



FACT SHEET: EDUCATION FOR ALL

September 2021

Introduction

Access to primary and secondary education is a right, and post secondary education (PSE) should be no different. The government of Canada first ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976. At that time, Canada acknowledged the right of every person to free primary and secondary education, with the promise of introducing free post-secondary education¹. However, this promise has yet to be fulfilled 45 years later.

PSE is not only a right– it has become a necessity in Canada’s economic climate. In Canada, 75% of new jobs created by regular economic growth are projected to be either management roles, or roles that typically require post secondary education². This number indicates that there will be increasingly fewer job opportunities for those without PSE.

Additionally, in Ontario, high school graduates above the age of 25 without a post secondary degree, diploma, or certificate have an employment rate of only 51.5%; more than 12% less than those with a postsecondary certificate or diploma, and more than 40% less than those with a university degree³.

Even though PSE is vital to secure employment, it is often only accessible to individuals in a higher income bracket. In 2015, the post secondary attendance rate of those with a household income of less than \$25,000 a year was 48.7%, while the attendance rate of those with a household income of more than \$100,000 a year was significantly higher, at 63.6%⁴.



51.5% Employment rate: High school graduates above the age of 25 *without* a post secondary degree, diploma, or certificate.

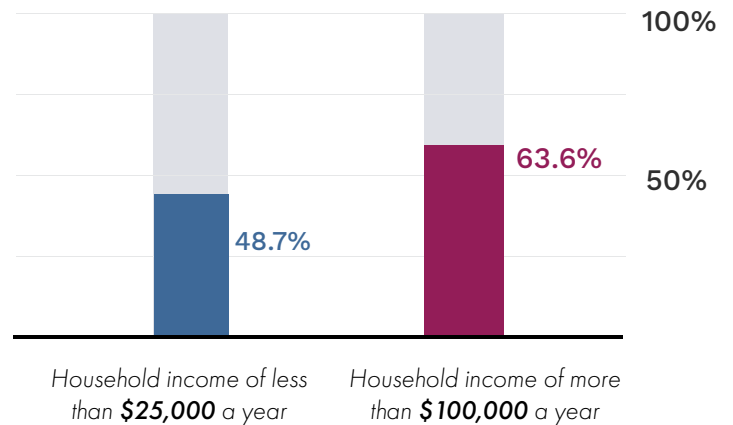


12% less than those with a postsecondary certificate or diploma.



40% less than those with a university degree.

Post Secondary Attendance Rate



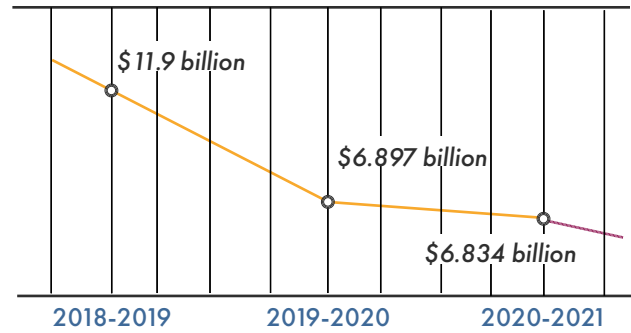
Ontario has one of the highest tuition fees for PSE in the country, making it financially accessible only to those with enough disposable income to pay for it upfront. Alternatively it forces students into debt to pay for their education. Considering the interest on this debt, these students end up paying more for the same education. After finishing their programs, the massive debt that many students carry is a long-term burden that impacts their financial growth for years. It is paramount that the government of Ontario commits to creating equitable access to free PSE for ALL students, regardless of their income level or immigration status.

Less Funding, More Debt

While no province or territory has made PSE entirely free, Ontario lags behind the rest of the country in terms of PSE spending. In 2015/2016, Ontario spent \$7840 per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student, the lowest expenditure rate of every province and territory, and a sorry comparison to Newfoundland and Labrador's expenditure of approximately \$21,224 per FTE student⁵. In 2017/2018, Ontario spent only 0.7% of its GDP on PSE operating funds, drastically behind Newfoundland and Labrador (1.4%) and Quebec (1.4%)⁶.

Not only does Ontario spend less on PSE than the rest of the country, but they continue to actively defund public PSE every year. Ontario spent \$11.9 billion on PSE in 2018/2019⁷, only to decrease to \$6.897 billion in 2019/2020⁸. In 2020/2021, Ontario plans to spend only \$6.834 billion⁹. The \$333 million decrease in spending between 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 consisted largely in a decrease in financial aid funding.

The current model for PSE financial aid in Ontario is far from being equitable or adequate. Instead of improving access to PSE for all, it has created even more barriers for low income students to access PSE. Due to the funding changes to OSAP in 2019, students whose parents make less than \$50,000 are no longer guaranteed enough funding for tuition¹⁰. In addition, at least 10% of funding is allocated towards loans rather than grants. Furthermore, the amount of funding available has decreased by \$670 million since 2018. The Government of Ontario also changed the eligibility requirements for OSAP in 2019, resulting in 34,555 fewer students being eligible for funding¹¹. Given that those with PSE tend to have higher salaries, this policy not only prevents individuals from accessing PSE, it also

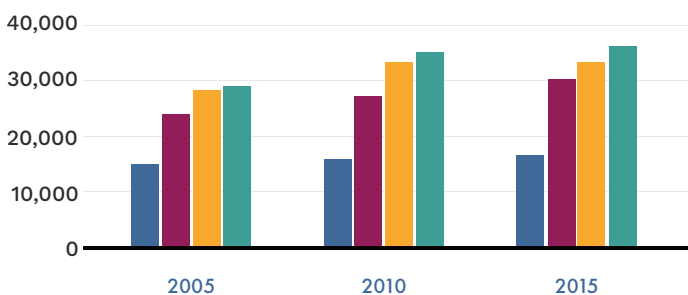


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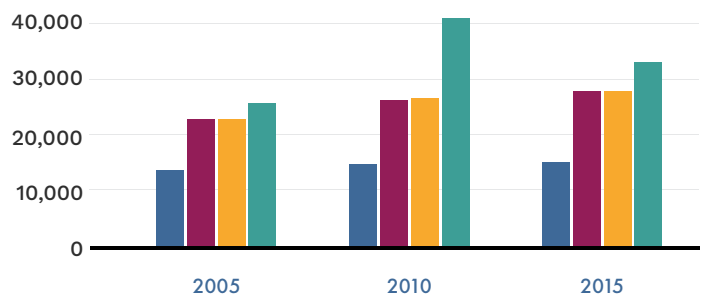
perpetuates the cycle of poverty. It forces students into debt that they have trouble paying off, leading to long-term financial precarity.

Today, the average student in Ontario graduates with more student debt than the national average, regardless of whether they are graduating from a college, bachelors, masters, or graduate program. The average amount of post-graduation debt continues to increase. The transition from school to the labour market is taking longer as well, as students are having a harder time finding work after graduation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue— Ontario youth, ages 15-24 saw an unemployment rate of 20.9% in December 2020, 11% higher than the Ontario average at that time¹². 52% of prospective graduates suffered cancelled or delayed work placements¹³. Given that youth unemployment tends to remain high after economic recessions, the pandemic is likely to have significant impacts on students' financial future, and 70% of post secondary students are worried about this very outcome¹⁴. On average, it currently takes 9.5 years to repay student debt, and this figure is likely to rise¹⁵. As a result, students who are in debt remain in a precarious financial situation even after finishing their PSE program as they struggle to find employment opportunities.

Student Debt (Ontario)



Student Debt (National)



Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0036-01 Student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study

■ College ■ Bachelors ■ Masters ■ Doctorate

Misplaced Funding

In 2019, the Ontario government announced that funding for Ontario colleges and universities would be tied to 'performance outcomes'. This means that more funding will be allocated to institutions that perform higher, according to the government's performance metrics. Previously, only 1.4% of provincial funding has been performance based. Between 2020 and 2025, the number will rise to 60%, meaning that 60% of provincial funding will be distributed to institutions based on their performance outcomes. These metrics include, among others; graduate employment earnings, graduation rates, graduate employment rate in a related field, and economic impact. Performance based funding will result in loss of funding for smaller, remote schools. Institutions will be encouraged to cut valuable programs that are not traditionally economically viable (such as humanities programs) in an effort to increase their performance rating, and thus receive more funding. This massive change in PSE funding is an oppressive strategy that will further impact already marginalized communities and will perpetuate the poverty cycle. Funding access to education based on performance is an ableist, racist, homophobic, colonialist, transphobic and sexist policy, as it further privileges those who encounter fewer barriers in their education.

Performance Based Funding in PSE

1.4%

Prior to 2018: 1.4% of provincial funding was performance based.

60%

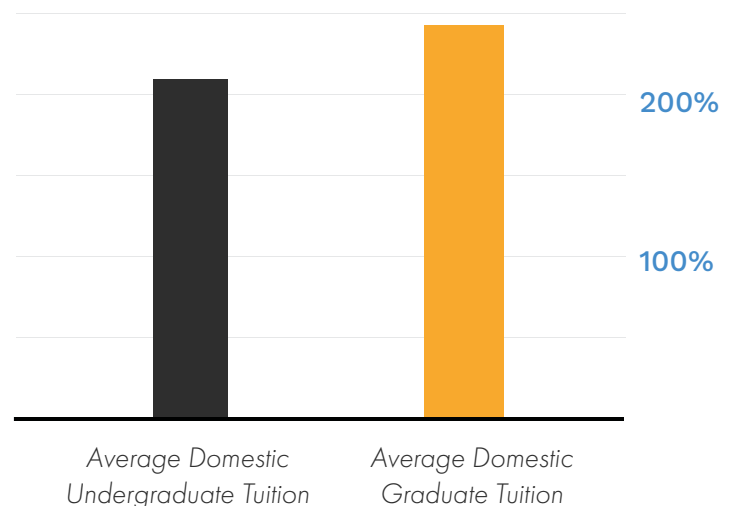
2020-2025: 60% of provincial funding will be performance based.

The Ontario government is also devoting \$15 million to accelerate the development of micro credential programs, with a planned \$59.5 million to be spent over the next 3 years. Microcredentials are rapid training programs that are intended to upskill participants, and increase their earning potential. While microcredentials are valuable programs for students, the allocation of funding to microcredentials along with the advancement of performance based funding functions to commodify post secondary institutions by encouraging them to drop longer, less hireable programs. It further encourages

institutions to plan less for academic excellence and success, but rather for more immediate economic gains. This is a serious problem as institutions rely on tuition fees (mainly coming from international students) to run their operations. Because international student tuition is unregulated, the average undergraduate tuition fees are more than four and a half times the price for domestic undergraduate students. In 2020-21 academic year, the average undergraduate tuition fees for international students were reported to be \$32,019.⁹

Who Gets Left Behind?

Tuition fees are the largest barrier to accessing post-secondary education in Ontario and the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this major issue. Since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215% and the average domestic graduate tuition has increased by 247%. The average graduate student today is paying \$5,200 more per year in tuition compared to the average graduate student in 1980-81¹⁶. Compared to the rest of the country, undergraduate tuition fee levels in Ontario are an astounding 58% higher than the average for the rest of Canada¹⁷. As a result of high tuition fees and the impacts of the pandemic, recent data shows that 44% of post-secondary students are concerned about paying for current expenses, 46% are worried about paying next term's tuition and 43% are worried about their ability to afford their accommodations for the following term¹⁸.



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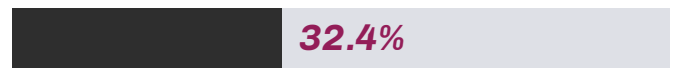
Key demographics are left behind in Ontario's PSE system. For instance, a significant gap exists in educational attainment between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Ontario. When it comes to university education, 32.4% of the non-Indigenous population has a university degree¹⁹ while only 13% of the Indigenous population has a university degree²⁰. Furthermore, people living with disabilities also lack support and services in post secondary institutions, and face significant barriers to PSE attainment²¹. It is clear that Ontario PSE leaves communities behind. Students in Ontario need more reliable, equitable, and extensive funding for PSE— one that allows for any individual to choose to pursue a high quality, publicly funded PSE.

The Case for Free Education

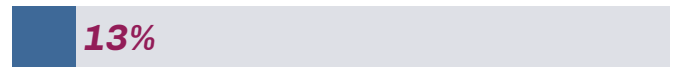
Many countries around the world have recognized the importance of providing free access to PSE. In Europe, post secondary institutions are often public— domestic students pay no tuition fees in Austria, Poland, Spain, Denmark, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The same is true for some countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas, including Malaysia, Morocco, Egypt, Uruguay, Ecuador and Argentina. Recognising the vital role of international students, some countries offer free PSE for ALL students, regardless of residence or nationality. These countries include the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Slovenia, Kenya, and Panama. These nations vary greatly in their demographics, economy and geography, yet they have all prioritized access to and the development of their public post secondary education systems. We can do it too.



University education (Indigenous vs non-Indigenous population in Ontario)



32.4% of non-Indigenous population has a university degree



13% of the Indigenous population has a university degree

¹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976.

² Imbalances Between Labour Demand and Supply 2019-2028. Canadian Occupational Projection System. 2019.

³ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0118-01. "Labour force characteristics by educational degree, annual".

⁴ Ford, R., Hui, T.S., Nguyen, C. (2019). Postsecondary Participation and Household Income. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁵ CAUT Almanac of Post Secondary Education in Canada. Canada and the Provinces. 2019.

⁶ ibid.

⁷ Public Accounts 2018-19: Annual Report. "Details of 2018-19 actual results (\$ Billions) - table 3". 2020

⁸ Expenditure Monitor 2020-21 Q4. Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. 2021.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ R. Tishcoff. What's the Deal With the 2019 Changes to OSAP?. Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance Blog. 2019.

¹¹ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. 2018. "Ontario Student Assistance Program Follow-Up on VFM Section 3.10, 2018 Annual Report."

¹² Statistics Canada. 2020. "Labour Force Survey"

¹³ Canada. 2020. "COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on the work placements of postsecondary students in Canada"

¹⁴ Statistics Canada. 2020. "COVID-19 Pandemic: Financial impacts on postsecondary students in Canada"

¹⁵ Education For All Campaign. Canadian Association of University Teachers, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0045-01. "Canadian and International tuition fees by level of study".

¹⁷ Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). 2020. "COVID-19 and the Academy".

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. 2020. "COVID-19 Pandemic: Financial impacts on postsecondary students in Canada".

¹⁹ Indigenous Services Canada Annual Report to Parliament. Government of Canada. 2020.

²⁰ In the Spirit of Reconciliation: Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation's first 10 years. Indigenous Peoples in Ontario. 2020.

²¹ Canadian Human Rights Commission. "Left out: Challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Canada's schools." (2017).