

Federal Policy Changes Affecting International Students, Fall 2024

Date: October 25, 2024, *updated November 20

Overview of Issue

On September 18th, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced several changes to the International Student Program (ISP) which will impact post-secondary institutions and students. Some specific policy changes announced by the federal government that will most directly impact Red Deer Polytechnic are:

- A 10 percent reduction in the number of approved Study Permits for 2025 from 2024 levels.
- Requiring graduates from public colleges and polytechnics to graduate from fields of study linked to occupations facing long-term shortages -- according to *national* labour market needs -- to qualify for a Post Graduation Work Permit (PGWP). Note: Graduates from universities have no requirement to demonstrate a correlation between their program and labour market need to be eligible for a PGWP.

A student's ability to receive a Post Graduate Work Permit is what makes studying at Red Deer Polytechnic attractive to international learners.

By limiting eligibility to attain a PGWP to only certain programs, we anticipate a substantial drop in the number of *new* international learners who will study at RDP **starting in the Fall of 2025**.

Note: the above-mentioned policy changes do not apply to international students already enrolled nor those who have applied for a study permit before November 1, 2024 (will affect enrolments for Fall 2025)

Anticipated Impact at Red Deer Polytechnic

At this time, PGWP-eligible programs have been identified from within five fields of study: agriculture & agri-food, healthcare, science-technology-engineering-mathematics (STEM), trade, and transport. Again, this is based on national labour market needs, not provincial or locally identified workforce needs.

At RDP, this means 17 programs with international students currently enrolled will still be eligible. However, 19 programs we currently offer to international students will no longer be eligible for a PGWP.

Of those 19, we expect our most impacted programs to be the Business Diploma, Early Learning and Child Care programs*, and University Arts Diploma.

Based on the most recent enrolment data (Fall 2024), in Fall 2025 we estimate the impact on our international enrolment to be:

- An estimated 190 international learners (Full course-load equivalents) will enroll in PGWP-eligible programs at RDP
- The estimated **drop in overall new international students will be approximately 450***. This represents those students whose preferred program of study will no longer PGWP-eligible
- This net-negative impact on Fall 2025 international enrollment at RDP will affect planning for our 2025/26 and 2026/27 budgets.

We currently estimate a negative impact of ~ \$8 million* in revenue to our 2025/26 budget.

Note: Fall 2024 saw RDP's largest intake of new international learners: over 600. The changes to PGWP eligibility will see us return to numbers more consistent with 2022/23 - 2023/24 international enrolments.

Contingency Planning

To mitigate enrolment and financial impacts, RDP is taking the following actions:

- Increase Program Capacity and number of intakes per year in eligible programs where possible
- Adjust program curriculum for those programs that are *close* to eligibility but are currently excluded.
- Consider program-sharing opportunities with other post-secondary institutions
- The Vice President Academic & Student Experience is leading the development of a Rapid Program Development Protocol to quickly bring online new programs within the five eligible program areas

Through these actions, **RDP anticipates we can reverse the net-negative enrolment and associated revenue gap by 40 per cent.** This would see us recover approximately 180 of the 450 international students we would otherwise lose due to these policy changes, and recoup ~ \$3.4 million of revenue.

* As of November 20, IRCC has indicated that Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) programs initially deemed ineligible for a PGWP may be added to the list of eligible programs. RDP offers two ELCC programs, which, if eligible for PGWP, will reduce RDP's projected impacted students from ~450 to 400 and will also result in a reduced revenue impact of ~ \$1 million

Key Messages and Advocacy

In alignment with the Canadian college and polytechnic sector, Red Deer Polytechnic is sending the following messages to federal officials, the provincial government, and our industry partners:

We understand and support the need for immigration to Canada to be done in a thoughtful, sustainable, and strategic way, including the way international students are recruited. A small number of Canadian institutions have behaved irresponsibly in growing their international student enrolment at a rapid and untenable rate. However, Red Deer Polytechnic has taken a measured and targeted approach that has resulted in a viable balance of domestic to international students, at about 10 to 1.

The Federal government is trying to force colleges and polytechnics to align programming with Ottawa's views on the labour market. Not only does this overstep and intrude on provinces' constitutional responsibility for education, but it will also imperil colleges and polytechnics' ability to develop and run programs that respond to the needs of local employers.

This decision impacts domestic students too. By dictating post-secondary program eligibility based on Ottawa's view of workforce needs, Polytechnics like RDP will be slower to develop new in-demand programs and may be forced to cut program options for domestic students that are desperately needed but no longer fiscally viable without the enrolment of international students.

Devaluing college and polytechnic credentials is an elitist and unacceptable position - one the federal government has made without evidence. IRCC must treat identical credentials -- be they offered at a public college, polytechnic, or university -- in an identical manner. Since bachelor's degree programs at universities are PGWP-eligible, equivalent degrees from polytechnics and colleges must also be eligible.

Unfortunately, the federal government has introduced a flawed policy in reaction to political pressure. IRCC must now work directly with institutions and provinces to develop a labour market alignment strategy for the PGWP that considers regional needs, not a one-size-fits-all national approach. By limiting post-graduate work permits to those studying in programs *identified by Ottawa* that align with *national* labour market needs, the Government of Canada has seriously damaged colleges and polytechnics' ability to deliver for their respective provincial economies, local communities, employer partners, and students.