



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

OCUFA analysis of Progressive Conservative 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 Progressive Conservative Party's platform does not include any reference to addressing underfunding for postsecondary education in the province. Without re-investment, the quality of education available to students at Ontario universities is threatened.

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. No additional funding commitments from a new government will only make the situation worse.

The PC platform statement that Ontario has a “spending problem” is a 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 the student experience as well as the quality of teaching and research at our institutions.

Faculty renewal and fairness for contract faculty

The Ontario PC platform does not include any commitments to addressing fairness for contract faculty, supporting full-time faculty hiring, or ensuring equal pay and job security for contract faculty.

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.

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.

The PC platform leaves both the need for a faculty renewal strategy and fairness for contract faculty unaddressed.

Accessibility of postsecondary education

The Ontario PC platform does not include any reference to measures that will ensure the affordability and accessibility of postsecondary education. The platform is also silent on whether current funding allocations, for example to the Ontario Student Grant program, will be maintained.

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. OCUFA supports reforms to student assistance that help students cover the cost of tuition through grants. OCUFA also supports calls from student groups to freeze tuition fees.

Other postsecondary education commitments

The Ontario PC platform includes a promise to mandate that universities uphold free speech on campuses and in classrooms. The platform does not expand on this promise or explain how such a mandate would be enforced. However, in previous announcements, the Ontario PC Party noted that their plan would tie government funding for public universities to free

speech through an expanded mandate for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) that would include a complaints and investigations process to evaluate free speech violations on campuses. OCUFA opposes any plans to tie funding to outcomes or performance, which ultimately hurt students (and the quality of their education) at universities from which funding is withheld.