

September 25, 2024

The Honourable Marc Miller, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees &
Citizenship Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Sent by email: Marc.Miller@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister:

Re: Recent Federal Announcements on International Student Reforms

On behalf of the Vancouver Community College (VCC) Board of Directors, we are writing to express our deep concern and disappointment with the recent federal announcement regarding further restrictions on international student study permits and changes to post-graduate work permit eligibility. These federal reforms will have a devastating effect on Canada's public colleges and institutions, creating a detrimental effect on the Canadian economy and the communities we serve. We urge the federal government to collaborate with public colleges to address these concerns and find solutions that recognize all degrees and diplomas for post-graduate work permits — giving colleges and universities equal qualifying criteria. We ask that provincial labour market needs are considered in consultation with provinces.

Canada's publicly funded colleges and institutes prepare nearly 800,000 learners with more than 10,000 programs across all sectors and adds over \$190B to Canada's economy each year. These new reforms disproportionately affect public colleges and institutions due to restricting the eligibility for post-graduate work permits for international students to defined labour market needs categories in comparison to post-graduate work permit eligibility for universities being open to Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels. Allowing eligibility of spousal post-graduate work permits only for graduate students in programs longer than 16 months and reserving 12% of provincial attestation letters for graduate program applicants exclusively, is clearly favouring universities and is detrimental to the pivotal role public colleges and institutions play.

The restrictions on international enrolment for 2025 and 2026, have already led to serious financial consequences across Canada's public colleges and institutes. The broader messaging and public relations surrounding these reforms from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

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have already impacted international student numbers, and prospective students are hesitant to apply given the reduced provincial allocations, and the uncertainty surrounding their ability to work post-graduation. This, in turn, has negative effects not only on international students but also on domestic students limiting the programs that can be offered.

VCC and other public colleges are integral to ensuring that our workforce is prepared to meet the evolving needs of the economy, and these reforms threaten to undermine that vital contribution. The shortage of qualified workers in healthcare and skilled trades is well documented, with Canada needing to fill over 700,000 skilled trade positions by 2028. Restricting international student enrolment and linking post-graduate work eligibility to national labour market targets creates a disconnect between institutional capacity and the actual needs of local businesses and industries. We have worked closely with industry and government to align academic programming with the estimated 85,000 expected job openings in B.C. in the next five years. By introducing these reforms, government risks creating gaps in essential industries that rely on a steady stream of qualified graduates. Meeting the needs of the regional economy will support communities across the country, but federal and provincial objectives must be addressed harmoniously.

To mitigate the harmful effects of these reforms, we call on the federal government to engage with provincial governments and educational leaders. We ask you to re-balance the policies that currently favour universities over colleges by recognizing all degrees and diplomas for post-graduate work permits, which match the labour market needs in consultation with the provinces. Our collective future depends on our ability to work in partnership to develop policies that empower institutions, like VCC, so we may continue to meet the demands for a skilled workforce and sustain local economies.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Vancouver Community College Board of Directors,



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Chair, Board of Directors
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cc.

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