

ONDP answers – to OCUFA Provincial Party Platform Survey

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?

The Ontario NDP has vision for a post-pandemic recovery that revitalizes Ontario's economy while addressing the climate crisis, and where post-secondary institutions play a central role. New Democrats will:

- work with universities to create thousands of new paid co-op and internship opportunities for young people, including green job certification training
- partner with universities, colleges, municipalities, First Nations, innovative companies, and the Ontario Clean Technology Association to establish Ontario's first Cleantech Bank, to export and adopt products and ideas that will lower our emissions, increase equity, and generate job and GDP growth in Ontario
- work with universities, colleges, start-ups, businesses, municipalities, and workers to build innovation hubs in areas with untapped potential
- support research and innovation at Canadian universities and research institutions, including a dedicated fund for research into "long COVID"

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?

New Democrats know that colleges and universities need stable funding to secure good faculty and deliver quality education to students. New Democrats are committed to a holistic and collaborative find-and-fix audit of the post-secondary sector to ensure the sector is strong.

We are also committed to ensuring that workers are treated fairly. We believe that any worker doing the same job as the worker next to them should get the same wage, protections, and benefits, whether they're part-time, temporary, or contract.

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

New Democrats are committed to fair treatment for contract workers, including contract faculty. Under an NDP government, any worker doing the same job as the worker next to them will get the same wage, protections, and benefits, whether they're part-time, temporary, or contract.

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

Yes, New Democrats will repeal Bill 124.

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?

Through our find-and-fix audit, we are committed to reviewing funding for the sector and ensuring that universities have the funding they need to support excellence in teaching and research.

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?

In our role as official opposition, and with seven MPPs from Northern Ontario, New Democrats understand the necessity and value of providing funding for Northern Ontario Universities. Two of our MPPs, Jamie West and France G linas, were on the frontlines calling for more support for Laurentian with faculty and staff after the university made widespread cuts in 2021.

We will increase funding in line with OCUFA's recommended commitment of investing \$6.5 million in the Northern Ontario Grant and \$12.5 million in the Bilingualism Grant to offset inflation.

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

Yes, we are committed to increasing funding in line with OCUFA's recommended commitment of \$1.5 million in Indigenous Education and training to offset inflation.

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

Yes, absolutely.

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?

New Democrats believe that cost should not be a barrier to people attending college or university. That's why we will reverse Doug Ford's cuts to OSAP and work towards making sure all students graduate debt-free by converting loans to grants. We will also retroactively wipe out student loan interest owed or paid to the province by any student or past student who still holds a provincial loan, so that students can leave university without the anxiety of large student loans.

Through our find-and-fix audit, we will ensure that problems, such as an over-reliance on international student fees, is properly understood, and meaningfully addressed.

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?

Yes, New Democrats will reverse Doug Fords cuts to OSAP, reinvest in OSAP, and work towards making sure all students graduate debt-free by converting loans to grants. We will also retroactively wipe out student loan interest owed or paid to the province by any student or past student who still holds a provincial loan.

May 18, 2022

Dr. Susan Wurtele, President
Ms. Jenny Ahn, Executive Director
Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
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Dear Dr. Wurtele and Ms. Ahn,

I hope this finds you both well. I'm writing to expand on some of the Ontario NDP's commitments for the post-secondary sector in our platform, with respect to contract faculty and operating grants to post-secondary institutions.

New Democrats are strongly opposed to precarious and underpaid work in all its forms, including in our universities and colleges. Post-secondary institutions have increasingly used contract faculty to cut costs, to the point where as of today, half of all faculty at Ontario universities are contract faculty. This is a crisis, one which has a devastating impact on workers and their families. Not only are contract faculty overworked and underpaid – they are also precariously employed, not knowing whether they will have a contract next semester, and often having to cobble together a living by teaching courses at multiple institutions, sometimes in different cities.

This has to change. New Democrats will always stand with contract faculty in our universities and colleges. That is why, in our platform, we have made a commitment to update the *Employment Standards Act* to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. We 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. We will also immediately repeal Bill 124 and make sure that faculty, and all public sector workers, receive the compensation and respect they deserve.

Strengthening employment law is only one part of the answer – we also know that faculty renewal is essential, and we have made our support for that clear in our platform. To add some additional detail, we plan to achieve this by bringing in a faculty renewal strategy in order to increase tenure-track faculty hiring and replacement.

To rectify the injustices experienced by contract faculty, and to address the myriad problems and funding shortfalls within our post-secondary sector, we have committed to

launch a collaborative and holistic find-and-fix audit of the college and university sector. Through this audit, we will bring together all post-secondary stakeholders, including student unions and organizations, tenured and contract faculty, teaching assistants and other academic support staff, maintenance, clerical and hospitality staff as well as institutions and their representative organizations.

The mandate of the audit will be to identify and develop recommendations on how to resolve the many issues that have been caused by decades of underfunding by Liberal and Conservative governments. This includes the unfair treatment of contract faculty, an overreliance on exorbitant international student tuition fees, creeping privatization of post-secondary education, high domestic student tuition fees, and institutional infrastructure repair backlogs. The audit will also ensure that safeguards are put in place so that no institution ends up in a similar position to Laurentian University in 2021.

An Ontario NDP government will be deeply committed to finding out exactly what is wrong in our post-secondary system, so that we can take the necessary action to fix it. The recommendations from the audit will unquestionably lead to significant increases in provincial funding to the post-secondary sector, but we believe we need to work with our partners in the college and university sector to determine what needs to be spent, and where, rather than arbitrarily pre-determining the results of the audit. However, we estimate that at a minimum, this would require bringing Ontario's funding up to the weighted national average.

I want to be clear that our commitment is to spend what it takes – unlike other parties who have capped what they would spend. We believe without a doubt that ours is the strongest commitment to the post-secondary sector in general, and contract faculty in particular.

If you would like to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Dan O'Brien (he/him)
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