

MEDIA RELEASE

Ontario universities applaud new provincial budget's PSE priority

Toronto, March 25, 2010 - The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) applauds the Ontario government on its 2010 budget, which places postsecondary education as a top priority and recognizes its importance to the economic growth of the province by providing base operating funds to meet the increasing demands for student spaces and capital funds for the buildings to house them.

“We thank the government for these investments to handle the additional students that we accommodated in 2009-2010 and the expected increase for 2010-2011,” said Sheldon Levy, Chair of Council and President of Ryerson University. “Ontario universities will ensure that we equip our graduates with the critical thinking and analytic skills that will increase the productivity and competitiveness of our economy. We have already accommodated over 100,000 new students with the five-year funding under Reaching Higher and are prepared to do our part in the future.”

“Students and their parents continue to see the career benefits of a university education in higher rates of employment and income than other levels of educational attainment,” said Bonnie M. Patterson, President of COU. “We share the government’s vision that higher education is critical to the future of the province.”

Growing numbers of students means growing demand for facilities. Patterson said that “the government’s continuing investments in capital projects for stimulus will provide the modern learning environments that this phase of student growth will need to prepare students for jobs in the knowledge economy.”

COU welcomes the Ontario government’s commitment to encourage the world’s brightest students to study in Ontario. Ontario universities will work with government to enhance efforts to recruit students while balancing intake against the need to accommodate domestic demand. We will also continue to encourage the government to look at the broad spectrum of international activities that benefit our students and our province including international exchanges for students, research collaborations and internationalizing university curriculum. All of these help to ensure that domestic students have the global perspective to successfully build international relationships, careers and business opportunities.

Ontario universities are committed to the government’s agenda for an online institute and already have numerous online solutions that can be built upon to provide university courses to those who need access to higher education in alternative forms. Universities have an online collaborative operation called the Scholars Portal, which accommodates 12 million searches and 4 million downloads of journals each year.

Universities also welcome the Ontario government's promised support for credit transfer. The ongoing development of pathways enables students to combine the academic rigour of universities with the applied training of colleges. Universities already engage in over 330 collaborative arrangements with colleges that provide pathways for students to move successfully from colleges to universities. Thousands of students are able to benefit from the bridges that these programs provide.

Universities await details contained in new legislation concerning compensation restraint to support public services and will be seeking the necessary clarity to be able to respond to government requirements for expenditure management.

"We appreciate that the commitments made today represent a significant investment, particularly in the context of this fiscal environment, and they will help universities to have a major impact on the future prosperity of Ontario. Today's investments will also help universities move towards the government's goal of reaching an Ontario postsecondary attainment rate of 70% to meet job requirements of the future," Patterson said.

Patterson indicated that universities also welcome the commitment of government to continue to work together to enhance the long-term sustainability of university pension plans.

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