



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

OCUFA analysis of NDP 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 should:

- ▶ 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 NDP platform promises additional investment in university and college operating grants in the amount of \$101 million in 2018-19, \$203 million in 2019-20, \$308 million in 2020-21, \$415 million in 2021-22, and \$523 million in 2022-23.

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 NDP's commitment to increase operating funding is a welcome shift from recent budgets in which near zero per cent increases in funding have become the norm.

Just to maintain current levels of per-student funding for Ontario's universities will require six per cent funding increases in each of the next three years, including an additional \$210 million investment in 2018-19 above what was allocated to universities in 2017-18. To bring Ontario's per-student funding in line with the average for the rest of the country, the government will need to invest an additional \$5.9 billion over the next three years. To catch up with the next worst province, Nova Scotia, will require an additional \$3.7 billion investment over three years.

In our most recent budget recommendations, OCUFA proposed that a sensible step in the right direction would be to return Ontario to 2008-09 levels of per-student funding, at the height of the Reaching Higher investments. This will require an investment of \$2.1 billion over three years, starting with \$335 million in this year's budget.

The NDP platform's proposed \$1.6 billion investment in university and college operating funding over five years is a step in the right direction, although it falls short of what is required to close the wide funding gap between Ontario and other provinces. It is critical for Ontario's next government to seriously consider the investment required to close the per-student funding gap, so the quality of university in the province does not suffer compared to other parts of Canada.

Faculty renewal and fairness for contract faculty

The Ontario NDP platform has promised the launch of a faculty renewal strategy to allow contract faculty to become full-time professors and instructors, and to invest in more tenure-track faculty positions. This commitment is in line with OCUFA's call for the establishment of faculty renewal as part of a broader government commitment to reverse the rise of precarious work and support good jobs in the university sector. This is the first time faculty renewal has been included in a major party platform.

To launch a faculty renewal strategy at Ontario's universities and colleges, the NDP platform provides for an investment of \$80 million in 2018-19, followed by \$160 million in 2019-20, \$240 million in 2020-21, \$240 million in 2021-22, and \$240 million in 2022-23.

These investment figures precisely mirror OCUFA's pre-budget recommendations for 2018-19, however, OCUFA's proposed figures were limited to a university faculty renewal strategy and did not include investment in faculty renewal at colleges.

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.

Meanwhile, as full-time faculty hiring has stagnated at Ontario's universities, the reliance on contract faculty has increased. These contract professors are generally hired on either a

limited-term contract or as sessionals on a per-course basis. Contract faculty lack job security, face unpredictable scheduling, and often juggle jobs at multiple institutions. Despite the lack of security afforded them in their employment, many contract faculty have been working in these positions for years.

Filling the gap between student enrolment and full-time faculty hiring with more contract faculty in precarious jobs is not an acceptable path forward. 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.

Any government faculty renewal strategy must be directed towards the dual goals of increasing the full-time faculty complement and delivering fairness for contract faculty. It is encouraging that the NDP commitment to a faculty renewal strategy embraces this approach.

Accessibility of postsecondary education

The Ontario NDP platform promises to turn all provincial loans for postsecondary students into grants, so any student who qualifies for OSAP would graduate free of debt. The NDP also promises to retroactively forgive all interest for anyone currently carrying provincial student loan debt, and end the practice of government hiring private debt collection services for student loans.

The NDP platform estimates that the cost of changing loans to grants will be \$449 million in 2018-19, \$467 million in 2019-20, \$486 million in 2020-21, \$505 million in 2021-22, and \$526 million in 2022-23. The cost of forgiveness for payment of all outstanding interest on student debt has been estimated as a one time expenditure of \$112 million in 2018-19.

The promise of turning student loans into non-repayable grants is a welcome reform that would help many students and their families cover the costs of high tuition fees. 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 NDP platform does not include measures to address rising tuition fees for university students.

Other postsecondary education commitments

The Ontario NDP platform includes a commitment to build on the federal Student Work-Integrated Learning Program, through the creation of 27,000 new placements; expanding the program to go beyond science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to include other fields; and doubling Ontario's Career Kick-Start program to support experiential learning opportunities for students. The platform also promises the establishment of a Franco-Ontarian university, where students can earn a degree studying in French.