



# **United Steelworkers Post-Secondary Education Principles**

## **Accessibility - Quality - Accountability**

The following principles are the basis of the United Steelworkers campaign to ensure quality post-secondary education for all Canadians. Each of these principles will be applied differently in each province or territory to respect and embrace the diversity of Canada.

### **1. ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE QUALITY EDUCATION IS A RIGHT OF ALL CANADIANS.**

Post-secondary education must be part of a continuum of learning opportunities for all Canadians, which begins with early-childhood development and extends to different continuous education initiatives for adult learners. As such, post-secondary education has to be accessible and affordable for all Canadians.

Funding should allow for the full participation of all Canadians in post-secondary education. Personal or family income should not limit participation in post-secondary education. Ensuring participation means guaranteeing affordable tuition, books and living expenses for all participants in the post-secondary education system.

## **2. QUALITY POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION MUST RECEIVE ADEQUATE FUNDING.**

Adequate public funding, from both the provincial and federal governments, is critical to ensure high-quality post-secondary education.

While much attention has been rightfully paid to the issue of resources to ensure high quality instruction, the related issue of resources for support staff has unfortunately not received as much attention.

All staff are a fundamental part of the delivery of quality education, from the gardener and security officer to the librarian and from administrative support staff to the faculty member supervising a PhD thesis. If we are to ensure quality post-secondary education, adequate staff levels need to be maintained and all staff need to be valued, well trained, fairly compensated and properly treated.

Modern, up-to-date facilities and infrastructure, which are critical to teaching and support staff, are also essential to providing quality post-secondary education. They help to ensure Canada is globally competitive in the creation, dissemination and implementation of knowledge.

While partnership with the private sector is important, it is vital that such contributions from the private sector should be made without conditions or restrictions that might affect the educational programs and research outcomes or unfairly benefit the donor.

**3. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE TO CANADIANS FOR ALL THE RESOURCES, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, THEY RECEIVE.**

All Canadians have the right to know how their resources are spent by post-secondary institutions. They also have the right to know that private funding is in no way dictating educational and research programs in post-secondary institutions.

Private investment in post-secondary institutions should be properly monitored to ensure it benefits society the most. Arts and humanity programs should be supported to create strong communities, good governments and successful businesses.

Government, educational institutions, students, faculty and staff, and the public should be actively engaged in the establishment and monitoring of standards and program guiding post-secondary education initiatives.

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## **ONTARIO**

### **1. ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE QUALITY EDUCATION IS A RIGHT OF ALL CANADIANS.**

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Funding should allow for the full participation of all Canadians in post-secondary education. Personal or family income should not limit participation in post-secondary education. Ensuring participation means guaranteeing affordable tuition, books and living expenses for all participants in the post-secondary education system.

Tuition fees rose sharply in Ontario over the last decade. In 1995-96, tuition fees made up just 29 per cent of operating revenues for universities in Ontario. Six years later, the share had increased to 44 per cent.

These high tuition fees have created a class-structured post-

secondary education system. The percentage of students from lower income families is much smaller than students from families with a higher income. Some data showing the closing of this gap is available but the distance is still something to preoccupy decision-makers and the public.

Since most of the cost of a university or college education is not covered by tuition fees, it is subsidised by tax-payer dollars. The result is a system that unfairly subsidises the children of higher-income families.

Tuition is the most visible expense for a student in post-secondary education. But students are faced with many more expenses. Books and living expenses should

be explicitly considered when calculating the cost of post-secondary education. For example, among students from lower income families, those living within 40 kilometres of a university were 4.4 times more likely to attend university than those living further away.

The tuition freeze implemented by the Ontario Liberal government is a welcome change. However, it does not deal with the existing inequities, nor does it address the financial sustainability of the post-secondary education system in Ontario.

Student loans, as a model to help to pay for the education system, are also plagued with problems. Students end their education with

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huge debt-loads. This debt not only affects their disposable income after schooling but it also affects their ability to choose their future as professionals. Some have argued that the student loan system is fair, and point to research that shows university graduates have higher incomes. This argument ignores the fact that many graduates are taking low-paying jobs.

Instead of a student loans approach, the United Steelworkers believes the issues of post-secondary education accessibility and sustainability can best be achieved through lower tuition fees, a student grant system and a more progressive tax system. A progressive tax system will allow the government to capture extra income earned by students with higher incomes and use it to fund the education system, instead of relying on funds from debt repayment. The support for participation in

post-secondary education should include tuition payment, books and a living allowance.

Students are offered jobs in universities and college to pay for part of the cost of their education. Unfortunately, the cost-cutting mentality that has swept through universities and colleges has led to a situation where students are used as cheap labour to do staff work. While the United Steelworkers supports co-op education because it plays an invaluable role in translating classroom education to hands-on experience, the union strongly believes that it must not be used as a way to replace existing workers. Students should be paid to work with trained staff in fields related to their studies. This working opportunity will prepare students for the workplace and will also facilitate employment opportunities by reducing training needs in the workplace.

One related and important accessibility objective is the relationship between universities and colleges. The transferability of learning between these institutions must be ensured to obtain the maximum benefit of our education system to our citizens.

## **2. QUALITY POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION MUST RECEIVE ADEQUATE FUNDING.**

Ontario ranks 10<sup>th</sup> among the provinces in funding its universities. It is even behind most states in the US. It has been 10<sup>th</sup> on a per capita basis since 1993-94. Taking inflation and enrolment into account, provincial grants to universities for 2002-03 were more than half a billion dollars below the 1995-96 level.

In spite of the lowest level of funding in Canada, Ontario continues to deliver quality post-secondary education. This is largely due to the staff and faculty who work hard to make it happen. As the amount of resources continues to decline, working conditions are deteriorating. Despite the best efforts of staff and faculty, the quality of education in Ontario is being eroded.

This situation needs to be reversed. It is not enough for the Liberal government to announce an increase in post-secondary education if that increase does not take into consideration the deficit created by 10 years of under-funding. Funding must take into account the cuts over the last decade, inflation, infrastructure renewal needs, and new student enrolment levels. This must be

the starting point for proper funding for a post-secondary education system that reflects the needs of all Ontarians.

Research is also a fundamental element of post-secondary education. As a result, research funding is an important area of concern. Funding cuts to university and community colleges brought a new player to the game: the private donor. Ontario is the jurisdiction with the lowest level of funding per student in Canada, at the same time Ontario has the highest proportion of private funding of all provinces. Historically, Ontario universities and colleges have counted on individuals or corporations to contribute to endowment funds and infrastructure. These donations are a welcomed recognition of a job well done by our post-secondary institutions. However, in the past 10 years, the picture has changed. Post-secondary institutions appear to be for sale and, even worse, corporations and rich

individuals are buying them up. We can see the commercialisation of our post-secondary education institutions. From centres and chairs named after donors to full programs and curricula developed to fit the criteria of the donor to presidents hired for their ability to fundraise.

The federal and provincial governments must address the issue of private funding in our post-secondary education system. Clear policies and priorities among different levels of government need to be developed to support research funding without having strings attached.

One possible model would be the creation of industry funds to which donors contribute research funds and benefit from the result. However, because they would be contributing to a general fund, they would not be able to direct the research and education provided by post-secondary institutions. For

example, if a university established an advanced telecommunications research venture, interested individuals or corporations could donate to it. An independent committee of peers would decide what research and education projects to fund. The donors would benefit from the results but would not be able to direct the activities of the project by stating or donating only to their areas of interest.

This model could be reinforced either by matching government grants or a system of tax measures that support research funding.

While much attention has been rightfully paid to the issue of resources to ensure high quality instruction, the related issue of the resources for support staff has unfortunately not received as much attention.

All staff are a fundamental part of the delivery of quality education, from the gardener and security officer to the librarian and nurse to the faculty member supervising a PhD thesis. If we are to ensure quality post-secondary education, adequate staff levels need to be maintained and all staff need to be valued, well trained, fairly compensated and properly treated.

Downsizing, contracting out, multi-tasking, and efficiency measures are well-known management practices in industrial settings. Since the Conservatives implemented their agenda of cuts to post-secondary institutions, they have become common place in the post-secondary education setting. A high quality education system of small classes with front-line

support to the students is the objective we need to pursue.

In contrast, the common practice today is hundreds of students in large auditoriums listening to lectures; more than 30 students with an assistant to review their assignments; libraries staffed by part-time workers; and lessons to be found only on the internet. Staff has too little time to set-up or takedown classroom equipment or laboratories or to maintain audio-visual and other equipment.

These conditions not only affect the staff but they also affect the quality of education that students are receiving. We cannot expect post-secondary institutions to deliver to the labour market well prepared professionals when they do not have the resources to hire, train and maintain a sufficient number of staff in each of the essential parts of the system.

The United Steelworkers strongly believes that behind

every good professor there are invisible workers ensuring the delivery of a good education. From the secretary typing the lesson, to the lab technician conducting the research, to the electrician maintaining the lights, projectors and computers in the classroom, to the gardener, the security guard and the cook, we believe each worker is an essential part of a quality education system.

Modern, up-to-date facilities and infrastructure, which are critical to supporting teaching and support staff, are essential in providing quality post-secondary education. They help to ensure Canada is globally competitive in the creation, dissemination and implementation of knowledge.

The results of tax cuts and under-funding public institutions are starting to be felt. The Council of Ontario Universities estimates the backlog of deferred maintenance from years of

under-funding to be more than \$1.3 billion. And the situation with our community colleges is no different.

The Ontario government should revert to a funding policy that commits public funds to build and to modernise public institutions. Lack of resources is a poor excuse. The Ontario Alternative Budget has put forward a modest plan to raise an additional \$3.5 billion a year to pay for public needs. It would tighten up loopholes and enforcement to make sure everyone pays their fair share.

**3. POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE TO CANADIANS FOR ALL THE RESOURCES, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, THEY RECEIVE.**

Universities and colleges receive billions of dollars in public and private money. They deserve those funds, but should be accountable for how those resources are spent. Proper regulation would prevent the mystery of private donations, ensure the most cost-effective use of public funds, and assure stakeholders of proper information and full engagement.

The public-private partnership model (or P3s) is increasing in the post-secondary education sector. P3s are being used for infrastructure and research programs even though it has been demonstrated that P3s are more expensive to the public than government investment. It has also been proven that P3s harm the public sector over the long-term. The public should

have the opportunity to know and openly participate in any attempts to direct private resources into infrastructure projects using a P3 style of investment.

Private donors build centres, labs, auditoriums and classrooms. Private donors establish chairs and programs in the area of business in which they are interested. It is normal to see science and business programs getting private support, meanwhile arts and humanities programs decline in resources. In addition, the boards of post-secondary institutions tend to be dominated by business men and women. Many institutions view providing industry with programs to meet their needs as part of their mandate.

In the process, programs in the arts and humanities get fewer resources allocated to them. We need our educational institutions to support the Canadian economy. It is wrong to sacrifice programs in the

arts and humanities in order to serve the needs of industry. As a result, post-secondary education is being hurt in two ways.

First, this tendency threatens our institutions and our students ability to think critically and creatively. The ability to think critically and creatively, to express ideas and to engage in debate are important skills. Our community depends on good government, successful businesses, and strong citizens.

Second, in the case of private donations, most of them are matching some type of public investment. The public needs to know their tax dollars are going towards broader education goals and not supporting private interests in their quest for new and improved products.

Accountability means directing public resources to where they will benefit society the most, and monitoring the

implementation of programs.

There are mechanisms in place that could improve accountability if used properly. For example:

- ♦ If mandated, the provincial auditor could play a more effective.
- ♦ The provincial government should also remove the universities' exemption from the Freedom of Information Act.
- ♦ The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should involve stakeholders in establishing and monitoring program standards.
- ♦ The involvement of staff at colleges and universities is essential. They should be consulted with respect to the planning and monitoring of standards and programs. They are also indispensable in ensuring accountability.

#### **4. OUR PRIORITY: MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE WORK IN THE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM.**

In this review of our post-secondary education system, different groups and individuals will address different priorities around the issues of accessibility, quality and accountability. Whether it be the cost of education to families in Ontario, mandatory retirement of faculty, or the effects of international trade agreements in the post-secondary system, these are all important issues.

In our submission, however, we would like to highlight one aspect of the post-secondary education system

that has unfortunately received little attention to date. Support staff at our universities and colleges play a critical role. We strongly believe that the funding, employment levels, remuneration and working conditions of support staff need to be a cornerstone of post-secondary education reform in Ontario and across Canada.

Support staff keep the education system running smoothly. They operate the departmental offices, program the computers, staff the laboratories, and publish the newsletters. They make the fundraising phone calls, and manage the morgue. They are on the front line in the colleges and universities' relationship with students.

At the same time, we have heard how the levels of support staff have been cut to the bone and how support staff resources, and related infrastructure needs, have continued to be ignored.

Recognition and respect of support staff need to be at the centre of this review.

Specifically, we believe that:

- ♦ Adequate support staff levels need to be maintained and all staff need to be valued, well trained, fairly compensated and properly treated. Resources should be specifically allocated to hire, retain, train and update support staff;
- ♦ Facilities and infrastructure should be maintained and planned to ensure the health and well-being of students and staff. Maintaining, operating and staffing facilities according to students and staff needs is essential to provide quality education; and,
- ♦ Accountability of private and public resources is important. A much needed measurement of that accountability is where resources are allocated and who is controlling them. In addition, support staff should have a stronger voice reflected in the governing bodies of post-secondary educational institutions.