

2022 ONTARIO ELECTION

Analysis of party commitments to postsecondary education

OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario

Public universities **for all** • Good jobs **for all** • A better future **for Ontario**

Authorized by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations.

Overview of commitments to OCUFA priorities

OCUFA election priority	ONDP	OLP	OPC	GPO
Remove wage constraints legislated under Bill 124	✓	✓	✗	✓
Reform ESA to include equal pay for work of equivalent value for workers, including contract faculty	✓	✓	✗	✓
Increase university funding to ensure faculty renewal	✓	✓	✗	✓
Discontinue performance-based funding model for Ontario's universities	✓	✗	✗	✓
Meaningfully increase university operating grants	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meaningfully increase northern and bilingual grants	✓	✓	✗	✗
Increase special purpose funding, particularly for Indigenous programming and supports	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase funding for research	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increase OSAP and reverse cuts	✓	✓	✗	✓
Provide grants, not loans	✓	✓	✗	✓

Review of party platforms and policy proposals for the 2022 Ontario election

Over the course of the Ontario election campaign, each of the major parties, including the New Democratic Party (NDP), Liberal Party (OLP), the Progressive Conservative Party (PC), and the Green Party (GPO), have presented their vision for the future of the province through their election platforms and campaign announcements.

OCUFA has examined each party's vision and commitments for the postsecondary education sector and how they measure against OCUFA's priorities. This analysis is based on the parties' published platforms, costings, and responses to the [OCUFA Party Platform Survey](#). In order to assess the impact of what each party is proposing for university professors and academic librarians, and for the postsecondary education sector more broadly, OCUFA has developed a set of criteria for assessment based on our priorities. The ideal postsecondary education platform would:

- ▶ increase investments in core operating funding for Ontario's universities to support quality research and education;
- ▶ remove the wage constraints legislated under Bill 124;
- ▶ reform *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) language to include equal pay for work of equivalent value for workers in the province, including contract faculty, using a pro-rata system;
- ▶ commit to a faculty renewal strategy that supports quality education through additional full-time faculty hiring, replacing retiring faculty, and creating pathways for contract faculty into secure, full-time positions;
- ▶ commit to discontinuing the performance-based funding model for Ontario's universities;
- ▶ provide meaningful increase to northern and bilingual university grants in recognition of the important mandate of northern and bilingual institutions and the particular challenges they face;
- ▶ provide an increase in special purpose funding, particularly for Indigenous programming and supports;
- ▶ provide increased funding for research under the research funding envelope; and
- ▶ improve access to postsecondary education for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds through an increase to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and the replacement of loans with grants.

Fairness for contract faculty

Full-time faculty hiring has stagnated at Ontario's universities, while the reliance on contract faculty has increased at an alarming rate. Rather than serving as a temporary measure to accommodate significant enrolment increases in the early 2000s, the use of contract faculty has become an entrenched strategy to reduce costs in universities across Ontario. It is widely acknowledged that contract faculty are paid less than their full-time colleagues for performing work of equal value. Research also suggests that the majority of contract faculty are women and racialized faculty are overrepresented in contract positions, making fairness for contract faculty an issue of equity. OCUFA has long advocated against the systemic use of precarious labour, in particular contract faculty and academic librarians, at Ontario's universities and called on the provincial government to take leadership on the issue.

ONDP

The Ontario NDP has committed to bringing legislation forward that amends the *Employment Standards Act* to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. In their response to OCUFA, they specifically noted that they will “ensure that contract faculty get the same wages, protections and benefits for the courses they teach as their tenured colleagues get for the courses they teach.” The ONDP has also committed to removing the public sector wage constraints by repealing Bill 124.

The ONDP platform also includes a mention of faculty renewal. The party has communicated to OCUFA that they are planning on introducing a faculty renewal strategy in order to increase tenure-track faculty hiring and replacement.

OLP

The Ontario Liberal platform also commits to repealing Bill 124 and reinstating equal pay provisions under the ESA to ensure equal pay for all regardless of gender, race, or employment status. In their response to the OCUFA survey, they have made explicit their commitment to supporting postsecondary institutions in creating full-time, stable and permanently funded positions but do not include any further details on what that support will look like.

OPC

The Ontario PCs have not released an election platform or any costed commitments up to this point in the election period. The party has not made any campaign commitments regarding postsecondary education and has not responded to OCUFA's party platform survey either.

GPO

The Green Party of Ontario's platform includes promises for repealing Bill 124 and introducing equal pay for equal work provisions. More specifically, in their communication to OCUFA, they have made a commitment to “ensuring consistent and fair labour standards and working conditions for all faculty, including contract faculty, so that people receive equal wages for equal work.”

University funding

Strong public funding for universities is necessary to support excellence in teaching and research and an accessible postsecondary education for Ontarians from diverse backgrounds. On a per-student basis, public funding has been on a downward trend in Ontario since it last peaked in 2008-09. Since then, per-student funding has been declining. On a per-student basis, Ontario university operating funding is 40 per cent lower than the rest of Canada average; provincially-sponsored research funding is 55 per cent lower.

OCUFA has long been an advocate for enrolment-based public funding for universities, with consideration for special grants for universities with specific missions or purposes. In recent years, OCUFA has also been vocal in opposing performance-based funding schemes and competitive models of university funding. Moreover, OCUFA has been cautioning against the growing privatization and corporatization of Ontario's universities as a direct result of decades of chronic underfunding.

ONDP

To address the funding crisis in the sector, the Ontario NDP has committed to launching a “collaborative and holistic find-and-fix audit of the college and university sector.” The mandate of the audit will be to identify the main issues in the sector and their root causes and to offer recommendations for resolving them. The audit will be conducted in collaboration with all stakeholders in the postsecondary education sector. While the party is not providing a specific dollar figure for their investment in PSE funding, they have estimated that, at a minimum, their additional investment will bring Ontario's funding up to the weighted national average (estimated at \$1 billion in additional funding per year).

The ONDP has also committed to scrapping the performance-based funding model and adopting OCUFA's recommendations to increase funding for the Northern Ontario Grant by \$6.5 million and the Bilingualism Grant by \$12.5 million. The party has also committed to a \$1.5 million increase in funding for Indigenous education and training, in line with OCUFA's recommendation.

OLP

The Ontario Liberal Party has communicated its commitment to a \$1 billion investment in postsecondary education over four years and increasing operating grants for universities. The party has also committed to a \$50 million annual increase in funding for northern postsecondary education and the necessary supports for establishment of Université de Sudbury as an independent francophone university.

OPC

The Ontario PCs have not released an election platform or any costed commitments up to this point in the election period. The party has not made any campaign commitments regarding postsecondary education and has not responded to OCUFA's party platform survey either.

GPO

The Green Party of Ontario has committed to indexing the base operating grant to the weighted national average, followed by inflationary increases year-to-year. In their communication to OCUFA, they costed this increase at an additional \$3.7 billion in funding over four years.

The Greens have also committed to removing the performance-based funding model and returning to an enrolment-based model of funding as well as supporting the Université de Sudbury as a northern university by and for Francophones.

Accessible postsecondary education

For years, Ontario has consistently had amongst the highest tuition fees in Canada for domestic students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the highest tuition fees in Canada—by far—for international students. To make up for low levels of per-student public funding, postsecondary tuition fees have been allowed to increase. Since 2014-15, tuition fees have made up more than half of Ontario university operating revenue. The continued shift in Ontario towards funding individual students rather than the system as a whole undermines the quality of higher education and can drive universities towards short-term, cost-saving measures. This strategy ignores long-term planning and investments that are needed to support universities' educational and research mandates.

OCUFA has been critical of the exponential rise in tuition fees as a clear barrier to access, and one which has been encouraged to make up for the chronic underfunding of universities and postsecondary education. OCUFA has also repeatedly cautioned against an increased reliance on international students' tuition fees, an unreliable source of funding as evidenced by the sudden and severe impact on revenues for some institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ONDP

The ONDP platform commits to reversing the cuts made to the OSAP under the Ford government. They have also committed to converting student loans to grants, in line with OCUFA's priorities, and wiping out all interest owed on student loans.

OLP

The OLP has made several commitments in their platform with regards to the accessibility and affordability of higher education. These include the commitment to reverse the PC government's OSAP cuts, eliminate interest on student loans, and expand eligibility criteria for accessing OSAP. The party's platform also indicates they will "keep tuition costs from rising" through investments in the sector.

Further, the OLP plan promises a targeted assistance program that covers tuition fees for students enrolled in nursing, medical, early childhood education, and personal support work programs so long as the students agree to work for a certain period of time after graduation, in remote, northern, and under-served communities.

OPC

The Ontario PCs have not released an election platform or any costed commitments up to this point in the election period. The party has not made any campaign commitments regarding postsecondary education and has not responded to OCUFA's party platform survey either.

GPO

Similar to the ONDP and OLP, the Greens have also promised to reverse the cuts to OSAP. To improve access to higher education, they have also committed to converting loans to grants for low and middle-income students and eliminating interest charges on student debt.

Other notable postsecondary education commitments

ONDP

- ▶ Enshrine in law students' right to organize and form unions, organizations, and clubs
- ▶ Investment in co-ops, internships, and work-integrated learning
- ▶ Legislate 10 permanent paid personal emergency leave days
- ▶ Compel universities to update their policies on sexual violence reporting to reflect calls from survivors and advocates and to protect survivors from further harm
- ▶ Support research and innovation at universities, including dedicated funding for research into “long COVID”

OLP

- ▶ Increase supports for apprenticeships
- ▶ Legislate 10 paid sick days
- ▶ Expand opportunities to learn First Nations languages and investing \$2 million in First Nations Public Libraries

OPC

- ▶ No commitments have been announced.

GPO

- ▶ Develop province-wide, culturally relevant, trauma-informed and survivor-centric standards for sexual and gender-based violence on postsecondary campuses
- ▶ Legislate 10 paid sick days
- ▶ Restore funding for the Indigenous curriculum program