



## **I:: Objectives for Postsecondary Education (PSE) and Training**

What objectives should Canada aspire to for PSE and training?

The College Student Alliance (CSA) believes that the Government of Canada should aspire to a higher education system that provides easy accessibility; transferability of credits across all sectors of postsecondary education as well as provincially and is affordable for all. There must be an accountability function that will ensure the highest level of quality education and training across Canada.

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**Objective 1: Increase the accessibility of postsecondary education and training among all Canadians; especially those from under-represented groups such as aboriginal peoples, students from low-income families and persons with disabilities.**

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With today's reliance on a highly-skilled and educated workforce, our first priority must be to increase enrolment, participation and graduation among all pathways of postsecondary education. In Canada, our total enrolment in PSE and training has only increased by 4 per cent since 1995, but 2 per cent of that growth is attributable to change in the population and only 1 per cent to an increase in the enrolment rate.<sup>1</sup> While other OCED countries, have managed an overall average increase in enrolment of 49 per cent, which is strictly based on increases to the enrolment.

It is predicted that within the next decade over 70 per cent of all jobs created will require some form of postsecondary education. With only 50 per cent of students who enter grade nine in Ontario moving forward to PSE, which is going to place major barriers to Canada's future economic and fiscal prosperity.

In order to increase enrolment and participation rates, the rate of participation for students from under-represented groups (Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, students from low-income families) must be increased for the betterment of society. Students from under-represented groups are less likely to pursue higher education due to financial barriers. To increase their participation and ultimately their success will be targeted financial assistance such as up-front tuition grants.

People with special needs have a wealth of talent and abilities, but they need access to institutions, specialized equipment such as computer systems for the hearing and sight challenged, etc.

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**Objective 2: Increase the affordability of postsecondary education and training, to ensure all willing and qualified Canadians have access to obtain a postsecondary education designation.**

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The accessibility and affordability of Canada's postsecondary education system are significant problems as students struggle to afford the costs of college and university education. College and college/university students, require assistance to cover the realistic costs of obtaining an education without giving them an unfair debt load.

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<sup>1</sup> Education at a Glance, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED), 2006.

Currently, the entire student financial assistance regime in Canada, to many, is a bewildering hodgepodge of federal and provincial programs, featuring primarily loans, and just recently grants and tax incentives.

In Canada, the total average government student loan debt for a college graduate has increased 74 per cent from \$7,530 in 1990 to \$13,000 in 2003.<sup>2</sup> While earnings for Ontario college graduates six months after graduation, working full-time in related employment, have only increased by 23.1 per cent from \$23,876 to \$31,046 during the same time period.<sup>3</sup>

Compounding the issues of government debts and private loans is skyrocketing tuition fees. Ontario college students are now paying at least 145 per cent more in tuition fees than in 1990; thus creating barriers for Canadians to pursue their dreams of obtaining either a college, university or trade education. The financial burden is especially felt among those from under-represented groups such as Aboriginal peoples, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families.

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**Objective 3: Increased accountability to students, their families and taxpayers, to ensure that Canada's PSE and training system is accessible, affordable, quality and transferable.**

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The topic of increasing accountability in all public sector spending has recently emerged among the federal and provincial governments. In Ontario, the provincial government has gone so far as to set up an arms-length Crown Agency, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), to assist the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in improving all aspects of the postsecondary education sector. This includes improving the quality of education provided in the sector, access to postsecondary education and accountability of the postsecondary educational institutions. HEQCO will not only report to the Minister but also make available reports to the public, ensuring transparency and public accountability.<sup>4</sup>

The government of Canada must ensure that transfer payments made to the provinces and territories for postsecondary education and training are in fact used for related programs. Too often funds earmarked for one sector end up being used for non-related spending or the federal funds received are used to reduce the amount of provincial investment in sector. This must not be allowed to happen—the students are cheated, the taxpayers are cheated and Canada ultimately loses ground in a knowledge based society.

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<sup>2</sup> The Price of Knowledge 2004, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

<sup>3</sup> 2001-2002 Employment Profile – Government of Ontario, 2003

<sup>4</sup> The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005

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**Objective 4: Canada's PSE and training system must be of the highest quality.**

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Over the past decade, both the federal and provincial governments have reduced the funds it transfers to the colleges for general operations. These cumulative and substantial reductions have forced colleges to increase the tuition fees they charge students while at the same time reduce their allocations to student services and academic programs. What makes these funding trends particularly troublesome is that they have taken place at a time when full-time and part-time enrolments have increased and continue to do so. Funding challenges have put the quality of a college education in jeopardy. Now the Ontario provincial government has started to re-invest in postsecondary education and training with an investment of \$6.2 billion over the five years, but that investment will only start to bring our institutions above water. In order to ensure that our institutions are providing the highest quality of education the federal government has to re-invest in PSE and training.

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**Objective 5: Improve recognition of prior learning and mobility across the educational institutions with a focus on PSE at all levels of learning from primary onwards.**

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Economics of scale suggest that we can do better and we must. Canadian students and future workers should not be restricted to choosing an education that offers only practical, theoretical, or technological skills, but rather a combination of all three. The federal government must encourage all Canadians to strive to become lifelong learners, to continually reach higher up the educational ladder to success.

Addressing the issue of transferability across all sectors of PSE and training puts students first—where they belong. Creating a seamless method of transfer of credits and recognition of prior learning across differing educational streams and across provincial borders is essential in today's highly mobile society and fosters a lifelong learning mindset among Canadians. Students need to be able to freely move between the tiers and borders of provinces and territories without redundant learning, additional costs and without negative effects of institutional competition.

College and college/university students want to know that they can gain the skills they need to be successful in life and work, and that those credentials and skills will be recognized across the country.

Which objectives would you rank among the top three priorities for action?

Of the above five objectives for the federal government, the CSA recommends that the government immediately create action plans for the following:

**Priority 1:** Increase the accessibility of postsecondary education and training among all Canadians, with a demonstrated focus on under-represented groups such as aboriginal peoples, students from low-income families and persons with disabilities.

**Priority 2:** Increase the affordability of postsecondary education and training, to ensure all willing and qualified Canadians have access to obtain a postsecondary education designation.

**Priority 3:** Improve recognition of prior learning and mobility across the educational institutions with a focus on PSE at all levels of learning from primary onwards.

## **II:: Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities in PSE and Training**

Given what you have identified as objectives, what would be the most important roles for the Government of Canada to play?

### **Role 1:: Develop and sign a Pan-Canadian Accord on postsecondary education and training with all provinces and territories.**

With Canada's economic and fiscal prosperity tied to Canadians' education and earning power, the government of Canada must ensure that all systems of PSE and training in the country are serving a common purpose and are cohesive. A Pan-Canadian Accord on PSE and Training would provide Canada with a vision for higher learning, the objectives for such a vision, and an action plan for improving our postsecondary education.

Along with provincial and national student groups, the Council of the Federation at a First Minister's Conference on postsecondary education and training should be dedicated to this issue.

### **Role 2:: Establish a dedicated postsecondary education and training transfer payment to the provinces and territories to ensure an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality education system.**

To ensure our postsecondary education and training system is the best in the world, the Government of Canada must cooperate on the development of a Pan-Canadian Accord on Postsecondary Education, which must also lay out a commitment plan for re-investment.

### **Role 3:: Re-investment and commitment to student financial assistance in Canada.**

A plan for re-investment in Canada's PSE and training system would ensure that it remains accessible and affordable to all Canadians with the dream of reaching higher in life. An improved federal student financial assistance program and funding to PSE and training would allow provinces and territories to stop the upward trend of skyrocketing tuition fees.

One area of focus the Government of Canada must address quickly is the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF), whose mandate is completed in 2009. Currently, the CMSF distributes over \$350 million annually in needs based grants. This is \$350 million deficit if this program is not allowed to continue beyond 2009. Low-income families are the prime benefactor of this grant process; many I'm sure would not be in postsecondary education without this assistance.

Where would clarifying roles and responsibilities amongst governments be most helpful? Do you have advice on how these roles could be defined?

The federal government needs to set the objectives, the measurement guidelines and the accountability structures that all provinces and territories can live by. Allowing the provinces the freedom to address the specific needs of their population within those guidelines and measuring systems is best managed by a federal Minister of Higher Education and Training. This give the provincial higher education ministers a resource for information and best practice methods, displays to all Canadians that the federal government is serious about providing quality education and improving our position in the knowledge based world. To date, Canada remains the lone member of the G8 without a Minister of Education.

The provincial and territorial governments need to retain the freedom to control their PSE streams within the guidelines established by federal policy. Working within an accountable structure that measures their intent and outcomes, yet still allowing for input unique to their provincial or territorial needs and fuelling the creative process, the provinces will aspire to a higher level of commitment, delivery and outcome in PSE and training. The end result is that we have better, more economically viable communities, provinces, territories and ultimately a stronger Canada.

### **III:: Developing a framework for ensuring measurable results and accountability**

What results would be most useful to measure in terms of PSE and training?

The results that the CSA would like to see the federal government measure would be enrolment rates with specific demographic representations for under-represented groups, participation and graduation rates; quality benchmarks as well the level of mobility across the country. Statistics Canada already looks at the universities in terms of affordability and accessibility, but they do not look into colleges. Since 1972, Statistics Canada has been collecting data related to tuition, mandatory ancillary fees, and on campus housing for Canadian universities and degree granting institutions. The same data has never been collected by Statistics Canada for their counterparts in Canadian Colleges.

How could governments report on progress so that they are held accountable?

When it comes to reporting on progress at the provincial and territorial level there needs to be a specific Minister clearly charged with the portfolio of PSE and training; at the federal level it is often mixed with Human Resources and Social Development. If the Government of Canada truly wished to be more transparent and accountable with its investments in PSE and training, then a separate Ministry of Higher Education and Training should be created.



### **About the College Student Alliance**

The College Student Alliance (CSA) is an advocacy and services organization which has been proudly serving Ontario's college students since 1967. The CSA currently represents 16 colleges and 22 student councils with over 109,000 full-time student members throughout the province of Ontario. For more information on the CSA, please visit our Web site at [www.csaontario.org](http://www.csaontario.org).