

OCUFA Provincial Party Platform Survey

Provincial Election 2022

Introduction

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) is the voice of 17,000 full-time and contract university faculty and academic librarians in 30 member associations across Ontario. We are policy and research leaders in higher education and are committed to enhancing the quality of university education in Ontario.

We are requesting your responses to our provincial party platform survey questions as outlined below. These questions are informed by the postsecondary education priorities as set by Ontario university faculty and academic librarians. The results of this survey will be released publicly and distributed to faculty members and students across Ontario campuses.

We would appreciate it if you could respond by April 28. You can send your responses, as well as any questions about the survey, to Mina Rajabi Paak at mrjabi@ocufa.on.ca.

Investing in Ontario's recovery

Universities are vital institutions within our communities and in the province. They deliver education to thousands of students, create vibrant campus communities, produce thought-provoking and groundbreaking research that drives innovation, provide good jobs that support local economies, and provide solutions to society's most pressing problems. Government commitment to postsecondary education is essential for sustaining these institutions and their contributions to Ontario's economic, social, and cultural health, and is more important than ever given the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need for post-pandemic recovery. OCUFA's recent public opinion polls show that the majority of Ontarians believe in the important role universities will play in the post-pandemic recovery.

QUESTION: What is your party's vision for post-pandemic recovery in Ontario and what supports will you be providing to universities as engines of research, innovation, and education in the province?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Fairness for contract faculty

Full-time faculty hiring has stagnated at Ontario's universities, while the reliance on contract faculty has increased. 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 sessional faculty are often paid less than their full-time colleagues for performing teaching work of equal value. Research also suggests that the majority of contract faculty are women, making fairness for contract faculty an issue of equity. Contract faculty are highly qualified teachers and researchers, but their conditions of work do not allow them to contribute to their fullest potential in the classroom or provide the educational continuity that students deserve. Job insecurity reduces their ability to follow through with students and provide them with the ongoing support and guidance that will help them excel. It is time for the provincial government to take leadership on the issue.

QUESTION: How will your party address precarious work at Ontario universities and will your party commit to delivering job security, and providing funding to ensure faculty renewal?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

QUESTION: Will your party implement and fund new labour laws, including equal pay for work of equivalent value provisions for university contract faculty?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Public sector wage constraints and Bill 124

The 2019 *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act* (aka *Bill 124*), legislated by the Ontario government was a clear attack on the right to free and fair collective bargaining, a threat to pay equity and benefits for contract faculty and other marginalized workers, and an erosion of the foundations of Ontario's important public services. This legislation was put forward without any evidence of how a wage cap would impact the Treasury or the provincial deficit. This has been especially concerning for professors, academic librarians, and other university workers in the province, as they negotiate their contracts with and get paid by universities, not the government.

The government's imposition of a one per cent wage cap, has put contract faculty at further risk. Their already low real incomes have been and continue to be decreased further since inflation rates outpace the government's legislated wage cap.

QUESTION: Will your party repeal the legislated wage constraints introduced under Bill 124?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

University funding

Strong public funding for universities is necessary to support excellence in teaching and research, and 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's funding for universities has fallen further and further behind the rest of the country over the last decade. In 2019-20, the last year for which data is available, the average level of per-student funding in Ontario was \$7,425 compared to \$12,930 for the rest of the country.

QUESTION: Will your party commit to increased investments to bring core provincial funding for Ontario universities up to the national average, or greater, to create the postsecondary sector Ontarians deserve?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Northern Ontario universities face unique financial and program challenges as a result of providing university education and research programs suited to the needs of the specific geographical location, population, and social, cultural, and economic factors present in the extensive geographical area they serve. The unique mandates of Northern universities and their particular circumstances result in challenges that are not shared by other institutions in the province. It is important to note that the Northern Ontario University Grant has been created to specifically address the challenges faced by Ontario's northern institutions.

This vital source of funding, however, has been stagnant for over a decade with no increases or adjustments to keep up with inflation. Similarly, the government has failed to ensure that funding for the Bilingual Grant and the Special Purpose Funding envelope keep up with the growing student body and the needs of institutions.

QUESTION: Will your party commit to meaningful increases to the Northern and Bilingual grants in recognition of the important mandate of northern and bilingual institutions and the particular challenges they face?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

QUESTION: Will your party commit to an increase in special purpose funding, particularly for Indigenous programming and supports?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

For many years, the government has allocated operating funding based primarily on student enrolment. In 2021 a new model of funding was implemented that is tied to performance, as measured by a series of metrics. OCUFA has been vocal in opposing performance-based funding schemes and competitive models of university funding. By design, performance-based funding works against quality improvement by withholding funds from universities that fail to meet prescribed targets. This approach to funding punishes students at institutions unable to meet their targets and makes it more difficult for those institutions to improve.

QUESTION: Will your party repeal the performance-based funding model for Ontario's universities?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Accessible postsecondary education

For years now, 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. 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 universities increased reliance on international students' tuition fees, as evidenced by the sudden and severe impact on revenues for some institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

QUESTION: What is your party's plan for improving access to postsecondary education for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and reducing public universities' reliance on tuition fees?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Will your party reverse the cuts to OSAP and respond to calls from student groups to convert student loans to grants and address the student debt crisis?

Response:

Click or tap here to enter text.