



# STRENGTHENING POST-SECONDARY FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

---

FEBRUARY 11, 2022



# Table of Contents

**3**

**MESSAGE FROM  
NDP LEADER  
RACHEL NOTLEY**

**4**

**MESSAGE FROM  
ADVANCED EDUCATION  
CRITIC DAVID EGGEN**

**5**

**RESPONSE TO  
GOVERNMENT POLICY**

**6**

**SETTING THE STAGE  
FOR THIS REPORT**

**8**

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

**10**

**PROPOSALS**

**23**

**CONCLUSION**



## MESSAGE FROM **NDP LEADER RACHEL NOTLEY**

Alberta's post-secondary schools can be the engine of our province's economic future.

If properly supported, they can provide a world-class education and set the next generation of our province's leaders up for success. The schools and the people educating tirelessly inside of them can help to grow critical-thinking skills, creativity, and research capacity for innovation.

Alberta's post-secondary institutions can also support growth in emerging industries and can build upon the world-leading applied and pure research already being done right here.

Let's be clear about this — a well-educated and skilled workforce, not the corporate tax rate, is the top consideration for companies when looking to move or expand their operations.

So far, the UCP government has leveled more than \$600 million in devastating cuts to post-secondary schools. These come at a time when our economy is at a generational crossroads, when critical decisions must be made about the best path forward. In the fallout, schools had to impose across-the-board cuts, to eliminate entire programs and to abandon research projects that were already underway. As a result, we have seen young people flee Alberta at a level not seen since 1988.

Alberta post-secondary schools should be the draw for keeping young people here, not the other way around. They should draw in future leaders from other jurisdictions. Frankly, Albertans should be able to look at these schools and know they're regarded as being among the best in the country, and the world and are internationally recognized by prospective international students and academics. In this province, we have historically expected nothing less from advanced education and that should not change, especially not now.

Looking forward, we need to shift our focus and measure success by increasing access, improving the quality of education in the province, and making sure our graduates want to stay, work and build their life right here in Alberta.

In the pages that follow, we set out an initial roadmap of ideas to leverage our post-secondary schools' success to date and to build upon it moving forward. We want to hear your vision for these vital schools and how they prepare our future leaders. We want your feedback on the ideas that follow.

Thank you,

— Rachel Notley  
Leader of the NDP Official Opposition



## MESSAGE FROM **NDP ADVANCED EDUCATION CRITIC DAVID EGGEN**



Alberta is home to world-renowned universities, strong technical institutes, and valued colleges. As the NDP Advanced Education Critic, I have had the pleasure of consulting with students, faculty and staff from all corners of this great province on what the future of Alberta post-secondary should look like.

Alberta's institutions are essential pillars in our society and our economy. From apprenticeship to PhD programs, our post-secondary institutions provide young Albertans with the skills they need for a better career.

The devastating cuts imposed by the UCP government on these schools has had a crushing effect. Despite mounting pressure and evidence to suggest these harmful decisions will set us back greatly, they have refused to reverse course.

Alberta's NDP would reverse course and fast. We would put funding back into our schools to set them up for success. We would work directly with industry leaders, school administrators, faculty and researchers to determine where workforce needs will emerge and we will respond accordingly with increased access in those areas.

With the right government support, Alberta's schools could help us move quickly to a net-zero energy economy, they could help us bolster our tech sector and make us a destination for

new companies and investment. The research done could help us anticipate the next global pandemic and better prepare for it — and all of this barely cracks the surface.

We can attract the brightest minds, we can inspire the next generation of big thinkers and innovators. Government has a role to play and it shouldn't shy away from that, it should embrace it.

The ideas presented in this paper show that there is a better path forward for post-secondary.

Thank you to all Albertans who provided feedback and helped us generate this report. For those who haven't weighed in yet, I encourage you to read all of what follows, think about it carefully and provide your feedback. Together, we can build Alberta's future.

Sincerely,

— David Eggen  
NDP Official Opposition Critic  
for Advanced Education



## RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

Over their term, when adjusted for population growth and inflation, the UCP government will have reduced total funding for post-secondary schools by more than \$600 million. The UCP government has tried to justify cuts through its MacKinnon Panel which claimed that Alberta was spending \$5,000-\$15,000 more per full-time equivalent (FTE) student than other provinces. However, as University of Lethbridge researchers Trevor W. Harrison and Richard E. Mueller highlighted, Statistics Canada data from the same year suggests a more nuanced picture — the spending in our universities is much smaller than reported by MacKinnon Panel and is actually lower per FTE than in some other Canadian jurisdictions. Where Alberta does spend more is on our rural

colleges and polytechnics, which provide unique programming and serve rural communities. Alberta's NDP views these schools as being essential to rural economic development, to regional growth and to building sustainable jobs in their respective communities.

In April 2021, the UCP government published its Alberta 2030 strategy for the post-secondary sector. While the strategy does contain some positive proposals, some of which we propose adopting in the following pages, it is inconceivable that the broader goals the government claims to have can be achieved while ramming through devastating cuts.

To date, UCP cuts have resulted in the loss of over 1,400 full-time positions at post-secondary schools, the closing of seven rural campuses across institutions, and the elimination of 17 programs, including multiple nursing programs in rural communities.

In response to the cuts, University of Calgary political scientist Lisa Young concluded that, “the province and its post-secondary sector will not be well-positioned to undertake the kind of substantial enrollment growth and improvements to participation rates that would position the province for the economic transitions that lie ahead.”<sup>1</sup>

### THE UCP HAS:

- **CUT MORE THAN \$600 MILLION FROM POST-SECONDARIES**
- **SEVERELY INCREASED TUITION E.G. THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STUDENTS' UNION IS EXPECTING AN AVERAGE 23.5 PER CENT INCREASE IN TUITION OVER THREE YEARS**
- **CAUSED THE CLOSURE OF 7 RURAL CAMPUSES AND AT LEAST 17 PROGRAMS CUT OVER 1,400 FULL TIME POSITIONS**
- **OVERSEEN THE FIRST NET OUT-MIGRATION OF 18-24 OLDS SINCE 1988**

1. Under review: Lisa Young, “Riding the Roller Coaster: Post-secondary education policy in Alberta under Kenney” in Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland and David Taras (eds) Blue Storm: The Politics of the Kenney Government under contract with University of Calgary Press



## SETTING THE STAGE

The policy proposals drafted below were formed by the feedback from numerous consultations NDP Advanced Education Critic David Eggen held with stakeholders and the general public over the last 18 months.

Alberta's NDP knows that a well-funded and highly reputable post-secondary sector is critical to equipping Alberta's future leaders with necessary skills and to maintaining and growing research and innovation. Equally important is that post-secondary education be accessible to all — whether in tech, trades, fine arts, sciences, liberal arts or elsewhere.

We also know that investing in the post-secondary sector means investing in growing our economy. The University of Calgary published a study that estimates its impact at \$16.5 billion annually to Alberta's economy, with \$8.2 billion coming specifically from its research initiatives. The study also suggest that the additional in-province income of the University's alumni is around \$4.7 billion annually.<sup>2</sup>

A recent study found that the total impact of Grande Prairie Regional College on the community was \$249.9 million — an amount that represented approximately 1.4 per cent of the regional GDP and supported the equivalent of 2,416 jobs.<sup>3</sup>

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) estimated that in 2013/14 its economic impact totaled \$1.7 billion and the annual rate of return to the province on investments was 32 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

### TO DEVELOP THIS PAPER, WE CONSULTED ALBERTANS AND STAKEHOLDER IN SEVERAL WAYS

- **4 AB FUTURE TOWNHALLS IN WHICH HUNDREDS OF ALBERTANS PARTICIPATED**
- **DEDICATED STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS**
- **A SURVEY CONSULTING ALBERTANS ON THEIR PRIORITIES FOR OUR POST-SECONDARY SECTOR**
- **WE INVITED EXPERTS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO PROVIDE SPECIFIC FEEDBACK**
- **OUR CAUCUS HELD ANTI-RACISM CONSULTATIONS THAT HELPED INFORM SOME OF THE WORK IN THIS PAPER**

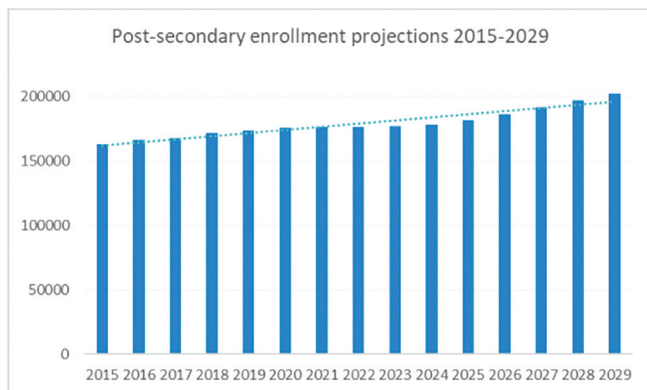
2. Hanover Research (2021). Economic Impact Analysis. The University of Calgary. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/sites/default/files/2021-02/Economic%20Impact%20Report%20-%20UCalgary%20-%20January%202021.pdf>

3. <https://www.gprc.ab.ca/doc.php?d=ECONIMPCTGPRC>

4. [https://publicdocs.nait.ca/sites/pd/\\_layouts/15/DocIdRedir.aspx?ID=4NUSZQ57DJN7-208515216-7692](https://publicdocs.nait.ca/sites/pd/_layouts/15/DocIdRedir.aspx?ID=4NUSZQ57DJN7-208515216-7692)

A strong post-secondary sector is also critical to attracting and retaining quality employers in Alberta. Surveys and research have found that some of the most important considerations for investment attraction are a skilled workforce, quality education system and liveability. The UCP's plan to decimate funding runs directly contradictory to its stated goals of drawing new companies and new economic investment to Alberta.

Furthermore, there are serious concerns regarding post-secondary accessibility in the years to come. The government's own data suggests annual enrollment between 2015 and 2029 is projected to increase by almost 40,000 students per year. If the province fails to ensure that a sufficient amount of spaces is available to young people looking to study in Alberta, they will be forced to look elsewhere for opportunities and potentially leave the province for good.



(Source: Government of Alberta (2021). Alberta Post-Secondary Enrolment (FLE) Projections)<sup>5</sup>

Some are already leaving. As reported by Statistics Canada, 2020/21 was the first year since 1988 that Alberta has seen a net-negative migration of young people aged 18-24<sup>6</sup> and a survey by the University of Alberta Students' Union indicates that around 61 per cent of student think there is at least a 50-50 chance that they will leave the province after their studies, with 14 per cent reporting they have already decided that they will definitely leave Alberta after graduating.<sup>7</sup>

We need a Government that supports post-secondary, that makes our schools a draw for applying high school students here and abroad and that properly prepares for the anticipated surge in enrolment. Doing all of this sets up post-secondary as a pillar of Alberta's economic diversification effort.

When in government, the Alberta NDP made key investments in post-secondary, such as:

- Keeping tuition stable so Alberta students and their families could both afford and plan for their costs.
- Adding 3,000 new tech spaces for students;
- Providing stable and predictable funding to institutions; and
- Making capital investments to support research and teaching options. As a result we saw several new facilities supporting research launched across the province, such as the Alternative Energy Lab in Red Deer or the Destination Project in Lethbridge.

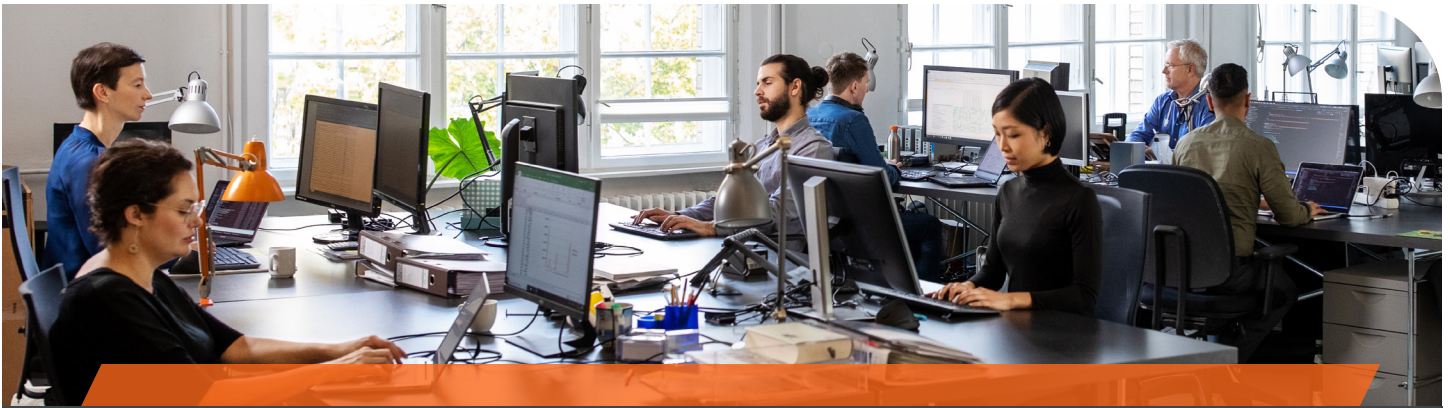
The proposals in the pages that follow attempt to restore some of the positive work underway by the NDP Government but also to make meaningful improvements beyond that. We recognize the work that was done was merely a start.

5. <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/alberta-post-secondary-enrolment-fle-projections>

6. Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0015-01 Estimates of the components of interprovincial migration, by age and sex, annual

7. [https://www.su.ualberta.ca/media/uploads/1143/Survey%20Report\\_%20Your%20Life%20After%20UAlberta.pdf](https://www.su.ualberta.ca/media/uploads/1143/Survey%20Report_%20Your%20Life%20After%20UAlberta.pdf)





## SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

### PROPERLY FUNDING THE POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM

1. Improve funding to our post-secondaries and bring back stability to the system to create the spaces and opportunities we need
2. Cancel the performance-based funding model

### SUPPORTING ALBERTA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUTURE AND RESILIENCE

1. Work with post-secondaries to strengthen their ability to innovate and transform Alberta communities into hubs for economic innovation
2. Consult with universities, researchers, and the federal government to improve frameworks for intellectual property (IP)
3. Work with regional institutions to offer opportunities for local workers to upgrade existing skills and credentials to respond to changing workforce and local needs
4. Establish a Future Leaders Council
5. Require all students to develop digital skills
6. Support Alberta students in finding valuable work experience
7. Ensure that all Albertans are able to participate in post-secondary learning by implementing access to high-speed internet across the province
8. Support Alberta's strong environment for apprenticeships





## ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

1. Address the extreme tuition increases and revert back to capping tuition to inflation
2. Examine the Student Aid system and other affordability factors to ensure all Albertans are able to afford and access a variety of post-secondary options
3. Ensure students can participate in post-secondary education regardless of ability, personal challenges and learning needs

## SUPPORTING AND ATTRACTING STAFF

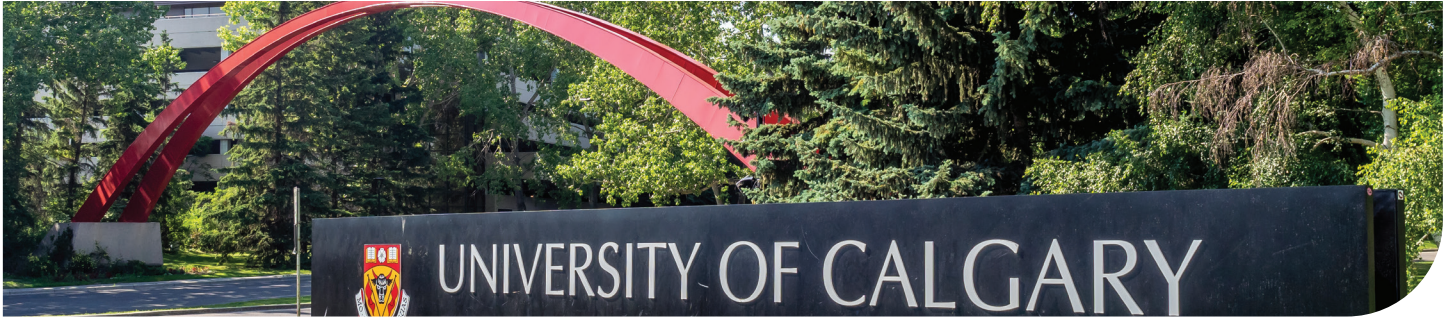
1. Institute policies and recruitment initiatives that support quality instruction
2. Providing opportunities for pure research and support existing work

## RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

1. Implement and strengthen efforts of reconciliation in post-secondary schools
2. Work with the University of Alberta and the Francophone community to provide sustainable, multi-year funding to Campus Saint Jean
3. Improve the recognition of foreign credentials
4. Recognize the vital role that arts, literature, and creative sectors play in the economy, and in the well-being of our communities
5. Continue to build an environment that promotes the mental health and well-being for staff and students

# PROPOSALS

## PROPERLY FUNDING THE POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM



### 1. IMPROVE FUNDING TO OUR POST-SECONDARIES AND BRING BACK STABILITY TO THE SYSTEM TO CREATE THE SPACES AND OPPORTUNITIES WE NEED

We propose post-secondary funding that is sustainable and predictable, and we would develop bold, new targeted funding initiatives that focus on supporting emerging industries and workforce demands. A greater focus, for example, could be put on skills related to the development of renewable energy and the technology sector. The NDP Government did some work in this area, funding 3,000 spaces for education in the technology sector. The UCP did not move forward with building this necessary initiative and maintained funding for only 406 spaces.

These targeted funding initiatives will send a clear signal to Albertans and the rest of the world that our intention to diversify and grow the economy is legitimate.

Going forward we will continue to consult with education and economic stakeholders on how to most effectively invest in post-secondary to both maintain academic freedom but also prepare the future workforce.

### 2. CANCEL THE PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING MODEL

The performance-based funding model announced by the UCP was ill-conceived. Put simply, it is all stick and no carrot — and is not a model utilized anywhere else in the world. Institution's funding relies on metrics based on outcomes that are out of the institutions' control, and the pandemic's impact only exacerbates this. There is no longer a reliable, reasonable "base" year for institutions to rely on.

Alberta's NDP completely agrees that targeted funding is needed for key and emerging sectors, but it also proposes that base funding that is reliable be provided to all schools annually.

The tension and distrust that has come with the botched implementation of the performance-based funding model has had a negative effect on confidence in Alberta post-secondary, and currently, there is little incentive for competitive growth among schools — all are left bracing for further inevitable cuts from the current Government.

We propose abandoning the performance-based funding model and instead working with schools on improving outcomes and growing access in key and emerging sectors through targeted funding initiatives.

# PROPOSALS

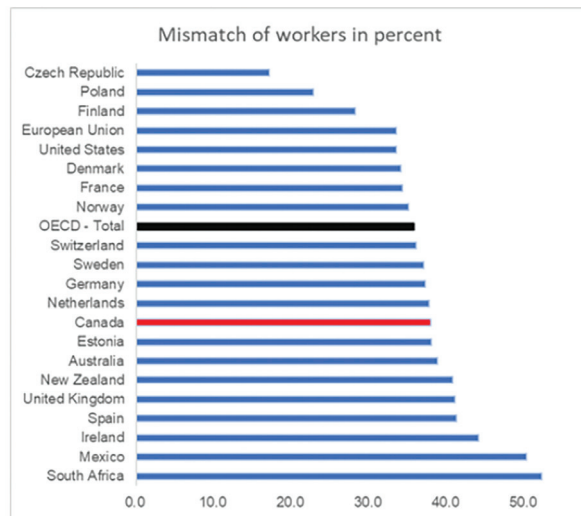
## SUPPORTING ALBERTA'S ECONOMIC FUTURE AND RESILIENCE



We propose post-secondary funding that is sustainable and predictable, and we would develop bold, new targeted funding initiatives that focus on supporting emerging industries and workforce demands. A greater focus, for example, could be put on skills related to the development of renewable energy and the technology sector. The NDP Government did some work in this area, funding 3,000 spaces for education in the technology sector. The UCP did not move forward with building this necessary initiative and maintained funding for only 406 spaces.

These targeted funding initiatives will send a clear signal to Albertans and the rest of the world that our intention to diversify and grow the economy is legitimate.

Going forward we will continue to consult with education and economic stakeholders on how to most effectively invest in post-secondary to both maintain academic freedom but also prepare the future workforce.



(Source: OECD (2021). Mismatch 2016. OECD.Stat)

# 1. WORK WITH POST-SECONDARIES TO STRENGTHEN INNOVATION AND HELP MAKE OUR COMMUNITIES HUBS FOR ECONOMIC INNOVATION

Supporting innovation and commercialization is one of the key pillars of the UCP's 2030 strategy. While some of the initiatives in this section are worth considering, the overall strategy ignores that true innovation and research development requires well-supported post-secondary institutions.

Other innovation strategies have recognized that it will require bringing together civic, public, and private actors to grow an innovative ecosystem. The Dutch innovation strategy, for example, highlights the need to bring opportunities for cooperation between different partners that work differently and have diverging agendas. It highlights the WaterCampus Leeuwarden where entrepreneurs, researchers, students and public or semi-public organizations such as waterworks and water boards can come together. The University's research institute is a partner in the WaterCampus that brings together leading experts, students, as well as competing businesses.

This is only one example of the different ways we as a province can support the creation of innovative networks and hubs that will be a key step in bridging the commercialization gap and developing stronger networks in our communities and across Alberta. We would further assess innovation models like this and produce a series of options in collaboration with stakeholders. Effectively, our goal will be to establish innovation hubs in various centres throughout rural Alberta.

Innovation hubs are one tool in the effort to accelerate applied research and commercialization. Overall, Alberta needs a framework that will guide this work. Through the framework we can create an inventory of strategies sectors and stakeholders, identify opportunities for collaboration in targeted and strategic areas and avoid repetition and inefficiencies. Alberta boasts work leading expertise in many areas and this can be significant resource in our diversification efforts going forward.



## 2. CONSULT WITH UNIVERSITIES, RESEARCHERS, AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (IP) FRAMEWORKS

During consultations with industry and the post-secondary sector, we have heard that the current framework for intellectual property needs to be reviewed. The UCP government has committed to doing so.

Our hope is a renewed IP policy would meet several goals. It should recognize the importance for commercialization along with the public

benefits IP policies should ensure but do so while also being accountable to researchers seeking to maintain control over what happens to their work and how its used.

We propose conducting a broad review of IP policy to help strike the right balance, producing a policy for public discussion and then finalizing it.

## 3. WORK WITH INSTITUTIONS ACROSS THE PROVINCE TO CREATE PROGRAMS FOR LOCAL WORKERS TO UPGRADE SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS TO MEET FUTURE AND CURRENT DEMAND.

As workforce demands across industries are expected to shift, it will be crucial to enable Albertans to upgrade skills or develop new ones as they need. We propose working with post-secondaries to provide a new array of programs that allow for skill and credential upgrading.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, the labour market is transitioning quickly, and a majority of employers in Alberta are already transitioning to a more specialized and skilled workforce within 3-5 years. Our approach would reduce the risk for Albertans and allow them to take advantage of the opportunities should they require support. We would propose establishing an initial set of programs and then committing to public reporting of success and challenges related to keeping pace with a changing workforce.

Technology has rapidly driven the evolution of our economy and the resulting job prospects. Careers that were unimaginable 20 years ago are now commonplace. Professions that seemed stable seemingly eroded over night.

Albertans don't want to be left behind and, as such, more and more are looking at options to potentially switch careers and explore new opportunities. Micro-credential programs and

other non-traditional forms of skill development are becoming increasingly popular with people looking to expand their career options. As well, more and more employers are accepting these types of credentials from potential employees.

As a simple explanation, micro-credentials are rapid degree programs that are typically narrower in their focus of competencies and skills than those included in traditional degree and diploma programs.

The UCP government is currently implementing a pilot program on micro-credentials and we are looking forward to seeing the initial outcomes. Albertans can take micro-credentials in areas such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, agri-business, and data privacy and security.

Alberta's NDP proposes continued expansion of these offerings. We propose working with institutions, with employers and trade unions to ensure existing programs are quality and produce job-ready graduates, and we would incentivize development of new programs over time.

## 4. ESTABLISH A FUTURE LEADERS COUNCIL

Alberta has a long history of being a land of opportunity, one that attracts young people looking for a place to work hard, live life fully in a beautiful community and start a family. Given this, the out-migration of young people for the first time since the late 1980s is cause for great concern. Alberta's NDP knows we must find a broad range of solutions to this problem going forward and quality post-secondary will play a critical role in keeping young people here.

We propose establishing a Future Leaders Council that would include multiple provincial government ministers, municipal leaders, young people industry leaders, Indigenous partners, cultural leaders, faculty and potentially other partners.

This group would be focused on developing a comprehensive strategy to keep young Albertans here and to draw in future leaders from other jurisdictions as well. Some of the initial focus of the Council would be on post-secondary; however, its work would no doubt continuously evolve based on advice from partners and migratory trends.

Alberta's NDP believes our province's greatest advantage is not the resources that exist under the ground, but rather it's the people walking on it. We must maintain that advantage by keeping Albertans here.

## 5. REQUIRE ALL STUDENTS TO DEVELOP DIGITAL SKILLS

Digitization is becoming essential in most fields — digital skills are fastly becoming necessities for employment. A study commissioned by the United Kingdom's department for Digital, Culture, Media, & Sport highlighted that over 80 per cent of all online job postings required digital skills from potential candidates and even 77 per cent of jobs at the low-end of the skill range required some digital skills. Furthermore, across all skill levels, the wage differential resulting from digital skill was close to 30 percent in the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

That is why we propose working with post-secondaries to implement digital components and courses in every degree. This would likely include a required digitization course for all students or the integration of digital content into current programming.

8. Nania, J., Bonella, H., Restuccia, D., & Taska, B. (2019). No longer optional: Employer demand for digital skills. Burning Glass Technologies. <https://www.burning-glass.com/wpcontent>.

## 6. SUPPORT ALBERTA STUDENTS IN FINDING VALUABLE WORK EXPERIENCES

Enabling students to get work experience during their studies has proven an effective way to prepare students to transition to employment.

So far, the UCP has done little to help students find work placement or present new solutions for this challenge. While the UCP's own 2030 strategy suggests that the province may have a role to play, there has been no action from the UCP to support students in finding work experience relevant to their future careers.

We propose substantive action. This would include working with post-secondaries and the private sector to identify the best way to create opportunities, including restoring programs canceled by the UCP, such as the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP). This program had great success in incentivizing employers to hire Alberta students over the summer and provide them with relevant work experience. Albertans can expect that once STEP was revived further programming and initiatives would be explored to improve work experience.

## 7. ENSURE THAT ALL ALBERTANS ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN POST-SECONDARY LEARNING BY IMPLEMENTING ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACROSS THE PROVINCE AND IMPROVE CAPABILITIES FOR ONLINE LEARNING

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for reliable, high-speed internet access. We must identify where service is inadequate in order to create an ideal environment for Albertans and schools to utilize online and distance learning. Alberta's NDP has already

released a full list of proposals aimed at providing rural, high-speed broadband internet across the province. The full proposal is available at [www.AlbertasFuture.ca](http://www.AlbertasFuture.ca).

## 8. SUPPORT ALBERTA'S STRONG ENVIRONMENT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS

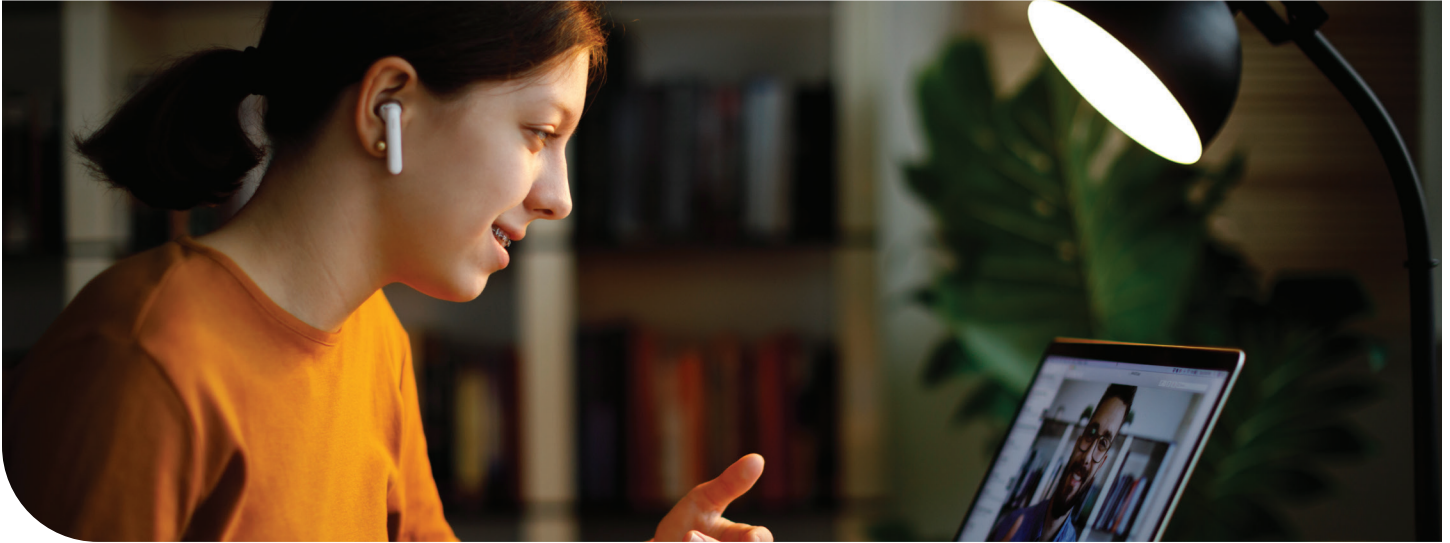
The UCP has claimed to make apprenticeships a key focus of their work in advanced education. Bill 67 was supposed to be a big step forward for apprenticeship training in Alberta but the act has created uncertainty for many stakeholders and the minister had to make several changes to the act only a few months after passing it.

Since then we have heard concerns that Alberta's current skill training system might be undermined. The system used to bring a variety of stakeholders to the table, which was a key factor of its success. We propose continuing that work and ensuring, as we move forward, that the apprenticeship system remain under public control so it can benefit all Albertans.



# PROPOSALS

## ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

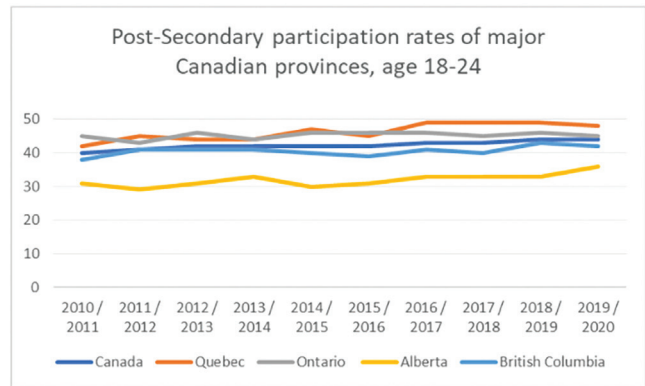


Ensuring that all Albertans have access to affordable post-secondary education is critical.

Post-secondary investment must target access and affordability. Put simply, students shouldn't be burdened for decades to come because they chose to seek advanced education.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2019-2020, Alberta's post-secondary participation was lower than the national average in trades, colleges, and universities for those over 18 years of age.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Alberta over the last decade has consistently had the lowest participation rate of all major Canadian provinces. This has to change.

The policy proposals in this section are aimed at immediately addressing affordability issues created by the current government's policies, and establishing a long-term plan to make post-secondary education accessible to everyone.



(Source: Statistics Canada (2021). Table 37-10-0103-01 Participation rate in education, population aged 18 to 34, by age group and type of institution attended)

9. Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0103-01 Participation rate in education, population aged 18 to 34, by age group and type of institution attended

### 1. ADDRESS THE EXTREME TUITION INCREASES AND REVERT BACK TO CAPPING TUITION TO CPI

After originally supporting legislation from the NDP Government to cap tuition to the consumer price index, the UCP then reneged on that commitment and put in place a special exception clause that allows for massive increases to be imposed without warning. Some of these increases could exceed 40 per cent in a single year.

Alberta's NDP recognizes these unconscionable increases cut off access for students or force them to take on massive debt. As such, we propose removing the special exception clause immediately. Further efforts to address affordability and student debt are addressed in later proposals.



## 2. EXAMINE THE STUDENT AID SYSTEM AND OTHER FACTORS TO ENSURE ALL ALBERTANS - NO MATTER THEIR AGE, ABILITY OR GENDER - ARE ABLE TO AFFORD AND ACCESS A VARIETY OF POST-SECONDARY OPTIONS.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2015, the median debt in Alberta was around 30 per cent higher than the Canadian median student debt. In government, Alberta's NDP implemented policies that saw provincial tuition levels move from being the highest in the country to among the lowest. Policy changes since from the current government have reversed the progress made.

The UCP promised to increase student aid. We hope to see more action on that immediately. Until it is possible to review the system holistically it would be prudent to increase support for students in immediate need.

We propose a comprehensive review of Student Aid to make it work better for students and while protecting them from generational debt.

Furthermore, and more immediately for that matter, we propose immediately reversing the increase to student loan interest rates imposed by the UCP.

We want post-secondary education to be viewed as an improvement to quality of life, not as a financial burden.

## 3. ENSURING STUDENTS CAN PARTICIPATE IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION REGARDLESS OF ABILITY, PERSONAL CHALLENGES AND LEARNING NEEDS

Through our previous consultations, we have heard that the current system is full of challenges for students. For example, students with children struggle to affordable childcare (a challenge addressed in a separate proposal on AlbertasFuture.ca) and also to find flexibility to complete their studies.

For many Albertans with disabilities, there are far too many barriers to access post-secondary education. We must work with these Albertans and post-secondary schools to remove barriers and provide support so all Albertans can access the education that is right for them.

We know that these barriers are complex and multifaceted but we would consider

an amendment to the post-secondary learning act that would strengthen the claim of learners with disabilities in accessing post-secondary education.

As well, as part of the mandate of our Future Leaders Council established earlier in this paper, we would run an in-depth consultation specifically with students with lived experiences of attempting to attain post-secondary education in difficult circumstances. This consultation will include students who ultimately did graduate as well as those who abandoned their advanced education pursuits due to the challenges they faced.



# PROPOSALS

# SUPPORTING AND ATTRACTING STAFF



We need to make sure that we continue to attract excellent staff to build the very foundation of post-secondary education in Alberta.

When institutions are forced to cut costs and lay off staff long-term teaching contracts are sacrificed in favour of precarious employment of academics. Institutions then are forced to rely primarily on sessional professors and cut research positions — and this undermines both

the research opportunities and instructional quality experienced by students.

Quality staff educating within the walls of quality schools can act as a major draw for students, keeping those already in Alberta closer to home and drawing envy — and ultimately applications — from those living elsewhere.

## 1. INSTITUTE POLICIES AND RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT QUALITY INSTRUCTION

We need consistency in the sector, not an environment where researchers and instructors are working with the constant fear that they might lose funding.

Reversing cuts is a start but we also propose launching further recruiting efforts to bring in additional faculty, including those that have left the sector due to frustrations or the stress of precarious employment.

## 2. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PURE RESEARCH AND SUPPORT EXISTING WORK

The opportunity to engage in pure research is a key consideration for quality professionals when determining where to work. Pure research, essentially, is research independent of pressures from demands of sponsored research agendas. This means providing space for more discovery and particularly ensuring opportunities for basic research where it is often unclear how outcomes could be applied. We heard concerns that there is increasing pressure that might create additional hurdles for these kinds of research but we know it will be crucial to work with our institutions to ensure that researchers can undertake this kind of research.

Naturally, allowing people to focus on research enhances Alberta's positioning as a hub for innovation and discovery. These positive impacts were highlighted recently through the new types

of COVID vaccinations. New mRNA vaccinations are the result of years of investments in pure research.

We have heard that other jurisdictions are looking at a variety of ways to fund more effectively in a way that gives researchers more freedom to undertake meaningful pure research. We would observe these approaches further to see what is effective and put forward a Pure Research Strategy with potential government investment to provide more effective dedicated support for pure research opportunities.

We would also further assess the creation of an Alberta Research Chair program modeled after the Canada research chair program, which was designed in part to attract top Canadian researchers back to schools nationwide.



# PROPOSALS

## RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Alberta's post-secondary landscape is unique in that we offer advanced education at schools more geographically dispersed than anywhere else in Canada. This is an advantage we can harness to allow people to study close to home if they choose and to also help us revitalize and maintain resilient rural communities.

The schools across Alberta offer secure jobs and in some instances are the largest employer in their community.

A recent study of Augustana in Camrose found that the economic impact on the economy in 2018-19 was \$111.7 million - with 65 percent or \$70 million retained locally.

UCP cuts to these schools will have a generational impact on rural Alberta that will be near-impossible to recover from.

### 1. IMPLEMENT AND STRENGTHEN EFFORTS OF RECONCILIATION IN POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS

We will work with Indigenous communities and post-secondary institutions across the province to support ongoing and growing access to post-secondary opportunities by establishing a framework for on-reserve learning that includes credit transferability and credential recognition.

We would work with Indigenous colleges and Institutions to identify deficiencies in the current system that negatively impact Indigenous peoples' participation in post-secondary.

As well, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a need to support more education and academic work for Indigenous languages. While there is some work happening at institutions there are still opportunities to expand this work, in particular, to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action Number 14: there is urgency to preserve Aboriginal languages and

the preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.

We will provide funding and work in collaboration with Indigenous partners to see through the TRC commitment around language and culture. This work is long past overdue.

There are several other recommendations that reference post-secondary institutions directly, such as Call to Action Number 11: "We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education". We will work with indigenous communities, our post-secondaires, and other stakeholders to support implementation on all of these critical matters.

## 2. WORK WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA AND THE FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE, MULTI-YEAR FUNDING TO CAMPUS SAINT JEAN

The Campus Saint-Jean plays a critical role in providing post-secondary French-language education as well as providing education to train French immersion and Francophone teachers. Both are crucial to ensure a vibrant French culture in Alberta.

As well, having the only French campus west of Winnipeg is important for the Francophone community to grow in the province.

When the Campus was obtained by the University of Alberta, the provincial government committed to ensuring the campus would be supported. We propose that sustainable, multi-year funding is absolutely necessary and must be committed long-term.

## 3. PROMOTE ANTI-RACISM AT OUR POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

In our consultations on post-secondaries and anti-racism we have heard that there is more work to be done in our post-secondary education system to combat racism. We would work with our post-secondaries to promote anti-racism across the system in areas such as recruitment of students and staff, research, and curricula.

Through our anti-racism consultations we will continue to consult on identifying opportunities to promote anti-racism across our institutions.

Some initial work on this is available in a separate proposal titled *Your Future, Your Voice: What Albertans Told Us About Racism and Being Anti-Racist* that is available online at [www.AlbertasFuture.ca](http://www.AlbertasFuture.ca). Among the items proposed the important matter of foreign credentialing addressed in the next section.

## 4. IMPROVE THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

It's clear that Alberta still has a challenge in recognizing foreign credentials. This has a significant impact on the opportunities many new Albertans face and impacts our economy as a whole.

We would work with professional faculties, associations, and relevant boards to identify new streamlined pathways to recognize foreign credentials. The NDP government published the report "Taking action against racism," which identified several steps to improve the recognition of foreign credentials, including an engagement on setting up a Foreign Qualification Recognition Fund.

The set of proposals in that document serve as a starting point to develop pathways and opportunities to recognize credentials faster. We are hoping to conduct further consultation on foreign credentialing in an upcoming Alberta's Future session.

## 5. RECOGNIZE AND PROMOTE THE VITAL ROLE THAT ARTS, LITERATURE, AND CREATIVE SECTORS PLAY IN THE ECONOMY, AND ALSO IN OUR LIVES AND THE WELLBEING OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

Post-secondary education can train people for specific jobs. Post-secondary education also provides a much broader positive effect for individuals, communities, and the economy. When creativity, openness, and curiosity are nurtured, we both make our economy more resilient over the long-term, and we also strengthen democracy, equity, and social participation.

ATB Financial's Chief Economist Todd Hirsch wrote in 2013, "Your university education, at least at the bachelor of arts level, was never intended to land you a job. It was intended to make you a more complete thinker. It was intended to teach you how to absorb complex information and

make reasoned arguments. It was, quite simply, intended to teach you how to learn. Those are skills that you'll use in any field of work."

If we accept that our greatest strength in Alberta is our people, then we need to invest in their growth and creativity. It could be said that much of this proposal focuses on job-readiness and responding to workforce need; however, those offerings are about expanding on current offerings and establishing new strategies. The NDP proposes continuing to support all students wanting to pursue advanced education to become a more complex thinker. School isn't just about getting a job when you graduate.

## 6. CONTINUE TO BUILD AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Mental health is a prevalent issue in Alberta and COVID-19 has only worsened the crisis.<sup>10</sup> This is why we will continue to work with staff and students to improve support for mental health on campus or beyond.

This can include increasing access to mental health supports and building an environment that supports safety, well-being, and mental health. Ensuring that our campuses can become such an environment, we would work with institutional leadership, student leaders, and staff associations. The Canadian Mental Health Association has published a toolkit for Alberta campuses which could be a start to consult on more steps to promote mental health on Alberta campuses.

This would include concrete steps to address sexual and gender-based violence on Alberta's campuses and wider post-secondary communities. Concrete steps could consist of providing funding for training for staff and

faculty on appropriate responses to sexual violence disclosures as well as taking steps on prevention. In addition, it's critical to bring together advocates, experts, and university stakeholders to develop sexual violence procedures and policies at every institution. The Council of Alberta University Students released a White Paper which proposes a number of solutions that would be part of a strategy that we propose the province implement. Among the recommendations include development of online-based training that institutions can use as a baseline to educate their campus staff and faculty on effective and supportive responses to sexual violence disclosures.<sup>11</sup>

We have also called the UCP government to help Albertans get through the COVID-19 pandemic by making five mental health therapy sessions available through the provincial insurance plan, with an online assessment tool to help connect them with a mental health professional.

10. Browning, M. H., Larson, L. R., Sharaievska, I., Rigolon, A., McAnirlin, O., Mullenbach, L., ... & Alvarez, H. O. (2021). Psychological impacts from COVID-19 among university students: Risk factors across seven states in the United States. *PLoS one*, 16(1), e0245327.

11. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b95cd14697a9812941dd36f/t/5e3dac89475a525571d360db/1581100176267/CAUS-Sexual+Violence+on+Campus-2020-v3-PRINT-no+cropp.pdf>



## CONCLUSION

This discussion paper is one of many in a series outlining potential opportunities to build Alberta's future.

Our ideas within this paper are built around five principles:

- Job creation and security for Albertans
- Equity and inclusion of all Albertans
- Diversification as a priority
- The recognition of the role of the Public Service in growing the economy;
- And the rejection of a race to the bottom

This post-secondary system paper is based on evidence and sound economic research that positions Alberta's system as a critical component of economic recovery, diversification, and growth.

The proposals on the preceding pages need to be considered if we want to support our post-secondary institutions, infrastructure, students, and faculty and capitalize on the opportunities to diversify our economy. We have already lost too many jobs in this sector, and we are witnessing Alberta's youth flee the province for better opportunities elsewhere. We simply cannot afford to lose any more.

The post-secondary system in this province is world-class, and we need to keep it that way. We need to fully fund our institutions so they can provide immediate skills to workers to hit the ground running, and our skilled workforce will be able to attract the investment we need to grow our economy.

Investing in our post-secondaries will build on the high-quality programs that exist and prepare us for the future by giving us the opportunities to be pioneers in the industries of tomorrow. Create well-paying jobs and retain the younger generation.

By working together, we can create a stronger economy for tomorrow. It starts now. And it starts with you.

This report is meant to spark conversation and inspire new ideas about what is needed to support and invest in Alberta post-secondary as part of a broader strategy to build a better future for Alberta. These proposals are not set in stone, but should be considered as a starting point for discussion. We want to hear your thoughts and ideas, so please visit [albertasfuture.ca](http://albertasfuture.ca) to provide feedback.

# Give Us Feedback

---

## WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

**Alberta's Future** is an initiative to build a new economy that benefits every person in our province. We want you to share your thoughts and ideas on proposals like this one.

We welcome you to submit your own proposals too!

All of our proposals and those contributed by Albertans like you can be found at **AlbertasFuture.ca**. On that website, you can also register for in-person and online conversations happening right across Alberta.

We are also hosting this conversation on social media, using the hashtag **#ABFuture**

**Engage directly with NDP Leader Rachel Notley on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook**

