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WORK PERMITS | FIRST-TIME STUDENTS AND SPOUSES OUTSIDE CANADA

Spousal Open Work Permit for Spouses of New Students Applying From Outside Canada

Coming to Canada for the first time on a study permit? Your spouse or common-law partner may be able to apply for an initial open work permit with your study permit application, and work for almost any employer once they arrive. It depends on your program.

PERMIT TYPE	APPLY	PROGRAMS	IRCC FEE
Open (C42)	**With study permit**	**16+ mo master's, PhD**	**$255 CAD**

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Scope of this guide: This guide is for students applying for their **first study permit from outside Canada**, with a spouse or partner who is also outside Canada. It covers applying together, applying after approval, and a spouse joining a student who has already arrived. Students and spouses already in Canada should use our SOWP guide for students inside Canada.

1. SOWP Eligibility Checker

Answer each question from the dropdown lists. The checker shows whether the spouse is likely to qualify and what to fix. It follows IRCC's C42 officer instructions.

Choose an answer in each list; the result updates after each choice. Question 4 only counts when applying together, and question 5 only when the student is already in Canada. The form works in Adobe Acrobat Reader and most desktop PDF readers. If no result appears, use the checker on the Neximm webpage for this guide, or the checklist in section 5.

1. When will the spouse apply for the open work permit?

Choose an answer

2. What program will the student study in Canada?

Choose an answer

3. Is it a full-time, PGWP-eligible program at a designated learning institution (DLI)?

Choose an answer

4. Does the student have a PAL/TAL, or an exemption from it? Applying together only

Choose an answer

5. Is the student in the last term of the program? Student already in Canada

Choose an answer

6. What is the relationship?

Choose an answer

7. What funds can you show?

Choose an answer

8. Medical: 6+ months in certain countries last year, or will the spouse work in health or child care?

Choose an answer

Your result

Self-check only: This is general information, not legal advice. The officer decides based on your facts and documents.

2. What Is This Permit?

It is an open work permit for the spouse or common-law partner of a full-time student, under R205(c)(ii), administrative code C42. It needs no job offer and no LMIA. The spouse can work for any employer, except one on IRCC's non-compliant list, or one that regularly offers striptease, erotic dance, escort services or erotic massages (IRCC).

For a family applying from outside Canada, the student does not need to hold the study permit yet. IRCC accepts a student who is **provisionally approved** (holding a port of entry letter of introduction) or applying as a family group, with proof that they plan to live in Canada while studying (officer instructions).

> **Spouses only:** Dependent children cannot get an open work permit under C42 (officer instructions). Children can apply for a study permit or visitor visa with the family (IRCC).

3. Eligible Programs

For applications received on or after January 21, 2025, the student must be accepted into a full-time, PGWP-eligible program at a DLI, must not be in the last term, and must be in one of these programs (IRCC):

PROGRAM	DETAILS
Master's degree	16 months or longer. The DLI letter must state the length; in a range, the minimum must be 16 months (officer instructions)
Doctoral degree	PhD and other doctorates
Professional degree at a university	DDS, DMD; LLB, JD, BCL; MD; OD; PharmD, BS, BSc, BPharm; DVM; BScN, BSN; BNSc; BN; BEd; BEng, BE, BASc
Eligible programs	Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot (FMCSP), and listed provincial programs in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia

Not eligible

College diplomas and certificates, graduate certificates, master's programs under 16 months, and bachelor's degrees not on the professional list.

PAL/TAL in 2026

Since January 1, 2026, master's and doctoral students at a **public** DLI do not need a provincial or territorial attestation letter (IRCC notice). Most other students need one, and it must be submitted with the study permit application (IRCC PAL/TAL page). Check the DLI list for public institutions with PAL-exempt graduate programs.

> **No NOC or TEER test:** Eligibility depends on the student's program, not on any job. Officers record NOC 99999 and "Open" for employer and occupation (officer instructions).

4. How to Apply From Outside Canada

SITUATION	HOW THE SPOUSE APPLIES
Applying together (recommended)	Submit the spouse's work permit with the student's first study permit application. IRCC processes the family together (IRCC).
Study permit approved, not yet travelled	Apply online from outside Canada and upload the student's letter of introduction as proof (officer instructions).
Student already in Canada	Apply online from outside Canada with the student's study permit and proof of enrolment (IRCC).

Steps for a family application

1. Get the letter of acceptance, and the PAL/TAL or proof of exemption
2. Check the program qualifies and that the master's length is stated
3. Gather funds for the family plus separate funds for the spouse (section 6)
4. In the IRCC secure account, add the spouse when the tool asks about family members coming with you
5. Complete forms: IMM 1294 for the student (guide 5269) and IMM 1295 for the spouse (guide 5487)
6. Upload documents, pay all fees together and submit
7. Give biometrics within the time on the biometrics instruction letter

IRCC asks spouses applying from outside Canada to answer the online questions **exactly** this way (IRCC):

QUESTION IN THE ONLINE TOOL	ANSWER
Coming to Canada under an active public policy or special measure?	**No**
Spouse, common-law partner or dependent child of a person who has or is applying for a work permit?	**Yes**
Spouse or common-law partner of a person who holds a study permit?	**Yes**
What type of work permit?	**A work permit for a spouse of an international student, or for a family member of a worker**

> **Doctoral students:** PhD students who apply online from outside Canada, with family members included and submitted together, may get processing in about 2 weeks once the DLI verifies the letter of acceptance (IRCC).

5. Documents Checklist

Each family member completes their own forms (guide 5269). Tick each item as you collect it.

- [ ] Spouse's valid passport (validity sets the latest permit end date)
- [ ] Marriage certificate, or IMM 5409 Statutory Declaration of Common-law Union with proof of 12 months living together
- [ ] Student's letter of acceptance from the DLI, with full-time status and start and end dates
- [ ] For a master's program: a letter stating the program lasts 16 months or longer
- [ ] For an eligible program: the provincial letter, or the FMCSP acceptance letter
- [ ] Student's PAL/TAL, or proof of the exemption
- [ ] Study permit approval letter, if the spouse applies after approval
- [ ] Proof of funds for tuition, family living costs and travel, plus the spouse's own funds
- [ ] Proof of ties and plans, such as job, property or family at home
- [ ] Upfront medical exam results, if needed (section 7)
- [ ] Certified translations of documents not in English or French

Common-law couples can show joint leases, shared bills or ID with the same address (IRCC Help Centre).

6. Proof of Funds

The student must show enough money, **without working in Canada**, for tuition, living costs for everyone coming, and travel to and from Canada (IRCC).

FAMILY SIZE, OUTSIDE QUEBEC	LIVING COSTS PER YEAR (CAD)
Student only	$23,448
Student and spouse	$29,192
Student, spouse and 1 child	$35,888
Student, spouse and 2 children	$43,572

These amounts apply to applications on or after September 1, 2026, and exclude tuition and travel. Quebec sets its own amounts (IRCC).

Separate funds for the spouse: IRCC's C42 instructions say the spouse must have enough money to support themselves, separate from the funds used for the study permit, because an open work permit does not guarantee a job (officer instructions). Show both.

7. Fees, Biometrics and Medical Exams

FEE (CAD)	AMOUNT
Study permit (student)	$150
Work permit (spouse)	$155
Open work permit holder fee (spouse)	$100
Biometrics	$85 per person, or $170 for a family applying together

Fees are from the IRCC fee list. A visitor visa or eTA, if needed, is issued at no extra cost (IRCC).

Medical exams

For stays over 6 months, a medical exam is needed if the person lived in or travelled to certain countries for 6 months or more in a row in the past year, or will work in a job where public health must be protected, such as health care, schools or child care (IRCC). An upfront exam with a panel physician before applying avoids delays.

8. Approval and Arrival

- If approved, the spouse gets a port of entry letter of introduction. It is **not** the work permit (IRCC)
- A visitor visa or eTA is issued automatically, unless the spouse is exempt (IRCC)
- At the border, bring the passport, the letter, the visa if needed, and medical results if required (IRCC)
- The border officer makes the final decision and prints the work permit (IRCC)
- The permit usually ends with the student's study permit, and no later than the spouse's passport or biometrics expiry (officer instructions)

Travel together or after the student: For family groups, IRCC assesses the principal first, and its worker instructions require the principal to enter Canada before or with the family (IRCC). Neximm advises the same order for students.

Check the permit at the border: Make sure the end date and conditions are correct before leaving the counter. Most people can no longer apply for a work permit at a port of entry (IRCC Help Centre).

9. Common Refusal Reasons

REFUSAL REASON	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	HOW TO PREPARE
Student refused	The study permit is refused, so the family application fails	Make the study file strong first
Ineligible program	College, graduate certificate, or a master's under 16 months	Check the program before you apply
Master's length not shown	The letter of acceptance does not state 16 months or longer	Ask the DLI for a letter stating the length
No PAL/TAL	Missing letter, or exemption not proven	Upload the PAL/TAL or exemption proof
Not enough funds	No separate funds for the spouse, R200(1)(b)	Show the spouse's own savings or income
Relationship not genuine	Weak proof of marriage or cohabitation (R4)	Send strong relationship evidence
Ties and purpose	Officer not satisfied the family will leave at the end of the stay	Show ties at home and a clear study plan

10. If the Spouse Does Not Qualify

- **Come as a visitor:** family members can apply for visitor visas with the study permit application (IRCC)
- **Apply for their own permit:** an employer-specific work permit, or their own study permit
- **Later:** if the student moves to an eligible program, see our SOWP guide for students inside Canada

11. How Neximm Can Help

A family application is only as strong as the student's file. One missing letter, a short master's program or weak funds can refuse the whole family.

Neximm Immigration is an RCIC-led consultancy based in Dehradun, India. A licensed Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant advises on and represents your file.

- **Program check:** length, PGWP eligibility and PAL/TAL status
- **Family file:** study permit and spousal work permit prepared together
- **Funds and ties:** separate proof for the spouse and a clear study plan
- **Relationship evidence:** marriage and common-law proof

Book your SOWP assessment today

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Official IRCC sources

IRCC – Help your spouse or common-law partner work in Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work/help-your-spouse-common-law-partner-work-canada.html

IRCC program delivery instructions – Spouses of study permit holders [R205(c)(ii) – C42]: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/public-policy-competitiveness-economy/c42.html

IRCC – Proof of financial support (study permit): https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/get-documents/financial-support.html

IRCC – Provincial or territorial attestation letter: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/get-documents/provincial-attestation-letter.html

IRCC notice – 2026 allocations under the international student cap: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/2026-provincial-territorial-allocations-under-international-student-cap.html

IRCC – Apply for a study permit as a graduate student: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/graduate-student/how-to-apply.html

IRCC – Doctoral students: faster processing: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/graduate-student/faster-processing.html

IRCC – Guide 5269: Study permit outside Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/application/application-forms-guides/guide-5269-applying-study-permit-outside-canada.html

IRCC – Guide 5487: Work permit outside Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/application/application-forms-guides/guide-5487-applying-work-permit-outside-canada.html

IRCC – Work permit: wait for a decision (outside Canada): https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/permit-outside/wait-decision.html

IRCC – Work permit: arrive in Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/permit-outside/arrival.html

IRCC – Medical exams for visitors, students and workers: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/application/medical-police/medical-exams/requirements-temporary-residents.html

IRCC – Work permit options for family members: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/family-members-wp.html

IRCC fee list: https://ircc.canada.ca/english/information/fees/fees.asp

This guide offers general information and is not legal advice. It is based on IRCC web pages and program delivery instructions reviewed in October 2026. IRCC rules can change at any time. Contact Neximm Immigration for advice on your own situation.