



Northeastern University  
Toronto

*Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal  
Budget by Northeastern University Toronto*

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That the government provide financial support to provinces seeking to improve digital learning infrastructure and best practices so that higher education institutions across the country may better meet learners where they are be more resilient to future disruptions.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government implement the Canada Training Credit and incentivize stackable credentials.

**Recommendation 3:** That the government expand Lifelong Learning Plan eligibility and accessibility.

**Recommendation 4:** That the government continue to invest in research funding for academic institutions and Canada's research community, particularly in the areas of health, security, and sustainability research,

## **Introduction**

Northeastern University Toronto appreciates the opportunity to participate in the federal government's pre-budget consultation process. Northeastern University, founded in 1898 in Boston, Massachusetts, is a leader in experiential education, lifelong learning, and is ranked as a top tier R1 university. Toronto is Northeastern's first international campus, and part of a global university system.

Northeastern University Toronto delivers graduate-level degree programs focused on in-demand fields such as Project Management, Regulatory Affairs, and Cybersecurity and has received consent to offer a Master of Science in Computer Science. In addition, the Toronto campus partners with businesses across Ontario to develop talent and collaboratively address workforce needs in areas like data and analytics and artificial intelligence.

## **Budget 2021: Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Lifelong Learning Infrastructure**

As the Canadian government turns to economic recovery measures as part of the next phase of COVID-19 response, Northeastern University Toronto urges the government to include investments in the infrastructure of lifelong learning in the next federal budget, including incentives to build digital learning capacity, new mechanisms to help Canadians save for ongoing educational needs, and robust research and development focused on the future of work and learning.

In the midst of the current COVID-19 crisis, many Canadians, including members of Northeastern University's community, are stuck at home. Unemployment is skyrocketing and Canadians across the country are being forced to find new ways to work, learn, and take care of their families. At the same time, artificial intelligence and automation are continuing to transform the global economy and will continue to have a profoundly disruptive effect on Canadian workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated what was already the case – the evolving nature of work creates the need for workers to get training to keep existing jobs or prepare for new ones.

As a result, Canadians already at risk of being left behind now face the prospect of a recession, increased job insecurity, and additional family challenges. As Canada prepares to kick-start and stimulate the economy, we must ensure that we equip our workers with the skills they need to fully participate and succeed.

As proven leaders in experiential learning and higher education innovation, we at Northeastern University believe that this moment presents a lifelong learning imperative: we must meet learners where they are—at home, at work, balancing family, professional, and other obligations—and acknowledge that advances in technology and changes to the very nature of work will require Canadians to continuously upskill over our lifetimes. **In order to meet this moment, we must build a 21st Century Lifelong Learning Infrastructure.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the Canadian economy to a standstill. At the same time, the pandemic has exposed critical gaps in Canada's post-secondary education system, particularly the reliance on traditional modes of educational delivery. It is now more important than ever to advance lifelong learning as part of Canada's economic restart and long-term economic recovery.

### **Our Recommendations**

Building a robust 21st century lifelong learning infrastructure will ensure that Canadians are not left behind when the economy picks back up again, that institutions of higher education have the capacity to deliver the learning of the future, and that employers continue to have access to the talent they need to adapt to the rapidly changing nature of work. The recommendations we present would form the foundation of a 21<sup>st</sup> century lifelong learning infrastructure:

- *Digital Learning Capacity Building:* Provide financial support to provinces seeking to improve digital learning infrastructure and best practices so that higher education institutions across the country may better meet learners where they are be more resilient to future disruptions. Higher education is already trending in this direction, but the current moment shines a bright light on the need for broad-based investment in novel digital learning methods.
- *Implement the Canada Training Credit and incentivize stackable credentials:* a Budget 2019 and election platform commitment, the Canada Training Benefit would give workers a refundable tax credit on their income tax and benefit return to help offset tuition costs for training, provide income support during training, and offer job protection so that workers can take the time they need to keep their skills relevant and in-demand. While these are important first steps, the Canada Training Credit is capped at a lifetime training amount limit of \$5000 for up to half of eligible tuition and fees for training program or courses. There is significant room to expand benefit criteria and increase the maximum to allow Canadians greater choice and access to up-skilling and training

programs. The government must prioritize the rollout of the *Canada Training Benefit* to facilitate economic recovery in the coming months. The federal government could also further incentivize lifelong learning that builds towards degree completion by, for example, matching dollars spent on stackable credentials with credits to an individual's Canada Training Credit tax credit for later use.

- *Expand Lifelong Learning Plan eligibility and accessibility:* Currently, the Lifelong Learning Plan allows Canadians to withdraw up to \$20 000 from registered retirement savings plans (RRSPs) to finance full-time training or education for individuals and partners. Repayments to individuals' RRSP plans are required as part of the program. To allow more Canadians to access the benefits of lifelong learning, more flexibility should be introduced around eligibility requirements. The government should also allow employers to contribute to their employees' Lifelong Learning Plan accounts in the same way they match contributions to retirements savings accounts. This would show that employers understand the new reality in which individuals must continuously interweave working and learning.
- *Continue to invest in research funding for academic institutions and Canada's research community:* Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government committed significant financial support to Canada's academic institutions and research community. The government should continue to provide support to Canada's research community and focus investment on critical areas that will contribute to Canada's growth and resilience: health, security, and sustainability.

These recommendations will ensure that Canadians get the skills they need for good quality jobs, maximizing labour force participation and putting Canada on the path of long-term economic growth.

## **Conclusion**

So many aspects of our society will require a bold vision for the future and a plan for rebuilding. Higher education will be no different. We can meet these challenges, but in order to do so, government, higher education, and industry must come together to ensure that essential learning opportunities are available, accessible, and effective for everyone. If we do that, we will come out of this crisis with a stronger and more resilient workforce and a community of lifelong learners that will generate decades of growth, prosperity, and stability.