



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

OCUFA analysis of Liberal Party Platform *Ontario Election 2018*

Framework for analyzing party platforms

Over the course of the election campaign, all of the major parties will present their vision for the future of the province through their election platforms. 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. When it comes to higher education, the ideal platform would:

- ▶ Increase investments in core operating funding for Ontario's universities to support quality research and education;
- ▶ Ensure that the renewed funding model does not link performance metrics to funding;
- ▶ Require meaningful consultation with faculty as part of the Strategic Mandate Agreement development process;
- ▶ 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;
- ▶ Address precarious work at Ontario universities and deliver fairness for contract faculty by taking leadership to fund and facilitate the implementation of updated labour laws and identify remaining gaps in coverage; and
- ▶ Introduce measures to address calls from student groups to freeze tuition fees and improve access to postsecondary education for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Postsecondary education funding

The Ontario Liberal Party's platform does not address the need for renewed public funding for Ontario universities to support high-quality education. Many years of inaction and inattention to public university funding has put Ontario in a difficult position, where sweeping change is needed to make up for lost ground. Recent budgets have seen operating funding for universities stagnate, resulting in real cuts after accounting for inflation, and leaving Ontario with the lowest per-student funding levels in Canada. The Liberal platform does not commit to increasing university operating funding, which is urgently needed to address ongoing underfunding.

The Liberal platform addresses funding for universities only in the context of providing targeted funding for specific projects in the university sector. For example, the Liberal

platform reiterates their previous commitment to investing \$500 million over ten years, starting in 2020-21, to support deferred maintenance projects and help renew college and university campuses. Two-thirds of this funding is expected to be allocated to universities.

Faculty renewal and fairness for contract faculty

The Ontario Liberal platform does not include any commitment to faculty renewal. Government leadership will be crucial for providing funding and leadership for a faculty renewal strategy at Ontario universities. This gap in the Liberal platform is disappointing.

In Ontario, full-time faculty hiring has not kept pace with student enrolment. In the last decade, full-time student enrolment increased by 23 per cent. Over the same period, the number of full-time faculty employed at Ontario universities increased by only 3.4 per cent. This means that, since 2007-08, the rate of increase in student enrolment has been almost seven times that of faculty hiring. More students and fewer professors leads to less one-on-one engagement, larger class sizes, fewer opportunities for mentorship and academic advising, and diminished chances for undergraduate students to be involved in the research projects of their professors.

The Ontario Liberal platform reiterates a commitment to changes brought forward in *Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*. This includes new provisions that mandate equal pay for contract, part-time, casual or seasonal workers. Loopholes and broad exemptions in the equal pay provisions leave too much room for universities to avoid paying their workers fairly, including contract faculty. This provision must be strengthened. Moreover, nothing is included in the Liberal platform to address the need to improve job security for contract faculty or create pathways for contract faculty into full-time, secure positions.

These gaps are of concern because a growing number of faculty at Ontario universities are being hired on short-term, precarious contracts. OCUFA estimates that the number of courses taught by contract faculty has doubled since 2000. Recent research from the Council of Ontario Universities shows that over 50 per cent of university teaching is done by contract faculty. It is widely acknowledged that contract faculty earn less for the same work as their full-time colleagues, lack access to benefits, often juggle jobs at multiple institutions, and face unpredictable scheduling and job insecurity

We need a government that will confidently set a standard of fairness for contract faculty across the postsecondary sector. As recent changes to labour and employment legislation are rolled out, close attention to gaps in coverage will be crucial. The government should take leadership to identify outstanding issues and commit to provide public funding where necessary for fairness for contract faculty to be achieved.

Accessibility of postsecondary education

The Ontario Liberal platform promises to continue the implementation of the new Ontario Student Grant program, including reductions in the minimum parental contribution required under the Ontario Student Assistance Program. This will provide students from middle-income families with additional financial aid and result in more students qualifying for the grants and loans they need to afford the cost of tuition fees, which continue to increase.

This continued commitment to increasing the accessibility of postsecondary education through reforms to student assistance is welcome. The platform does not specify the exact amount of funding that would be dedicated to this program. Partial grants, however, cannot guarantee equitable and accessible postsecondary education, particularly in the face of continuing tuition fee increases. OCUFA has long argued that tuition fees are a barrier to access that prevent students from pursuing a postsecondary education and should not be relied upon as a foundation for university funding. We support calls from student groups to freeze tuition fees. The Liberal platform does not include measures to address rising tuition fees for university students.

While investments in student access to postsecondary education are of utmost importance, the lack of parallel investments in faculty hiring and university operating grants also compromises the quality of higher education. Ontario students deserve better.

Other postsecondary education commitments

The Ontario Liberal platform includes a number of initiatives and programs geared towards experiential learning, training, and apprenticeships. This includes the investment of \$132 million over the next three years in innovative college and university programming directed at strengthening experiential learning opportunities, creation of an Office of Apprenticeship Opportunity, establishment of a Graduated Apprenticeship Grant for employers to hire new apprentices, creating hands-on learning opportunities for more than 98,000 students, and an increase to the College Equipment and Renewal Fund from \$8 million to \$20 million annually over the next three years. The Ontario Liberal platform also includes the promise of developing a plan to increase the number of graduates in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) by 25 per cent and a continued commitment to funding the establishment of new postsecondary campuses in Markham, Brampton and Milton as well as the creation of a French language university.