

# Work visa changes help international students

By Edward C. Corrigan

On April 21, Diane Finley, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, announced sweeping changes to work permits for international students who graduate from eligible programs at qualifying Canadian post-secondary institutions. The change is intended to help attract foreign students to Canada.

Effective immediately qualified international students are able to obtain an open work permit under the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program.

This new program has no restrictions on the type of employment and no requirement for a job offer. The duration of the permit has been extended to three years across the country. Previously, the program only allowed international students to work for one or two years, depending on location. Students studying in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver were only eligible for a one-year work permit.

“The Government of Canada wants more foreign students to choose Canada and we want to help them succeed,” said Finley. “Open and longer work permits provide international students with more opportunities for Canadian work experience and skills development. This will, in turn, help make Canada a destination of choice, and help us keep international students already studying in Canada.”

The increased flexibility will benefit graduates and employers alike as the program will help international students get important work experience and at the same time respond to Canada’s labour market needs. The Citizenship and Immigration media release says “Canada will benefit in the long run as the professional experience gained will help graduates meet the requirements to stay permanently in Canada.”

“As we move toward the implementation of the Canadian Experience Class, these changes will help create a pool of individuals who, with work experience, will find it easier to apply to immigrate to Canada,” Finley said. She added “Our ability to

retain international graduates with Canadian qualifications, work experience and familiarity with Canadian society, will help increase our competitiveness and benefit Canada as a whole.”

The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program allows students who have graduated from an eligible program at a post-secondary institution to gain valuable Canadian work experience. Preliminary data indicate that 63,673 international students came to Canada in 2007, a 4.6-per-cent increase over the previous year.

To qualify for immigration under the Canadian Experience Class a minimum of one year of work experience in managerial, professional or technical positions is required. Employment positions that will qualify are those at level 0, A or B under the National Occupational Classification system.

To qualify for extending the duration of the work permit to three years a student’s program of study must be at least two years. The open work permit will grant flexibility but only certain jobs will qualify for Skilled Worker consideration. Students who are in Canada now can apply to extend their Post-Graduate Work Permits under the new program.

To be eligible for the program, international students must have studied full-time for the eight months preceding the completion of their program of studies and have graduated from:

- a public post-secondary institution, such as a college, university or CEGEP (in Quebec
- a private post-secondary institution that operates under the same rules and regulations as public institutions, and that receives at least 50 per cent of its financing for its overall operations from government grants (currently, only private college-level educational institutions in Quebec qualify); or
- a Canadian private institution authorized by provincial or territorial statute to confer degrees.

Other requirements include:

- Must apply for a work permit within 90 days of receiving written confirmation (for example, a transcript or an official letter) from the institution that they have met the requirements of the academic program.
- Must have completed and passed the program of study and received a notification that they are eligible to obtain their degree, diploma or certificate.
- Must have a valid study permit when they apply for the work permit.

If the student's program of study is less than two years but at least eight months, the student would be still eligible for a post-graduate work permit. However, the validity period of the work permit must not be longer than the period of study of the graduate at the particular post-secondary institution in Canada.

International students not eligible for the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program include the following:

- Students participating in a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship Program or a Government of Canada Awards Program funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.
- Students receiving funding from the Canadian International Development Agency and participating in a distance learning program.
- Students who have previously been issued a post-graduation work permit after any other program of study. However, note that graduates who are already working with a work permit issued under the previous rules are eligible to apply for an extension.

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