

March 19, 2025

Open Letter

Hon. Nolan Quinn  
Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security  
5th Flr, 438 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
Frost Bldg S, 7 Queen's Park Cres.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

**Re: Urgent Need for Strategic Investment in Ontario's Post-Secondary Education System**

Dear Ministers:

Congratulations on your new mandate! You have earned the confidence of Ontarians by promising to protect our economy and communities at a time of significant risk and to improve our competitiveness and resilience in the future.

As Ministers of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, and Finance, you are at the very core of Ontario's competitive advantage as a destination for investment and talent—provided that we act urgently to invest in the sector in the upcoming Budget. This is an opportunity to position Ontario as the most innovative region globally, home to the most skilled workforce, capable of standing on its own in an increasingly protectionist world.

**The challenge**

The financial crisis facing our post-secondary institutions is many years in the making. Chronic underfunding, rising operational costs, and recent federal government actions to curtail international student permits have each caused significant damage to their sustainability. This was further compounded by the 2019 tuition cut and freeze amid high inflation.

Without immediate and effective investments, institutions will be forced to make decisions that compromise the quality of education and limit accessibility, eroding the province's reputation and ability to attract and retain talent. They are already forced to turn away excellent students in high-demand programs and struggle to be competitive in the battle to attract global research talent. This is harming the dozens of Ontario communities that depend on their local post-secondary institutions as economic drivers and magnets that attract and retain bright young people.

## The opportunity

It doesn't have to be this way. Globally, Ontario has been a leader in talent development, producing a highly skilled workforce at the core of several major industries, including advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence and life sciences.

Our colleges and universities are the foundation of this success, equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and adaptability necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy.

The economic threat from the U.S. – and the need for Ontario to become more competitive and self-reliant - underscore the urgency of strengthening our talent pipeline. Supporting talent development, upskilling, and reskilling are more essential than ever to ensure Ontario's workforce remains competitive and resilient in the face of disruption. Technology and AI-driven efficiencies in education and research will be critical to sustaining this momentum. Colleges and universities are already integrating advanced tools to improve learning, streamline operations, and enhance prior learning recognition—steps that will allow institutions to continue to be responsive and effective to meeting student needs.

## The solution

With the renewal of the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) in 2025, we urge the Government of Ontario to prioritize strategic investment in the post-secondary sector as a cornerstone of its broader economic development strategy.

We have four specific recommendations, each tied to Ontario's global competitiveness:

- 1. Increase base operating revenues**, including increased funding for part-time students, to ensure institutions maintain program quality and expand capacity to meet future demand. Funding can enable investments in AI and emerging technologies to drive efficiencies, optimize institutional operations, and enhance productivity.
- 2. Fully fund enrolment expansion** and current unfunded students to reflect changing demographics, and to create more opportunities for young talent. We welcome the government's \$450 million to support STEM programs at publicly funded colleges and universities, expanding the number of funded seats by over 20,000 annually. This will help, but not close, the growing gap in demand by Ontario high school students.
- 3. Enhance research funding** to bolster Ontario's position as a leader in innovation and attract top-tier global talent. Funding can enable researchers to engage with and study cutting-edge technologies, elevating our capacity for knowledge creation, mobilization, and commercialization.
- 4. Strengthen partnerships** between government, industry, and academia to address skills gaps and foster sector-specific growth. This must include investment in technology-enabled teaching and learning, ensuring students are not just using technology but are equipped to understand, innovate, and create with it.

Ontario needs your leadership more than ever. After years of financial challenges in the sector, your government has a historic opportunity to succeed where others fell short. Investing in Ontario's colleges and universities is the best strategic choice the government can make today to secure our province's long-term prosperity.

By leveraging technology and innovation, we can accelerate our efficiency journey, ensuring that every dollar invested delivers maximum impact—from streamlining enrolment processes to enhancing workforce readiness.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with you to support post-secondary education – and the growth, jobs and investment that will come with it.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch  
President & CEO  
Ontario Chamber of Commerce



Maureen Adamson  
President & CEO  
Colleges Ontario



Steve Orsini  
President & CEO  
Council of Ontario Universities

CC:

Hon. Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade  
Patrick Sackville, Chief of Staff, Office of the Premier of Ontario  
Rahul Bedi, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Premier of Ontario  
David Wai, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Jason Fitzsimmons, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance

Endorsed by:

Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade  
Aylmer & Area Chamber of Commerce  
Bayfield and Area Chamber of Commerce  
Bracebridge Chamber of Commerce  
Brantford-Brant Chamber of Commerce  
Brock Board of Trade  
Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce  
Burlington Chamber of Commerce  
Caledon Chamber of Commerce  
Cambridge Chamber of Commerce  
Canadian Franchise Association  
Central York Chamber of Commerce  
Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce  
Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce  
Clearview Chamber of Commerce  
Dryden District Chamber of Commerce  
Dufferin Board of Trade  
Fenelon Falls & District Chamber of Commerce  
Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce  
Georgina Chamber of Commerce  
Geraldton District Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Fort Erie Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce  
Grimsby & District Chamber of Commerce  
Guelph Chamber of Commerce  
Haliburton Highlands Chamber of Commerce  
Hamilton Chamber of Commerce  
Leamington District Chamber of Commerce  
London Chamber of Commerce  
Milton Chamber of Commerce  
Mississauga Board of Trade  
Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce  
Niagara Board of Trade & Commerce  
Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce  
Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce  
North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce  
North Durham Chamber of Commerce  
Oakville Chamber of Commerce



Orillia & District Chamber of Commerce  
Owen Sound & District Chamber of Commerce  
Paris and District Chamber of Commerce  
Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce  
Peterborough and the Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce  
Port Colborne-Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce  
Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce  
Quinte West Chamber of Commerce  
Richmond Hill Board of Trade  
Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce  
Simcoe & District Chamber of Commerce  
South Huron Chamber of Commerce  
St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce  
Strathroy & District  
The Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce  
Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce  
Timmins Chamber of Commerce  
Toronto Region Board of Trade  
Upper Ottawa Valley Chamber of Commerce  
Welland/Pelham Chamber of Commerce  
Whitby Chamber of Commerce