Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST)

Phase 2 Final Report

October 2024

Blueprint

Future Skills Centre Centre des
Compétences
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Canada

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About the Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change.

Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

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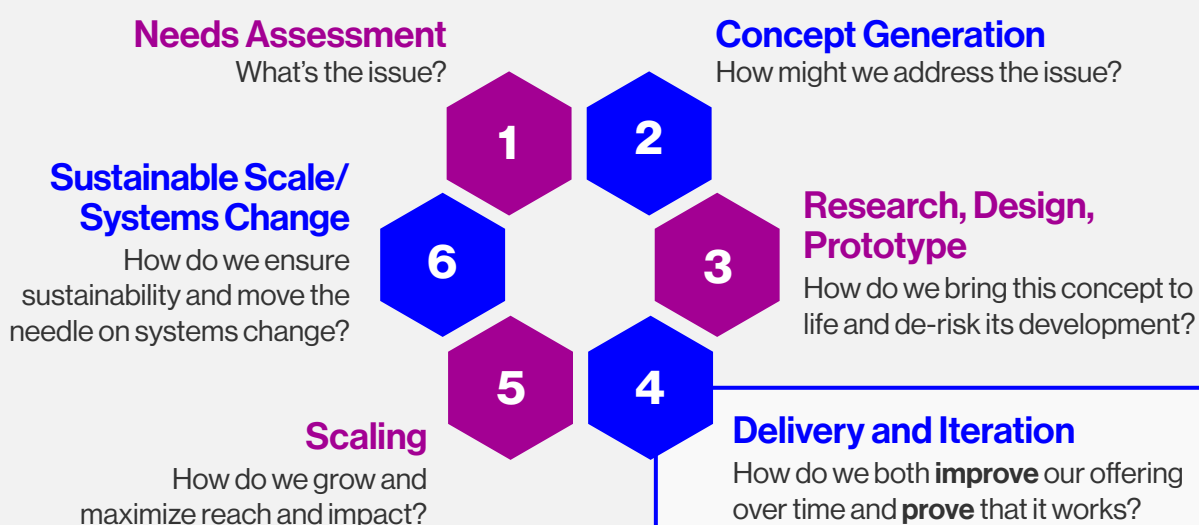
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Preface

Canada's labour market is rapidly changing. To keep pace with these changes, Canadians need skills development opportunities that respond to demands and apply evidence-informed practices. Many skills development innovations have emerged to meet these needs, but they often face barriers to scaling their interventions beyond a pilot stage.

To address this challenge, the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and Blueprint launched the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio**.**

In this initiative, FSC is partnering with 10 organizations with promising skills development interventions that began scaling up their impact. As part of the FSC consortium, Blueprint is working closely with each grantee organization to generate evidence to support their scaling journey. This is an opportunity to disrupt the current "one study at a time" approach to evidence-building in favour of continuous evidence generation and program improvement. The hope is that this approach will better produce the quality and quantity of evidence needed to help promising interventions progress in their scaling journeys. For more information about Blueprint's approach to scaling, see our Scaling Social Innovation webpage.

Blueprint's evidence generation approach is aligned with the six-stage innovation cycle (see **Figure 1**). Our focus for the Scaling Portfolio is to work alongside partner organizations to generate evidence that helps move their interventions through **Stage 4** to **Stage 5**, with the ultimate goal of supporting sustainable scale and systems change (**Stage 6**).

Figure 1 | The Six-stage Innovation Cycle

Needs Assessment
What's the issue?

1

Concept Generation
How might we address the issue?

2

**Sustainable Scale/
Systems Change**
How do we ensure sustainability and move the needle on systems change?

6

Research, Design, Prototype
How do we bring this concept to life and de-risk its development?

3

5

4

Scaling
How do we grow and maximize reach and impact?

Delivery and Iteration
How do we both **improve** our offering over time and **prove** that it works?

About this report

This report shares findings from our ongoing evaluation of **Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST)**, an online skills assessment and development platform that builds newcomers' occupational knowledge and competencies before and after arrival in Canada.

Blueprint's *Interim Report* (April 2023) analyzed data from September 2021 to June 2022. This report—a *Final Report* for Phase 2 of FSC funding—builds upon and expands findings presented in our initial dataset with new data collected from July 2022 to March 2024, providing a longitudinal analysis of program uptake, participant experiences, and employment outcomes over a 31-month period (i.e., it encompasses the entire period from September 2021 to March 2024). In addition, this evaluation contains a nine-month follow-up survey not yet available for participants at the interim stage. It also contains new qualitative feedback from Service Delivery Partners (SDPs), industry partners, and participants from a new sector stream (Seniors Care) and streams unrepresented in the prior study (Skilled Trades and Culinary Arts). Additional reports for the next phase of work (Phase 3 of FSC funding) will be available in 2025.

This work is part of Blueprint's contribution to the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio, which involves collecting and monitoring interventions and capturing implementation stories and participant outcomes along their scaling journey.

Our work is organized into four sections:

- **Introduction (pgs. 8–13)**
  describes FAST's structure, training modules, theory of change, scaling timeline, and partnerships.

- **Learning agenda and methodology (pgs. 14–18)**
  shares our approach to evidence generation and our learning agenda, data sources, and limitations.

- **Findings (pgs. 19–42)**
  presents key findings on program uptake, experiences, early outcomes, and implementation.

- **Discussion and conclusions (pg. 43-45)**
  summarizes our findings, next steps for the program, and future reporting.

Executive summary

This report shares findings from our evaluation of Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST): an online, self-paced skills assessment platform designed to help newcomers accelerate their job search and better understand their target occupations and industries. Led by IEC-BC, FAST provides occupation-specific assessments in six sector streams—Accounting & Finance, Biotechnology & Life Sciences, Culinary Arts, IT & Data Services, Seniors Care, and Skilled Trades—through modules that provide workplace cultural training, technical competency assessments, referrals for skills credentials, and job search and career navigation supports.

IEC-BC partners with employers and community and immigrant service delivery partners (SDPs) who refer their clients to FAST, help develop module content, and provide professional services (e.g., industry designations, credential services, etc.). Eligible participants are those approved to immigrate to Canada with two-to-five years of work experience in one of the six streams; applicants can enrol *after* their arrival or before by working with SDPs. Participants can engage with whichever FAST elements they find useful and take as long as they wish; they are encouraged to take advantage of other complementary career services where available.

This work is part of Blueprint's contribution to the **Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio**, which involves collecting data on FAST and capturing implementation stories and participant outcomes along its scaling journey. FAST is now in Phase 3 of Future Skills Centre (FSC) funding. Blueprint conducted an early-stage evaluation for Phase 1 and released an *Interim Report* for Phase 2 (April 2023). This *Final Report* for Phase 2 builds upon data presented in our *Interim Report* with new data collected from July 2022 to March 2024. Findings from Phase 2 are based on administrative and survey data as well as interviews with participants, SDPs, and industry partners. Our data reveal the following:

- As of March 2024, FAST received **1,506** total enrolments, surpassing IEC-BC's target enrolment of 950 by **556** participants (i.e., by **59%**). FAST reached newcomers who were highly educated, racialized, mid-career workers. Many held caregiving responsibilities and had low household incomes; most resided in Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan.

- As FAST is free, online, and self-paced, participants can complete as much as they find useful—yet **21%** still completed the full set of modules. Most participants who did not complete had other commitments or found employment.

- Among respondents, **61%** were satisfied with FAST overall, enjoying the self-paced, low-barrier, flexible access to industry-related assessments; **80%** would recommend it or had already done so. Most felt that someone else could find the modules useful even if they did not. Completion rates correlated with higher satisfaction rates and likelihood of recommendation: **79%** of completers were satisfied vs. **54%** of non-completers, and **94%** of completers would recommend vs. **75%** of non-completers.

- Respondents were satisfied with skills gap training (**67%**) and technical competency assessments (**66%**) and found FAST useful for improving industry-specific competencies (**71%**) and for workplace acculturation (**77%**).

- Top stream enrolments were in IT & Data Services (**46%**), Biotech & Life Sciences (**24%**), and Accounting & Finance (**20%**); Biotech & Life Sciences saw above-average completion rates (**36%**). These three streams had high rates of satisfaction (**63%**).

- Respondents had higher feelings of employment readiness over time (**60%** to **70%)**. Employment rates increased from **45%** at exit to **72%** nine months after, and this trend held regardless of completion and socio-demographic status. All streams showed an upward trend in employment rates; the highest increases were in the three streams mentioned above. Respondents reported higher quality of employment, and earnings increased by **25%**.

- Biotech & Life Sciences saw the highest increase in employment rates over time (**+31%**), followed by IT & Data Services (**+29%**). The Skilled Trades stream had the highest employment rate (**67%**) at the exit point.

- SDPs perceived FAST as a valuable tool to support newcomers' employment journeys due to its accessibility (for pre- and post-arrival applicants); flexible eligibility (for experience, language levels, and PR status); workplace culture modules; complementary use with other employment services; and sector- and occupation-specific training for reduced entry barriers and accreditation services.

- SDPs noted that IEC-BC answered questions and provided resources to inform referrals; the more familiar SDPs were with FAST, the more likely they would recommend clients. SDPs were more likely to recommend newcomers who were more settled, ready for self-guided learning, and committed to finding employment.

- Industry partners believed FAST could be valuable to both newcomers and employers—especially small- and medium-sized enterprises in high-demand sectors—and felt FAST added special strategic value to unregulated sectors.

New iterations of FAST have been developed in response to feedback from participants and partners. In Phase 3 of FSC funding, IEC-BC will:

- Expand the eligibility criteria for a new standalone workplace culture module to more international students and temporary workers to support their job and career journeys.

- Pilot a time-bound model (where some participants will have limited access over an eight-week period) to encourage higher engagement; Blueprint will conduct A/B testing to determine whether duration of access impacts engagement rates.

- Pilot a cohort model of FAST to include more structured opportunities for participants to meet with each other and an IEC-BC staff member.

- Explore opportunities for further collaboration with industry partners, tailored to local labour market needs and regulations. This will involve forming an advisory group made up of two employers from each FAST streams, totaling 12 key industry representatives. Leads plan to engage more SME employers for validation and feedback.

- Continue to adapt to local contexts. IEC-BC is partnering with New Brunswick Community College and the NB government, multicultural council, and other institutions to create a bilingual FAST-NB platform to meet provincial settlement/retention needs.

Upcoming reports in 2025-26—an *Interim Report* and *Final Report* for Phase 3—will monitor IEC-BC's adaptations to FAST, identify areas for improvement, and deepen our understanding of participants' program experiences and satisfaction with the time-bound vs. non-time-bound versions, the cohort version, and the standalone workplace culture module. These upcoming reports will address data limitations and include an updated theory of change. Data linkage for FAST participants from Phase 2 will be available in August 2025, which will be included in Blueprint's *Final Report* or in a separate deliverable in 2026.

1. Introduction

Canada's immigration policy is designed to ensure the country has the workers it needs to fill critical labour market gaps and support a strong economy.[1] To realize this intention, we need an employment and training ecosystem that helps newcomers leverage their skills and fully integrate into the labour market.[2] However, newcomers often face considerable barriers to accessing employment aligned with their education, skills, and experience[3] — and at similar levels of seniority to the roles they held in their countries of origin.[4] Through a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, limited familiarity with Canadian workplace norms, and a lack of Canadian work experience, many newcomers remain un- or under-employed.[5]

To address pervasive underemployment among skilled newcomers, the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) designed Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent, or FAST. This online, self-paced skills assessment platform was designed to help newcomers accelerate their job search and better understand their target occupations and industries, their necessary competencies, and their qualifications and norms.

Specifically, FAST provides comprehensive, occupation-specific assessments in six sector streams, chosen based on feedback from employers on key labour market gaps: Accounting & Finance, Biotechnology & Life Sciences, Culinary Arts, IT & Data Services, Seniors Care, and Skilled Trades.[6] A series of modules supports each stream, providing the following components with slight variations based on employer needs (see **Table 1**).

1 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. (2022). *New immigration plan to fill labour market shortages and grow Canada's economy.* Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/02/new-immigration-plan-to-fill-labour-market-shortages-and-grow-canadas-economy.html

2 Tobin, S. (2023). *State of skills: Leveraging the skills of newcomers.* Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/State-of-Skills_-Leveraging-the-Skills-of-Newcomers_final.pdf

3 Mo, G.-Y., & MacKenzie, P. (2022, March 31). Using the talents of newcomers to Canada. *Policy Options.* https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/using-the-talents-of-newcomers-to-canada/

4 Ng, E., & Gagnon, S. (2020). *Employment gaps and underemployment for racialized groups and immigrants in Canada: Current findings and future directions.* Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/EmploymentGaps-Immigrants-PPF-JAN2020-EN.pdf

5 Cukier, W., Mo, G.-Y., Karajovic, S., Wilson, B., Walker, J.-A., & Lee, K. (2023). *Racialized Canadians and newcomers: Foundational & transferable skills.* Ted Rogers School of Management (Diversity Institute). https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/research/racialized-canadians-and-newcomers-foundational-and-transferrable-skills-9-23.pdf

6 Importantly, FAST is not a training or reskilling program; it is a competency assessment program that can help skilled professionals in one of the six streams compare their past experiences with Canadian standards.

Table 1 | FAST training components

Workplace cultural training	Technical competency assessments	Referrals for skills credentials	Job search and career navigation supports
The module "Prepare to Work in Canada" orients newcomers to Canadian culture and workplace customs and includes essential skills competency assessments.	Helps participants develop and test their occupation-specific skills, strengths, and gaps in collaboration with industry partners, including ICTC, BioTalent, and the BC Care Providers Association.	Refers those who complete all FAST modules to industry partners for credentialing services, such as IT professional designations and Microsoft certifications. Biotechnology & Life Sciences graduates receive a BioTalent 'Bio Ready' certification and Seniors Care graduates receive a BCCPA assessment.[7]	Provides all participants with links to adjacent IEC-BC services—BC JobConnect and MentorConnect—where they can apply to job postings, connect with professionals in their fields, and be notified of job events led by IEC-BC via email.[8]
Available for Accounting & Finance, IT & Data Services, and Biotech & Life Sciences.	*Available for Accounting & Finance, Culinary Arts, and Skilled Trades.*	*Available for Biotech & Life Sciences and Seniors Care.*	*Available for participants in all streams.*

IEC-BC ensures FAST is accessible to as many newcomers as possible. Participants can enrol *after* their arrival in Canada or *before* by working with settlement organizations that provide pre-arrival services. Eligible participants must be approved to immigrate to Canada and have two to five years of work experience in one of the six sectoral streams. IEC-BC recommends that participants have a language proficiency of at least Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) level 6, but it does not *require* CLB certificates and views language proficiency as an asset.

Most participants are referred to the program by IEC-BC, case workers, or settlement workers from service delivery partners (SDPs). SDPs will often refer clients to FAST even if they do not meet CLB (or other) requirements. The program welcomes refugees, international students, and skilled immigrants with valid work permits. Since FAST is self-paced and flexible, participants can engage with whichever elements they find most useful and can take however long they wish. While doing so, IEC-BC and SDPs assume participants will take advantage of other complementary services where available.

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7 Participants were also referred to the Skills Passport for Newcomers in Tech (SPRINT) program, an initiative that provided free additional resources and supported over 800 immigrant clients until March 2023.

8 This is regardless of their geographic location—participants arriving in other provinces are referred to similar service providers in their region. However, while adjacent services are accessible by all participants, job postings, mentors, and events are based in BC only, which means that they mainly benefit participants who live in the province. These features are not officially part of Blueprint's FAST evaluation, but frequently mentioned in interviews with participants and SDPs.

Figure 2 illustrates the program logic model. In the short-term, FAST is designed to increase employment readiness and improve confidence; over the long-term, it is meant to help participants find employment aligned with their interests and skills and help employers address labour market shortages in key industries.

Figure 2 | **FAST Program Logic Model**

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	
			Short term	**Long term**
IEC-BC Staff	Occupation-specific LMI	Credentials (IT & BioTech)		Participants find commensurate employment
Partner organizations	Industry-specific competency assessments	Improved knowledge of own skill level and requirements to enter certain sectors	Career or Employment readiness	
	Workplace culture training	Increased familiarity with Canadian workplace culture norms		Higher job satisfaction and performance
Employers	Closing of skills gaps			
	Credentialing referral (IT & Biotech)	Participants better able to signal competencies to prospective employers	Improved confidence to approach industry of choice	Employers can more successfully address labour shortage
Program funding	Employment supports (e-mentoring, optional interview simulation tools, BC JobConnect)	Closing of skills gap		

Moderators	Sectoral streams	Newcomer demographic characteristics
	Regional variation	Delivery context

1.2. FAST's scaling journey

In spring 2019, FAST was selected to join the **Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio**, receiving a grant from the Future Skills Centre (FSC) to add two new streams (Accounting & Finance and Culinary Arts) and expand the program from BC to Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. In the same year, Blueprint conducted an early-stage evaluation of Phase 1 to understand the experience of participants and SDPs. Our findings demonstrated that newcomers found value in FAST, particularly in gaining a better understanding of Canadian workplace culture. We identified key areas for improvement, such as providing more targeted sectoral content and continuing to invest in sustainable partnerships with SDPs.

In 2021, IEC-BC received a second FSC grant to continue expanding FAST, moving from pilot to iteration phase. In Phase 2, focus shifted from generating early evidence of promise to generating data to help strengthen design and implementation. IEC-BC partnered with the BC Care Providers Association to add a new Seniors Care stream to respond to the labour needs for clinical and non-clinical occupations in the long-term care sector.

In April 2023, Blueprint released an *Interim Report* to share insights on FAST's effectiveness, exploring program uptake, participant experiences, and early employment outcomes for Phase 2. Data were collected from September 2021 to June 2022. This document represents our Final Report for this phase of FSC funding, building on and expanding findings presented in our initial dataset with new data collected from July 2022 to March 2024 (covering the entire period of September 2021 to March 2024). It provides a longitudinal analysis of program uptake, participant experiences, and employment outcomes along with new data sources: a nine-month follow-up survey as well as interviews with industry partners, SDPs, and participants enrolled in new streams and those underrepresented in the previous study due to low enrolment numbers.

In April 2024, IEC-BC received a third FSC scaling grant to move into Phase 3 of the project and launch new iterations. Table 2 summarizes FAST's scaling timeline and how Blueprint will continue to support with evidence generation and reporting.

Table 2 | FSC grant timeline

2015	Phase 1: Nov. 2019–March 2021	Phase 2: Sept. 2021–March 2024	Phase 3: Apr. 2024–end date TBD
	First FSC Scaling Grant	Second FSC Scaling Grant	Third FSC Scaling Grant
IEC-BC launches FAST in BC	IEC-BC receives an FSC grant to expand FAST to two new sectors (Accounting & Finance and Culinary Arts) and three new jurisdictions: Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. • Blueprint conducts its early-stage evaluation.	IEC-BC receives an FSC grant to continue expansion to the Seniors Care stream. FAST offers the Seniors Care stream in BC; IEC-BC partners with NBCC to expand FAST to New Brunswick. • Blueprint assists with continued evaluation and scaling design. • Blueprint releases its Phase 2 Interim Report, covering Sept. 2021 to June 2022, in April 2023. • Blueprint releases its Phase 2 Final Report, covering Sept. 2021 to March 2024, in September 2024.	IEC-BC receives a third FSC grant to implement and evaluate new program iterations (e.g., time-bound, cohort-based approaches) and to expand offerings to new target populations (viz., international students, naturalized citizens, and open work permit holders). • Blueprint assists with continued evaluation and capacity building. • Blueprint's Phase 3 Interim Report is forthcoming in spring 2025; our Phase 3 Final Report is forthcoming in early 2026.

1.3. FAST partnerships

IEC-BC partners with many employers and community and immigrant SDPs who refer their clients to FAST. These partners have helped develop FAST module content and provided professional services (e.g., industry designations, credential services, etc.) to FAST users. **Box 1** summarizes the roles of core partners.

Box 1 | Partners

Lead

Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC). IEC-BC is a not-for-profit organization that provides BC employers with solutions, tools, and resources they need to attract, hire, and retain qualified immigrant talent. It believes that the successful integration of skilled newcomers into the BC labour force is critical to both their success and the province's long-term economic performance. It works with employers, government, and other partner stakeholders to ensure that BC employers can effectively integrate global talent.

Industry partners *co-create occupation-specific content. FAST completers are also referred to industry partners for credentialing services where relevant.*

- BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA). Established in 1977, BCCPA is the leading voice for BC's continuing care sector. Its growing membership base includes over 450 long-term care, assisted living, and commercial members from across BC. Through its operating arm EngAge BC, the organization represents independent living and private-pay home health operators. BCCPA and EngAge BC members support more than 19,000 seniors annually in long-term care and assisted living settings and 6,500 independent living residents. Additionally, its members deliver almost 2.5 million hours of home care and home support services each year. All members are required to abide by the Association's Code of Ethics.

- The British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Since 1964, BCIT has taught and trained experts, professionals, and innovators who shape our economy—across BC and around the world. BCIT offers practical career credentials designed for the workplace, from diplomas and certificates to bachelor's and master's degrees. Their schools cover subjects as diverse as applied and natural sciences, business and media, computing and IT, engineering, health sciences, and trades.

- BioTalent Canada. BioTalent Canada supports the people behind life-changing science. Trusted as the go-to source for labour market intelligence, BioTalent Canada guides bio-economy stakeholders with evidence-based data and industry-driven standards. BioTalent Canada is focused on igniting the industry's brainpower, bridging the gap between job-ready talent and employers, and ensuring the long-term agility, resiliency, and sustainability of one of Canada's most vital sectors.

- The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC). The ICTC is a neutral, not-for-profit national centre of expertise with the mission of strengthening Canada's digital advantage in the global economy. At the time of this writing, across 36 different initiatives, ICTC has provided opportunities to 118,186 people for upskilling, reskilling, and on-the-job training in the digital economy.

- New Brunswick Community College (NBCC). NBCC is a community college located throughout various locations in New Brunswick, including Moncton, Miramichi, Fredericton, Saint John, St. Andrews, and Woodstock. Students learn in a dynamic environment through hands-on training, state-of-the-art equipment, and real-world experiences. With more than 90 programs, NBCC provides a wide range of learning opportunities that prepare students to step into the workplace with expertise and confidence.

- World Education Services (WES). WES is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students in the US and Canada. For 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has expanded its mission to pursue and scale social impact.

Box 1 | Partners

Service Delivery Partners (SDPs) *assess newcomers' suitability and eligibility for FAST and refer them to the program. There are over 20 SDPs; below, we list the three SDPs with the highest number of referrals.*

- [ACCES Employment](#). ACCES Employment is a community-based workforce development organization that assists jobseekers from diverse backgrounds who are facing barriers to employment to integrate into the Canadian job market. It achieves this by providing employment services, linking employers to skilled people, and building strong networks in collaboration with community partners.

- [Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)](#). ISANS is the leading immigrant settlement service agency in Atlantic Canada, serving 15,000+ clients annually in 100+ communities across Nova Scotia, through many kinds of services—language, settlement, community integration, and employment—both in-person and online. Its staff brings varied languages, diverse experiences, and unique perspectives to inform client-centred programming.

- [Regina Immigrant Women Centre Inc. (RIWC)](#). RIWC provides opportunities, programs, and services for immigrant and refugee women and their families to facilitate and support their smooth integration into local communities. It aspires to empower, support, and champion opportunities for immigrant and refugee women and their families through a nationally recognized suite of community centred and integrated services.

2. Learning agenda and methodology

2.1. Blueprint's evidence generation approach

Blueprint has developed a novel approach to evidence generation that fits within the six stages of the innovation cycle to support the scaling-up of promising interventions. By understanding an intervention's stage of development, we can determine the most appropriate tools to advance it to the next stage. **Box 5** of the [Scaling Design Report](#) provides more details on our evidence generation approach.

Among the Scaling Up Skills Development Portfolio interventions, FAST is in **Stage 4** of the innovation cycle, **Delivery and Iteration**. Stage 4 is further broken down into three levels of delivery maturity: *Implement, Improve and Prove* (see **Figure 3**). Because FAST was already delivered as a pilot and to an initial cohort, we categorize it at **Stage 4b** of the innovation cycle, Improve, where evidence generation is focused on data to support continuous improvement.

Figure 3 | Phases of Delivery Maturity

4

4a
Focus on **data to support implementation**

Implement

4b
Focus on **data for improvement**

Improve

4c
Focus on **long-term outcomes, impact evaluation and cost -benefit analysis to build the business case for scaling**

Prove
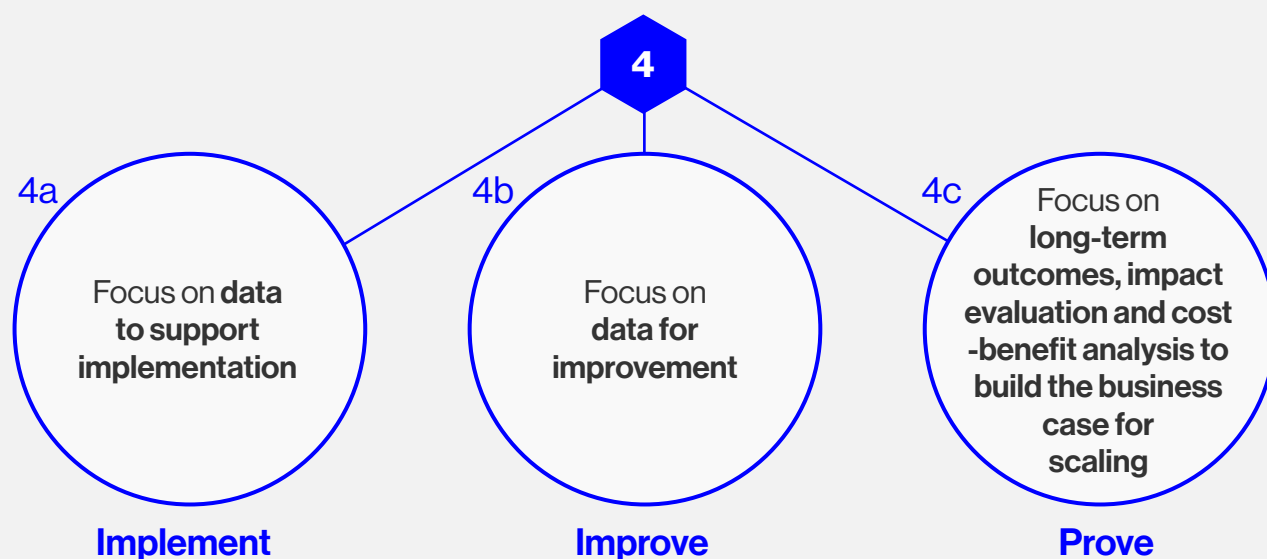
Our measurement approach includes both indicators that are specific to the FAST model and common indicators drawn from our Common Outcomes Framework (see **Box 2**).

Box 2 | **Common Outcomes Framework**

Our measurement approach includes indicators that are specific to an intervention as well as a set of common indicators that are measured for every intervention in the Portfolio.

These common indicators are drawn from Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, which was developed in consultation with our partners and was informed by review of employment-related outcomes frameworks and measurement approaches both within Canada and internationally. They include:

- **Intermediate outcomes** that reflect 'in-program' participant experiences and gains (e.g., program satisfaction and skills development).
- **Long-term outcomes**, such as employment and educational attainment.

Using a consistent approach to measuring outcomes is part of our commitment to understanding how each intervention in the Portfolio is reaching people across Canada and allows us to measure long-term outcomes using Statistics Canada's Social Data Linking Environment.

For more information on Blueprint's Common Outcomes Framework, see **Appendix A**.

2.2. Learning agenda

This report answers questions in five areas:

1. Program Uptake	2. Participant Experience	3. Program Outcomes	4. Program Implementation	5. Perceived Labour Market Value
a. Who did FAST reach? b. How did program reach vary across streams?	a. How many participants completed the program? b. Were participants satisfied with the program? c. Did satisfaction vary across program stream? d. Did satisfaction vary across program component? e. What did participants identify as opportunities for improvement?	a. What employment-related outcomes did participants achieve? b. How did these outcomes differ by participant completion status and streams?	a. What were SDPs' impressions of FAST? b. What were their experiences referring clients to the program? c. What did SDPs identify as opportunities for improvement?	a. What did industry partners perceive to be FAST's value-add to the immigrant services landscape and labour market? b. What challenges did industry partners identify for FAST to be effectively adopted in the labour market and realize its potential value?

2.3. Data sources and sample sizes

Blueprint gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to answer our questions. To understand participant outcomes, we used a longitudinal research design whereby data on outcomes were collected at baseline, exit, and at three- and nine-month follow-up points. Longer-term impact analysis may be possible in the future through Statistics Canada data linkage. After collecting data, the Blueprint team conducted an internal sensemaking process to discuss trends and discrepancies, summarize key takeaways, and develop recommendations.

Quantitative data sources and response rates are summarized in **Table 3**.

Table 3 | **FSC grant timeline**

Data sources	Description	Participants enrolled and consenting to research	Collection dates
Administrative data	Collected by IEC-BC at program registration for participants consenting to the research; includes socio-demographic characteristics, stream, arrival status, and enrolment and completion data.	**1,506**[9]	Sept. 2021–Mar. 2024
Exit survey	Administered five weeks after registration to capture satisfaction and additional socio-demographic characteristics.	**39%** (551/1,430)	Sept. 2021–Mar. 2024
Three-month follow-up survey	Administered three months after the exit survey to capture employment outcomes.	**40%** (543/1,345)	Dec. 2021–Mar. 2024
Nine-month follow-up survey	Administered nine months after the exit survey to capture employment outcomes.	**42%** (444/1,058)	June 2022–Mar. 2024

Note. In the cells describing, 'Participants enrolled and consenting to research' at the exit (i.e., five-week), three-month, and nine-month marks, the denominators indicate the number of participants who received the surveys; the numerators indicate the proportion of participants who completed the surveys. Decreasing denominators at each point are due to FAST's rolling enrolment structure. By March 2024, recently enrolled participants may have received their exit survey (sent five weeks after enrolment), but fewer would have received their three-month follow-up survey, and fewer still would have received their nine-month follow-up survey.

9 To maximize the number of participants consenting to the research, the program automatically enrolled participants and allowed them to opt-out of consent post-registration.

Qualitative data sources and response rates are summarized in **Table 4**. Descriptions of each source are provided below the table.

Table 4 | Qualitative data sources, sample sizes, participants, and dates

Data sources	Sample sizes	Collection dates
Diary studies	**15:** • IT & Data Services: 5 • Skilled Trades: 4 • Accounting & Finance: 3 • Biotechnology & Life Sciences: 2 • Seniors Care: 1	Jan. 2022–Jan. 2023
Participant interviews	**16:** • Biotechnology & Life Sciences: 6 • IT & Data Services: 4 • Seniors Care: 3 • Culinary Arts: 2 • Accounting & Finance: 1	Jan 2022–May 2023
Service Delivery Partner (SDP) interviews	**6 SDPs:** • BC (KIS) • BC (SUCCESS) • Manitoba (PLLC) • Nova Scotia (ISANS) • Ontario (HMC) • Saskatchewan (RIWC)	May 2022–June 2022
Industry partner interviews	**4 industry partners:** • BCCPA • BioTalent Canada • WES • NBCC	Oct. 2022–Nov. 2022

Diary studies. A diary study allows researchers to capture a participant's in-depth experience by following along their journey over a period. For this four-week diary study, Blueprint contacted participants once per week through WhatsApp to share their thoughts about FAST (with prompts about career navigation) in real time. We conducted two in-depth interviews with each participant focused on career pathways and goals in relation to FAST: one conducted at the time of enrolment and the other four weeks later. Participants were selected to reflect a mix of characteristics across newcomer arrival status, gender, age, referral source, and stream.

Participant interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews to generate evidence on program experience and satisfaction and the perceived effect of the program on employment outcomes. Participants were selected to reflect a mix of characteristics across FAST completion status, commensurate employment,[10] salary, and stream. Participants were contacted to participate in an interview five weeks after registration, which was IEC-BC's average estimated time to complete the program.

Service delivery partner (SDP) interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews with SDPs who helped refer and introduce their clients to FAST to explore their perception of FAST and their experience in referring participants.

Industry partner interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews with organizations that partnered with FAST in various capacities, including on curriculum development, complementary certification, and expansion to new sectors. Industry partners were asked about their perception of FAST's value-add and experiences working with IEC-BC.

2.4. Data limitations

The findings are framed within the context of certain limitations:

- **Exit survey timing affecting data collection.** Early in the project, IEC-BC staff estimated the average time for FAST completion was five weeks; hence the exit surveys were sent five weeks after enrolment. This meant some participants had not yet completed FAST when they received the exit survey and were unable to answer all exit survey questions. IEC-BC has since reassessed their platform data to better estimate average time-to-completion. The exit survey is now sent eight weeks post-program, which will be reflected in future reports.

- **Gaps in baseline socio-demographic data.** Some socio-demographic information, such as employment status and enrolment in education, were collected at program exit and follow-ups only to streamline the registration process for participants (i.e., they were not included in IEC-BC's program registration form). Thus, we could not analyze changes in these characteristics from pre- to post-program. This limitation will be revisited during the next phase of work.

- **Potential bias in industry partner interviews.** IEC-BC provided Blueprint with connections to industry partners. In relationship-based recruitment strategies, those recruited may be more likely to express positive relationships with the organizer.

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10 Commensurate employment is defined as employment that matches a candidate's education, skills, and work experience, and is at a similar level of seniority as the last job they held before arriving in Canada.

3. Findings

3.1. Program uptake

3.1.1. Who did FAST reach?

IEC-BC surpassed initial enrolment targets for FAST. Administrative data show FAST saw 1,506 total participants consenting to research between September 2021 and March 2024, surpassing a target enrolment of **950** newcomers by **59%**.

FAST participants were mostly newcomers who were highly educated, racialized, mid-career workers with caregiving responsibilities and low household incomes. Among FAST participants,[11] nearly all were landed newcomers or permanent residents;[12] **73%** lived in Canada for less than a year, and **20%** lived in Canada between one and five years. A full breakdown of participant demographics can be found in **Appendix B**. The majority were:

- highly educated (**86%** had a university degree or higher);
- **95%** received their highest level of education outside of Canada;
- racialized (**83%**);
- parents (**85%** had child dependents);
- low household income[13] (**70%** earned under $40,000 per year and **18%** earned between $40,000 and $60,000 per year)[14];
- in a working-age group (**80%** were between **30** and **49** years old, with the average participant being **36** years old).

There was an equal split between men and women. Though participants can join the program pre- and post-arrival and come from a variety of countries, the highest proportions were from India (**24%**) and Nigeria (**16%**), and most had already arrived in Canada (**69%**). Five weeks after registration, only **5%** of participants reported that they were not in Canada, indicating that pre-arrival newcomers were participating in FAST in the few weeks leading up to their scheduled immigration. Participants largely resided in Ontario (**25%**), British Columbia (**23%**), Nova Scotia (**17%**) and Saskatchewan (**16%**). Only **12%** of participants collectively lived in Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Quebec, and zero participants lived in Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Prince Edward Island, or the Northwest Territories.

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11 FAST participants' socio-demographic information was drawn from both IEC-BC's administrative data base (N=1506) and Blueprint exit surveys (N=551). The latter data source represents FAST participants who consented to participating in this study (37% of all eligible FAST enrollees).

12 Other responses to questions about immigration status were Canadian citizen (by naturalization) [1%], Canadian citizen (by birth) [1%], refugee claimant (3%), and 'other' (10%).

13 Reporting on household income includes income contributions from multiple individuals in the same home. As can be seen in **Appendix B**, 87% of respondents have two or more people living in their household, including themselves.

14 This is likely because participants were unemployed, but Blueprint does not have information on employment status at intake.

Forty-nine percent reported speaking English as a first language. This number is high compared to the general profile of immigrants to Canada: in 2016, **28%** of immigrants reported English and French as their first language.[15] Participants were asked whether their first language was English, French, or 'other'; the 49% we gathered is likely an overestimate from participants misinterpreting the question about first language as 'fluency' instead.

3.1.2. How did program reach vary across streams?

Enrolment was largely concentrated in IT & Data Services, Biotech & Life Sciences, and Accounting & Finance. Based on administrative data from **1,506** participants, **90%** of enrolments were concentrated in just three streams: IT & Data Services (**46%**), followed by Biotech & Life Sciences (**24%**) and Accounting & Finance (**20%**). There was much lower uptake for the Skilled Trades (**5%**), Seniors Care (**4%**), and Culinary Arts (**1%**) streams. Disregarding the addition of the new stream, Seniors Care, this is the same order reported in our *Interim Report.* **Table 5** presents an enrolment breakdown by stream.

Table 5 | FAST enrolments by stream

Stream	Participants enrolled	
IT & Data Services	46% (698/1,506)	
Biotech & Life Sciences	24% (354/1,506)	90% (1,360/1,506)
Accounting & Finance	20% (308/1,506)	
Skilled Trades	5% (76/1,506)	
Seniors Care	4% (58/1,506)	10% (146/1,506)
Culinary Arts	1% (12/1,506)	

Source. IEC-BC administrative data.

Socio-demographic characteristics—such as location, gender, and education—differed across streams. Below, we summarize notable differences in participant characteristics by stream. For a more complete breakdown, see **Appendix B**.

- **By region:** Enrolment in streams followed regional population sizes; for example, ON and BC residents composed **48%** of the full sample; accordingly, most participants in the Biotech & Life Sciences and IT & Data Services streams resided in these provinces (**55%** and **52%**, respectively). However, **55%** of the third most-popular stream, Accounting & Finance, was composed of participants from NS and SK, with only **28%** of participants in this stream located in ON and BC. This was likely a product of the number and strength of recommendations from SDPs, region-to-region.

15 Statistics Canada. (2019, April 3). *Linguistic integration of immigrants and official language populations in Canada.* https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016017/98-200-x2016017-eng.cfm

- **By gender:** Women made up the majority of the Seniors Care (**65%**), Biotech & Life Sciences (**68**%), and Accounting & Finance (**60%**) streams, whereas Skilled Trades was filled predominantly by men (**88%**). The IT & Data Services and Culinary Arts streams were balanced in terms of gender.
- **By education level:** Although participants in all streams had high levels of education, those in Biotech & Life Sciences were more highly educated than those in other streams, with the vast majority (**95%**) having a bachelor's degree or higher and **72%** having degrees above the bachelor's level.

3.2. Participant program experience

3.2.1. How many participants completed the program?

According to administrative data, 21% of participants (317/1,506) completed the full set of FAST modules after signing up. Since the program was online, self-paced, and flexible, participants could choose to complete as much of FAST as they found useful and/or relevant. Most FAST participants engaged with a variety of program modules.

It is unsurprising to see free, low-barrier, self-directed, and digital programs with completion rates lower than other cohort-based programs. As we will explore in **section 3.2.2**., completion rates are correlated with program satisfaction but not with employment outcomes; therefore, completion rates should not be interpreted as an indicator of success for FAST.

Completion rates varied by stream. Figure 4 shows a breakdown of completion rates across the six streams. Biotech & Life Sciences saw the highest completion rates (**36%**), with Seniors Care and Culinary Arts seeing the lowest (**10%** and **0%**, respectively). Rationale for higher completion rates for various streams are discussed in **section 3.2.2**.

Figure 4 | Reasons for not completing FAST
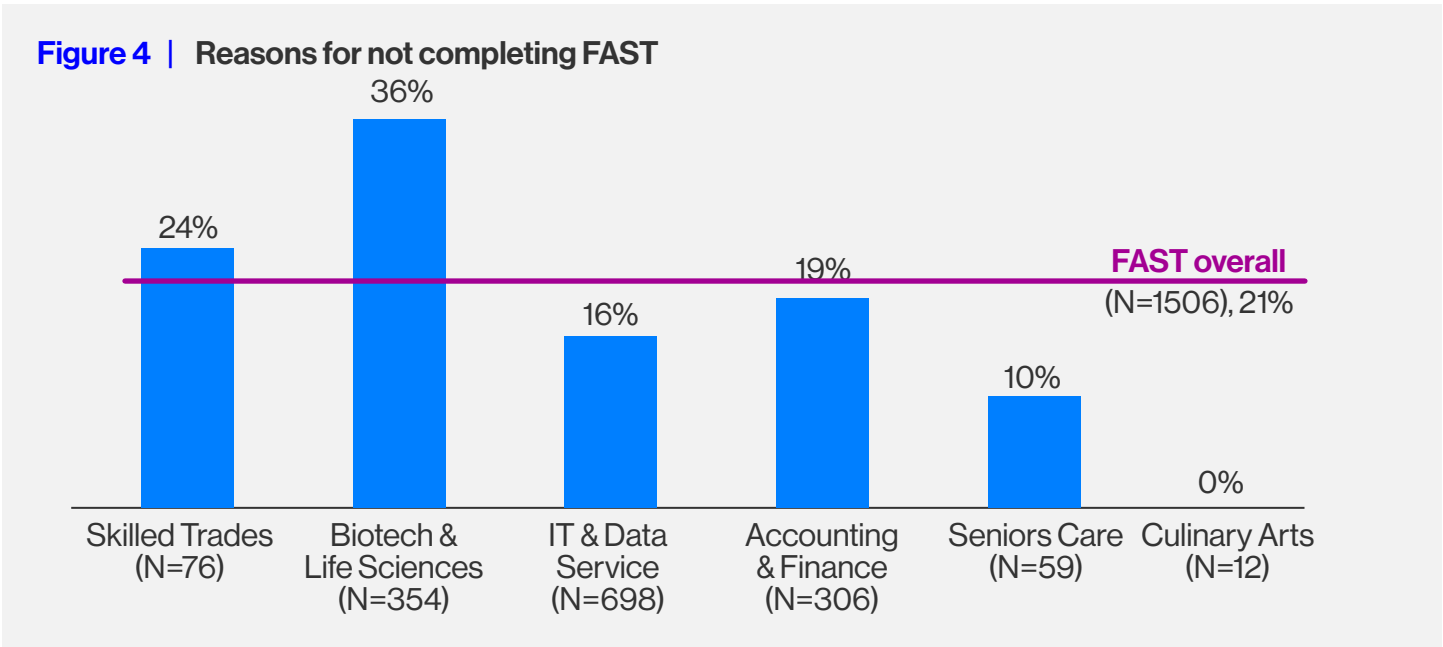
Source. IEC-BC administrative data.

Completion rates were consistent across socio-demographic characteristics. There were two exceptions to this consistency: **i)** a slightly higher proportion of women completed FAST compared to men (**34%** vs. **26%**), and **ii)** a slightly higher proportion of those who did not speak English or French as their first language completed FAST compared to those who reported speaking English as a first language (**33%** vs. **25%**).[16]

Reasons for not completing FAST were related to other employment and settlement priorities.
Responses from the exit survey showed that **55%** of those who did not complete FAST cited time constraints as the main reason. Only **14%** did not complete due to issues with FAST—either website difficulties (**9%**) or unhelpful content (**5%**)—and **11%** did not complete because they found employment. **Figure 5** offers a visual breakdown of reasons given for non-completion.

Figure 5 | **Reasons for not completing FAST**

Why have you not completed FAST? Select all that apply. (N=175)
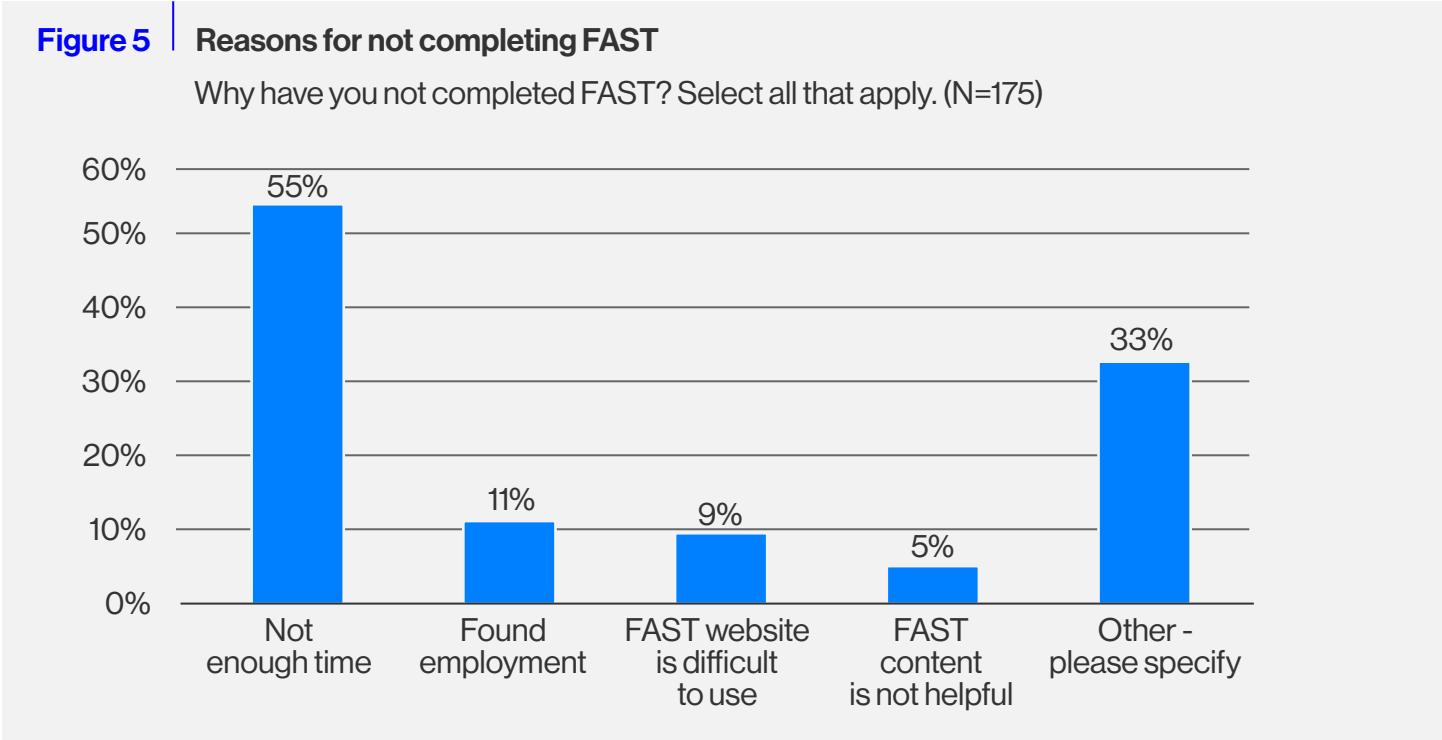
Source. Exit survey (N=175)

Note. Respondents were prompted to select all response options that applied. Open-text responses for "other" reasons for FAST non-completion were thematically coded alongside other qualitative data from participants, with several overlapping themes from the existing response options in the survey questions.

Additional insights into reasons for non-completion, based on participant and SDP interviews and the diary study, are provided below.

- **Time constraints** (**55%**). Interviews with participants and staff provided more information about newcomers' time constraints, which included personal circumstances related to settlement (e.g., finding housing, navigating children's schooling) and spending more time on other employment-related supports. As described by participants and SDPs, FAST was not their sole priority and often only one of many ways that participants sought employment.

16 Completion rates presented here are higher than the average completion rate of 21% because they are combined with exit survey data. Completion rates broken down by socio-demographic indicators collected in the exit survey (n=551) (i.e., gender and first official language spoken) are snapshots of the overall completion rates collected from administrative data (n=1506). The completion rate on the exit survey only is 30% (165/551).

> "I was just trying to settle in, and trying to get my kids in school, looking for a job ... Yeah, it's been kind of hectic. You apply to lots of jobs [and] you have to work on your resume most of the time."
>
> *—Participant interview*

- **Finding other employment** (**11%**). As FAST's primary goal was to support newcomers find employment, participants were likely to disengage if they were successful in finding work. As one SDP interviewee observed: "*Most of the time, these are cases of clients who got employment, so they're not interested in continuing the course.*" Further details on participant employment outcomes are found in **section 3.3**.

- **'Anything helps,' 'one piece of the puzzle' mindset.** A key theme that emerged from diary studies and interviews with participants and SDPs was that immigrants often express an 'anything helps' mindset. Newcomers may enrol in more than one employment program or service because they believe it can increase their probability of finding employment. According to some participants and SDPs, FAST's accessibility meant that some newcomers were willing to enrol based on this possibility without fully understanding the program or how it might add value to their specific career journeys.

3.2.2. Were participants satisfied with the program?

Most participants were satisfied with FAST overall. Measured at the exit survey, **61%** of respondents were either 'somewhat' (**29%**) or 'very' (**32%**) satisfied with FAST, as shown in **Table 6** (below).[17] Notably, only **11%** of respondents were dissatisfied.

Participants were likely to recommend FAST to someone else—regardless of their own satisfaction with it. As shown in **Table 6**, a much higher proportion of exit survey respondents (**80%**) said they would 'definitely' or 'probably' recommend FAST to others—or had already done so. In diary studies and interviews, most respondents—even those who did not find all FAST modules useful—felt that someone else could find them useful. This discrepancy between willingness to recommend the program and satisfaction rates reinforces the notion that many newcomers believed there was value in enrolling in multiple programs to increase the probability of finding employment.

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17 There were no noteworthy differences in satisfaction when compared across various socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 6 offers a comparison of satisfaction rates and willingness to recommend.

Table 6 | Overall satisfaction rates and willingness to recommend FAST

Topic	Participant responses		
Overall satisfaction	Very satisfied	31% (171/550)	61% (337/550)
	Somewhat satisfied	30% (166/550)	
	Neutral	29% (157/550)	
	Somewhat dissatisfied	5% (25/550)	
	Very dissatisfied	6% (31/550)	
Based on your experience in the program, how likely are you to recommend FAST to someone looking to find a job in Canada?	I've already recommended it to someone	14% (76/550)	80% (442/550)
	Definitely recommend	44% (240/550)	
	Probably recommend	23% (126/550)	
	Not sure	15% (83/550)	
	Probably not recommend	3% (14/550)	
	Definitely not recommend	2% (11/550)	

Source. Exit survey.

Program completion and willingness to recommend were positively associated with program satisfaction. Participants who completed FAST were more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction regardless of their program stream.[18] As shown in **Table 7**, **79%** of completers were satisfied with FAST compared to **54%** of non-completers. Similarly, program completion was positively associated with the likelihood of recommending FAST.[19] Almost all completers (**94%**) would 'definitely' recommend or had already recommended the program compared to non-completers (**75%**).

18 It is also possible that those who were more satisfied decided to complete the program. A multiple regression analysis found a statistically significant relationship between program completion and program satisfaction at the 0.1% level after controlling for participant stream, with a regression coefficient of 0.45906 (SE = 0.10555, t = 4.349, p < 0.001).

19 Two multiple regression analyses confirmed that the positive relationship between program completion and satisfaction (p<0.01), as well as likelihood to recommend (p<0.01), persist after controlling for program stream.

Table 7 | Overall satisfaction rates and willingness to recommend FAST

Program satisfaction broken down by completion status		Program completion status			
		Complete (N=165)		Not complete (N=386)	
Overall satisfaction	Very satisfied	**45%** (75/165)	**79%** (131/165)	**25%** (96/385)	**54%** (206/385)
	Somewhat satisfied	**34%** (56/165)		**29%** (110/385)	
	Neutral	**13%** (21/165)		**35%** (136/385)	
	Somewhat dissatisfied	**1%** (2/165)		**6%** (23/385)	
	Very dissatisfied	**7%** (11/165)		**5%** (20/385)	
Based on your experience in the program, how likely are you to recommend FAST to someone looking to find a job in Canada?	I've already recommended it to someone	**20%** (33/165)	**94%** (155/165)	**11%** (43/385)	**74%** (287/385)
	Definitely recommend	**52%** (86/165)		**40%** (154/385)	
	Probably recommend	**22%** (36/165)		**23%** (90/385)	
	Not sure	**4%** (6/165)		**20%** (77/385)	
	Probably not recommend	**1%** (1/165)		**3%** (13/385)	
	Definitely not recommend	**2%** (3/165)		**2%** (8/385)	

Respondents enjoyed the self-paced, no-cost design. One of the largest draws for respondents, as reported in interviews and diary studies, was that FAST was both self-directed and free. This allowed newcomers to have low-barrier access points to industry-related assessments and information they could fit into their busy schedules. As one participant put it: "FAST is free, online and self-paced, which was a big draw for me."

3.2.3. Did satisfaction vary across program stream?

Satisfaction levels varied considerably across industry streams. In Biotech & Life Sciences, IT & Data Services, and Accounting & Finance, **63**% of respondents expressed being 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied. Fewer respondents were satisfied in the Skilled Trades (**44%**) and Seniors Care (**41%**) streams. The Culinary Arts stream had too small a sample size (n=4) for satisfaction rates to be meaningful. **Table 8** shows overall satisfaction rates with FAST by program stream.

Table 8 | Overall satisfaction rates with FAST by program stream

Overall satisfaction /stream	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
Skilled Trades	17% (5/30)	0% (0/30)	40% (12/30)	27% (8/30)	17% (5/30)
				44%	
Biotech & Life Sciences	3% (4/133)	5% (6/133)	29% (39/133)	24% (32/133)	39% (52/133)
				63%	
IT & Data Services	4% (11/259)	5% (13/259)	28% (73/259)	34% (87/259)	29% (75/259)
				63%	
Accounting & Finance	8% (9/107)	3% (3/107)	26% (28/107)	30% (32/107)	33% (35/107)
				63%	
Culinary Arts	0% (0/4)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/4)	75% (3/4)	25% (1/4)
				100%	
Seniors Care	12% (2/17)	18% (3/17)	29% (5/17)	24% (4/17)	18% (3/17)
				42%	

Participant satisfaction varied based on the relevance of occupation-specific content. Interviews and diary studies revealed that satisfaction rates were closely tied to how well FAST's content aligned with participants' career goals and language proficiencies, particularly regarding technical terminology and regulatory information for specific professions.

- **Biotech & Life Sciences, IT & Data Services, and Accounting & Finance.** Respondents in these streams reported that, unlike other programs and supports they had accessed, FAST provided them with an in-depth understanding of their potential career pathways in a packaged, digestible form and with the option of receiving certificates. Respondents noted that they learned 'what it looked like' to work in junior and senior accounting roles; which jobs were regulated and certified; and which certifications were important for entering regulated fields.

  > "From the FAST course, I was taken to … BioTalent … That was when I became bio-ready, and I got a certificate. I didn't know that I would get a certificate without going to the school directly. It's in my resume and I'm so proud to put it there."
  >
  > —*Participant interview*

- **Skilled Trades.** Some respondents in this stream reported a mismatch between the *non-labour-intensive* roles they were looking for within the sector (e.g., engineering, machinery sales and retail, project management and coordination, etc.) and the technical content and assessments offered by FAST, which focused on l*abour-intensive* roles. Some mid-career participants discovered that the Skilled Trades stream was focused on roles that were either too primary or not relevant to their job search goals.

  > "I will not be looking for any job which is not suitable. Every job that was listed there [in the Skilled Trades stream] was not suitable."
  >
  > —*Participant interview*

- **Seniors Care.** Some respondents in this stream reported that the language and content could be overly technical and therefore challenging to navigate. As this was a relatively new stream, there was less visual, interactive, and video-based content. These elements have been incorporated in the other streams, contributing to higher levels of satisfaction.

3.2.4. Did satisfaction vary across program component?

Respondents found workplace culture training to be the most useful component of the program, followed by skills gap training and the technical assessments. As shown in **Table 9**, most respondents found various components 'very' or 'somewhat' useful: workplace culture training (**77%**), skills gap training (**67%**), and technical competency assessments (**66%**). Respondents reported moderate utility for e-mentoring and webinars (both **54%**) and with BC Job Connect (**45%**).

Table 9 | Program satisfaction by component

How useful were each of the components of FAST for your job search?			
Workplace culture training	Very useful	**54% (296/547)**	**77%**
	Somewhat useful	**22% (123/547)**	
	A little useful	**7%** (37/547)	
	Not useful	**5% (**27/547)	
	I did not use this	**12%** (64/547)	
Skills gap training	Very useful	**38% (208/547)**	**67%**
	Somewhat useful	**29% (157/547)**	
	A little useful	**11% (**61/547)	
	Not useful	**6%** (33/547)	
	I did not use this	**16%** (88/547)	
Technical competency assessments	Very useful	**40% (220/549)**	**66%**
	Somewhat useful	**26% (141/549)**	
	A little useful	**11%** (60/549)	
	Not useful	**6%** (35/549)	
	I did not use this	**17%** (93/549)	
E-mentoring	Very useful	**28% (154/545)**	**54%**
	Somewhat useful	**26% (142/545)**	
	A little useful	**8%** (44/545)	
	Not useful	**8%** (43/545)	
	I did not use this	**30%** (162/545)	
Webinars	Very useful	**31% (170/544)**	**54%**
	Somewhat useful	**22% (122/544)**	
	A little useful	**12%** (64/544)	
	Not useful	**7%** (36/544)	
	I did not use this	**28%** (152/544)	
BC Job Connect*	Very useful	**22% (28/125)**	**45%**
	Somewhat useful	**22% (28/125)**	
	A little useful	**14%** (18/125)	
	Not useful	**17%** (21/125)	
	I did not use this	**28%** (152/544)	

Source. Exit survey. *Note. Responses about BC Job Connect are from respondents from BC only.

Most respondents found the program useful for improving technical and workplace cultural knowledge: **71% (333/466)** of respondents thought FAST was 'very' or 'somewhat' useful for improving industry-specific technical competencies, and **77% (357/466)** thought FAST was 'very' or 'somewhat' useful for improving workplace cultural knowledge (as shown in **Table 10**).

Table 10 | Program satisfaction and technical competencies

How useful was FAST for improving your industry-specific technical competencies?		
Very useful	29% (134/466)	71% (333/466)
Somewhat useful	43% (199/466)	
A little useful	19% (89/466)	
Not useful	9% (44/466)	
How useful was FAST for improving your workplace culture knowledge?		
Very useful	43% (199/466)	77% (357/466)
Somewhat useful	34% (158/466)	
A little useful	15% (69/466)	
Not useful	9% (40/466)	

Source. Exit survey.

In the diary study and interviews, participants praised the workplace culture training. Participants thought the "Prepare for Work in Canada" module contained helpful information on non-verbal communication (including 'unspoken rules'), professional language, and navigating culture shock within the workplace.

> "It was awesome because it took me through the culture, what to expect, communication, [and taught] everything I need to know to be able to get a good job here."
>
> *—Participant interview*

> "The other part that really interested me was when they were explaining about culture shock. They explained step-by-step what's happening … [It made me think] maybe it's going to happen with me, so there is a way out, and this is how you can get out of this … It was really relaxing for me. And I got … confident that, OK, I know these steps and if it's going to happen, it's normal."
>
> *—Participant interview*

3.2.5. What did participants identify as opportunities for improvement?

In interviews and diary studies, FAST participants identified the following areas for improvement.

More clearly stated purposes, processes, available occupations, and more upfront information.
Participants described coming to FAST for various purposes: to accelerate their job search, learn more about sectors, receive skills assessment, and connect with mentors. But not all who enrolled understood FAST's offerings or processes. Some reported hearing incorrect information about FAST online or from their service providers (for example, some believed it was suitable for engineers). Some participants assumed the skills assessment was an examination.

> "I feel a bit disoriented. I don't know if it's my fault for lack of navigation skills [or] FAST portals, because although I feel that there are a lot of things that can be done and are available, there's no chronological direction on the FAST portal as to what to do next or [how] you choose something on it. Maybe it's because I like a systematic approach; however, I think the psychological impact of this is that a person may just lose interest entirely."

—Participant interview

> "What I [found challenging was] that they didn't explain the process. They didn't explain what you are going to do after you finish all the months."

—Participant interview

> "Yes, these modules are interesting, but what [about] after? I don't know what's coming after finishing the module [...] I know there are steps, yes, and I need to go one by one, but it's better to know all the processes and, like I said, the purpose."

—Participant interview

Opportunities to improve the platform's user interface and content presentation. Some participants from the Skilled Trades and Seniors Care streams experienced technical difficulties with the website and uncertainty when navigating the modules and assessing their progress. Some observed that learning content in the occupational skills assessment modules were overly technical and/or text-heavy; used unfamiliar acronyms; and contained some broken hyperlinks, disrupting learning flow. When they encountered such challenges, some participants felt demotivated. As one Seniors Care participant observed:

> "I did many tests, but I haven't yet finished, because it will be so hard for me because I have to know some technical words … So I have to review and to see if I can understand the question, and then translate in my language, and then understand the question so that I may be able to answer [it] … And also, at the end, I think I'm stuck. I have to download the certificate, but it doesn't come; it's pending. There's also two courses, two pieces I have to do, but it says 'pending' [...] So I don't know how I can continue."

—Participant interview

To improve their experience with the online platform, participants recommended:

- greater visual and video content to support their learning experience,
- additional explanations of technical acronyms,
- greater clarity on FAST's offerings and guidance on how to sequence the program's multiple modules, and
- a progress bar to show how close they are to completion.

More human touchpoints with IEC-BC staff, peers, and mentors. Participants described wanting to connect with others enrolled in FAST; some expected to meet staff from IEC-BC to provide guidance on navigating the program. Some participants noted that it would be helpful to have a staff member or service provider check in periodically to help. As one participant noted, "I think every once in a while, there should be a live class where the participants could just be there too."

National coverage for adjacent IEC-BC services for participants outside of BC. FAST is open to immigrants across Canada, but adjacent services—including BC JobConnect and BC MentorConnect—are still limited to participants residing in or planning on relocating to BC. In interviews and diary studies, most non-BC residents noted this limitation and instead hoped to access job boards and mentorship programs in their regions.

> "The BC Job Mentorship Program … is not applicable for somebody from another province. So, I don't know if it can be more of a universal thing where other provinces can apply for mentorship programs?"
>
> *—Participant interview*

More streamlined registration processes across partner organizations. Currently, participants who complete FAST and are eligible for additional credentialling with industry partners are provided referral information in the FAST platform. However, to register for such credentialling, participants must leave the FAST platform and navigate to the industry partner's website. Participants flagged this as an additional step in the overall user experience and a duplication of information-sharing. We take this up further in **section 3.5**.

3.3. Participant outcomes

3.3.1. What employment-related outcomes did participants achieve?

Our study design does not allow us to attribute certain outcomes to FAST versus other factors (e.g., newcomers becoming more familiar with the Canadian labour market over time, participation in other settlement/employment services, etc.). Therefore, our findings should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal. With this caveat in mind, results are encouraging.

Overall, FAST respondents reported higher employment readiness at the exit survey. Most FAST participants reported feeling more prepared and confident in their employment journeys after accessing FAST. **Table 11** shows that the percentage of respondents who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with various career readiness-related prompts at the exit survey ranged from **60%** to **70%**.

Table 11 | Participant responses to career-readiness prompts

Survey prompts	Responses		
FAST has helped and supported my preparation for employment.	Strongly agree	**17%** (93/549)	**60%** (331/549)
	Agree	**43%** (238/549)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	**27%** (148/549)	
	Disagree	**5%** (29/549)	
	Strongly disagree	**7%** (41/549)	
Skills gap training	Strongly agree	**28%** (113/403)	**67%** (271/403)
	Agree	**39%** (158/403)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	**19%** (76/403)	
	Disagree	**5%** (19/403)	
	Strongly disagree	**9%** (37/403)	
Technical competency assessments	Strongly agree	**32%** (127/401)	**69%** (275/401)
	Agree	**37%** (148/401)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	**19%** (76/401)	
	Disagree	**5%** (20/401)	
	Strongly disagree	**7%** (30/401)	
E-mentoring	Strongly agree	**31%** (126/402)	**70%** (282/402)
	Agree	**39%** (156/402)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	**17%** (69/402)	
	Disagree	**6%** (26/402)	
	Strongly disagree	6% (25/402)	
Webinars	Strongly agree	**18%** (91/514)	**61%** (310/514)
	Agree	**43%** (219/514)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	**25%** (127/514)	
	Disagree	**4%** (18/514)	
	Strongly disagree	**28%** (152/544)	

Note. These prompts were provided on the exit and two follow-up surveys, but because there were small differences in readiness perceptions over time, we include responses to the exit survey only as it had the largest sample size.

FAST respondents' employment rates improved over time. Based on the exit survey and the three- and nine-month follow-up surveys, the overall employment rate among FAST participants increased from **45%** at the exit survey to **72%** after nine months: an increase of 27 percentage points (as shown in **Table 12**). This trend is consistent whether we consider all survey respondents or only the subset of participants who responded to all three surveys (for whom increases ranged from **46%** to **74%**, as shown in **Figure 6** below).

Table 12 | Participant employment rates over time

Employment outcomes	Exit	Three-month follow-up	Nine-month follow-up	Percentage point increase
Employed	45% (250/551)	56% (302/543)	72% (320/443)	+27

Figure 6 | **Participant employment rates over time** (respondents who completed all three surveys: n=224)
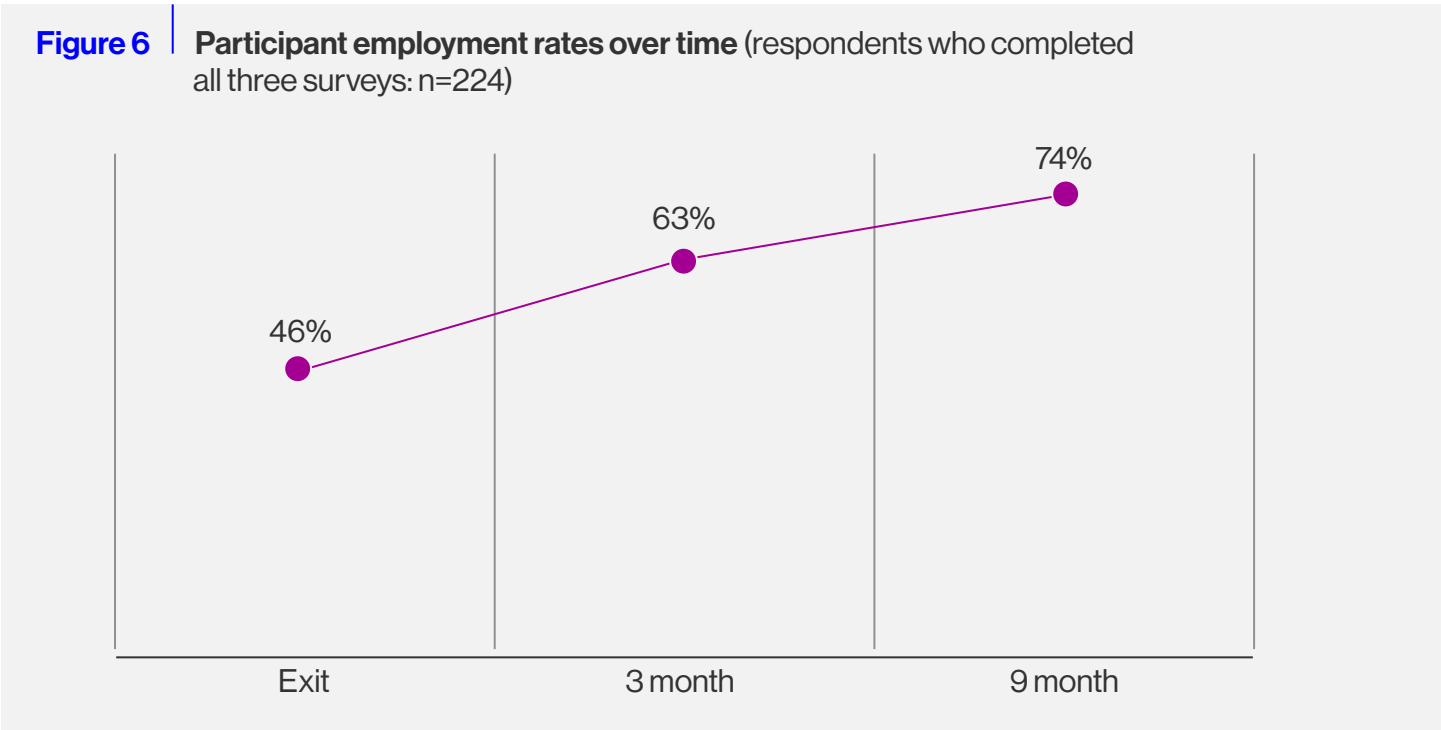
3.3.2. How did these outcomes differ by participant completion status and streams?

The pattern of improved employment outcomes over time was consistent regardless of completion status and participants' socio-demographic characteristics. A lack of correlation between program completion and employment may be because: **i)** FAST is merely one component of a large ecosystem of services for newcomer jobseekers that contribute to positive employment outcomes; **ii)** full completion of FAST is not a necessary condition for participants to acquire the information and resources they need to gain employment; or **iii)** the program has no causal impact on employment outcomes.

All streams showed an upward trend in employment rates. As shown in **Table 13** and **Figure 7**, Biotech & Life Sciences showed the highest increase over time (**+31%**), followed by IT & Data Services (**+29%**), Accounting & Finance (**+19%**), Skilled Trades (**+9%**), and Seniors Care (**+5%**).

Table 13 | Employment rates by stream across survey time points

Stream	Employment rates across survey time points			
	Exit	3-month follow-up	9-month follow-up	Percentage point increase
Skilled Trades	67% (20/30)	70% (16/23)	76% (13/17)	+9
Biotech & Life Sciences	39% (52/133)	53% (72/135)	70% (81/115)	+31
IT & Data Services	43% (112/260)	55% (148/268)	72% (159/220)	+29
Accounting & Finance	52% (56/107)	55% (52/95)	71% (60/84)	+19
Culinary Arts	N/A (n=<5)	N/A (n=<5)	N/A (n=<5)	N/A
Seniors Care	53% (9/17)	58% (11/19)	N/A (n=<5)	+5

Note. The findings for all timepoints in the Culinary Arts stream and the nine-month timepoint for the Seniors Care stream were excluded from this analysis because the sample sizes were too small (n=<5).

Figure 7 | Employment rates by stream across survey time points
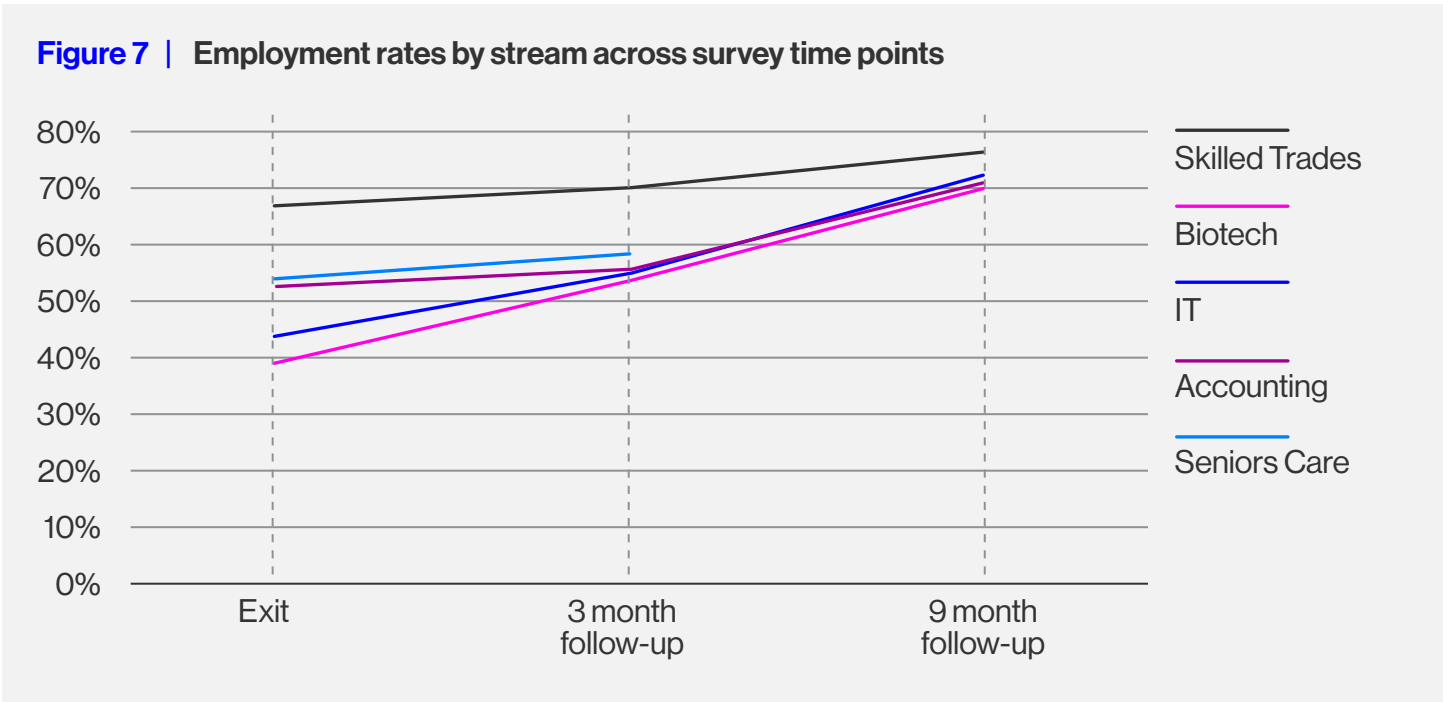
Compared to other streams, Skilled Trades had a much higher employment rate (67%) at the exit point. This was potentially due to the significant demand for skilled trades jobs observed on IEC-BC job boards. This observation aligns with broader industry patterns—several factors contribute to the increased demand for skilled trades workers, including cultural norms that have traditionally emphasized university degrees over blue-collar work, an aging skilled trades workforce—with a projected 700,000 retirements by 2030—and growing population and infrastructure needs.[20] Statistics Canada's Job Vacancies data for the relevant period further supports these observations.[21]

FAST participants' *quality* **of employment also improved over time.** Comparing the program exit point and nine months post-program, respondents reported the following improvements to their employment situations (as shown in **Table 14**):

- more participants reported working in their desired role (**+5%**);
- fewer participants reported their employment as transitional or temporary (**-15%**);
- fewer participants reported their employment as casual (e.g., being on call) (**-12%**); and
- more participants reported working in the sector in which they worked before arriving in Canada (**+6%**).

Table 14 | Employment conditions across survey time points

Employment and education outcomes		Exit	Three-month follow-up	Nine-month follow-up	Percentage point change
My job is casual.	Yes	34% (71/211)	32% (82/258)	22% (57/258)	-12
	No	66% (140/211)	68% (176/258)	78% (201/258)	+12
I would describe my current employment as ...	... my desired role.	10% (22/211)	14% (35/259)	15% (39/257)	+5
	... a steppingstone.	43% (91/211)	42% (108/259)	54% (139/257)	+11
	... transitional or temporary.	46% (98/211)	45% (116/259)	31% (79/257)	-15
The sector of your current employment is ...	... the same as the sector you worked in before arriving in Canada.	15% (32/211)	17% (44/258)	21% (54/258)	+6
	... similar to the sector you worked in before arriving in Canada.	27% (57/211)	24% (62/258)	27% (70/258)	0
	... different from the sector you worked in before arriving in Canada.	58% (122/211)	59% (152/258)	52% (134/258)	-6

20 *For more, see:* Weikle, B. (2024, April 22). "Shortage of skilled tradespeople is hitting all Canadians in the pocketbook, economists say." CBC Radio. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/costofliving/skilled-trades-shortage-cost-of-living-1.7169441
Khan, S. (2023). State of skills: Innovation in training, recruitment and upskilling for skilled trades. Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/state-of-skills-innovation-in-training-recruitment-and-upskilling-for-skilled-trades/

21 Statistics Canada. (2024, July 25). Job vacancies, payroll employees, and job vacancy rate by industry sector, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality [Table: 14-10-0372-01]. https://doi.org/10.25318/1410037201-eng

Respondents reported increased earnings over time. Between program exit and nine months post-program, respondent earnings increased by **25%** (as shown in **Table 15**). **Table 15** also compares earnings between participants who did and did not complete FAST, which shows:

- both completers and non-completers experienced an increase in average weekly earnings in the three- and nine-month follow-up surveys; and
- program *non-completers* had higher weekly earnings than program *completers*. This was likely due to non-completers finding employment and exiting FAST (one of the main reasons given for not completing). Notably, the difference in weekly earnings between completers and non-completers shrank over time (dropping from a difference of $146.50 to $69.62 per week). Completers also saw higher increases than non-completers at the three-month (**+22%** vs. **+9%**) and nine-month (**+38%** vs. **+22%**) marks.

Table 15 | FAST participant average weekly earnings over time by completion status

	Timepoint (and data source)		
	Exit survey	**Three-month follow-up survey**	**Nine-month follow-up survey**
Total percentage employed	45% (250/551)	56% (302/543)	72% (320/443)
Total average weekly earnings*	$775.28 (n=231)	$874.25 (n=277)	$971.74 (n=268)
Percentage change in earnings from exit		+13%	+25%
Percentage change in earnings from exit	$668.74 (n=63)	$823.72 (n=72)	$921.86 (n=76)
Percentage difference from total average weekly earnings		+23%	+38%
Average weekly earnings for non-completers	-14%	-6%	-5%
Percentage change in earnings from exit	$815.24 (n=168)	$892.00 (n=205)	$991.48 (n=192)
Percentage change in earnings from exit		+9%	+22%
Percentage difference from total average weekly earnings	+5%	+2%	+2%

*Note. All earnings reported biweekly, monthly, semimonthly, and annually were converted into weekly earnings for comparison purposes. Hourly wages were also converted into weekly earnings for comparison purposes based on the average number of hours worked per week reported by respondents.

More highly educated participants saw improvements in position levels over time. When looking at the full sample at program exit, we observed an even split between respondents employed in entry-level roles (**51%**) and in technical, management, or executive roles (**49%**), as shown in **Table 16** (below). When we compared respondents' position levels over time, there were slight changes but no discernable trends for those working in entry-level roles; there were also no discernable trends when comparing position levels against education levels.

However, when we tracked position titles among respondents who a) held entry-level positions at the exit stage; and b) held bachelor's degrees or higher (n=35), we saw small improvements. Though this is a limited sample, **Table 16** shows that **45%** of these individuals moved from entry level to technical (**31%**) or management (**14%**) positions nine months later.

Table 16 | Comparing changes in position titles between full sample and participants with bachelor's degrees or higher over time

	Exit		Three-month		Nine-month	
	Full sample (n=249)	Limited sample* (n=35)	Full sample (n=299)	Limited sample* (n=35)	Full sample (n=318)	Limited sample* (n=35)
Entry level (produce basic or beginner-level work)	51% (126/249)	100% (35/35)	54% (161/299)	80% (28/35)	47% (149/318)	54% (19/35)
Technical/Production (produce advanced-level work but do not supervise)	34% (85/249)	0% (0/35)	35% (104/299)	14% (5/35)	42% (133/318)	31% (11/35)
Management (e.g., Director, Manager, Supervisor)	14% (36/249)	0% (0/35)	11% (32/299)	6% (2/35)	11% (35/318)	14% (5/35)
Executive (e.g., C level: CEO, CFO, Executive Director, President/Vice President)	1% (2/249)	0% (0/35)	1% (2/299)	0% (0/35)	0% (1/318)	0% (0/35)

Note. The limited sample refers to those participants who report entry level employment and hold bachelor's degree or higher at exit and who answered all three surveys.

3.4. Program implementation

3.4.1. What were SDPs' impressions of FAST?

Most SDPs viewed FAST as a valuable tool to support newcomers' employment journeys. SDPs do not have direct access to the FAST platform; instead, they receive feedback from the participants they referred to the program, who continue to seek employment counselling or other services with their organization, and/or IEC-BC staff, who share program updates. SDPs saw the following program features as most valuable:

- **Accessibility.** SDPs saw value in FAST being free, online, offered nationally, and available for immigrants both post- and pre-arrival.

- **Flexibility.** SDPs appreciated being able to make exceptions to eligibility criteria—including for work experience, language levels, and PR status. SDPs noted that newcomers can demonstrate readiness for FAST by showing a strong motivation to find employment in one of the six sectors and exhibiting digital literacy.

- **Workplace culture training.** SDPs mentioned that the foundational training in Canadian workplace culture offered excellent value for newcomers with limited work experience seeking greater cultural competencies and soft skills.

- **Complementary nature.** SDPs noted that FAST could be used alongside other general employment services, such as for job applications and sector-specific workshops.

> "We cover ... job search techniques, resume writing, cover letters, etcetera. But FAST ... cover[s] ... workplace culture. It's complementing what we offer. So, if clients ... really need the additional support to become fully employed, that's ... a very good combination to have our program and FAST."
>
> *—SDP interview*

- **Sector- and occupation-specific training.** SDPs saw high value in providing streams that focused on specific industries. These reduced entry hurdles for participants; streamlined information to one location; offered alignment with regional labour market needs; provided key industry certifications; and gave opportunities for some participants in BC to connect with employers, such as through BC JobConnect.

> "Whenever we see a client, we talk about the program, and we highlight how much they can get from [completing FAST]. Certificate [at the end of completion]? ... Absolutely, this is an extra benefit."
>
> *—SDP interview*

> "And I think that's a comment that we've heard about before ... for Biotech and IT, it seems like these are often popular because they have those certifications at the end ... and they're provided free of charge. That seems to be a big draw for those streams."
>
> *—SDP interview*

3.4.2. What are SDPs' experiences referring clients to the program?

SDPs had positive experiences referring participants to FAST. In interviews, SDPs noted that learning about FAST was a smooth process, and that IEC-BC was supportive in answering questions and providing relevant resources to inform referrals.

> "We contact [IEC-BC] whenever we need. So, they are very approachable … When I took over, I wanted to refresh my memory. I wanted to learn again about the FAST program. So, I requested a meeting and we had a meeting."
>
> —*SDP interview*

> "I am a guest speaker for the job search program … I will [promote FAST] to clients."
>
> —*SDP interview*

SDPs who were more familiar with FAST were more likely to recommend it. The greater their understanding of FAST's offerings and potential benefits, the more comfortable SDPs were promoting and explaining its value. SDPs were more likely to recommend other programs (e.g., those offered in-house, or better known within their region) if they were less familiar with FAST.

> "In terms of the staff … after they've been here longer, and that's what I've noticed—they're the ones actually making most referrals."
>
> —*SDP interview*

SDPs mentioned other factors that would influence their likelihood of referring clients to the program. They were more likely to recommend clients who were:

- **Ready for self-guided virtual learning and committed to finding employment.** Some SDPs spoke about how FAST was ideal for newcomers who could manage self-directed modules and work independently. They would less frequently refer clients who would benefit from higher-touch employment services or skills programs.

> "We will know [whether the client is committed] from day one … And people who are committed [can] complete it all in less than three or four weeks … FAST … really requires a specific personality of clients who are capable of going online [for] self-study."
>
> —*SDP interview*

- **Further along in their settlement journeys.** SDPs noted that they tended to recommend FAST to newcomers who were relatively settled and had addressed more urgent needs, such as housing and childcare.

3.4.3. Were there any opportunities for improvement?

SDPs also raised the following opportunities to improve FAST.

Provide more regular updates from IEC-BC about participants to enable follow-up and encourage completion. SDPs reflected it has been challenging to follow-up on the progress of many clients they refer to FAST. They mentioned that it would be helpful for IEC-BC to provide more regular updates about the progress of referred clients, which would allow SDPs to provide tailored follow-ups to participants who may require additional support.

SDPs also noted that this approach would encourage more of a human touch for FAST—echoing participants' requests for greater personal connections with organizers and peers. To SDPs, additional follow-ups would increase completion rates and allow SDPs to gather more feedback and testimonials about FAST to inform future referrals.

Engage other newcomer populations. SDPs mentioned working with a wide range of newcomers who may not have permanent residency, such as international students and temporary residents. SDPs saw the potential for some of FAST's non-credential-related components (such as the workplace culture training, which **77%** of respondents found useful) to benefit these participants as well.

> "I always think [it] would be helpful ... [but] there's not much that can be done about it. And it just involves finding a way to get temporary foreign workers to also be able to participate in the program."
>
> *—SDP interview*

Explore expanding coverage for adjacent services. Echoing participant feedback, SDPs noted the importance of post-program supports, such as BC JobConnect and BC MentorConnect, in enhancing job placement and retention. However, some SDPs were hesitant to refer non-BC-based clients to FAST because of the inherent regional limitations of these services. SDPs discussed how future collaborations with other provincial stakeholders could potentially facilitate regionally appropriate solutions—those that could replicate the value of BC-based services while attuning to local contexts and needs.

> "Because BC MentorConnect and BC JobConnect are province-specific], some [practitioners] were a little bit hesitant [to refer clients and] are more focused on referring clients ... when they're moving to BC."
>
> *—SDP interview*

> "Sometimes clients, when they join the program, assume that potential employers are in BC, not in Ontario. It could be one of the factors that ... may [prevent them from being] eager [or] interested [in committing] to the program."
>
> *—SDP interview*

3.5. Perceived labour market value

3.5.1. What did industry partners perceive to be FAST's value-add to the immigration services landscape and labour market?

Industry partners believed FAST could add value to both sides of the labour market. In interviews, representatives from industry partner organizations—associations and/or certification providers that helped curate and develop content for FAST assessments—believed FAST could be valuable to both newcomers and employers:

- **For newcomers: i)** to improve their industry-specific knowledge within a sector, identify occupations available within it, and assess their skills and competencies against stated expectations; and ii) to receive Canadian validation of their knowledge and skills, which could increase the likelihood of job matching and better labour market outcomes.

- **For employers:** industry partners felt that FAST was strategically positioned to support small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in high-demand sectors, especially those experiencing talent shortages and HR capacity issues, and those looking to increase workplace diversity. However, partners also noted that it was important to validate the skills assessments and certifications with employers in targeted sectors to ensure content met their evolving recruitment needs and instilled confidence in FAST graduates.

Overall, partners saw potential for FAST to provide efficient, reliable, and industry-specific pathways for employers in various sectors that also supported an underserved group of workers. According to interviewees:

> "We didn't have a lot of immigrant-serving agencies [in our network]. And that market is a key market for the [sector] ... we saw this as a real win-win ... [and] a really good kind of synergistic partnership ... [Skilled immigrants] are a very, very important [labour] market for our industry to be able to tap into ... [and] represent a hugely, strategically advantageous labour group of educated, motivated workers that, a lot of the time, our research has indicated that [employers in the industry] are not tapping into enough."
>
> *—Industry partner interview*

> "Everybody else is realizing that we don't have enough domestically trained Canadians. And there's also these really wonderful people who have amazing skills, but can't work to their full skillset yet, you know, when they first get to Canada."
>
> *—Industry partner interview*

3.5.2. What challenges did industry partners identify for FAST to be effectively adopted in the labour market and realize its potential value?

Partners noted that FAST needs to work closely with industry stakeholders to maximize its value to each sector. To expand and cover more industries and job types, FAST must continue collaborating with key industry stakeholders. This ensures the program complements existing resources, processes, and regulations.

This was crucial when expanding into the Seniors Care stream. Partners noted that the healthcare sector has a complex system of training, certifications, and regulations that can be difficult for outside organizations to understand and gain trust within. Job descriptions in this sector must be approved by unions and can't easily be changed to match FAST's terminology. For this stream, an industry partner helped IEC-BC understand the sector's key players and practices and understand how FAST could add value to existing structures.

FAST's skills assessments need to be clearly distinguished from 'training' and 'certification/accreditation' programs offered by sector associations and institutions. This distinction ensures FAST aligns with regulatory practices. Additionally, occupations listed on the FAST platform should be clearly differentiated from regulated occupations that require specific industry accreditation. This prevents confusion and ensures FAST complements, rather than conflicts, with existing industry standards.

> "I think we really needed to understand how … FAST was going to integrate with what we're already doing in BC, with regulated professions. One of the first questions that comes out when we talk to, for example, our care provider members, is how is this different from what the colleges do? One of the markers of success will be those relationships with the college and the regulatory bodies, and being able to articulate how FAST can add value without duplicating, without sort of taking over the reins."
>
> —*Industry partner interview*

Employers may have limited capacity to engage with unfamiliar platforms like FAST. Industry partners stressed that employers are "time trenched" and may not have capacity to fully digest what it means for a newcomer candidate to have a FAST certification of completion. If IEC-BC were to pursue a dual-client model—e.g., if it were to explore providing access to employers to job-ready FAST graduates through direct referrals or through a program portal—FAST content and certification would need to be validated by those employers. IEC-BC would need to articulate how FAST could support employers in hiring; it would need to create tools and processes integrated into employers' existing hiring procedures.

> "I'd love to have the FAST program expose itself to more biotech employers directly … Most biotech employers [don't know] the FAST program exists, or what kind of level of expertise or training comes out of a person who's gone through [it]." —*Industry partner interview*

More streamlined registration processes across partner organizations. As discussed, participants who complete FAST (and are eligible for additional credentialling) must register with industry partners providing the credentials—the option to register is not provided by the FAST platform. Both participants and industry partners flagged this as an additional step in the overall user experience and a duplication of information-sharing. As one industry partner commented:

> "This has been a pain point for the entire [settlement and immigration] sector. If there's one registration page for all things, instead of a client continuously, you know, putting in the same information over and over, I think that would help the sector as a whole."

4. Discussion and conclusions

4.1. Promising findings

This Final Report for Phase 2 shows promising findings, including:

- **High uptake and satisfaction rates.** FAST received 1,506 total enrolments, exceeding the target enrolment by 59%. Most participants were satisfied with FAST overall and with its various components—especially the workplace culture, skills gap training, and technical competency assessments—and enjoyed the self-paced, low-barrier access to industry-related assessments and the program's flexibility. Those who experienced more of FAST (i.e., those who completed the program) tended to be more satisfied with it and were more likely to recommend it. IT & Data Services, Biotech & Life Sciences, and Accounting & Finance streams all saw high rates of enrolment and satisfaction.

- **Encouraging employment outcomes.** From the exit survey to nine months after, respondents reported higher feelings of employment readiness and employment rates. This upward trajectory occurred regardless of completion status, socio-demographic status, and stream, though Biotech & Life Sciences and IT & Data Services saw the highest increases. Employed respondents reported higher earnings and higher quality of employment.

- **Positive impressions from SDPs.** SDPs saw FAST as a valuable tool to support newcomers' employment journeys due to its accessibility (for pre- and post-arrival applicants); flexible eligibility (for experience, language levels, and PR status); workplace culture modules; complementary use with other employment services; and sector- and occupation-specific training for reduced entry barriers and accreditation services. They praised IEC-BC for answering questions and providing resources promptly to help inform referrals. The more familiar SDPs were with FAST, the more likely they were to recommend clients to it, and thought it was well-suited for newcomers who were settled, ready for self-directed learning, and genuinely interested in one of the streams.

- **Positive impressions from industry partners.** Industry partners echoed SDP sentiments above—they were eager to work with programs that connected them to immigrants and newcomers and support those groups with workplace integration. They believed FAST could be valuable to both newcomers and employers—especially SMEs in high-demand sectors. To industry partners, FAST was well positioned to help newcomers enter the industry, build hands-on experience, and work on obtaining certifications for more commensurate positions.

4.2. Opportunities for improvement

For the next phase of FSC funding, IEC-BC is planning additional iterations of FAST. In response to feedback from participants and partners, IEC-BC is making the following adaptations:

- Expanding the eligibility criteria for a newly created, standalone workplace culture module to more international students and temporary workers to support their job search and career journeys.

- Piloting a time-bound model of FAST, in which some participants will have limited access over an eight-week period to encourage higher engagement (as opposed to untimed, unlimited access). Blueprint will conduct A/B testing to determine whether duration of access impacts engagement rates.

- Piloting a cohort model of FAST in which the time-bound version will also include more structured opportunities for participants to meet with each other and an IEC-BC staff member, who could provide guidance and support.

- Continuing to explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration with employers and industry partners, especially when these can be tailored to local labour market needs and regulations. This will involve forming an advisory group made up of two employers from each of the six FAST streams, totaling 12 key industry representatives. Leads plan to engage more SME employers for validation and feedback for FAST's relevance and value-add to employers, incorporating their perceptions of the quality of the skills assessment content, how FAST can contribute to SME employers' hiring and recruiting needs, and how FAST can better engage employers generally.

- Continuing to adapt to local contexts. IEC-BC is partnering with New Brunswick Community College and the NB government, multicultural council, and other educational institutions to create a bilingual FAST-NB platform tailored to meet the specific newcomer settlement and retention needs of the province while ensuring employers in the province find talent. The adaptation is starting with the IT and Skilled Trades sectors—both priority sectors in NB.

We also identified the following opportunities to consider as FAST evolves:

- **Program clarity and information.** Stakeholders recommended clearer, more upfront communications around processes, offerings, streams, and structure. This could entail more advice on module sequencing and a progress bar to show completion status. Industry partners recommended that skills assessments could be better distinguished from other training and certification programs. They also suggested better differentiation of listed occupations from regulated professions requiring specific accreditation.

- **Addressing under-performing streams.** The Skilled Trades, Seniors Care, and Culinary Arts streams had lower enrolment numbers, completion rates, levels of satisfaction, and employment rates. Small adjustments may prove beneficial: a) in Seniors Care, by providing additional visual and audio content and simplifying text-heavy and technical terms; and b) in Skilled Trades, more clearly indicating the labour-intensive nature of the roles to avoid mismatched expectations.

- **Enhancing user experience on the platform:** Certain platform components may be enhanced to improve UX. As discussed, the registration process for credentialing might be streamlined to reduce duplication of information-sharing by participants and industry partners—such as by creating a single registration page for all services. Stakeholders also recommended restoring some broken hyperlinks and improving experiences for non-native English speakers by explaining sector-based acronyms. The issue of inactive hyperlinks might also be addressed by minimizing the number of times participants are re-directed, period—with content instead summarized directly on the FAST platform.

4.3. What's next?

Blueprint's upcoming reports will capture additional research to deepen our understanding of participants' program experiences and satisfaction with different iterations. While monitoring IEC-BC's continued adaptations to FAST and areas for improvement, our future reports will also seek to address the data limitations cited above.

The next report—an *Interim Report* for Phase 3 of FSC funding—will present preliminary findings (administrative data, exit survey data, interview findings, and outcomes data) on the new FAST iterations, including the time-bound vs. non-time-bound variations, the cohort-based version (allowing participants to interact virtually with other participants and IEC-BC facilitators), and the standalone Prepare for Work in Canada module with widened eligibility criteria. Our *Final Report* for Phase 3 will include an updated Theory of Change and all follow-up survey and interview data from April 2024 to July 2025, with larger sample sizes compared to the interim period.

Data linkage for FAST participants from Phase 2 will be available in August 2025, which will either be included in the *Final Report* or in a separate deliverable later in 2026.

Appendix A
Common Outcomes Framework

	Outcome	Indicators
Socio-demographics	Sex & Gender	Sex at birth
		Self-identified gender
	Age	Age
	Location	Province
		Region & Municipality
	Marital status	Marital status
	Children & Dependents	Children
		Dependents
		Household size
	Household Income	Household income
	Education	Highest credential obtained
		Location of highest credential attainment
	Indigenous Identity	Self-identified Indigenous identity
	Francophone status & languages spoken	First language spoken
		Official languages
		Language spoken at home
		Other languages spoken (At home)
	Citizenship Status	Place of birth
		Year of arrival
		Citizenship status
	Racial identity	Self-identification as member of racialized group
	Disability	Self-identified disability
Employment status and history	Employment	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/part-time)
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Work history	Time since last employed
		NOC code of job
		NAICS code of job
	Income source	Income sources

	Outcome	Indicators
Intermediate outcomes	Program completion	Successful completion of planned activities
	Participant satisfaction	Satisfaction with program
		Perceived Utility of Program
		Likelihood to recommend
Customized intermediate outcomes	Skills gains	Measured gains in specific skills
	Program-specific credential attainment	Attainment of program-specific credentials
Long-term outcomes	Employment and retention	Employment status
		Nature of employment (permanent, temporary, full/part-time)
		Retention
	Earnings	Hours worked / week
		Wages
		Annual earnings
	Benefits	Presence of benefits including: Paid leave, Health and dental coverage, Pension plan
	Industry and occupation of employment	NAICS code of job
		NOC code of job
	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with job
		Perceived opportunity for career advancement
		Perceived job security
	Enrolment in further education	Enrolment in further education
		Type of training
		Field of study
	Credential attainment	Attainment of high school or PSE credentials
		Field of study credentials

Appendix B

Table B1 | Sociodemographic data and participant characteristics from exit survey

Participant Characteristics		Total (N=551)	Skilled Trades (N=30)	Biotech & Life Sciences (N=133)	IT & Data Services (N=260)	Accounting & Finance (N=107)	Culinary Arts (N=4)	Seniors Care (N=17)
Gender	Woman	50% (232/465)	12% (3/25)	68% (70/103)	40% (87/218)	60% (59/98)	50% (2/4)	65% (11/17)
	Man	49% (227/465)	88% (22/25)	32% (33/103)	59% (128/218)	38% (37/98)	50% (2/4)	29% (5/17)
	Gender not listed, or I would like to self-describe	1% (3/465)	0% (0/25)	0% (0/103)	0% (1/218)	1% (1/98)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
	Prefer not to answer	1% (3/465)	0% (0/25)	0% (0/103)	1% (2/218)	1% (1/98)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
Province	Ontario	25% (137/542)	23% (7/30)	34% (44/130)	28% (72/254)	11% (12/107)	25% (1/4)	6% (1/17)
	British Columbia	23% (126/542)	23% (7/30)	21% (27/130)	24% (60/254)	18% (19/107)	0% (0/4)	76% (13/17)
	Nova Scotia	17% (94/542)	13% (4/30)	15% (20/130)	15% (37/254)	28% (30/107)	75% (3/4)	0% (0/17)
	Saskatchewan	16% (85/542)	7% (2/30)	10% (13/130)	16% (41/254)	27% (29/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	Alberta	8% (41/542)	13% (4/30)	9% (12/130)	7% (19/254)	5% (5/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
	Manitoba	2% (13/542)	3% (1/30)	2% (3/130)	2% (4/254)	4% (4/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
	New Brunswick	1% (7/542)	3% (1/30)	2% (3/130)	2% (4/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	Quebec	1% (7/542)	3% (1/30)	1% (1/130)	2% (4/254)	1% (1/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	Newfoundland	0% (2/542)	0% (0/30)	1% (1/130)	0% (0/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
	Northwest Territories	0% (2/542)	0% (0/30)	0% (0/130)	0% (1/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	I do not live in Canada	5% (29/542)	10% (3/30)	5% (7/130)	5% (12/254)	7% (7/107)	0% (0/4))	0% (0/17)
BIPOC status	BIPOC	83% (388/465)	68% (17/25)	88% (91/103)	83% (182/218)	82% (80/98)	75% (3/4)	88% (15/17)
	White/non-BIPOC	9% (43/465)	16% (4/25)	4% (4/103)	10% (21/218)	11% (11/98)	25% (1/4)	12% (2/17)
	Another race category	3% (12/465)	0% (0/25)	2% (2/103)	3% (6/218)	4% (4/98)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	Prefer not to answer	5% (22/465)	16% (4/25)	6% (6/103)	4% (9/218)	3% (3/98)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
Highest level of education	University certificate, diploma, or degree above bachelor level	54% (297/550)	40% (12/30)	72% (96/133)	44% (115/260)	61% (65/106)	50% (2/4)	41% (7/17)
	University bachelor's degree (e.g., B.A., B.A. (Hons.), B.SC., B.Ed., LL.B.)	32% (177/550)	30% (9/30)	23% (31/133)	39% (102/260)	25% (27/106)	25% (1/4)	41% (7/17)
	University certificate, diploma, or degree below bachelor level	8% (43/550)	3% (1/30)	4% (5/133)	11% (29/260)	6% (6/106)	25% (1/4)	6% (1/17)
	College, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma	3% (16/550)	10% (3/30)	1% (1/133)	3% (8/260)	3% (3/106)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
	Registered Apprenticeship or other trades certificate or diploma	0% (1/550)	0% (0/30)	0% (0/133)	0% (1/260)	0% (0/106)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
	High school diploma or equivalency certificate	2% (12/550)	13% (4/30)	0% (0/133)	2% (4/260)	3% (3/106)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)

Participant Characteristics		Total (N=551)	Skilled Trades (N=30)	Biotech & Life Sciences (N=133)	IT & Data Services (N=260)	Accounting & Finance (N=107)	Culinary Arts (N=4)	Seniors Care (N=17)
Years in Canada (for those who have landed)	Less than 1 year	73% (287/392)						
	1–2 years	7% (29/392)						
	3–5 years	13% (50/392)						
	More than 5 years	7% (26/392)						
Disability	Yes	2% (10/464)						
	No	98% (454/464)						
First language spoken	English	49% (267/549)						
	French	5% (28/549)						
	Other	46% (254/549)						
Including yourself, how many people live in your household on a regular basis?	1	13% (58/456)						
	2	27% (125/456)						
	3	22% (100/456)						
	4	22% (100/456)						
	5	11% (51/456)						
	More than 5	5% (22/456)						
Primarily responsible for the care and upbringing of any member of your household aged 17 or under		85% (207/243)						
Can you speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation?	English only	84% (238/283)						
	French only	1% (2/283)						
	Both English and French	14% (39/283)						
	Neither English nor French	1% (4/283)						
Total household income	Under $20,000	49% (176/362)						
	$20,000–$40,000	21% (75/362)						
	$40,000–$60,000	18% (66/362)						
	$60,000–$80,000	4% (16/362)						
	$80,000–$100,000	4% (13/362)						
	Over $100,000	4% (16/362)						

Source. Exit survey.

Table B2 | Sociodemographic data and participant characteristics from administrative data

Participant Characteristics		Total (N=1506)	Skilled Trades (N=76)	Biotech & Life Sciences (N=354)	IT & Data Services (N=698)	Accounting & Finance (N=308)	Culinary Arts (N=12)	Seniors Care (N=58)
Arrival	Pre-Arrival	31% (473/1506)	39% (30/76)	30% (106/354)	32% (224/698)	33% (101/308)	42% (5/12)	12% (7/58)
	Post-Arrival	69% (1033/1506)	61% (46/76)	70% (248/354)	68% (474/698)	67% (207/308)	58% (7/12)	88% (51/58)
Age (Average = 36.44)	18–24	2% (35/1486)	3% (2/73)	2% (8/350)	3% (20/690)	1% (2/303)	0% (0/12)	5% (3/58)
	25–29	13% (194/1486)	8% (6/73)	14% (50/350)	13% (90/690)	13% (39/303)	0% (0/12)	16% (9/58)
	30–39	55% (818/1486)	58% (42/73)	60% (209/350)	55% (382/690)	51% (154/303)	58% (7/12)	41% (24/58)
	40–49	24% (363/1486)	23% (17/73)	17% (61/350)	25% (170/690)	31% (95/303)	33% (4/12)	28% (16/58)
	50+	5% (76/1486)	8% (6/73)	6% (22/350)	4% (28/690)	4% (13/303)	8% (1/12)	10% (6/58)
Referral source	Service Delivery Partners (SDPs)	60% (898/1506)						
	Other (social media, IRCC, professional network, etc.)	40% (608/1506)						
Home country (excluding Canada)	India	24% (318/1328)						
	Nigeria	16% (206/1328)						
	China	6% (78/1328)						
	Ukraine	5% (70/1328)						
	Iran	4% (47/1328)						

Table B3 | Participant location by province and stream

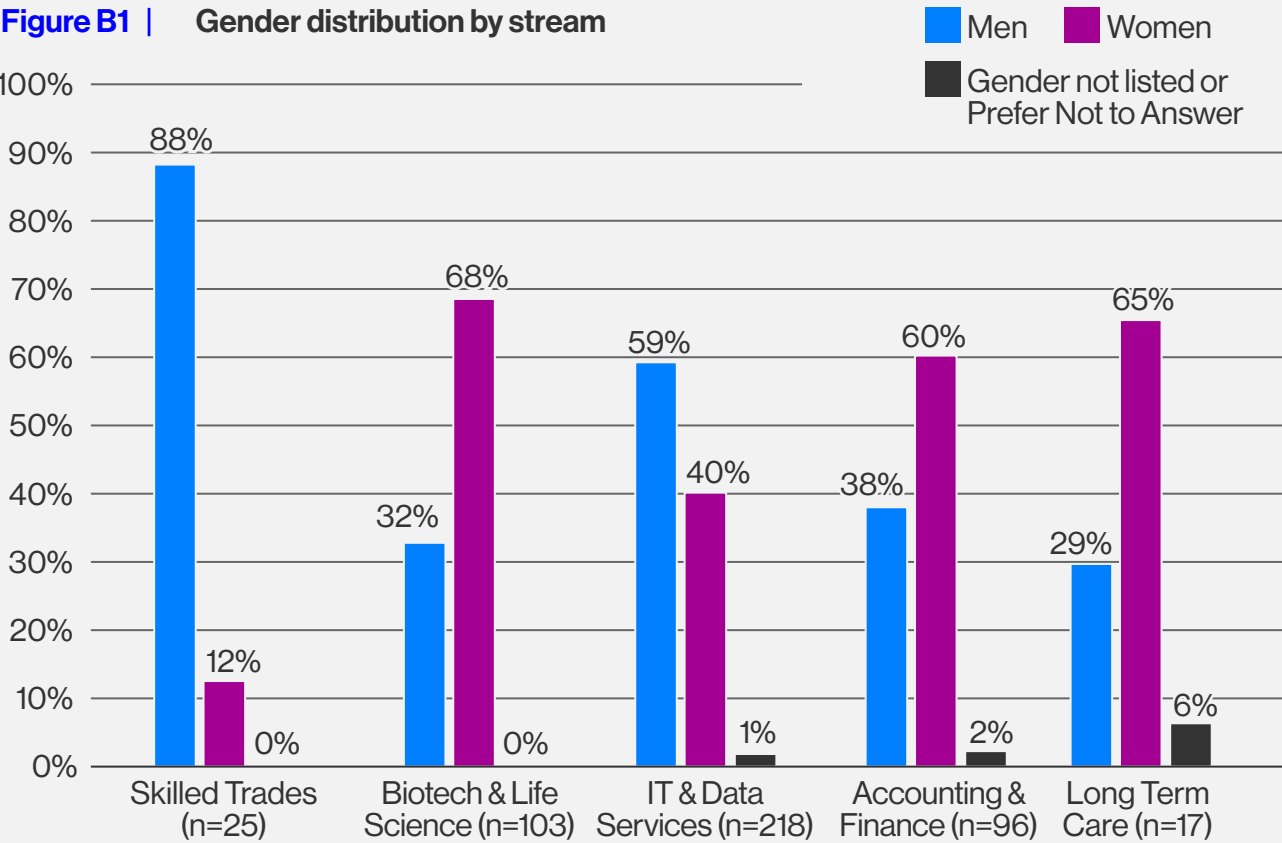| Participant province	Total (N=551)	Skilled Trades (N=30)	Biotech & Life Sciences (N=133)	IT & Data Services (N=260)	Accounting & Finance (N=107)	Culinary Arts (N=4)	Seniors Care (N=17)
Ontario	25% (137/542)	23% (7/30)	34% (44/130)	28% (72/254)	11% (12/107)	25% (1/4)	6% (1/17)
British Columbia	23% (126/542)	23% (7/30)	21% (27/130)	24% (60/254)	18% (19/107)	0% (0/4)	76% (13/17)
Nova Scotia	17% (94/542)	13% (4/30)	15% (20/130)	15% (37/254)	28% (30/107)	75% (3/4)	0% (0/17)
Saskatchewan	16% (85/542)	7% (2/30)	10% (13/130)	16% (41/254)	27% (29/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
Alberta	8% (41/542)	13% (4/30)	9% (12/130)	7% (19/254)	5% (5/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
Manitoba	2% (13/542)	3% (1/30)	2% (3/130)	2% (4/254)	4% (4/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
New Brunswick	1% (7/542)	3% (1/30)	2% (2/130)	2% (4/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
Quebec	1% (7/542)	3% (1/30)	1% (1/130)	2% (4/254)	1% (1/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
Newfoundland	0% (2/542)	0% (0/30)	1% (1/130)	0% (0/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	6% (1/17)
Northwest Territories	0% (1/542)	0% (0/30)	0% (0/130)	0% (1/254)	0% (0/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)
I do not live in Canada	5% (29/542)	10% (3/30)	5% (7/130)	5% (12/254)	7% (7/107)	0% (0/4)	0% (0/17)

Figure B1 | Gender distribution by stream

Legend: Men, Women, Gender not listed or Prefer Not to Answer

Stream	Men	Women	Gender not listed or Prefer Not to Answer
Skilled Trades (n=25)	88%	12%	0%
Biotech & Life Science (n=103)	32%	68%	0%
IT & Data Services (n=218)	59%	40%	1%
Accounting & Finance (n=96)	38%	60%	2%
Long Term Care (n=17)	29%	65%	6%

Figure B2 | Highest education levels by stream

Stream	University certificate, diploma, or degree above bachelor level	University bachelor's degree	Other	No certificate, diploma or degree
Skilled Trades (n=30)	40%	30%	27%	3%
Biotech & Life Science (n=133)	72%	23%	5%	0%
IT & Data Services (n=260)	44%	39%	16%	0%
Accounting & Finance (n=108)	61%	25%	11%	2%
Long Term Care (n=17)	41%	41%	18%	0%

Legend:
- University certificate, diploma, or degree above bachelor level
- University bachelor's degree
- Other (Collage, CEPEP, other non-university certificate or diploma, high school diploma or equivalent certificate, registered apprenticeship or other trades, certificates or diplomas)
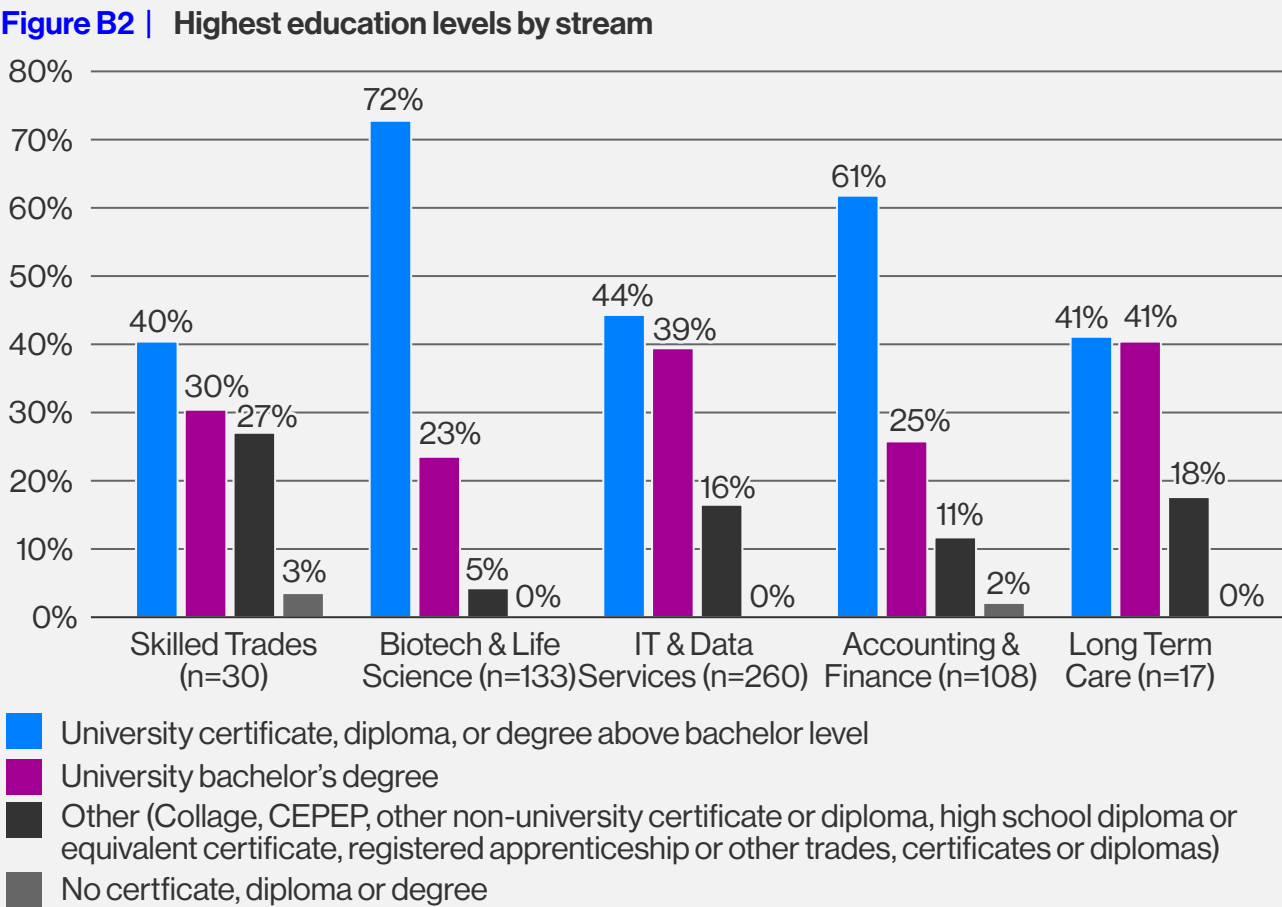- No certficate, diploma or degree

Table B4 | Comparison of FAST participants' employment rates
with completion status and key socio-demographic characteristics

Employment rate		Exit survey	Three-month survey	Nine-month survey
Completion Status Comparison	Completers	41% (67/165)	57% (82/143)	71% (91/129)
	Non-completers	47% (183/386)	55% (220/400)	73% (229/314)
Gender Comparison	Woman	45% (104/232)	55% (87/157)	71% (81/114)
	Man	47% (106/227)	62% (94/151)	81% (87/107)
Race Comparison	BIPOC	46% (179/388)	60% (160/265)	77% (150/195)
	White/non -BIPOC	47% (20/43)	63% (17/27)	71% (12/17)

Table B5 | Highest level of education for those employed in entry level positions only

Highest level of education for participants employed in entry-level positions	Three-month survey	Nine-month survey
University certificate, diploma, or degree above bachelor level	53% (62/117)	57% (52/92)
University bachelor's degree (e.g., B.A., B.A. (Hons.), B.SC., B.Ed., LL.B.)	33% (39/117)	30% (28/92)
Other	14% (16/117)	13% (12/92)