

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Budget

Canadian Federation of Students

PART 1: LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Universally Accessible Post-Secondary Education

1. Establish an ongoing transfer to the provinces and territories to eliminate tuition fees. The federal government assumes a 50% share of the cost while provincial and territorial authorities commit to their share of this cost and observe the proposed *Post-Secondary Education Act*. **Cost:** \$2.6 billion per year.
2. Restore federal transfers to provinces and territories for post-secondary education to 1992 levels to address the \$2.29 billion cut in 1996, and increase this funding based on enrolment/inflation growth since. With current federal funding at \$4.3 billion, an annual federal funding gap of \$2.6 billion remains. **Cost:** \$6.9 billion per year (includes \$4.3 billion in current funding, plus additional funding of \$2.6 billion).
3. Enact a national post-secondary education strategy in cooperation with provinces and territories, and commit, in support of this strategy, an additional \$3 billion through transparent transfer payments to provinces and territories.

Recommendation #2: Fairness for International Students

1. Require provinces and territories to offer the same public health care to international students as is provided to domestic residents, in accordance with its duties under the Canada Health Act.
2. Work with provincial governments to develop an international student affordability strategy and subsequent funding to ensure international learners have access to high-quality education, services, and quality of life.

Recommendation #3: Graduate Students and Research

1. Maintain the current fair dealing framework in the Copyright Act and introduce provisions whereby Open Educational Resources are disseminated and maintained by graduate students and faculty. **Cost:** \$8 million per year.
2. Extend eligibility for Canada Student Grants to graduate students. **Cost:** \$25 million per year.
3. Explore the creation of dedicated research fellowships for Indigenous and international students.

Recommendation #4: Improvements to Healthcare and Mental Health Supports

1. Allocate \$300 million per year, over two years, to improve on-campus mental health services. The fund, modeled after the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund, would allow post-secondary institutions to apply for federal grants to improve on-campus mental health services. **Cost:** \$600 million over two years.
2. Create a dedicated mental health stream to ensure ongoing mental health promotion and prompt treatment of mental illnesses through a nationwide program in accordance with the principles and criteria of the Canada Health Act. **Cost:** \$350 million over three years.
3. Implement a single-payer national pharmacare plan to lower costs and improve health outcomes. **Cost:** \$11.5 billion per year.

Recommendation #5: Decolonize Learning

1. Invest additional funds to those allocated in Budget 2021 to fully address the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) application backlog. **Cost:** an additional \$228.3 million over three years.
2. Dedicate funding to support the development of Indigenous learning materials and language courses at the post-secondary level in accordance with *Bill C-91: An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages* and *Bill C-15: An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. **Cost:** \$10 million per year.

Recommendation #6: Bold Action on Climate Change

1. Implement and fully-fund a decarbonization strategy akin to the “Green New Deal.” This strategy should limit the most devastating impacts of climate change for our generation and those to come, and put justice for Indigenous people, workers, and the poor at the centre of the transition to a green economy. This would include federal envelope funding for post-secondary institutions engaging in research and innovation on a renewable energy future and retraining workers for green jobs. **Cost:** minimum 5% of GDP annually.

PART 2: CONTEXT AND EXPLANATION

Recommendation #1: Universally Accessible Post-Secondary Education

Ensuring Canada's competitiveness requires educated and active participants in our economy. We need to unleash the potential of the most talented members of our society — not just the wealthiest. To achieve this goal, the ongoing underfunding of post-secondary education must be addressed. The great majority of new jobs in Canada require some form of post-secondary education. We need to eliminate student debt loads and the unfair interest rates on student loans that discourage lower-income people from pursuing higher education and stifle consumer spending, investment, and innovation.

In 2015, debt owed to the Canada Student Loans Program reached \$19 billion¹ and total public student debt sits at \$36 billion. Financing post-secondary education through student loans is inequitable and requires students from low- and middle-income backgrounds to pay more for their education than students who can afford to pay the full cost upfront. A student who must take out \$30,000 in loans to finance their education will pay \$10,318 more for their education over 10 years through accumulated interest on these loans.² While Budget 2019 took steps to address this issue by reducing student loan interest rates, students who cannot afford the upfront cost of education continue to pay over \$2,000 more over the length of their loan.

By introducing new funding and reallocating current funding, Budget 2022 can ensure federal expenditures are creating a post-secondary education system that is accessible to all.

Recommendation #2: Fairness for International Students

Collectively, international students make a substantial economic contribution. Every year, spending by international students supports over 100,000 full time equivalent jobs.³ In 2014 alone, the total expenditure by international students and visiting friends and family, stood at \$11.4 billion. Moreover, international students contribute to the diversity of our campuses, providing unique points of view and critical perspectives. These contributions illustrate how vital it is for Canada to distinguish itself as an attractive destination for students from around the world.

Provincial policies of differential fees have created a system where international students pay three to four times more in tuition fees than their domestic peers, for the same education. The combination of this tiered system and the stress of being away from home results in wellness struggles and a greater need for job security for many international students.

Despite this demonstrated need, the Canada Summer Jobs program continues to exclude international students from participation. This is a restriction that can, and should, be removed. Moreover, the health and wellness of all students studying in Canada, not just domestic students, should be a public priority. As such, we recommend that as part of its duties under the Canada Health Act, the federal government requires provinces and territories to offer the same public health care to international students that is provided to domestic residents.

Recommendation #3: Graduate Students and Research

Committing to support research goes a long way towards promoting innovation and thus ensuring Canada's competitiveness. Ensuring that historically underrepresented groups have the means and incentives to pursue graduate studies is crucial to this. While indisputably important to the pursuit of justice and equality in our society, this will also bring diverse perspectives to the social and technological challenges facing Canadians in an increasingly complex and competitive global system.

Expanding the eligibility criteria for needs-based Canada Student Grants would allow more underrepresented students to pursue graduate studies and for all graduate students to focus on completing their research. Additionally, creating dedicated research

¹ Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions of Canada (Office of the Chief Actuary), "Actuarial Report on the Canada Student Loans Program" (Ottawa: June 2015).

² Ibid

³ Economic Impact of International Education in Canada - 2016 Update. Global Affairs Canada.
<http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>

fellowships for Indigenous and international students would serve to support the diversity of perspectives, and solutions to problems. As a result, Canada will benefit from a more highly educated and diverse workforce that would fuel research and innovation in both the public and private sectors.

Recommendation #4: Improvements to Healthcare and Mental Health Supports

Ensuring Canada's competitiveness requires a healthy workforce: body and mind. Early life experiences and access to healthcare significantly impact the productivity of the workforce.⁴ It is therefore crucial that students and their families have access to adequate healthcare, including psychological care, both on and off campus.

In Spring 2016, over 43,000 students from more than 42 post-secondary institutions across Canada responded to the National College Health Assessment. This survey found that, within the last 12 months: 89.5% of respondents felt overwhelmed by all they had to do; 59.6% felt that things were hopeless; 73.7% felt very sad; 44.4% felt so depressed it was difficult to function; and, 13% had seriously considered suicide.⁵

Structural and financial constraints on post-secondary institutions have hindered their ability to provide necessary mental health services. The need for mental health services has far outpaced their delivery, as evidenced by growing waiting lists and restrictions on on-campus services.

Recommendation #5: Decolonize Learning

Boosting Canada's competitiveness requires lifting up all members of our society to unleash their talents and productivity, and to spark innovation and promote social unity with new ways of thinking, learning, and communicating. It is therefore imperative that we continue making education more inclusive of Indigenous learners, and that we close achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The Centre for the Study of Living Standards, for example, projected that "Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be \$36.4 billion greater in 2031 if the Indigenous education attainment gap and related gaps for employment rates and income by level of employment were closed."⁶

Students were pleased to see various post-secondary sector investments for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Budget 2019 that included \$327.5 million over five years to the PSSSP for First Nations learners, \$125.5 million over ten years for Inuit students, and \$362 million over ten years for Métis student access to post-secondary. However, in Budget 2022 we hope to see an additional annual injection of \$76.1 million over the next three years to accommodate the rapid growth of this demographic of learners and to address the backlog of program applicants.

As emphasized in the Report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, post-secondary institutions have an important role to play in honouring and preserving Indigenous languages and cultures. With *Bill C-91* this government has prioritized the preservation and promotion of Indigenous language. However, there is a specific role for the post-secondary sector to play. To that end, we recommend \$10 million to support the development of culturally appropriate curricula at the post-secondary level, including courses and programs in Indigenous languages, cultures, and history.

Recommendation #6: Bold Action on Climate Change

Canada must act on climate change. To this end, in addition to creating 1 million climate jobs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 to 35%, the Green Economy Network's (GEN) recommends that Canada invest a minimum of 5% of GDP annually over five years, with subsequently greater investments, in "public renewable energy developments [i.e. wind, solar, and geothermal power]; energy efficiencies through building retrofits; public transit improvements and expansion; and in higher speed rail between urban cities within urban corridors."

⁴ Public Health Agency of Canada. May 2009. "Investing in prevention: The economic perspective." Government of Canada.

⁵ American College Health Association. 2016.

⁶ Calver, Matthew. 2015. "Closing the Aboriginal Education Gap in Canada: Assessing Progress and Estimating the Economic Benefits." Centre for the Study of Living Standards: Ottawa.