Policy Instability and Misinformation

Part 2 of the Trust Through Information series

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Policy Instability Leads to Misinformation

Introduction

This paper is part of a research series designed to support cross-sector dialogue on strengthening integrity and accountability in the ecosystem of information provided to international students.

The research reveals critical shortcomings in the information that reaches international students. Official sources, defined as government (federal, provincial, and territorial) and post-secondary institutions (PSIs), provide inadequate guidance, leaving students reliant on intermediaries and content creators. Artificial intelligence technologies draw from vast bodies of outdated or inaccurate information. These dynamics enable widespread circulation of misinformation, creating a damaging gap between what students expect, what they experience in Canada, and what policymakers intend. The consequences include harm to international students, erosion of global trust in Canada's post-secondary education sector, and reduced policy effectiveness.

The series consists of an introductory paper, *Trust Through Information*, that summarizes all the challenges our research uncovered, followed by individual reports that go into depth on each one.

Each paper in the series elaborates on a single systemic challenge WES has identified, presenting the current state, desired outcomes, accountability mechanisms, and examples of good practice.

To read the full series, please visit the **WES website**.

Frequent changes to policies weaken the information ecosystem

Over the past two years, Canada has introduced over 20 changes to immigration and visa policies that affect international students. These changes have significant implications, both for prospective international students and for those who are already in the country.[1]

A recent WES study, drawing on focus groups with 80 international students, found that international students extensively research immigration options even before they choose to study in Canada, and they stay closely attuned to policy developments throughout their time in the country.

1 https://www.wes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/0225-spr-international-student-policy-brief-digital.pdf

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However, the rapid pace of policy change has resulted in students' confusion,[2] and it undermines students' ability to make informed decisions about their academic and professional future. The speed and frequency of policy changes outpace the capacity of information providers—both governmental and non-governmental—to update their content, leaving international students to navigate an information ecosystem where even recently published content may be obsolete. International students who were in Canada in fall 2023, when the first reforms were announced, now have to adapt to the reality that the work and immigration opportunities advertised to them are no longer available.

Key challenges that international students face:

- **No single source provides clear, reliable, up-to-date guidance.** International students must triangulate across an array of information sources, with many describing the effort required to find and verify accurate information as "overwhelming" and feeling like "more than a full-time job."[3]
- **Rules may change overnight.** With frequent reforms, international students need to constantly re-confirm information to ensure its accuracy. The recent policy turmoil was made even more disruptive because the policy changes were announced in a way that was markedly inconsistent. Some changes were communicated beforehand, while others were effective immediately. Some were announced individually, while others were bundled with temporary resident policy reforms. On a few occasions, eligibility rules were changed on the relevant Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) page without an accompanying announcement or news release (see Chart 1 and Figure 1).

2 https://thepienews.com/ircc-clarifies-pgwp-grandfathering-policy-sector-confusion
3 https://knowledge.wes.org/canada-report-insights-from-international-students-in-canada.html

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Chart 1: Changes to International Student Work Rules and Post-Graduate Work Permits, October 2023–July 2025

Change / Policy Item	Date Announced	Implementation / Effective Date	Link to Announcement
Changes to Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) Program	October 27, 2023	No specific implementation date	IRCC news release "Changes to International Student Program aim to protect students"
Extension of waiver on 20-hour-per-week off-campus work limit	December 7, 2023	Waiver extended to April 30, 2024, for students in Canada and applicants who applied for a study permit on or before December 7, 2023	IRCC news release "Revised requirements to better protect international students"
Students in public-private curriculum licensing programs no longer eligible for PGWP	January 22, 2024	No later than September 1, 2024 Effective date later revised to May 15, 2024	IRCC news release "Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for2024" and later PGWP partnership update notice
3-year open work permit for graduates of master's degree programs	January 22, 2024	"Soon"	IRCC news release "Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024"
Revisions to effective date for changes to PGWP eligibility	March 22, 2024	Study permits or study permit approvals on or after May 15, 2024	IRCC notice "Update on public-private college partnership programs for international students"
Changes to off-campus work hours	April 29, 2024	Temporary waiver to limits on off-campus work end April 30, 2024 Permission to work 24 hours off campus to come in fall	IRCC news release "Canada to introduce new rules around off-campus work hours for international students"

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Change / Policy Item	Date Announced	Implementation / Effective Date	Link to Announcement
Changes to PGWP eligibility[4]	September 18, 2024	Language requirement implemented November 1, 2024 No specific implementation date announced for field of study requirements; see next line for actual implementation date	IRCC news release "Strengthening temporary residence programs for sustainable volumes"
Publication of list of programs associated with eligibility for PGWP[5]	No announcement; IRCC page updated around October 7, 2024	November 1, 2024	No news release
Changes to off-campus work hours	November 15, 2024	November 8, 2024[6] Note: Change announced after implementation date	IRCC news release "New International Student Program regulations take effect"

4 Record of policy change found at https://www.cicnews.com/2025/03/canada-removes-pgwp-field-of-study-requirements-for-graduates-of-college-bachelors-programs-0353005.html
5 Record of policy change found at https://thepienews.com/canadas-pgwp-eligibility-criteria-announced
6 Implementation date taken from updates to the IRCC webpage, found at https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/work-off-campus.html

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Figure 1

Update on field of study requirement for post-graduation work permits

We updated eligible CIP codes on July 4, 2025.

On July 4, 2025 we updated the list of eligible CIP codes to add back fields of study that were removed on June 25, 2025.

Those fields of study that were removed on June 25, 2025, will stay eligible until the list is next updated. If you submitted your study permit application in one of them between June 25 and July 4, you'll still meet the field of study requirement when you graduate.

Eligible fields of study are linked to certain jobs in long-term shortage in Canada and can change based on the needs of the Canadian labour market.

Check below to see if your program's CIP code meets the field of study requirement.

Example of IRCC updates occurring in quick succession. The list of Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes that are associated with eligibility for a PGWP was revised on June 25, 2025, and again the following week on July 4, 2025.

- **Outdated information is the most common type of misinformation.** Many sources outline eligibility requirements that are outdated. Moreover, they do not include disclaimers that requirements are subject to change or links to official IRCC resources.

Figure 2

How Much Proof of Funds Do I need to Study in Canada?

To study in Canada, you must demonstrate sufficient funds to cover your tuition fees and living expenses. As of January 1, 2024, the minimum cost-of-living financial requirement has increased to $20,635 CAD per year for a single student, excluding tuition. This amount is adjusted annually based on Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off (LICO). If you have accompanying family members, additional funds are required.

Example of outdated online information about proof of fund requirements, posted on the website of a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant.

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Figure 3

Student Direct Stream

This faster processing option is available for some applicants who meet specific criteria, like the following:

1. Be a citizen and resident of one of the 14 participating countries.
2. Pay your tuition fee in full.
3. Have a Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) in Canada.
4. Get a medical exam before applying (if required).
5. Get a police certificate before applying (if required).
6. Provide your most recent secondary or post-secondary school transcript(s).
7. Achieve the minimum score required for one of the qualifying language tests.

Example of a post-secondary institution providing instructions for a process that was cancelled over a year ago.

- **Policy changes may not be apparent on IRCC channels.** Not every change to international student policy appears in the IRCC Newsroom or the list of Notices (see Chart 1 above). Outdated information may remain on the IRCC website and therefore findable by web search, even if the homepage no longer links to that information (see Figure 4).

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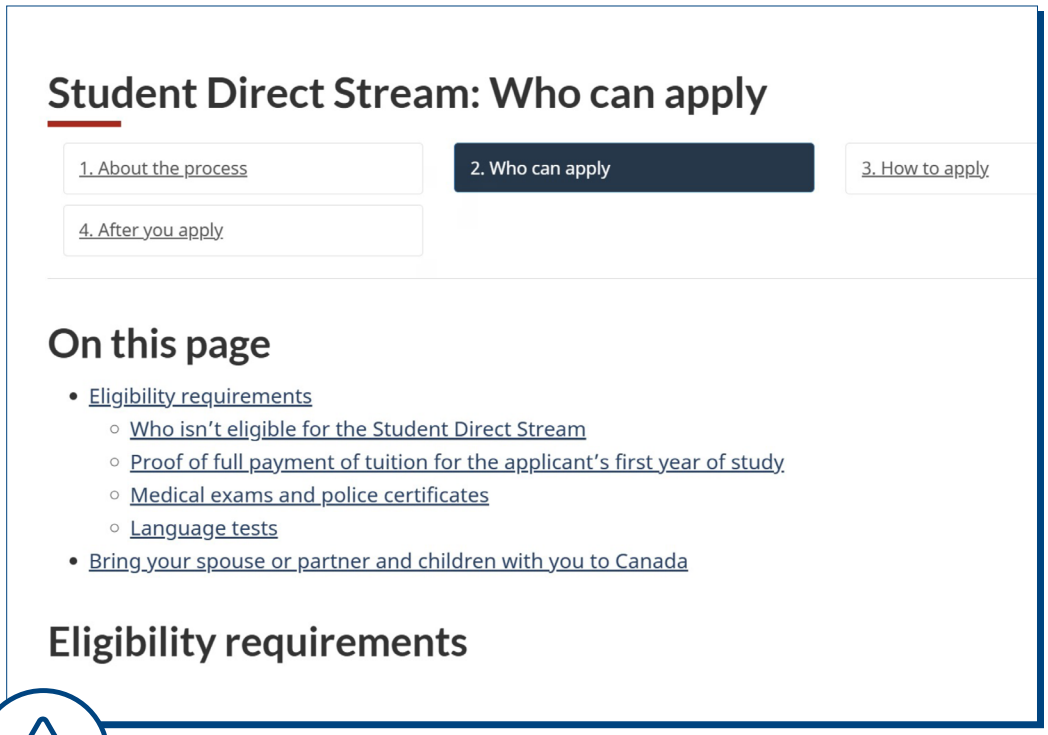
Figure 4



Web search for Student Direct Stream (SDS) produces instructions from a government website on how to apply, more than a year after SDS was closed.

- **Ineligibility for federally funded settlement services and lack of plain language guidance from government.** The absence of official support, combined with challenges using information on government websites, leaves international students reliant on other, unofficial sources, such as CIC News, content creators, or intermediaries like education agents and immigration consultants, to explain the rules.[7]
- **Authoritative-looking guidance may be out of date.** Numerous websites reproduce content on immigration and visa rules, such as a Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) points table or a summary of recent policy changes (see Figures 5 and 6). This content gives the sites a sophisticated, professional look and could elicit trust. However, since such detailed features may not be regularly reviewed and revised, they often contain outdated information.

7 https://knowledge.wes.org/canada-report-insights-from-international-students-in-canada.html

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Figure 5

Bonus Points

As prescribed under Canada PR Point System, there are bonus points for:

Job Offer from Canadian Employer	600
Provincial Nominee Program Scheme	600

Webpage advertising intermediary services to prospective international students has information about extra points in the CRS that went out of date more than six months ago.

Figure 6

Changes to IRCC Processes

This information was last updated on Monday, October 28, 2024. Please refer directly to the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website for the most up-to-date information.

Example of a post-secondary institution that posted a summary of changes to immigration rules. The summary has not been updated in over a year. In this example, the post-secondary institution did include the date the page was updated and a recommendation to verify the information with IRCC.

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Recommendations for Discussion

A predictable policy environment enables post-secondary institutions and international students to make informed decisions, increases the capacity of policymakers to achieve policy goals, and enhances Canada's competitiveness in attracting international students. Creating a more navigable policy landscape for international students requires both greater policy stability and improved, consistent communication when changes do occur. When policy changes are necessary, information across all channels must be updated in real time to prevent students from accessing outdated guidance.

We offer these proposed outcomes and actions as a starting place for cross-sectoral conversation:

Proposed Outcomes

- Immigration policy, including international student policy, is aligned with long-term objectives related to population growth, labour market needs, infrastructure priorities, and regional development goals.
- International students can expect consistency in their rights and opportunities, from when they are recruited to when they complete their study or post-study work.
- International students are able to easily find and understand information about policy changes when they occur.
- A centralized platform provides all information and updates about immigration and visa rules, and official sources link to that platform rather than publishing their own information.

Proposed Actions

Proposed short-term actions to improve communication

- Federal and provincial government collaborate to establish a whole-of-government approach to setting shared long-term objectives related to population growth, labour market needs, infrastructure priorities, and regional development goals and determine what role immigration should play in meeting these objectives.
- Government rigorously maintains the platform to ensure that information remains accurate.
- IRCC schedules international student policy announcements with revisions to IRCC web content so that all government channels are communicating the same message at the same time.
- Changes to study permit or PGWP eligibility requirements are coupled with a formal announcement from the IRCC Newsroom.

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- Government provides standardized update notifications that non-governmental information providers can easily access and implement, with implementation dates that allow adequate time for other information providers to update their content.
- Post-secondary institutions and other non-governmental sources direct international students to read about immigration and visa rules on the centralized platform rather than reproducing the rules on their own websites.
- When post-secondary and other non-governmental sources create their own content on immigration rules, they state when the information was updated and direct international students to verify content on the IRCC website or centralized government platform.

Proposed systemic changes to create a more predictable environment

- Federal government sets a long-term vision for the future of Canada, including the role that immigration and post-secondary education can play to achieve that long-term vision, thereby reducing the frequency of policy reforms.
- Federal government draws upon that vision in crafting immigration policies, including those that affect international students.
- Federal government creates a stable pathway to permanent residence for international students that enables them to assess their circumstances against clear eligibility criteria that remains consistent over time.
- IRCC establishes clear timelines (for example, within 48 hours) for when web content will be updated following policy announcements.

A longer-term approach is in line with recommendations by thought leaders who participated in WES roundtables on Canada's immigration system.[8]

Proposed Accountability Mechanisms

- Federal government seeks regular feedback from post-secondary institutions, settlement services, and international students to ensure that a centralized international student information platform covers all necessary topics in clear language.
- International students are regularly asked for feedback on their ability to keep track of and understand policy changes.
- Federal government tracks and publicly reports metrics on international students' information-seeking behaviours and satisfaction with immigration and visa information.
- Federal and provincial government requires post-secondary institutions and education agents to include date stamps, regular review cycles, and links to government websites when providing immigration and visa information.

8 https://knowledge.wes.org/rs/317-CTM-316/images/wes-canada-report-renewed-vision-of-immigration-wes-roundtable-report.pdf

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Examples of Good Practice in Information Updates

Platform Dedicated to Policy Announcements

Figure 7

Australia offers a dedicated government website that consolidates news and announcements about studying in Australia. Students can subscribe to a newsletter that delivers updates directly to them.

Figure 8

We've seen major changes to Canada's international student program in 2024.

Major changes include

- Updated eligibility criteria for post-graduation work permits (PGWPs);
- Updated cost of living requirement;
- Closure of the Student Direct Stream and the Nigeria Student Express;
- Caps on study permit applications;
- Stricter rules for study permits;
- New rules regarding off-campus work hours for international students; and
- Updated regulations for open work permits for spouses.

Discover your options to study in Canada

Example of how to summarize policy changes in clear, plain language. For the full text, see the CIC News article.

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Drawing attention to policy changes

Figure 9

How to change your school as a post-secondary student

Starting November 8, 2024, you need to get a new study permit by applying to extend your current one to change your school at the post-secondary level.

Example of a visual element on the IRCC website that draws attention to information that may have changed.

Tools to encourage verification of information

Figure 10

Liability Disclaimer:

*The immigration information on this webpage has been reviewed by [redacted] licensed Immigration Team in good standing with the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants (**CICC**). Please note that this is not a legal document, and information may change at any time without notice. For the most updated information, please always refer to the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) **website**.*

Sample disclaimer by a post-secondary institution that encourages international students to verify information with the source.

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