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# International Graduates at Fleming College: Exploring Career Intentions and Employment Outcomes

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College

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The international education sector in Ontario is facing tremendous pressure and uncertainty right now. In response to accelerated growth in international enrollment and reports of graduates struggling to find work, the Government of Canada announced a series of policy changes starting in January 2024, including an intake cap on international student permit applications and changes to the eligibility criteria for the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) program (Crawley & Ouellet, 2024; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2024a; Minks & Shank, 2025). While these changes have had an immediate impact on international student enrollment, it's not yet clear what the consequences will be for the next cohort of international graduates.

To begin to understand how students will be affected, this data brief examines the employment aspirations and outcomes of international students at Fleming College. As part of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario's (HEQCO) Consortium on International Education, Fleming College surveyed international students (fall 2023–fall 2024) and used alumni records (2018–2022) to investigate their employment interests and outcomes. This case study discusses the influence of the PGWP program on international students' decision-making processes, and its potential to create more direct pathways for addressing labour market shortages.

## Background

### Fleming College

Established in 1967, Fleming College is a mid-sized college with three campuses across Central Ontario (Fleming College, 2021). Its main campus is located in the city of Peterborough, with smaller campuses in Lindsay and Haliburton (Colleges and Institutes Canada [CICan], n.d.). Until 2024, Fleming also offered programs through a public college–private partnership (PCPP) campus in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> In the 2023-24 school year, Fleming had a student population of over 10,000, approximately 70% of which were international students (Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security [MCURES], 2025c). At that time, the college offered over one hundred full-time

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<sup>1</sup> The Fleming College PCPP, which was active during the study and attracted many international students, stopped accepting new applications following the federal immigration policy changes introduced in 2024.



programs across seven areas of study, with particular emphasis on environmental studies and sustainability (MCURES, 2025b).

## The PGWP Program

The PGWP is an important aspect of Canadian immigration policy. PGWP eligibility is of strong interest to international students; according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) International Student Survey, in 2023 70% of international students intended to apply for a PGWP and 57% intended to apply for permanent residency (CBIE, 2024). For many of these students, studying in Canada is not only an opportunity to obtain an education, but an opportunity to immigrate here. For this reason, PGWP eligibility is highly influential in steering international student applications.

The PGWP allows international graduates of Canadian public, and in some cases private, institutions the ability to work in Canada for up to three years after graduation. Many international students who are looking to remain in Canada pursue a PGWP to fulfil the work-experience component of the IRCC scoring rubric for the three main express-entry immigration routes: the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the Federal Skilled Trades Program and Canadian Experience Class (IRCC, 2024b).

Prior to September 2024, all graduates of Canadian institutions were eligible for a PGWP. In September 2024, IRCC changed their policy around PGWPs, limiting eligibility to graduates of specific credentials and fields of study (IRCC, 2024a). Eligible programs were selected to support industries that are experiencing labour shortages, such as healthcare and transport, and were released in a list on the Government of Canada website (Singh, 2025). Throughout 2024 and 2025, several changes were made to this eligibility list, including the removal of 178 programs on June 25, 2025, and the reinstatement of those programs on July 4, 2025. The current list will remain in effect until 2026, after which it may be revised (IRCC, 2025). Ongoing and anticipated changes to the PGWP eligibility list make it difficult both for international students to plan their future in Canada and for institutions to manage program offerings and enrollment planning.

From a policy perspective, the PGWP eligibility list is an important element of the government's immigration and labour force goals and is being used to shape



international students' academic plans, hoping that they will stay and work in labour-short industries. In this way, international student and government goals are intertwined.

## Research Questions and Methodology

This data brief, a collaboration between Fleming College and HEQCO, addresses the following questions:

1. What were international students' employment expectations and intentions when they chose a program at Fleming College?
2. How closely was international graduate employment related to program choices and expectations?

To answer the first question, Fleming administered an online survey that captured international students' post-graduation employment intentions.<sup>2</sup> Data was collected between fall 2023 and fall 2024. This approach allowed the research team to gather direct information from respondents regarding their study and employment plans. A total of 3,919 international students<sup>3</sup> at Fleming College<sup>4</sup> responded to a 23-item questionnaire.

To answer the second question regarding how closely international graduates' employment aligned with program choices and expectations, two datasets — LiveAlumni and MCURES' College Graduate Outcomes Survey (COGS) — were used. The LiveAlumni<sup>5</sup> database, which was accessed through Fleming College's Office of Advancement and Alumni Relations, tracks graduates' employment status. LiveAlumni provided researchers with 1,010 Fleming College international graduate alumni records from 2018 to 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> All full-time, upper-semester international students enrolled at Fleming College's Toronto (PCPP), Lindsay and Peterborough campuses were invited to participate.

<sup>3</sup> The survey had a 27% response rate.

<sup>4</sup> This total includes both main- and PCPP-campus students.

<sup>5</sup> LiveAlumni is a global software solution that tracks alumni activity across public websites and links the data to postsecondary programming.



A total of 1,810 international graduates at Fleming College completed the MCURES COGS survey six months after graduation between 2018-19 and 2021-22. The COGS survey asks students about their experience finding work and includes international graduates who returned to their home countries as well as those who remained in Canada (MCURES, 2025a).

## Findings and Discussion

### Anticipated Employment Outcomes

Results of the Fleming College international student survey suggest that the majority of students were looking ahead to their future careers when choosing Ontario for their studies. When asked about their decision process, 36% of respondents selected 'job opportunities' as one of the reasons that they chose to study in Ontario over other provinces. The only more frequent response (at 39% of respondents) was 'I have friends in Ontario.' This speaks to students' mindsets when they begin college — they are planning for a future in Ontario, based both on community and career aspirations.

Consistent with prior research on international college students (CBIE, 2024), 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they chose their program of study because it would prepare them for obtaining a PGWP, underscoring the widespread importance of PGWP access in international students' decision making. Under the recent PGWP policy changes, there will be fewer program options for international students, which may encourage them to study in another country to pursue the program of their choice. Ontario is already seeing a reduction in study permit applications as the new policies have created uncertainty among potential students (Rushowy, 2025).

The majority of respondents also considered their job prospects when applying. Eighty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they chose their program because it would prepare them for a job related to their field of study. This aligns with IRCC's goals to attract international talent to grow our economy and lead students toward a successful career (Wong, 2025; EduCanada, 2025). Additional data related to graduate employment outcomes help clarify whether students' and IRCC's goals are being achieved.



## Actual Employment Outcomes

COGS' data show that 82% of Fleming College international students between 2018-19 and 2021-22 were actively employed after graduation.<sup>6</sup> Only 10% of graduates were unemployed six months after graduation. LiveAlumni data showed similarly strong outcomes for Fleming alumni: 98% of international alumni in the LiveAlumni sample found employment in provinces across Canada, with 64% securing employment in Ontario specifically. These results reflect student intentions to work and stay in the country and the province that were captured in the Fleming College student survey.

A closer look at working graduates' fields of employment through the COGS data revealed that only 15% of respondents were working in their field of study six months after graduation. However, this overall figure masks important differences. Graduates from certain fields of study had better alignment with their employment than others. Seventy-eight percent of working graduates who studied education, law and social, community and government services were working in a field related to their program. Of working graduates who studied in health programs, 56% were working in a field related to their program. Together, graduates in these fields represented over half of Fleming graduates employed in their field of study.

## Conclusion

This study captures insight into international students' expectations when choosing to study in Ontario and their post-graduation employment outcomes in the province. Many international students enrolled at Fleming College expecting that their programs would prepare them for employment in Ontario, with PGWP eligibility playing a major role in their decision-making process. While most students captured through LiveAlumni and COGS data achieved their goal of securing a job in Ontario, they often found employment in roles unrelated to their field of study. Strategic restrictions on PGWP eligibility may help ensure that international graduates can secure employment in their chosen fields and help fill current labour market gaps. But further research on

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<sup>6</sup> Of survey respondents (n=1,810), 47% indicated that they pursued further studies. Fifty-two percent were available for work (n=932).



graduates' outcomes under the new IRCC policies is needed. International graduates' transitions into the labour market are complex and shaped by a range of interrelated factors, including professional intentions, family considerations, lifestyle preferences, work experiences gained during studies, cultural expectations, job opportunities and the availability of work permits, among others (Han, Gulanowski & Sears, 2022).

Data presented in this brief offer a benchmark for alignment between student intentions, programs of study and employment outcomes and raise additional questions for further study, including: To what extent will new PGWP restrictions shape students' intentions to work in Canada following graduation? Are graduates seeking employment in their specific fields? Are they developing skills that prepare them for employment across a range of job types and fields? Are they pursuing linear employment pathways — entering jobs in their field of studies and pursuing advancement — or are they starting in jobs outside their field in order to gain experience? How do graduate outcomes differ by region and employment sector? More detailed data is needed to answer these questions.

Regardless of why international students come to Canada, fostering long-term career success is essential to ensuring graduates have the skills to thrive in Ontario and beyond. Governments and institutions can collaborate to provide high-quality, relevant education, especially amid shifting policies and financial constraints. This will help graduates secure employment, strengthen Ontario's global reputation and sustain international education as a vital pathway for skilled immigration.



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