

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations– Election 2014 questions

Responses from the Ontario NDP

What will your party do to ensure Ontario universities have the funding they need to provide a high quality education to every student?

The Ontario NDP is troubled by the underfunding of Ontario's universities. We are concerned that access to quality education is threatened by Ontario's current per student funding for universities, which continues to be the lowest in Canada.

On April 29th, 2014, the NDP critic for Training, Colleges and Universities, Teresa Armstrong, tabled a motion in the House calling for an all-party Select Committee to be established immediately to review Ontario's current provincial post-secondary education strategies, policies, and frameworks, including funding levels, and make recommendations that promote the sustainability and quality of Ontario's post-secondary education system. This all-party Select Committee would have been able to conduct hearings with students, university faculty, and staff, and table a final report by April 2015.

Andrea Horwath and an Ontario NDP government will work with universities to ensure adequate funding to protect quality education. We will also take immediate steps to limit cost increases for students by freezing tuition rates, while compensating institutions for the difference, and making provincial student loans interest-free.

How does your party plan to address the full-time faculty shortage in Ontario?

The Ontario NDP recognizes that Ontario has the highest student-faculty ratio in the country. We also understand that full-time faculty hiring has not kept pace with enrolment, resulting in larger class sizes, growing concerns about quality, increased pressures on faculty, reduced time for faculty research, and increasing differentiation between teaching-stream and research-stream faculty members. Students deserve meaningful interaction with highly-qualified professors, but these opportunities are all too rare.

An Ontario NDP government will work with universities and their faculty members to address these concerns and to focus renewed attention on the importance of expanding the full-time faculty complement at Ontario's universities.

What will your party do to address the increasing precarity of academic employment in the province?

The Ontario NDP recognizes that hiring part-time contract lecturers has become increasingly common at universities in Ontario and more widely. Rather than hiring tenure-track full-time faculty members to teach and conduct important research, many universities are turning to part-time contract lecturers. Too often, these highly qualified and devoted employees are not afforded the dedicated research time and long-term security needed to make cutting-edge contributions to their fields. This situation impacts the professional opportunities available to them, and ultimately impacts the quality of education in the classroom.

An Ontario NDP government will work with faculty members and universities to determine the most appropriate remedies to address this trend, protect good full-time jobs in our universities, and ensure the quality of higher education in Ontario.

What will your party do to control tuition fees and ensure Ontario's universities are affordable to every willing and qualified student?

The Ontario NDP understands that the cost of higher education – from skills training to university studies – is out of reach for too many people in Ontario. No one should have to settle for less because high tuition costs are a barrier to their education. Ontario has the highest average tuition fees in Canada and our students carry amongst the highest debt loads.

The Ontario NDP is the only party with a plan to provide tuition fee relief and help ensure higher education is more affordable and accessible for Ontario students. Andrea Horwath and an NDP government will freeze student tuition fees at 2014 levels and make provincial student loans interest-free. These are crucial first steps to getting costs under control and making higher education affordable and accessible for more Ontarians. We are committed to seeing that universities do not see a decrease in revenue from our tuition freeze.

What will your party do to ensure fair labour laws that benefit all Ontarians?

The Ontario NDP has worked with labour organizations to put together a significant package of labour law reforms. These labour reforms would help level the playing field in Ontario. Most of these elements were packaged into *Bill 129* which was introduced last fall by our Labour critic, Taras Natyshak. *Bill 129* included important elements, such as successor rights in the contract sector, the provision of an additional route to binding arbitration on the first contract, changes in reinstatement procedures during an organizing campaign, neutral off-site voting and electronic voting for certification, and access to binding arbitration for either party in prolonged strike situations. These measures will increase fairness by providing more protection for the most vulnerable workers when businesses are sold, including cleaners and food service employees, and allowing either party to take steps towards arbitration in cases of ongoing strikes or lock-outs.

What steps will your party take to ensure that the university sector is able to develop and implement fair and sustainable pension solutions?

Retirement security is a real worry for many Ontarians. Today, most Ontarians agree that the best approach to improving retirement security is through a responsible enhancement of the CPP. Our federal NDP counterparts continue to work towards CPP expansion, which will help all Canadians in their retirement. With a federal election only a year away, we would pursue an enhanced CPP in conjunction with the federal government. If it becomes clear after the 2015 election that there will be no federal support for a CPP enhancement, an Ontario NDP government would implement an Ontario Retirement Plan. An Ontario NDP government will work with the university sector, including university faculty, to help ensure pension sustainability.

How will your party use research policy and funding to strike a balance between basic research and research commercialization?

The Ontario NDP understands that basic research drives innovation. Regardless of field, new discoveries and advances begin with basic curiosity-driven research. We also recognize the importance of research in the social sciences and humanities, which is important to helping students understand and engage critically with the social, political, and economic challenges facing our province. A NDP government will support basic research as well as applied research. We will work with universities and faculty to ensure policy frameworks promote this balance.

What will your party do to ensure that the transition to a new teacher training model in Ontario doesn't create chaos at universities where students in the Faculty of Education account for a significant portion of enrolment?

The Liberals have shown a lack of respect to the education sector. When the Liberals introduced *Bill 115*, teachers were not treated with the respect that trained professionals deserve. Universities have been caught off guard by the significant financial impact of changes to teacher training. Liberal waste and scandal shows that the Liberals do not respect the value of public dollars or the importance of sustaining public assets for the long-term.

An Ontario NDP government will restore trust in the education sector by investing in 1,000 additional teachers. We are the only party that will get more teacher graduates into the classroom where they can ensure our kids have the support they need to succeed. We will also work with universities to implement changes that work for the province and for our institutions. Universities must be respected as partners, not left scrambling to deal with major policy shifts. It's time for a government that restores respect to the education sector.