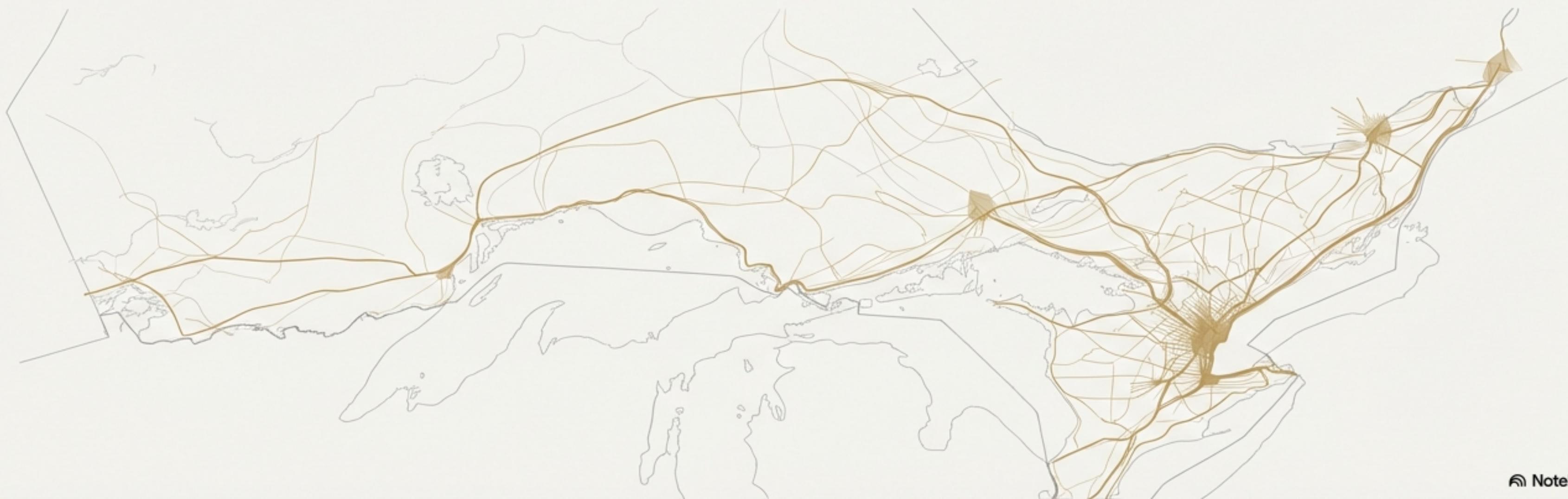


# Securing Ontario's Future: Why Graduate Talent is a Strategic Asset We Cannot Afford to Mismanage

A Strategic Analysis of Proposal 25-MLITSD019 and its Impact on Provincial Competitiveness



# The Proposal's Goal is Sound, but the Method is a Strategic Misstep

We support the goal of aligning immigration with Ontario's labour market needs and ensuring program integrity. However, Proposal 25-MLITSD019, in its current form, will have unintended negative consequences:



- **It Weakens Ontario's Competitiveness:** By removing pathways for the very talent needed in the AI era.
- **It Increases Graduate Vulnerability:** By tying immigration status almost exclusively to a single employer.
- **It Damages Ontario's Reputation:** By breaching the trust of students who chose Ontario based on existing pathways.

This presentation outlines these concerns and proposes a more strategic path forward.

# Ontario's Graduate Students are a Low-Risk, High-Return Strategic Asset

Retaining Ontario-trained graduates is a proven strategy that supports innovation, productivity, and long-term tax revenue. They are not an unknown quantity; they are a pre-qualified talent pool.



## Pre-Vetted

Already screened for high academic achievement, language proficiency, and cultural adaptability through rigorous university admission processes.



## Invested

Have committed significant financial resources, time, and personal sacrifice to pursue higher education in Ontario. They have a demonstrated commitment to the province.



## Integrated

Already contributing to the economy through research projects, internships, and part-time roles, often sharing critical skills with local SMEs and communities.



## Globally Sought-After

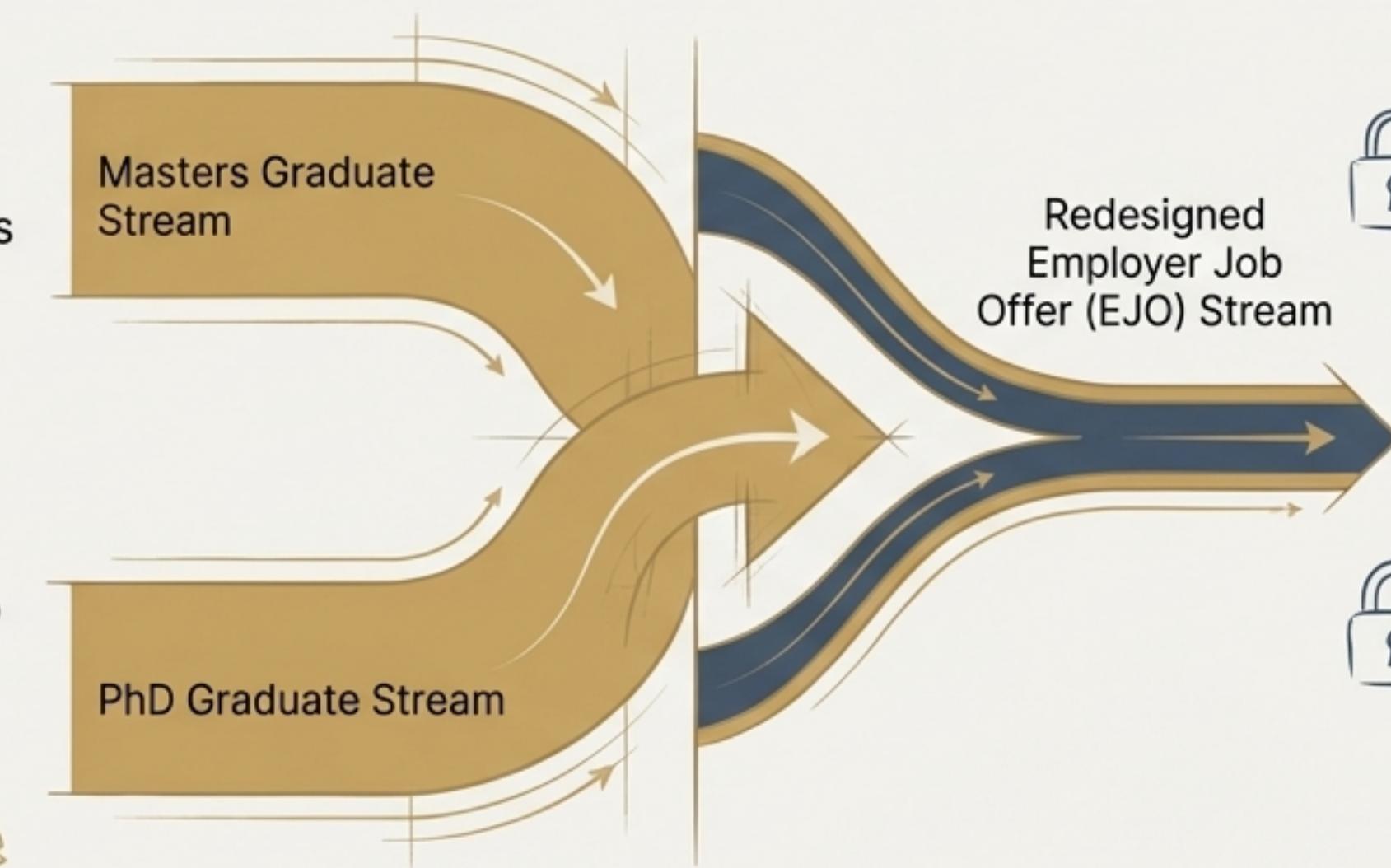
This is highly mobile talent. Other jurisdictions, nationally and internationally, actively recruit them. Fair and clear pathways are critical to retention.

# What is Changing? The Shift from Graduate Pathways to Employer Dependency

## Understanding Proposal 25-MLITSD019

### Current State

- Dedicated, independent pathways for Masters and PhD graduates (OINP Masters Graduate Stream & PhD Graduate Stream).
- Recognizes the value of an Ontario education directly.
- Allows graduates flexibility to work on startups, contracts, or multiple projects without being tied to a single employer for their nomination.



### Proposed Future State

- Elimination of the dedicated Masters and PhD streams.
- Graduates are consolidated into a redesigned Employer Job Offer (EJO) stream.
- Permanent residence becomes **almost entirely dependent on securing and maintaining a specific job offer from a single employer**.



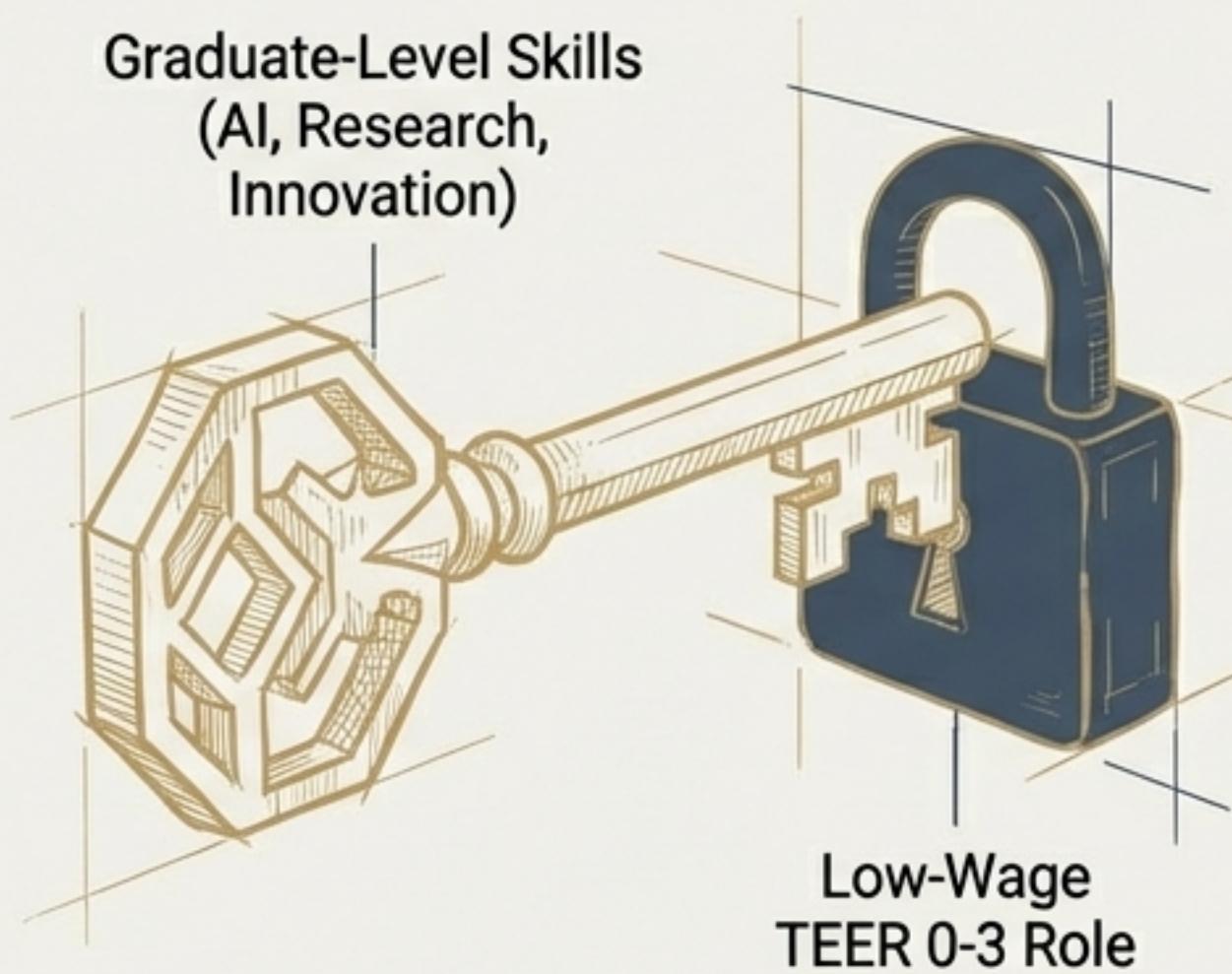
# Consequence 1: A Flawed Assumption Leads to Underemployment

The proposal assumes that a graduate's value is best captured by a single, stable, full-time job. This fails to reflect the reality of the modern innovation economy.

## The Reality for High-Impact Graduates

Value is often created through:

- Contract work with multiple SMEs.
- Early-stage startup projects and prototyping.
- Research collaborations with university labs and industry partners.
- Community teaching and knowledge sharing (e.g., AI workshops).



## The Proposal's Troubling Signal

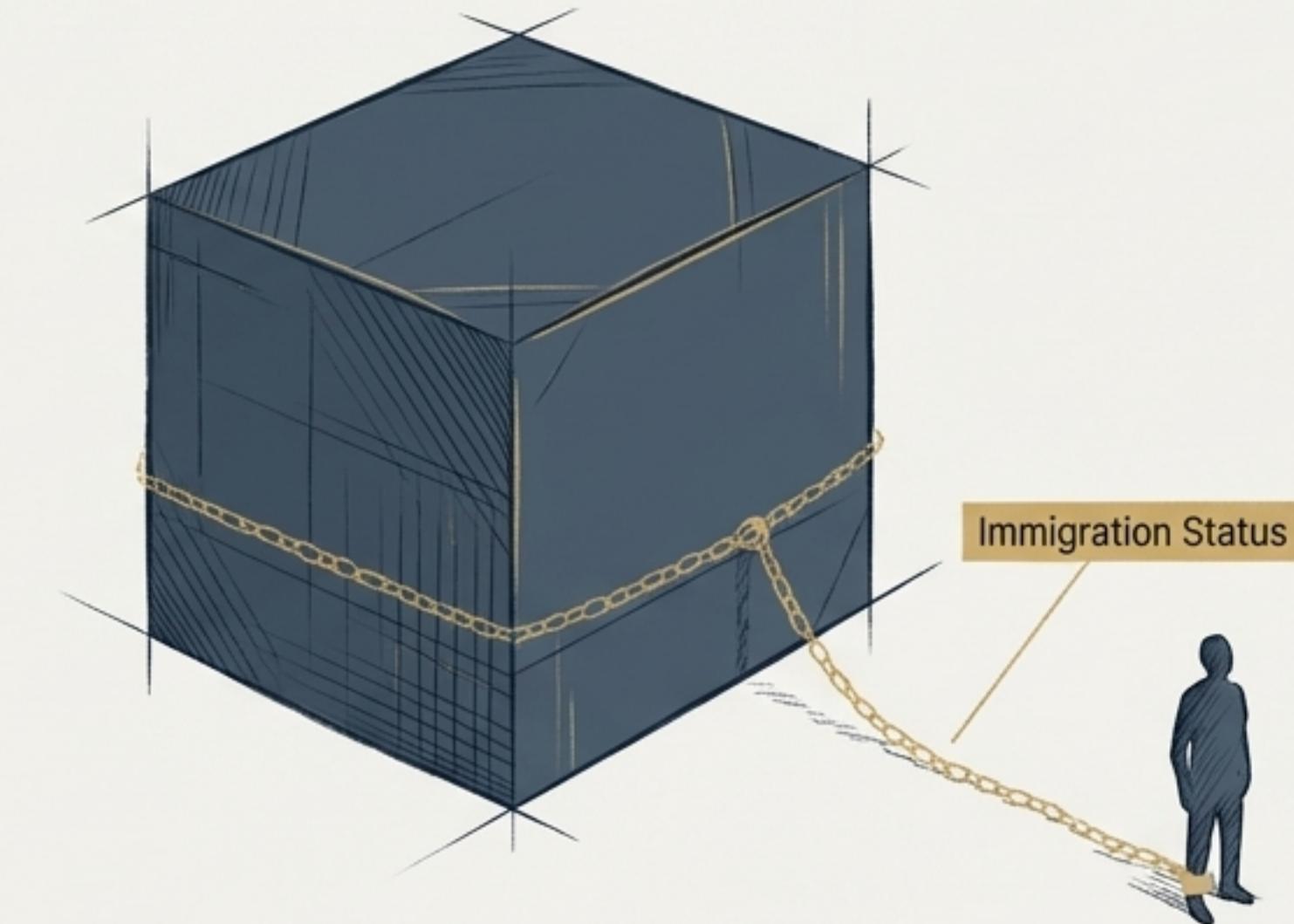
The provision allowing recent graduates to qualify with a low-wage offer under TEER 0-3 actively encourages underemployment ("brain waste") and devalues graduate education. It creates incentives for employers to offer low-wage roles as an immigration ticket, not as a genuine investment in top-tier talent.

## Consequence 2: Increased Worker Vulnerability

The proposed changes are directly at odds with the **Ministry's stated goals of protecting workers**. When **immigration status is almost entirely dependent on one employer**, a significant power imbalance is created.

This dependency makes recent graduates:

- Less likely to report workplace issues or abuse.
- Less able to negotiate for fair wages and working conditions.
- More likely to remain in unsuitable or poorly paid roles simply to secure their nomination.



An independent pathway is a critical tool for worker protection, as it gives graduates the stability and leverage to leave bad jobs and seek out roles that best utilize their skills.

# Consequence 3: Strategic Misalignment with Federal and Industry Direction

Proposal 25-MLITSD019 moves Ontario in the opposite direction of national policy and leading industry voices.



Starting January 1, 2026, the federal government is exempting Masters and PhD students from the national study permit cap. This recognizes graduate students as a priority group for Canada's economic growth and innovation.

Proposals like "Recognize Commitment to Canada in Immigration" (by Shopify CEO Tobi Lütke) argue that immigrants should be rewarded for contributions like pursuing a Canadian education.

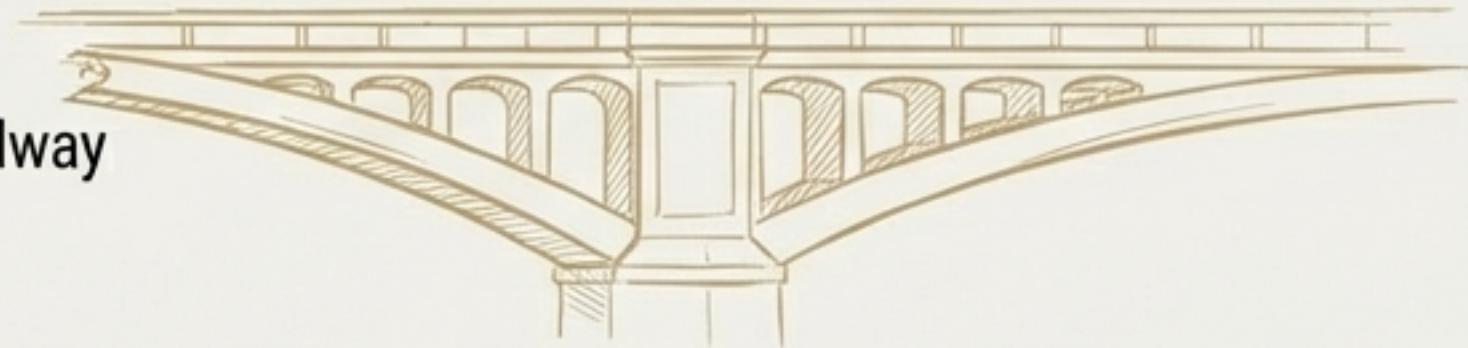
**The Conflict:** Ontario's proposal would remove the primary provincial pathway for the exact group the federal government and business leaders agree Canada must prioritize and retain.

# Consequence 4: A Breach of Trust with Current Students

Students who enrolled in multi-year graduate programs in Ontario did so with the reasonable expectation that the OINP Masters Graduate Stream would be an available pathway upon graduation. Changing the rules midway through their programs is a significant breach of trust.



Changing the rules midway



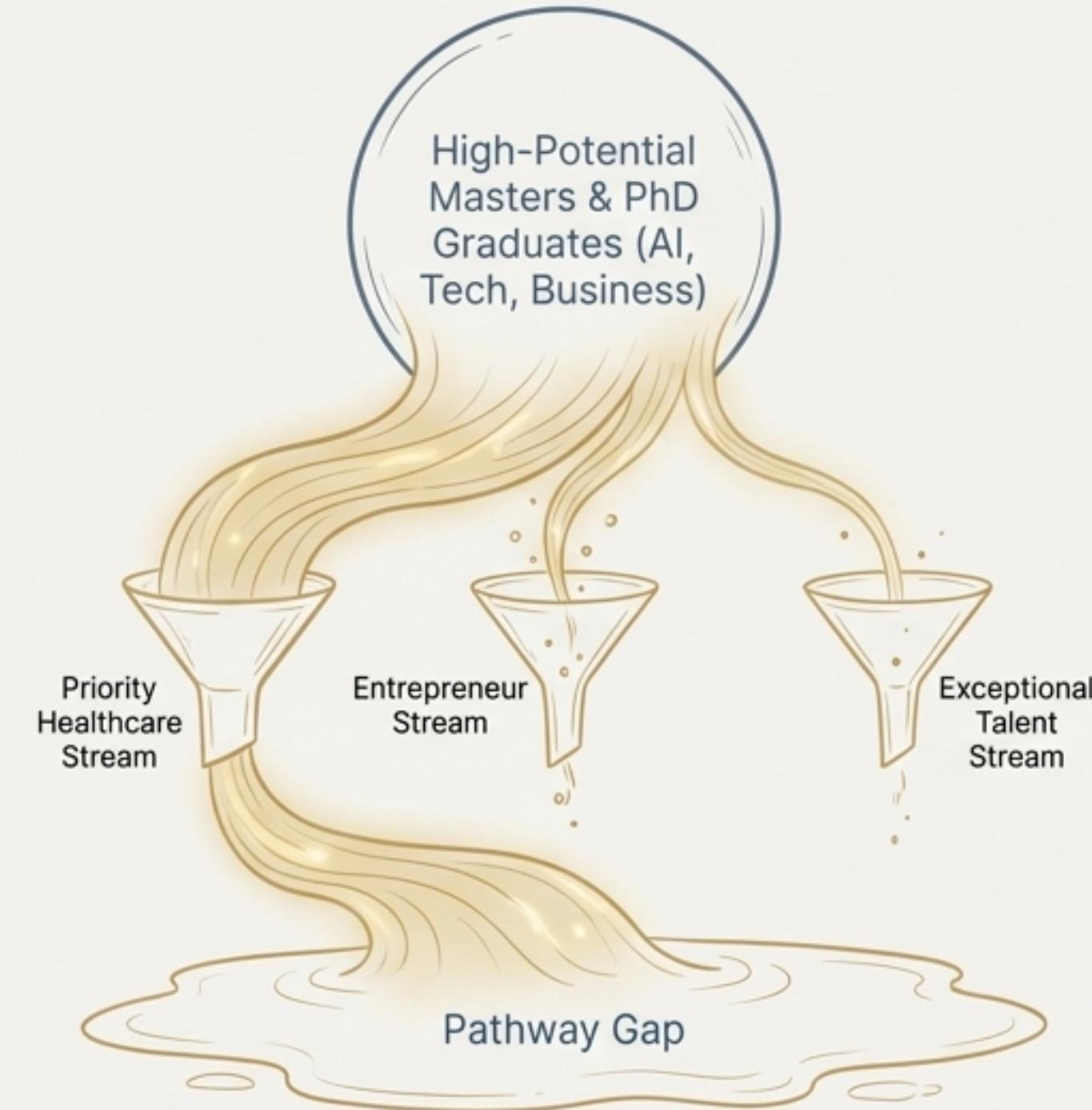
## The Impact:

- It creates profound uncertainty and distress for thousands of students who made life-altering decisions based on the existing framework.
- It damages Ontario's reputation as a predictable and trustworthy destination for education and career-building.
- Word of such changes travels fast, potentially deterring future top-tier applicants from choosing Ontario universities.

**The Solution:** Any significant changes must include robust transitional protections, such as grandfathering students who enrolled before a specified date. This is not special treatment; it is a matter of fairness.

# The Proposed “Strategic Streams” Are Not a Realistic Replacement

The three new proposed streams, while valuable, fail to provide a viable pathway for the majority of non-regulated Masters and PhD graduates in fields like AI and technology innovation.



**Priority Healthcare Stream:** Correctly limited to regulated health professionals, offering no route for tech or business graduates.

**Entrepreneur Stream:** Targets individuals who *already operate a business*. This excludes most early-stage founders who are still building prototypes, validating ideas, or participating in incubators.

**Exceptional Talent Stream:** Targets those with *major awards or patents*. This sets an impossibly high bar for early-career individuals, ignoring the 'early-stage builders' who create significant value before achieving widespread recognition.

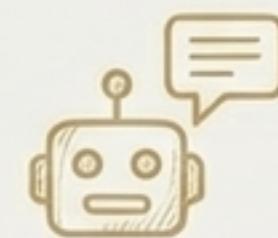
**The Net Effect:** For many high-potential graduates, the only clear, non-employer-based pathway is being eliminated without a functional replacement.

# Case in Point: The “Early-Stage Builder” Ontario Risks Losing My Contributions as a Master of Engineering Student in Technology Innovation Management

## Who I Am

- Enrolled in a Master of Engineering in Technology Innovation Management at Carleton University.
- My work happens across startups, university labs, small businesses, and community groups—it does not fit into a single employer relationship.

## What I Build and Share



**Practical AI Tools:** Built Real Speaking (AI English coach), JoeSlides (AI presentation assistant), and a Literature Screening Assistant for researchers.



**Knowledge Dissemination:** Delivered talks on AI adoption at Carleton University and local tech meetups.



**SME Enablement:** Worked directly with small businesses to help them implement AI tools in their workflows.

The current Masters Graduate Stream provides the stability to focus on building value for Ontario. The proposed changes would force talent like me to prioritize a single job offer over broader, more impactful innovation.

# A Path Forward: Three Strategic Recommendations for a Stronger OINP

To align Ontario's immigration program with its economic goals in the AI era, we respectfully ask the government to consider three key adjustments.

## 1.



### Preserve an Independent Pathway

Maintain a clear, accessible route for Ontario's Masters and PhD graduates that does not depend entirely on a single employer. This is critical for fostering innovation and protecting workers.

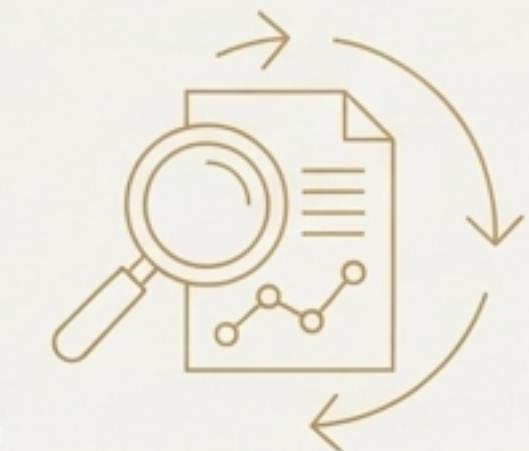
## 2.



### Provide Robust Transitional Protection

If streams are eliminated, "grandfather" all current students who began their programs under the existing framework. This is essential for maintaining trust and fairness.

## 3.



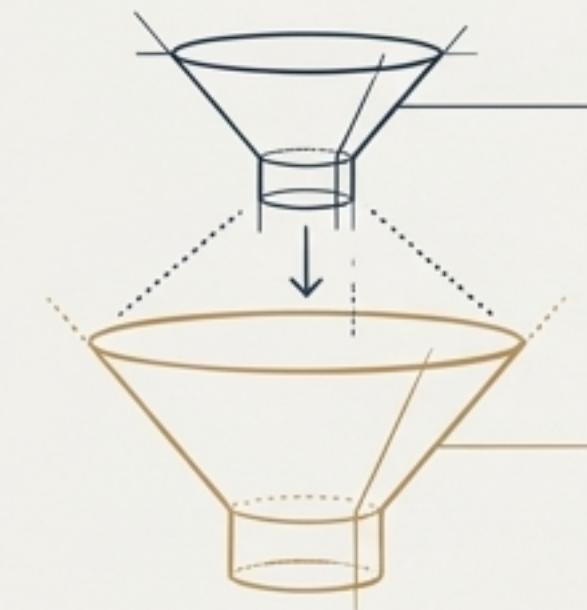
### Commit to Transparency and Review

Publish a detailed impact analysis of the changes and commit to a formal public review of the new system within 2-3 years to measure outcomes against stated goals.

# Designing for the Future: How to Capture Early-Stage Builders

If the new Entrepreneur and Exceptional Talent streams proceed, they can be designed to recognize the value of early-stage contributors.

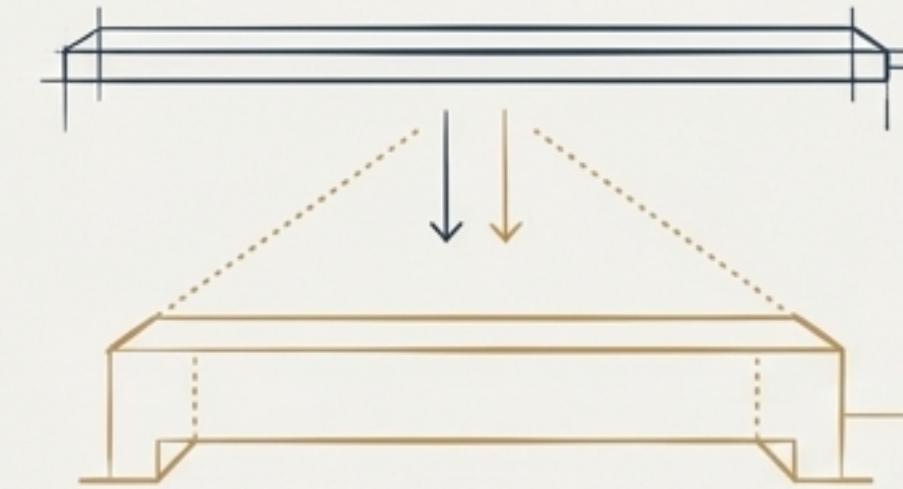
## For the Entrepreneur Stream



Current Criteria:  
"Operates a business".

Demostrable traction,  
such as pilot projects with  
Ontario businesses or early  
formally established.

## For the Exceptional Talent Stream



Current Criteria:  
"Major awards or patents".

Expanded local impact,  
such as helping a significant  
number of Ontario major  
international awards.

### ...criteria should include:

- Active participation in a recognized Ontario incubator or accelerator program.
- Demonstrable traction, such as pilot projects with Ontario businesses or early revenue, even if the business is not yet formally established.

### ...criteria should recognize:

- Leadership of meaningful projects in high-priority fields like AI, even without major international awards.
- Demonstrated local impact, such as helping a significant number of Ontario firms adopt new technology responsibly.

# The Choice for Ontario: Retain a Strategic Asset or Create a Barrier to Innovation

Ontario's Master's and PhD graduates are a uniquely valuable talent pool. They are pre-vetted, invested in the province, and already integrated into our communities. They are working in fields like AI that are central to our future prosperity.

The current proposal creates unnecessary barriers that will drive this talent away, encourage underemployment, and undermine Ontario's reputation.

**A better path is possible.** By preserving an independent pathway and ensuring fairness for current students, Ontario can align its immigration program with its economic ambitions and secure its position as a global leader in innovation.

**We urge you to adjust Proposal 25-MLITSD019 to retain and support the graduate talent that is already here, working to build Ontario's future.**

