



Office of the President

1050 KANEFF TOWER
4700 KEELE ST
TORONTO ON
CANADA M3J 1P3
T 416 736 5200
www.yorku.ca/president

August 7, 2020

The Hon. Wayne Easter, P.C., M.P.
Chair, House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Sent via e-mail: Finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Easter,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission to the House Standing Committee on Finance's consultations on the Government of Canada's 2021 Budget.

York University recommends that the 2021 federal budget make bold investments in Canada's postsecondary education system to ensure that universities continue to conduct the cutting-edge research that seeks to solve some of Canada's most complex issues, including responding to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhonda L. Lenton'.

Rhonda L. Lenton, PhD
President & Vice Chancellor

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Encl: York University's 2021 Pre-Budget Submission



Recommendations:

- *Invest in green and accessible capital infrastructure, including digital infrastructure and cybersecurity, and offer another round of funding through the CFI Innovation Fund.*
- *Investing in knowledge mobilization at Canadian universities, including a new higher education knowledge mobilization fund to leverage research in all disciplines and intellectual property generated at universities to address problems in Canadian society, including challenges due to COVID-19.*
- *Create training vouchers for workers displaced by the pandemic and enhance funding provided through the Canada Training Benefit, so that it becomes responsive to Canadians' need for lifelong learning, providing funding for institutions to develop accessible short courses in key demand areas and extending changes made to the Canada Student Loan Program through the end of 2021.*
- *Increase visa-processing capacity to address the volume of applications, invest in international student access by cost-sharing safe arrival and quarantine measures with universities and offset international student losses with a dedicated federal transfer to universities in the event of a drop in international students.*
- *Provide \$25 million to support the creation of a Research Institute for Disaster and Emergency Management (DEM) that would complement CIFAL York and would make Canada a global leader in sharing DEM best practices and training.*

York University
Pre-Budget Submission to the House Standing Committee on Finance
August 2020

York University is Canada's 3rd largest university with 52,000 students including nearly 6000 graduate students, one of the largest graduate student cohorts in the country. York is ranked among Canada's top 10 research universities for Sciences, Engineering, Social Sciences and Humanities when measured by impact. By combining excellence in research and teaching with careful stewardship of public funds, York is equipping the next generation for success in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy while also delivering world-class research with real-world applications and impacts.

York University has been a leader in the response to COVID-19 from the beginning of the pandemic. During the initial personal protective equipment (PPE) shortage, the University donated over 57,000 pairs of latex and nitrile gloves, 6500 N95 masks, to area hospitals. The University also deployed resources to support new research into challenges created by the pandemic and encouraged its faculty to assist governments in their response to the pandemic in any way they can. Most notably, Professor Steven Hoffman was appointed by the UN Deputy Secretary-General to lead the development of a United Nations Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 recovery.

York University believes that investments highlighted in this submission are key to supporting our response to the public health and economic challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 in Canada and the world. Canada's current and future economic success relies heavily on our ability to react quickly to the challenges presented by the pandemic and respond with new ways of doing things that result in greater efficiency and better outcomes in the post-COVID world.

Investing in Digital and Research Infrastructure

Among the many challenges presented by COVID-19, it has primarily altered how we interact with each other and this has had a profound impact in the PSE sector. Given these challenges, universities have been focusing their efforts on building infrastructure, including new capital projects, digital labs and online solutions for teaching and learning, that are needed to continue to be able to deliver high quality teaching and research through this public health crisis.

The necessary transition to digital and online learning while COVID-19 remains a public health crisis has also increased the frequency and severity of threats to institutional cyber security. Given that these threats will only increase in frequency and complexity in the future, and especially given the reliance on digital learning during the pandemic, we recommend that investments be made to harden University infrastructure against new threats by providing investment for existing or new collaborative cybersecurity initiatives across the sector.

We also continue to invest in infrastructure to support our growth in comprehensive research, and we appreciate the partnership of the federal government in assisting with support for some of these projects. Currently, we are undergoing an expansion of the Sherman Health Science Centre to build a new facility for neuroscience, which was funded in part through the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). We call on the government to continue to partner with universities to advance infrastructure and ensure that Canadian research enterprise remains amongst the best in the world by offering another round of funding through the CFI Innovation Fund.

Recommendation:

Invest in green and accessible capital infrastructure, including digital infrastructure and cybersecurity, and offer another round of funding through the CFI Innovation Fund.

Promoting Knowledge Mobilization

Researchers at York are working to find innovative solutions to complex societal issues that Canadians collectively face, but without proper support, these solutions often have difficulty being deployed for the benefit of society. Knowledge mobilization is crucial for taking research conducted at Canada's universities and applying it to the real-world problems that Canadians face.

The research being conducted at York is responsive to the needs of society, and the research being conducted with respect to COVID-19 is no different. A disinfection robot that used artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning was employed to sanitize a long-term healthcare facility that confirmed its first COVID-19 case in early April and by the end of April had confirmed an outbreak. While these types of robots have long been used in hospitals, this is the first instance of using AI to make the more effective in its duties and was made possible by applying research conducted at York to a problem in our community.

York has also mobilized to respond to economic challenges posed by the pandemic. In partnership with the federal and provincial governments, York's Schulich School of Business has deployed 100 of its MBA and undergraduate students to aid small businesses across the GTA that are struggling from the impacts of COVID-19 to quickly gear up for online commerce. This partnership was made possible through the Digital Main Street initiative, which includes the City of Toronto and leading global technology companies, including Shopify and Google. Digital Main Street is an example of knowledge mobilization through public-private partnership that has responded to an immediate need in society due to the economic impacts of pandemic.

Recommendation:

Investing in knowledge mobilization at Canadian universities, in a new higher education knowledge mobilization fund to leverage research in all disciplines and intellectual property generated at universities to address problems in Canadian society, including challenges due to COVID-19.

Creating new opportunities for up-skilling and re-skilling through access

Unlocking the full potential of universities requires that we do not leave talent behind. We need to not only increase the percentage of our population who attend university but also the diversity of our student population. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has created challenges for access to both post-secondary education as well as jobs. This is especially true for individuals from vulnerable populations, including those who are female, Black, indigenous, people of colour, or Canadians with disabilities. We know that Canada's economic recovery will only be successful if it includes everyone.

York appreciates the federal government's investment in skills and training in 2019, but given the economic crisis created by the pandemic, we acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure the Canadian workforce adapts to lifelong learning and we do not lose the recent gains we have made through investment in Canadian competitiveness. By expanding access to and enhancing the funding already provided through the Canada Training Benefit, the government can ensure that more individuals will receive the training they need while also ease the transition the workforce is experiencing due to automation and AI.

Recommendation:

Create training vouchers for workers displaced by the pandemic and enhance funding provided through the Canada Training Benefit, so that it becomes responsive to Canadians' need for lifelong learning, providing funding for institutions to develop accessible short courses in key demand areas and extending changes made to the Canada Student Loan Program through the end of 2021.

Facilitating access and support for international students

York is one of Canada's most diverse universities, with more than 70 per cent of our undergraduates identifying their ethno-cultural background as non-white compared to 50 per cent for the rest of the sector. York has 11,820 international students from 178 countries, and the University has over 170 international research partnerships. We understand the crucial role international research collaboration plays in developing solutions to the most complex issues facing society, including in the global response to COVID-19.

International students are also a crucial source of revenue for universities and economic activity for Canada. They contributed an estimated \$21.6 billion to the Canadian economy in 2018 and sustained close to 170,000 jobs for Canadians in 2016, including \$6 billion per year in tuition. COVID-19 has created unique challenges for universities in terms of access for their students, especially international students. With the closure of borders around the world, and uncertainty regarding the timing and logistics of their reopening, in addition to concerns of student safety and the need for quarantine upon arrival, international students face new barriers to studying in Canada. Given that the pandemic is a global event, it is crucial that the government continues to support the attraction and retention of international students to ensure that Canada does not lose recent gains it has made in international competitiveness and is situated to take advantage of a post-COVID-19 context.

Recommendation:

Increase visa-processing capacity to address the volume of applications, invest in international student access by cost-sharing safe arrival and quarantine measures with universities and offset international student losses with a dedicated federal transfer to universities in the event of a drop in international students.

CIFAL and the Research Institute for Disaster and Emergency Management

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) has established a CIFAL Global Network which is composed of International Training Centres for Authorities and Leaders. The central purpose of CIFAL's training programmes is to develop and strengthen human capacities to better respond to development challenges and to facilitate City to City (C2C) partnerships. The CIFAL centres provide innovative training throughout the world and serve as hubs for the exchange of knowledge amongst government officials, the private sector and civil society. York University recently signed an agreement with UNITAR to create Canada's first CIFAL Centre, CIFAL York.

The Institute will be focused on developing capacity in the following areas: Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Development, Emergency and Disaster Management, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development and advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Canadian research talent can help mitigate future emergencies by moving from emergency response to risk management. Developing a Research Institute that would further advance York's international leadership in Disaster and Emergency Management (DEM) and related fields. This interdisciplinary Institute would encompass research, scholarship and academic opportunities along with professional development activities in DEM. The Institute would bring together an expansive team of world-leading experts from key areas such as populations and public health, urban studies, artificial intelligence and homelessness to address, more effectively, the increasingly systemic nature of disaster and emergency risk, with a fundamentally new approach in how we manage such systemic risks in the context of DEM.

Recommendation:

Provide \$25 million to support the creation of a Research Institute for Disaster and Emergency Management (DEM) that would complement CIFAL York and would make Canada a global leader in sharing DEM best practices and training.