexis Tennent. "Why is it so hard to think about the future?" (Sept. 13, 2021). <https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/3519>

es and micro-credentials support this process by rendering skills explicit and verifiable, giving learners more agency to shape their future.⁷

Micro-credentials and Modular Learning

Degree, diploma, and certificate programs can provide deep, experience-based knowledge that many professions are built on. However, for individuals seeking to highlight specific competencies or emerging strengths as they are developed, micro-credentials offer a complementary pathway.⁸

Micro-credentials are designed to be flexible, affordable, focused, and fast.⁹ They are often co-created with industry partners to reflect real workforce needs, and they can be completed online, on campus, or in the workplace.¹⁰

Ontario's post-secondary institutions are leading the way in this space. Through platforms like the Ontario Micro-credentials Portal, learners and employers can explore over 2,500 short-duration, skills-focused training courses and programs across in-demand sectors.¹¹ The Portal is for all types of users and provides personalized recommendations for individual skill development, sharing five-year job outlooks associated with programs to help learners make informed choices. It also offers pathways for businesses

7 Colin Sullivan. "Stand Out in the Job Market – the Benefits of Microcredentials [Part 2]." UMBC Mic'd Up Podcast. (October 2024). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cas3UMYvEp4>

8 "The future is micro: Digital learning and micro-credentials for education, retraining and lifelong learning." eCampusOntario. (2021). <https://www.ecampusontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TheFutureisMicro-final-ENG.pdf>

9 "Is the future micro? Unbundling learning for flexibility & access." Future Skills Centre. (March 4, 2021). <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/is-the-future-micro-unbundling-learning-for-flexibility-access/>

10 "Is the Future Micro? Unbundling Learning for Flexibility & Access." Future Skills Centre. (March 4, 2021). <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/is-the-future-micro-unbundling-learning-for-flexibility-access/>

11 "The Micro-credentials Portal: Unlock your potential. Elevate your career." eCampusOntario. (2025). <https://microlearnontario.ca/>

to connect directly with institutions hosting programs of interest or training skilled graduates. With over 65,000 users in 2024, the Micro-credentials Portal is a tool for charting continuous professional development – whether for oneself or one’s team – with confidence and clarity.

Durable Skills: The Foundation Beneath the Content

While technical knowledge and job-specific training are important, it’s often the durable skills, like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, networking, support system development, and adaptability, that enable individuals to continuously thrive in uncertain environments.

As AI reshapes the workforce, human-centric, durable skills are becoming even more essential. According to the Information and Communications Technology Council’s 2024 report, AI seems poised to automate specific job tasks, like writing emails, summarizing large texts, or analyzing data, rather than entire jobs.¹² This means that the ability to think critically, adapt, and collaborate will remain core to professional success, even as the tools used evolve. The World Economic Forum also emphasizes that while technical proficiency is important, skills such as leadership, negotiation, and emotional intelligence will remain central to career success.¹³ These competencies are developed across a range of academic and co-curricular experiences. Group projects, presentations, research assignments, and even navigating campus life all contribute to the development of durable skills. They help individuals bounce back from setbacks, navigate ambiguity, and keep learning.

12 “Automation and the future of tech careers in Canada: What students need to know.” Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC). (2024). <https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/automation-and-the-future-of-tech-careers-in-canada>

13 “Why Workers Must Upskill as AI Accelerates Workplace Changes.” World Economic Forum. (April 2025). <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/04/linkedin-strategic-upskilling-ai-workplace-changes/>

Recognizing and nurturing durable skills is essential to preparing students for the future, and post-secondary education helps learners develop these with exercises in reflection, work-integrated learning, and experiential education.

Micro-credentials as a Response to AI and the Vanishing Entry-Level Job

As AI is increasingly integrated into the workplace, activities that might be suitable for entry-level personnel may be automated. This can result in new hires needing to demonstrate job-ready skills without necessarily having access to the traditional pathways to gain them.¹⁴

Micro-credentials can offer a strategic solution to this challenge: they provide learners with evidence of the attainment of skills aligned with labour market needs. They can help bypass the experience paradox by rendering skills explicit and the achievement of outcomes visible. The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), for example, embeds information about assessments completed, skills acquired, and learning outcomes achieved within the blockchain-based, digital badges they issue for their micro-credential programming.¹⁵ These badges can be shared on LinkedIn or within resumes, allowing employers to quickly assess the relevance of a candidate’s competencies gained or validated through micro-credentials. This kind of transparency supports skills-based hiring and helps learners demonstrate readiness for roles that demand both technical proficiency and durable skills.

14 Larry English. “AI and the Vanishing Entry-Level Job: The Changing Future of Work.” Forbes. (August 12, 2025). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/larryenglish/2025/08/12/ai-and-the-vanishing-entry-level-job-the-changing-future-of-work/>

15 “Unlocking the Power of Digital Credentials with BC diploma.” eCampusOntario. (Jul. 22, 2025). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQiv_tgyT1c

In a labour market shaped by automation and rapid change, micro-credentials are not just tools for job readiness – they are instruments Ontario’s post-secondary institutions are using to adapt learning for the changing future.

Making Learning Intentional, Visible, and Articulable

Reflection and futures thinking are not one-time exercises; they’re lifelong practices. Just as skills accumulate like building blocks, the ability to reflect enables learners to reconfigure those blocks into new structures as goals evolve. The process is iterative: reflect-imagine-build, reflect-imagine-build...

Making learning visible is a key part of this process. Tools like e-portfolios, digital badges, and micro-credentials help showcase strengths to others. An additional, perhaps deeper, value lies in articulating the learning process to oneself: *“What skill did I show? Why did I do it that way? Where else could I use this skill?”* This kind of self-awareness supports alignment between learning experiences, personal values, and future aspirations.

Stackable micro-credentials support learner agency in this process by allowing individuals to showcase their skills as soon as they are acquired, rather than waiting for a terminal credential.¹⁶ This flexibility is particularly valuable in a labour market shaped by rapid change, where immediate proof of skills can open doors to new time-sensitive opportunities.

Future thinking adds another layer of intentionality. As learners reflect on their experience, interest and desired impact, they can also imagine the kinds of futures they want to help shape.

¹⁶ Kat Tancock. “Micro-Credentials in Canada: Is It Worth It to Upskill?” MoneySense. (August 26, 2024). <https://www.moneysense.ca/learn/micro-credentials-in-canada-is-it-worth-it-to-up-skill/>

These considerations guide decisions about how to intentionally rearrange one’s skills/blocks, what new skills to seek out, and how to communicate evolving strengths in ways that resonate with employers, collaborators, and communities.

Post-secondary Institutions as Lifelong Partners

Ontario’s post-secondary institutions do not need to be viewed as one-time service providers; they are lifelong learning partners. Whether through access to micro-credentials, experiences that nurture durable skills, return-to-learn pathways, or career development services, institutions are building ecosystems that support learners at every stage.

This shift reflects a broader transformation in the post-secondary landscape. Lifelong learning is no longer a peripheral concept; it is central to workforce resilience, civic participation, and personal fulfillment. The OECD Micro-credential Implementation Project highlights the value of institutional collaboration with employers and learning platforms to ensure micro-credentials are recognized, stackable, and aligned with evolving landscape skills needs.¹⁷ The Future Skills Centre’s national micro-credential project portfolio highlights how institutions are adapting to meet the needs of diverse learners, including those seeking flexible, hybrid, and workplace-integrated learning experiences.¹⁸ Ontario’s post-secondary institutions are at the forefront of this shift, championing flexible, student-centered approaches that

¹⁷ Roza Gyorfí and Shizuka Kato. “Key Findings from the OECD–EC Micro-credential Implementation Project.” NA-KVIS. (November 2023). <https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Key-findings-from-the-OECD-EC-Micro-credential-Implementation-Project-Kato-Gyorfí.pdf><https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Key-findings-from-the-OECD-EC-Micro-credential-Implementation-Project-Kato-Gyorfí.pdf>

¹⁸ “Microcredentials Project.” Future Skills Centre. (March 2025). <https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/microcredentials/>

recognize the realities of modern life and work, and the need to build and validate skills over time.

The future of work will continue to shift, and learners are not expected to have all the answers from the outset. But by embracing the support of institutions committed to lifelong learning, exploring micro-credentials, reflecting on durable skills, and engaging in futures thinking, learners can build career paths that not only respond to change but shape it.



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