



Post-Secondary
Education:
Our
Choices,
Our
Future

CUPE



The *Canadian Union of Public Employees* believes that access to publicly provided higher education is a right. Building and maintaining a quality post-secondary education system should be a high—and urgent—government priority because higher education plays a crucial role in the lives of individuals, and in our economic, social and cultural development.

Our
wellbeing
depends
on it





Post-secondary education is an invaluable public good—important to everyone. The post-secondary sector makes a significant contribution to advancing Canada’s social, cultural and economic wellbeing, as well as its ability to innovate, respond to change, and maintain a vibrant and stable democracy. Accessible higher education, provided by public institutions and supported by public funds, has great potential to lessen social and economic disparities, thus promoting social cohesion. Post-secondary institutions also provide stable public sector jobs for many people, with economic spin-offs that benefit entire communities.

Like other Canadians, many CUPE members have a direct interest in post-secondary education. Some have children who attend a university or community college (or will someday) or have partners, friends or other family members who study at a post-secondary institution. Some of our members are themselves enrolled in post-secondary programs and courses. And close to 63,000 CUPE members work in community colleges, CEGEPs and universities across Canada in all aspects of the post-secondary education sector, providing services to students, staff and their communities. They are proud to be a part of this vital sector, but concerned that access

and quality are eroding due to the high and ever-increasing cost of tuition, increased commercialization of everything from food services to research, and cutbacks to programs and other core services. As a nation striving to develop an educated population and to stay globally competitive we can and must do better.

We’re falling behind

Canada currently ranks at the top of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for how many of our citizens have post-secondary education, but the OECD has warned that this reputation is

at risk. Compared to other member countries, Canada's post-secondary enrollment growth has been at the bottom of the barrel since 1996. Canada's financial commitment to all levels of education has also been on the downslide. Only Japan, Australia, the United States and Korea contribute a smaller proportion of public dollars to education.

The danger signals have been flashing for decades:

- Tuition fees have risen dramatically and continue to rise at a rate way above inflation.
- Provincial/territorial funding of the sector has declined, with the sector increasingly seen as an expendable luxury or frill.
- Decisions are made with an eye on the bottom line instead of quality, making cost-cutting the standard in the sector.
- The federal government is nowhere to be found—there is no national policy for the post-secondary sector, funding was slashed dramatically decades ago and never restored, and the government plays no role in guaranteeing access.
- Provinces decide how much tuition students will be charged and have had free rein since the 1990s to determine the portion of their federal transfers that will be devoted to education, creating a patchwork across the country.

Higher learning, higher benefits

Research shows that post-secondary education is of fundamental value to individuals and society. Universities, CEGEPs and community colleges provide an environment for students to investigate the world, people, science, technology and the arts, exchange information and ideas, and learn to apply their knowledge through the acquisition of practical skills. These institutions are also hubs of research and innovation in all fields.

There is no question that higher education has a positive impact on the lives of individuals and society. It's good for jobs and earnings. It's good for people's



The toll on students

- Financial issues present an obstacle to enrollment for one in four potential PSE students.
- Students who have high levels of debt have lower rates of completion.
- Worries about student debt cause greater levels of stress, anxiety and difficulty sleeping.
- New graduates in debt delay starting families, buying houses, cars and other assets, all things which drive the economy.
- New graduates in debt have a reduced ability to acquire career-related volunteer experience, or to take a job that pays less to get a foot in the door in their desired field, depriving Canada of the expertise it needs in the future.

*Source: Student Debt in Canada: Education Shouldn't Be a Debt Sentence.
Canadian Federation of Students*

health and level of community participation. And it's good for the economy and government finances.

Studies confirm that university, CEGEP and community college graduates will generally:

- Have higher lifetime earnings.
- Experience shorter periods of unemployment.
- Contribute to innovation and economic growth.
- Contribute to government revenues through their taxes, making it possible to pay for programs such as health care, education and social assistance.
- Have healthier and longer lives, and be less likely to smoke or abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Become more involved in their communities through volunteering and social and political activism.
- Positively influence future generations on the value of education.

Where's the funding?

Despite the overwhelming evidence that investing in post-secondary education makes sense for Canada's social and economic wellbeing, the barriers to access higher learning are greater than ever. Universities, community colleges and CEGEPs have seen the proportion of government funding plummet since the 1980s. To make up for much of the shortfall, these institutions have raised tuition fees, with increases far outstripping the rate of inflation since 1990.

Shifting the financial burden to parents and students means that post-secondary education is no longer a financial possibility for

many—particularly those from lower-income families. Student debt is reaching all-time highs (as are youth unemployment levels). High school students who do not to pursue a post-secondary education frequently cite the financial barriers as the main reason they can't attend. Yet some form of post-secondary education has become a prerequisite for the vast majority of jobs.

In addition to fee increases, many universities, CEGEPs and community colleges are pushing for drastic cutbacks that adversely affect quality. Workers in the post-secondary sector are facing attacks on their wages, benefits, pensions (when they still have them) and working conditions

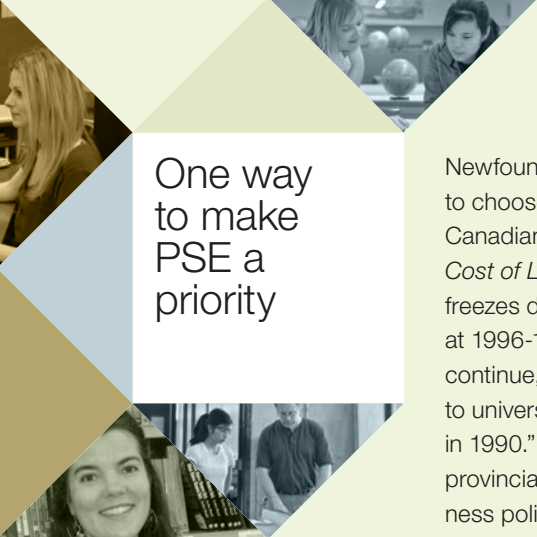
through demands for concessions at the bargaining table, and through job losses due to increased privatization and budget tightening.

Governments and post-secondary institutions claim they “have no choice” in tough economic times. However, these are choices, and the decisions we make will affect everyone's lives, present and future. Our choices should be based on the priorities of Canadians. Time and again, we've seen that when priorities favour the bottom line and the short-term goals of the corporate sector, social programs, workers' rights and our standard of living inevitably suffer.

Governments have choices


Many OECD countries have chosen in favour of funding quality, public higher education. Many countries—including the Nordic European countries—charge no tuition fees, while other countries charge minimal fees.





One way to make PSE a priority

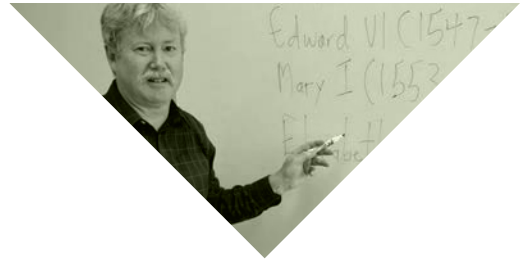
Newfoundland and Labrador has shown it's possible for governments to choose to make higher learning more affordable. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives's study, *Eduflation and the High Cost of Learning*, the province initiated a series of tuition rollbacks and freezes during the period between 1999-2005, effectively freezing fees at 1996-1997 levels. As the report says: "By 2015-16, if current trends continue, it will be twice as affordable for median-income families to go to university in Newfoundland as it was for the average Canadian family in 1990." The province was also the first to eliminate interest on the provincial portion of student loans in 2009. It also has a debt forgiveness policy for the provincial portion of the student debt.



The public is on our side

Canadians do not want the government to make it harder for people to pursue a higher education. Most feel that education is a public good that should be supported by government, and that government should make higher learning *more* affordable, even if it means raising taxes.

Source: Public Education for the Public Good. Canadian Federation of Students



CUPE on campus

CUPE members who work in universities, CEGEPs and community colleges are committed to maintaining high-quality, welcoming and diverse learning communities 24/7. Our members are the trades people, landscapers, caretakers and cleaners who look after campus buildings, roads, grounds and facilities; the security guards who keep campuses safe; the housing, food and catering service workers who prepare meals and provide residence services; the administrative, clerical and technical workers whose work is a vital support to students and staff; the child care workers who deliver early childhood education to children

in campus communities; the librarians who help students find the best resources; and the teaching assistants, sessional lecturers, English language teachers, computer consultants, research assistants and other educational workers who daily and directly interact with students.

Good jobs means quality services

Despite the key role university, CEGEP and community college workers play in Canada's public post-secondary sector, their jobs—and the future of higher learning in Canada—are under threat as never before. In response to inadequate government funding, post-secondary institu-

tions are sacrificing standards by privatizing services, and using schemes such as “quality reviews” and “service transformation processes” that emphasize cost-cutting over striving for excellence and diverse programs.

For workers, these developments have led to actual and potential job losses, pressure for lower wages and benefits, heavier workloads, health and safety concerns from increased stress and cutting corners, and more precarious casual and contract work. For students, it all boils down to paying more for less—fewer educational choices, as well as a reduction in the overall standards of post-secondary education.



The consequences of privatization



- Tuition fee hikes for Canadian students (an average annual rate of 6.2 per cent, with ancillary fees, from 1990 to 2011, while inflation was about 2.1 per cent) and even higher fees for international students.
- Corporate-sponsored research with a corporate agenda.
- Buildings named after banks and corporations that have contributed to the funding problems the sector faces by not paying their fair share of taxes.
- Commercial ads everywhere you turn (including bathroom stalls).
- Differential funding that disproportionately favours science and business programs over fine arts, languages and the humanities.
- Differential tuition for programs such as medicine, dentistry and law, essentially blocking access to these programs when Canada has a shortage of physicians.
- Weakening institutions of higher learning as independent sources of information and thought.
- McJobs (think low-wage, non-union, and poor working conditions) that replace full-time jobs and decent part-time jobs for students.
- The creation of campus “malls” of commercial fast-food and bookstore chains that undermine student-run services.
- “Coca-Cola” universities and community colleges that allow only specific brands of soft drinks, coffee and food to be sold.
- Private, for-profit colleges being set up on campuses.
- Lower standards for cleaning and maintenance due to contracting out.
- Information technology outsourcing—even of administrative decision-making and paper grading—causing loss of jobs and quality control.
- Setting up overseas campuses that contribute to privatizing education in other countries.



Unions are good for PSE workers

Unionization provides workers with a way to safeguard and improve their wages, benefits and working conditions. Being part of a union also gives workers a collective way to promote and defend quality services. Unionized employees enjoy higher wages than their non-unionized counterparts, and have better rights, protections, and benefits. In tough times, the union is the only vehicle with the capacity and clout to stand up to governments and employers, and join with other groups to advocate for the interests of the users and providers of public services.

As a public sector union with a significant number of members

working in community colleges, CEGEPs and universities, CUPE understands the issues that matter to PSE workers. Our union has worked to do the following:

- Make inroads at the bargaining table and defend hard-won gains.
- Give university, CEGEP and community college workers more power to promote strategic approaches such as coordinated bargaining.
- Employ creative methods such as contracting-in campaigns to show that work provided by unionized employees who are paid and treated fairly is of higher quality and a better deal financially.
- Advocate for the sector with university, CEGEP and community college boards of governors, and governments.

- Support students in campaigns on important issues, such as class size limits, lowering tuition fees, and improving campus infrastructure.
- Promote the benefits of public post-secondary education, the value of the jobs university, CEGEP and community college workers do, and the need for governments to make higher learning a policy and funding priority.
- Provide research support on issues ranging from the federal budget's impact on the sector and outsourcing services such as grading exams and assignments, to the complexities of funding packages for graduate students.

Real gains for CUPE members

At the bargaining table, CUPE has strongly resisted austerity agendas and the push for concessions put forward by employers. Over the years, CUPE has made many inroads for members in the PSE sector:

- Higher wages.
- Pensions and other benefits such as vacation leave, extended health care provisions and parental leave.
- Health and safety protection that exceeds legislated minimums.
- Clauses that minimize the negative effects and maximize the potential benefits of technological change.

- Protection from harassment and bullying.
- Contracting-out language to help resist privatization efforts.
- Reimbursement and leave with pay for work-related education and training course costs.
- Tuition fee waivers and repayment for PSE workers and their family members enrolled in university, CEGEP or community college programs, contributing to improved credentials and an educated population.
- Protection from academic harm for teaching assistants filing grievances.
- Longer periods of hiring preferences for graduate students to assist them in reaching graduation.

Advocating for PSE

CUPE and our coalition partners have long advocated for governments to make higher learning more affordable through adequate funding of the sector. There is also a need for funding and policies that remove obstacles to post-secondary education for groups that have traditionally been marginalized, such as Aboriginal youth.

The federal government has abandoned any meaningful role in post-secondary education. CUPE believes the government must reengage and work with its provincial/territorial counterparts to develop a system of post-secondary education and policies that improve the learning futures of Canadians.



Advocacy and activism work

After months of historic protests by Quebec students and their supporters in 2012, the newly elected government cancelled proposed tuition fee hikes of 75 per cent over five years on its first day in power. Under the banner of the red square, protesters took to the streets en masse, with marches attracting hundreds of thousands of people, including many from CUPE locals. The campaign raised the issue of access to education beyond Quebec and showed what collective action can achieve to maintain affordable higher learning.

Lower tuition fees and measures to reduce student debt are critically important to the future of post-secondary education. We will continue to stand alongside Canada's students and other groups in support of campaigns to reach these goals. We want to see governments move to the eventual elimination of tuition fees. We will also support the efforts of students in other countries who face the same struggles to defend their right to access

affordable, publicly provided post-secondary education.

Our union will continue to push to keep universities, CEGEPs and community colleges public. When a public good is privatized and becomes a source of profit-making, accountability and quality suffer, and society loses out. Communities also lose the good jobs provided by post-secondary institutions—the kind of employment that is necessary to keep our economy healthy.

Our program for PSE

CUPE is committed to the struggle to build a quality, public post-secondary education system in Canada. The union and its post-secondary education task force will continue to do the following:

- Promote the issues and importance of quality, publicly delivered post-secondary education among CUPE members.



CUPE's PSE Task Force

CUPE has an active national post-secondary education task force focused on moving the sector's issues forward within the union and in the public arena. The task force provides advice on how CUPE can advocate for publicly funded and delivered post-secondary education through an integrated system of public community colleges, CEGEPs and universities. It makes recommendations on strategies to increase funding for post-secondary education, resist privatization, and engage employers in coordinated bargaining.

- Advocate for the federal government to take a leadership role in post-secondary education. This includes enshrining the right to post-secondary education in law, and a dedicated transfer to the provinces and territories that addresses funding shortfalls and tuition fee hikes since 1992.
- Join students and other organizations in campaigns to pressure federal and provincial/territorial governments to commit to public investments in the sector to achieve:
 - lower tuition fees and reduced student debt;
 - increase funding for student grants and research; and
 - increase funding for the operation, building and renewal of our campus infrastructure.
- Push for investments to ensure that First Nations and Inuit learners are adequately funded to attend post-secondary education institutions and have access to appropriate support services.
- Ensure university, CEGEP and community college workers have a strong voice by organizing unorganized groups in the sector.

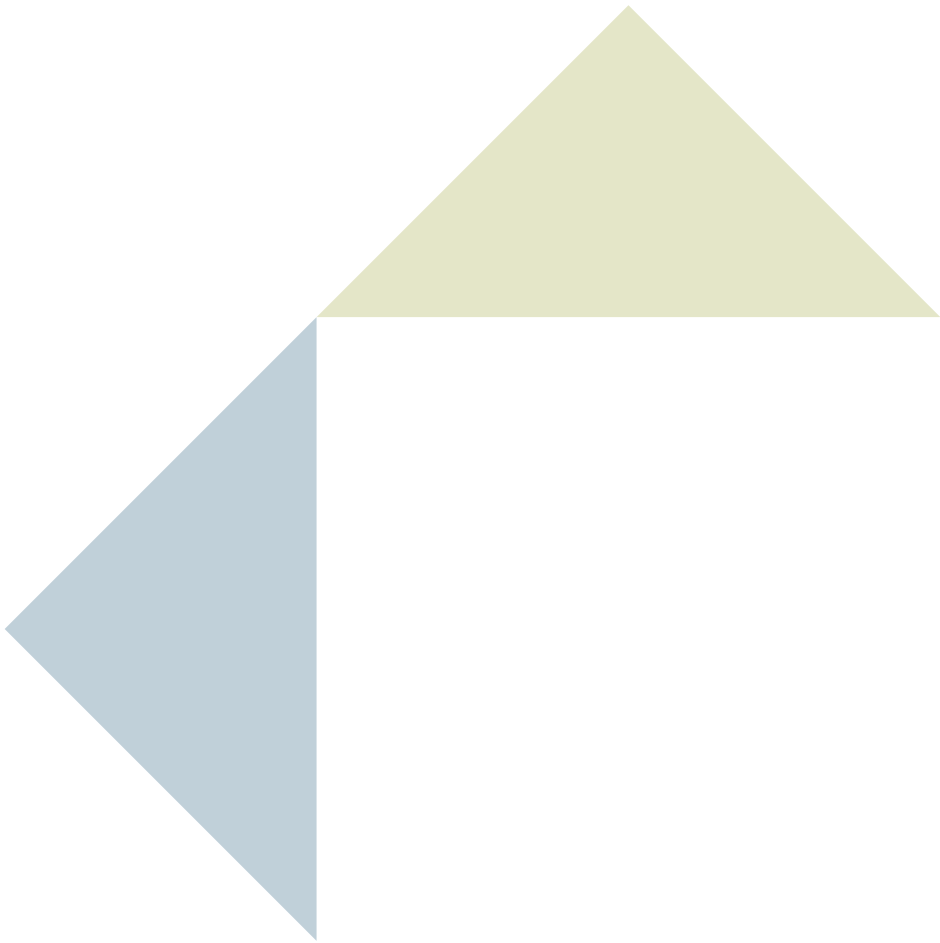
- Continue to defend the interests of CUPE PSE workers in their workplaces and at the bargaining table, with an emphasis on coordinated bargaining strategies.
- Lead the fight against any efforts to privatize or pursue public-private partnerships on our campuses.

Making the case for a quality, public post-secondary education system is a top priority for CUPE. It's the obvious choice for a better future for Canada.



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