



#20 - Strengthening Post Secondary Education and Increasing Funding for Research

Description

The economic footprint of post-secondary education has taken a dramatic hit through the pandemic along with the reductions of government funding. Access to education is essential in the economic recovery of Canada and its future access to human capital and intellectual development. Post secondary education serves as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategic organization for both the management and advancement of social and economic progress.

Background

The economic impact of post-secondary education on our society and economy is a crucial factor in driving innovation, entrepreneurship, and social progress. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the economic footprint of post-secondary institutions, exacerbating the existing reduction in government funding. The repercussions of the pandemic, coupled with the ongoing reductions in funding, have created a challenging environment for post-secondary institutions to navigate. As a result, access to education has been hindered, compromising the economic recovery of our nation and threatening our future access to human capital and intellectual development.

Post-secondary education serves as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategic organization, facilitating the management and advancement of social and economic progress. It is the backbone of a thriving knowledge-based economy, nurturing talent, and equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to address complex challenges and drive meaningful change. The research conducted within post-secondary institutions plays a pivotal role in developing groundbreaking technologies, enhancing productivity, and fostering competitiveness in a globalized world.

Moreover, post-secondary institutions contribute significantly to the local and national economies. They stimulate economic growth through job creation, workforce development, and knowledge transfer. The expenditures made by students, faculty, and staff have a multiplier effect on local businesses, supporting a wide range of industries and services. The reduction in government funding for post-secondary education not only undermines the ability of institutions to fulfill their educational mandates but also jeopardizes the economic vitality of communities where these institutions are located.



Since 2020, The University of Alberta has seen reductions in federal funding⁹⁵. Similar reductions were seen in other institutions across the country, impacting their ability to deliver quality education and conduct vital research. To ensure a robust economic recovery and future prosperity, it is imperative to prioritize the revitalization of post-secondary education and provide increased funding for research.

This is particularly important when it comes to smaller and regional post-secondary schools which are growing increasingly disadvantaged. Every institution has the same baseline expenses, regulatory frameworks and reporting requirements for funding, but smaller institutions lack the economy of scale or leveraged funding to enable these affordably. Those requirements have increased dramatically over the past decade. Furthermore, the increase in funding for large universities and consortia that effectively remove smaller institutions from the competition has been troubling.

Rather than investing in discovery, which leads to innovation, many federal programs are focused further up the Technology Readiness Level⁹⁶, scale, leaving a dearth of fundamental research funding from any source in Canada. The grants programs for TRL1-3 activities are shrinking in number and size, with the majority of new and expanding grants programs focused on TRL7-9. There is essentially no funding, whether provincial, federal, philanthropic, or angel, for TRL4-6 in Canada. It is nearly impossible — and extremely costly — to successfully advance to TRL7-9 without laying the foundations first, leaving Canadian innovation lagging.

Universities Canada noted that Canada invests 1.8% of GDP in Research and Development while the OECD average is 2.1%⁹⁷. While we have been declining, countries such as The United States, Germany, United Kingdom, and Finland are dramatically increasing investment. This not only makes it harder for us to retain top talent in Canada but also means that our Research, Development and Innovation portfolios are suffering compared to other OECD nations.

Investing in education not only cultivates a skilled workforce but also fosters a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship that drives economic growth. By increasing funding for research, we can propel scientific discoveries, technological advancements, and breakthrough innovations that have far-reaching economic benefits. Additionally, supporting work-integrated learning and apprentice programs enables students to gain practical skills, bridging the gap between academia and industry, and ensuring a smooth transition into the workforce.

⁹⁵ ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA (<https://www.ualberta.ca/media-library/impact-report/u-of-a-economic-impact-study-report.pdf>)

⁹⁶ Technology readiness levels. Government of Canada (<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/innovation-canada/en/technology-readiness-levels>)

⁹⁷ Open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Universities Canada (<https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/open-letter-to-prime-minister/>)



Now, more than ever, we must recognize the critical role of post-secondary education in building a resilient and prosperous nation. By advocating for increased funding, freezing operating grants, and promoting partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions, we can strengthen the economic footprint of post-secondary education and pave the way for a brighter future. The importance of "building local" cannot be overstated as it empowers individuals to contribute to their communities, fosters local economic growth, and sustains a prosperous society.

Together, let us prioritize the revitalization of post-secondary education, increase funding for research, and ensure that the economic footprint of post-secondary institutions remains strong, enabling us to navigate the challenges of the present and build a thriving future for all.

Recommendations

That the Government of Canada:

1. Increase Funding for Research:
 - a. Allocate additional federal funding specifically designated for research and development in post-secondary institutions.
 - b. Establish grant programs aimed at supporting innovative research projects and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations.
 - c. Enhance research infrastructure by providing grants for the acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.
 - d. Facilitate partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions to encourage industry-sponsored research projects.
2. Support Sustainability and Affordability:
 - a. Develop measures to enhance the affordability of post-secondary education, including reviewing tuition fee structures and exploring financial aid options for students.
 - b. Encourage institutions to adopt sustainable practices and reduce their environmental impact through initiatives such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and carbon neutrality targets.