

Brief for the Pre-budget Consultations for Budget 2021

**Submitted to the House of Commons Standing
Committee on Finance (FINA)**

By the University of Quebec

Recommendations

- 1. Invest \$60 million per year to support and develop research partnerships and the mobilization and dissemination of knowledge at all Canadian universities.**
- 2. Increase funding for federal granting agencies by \$340 million per year to support investigator-led research.**
- 3. Support the development of digital higher learning to address the issues and needs institutions are dealing with as they fulfill their teaching, research and community-service missions during the pandemic and recovery.**
- 4. Increase funding to promote Canada as a post-secondary education destination and to welcome and integrate Canadian students studying out of province and international students by \$75 million per year.**

The heads of the University of Quebec network's 10 institutions applaud the federal government's recent investments in research and support for students to lessen the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and lay the groundwork for recovery. They believe these investments are important milestones in the government's efforts to end the crisis using Canadian knowledge and innovation. This brief to the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA) includes four recommendations to strengthen universities' ability to contribute even more through their interconnected missions of education, research and community service.

1. Invest \$60 million per year to support and develop research partnerships and the mobilization and dissemination of knowledge at all Canadian universities.

Knowledge mobilization and the capacity to innovate in services, processes or products at Canadian public or private organizations is critical to a sustainable and green recovery. The linkages between universities and knowledge users are vitally important.

Canadian universities already conduct a significant share of their research in partnership with the public or private sectors. This research depends on the financial support of these partners, as is sometimes required by federal funding programs or by contracts.

The historic economic slowdown caused by the pandemic seems to portend that the financial capacity of organizations to invest in research partnerships will be limited or disappear altogether in the coming years. Yet the need to generate new knowledge or make existing knowledge more accessible has never been so great.

The recommended investment would enable universities to do the following:

- replace the financial support normally provided by partners in order to continue research that is focused on knowledge transfer for innovation;
- fund the activities and personnel needed to mobilize and disseminate knowledge in various sectors;
- support highly skilled jobs in research projects; and
- fund training for the next generation through the many projects involving partners.

By our estimates, these annual investments should be between \$150,000 and \$1.5 million per post-secondary institution eligible for federal granting council funding, based on the average annual value of their research funds.

2. Increase funding for federal granting agencies by \$340 million per year to support investigator-led research.

By reinvesting in research in accordance with recommendation 6.1 of the [expert panel on Canada's Fundamental Science Review](#), the federal government could enable all Canadian universities to be fully involved in training highly qualified personnel (HQP). Nearly 50% of federal agency research grants serve to provide scholarships and bursaries or salaries to students working on research teams. Supporting research therefore means supporting the training of HQP.

The transition to the knowledge society and the digitization of vast swathes of the global economy are producing benefits that all Canadians should be able to enjoy. The transition calls for solutions to achieve sustainable and green economic growth. To find these solutions, organizations need workers with the skills to mobilize the latest knowledge in order to generate new ideas, goods and services.

Training HQP in our universities is crucial to the resilience of Canadian society during the recovery. Through their involvement in academic research activities and interactions with research professors, undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate students gain the knowledge and skills prized in the knowledge society.

Our country must ensure access to these resources for all young Canadians, no matter where they live and without requiring them to move too far from their communities. Canada has an important asset in this regard: the roughly 100 universities operating across the country. Yet, Canadian students and institutions do not currently have equal access to these resources: 56% of Canadian university students are educated at universities that receive only 26% of academic research funding.

It therefore seems entirely appropriate to rebalance public investments to generate benefits in every region of the country. One option would be to take into account new criteria in addition to the recently added principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.¹

The recommended investments should contribute to the following:

- rebalancing the share of grants for publicly funded academic research within the research ecosystem; and
- ensuring dynamic research environments exist in all Canadian universities, regardless of their size or that of the communities they serve.

¹ One example is the New Frontiers in Research Fund of 2018. Despite the addition of an “inclusion” assessment criterion, 75% of the grants were awarded to young candidates affiliated with 15 Canadian universities.

3. Support the development of digital higher learning to address the issues and needs institutions are dealing with as they fulfill their teaching, research and community-service missions during the pandemic and recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the ongoing problems with higher education digital infrastructure and technology in Canada.

The resumption of economic and academic activities will also increase the pressure on this technology and infrastructure. Consider the following examples:

- the resumption of research work;
- the relaunch of university-private sector partnerships for social and technological innovation;
- the upgrading or requalification needs of those who wish to re-enter the workforce;
- the combination of telework and in-person work for university academic staff; and
- the expected partial reopening of university classrooms while strict public health rules remain in effect.

Increased and accelerated investments will be needed to develop digital higher learning in ways such as the following:

- making high-speed broadband available in rural regions of Canada so that all institutions can adopt digital technologies and all students can access digital resources;
- providing the classroom equipment needed to teach while respecting distancing guidelines, including webcasting of in-class content; and
- supplying the necessary resources to ensure secure and ethical remote access to data and resources for remote research.

The requested investments should do the following:

- accelerate implementation of the measures announced in Budget 2019 to provide 100% broadband coverage to all communities, across the country;
- enable the deployment and expansion of online or partially online education;
- support the development or expansion of training options for workers to requalify or upgrade their skills;
- fund physical infrastructure (including buildings and equipment) and digital infrastructure (including network architecture and software);

- respect provincial jurisdiction and include transfers to the provinces where necessary; and
- extend the scope of existing federal programs that support digital development.²

4. Increase funding to promote Canada as a post-secondary education destination and to welcome and integrate Canadian students studying out of province and international students by \$75 million per year.

While Canada is viewed favourably and studies place it among the top education destinations in the post-pandemic era, it will take several years before international student numbers recover. At the same time, as students are reconsidering their foreign study plans during the pandemic, interprovincial mobility should be made easier.

Having students from different backgrounds benefits university campuses in Canada and the country as a whole.

- A growing international student body enriches university life and globalizes post-secondary studies. It also introduces Canadian students to the cultural diversity that is the hallmark of the 21st-century world and may encourage them to travel.
- On the research front, integrating international or out-of-province undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate student researchers into research teams can meet urgent research workforce needs. It also helps establish partnerships between domestic and international research networks. Student researchers who return home after their studies likewise maintain productive links with the academic community in which they were trained.
- The duration of post-secondary studies helps effectively integrate students into the host society; these students may then choose to immigrate to Canada. The quality of training available in universities and a Canadian degree improve the employability of immigration candidates.³

In this context, more investment is needed to do the following:

- increase funding for [Canada's International Education Strategy](#);
- establish post-secondary student recruitment strategies, including welcome scholarships and bursaries, in the different catchment areas for Canada's two official languages;

² Examples include the [Connect to Innovate](#) and [Building a Better Canada](#) programs.

³ In Quebec, where the employment rate is 84%, the labour force participation rate of international students with a degree from a Quebec university is comparable to that of their Quebec-born peers (Quebec Department of Immigration, Francization and Integration, 2020: 6).

- help post-secondary institutions prepare measures to better welcome Canadian and international students on campus and in communities during the pandemic, from their arrival in Canada and on campus to the completion of their social and academic integration; and
- adapt Canada's immigration standards and services and border services to make it easier for international students to enter Canada and obtain the necessary permits.

The University of Quebec network

As a crucible of new scientific knowledge and a training ground for the experts of tomorrow, the University of Quebec network is involved in the scientific, economic, social and cultural development of Quebec and Canada, including the current issues raised by the pandemic. The network's 10 institutions, their personnel and their 100,000 students are key players in Canada's socio-economic recovery:

- University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM)
- University of Quebec at Trois-Rivières (UQTR)
- University of Quebec at Chicoutimi (UQAC)
- University of Quebec at Rimouski (UQAR)
- University of Quebec in Outaouais (UQO)
- University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT)
- Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS)
- École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP)
- École de technologie supérieure (ÉTS)
- Télé-université (TÉLUQ)