



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

April 29, 2020

BY E-MAIL: 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, ON
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Dear Prime Minister:

On behalf of the 72,000 academic staff, working at universities and colleges across this country, first, thank you for the swift actions and significant resources that your government has provided to contain the spread of the pandemic and to support Canadians through this crisis. We would particularly like to thank you for the unprecedented level of student support announced last week.

These emergency measures recognize the financial hardship that students face as a result of the pandemic. It will help many students get by this summer and continue their studies this fall. It will not, however, address the significant financial impact that the pandemic is having on universities and colleges, negatively impacting jobs, programs and student supports.

Universities and colleges are integral to the solving of Canada's current and future challenges. We are writing to urge you to take immediate steps to further close the gaps in emergency support and commit to making changes to improve the affordability and sustainability of post-secondary education as part of a recovery plan that ensures a stronger and more just post-Covid-19 Canada.

This crisis has shown many of our country's strengths, but also where we need to do better. Many of the pandemic-related measures that have been taken across the country should not be interim changes, but permanent ones. And, new investments need to be made to strengthen our social safety nets, labour and employment standards, and public services and institutions, which have too quickly reached their limits. These investments will drive our recovery, strengthen our resiliency and make Canada a better place to live, learn, and work.

**Recommendation 1:
Allow universities and colleges access to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.**

Last year, public funding of universities and colleges made up less than half of revenues. And because of the long decline in public funding for the sector, at least one third of academic staff are working contract to contract with limited, if any, access to benefits, and are vulnerable to any downturn in enrollment and other revenue losses as a result of the pandemic.

As a result of reductions in public funding, universities and colleges have a growing dependency on student fees, particularly from international students. Temporary changes made to study and post-graduation work permits for international students will help mitigate, but not eliminate, the risk of less international student enrollment, and this is a short-term stop-gap and not a medium or long-term solution. Even a slight downturn in student enrollment will result in significant revenue loss, leading to program closures, and cuts to jobs and student services just when students need them the most.

We urge the government to include universities and colleges as eligible organizations in the emergency wage subsidy program.

Recommendation 2:

Work with the provinces, universities and colleges to ensure that any qualified Canadian will be able to get the education and training they need without taking on additional debt.

Your government has made important changes to student loans and grants, including the temporary changes made this week. Even with this temporary doubling of the student grant, however, it remains an amount less than the average tuition in Canada, and students will also need assistance for living costs. With high levels of unemployment, more Canadians than ever may consider training and retraining, but upfront costs will remain a barrier. When polled, nearly all Canadians (93%) said they would have pursued post-secondary education after high school if they had not needed to pay tuition.

An educational assistance program like that used for veterans returning from the Second World War is an example of providing support to Canadians to get the education and training they need without taking on debt. Like after the war, this federal support could include both direct supports to students in the form of grants, as well as grants to universities and colleges to cover the costs of tuition waivers. Direct grants to institutions may also be necessary to offset expected losses in international student fees.

Recommendation 3:

Increase the federal transfer to the provinces for post-secondary education with agreements on shared priorities to improve affordability, accessibility and quality.

This pandemic has brought into sharp relief the unsustainability of the current financing of post-secondary education in Canada. Support for students must be complemented with a commitment to stable and predictable core operating funding. This will allow colleges and universities to focus on the academic mission, and not on fundraising. The last federal top-up to post-secondary education through the transfer was in 2007. Provincial governments are taking divergent approaches, and some do not have the same fiscal maneuvering room as the federal government. There is really no time like this present for federal leadership to ensure stable funding for post-secondary education no matter where one lives in Canada.

Canada's economy will need to rely on government investment in public services and institutions as its main 'engines' of growth to stimulate recovery and to deliver on Canadian priorities – health and education, good jobs and a decent quality of life. This pandemic has had extraordinary impacts, and it warrants extraordinary measures, measures that strike the balance between responding effectively to today's challenges, while putting us on a path to a long-term recovery and renewal of our public services and institutions.

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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 be better for it.

Yours sincerely,



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President



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