



POLICY PAPER

Student Entrepreneurship, Employment, and Employability

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision, we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby the government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishinaabek, and Mississauga Peoples.

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OUSA policy papers are written by students to articulate student concerns and offer student-driven solutions for accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in the province.

To support our policies and ensure that we are effectively representing undergraduate and professional students at Ontario's universities, students and student groups from each of our eight member institutions were consulted to provide guidance and feedback on the principles, concerns, and recommendations contained herein.

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GLOSSARY

Academically qualified student: A student who meets academic requirements as established by their institutions.

Co-operative Education Tax Credit: A refundable tax credit offered by the government of Ontario to support businesses in hiring co-op students enrolled at post-secondary institutions. Employers can claim up to 25% of eligible expenses (30% for small businesses) related to the placement, up to a maximum of \$3,000.¹

Envelope funding: Government funding designated for a specific purpose or to accomplish a particular goal.

Entrepreneurship: “The process of creating and implementing innovative ideas to address economic opportunities or social problems, whether that is through enterprise creation, improved product development or new a mode of organization.”²

Entrepreneurial research: The process of conducting research from various sources to support the development of economic and social innovation.

Employment Standards Act: Legislation enacted by the Government of Ontario that governs the rights and protections of workers in the province. The Act stipulates the various rights Ontario workers are entitled to regarding their hours of work, pay, breaks and vacation, and leaves of absence, among others.

Full-time employment: According to Statistics Canada, full-time employment constitutes 30 or more hours worked per week.³

Interpersonal skills: The ability of people to communicate with and relate to other individuals in daily interactions. Interpersonal skills encompass a variety of specific skills such as verbal communication, active listening, and being emotionally attuned.

Skills articulation: The ability for graduates and job seekers to accurately and adequately communicate their range of skills and capabilities to potential employers.

Learning equipment: Tools, resources, and infrastructure designed to facilitate different styles and types of learning.

Micro-credentials: A type of post-secondary credential that aims to quickly train and reskill individuals. Micro-credentials are shorter in length than a degree or diploma and designed to target the development of specific skills for a given industry/sector.

All the following definitions related to experiential learning have been adopted from Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL).⁴

Co-op: “Consists of alternating academic terms and paid work terms. Co-op internship consists of several co-op work terms back-to-back. In both models, work terms provide experience in a workplace setting related to the student’s field of study. The number of required work terms varies by program; however,

¹ Ministry of Finance, “Co-operative education tax credit,” *Government of Ontario*, last modified October 21, 2022, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/co-operative-education-tax-credit>

² Creso Sá, Andrew Kretz, Kristjan Sigurdson, K, *The State of Entrepreneurship Education in Ontario’s Colleges and Universities* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014).

³ Statistics Canada, Classification of Full-time and Part-time Work Hours,” *Government of Canada*, last modified September 16, 2016, <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=114437&CVD=114437&CLV=0&MLV=1&D=1>

⁴ Co-Operative Education And Work-Integrated Learning Canada, “What Is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)?,” *CEWIL*, n.d., <https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/About-Us/Work-Integrated-Learning.aspx?hkey=ed772be2-00d0-46cd-a5b8-873000a18b41>

the time spent in work terms must be at least 30% of the time spent in academic study for programs over 2 years in length and 25% of time for programs 2 years and shorter in length.”

Community Service Learning: “Integrates meaningful community service with classroom instruction and critical reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen communities. In practice, students work in partnership with a community-based organization to apply their disciplinary knowledge to a challenge identified by the community.”

Entrepreneurship: “Allows a student to leverage resources, space, mentorship and/or funding to engage in the early-stage development of business start-ups and/or to advance external ideas that address real-world needs for academic credit.”

Internship: “Offers usually one discipline-specific, supervised, structured paid or unpaid, and for academic credit work experience or practice placement. Internships may occur in the middle of an academic program or after all academic coursework has been completed and prior to graduation. Internships can be of any length but are typically 12 to 16 months long.”

Work-integrated learning: “A form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student’s academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting. WIL experiences include an engaged partnership of at least: an academic institution, a host organization, and a student. WIL can occur at the course or program level and includes the development of student learning objectives and outcomes related to: employability, agency, knowledge and skill mobility and life-long learning.” Types of WIL include:

- Apprenticeship
- Co-op
- Internships
- Entrepreneurship
- Community and industry research and projects
- Mandatory professional practicum/clinical placement
- Community service learning
- Work experience

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As post-secondary students progress through their undergraduate education, they have a range of experiences that equip them with the skills they need to enter the job market. Securing stable and sustainable employment is one of the main reasons students attend university, and thus, it is important that post-secondary institutions provide the opportunities and tools necessary to foster students' employability. However, there are several gaps in experiential learning, skills development, entrepreneurship, legal protections, and post-graduation opportunities that prevent students from gaining fulfilling experiences that help them achieve their full potential in the labour market. Therefore, it is critical that the provincial government and relevant sector stakeholders work together to maximize the opportunities presented to post-secondary students and support success in their chosen career path.

THE PROBLEM

Inequities and Disparities in Experiential Learning

Students are concerned that work-integrated learning is more common and well-funded in business and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and less available and disproportionately underfunded in the arts and humanities, which leaves some students with reduced opportunity to pursue work-integrated learning. Further, students from marginalized communities are less likely to enter business and STEM fields, thereby disproportionately affecting their access to work-integrated learning opportunities. Students who don't have work-integrated learning opportunities as part of their educational degree, are at a disadvantage when entering the job market.

In addition, there are not enough existing co-operative learning placements to match student demand. Existing co-operative learning placements are overrepresented in STEM and business fields without many opportunities in other sectors. There are also not enough incentives for employers to increase co-operative learning placements and employers do not receive adequate compensation when hiring students partaking in an 8-week flexible work term, which might discourage them from offering such opportunities. Notably, financial constraints are cited as one of the largest barriers to employers being able to provide work-integrated learning opportunities, and the current Co-operative Education Tax Credit structure does not support flexible work terms.

Students are also worried that unpaid work opportunities exacerbate the financial burden faced by students, who forego pay in order to complete mandatory unpaid placements allowing employers to exploit their labour. Unpaid work opportunities disproportionately impact low-income and racialized students, who have less flexibility to pursue these opportunities and thus miss out on valuable experiences to supplement their in-course content. These opportunities are also concentrated in fields that women tend to pursue more, disproportionately impacting these students by perpetuating the gender pay disparity, and negatively impacting student finances. As well, students who must complete mandatory unpaid placements have limited time to pursue other paid opportunities, reducing their ability to earn and save money.

Students can experience additional stressors and pressures during work-integrated learning that can lead to physical and mental health challenges, and are not properly informed of the time commitment a work-integrated learning opportunity entails, making it difficult to balance academic and personal obligations. In addition, students with off-campus placements who must relocate may be unaware of the wellness supports in proximity to them. Students are concerned that the increase in hybrid and remote work models in work-integrated learning environments may further isolate students facing increased stressors and workloads.

Furthermore, post-secondary institutions do not offer enough community service learning opportunities. Community service learning courses lack structure which poses difficulties when developing these learning opportunities. Faculty turnover causes a loss of relationships between institutions and community service partners. Additionally, a lack of accessible transportation poses a barrier to student

engagement in community service learning opportunities and limits the community partners ability to participate. Students are also worried that a lack of student consultation from community service learning can lead to inaccurate advertising for the nature of said opportunities.

Lack of Comprehensive Skill Development

Students are concerned about being unable to find relevant research and reports of the provinces' current in-demand skills. Therefore, students struggle to find relevant opportunities related to their desired field of work. In addition, the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce are constantly evolving and students may not be given the resources to develop the necessary skills to be competitive.

As well, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often do not have the opportunity to learn how to invest and save for their future as well as face more barriers to continuously save and invest due to many living day-to-day with their finances. Students are also not given the necessary information regarding investing and budgeting.

Remote work has increased drastically since COVID-19 and workplaces are shifting to more virtual environments, which is a continuous concern for rural and northern students. Employers can have assumptions about the digital skills new graduates hold, presenting a barrier to students without these skills to successfully transition into the workforce. Additionally, digital literacy skill development through online learning cannot replace the in-person learning that some students require to thrive. Students are also worried that more jobs are susceptible to automation, and will need to enhance their digital skills to remain competitive and to have a successful career path.

Students have different levels of skills proficiency as there are inconsistent opportunities and experiences for professional development to gain desirable skills for the workplace. Further, the shift to online work and learning gave students vastly different work experiences, which could lead to variations in and skills amongst their peers.

The COVID-19 pandemic left students with a lack of opportunities to network and gain connections that can help them enter the workforce or their desired field. In addition, students are not aware of resources from career services within their institutions that can support their long-term career goals, including the ability to network without business-related backgrounds.

Students are concerned that institutions do not have sufficient resources and systems to provide them with interactive means to articulate the skills they gain during their post-secondary education as they enter the workforce post-graduation.

Some graduates are unprepared with foundational in-demand skills that would help them enter and succeed in the workforce. There is minimal research on the specific in-demand skills that university students in Ontario can and should acquire from their programs.

Students are worried that post-secondary students, especially those from low-income households, are not able to access necessary digital tools to thrive in their academic careers.

Minimal Support for Entrepreneurship

Students are less inclined to pursue entrepreneurship due to financial barriers, and inflation has created additional barriers for students who wish to complete a work term entrepreneurship opportunity, including rising costs of housing and transit.

Students are concerned that there is not enough funding to commercialize their intellectual property. Additionally, students are also uninformed on how to commercialize their intellectual property on their respective campuses.

Students outside of business-oriented programs do not receive adequate support for pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities.

Limited Legal Employment Protections

All students engaging in work as a part of their university program are not covered by regulations in the Employment Standards Act leading to disparities in pay, benefits, and worker rights. Under the Employment Standards Act, students are not entitled to receive minimum wage leading to inequitable pay and increased financial burden. Notably, the exemption of students from the Employment Standards Act leads to confusion surrounding students' rights when pursuing a work placement or co-op term. Students can also experience harm and harassment in work-integrated learning placements, making their workplace environments physically, mentally, and psychologically unsafe.

Students are concerned that campus employment opportunities disproportionately favour domestic students and often see international students as ineligible candidates, who are also required to obtain study and work permits to pursue co-operative learning placements. Certain fields require security clearances that are disproportionately difficult for international students to receive. In addition, the lack of international student support and transition tools during an undergraduate degree will lead to a lack of retention in the place of study. Many international students are also unaware of the processes in place to ensure residency post-graduation. Students are worried that employers are hesitant to hire international students due to financial constraints and inaccessible funding.

Unclear and Unfair Post-Graduation Options and Outcomes

Students are concerned that micro-credentials are not widely accepted and understood by employers in some sectors. Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity on what micro-credentials entail and how they bring value to students. Due to a lack of understanding of micro-credential applicability, students may not recognize this as a possible option after graduating.

Lastly, students are worried that during the pandemic youth unemployment disproportionately affected marginalized groups including international students, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and Black youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding Experiential Learning Opportunities and Compensation

The provincial government should revitalize the Career Ready Fund to provide post-secondary institutions with funding to increase work-integrated learning in disciplines where such opportunities are currently lacking. The provincial government should also work with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable to conduct research and establish best practices on incorporating work-integrated learning in the arts and humanities, and other fields of study where such opportunities are limited.

The provincial government should incentivize employers to hire co-op students with the option of converting existing tax credits provided for co-op students into upfront grants. The provincial government should modify the Co-operative Education Tax Credit so that the maximum credit value employers can claim equates to 30% of the current average co-op salary. Further, the provincial government should decrease the minimum co-operative education placement time required by the Co-operative Education Tax Credit, from 10 weeks to 8 weeks, permitting flexible work term eligibility. The provincial government should create envelope funding to support the creation of meaningful, relevant co-operative learning opportunities in small businesses and not-for-profit organizations. The provincial government should also provide envelope funding to institutions to support students who wish to pursue flexible work terms.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to revisit the Employment Standards Act, and ensure that all internships, that are not required for academic accreditation, are guaranteed to receive fair compensation. While the Ministry of Colleges and Universities addresses the recommendation immediately above, they should establish guidelines that ensure that students in an unpaid internship should not be required to work more than 37.5 hours per week for full-time employment, with exceptions given to students in careers that

necessitate more hours. The provincial government should provide envelope funding to accreditation bodies for the purposes of hiring and compensating students who must complete mandatory placements as regulated by these accrediting bodies. In addition, the provincial government should provide institutions with envelope funding for bursaries for students with mandatory unpaid work placements to compensate for necessary expenditure.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop a best practice model on how best university co-op/experiential learning centres can prepare and inform students of the demands and pressures of their placements. The Council of Ontario Universities should develop and distribute guidelines to university co-op/experiential learning centres to help them create resource packages that inform students on how to access wellness resources on campus and during out-of-town placements. As well, the provincial government should require university co-op/experiential learning centres to partner with employers and establish a mentoring program for students in work-integrated learning placements. Work-integrated learning opportunities should allot time for students to process/recover from physical and mental health challenges related to their placement. Additionally, the provincial government should mandate universities provide training on employment law and worker rights prior to any work-integrated learning placement.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide faculty incentives to develop meaningful community service learning courses. The Council of Ontario Universities, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations should work together to create a best practice model for administering community service learning-based courses. The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities to provide financial support for necessary expenditures, including transportation fees for students to aid their access to community partners. The provincial government should also formulate student consultation guidelines for community service learning opportunities.

Strengthening Skills Development and Articulation

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regularly conduct and disseminate research regarding projected in-demand skills and jobs to ensure that institutions can support students with the development of these skills.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should collaborate with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to establish a personal financial management course credit for undergraduate degrees outside of business and math focused programs. Furthermore, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide further incentive for institutions to implement financial management teachings for students outside of business and math-focused programs.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide guidelines for students to learn digital tool training prior to entering in their workplace, and should work with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable to create a framework for digital literacy skills that post-secondary institutions can adopt and distribute to faculty as they develop learning outcomes.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to develop programs and workshops that build students' proficiency in interpersonal skills. This Ministry should also develop a comprehensive framework of expectations and supports in hybrid work arrangements that is integrated within post-secondary institutions' career support services.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide a comprehensive framework for career coaching at the post-secondary level that is advertised and accessible for students. In addition, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to expand programming for students to receive desired career support in their given field.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should establish a best practice model that post-secondary institutions should follow, that outlines how to convey the academic, oral, practical, and writing skills acquired through post-secondary education and extracurriculars.

The provincial government should commission the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to conduct cyclical research on the specific in-demand technical and non-technical skills employers are seeking from university graduates. Consequently, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should use the skills research of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to disseminate this information accessibly to students within their institutions. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities along with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should require work-integrated learning employers various opportunities for students in association with their degree.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide grants that support student entry into the workforce with the tools and resources needed to succeed.

Enhancing Supports for Entrepreneurship

The provincial government should continue to provide envelope funding to create and maintain work-integrated learning programs that focus on innovation and cultural change. The provincial government should also provide funding for students who require travel and living arrangements for their entrepreneurial work term placements. The provincial government should incentivize partnerships between universities and local and regional businesses to establish unique entrepreneurship opportunities within their industry.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should allocate more funding to be able to support students with ownership of intellectual property. Additionally, Intellectual Property Ontario should provide intellectual property advice and resources specifically designed for post-secondary students pursuing entrepreneurship experiences.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop best practices and guidelines for post-secondary institutions to improve programming and access to accelerators, incubators, and spaces for innovation specifically for undergraduate student entrepreneurs. The provincial government should also provide envelope funding to expand, support, and promote entrepreneurship opportunities across all disciplines.

Legal Employment Protection for Students

The provincial government should amend the Employment Standards Act such that students completing work placements as a part of their university program are entitled to the same rights and protections as Ontario workers. Further, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to create a guide outlining students' rights in the workplace. The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to establish a reporting mechanism within co-op/experiential learning centres for students to disclose experiences of harm and harassment at their workplace. Once the above reporting mechanism is implemented, the provincial government should require these centres to work with the employer to address and resolve the incident as stipulated in the workplace's respective violence and harassment policy.

The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of increasing international student specific employment opportunities on-campus and should lobby the federal government to allow international student study permits to authorize co-operative learning opportunities. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research about the various challenges that interfere with international students integrating into the workforce, and should work with the government to create a best practice model to provide international students with academic, social, and cultural support and help them overcome integration challenges. In addition, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to institutions to create services that support international students in Ontario and ensure post-graduation retention. The provincial government should work in collaboration with the federal government to streamline the visa and permit retention process post-graduation. The provincial government should also lobby the federal government

to ensure that security clearances are not barriers for international students seeking employment. The provincial government should provide envelope funding to co-op employers in order to relieve financial constraints in hiring international students, and provide transparent information to raise awareness of work-integrated learning opportunities for international students along with further resources for employment.

Clarity and Equity Around Post-Graduation Options and Outcomes

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adapt the eCampus micro-credentials framework to provide a provincial-wide understanding of the purpose of micro-credentials as well as provide a recognized and standardized framework across Ontario campuses. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should identify and research how organizations and employers are utilizing micro-credentials within their recruitment of recently graduated students. The Ministry of College and Universities should also develop educational programs and resources for students to learn about micro-credentials including the process of attaining them, as well as the costs and benefits.

Lastly, the provincial government should provide tax incentives, grants, and social procurement for employers who offer work-integrated learning opportunities for equity-deserving groups. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should also work towards developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy to recruit and retain marginalized students in work-integrated learning.

INTRODUCTION

Employment is one of the primary drivers that motivates students to enter and graduate from post-secondary. Notably, an undergraduate degree is an important prerequisite to obtaining a job. The Ontario University Graduate Survey found that just over half of respondents required an undergraduate degree for the position they currently occupied.⁵ Thus, the experiences and skills gained over the course of an undergraduate degree are valuable takeaways for graduates as they think about their career plans.

Since this policy paper was last published, there has been significant changes to the global economic climate and future of work environments that have shifted the realities of post-graduation employment for students. The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on youth unemployment, work-integrated learning, and personal finances. Given that lockdowns at the onset of the pandemic most affected the sectors students tend to work in (like retail, tourism, and hospitality), many students had their hours cut or experienced complete job losses, and thus, reduced their income. From the pandemic, many employers are also altering their workplaces to accommodate hybrid or completely remote models of working. This changes the way post-secondary institutions must prepare students to thrive and succeed in the workforce, as the skills that employers now desire are slightly evolving.

The provincial government has also prioritized the development of local innovations. In 2022, the province officially launched *Intellectual Property Ontario*, an agency designed to support the development and commercialization of ideas from Ontario's innovators, entrepreneurs, and researchers.⁶ As students continue to think about the ways they can contribute to their local communities, the introduction of this agency may influence the ways students can bring those ideas to life.

Micro-credentials have also risen in prominence, expanding educational options for current and prospective learners. Micro-credentials seek to expedite targeted skill development for certain industries and sectors, and as this paper will explain, more needs to be done to assess their usefulness for current undergraduate students.

With all these developments, the future of student entrepreneurship, employment, and employability faces several questions and challenges ahead. Between the different kinds of work-integrated learning, skills acquisition, entrepreneurial supports, legal documents, and outcomes beyond an undergraduate degree, there are many ways to strengthen the resources currently available to students as they get ready to enter the workforce. Post-secondary institutions must be well-positioned to support these needs, and the provincial government can do more to ensure equitable opportunities for students as they pursue in-study and post-graduation employment.

Through post-secondary education, students are preparing and equipping themselves with the skills and experiences needed to become future leaders and contributors to Ontario's local communities. It is our hope that the insights and recommendations offered in this paper pave way for the provincial government to comprehensively and proactively support student employability and entrepreneurship, and consequently, ensure the success and prosperity of our society.

⁵ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "2020-21 Ontario University Graduate Survey," Government of Ontario, last modified October 19, 2022, <https://www.iaccess.gov.on.ca/OsappRatesWeb/enterapp/overview.xhtml>

⁶ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, "Province Launches Intellectual Property Ontario," *Ontario Newsroom*, March 3, 2022, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001687/province-launches-intellectual-property-ontario>

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

INCREASING WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS ALL DISCIPLINES

Principle: Work-integrated learning is a valuable asset to post-secondary education and should be widely available to students across all disciplines.

Principle: All eligible students should have the opportunity to participate in work-integrated learning.

Principle: A student's chosen field of study should not inequitably disadvantage their access to work-integrated learning.

Concern: Work-integrated learning is more common and well-funded in business and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and less available and disproportionately underfunded in the arts and humanities, leaving some students with reduced opportunity to pursue work-integrated learning.

Concern: Students from marginalized communities are less likely to enter business and STEM fields, thereby disproportionately affecting their access to work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Students who don't have work-integrated learning opportunities as part of their educational degree, are at a disadvantage when entering the job market.

Recommendation: The provincial government should revitalize the Career Ready Fund to provide post-secondary institutions with funding to increase work-integrated learning in disciplines where such opportunities are currently lacking.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable to conduct research and establish best practices on incorporating work-integrated learning in the arts and humanities, and other fields of study where such opportunities are limited.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities afford students with the chance to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. Obtaining relevant experience during their post-secondary education allows graduates to better succeed in finding employment. Based on data from the 2018 National Graduates Survey, Statistics Canada found that students who participated in WIL were more likely to have a job related to their field of study.⁷ Furthermore, participants in WIL were less likely to be overqualified for the job they held three years after graduation, and had higher earnings than their counterparts.⁸ It is also important to note that the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel recommended to expand opportunities for learning by experience such that every student can complete at least one experiential learning opportunity before finishing college or university. As such, it is imperative that the province works to increase WIL opportunities for students across all disciplines.

Students should not be inequitably disadvantaged due to their chosen field of study. However, WIL opportunities are currently more well-funded in business and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. According to Statistics Canada, 18.7% of Humanities graduates participated in WIL, while 47.3% of Mathematics, Computer, and Information Sciences graduates and 64.6% of Architecture, Engineering, and Related Technologies graduates participated. The disparity in these numbers is not a result of disengagement from students; rather, it stems from a lack of funding for WIL opportunities outside of business and STEM-related work. Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL) iHUB, a grant-based funding program partnering with the federal

⁷ Diane Galarneau, Mark Kinack, and George Marshall, "Work-integrated learning during postsecondary studies, 2015 graduates," *Statistics Canada*, May 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00003-eng.htm>

⁸ Ibid.

government, funded significantly more opportunities in business and STEM in Ontario compared to arts and humanities, as shown in Table 1.⁹ Moreover, Employment and Social Development Canada launched the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP), which is specifically geared towards increasing WIL opportunities for students in STEM and business programs.¹⁰ Additionally, women are still severely underrepresented in some disciplines, especially in STEM fields.¹¹ With women and many other equity-deserving groups overrepresented in other disciplines like Arts and Humanities, the lack of WIL opportunities across disciplines is disproportionately harming these groups.

Table 1: Number of WIL Placements Funded Through CEWIL Canada in 2021

Field of Study		Number of Experiences
STEM	Biological and biomedical sciences	318
	Computer and information sciences and support services	92
	Engineering	178
	Engineering technologies and engineering-related fields	41
	Mathematics and statistics	111
	Physical sciences	12
	TOTAL	752
Business	Business, management, marketing and related support services	1,082
	TOTAL	1,082
Arts and Humanities	Liberal arts and sciences, general studies and humanities	25
	Visual and performing arts	148
	TOTAL	173

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated difficulties surrounding WIL. While most activities transitioned online, WIL opportunities were unable to transition; this resulted in the cancellation or

⁹ Data was gathered applying Ontario, Bachelor's degree, and 2021 filters: Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, "CEWIL Canada Work Integrated Learning iHUB," *CEWIL Canada*, n.d., <https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/Resources/iWIL-Hub/iHUB-Reporting-Dashboard.aspx?hkey=2f98068c-aca5-4fee-a2bf-157a7db93bfd>

¹⁰ Steve Martin and Brandon Rouleau, "An exploration of work, learning, and work-integrated learning in Canada using the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults," *Statistics Canada*, May 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-648-x/89-648-x2020001-eng.pdf?st=lf4FM8zT>

¹¹ Amy Kaufman and Julia Colyar, *Canadian Academia and the Faculty Gender Gap* (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2022), <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WIA-Part-1-FINAL.pdf>

postponement of many such programs.¹² Compounded with the overall job loss and reduction in job opportunities for students throughout the pandemic, post-secondary students suffered immense financial impacts. For example, over 70% of continuing students were very or extremely concerned about the pandemic's financial impacts on themselves, and a common concern was that they would have to exhaust their savings.¹³ Given the impacts of the pandemic, it is especially important for the province to ensure all disciplines are supported with WIL opportunities to give all students a chance to build relevant, practical skills in their respective fields.

To achieve this, the province should re-establish the Career Ready Fund to fund post-secondary institutions' WIL opportunities, specifically in disciplines currently lacking these opportunities, such as arts and humanities. In addition, the province should work with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable to conduct research and establish best practices surrounding WIL opportunities in fields of study that are currently lacking in WIL opportunities. These frameworks can work towards better expanding and incorporating experiential learning opportunities across all disciplines, and thus, also promote both traditional and non-traditional career paths.

INCREASING CO-OP OPPORTUNITIES IN ONTARIO

Principle: All willing and academically qualified students should have the ability to access co-operative learning opportunities.

Principle: A sufficient number of co-operative learning opportunities should exist to ensure all eligible students in co-op programs are able to secure work placements.

Principle: Co-op opportunities should be varied in their offerings to allow students to access co-operative placements in their desired field.

Concern: There are not enough existing co-operative learning placements to match student demand.

Concern: Existing co-operative learning placements are overrepresented in STEM and business fields without many opportunities in other sectors.

Concern: There are not enough incentives for employers to increase co-operative learning placements.

Concern: Employers do not receive adequate compensation when hiring students partaking in an 8-week flexible work term, which might discourage them from offering such opportunities.

Concern: Financial constraints are cited as one of the largest barriers to employers being able to provide work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Current Co-operative Education Tax Credit structure does not support flexible work terms.

Recommendation: The provincial government should incentivize employers to hire co-op students with the option of converting existing tax credits provided for co-op students into upfront grants.

Recommendation: The provincial government should modify the Co-operative Education Tax Credit so that the maximum credit value employers can claim equates to 30% of the current average co-op salary.¹⁴

¹² Statistics Canada, "Study: Work-integrated learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic," *Statistics Canada*, May 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200525/dq200525a-eng.htm>

¹³ Statistics Canada, "COVID-19 Pandemic: Financial impacts on postsecondary students in Canada," *Statistics Canada*, May 15, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00016-eng.htm>

¹⁴ "Co-operative education tax credit," Government of Ontario, last updated March 27, 2022, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/co-operative-education-tax-credit>

Recommendation: The provincial government should decrease the minimum co-operative education placement time required by the Co-operative Education Tax Credit, from 10 weeks to 8 weeks, permitting flexible work term eligibility.

Recommendation: The provincial government should create envelope funding to support the creation of meaningful, relevant co-operative learning opportunities in small businesses and not-for-profit organizations.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to support students who wish to pursue flexible work terms.

Co-operative education models, abbreviated as co-op opportunities or co-op, refer to “alternating academic terms and paid work terms” as defined by Co-operative Education and Work Integrated Learning Canada.¹⁵ These work terms provide students with valuable workplace experience related to their field of study. Through co-op, students can gain workplace skills to better prepare them to enter the workforce in their desired industry. The work experience gained from these placements are an excellent way for students to bolster their resume and employability. Co-op opportunities are also opportune for students to establish professional networks to aid in their career development. The income provided by co-op placements is also a major benefit for students, allowing them to be compensated for their work and to cover costs of living and tuition expenses.¹⁶ Students are looking for paid opportunities to address the rising costs of tuition, as illustrated by student respondents in OUSA’s 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey (OUSS), where 46% of those with summer employment cited covering the cost of education as their primary reason for employment.¹⁷

While co-op education provides many benefits for students, there are not enough opportunities for students to engage in this style of learning. The Affordability Report disseminating 2020 OUSS results clearly demonstrated the desire held by students for more co-op positions.¹⁸ Students noted disproportionate co-op availabilities which favoured positions in STEM and business fields, yet left few options for those interested in the arts and media, among others. When co-op opportunities are offered to students, they tend to be irrelevant to students’ desired career paths, limiting the skills students can gain from these experiences. As one student expressed in the 2020 OUSS, “Employment opportunities need improvement in my opinion because I was enrolled in the Neuroscience with Co-op option at [institution] along with about 50 other people in my program and year of study. Everybody who was in co-op in my program dropped their co-op because there are NO paid opportunities that are actually related to our field.”¹⁹ According to the aforementioned report, 60% of students with in-study jobs were employed in a field unrelated to their area of study.²⁰ Even within the existing co-op opportunities, many of these positions are unpaid, failing to truly meet the definition of co-op education.²¹ Financial constraints are frequently cited by employers as the primary barrier to hiring co-op students, resulting in an abundance of unpaid or underpaid positions.²² Data from the 2020 OUSS revealed that among students without a WIL opportunity, 74% would participate if the opportunity arose.²³ This demonstrates the growing demand for WIL and highlights the need for additional incentives and supports for employers to hire more co-op students.

¹⁵ Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, “What Is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)?,” 2021, *Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada*, <https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/About-Us/Work-Integrated-Learning.aspx?hkey=ed772be2-00d0-46cd-a5b8-873000a18b41>

¹⁶ University of Waterloo, “What to expect in a co-op,” *University of Waterloo*, n.d., <https://uwaterloo.ca/future-students/missing-manual/careers/what-expect-co-op>

¹⁷ Britney De Costa and Malika Dhanani, *Affordability: Results from the 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*, Research Report (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2022), https://www.ousa.ca/reports_ouss_2020_affordability

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Unpublished student quote from 2020 OUSS data.

²⁰ De Costa and Dhanani, *Affordability: Results from the 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*

²¹ Ibid.

²² Peggy Sattler and Julie Peters, “Work-Integrated Learning and Postsecondary Graduates: The Perspective of Ontario Employers,” (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario), 2012, <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WIL-Employer-Survey-ENG.pdf>

²³ Unpublished 2020 OUSS data.

To match the growing demand for co-op education, and to ensure a sustainable system for future years, there are a number of recommendations to be implemented at a provincial level. While the Co-operative Education Tax Credit (CETC) is an excellent support for co-op employers, only 33% of co-op employers access this financial support.²⁴ By converting this tax credit into an upfront grant for employers to access, financial support for co-op employers will become more accessible. This conversion would directly provide employers with the financial resources needed to hire a student which could result in higher uptake by co-op employers who were previously unable to compensate students.²⁵ The CETC aims to cover up to 30% of relevant expenditures for small businesses, however with the maximum claim value set at \$3,000 this is not a realistic goal.²⁶ Rather than setting this low maximum value, the revised CETC grant should provide funding that equates to 30% of the current average Ontario co-op salary for small businesses, and 25% for larger corporations. Using this proportional approach would also account for salary differentiation among fields of study as well as the higher wages that accompany sequential work terms (i.e. as a student completes more work terms, their wages increase).²⁷ To further support small businesses and not-for-profit organizations in the creation of co-op placements, OUSA advocates for the provincial government to provide specified envelope funding to these groups of organizations who may otherwise be unable to offer these opportunities. Increased co-op placements for small businesses can help expand their workforce and improve employee retention.²⁸ Students continue to seek flexibility in their co-op placements, and the current CETC structure is not conducive to this since students have to be on their work term for at least 10 weeks. OUSA recommends the provincial government reduce the qualifying co-op placement time from 10-weeks to 8-weeks, to better financially support employers looking to hire students on a flexible work-term.²⁹

The University of Waterloo has pioneered the implementation of flexible work terms, which allow students to work with multiple employers within a work term, or a single employer for a shorter period of time. The option for multiple employers provides students with the opportunity to explore numerous fields of interest and gain employable skills across disciplines. Flexible work terms also make co-op education more accessible to students with the reduced time-frame option, allowing more of them to engage in valuable experiential learning opportunities. Unfortunately, flexible work terms are not common practice across all Ontario universities. To provide all Ontario university students with valuable and accommodating co-op experiences, OUSA recommends that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities provide specified funding to universities to implement flexible work terms. This funding would support students on placements shorter than 10 weeks in which case the employer would not qualify for the CETC.³⁰

UNPAID WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Principle: Students should be equitably paid for the work they complete as a part of their post-secondary degree.

Principle: Students who have mandatory placements should not be forced to complete these placements unpaid.

²⁴ Sattler and Peters, “Work-Integrated Learning and Postsecondary Graduates: The Perspective of Ontario Employers,”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Co-operative education tax credit,” *Government of Ontario*, last updated March 27, 2022, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/co-operative-education-tax-credit>

²⁷ Co-operative Education, “Co-op earnings,” *University of Waterloo*, n.d., <https://uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education/about-co-op/co-op-earnings>; “Salary Data and Sample Jobs,” *Wilfrid Laurier University*, 2022, <https://www.wlu.ca/information-for/community-members/employers/co-op/salary-data.html>

²⁸ University of Waterloo, “How Co-op Can Boost Your Bottom Line,” *University of Waterloo*, n.d., https://uwaterloo.ca/co-op-can-boost-business-bottom-line/sites/ca.co-op-can-boost-business-bottom-line/files/uploads/files/co18437_bltz_campaign_white_paper_edit_print3_accessible_final-june_1.pdf

²⁹ Co-operative Education, “Co-op roles and responsibilities,” *University of Waterloo*, n.d., <https://uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education/supports-and-resources/co-op-rights-and-responsibilities#work-term-requirement-chart>

³⁰ Co-operative Education, “Arrange your own job,” *University of Waterloo*, <https://uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education/find-your-co-op-job/arrange-your-own-job>

Concern: Unpaid work opportunities exacerbate the financial burden faced by students.

Concern: Students forego pay in order to complete mandatory unpaid placements allowing employers to exploit their labour.

Concern: Unpaid work opportunities disproportionately impact low-income and racialized students, who have less flexibility to pursue these opportunities and thus miss out on valuable experiences to supplement their in-course content.

Concern: Unpaid work opportunities are concentrated in fields that women tend to pursue more, disproportionately impacting these students by perpetuating the gender pay disparity, and negatively impacting student finances.

Concern: Students who must complete mandatory unpaid placements have limited time to pursue other paid opportunities, reducing their ability to earn and save money.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to revisit the *Employment Standards Act*, and ensure that all internships, that are not required for academic accreditation, are guaranteed to receive fair compensation.

Recommendation: While the Ministry of Colleges and Universities addresses the recommendation immediately above, they should establish guidelines that ensure that students in an unpaid internship should not be required to work more than 37.5 hours per week for full-time employment, with exceptions given to students in careers that necessitate more hours.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to accreditation bodies for the purposes of hiring and compensating students who must complete mandatory placements as regulated by these accrediting bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide institutions with envelope funding for bursaries for students with mandatory unpaid work placements to compensate for necessary expenditure.

While many placements students engage in as a part of work-integrated learning (WIL) are paid, there are opportunities which remain unpaid. According to the 2020 OUSS administered by OUSA, 8% of respondents had participated in an unpaid placement.³¹ Notably, some fields of study, like nursing, require unpaid placement hours as a part of the profession's accreditation regulations. However, students should not have to complete unpaid placement hours as it exacerbates the pre-existing financial challenges they already have. Between limited financial aid, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rising cost of living, post-secondary education is becoming more expensive and students have reduced avenues to adequately save and finance their education, which is where paid placements could act as a valuable resource both financially and academically.

In addition, unpaid placements disproportionately affect women, racialized, and low-income students. This is because opportunities for paid placements tend to be available in fields dominated by men (like engineering), whereas unpaid placements are concentrated in fields more heavily occupied by women (like health).³² One study found that 64% of men in undergraduate degrees had a paid placement, whereas only 23% of women had this same opportunity.³³ Furthermore, the uptake of unpaid placements is more feasible for students from high-income backgrounds, who can afford to engage in unpaid work and

³¹ Unpublished 2020 OUSS data.

³² Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategies in WIL," *Business + Higher Education Roundtable*, n.d., <https://bher.ca/wil-hub/create-quality-wil/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-strategies-wil>

³³ Ibid.

thereby gives them greater flexibility in choosing their WIL.³⁴ Consequently, the experience they gain may advantage them over students from lower-socioeconomic status since they are able to take on a wider variety of placements that build their professional experience.³⁵ This is why the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to revisit the *Employment Standards Act*, and ensure that all internships, that are not required for academic accreditation, are guaranteed to receive fair compensation. At the federal level, the Government of Canada has made amendments to the *Canada Labour Code* in recent years that better protects the rights of students in federally-regulated sectors. Most recently, changes were made to ensure that students were covered by the same labour protections as all other employees, including the right to be compensated at minimum wage.³⁶ As a result, the provincial government can follow suit and ensure wage regulations for student placements – more about this is also explained in the Employment and Labour Protections section of the paper. In the meantime, they should establish guidelines that ensure that students in an unpaid internship should not be required to work more than 37.5 hours per week for full-time employment, with exceptions given to students in careers that necessitate more hours. However, in order to ensure students pursuing these careers are not financially disadvantaged during their post-secondary education, the provincial government should also provide envelope funding to accreditation bodies for the purposes of hiring and compensating students who must complete mandatory placements as regulated by these accrediting bodies.

Costs associated with unpaid placements further worsens this problem for students. Sometimes, placements for certain industries are located in farther regions from where the student studies, which can incur additional expenses like transportation and rent. These opportunities exclude low-income students in particular, but also leads to limited capacity for students to save money for tuition the next semester.³⁷ In fact, these types of work-related expenses and unexpected costs, especially in unpaid placements, have been cited by students as one of the biggest challenges in WIL.³⁸ Some post-secondary institutions offer reimbursements for these additional cost associated with unpaid placements, but in a study published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), about 75% did not.³⁹ Thus, reimbursements for unpaid placement costs is not a standard practice across institutions and can be retracted at any time.⁴⁰ Staff working within WIL at institutions believe that reduced financial aid to support these types of costs would lead to less participation in WIL, and that institutions should be providing more financial assistance to compensate students in unpaid placements for these expenses.⁴¹ Hence, the provincial government should provide institutions with envelope funding for bursaries for students with mandatory unpaid work placements to compensate for necessary expenditure.

WELLNESS SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS PURSUING WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Principle: Students pursuing work-integrated learning should have easy access to comprehensive wellness supports to address the specific needs that emerge as they engage in these opportunities.

Principle: Students should be prepared and have an understanding of work placement demands prior to beginning any form of work-integrated learning.

Concern: Students can experience additional stressors and pressures during work-integrated learning that can lead to physical and mental health challenges.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Canada Gazette, “Standards for Work-Integrated Learning Activities Regulations: SOR/2020-145,” *Government of Canada* 154, no.14 (July 2020), <https://canadagazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2020/2020-07-08/html/sor-dors145-eng.html>

³⁷ Wendy Cukier, Mark Campbell, and Lauren McNamara, “Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario,” *The Diversity Institute*, 2018, https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/ensuring_equitable_access_to_work-integrated_learning_in_ontario/

³⁸ R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., *Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities* (Toronto, ON: Higher Quality Council of Ontario, 2018), 48.

³⁹ Ibid, 49-50.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Concern: Students are not properly informed of the time commitment a work-integrated learning opportunity entails, making it difficult to balance academic and personal obligations.

Concern: Students with off-campus placements who must relocate may be unaware of the wellness supports in proximity to them.

Concern: The increase in hybrid and remote work models in work-integrated learning environments may further isolate students facing increased stressors and workloads.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop a best practice model on how best university co-op/experiential learning centres can prepare and inform students of the demands and pressures of their placements.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop and distribute guidelines to university co-op/experiential learning centres to help them create resource packages that inform students on how to access wellness resources on campus and during out-of-town placements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should require university co-op/experiential learning centres to partner with employers and establish a mentoring program for students in work-integrated learning placements.

Recommendation: Work-integrated learning opportunities should allot time for students to process/recover from physical and mental health challenges related to their placement.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate universities provide training on employment law and worker rights prior to any work-integrated learning placement.

Students pursuing WIL have to adapt to a new set of responsibilities and the accompanying stressors and pressures. As such, students should be able to access comprehensive wellness supports to address their needs as they participate in WIL opportunities. Prior to beginning their placements, students should also have a clear understanding of workplace demands. HEQCO found that time management tends to be more difficult for students completing placements that are concurrent with academic work.⁴² They found that one-on-one advice, support, or mentoring was the most effective strategy in helping students learn to balance their WIL experience; however, only 46% of students were using this method.⁴³ Despite this, mentors are effective in assisting students to understand how to apply theory in practice, setting them up to be ready for the labour market.⁴⁴ To ensure students are equipped with the best tools and strategies to adapt to the new demands and pressures, HEQCO should develop a best practice model for university co-op/experiential learning centres to prepare their students ahead of their placements. The province should require these centres to partner with employers and establish a mentoring program, and also mandate universities to provide training on employment law and worker rights for students in WIL placements.

A WIL placement's location can impact a student's decision to participate, especially if it would require them to relocate due to commuting distance. Availability and affordability of accommodations and public transit are factors for consideration as well. HEQCO conducted a survey where 26% of respondents stated that relocation was not necessary for WIL; this indicates that a significant amount of respondents did require relocation.⁴⁵ Furthermore, financial assistance towards relocation for WIL is limited and usually does not cover all relocation costs.⁴⁶ These additional stressors can further impact a student's mental and physical health, and contribute to the need for students to have access to wellness resources. While

⁴² Ibid, 45.

⁴³ Ibid, 46.

⁴⁴ Jie Wang, Chelsea Gill, and Kuan-Huei Lee, "Effective Mentoring in a Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Program," *Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism* (March 2022): 8, doi: 10.1080/15313220.2022.2056561

⁴⁵ R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd., *Barriers to Work-integrated Learning Opportunities*, 46.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 47.

awareness of mental health and supports for students dealing with mental health issues have increased, stigma around mental health still exists. Institutions can help by facilitating connections between students and resources. To achieve this, the Council of Ontario Universities should develop and distribute guidelines to university co-op/experiential learning centres to help them create resource packages that inform students on how to access wellness resources both on-campus and during out-of-town placements. Moreover, WIL placements should allot time for students to process and recover from physical and mental health challenges that arise due to their placement.

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should respond to the needs of their communities.

Principle: Students should be able to improve and work in their communities while gaining valuable educational experience and course credit.

Principle: Community service learning opportunities should involve consultation from students enrolled in those courses/departments offering them.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions do not offer enough community service learning opportunities.

Concern: Community service learning courses lack structure which poses difficulties when developing these learning opportunities.

Concern: Faculty turnover causes a loss of relationships between institutions and community service partners.

Concern: Lack of accessible transportation poses a barrier to student engagement in community service learning opportunities and limits the community partners ability to participate.

Concern: Lack of student consultation from community service learning can lead to inaccurate advertising for the nature of said opportunities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide faculty incentives to develop meaningful community service learning courses.

Recommendation: The Council of Ontario Universities, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations should work together to create a best practice model for administering community service learning-based courses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities to provide financial support for necessary expenditures, including transportation fees for students to aid their access to community partners.

Recommendation: The provincial government should formulate student consultation guidelines for community service learning opportunities.

Community service learning refers to the integration of community service with academic instruction and critical reflection, with the aim of enhancing students' learning experiences and strengthening ties to the community.⁴⁷ These opportunities allow students to pursue academic enrichment while making contributions to their local or global communities. The partnerships formed between universities and community partners allow post-secondary institutions to share their resources with partners in both public and private sectors.⁴⁸ Reciprocal relationships formed between universities and community

⁴⁷ Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, "What Is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)?,"

⁴⁸ Western Student Experience, "What is Community Engaged Learning," *Western University*, <http://cel.uwo.ca/about/index.html>

partners allow for economic development, research exploration, and exchange of information. Forming community partnerships based on student consultation can help ensure that offered learning opportunities reflect students' desired learning outcomes. Community learning opportunities hold the potential to enhance teaching and learning, prepare engaged citizens, and strengthen civic responsibility while addressing societal issues and providing space for students to contribute to public welfare.⁴⁹ Community service learning provides opportunities for students to utilize their course-based learning within their community to observe real-world impacts and applications.⁵⁰ In Alberta, nearly two-thirds of community service learning participants believe that their community experiences have been beneficial for making career decisions.⁵¹ Working with community partners fosters employable skills in students such as critical thinking and communication.⁵² As employers continue to expect work experience from new graduates, community service learning provides an avenue for students to gain relevant work experience while completing their academic requirements.⁵³

Student interest in community service learning opportunities continues to grow exponentially, yet available opportunities have been unable to meet this demand.⁵⁴ While community service learning opportunities hold incredible potential, their execution requires additional support to adequately benefit students. Students within community service learning courses cited a lack of clarity on the goals and standards of the course, demonstrating a need for uniform structure.⁵⁵ Faculty members have similarly encountered difficulties in implementing community service learning courses, and could benefit from provincial standards and guidelines.⁵⁶ Establishing partnerships with community members is a time-intensive process, and successful partnerships are largely the result of efforts made by individual faculty members. This degree of involvement is not standard across faculty members, and faculty turnover can threaten existing community partnerships.⁵⁷

Students' lack of access to transportation has been recognized as a barrier to engagement in community service learning.⁵⁸ Students are often asked by institutions to arrange their own transportation, which poses additional financial challenges to students wishing to pursue community service learning opportunities.⁵⁹ This also limits engagement from viable community partners if they are located further from the post-secondary institution and inaccessible to students.

To meet the demand for community service learning, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop incentives to motivate institutions and faculty members to develop community service learning courses. These incentives could financially compensate faculty members for the additional time and effort required in establishing community service learning courses. Incentives could also take the form of additional support and structure provided to faculty members to make the process easier and less laborious. These frameworks should be established by the Council of Ontario Universities, HEQCO, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations to ensure uniform guidelines that are accommodating of casualty member needs. The provincial government should also form student consultation guidelines for post-secondary institutions to follow before the implementation of community

⁴⁹ Simon Fraser University, "About the Elective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification," *Simon Fraser University*, <https://www.sfu.ca/carnegie/about/carnegie.html>

⁵⁰ Western Student Experience, "What is Community Engaged Learning,"

⁵¹ Alison Taylor and Milosh Raykov, "The Long-term Outcomes of Community Service-Learning," *University of Alberta*, 2014, <https://www.ualberta.ca/community-service-learning/media-library/documents/reports/csl-tlef-report-mar31.pdf>

⁵² Angel Huang, "Why Post-Secondary Institutions Should Prioritize Experiential Learning," *Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance* (blog), January 28, 2020, https://www.ousa.ca/blog_post_secondary_institutions_prioritize_experiential_learning

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Anna Twohey, "Ensuring Community Engaged Learning benefits everyone," *Western University*, May 2022, https://www.fims.uwo.ca/news/2022/ensuring_community_engaged_learning_benefits_everyone.html

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Rhonda Lenton et al., "Community Service Learning and Community-Based Learning as Approaches to Enhancing University Service Learning," (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario), 2014, <https://heqco.ca/pub/community-service-learning-and-community-based-learning-as-approaches-to-enhancing-university-service-learning/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Department of Language Studies, "Community-Engaged Learning Student Handbook," *University of Toronto Scarborough*, September 2017,

<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/dls/sites/utsc.utoronto.ca.dls/files/images/CEL%20Student%20Handbook.%20Sept%202017.pdf>

⁵⁹ Western University, "Student Guide to Community Engaged Learning," *Western University*, <http://cel.uwo.ca/pdf/Student%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Engaged%20Learning.pdf>

service learning to ensure the learning opportunity serves student interest. To make community service learning opportunities more accessible to students and community partners, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to provide or subsidize transportation for students engaged in these learning experiences. For example, post-secondary institutions could use these grants to offer partial rebates on students' transport costs to their community service learning partners.

SKILLS AREA

RESEARCH AND REPORTING

Principle: Institutions should be providing students with the opportunities to develop the skills needed to excel in their field of work.

Principle: Institutions should be able to adapt to the changes in the workforce and provide students with access to resources to develop current and in-demand skills.

Concern: Students are unable to find relevant research and reports of the provinces' current in-demand skills. Therefore, students struggle to find relevant opportunities related to their desired field of work.

Concern: The skills necessary to succeed in the workforce are constantly evolving and students may not be given the resources to develop the necessary skills to be competitive.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regularly conduct and disseminate research regarding projected in-demand skills and jobs to ensure that institutions can support students with the development of these skills.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, various skills emerged as being needed in a growing workforce. Post-secondary students require a combination of these skills to excel in the workforce and the development of these skills should be supported. With an increased focus on digital technology knowledge amongst other hard skills, there is also a demand for increased communication and collaboration as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As students have demonstrated resiliency, institutions should also focus on adapting to changes in the workforce and provide students with access to resources for current and in-demand skills.

Recently, the National Business Survey revealed that over 80% of Canadian businesses and executives are finding it difficult to find employees to fulfill their roles, which insinuates a skills gap that has not been fully communicated to future employees.⁶⁰ Prior to entering these roles, students are not always equipped with the knowledge and skills during their work-integrated learning. The report shows that various skills are in higher demand including good communication, and willingness and ability to learn.⁶¹ Some in-demand soft skills also include critical thinking, co-ordination, active listening, and complex problem solving, which can all be beneficial and required for 23 million expected job openings.⁶² Recent evidence shows that the skills necessary in the workforce are constantly evolving, and students would need further support to be able to stay on top of the trends and be able to attain the necessary skills to be competitive.

⁶⁰ Environics Research, "National Business Survey: Career Development in the Canadian Workplace," *Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC)*, January 2022, 6.

⁶¹ Ibid, 7.

⁶² Office of the CEO, "Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption," *RBC*, March 2018, 3, <https://www.rbc.com/dms/enterprise/futurelaunch/humans-wanted-how-canadian-youth-can-thrive-in-the-age-of-disruption.html>

Therefore, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regularly conduct and disseminate research with regard to skills necessary for the workforce and upcoming job expectations in regular intervals to ensure that institutions can support students with the development of these skills. With a consistently evolving workforce, students should be consistently updated on how to stay competitive in the workplace.

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND BUDGETING DURING POST-SECONDARY

Principle: Post-secondary graduates should finish their education not only with an ability to contribute to the workforce, but with an ability to manage their personal lives, including organizing their personal finances and planning for their future.

Principle: Institutions should incorporate information about investing and saving money to support students from various socio-economic backgrounds within academic classes and programming.

Concern: Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often do not have the opportunity to learn how to invest and save for their future as well as face more barriers to continuously save and invest due to many living day-to-day with their finances.

Concern: Students are not given the necessary information regarding investing and budgeting.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should collaborate with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to establish a personal financial management course credit for undergraduate degrees outside of business and math focused programs.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide further incentive for institutions to implement financial management teachings for students outside of business and math-focused programs.

Throughout the post-secondary journey, individuals are learning about themselves outside of the classroom including how to live on their own and more independently. Incoming post-secondary students are increasingly learning to become more independent, including financial independency. There will continuously be a larger need for managing personal finances throughout post-secondary education and into the workforce. With expedited rates of growing inflation, students may also benefit from institutions that support information on investing and saving finances to ensure that students from various socio-economic backgrounds receive similar mentorship experiences.

While more than 90% of employers believe that recent grads have basic literacy and numeracy skills, there will be a continuous demand of using mathematic and numeracy skills that will lead up to career success and beyond.⁶³ Approximately 70% of job openings will have a significant increase on math and numeracy skills.⁶⁴ However, many students from lower-income households may have difficulty keeping up with a competitive marketplace. Over 30% of youth that have annual household incomes under \$60,000 had their employment impacted by the pandemic.⁶⁵ Affluent households often have resources to financial information as well as have higher focus and retention to learn about financial topics that are passed down for generations.⁶⁶ Students from lower economic households would not be able to gain similar resources and may rely on institutions to learn more about how to be financially literate including investing, saving, and budgeting. Students from lower income households overlap with other

⁶³ Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report," *Business + Higher Education Roundtable and Business Council of Canada*, March 2022, 8, <https://bher.ca/publications/research-publications/empowering-people-recovery-and-growth-2022-skills-survey-report>

⁶⁴ Office of the CEO, "Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption," 3.

⁶⁵ "Making Up Time: The Impact of the Pandemic on Young Adults in Canada," *Environics Institute for Survey Research, Future Skills Centre, and The Diversity Institute*, November 2021, 6, <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/making-up-time-the-pandemic-s-impact-on-young-adults-in-canada>

⁶⁶ Keith Beverly, "A planner's guide to serving the affluent diverse gen XY household," *Journal of Financial Planning* 32, no.3 (March 2019): 34-37.

marginalized communities including lower income students from rural and remote areas and Indigenous students. Ultimately, these groups become more difficult to reach with basic literacy and numeracy skills due to geo-demographics.⁶⁷ These gaps are recognized especially within international students who continuously have to budget day-to-day throughout their educational journey.

Therefore, to minimize the gap between students with knowledge of managing personal finances and those without, there should be further collaboration from HEQCO as well as with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to establish a personal financial management course credit for undergraduate degrees outside of business and math focused programs. This course could be further developed to include basic management skills that can be relatable and incentivizing to students, regardless of any academic relevance to their degree. This course would push for the understanding that personal financing is a key skill to understand and prepare for when working.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with the digital literacy skills needed to thrive in a post-pandemic job market.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with resources and services needed to develop skills that are less prone to automation in a technology-driven job market (e.g. critical thinking).

Principle: Students have diverse learning styles and levels of digital literacy.

Concern: Remote work has increased drastically since COVID-19 and workplaces are shifting to more virtual environments, which is a continuous concern for rural and northern students.

Concern: Employers can have assumptions about the digital skills new graduates hold, presenting a barrier to students without these skills to successfully transition into the workforce.

Concern: Digital literacy skill development through online learning cannot replace the in-person learning that some students require to thrive.

Concern: More jobs are susceptible to automation, and students will need to enhance their digital skills to remain competitive and to have a successful career path.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide guidelines for students to learn digital tool training prior to entering in their workplace.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable to create a framework for digital literacy skills that post-secondary institutions can adopt and distribute to faculty as they develop learning outcomes.

The pandemic has highlighted our dependency on technology to continue our daily lives in an increasingly online world. Institutions and businesses have recognized that digital literacy skills are growing more and more in-demand during the pandemic. This has been predominantly found among students who shifted their academic work online as well as through their professional experiences. Students are being encouraged to continue improving their digital literacy skills using resources provided by their institution, in order to thrive in their future careers as we recognize post-pandemic impacts. Low-income students also face barriers in developing other in-demand skills through a lack of digital literacy experiences that employers may be looking for.

⁶⁷ Business + Higher Education Roundtable, “Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report,” 8.

A recent study from the Brookings Institution found that 71% of U.S. jobs will require medium to high amounts of digital skills. Increasingly, Canadians are also prioritizing digital fluency and comprehension as a requirement for any job as work environments continue to shift into completely remote or hybrid models.⁶⁸ There can be further considerations of the new trend, “hybrid skills,” that address the growing need for a combination of digital skills along with interpersonal skills.⁶⁹

Post-secondary institutions should support students with attaining in-demand digital literacy skills as a Statistics Canada survey identified that small businesses were already leading projects to replace human labour with advanced technology, including the use of chatbots and digital assistants for service.⁷⁰ Supporting students with fluency in digital skills can reduce organizations’ will to rely on automation and open windows of employment for students.

To ensure that students are equipped with skills to be digitally literate amongst other in-demand skills, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide guidelines for students to learn digital tool training prior to entering in their workplace. The Ministry should also work with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable to create a framework for digital literacy skills that post-secondary institutions can adopt and distribute to faculty as they develop learning outcomes. This framework will outline the technological skills that are necessary in today’s workforce and integrate this information within academic content.

PROFESSIONALISM, BUSINESS ETIQUETTE, AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should have opportunities that focus on developing programs and workshops to enhance skills that could have been gained from experiential and workplace environments in which students have not been able to develop prior to entering post-secondary the pandemic.

Principle: Students should be provided with opportunities to learn business etiquette and expectations in all workplaces including remote and hybrid work arrangements.

Concern: Students have different levels of skills proficiency as there are inconsistent opportunities and experiences for professional development to gain desirable skills for the workplace.⁷¹

Concern: The shift to online work and learning gave students vastly different work experiences, which could lead to variations in and skills amongst their peers.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to develop programs and workshops that build students’ proficiency in interpersonal skills.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should develop a comprehensive framework of expectations and supports in hybrid work arrangements that is integrated within post-secondary institutions’ career support services.

As we continue to navigate the pandemic and see transitions back to pre-pandemic lifestyles, post-secondary institutions should continue to monitor how the pandemic has hindered recent job growth and skills for students. Students lost the ability to engage in co-op opportunities, internships, and other work-

⁶⁸ Office of the CEO, “Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption,” 21.

⁶⁹ Council of Ontario Universities, “The Role of Ontario Universities in Empowering Economic Growth,” *Council of Ontario Universities*, published December 8, 2021, 4, <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-Role-of-Ontario-Universities-in-Powering-Economic-Growth-BHER.pdf>

⁷⁰ Wendy Cukier, Karen E. McCallum, Patrick Egbunonu, and Kim Bates, “The Mother of Invention: Skills for Innovation in the Post-Pandemic World,” *Public Policy Forum, The Diversity Institute, and The Future Skills Centre*, June 2021, 13, <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/MotherOfInvention-PPF-June2021-EN-1.pdf>

⁷¹ “Making Up Time: The Impact of the Pandemic on Young Adults in Canada,”

integrated learning opportunities since 2020. Approximately 34% of youth between the ages of 18-24 had their work reduced during the pandemic,⁷² and thus, post-secondary students all have varying levels of work experience.

Due to the variations in skills development that students have and have not gained throughout the pandemic, post-secondary institutions should provide opportunities that focus on developing these missing skills that were lost from the pandemic years. In particular, throughout the lack of opportunities, students have not had opportunities to learn business etiquette and professional expectations. Due to the modern development of remote and hybrid work arrangements, students will need to know about new expectations and workplace etiquettes that may also vary within each workplace and industry.

Therefore, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to develop programs and workshops that build students' proficiency in soft skills within workplaces. Some of these soft skills focus on communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. This can occur by including these programs and workshops within workplaces and academic spaces. By integrating career development opportunities within post-secondary institutional programs, all students across different disciplines are at a similar playing field.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should also develop a comprehensive framework that outlines what career support services should be provided for students to thrive in hybrid work arrangements. These could include resources and services provided by the institution to support the students' employment journey whether it is remote or in-person. However, new expectations should be highlighted to show new work environment engagements after the pandemic.

CAREER SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with the skills and tools needed to succeed in the workforce.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions should ensure that students pursuing work placements are provided support and mentors to discuss and navigate challenges in the workplace.

Concern: The COVID-19 pandemic left students with a lack of opportunities to network and gain connections that can help them enter the workforce or their desired field.

Concern: Students are not aware of resources from career services within their institutions that can support their long-term career goals, including the ability to network without business-related backgrounds.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide a comprehensive framework for career coaching at the post-secondary level that is advertised and accessible for students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to expand programming for students to receive desired career support in their given field.

At post-secondary institutions, career services and supports should help students build the skills and tools needed to succeed in the workforce. Students attend post-secondary institutions to be prepared for a career after graduation. However, OUSA's 2020 OUSS revealed that 62% of students have not participated in work-integrated learning opportunities to advance their skills throughout their undergrad.⁷³ Students are not getting the experiences needed to support their employment future

⁷² Ibid, 8.

⁷³ Britney De Costa, Malika Dhanani, and Shemar Hackett. *Quality: Results from the 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*. Research Report (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2022), 22, https://www.ousa.ca/reports_ouss_2020_quality

throughout their academic careers. Post-graduation employment prospects are a large source of stress for students, with 64% stating this concern contributes to their mental health issues.⁷⁴ Thus, it is crucial that institutional career services are well-resourced to provide students with the employment support they need to succeed in their career development.

With the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, students have not had many opportunities or access to resources to network and gain connections that can help them explore and understand their desired field. The pandemic has isolated post-secondary students to navigate their own challenges in exploring their career through an online world. Due to the pandemic, students may not be aware of resources from career services within their institutions to support their long-term career goals. As one student respondent to OUSA's survey stated, "I think a lot of students also feel stressed about finding work or a career after school, there needs to be more accessibility for career services to help students find out what they want to do."⁷⁵ With the improvement of supports from career services, students would have opportunities to develop further skills and talent, making them more attractive to employers.⁷⁶ Career services also offer valuable support to students in job searching, cover letter and resume review, and interview preparation, all of which position students to gain experience and expertise in the job application process post-graduation.

To combat these challenges, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to expand programming for students to receive desired career support in their given field. The province should also provide a comprehensive framework for career coaching at the post-secondary level that is advertised and accessible for students.

SKILLS ARTICULATION POST-GRADUATION

Principle: Upon entering the workforce, all students should be able to identify and convey the skills acquired through their post-secondary education and extracurricular experiences.

Concern: Institutions do not have sufficient resources and systems to provide students with interactive means to articulate the skills they gain during their post-secondary education as they enter the workforce post-graduation.⁷⁷

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should establish a best practice model that post-secondary institutions should follow, that outlines how to convey the academic, oral, practical, and writing skills acquired through post-secondary education and extracurriculars.

Students should be able to articulate the skills that they have gained throughout their university experience including their academic work and extracurricular activities. There is an increase in demand for specialized skills in the workforce, in which skills articulation will be most important to remain competitive.⁷⁸ Evidence suggests that students have been gaining skills throughout their work-integrated learning. A recent survey revealed that over 65% of interns report using productivity software frequently but only 54% have confidence in these skills.⁷⁹ Therefore, the ability to articulate skills will be hindered by the level of confidence that exists.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁷⁵ Unpublished student quote from 2020 OUSS data.

⁷⁶ David W. Drewery, T. Judene Pretti, and Dana Church, "Signaling 'student-oriented' job opportunities enhances job attractiveness in work-integrated learning programs," *Higher Education Research & Development* 41, no.2 (2022): 346-359, 346, doi:10.1080/07294360.2020.1857346

⁷⁷ Maria Ruiz, "Helping students translate their skills into the workplace," *CareerWise*, 2019, <https://careerwise.ceric.ca/2020/01/06/helping-students-translate-their-skills-into-the-workplace/#.Y4kd1uzMJQK>

⁷⁸ Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report," 8.

⁷⁹ Creig Lamb and Daniel Munro, "Mitacs Skills for Innovation Sharpening Canada's Skills Advantage," *Mitacs*, September 2022, 27, https://www.mitacs.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/page/mitacs_skills_innovation_en.pdf

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are not only looking for the development of interpersonal skills, but also associated technological skills.⁸⁰ Since the pandemic, new working models and skills will be key for employees to navigate a return to the workforce.⁸¹ This may include rethinking infrastructure, investments, and incentives for employee retention. Currently, post-secondary institutions need further support to help students remain competitive in a post-pandemic workforce and to articulate the skills they have acquired throughout their education.

Therefore, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should establish a best practice model that post-secondary institutions should follow to develop resources that students can use to articulate the skills they have learned over the course of their post-secondary education. This model should include comprehensive methods required for any showcase of skills including academic, oral, practical, and writing skills acquired through post-secondary education and extracurriculars. The career services office at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, has developed Skills Cards to support students with identifying and articulating the types of skills they have learned. This method also highlights real student experience in action with these skills to demonstrate how their work experience can be articulated for future workplace preparation, including resumes and job interviews.⁸² These models can be used to develop a comprehensive model for post-secondary issues to effectively support all students.

DEVELOPING IN-DEMAND SKILLS

Principle: Post-secondary education should help students gain in-demand hard and soft skills for the workplace.

Concern: Some graduates are unprepared with foundational in-demand skills that would help them enter and succeed in the workforce.⁸³

Concern: There is minimal research on the specific in-demand skills that university students in Ontario can and should acquire from their programs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should commission the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to conduct cyclical research on the specific in-demand technical and non-technical skills employers are seeking from university graduates.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should use the skills research of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to disseminate this information accessibly to students within their institutions.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities along with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should require work-integrated learning employers various opportunities for students in association with their degree.

Identifying necessary skills in a consistently evolving workforce can present challenges for students looking towards a career upon graduation. Post-secondary institutions should support students by identifying the in-demand skills needed to thrive in a post-academic workforce.

Employers of entry-level positions now have higher expectations for graduates to gain particular in-demand skills after completing a post-secondary degree. Technical skills are now one of the top five skills that employers are looking for in new entry-level work.⁸⁴ A recent report by the Business + Higher Education Roundtable showed that in 2020, 99% of employers reported that recent graduates had the

⁸⁰ Office of the CEO, "Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption," 21.

⁸¹ Cukier, McCallum, Egbunonu, and Bates, "The Mother of Invention," 32.

⁸² Career Services, "Queen's Skills Cards," *Queen's University*, n.d., <https://careers.queensu.ca/skillscards#How-to-use-skills-cards>

⁸³ Office of the CEO, "Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption," 21.

⁸⁴ Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report," 9.

technical skills needed for their respective jobs; however, this number has dropped to 84% in 2022.⁸⁵ There is now a higher expectation for new graduates to be able to fulfill this technical skills gap after graduating university.

There is a demand for various hard and soft skills to coincide in the workplace. A recent survey revealed that 43-53% of organizations based on engineering, science, or digital and technology skills will also need critical thinking and creativity skills.⁸⁶ Students would also need to be equipped to learn how to use both types of skills effectively. The provincial government should use skills research from HEQCO and effectively disseminate this research to students at their post-secondary institutions. With continuous research and updates, students can be aware of the in-demand skills needed for current work placements. The college sector offers in-demand skills development through hands on-learning. However, this can also be conveyed at the university level as well.

Consequently, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop more work-integrated learning opportunities in association to their degrees, including various programs that may not have a technical focus. Work-integrated learning opportunities could be beneficial to teach students both hard and soft skills evident within the industries, providing life-long learning benefits.

ENSURING LEARNING EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS EMPLOYABILITY

Principle: Post-secondary students should have access to and be able to afford digital tools and learning equipment.

Concern: Post-secondary students, especially students from low-income households, are not able to access necessary digital tools to thrive in their academic careers.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide grants that support student entry into the workforce with the tools and resources needed to succeed.

With the increased demand and use of technology, especially in the classroom and workplace, post-secondary students should have affordable access to digital tools and learning equipment that contribute to their overall employability. Increased use of digital tools will be able to enhance hard skills to remain competitive in the workforce. Some of these digital tools consist of updated software, programs, and applications as well as tangible devices to utilize these essentials including laptops, computers, and mobile devices.

Digital equipment has become essential for post-secondary students to succeed in their academic careers; however, low-income students may struggle to access these tools. During the pandemic, some governments and school boards provided elementary and secondary school students with digital devices and internet access.⁸⁷ The Ontario government has targeted online learning in secondary schools, which supports the possibilities of virtual classrooms.⁸⁸ Similar measures must also be taken at the post-secondary level so that low-income students are not disadvantaged to succeed in their academics. The lack of support for digital devices with internet access has been an extensive problem across various levels of education including elementary and secondary schools. There is also a perception of current post-secondary students that assumes new graduates are digitally literate and can be successful in transitioning to the workforce. “Generation Z” are often viewed as being technologically-savvy and understanding of current technological trends; however, this generational stereotype does not translate to digital literacy

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Lamb and Munro, “Mitacs Skills for Innovation Sharpening Canada’s Skills Advantage,”

⁸⁷ Jess Whitley, Miriam H. Beauchamp, and Curtis Brown, “The impact of COVID-19 on the learning and achievement of vulnerable Canadian children and youth,” *FACETS*, 6, October 2021: 1693–1713, doi: 10.1139/facets-2021-0096

⁸⁸ Ministry of Education, “Online learning for secondary students,” *Government of Ontario*, last updated February 3, 2022, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/online-learning-secondary-students>

skills in the workplace. In a recent survey, research shows that 54% of interns feel very confident in their productivity software proficiency (including programs like Microsoft Office); while this is a sizeable number of interns, employers have also stated that this skill is now a standard requirement in innovation spaces, inciting the need to increase the number of interns who feel confident in this ability.⁸⁹

Therefore, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide grants that support student entry into the workforce with the tools and resources needed to succeed. This could include a program to ensure that students have access to digital tools in-study despite various challenges. As well, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide guidelines for students to learn digital tool training in their workplace, rather than workplaces building assumptions about the skills of new entry-level graduates.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Principle: Work term programs should be well-funded for students pursuing an entrepreneurial experience.

Principle: Students seeking entrepreneurship work terms should be able to have the autonomy to develop their own ambitions consistent with their level of energy and academic and professional skills, as well as contribute to their local economy.

Concern: Students are less inclined to pursue entrepreneurship due to financial barriers.

Concern: Inflation has created additional barriers for students who wish to complete a work term entrepreneurship opportunity, including rising costs of housing and transit.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to provide envelope funding to create and maintain work-integrated learning programs that focus on innovation and cultural change.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding for students who require travel and living arrangements for their entrepreneurial work term placements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should incentivize partnerships between universities and local and regional businesses to establish unique entrepreneurship opportunities within their industry.

Post-secondary institutions are a primary source of research and innovation in the province. In fact, research output and innovative developments guide parts of the Strategic Mandate Agreements that institutions have with the provincial government, relying on success in these metrics to receive funding. Consequently, institutions are resourced with the tools, equipment, and supports to pursue entrepreneurship, and students have an interest to partake in these activities. Across Canada, 42% of young adults expressed an interest in starting their own business.⁹⁰ However, entrepreneurship is a costly endeavour; with the rise in cost of transit, housing, and other basic needs, this poses a barrier on students who benefit from participating in work term entrepreneurship opportunities. Some Ontario students may feel obligated to take time off school as they must choose between paying rent or paying their tuition. This is especially seen with many students from lower socio-economic status, often first-generation university

⁸⁹ Lamb and Munro, "Mitacs Skills for Innovation Sharpening Canada's Skills Advantage,"

⁹⁰ Isabelle Bouchard and Pierre-Olivier Bédard-Maltais, "A Nation of Entrepreneurs: The Changing Face of Canadian Entrepreneurship," *Business Development Bank of Canada*, 2019, https://www.bdc.ca/en/documents/analysis_research/bdc-etude-sbw-nation-entrepreneurs.pdf?utm_campaign=Changing-faces-Study-2019-EN

students, as they must balance multiple commitments such as jobs, family caregiving, and so on. As a result, this can make it difficult for them to participate in co-op placements that are distant/away from home. Students should not have to pick one or the other when it comes to these important commitments.

Therefore, the provincial government to provide funding for students who require travel and living arrangements for their entrepreneurial work term placements. In doing so, students can have more equal access to opportunities that will help them advance their careers and shift out of lower socio-economic statuses. Additionally, the provincial government should continue to provide envelope funding to create and maintain work-integrated learning programs that focus on innovation and cultural change. While entrepreneurship work term placements have been on the rise, it is important to ensure that these opportunities are accessible and available to students from all disciplines, as they can support the development of modern technical skills.⁹¹ The provincial government should also incentivize partnerships between universities and local and regional businesses to establish unique entrepreneurship opportunities with their industry.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF ONTARIO

Principle: Every student pursuing entrepreneurship in Ontario should have equal access for protections to their intellectual property and support for the commercialization of their intellectual property.

Concern: There is not enough funding for students to commercialize their intellectual property.

Concern: Students are uninformed on how to commercialize their intellectual property on their respective campuses.⁹²

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should allocate more funding to be able to support students with ownership of intellectual property.

Recommendation: Intellectual Property Ontario should provide intellectual property advice and resources specifically designed for post-secondary students pursuing entrepreneurship experiences.

Due to a lack of funding for students to commercialize their intellectual property, they are inclined to sell their intellectual property at the development stage or are left untouched at the academic level. Often, Ontario-born intellectual property is sold to foreign companies, which means the entrepreneurial benefits to Ontario's economy are hindered. Examples of this can be seen at an academic institutional level. Dr. Sidhu of the University of Toronto tells stated that most of the interested investors in Ontario-born entrepreneurial projects are foreign, saying "If they fund 90% of the development, they get 90% of the reward. That's the way the world works."⁹³ This also means that foreign countries will benefit from the commercialization of these projects as the authority and benefits of these entrepreneurial innovations and projects leave Ontario once bought by these foreign companies. OUSA therefore asks that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should allocate more funding to be able to support students with ownership of intellectual property.

There is also concern with the access to and level of intellectual property (IP) literacy amongst students. Regarding IP literacy, through a survey launched in 2019 by the Expert Panel on Intellectual Property, it was found that ongoing and comprehensive IP education would be beneficial for students.⁹⁴ This would be especially helpful for students who are looking to commercialize intellectual property not only within the

⁹¹ Stephen Daze, "Entrepreneurship Education in Canada: Annual Review – 2021," *Telfer School of Management* (University of Ottawa), 2021, 3.

⁹² Expert Panel on Intellectual Property, "Report: Intellectual Property in Ontario's Innovation Ecosystem," *Government of Ontario*, February 2020, https://files.ontario.ca/books/expert-panel-report-intellectual-property-2020-02-20_o.pdf

⁹³ Diane Peters, "Can Canada keep its intellectual property from slipping away?," *University Affairs*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/can-canada-keep-its-intellectual-property-from-slipping-away/>

⁹⁴ Expert Panel on Intellectual Property, "Report: Intellectual Property in Ontario's Innovation Ecosystem,"

province but also within their academic institution. Therefore, we recommend that Intellectual Property Ontario provide intellectual property advice and resources specifically designed for post-secondary students pursuing entrepreneurship. As suggested by the Expert Panel on Intellectual Property in their report, there is a strong demand for curricula and modules that improve IP literacy, and the resources that facilitate this should be “easily accessed regardless of location, funding or internal capacity...”⁹⁵

ENTREPRENEURIAL RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Principle: All students should have access to various entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial research opportunities, regardless of their academic discipline.

Concern: Students outside of business-oriented programs do not receive adequate support for pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop best practices and guidelines for post-secondary institutions to improve programming and access to accelerators, incubators, and spaces for innovation specifically for undergraduate student entrepreneurs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to expand, support, and promote entrepreneurship opportunities across all disciplines.

As entrepreneurial businesses and activities contribute to Ontario’s economy, we should encourage students of all disciplines to participate in entrepreneurial opportunities. We recommend that the provincial government provide envelope funding to expand, support, and promote entrepreneurship opportunities across all disciplines. This is because, “Graduates with degrees in CSE [computer sciences and engineering] are significantly more likely to become entrepreneurs than those without either CSE or management degrees.”⁹⁶ This may be because there is more funding in CSE related entrepreneurial initiatives as compared to, for example, arts disciplines.

A review of public funding to Ontario universities in December of 2015 noted the window of opportunity to expand entrepreneurial and experiential courses.⁹⁷ It was also found that students who took entrepreneurship courses were more likely to become entrepreneurs than those who had not participated in such courses.⁹⁸ As such, we recommend the Ministry of Colleges and Universities improve programming and access to accelerators, incubators, and spaces for innovation specifically for undergraduate student entrepreneurs. This is because there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurship and older age groups. One study found that older age groups have more time for training and networking, which may encourage them to participate more in entrepreneurship as compared to those in their 20s.⁹⁹ By increasing funding for institutions for academic course offerings, this allows students to gain entrepreneurial experience during their undergraduate career and save them valuable time.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Shiri M. Breznitz and Qiantao Zhang, “Entrepreneurship Education and Firm Creation,” *Regional Studies* 56, no.6 (February 2021): 940-955, doi: 10.1080/00343404.2021.1878127

⁹⁷ Simona Chiose, “Ontario universities struggle to bolster entrepreneurship programs,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 1, 2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/ontario-universities-struggle-to-design-entrepreneurship-programs/article27986407/>

⁹⁸ Breznitz and Zhang, “Entrepreneurship Education and Firm Creation,”

⁹⁹ Ibid.

EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR PROTECTIONS

INCLUSION OF STUDENTS IN THE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT

Principle: Students engaging in a work placement or co-op deserve the same rights and protections as any other Ontario worker.

Principle: Students deserve a safe and inclusive workplace environment during their work-integrated learning placements.

Concern: All students engaging in work as a part of their university program are not covered by regulations in the *Employment Standards Act* leading to disparities in pay, benefits, and worker rights.

Concern: Under the *Employment Standards Act*, students are not entitled to receive minimum wage leading to inequitable pay and increased financial burden.

Concern: The exemption of students from the *Employment Standards Act* leads to confusion surrounding students' rights when pursuing a work placement or co-op term.

Concern: Students can experience harm and harassment in work-integrated learning placements, making their workplace environments physically, mentally, and psychologically unsafe.

Recommendation: The provincial government should amend the *Employment Standards Act* such that students completing work placements as a part of their university program are entitled to the same rights and protections as Ontario workers.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to create a guide outlining students' rights in the workplace.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to establish a reporting mechanism within co-op/experiential learning centres for students to disclose experiences of harm and harassment at their workplace.

Recommendation: Once the above reporting mechanism is implemented, the provincial government should require these centres to work with the employer to address and resolve the incident as stipulated in the workplace's respective violence and harassment policy.

Labour laws in the province are governed by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) as well as the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA). Under OHSA, students are classified as “workers” which entitles them to the same health and safety protections listed in the Act, including the right to refuse unsafe work.¹⁰⁰ However, students employed for WIL are not covered by the ESA and are therefore rendered ineligible to receive protections and benefits related to wages, hours of work, and breaks.¹⁰¹ This indicates a legal inconsistency for students and exposes gaps in their labour rights and protections. As such, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to create a guide outlining students' rights in the workplace. This would increase transparency and clarity for students engage in WIL and allows them to be properly informed of what they are and are not entitled to.

Notably, the ESA is specific in its stipulations on minimum wage for students, with the province stating that those not entitled to minimum wage include “post-secondary students working in co-operative or

¹⁰⁰ *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1

¹⁰¹ *Employment Standards Act*, 2000, S.O. 2000, c. 41

work experience programs approved by their college or university.”¹⁰² This regulation can significantly impact student finances, who are already trying to recover from the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the class of 2020 is estimated to lose anywhere between \$8,000 to \$44,000 over the next 5 years depending on youth unemployment rates, all due to pandemic-related job cuts and losses.¹⁰³ Therefore, shortcomings on minimum wage entitlements in the ESA only exacerbate this issue if students are not able to earn as much as other Ontarian employees. This is why the provincial government should amend the *Employment Standards Act* such that students completing work placements as a part of their university program are entitled to the same rights and protections as Ontario workers.

There is also increased concern about students experiencing harm and harassment in the workplace. In one study, co-operative education coordinators noted students were most vulnerable in experiencing harassment, and were particularly worried about “bullying, physical or emotional intimidation, neglect, and sexual harassment.”¹⁰⁴ Another study of social work students in field placements found that about 55% reported experiencing sexual harassment, with 63% experiencing more than one type of harassment.¹⁰⁵ *Courage to Act*, a national project to address sexual violence at post-secondary institutions, is also conducting research on sexual harassment in experiential learning, indicating that this issue has anecdotal evidence to suggest its prevalence in work-integrated learning settings.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to establish a reporting mechanism within co-op/experiential learning centres for students to disclose experiences of harm and harassment at their workplace. Once the above reporting mechanism is implemented, the provincial government should require these centres to work with the employer to address and resolve the incident as stipulated in the workplace’s respective violence and harassment policy. Students deserve safety, protection, and accountability among all parts of their post-secondary education, including in their work-integrated learning.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Principle: International students are valuable additions and contributors to the Ontario workforce.

Principle: International students require additional supports to facilitate their arrival in Ontario.

Principle: International students should be able to pursue career paths at their educational institution to acquire the adequate transition tools necessary to succeed after graduating.

Principle: International students should be able to receive the same employment opportunities as domestic students.

Concern: Campus employment opportunities disproportionately favour domestic students and often see international students as ineligible candidates.

Concern: International students are required to obtain study and work permits to pursue co-operative learning placements, unlike their domestic peers.

Concern: Certain fields require security clearances that are disproportionately difficult for international students to receive.

¹⁰² Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, “Young workers’ rights,” *Government of Ontario*, last updated August 3, 2022, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-o/young-workers-rights#section-3>

¹⁰³ Statistics Canada, “Impacts on Youth,” *Government of Canada*, October 20, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s9-eng.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca Newhook, “Are University Co-operative Education Students Safe? Perceptions of Risk to Students on Work Terms,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 46, no.1 (2016): 121-137, doi: 10.47678/cjhe.v46i1.18604

¹⁰⁵ Carrie A. Moylan and Leila Wood, “Sexual Harassment in Social Work Field Placements: Prevalence and Characteristics,” *Journal of Women and Social Work* 31, no.4 (2016): 405-417, doi: 10.1177/0886109916644643

¹⁰⁶ Britney De Costa, “Sexual Harassment in Experiential Learning: A Courage to Act Research-to-Action Project,” *Courage to Act*, January 31, 2022, <https://www.couragetoact.ca/blog/experiential-learning-project>

Concern: The lack of international student support and transition tools during an undergraduate degree will lead to a lack of retention in the place of study.

Concern: Many international students are unaware of the processes in place to ensure residency post-graduation.

Concern: Employers are hesitant to hire international students due to financial constraints and inaccessible funding.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of increasing international student specific employment opportunities on-campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should lobby the federal government to allow international student study permits to authorize co-operative learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research about the various challenges that interfere with international students integrating into the workforce.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should work with the government to create a best practice model to provide international students with academic, social, and cultural support and help them overcome integration challenges.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to institutions to create services that support international students in Ontario and ensure post-graduation retention.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work in collaboration with the federal government to streamline the visa and permit retention process post-graduation.

Recommendation: The provincial government should lobby the federal government to ensure that security clearances are not barriers for international students seeking employment.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to co-op employers in order to relieve financial constraints in hiring international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide transparent information to raise awareness of work-integrated learning opportunities for international students along with further resources for employment.

International students continue to be an important source of labour, both during their time in-study and post-graduation. Following graduation, half of international students remain in their province of study, and with Ontario being the largest attractor of international students in Canada, this creates a strong workforce for the Ontario government to utilize.¹⁰⁷ This is also reflected in the growing proportion of the workforce that international students continue to comprise. Participation in the labour market by international students at the college level has increased from 7% in 2000 to 57% in 2018.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the number of international students participating in the post-graduation work permit program (PGWP) has grown 13 times in size since 2008, with 135,100 PGWP participants reporting an income in 2018.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Eden Crossman, Youjin Choi, Yujian Lu, and Feng Hou, "International students as a source of labour supply: A summary of recent trends," *Statistics Canada*, March 23, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2022003/article/00001-eng.htm>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Overall, these various statistics exemplify the valuable contributions international students have made, and continue to make, to our workforce.¹¹⁰

Within the 2020-21 academic year, international students comprised 21% of students enrolled in post-secondary education in Ontario.¹¹¹ This number has grown dramatically since the reported 12% in the 2015-2016 academic year.¹¹² As the number of international students studying in Ontario continues to grow, the available supports must also expand to meet growing demand.

The current study permit structure permits international students to work on-campus without an additional work-permit if they are enrolled full-time.¹¹³ These employment opportunities set international students up for success post-graduation and provide areas for students to gain employable skills. While international students are able to partake in valuable campus employment opportunities, these opportunities are few and far between. Many campus employment opportunities are only made available to permanent Canadian residents, making international students ineligible for employment.¹¹⁴ The lack of employment opportunities and income for international students is of great concern especially when contrasted against the significantly higher tuition costs they are asked to pay. Canadian work experience is also a key driver in post-graduation job attainment, and consequently, income level. Before graduation, Canadian citizens have about 6.3 years of Canadian work experience while international students have about 1.3 years.¹¹⁵ Therefore, barriers that prevent international students from accumulating Canadian work experience during their undergraduate degree disadvantage their post-graduation employability.

International students arrive in Ontario often without the professional or personal networks enjoyed by many domestic students, making searches for employment and transitions into the workforce much more difficult.¹¹⁶ International students are also often unaware of the processes in place to transition their study permits into residency post-graduation.¹¹⁷

When pursuing employment, there are additional hurdles for international students to overcome which make employability a challenge. To pursue co-operative education or internship programs, international students are required to obtain a work permit in addition to their study permit.¹¹⁸ Additionally, international students are ineligible to apply for federal jobs requiring secret security clearance and are less likely to obtain government employment requiring security clearance.¹¹⁹ Employers have also shown hesitancy in hiring international students due to a lack of financial resources. Many established grants are limited to Canadian citizens, failing to provide financial support to employers wishing to hire international students.¹²⁰

To begin addressing gaps in international student employment and employability, the provincial government should begin by providing envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for the purposes of opening up campus employment opportunities geared towards international students. This will help

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Statistics Canada, "Table: 37-10-0018-01 Postsecondary enrolments, by registration status, institution type, status of student in Canada and gender," *Government of Canada*, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3710001801>

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "As an international student, can I work in Canada without a work permit?," *Government of Canada*, last modified July 26, 2022, <https://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=496&top=15>

¹¹⁴ De Costa and Dhanani, *Affordability: Results from the 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*.

¹¹⁵ Youjin Choi, Feng Hou, and Ping Ching Winnie Chan, "Early Earnings Trajectories Of International Students After Graduation From Postsecondary Programs," *Statistics Canada*, Economic and Social Reports, February 24, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021002/article/00004-eng.htm>

¹¹⁶ Ben Richardson and Yadullah Hussain, "Course Correction: How international students can help solve Canada's labour crisis," *RBC*, September 1, 2022, <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/course-correction-how-international-students-can-help-solve-canadas-labour-crisis/>

¹¹⁷ Clayton Smith, "Solving the International Student Retention Puzzle: Barriers to International Student Success," *University of Windsor*, https://umanitoba.ca/student/media/Pre-Summit_Workshop_-_Barriers.pdf

¹¹⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "As an international student, can I take part in co-op and internship programs?," *Government of Canada*, last modified July 26, 2022, <https://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=496&top=15>

¹¹⁹ Faculty of Science, "International Students," *University of Manitoba*, <https://umanitoba.ca/science/programs-of-study/co-op/current-students#international-students>; Moira MacDonald, "The push to bridge the school-work gap," *University Affairs*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/push-bridge-school-work-gap/>

¹²⁰ Business + Higher Education Roundtable, "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategies in WIL,"

international students start to build professional networks, teach them with employable skills, and provide them with an income to address high tuition costs.

To further open up employment opportunities, the provincial government should lobby the federal government to allow study permits to authorize co-operative education and internship placements. These work-integrated-learning opportunities will enrich the educational experience of international students and provide them with a valuable income. HEQCO should also research the challenges interfering with international student integration into the workforce to best inform structures and supports for international students. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should also implement envelope funding programs to support post-secondary institutions establishment of international student supports.

The provincial government should work in collaboration with the federal government to support international students in retaining their visas post-graduation. Additional funding into the PGWP program could provide valuable resources to international students looking to remain in Canada post-graduation. To expand employment options post-graduation, the provincial government should lobby the federal government to remove barriers in employment for international students that stem from security clearance requirements.

PREPARING FOR EDUCATION BEYOND UNDERGRAD

FURTHER UNDERSTANDING OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Principle: Micro-credentials can be an additional asset to students' post-secondary degrees and can help improve employability.

Principle: Micro-credentials can be beneficial towards students who want to reskill or upskill but are not targeted for students who are currently completing an undergraduate post-secondary degree.

Concern: Micro-credentials are not widely accepted and understood by employers in some sectors.

Concern: There is a lack of clarity on what micro-credentials entail and how they bring value to students. Due to a lack of understanding of micro-credential applicability, students may not recognize this as a possible option after graduating.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adapt the eCampus micro-credentials framework to provide a provincial-wide understanding of the purpose of micro-credentials as well as provide a recognized and standardized framework across Ontario campuses.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should identify and research how organizations and employers are utilizing micro-credentials within their recruitment of recently graduated students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of College and Universities should develop educational programs and resources for students to learn about micro-credentials including the process of attaining them, as well as the costs and benefits.

Micro-credentials are becoming increasingly popular as education becomes more digitized. Micro-credentials could also provide a bridge for students to match skills gaps within the workforce.¹²¹ Although recent graduates may not want to pursue further education right away, micro-credentials can be

¹²¹ Marcelo Fabián Maina, Lourdes Guàrdia Ortiz, Federica Mancini, and Montserrat Martinez Melo "A micro-credentialing methodology for improved recognition of HE employability skills," *International Journal of Education*, 2022, page 2

presented as a future educational opportunity if they wish to pursue it. However, micro-credentials could also be costly and can be pushing for a transactional, profit driven relationship between universities and clients.¹²² Thus, it can be argued that micro-credentials are not targeted to students. However, due to the novelty of micro-credentials and recent expansion during the pandemic, there should be further consideration on what a consistent model may look like, and if it can benefit or enhance a students' employability in the workforce.

With micro-credentials continuously growing in popularity, there should be further understanding on what micro-credentials consists of, what the benefits are, and what risks exist within them. Micro-credentials can also often be certificates, nanodegrees, stackable credits, etc.¹²³ Students should be aware of various opportunities that exist outside of typical post-secondary education. With further clarification on grants and how to use them, students can increase their understanding to see how to advance their career.

Moving forward, there should be more support from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to adapt the eCampus micro-credentials framework to provide a provincial-wide understanding of what entails a micro-credential program. This framework should be recognized, standardized, and regulated to improve students' understanding of how micro-credentials apply to them. With a regular framework, students can take into consideration an educational route that they previously have not considered to improve their career trajectory. Another policy worth implementing is that the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should look into the possible future of micro-credentials, and how organizations and employers are utilizing micro-credentials for recruitment processes.¹²⁴ There should be further considerations of the implications of micro-credentials as they continue to expand.

ENSURING EMPLOYABILITY FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENT GROUPS

Principle: Students can increase likelihood of employability after graduation with work-integrated learning opportunities.

Principle: Work-integrated learning opportunities should be equitably accessible for marginalized students.

Concern: During the pandemic, youth unemployment disproportionately affected marginalized groups including international students, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and Black youth.¹²⁵

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide tax incentives, grants, and social procurement for employers who offer work-integrated learning opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should work towards developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy to recruit and retain marginalized students in work-integrated learning.

¹²² Shane J. Ralston, "Higher Education's Microcredentialing Craze: a Postdigital-Deweyan Critique," *Postdigital Science and Education* 3, (May 2020): 83-101, doi: 10.1007/s42438-020-00121-8

¹²³ Martin Boucher, "Micro-credentials are no Panacea: Universities need to also focus on more fundamental innovation," *University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan (Centre for the Study of Science and Innovation Policy)*, June 16, 2021, <https://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/esip/publications/making-waves/micro-credentials-are-no-panacea.php>

¹²⁴ Misheck Mwaba, Noel Baldwin, and Steve Richter, "Microcredentials are surging in popularity, but how should they be shaped?," *Institute for Research on Public Policy*, March 21, 2022, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/micro-credentials-training-education/>

¹²⁵ Pedro Barata, Wendy Cukier, and Andrew Parkin, "Young adults have been hit hard by the pandemic. The recovery must not leave them behind," *First Policy Response*, January 25, 2022, <https://policyresponse.ca/young-adults-have-been-hit-hard-by-the-pandemic-the-recovery-must-not-leave-them-behind/>

Marginalized students have had disadvantages when it comes to work-integrated learning opportunities, in-study jobs, and post-graduation employment prospects. Throughout the pandemic, marginalized groups have faced barriers in attaining employment including Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and Black youth. Indigenous Peoples have often faced social and economic exclusion that lead to fewer employment opportunities, often perpetuating the cycle of poverty that Indigenous People experience through colonialism.¹²⁶ In recent years, Canada's disability and employment policies for working-age individuals have been re-examined to increase funding. Approximately 22% of Canadians 15 and older live with disabilities, and this group of youth has a low employment rate at 21%.¹²⁷ Notably, for disabled graduates in Ontario post-graduation employment, they are more likely to be low-income, suggesting a worrisome pay disparity between disabled and non-disabled employees.¹²⁸ A recent study from Toronto has examined the difference in recruiter callbacks comparatively with white and Black sounding names, in which the group with white members had 50% more callbacks.¹²⁹ Further, Statistics Canada found that Black men aged 23-27 have nearly double the unemployment rate of other youth, at 19% versus 11%, while Black women of the same age range have an 11% unemployment rate whereas other youth sat at 7%.¹³⁰ Evidently, marginalized groups have exhibited various socio-economic barriers from achieving employment goals and resources. These groups have also been most impacted from the pandemic where 45% of Indigenous youth and 34% of disabled youth experienced a loss of hours due to the pandemic.¹³¹ Lastly, students who have more privileged backgrounds tend to have a greater flexibility in their choice of WIL placement and are easily able to participate in unpaid WIL experiences, a luxury that many marginalized student populations do not have.

With recent provisions to check employment policies for marginalized groups, the provincial government should work towards developing providing tax incentives, grants, and social procurement for employers who offer work-integrated learning opportunities for equity-deserving groups. This includes increased accessibility and awareness for resources to support these groups accordingly to various barriers. Finally, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should also work towards developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy to recruit and retain marginalized students in work-integrated learning. Various groups need consistent research due to varying circumstances which will need to be highlighted to this group to ensure that they are constantly supported in an evolving economy. By expanding accessibility to WIL for marginalized groups, the provincial government has an opportunity to ensure these groups are well-equipped with professional experiences, increasing their employability post-graduation.

¹²⁶ Eva Jewell, Andrea Doucet, and Jessica Falk, "Social Knowing, Mental Health, and the Importance of Indigenous Resources: A Case Study of Indigenous Employment Engagement in Southwestern Ontario," *Canadian Review of Social Policy* 80, (2020): 1-25, 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48670534>

¹²⁷ Shannon Dinan And Normand Boucher, "Disability and Employment Policy in Canada: National Policy Variation for Working Age Individuals," *Journal of Social Policy*, December 2021: 1-21, 3, doi:10.1017/S0047279421000878

¹²⁸ Ken Chatoor, *Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes for Ontario Students with Disabilities* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2021), 15.

¹²⁹ Mariama Zaami and Amal Madibbo, "You Don't Sound Black' African Immigrant Youth Experiences of Discrimination in the Labor Market in Calgary," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 83, July 2021: 128-138, 130, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.06.003

¹³⁰ Martin Turcotte, "Results from the 2016 Census: Education and labour market integration of Black youth in Canada," *Statistics Canada*, February 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00002-eng.htm>

¹³¹ "Making Up Time: The Impact of the Pandemic on Young Adults in Canada," 8.

POLICY STATEMENT

Whereas: Work-integrated learning is a valuable asset to post-secondary education and should be widely available to students across all disciplines.

Whereas: All eligible students should have the opportunity to participate in work-integrated learning.

Whereas: A student's chosen field of study should not inequitably disadvantage their access to work-integrated learning.

Whereas: All willing and academically qualified students should have the ability to access co-operative learning opportunities.

Whereas: A sufficient number of co-operative learning opportunities should exist to ensure all eligible students in co-op programs are able to secure work placements.

Whereas: Co-op opportunities should be varied in their offerings to allow students to access co-operative placements in their desired field.

Whereas: Students should be equitably paid for the work they complete as a part of their post-secondary degree.

Whereas: Students who have mandatory placements should not be forced to complete these placements unpaid.

Whereas: Students pursuing work-integrated learning should have easy access to comprehensive wellness supports to address the specific needs that emerge as they engage in these opportunities.

Whereas: Students should be prepared and have an understanding of work placement demands prior to beginning any form of work-integrated learning.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should respond to the needs of their communities.

Whereas: Students should be able to improve and work in their communities while gaining valuable educational experience and course credit.

Whereas: Community service learning opportunities should involve consultation from students enrolled in those courses/departments offering them.

Whereas: Institutions should be providing students with the opportunities to develop the skills needed to excel in their field of work.

Whereas: Institutions should be able to adapt to the changes in the workforce and provide students with access to resources to develop current and in-demand skills.

Whereas: Post-secondary graduates should finish their education not only with an ability to contribute to the workforce, but with an ability to manage their personal lives, including organizing their personal finances and planning for their future.

Whereas: Institutions should incorporate information about investing and saving money to support students from various socio-economic backgrounds within academic classes and programming.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with the digital literacy skills needed to thrive in a post-pandemic job market.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with resources and services needed to develop skills that are less prone to automation in a technology-driven job market (e.g. critical thinking).

Whereas: Students have diverse learning styles and levels of digital literacy.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should have opportunities that focus on developing programs and workshops to enhance skills that could have been gained from experiential and workplace environments in which students have not been able to develop prior to entering post-secondary the pandemic.

Whereas: Students should be provided with opportunities to learn business etiquette and expectations in all workplaces including remote and hybrid work arrangements.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should provide students with the skills and tools needed to succeed in the workforce.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions should ensure that students pursuing work placements are provided support and mentors to discuss and navigate challenges in the workplace.

Whereas: Upon entering the workforce, all students should be able to identify and convey the skills acquired through their post-secondary education and extracurricular experiences.

Whereas: Post-secondary education should help students gain in-demand hard and soft skills for the workplace.

Whereas: Post-secondary students should have access to and be able to afford digital tools and learning equipment.

Whereas: Work term programs should be well-funded for students pursuing an entrepreneurial experience.

Whereas: Students seeking entrepreneurship work terms should be able to have the autonomy to develop their own ambitions consistent with their level of energy and academic and professional skills, as well as contribute to their local economy.

Whereas: Every student pursuing entrepreneurship in Ontario should have equal access for protections to their intellectual property and support for the commercialization of their intellectual property.

Whereas: All students should have access to various entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial research opportunities, regardless of their academic discipline.

Whereas: Students engaging in a work placement or co-op deserve the same rights and protections as any other Ontario worker.

Whereas: Students deserve a safe and inclusive workplace environment during their work-integrated learning placements.

Whereas: International students are valuable additions and contributors to the Ontario workforce.

Whereas: International students require additional supports to facilitate their arrival in Ontario.

Whereas: International students should be able to pursue career paths at their educational institution to acquire the adequate transition tools necessary to succeed after graduating.

Whereas: International students should be able to receive the same employment opportunities as domestic students.

Whereas: Micro-credentials can be an additional asset to students' post-secondary degrees and can help improve employability.

Whereas: Micro-credentials can be beneficial towards students who want to reskill or upskill but are not targeted for students who are currently completing an undergraduate post-secondary degree.

Whereas: Students can increase likelihood of employability after graduation with work-integrated learning opportunities.

Whereas: Work-integrated learning opportunities should be equitably accessible for marginalized students.

Be it resolved that: The provincial government should revitalize the Career Ready Fund to provide post-secondary institutions with funding to increase work-integrated learning in disciplines where such opportunities are currently lacking.

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT): The provincial government should work with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable to conduct research and establish best practices on incorporating work-integrated learning in the arts and humanities, and other fields of study where such opportunities are limited.

BIFRT: The provincial government should incentivize employers to hire co-op students with the option of converting existing tax credits provided for co-op students into upfront grants.

BIFRT: The provincial government should modify the Co-operative Education Tax Credit so that the maximum credit value employers can claim equates to 30% of the current average co-op salary.

BIFRT: The provincial government should decrease the minimum co-operative education placement time required by the Co-operative Education Tax Credit, from 10 weeks to 8 weeks, permitting flexible work term eligibility.

BIFRT: The provincial government should create envelope funding to support the creation of meaningful, relevant co-operative learning opportunities in small businesses and not-for-profit organizations.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to support students who wish to pursue flexible work terms.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to revisit the Employment Standards Act, and ensure that all internships, that are not required for academic accreditation, are guaranteed to receive fair compensation.

BIFRT: While the Ministry of Colleges and Universities addresses the recommendation immediately above, they should establish guidelines that ensure that students in an unpaid internship should not be required to work more than 37.5 hours per week for full-time employment, with exceptions given to students in careers that necessitate more hours.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to accreditation bodies for the purposes of hiring and compensating students who must complete mandatory placements as regulated by these accrediting bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide institutions with envelope funding for bursaries for students with mandatory unpaid work placements to compensate for necessary expenditure.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should develop a best practice model on how best university co-op/experiential learning centres can prepare and inform students of the demands and pressures of their placements.

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities should develop and distribute guidelines to university co-op/experiential learning centres to help them create resource packages that inform students on how to access wellness resources on campus and during out-of-town placements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should require university co-op/experiential learning centres to partner with employers and establish a mentoring program for students in work-integrated learning placements.

BIFRT: Work-integrated learning opportunities should allot time for students to process/recover from physical and mental health challenges related to their placement.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate universities provide training on employment law and worker rights prior to any work-integrated learning placement.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide faculty incentives to develop meaningful community service-learning courses.

BIFRT: The Council of Ontario Universities, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations should work together to create a best practice model for administering community service learning-based courses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities to provide financial support for necessary expenditures, including transportation fees for students to aid their access to community partners.

BIFRT: The provincial government should formulate student consultation guidelines for CSL opportunities.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should regularly conduct and disseminate research regarding projected in-demand skills and jobs to ensure that institutions can support students with the development of these skills.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should collaborate with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to establish a personal financial management course credit for undergraduate degrees outside of business and math focused programs.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities to provide further incentive for institutions to implement financial management teachings for students outside of business and math-focused programs.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide guidelines for students to learn digital tool training prior to entering in their workplace.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with the Business and Higher Education Roundtable to create a framework for digital literacy skills that post-secondary institutions can adopt and distribute to faculty as they develop learning outcomes.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide funding to post-secondary institutions to develop programs and workshops that build students' proficiency in interpersonal skills.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should develop a comprehensive framework of expectations and supports in hybrid work arrangements that is integrated within post-secondary institutions' career support services.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide a comprehensive framework for career coaching at the post-secondary level that is advertised and accessible for students.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to expand programming for students to receive desired career support in their given field.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should establish a best practice model that post-secondary institutions should follow, that outlines how to convey the academic, oral, practical, and writing skills acquired through post-secondary education and extracurriculars.

BIFRT: The provincial government should commission the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to conduct cyclical research on the specific in-demand technical and non-technical skills employers are seeking from university graduates.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should use the skills research of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to disseminate this information accessibly to students within their institutions.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities along with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should require work-integrated learning employers various opportunities for students in association with their degree.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should provide grants that support student entry into the workforce with the tools and resources needed to succeed.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to provide envelope funding to create and maintain work-integrated learning programs that focus on innovation and cultural change.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding for students who require travel and living arrangements for their entrepreneurial work term placements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should incentivize partnerships between universities and local and regional businesses to establish unique entrepreneurship opportunities within their industry.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should allocate more funding to be able to support students with ownership of intellectual property.

BIFRT: Intellectual Property Ontario should provide intellectual property advice and resources specifically designed for post-secondary students pursuing entrepreneurship experiences.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should develop best practices and guidelines for post-secondary institutions to improve programming and access to accelerators, incubators, and spaces for innovation specifically for undergraduate student entrepreneurs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to expand, support, promote entrepreneurship opportunities across all disciplines.

BIFRT: The provincial government should amend the *Employment Standards Act* such that students completing work placements as a part of their university program are entitled to the same rights and protections as Ontario workers.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to create a guide outlining students' rights in the workplace.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to establish a reporting mechanism within co-op/experiential learning centres for students to disclose experiences of harm and harassment at their workplace.

BIFRT: Once the above reporting mechanism is implemented, the provincial government should require these centres to work with the employer to address and resolve the incident as stipulated in the workplace's respective violence and harassment policy.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of increasing international student specific employment opportunities on-campus.

BIFRT: The provincial government should lobby the federal government to allow international student study permits to authorize co-operative learning opportunities.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct research about the various challenges that interfere with international students integrating into the workforce.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should work with the government to create a best practice model to provide international students with academic, social, and cultural support and help them overcome integration challenges.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding to institutions to create services that support international students in Ontario and ensure post-graduation retention.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work in collaboration with the federal government to streamline the visa and permit retention process post-graduation.

BIFRT: The provincial government should lobby the federal government to ensure that security clearances are not barriers for international students seeking employment.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to co-op employers in order to relieve financial constraints in hiring international students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide transparent information to raise awareness of work-integrated learning opportunities for international students along with further resources for employment.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should adapt the eCampus micro-credentials framework to provide a provincial-wide understanding of the purpose of micro-credentials as well as provide a recognized and standardized framework across Ontario campuses.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should identify and research how organizations and employers are utilizing micro-credentials within their recruitment of recently graduated students.

BIFRT: The Ministry of College and Universities should create develop educational programs and resources for students to learn about micro-credentials including the process of attaining them, as well as the costs and benefits.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide tax incentives, grants, and social procurement for employers who offer work-integrated learning opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development should work towards developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy to recruit and retain marginalized students in work-integrated learning.