

Educated Investments: Supporting Students for a Better Future

OUSA's 2020 Pre-Budget Submission

OUSA represents almost 150,000 university students at eight member associations across Ontario. We have come together since 1992 to advocate for the interests of Ontario's undergraduate students by providing sound research and educated solutions to the Ontario government on ways to improve the quality, affordability, accessibility, and accountability of post-secondary education in the province.

Introduction

Students in Ontario want a post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, accountable, and high-quality. Unfortunately, the changes to post-secondary over the past year have left students feeling uncertain about their future and worried about completing their studies. Most notably, students relying on the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) have been negatively affected by changes to the program, which reduced grant funding to many students.

We understand that the current government has prioritized balancing the budget and is looking to make responsible investments through Budget 2020. OUSA's budget submission will emphasize that investments in post-secondary education *are* responsible investments for the future of Ontario's workforce. Increasing the affordability of university for students who need it most, through the restoration of OSAP funding, will ultimately result in graduates who are healthy and well-prepared for employment.

Our budget submission will also focus on three additional student priorities: student mental health, sexual violence prevention and response, and experiential learning opportunities. We hope that through Budget 2020, the government will put students first and consider OUSA's eight recommendations to improve post-secondary education in Ontario.

OUSA believes that committing to the following recommendations would be a positive step in affirming the province's dedication to students and improving their educational experiences. Doing so would also convey that Ontario is actively working to advance affordable, progressive, and equitable learning opportunities for the province's student population.

Summary of Recommendations

Restoring the Ontario Student Assistance Program

- The provincial government should restore the “targeted free tuition” program implemented in 2016 and provide free tuition, in the form of grants, to all students from families in the first six income deciles.
- The provincial government should implement a two-year, interest-free grace period after graduation to ensure students are able to cover loan and interest payments.
- The provincial government should define “mature” or “financially independent” students as those who have been out of secondary school for four years, not six.

Supporting Student Mental Health

- The provincial government should provide dedicated funding for community-based mental health providers to supply culturally relevant and diverse counselling on campuses.
- The provincial government should continue funding the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) to further promote systemic responses in the post-secondary system to address the mental health needs of students.

Eliminating Sexual Violence on Campus

- The provincial government should maintain the doubling of the funding for the Women’s Campus Safety Grant in order to address the needs for gender-based and sexual violence education, bystander intervention training and other interventions, as well as program evaluation on university campuses.
- The provincial government should also adapt the terms of reference for the Women’s Campus Safety Grant to ensure that funds can be used for effective, evidence-informed initiatives, services, and supports.

Preparing Students for the Workforce

- The provincial government should re-invest \$68M over 3 years in the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to create more job opportunities for students and recent graduates.

Restoring the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)

All willing and qualified students in Ontario, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have access to high-quality post-secondary education. Students continue to be concerned about the affordability of post-secondary education in the province. According to OUSA's 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey, students overwhelmingly felt that affordability and financial assistance needed the most improvement at their institutions.¹

In 2019, the landscape of student financial aid in Ontario changed drastically. Students now receive significantly less OSAP funding, and many have been forced to delay their graduation or withdraw from studies entirely. We recognize the provincial government's interest in making OSAP financially sustainable, but the effects of cuts to the program will have a lasting, negative impact — most notably, these cuts increase the amount of debt students are required to take on, making it more difficult for them to contribute to economic growth upon graduation.

Recommendation: The provincial government should restore the “targeted free tuition” program implemented in 2016 and provide free tuition, in the form of grants, to all students from families in the first six income deciles.

It is in the province's economic interest to ensure that all willing and qualified students are able to access post-secondary education. Providing low-income students with funding to cover tuition costs ensures that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, are able to gain the skills necessary to enter Ontario's workforce as highly skilled labourers and contribute to the province's economic growth.

“Targeted free tuition,” introduced in 2016, resulted in increased OSAP applications, particularly from marginalized students. In 2017, there were thirty-six percent more applications from Indigenous students and twenty percent more applications from mature students.² In total, applications increased from 313,000 in 2016 to 384,000 in 2017.³ While the Auditor General's report cited that these changes did not largely increase enrollment in post-secondary institutions, the report failed to recognize that enrolment increases often require capital investment, and that the 2016 OSAP model would have needed to stay in place for a longer period to result in an increase in Ontario's post-secondary enrolment.

¹ Ryan Tishcoff, *Affordability: Results from the 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey*, Research Report (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019).

² Mackenzie Claggett, “Financing Fees: The Inequitable Burden of University Costs,” OUSA (blog), September 5, 2018, https://www.ousa.ca/blog_mackenzie_capstone.

³ Simona Chiose, “OSAP applications rise after Ontario streamlines student-aid system,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/osap-applications-rise-after-ontario-streamlines-student-aid-system/article36234322/>.

The 2016 OSAP changes had other positive impacts as well, including lower loan default rates, fewer programs requiring administration (which meant lower government costs), the majority of grants (seventy-six percent) being received by low-income students, and improvements to grant over-awards.⁴

Recommendation: The provincial government should implement a two-year, interest-free grace period after graduation to ensure students are able to cover loan and interest payments.

The current OSAP grace period makes it difficult for new graduates to cover loan and interest payments. While many have secured employment six months after graduating, some are underemployed, working low-paying jobs outside of their field in order to balance loan repayment with living expenses. Those who have not secured employment may be forced to take out high-interest bank loans to cover their loan payments, which can have long-term effects on their financial stability. Extending the grace period to two years would help ensure that more graduates are able to secure well-paying jobs before being required to repay their OSAP loans.

Because interest compounds during the grace period, those who do not make payments until six months after graduating end up paying significantly more overall. For this reason, many choose to make an initial payment to offset interest costs. However, many graduates — particularly those from low-income families — are unable to make this payment. They have no choice but to let their interest build, which means their loans end up being more expensive in the long run. An interest-free grace period would prevent this inequity and ensure that loan repayment is not more burdensome for some students than others. To date, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island have all eliminated interest on provincial student loans, which decreases financial burdens for students and allows them to contribute more to the economy.

Further, a two-year, interest-free grace period would make it easier for new graduates to save for important milestones, including buying a home, starting a family, and making financial investments — all of which benefit Ontario's economy.

Recommendation: The provincial government should define “mature” or “financially independent” students as those who have been out of secondary school for four years, not six.

“Mature” or “financially independent” status affects how much OSAP funding students receive. A dependent student's funding is determined using their parents' income, while a mature student's funding is determined using their personal income (and not their parents'). The assumption

⁴ Office of the Auditor General, *Annual Report 2018, Volume 1* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2018), chap. 3, section 3.10, accessed March 25, 2019, http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en18/v1_310en18.pdf.

being made is that dependent students (those less than six years out of high school) receive financial help from their parents.

Often, however, dependent students' parents do not help them pay for school. This can be for any number of reasons, including estrangement, existing financial commitments, or a belief that it is the student's responsibility to "pay their own way." If, because of their parents' income, these students do not qualify for OSAP or receive little in OSAP awards, they will be forced to work extensive hours while studying to cover their tuition and living expenses. This can hurt their academic performance and long-term career prospects.

As of 2019, students are now considered dependent until six years after leaving high school (increased from four years). This increase means that more students now find themselves in the situation described above, with little or no funding from parents or OSAP. This change also means that students who begin graduate or professional programs immediately after a four-year undergraduate degree will still be considered dependent for the first two years of these programs, and so may receive little or no OSAP funding as they complete significantly more expensive schooling.

Defining "mature" or "financially independent" students as those who have been out of high school for four years, not six, will help eliminate the issues above and ensure that more students are able to complete their education in a timely manner and contribute sooner to Ontario's economy.

Supporting Student Mental Health

There is a mental health crisis at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, and addressing this crisis requires a "whole of community" approach. The current system is uncoordinated and underfunded, and its lack of resources means that students do not receive the timely, diverse care they need to excel at post-secondary institutions.

We know that the current government has recognized mental health services as a priority for Ontarians and has committed to investing \$3.8 billion in mental health and addictions services over the next ten years. This is a great step in the right direction. The government must ensure that student mental health is acknowledged and dedicate a significant portion of its \$3.8 billion investment to support this high-risk cohort of the Ontario population.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide dedicated funding for community-based mental health providers to supply culturally relevant and diverse counselling on campuses.

Universities continue to act as primary care providers, despite not being designed or equipped to perform this role. Students often face long wait times for mental health care services, with some waiting hours to see a triage specialist only to be told they need to wait several months to see a counsellor.⁵ While there are off-campus options available, many students cannot afford to seek mental health support from community providers.

Recent survey results demonstrate the growing need for improved mental health services in Ontario. As of 2016, two percent of Ontario's post-secondary students had attempted suicide within the last year and fourteen percent had seriously considered it (up from eleven percent in 2013). Forty-six percent of students had felt so depressed that it was difficult to function (up from forty percent in 2013). Contributing factors included overwhelming anxiety (65 percent, up from fifty-eight percent in 2013), loneliness (sixty-seven percent), and academics, which sixty percent of students found traumatic or very difficult to handle.⁶

Community-based mental healthcare providers play an integral role in providing services to students, but securing funding to maintain these operations can be difficult. In some cases, providers have partnered with student associations to make their services more accessible to students. For example, in 2017, the University Students' Council (USC) at Western University partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association-Middlesex to provide free mental health

⁵ Laura Hensley, "'One Size Doesn't Fit All': Canadian Campuses Desperately Need Better Mental Health Services," Global News, October 9, 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5969461/mental-health-canadian-campus/>.

⁶ "NCHA-II Ontario Canada Reference Group: Executive Summary, Spring 2016." American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, 2016.

care to students at a nearby clinic.⁷ Initiatives like this are a step in the right direction, and government funding would ensure that community organizations are able to provide sustainable mental health services to students across the province.

Government funding would also help ensure that students have access to mental health services that are culturally relevant. There is no “one size fits all” model for mental health care; instead, students need services that respond to their unique cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, a counsellor treating a low-income student should be aware of the impacts that food insecurity can have on that student’s mental health. Similarly, a counsellor treating a student of a particular religious background should be aware of the possible effects their religious obligations could have on their mental health. It is essential that the government provide dedicated funding for community-based mental health services so that they can provide care that meets the diverse needs of students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should continue funding the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) to further promote systemic responses in the post-secondary system to address the mental health needs of students.

To improve mental health supports on post-secondary campuses, we need organizations that develop effective strategies on raising awareness, reducing stigma, and maximizing resources. Continued funding for the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) will ensure that these strategies continue to adapt to students’ changing mental health needs and that best practices are shared across the sector.

CICMH provides research, reports, survey data, and resources for faculty and institutions, enhancing their capacity to support student mental health and well-being. It also connects diverse campus and community organizations to each other: in October, it hosted its sixth conference on campus mental health, giving post-secondary stakeholders from across the sector the ability to come together, exchange best practices, collaborate on solutions, and fill gaps in coverage.

The work CICMH does is integral to Ontario’s progress in supporting student mental health. Its strategies for addressing student mental health needs include: building the knowledge and skills of front-line post-secondary staff and student leaders; fostering collaboration that promotes innovative, systemic responses; and developing strategic partnerships to leverage external knowledge, resources, and relationships.⁸ Ultimately, funding CICMH and organizations like it promotes student access to timely, diverse mental health services on campus.

⁷ Department of Communications and Public Affairs, and Western University, “Mental-Health Crisis Clinic Earns Community Backing.” Western News, January 31, 2019, <https://news.westernu.ca/2017/11/mental-health-crisis-clinic-earns-community-backing/>.

⁸ Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, “Strategic Plan, 2016-2020,” accessed January 20, 2020, <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CICMH-Strategic-Plan-2016-2020.pdf>.

Eliminating Sexual Violence on Campus

According to the results shared from the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey, over sixty percent of Ontario university students disclosed an experience of sexual harassment and almost one-quarter disclosed a non-consensual sexual experience.⁹ Statistics Canada suggests a rate of seventy-three incidents of sexual violence per one thousand post-secondary students across the country.¹⁰ In Canada, almost half (41 percent) of all police-reported incidents of sexual violence came from post-secondary institutions,¹¹ and it is estimated that eighty-three percent of all sexual assaults go unreported.¹² In Ontario alone, hospitals treat 3,500 cases of sexual assault per year.¹³ These are alarming statistics, and OUSA is deeply concerned about the degree to which students experience gender-based and sexual violence.

In addition to the human cost of gender-based and sexual violence, there is also an economic cost. In 2009, violent crimes cost Canada \$13 billion, with sexual assault and other sexual offences costing the most of all violent crimes at \$4.8 billion.¹⁴ A 2013 study estimated that sexual and intimate partner violence cost each Canadian \$334 a year.¹⁵ Our province would not only benefit socially, but also economically from investing in the prevention of gender-based and sexual violence. OUSA urges the government to take greater action to end gender-based and sexual violence on campus and to support efforts happening on campuses across the province through the Women's Campus Safety Grant (WCSG).

Recommendation: The provincial government should maintain the doubling of the funding for the Women's Campus Safety Grant in order to address the needs for sexual violence education, bystander intervention training and other interventions, as well as program evaluation on university campuses.

The WCSG is an important allocation of grant funding that ensures that institutions devote funding to gender-based and sexual violence elimination efforts on campus. Through the WCSG, the provincial government can play an important role in ensuring that we are equipping institutions with all the tools and resources they need to implement prevention programs,

⁹ *Summary Report of the Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey*, (CCI Research, March 19, 2019), <https://files.ontario.ca/tcu-summary-report-student-voices-on-sexual-violence-survey-en-2019-03.pdf>.

¹⁰ Shana Conroy and Adam Cotter, "Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014," Statistics Canada, July 11, 2017, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14842-eng.htm>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *By the Numbers: Violence Against Women and Girls in Canada* (Women's Shelters Canada, December 2017), http://fede.qc.ca/sites/default/files/upload/documents/publications/wsc_by_the_numbers_vaw.pdf.

¹³ "More than 52,000 sexual assault cases treated in Ontario hospitals during 15-year period," IC/ES, July 18, 2019, <https://www.ices.on.ca/Newsroom/News-Releases/2019/More-than-52000-sexual-assault-cases-treated-in-Ontario-hospitals-during-15-year-period>.

¹⁴ Josh Hoddenbagh, Ting Zhang, and Susan McDonald, *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Violent Victimization in Canada, 2009* (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, Research and statistics Division, 2014), https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rr14_01/rr14_01.pdf.

¹⁵ Kate McInturff, *Violence Against Women in Canada* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, July 11, 2013), <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/gap-gender-gap>.

education, and training. Instituting gender-based and sexual violence prevention programs is not simple. Not only do institutions need to find an effective program, receive support from stakeholders, and organize the program itself, they must also be able to fund such a project. Sexual violence prevention programs require staff and resource materials; sometimes there is a cost to use programs that have already been developed; and there are many other incidental fees.

In March 2019, the provincial government doubled its investment to help prevent sexual violence on campus by increasing WCSG funding from \$3 million to \$6 million.¹⁶ This was a step toward safer campuses that will support institutions in their sexual violence prevention efforts. However, the issue of sexual and gender-based violence is as pervasive as it is complex, and it will not be solved overnight. Effective prevention initiatives and programs are costly to implement and run, and without adequate funding implementing these initiatives is not sustainable. Institutions require ongoing support and resources as they work to make their campuses safer for all students, and it is therefore imperative that the provincial government continue to invest in these efforts. To this end, OUSA recommends that the provincial government maintain the doubling of the funding for the WCSG.

The WCSG is a provincial initiative that has supported universities to address safety for women and trans students on campuses since 1991. However, our knowledge and understanding of sexual violence has grown tremendously since then, and it is necessary that the terms of reference for this grant be adapted to reflect the needs for sexual violence education, bystander intervention training and other interventions, as well as program evaluation on university campuses. This will ensure that the funding offered through the grant is used in the most effective way possible.

Recommendation: The provincial government should also adapt the terms of reference for the Women’s Campus Safety Grant ensure that funds can be used for effective, evidence-informed initiatives, services, and supports.

The current terms of reference include sexual violence prevention and general safety programming. However, while general safety programming is important, the scope of the WCSG must expand to include education, training, and evaluation. In order to ensure that this funding is going towards initiatives that are likely to decrease gender-based violence, the province should reform the terms of reference to include initiatives that reduce gender-based violence and support survivors, and only allow general campus safety initiatives to receive funding if the rest of the money is not allocated towards gender-based violence prevention or support initiatives.

¹⁶ Government of Ontario, “Ontario Government Takes Action to Protect Students from Sexual Violence,” Newsroom, March 19, 2019, <https://news.ontario.ca/maesd/en/2019/03/ontario-government-takes-action-to-protect-students-from-sexual-violence.html>.

In the current terms of reference, the following items are considered “non-eligible expenses”: research projects/safety audits, travel/hospitality, employee salaries and benefits, and consultant fees. OUSA believes that the government should also expand the terms of reference to allow post-secondary institutions to delegate funding to salaries, in order to better fund bystander intervention initiatives. Many of these best practice programs, such as “Flip the Script” require institutions to pay into “train the trainer” models, and these criteria make it difficult to run successful interventions on campus. Finally, there are many programs being used to prevent sexual violence at universities, yet few have been evaluated by research. Time and resources must be invested into such programs to evaluate their efficacy and ensure survivor-centric, evidence-based programs are receiving the funding they deserve. The province should expand the terms of reference to include program evaluation in order to allow experts to pilot evidence-informed initiatives to determine best practices for sexual violence prevention initiatives.

The following are OUSA’s proposed additions to the WCSG terms of reference based on up-to-date, evidence-informed research on sexual violence prevention and response:

Awareness/Education

- Potential topics should include: consent and building a culture of consent; healthy boundaries and making friends; comprehensive sexual health; gender identity and expression; men, masculinity and gender role socialization; safer partying;
- Campus safety websites and resource centres including the production of flyers, videos and digital products for online distribution;
- Supplies and promotional materials for specific campus awareness campaigns and social media campaigns on safety issues such as combatting sexual violence and building consent awareness;
- Hosting or co-hosting awareness programs, safety and/or sexual violence conferences, courses and speaker honoraria.

Services/Supports

- Gender-based and Sexual Violence Prevention Training, including bystander intervention training;
- Campus “Walk Safe” programs;
- Sexual assault prevention training, including self-defence workshops, peer support worker training and violence prevention training and related equipment;
- Universities are encouraged to use their capital budgets to pay for lighting, security cameras, and phone systems whenever possible. If there are sufficient funds in the Women’s Campus Safety Grant that are not absorbed by other initiatives for reducing gender-based violence, post-secondary institutions can continue to utilize this funding for capital investments that go towards creating environmental design that are directly related to creating a better environmental design to reduce gender-based violence. This would specifically include lighting, phone systems or security cameras. This would not

include things like bike locks or items that do not reduce gender-based violence on campus;

- Evaluation of evidence-informed initiatives on campus to determine if they are effective;
- Salaries that involve training and “train the trainer” models in order to ensure students and on-campus experts are knowledgeable in best practices. This would not include salaries that would normally be absorbed by the post-secondary institution, but rather one-off training modules that may not be justified as honoraria.

Preparing Students for the Workforce

Students deserve to have the skills they need to find rewarding careers in the modern economy, and ensuring students have the skills to succeed is a growing priority for both students and employers. According to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, “skills gaps and the challenge of finding the right workers are some of the biggest issues [its members] face.”¹⁷ This is not a unique sentiment, and students recognize the need to take a broader approach to preparation for the workforce, focusing not only on discipline-specific knowledge, but also providing opportunities for students to develop skills inside and outside the classroom through experiential learning.

Experiential learning¹⁸ opportunities enable students to develop in-demand skills and graduate university with a better understanding of what future employers expect of them. These opportunities — work-integrated learning and co-op opportunities in particular — are recognized as essential to addressing the skills gap that leaves students without these in-demand skills, and employers without a pool of workers with appropriate skills to draw from.¹⁹

There are clear benefits to supporting experiential learning opportunities. First, students benefit from experience that prepares them for the workforce and setting themselves up to earn more post-graduation. By gaining industry-specific applied knowledge, students who have had experiential learning opportunities feel more confident in their skills and are better prepared to enter the workforce. In a 2016 survey conducted by Abacus Data, 86 percent of student respondents who had work-integrated learning opportunities reported that they felt better prepared for the workforce because of their industry-specific knowledge and experience, compared to the 49 percent of students who did not receive work-integrated learning opportunities during their post-secondary education.²⁰

Employers also benefit from experiential learning opportunities by having unique perspectives in the workplace and fostering a pool of potential employees to train and recruit from. They have used these pedagogies as opportunities to: pre-screen students for permanent positions; improve employee retention; create positive relationships with higher education institutions and

¹⁷ Bryan May, *Experiential learning and Pathways to Employment for Canadian Youth: Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities* (House of Commons Canada, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, October 2018), <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/HUMA/Reports/RP10078738/humarp12/humarp12-e.pdf>.

¹⁸ Experiential learning is an approach to learning on the basis of reflection on doing, encompassing a variety of different opportunities such as work integrated learning and community service learning.

¹⁹ The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Royal Bank, and Statistics Canada all support the need for experiential learning to address this gap: Bryan May, *Experiential learning and Pathways to Employment for Canadian Youth: Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities* (House of Commons Canada, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, October 2018), <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/HUMA/Reports/RP10078738/humarp12/humarp12-e.pdf>; “Faculty are generally supportive of work-integrated learning, especially at colleges. A 2012 survey found that 95% of college and 83.5% of university faculty in Ontario agreed or strongly agreed that WIL is valuable, with most indicating that students are the primary beneficiaries.”; Business/Higher Education Roundtable, *Taking the Pulse of Work-Integrated Learning in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Business/Higher Education Round Table, 2015).

²⁰ Abacus Data, *Work Integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Education: What Students Think* (Ottawa, ON: Abacus Data, 2016).

with the sector; enable the achievement of goals that could not otherwise have been completed; and be a marketing and recruiting tool.²¹ There are also cost saving benefits: it is “estimated that a co-op program with 800 students saves employers between \$500,000 and \$1.37 M annually.”²²

Experiential learning opportunities also benefit society through the strength of the skills students bring to their work and their ability to engage in work across sectors, creating positive outcomes for innovation, social impact, economic growth, health, global competitiveness, and stability.

However, while experiential learning has clear benefits and is a priority for students, universities, and employers, there are limited opportunities, particularly for students in general arts and science programs.²³ This is due, in part, to employers’ lack of infrastructure and resources to support such opportunities in these fields.

Recommendation: The provincial government should re-invest \$68M over 3 years in the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to create more job opportunities for students and recent graduates

In 2017, the provincial government announced the establishment of the Career Ready Fund to help post-secondary institutions and employers create more opportunities for students and recent graduates; including the launch of a program to help employers offer more work-integrated learning opportunities for post-secondary students.²⁴ Through an investment of \$68 million over three years, institutions across the province were able to create a diverse portfolio of experiential learning opportunities for post-secondary students and recent grads to help transition them into the workforce.

The Career Ready Fund has supported experiential learning in diverse fields of study, from opportunities in agriculture at the University of Guelph (co-op option in Food Industry Management and Marine and Freshwater Biology; Flexible Internship in Agri-Food),²⁵ to increased access to employment for students with disabilities at Carleton University (Carleton University Accessible Experiential Learning project).²⁶ Additionally, the Career Ready Fund has increased employment rates among new grads: Brock University used the Career Ready Fund to expand their experiential learning opportunities to reach 100 percent of academic programs, which they attribute to their above average employment rates for new grads (the employment

²¹ Business/Higher Education Roundtable, Taking the Pulse of Work-Integrated Learning in Canada (Toronto, ON: Business/Higher Education Round Table, 2015).

²² Ibid.

²³ Peggy Sattler & Julie Peters, *Work-Integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Graduates: The Perspective of Ontario Employers* (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2012).

²⁴ Charles Sousa, *2017 Ontario Budget: A Stronger, Healthier Ontario* (Government of Ontario, Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2017).

²⁵ “Flexible Internship in Agri-Food,” UNiversity of Guelph, accessed January 22, 2020, <https://www.uoguelph.ca/experientiallearning/fiaf-partner>.

²⁶ “Carleton gets \$800,000 from Ontario to Kickstart Careers for Students with Disabilities,” Carleton Newsroom, April 30, 2018, <https://newsroom.carleton.ca/2018/carleton-gets-800000-from-ontario-to-kickstart-careers-for-students-with-disabilities/>.

rate for undergraduate students within 6 months of graduation grew from 90 to 94 percent between 2015 and 2017, and for those within two years of graduation the employment rate increased steadily from 95 to 97 percent over that same period).²⁷

Ensuring students are career-ready upon graduation has clear benefits for our entire province, and supporting work-integrated learning opportunities through the Career Ready Fund is a proven approach to this end. However, since 2017 there has been no new commitment from the provincial government towards the Career Ready Fund. Given its record of supporting the creation of experiential learning opportunities that benefit students and employers, OUSA asks that the provincial government re-invest \$68 million over three years in the Career Ready Fund.

²⁷ Douglas Hunt, "Career launcher: This fall, every Brock program will have an experiential option," Brock News, July 31, 2019, <https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2019/07/career-launcher-this-fall-every-brock-program-will-have-an-experiential-option/>; *Budget REport 2019-20: Including Key Performance Metrics* (Brock University, 2019), https://issuu.com/brockuniversity/docs/2019_20_budget_report_flipbook.