

Written Submission for the Pre-budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

Submitted by:

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

Recommendation 1: Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grant levels by \$1200 dollars per student for the 2021 federal budget.

Recommendation 2: Ensure all Canadian employers, including healthcare employers, are eligible for the Student Work Integrated Learning Program (SWILP) wage subsidies.

Recommendation 3: Invest in post-graduation retention of our international students by:

- I. Developing educational programs that help international students improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness through out-of-classroom and social learning environments.
- II. Making \$20 million dollars available to support Student Work Placement Program opportunities for both international and domestic students.

Recommendation 4: Establish an application-based grant to assist universities and Indigenous institutes in creating or expanding Indigenous studies and programs to revitalize and preserve Indigenous languages and cultures.

Kindly consider the following pre-budget consultation comments in advance of the 2021 federal budget.

The Importance of Post-Secondary Education

Public investment in education has long been a tradition of promoting post-secondary attainment, which advances research, but also educates students to meet the needs of an evolving workforce. University graduates become valuable contributors to the Canadian economy through providing highly skilled labour to companies, entrepreneurship, and increased income tax revenue.

In light of the current COVID-19 global pandemic, which is having an acutely adverse effect on students across Canada, improving and maintaining the quality of education needs to be a top priority. This will ensure that the post-secondary educational system continues to work and work equitably. The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association commends the government's swift action in support of students and recent graduates as part of the response to COVID-19. However, there is more that can be done to continue to support students.

Students need to be in a state of well-being, both physically and mentally, and barriers need to be acknowledged and removed for marginalized groups and those with fewer means. We have outlined several recommendations to work toward these broad goals. These recommendations are in four key areas, to which we hope to draw the attention of the federal government:

- Support for Students in Response to COVID-19
- Enhancing Work Integrated Learning
- Support for International Students
- Support for Indigenous Students

Support Students in Response to COVID-19

Recommendation 1: Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grant levels by \$1200 dollars per student for the 2021 federal budget.

The financial effects of COVID-19 on students have been especially negative. More than 75% of students had their summer work plans impacted by COVID-19.¹ This has made it more difficult for students to pay for school, with many students concerned that they will not be able to pursue courses in the fall term. Without access to affordable education for middle-class and marginalised Canadians, there is a risk of increased inequality in our society.

The increase to 2020 grant levels has helped mitigate the financial impacts for students. However, these concerns will persist through the coming years. The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association is therefore calling on the federal government to increase the 2019 Canada Student Grants levels by \$1200 dollars per student for the 2021 federal budget. This investment, which is in line with the government's promise to strengthen support for the middle-class in its 2019 election platform,² will improve equitable access to education. Fulfilling this platform promise is critical now as students' income and parental support has been affected by COVID-19.

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association also commends and supports the recommendations put forward by Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) to continue to support students through the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Statistics Canada, "[Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Postsecondary Students](#)," Government of Canada, May 12, 2020.

² Liberal Party of Canada, "[Forward: A Real Plan for the Middle Class](#)," p.9, 2019.

Enhance Work Integrated Learning

Recommendation 2: Ensure all Canadian employers, including healthcare employers, are eligible for Student Work Integrated Learning Program (SWILP) wage subsidies

The Student Work Integrated Learning Program (SWILP), enables post-secondary students across Canada to gain paid work experience in their field of study. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a model and process of curricular experiential education which formally and intentionally integrates a student's academic studies within a workplace or practice setting.³ Under its current framework, the SWILP wage subsidy prioritizes experiences for students in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business fields.⁴ This leaves out a large number of students who are not enrolled in these programs.

In order to fully realise the potential of SWILP and to better support students in the midst of a global pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis, the government should extend the SWILP wage subsidy to public and not-for-profit sector employers including the health sector where work integrated learning opportunities are prevalent but often unpaid. As a result of their skills in critical thinking, complex decision-making, and creative exploration, leaders across industries hold degrees in the social sciences and humanities more often than any other course of study.⁵ Therefore, we are calling on the federal government to increase employer supports for WIL programs in the humanities and social sciences.

³ CEWIL Canada, "[Work Integrated Learning](#)," August 6, 2020

⁴ CEWIL Canada, "[Student Work Integrated Learning Program](#)," CAFCE Webinar, September, 2017.

⁵ British Council, "[The Educational Pathways Of Leaders: An International Comparison](#)," 2015.

Support International Students

Recommendation 3: Invest in post-graduation retention of our international students

Canada is an increasingly attractive destination for international students. At the university level, international students now account for 14.7% of enrolments.⁶ Canada hosts more than 640,000 international students who contribute an estimated \$21.6 billion dollars to Canada's GDP and support more than 170,000 jobs.⁷ International students also enhance the learning experience of all students and connect Canadian campuses and scholars to global knowledge networks.⁸ Furthermore, international students continue to help meet labour market needs, enriching Canada's human capital.

A study by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) found that generalized workshops are not an effective method of preparing students for the workforce.⁹ In contrast, the experience of some students has shown that a more effective strategy for cultural integration and improvement of English-language skills than classroom learning environments is out-of-class learning in social environments, such as volunteering and leisure activities.¹⁰ Such programs would also benefit newcomers to Canada who are not post-secondary students. To that end, as a means to retain international students, the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association requests that the federal government:

- I. Develop educational programs that help international students improve their English-language proficiency and cultural awareness through out-of-classroom and social learning environments.

⁶ Statistics Canada, "[International Student Enrolment in Postsecondary Education Programs Prior to COVID-19](#)," Government of Canada, June 15, 2020.

⁷ Global Affairs Canada, "[Building on Success: International Education Strategy](#)," Government of Canada, 2020.

⁸ Century Initiative, "[Scaling International Education](#)," September, 2020

⁹ Gribble, Catriona, Jill Blackmore, and Mark Rahimi, "[Challenges to providing work integrated learning to international business students at Australian universities](#)," The Journal of the University Vocational Awards Council 5 (4): 401-416, November 9, 2015.

¹⁰ Liu, Lu, "An International Graduate Student's ESL Learning Experience Beyond the Classroom," TESL Canada Journal 29 (1): 77-92, 2011.

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association echoes the concerns of the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) that the current SWPP framework can cause an unfair hiring bias towards domestic students which denies international students the same valuable experiences. A \$20 million dollar investment in the program could fund positions for up to 7,000 international students, helping them gain Canadian work experience in preparation for applying for a post-graduate work permit while developing valuable skills. Therefore, the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association also requests that the federal government:

- II. Make \$20 million dollars available to support Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) opportunities for both international and domestic students.

Support Indigenous Students

Recommendation 4: Establish an application-based grant to assist universities and Indigenous Institutes in creating or expanding Indigenous studies and programs to revitalize and preserve Indigenous languages and cultures

Investment in protection of Indigenous languages and the promotion of Indigenous cultures aligns with calls to action 16 and 65 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To advance research programs that may not normally be economically viable, the federal government should institute a special stream of funding, administered similar to the Canada Research Chairs program, to allow universities and Indigenous Institutes to propose creation or expansion of specialized Indigenous studies or language programs. Indigenous Services Canada would assess applications based on feasibility and impacts on teaching, research, community and culture.

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association proposes that the government support eight programs across the country in a pilot program. We suggest that funding would support departments made up of approximately six faculty and staff as well as administered expenses at 50%, with the other 50% coming from other funding sources. The government contribution would be up to \$600,000 dollars a year for ten years. This proposal would entail \$48 million dollars in government expenditures over ten years.

The government should also provide guidance that universities may and should seek diversity in potential instructors when considering applications, including allowing instructors without advanced degrees to hold professorial positions if their presence can improve the quality of the program.

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) represents over 34,000 undergraduate students studying at the University of Waterloo. We are committed to accessible, affordable and high-quality education. We support students having a world-class education, quality of life during their education, and a post-secondary education system that works for Canada, Canadians, and all students.

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The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River