



POLICY PAPER

Accountability & System Vision

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 160,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, high quality and equitable 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 nine member institutions were consulted to provide guidance and feedback on the principles, concerns, and recommendations contained herein.

OUSA would like to thank students and student groups from Brock University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Ontario Tech University, Queen's University, Trent University Durham GTA, the University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University for their valuable contributions to this policy paper.

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GLOSSARY

Corridor Funding Model: refers to the funding model that the provincial government employs to determine per-student funding for post-secondary institutions in Ontario. The corridor refers to the upper and lower range of enrollment institutions can maintain to ensure funding stability. “The government creates a set of relations between the costs associated with different fields of study... It then adds all those together to come up with a total number of weighted student units for each institution,” which directly reflects the higher relative costs of delivering programs (such as laboratory or clinical courses).¹ Typically, institutions maintain enrollment at the midpoint of the corridor.

Equity-deserving groups: Groups that are being denied equity as a result of any aspect of their identity, including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and immigration status.

Infrastructure: Physical structures, supplies, resources, buildings, and facilities that contribute to institutional operation. Infrastructure also includes digital, technological, and transport-related supports, and where applicable, is specified throughout the paper.

Long-term Co-op/Internship/ Work-term: A structured work-integrated learning (WIL) experience where a student works with an employer for an extended period, typically 4, 8, 12, or 16 months, to gain practical, career-related experience while completing their academic program. These roles are often full-time, paid, and connected to the student’s field of study.²

Rural and northern students: This definition has been adapted from OUSA’s “Rural and Northern Students” policy paper.³ Rural communities, as defined by Statistics Canada, are those whose population is less than 1,000 and whose population density is less than 400 per square kilometre.⁴ Rural areas comprise of districts outside of census metropolitan areas including Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo, London, St. Catharines-Niagara, Oshawa, Windsor, Barrie, Greater Sudbury, Kingston, Guelph, Brantford, Thunder Bay, or Peterborough. Northern areas, as defined by the Government of Ontario, refers to the City of Greater Sudbury and other districts including Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Algoma, Cochrane, Manitoulin, Sudbury, Timiskaming, Nipissing, and Parry Sound.⁵ The five publicly-assisted universities that would fall within northern Ontario include Algoma University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Nipissing University, and L’Université de Hearst. All that considered and unless otherwise specified, rural and northern students include:

¹ Alex Usher, “Talking about Corridors,” Higher Education Strategy Associates, November 27, 2024, <https://higherstrategy.com/talking-about-corridors/>

² University of Toronto Experiential Learning Hub, “Learning Type: Co-op / Professional Work Term,” University of Toronto, accessed June 26, 2026, <https://experientiallearning.utoronto.ca/learningtype/co-op-professional-work-term/>

³ Sayak Sneddon-Ghosal, Brodie Norwich, Zarreen Brown, Emily Poirier, and Ann Lei, Policy Paper: Rural & Northern Students, Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2024 .

⁴ Statistics Canada, “Population Centre and Rural Area Classification 2016,” Statistics Canada, February 8, 2017, online: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects/standard/pcrac/2016/introduction>

⁵ Government of Ontario, “Ontario population projections,” *Government of Ontario*, August 25, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-population-projections>

1. Students from rural and northern communities who attend northern post-secondary institutions;
2. Students from rural and northern communities who attend post-secondary institutions in southern, urban centres; and
3. Students from southern, urban centres who attend post-secondary institutions in northern regions.

Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) Report Back Data: The public reporting document of an Ontario college or university to the province detailing its performance on the metrics and goals outlined in its SMA.

Student mediation: Refers to processes at post-secondary institutions that handle academic and non-academic disputes between students and faculty, institutional administration, institutional resources, relevant policies and procedures, and other students. Offices that engage in this work are referred to differently across Ontario institutions, and for the purposes of this paper, student mediation encapsulates ombudsperson offices, appeals boards, and other bodies that manage student-related concerns and disputes.

University board: A university board is responsible for matters involving institutional finances, property, and activities. University boards play the important role of appointing the university's president and appraising their performance. They are typically composed of senior administrators (like the president and chancellor), internal faculty members, and external public members, and are governed by a set of internally written by-laws. In Ontario, university boards have decision-making autonomy and do not typically face interference from the provincial government but the two may occasionally engage with one another.⁶

University senate: University senates are institutional bodies that manage and make decisions pertaining to academic operations and matters. At most Canadian universities, the senate shares governance responsibilities with the university board, a model known as bicameral governance.⁷

⁶ Julia Eastman, Glen A. Jones, Olivier Bégin-Caouette, Sharon X. Li, Christian Noumi, and Claude Trottier, "Provincial Oversight and University Autonomy in Canada: Findings of a Comparative Study of Canadian University Governance," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 48, no.3 (2018): 65-81

⁷ Queen's University, University Secretariat and Legal Counsel, "FAQ's - University Council Reform," FAQ 4 and FAQ 6, <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/faqs>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Accountability and System Vision policy paper was developed by undergraduate students through the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance to identify student concerns and propose student-driven recommendations for Ontario's post-secondary sector. The post-secondary sector contains many macro-level agents and structures that work together to shape the direction and delivery of post-secondary education in Ontario.

The paper focuses on the systems, structures, and decision-making processes that shape students' access to, experiences within, and outcomes from university education. While issues such as Ministry frameworks, university governance, quality assurance, capacity expansion, funding models, Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA), experiential learning, and mediation offices may not always directly interact with students on a daily basis, they have a significant impact on students across Ontario.

Find a full summary of this paper's concerns and recommendations in the [Policy Brief](#).

INTRODUCTION

One of OUSA's primary advocacy drivers aims for an accountable and sustainable post-secondary system in Ontario. This system can be complex and involves the resources and decision-making power of various stakeholders, each with their own interests and objectives. Although a macro-level issue within the post-secondary sector, students are directly impacted by the structures, frameworks, and funding decisions that shape their access and outcomes in education.

This paper builds on OUSA's previous work on Accountability and System Vision, carrying forward key concerns related to quality assurance, Strategic Mandate Agreements, university governance, student mediation, capacity expansion, and funding models. Each of these topics continues to hold importance for students and remains central to conversations about the future of Ontario's post-secondary system. This paper also considers the ways in which equity, accessibility, and student representation must be integrated across these areas to ensure that the system is responsive to the diverse needs of students.

Issues of accountability in post-secondary stem from the publicly-assisted nature of the sector and the influence that government and institutional decisions have on students' educational experiences. Students continue to be concerned about the transparency and accountability of provincial frameworks, particularly when students, faculty, and other impacted stakeholders are not meaningfully consulted in decisions that affect the sector. Without formal mechanisms for student involvement, government priorities around funding formulas, regulatory changes, and framework reviews, there is a risk of being disconnected from the lived realities of students.

Accountability also extends to university governance, where boards and senates make decisions that directly affect students. Despite students' significant contributions to university operations through tuition and fees, undergraduate representation on governance bodies remains limited and inconsistent across institutions. Students should have the right to be elected as voting members, receive the training necessary to participate meaningfully, and access transparent information about governance decisions. Ensuring equitable student representation is necessary for university decision-making to reflect the needs and experiences of the communities it serves.

Accountability is also essential in student-facing dispute resolution processes, including institutional offices that help students navigate academic and non-academic disputes, policies, appeals, and complaints. For the purposes of this paper and where "student mediation" is not accurate, the term "ombudsperson" will be used when discussing institutional offices to de-gender the terminology used in OUSA's advocacy. However, when discussing the provincial body, the term "ombudsman" will be used to keep consistent with provincial terminology.

Quality assurance remains another important area of accountability. Degree expectations, program reviews, course evaluations, and institutional quality assurance processes should clearly communicate the knowledge, skills, and competencies students are expected to develop throughout their education. However, students continue to face barriers when these processes are vague, inaccessible, or inconsistently applied across institutions. Quality assurance mechanisms must also better reflect the experiences of equity-deserving students, students with disabilities, and students in professional programs, ensuring that program quality is not measured solely through institutional compliance but through meaningful student outcomes.

Looking at a vision for the post-secondary system in the province, students are thinking about the ways equity and accessibility can be better integrated into all facets of the system. Students from equity-deserving groups continue to face barriers in participation, retention, and post-graduation outcomes, while students with disabilities often encounter inconsistent supports across physical, hybrid, and online learning environments. Indigenous students, rural and northern students, and Francophone students also face unique challenges related to geography, transportation, infrastructure, community connection, and culturally relevant supports. A strong system vision must account for these realities and ensure that access to post-secondary education is not dependent on identity, location, disability, language, or institutional capacity.

Capacity expansion and infrastructure planning are also central to the student experience. While government frameworks have placed emphasis on enrollment, facilities, jobs and the economy, students remain concerned that expansion decisions may not adequately address regional inequities, deferred maintenance, satellite campus quality, transportation, accessibility, or digital infrastructure. Expansion should not only increase the number of available spaces in the system but should also ensure that students have access to safe, inclusive, and well-resourced learning environments.

Concerningly, current university funding models remain unsustainable for the sector due to the growing reliance on student tuition and fees to fund institutional operations. This is particularly worrisome for international students, whose tuition remains unregulated and can be subject to unpredictable increases. Strategic mandate agreements and performance-based funding requirements also continue to shape institutional priorities through measures tied to employment, earnings, experiential learning, and research. While accountability for public funding is important, these mechanisms must be transparent, balanced, and designed in ways that do not prioritize narrow economic outcomes over educational quality, equity, accessibility, and student well-being.

While seemingly indirect issues for students, mechanisms of accountability and actions toward achieving a desired system vision critically influence the ways in which students experience post-secondary education. It is OUSA's hope that the following principles, concerns, and

recommendations will illustrate current gaps and areas for improvement within the post-secondary sector, and further OUSA's mission to achieve an accountable, accessible, affordable, equitable, and high-quality education for students in Ontario.

REPRESENTATIVE MINISTRY OF COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES, RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND SECURITY FRAMEWORKS

Principle: The provincial government should be both transparent and accountable to students, faculty, and others impacted by its decisions.

Concern: There is a lack of transparency and student involvement in the province's current frameworks.

Recommendation: MCURES should create and consult a post-secondary education advisory body with equitable representation from students, faculty, university administrators, and other post secondary sector experts to advise the Ministry on framework reviews, regulatory changes, funding formulas and other government priorities.

The core of many concerns students have revolves around a lack of transparency and student involvement in the province's current decision making frameworks. OUSA believes that the provincial government should be both transparent and accountable to students, faculty, and others impacted by its decision. One way to systematically include these perspectives into the decision-making process would be to have a designated advisory body with equitable representation of each of these stakeholders. As a reference model, this advisory body could be structured similarly to the Minister of Education's Advisory Council on Special Education, which comprises a diverse range of perspectives and helps recommend to the minister on policies pertaining to Special Education.⁸ With regards to the Advisory Council at MCURES, their role would be to focus on framework reviews, regulatory changes, funding formulas and other government priorities.

⁸ Ministry of Education, "Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education." Ministry of Education, 2023. <https://www.pas.gov.on.ca/Home/Agency/209>.

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION TO UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT GOVERNANCE

A university board is the institution's highest governing authority, responsible for overseeing finances, property, and overall operations. Boards are also tasked with appointing the university president and monitoring their performance. The terms of university boards vary by institution; among OUSA member schools, boards are commonly referred to as 'Boards of Trustees' or 'Boards of Governors.'

At most Canadian universities, governance responsibilities are shared between the board and the university senate, with the senate primarily responsible for academic matters. This system of shared authority is known as bicameral governance. As such, the recommendations in the following section related to university governance apply to both the boards and senates.

Student participation in university governance occurs through student representation on governing bodies as well as through student unions. Student unions work in collaboration with universities to deliver student services and advocate on behalf of students to institutional governance bodies.

INCREASING STUDENT AND DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ON GOVERNANCE BODIES

Principle: University governance bodies, including committees, are most effective when their membership represents diverse perspectives and experiences, and engages to their full potential.

Principle: Students should have the right to be elected to university governance bodies as voting members and be involved in their universities' decision-making processes.

Principle: All university governance structures should include equitable student representation to ensure nuanced governing perspectives.

Principle: Transparent information regarding the activities of university governance bodies should be comprehensible and made available to students in a timely manner.

Concern: There is a lack of proactive and transparent communication between university governing bodies and university community members, which creates substantial barriers for constituents to engage with governing bodies and decisions that impact them.

Concern: Undergraduate student influence is often limited and selective in university governance bodies since few seats are allocated to undergraduate student representatives, resulting in certain academic programs not being represented.

Concern: There is insufficient provincial regulation on the equitable representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies.

Concern: The lack of diverse representation of marginalized groups in governing bodies can lead to oversights on the experiences of equity-deserving students.

Concern: Due to unique and potentially exacerbated challenges, individuals from marginalized groups face additional barriers to engaging with university governance.

Concern: There is a lack of adequate data across post-secondary institutions as to which marginalized groups are underrepresented on governance bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish a triennial review and issue memoranda with clear and actionable recommendations to post-secondary institutions which evaluates students' impact within university governing bodies and equity in student representation across Ontario.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that the ratio of student members of university boards to members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, if any, adequately reflect the relative contributions to university operations from tuition to provincial government funding.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that the distribution of student seats on university senates be at least half the distribution of faculty member seats, with at least one student seat per Faculty.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that student representatives on university governance bodies be democratically elected by students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that each university governance body implement a regular and transparent internal reporting process in which they publish their activities and decisions to stakeholders and university community members in a comprehensible manner..

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate universities to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups in both student and senior leadership seats on governance bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate a review of university consultation processes, mechanisms, and engagement with different campus and community stakeholder groups.

University governance bodies are most effective when their membership represents the diverse perspectives and experiences of each university community and when all members, regardless of background, are able to engage to their full potential. As key stakeholders, students have a right to be involved in their universities' governance, and are able to provide valuable insights on how students experience a university's actions, values, and operations. While the value of diverse and engaged student participation in governance is clear, this potential is often undermined when governing bodies fail to communicate within the university. This lack of

proactive communication and reporting between university governing bodies and their stakeholders, creates substantial barriers for constituents, including students, to engage with governing bodies and decisions that affect them. To address this, the provincial government should mandate that each university governance body implement a regular and transparent internal reporting process in which they publish their activities and decisions to stakeholders and university community members in a comprehensible manner. The provincial government should also mandate a review of university consultation processes, mechanisms, and engagement with different campus and community stakeholder groups.

Table 1: Undergraduate Representation on University Senates (2025-2026)⁹

School	Total Number of Senate Members	Number of Faculty Members on Senate*	Number of Undergraduate Students on Senate	Percent of Undergraduate Students on Senate
Brock	72	39	6	8.3%
Laurentian	61	37	11**	18%
McMaster	67	31	6	9%
Ontario Tech	52	24	4**	7.7%
Queen's	68	36	15	22.1%
Trent	51	25	9**	17.6%
Waterloo	93	47	8	8.6%
Western	99	46	14	14.1%

⁹ Information gathered from respective institutional websites: [Brock University](https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/senate/), [Laurentian University](https://laurentian.ca/about/governance-leadership/senate/), [McMaster University](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/senate-and-committees-membership/senate/), [Ontario Tech University](https://secretariat.ontariotechu.ca/academic-council/academic-council-membership/index.php), [Queen's University](https://queensuniversity.civicweb.net/portal/members.aspx?id=16), [Trent University](https://www.trentu.ca/leadership-governance/sites/trentu.ca.leadership-governance/files/documents/08%20Senate%202025_05_06%20Agenda%20and%20Meeting%20Materials.pdf), [University of Waterloo](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/governing-bodies/senate/), [Western University](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/senate/members.pdf), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](https://www.wlu.ca/about/governance/senate/membership.html)
 Brock University, "Senate." *Brock University*, 2026. <https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/senate/>; Laurentian University, "Senate." *Laurentian University*, 2026. <https://laurentian.ca/about/governance-leadership/senate/>; McMaster University, "Membership of the Senate." *McMaster University*, January 14, 2026. <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/senate-and-committees-membership/senate/>; Ontario Tech University, "2025-2026 Academic Council Membership." *Ontario Tech University*, 2025. <https://secretariat.ontariotechu.ca/academic-council/academic-council-membership/index.php>; Queen's University, "Senate." *Queen's University*, 2026. <https://queensuniversity.civicweb.net/portal/members.aspx?id=16>; Trent University, "2025-26 Members of Senate." *Trent University*, 2025. https://www.trentu.ca/leadership-governance/sites/trentu.ca.leadership-governance/files/documents/08%20Senate%202025_05_06%20Agenda%20and%20Meeting%20Materials.pdf; University of Waterloo, "Senate." *University of Waterloo*, May 6, 2026. <https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/governing-bodies/senate/>; Western University, "Senate Membership 2025-26." *Western University*, May 5, 2026. <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/senate/members.pdf>; Wilfrid Laurier University, "Senate Membership." *Wilfrid Laurier University*, 2026. <https://www.wlu.ca/about/governance/senate/membership.html>.

Wilfrid Laurier	84	40	7	8.3%
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* Terminology differs at different institutions

** Some student seats were vacant at time of writing

Students should have the right to be elected to university governance bodies as voting members and be involved in their universities' decision-making processes. Undergraduate student influence is often limited and selective in university governance bodies since few seats are allocated to undergraduate student representatives, resulting in certain academic programs not being represented. According to the latest available data from OUSA's member institutions, the percentage of undergraduate students on university senates ranges from 7.7 percent at Ontario Tech University to 22.1 percent at Queen's University, with several institutions falling closer to 8 percent, as seen in Table 1. Tables 2 further demonstrate that student representation can be unevenly distributed across faculties, especially when student seats are concentrated in at-large positions rather than connected to specific academic units. To ensure students are involved in their universities' decision-making process, the provincial government should mandate that the distribution of student seats on university senates be at least half the distribution of faculty member seats, with at least one student seat per Faculty. To ensure that existing student seats accurately represent student perspectives, the provincial government should mandate that student representatives on university governance bodies be democratically elected by students.

Table 2: Current and Proposed Faculty and Undergraduate Representation on Queen's Senate (2025-2026)¹⁰

Faculty	Number of Faculty Members on Senate*	Current Number of Undergraduate Students on Senate	Proposed Number of Undergraduate Students on Senate
Arts and Science	13	5	6
Business	3	2	1
Education	3	1	1
Engineering and Applied Science	6	2	3
Health Sciences	5	3	2
Law	2	1	1
At Large	3	0	1
Ex-Officio*	1	1	1

¹⁰ Information gathered from respective institutional websites: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Ontario Tech University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#); Ibid.

Total	36	15	16
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Table 3: Undergraduate Student Representation on University Boards (2025-2026)¹¹

School	Total Number of Board Members	Number of Board Members Appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council	Number of Undergraduate Students on Board*	Percent of Undergraduate Students on Board
Brock	26	0	1	3.8%
Laurentian	16	5	1	6.3%
McMaster	49	6	1	2%
Ontario Tech	22	3	1	4.5%
Queen's	25	0	1**	4%
Trent	22	0	2	9.1%
Waterloo	36	7	3	8.3%
Western	27	4	2	7.4%
Wilfrid Laurier	34	6	2	5.8%

* Excludes observer/non-voting undergraduate student members

** The Rector, which may be an undergraduate or a graduate student, occupies an additional seat on the Board of Trustees

All university governance structures should include equitable student representation to ensure nuanced governing perspectives. Undergraduate student influence on university boards remains limited, and there is insufficient provincial regulation on the equitable representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies. University boards currently have low

¹¹ Information gathered from respective institutional websites: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

Brock University, "Bicameral Governance of Brock University Summary." *Brock University*, 2026.

<https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/governance/#board-of-trustees>; Laurentian University, "Board of Governors Composition." *Laurentian University*, 2025.

<https://laurentian.ca/about/governance-leadership/board-governors/board-composition>; McMaster University, "Board of Governors & Committees (Membership)." *McMaster University*, 2025.

<https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/board-of-governors-and-committees/membership/>; Queen's University, "Board Members." *Queen's University*, 2025. <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/board-trustees/board-members>; Trent University, "Membership." *Trent University*, 2025. <https://www.trentu.ca/governance/board-governors/membership>; [University of Waterloo](#), "Board of Governors." *University of Waterloo*, April 16, 2026.

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/governing-bodies/board-governors>; [Western University](#), "Membership of the Board of Governors." *Western University*, 2024. <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/officers.pdf>; [Wilfrid Laurier University](#), "Board of Governors Membership." *Wilfrid Laurier University*, 2026.

<https://www.wlu.ca/about/governance/board-of-governors/membership.html>.

student representation, with undergraduate students occupying between one and three seats on university boards at OUSA member institutions, as seen in Table 3. Students contribute significantly to university operations through tuition and fees, yet they often have limited representation in the spaces where institutional priorities and financial decisions are discussed. To better reflect students' stake in post-secondary institutions, the provincial government should mandate that the ratio of student members of university boards to members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, if any, adequately reflect the relative contributions to university operations from tuition to provincial government funding

There is insufficient provincial regulation on the equitable representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies, which contributes to inconsistent representation across senates and boards. The variation shown in Tables 1 through 3 demonstrates that undergraduate representation differs widely across OUSA member institutions, both in the number of seats students hold and in how those seats are distributed. To begin addressing the limited student representation on university governance bodies, the provincial government should establish a triennial review and issue memoranda with clear and actionable recommendations to post-secondary institutions which evaluates students' impact within university governing bodies and equity in student representation across Ontario.

Additionally, there is a lack of clear and consistent data available regarding the demographics of university senate and board representatives. Individuals from marginalized groups face unique concerns in the post-secondary environment, and university senates play an important role in academic decision-making that must include equitable representation of the students impacted. OUSA's 2022 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey (OUSS) found that 40 percent of respondents identified as a "person of colour," or "a racialized person", 24 percent identified as Two-Spirit or LGBTQ+, 33 percent identified as having a disability or multiple disabilities, and nine percent identified as Indigenous.¹² Marginalized groups are further under-represented among institutional governance and senior leadership. Nationally, racialized individuals make up only eight percent of university senior leadership, disabled individuals make up about five percent, Indigenous people comprise about three percent, and Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ individuals make up about eight percent.¹³ To that end, OUSA recommends that the provincial government mandate universities implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of marginalized groups in their senior leadership and governance bodies. Alongside inclusive hiring practices, ensuring individuals from marginalized groups are supported and feel included on governance bodies and in leadership positions enables them to participate to their fullest.

¹² Octave Andrade-Dixon and Abishane Suthakaran, *Affordability: Results from the 2022 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*, research report, Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2025.

¹³ Universities Canada, "Equity Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian Universities: Report on the 2019 National Survey," Universities Canada, October 2019 , <https://univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019-1.pdf>.

STUDENT VOTING EQUITY ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Principle: Students should have the same voting privileges as any other voting member of university governance bodies.

Principle: Student voices should be considered as valuable as contributions from any other member of university governance bodies.

Concern: Students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them, due to actual and perception of inexperience.

Concern: Students may be discouraged from contributing to university governance discussions due to perceived power imbalances in university governance bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide EDIA, Indigenization, and governance procedure training that allow interested undergraduate students to gain knowledge and skills necessary to seek election for undergraduate student representation positions within university governance bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide training to enable the active participation of all members.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide training for all members of university governance bodies to address actual and perceived power imbalances between students and other members.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish a set of best practices for university governance bodies to ensure that students are represented and not unduly restricted from relevant committees nor from voting within their responsibilities.

Students are key stakeholders in the university environment, and their voices must carry equal weight in university governance. However, student representatives are often restricted or discouraged from voting on issues that directly impact them, based on the perception that they are inexperienced or lack the necessary expertise. This practice undermines the role of student representatives as legitimate members of university governance bodies and committees and diminishes the value of student perspectives.

As decisions being made within these governance bodies will largely be affecting students, it is only reasonable to prepare the few student voices adequately for the job. Undergraduate student representation on university boards typically make up under ten percent of the members. Considering this, lack of proper orientation and guidance on roles and responsibilities

has been cited as a significant barrier for all members of university governance bodies¹⁴. With school administrators, such as presidents and vice-presidents, having the most influence on decision making, students should be best prepared for expressing their concerns to affect change¹⁵. If this barrier exists for even the most experienced members, it is understandable for the gap to be even more significant for students who are in these positions for a short term. For example, students on university governance bodies at the University of Waterloo expressed a desire for more detailed context on agenda items to be shared with new student members, and for better training on procedure and rules of order. As well, students on smaller committees especially conveyed their frustration with a lack of training from the university, instead relying on their predecessors in student seats to pass on knowledge. If departing representatives are unavailable to pass on this knowledge, there is a risk of losing key information about institutional governance. To address the perception of inexperience, the provincial government should mandate that students occupying seats on university governance bodies be provided with adequate training and support to enhance their abilities to meaningfully engage with and provide useful feedback and insights to governance bodies.

Additionally, another major barrier expressed by students is the lack of advertisement and awareness of positions that exist on university governance bodies. Students are a major stakeholder in university conversations but are represented in a very small percentage in governing committees. Many students are unaware of opportunities that exist to participate in their schools committees and would appreciate a more active approach from administrators in recruiting interested students.¹⁶ Students may only be hearing about open positions from their respective student associations and their subsocieties as their institution's website does not adequately present the information. Student diversity in university governing bodies is an important objective, however, this becomes difficult to achieve when only students previously involved in student associations are being given information regarding governance seats. To address the overreliance on student groups in recruiting student representatives, the provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide resources and training that allow interested undergraduate students to learn knowledge and skills necessary to seek election to or apply for undergraduate student representation positions within university governance bodies.

¹⁴ Jones, Glen A., Theresa Shanahan, and Paul Goyan. "University Governance in Canadian Higher Education." *Tertiary Education and Management* 7, no. 2 (January 2001): 135–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2001.9967047>.

¹⁵ Powell, Billroy. "Stakeholders' Perception of Who Influences the Decision-making Processes in Ontario's Public Postsecondary Education Institutions." *Higher Education Research & Development* 27, no. 4 (December 2008): 385–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360802406841>.

¹⁶ Hossain, Fatema Rehana. "Student Participation in University Governance: A Qualitative Study." *Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University*, September 2015.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

DEGREE EXPECTATIONS

Principle: Undergraduate Degree Frameworks should clearly define and directly communicate the knowledge, skills, and competencies students are expected to develop by graduation.

Principle: All Undergraduate Degree-Level Expectations (UDLEs) should have integrated equity-based learning outcomes, ensuring that graduates gain competencies in equity, diversity, and inclusion alongside disciplinary expertise.

Principle: For professional programs, institutional and external accreditation standards should be coordinated to avoid duplication, misalignment, or contradictory requirements, and clearly outline expected employment pathways.

Concern: UDLEs are not easily accessible and inadequately communicated, making it difficult for students to know what competencies they should be achieving, leading to uneven standards across programs.

Concern: The structure and interpretation of the UDLEs framework are not currently standardized across institutions and lack clarity on how expectations and learning outcomes are articulated to students

Concern: There is limited Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism requirements in UDLEs.

Concern: Professional faculties often face conflicting requirements between institutional expectations and those set by external accreditation bodies.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should revise the UDLEs to clearly define learning outcomes, skills and competencies, and provide consistent guidance for institutions, while ensuring clear and accessible student-friendly language.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should work with institutions and professional and accreditation bodies to harmonize institutional degree expectations with accreditation requirements, reducing conflicting standards and consistency across Ontario programs.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should consult with equity-deserving students to develop and integrate measurable Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism competencies (I-EDIAA) into degree level expectations.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should ensure that student and graduate feedback is incorporated during the process of updating UDLEs by consulting with existing student bodies.

Degree-level expectations and frameworks are central to the quality assurance system in Ontario. The OUCQA oversees UDLEs, which outline the skills, knowledge, and competencies that undergraduate students should demonstrate by graduation. However, despite their importance, UDLEs remain vague and inconsistently applied across institutions. This lack of clarity limits students' ability to understand what they should be achieving at different stages of their education and undermines the comparability of degrees across the province.¹⁷ Students also have limited access to information about how program-level expectations translate into the courses that make up their degree, including course-specific learning outcomes, milestones by year of study, and how transfer credits map onto those competencies. Making these expectations publicly accessible at both the program and course level would help students compare similar programs across institutions and understand how individual courses contribute to their overall degree.¹⁸

Currently, UDLEs define broad outcomes such as “application of knowledge” or “awareness of limits of knowledge,” but do not provide clear or measurable benchmarks.¹⁹ Clear articulation of learning outcomes by year of study across institutions, and consistent communication of these outcomes to students, would help ensure that program expectations are not only comparable on paper but visible and understandable in day-to-day academic planning.²⁰ This vagueness has led to significant differences in interpretation among Ontario universities, leaving some students with fewer opportunities to demonstrate and develop expected competencies. Inconsistent application also poses challenges for transfer students, who often face difficulties moving between institutions when degree expectations are applied differently. This undermines student mobility and risks weakening public confidence in the quality of Ontario’s degrees.

Revising the UDLEs is therefore not only a technical exercise but a necessary update to align degree frameworks with how students actually progress through courses, how programs are evaluated, and how transfer and mobility occur across the system. The need for more clarity is also clear when considering how the provincial government measures program outcomes. SMA link institutional funding to performance metrics such as graduation rates, graduate employment, and earnings.²¹ Yet, if UDLEs remain subjective and inconsistently applied, there is a risk that PBF models will incentivize institutions to prioritize easily measured outcomes such as graduation rates or short-term employment figures, rather than ensuring that all students achieve meaningful learning. This creates misalignment between provincial accountability mechanisms and the foundational degree expectations on which they are meant to rest.²²

¹⁷ “Introduction,” *Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance*, accessed February 3, 2026, <https://oucqa.ca/framework/introduction/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Appendix 2: OCAV’s Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Level Expectations,” *Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance*, accessed February 3, 2026. <https://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-2/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements, 2020-2025 | ontario.ca. Accessed July 10, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements-2020-2025>.

²² Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, Introduction

Equity-based learning outcomes are another major gap. While some institutions, such as the University of Waterloo, have gone beyond the UDLEs by integrating additional expectations around experiential learning and diversity, this is not system-wide.²³ Graduates should leave Ontario universities with not only disciplinary expertise but also competencies in equity, diversity, and inclusion such as cultural awareness, inclusive communication, and understanding systemic barriers. Embedding these expectations into the UDLE framework would ensure consistent preparation for students to enter increasingly diverse workplaces and communities.

Quantitative evidence highlights the urgency for change. A 2023 HEQCO report found that students with disabilities are significantly less likely to graduate and, when they do, they experience poorer labour market outcomes, including higher rates of unemployment and lower income compared to their peers.²⁴ Similarly, a 2023 analysis linking postsecondary non-completion rates with labour market outcomes showed that students who leave without a credential face much higher risks of unstable employment and limited career mobility.²⁵ System-wide, the province's own performance data shows that 92 percent of Ontario university graduates are employed two years after graduation, but only 79 percent report working in a field related to their studies. These gaps illustrate why degree expectations must be both clear and equity-focused as it is not enough for students to graduate—they must graduate with relevant, transferable skills that prepare them for sustainable careers.

Professional programs face unique challenges within this framework. Faculties in nursing and engineering must balance institutional expectations with requirements set by external accreditation bodies. These bodies often mandate specific competencies that may not align easily with UDLEs, ultimately creating duplication or even contradictory requirements. For example, nursing faculties must demonstrate compliance with both institutional review processes and professional standards set by the College of Nurses of Ontario. In practice, this has led to extensive reporting requirements that duplicate work without improving outcomes. Greater coordination between OUCQA and professional accrediting organizations is needed to ensure consistent and non-duplicative standards across Ontario programs.

Qualitative evidence also highlights these gaps, showing that students find degree-level expectations inconsistently communicated and rarely useful for understanding what skills they will graduate with. Undergraduates expressed concerns that degree-level expectations are

²³ “Undergraduate Degree Learning Expectations (Udles): Academic Quality Enhancement: University of Waterloo.” *Academic Quality Enhancement*, December 11, 2024.
<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-quality-enhancement/degree-level-expectations-dles/undergraduate-degree-learning-expectations-udles>.

²⁴ Chatoor, Ken. “Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes for Ontario Students with Disabilities.” Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, June 2, 2021.
<https://heqco.ca/pub/postsecondary-credential-attainment-and-labour-market-outcomes-for-ontario-students-with-disabilities/>.

²⁵ Colyar, Julia, Ken Chatoor, and Janice Deakin. “Linking Postsecondary Non-Completion Rates and Labour Market Outcomes.” Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, November 8, 2023.
<https://heqco.ca/pub/linking-postsecondary-non-completion-rates-and-labour-market-outcomes/>.

rarely communicated in accessible language and do not clearly indicate the skills they will graduate with. Many students noted that, while their programs helped them develop disciplinary expertise, they felt underprepared for the demands of diverse workplaces and communities. This feedback aligns with research showing that institutions often emphasize compliance with degree frameworks rather than using them as tools to guide meaningful learning.²⁶

Students are also too often excluded from decisions about what constitutes quality learning. As primary stakeholders with lived experience in Ontario classrooms, students are best placed to identify whether degree-level expectations reflect the skills and knowledge required for success after graduation. Incorporating student feedback into revisions of UUDLEs would strengthen accountability and ensure that updated frameworks reflect both academic and real-world needs.

Taken together, the evidence points to several areas for improvement and OUSA's recommendations reflect these priorities. First, the OUCQA should revise the UDLEs to clearly define learning outcomes, skills and competencies, and provide consistent guidance for institutions, while ensuring clear and accessible student-friendly language. Second, the OUCQA should work with institutions and professional and accreditation bodies to harmonize institutional degree expectations with accreditation requirements, reducing conflicting standards and ensuring consistency across Ontario programs.²⁷

By consulting with equity-deserving students, OUCQA can ensure that degree frameworks include competencies in equity, diversity, and inclusion alongside traditional disciplinary skills. Third, the OUCQA should consult with equity-deserving students to develop and integrate measurable I-EDIAA into degree-level expectations. Finally, the OUCQA should ensure that student and graduate feedback is incorporated during the process of updating UDLEs by consulting with existing student bodies and publishing periodic public reports on progress toward updated expectations and related outcomes.²⁸

²⁶ "Introduction," Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance

²⁷ "Appendix 2: OCAV's undergraduate and graduate degree level expectations," Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance.

²⁸ "Introduction," Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance

INCREASING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS FROM EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS

Principle: The varying needs of students from equity-deserving groups in the post-secondary environment should be understood in order to improve the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education.

Principle: All students should have equitable access to post-secondary education, meaningful supports during their studies, and fair opportunities to succeed in their careers after graduation.

Principle: Equity deserving students should have access to adequate supports, as a necessary means of meaningful participation in post-secondary education.

Concern: There is a lack of data linking the quality of post-secondary education to the pathways and labour market outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups, making it difficult to identify barriers within institutions and design effective supports that improve both educational and employment equity.

Concern: Existing institutional supports for equity-deserving students are inconsistent, negatively impacting participation, retention, and post graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups across Ontario.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities collect and publish disaggregated data on the participation, retention, and post-graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups, using non-compulsory self-identification methods .

Recommendation: The provincial government should task the HEQCO with conducting consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to better inform equity-focused recommendations for the post-secondary sector.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide targeted funding for universities to expand supports for equity-deserving students during their degrees.

The varying needs of students from equity-deserving groups in the post-secondary environment should be understood in order to improve the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education. Students of Ontario universities should be given access to support to ensure their entry, completion, and guidance into a job market are as barrier free as possible. Within the current climate in Canada, all students face difficulties while completing their degrees, and those difficulties are exacerbated for racialized, queer, indigenous, and other historically excluded groups. Existing institutional supports for equity-deserving students are inconsistent, negatively impacting participation, retention, and post graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups across Ontario.

Building the infrastructure to address this begins with disaggregated evidence within the city of Hamilton linking student records with labour-market information shows that when administrative and employment data are connected under strong privacy safeguards, it becomes possible to see retention, completion, and early-career outcomes by equity markers rather than averages that conceal gaps.²⁹ These analyses also show that non-completion carries measurable penalties in employment and earnings, costs that fall most heavily on students who faced barriers within the system to begin with.³⁰ Furthermore, Canada-wide job-quality research finds that racialized workers are less likely to access comparable job quality, including lower earnings and reduced pension coverage, even when education levels are similar to their non-racialized counterparts. This signals inequities that persist beyond graduation unless institutions and government act on evidence³¹. Without disaggregated data published consistently across the sector, quality assurance frameworks can only test average performance and fail to track whether reforms are working for the students they are intended to serve.³² More so, programs designed to better equip undergraduate students for the workforce post-graduation do not always deliver equal benefit to all students. For example, the University of Waterloo's co-op program is regarded as one of the best in the world. Students who participate in the program have greater skill development, stronger professional networks, and higher post-graduation employment rates and earnings.³³ However, this is often not the outcome for Waterloo's equity-deserving students. These students tend to not participate in the program as much as students not from equity-deserving groups. As well, some students from these groups who do participate report various forms of inequality such as discrimination, unequal access to resources, and underemployment.³⁴ Addressing these gaps is essential if universities want to aim to serve all its students, not just those who already hold structural advantages. These inequities show the structural conditions that only coordinated provincial policy can meaningfully change. The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities collect and publish disaggregated data on the participation, retention, and post-graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups, using non-compulsory self-identification methods. With this data, universities and the province could see which students are being left behind, where in their degree they are most at risk of leaving, and whether existing supports are actually working. As

²⁹ Au, April, Jackie Pichette, and Karen Robson. "The Power of Connected Data: Charting Student Pathways to and through Postsecondary in Hamilton." Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2022. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Power-of-Connected-Data-CRP-Pathways-Report-Final-English.pdf>.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Galarneau, Diane, Sylvie Brunet, and Liliana Corak. "Early Career Job Quality of Racialized Canadian Graduates with a Bachelor's Degree, 2014 to 2017 Cohorts." Statistics Canada, January 18, 2023. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00001-eng.htm>.

³² Ibid

³³ Khan, Tauhid Hossain, David Drewery, Idris Ademuyiwa, Annie-Marie Fannon, and Colleen Phillips-Davis. "An Investigation of Barriers Experienced by Students from Equity-Deserving Groups in a Canadian Co-Op Program." *International Journal of WIL*, 2024. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1432621.pdf>.

³⁴ Ibid

well, the provincial government should provide targeted funding for universities to expand support for equity-deserving students during their degrees.

INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY AND LEARNING STRUCTURES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Principle: All post-secondary students should have equitable access to physical, hybrid, and online learning spaces, supported by a wide range of accessible learning resources that accommodate diverse disabilities and learning needs.

Principle: Accessibility requirements in post-secondary education should follow standards that meet the needs of students with disabilities and proactively remove barriers.

Concern: Some post-secondary institutions deny academic accommodations without offering alternative supports and have inconsistent supports across campuses.

Concern: Currently, students with disabilities lack equal access to physical spaces on campus, and are often uninformed about available accessibility services or how to access them.

Concern: The current *AODA* framework is not sufficient for student accessibility needs in post-secondary education.

Concern: The provincial deadline for updating post-secondary accessibility standards (January 2025) has passed without implementation, leaving students with disabilities without the supports promised under *AODA*.

Recommendation: The provincial government should adopt all formal *AODA* recommendations for both physical and digital learning environments on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce dedicated and scalable funding to support institutions in retrofitting non-compliant older buildings and ensuring new construction projects meet *AODA* standards, with funding levels that reflect project size and institutional capacity.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase post-secondary special purpose grants to expand accessibility of hybrid learning technology; including high-flex classrooms, lecture capture with transcripts, and digital learning infrastructure, for all students, not only those registered with accessibility services.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence, and Security should require institutions to submit public annual reports on progress toward meeting accessibility targets, with accountability measures for non-compliance and implement the Development of Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards; Final Recommendations Report (2022) in full with a clear implementation plan.

All post-secondary students should have equitable access to physical, hybrid, and online learning spaces, supported by a wide range of accessible learning resources that accommodate diverse disabilities and learning needs. Quality in post-secondary education depends on whether students with disabilities can learn consistently and with dignity across physical, hybrid, and online environments. Students continue to report barriers in legacy buildings, inconsistent implementation of accessibility standards, and mixed experiences with digital tools that either enable participation or block it. In some cases, students may also be denied academic accommodations without being offered alternative supports, leaving them without meaningful access to their courses.

The scale of need is well documented. In 2022, 27 percent of Canadians aged 15 and over reported one or more disabilities, and among youth aged 15 to 24 the rate was 17 percent, with learning, mental-health, and mobility disabilities prominent, all directly affected by how spaces and schedules are designed.³⁵ A province-wide review of accessibility services found growing registrations with Offices for Students with Disabilities and increasing complexity of needs, which strains capacity even where institutional commitment is strong.³⁶ Students describe inaccessible routes, unreliable building infrastructure, and lecture spaces with inadequate auditory supports, all of which translate into lost participation and unequal outcomes. These barriers are exacerbated when students are not clearly informed about available accessibility services, how to request support, or where to turn when existing supports are insufficient.

Accessibility requirements in post-secondary education should follow standards that meet the needs of students with disabilities and proactively remove barriers. However, the current AODA framework has not yet produced consistent, enforceable post-secondary standards that fully respond to student accessibility needs. This gap has become more urgent because the provincial deadline for updating post-secondary accessibility standards in January 2025 has passed without implementation, leaving students with disabilities without the supports promised under the AODA.³⁷ Without adoption, access remains inconsistent across institutions, where outcomes depend on uneven implementation of accessibility standards rather than clear provincial requirements.³⁸

³⁵ Robin Pianosi, Laura Presley, Jeannie Buchanan, Amélie Lévesque, Sarah-Anne Savard, and Janet Lam, *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022: Concepts and Methods Guide*, Reports on Disability and Accessibility in Canada, Statistics Canada, December 1, 2023.

³⁶ Sara Lanthier, Rachel Tishcoff, Sarah Gordon, and Julia Colyar, *Accessibility Services at Ontario Colleges and Universities: Trends, Challenges and Recommendations for Government Funding Strategies*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2023.

³⁷ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance (AODA), “Torrent of Media on Ontario Government’s Failure to Meet the 2025 Deadline for Ontario to Become Accessible,” January 8, 2025, <https://www.aodaalliance.org/whats-new/torrent-of-media-on-ontario-governments-failure-to-meet-the-2025-deadline-for-ontario-to-become-accessible/>

³⁸ Government of Ontario, “Development of Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards”; AODA Alliance, “Torrent of Media on Ontario Government’s Failure.”

Ontario already has a blueprint that could close the gap between principle and practice. The Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee's Final Recommendations Report from 2022 sets out detailed guidance for proactively identifying and eliminating barriers in physical and digital learning environments in colleges and universities.³⁹ Adoption would create consistent expectations for space types and numbers, routes and wayfinding, and digital requirements such as captioning, procurement standards, and accessible learning platforms. The response requires movement on four fronts that work together.

First, the province should adopt all formal AODA recommendations for both physical and digital learning environments on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee, converting principles into expectations that students can rely on.⁴⁰

Second, the provincial government should introduce dedicated and scalable funding to support institutions in retrofitting non-compliant older buildings and ensuring new construction projects meet AODA standards. Many campuses include heritage facilities that are complex and costly to modify, and without envelope funding specifically for accessibility projects, institutions will continue to trade off basic access against other pressures. Recent modernization funds show that targeted capital support is possible and can be aligned with accessibility priorities.⁴¹

Third, the provincial government should increase post-secondary special-purpose grants to expand accessible hybrid learning technology including high-flex classrooms, lecture capture with transcripts, and digital learning infrastructure, for all students, not only those registered with accessibility services. Students reported that captioning, lecture capture, and flexible pacing reduced friction when delivered consistently, and that gaps in captioning, inaccessible platforms, and unreliable room technology created new barriers.⁴² Province-wide reviews and national surveys documented the same pattern, namely that accessible, well-designed digital tools embed inclusion into course delivery and reduce reliance on ad hoc accommodations, while inconsistent implementation undermines accessibility.⁴³

Fourth, the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence, and Security should require institutions to submit public annual reports on progress toward meeting accessibility targets, with accountability measures for non-compliance, and should implement the Development of

³⁹ Government of Ontario, "Development of Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards: Final Recommendations Report 2022," April 22, 2022.

⁴⁰ Lanthier et al., *Accessibility Services at Ontario Colleges and Universities*, 19-20.

⁴¹ Government of Ontario, "Ontario Helping Colleges and Universities Build Better Facilities," news release, January 24, 2025, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005632/ontario-helping-colleges-and-universities-build-better-facilities>

⁴² Tasneem Irhouma and Nicole Johnson, *Digital Learning in Canada in 2022: A Changing Landscape*, 2022 National Report, Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, 2022.

⁴³ Sara Lanthier, Julia Colyar, and Jessica Deakin, *Ontario College and University Investments in Digital Learning During the Pandemic*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2023 .

Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards; Final Recommendations Report in full with a clear implementation plan. Public sector organizations already operate under accessibility compliance reporting requirements⁴⁴; applying a similar approach to post-secondary targets would increase transparency and provide students with predictable information

Quantitative evidence supports these steps because disability prevalence among youth is significant and demand for support has grown sharply. Statistics Canada's 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability identified approximately 8.0 million Canadians aged 15 and older with one or more disabilities.⁴⁵ In Ontario postsecondary education, HEQCO found that students registered with Offices for Students with Disabilities rose from 54,354 in 2013–14 to 97,090 in 2021–22 across colleges and universities combined, an increase of about 79 percent. University OSD registrations grew even faster, from 25,799 to 58,245, a 126 percent increase, while college registrations rose from 28,555 to 38,845, a 36 percent increase.⁴⁶ Qualitative accounts reinforce the case because when courses are scheduled in inaccessible rooms, when captioning fails, or when students are left without clear information about available supports, accommodations become workarounds that still cost students time, energy, and grades. In contrast, reliable lecture capture, captioning, accessible design, and clear pathways to accessibility services reduce the need for individual fixes and increase participation. These reforms are not separate items; standards without funding stall, funding without timelines drifts, and either without reporting lacks accountability. Together they move Ontario from episodic accommodation to system accessibility.

Quality assurance is ultimately about whether the system works for those it serves. For students with disabilities, that means the building to which a course is assigned, the platform a course uses, and the accessibility process a student must navigate should not determine whether that student can learn that day. Adopting the standards, funding the retrofits, investing in accessible digital infrastructure, and requiring public reporting are the practical steps that align policy with students' everyday reality.

QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Principle: Institutions should be held accountable for ensuring that quality assurance processes are transparent, evidence-based, and reflect the diverse experiences of Ontario's undergraduate students.

Principle: Students should have meaningful input into how quality assurance mechanisms are designed, implemented, and reviewed, including active participation in consultations and decision-making rather than token or symbolic engagement.

⁴⁴ Government of Ontario, "Completing Your Accessibility Compliance Report," published December 2, 2016, updated February 19, 2026 <https://www.ontario.ca/page/completing-your-accessibility-compliance-report>

⁴⁵ Pianosi et al., *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022*, 13.

⁴⁶ Lanthier et al., *Accessibility Services at Ontario Colleges and Universities*, 11.

Principle: The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure quality assurance mechanisms establish consistent, sector-wide standards that make program quality comparable across institutions.

Principle: Data regarding the participation of students from equity-deserving groups in the labour market is necessary in order to identify and address how barriers in post-secondary education impact graduates' professional outcomes, with particular attention to equity and inclusion.

Concern: Current quality assurance frameworks lack clarity or transparency, making it difficult to measure the effectiveness of learning outcomes and institutional performance.

Concern: Current institutional bias in the development and reporting of quality assurance measures can lead to inconsistent standards and limit meaningful accountability.

Concern: Current course evaluation processes may allow students to disclose systemic inequities in their experiences, but institutions are not consistently responsive or transparent in addressing this feedback, leading to limited accountability and follow-through.

Concern: Universities do not consistently collect or report disaggregated data on the post-graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups, limiting the sector's ability to address inequities.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage universities to review course evaluation processes, ensuring that data collection is equitable and that feedback is meaningfully implemented into teaching and program improvements.

Recommendation: The OUCQA should incorporate feedback from current students, alumni, faculty and industry consultants during cyclical program reviews and ensure the process includes at least one student reviewer and one reviewer from a field of work relevant to the respective program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with the OUCQA to reduce institutional bias by creating independent oversight, standardizing reporting, expanding external review, and enforcing compliance with quality standards.

Recommendation: MCURES should require institutions to make quality assurance performance reviews and related data publicly available to ensure accountability and comparability across institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should require the collection and public reporting of disaggregated, non-compulsory data on the participation and post-graduation outcomes of equity-deserving students, with HEQCO mandated to analyze and consult on findings.

Strong quality assurance mechanisms are essential to maintaining the accountability and credibility of Ontario's post-secondary education system. Institutions must not only ensure that their academic programs meet basic standards, but also that these standards are transparent, evidence-based, and reflective of the diverse experiences of Ontario's undergraduate students. Without clear, consistent, and independent quality assurance practices, students face uncertainty about the value of their degrees, and the sector risks decreasing public trust in higher education.

The OUCQA is currently responsible for overseeing program-level quality through the approval of new programs, cyclical program reviews, and audits of institutional quality assurance processes. While this framework has established a baseline, it remains limited in scope and application. In 2018, an external review of the Quality Assurance Framework called for an expansion beyond institutional compliance toward encouraging genuine investments in quality improvement.⁴⁷ Despite this recommendation, Ontario's system remains focused on procedural compliance rather than meaningful accountability or student experience.⁴⁸

This limitation is reflected in the current Institutional Quality Assurance Process requirements. Although institutional quality assurance processes require two external reviewers during cyclical program reviews,⁴⁹ these reviewers are typically associate or full professors from related academic fields rather than industry professionals. As a result, reviews may miss important insight into the skills, competencies, and expectations graduates will face in their fields. Consulting representatives from relevant industries would strengthen quality assurance by helping programs better prepare students for employment, professional success, and evolving workforce needs.

The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure quality assurance mechanisms establish consistent, sector-wide standards that make program quality comparable across institutions. However clarity and comparability remain significant concerns. Current frameworks lack standardized, sector-wide metrics for evaluating learning outcomes, making it difficult to assess whether programs across Ontario provide comparable value. This issue is conjoined by the government's increased reliance on PBF models, which tie institutional resources to outcomes such as graduate employment and earnings. Without clear, consistent learning outcome standards, these models risk incentivizing institutions to prioritize easily measured outcomes rather than addressing deeper issues of teaching quality and student success. To address this, the OUCQA should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

⁴⁷ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, *Introduction*

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, *External evaluation*

Institutional bias also poses a challenge. Because quality assurance processes are developed and reported internally, institutions have significant discretion in shaping the criteria and evidence used to evaluate program quality. This can lead to uneven standards and limit accountability. For example, cyclical reviews may emphasize institutional strengths while downplaying weaknesses, with little external oversight to correct for bias. Stronger provincial involvement and independent oversight mechanisms are needed to ensure that universities are held to consistent standards and that reporting is impartial.

Students have consistently expressed frustration with how quality assurance measures fail to reflect their lived experiences. Course evaluations are the most common tool used to capture student feedback, yet they are widely criticized for being inconsistent, prone to bias, and insufficiently acted upon. Further, evaluations rarely require students to provide feedback on whether courses are inclusive, accessible, or reflective of equity principles. When institutions do collect meaningful feedback, mechanisms for acting on it remain opaque. As a result, students feel their voices are undervalued and their concerns overlooked.

Reform is needed to ensure student feedback is collected equitably and meaningfully implemented into program and teaching improvements. This is not only a matter of fairness but also one of accountability: students are the primary stakeholders in post-secondary education and should have input into how programs are evaluated. OUSA recommends that the provincial government require universities to review and reform course evaluation processes to ensure that data collection is equitable and that feedback is incorporated into program improvements.

The OUCQA should incorporate feedback from current students, alumni, faculty and industry consultants during cyclical program reviews and ensure the process includes at least one student reviewer and one reviewer from a field of work relevant to the respective program. Currently, review teams are typically composed of faculty and external academic experts, but rarely include students or industry professionals.⁵⁰ Adding at least one student reviewer and incorporating feedback from both current students and graduates would strengthen accountability and ensure that reviews capture the lived experience of learning. Student inclusion in these processes is consistent with the principle that students should have meaningful input into how quality assurance mechanisms are designed, implemented, and reviewed.⁵¹

Public reporting is another critical gap. At present, many institutional quality assurance reviews and outcomes are either not published or buried deep in university websites, inaccessible to students and the public. This lack of transparency undermines accountability and prevents sector-wide comparisons. OUSA recommends that MCURES require institutions to publish quality assurance performance reviews and related data in accessible formats. Clear, comparable

⁵⁰ Chatoor, *Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes*

⁵¹ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, *Introduction*

reporting would not only support accountability but also help students make informed decisions about their education.

Equity considerations must also be integrated into quality assurance. Data regarding the participation of students from equity-deserving groups in the labour market is necessary in order to identify and address how barriers in post-secondary education impact graduates' professional outcomes, with particular attention to equity and inclusion. Universities do not consistently collect or report disaggregated data on the participation and post-graduation outcomes of equity-deserving groups, leaving major gaps in understanding how systemic barriers affect graduates' professional outcomes. A 2023 HEQCO report found that students with disabilities were significantly less likely to graduate and, when they did, were more likely to experience unemployment or lower incomes compared to their peers.⁵² Similarly, a 2023 HEQCO analysis linking postsecondary non-completion rates with labour market outcomes showed that students who leave without a credential face much higher risks of unstable employment and limited career mobility.⁵³ Without systematic collection and reporting of equity data, institutions cannot be held accountable for addressing these disparities. The provincial government should require the collection and public reporting of disaggregated, non-compulsory data on the participation and post-graduation outcomes of equity-deserving students, with HEQCO mandated to analyze and consult on findings.

To strengthen independence, the provincial government should also work with OUCQA to reduce institutional bias by establishing external oversight of quality assurance implementation and reporting. This should include setting standardized reporting criteria, expanding the role of external reviewers, and introducing enforcement measures for institutions that fail to meet quality assurance standards.⁵⁴ Independent oversight would ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are not only rigorous but also impartial and credible.

Taken together, these reforms would create a stronger, more transparent, and more equitable quality assurance system for Ontario's universities. By clarifying learning outcomes, strengthening oversight, incorporating student voice, and embedding equity considerations, Ontario can ensure that all students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for meaningful careers and civic participation.

⁵² Chatoor, *Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes*

⁵³ Colyar et al., *Linking Postsecondary Non-Completion Rates and Labour Market Outcomes*

⁵⁴ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, *Introduction*

CAPACITY EXPANSION

INDIGENOUS STUDENTS' SUPPORT OVERVIEW

Envisioning PSE in ON cannot happen without consideration of Indigeneity in our system. As such, this section aims to provide a macro-level overview. However, specific nuances can be found in our Indigenous Students paper which can be read [here](#).

Principle: Indigenous students should be supported in their post-secondary pursuits through spaces and learning objectives dedicated to Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing.

Principle: Indigenous students have strong connections to diverse communities across Ontario and deserve to attend post-secondary while preserving these ties.

Principle: The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies.

Principle: The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs that ensure access and transportation to post-secondary education.

Concern: Most post-secondary institutions in Ontario are located in the southern regions which heightens community disconnect for Indigenous students from northern First Nation Reserves.

Concern: There is consistently inadequate support and celebration of Indigenous voices, students, culture, and representation in post-secondary spaces

Recommendation: The Ministry of Transportation in partnership with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation should work to expand affordable and reliable public transportation options available in rural and northern areas and Indigenous communities that connect to Southern Ontario through a strategic transit plan.

Recommendation: The provincial government should further invest in programs, resources and support focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase funding through the Indigenous Student Success Fund for Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses.

Indigenous students have strong connections to diverse communities across Ontario and deserve to pursue post-secondary education while maintaining these ties. However, most post-secondary institutions in Ontario are concentrated in the southern regions, with approximately 40 universities and satellite campuses located in southern Ontario.⁵⁵ This forces

⁵⁵ [Find postsecondary institutions | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/my-career-journey/find-postsecondary-institutions/)

Government of Ontario, "Find Postsecondary Institutions," *Government of Ontario*, 2026, <https://www.ontario.ca/my-career-journey/find-postsecondary-institutions/>.

Indigenous students from northern regions to choose between connection with their communities and a post-secondary education. The geographic challenge leads to heightened disconnections from family, culture, and traditional lands, impacting the mental health and academic performance of many Indigenous students. From a 2020 study of university students in Canada, approximately 54 percent of Indigenous students surveyed withdrew from their programs before completion and did not return back.⁵⁶

The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs that ensure access and transportation to post-secondary education. Although a transportation plan is already required under the government's Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework in an effort to increase student access, Indigenous students continue to face barriers to post-secondary education related to distance, cost, and access. These barriers align with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's broader Calls to Action on closing educational gaps and improving support for First Nations students pursuing post-secondary education.⁵⁷ These barriers are especially significant for Indigenous students from northern and remote communities, who may be required to leave their families, cultures, and traditional lands in order to pursue post-secondary education. To reduce these barriers, the Ministry of Transportation, in partnership with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, should work to expand affordable and reliable public transportation options available in rural and northern areas and Indigenous communities that connect to Southern Ontario through a strategic transit plan.

To succeed in their post-secondary pursuits, Indigenous students must also be supported through spaces, programs, and learning objectives dedicated to Indigenous culture and ways of knowing. Currently, there has not been enough recognition or celebration of the voices and culture of Indigenous people across Ontario campuses. Many universities continue to operate in spaces shaped by colonial histories, where Indigenous knowledge and culture are not adequately valued or integrated into institutional life. This lack of culturally relevant support contributes to alienation and additional barriers for Indigenous students, with 45 percent of Indigenous students reporting experiences with racism and marginalization in post-secondary education.⁵⁸ To strengthen culturally relevant campus supports, the provincial government should increase

⁵⁶ [Creating a "sense of belonging" for Indigenous students: identifying supports to improve access and success in post-secondary education - Rose E Cameron \(Anishinaabekwe\), Meghan J Bird, Deanna D. Naveau-Heyde \(Mattagami First Nation\), Esme Fuller-Thomson, 2024](#)

Cameron (Anishinaabekwe), Rose E, Meghan J Bird, Deanna D. Naveau-Heyde (Mattagami First Nation), and Esme Fuller-Thomson. "Creating a 'Sense of Belonging' for Indigenous Students: Identifying Supports to Improve Access and Success in Post-Secondary Education." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 20, no. 4 (November 11, 2024): 732–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801241291242>.

⁵⁷ National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action," University of Manitoba, accessed June 10, 2026.

<https://nctr.ca/about/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada-calls-to-action/>

⁵⁸ [Indigenous-Education Factsheets 2021 EN.pdf](#)

Canadian Federation of Students, "Factsheet: Indigenous Education." *Canadian Federation of Students*, October 2021. https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Indigenous-Education_Factsheets_2021_EN.pdf.

funding through the Indigenous Student Success Fund for Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses.

The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies. Indigenous languages, cultures, and knowledge systems are essential to supporting Indigenous students' academic success, cultural connection, and sense of belonging in post-secondary education. To address the challenges faced by Indigenous students, the provincial government should further invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes. Greater access to Indigenous-centred programming would help preserve and revitalize languages and cultures, while providing opportunities for all students to learn about Indigenous knowledge systems. Making Indigenous-centred programming available in publicly-assisted universities is a first step to integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into the academics and operations of universities rather than leaving them in isolated programs or Indigenous institutions. This would also provide Indigenous students studying away from their communities a means of staying connected with their traditions and continuing their learning of Indigenous culture.

Finally, the provincial government should ensure that the needs of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff are met through a provincial Indigenous advisory committee directed by Indigenous voices. The advisory committee should allow Indigenous people to directly address their concerns with the provincial government and have an active role in improving university education for Indigenous people. The provincial government and Ontario's universities have an opportunity to take a forefront role in supporting Indigenous students and community members while also actively responding to pre-existing reports and recommendations.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT RURAL AND NORTHERN STUDENTS

Principle: Rural and northern students should have the same level of access to broadband internet, technology, transportation, and university campuses as students living in southern urban areas.

Concern: Students in rural and northern communities face additional financial barriers to accessing reliable internet required for post-secondary education.

Concern: Private sector internet providers are not effectively incentivized to support access to quality internet service in rural and northern areas.

Concern: Rural and northern students face greater barriers compared to urban students in accessing inter-regional transportation options to their post-secondary institutions and/or experiential learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to rural and/or northern students who require access to technology off-campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to engage in providing financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet and technology to rural and northern communities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Transportation should create and incentivize expanded options connecting rural and northern communities to southern Ontario.

Every student in Ontario, regardless of where they are living, should have equal opportunity to access post secondary educational spaces, and the technology needed to support their studies. Students who are living in rural, northern and remote communities often face additional barriers to access due to geography, lack of transit and transportation infrastructure, and poor internet service.

While the provincial and federal governments have jointly committed to ensuring that everyone in Canada, including those living in remote areas, has access to high-speed internet by 2030.⁵⁹ There are still many communities in the province that struggle with reliable service. According to a recent study, 75 percent of Northern Ontario households have access to the minimum service levels of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload.⁶⁰ However, this number decreases to around 56 percent of households with access in more remote communities, and around 25 percent of Northern Ontario has below standard to no discernable broadband service.⁶¹ The provincial goal of having all of Ontario connected to internet services by 2025, has been delayed until 2028.⁶² Diagrams show infrastructure ending in the Hearst and Kapuskasing areas,⁶³ leaving the northern most areas of the province un-serviced. It is crucial that the provincial government continue to engage in providing financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet and technology to rural and northern communities.

⁵⁹Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. "Expanding High-Speed Internet Access in Northern Ontario." *Government of Canada*, June 24, 2024.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2024/06/expanding-high-speed-internet-access-in-northern-ontario.html>.

⁶⁰Blue Sky Net. "2025 Northern Ontario Broadband Report." *Blue Sky Note*, 2025.
https://connectednorth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-Northern-Ontario-Broadband-Report_FEB-2025.pdf.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶²Government of Ontario. "Ontario Bringing High-Speed Internet Access to Underserved Communities." *Government of Ontario*, September 16, 2024.
<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005054/ontario-bringing-high-speed-internet-access-to-underserved-communities>.

⁶³Government of Ontario. "Ontario Connects: Making High-Speed Internet Accessible in Every Community." *Government of Ontario*, November 14, 2025.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-connects-making-high-speed-internet-accessible-in-every-community>.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-connects-making-high-speed-internet-accessible-in-every-community>

In April of 2023, the Provincial Government committed \$8.4 million in funding to support 14 service provider lead projects through the Improving Connectivity for Ontario program.⁶⁴ Until those initiatives are complete, a limited number of internet providers currently service rural and far northern regions resulting in less competition for pricing and higher internet costs than in urban centres. To help off-set the pricing difference, the provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to rural and/or northern students who require access to off-campus technology.

Students, particularly those in remote, northern regions must often travel significant distances in order to access campus amenities. For a student living in Fort Severn, the nearest post secondary institution is located in Manitoba. If they wished to stay within Ontario as a domestic student, the nearest campuses would be several hundred kilometers away at Thunder Bay, Kapuskasing, or Timmins. Road, rail and bus service in rural and remote areas are often infrequent or completely non-existent, increasing the difficulty for those students to travel to a learning centre. The Ministry of Transportation should create and incentivize expanded transportation options connecting rural and northern communities to other parts of the province, especially learning centres in southern Ontario.

Prior to 2017, OSAP offered an Ontario Distance Grant to students who lived more than 80 km away from the nearest publicly-assisted post secondary institution. Changes in the OSAP system after this time resulted in a consolidation of grants with little transparency into how funding for distance was calculated, if in fact it was still being considered. While there is an Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant available to assist First Nations students living in zones three or four⁶⁵, there are several qualifications that must be met, and funding is not guaranteed. To better assist any student who must travel or relocate in order to attend a publicly-assisted facility, the provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS

Principle: Francophone students have the right to engage and participate in courses instructed in the French language and benefit from the diverse post-secondary education sector in Ontario.

Principle: Francophone students should have access to adequate instructional materials and programming in French across Ontario's numerous post-secondary institutions.

⁶⁴Government of Ontario. "Bringing High-Speed Internet Access to More Residents and Businesses." *Government of Ontario*, April 27, 2023. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1002985/bringing-high-speed-internet-access-to-more-residents-and-businesses>.

⁶⁵MCURES Student Financial Assistance Branch. "2023-24 Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant." *Government of Ontario*, 2023. https://osap.gov.on.ca/prdosapconsum/groups/forms/documents/forms/pocont1_082275.pdf.

Concern: In recent years, institutions that offer programs in the French language have not been protected financially nor has their longevity been prioritized by the provincial government

Concern: Francophone students have very limited options for learning in French and must choose between relocating and learning in another language.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions that offer programs in the French language do not offer a wide-array of diverse courses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue investing in existing French programs as well as programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language.

Recommendation: The provincial government should reintroduce the Ontario Distance Grant for OSAP-eligible Francophone students who are attending full-time studies in French and must travel to get to their post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work directly with universities offering programs in the French language to ensure solvency and ongoing financial support for post-secondary institutions that have French language programs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to Ontario post-secondary institutions to recruit instructors for French programs to promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with post-secondary institutions to support a joint college/university program that would allow Francophone students to cross-enroll between institutions and easily transfer their credits to improve access to a wide array of French courses.

Francophone students in Ontario should be able to access quality education opportunities in their language of choice and benefit from the diverse post-secondary education sector in Ontario. However, the number of institutions offering full French-language studies remains small and there are limited opportunities for students to pursue studies in French. Francophone students have very limited options for learning in French and must choose between relocating or learning in another language. Within Ontario, over 17,000 residents between the ages of 15 and 24 have French as their mother tongue, and over 77,000 French speakers across the province.⁶⁶ Despite this, there are only two publicly funded French-language colleges and ten

⁶⁶ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "All Languages Spoken at Home by Mother Tongue, Knowledge of Official Languages and Generation Status: Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations with Parts." Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, June 21, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810061701-eng>.

French-language and bilingual institutions offering university programs.⁶⁷ These schools are spread only across five cities and so students living outside of areas that are recognized to be regionally bilingual such as Sudbury, Hurst, Ottawa, Kingston and Toronto who wish to pursue education in French must choose between relocating, taking limited classes in a bilingual setting, or continuing their education in a secondary language. International students arriving in Ontario from Western and Central Africa make up a growing part of francophone post-secondary enrolment. Their numbers grew significantly after 2016, and between 2017 and 2022 the share of international students at Collège Boréal and Collège La Cité quadrupled.⁶⁸ Furthermore, more than half the students at Université de Hearst and the Université de l'Ontario français are now international students. Recent federal reductions to study permits issued in 2024, intended to address housing and immigration pressures, risk undermining the financial stability of these rare institutions.⁶⁹ The benefits of being able to access a French education go beyond cultural preservation and identity. Graduates from the two French colleges, Collège Boréal and Collège La Cité, have better employment rates six months after graduation than those from other Ontario colleges.⁷⁰ The scope and range of programs offered in French are limited. Even at institutions that do offer French language programs, options tend to be narrow in scope. Queen's University, for example, offers French studies covering literature, film, translation, and culture, but this represents a single department rather than a broad range of disciplines.⁷¹ An infusion of \$10.8 million was invested into the University of Sudbury to re-launch French programming in a variety of fields including health, business and the arts⁷². This signals that gaps in program availability remain significant enough to require meaningful public investment from governments.

Some institutions like the University of Windsor and University of Ottawa have formed their own partnerships to recognize French language transfer credits between universities.⁷³ However, there is room for additional collaboration between universities and the two existing

⁶⁷ Government of Ontario. "French-Language Colleges and Universities." Ontario, June 5, 2026.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-language-colleges-and-universities>.

⁶⁸ Naisby, Jonathan, Marie-Eve Pépin, and Matthieu Brennan. "Study on French-Language Postsecondary Education in Ontario." L'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, March 31, 2024.
https://api.monassemblee.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/AFO-Final-report-Postsecondary-education-BBA_final.pdf.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Queen's University. "French Studies." Queen's University, 2025.
<https://queensu-ca-public.courseleaf.com/arts-science/schools-departments-programs/french-studies/>.

⁷² Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. "Ontario Expanding French-Language Postsecondary Education in the North." *Government of Ontario*, April 27, 2023.
<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1006159/ontario-expanding-french-language-postsecondary-education-in-the-north>.

⁷³ University of Windsor. "UWindsor and Uottawa Partner to Strengthen French-Language Transfer Credit Recognition across Ontario." *Education News Canada*, February 10, 2026.
<https://educationnewscanada.com/article/education/category/education/95/1183629/university-of-windsorfebruary-10-2026-uwindsor-and-uottawa-partner-to-strengthen-french-language-transfer-credit-recognition-across-ontario.html>.

French language colleges to expand the range of courses available to students. The provincial government should continue investing in existing French programs as well as programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language. As well, the provincial government should work with post-secondary institutions to support joint college/university programs that would allow Francophone students to cross-enroll between institutions and easily transfer their credits to improve access to a wider array of courses taught in French.

DEFERRED CAMPUS MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

Principle: Physical spaces on university campuses should ensure an accessible and safe space for all students, including, but not limited to those with disabilities, and respiratory conditions.

Principle: Information regarding institutional deferred maintenance should be readily accessible to students, staff, and community stakeholders.

Principle: Students living with disabilities should not be impeded from accessing spaces and services on campus due to delayed maintenance or inadequate infrastructure

Principle: Post-secondary maintenance should be completed in a timely manner to foster a safe environment for students, community members, staff and visitors.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions in Ontario should not defer maintenance as a means of budgetary savings.

Principle: Deferred maintenance should not unreasonably impact students' access to important physical infrastructure.

Concern: There is a significant backlog of maintenance requests across post-secondary campuses, resulting in inaccessible and unsafe learning spaces.

Concern: Currently, no standardized post-secondary AODA education policy is in place to ensure standards for physical spaces on post-secondary campuses.

Concern: The Blue Ribbon Panel failed to address Ontario's lack of a standardized post-secondary AODA education policy of physical spaces on campuses, thus leaving a significant gap in accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities.

Concern: As facilities reach their physical end of life, they restrict students' access to spaces, and overall safety.

Concern: The inequitable cost sharing system is delaying the completion of facilities renewal and increasing costs to students.

Concern: The current government funding model, which requires matching contributions from private-sector partners, results in a system where institutions cannot reliably depend on necessary funding.

Concern: The lack of easily accessible information regarding deferred maintenance in Ontario's postsecondary institutions makes it difficult for stakeholders outside of the Ministry of Colleges & Universities to hold institutions accountable.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current *AODA*, and provide appreciable funding to increase overall accessibility of campuses for everyone.

Recommendation: The Minister of Accessibility should recommend that the Lieutenant Governor accept the final recommendations of the *AODA* Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

Recommendation: The MCURES should increase Facilities Renewal Program contributions such that institutional funding makes up not more than one-half (50 percent) of deferred maintenance funding.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue to provide adequate sustained investments into the Facilities Renewal Program to appropriately address the backlog of projects facing institutions.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security should establish a set of best practices for institutions which promote the accessible dissemination of deferred maintenance information to students and stakeholders.

Post-secondary institutions in Ontario should not defer maintenance as a means of budgetary savings, and deferred maintenance should not unreasonably impact students' access to important physical infrastructure. However, ongoing provincial funding concerns have led many post-secondary institutions to defer required maintenance or delay much-needed renovations in an attempt to cut costs. This has had a detrimental effect on students, particularly for those who require accessible spaces on campus. Post-secondary maintenance should be completed in a timely manner to foster a safe environment for students, community members, staff and visitors. Information about needed repairs, planned upgrades, and expected timelines should be readily accessible to students, staff, and community stakeholders.

Physical spaces on university campuses should be accessible and safe for all students, including, but not limited to those with disabilities and respiratory conditions. Students living with disabilities should not be impeded from accessing spaces and services on campus due to delayed maintenance or inadequate infrastructure. A series of recommendations for accessibility in post secondary institutions exists under the *AODA* to ensure minimum standards for physical spaces are met by post-secondary institutions, but these have not yet been approved.⁷⁴ The

⁷⁴Government of Ontario. "Development of Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards - Final Recommendations Report 2022." *Government of Ontario*, April 25, 2022.

Minister of Accessibility should recommend that the Lieutenant Governor accept the final recommendations of the AODA Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.⁷⁵

Additionally, the Blue Ribbon Panel failed to address Ontario's lack of a standardized post-secondary AODA education policy of physical spaces on campuses, leaving a significant gap in accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities. The provincial government should work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are met, including those outlined in the current *AODA*, and provide appreciable funding to increase overall accessibility of campuses for everyone.

A number of university buildings were constructed in the 1960's to accommodate an enrollment boom and are now beginning to show their age, requiring substantial amounts of money to be spent on repairs, refurbishments and modernization. As facilities reach their physical end of life, they can restrict students' access to essential spaces and risk overall safety. The high cost of repairs, a lack of trades specialists, and the potential disruption caused by extensive renovations has resulted in a significant backlog of maintenance requests across post-secondary campuses, resulting in inaccessible and unsafe learning spaces. A 2019 report reveals that Canadian universities had \$17.2 billion in deferred maintenance costs, with 36 percent of those projects marked as urgent or needing to be resolved within two years.⁷⁶

The lack of easily accessible information regarding deferred maintenance in Ontario's postsecondary institutions makes it difficult for stakeholders outside of the Ministry of Colleges & Universities to hold institutions accountable. MCURES should establish a set of best practices for institutions which promote the accessible dissemination of deferred maintenance information to students and stakeholders.

A highly educated workforce is crucial for the growth of the economy, and as such, investment in infrastructure and learning spaces should be a priority. In 2025, the provincial government announced that they were providing over \$2 million in grants to support maintenance, repairs, upgrades, and renewals to post secondary institutions providing they can source matching funds from private-sector partners.⁷⁷ This funding model creates an inequitable system where individual institutions cannot depend on reliable funding. The end result of this is a delay in completing facility renewals and ultimately increases the costs to students. The MCURES should

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/development-proposed-postsecondary-education-standards-final-recommendations-report-2022>.

⁷⁵ Government of Ontario. "Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee." Government of Ontario, March 3, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/postsecondary-education-standards-development-committee>.

⁷⁶ Universities Canada. "Improving Campuses for Students and Communities." Universities Canada, October 1, 2024. <https://univcan.ca/news/improving-campuses-for-students-and-communities/>.

⁷⁷ Government of Ontario. "Ontario Helping Colleges and Universities Build Better Facilities." Government of Ontario, January 24, 2025. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005632/ontario-helping-colleges-and-universities-build-better-facilities>.

increase the Facilities Renewal Program contributions such that institutional funding makes up not more than 50 percent of deferred maintenance funding. The provincial government should also continue to provide adequate sustained investments into the Facilities Renewal Program to appropriately address the backlog of projects facing institutions.

SATELLITE CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE

Principle: On-campus culturally-conscious academic, health, and support resources are key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students, and should be accessible to all students regardless of campus.

Principle: Students should have adequate access to safe, affordable, and accessible transportation in the area of their campus of choice.

Principle: Students' contributions to the services available on campus through ancillary fees should be reflected on their home campus while representing no more than one third of the institutional operating budgets.

Principle: Students should feel confident that programs and offerings from satellite campuses are high quality and on par with main campus standards.

Principle: Satellite campuses should be held to the same standard of accessibility to physical spaces as a university's main campus.

Principle: Students should have access to safe and affordable housing in locations of satellite campuses.

Concern: High quality services and supports are not readily nor equally available across institution's primary and satellite campuses.

Concern: Some satellite campuses lack basic amenities like food services, recreation areas, and study spaces, leaving students isolated and underserved.

Concern: The ancillary fees paid by students on satellite campuses are not reflected in the quality of services available to them on those campuses.

Concern: Commuting to distant university campuses or moving entirely can be inaccessible for post-secondary students who require accommodations including, but not limited to, financial, accessibility, and other needs.

Concern: Communities where satellite campuses are located may not have adequate housing options to serve student populations.

Concern: Most post-secondary students do not have access to private transportation leaving them reliant on public transport systems.

Concern: The local community around satellite campuses, especially those with a lower density of students, may not be served adequately by safe, affordable, and accessible public transport.

Concern: Satellite campuses are often not located in accessible areas for students living in rural and/or northern areas, and lack proper infrastructure to support their students.

Concern: Satellite campuses are often a lower priority than main campuses when considering infrastructure improvements that would increase quality and accessibility of programs and offerings.

Recommendation: The provincial government should include a metric in Strategic Mandate Agreements that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should commission the HEQCO to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses as a strategy for improving access to post-secondary education for populations in rural and northern communities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of College and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to invest in rapid transit through the Community Transportation Grant Program, with a priority of reaching underserved satellite campuses and strengthening transit options.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to services, programs, and accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage and support the development of student housing on satellite campuses that is on par with the housing provided on main campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions prioritize the development of essential student services when establishing or expanding satellite campuses.

Satellite campuses should be held to the same standard of accessibility to physical spaces as a university's main campus. Students should also have access to safe and affordable housing in locations of satellite campuses, and their contributions to on-campus services through ancillary fees should be reflected on their home campus while representing no more than one third of

institutional operating budgets. Students who do not study on main campuses should not bear a lesser quality of the post-secondary experience just because of the location of their school. Satellite campuses are often a lower priority than main campuses when considering infrastructure improvements that would increase quality and accessibility of programs and offerings. The local community around satellite campuses, especially those with a lower density of students, may not be served adequately by safe, affordable, and accessible public transport. Furthermore, satellite campuses are often not located in accessible areas for students living in rural and/or northern areas, and lack proper infrastructure to support their students.

The dissimilarities between main and satellite campuses impact a wide variety of university resources and infrastructures. Satellite campuses tend to have a limited budget and have to decide on which programs and services they would like to provide. This affects amenities that are not only academic focused, but provide students with support services and programming that are culturally-conscious. Dining, study areas, recreation spaces and health services are also key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students regardless of campus location. Without access to a full suite of services, students are left feeling isolated and underserved.

The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions prioritize the development of essential student services when establishing or expanding satellite campuses. The provincial government should encourage and support the development of student housing on satellite campuses that is on par with the housing provided on main campuses. The Ministry of College and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to invest in rapid transit through the Community Transportation Grant Program, with a priority of reaching underserved satellite campuses and strengthening transit options. The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to services, programs, and accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

Satellite campuses have the potential to play an important role in post-secondary education, allowing students to receive education at specialized, smaller, or more regionally accessible spaces. They may provide a feasible alternative for students who would otherwise face financial or other access concerns if they were required to commute or relocate to distant university campuses. Satellite campuses should be held to the same standards of academic quality, infrastructure and accessibility as a university's main campus. Satellite campuses should also be designed to provide students with the same access to amenities and services as their peers attending a major campus hub, especially considering that satellite students often pay the same tuition and ancillary fees as those who are attending the main campus.

Satellite campuses are often a lower priority than main campuses when considering infrastructure improvements that would increase quality and accessibility of programs and

offerings, however, students should feel confident that programs and offerings from satellite campuses are of high quality and on par with main campus standards. This includes amenities that are not only academic focused, but provide students with support services and programming that are culturally-conscious. Dining, study areas, recreation spaces and health services are also key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students regardless of campus location. Without access to a full suite of services, students are left feeling isolated and underserved. The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions prioritize the development of essential student services when establishing or expanding satellite campuses. Unfortunately, not all existing satellite campuses are well equipped, and the ancillary fees that students pay for services that they cannot access should accurately reflect what options are available. Satellite centre fees should represent no more than one third of the main institution's operating budget.

Housing and transit service should be primary considerations when satellite campuses are established. Students attending satellite campuses should have the same access to safe, affordable and accessible housing and transit options as students attending a main campus. The provincial government should encourage and support the development of student housing on satellite campuses that is on par with the housing provided on main campuses. In order for remote satellite campuses to live up to their full potential to provide more educational opportunities, the Ministry of College and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to invest in rapid transit through the Community Transportation Grant Program, with a priority of reaching underserved satellite campuses and to strengthen transit options.

In 2020, the provincial government developed an evaluation framework for post secondary institutions wishing to expand into satellite locations.⁷⁸ In conjunction with Strategic Mandate Agreement three, the framework outlines recommended standards which will ensure a satellite campus' financial stability and capacity for growth. It also sets out requirements for student services and facilities, housing and transit and physical location. Institutions are encouraged to self-fund their expansions, and work co-operatively with community partners for support and space utilization. While this will hold new campuses to a higher standard, this should be applied retroactively to existing satellite campuses to ensure quality across the board. The provincial government should make additional funding available to existing post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to services, programs, and accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

⁷⁸ Government of Ontario. "Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework." *Government of Ontario*, September 23, 2024.
https://www.ontario.ca/page/major-capacity-expansion-policy-framework?_ga=2.32519358.1274005739.1626118830-1649570596.1626118830.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING MODELS

In Ontario, universities are funded through a hybrid model that combines public government support with private revenue sources. Over 20 years ago, universities' funding used to be $\frac{2}{3}$ from government funding and $\frac{1}{3}$ from student and other revenue. Today, only about $\frac{1}{3}$ of university funding comes from the province, while roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ is generated through tuition and other private sources.

Since 2012, the provincial government has allocated its share of funding primarily through SMAs. The remaining funding is derived from a mix of students' tuition and other revenue streams, such as donation and infrastructure rental revenues. A detailed discussion of SMAs is reserved for the section preceding the second subsection, "Re-evaluating Funding Sources," which then critiques the specific mechanisms embedded within the SMA framework.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNIVERSITY OPERATIONAL FUNDING

Principle: Undergraduate students, as the largest stakeholders in higher education, should be represented in institutional budgeting processes and have transparency into how tuition and ancillary fees are allocated.

Principle: Operational funding should adequately support needs of students through a combination of performance-based and enrolment-based funding metrics.

Principle: Post-secondary education is a public good, and operational funding should reflect shared responsibility between the provincial government, institutions, and students.

Principle: Students should not contribute more than one-third of institutional operating budgets.

Concern: Students at some universities across Ontario do not have transparency into how their tuition and ancillary fees are allocated in their university budget.

Concern: The cost of providing higher education has increased disproportionately to public funding, **which continues to make** higher education financially inaccessible.

Concern: Student tuition fees contributions have accounted for an increasingly disproportionate amount of Ontario universities' operating budgets and revenues, outpacing government contributions each year.

Concern: Currently, per-student funding does not increase with inflation each year or reflect the rising operational costs of institutions, resulting in students contributing disproportionately more to their higher education than public funding.

Concern: Due to inadequate government funding, institutions in Ontario rely on increasing international tuition, ancillary fees, and revenue-generating campus services to supplement operating budgets.

Concern: To supplement their operating budgets, due to inadequate government funding, institutions in Ontario have increasingly outsourced or delegated core academic functions, including teaching & program delivery, to for-profit partners.

Concern: The various provincial frameworks for institutional funding, tuition, student financial aid and institutional accountability and governance are developed separately in an incohesive manner.

Recommendation: The provincial government should strengthen existing tuition transparency requirements by enforcing a standardized format for tuition and ancillary fee breakdowns, requiring that this information be communicated to students each academic term in accessible, student-facing formats.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate student involvement in institutional budget planning processes by requiring governing bodies perform formal consultations with existing student advisory committees or associations, when making financial decisions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing no more than one-third of total institutional operating budgets.

Recommendation: The provincial government should task HEQCO with evaluating the quality of programs delivered through private, for-profit partnerships to ensure they meet the same accountability and academic standards as public post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement a one-time increase to both operating grants and per-student funding allocations, tied to inflation since 2014, followed by annual adjustments based on the CPI, with a guaranteed minimum of two percent per year.

Recommendation: The provincial government should index base operating grants to the CPI annually to maintain consistent per-student funding.

Recommendation: When the domestic tuition freeze is lifted, the provincial government should only permit gradual tuition increases tied to inflation or two percent, whichever is lower, and provide proportional increases in OSAP grants and loans to ensure affordability.

Recommendation: The provincial government should review the institutional funding, tuition, and financial aid frameworks through a post secondary education advisory body when drafting or revising frameworks to consider the post-secondary sector more holistically.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish clear regulations governing universities abilities to contract out core academic activities to private, for-profit partners.

Ontario's universities rely on three primary revenue sources: provincial operating grants, student tuition and ancillary fees, and other revenues. Over the last decade the balance among these sources has shifted steadily away from government and toward students, which is not

consistent with a system that understands post-secondary education as a public good. If students are the largest stakeholders in higher education, they should be represented in institutional budgeting processes and have transparency into how tuition and fees are allocated. If the system is to be sustainable and fair, students should not contribute more than one third of institutional operating budgets; the remaining two thirds should be covered through proportional contributions from the provincial government and institutions themselves, with public contributions that are predictable, indexed, and transparent

Transparency is the first condition for trust. On many campuses, students cannot easily see where their tuition and ancillary fees go or how board decisions connect to service levels, which fuels skepticism in periods of fiscal pressure. The provincial government should strengthen existing tuition transparency requirements by enforcing a standardized format for tuition and ancillary fee breakdowns, requiring that this information be communicated to students each academic term in accessible, student-facing formats. This would convert uneven disclosure into a basic accountability practice. The provincial government should mandate student involvement in institutional budget planning processes. This should require governing bodies to formally consult existing student advisory committees or associations when making financial decisions that materially affect learners. These steps strengthen informed consent around fees and place students where they belong, not as payers of last resort but as partners in decisions that shape academic quality.

Affordability pressures are also the outcome of funding choices. The cost of providing higher education has increased disproportionately to public funding, which continues to make higher education financially inaccessible. Ontario's domestic tuition freeze followed a 10 percent cut in 2019, and although the province announced stabilization measures through 2024 and 2025, underlying operating funding has eroded in real terms, pushing institutions to rely on other revenue sources. In late 2024 the government announced a stabilization package of 1.3 billion dollars and extended the domestic tuition freeze for 2024–25, which signals that the system needs a reset rather than another year of the status quo.⁷⁹ At the same time, student-level evidence shows pressure points, including a large majority who are worried about having enough money to complete their programs, with international students reporting particularly acute pressures.⁸⁰ Freezing domestic tuition without rebuilding public funding shifts the pressure elsewhere, for example into class size, staffing, ancillary fees, and a greater reliance on international tuition.⁸¹

The composition of institutional operating revenue has documented this shift. In 2013–14, tuition and fees accounted for roughly 52 percent of operating revenue while government

⁷⁹ Government of Ontario, "Associate Minister Tangri to Hold a Press Conference," media advisory, May 2, 2024. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/advisory/1004523/associate-minister-tangri-to-hold-a-press-conference>

⁸⁰ Octave Andrade-Dixon and Abishane Suthakaran, *Affordability: Results from the 2022 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*, research report, Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2025.

⁸¹ Ibid.

grants were about 42 percent, reversing the historical pattern in which grants dominated.⁸² By 2018–19 through 2020–21, tuition had risen to about 61 percent of the operating fund while grants sat closer to 32 percent.⁸³ A model that relies this heavily on tuition is the opposite of a public good funding approach and concentrates risk on students. It also encourages institutions to manage risk by leaning into tuition growth rather than predictable public investment, which amplifies volatility and gaps for equity deserving students.

Per student funding that does not keep pace with inflation is a central mechanism behind these trends. The provincial blue-ribbon panel reported that nominal operating grants per full-time student declined from 8,514 dollars in 2008 to 8,350 dollars in 2021, which is a reduction in real terms once inflation is considered.⁸⁴ The panel recommended a one time increase of about 10 percent to per student funding, followed by annual adjustments at the CPI or a minimum of two percent for several years, in order to catch up. This one-time increase should restore operating grants and per-student allocations to at least their 2014 levels in real terms, accounting for inflation over the intervening years, followed by annual adjustments tied to the CPI with a guaranteed minimum of two percent. Without this correction, universities will continue to operate with structural deficits that push them to rely on tuition, international enrollment, and private partnerships to fill the gap.⁸⁵ Inadequate government funding can also pressure institutions to outsource or delegate core academic functions, including teaching and program delivery, to for-profit partners as a way to supplement operating budgets. As private partnerships become a larger part of institutional budget strategies, clearer rules are needed to protect academic quality and accountability. The provincial government should establish clear regulations governing universities' abilities to contract out core academic activities, including teaching and program delivery, to private, for-profit partners. The provincial government should also task HEQCO with evaluating the quality of programs delivered through private, for-profit partnerships to ensure they meet the same accountability and academic standards as public post-secondary institutions. This is the logic for a one time increase to both operating grants and per student allocations, with annual CPI indexing thereafter, and it is the mechanism that prevents automatic erosion from recreating the same gap. A CPI-indexed floor would stop the drift back to tuition and fees to fill the shortfall and would provide institutions with the planning horizon needed to protect quality.⁸⁶

⁸² Council of Ontario Finance Officers, *Financial Report of Ontario Universities: 2017–18 Highlights*, Council of Ontario Universities, March 2019.

⁸³ Council of Ontario Finance Officers, *Financial Report of Ontario Universities: 2020–21 Highlights*, Council of Ontario Universities, June 2022.

⁸⁴ Alan Harrison, *Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario's Postsecondary Sector*, Blue-Ribbon Panel on Postsecondary Education Financial Sustainability, 2023.

⁸⁵ Canadian Association of University Teachers, "Ontario: Blue-Ribbon Panel Calls for Increased Post-Secondary Funding," CAUT Bulletin, <https://www.caut.ca/bulletin/news-ontario-blue-ribbon-panel-calls-for-increased-post-secondary-funding/>

⁸⁶ Harrison, *Ensuring Financial Sustainability*, 20.

Overreliance on international tuition is the other predictable result of flat grants. International undergraduate tuition in Ontario is the highest in Canada, Statistics Canada reported an average of 45,242 dollars for international undergraduates in 2022–23 in Ontario,⁸⁷ and national tables show typical program prices routinely exceeding 40,000 dollars.⁸⁸ The blue-ribbon panel warned explicitly about heavy reliance on international tuition revenue and the system-wide risk exposure it creates.⁸⁹ When grants do not keep pace, institutions are implicitly encouraged to recruit internationally to backstop budgets, an approach that is neither predictable nor aligned with a public good model and that carries equity concerns for students who face higher costs and fewer supports.⁹⁰

A shared responsibility model looks different in practice. Operating funding should support student needs through both performance and enrolment metrics without shifting costs continually to students. Students, institutions, and government should each contribute, but students should not contribute more than one third of total operating budgets. Increasing operating grants until the student share falls to this threshold would restore a public good balance and reduce volatility associated with enrollment swings. It would also align with the panel's broader framing, namely more money per student, predictable adjustments, and rebuilt need-based aid alongside any tuition policy changes.⁹¹ The various provincial frameworks for institutional funding, tuition, student financial aid, and institutional accountability and governance should not be developed separately, as disconnected policy decisions can shift costs onto students and weaken system-wide accountability. If the domestic tuition freeze is lifted, any permitted tuition increases should be gradual over multiple years, tied to inflation or two percent, whichever is lower, and matched to proportional increases in OSAP grants and loans so that affordability is protected for low and middle income learners. Because OSAP already operates with eligibility thresholds and lifetime loan and grant limits, increases to financial aid will require the provincial government to rework its budget and reallocate resources toward student financial assistance, rather than expecting institutions or students to absorb the difference. The provincial government should review institutional funding, tuition, and financial aid frameworks through a post-secondary education advisory body when drafting or revising these frameworks to ensure the sector is considered holistically. Without parallel OSAP reform, even modest tuition increases risk pushing students beyond existing aid caps and deepening affordability and accessibility gaps. Tuition policy and student aid policy should move in lockstep rather than in sequence.

⁸⁷ Statistics Canada, "Tuition Fees for Degree Programs, 2022/2023," *The Daily*, September 7, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220907/dq220907b-eng.htm>

⁸⁸ Statistics Canada, "Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Level of Study (Current Dollars)," Table 37-10-0045-01, release date September 10, 2025, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>

⁸⁹ Harrison, *Ensuring Financial Sustainability*, 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4

These financial reforms are quality measures, not only fiscal adjustments. Funding models shape academic experience, including class sizes, lab hours, advising, mental health supports, and time to graduation. Under the current model, students are asked to carry more of the system's weight while having limited visibility into how funds are used. Transparent tuition breakdowns, mandated student involvement in planning, a one time operating grant reset, annual CPI indexing, and a cap on the student share at one third are practical changes that lower the temperature on annual fee debates, reduce overreliance on international tuition, and allow institutions to plan around pedagogy, research, and student success. Student testimony confirms the stakes, many describe working more hours, skipping meals, or delaying graduation to manage costs, and international students often report that they feel more like revenue strategies than learners.⁹² Trust is rebuilt when students can see the numbers, sit in the rooms where decisions are made, and know that public funding is keeping pace with the cost of delivery. Within this shared-responsibility framework, universities should remain primarily responsible for stewarding and allocating operating funds in ways that protect academic quality and student supports, while governments and students provide stable and proportional funding contributions.

AN INTRODUCTION TO STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

Introduced in 2014, SMAs are an accountability mechanism implemented by the provincial government to increase transparency on how funding is being used by post-secondary institutions, and to highlight institutional priorities.

In the latest SMA 4 (2026-2030), the provincial government has distributed government grants through four funding channels: Enrolment Envelope, Performance-Based Grant, Differentiation Envelope (Remainder), and STEM Funding. Historically in SMA 1 and 2, institutional operational funding was mostly based on enrollment.

The Enrolment Envelope operates through the Corridor Funding model, in which universities have an upper and lower range of enrolment levels institutions need to maintain to ensure funding stability. Enrolment level is calculated based on the weighted grant units varying across programs of study. Institutions going below the lower range of enrolment will result in a decreased funding level, while, going above the corridor midpoint will not result in additional funding level.

The 2020-2025 agreement introduced a new PBF model, which falls under the Differentiation Envelope that ties a significant portion of SMA's funding to student and economic outcome.⁹³ As

⁹² Andrade-Dixon and Suthakaran, *Affordability*, 33-41.

⁹³ Government of Ontario. "College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements." *Government of Ontario*, May 5, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/all-college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements>.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/all-college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements>

the proportion of institutions' operating grants based on PBF grows, this proportion shift will be transferred from the Enrolment Envelope.

In the 2026-2030 agreement, the eight metrics schools will be evaluated on are⁹⁴:

1. Graduate Employment Rate in a Related Field
2. Graduation Rate
3. Graduate Employment Earnings
4. Experiential Learning
5. Community/Local Impact
6. Institutional Strength/Focus
7. Investment and Innovation-Related
8. Institution-Specific

Institutions must allocate funding weights for each metric; the range of weights is set to fluctuate over the course of three years, but stretches from a minimum of five percent to a maximum of 25 percent, and the total of all weights across the 8 metrics must equal 100 percent.⁹⁵ For PBF, the system average proportion in SMA 4 year 1 and 2 was capped at 25 percent. Pending a broader funding review in Year 3, there may be a potential of further increase by 5 percent each year to up to 40 percent in year 5.

RE-EVALUATING FUNDING SOURCE MODELS

Principle: The criteria which determines funding for post-secondary programs should ensure sustainable funding for all students and programs.

Principle: Any increase in PBF within SMAs should be incremental and contingent on the successes of the mechanism, validated by a comprehensive, long-term evaluation, and protected from economic instability.

Principle: Students should be consulted and included in deliberations about PBF metrics within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Principle: Universities should not face negative consequences for external factors beyond their

⁹⁴ McMaster University, and Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. "SMA4 Technical Appendices." *McMaster University*, 2025.
https://ira.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2025/08/SIGNED_McMaster-University_SMA4-Agreement-Technical-Appendices_July-9-2025_Final.pdf.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Postsecondary Education System: Performance/Outcomes Based Funding – Technical Manual," *Government of Ontario*, September 2019,
https://www.uwindsor.ca/strategic-mandateagreement/sites/uwindsor.ca.strategic-mandate-agreement/files/performance_outcomes-based_funding_technical_manual_v1.0_-_final_september_419_en_0.pdf

control that affect core performance-based metrics.

Concern: “Graduate Employment Earnings” and “Graduation Rate” metrics may introduce the practice of ‘creaming’ where institutions can attempt to perform well on these metrics by focusing their recruitment efforts on private high schools as well as non-marginalized groups because these groups have higher historical performance in these metrics.

Concern: “Graduate Employment in Related Fields”, and “Graduate Employment Earnings” as metrics can inadvertently disadvantage BHASE programs whose graduates often pursue further education as well as work in a wide range of sectors including public service, and non-governmental organizations, that typically have lower earnings.

Concern: Long-term metrics such as “Graduate Employment Earnings”, “Graduate Employment Rate in a Related Field”, and “Graduation Rate” can take years to reflect institutional result changes, making them misaligned with annual funding and shorter-term SMA cycles.

Concern: Student concerns and perspectives are not adequately considered and incorporated in SMA negotiations, resulting in a lack of institutional accountability to student needs.

Concern: The current PBF model within SMA that last five years disincentivizes institutions to adapt to global, political, and economic conditions without risking detrimental cuts to funding.

Concern: The freeze on weighted grant units in 2017 neglected the variations amongst different faculties’ program delivery and inflationary resource costs since 2009.

Concern: The provincial government has not increased the enrolment corridor since 2017.

Recommendation: The provincial government should measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, graduation rate, retention rate, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation of diverse scholarship in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator.

Recommendation: The provincial government should reevaluate the calculation of “Graduate Employment Rate in a Related Field” to be more expansive and reward institutions who successfully encourage domestic students to pursue additional higher education developing a more educated and talented workforce.

Recommendation: The provincial government should decouple the calculation of “Graduate Employment Earnings” into BHASE graduates’ earnings and STEM graduates’ earnings to promote a holistic evaluation and reduce the disproportionate advantages of STEM-heavy institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should align performance metrics with SMA timelines by incorporating short-term progress indicators (such as yearly student retention rate or student satisfaction rate) that capture more immediate institutional improvements.

Recommendation: MCURES should maintain the weighting of performance based funding at 25 percent for the entire duration of the new Strategic Mandate Agreements, until further data about the effectiveness of PBF on improving student outcomes is available.

Recommendation: The provincial government should balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the SMA envelope, enrollment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure PBF metrics do not adversely impact an institution's ability to respond and be accountable to student needs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should conduct consultations with the previously defined post secondary advisory body to ensure that the sector's needs are met under a PBF model.

Recommendation: The provincial government should add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the SMA system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adjusting performance measures to more accurately determine PBF.

Recommendation: MCURES should increase the value of grant units, and the weighting of grant units for programs to reflect the variation in enrolment distribution for various programs and inflationary increases in program delivery costs since 2009.

Recommendation: The provincial government should allow for institutions to adjust enrollment projections during the midpoint of SMA negotiations in order to match fluctuating student enrollment at institutions across the province.

OUSA believes that the dramatic increase in the proportion of PBF in operating grants fails to treat education as a public good, commodifies students and university outputs, while ignoring the overarching societal benefits they provide. When PBF is in place, its metrics that determine funding for post-secondary institutions should ensure sustainable and equitable funding for all students and programs. However, the current PBF structure embedded within SMA risks going against this objective by targeting narrow institutional outcomes and creating structural disadvantages for certain student populations and program areas. Metrics such as “Graduate Employment Earnings” and “Graduation Rate” may encourage the “creaming” practice, in which institutions prioritize recruitment from private schools and non-marginalized groups who historically perform better on these indicators. A study from HEQCO reveals that students from historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous, Black, and West Asian students had higher rates of degree non-completion, and they are among the lowest earners one year after leaving post-secondary institutions.⁹⁶ A synthesis of evaluations of PBF programs implemented in

⁹⁶Chatoor, Ken, and Ryan Tishcoff. “Examining the Role of Sociodemographic Characteristics in Postsecondary Non-Completion and Labour Market Outcomes.” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, June 5, 2024. <https://heqco.ca/pub/examining-the-role-of-sociodemographic-characteristics-in-postsecondary-non-completion-and-labour-market-outcomes/>.

the United States' higher education reveals the intended impact of the programs are minimal, including student retention rate and graduation rate.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the unintentional impact of it is evident in lowering college access among marginalized students who typically graduate at a lower rate. Institutions started to game the system by admitting less marginalized students in an attempt to improve the measured performance.⁹⁸ Thus, using these metrics in Ontario would undermine the accessibility mandate of public universities and conflicts with the principle that students should not be excluded or materially disadvantaged in funding considerations due to factors beyond their control.

When comparing institutions in states that have an equity metric in the PBF versus those without an equity metric, it was found that systems with an equity metric results in a larger increase in African American student enrollment.⁹⁹ This large increase is disproportionately from less selective colleges, whereas with more selective colleges, this equity lens is suspected to at least counteract against the phenomenon where selective schools admit less marginalized groups in hopes of improving academic outcomes.¹⁰⁰ These policy results in the United States is the basis for OUSA's recommendation to the provincial government to measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator. Ultimately, this hopes to motivate institutions to enhance the existing volume and breadth of student support programs and student satisfaction (COU, CUDO).

Additionally, the use of employment-based metrics disproportionately disadvantages BHASE (Business, Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, and Education) programs, whose graduates frequently pursue further education or enter sectors such as public service and non-profit work that are socially essential yet characterized by lower earnings. Another study by HEQCO reveals that STEM graduates are likely to earn more than Humanities graduates.¹⁰¹ As a result, institutions with a strong BHASE presence may appear to underperform, not due to institutional failure but due to the narrow valuation of success embedded in current performance measures. To address these inequities, the provincial government should adopt more holistic performance indicators by measuring the representation and success of

<https://heqco.ca/pub/examining-the-role-of-sociodemographic-characteristics-in-postsecondary-non-completion-and-labour-market-outcomes/>

⁹⁷ Justin C. Ortagus, Robert Kelchen, Kelly Rosinger, and Nicholas Voorhees, "Performance-based Funding in American Higher Education: A Systemic Synthesis of the Intended and Unintended Consequences," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 42, no.4 (2020): 520-550, doi: 10.3102/0162373720953128

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Kelchen, Robert. "Do Performance-Based Funding Policies Affect Underrepresented Student Enrollment?" *The Journal of Higher Education* 89, no. 5 (September 2018): 702–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1434282> . https://journals.scholarsportal.info/details/00221546/v89i0005/702_dpfpause.xml

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Hicks, Martin, and Linda Jonker. "Still Worth It after All These Years." *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, January 6, 2015. <https://heqco.ca/pub/still-worth-it-after-all-these-years/> . <https://heqco.ca/pub/still-worth-it-after-all-these-years/>

equity-deserving groups among students and faculty. This could include metrics such as sense of belonging, retention, graduation rates, and representation of diverse scholarship within curriculum content. Furthermore, the calculation of “Graduate Employment Rate in a Related Field” should be expanded to reward institutions that encourage students to pursue additional higher education, recognizing the long-term contributions of advanced training to workforce capacity and societal development. The government should also decouple graduate earning metrics for BHASE and STEM disciplines to reduce the disproportionate advantages granted to STEM-heavy institutions and enable a more equitable evaluation of institutional impact.

Another key concern lies in the misalignment between long-term performance outcomes and the short-term funding cycles of SMAs. Metrics such as graduation rate and graduate employment earnings often require several years to reflect meaningful changes in institutional performance, yet they are used to inform funding decisions for annual budget cycles and are only reviewed once every five-year agreement. To mitigate this, performance metrics should be aligned with SMA timelines through the introduction of short-term progress indicators such as annual retention rates or student satisfaction measures, which better capture immediate institutional improvements while still supporting long-term objectives.

Given the experimental nature of PBF in Ontario, any expansion of its weighting within SMAs should be incremental and contingent upon demonstrable evidence of success, validated through comprehensive evaluation. The heavy weighting of the PBF package would create instability and disincentivize institutions from adapting to evolving global, political, and economic conditions for fear of financial penalties. Thus, until further evidence of success is available, MCURES should maintain the current weighting of PBF at 25 percent for the duration of the new SMA cycle. Moreover, the funding model should be more evenly balanced across PBF, enrollment-based funding, and special purpose grants to prevent performance metrics from undermining institutional responsiveness to students' needs.

The current funding structure also fails to adequately account for institutional diversity and structural constraints. The freeze on weighted grants units in 2017 disregarded inflationary pressures and the evolving costs of program delivery, particularly for resource-intensive disciplines. Similarly, the enrollment corridor has not been increased since 2017, leaving schools with growing demands to fund the extra seats on their own budget. To address these challenges, the government should increase the value and weighting of grant units to reflect variations in program delivery costs and inflationary changes since 2009. Institutions should also be permitted to adjust enrollment projections mid-cycle during SMA negotiations to better align funding with real-time enrollment trends.

Finally, meaningful student participation must be central to the development and evaluation of PBF metrics. Current SMA negotiations insufficiently incorporate student perspectives, resulting

in diminished accountability to students' needs. The provincial government should therefore conduct structured consultations through a defined post-secondary advisory body to ensure that funding decisions reflect the lived realities of students. Additionally, introducing a formal bargaining mechanism within the SMA framework would enable universities to propose innovative operational changes without risking a loss of institutional funding.

Together, these reforms would ensure that funding criteria reflect the complex realities of institutional performance, student diversity, and evolving economic conditions. By doing so, the province can strengthen post-secondary education as a public good rather than constraining it within narrowly defined metrics.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Principle: Research and teaching should be given equal priority when it comes to government funding, promoting differentiation between post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Students should feel confident that their tuition fees are being invested in their education and learning experiences offered to them throughout their degree.

Concern: Incentivizing institutions to hire professors based on research success and to focus on publishing rather than supporting students with their learnings, potentially leads to lower quality of teaching.

Concern: Providing increased funding to research-intensive institutions discourages differentiation between universities and the programs offered which undermines the sector's long-term sustainability.

Recommendation: The provincial government should adjust the university funding model to add a performance metric that covers student satisfaction in their learning experiences, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and equitable hiring across both teaching and research-track professors.

Recommendation: The provincial government should conduct consultations with the previously defined post secondary advisory body to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from equity-deserving groups, can be incorporated within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to collect feedback from students to adjust Strategic Mandate Agreements to reflect student learning and career goals and identify gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors.

Differentiation has been on the radar of Ontario's higher education policy makers for the past decade. Simply put, differentiation allows post-secondary institutions to have different areas in which they are considered strong in, and funding should be provided to incentivize this practice.

With the province wanting a balance between stronger labour market outcomes and improving access to students from non-traditional backgrounds, differentiation was the intended mechanism to do both without significant financial investment.

However, in reality, differentiation becomes a symbolic rhetoric with government funding not reflecting a balance between research-intensive and teaching-focused institutions. As a brief example, looking at the visualization showcasing the existing state of differentiation by HEQCO in 2016, McMaster is an institution with significantly higher focus on research intensity, while Laurentian University has a much higher emphasis on cultivating a positive learning experience for students.¹⁰² Looking at the allocation of the Ontario Research Fund (both the Research Excellence and Infrastructure streams) for projects approved at both institutions between 2018 and 2025, McMaster received a total of just over \$793 million from the province while Laurentian received just over \$402 thousand.¹⁰³

On top of this, with “Research funding and capacity” and “Research funding from industry sources” being two of the metrics from PBF and learning quality not being one of the metrics, this perpetuates the limited funding problem of small institutions with more emphasis on teaching and equity. Note that the metric “Institutional Strength/Focus” is broad enough for institutions to have learning quality as the metric, but all institutions deserve to have that metric reserved for any other focus they have, not including the basics of research and teaching). OUSA believes that the provincial government should adjust the university funding model to add a performance metric that covers student satisfaction in their learning experiences, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and equitable hiring across both teaching and research-track professors. An example of how this metric could be measured would be through the common Institutional Quality Assurance Process audit that all Ontario schools need to go through. When creating this “Teaching Quality” metric, it is important that the provincial government consult with students. This can be done through advisory committees at each post-secondary institution to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from groups deserving equity, can be incorporated within SMAs. The provincial government should then utilize feedback from students to adjust SMA to reflect student learning and career goals and hold post-secondary institutions accountable for the use of students’ tuition through Strategic Mandate Agreements. The provincial government

¹⁰² Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. “EduData – Ontario’s 20 Unique Universities.” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, July 12, 2016. <https://heqco.ca/edudata-ontarios-20-unique-universities/>.
<https://heqco.ca/edudata-ontarios-20-unique-universities/>

¹⁰³ Government of Ontario, Ontario Research Funding – Summary (current) § (2026).
https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/c2621390-9362-43ae-b10a-a3258ba800cd/resource/ebf11cfd-37f7-4775-b2d7-de4f1343787a/download/research_funding_summary_current_2018-2026_updated_en.xlsx.
Data retrieved from an open dataset titled “Ontario Research Funding – Summary (current)” provided by the Ontario MCURES to the Government of Canada. The dataset was last updated on March 31, 2025 and accessed on August 7, 2025,
<https://data.ontario.ca/en/dataset/ontario-research-funding-summary-current/resource/ebf11cfd-37f7-4775-b2d7-de4f1343787a>

should also incorporate student learning goals and feedback from consultations to inform post-secondary institutions of gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors.

STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENT DATA TRANSPARENCY

Principle: Data collection from the strategic mandate agreement report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Principle: Data collected from the strategic mandate agreements should be made publicly available.

Concern: Strategic mandate agreement report back data is not centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner.

Concern: There is a lack of data transparency regarding university's performance on each of the performance-based funding metrics, the funding they were allocated accordingly, as well as a lack of evaluation data on existing programs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should centrally store data collected by the strategic mandate agreement report backs and make it accessible to the public.

Recommendation: The provincial government should publicly report the university's performance on each performance-based metric with its' funding allocated, and use the data to inform the renewal and budget percentage of each metric.

A critical issue in the post-secondary sector is the lack of data and transparency to relevant stakeholders regarding performance measurement and funding allocation. Improving the post-secondary system can be a group effort, where whomever is interested can conduct research and find innovative solutions. Currently, data regarding the SMAs are stored on individual university websites, which can be difficult to navigate. The same can be seen with SMA data on the provincial website as well, where report back information is stored under each institutional SMA link, making it difficult to view this data in a central manner. Currently, data regarding the SMAs are stored on individual university websites, which can be difficult to navigate. The same can be seen with SMA data on the provincial website as well, where report back information is stored under each institutional SMA link, making it difficult to view this data in a central manner. To make this more accessible to the public, the provincial government should centrally store and publicize data collected by the SMA report backs. Furthermore, the provincial government should publicly report the university's performance on each performance-based metric with its' funding allocated, and use the data to inform the renewal and budget percentage of each metric.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Institutions should be supported to perform well on the experiential learning metric of the PBF model. In reality there are many barriers that prevent students from accessing experiential

learning opportunities, most notably regarding specific challenges in accessing WIL. This subsection attempts to outline and address those concerns.

Principle: Experiential learning should be integrated into post-secondary education across Ontario institutions without causing undue financial burden on students.

Principle: In order to achieve success in their experiential learning metric under the Strategic Mandate Agreement, institutions should be well-supported to provide high-quality and widely available experiences.

Principle: Experiential learning is an important avenue for students to be adequately prepared to enter the workforce.

Principle: All employers including non-profits and small businesses should have equitable incentive mechanisms to be able to offer and increase available experiential learning opportunities to students.

Concern: Non-profits may face financial constraints in providing students experiential learning opportunities due to inability to access tax credits.

Concern: Incentives for employers to create experiential opportunities have not been adjusted or increased since 2009 and many employers may be ineligible.

Concern: The experiential learning metric does not include international students, and as such, is not accounted for in an institution's actual performance under that metric.

Concern: Students face financial barriers to participate in experiential learning programs, including co-op tuition fees, mandatory ancillary fees, transportation, relocation and housing costs.

Concern: Some students may not receive equitable financial aid and benefits from the provincial government, due to being considered part-time students at certain institutions while taking part in experiential learning opportunities.

Concern: Students at institutions without strong co-op or career services departments have fewer opportunities to access quality WIL experiences compared to those at institutions with established co-op infrastructures.

Concern: There are inconsistencies between institutions on how student experiential learning accessibility concerns are addressed.

Concern: A student's functional limitations may reduce their ability to work while studying, which prevents them from gaining work experience during their studies.

Concern: Students may face barriers to obtaining experiential learning for reasons including but not limited to covert and overt racism, religious discrimination, and employer bias.

Concern: Students from post secondary institutions without the adequate supports and developed infrastructure may lack opportunities to engage in experiential learning.

Recommendation: The provincial government should change the experiential learning metric to be inclusive of both domestic and international students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish a minimum 15 percent weight, across institutions, for the experiential learning metric under performance based funding strategic mandate agreements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should modify the Co-operative Education Tax Credit so that the maximum credit value employers can claim equates to 30 percent of the current average co-op salary taking into account inflation between 2007 and now, with maximums of \$4,000 for larger employers, and \$5,000 for smaller ones, instead of the current maximum of \$3000 regardless of the employer's size.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope grant funding for OSAP to fund qualifying students participating in co-op programs that can be used towards paying co-op tuition fees, ancillary fees, transportation, relocation and housing costs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate institutions to consider students on co-op terms to qualify for similar financial aid as full-time students on an academic term.

Recommendation: The provincial government should task HEQCO to research every 4 years the experiential learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for all students, including equity-deserving.

Recommendation: The provincial government should allow post-secondary institutions to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant for undergraduate research opportunities, increasing the funding allocated to students, and ensuring research terms count towards co-op credits.

Recommendation: The provincial government should allow non-profits to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant.

Recommendation: For programs with high participation in experiential learning, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to create or expand faculty-specific experiential learning support offices at all schools that are able to support applications, employer relations and professional development for students navigating competitive experiential learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should prioritize experiential learning grants and opportunities, including research grants, for student groups who have historically low participation rates in these opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should task the Ontario Human Rights Commission to create standards for equity, diversity, and inclusion recruitment training for those hiring student employees, to ensure equitable access to job opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

With the understanding that improving labour market outcomes is one of the important pillars of post-secondary education, improving the accessibility of WIL opportunities should be one of the top priorities from the provincial government. These opportunities allow students to gain awareness and network with colleagues to eventually be transpired to post-graduation opportunities and skill development, reinforcing the importance of experiential learning as an avenue for preparing students to enter the workforce.

Despite this importance, the current integration of experiential learning within the SMA framework falls short of supporting institutions, employers, and students in achieving equitable participation and high-quality learning outcomes. Students have had a difficult time in gaining employment amidst tariff and trade uncertainty. In July 2025, the youth unemployment rate reached 14.6 percent, the highest rate since September 2010 (excluding the Covid years of 2020 and 2021).¹⁰⁴ In specific to students seeking summer jobs who will return to school full time in September, their unemployment rate was 17.5 percent, the highest ever since 2009, excluding the Covid year 2020.¹⁰⁵

However, not every post-secondary institution offers equal opportunities for WIL on their campuses, and there is inconsistency in how these institutions address concerns over experiential learning accessibility. Students attending Ontario institutions deserve to have equal, affordable, and accessible access to WIL at whichever institution they decide to attend. Among OUSA's nine member institutions, there are McMaster and Queen's which allocated five percent (the lowest possible weights), Trent allocated 10 percent, Brock allocated 20 percent, whereas others including Laurentian, Waterloo, Western, and Wilfrid Laurier allocated 15 percent to the "experiential learning" metric for the 2024-25 round of their SMAs.¹⁰⁶ On top of the difference

¹⁰⁴ Statistics Canada. "Labour Force Survey, July 2025." *Government of Canada*, August 8, 2025.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250808/dq250808a-eng.htm>.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250808/dq250808a-eng.htm>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Information gathered from respective institutional 2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreements: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#). Government of Ontario. "2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Brock University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>; Government of Ontario.

"2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Laurentian University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>; Government of Ontario.

"2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: McMaster University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>; Government of Ontario.

"2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Queen's University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>; Government of Ontario.

"2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Trent University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026.

in institutional priority to experiential learning, students enrolled in arts and humanities or social sciences are also found to be statistically less likely to be involved in WIL programs in Ontario according to a HEQCO report.¹⁰⁷ These findings conflict with OUSA's core belief that equitable WIL opportunities should be available to all students, no matter what institutions they go to or programs they enroll in. Systemically, while differentiation between institutions should be taken into consideration, experiential learning across disciplines should consist of a minimum of 15 percent PBF weight for all institutions because of its close link to post-graduation employment outcome.

It is undeniable that resource constraints, including inadequate institutional supports and underdeveloped infrastructure, are the primary reason behind differences in the amount of opportunities available to students across schools and faculties. Students at universities with long-established co-op programs and career services have significantly greater access to high-quality placements than those at institutions with limited staffing, employer networks, or faculty-specific support. To address these gaps, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions with high experiential learning demand to create or expand faculty-specific support offices, ensuring students receive consistent guidance, employer access, and professional development resources across Ontario.

Experiential learning access is also shaped by systemic inequities. It is very important to recognize that there are Canadian equity-deserving student groups that face additional barriers when it comes to accessing the opportunities they should be able to have access to on paper. Racialized youth have faced a significantly higher unemployment rate compared to their non-racialized counterparts. In July 2025 where the youth unemployment rate reached 14.6 percent, its highest level since 2010, the unemployment rate for Arab youth was 26.4 percent, 23.4 percent for Black youth, 20.5 percent for Chinese youth, 19.4 percent for Filipino youth, and 17.1 percent for South Asian youth¹⁰⁸.

An example of a barrier is the lack of a pre-existing corporate network from their families, leading to difficulties in knowing what professional options are out there as well as less

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>.; Government of Ontario. "2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: University of Waterloo." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>.; Government of Ontario. "2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Western University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>.; Government of Ontario. "2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreement: Wilfrid Laurier University." *Government of Ontario*, February 26, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2020-2025-strategic-mandate-agreement-brock-university>;

¹⁰⁷ Sattler, Peggy. "WIL in Ontario's Postsecondary Sector." *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, January 19, 2011. <https://heqco.ca/pub/work-integrated-learning-in-ontarios-postsecondary-sector/>.

¹⁰⁸ Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Survey, July 2025* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250808/dq250808a-eng.htm>

opportunities stemming from these limited networks.¹⁰⁹ Marginalized student groups such as low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities often lack professional ties which could be very beneficial to get their first few experiences. On top of this, these students often have more family and part-time work responsibilities, which pose a barrier to participation in WIL, especially unpaid WIL. For students with disabilities, their functional limitations may limit them from working while studying, which prevents them from gaining work experience during their studies.

Students may face discrimination, including racism, religious bias, and employer prejudice, as well as barriers related to disability or functional limitations that restrict their ability to work while studying. To ensure equitable access, the Ontario Human Rights Commission should be tasked with establishing equity, diversity, and inclusion recruitment standards for employers hiring students.

At the moment, there exist programs run by non-governmental organizations such as the Skills for Youth Success program run by CultureLink for immigrant youth aged 15 to 29¹¹⁰, or Ontario's YMCA six-week program called Y Opportunities for youth with disabilities to build skills that can be used towards opportunities in the labour market¹¹¹, or job board portal specifically for equity-deserving groups.¹¹² Such programs are invaluable to students to enter the job market, and the provincial government should support and encourage such programs with more funding. On existing WIL opportunities including research grants, the provincial government should also prioritize marginalized student groups, whom of which have had limited access to these opportunities. In the post-secondary context, a way the province could do so is to prioritize experiential learning grants for student groups with historically low participation rates.

Students also face many financial barriers to participate in co-op programs, including co-op tuition fees, mandatory ancillary fees, transportation, relocation and housing costs. In a survey by HEQCO, 74 percent of participants indicated that they had to relocate for their WIL opportunity, and many students also indicated that the financial support did not fund all work-related expenses.¹¹³ It is on that basis that OUSA recommends the provincial government to provide envelope grant funding for OSAP to fund qualifying students participating in co-op programs that can be used towards paying co-op tuition fees, ancillary fees, relocation and

¹⁰⁹ Future Skills Centre. "Labour Market Implications for Racialized Youth." *Future Skills Centre*, March 2023. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/labour-market-implications-for-racialized-youth/>.

¹¹⁰ CultureLink. "Skills for Youth Success (SYS)." *CultureLink*, May 9, 2018. <https://www.culturelink.ca/skills-for-youth-success-sys/>.

¹¹¹ YMCA of Southwestern Ontario. (n.d.). Education & enrichment. <https://www.ymcaswo.ca/programs/education-enrichment/employment-services>

¹¹² Diversity Job Board. "Careers for Qualified Diverse Professionals." *Diversity Job Board*, n.d. <https://www.diversityjobboard.com/>.

¹¹³ Malatest, R. A. "Barriers to WIL Opportunities." *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, September 18, 2018. <https://heqco.ca/pub/barriers-to-work-integrated-learning-opportunities/>.

housing costs. It is also important to note that students across many Ontario schools are considered part-time while paying tuition and ancillary fees, leading to them not getting equitable financial aid and benefits. Thus, in addition to envelope financial aid funding, the provincial government should also mandate institutions to consider students on co-op terms to qualify for similar financial aid and benefits as students on a non-co-op term. Beyond these known challenges, it is important that the provincial government should task HEQCO to periodically research every 4 years the experiential learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for all students, including equity-deserving.

The SMA experiential learning metric itself has structural concerns. International students, who contribute substantially to Ontario's labour market are excluded from the metric entirely, causing institutions' actual performance to be underrepresented. OUSA recommends that the provincial government make the experiential learning metric to be inclusive of both domestic and international students.

Employers also face barriers that restrict the availability of placements. Currently, schools across Ontario have inconsistent policies surrounding the acceptance of research work terms, such as USRAs (Undergraduate Student Research Award), towards the completion of a co-op credit. Without it being counted towards a co-op credit, institutions cannot access any tax credit, limiting the number of opportunities available to students. OUSA recommends the provincial government to allow post-secondary institutions to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant for undergraduate research opportunities, increasing the funding allocated to students, and ensuring research terms count towards co-op credits. Similarly, non-profits, despite their important role in training students and serving communities, cannot access existing tax credits, and employers across all sectors have not seen incentives updated since 2009, despite inflation and rising wage expectation. Many employers are therefore either ineligible or unable to offer meaningful experiential learning opportunities. Given the role these incentives play in supporting non-profits' capacity to offer opportunities, such programs should be updated to ensure barrier-free access for all employers. To strengthen employer participation, the provincial government should modify the Co-operative Education Tax Credit so the maximum claimable value reflects 30 percent of the current average co-op salary, differentiated by employer size, and allow non-profits to access the credit through a grant mechanism. Currently, regardless of employer's size, all employers can claim a maximum \$3,000 tax credit for eligible expenses.¹¹⁴ Taking into account inflation since 2007, OUSA notes that the original \$3,000 maximum tax credit is now worth approximately \$4,443.50. In light of this, OUSA recommends increasing the cap to \$4,000 for large employers and \$5,000 for small employers to more effectively incentivize the creation of co-op placements. This tiered

¹¹⁴ Government of Ontario. "Co-Operative Education Tax Credit." Government of Ontario, November 12, 2025. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/co-operative-education-tax-credit>.

approach reflects the differences in employer capacity, providing support to smaller organizations that face greater financial barriers in offering paid WIL placements, as recruitment costs and wages can be a barrier to doing so, especially for small to medium-sized businesses.

Together, these reforms would create an experiential learning ecosystem in Ontario that is equitable, financially accessible, and aligned with workforce needs. By strengthening institutional supports, modernizing employer incentives, expanding student financial assistance, and embedding equity into both funding and hiring practices, Ontario can ensure that experiential learning fulfills its promise as a transformative and inclusive component of post-secondary education.

It is very important to recognize that there are Canadian equity-deserving student groups that face additional barriers when it comes to accessing the opportunities they should be able to have access to on paper. Racialized youth have faced a significantly higher unemployment rate compared to their non-racialized counterparts. In July 2025 where youth unemployment rate reached 14.6 percent, its highest level since 2010, the unemployment rate for Arab youth was 26.4 percent, 23.4 percent for Black youth, 20.5 percent for Chinese youth, 19.4 percent for Filipino youth, and 17.1 percent for South Asian youth¹¹⁵.

OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE & MEDIATION OFFICES

OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE/MEDIATION OFFICE ESTABLISHMENT, FUNDING AND INDEPENDENCE

Principle: Through their independent and impartial nature, ombudsperson or mediation offices provide benefit and support to students in resolving disputes fairly.

Principle: Students should not have to bear the financial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses at the time of utilizing the service.

Principle: Ombudsperson and mediation offices should operate with the structural independence and neutrality to effectively and fairly serve students.

Principle: Students should have readily-accessible dispute resolution mechanisms in which they should not be responsible for disproportionate funding.

Concern: Some Ontario universities do not have institutional ombudsperson or impartial mediation offices, leaving students without access to impartial dispute resolution services.

Concern: At some post-secondary institutions, students are charged additional fees to utilize

¹¹⁵ Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Survey, July 2025*
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250808/dq250808a-eng.htm>

the services of dispute resolution mechanisms.

Concern: At many post-secondary institutions, students are forced to disproportionately bear the cost of funding of ombudsperson or mediation offices on university campuses.

Concern: Funding arrangements that tie ombudsperson offices too closely to institutional administrations risk undermining their independence and student trust.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions establish an ombudsperson office or impartial mediation office that is accessible to all students and operates independently from university administration to ensure procedural fairness and support.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate standardized ombudsperson and mediation training for all staff to ensure consistent, impartial, and professional dispute resolution practices across Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide institutions with enrollment-based funding to adequately run ombudsperson or mediation offices on all campuses, including satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should require that institutional ombudsperson offices adopt an independent funding structure to safeguard neutrality.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that students shall not bear additional costs to utilize dispute resolution mechanisms.

Students should not have to bear the financial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses at the time of utilizing the service. As well, ombudsperson and mediation offices should operate with the structural independence and neutrality to effectively and fairly serve students. Without these guarantees, the mechanisms meant to protect students risk becoming inaccessible to those who need them the most, or becoming compromised by institutions that are meant to hold them accountable. Certain universities charge students additional fees to utilize the services of dispute resolution mechanisms and do not have institutional ombudsperson or impartial mediation offices, leaving students without access to impartial dispute resolution services.

Students should not bear the financial cost of the mechanisms that protect their rights. In Ontario, funding arrangements remain inconsistent. At some institutions students finance a substantial share of ombudsperson or mediation office budgets through association levies or ancillary fees, at others costs are shared with the university, and in a few cases services are fragmented across human rights or conflict management units. These funding inconsistencies can be seen across OUSA's member institutions. As seen in Table I, of the nine OUSA member

institutions, Laurentian University, Ontario Tech University, Trent University, and Wilfrid Laurier University, do not have a dedicated ombudsperson office. Instead, students are directed to complaint forms, human rights offices, or appeals committees. Among institutions that do have ombuds offices, the funding models vary widely. Queen's is funded entirely by the university, while Waterloo splits costs 50/50 between the university and student fees, and Western draws funding from a mix of affiliated colleges and student associations. Where student levies fund most of an office's operations, learners effectively pay twice, once through tuition and again through fees, to secure basic fairness. This leaves students uncertain about scope, access, and independence. The funding structure is also about independence. Canadian and international ombuds practice emphasizes four cornerstones, independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and informality, and warns against arrangements that create real or perceived conflicts of interest.¹¹⁶ Offices whose budgets sit entirely within a senior administrator's portfolio can struggle to be seen as neutral even when staff act with integrity. Professional bodies recommend arrangements that separate budget oversight and codify independence in terms of reference.² When students believe an office is structurally tied to the administration they may be challenging, they are less likely to seek help early, which increases the likelihood of escalation and formal grievances. When independence is clear in mandate and funding, students are more willing to approach the office, and systemic issues surface through reporting rather than social media crises. Because these offices also serve faculty and staff, early impartial resolution benefits the entire campus community.

To address these gaps, the provincial government should provide institutions with enrollment-based funding to adequately run ombudsperson or mediation offices on all campuses, including satellite campuses. Enrolment-based provincial funding would standardize access across campuses and satellite sites and scale resources with caseloads, which typically move with enrollment. Provincial stabilization measures in 2024 show that targeted funding is possible in response to system risks and a modest, dedicated stream for campus dispute resolution would yield large returns in early resolution and trust.¹¹⁷ The provincial government should also require that institutional ombudsperson offices adopt an independent funding structure to safeguard neutrality.

Table I: Funding Arrangements of Ombudsperson and/or Mediation Offices at OUSA Member Institutions (2025-26)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen. "Statement of Ethical Principles." Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen, 2026. https://www.ombudsmanforum.ca/statement_of_ethical_principle.php.

¹¹⁷ Government of Ontario. "Ontario Investing Nearly \$1.3 Billion to Stabilize Colleges and Universities." Government of Ontario, 2024. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004227/ontario-investing-nearly-13-billion-to-stabilize-colleges-and-universities>.

¹¹⁸ Information gathered from respective institutional websites except for Queen's University, where information was unavailable: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

Post-secondary Institution	Is there an Ombuds Office?	Funding Model
Brock	Yes	University (joined in 2020), BUSU, and GSA
Laurentian	No (have a complaint form, under Official Languages Act)	N/A
McMaster	Yes	University and Student Union
Ontario Tech	No (Office of Human Rights)	University
Queen's	Yes	University
Trent	No (Special Appeals Committee)	N/A
Waterloo	Yes	50% by the university, 50% students fees by student services advisory committee
Western	Yes	University, Affiliated Colleges, USC, Student Councils of Colleges, SGS, and MBA Association
Wilfrid Laurier	No (Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management)	N/A

STUDENT TRANSPARENCY

Principle: Students should have adequate representation within institutional ombudsperson offices and mediation offices.

Principle: Students should have transparent and easily accessible communication channels to ensure awareness and understanding of how their institution's ombudsperson or mediation office operates and the services they provide.

Concern: Student representation is not mandated across university ombudsperson offices/mediation offices or advisory committees, despite being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education.

Concern: Many offices lack transparent and direct communication of reporting mechanisms and integrated opportunities within their office for student consultations.

Concern: Many students are not aware of the existing support and services provided by the institutional ombudsperson offices, due to poor promotion and communication to students, leading to low awareness and utilization.

Brock University. "Office of the Student Ombuds." Brock University, 2026. <https://brocku.ca/ombuds/>.; LAURENTIAN MISSING; McMaster University. "Ombuds Office." McMaster University, 2026. <https://ombuds.mcmaster.ca/>.; Ontario Tech University. "Human Rights." Ontario Tech University, 2026. <https://usgc.ontariotechu.ca/human-rights/services/index.php>.; Queen's University. Rep. Budget Report 2025-26. Kingston: Queens University, 2026.; Trent University. "Special Appeals Committee." Trent University, 2026. <https://www.trentu.ca/governance/senate/committees/special-appeals-committee>.; The Office of the Ombudsperson. Rep. Annual Report 2025. Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 2025.; Western University. "Office of the Ombudsperson." Western University, 2026. <https://uwo.ca/ombuds/index.html>.; Wilfrid Laurier University. "Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management." Wilfrid Laurier University, 2026. <https://students.wlu.ca/support-and-wellness/human-rights-and-conflict-management/index.html?ref=wellness-and-recreation%2Fhuman-rights-and-conflict-management%2Findex.html>.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that all institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices include undergraduate and recent alumni representation through formal advisory committees, with students comprising at least twenty percent of committee membership.

Recommendation: The provincial government should require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices, along with their governing bodies and student associations, to engage in bilateral annual reporting to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous feedback between all parties.

Recommendation: The provincial government should require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices to increase student awareness and utilization of services and resources to students by actively promoting their services through orientations, online platforms, and accessible materials.

Students should have adequate representation within institutional ombudsperson offices and mediation offices, and should have transparent and easily accessible communication channels to ensure awareness and understanding of how their institution's ombudsperson or mediation office operates and the services they provide. Without these guarantees, dispute resolution offices risk operating as administrative structures that students neither trust nor know how to access.

Student representation is not mandated across university ombudsperson offices, mediation offices, or advisory committees, despite students being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education. Many offices also lack transparent and direct communication of reporting mechanisms and integrated opportunities within their office for student consultations. Moreover, many students are not aware of the existing support and services provided by institutional ombudsperson offices, due to poor promotion and communication to students, leading to low awareness and utilization.

Laurentian University, for example, does not have a dedicated ombudsperson or mediation office. Rather, students are directed to a privacy complaints page that does not offer impartial dispute resolution, advisory committee input, or any form of annual public reporting.¹¹⁹ Students at Laurentian who face grade disputes, policy concerns, or discrimination issues have no neutral institutional body to turn to and no structured channel through which to raise concerns about how disputes are being handled. Trent University similarly lacks a dedicated ombudsperson office, instead operating a Special Appeals Committee that is limited to academic matters.¹²⁰ This leaves students facing non-academic disputes, including those involving discrimination, procedural unfairness, or interpersonal conflict, without access to impartial

¹¹⁹ Laurentian University. "Procedure for Handling Privacy Complaints." Laurentian University, 2026.
<https://laurentian.ca/procedure-handling-privacy-complaints>.

¹²⁰ Trent University. "Special Appeals Committee."

resolution. Similar to Laurentian University, Trent does not publish annual reports that would allow students or administrators to identify systemic issues or track outcomes over time. These cases illustrate that without provincial requirements, institutions can leave significant gaps in student protection with no accountability mechanism to surface them.

By contrast, existing models demonstrate that meaningful representation and transparency are achievable. At Queen's the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee includes the AMS and SGPS presidents along with faculty and administrators; at Western the office operates with an advisory committee and publishes detailed annual reports.¹²¹ These practices create predictable channels for feedback and continuous improvement. Western's most recent report found that one in every 44 students contacted the office in 2022–23 and that 17 percent of visitors identified as international, information that helps student leaders and administrators plan resources and address policy gaps.¹²² External ombuds offices across Ontario already embrace annual reporting, and similar expectations should be standard for campus dispute resolution.¹²³ Clear documents, plain-language web pages that explain scope and intake, and visible conflict-of-interest safeguards complete the picture so that students know what to expect before a problem escalates.

To address these gaps, the provincial government should mandate that all institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices include undergraduate and recent alumni representation through formal advisory committees, with students comprising at least twenty percent of committee membership. The provincial government should also require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices, along with their governing bodies and student associations, to engage in bilateral annual reporting to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous feedback between all parties. Reporting should cover caseload volumes, issue types, time to resolution, recommendations to the institution, and follow-up actions. Finally, the provincial government should require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices to increase student awareness and utilization of services by actively promoting their services through orientations, online platforms, and accessible materials

ESCALATION AND PROVINCIAL OVERSIGHT

Principle: Students should have clear, consistent and accessible avenues to escalate unresolved complaints beyond the institutional level.

¹²¹ Queen's University. "Ombudsperson Advisory Committee." Office of the University Ombudsperson, 2026. <https://www.queensu.ca/ombuds/who-we-are/advisory-committee>; The Office of the Ombudsperson. Rep. Annual Report 2022-23, 2023. <https://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/pdf/reports/annualreports/2022-2023.pdf> ?

¹²² Western University. "Senate Agenda, 2024." <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/senate/minutes/2024/a24jan19sen.pdf>.

¹²³ Ombudsman Ontario. Rep. 2023-2024 Annual Report, 2024. <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/en/our-work/annual-reports/2023-2024-annual-report>.

Principle: Students should have readily-accessible dispute resolution mechanisms, which they are not the sole bearers of funding.

Concern: The number of academic and non-academic issues has increased in recent years, highlighting gaps in campus-level dispute resolution processes .

Concern: No formalized connection currently exists between the Ontario Ombudsman and institutional ombudsperson offices, resulting in inconsistent reporting standards and unclear escalation pathways for unresolved student complaints.

Recommendation: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student advisory committee with elected undergraduate representatives and graduates from each Ontario post-secondary institution.

Recommendation: The MCURES should facilitate a formalized reporting connection between institutional ombudsperson offices and the Ontario Ombudsman, with clear accountability measures and reporting standards to ensure unresolved student complaints can be escalated and handled consistently across institutions.

Students deserve clear, consistent avenues to escalate unresolved complaints when their institutions cannot resolve disputes internally. The absence of accessible, impartial pathways can leave students without meaningful recourse, undermining trust in universities and the broader post-secondary sector. While ombudsperson offices are designed to address complaints at the institutional level, many students experience gaps in these processes, particularly when disputes involve both academic and non-academic issues. These dispute resolution mechanisms should be readily accessible to students without requiring them to be the sole bearers of funding.

The volume of complaints illustrates these shortcomings. In 2023–24, the Ontario Ombudsman received 289 university-related cases, up from 205 the previous year, and 292 college cases, up from 236 in 2021–22.¹²⁴ Common issues included admissions, communication of policies, grade appeals, and tuition refunds.¹²⁵ The growth in cases highlights weaknesses in campus-level dispute resolution, where many students are left with no option but to escalate to the provincial Ombudsman. Yet the current framework lacks a formalized connection between institutional ombudsperson offices and the Ontario Ombudsman. As a result, reporting standards are inconsistent, escalation pathways are unclear, and students are often unsure of where to turn when they cannot find a resolution on their own campus. This creates a gap between campus-level dispute resolution processes and the provincial oversight provided by the Ontario Ombudsman, where students may move from one system to the other without clear handoff points, shared reporting standards, or coordinated follow-up.

¹²⁴ Ombudsman Ontario, *2023-2024 Annual Report*, June 26, 2024, <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/en/our-work/annual-reports/2023-2024-annual-report>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41

The lack of consistency across institutions also undermines equity. Students at universities with well-established ombudsperson offices may benefit from stronger protections, while those at institutions without such offices—or with underfunded and structurally dependent ones—are left with limited support. This variation means that the ability to resolve disputes is not guaranteed equally across Ontario, but is instead determined by institutional capacity and governance.

To address these concerns, OUSA recommends strengthening provincial oversight by creating clearer connections between institutional ombudsperson offices and the Ontario Ombudsman. The MCURES should facilitate a formalized reporting connection between institutional ombudsperson offices and the Ontario Ombudsman, with clear accountability measures and reporting standards to ensure unresolved student complaints can be escalated and handled consistently across institutions. This would not only improve accountability but also allow for sector-wide identification of systemic issues in dispute resolution.

Further, students should have a voice in shaping oversight mechanisms at the provincial level. The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student advisory committee with elected undergraduate representatives and graduates from each Ontario post-secondary institution to provide feedback, flag emerging issues, and ensure oversight mechanisms are informed by lived student experience. Establishing this body would align with best governance practices, where advisory committees provide critical insight and accountability to decision-makers.

In summary, escalation and oversight are critical components of a fair and transparent dispute resolution system. Without a consistent, province-wide framework, students remain vulnerable to uneven protections and unclear pathways for resolving serious issues. By connecting institutional ombudsperson offices to the Ontario Ombudsman and incorporating student voice in oversight, Ontario can ensure that all students—regardless of their institution—have access to impartial, effective mechanisms to resolve disputes.

POLICY STATEMENT

Whereas: The provincial government should be both transparent and accountable to students, faculty, and others impacted by its decisions.

Whereas: University governance bodies, including committees, are most effective when their membership represents diverse perspectives and experiences, and engages to their full potential.

Whereas: Students should have the right to be elected to university governance bodies as voting members and be involved in their universities' decision-making processes.

Whereas: All university governance structures should include equitable student representation to ensure nuanced governing perspectives.

Whereas: Transparent information regarding the activities of university governance bodies should be comprehensible and made available to students in a timely manner.

Whereas: Students should have the same voting privileges as any other voting member of university governance bodies.

Whereas: Student voices should be considered as valuable as contributions from any other member of university governance bodies.

Whereas: Undergraduate Degree Frameworks should clearly define and directly communicate the knowledge, skills, and competencies students are expected to develop by graduation.

Whereas: All UDLEs should have integrated equity-based learning outcomes, ensuring that graduates gain competencies in equity, diversity, and inclusion alongside disciplinary expertise.

Whereas: For professional programs, institutional and external accreditation standards should be coordinated to avoid duplication, misalignment, or contradictory requirements, and clearly outline expected employment pathways.

Whereas: The varying needs of students from equity-deserving groups in the post-secondary environment should be understood in order to improve the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education.

Whereas: All students should have equitable access to post-secondary education, meaningful supports during their studies, and fair opportunities to succeed in their careers after graduation.

Whereas: Equity deserving students should have access to adequate supports, as a necessary means of meaningful participation in post-secondary education.

Whereas: All post-secondary students should have equitable access to physical, hybrid, and online learning spaces, supported by a wide range of accessible learning resources that accommodate diverse disabilities and learning needs.

Whereas: Accessibility requirements in post-secondary education should follow standards that meet the needs of students with disabilities and proactively remove barriers.

Whereas: Institutions should be held accountable for ensuring that quality assurance processes are transparent, evidence-based, and reflect the diverse experiences of Ontario's undergraduate students.

Whereas: Students should have meaningful input into how quality assurance mechanisms are designed, implemented, and reviewed, including active participation in consultations and decision-making rather than token or symbolic engagement.

Whereas: The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure quality assurance mechanisms establish consistent, sector-wide standards that make program quality comparable across institutions.

Whereas: Data regarding the participation of students from equity-deserving groups in the labour market is necessary in order to identify and address how barriers in post-secondary education impact graduates' professional outcomes, with particular attention to equity and inclusion.

Whereas: Indigenous students should be supported in their post-secondary pursuits through spaces and learning objectives dedicated to Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing.

Whereas: Indigenous students have strong connections to diverse communities across Ontario and deserve to attend post-secondary while preserving these ties.

Whereas: The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies.

Whereas: The provincial government has a responsibility to support and invest in programs that ensure access and transportation to post-secondary education.

Whereas: Rural and northern students should have the same level of access to broadband internet, technology, transportation, and university campuses as students living in southern urban areas.

Whereas: Francophone students have the right to engage and participate in courses instructed in the French language and benefit from the diverse post-secondary education sector in Ontario.

Whereas: Francophone students should have access to adequate instructional materials and programming in French across Ontario's numerous post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Physical spaces on university campuses should ensure an accessible and safe space for all students, including, but not limited to those with disabilities, and respiratory conditions.

Whereas: Information regarding institutional deferred maintenance should be readily accessible to students, staff, and community stakeholders.

Whereas: Students living with disabilities should not be impeded from accessing spaces and services on campus due to delayed maintenance or inadequate infrastructure

Whereas: Post-secondary maintenance should be completed in a timely manner to foster a safe environment for students, community members, staff and visitors.

Whereas: Post-secondary institutions in Ontario should not defer maintenance as a means of budgetary savings.

Whereas: Deferred maintenance should not unreasonably impact students' access to important physical infrastructure.

Whereas: On-campus culturally-conscious academic, health, and support resources are key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students, and should be accessible to all students regardless of campus.

Whereas: Students should have adequate access to safe, affordable, and accessible transportation in the area of their campus of choice.

Whereas: Students' contributions to the services available on campus through ancillary fees should be reflected on their home campus while representing no more than one third of the institutional operating budgets.

Whereas: Students should feel confident that programs and offerings from satellite campuses are high quality and on par with main campus standards.

Whereas: Satellite campuses should be held to the same standard of accessibility to physical spaces as a university's main campus.

Whereas: Students should have access to safe and affordable housing in locations of satellite campuses.

Whereas: Undergraduate students, as the largest stakeholders in higher education, should be represented in institutional budgeting processes and have transparency into how tuition and ancillary fees are allocated.

Whereas: Operational funding should adequately support needs of students through a combination of performance-based and enrolment-based funding metrics.

Whereas: Post-secondary education is a public good, and operational funding should reflect shared responsibility between the provincial government, institutions, and students.

Whereas: Students should not contribute more than one-third of institutional operating budgets.

Whereas: The criteria which determines funding for post-secondary programs should ensure sustainable funding for all students and programs.

Whereas: Any increase in PBF within SMAs should be incremental and contingent on the successes of the mechanism, validated by a comprehensive, long-term evaluation, and protected from economic instability.

Whereas: Students should be consulted and included in deliberations about PBF metrics within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Whereas: Universities should not face negative consequences for external factors beyond their control that affect core performance-based metrics.

Whereas: Research and teaching should be given equal priority when it comes to government funding, promoting differentiation between post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Students should feel confident that their tuition fees are being invested in their education and learning experiences offered to them throughout their degree.

Whereas: Data collection from the SMAs report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Whereas: Data collected from the SMAs should be made publicly available.

Whereas: Experiential learning should be integrated into post-secondary education across Ontario institutions without causing undue financial burden on students.

Whereas: In order to achieve success in their experiential learning metric under the Strategic Mandate Agreement, institutions should be well-supported to provide high-quality and widely available experiences.

Whereas: Experiential learning is an important avenue for students to be adequately prepared to enter the workforce.

Whereas: All employers including non-profits and small businesses should have equitable incentive mechanisms to be able to offer and increase available experiential learning opportunities to students.

Whereas: Through their independent and impartial nature, ombudsperson or mediation offices provide benefit and support to students in resolving disputes fairly.

Whereas: Students should not have to bear the financial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses at the time of utilizing the service.

Whereas: Ombudsperson and mediation offices should operate with the structural independence and neutrality to effectively and fairly serve students.

Whereas: Students should have readily-accessible dispute resolution mechanisms in which they should not be responsible for disproportionate funding.

Whereas: Students should have adequate representation within institutional ombudsperson offices and mediation offices.

Whereas: Students should have transparent and easily accessible communication channels to ensure awareness and understanding of how their institution's ombudsperson or mediation office operates and the services they provide.

Whereas: Students should have clear, consistent and accessible avenues to escalate unresolved complaints beyond the institutional level.

Whereas: Students should have readily-accessible dispute resolution mechanisms, which they are not the sole bearers of funding.

Be it resolved that: MCURES should create and consult a post-secondary education advisory body with equitable representation from students, faculty, university administrators, and other post secondary sector experts to advise the Ministry on framework reviews, regulatory changes, funding formulas and other government priorities.

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT): The provincial government should establish a triennial review and issue memoranda with clear and actionable recommendations to post-secondary institutions which evaluates students' impact within university governing bodies and equity in student representation across Ontario.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that the ratio of student members of university boards to members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, if any, adequately reflect the relative contributions to university operations from tuition to provincial government funding.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that the distribution of student seats on

university senates be at least half the distribution of faculty member seats, with at least one student seat per Faculty.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that student representatives on university governance bodies be democratically elected by students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that each university governance body implement a regular and transparent internal reporting process in which they publish their activities and decisions to stakeholders and university community members in a comprehensible manner.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate universities to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups in both student and senior leadership seats on governance bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate a review of university consultation processes, mechanisms, and engagement with different campus and community stakeholder groups.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide EDIA, Indigenization, and governance procedure training that allow interested undergraduate students to gain knowledge and skills necessary to seek election for undergraduate student representation positions within university governance bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide training to enable the active participation of all members.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that university governance bodies provide training for all members of university governance bodies to address actual and perceived power imbalances between students and other members.

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish a set of best practices for university governance bodies to ensure that students are represented and not unduly restricted from relevant committees nor from voting within their responsibilities.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should revise the UDLEs to clearly define learning outcomes, skills and competencies, and provide consistent guidance for institutions, while ensuring clear and accessible student-friendly language.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should work with institutions and professional and accreditation bodies to harmonize institutional degree expectations with accreditation requirements, reducing conflicting standards and consistency across Ontario programs.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should consult with equity-deserving students to develop and integrate measurable I-EDIAA into degree level expectations.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should ensure that student and graduate feedback is incorporated during the process of updating UDLEs by consulting with existing student bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities collect and publish disaggregated data on the participation, retention, and post-graduation outcomes of students from equity-deserving groups, using non-compulsory self-identification methods .

BIFRT: The provincial government should task the HEQCO with conducting consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to better inform equity-focused recommendations for the post-secondary sector.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide targeted funding for universities to expand supports for equity-deserving students during their degrees.

BIFRT: The provincial government should adopt all formal AODA recommendations for both physical and digital learning environments on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce dedicated and scalable funding to support institutions in retrofitting non-compliant older buildings and ensuring new construction projects meet AODA standards, with funding levels that reflect project size and institutional capacity.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase post-secondary special purpose grants to expand accessibility of hybrid learning technology; including high-flex classrooms, lecture capture with transcripts, and digital learning infrastructure, for all students, not only those registered with accessibility services.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence, and Security should require institutions to submit public annual reports on progress toward meeting accessibility targets, with accountability measures for non-compliance and implement the Development of Proposed Postsecondary Education Standards; Final Recommendations Report (2022) in full with a clear implementation plan.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage universities to review course evaluation processes, ensuring that data collection is equitable and that feedback is meaningfully implemented into teaching and program improvements.

BIFRT: The OUCQA should incorporate feedback from current students, alumni, faculty and industry consultants during cyclical program reviews and ensure the process includes at least one student reviewer and one reviewer from a field of work relevant to the respective program.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with the OUCQA to reduce institutional bias by creating independent oversight, standardizing reporting, expanding external review, and enforcing compliance with quality standards.

BIFRT: MCURES should require institutions to make quality assurance performance reviews and related data publicly available to ensure accountability and comparability across institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should require the collection and public reporting of disaggregated, non-compulsory data on the participation and post-graduation outcomes of equity-deserving students, with HEQCO mandated to analyze and consult on findings.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Transportation in partnership with the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation should work to expand affordable and reliable public transportation options available in rural and northern areas and Indigenous communities that connect to Southern Ontario through a strategic transit plan.

BIFRT: The provincial government should further invest in programs, resources and support focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase funding through the Indigenous Student Success Fund for Indigenous Student Centres on post-secondary campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to rural and/or northern students who require access to technology off-campus.

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to engage in providing financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet and technology to rural and northern communities.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Transportation should create and incentivize expanded options connecting rural and northern communities to southern Ontario.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue investing in existing French programs as well as programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language.

BIFRT: The provincial government should reintroduce the Ontario Distance Grant for OSAP-eligible Francophone students who are attending full-time studies in French and must travel to get to their post-secondary education.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work directly with universities offering programs in the French language to ensure solvency and ongoing financial support for post-secondary institutions that have French language programs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to Ontario post-secondary institutions to recruit instructors for French programs to promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with post-secondary institutions to support a joint college/university program that would allow Francophone students to cross-enroll between institutions and easily transfer their credits to improve access to a wide array of French courses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current AODA, and provide appreciable funding to increase overall accessibility of campuses for everyone.

BIFRT: The Minister of Accessibility should recommend that the Lieutenant Governor accept the final recommendations of the AODA Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

BIFRT: The MCURES should increase Facilities Renewal Program contributions such that institutional funding makes up not more than one-half (50 percent) of deferred maintenance funding.

BIFRT: The provincial government should continue to provide adequate sustained investments into the Facilities Renewal Program to appropriately address the backlog of projects facing institutions.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security should establish a set of best practices for institutions which promote the accessible dissemination of deferred maintenance information to students and stakeholders.

BIFRT: The provincial government should include a metric in the strategic mandate agreements that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should commission the HEQCO to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses as a strategy for improving access to post-secondary education for populations in rural and northern communities.

BIFRT: The Ministry of College and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to invest in rapid transit through the Community Transportation Grant Program, with a priority of reaching underserved satellite campuses and strengthening transit options.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to services, programs, and accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage and support the development of student housing on satellite campuses that is on par with the housing provided on main campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions prioritize the development of essential student services when establishing or expanding satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should strengthen existing tuition transparency requirements by enforcing a standardized format for tuition and ancillary fee breakdowns, requiring that this information be communicated to students each academic term in accessible, student-facing formats.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate student involvement in institutional budget planning processes by requiring governing bodies perform formal consultations with existing student advisory committees or associations, when making financial decisions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing no more than one-third of total institutional operating budgets.

BIFRT: The provincial government should task HEQCO with evaluating the quality of programs delivered through private, for-profit partnerships to ensure they meet the same accountability and academic standards as public post-secondary institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should implement a one-time increase to both operating grants and per-student funding allocations, tied to inflation since 2014, followed by annual adjustments based on the CPI, with a guaranteed minimum of two percent per year.

BIFRT: The provincial government should index base operating grants to the CPI annually to maintain consistent per-student funding.

BIFRT: When the domestic tuition freeze is lifted, the provincial government should only permit gradual tuition increases tied to inflation or two percent, whichever is lower, and provide proportional increases in OSAP grants and loans to ensure affordability.

BIFRT: The provincial government should review the institutional funding, tuition, and financial aid frameworks through a post secondary education advisory body when drafting or revising frameworks to consider the post-secondary sector more holistically.

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish clear regulations governing universities abilities to contract out core academic activities to private, for-profit partners.

BIFRT: The provincial government should measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, graduation rate, retention rate, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation of diverse scholarship in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator.

BIFRT: The provincial government should reevaluate the calculation of “Graduate Employment Rate in a Related Field” to be more expansive and reward institutions who successfully encourage domestic students to pursue additional higher education developing a more educated and talented workforce.

BIFRT: The provincial government should decouple the calculation of “Graduate Employment Earnings” into BHASE graduates’ earnings and STEM graduates’ earnings to promote a holistic evaluation and reduce the disproportionate advantages of STEM-heavy institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should align performance metrics with SMA timelines by incorporating short-term progress indicators (such as yearly student retention rate or student satisfaction rate) that capture more immediate institutional improvements.

BIFRT: MCURES should maintain the weighting of performance based funding at 25 percent for the entire duration of the new Strategic Mandate Agreements, until further data about the effectiveness of PBF on improving student outcomes is available.

BIFRT: The provincial government should balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the SMA envelope, enrollment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure PBF metrics do not adversely impact an institution's ability to respond and be accountable to student needs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should conduct consultations with the previously defined post secondary advisory body to ensure that the sector’s needs are met under a PBF model.

BIFRT: The provincial government should add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the SMA system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adjusting performance measures to more accurately determine PBF.

BIFRT: MCURES should increase the value of grant units, and the weighting of grant units for programs to reflect the variation in enrolment distribution for various programs and inflationary increases in program delivery costs since 2009.

BIFRT: The provincial government should allow for institutions to adjust enrollment projections during the midpoint of SMA negotiations in order to match fluctuating student enrollment at institutions across the province.

BIFRT: The provincial government should adjust the university funding model to add a performance metric that covers student satisfaction in their learning experiences, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and equitable hiring across both teaching and research-track professors.

BIFRT: The provincial government should conduct consultations with the previously defined post secondary advisory body to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from equity-deserving groups, can be incorporated within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to collect feedback from students to adjust SMAs to reflect student learning and career goals and identify gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors.

BIFRT: The provincial government should centrally store data collected by the SMA report backs and make it accessible to the public.

BIFRT: The provincial government should publicly report the university's performance on each performance-based metric with its' funding allocated, and use the data to inform the renewal and budget percentage of each metric.

BIFRT: The provincial government should change the experiential learning metric to be inclusive of both domestic and international students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should establish a minimum 15% weight, across institutions, for the experiential learning metric under performance-based funding strategic mandate agreements.

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 taking into account inflation between 2007 and now, with maximums of \$4,000 for larger employers, and \$5,000 for smaller ones, instead of the current maximum of \$3000 regardless of the employer's size.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope grant funding for OSAP to fund qualifying students participating in co-op programs that can be used towards paying co-op tuition fees, ancillary fees, transportation, relocation and housing costs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate institutions to consider students on co-op terms to qualify for similar financial aid as full-time students on an academic term.

BIFRT: The provincial government should task HEQCO to research every 4 years the experiential learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for all students, including equity-deserving.

BIFRT: The provincial government should allow post-secondary institutions to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant for undergraduate research opportunities, increasing the funding allocated to students, and ensuring research terms count towards co-op credits.

BIFRT: The provincial government should allow non-profits to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant.

BIFRT: For programs with high participation in experiential learning, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to create or expand faculty-specific experiential learning support offices at all schools that are able to support applications, employer relations and professional development for students navigating competitive experiential learning opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should prioritize experiential learning grants and opportunities, including research grants, for student groups who have historically low participation rates in these opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should task the Ontario Human Rights Commission to create standards for equity, diversity, and inclusion recruitment training for those hiring student employees, to ensure equitable access to job opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions establish an ombudsperson office or impartial mediation office that is accessible to all students and operates independently from university administration to ensure procedural fairness and support.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate standardized ombudsperson and mediation training for all staff to ensure consistent, impartial, and professional dispute resolution practices across Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide institutions with enrollment-based funding to adequately run ombudsperson or mediation offices on all campuses, including satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should require that institutional ombudsperson offices adopt an independent funding structure to safeguard neutrality.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that students shall not bear additional costs to utilize dispute resolution mechanisms.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that all institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices include undergraduate and recent alumni representation through formal advisory committees, with students comprising at least twenty percent of committee membership.

BIFRT: The provincial government should require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices, along with their governing bodies and student associations, to engage in bilateral annual reporting to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous feedback between all parties.

BIFRT: The provincial government should require institutional ombudsperson and mediation offices to increase student awareness and utilization of services and resources to students by

actively promoting their services through orientations, online platforms, and accessible materials.

BIFRT: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student advisory committee with elected undergraduate representatives and graduates from each Ontario post-secondary institution.

BIFRT: The MCURES should facilitate a formalized reporting connection between institutional ombudsperson offices and the Ontario Ombudsman, with clear accountability measures and reporting standards to ensure unresolved student complaints can be escalated and handled consistently across institutions.