AGF RESEARCH · FACT-CHECKED · 2026

Before You *board.*

The report we wish someone handed out at every education fair. 7.3 million students now study abroad — and the deal most are buying quietly changed while the brochures stayed the same: UK graduate postings down 45% in a year, ~140 applications per vacancy, 73% of employers screening with AI, post-study visas shortening everywhere. Not a report telling you to stay home — a pre-departure briefing: how the AI squeeze happened, what it means at each gate, and two complete playbooks — one for the student going fresh, one for the professional going after years of Kenyan experience.

7.3m	~140	92% vs 65%	24→18
students studying abroad worldwide — 15,526 of them Kenyan (UNESCO)	applications per UK grad vacancy, up from 86 — 73% AI-screened first	employed within 6 months, with vs without co-op — the loudest number here	post-study months in the UK from January 2027 — the clock shrinks

How the recruitment machine broke — the squeeze, dated. Not a crash: a repricing of the bottom rung.

Nov 2022	**ChatGPT launches** generative AI does routine junior work — first drafts, analysis, code
2023–2024	**Intake quietly shrinks** entry/junior vacancies fall ~1/3 from 2022; employers pause grad bulk-buying
2025	**The squeeze is measured** UK graduate postings −45% in one year; 22–25s in AI-exposed jobs ~19% below trend while seniors hold (Stanford)
2025–2026	**Both doors narrow** 73% of employers screen with AI; ~140 applications per vacancy; visa policy tightens in all four destinations
2026	**The new bar settles** entry roles now demand AI-fluency + evidence of real work; firms that still hire in bulk run structured pipelines

Fig 1 — How the recruitment machine broke, 2022–2026. Not a crash: a repricing of the bottom rung.

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01 · The Short Version

If you are planning to study abroad — or funding someone who is — here is the whole report in five findings:

- **The product changed; the marketing did not.** A foreign degree really sold a SEQUENCE: degree → graduate job → sponsorship → career. AI broke the second link. UK graduate postings fell 45% in a year; large employers report ~140 applications per vacancy (up from 86); 73% of employers screen with AI. The degree still teaches. It no longer converts on its own.
- **The squeeze is specific, dated and measurable** — not a mood. Since ChatGPT (Nov 2022): entry vacancies down ~1/3; US 22–25s in AI-exposed occupations ~19% below trend while experienced workers hold (Stanford); policy tightening stacked on top in all four destinations.
- **The visa clock makes it your problem more than your classmates'.** Two gates on one fixed clock: a shrunken market, and sponsorship thresholds (UK £41,700) priced above junior pay — inside a window the UK cuts from 24 to 18 months in January 2027.
- **It is still worth going — for the right plan.** The strongest number here: Canadian international students with co-op experience are 92% employed within six months; without, 65%. Value moved from the degree to what surrounds it. HESA still finds 78% of international graduates employed at 15 months — narrower, not shut.
- **Experience at home is now a visa strategy.** Two to five Kenyan years before a targeted one-year master's lands you above the entry squeeze, at salaries that clear the thresholds. Section 09 is that playbook.

Nobody at the education fair is paid to tell you the exit changed. This report is the missing page in the brochure.

02 · The Seven-Million Question

The seven-million question — how many are on the road, and where Kenya sits in the queue

7.3m	students in higher education outside their own country (UNESCO, 2025 report) — up from 2.1 million in 2000: mobility tripled in a generation
~430,000	of them from Sub-Saharan Africa — Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya the largest senders; Europe hosts the biggest share
15,526	Kenyan students abroad in UNESCO's 2023 count — Australia, the US and the UK the top three destinations
44%	of surveyed Kenyan students say they want to study overseas — the queue behind the queue. This report is written for them

Fig 2 — The scale of the journey (UNESCO; Kenya sector reporting).

About 7.3 million students are enrolled in higher education outside their own country — up from 2.1 million in 2000: mobility tripled in a generation. Roughly 430,000 come from Sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya the dominant senders; UNESCO counted 15,526 Kenyan students abroad in 2023 (Australia, the US and the UK the top hosts), and around 44% of surveyed Kenyan students say they want to study overseas. The queue behind the queue is enormous.

Two consequences. First, you compete against seven million mobile peers aimed at the same four Anglophone destinations and the same “safe” courses — so differentiation beats credentials. Second, host politics noticed the scale: every major destination spent 2024–2026 tightening the student-to-work pipeline. The tightening is not aimed at you. It will hit you anyway — unless you route around it.

03 · The Deal You Were Sold

What you are really buying — the graduate bargain, before and after AI

THE DEAL YOU WERE SOLD	THE DEAL ON OFFER NOW
Degree opens the door any respectable degree bought an interview; grad schemes hired in bulk	**Degree opens a queue** ~140 applications per UK graduate vacancy, up from 86 a year earlier
Employer pays for training two years of supervised routine work turned students into professionals	**AI does the training work** the routine tasks juniors learned on are the tasks firms automated first
Post-study visa = runway two or three years — ample time to convert a job into sponsorship	**Runway cut mid-flight** UK Graduate Route: 24 months now, 18 from January 2027
Sponsorship was routine employers sponsored juniors without blinking at the cost	**Sponsorship priced above you** UK threshold £41,700 — above most junior salaries; sponsorship moved mid-level and to shortage lists

Fig 3 — The bargain, before and after. The degree still teaches; it no longer converts on its own.

The sequence that worked for two decades — degree → graduate job in the post-study window → sponsorship → the life — ran on a bargain: employers bought graduates in bulk and paid for training with two years of supervised routine work, because someone had to do the routine work. The post-study visa was generous runway; junior sponsorship was routine; almost any recognised degree was the ticket. Relatives who travelled in 2010 or 2015 are not lying when they describe this world. They are describing a discontinued product.

Hold the load-bearing detail: the entry job existed because the routine work existed. Nobody hired juniors out of kindness. Then a machine arrived that does routine work.

04 · How the Machine Broke: The Squeeze, Dated

November 2022: generative AI ships; its first proven competence is exactly the routine information work entry jobs were made of. 2023–2024: employers do not fire juniors — they quietly stop replacing them; entry vacancies drift down roughly a third while total employment stays healthy, so nothing makes headlines. 2025: the squeeze becomes measurable — UK graduate postings drop 45% in a year to their lowest since 2018; Stanford's payroll research shows 22–25s in AI-exposed occupations ~19% below trend while experienced workers in the same occupations hold or gain. 2025–2026: both doors narrow at once — 73% of employers screen with AI, applications explode to ~140 per vacancy (AI made applying effortless too, clogging the funnel), and all four destination governments tighten student routes. 2026: the new bar settles — surviving entry roles demand AI-fluency plus evidence of real work, and bulk hirers run calendar-locked pipelines: miss the autumn window, wait a year.

Two honesty notes. The attribution is contested — LinkedIn's data blames rates more than AI; a Danish study found no average effect in its window — but the door is narrower under every explanation. And it is a squeeze, not a wall: HESA still finds 78% of international graduates in work at 15 months, and some employers are expanding entry hiring (IBM says it is tripling US entry intake in 2026). People get through. The question is which people, and how.

The evidence base has thickened, in both directions. Stanford's number read as an index: both groups at 100 in November 2022; by June 2026 the most-exposed young workers sit at 89 while less-exposed peers sit at 110 — a ~19% RELATIVE gap, hiring-driven, not firings. A US Census working paper corroborates it (22–24s ~12% lower in the most-exposed industry groups through mid-2025). And on the other side, a Federal Reserve study found NO association between firms' AI adoption and fewer total postings (Sept 2023–Nov 2025): total vacancies hold while opportunity shifts away from particular junior roles. Together: not fewer jobs overall — a different door. The New York Fed adds the widest context: recent-graduate unemployment ~5.6%, and 42% of employed recent US graduates in occupations that do not typically require a degree — employed-and-stuck, measured at national scale.

05 · Two Gates, One Clock

Two gates, one clock — why the entry squeeze lands hardest on the international graduate

Gate 1 The market	graduate hiring shrank exactly as your cohort graduates — fewer entry doors, ~140 applicants at each, AI reading first
Gate 2 The visa	sponsorship thresholds priced above junior pay (UK £41,700); sponsors moved mid-level and to shortage lists
The clock	your post-study window is fixed — UK 24→18 months, others 1–3 years — and it starts precisely when the gates are narrowest
The locals can wait	a local graduate rides out a bad cycle at home. You cannot. Every strategy in this report exists because of this asymmetry

Fig 4 — The structural asymmetry every international student inherits.

The local graduate who cannot find work moves home, temps, retries next cycle. You cannot: your post-study permission is a fixed clock — two years in the UK today, 18 months under the post-January-2027 rules, one to three elsewhere — and it starts at graduation, the precise moment the market gate is narrowest. Behind it stands the visa gate: the UK threshold at £41,700, above most junior pay, so even a graduate who wins a rare entry seat may find it cannot legally sponsor them. Add the employer's calculus — why pay visa fees for a junior when AI plus abundant local applicants exist? Sponsorship did not vanish; it migrated UP the ladder and OUT to the shortage lists.

The door abroad is open at the top of the ladder and at the hands-and-heart occupations — and nearly shut at the generic junior office rung in between. Every move in this report is a way of arriving at an open door.

06 · The Numbers the Education Fair Skips

- **78% — and its shadow.** HESA: 78% of international graduates employed at 15 months. But “employed” includes any work — Eurostat finds 41.4% of employed tertiary-educated non-EU citizens working below their qualification, versus 20% of nationals. Employed-and-stuck is the modal bad outcome, not jobless.

- **92% versus 65%.** Statistics Canada: co-op students 92% employed within six months; without co-op, 65%. A 27-point gap from one design choice made before enrolment. Choose the placement, not the prestige.

- **~140 applications per vacancy** — so rejection counts carry almost no information about you. Budget for volume, design for referrals: the side door beats the front portal, where AI reads applications AI wrote. And detectors false-flag non-native English at up to 61.3% — keep your own voice, keep drafts.

- **24 → 18 months.** The UK Graduate Route shrinks for post-January-2027 applicants. An 18-month clock means job-hunting starts in final year, not after it.

- **The gap narrows with time — and the language trap is real.** OECD: international graduates have weaker EARLY outcomes than domestic peers, the gap narrowing over years — the first eighteen months are the hard part by design. And an English-taught course is not an English-speaking labour market: if the jobs are advertised in French or German, start the language before you fly.

The fair sells the entrance. Buy the exit.

07 · Still Worth Going?

Still worth going? Not a verdict — a fork. Run your own plan down both columns.

GREEN LIGHTS	RE-THINK FIRST
A licensed or shortage field health, care, teaching, engineering, trades — lower thresholds, dedicated visas, ageing-country demand	**A generic degree on loans** business admin / general IT with debt, no placement, no shortage link — the squeezed profile
A funded postgraduate offer scholarship or assistantship — your downside is capped	**The plan is 'figure it out there'** the clock starts at the narrowest gate; hope is not a sequence
A co-op / placement degree Canada's split: 92% employed with co-op vs 65% without — work terms beat rankings	**Chasing a brand, not a route** rankings impress relatives; recruiters buy evidence of work
Experience already banked you enter the ladder mid-level, above the squeeze (Section 09)	**Selling land to pay fees** if failure would sink the family, the stress test comes first (Section 12)

Fig 5 — Not a verdict — a fork. Run your own plan down both columns before anyone pays anything.

Green lights: a licensed or shortage-list field (health, care, teaching, engineering, trades — the occupations that keep dedicated visa routes); a FUNDED postgraduate offer, which caps the downside; a degree with co-op or placement built in (the 92/65 split is the loudest signal in this report); or experience already banked at home. Re-think first: a generic business or general-IT degree on loans with no placement and no shortage link — the exact profile the squeeze targets; a plan whose second step is “figure it out there”; choosing a university for its name rather than its route; and any plan where failure sinks the family.

The fork is not STEM-versus-arts and not stay-home. A literature student with a placement year, a portfolio and a teaching pathway out-positions a computer-science student with none of the three. It is routine-versus-judgement and generic-versus-evidenced — applied to the biggest purchase your family may ever make.

08 · The New Student's Playbook

Coming fresh — straight from KCSE or a first degree, no professional experience yet. You have the hardest version of the problem, so your playbook starts earliest:

- **Pick the course for the exit, not the entrance.** Which occupation, on which visa list, at what salary? Read thirty current postings in your intended field and destination, and check the official sponsor register — not the agent's assurance.

- **Make placement the tie-breaker.** Between two offers, take the co-op year, sandwich placement or clinical hours — even at the lower-ranked institution. 92/65 is the closest thing to a cheat code this market offers.
- **Treat year one as job-search year one.** The 18-month clock kills final-year job-hunting. Societies immediately; field-relevant part-time work where visa hours allow; one real, clickable project shipped per year.
- **Build the referral network before you need it.** At 140-to-1 the portal is a lottery; the side doors are not. Professors, placement supervisors, alumni — infrastructure, not networking theatre.
- **Use AI like a professional, not a student.** Tool-fluency is the new baseline — but keep unaided practice (students who let the chatbot think scored 17% worse without it), and keep applications in your own voice.
- **Know your fallback rung before the clock starts.** Price the home option in year one, not month seventeen. A fallback priced early is a strategy; priced late, a defeat.

Before anyone pays a deposit, sit the plan for the seven-question exam: which jobs am I targeting and who recruits my profile; what does THIS course add; can I verify the qualification and get real supervised practice; what happened to recent international graduates, including those still searching; what language and permit conditions apply in MY graduation year; can I afford the course AND a slower search without unconfirmed earnings; and what will I do — on what date — if the job does not arrive? Proceed when every answer is concrete; reconsider when the plan rests on a promised job, an unverified visa claim, or the idea that one more qualification fixes every gap. And one habit that doubles as career insurance: learn each subject well enough to recognise a wrong answer — practise without AI first, then compare. A polished submission is weak evidence of learning if you cannot explain it, and interviewers now check exactly that.

09 · Coming With Experience: The Kenyan Professional's Playbook

Two students, two playbooks — the fresh undergraduate and the experienced Kenyan postgraduate

THE NEW STUDENT	THE EXPERIENCED POSTGRADUATE
Pick the course for the exit shortage field, co-op/placement built in, licensing path — decided before you apply, not after	**Your experience is the visa** 3–5 Kenyan years + a master's = mid-level entry — above the squeeze and the thresholds
Start the clock early treat year one as job-search year one: societies, part-time work in your field, a shipped project	**Choose a 1-year conversion** a targeted master's that renames what you already do for the new market beats starting over
Build proof, not just grades AI screening reads evidence; a portfolio outranks a transcript	**Apply at your level** 'graduate scheme' is a downgrade; aim at the roles your CV already earned — they clear £41,700
Know your fallback rung the home option priced BEFORE you need it is a plan, not a defeat	**Keep the Kenya option live** your network and track record at home are assets the fresh graduate does not have. Price both doors

Fig 6 — Same destination, different games. The experienced applicant plays the stronger hand — if they refuse to play it as a fresh graduate.

You have three, five, eight years of real Kenyan work and are considering a master's abroad. Your position inverted: in the old market, going late felt like going behind; in this market you are the strong applicant. The squeeze ate the entry rung, not the middle; thresholds that block juniors are trivial for mid-level roles; and the mid-level premium — firms that stopped training juniors still need tomorrow's seniors — is bidding up exactly your profile. Your experience is not a footnote on the CV. It is the visa strategy.

- **Go for conversion, not repetition.** A one-year master's that renames what you already do for the new market — finance to fintech, nursing to specialist practice — not a from-scratch pivot that resets you to the squeezed rung.
- **Apply at your level, ruthlessly.** A professional with six Kenyan years in a graduate-scheme queue has entered the 140-to-1 lottery with the weakest cohort. The same person at mid-level is scarce, sponsorable and above the threshold.
- **Sell the Africa premium, not around it.** You managed through failing infrastructure, cash customers and shifting regulation — capability every multinational building African expertise wants. Frame it as capability, not geography.
- **Time the master's to the clock.** Mid-level hiring runs year-round, unlike graduate schemes — so post-study months are genuinely usable runway, if the search starts at enrolment.
- **Keep the Kenya door open on purpose.** Network, track record, re-entry value: run home-first sequencing in both directions and price both doors every six months. The option itself is worth money.
- **First, define what the degree must change.** Continuing in your field (which local tools or rules are missing?); specialising (does the course teach a capability employers request, with practice?); changing careers (how much transfers, how much beginner training?); or mainly wanting the overseas move — then ask whether a direct search, internal transfer or shorter qualification reaches the goal at a fraction of the cost.
- **Titles are not levels — make the work easy to assess.** A Kenyan manager may fit an analyst, specialist or manager role abroad depending on the actual work. Write problem → action → measured result (“led eight warehouse staff handling ~600 orders weekly; late dispatches fell 18% to 11% in 12 weeks” — your own verified numbers), keep contactable references.
- **Mind the permit small print on survival jobs.** An unrelated job may not satisfy your NEXT residence permit's conditions (US OPT even caps unemployment days). Verify before relying on it; keep a dated plan for entering your profession alongside the job that funds the search.
- **If you have not left yet: bank the years first.** Two or three more Kenyan years convert you from the hard game to the strong one. The cousin who flew at 22 and the one who flew at 27 with a CV are playing different sports.

10 · The Six Destinations, Compared

Six destinations, 2024–2026 — post-study routes and their fine print (official guidance, reviewed 15 Sep 2026). Read the linked official page again before paying anything.

UK	Graduate visa: 2 years if applied for by 31 Dec 2026, 18 months from Jan 2027, 3 years for doctoral graduates; Skilled Worker threshold £41,700 — but shortage-list health and care routes stay open
Canada	permits capped (−35% in 2024, −10% in 2025) — but an eligible master's of 8+ months still earns the 3-year PGWP (a 'postgraduate certificate' does NOT); normally once per lifetime; co-op splits outcomes 92% vs 65%
US	OPT 12 months + 24-month STEM extension — but only 90 unemployment days (150 with STEM); H-1B stays a lottery (85,000 cap, ~35% odds); the $100k-fee proclamation vacated June 2026, appeal pending. Biggest prizes, least certainty
Germany	18-month job-search permit after a German degree, ANY work allowed during the search — but non-renewable, and the job market largely runs in German: an English-taught course does not mean an English-speaking labour market
France	12-month job-search/business permit for master's graduates — non-renewable, with study-related and salary conditions on work; French required for most hiring. Check nationality-specific arrangements
Australia	post-study 485 visa: age cap 35, durations cut by about a third — but regional study and health/trades shortage lists carry extensions and points

Fig 7 — Post-study routes per destination, from official guidance reviewed 15 September 2026 (gov.uk, IRCC, USCIS/DHS, German federal and French Service-Public pages, Australian Home Affairs). Re-read the official page before paying anything.

The fine print that decides plans: the UK Graduate visa runs two years if applied for by 31 December 2026, 18 months from January 2027 — and THREE years for doctoral graduates. Canada's 3-year PGWP needs an eligible master's of at least eight months (a postgraduate certificate does not qualify), normally comes once per lifetime, and even passport validity can shorten it. The US OPT gives 12 months plus 24 for eligible STEM — but with only 90 days of permitted unemployment (150 total with STEM) it is not three years of open searching: go funded, go STEM, count the days. Germany offers the most generous search terms — 18 months, any work allowed meanwhile — but non-renewable, in a labour market that runs in German. France gives master's graduates 12 non-renewable months, with French-language hiring to match. Both continental routes carry the OECD warning: the course may be in English; the jobs are not.

One line per country, for the family group chat: UK for licensed and mid-level; Canada for co-op undergraduates (degree, not certificate); US for funded STEM specialists who count their 90 days; Germany for engineers willing to learn German; France for francophone-ready master's graduates; Australia for young shortage-field applicants who read the age rule first.

11 · Ten Moves Before You Board

Before you board — the first five moves (five more in the text)

01 **Choose the exit before the entrance**

Decide the job, the visa route and the fallback before choosing the course. A degree is a vehicle; pick the destination first.

02 **Put co-op or placement above ranking**

The Canadian data is the loudest signal in this report: 92% employed with co-op versus 65% without. A work term beats twenty league-table places.

03 **Aim at shortage lists, not brochures**

Health, care, teaching, engineering, trades: lower thresholds, dedicated visas, political protection — the doors ageing countries cannot afford to close.

04 **Bank experience at home first if you can**

Two or three Kenyan years before a master's flips you from the squeezed rung to the scarce one. The inverted playbook is now the strong one.

05 **Stress-test the money for a slow start**

Model 12 months without a graduate job at local starting pay. If the plan only works in the best case, it is not a plan.

Fig 8 — The first five moves; the second five below. Print this page for the family meeting.

- **1. Choose the exit before the entrance.** Occupation → visa route → course, in that order.
- **2. Put co-op or placement above ranking.** 92% versus 65%. A work term beats twenty league-table places.
- **3. Aim at shortage lists, not brochures.** Health, care, teaching, engineering, trades — the doors ageing countries cannot afford to close.
- **4. Bank experience at home first if you can.** Kenyan years + one-year master's = mid-level entry above the squeeze.
- **5. Stress-test the money for a slow start.** Twelve months without a graduate job, at local starting pay. If the plan only survives the best case, it is not a plan.
- **6. Verify sponsorship, not vibes.** The official register and current thresholds, checked yourself. Agents sell entrances; registers describe exits.
- **7. Run the 30-vacancy test.** Thirty real postings in your field and city: demands, pay, and whether the pay clears the threshold.
- **8. Start the job search at enrolment.** From month one, not month eighteen.
- **9. Keep your own voice in every application.** 61.3% detector false-positives on non-native writing, and a funnel full of identical AI letters: sounding like yourself is an advantage twice over.
- **10. Price the return option annually.** Portfolio management, not failure-planning. An option priced is an option owned.

As a calendar: run the 30-day test before committing. Week 1 — pick two or three target roles, compare recent adverts in two destinations, map every requirement. Week 2 — talk to recent international graduates from your shortlisted courses, INCLUDING someone still searching or back home. Week 3 — demand course-specific outcomes and placement terms, check recognition and the work rules for your graduation year, write full cost against secured funding. Week 4 — finish a small project, have a professional review it, and compare proceeding now against a cheaper course, more Kenyan experience, or a deliberate delay. Thirty days of testing before three years of paying. Then in the first 90 days after landing: careers service, one professional association, employer deadlines mapped, the language routine started.

12 · The Family Briefing

Most study-abroad decisions in our community are family investments, so this section is for the funders. First: the investment case changed shape, not died — the fork in Section 07 is the underwriting checklist, and a green-light plan still carries strong odds. Second: run the stress test before the harambee — twelve months post-graduation without a professional job, at survival pay, with the clock running: can the family carry it without selling what cannot be re-bought? If not, change the plan, not the test. Third: measure the right thing — the first year abroad now normally contains rejection at industrial volume (140-to-1 is the market, not the child); judge placements won, projects shipped and referrals built, not speed to first job. Fourth: fund the things that compound — the laptop, the course, the certification — in both directions.

The stress test with numbers on it — an illustrative one-year master's (replace every line with verified local figures): tuition €12,000 + twelve months' living at €1,000 + travel, visas, insurance and setup €2,000 = €26,000 — then add €6,000 for six months of post-graduation living without earnings: an honest total of €32,000 before contingency. The last line is the one families skip, and it decides whether the graduate can hold out for the right job or must grab the survival job that eats the visa clock. Treat permitted part-time hours as uncertain income, not budget; count deposits, borrowing costs and exchange-rate slippage; for the experienced applicant, add the Kenyan salary and progression forgone.

13 · The Uncomfortable Part

- **This network profits from the journey it is warning you about.** A diaspora forum writing a pre-departure briefing has an interest in departures. Our resolution: the question was never whether to go but when, at what rung, with what plan — and for some readers the honest answer is “later” or “differently,” which is advice against our own romance.

- **The squeeze's cause is contested even where its existence is not.** If rates, not AI, drove most of the freeze, a rate cycle could reopen doors faster than this report implies. The strategies survive either way; the urgency may not.

- **The destination frame still leans Anglophone-plus.** This update added France and Germany from official guidance — closing part of the first edition's admitted gap — but the Netherlands, the Gulf, China and intra-African routes remain outside the evidence base, and for some readers those doors are wider.

- **Playbooks are probabilities, not promises.** A student can make all ten moves and still lose the lottery year; another can wing it and land. Every claim is sized to its evidence; extrapolations are flagged in Section 14.

14 · Method & Limits

- **Student flows:** UNESCO (7.3M mobile students, 2025 report; 2.1M in 2000; 15,526 Kenyans abroad, 2023) with SSA totals (~430,000) from sector analyses; the 44% Kenyan aspiration figure is survey sentiment, not intent.

- **The squeeze:** UK postings (–45% YoY) and application volumes (~140 per vacancy, from 86) from 2026 UK graduate-market reporting; 73% AI-screening from employer surveys; Stanford payroll research (22–25s ~19% below trend — a relative shortfall, caveats in our New Ladder report); the attribution debate held open.
- **Outcomes:** HESA Graduate Outcomes (78% at 15 months — includes any work); Eurostat overqualification (41.4% vs 20%); Statistics Canada co-op split (92%/65% — strong signal, not pure causation: co-op students may differ in unobserved ways).
- **Policy (as at 15 Sep 2026):** UK Home Office (–36% YoY Skilled Worker grants; £41,700; Graduate Route 24→18 from 1 Jan 2027); IRCC caps and PGWP field rules; USCIS FY2026 (85k cap, registrations –27%) and the vacated-but-appealed $100k fee; Australian 485 rules. Policy is the fastest-moving layer — verify on official sites before acting; nothing here is immigration advice.
- **Corroborating and route evidence**, added from a member-shared dossier whose primary citations we verified and cite: the Stanford Aug 2026 revision read as an index (89 vs 110 from a common 100 — relative, hiring-driven, not causal); US Census CES WP 26-27 (~12% lower, 22–24s, through 2025 Q2); the Federal Reserve adoption-vs-postings null (2023–25); NY Fed dashboard (5.6% unemployment, 42% underemployment, 2026 Q2); OECD International Students in Higher Education (2026); and France/Germany/US route fine print from Service-Public, the German federal government, USCIS and DHS (12- and 18-month search permits; OPT's 90/150 unemployment days), reviewed 15 Sep 2026.
- **What is extrapolation:** the Section 04 timeline connects measured points into a narrative; the playbooks and destination one-liners are strategy synthesis; the experience-first thesis rests on the level-split evidence plus threshold arithmetic — an inference, flagged as such.
- **AI use in production:** drafted, charted and fact-checked with AI assistance under editorial control; every load-bearing number verified against the primary source. Flagged for revisit by mid-2027 — this market is moving.

Companion reports — the AI quartet: The Algorithm at the Border, The New Ladder, The Leapfrog Test. All at africaglobalforum.com/reports. · Africa Global Forum · Research · 2026 · Free to read and share.