

Know More: Invest in Canadian Research, Science and Post-Secondary Education

Submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2024 Federal Budget

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2705, prom. Queensview Drive, Ottawa (Ontario) K2B 8K2
Tel. 613-820-2270 \ \ Fax 613-820-7244 \ \ Email acppu@caut.ca

www.caut.ca

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research and science

Recommendation 1

Leverage Canada's science and research strength to address current and future challenges by boosting granting council budgets for core programming by at least ten percent, or \$400 million annually for five years, as recommended by the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System.

Recommendation 2

Attract and support emerging talent and early career researchers by increasing both the number and value of graduate student scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships by \$200 million over 2 years. Scholarship and fellowship values should be indexed to inflation going forward.

Affordable education and training

Recommendation 3

Develop a national post-secondary education strategy that lays out a vision for public, high-quality, affordable and accessible post-secondary education and research across Canada.

Create a national post-secondary education transfer, separate from the Canada Social Transfer (CST), to implement the strategy and ensure a strong and viable public post-secondary education system into the future. To keep pace with inflation and increased enrolment, the PSE cash transfer requires a \$3 billion top up in 2024 to the notional PSE amount within the CST with annual funding increases set at a minimum escalator of 3% or at the rate of nominal GDP.

Recommendation 4

Address the affordability crisis and ballooning student fees by permanently increasing the Canada Student Grant to pandemic levels of \$6,000. Canada's grants and loan model should also be reweighted toward a 50:50 ratio, away from the current model of \$1 of grants for every \$2 disbursed as repayable loans.

Recommendation 5

Protect the mission of public post-secondary education by amending the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to exclude public post-secondary education institutions.

Address inequities in education

Recommendation 6

Provide an additional \$650 million annually to close the gap in Indigenous post-secondary educational attainment and support. This includes increased support for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) as well as funding for the Inuit and Métis Post-Secondary Education Strategies.

Recommendation 7

Renew and expand investments to improve and monitor equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research and post-secondary education. \$50 million in funding is required to improve data collection on EDI in post-secondary education, including the science and research workforce, the student experience, mental health, housing, international students, student debt and educational outcomes.

Context

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is the national voice for academic staff. CAUT represents more than 72,000 teachers, librarians, researchers, general staff, and other academic professionals at 125 post-secondary institutions across the country. CAUT works actively in the public interest to improve the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada.

Universities, colleges, and polytechnics are key public institutions that play an important role in Canadian society. From places of learning, research and discovery to economic hubs and community pillars, post-secondary institutions are at the forefront of innovation and problem-solving for the complex issues we face.

However, years of inadequate public funding have increased precarity in the academic workforce, reducing research capacity, while leading to increasing student fees that is making education less accessible and affordable for many. Canada has fallen behind its peers in public investments in science and research and post-secondary education, threatening Canadian productivity and innovation.

Canadian universities and colleges are tasked with preserving, sharing, and advancing knowledge. This crucial mission can only be achieved if both the federal and provincial governments ensure that science, research and post-secondary education and training are properly funded, affordable, and accessible.

CAUT recommends three key areas where federal leadership and investments are needed:

Research and science

1. Invest in science and research

Canada lags many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in supporting its research community. Significant investments are needed for Canada to stay competitive, leverage our significant research talent and replenish the federal research support system.

Fundamental science is the foundation of all research and should be funded at a minimum of 3:1 to downstream research. CAUT supports the recommendations made in the recent Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System (the “Bouchard report”), which highlights the need for investment in publicly funded research and addressing affordability among students and early career researchers to support Canada’s science and research capacity and talent pipeline.

By boosting the granting councils' total base budgets for their core programming by at least ten percent, or \$400 million annually, for five years, Canada can foster discovery of new knowledge through investigator-initiated research and better support and retain Canada's research talent.

Most graduate students and post-doctoral fellows are not funded by scholarships and fellowships, but through paid opportunities in the form of research assistantships funded through research grants. Investments in core grant programming can go a long way to improve compensation and support additional early career researchers through paid positions. Competitive and fair remuneration for this work is critical to attract and retain early career researchers in Canadian institutions.

2. Increase the number and value of graduate student scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships

A 2021 Council of Canadian Academies report concluded that cultivating a robust, resilient, and diverse scientific workforce is central to the development of a nation’s research capacity and requires supporting researchers throughout their careers¹. Unfortunately, the value of graduate scholarship awards in Canada has remained unchanged for nearly 20 years and postdoctoral fellowships have seen only a slight increase over the same period. In real dollars, the value of these scholarships and fellowships has declined substantially.

Canada should support emerging talent and early career researchers by increasing the number and value of graduate student scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships by \$200 million over 2 years. Scholarship and fellowship values should also be indexed to inflation to ensure that moving forward, award values increase alongside the cost of living.

¹ Council of Canadian Academies. (2021.) Powering Discovery: The Expert Panel on International Practices for Funding Natural Sciences and Engineering Research.

Affordable education and training

3. Develop a national PSE strategy implemented through a National Post-Secondary Education Transfer

Currently, there is no federal legislation, multilateral framework, national plan, or strategy for post-secondary education in Canada. Given the vital role of these institutions in the social, cultural, and economic development of communities and regions across Canada, it is imperative that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to develop a national post-secondary education strategy that lays out a vision for public, high-quality, affordable and accessible post-secondary education and research.

Inadequate public funding creates a negative ripple effect across the post-secondary education system, leading to an overreliance on private funding sources (mostly in the form of tuition fees, and increasingly, international student fees), precarious employment among academic staff, program cuts, and constraints on Canada's ability to generate research and innovation.

A federal transfer, separate from the Canadian Social Transfer, would provide predictable and transparent funding to provinces and territories for post-secondary education. With agreed upon conditions and data-sharing mandated by federal legislation or bilateral agreements, the transfer would provide much needed accountability while supporting the core operating functions of Canadian post-secondary institutions. The transfer should include conditionalities that focus on affordability to ensure that student fees are reduced for both domestic and international students.

The federal government should commit an additional \$3 billion to the 30.7% notional amount for PSE in the Canada Social Transfer to the new transfer with annual increases set at a minimum escalator of 3% or nominal GDP growth.

A specific PSE transfer will support a thriving public system that is affordable, accessible, and of the highest quality, and will improve access and support science and innovation well into the future.

4. Increase support for students

Between 2000-2001 and 2022-2023, average tuition fees have increased by 98% for domestic undergraduate students and 83% for domestic graduate students. In that time frame, international tuition fees have increased by 290% for undergraduate students and 127% for graduate students. By comparison, overall consumer prices have increased by 59%². In addition, student debt (for Canadians alone) stands at nearly \$39 billion³.

CAUT and student partners welcomed the 2023 Federal Budget announcement permanently eliminating interest on federal student loans. However, more needs to be done to make post-secondary education more affordable. This includes a permanent doubling of the value of the Canada Student Grant up to \$6,000 (the level of support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic).

To further tackle the issue of student debt, the government should also establish a more equitable 50:50 funding model for grants and loans, moving away from the current 2:1 model of grants versus repayable loans, as a step towards the full elimination of tuition fees.

5. Exclude public post-secondary education institutions from the CCAA

The *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) was designed as a remedy for commercial companies, not for public and publicly funded institutions. Commercial restructuring displaces the academic freedom and public interest mandates of the public university in favour of private interests.

² Statistics Canada. 2022. [Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study \(constant dollars\) \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/24-62-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm).

³ Statistics Canada. 2020. [Table 11-10-0016-01 Assets and debts held by economic family type, by age group, Canada, provinces and](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/24-62-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm)

[selected census metropolitan areas, Survey of Financial Security \(x 1,000,000\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/24-62-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm).

In February 2021, Laurentian University was the first publicly funded university in Canada to seek and receive creditor protection under the CCAA. As a result, the university saw close to two hundred jobs lost, 70 programs cut (including many French language programs), and community turmoil. As noted by the Auditor General of Ontario, the CCAA process was unnecessary, costly, and inappropriate for a publicly funded university.⁴

More than two years following the misuse of federal legislation and the harsh lessons learned from Laurentian University, CAUT urges the federal government to use the federal budget as an opportunity to exclude public post-secondary education institutions from federal bankruptcy and insolvency laws.

Address inequities in education

6. Invest in Indigenous learners and Indigenous post-secondary education

Despite post-secondary education being recognized as a treaty right, the legacy of colonialism, residential schools, and ongoing racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples in Canada have contributed to the significant gap in post-secondary attainment between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous people.

To address the financial and other barriers that First Nations, Inuit and Métis students experience in accessing education, the federal government should invest an additional \$650 million annually to Indigenous post-secondary education.

Funding should include top-ups to the Post-secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) to meet increased demand and unfunded applicants, and to compensate for higher student fees and inflation. Additional funds should be allocated to the Inuit and Métis Post-Secondary Education Strategies to address the specific needs and the right to self-determination of these groups.

Funding should also support Indigenous post-secondary institutions and community-based programming.

This investment in Indigenous post-secondary education is also important to support a diverse post-secondary workforce that includes Indigenous scholars and researchers.

7. Renew and expand investments in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

To address data gaps in the post-secondary sector, \$50 million should be allocated to support federal agencies and institutions to provide data to support evidence-based decision-making. The University and College Academic Staff System (UCASS) Survey pilot, which sought to increase data collection related to EDI and expand survey coverage to include part-time and contract staff, should be made permanent to capture equity data on the entire academic workforce across all post-secondary institutions and help fill information gaps that currently limit our understanding of these issues in the sector.

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Institutional Capacity Building grants, and the federal Dimensions program, funded for 5-years in 2018 should be renewed.

Additional funding is also needed to improve data collection on college tuition, student experience, mental health, housing, international students, student debt and educational outcomes, among other topics.

⁴ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. Nov 2022. [Special Report on Laurentian University](#).