



Canadian Association of University Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

September 21, 2020

**BY EMAIL:** [pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister and the Privy Council  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

**RE: The critical role of post-secondary education and research for Canada's post-pandemic recovery and future**

Dear Prime Minister:

On behalf of the 72,000 academic staff working at universities and colleges across this country, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is writing to urge you and your government in the upcoming session of Parliament to strengthen federal leadership to ensure an accessible and high-quality post-secondary education system for all Canadians.

Universities and colleges are integral to a strong, stable and resilient Canada, growing the knowledge, innovation and talent needed to solve current and future challenges. However, post-secondary education is under considerable strain that is negatively affecting jobs in the sector and beyond, the diversity of educational programs, and accessibility to opportunities.

A national pandemic recovery plan must include strategic investments focusing on strengthening our public services, including post-secondary education. In advance of the 2021 Budget, CAUT wrote to you and your cabinet urging the need to improve the affordability and sustainability of post-secondary education as part of this recovery plan. Outlined below are our recommendations.

**Develop a national strategy with the provinces and territories that provides adequate, stable federal funding to support quality post-secondary education.**

This pandemic has demonstrated the unsustainability of the current patchwork approach to post-secondary education policy at all levels. A stronger federal partner is needed. The last federal top-up for core operating costs to support post-secondary education was in 2007 through the Canada Social Transfer. Meanwhile, tuitions have risen over 40% and enrolment has grown by 20%. Provincial governments are taking divergent approaches, and some do not have the same fiscal manoeuvring room as the federal government.

CAUT believes it is key to develop, in collaboration with provinces and territories, a national post-secondary education plan that commits predictable, sustainable funding through a dedicated education transfer with accountability mechanisms so universities and colleges can make education more affordable for all, increase access for those who need it, and address issues of precarious work.

**Accelerate research through enhanced investments in the Tri-Councils granting programs and increase graduate student scholarships.**

This public health crisis has emphasized the value of strong research capacity to find solutions. The pandemic has also stalled much needed research across disciplines. Your government has done much to strengthen research in Canada, but the job is not done.

CAUT urges your government to meet the recommendation of its Advisory Panel on Federal Support for Fundamental Science. Current investments are 40-50 per cent short of what was recommended for Canada to stay globally competitive. Closing this funding gap will increase the sustainability of Canada's innovation and research capacity and ensure that Canadians are not left behind in an adapting world—socially and economically. Additionally, the government must increase scholarships for graduate students to the recommended levels in the Fundamental Science Review to better support early career researchers and improve the diversity of our research workforce.

**Secure opportunities for Canada's youth & unemployed Canadians by moving to a free tuition model for low- and middle-class Canadians at public universities and colleges.**

In these times of high unemployment, more Canadians than ever could benefit from training and retraining. Unfortunately, the impact of the pandemic has imposed significant financial barriers on current and would-be students.

CAUT recommends streamlining the complex mix of current federal programs for post-secondary education and focusing spending on eliminating direct costs for students. This would include repurposing the Canada Training Benefit to ensure that Canadians looking to build their skills and knowledge have meaningful access to opportunities, and redirecting the \$900 million in unused federal funding from the failed Canada Student Service Grant program to direct student support.

This is a critical moment in defining a path forward - one that brings an end to the health crisis, grows our struggling economy, and addresses long-standing issues such as climate and inequality. The post-secondary education sector is a critical partner, and we urge you in this next session to make needed improvements.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the pandemic's impacts on post-secondary teaching, learning and research, and the policy options we believe will help Canada survive the crisis and come through it stronger together.

Yours sincerely,



Brenda Austin-Smith  
President



David Robinson  
Executive Director