



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

What the 2018 election results mean for Ontario's professors and academic librarians

Ontario Election 2018

On June 7, the Ontario voters elected a Progressive Conservative majority government led by Doug Ford. This election outcome has a number of important implications for professors and academic librarians in the province and will pose several challenges and opportunities for the university sector over the next four years.

During the election, OCUFA analyzed the higher education platforms of the Ontario PC, NDP, and Liberal parties, posted their responses to OCUFA's party survey, and produced a report card evaluating the platforms of the different parties. Our analysis was based on a set of assessment criteria that included each party's approach to university funding, faculty renewal, precarious academic work, and access to postsecondary education.

The Ontario PC platform

The Ontario PC platform was silent on almost all postsecondary issues, and did not provide a plan for postsecondary education in Ontario. It did not include any reference to addressing underfunding for postsecondary education or the need for a faculty renewal strategy in the province. However, the platform statement did emphasize the PC party's belief that Ontario has a "spending problem". Such a statement should be of grave concern when it comes to public funding for all public services, including postsecondary education. Any cuts to university funding in this province would threaten the quality of education available to students, the teaching and research at our postsecondary institutions, and the good jobs and economic benefits universities provide.

On precarious work and fairness for contract faculty, the PC platform did not include any plans or references to how the party would address the problem of precarity on university and college campuses. However, prior to the election period and during the PC leadership race, Doug Ford was on record speaking against new changes to labour law introduced under Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, as well as the plan to increase the Ontario minimum wage to \$15 an hour. This approach, coupled with the fact that the PC caucus unanimously voted against Bill 148 at its third and final hearing, is of serious concern to OCUFA.

The one area where the PC platform is clear about its plans for postsecondary education is their promise to mandate that universities uphold free speech on campus and in the classroom. The platform does not expand on this promise or explain how such a mandate would be enforced. However, in previous announcements, the PCs noted their plan would tie government funding for public universities to free speech by expanding the mandate for the

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Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to include a complaints and investigations process to evaluate speech violations on campus.

Moving forward, what can we expect?

We expect the Progressive Conservative government to move swiftly to implement their platform promises, and despite postsecondary education being largely omitted from the PC platform, it is difficult to imagine that some of the cost savings the government is seeking won't come from education.

There are two important things to keep in mind as this new government's plans take shape. First, that without a plan in their platform, the Progressive Conservatives were not elected with any firm mandate to make substantial changes to Ontario's postsecondary education system. Second, that according to a public poll commissioned by OCUFA, a majority of those who voted for the PCs believe that larger class sizes and less one-on-one student-faculty engagement – both symptoms of underfunding – have a negative impact on education quality. The same poll also found a majority of PC supporters oppose universities hiring more contract faculty on short-term contracts instead of full-time professors. These issues will only be exacerbated with further cuts.

These facts alone won't change the government's approach, but they provide an opportunity to remind the government that Ontarians of all political stripes support fairness for contract faculty and ensuring universities have the resources they need to provide the high quality education Ontario students deserve.

OCUFA has been a constant and strong advocate for fairness for contract faculty and the need to address the rise of precarious work across Ontario. This work is vital and will continue. We will continue to advocate the government to ensure that measures are taken to protect workers at Ontario's universities and create pathways to job security for contract faculty.

We will also continue to oppose any plans to tie funding to outcomes or performance. Creating such a system of winners and losers creates scenarios where already well-resourced institutions will thrive and those institutions struggling to keep up are punished. Such an approach ultimately hurts students and threatens the quality of their education at universities from which funding is withheld. Government commitment to robust public funding for postsecondary education is essential for sustaining the capacity needed to ensure these contributions in the future.

In the upcoming months, as the new government is formed and there is more clarity on the government's agenda, including any plans for the postsecondary system, OCUFA will be offering further analysis and engage in advocacy on behalf of faculty and academic librarians for the high-quality, well-resourced, affordable, and accessible university system that serves our students, our communities, and Ontario.