



Experiential Learning and Pathways to Education for Canadian Youth

By the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

Executive Summary

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) advocates for a post-secondary education system in Canada that is accessible, affordable, innovative, and of the highest quality. A key aspect of these principles is ensuring that Canadian post-secondary students across programs and disciplines have the supports they need to translate their academic experience into meaningful employment opportunities.

CASA envisions a post-secondary system where all students have the opportunity to pursue meaningful career-relevant experience while studying, and are able to draw on the considerable knowledge and expertise they develop in their studies as they embark on their careers. CASA envisions a country where all youth, students, and recent graduates who want to work have opportunities to do so, where they can make the most of their skills and abilities, and where they earn a living that allows them to live comfortably while contributing to the broader economy and society.

Recommendations:

- The federal government adopt the Canadian Career Development Foundation's 8 recommendations to support Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs).
- The federal government create a part-time job program for post-secondary students that runs from September to April, modeled after the Canada Summer Jobs program, and offering the same number of part-time jobs as the Canada Summer Jobs creates during summer months.
- The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant be made available during the first year of an apprenticeship, as well as in the Journeyman year.
- The maximum amount for Trades-person's Tool Deductions be increased from \$500 to \$1,000.



The Value of PSE in Addressing Concerns with Youth Un(der)employment

There is clear evidence that post-secondary education leads to improved employment opportunities and career outcomes. Research shows steady increases in the average annual earnings for graduates with college diplomas, apprenticeships, and university degrees in the years following the completion of their programs. For those with college diplomas, annual income rose from an average of \$33,900 after graduation to \$54,000 eight years later. For undergraduate degree holders, their average earnings rose from \$45,200 to \$74,900 over that same timeframe after graduation¹. Furthermore, the median earnings in 2005 for Canadians with a Master's or doctoral degree was \$10,000 higher than those with a Bachelor's degree, and this group have lower than average unemployment rates².

The importance of youth in Canada pursuing and obtaining post-secondary education is projected to only get higher. One study in Ontario highlighted the need for more post-secondary graduates in the coming years, projecting that by 2032, Ontario “will need 77% of our workforce to have post-secondary credentials (apprenticeship, university, college, industry, and professional)”.³ This makes post-secondary education a key element of addressing youth unemployment and underemployment issues in Canada and unlocking the economic potential of the next generation.

Recent Data on Youth Employment

¹ Ross Finnie, Kaveh Afshar, Eda Bozkurt, Masashi Miyairi and Dejan Pavlic, *Barista or Better? New Evidence on the Earnings of Post-Secondary Education Graduates: A Tax Linkage Approach* (Ottawa: Education Policy Research Institute, 2016), vi-vii.

Accessed online:

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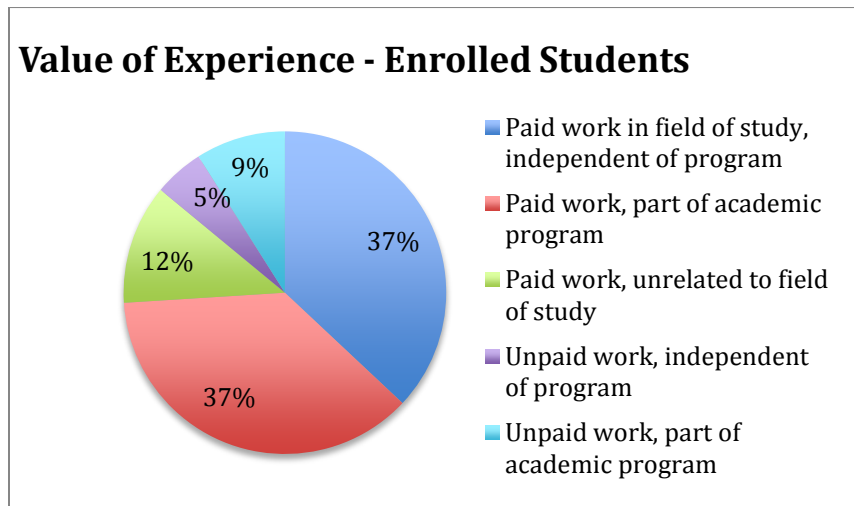
² Berger, Motte and Parkin, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*.

<http://www.yorku.ca/pathways/literature/Access/The%20Price%20of%20Knowledge%202009.pdf>

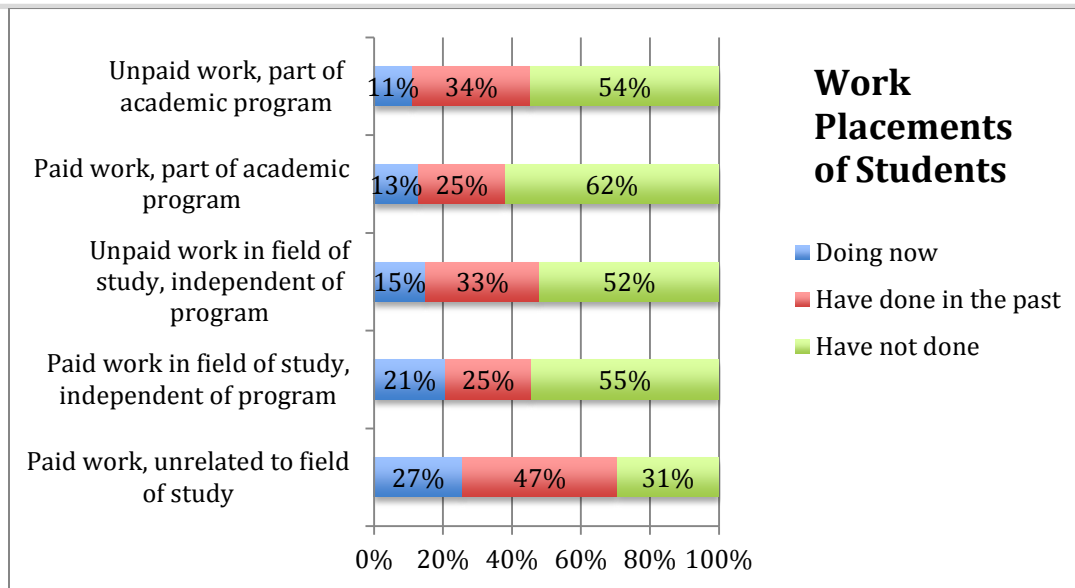
³ Rick Miner, *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People: Ontario's Labour Market Future* (Miner Management Consultants, 2010), 9. Accessed online: http://www.collegesontario.org/research/research_reports/people-without-jobs-jobs-without-people-final.pdf



Students across Canada told the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations in a survey that experiential learning is important to them. When students were asked what types of work experiences they think would help them get a job after they graduate, they strongly preferred paid work over unpaid, and also preferred experiences that relate to their field of study. 74% of respondents agreed that paid work in their field of study, whether it be part of their academic program or independent of it, would help them most to find work after graduation. Unfortunately, of those enrolled, only a portion of students get to participate in these valuable paid experiences. Of all those students who work during their studies, the vast majority are working, or have worked, in paid work unrelated to their field of study and their future career goals. Furthermore, students place very little value on unpaid work, but the number of students participating in unpaid work placements independent of their program exceeds the number of those participating in paid work placements as part of their academic program.



Additionally, while government has taken steps to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities available to students, 56% of students still report that the reason they are not pursuing these opportunities is because there are none available in their program. Therefore, there remains much work to be done.



Supporting In-Study Work Opportunities

Students have long looked to part-time and summer employment opportunities as a means to help them afford their education. But now, students are relying on these jobs at a higher rate than ever before⁴. In addition to earning money to put towards tuition, textbooks, and living costs, working during study can also help students develop workplace skills, build their resumes, and establish professional connections. Given the dual importance of in-study employment as a means of accessing and affording education, and as a tool for developing workplace skills, government interventions that help students get high quality work experiences could significantly lower rates of youth un- and under-employment.

Fairly compensated experiential learning opportunities, including paid internships, co-ops, and work-integrated programs for course credit, offer exciting avenues for helping to address unemployment and underemployment. These experiences have been proven to yield results in and out of the classroom. Undergraduates in a “work and learning program” have reported achieving a better academic performance than those who did not participate in experiential learning.⁵ On the same note, students who participated in co-ops as part of their college diploma or Bachelor’s degree

⁴ René Morissette, *Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, April 2016). Accessed online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2016002-eng.htm>

⁵ 2015 *Graduating University Student Survey Master Report*. Accessed online: http://www.cusc-ccreu.ca/CUSC_2015_Graduating_Master%20Report_English.pdf



programs go on to earn comparatively higher incomes than those who didn't.⁶ Current data suggests that fairly compensated experiences are the most beneficial for students since paid internships lead to higher rates of employment following graduation than unpaid internships.⁷ The need to invest in such opportunities for students is strengthened by the fact that employers have expressed a strong preference for hiring new staff that have some practical experience for “entry-level” roles.⁸

In 2016, the Canada Summer Jobs program (CSJ) helped create 65,000 summer jobs for students by providing funding to non-profit, public, and private sector employers. This program not only provides students with the necessary income to help afford their education, but also with workplace skills and professional networking opportunities. However, not all students are available to work full-time during the summer, since some continue to take classes, volunteer, or have other obligations. Therefore, students need the opportunity to engage in experiential learning on a part-time basis, throughout the school year. Funding part-time working opportunities from September to April could operate just like the CSJ and ensure that Canadian youth are developing workplace skills all-year round.

Expanding the Canada Summer Jobs program to include part-time positions throughout the academic year is a recommendation of CASA's that was adopted by the Expert Panel on Youth Employment in its final report in 2017.⁹

Recommendation:

- Create a student part-time job program for September to April, modeled off the Canada Summer Jobs program, and with an equal number of part-time jobs as the Canada Summer Jobs creates during summer months.

⁶ Carlos Rodriguez, John Zhao and Sarah Jane Ferguson, *Co-op participation of college and bachelor's graduates* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, December 2016). Accessed online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2016001/article/14692-eng.htm>

⁷ *Class of 2013 Student Survey* (National Association of Colleges and Employers, May 2013). Accessed Online: <http://www.naceweb.org/s05292013/paid-unpaid-interns-job-offer.aspx>

⁸ Sophie Borwein, *Bridging the Divide, Part I: What Canadian Job Ads Said* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014). Accessed online: <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Skills%20Part%202.pdf>

⁹ *13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada: Strategies For A New World Of Work* (Expert Panel on Youth Employment). Accessed Online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/youth-expert-panel/report-modern-strategies-youth-employment.html>



Transitions to the Workforce

Canada's youth, post-secondary students, and recent graduates face significant obstacles in their efforts to transition into the workplace. The unemployment and underemployment rates for these groups remain stubbornly high, and this compounds for underrepresented and marginalized youth. Additionally, student debt has risen steadily in recent years, putting more pressure on students to find work as quickly as possible.

There is an observable phenomenon among OECD countries called the Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs). The OECD defines PINEs as “young people who often have qualifications (diplomas or degrees); they frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth”.¹⁰ CASA endorses the 8 recommendations put forward by the Canadian Career Development Foundation that would help address issues around PINEs in Canada. These recommendations include a coordinated and highly visible youth school-to-work transition strategy, more research on PINEs, better access for youth to work experience and career training, increased access to apprenticeships and vocational education and training, employer consultation, and a focus on labour market needs.¹¹

Recommendation:

- The federal government adopt the Canadian Career Development Foundation's 8 recommendations to support “Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs)”.

Apprenticeships

Skilled tradespeople are essential contributors to the economy, and learning a trade offers a promising career avenue for many Canadian youth. Many have expressed concern about a shortage of skilled tradespeople in Canada's future, and a survey of Ontario employers found 41% expressed a need for more employees with skilled trade credentials.¹² Data from Statistics Canada shows strong employment rates for

¹⁰ Off to a Good Start? Jobs for Youth: Canada. (OECD, 2010) Accessed online: <https://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/22/34/46729407.pdf>

¹¹ Donnalee Bell and Krista Benes, *Transitioning Graduates to Work: Improving the Labour Market Success of Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs) in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Career Development Foundation, May 2012), vi-vii. Accessed online: <http://www.ccdf.ca/ccdf/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Report-and-Inventory-on-Canadian-Pines.pdf>

¹² James Stuckey and Daniel Munro, *The Cost of Ontario's Skills Gap: The Need to Make Skills Work* (Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 2013), iii. Accessed online: https://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/newsrelease/13-06-21/skills_shortages_cost_ontario_economy_billions_of_dollars_annually.aspx



apprentices who complete their programs.¹³ Fortunately, more Canadians are now participating in apprenticeships, and the number of Canadians completing them has doubled in the last decade.¹⁴

Despite their importance to the economy and their career opportunities, prospective apprentices face high costs associated with learning a trade. Costs include tuition and opportunity costs (i.e. lost wages while in the classroom). Opportunity costs are especially problematic for those with families to support. 35% of female apprentices and 40% of male apprentices have dependents. Travel costs between home and training centres can also be quite substantial. In most jurisdictions, apprentices are unfortunately ineligible for student loans. To help address these costs, the federal government offers the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, a taxable cash grant of \$1,000 per year. Those in Red Seal trade programs are eligible following successful completion of their first or second year level. To improve accessibility to apprenticeships, expanding the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant to first year and Journeyman year would ensure the necessary financial support is there during all years of study.

Another significant barrier to skilled trades is the high cost of tools that apprentices must purchase. To address this, the federal government introduced the Tradesperson's Tools Deduction (TTD), a tax deduction of up to \$500 for the cost of tools. Though this is an important source of support, this amount would generally only cover the cost of one piece of equipment.

Recommendations:

- The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant be made available for the first year of an apprenticeship, to improve access by addressing upfront costs.
- The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant be extended into the Journeyman year, ensuring that it is available for all years of study.
- The maximum amount for Trades-person's Tool Deductions be increased from \$500 to \$1,000.

¹³ *Completing an apprenticeship in Canada yields benefit, 2015* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2017). Accessed online: <https://www.statscan.gc.ca/daily/quotidien/170329/dq170329n-eng.pdf>

¹⁴ *Apprenticeships in Canada: Apprenticeship Data, Trends, and Observations* (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2016), 7. Accessed online: <https://caf-fca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Apprenticeship-in-Canada.pdf>