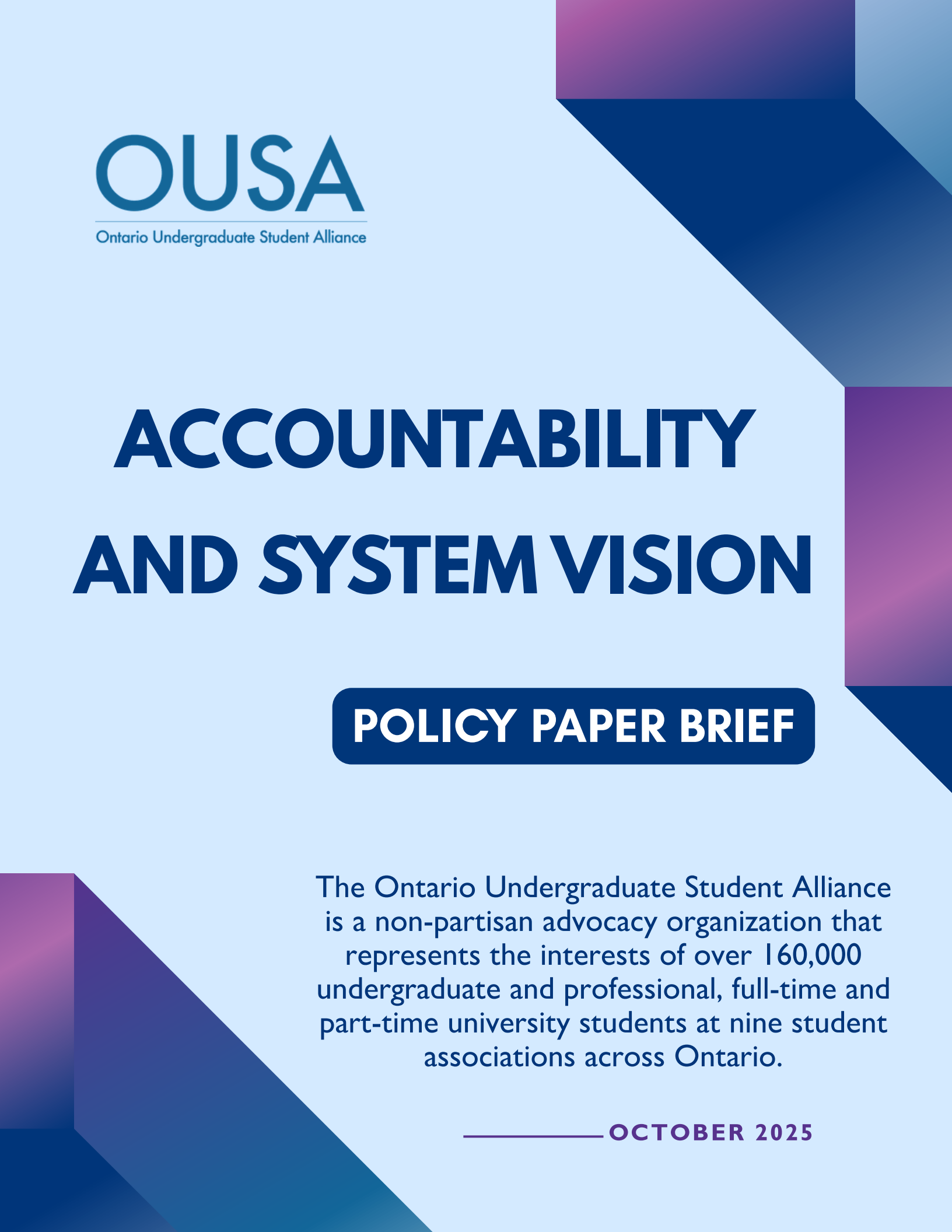




OUSA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SYSTEM VISION

POLICY PAPER BRIEF

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of over 160,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at nine student associations across Ontario.

OCTOBER 2025

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SUMMARY

The *Accountability and System Vision* policy paper was developed by undergraduate students through the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) 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 (SMAs), 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.

The *Accountability and System Vision* policy paper was written, approved, and published by undergraduate student authors. The **concerns** and **recommendations** within were voted on and ratified by student representatives from OUSA's member schools in October 2025 during Fall General Assembly.

FRAGMENTED MINISTRY FRAMEWORKS

Concerns:

Students are concerned by the lack of transparency and student involvement in the province's current post-secondary frameworks.

Recommendations:

The provincial government should task the **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- creating and consulting 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.

LIMITED REPRESENTATION IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

I. Student Representation on Governance Bodies

Concerns:

Students have identified concerns about 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. 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. Students are worried that there is insufficient provincial regulation on the equitable representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies. The lack of diverse representation of marginalized groups in governing bodies can lead to oversights on the experiences of equity-deserving students. Due to unique and potentially exacerbated challenges, individuals from marginalized groups face additional

barriers to engaging with university governance. Students are also concerned by the lack of adequate data across post-secondary institutions as to which marginalized groups are underrepresented on governance bodies.

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- establish a triennial review and issue memoranda with clear and actionable recommendations to post-secondary institutions that evaluate students' impact within university governing bodies and equity in student representation across Ontario.
- 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 and provincial government funding.
- 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.

Recommendations Continued:

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.
- mandate that each university governance body implement a regular and transparent internal reporting process where they publish their activities and decisions to stakeholders and university community members in a comprehensible manner.
- 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.
- mandate a review of university consultation processes, mechanisms, and engagement with different campus and community stakeholder groups.

2. Student Voting Equity on University Governance

Concerns:

Students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them due to actual or perceived inexperience. Students may also be discouraged from contributing to university governance discussions because of perceived power imbalances between students and other members of governance bodies.

Recommendations:

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.
- mandate that university governance bodies provide training to enable the active participation of all members.

Recommendations Continued:

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.
- 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.

INSUBSTANTIAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

I. Degree Expectations

Concerns:

Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations 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. The structure and interpretation of the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations framework are not currently standardized across institutions and lack clarity on how expectations and learning outcomes are articulated to students. There is limited Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism requirements in undergraduate degree level expectations. Professional faculties often face conflicting requirements between institutional expectations and those set by external accreditation bodies.

Recommendations:

The provincial government should task The **Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA)** with:

- revising the University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLEs) to clearly define learning outcomes, skills and competencies, and provide consistent guidance for institutions, while ensuring clear and accessible student-friendly language.
- working with institutions and professional and accreditation bodies to harmonize institutional degree expectations with accreditation requirements, reducing conflicting standards and consistency across Ontario programs.
- consulting with equity-deserving students to develop and integrate measurable Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism competencies (I-EDIAA) into degree level expectations.
- ensuring that student and graduate feedback is incorporated during the process of updating UDLEs by consulting with existing student bodies.

2. Support For Students From Equity-Deserving Groups

Concerns:

Students have expressed concern about the 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. 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.

Recommendations:

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.
- provide targeted funding for universities to expand supports for equity-deserving students during their degrees.

The provincial government should task the **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)** with:

- conducting consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to better inform equity-focused recommendations for the post-secondary sector.

3. Accessibility And Learning Structures For Students With Disabilities

Concerns:

Students with disabilities have raised concerns that some post-secondary institutions deny academic accommodations without offering alternative supports and have inconsistent supports across campuses. 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. The current Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) framework is not sufficient for student accessibility needs in post-secondary education. 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.

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- adopt all formal Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) recommendations for both physical and digital learning environments on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.
- 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.
- 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.

Recommendations Continued:

The provincial government should task the **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- requiring 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.

4. Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Concerns:

Students have expressed concern that current quality assurance frameworks lack clarity or transparency, making it difficult to measure the effectiveness of learning outcomes and institutional performance. Current institutional bias in the development and reporting of quality assurance measures can lead to inconsistent standards and limit meaningful accountability. 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. 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.

Recommendations:

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.
- work with the OUCQA to reduce institutional bias by creating independent oversight, standardizing reporting, expanding external review, and enforcing compliance with quality standards.
- 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.

Recommendations Continued:

The provincial government should task the **Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA)** with:

- only approving Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.
- incorporating 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.

The provincial government should task **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- requiring institutions to make quality assurance performance reviews and related data publicly available to ensure accountability and comparability across institutions.

INCOMPREHENSIVE CAPACITY EXPANSION INITIATIVES

1. Indigenous Students' Support

Concerns:

Most post-secondary institutions in Ontario are located in the southern regions, which heightens community disconnect for Indigenous students from northern First Nation Reserves. There is consistently inadequate support and celebration of Indigenous voices, students, culture, and representation in post-secondary spaces.

Recommendations:

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

The provincial government in partnership with the **Ministry of Transportation**, and the **Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation** should:

- working 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.

2. Infrastructure to Support Rural and Northern Students

Concerns:

Students in rural and northern communities face additional financial barriers to accessing reliable internet required for post-secondary education. Private sector internet providers are not effectively incentivized to support access to quality internet service in rural and northern areas. 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.

Recommendations:

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.
- introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students.
- continue to engage in providing financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet and technology to rural and northern communities.
- create and incentivize expanded options connecting rural and northern communities to southern Ontario.

3. Infrastructure to Support Francophone Students

Concerns:

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. Francophone students have very limited options for learning in French and must choose

between relocating and learning in another language. Post-secondary institutions that offer programs in the French language do not offer a wide array of diverse courses.

Recommendations:

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.
- 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.
- 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.

Recommendations:

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.
- 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.

4. Deferred Campus Maintenance and Repair

Concerns:

Students have raised concerns about the significant backlog of maintenance requests across post-secondary campuses, resulting in inaccessible and unsafe learning spaces. Currently, no standardized post-secondary Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act education policy is in place to ensure standards for physical spaces on post-secondary campuses.

The Blue Ribbon Panel failed to address Ontario's lack of a standardized post-secondary Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) education policy of physical spaces on campuses, thus leaving a significant gap in accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities. As facilities reach their physical end of life, they restrict students' access to spaces, and overall safety. The inequitable cost sharing system is delaying the completion of facilities renewal and increasing costs to students. 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. The lack of easily accessible information regarding deferred maintenance in Ontario's postsecondary institutions makes it difficult for stakeholders outside of Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES) to hold institutions accountable.

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), and provide appreciable funding to to increase overall accessibility of campuses for everyone.
- continue to provide adequate sustained investments into the Facilities Renewal Program to appropriately address the backlog of projects facing institutions.

The provincial government should task the **Minister of Accessibility** with:

- recommending that the Lieutenant Governor accept the final recommendations of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

The provincial government should task **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- increasing Facilities Renewal Program contributions such that institutional funding makes up not more than one-half (50 percent) of deferred maintenance funding.
- establishing a set of best practices for institutions which promote the accessible dissemination of deferred maintenance information to students and stakeholders.

5. Satellite Campus Infrastructure

Concerns:

High quality services and supports are not readily nor equally available across institution's primary and satellite campuses. Some satellite campuses lack basic amenities like food services, recreation areas, and study spaces, leaving students isolated and underserved. 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 ancillary fees paid by students on satellite campuses are not reflected in the quality of services available to them on those campuses.

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. Communities where satellite campuses are located may not have adequate housing options to serve student populations. Most post-secondary students do not have access to private transportation leaving them reliant on public transport systems. 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. 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.

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- include a metric in Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses.
- encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses.
- mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies.
- 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.
- encourage and support the development of student housing on satellite campuses that is on par with the housing provided on main campuses.

Recommendations Continued:

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 commission **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (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.

The provincial government should task **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** the **Ministry of Transportation** with:

- investing in rapid transit through the Community Transportation Grant Program, with a priority of reaching underserved satellite campuses and strengthening transit options.

UNBALANCED FUNDING MODELS

I. Shared Responsibility for University Operational Funding

Concerns:

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

The cost of providing higher education has increased disproportionately to public funding, which continues to make higher education financially inaccessible. Student tuition fees contributions have accounted for an increasingly disproportionate amount of Ontario universities' operating budgets and revenues, outpacing government contributions each year. 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. Due to inadequate government funding, institutions in Ontario rely on increasing international tuition, ancillary fees, and revenue-generating campus services to supplement operating budgets.

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

Recommendations:

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.
- 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.

Recommendations Continued:

The **provincial government** should:

- increase operating grants until students are contributing no more than one-third of total institutional operating budgets.
- 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 consumer price index (CPI), with a guaranteed minimum of two percent per year.
- index base operating grants to the CPI annually to maintain consistent per-student funding.
- when the domestic tuition freeze is lifted, 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.
- 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.

- establish clear regulations governing universities abilities to contract out core academic activities to private, for-profit partners.

The provincial government should task **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (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.

2. Re-Evaluating Funding Source Models

Concerns:

“Graduate Employment in Related Fields”, and “Graduate Employment Earnings” as metrics can inadvertently disadvantage BHASE (Business, Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Education) programs whose graduates often pursue further education as well as work in a wide range of sectors including public service, and NGOs, that typically have lower earnings.

“Graduate Employment in Related Fields”, and “Graduate Employment Earnings” as metrics can inadvertently disadvantage

BHASE (Business, Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Education) programs whose graduates often pursue further education as well as work in a wide range of sectors including public service, and NGOs, that typically have lower earnings.

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 Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) cycles. The current performance-based funding model within SMAs that last five years disincentivizes institutions to adapt to global, political, and economic conditions without risking detrimental cuts to funding. Student concerns and perspectives are not adequately considered and incorporated in strategic agreement negotiations, resulting in a lack of institutional accountability to student needs. The freeze on weighted grant units in 2017 neglected the variations amongst different faculties’ program delivery and inflationary resource costs since 2009.

The provincial government has not increased the enrollment corridor since 2017.

Recommendations:

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.
- 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.
- 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.

Recommendations Continued:

The **provincial government** should:

- align performance metrics with Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) timelines by incorporating short-term progress indicators (such as yearly student retention rate or student satisfaction rate) that capture more immediate institutional improvements
- balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the SMAs envelope, enrollment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure performance-based funding (PBF) metrics do not adversely impact an institution's ability to respond and be accountable to student needs.
- conduct consultations with the previously defined post secondary advisory body to ensure that the sector's needs are met under a PBF.
- add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the SMAs system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adjusting performance measures to more accurately determine performance-based funding.

- allow for institutions to adjust enrollment projections during the midpoint of SMAs negotiations in order to match fluctuating student enrollment at institutions across the province.

The provincial government should task **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- maintaining the weighting of performance based funding at 25 percent for the entire duration of the new SMAs, until further data about the effectiveness of performance-based funding on improving student outcomes is available.
- increasing 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.

3. Teaching And Research

Concerns:

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

Recommendations:

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.
- 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 (SMAs).

- 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.

4. Strategic Mandate

Agreement Data Transparency

Concerns:

Students have identified concerns that Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) report-back data is not centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner. 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.

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- centrally store data collected by the SMAs report backs and make it accessible to the public.
- 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.

5. Experiential Learning

Concerns:

Non-profits may face financial constraints in providing students experiential learning opportunities due to inability to access tax credits. Incentives for employers to create experiential opportunities have not been adjusted or increased since 2009 and many employers may be ineligible. As well, students face financial barriers to participate in experiential learning programs, including co-op tuition fees, mandatory ancillary fees, transportation, relocation and housing costs. 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.

Students at institutions without strong co-op or career services departments have fewer opportunities to access quality work-integrated learning experiences compared to those at institutions with established co-op infrastructures. Furthermore, students from post secondary institutions without

the adequate supports and developed infrastructure may lack opportunities to engage in experiential learning. Post-secondary institutions across Ontario do not have equal work-integrated learning opportunities, and there is no consistent way for institutions to address the challenges students face when participating in these opportunities. There are inconsistencies between institutions on how student experiential learning accessibility concerns are addressed.

Students may face barriers to obtaining experiential learning for reasons including but not limited to covert and overt racism, religious discrimination, and employer bias. International students, mature students, racialized students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities may face additional barriers when accessing experiential learning and workplace study opportunities. 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.

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

Recommendations:

The **provincial government** should:

- change the experiential learning metric to be inclusive of both domestic and international students.
- establish a minimum 15% weight, across institutions, for the experiential learning metric under Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) Performance-Based Funding.
- 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.
- 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.

- mandate institutions to consider students on co-op terms to qualify for similar financial aid as full-time students on an academic term.
- 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.
- allow non-profits to apply to the Co-operative Education Tax Credit in the form of a grant.
- for programs with high participation in experiential learning, 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.
- prioritize experiential learning grants and opportunities, including research grants, for student groups who have historically low participation rates in these opportunities.

Recommendations Continued:

The provincial government should task **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)** with:

- researching 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 provincial government should task the **Ontario Human Rights Commission** with:

- creating standards for equity, diversity, and inclusion recruitment training for those hiring student employees, to ensure equitable access to job opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

OMBUDSPERSON AND MEDIATION OFFICE OPERATIONS

I. Ombudsperson Office/Mediation Office Establishment, Funding And Independence

Concerns:

Some Ontario universities do not have institutional ombudsperson or impartial mediation offices, leaving students without access to impartial dispute resolution services. At some post-secondary institutions, students are charged additional fees to utilize the services of dispute resolution mechanisms.

Recommendations:

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.
- mandate standardized ombudsperson and mediation training for all staff to ensure consistent, impartial, and professional dispute resolution practices across Ontario's post-secondary institutions.
- provide institutions with enrollment-based funding to adequately run ombudsperson or mediation offices on all campuses, including satellite campuses.
- require that institutional ombudsperson offices adopt an independent funding structure to safeguard neutrality.
- mandate that students shall not bear additional costs to utilize dispute resolution mechanisms.

2. Student Transparency

Concerns:

Student representation is not mandated across university ombudsperson offices/mediation offices or advisory committees, despite being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education. Many offices lack transparent and direct communication of reporting mechanisms and integrated opportunities within their office for student consultations. 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.

Recommendations:

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.
- 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.
- 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.

3. Escalation And Provincial Oversight

Concerns:

Students have highlighted that the number of academic and non-academic issues has increased in recent years, highlighting gaps in campus-level dispute resolution processes. 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.

Recommendations:

The provincial government should task The **Ontario Ombudsman** with:

- establishing a student advisory committee with elected undergraduate representatives and graduates from each Ontario post-secondary institution.

The provincial government should task **Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security (MCURES)** with:

- facilitating 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.

The image features a light blue background with decorative geometric shapes in the corners. These shapes are composed of overlapping squares and triangles in shades of purple, magenta, and dark blue, creating a modern, abstract design.

OUS A

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance