



SUBMISSION FOR THE 2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

Introduction

Ontario's colleges deliver high-quality programs, equipping graduates with the expertise and qualifications to support a growing economy. Reducing red tape and investing in a strong college system is pivotal to restoring Ontario as an economic powerhouse.

Economic recovery

Ontario needs a robust college system to strengthen its workforce in critical areas coming out of the pandemic. As a start, colleges need important policy changes that unleash their full potential to produce graduates with the expertise needed in an age of rapid automation and digital transformation.

To reduce red tape and make post-secondary education more effective, colleges need more autonomy to quickly determine, develop and launch credentials in applied areas that support local employers' workforce demands. Further, they need the capacity to take on new entrepreneurial activities that help finance their critical role.

The college system's 50-year-old structure must be transformed to enable colleges to develop new programs without always having to navigate layers of government permissions. Armed with strategic mandate agreements and their emphasis on performance-based funding, government has the tools and capacity to provide this new autonomy without undermining critical oversight.

Colleges can also advance the success of local industry through applied research that helps businesses to become more competitive and to develop made-in-Ontario products for commercialization.

Colleges work with small and medium-sized businesses throughout the province on real-world research that the businesses can't afford on their own.

To stimulate more research that will help drive Ontario's economic recovery, **Ontario should reorient its research funding portfolio to match Quebec's annual allocations for college research.** An investment of \$20 million annually will also attract federal and private sector dollars, more than doubling the value of the investment.

Finally, the budget must address the training of highly qualified people in key areas, including skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, health care and other areas critical to restoring Ontario's position as an economic powerhouse.

To date, colleges have weathered the pandemic storm well because of careful stewardship of resources and tough decision-making. But this crisis has depleted colleges' resources and their ability to invest in the future, particularly in areas demanding new equipment and infrastructure.

In areas such as health care, advanced manufacturing, green infrastructure and digital innovation, students must be trained in advanced labs with state-of-the-art equipment.

Colleges are requesting an additional \$50 million in the college equipment renewal fund to support investments in critical infrastructure such as science and advanced manufacturing labs, digital training tools and low-carbon equipment.

Colleges are also asking the government to recognize the critical need for skilled trades by sharing the cost of trades training more appropriately. Ontario should provide a \$20 per diem increase for apprenticeship training and allow higher apprentice fees, recognizing the value of this career path.

Conclusion

Colleges have been part of Team Ontario from the beginning and have made tough decisions to maintain high-quality programs. Reduced red tape and strategic investments to strengthen the high-quality programs at Ontario's colleges will drive economic recovery and success.