# Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

## Study on the International Student Program and Study Permits

**October 2025**

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is the national voice of over 75,000 academic and professional staff at more than 130 universities and colleges across Canada. We defend academic freedom, advance equity, and advocate for high-quality, accessible and affordable post-secondary education.

International students are integral to Canada's post-secondary system. They enrich classrooms, contribute to cutting-edge research, and strengthen communities. Many also become permanent residents, enhancing our society and economy.

The federal cap on international student visas and delays in study permit processing have placed financial strain on an already struggling system. Institutions have lost revenue, hundreds of programs have been cancelled or suspended, and more than 13,000 jobs have been cut across the country, impacting the quality of education for all.

The visa cap has proven to be a blunt mechanism that has indiscriminately penalized responsible institutions alongside bad actors while failing to address the root problem: decades of chronic public underfunding. The result is instability, over-reliance on international student tuition fees, and vulnerability to sudden geo-political changes and domestic policy shifts. Unlike health care, childcare, housing or public transit, post-secondary education has no multilateral framework, national strategy, or dedicated provincial and territorial transfer.

Canada must replace ad hoc fixes with a principled, long-term approach that recognizes post-secondary education as core infrastructure, and international students as partners in education and research—not as revenue sources.

Frequent, one-size-fits-all policy changes create uncertainty for students and institutions. Caps deter applications and erode Canada's reputation as a welcoming, world-class education and research destination.

The cap on graduate students and processing delays has stalled research, leading to missed opportunities and lost talent and should be immediately withdrawn.

## Principles for reform

Canada's international education policy should be guided by the principles set out in the Accord on the Internationalization of Education.[1]

- Educational integrity: Place learning and research, not profit, at the centre of international student recruitment
- Equity and access: Value international students' knowledge as an asset and ensure affordability and support
- Reciprocity and sustainability: Build partnerships based on fairness, accountability and long-term benefit
- Social justice: Avoid exploitative or neo-colonial practices and connect global education policy to equity at home

## Recommendations

To achieve the below, federal coordination across departments is needed to:

- ensure immigration policy interacts coherently with education, innovation and workforce strategies
- strengthen intergovernmental coordination
- provide long-term stability in a fragmented policy area

### 1. Work with the provinces to provide stable public funding

Reliance on international tuition is unsustainable and harmful. Federal and provincial governments must work together to increase core public investment in post-secondary education.

### 2. Renew Canada's International Education Strategy

Replace ad hoc measures with a coherent, education-first framework that values international students for their knowledge and innovation, not as fiscal stopgaps.

### 3. Ensure transparency in visa processing

Expedite visa processing. Collect and publish regional approval and refusal data. Eliminate systemic inequities and bias from the system.

### 4. Regulate recruitment and expand supports

Accredit recruitment agents to prevent exploitation. Fund housing, settlement and mental health services so international students can thrive.

### 5. Strengthen employment and residency pathways

Create fair, transparent and timely routes to work opportunities and improve pathways to permanent residency for international students.

## Conclusion

The recent student visa cap has revealed the fragility of our post-secondary funding model and the absence of a coherent national plan to sustain public universities and colleges. International students enrich our classrooms, drive our research and build our communities, and the international student program should recognize this, while eliminating exploitative actors.

Canada must act now to stabilize and strengthen public post-secondary education—for international and domestic students, for communities, and for the future of the country.

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## Endnote

1 Association of Canadian Deans of Education. (2016). *Accord on the internationalization of education*. Vancouver, BC: ACDE. Retrieved from https://www.acde-acde.ca (originally published 2014)