

SUBMISSION: QUESTIONS FOR THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRAINING, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES

ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE

JANUARY 22, 2019

PREAMBLE

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) is concerned about the recent changes that were announced to the tuition framework and OSAP, as well as the inclusion of the Student Choice Initiative (SCI) which would allow students to opt-out of non-tuition ancillary fees. OUSA has presented a series of questions to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to gain clarification and we have outlined a series of concerns voiced by students. OUSA represents 8 student unions across Ontario and has a thorough understanding of the non-tuition ancillary fees, including student unions fees.

Decision and Implementation

- Who was consulted on these decisions?
- How did students inform these decisions?
- What is the timeline for implementation and who will be involved in the creation of the implementation plan?
 - What students will be consulted going forward?
 - How will University administration be involved moving forward?
- Would you be willing to hold a roundtable with students to address concerns?

TUITION FRAMEWORK

- Will international student tuition continue to be unregulated and unpredictable?
- How will the government ensure that quality of post-secondary education does not suffer as a result of Universities facing financial constraints?
- How will the government ensure that Universities do not dramatically raise prices on items like parking rates, late fees, and documentation to compensate for financial constraints?

ONTARIO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (OSAP)

- What amount of institutional financial aid, like tuition set-aside, will still be available for students?
- For students who expected to be classified as "independent", will they be grandfathered as in as "dependent" for the 2019-2020 year?
- With the increased expectation of parental financial contributions to students' education, are there concerns with how this will impact families' contributions to the economy and long-term savings for retirement and homeownership?

- What supports will be put in place for students who enrolled in the post-secondary intending to rely on the “free tuition” grant?
- Will there be a means for students to demonstrate that their parents are not financially contributing to their education?
- What metrics will be identified to assess the success of OSAP – not relying on overall enrolment numbers which are capped for institutions as the sole metric?
- Is the government concerned that increased levels of student debt will deter students from life milestones like purchasing a house or having children?
- The \$25,000 annual income threshold for the Repayment Assistance Plan is equivalent to a recent graduate working a full-time minimum wage job. Is it reasonable to expect a student in this employment situation to begin paying back their loans on top of other living expenses?

NON-TUITION ANCILLARY FEES

Technical Questions:

- What is classified as an “essential” service under the Student Fee Classification Framework?
- What will be the process for deeming services “essential” — who decides?
- Is there a review process for the Student Fee Classification Framework? If so, how often will this review take place? How will the framework be monitored?
- How many times a year will students need to opt out of fees? Will it be once a year (for both semesters) or every semester?
- How will the Ministry define a “reasonable period of time” to opt-out of fees?
- Will institutions have full control over the online opt-out options?
- How will incoming first year students know what services have value if they have not experienced University life yet?
- Will the operational costs of student unions that ensure compliance with the non-profit act and good governance be considered “essential”?
- Since many student fees have been introduced via referendum, will past referendum be considered valid?

Long-Term Agreements and Contracts:

- Student unions negotiate major discounts for transit passes that save students on hundreds of dollars every year - How will this stipulation impact transit agreements with municipalities and transit authorities?
- Student unions often lease their properties through their University and then rent out student union operated spaces to vendors – Will the government support student unions who may face legal challenges with vendors regarding existing contracts?
- Student fees are often tied directly to the financing of campus infrastructure projects - What supports will the government provide to ensure that these changes do not jeopardize ongoing infrastructure projects?

Student Union Services

- Will student union-run services that are classified as “essential” be exempt from the opt-out? If not, how will these essential services continue to operate?
 - Examples: peer mental health supports, LGBTQ+ services
- Student unions administer essential services, like health and dental plans, that are locked into long-term agreements – Will the government support the sustainability of these services?
- How will students administer services like the bus pass and health and dental plans, if there is a reduction of administrative support staff?
- How will student services track two types of students: those who have paid for a service and those who opted-out of the service?

Student Representation & Democracy

- How will the government ensure that the Student Choice Initiative (SCI) does not result in student associations across Ontario being forced to close?
- What does this mean for external advocacy organizations like OUSA? How will you hear from a collective student voice?

Job Loss

- How will the government support students and staff who work at student unions and are worried their jobs are in jeopardy?
- Will the government provide financial support to reduce the amount of job loss at organizations that will be hit the hardest?

Student Experience

- How will these changes affect supports for Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and international students that are often funded through student experience portfolios?
- Will career services and financial aid offices be eligible for opt-out?

CONCERNS & UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF STUDENT CHOICE INITIATIVE (SCI)

OUSA is concerned that these changes will result in an additional financial burden to government and individual students. We are also concerned that these changes will lead to several unintended consequences for student unions, institutions, and students.

As an example, in 2005, the Australian government passed an amendment to the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* to abolish compulsory student unionism in higher education institutions which receive Commonwealth funding and reduce grants to an institution that breaches the voluntary student unionism requirements.

This amendment was later repealed in 2011 because of the widespread negative impacts it had on student unions, institutions, and students. Reports cite that the law stripped an estimated \$170 million a year out of student services budgets nationally, led to the closure of many services and thousands of jobs lost. (<https://www.smh.com.au/education/student-union-fees-to-return-20100929-15xgk.html>)

OUSA encourages the government to consider the findings of the Australian government's consultations on the impacts of the voluntary student unionism on services, amenities, and representation for Australian University Students: (<http://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2008/04/apo-nid4022-1130991.pdf>)

- Students identified decreased student services levels and increased costs to individual students
- Student unions saw a decrease in student advocacy and democratic representation
- Many student unions had to rely on financial assistance from their institutions and dip into their reserve funds to use for day-to-day operations
- Student unions faced significant job losses, reduction of paid staff hours, and a loss of corporate knowledge which had long-term impacts on the organization
- Some institutions were left with no student unions at all, limiting the student body's ability to hold their institution accountable