

Advocacy Toolkit

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: OUR TIME TO ACT

Before You Begin

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is about influencing the political decisions which shape our lives. Advocacy involves building relationships with and making our views known to politicians: the people we elect to make policy and program decisions, pass legislation, and decide what gets funded and what doesn't.

Advocacy can take many different forms: phone calls, letter writing, meetings, petitions, and public events or demonstrations.

Why should CUPE members engage in advocacy?

Advocacy is a way to build and demonstrate public support for progressive policies on issues that matter to us. Elected representatives are people just like us. They make up their mind based on the information they read and hear on a regular basis.

Politicians are lobbied constantly by many different groups and organizations with very different agendas – including groups whose agendas and interests are completely opposed to CUPE's vision of a fairer, more just society. That's why politicians need to hear from us too. They need to know there is support for progressive policies and they need to hear what impact their decisions are having on our communities.

Why advocate on post-secondary education?

We have a crisis situation in Canada. For years, governments have underfunded post-secondary education. This underfunding has led to skyrocketing debt levels and a crisis of affordability for students. It has contributed to deteriorating working conditions for university and college employees, including an explosion in precarious work. It has contributed to the corporatization of higher education, including corporate donations with strings attached. We need adequate funding to ensure that all students, not just the wealthy,

can benefit from a publicly-funded post-secondary education. Post-secondary education should also be aimed at fostering citizens with valuable skills in critical thinking and cooperation.

How to use this advocacy toolkit

In order to achieve change, we need to put pressure on politicians to embrace a progressive vision for post-secondary education in Canada, including:

- adequate public funding for post-secondary education;
- free tuition;
- education in the public interest rather than in corporate interests; and
- decent wages and working conditions for workers.

This toolkit provides advice on steps you can take to build that pressure.

You don't need to be an expert; you just need to be prepared. This toolkit will show you how.

Getting Started

Understanding the issues

- Before you begin, read the background material and key messages provided in this toolkit.
- You can also read more about post-secondary education in CUPE's booklet *Post-Secondary Education: Our Choices, Our Future* or on CUPE's website.
- You may also want to check out other websites and reports from organizations associated with post-secondary education, such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives or the Canadian Federation of Students.

Choosing a strategy

- Different advocacy tactics (writing a letter, meeting with your representative, etc.) can be effective in different situations. Throughout this guide, we try to provide a sense of when and how certain activities can be most effective so that you can choose the right one for your situation.
- Both the federal government and provincial government are involved in post-secondary education in Canada, but they play different roles. (For more information, see page 3.) Depending on political events such as elections, budgets, and government announcements, there will be times when you will want to focus on the federal government and times when you will want to focus on the provincial government.
- When speaking or writing to a federal Member of Parliament or cabinet minister, use the key messages in this guide that are aimed at Federal Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers (on pages 8 and 10). When speaking or writing to a provincial representative or cabinet minister, use the key messages aimed at Provincial Representatives and Cabinet Ministers.

Finding your political representatives

- To identify your federal Member of Parliament, go to the website ourcommons.ca. You can search for members by constituency name or by using your postal code. Clicking on the name of the member will take you to a page with contact information for the MP's Ottawa office and local constituency office.
- To identify your provincial representative, go to the website for your provincial legislature. Some provincial legislature websites will allow you to search by postal code if you are not sure of your riding name. Others require you to visit the site of your provincial elections agency to find out the name of your riding, and then come back to the legislature site to search for your local representative.
- At each level of government, decisions about what legislation or budget gets presented to the legislature for approval are made by cabinet. You can find the list of federal cabinet ministers on the ourcommons.ca website (under the heading "Ministry") and the list of provincial cabinet ministers on the website of your provincial legislature. The titles of ministers vary from province to province and can change when a new government is elected. If you're not sure which Minister has responsibility for post-secondary education, try a Google search.

Tip:

Your provincial representative may be called a Member of Provincial Parliament (Ontario), a Member of the National Assembly (Quebec), a Member of the House of Assembly (Newfoundland & Labrador), or a Member of the Legislative Assembly (everywhere else).

Background: Post-Secondary Education in Canada

Research shows that post-secondary education is of fundamental value to individuals and society. It's good for jobs and earnings. It's good for people's health and level of community participation. And it's good for the economy and government finances.

In Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction. This means that provincial governments have the responsibility for setting the rules under which universities and colleges operate. But since World War II, funding for post-secondary education has come from both the federal and provincial governments, in recognition of the important role that education plays in our society and in our economy.

The federal government used to provide substantial funding for post-secondary education, but in the mid-1990s, the federal government cut billions in funding transfers to the provinces. Twenty years later, federal funding has still not returned to the level of the early 1990s, despite enrollment growth and inflation.

Federal funding, currently provided through the Canada Social Transfer, also comes with no strings attached. Unlike with other federal investments, such as health care funding, the provinces are not required to respect certain rules as a basis for receiving the funding, such as guaranteeing affordability or accessibility for students. In fact, provinces are not even required to spend the federal money on post-secondary education at all!

Provincial governments have also been cutting their budgets over the past few decades, resulting in major cuts to public funding for universities and colleges. In 1982, universities received 83 per cent of their operating revenue from governments. In 2012, only 55 per cent of their operating revenue came from governments.

The impact for students has been profound: tuition fees have increased by three times the rate of inflation since 1990. Class sizes have increased and schools have put off important maintenance and building projects in order to save money.

Workers are also paying a price: a growing number of faculty and staff are being hired in precarious, low waged positions. Schools are contracting out more services, which worsens working conditions and puts quality at risk. In some cases, schools are even bringing in for-profit academic service providers.

Schools that are desperate for money have opened the doors to corporations, allowing corporate donors to control research agendas and, in some cases, dictate academic decisions.

In order to reverse these trends and restore the idea of education in the public good, accessible to all students and not just the wealthy, we need to increase public funding for education from both the federal and provincial governments. We also need the federal government to commit to working with the provinces towards establishing free tuition for all students, ensuring that education promotes public interests rather than corporate interests, and creating decent wages and working conditions for workers.

We also need to ensure that the money spent by the federal government is going to post-secondary education. That's why we need a federal Post-Secondary Education Act, creating accountability for federal funding and defining a clear vision and set of principles for post-secondary education.

Key Messages

Key messages on the crisis in education:

- Government funding for post-secondary education has dropped dramatically. Thirty years ago, universities received more than 80 per cent of their funding from governments. Now, just half of their funding is from governments.
- This chronic underfunding has serious consequences for students, for workers, for our society and for our economy.
- For students, underfunding has led to a twin crisis of accessibility and student debt. Tuition and other costs have been rising rapidly. Students need to work and borrow more than they used to in order to be able to pay for tuition.
- For workers, underfunding has meant that post-secondary jobs have become more precarious, leaving workers trying to pay the bills with poverty wages or struggling to deal with positions that remain temporary for years.
- Universities and colleges have responded to the crisis by opening the door to corporate interests, putting education at risk of becoming a factory line that produces corporate workers, rather than citizens who can think for themselves.

Key Messages for Members of Parliament and federal Cabinet Ministers:

- Since the Second World War, Canadians have embraced a progressive vision of higher education, understanding that education plays a role in social mobility, fosters economic participation and growth, and educates citizens for democratic participation.
- The federal government recognized the role that education plays in our society and our economy by providing funding for higher education.
- But over the past few decades, federal funding has dropped dramatically. This chronic underfunding has serious consequences for students, for workers, for our society, and for our economy.
- The federal government has also failed to ensure that federal funding is actually going to post-secondary education, refusing to set out a common vision of accessible, high quality post-secondary education available to Canadians in every province and territory.
- That's why we need immediate investments by the federal government, and a federal Post-Secondary Education Act to create accountability and recognize common principles.

Key messages for provincial representatives and provincial Cabinet Ministers:

- Since the Second World War, Canadians have embraced a progressive vision of higher education, understanding that education plays a role in social mobility, fosters economic participation and growth, and educates citizens for democratic participation.
- Yet over the past few decades, government funding for post-secondary education has dropped dramatically. This chronic underfunding has serious consequences for students, for workers, for our society, and for our economy.
- Government funding is the result of choices. Other choices are possible.
- While Canada has adopted a market model in which students need to pay out of pocket to attend college or university, other countries have opted to provide their students with free tuition.
- Their systems work well, and our province should follow their example.
- We need immediate investments in post-secondary education, moving toward free tuition for all students, and a renewed commitment to public education in the public interest.

How to Meet with Your Member of Parliament or Provincial Representative

Meeting in person can be a great way to establish a relationship with your local politicians, to let them know why you support a progressive, inclusive vision for post-secondary education, and to find out where they stand on the issues.

Setting up a meeting

- To set up a meeting, call the politician's local constituency office. Identify yourself as a constituent and explain the reason for requesting the meeting.
- Be aware that most politicians have busy schedules and it may take some time to arrange a meeting.
- If the elected official is unavailable, request a meeting with staff. Staff have more availability and they can pass along your concerns to the politician.

Preparing for a meeting

- Build a lobby team – lobbying with two or three other people will give you confidence, represent multiple perspectives, and demonstrate to your politician that this issue has widespread support.
- Develop a plan for the meeting: Who will speak and in which order? Which points do you need to cover? What questions do you want to ask the politician? Who will take notes?
- Prepare what you want to say. Focus on being short, to the point, and using personal or local examples to reinforce that this issue affects local constituents.
- Practice your presentation with friends and family.

During the meeting

- Begin by introducing yourselves, then get right to the point by making your pitch.
- Give the politician a chance to speak. You want to know what they think and understand where they are coming from, but do not allow them to take over the whole meeting or to talk about a different subject all together.
- Be calm and respectful, but be direct. It is okay to ask questions and to respectfully disagree.
- It's okay to say "I don't know," if the politician asks a question you don't know the answer to. Tell them you will be happy to get back to them with more information after the meeting.
- Ask the politician directly if you can count on their support and what they will do to support higher education.
- At the end of the meeting, conclude with a brief summary of your key points, then leave a copy of CUPE's post-secondary education pamphlet with the politician.
- Ask for a photo with the politician that you can share on social media with a message in support of post-secondary funding.

After the meeting

- Debrief as a team. What did you learn? How can you use this information?
- Follow up: Send the politician an email thanking them for their time and providing any additional information you might have promised during the meeting.
- Share your photo on Facebook or Twitter, along with a brief message. Highlight any commitments the politician may have made to you – and if they didn't, highlight that.

Checklist for what to cover during the meeting:

- > Who you are and what you do.
- > Your pitch for post-secondary education, putting the Key Messages (page 4) in your own words.
- > Why you care, using examples and personal stories of how this issue affects you or your loved ones.
- > Why they should care, using both local and national or provincial examples.
- > The Ask: Will you support greater funding for post-secondary education?
- > The Ask Part II: What specifically will you do to promote this issue?
- > Listen: What can you learn from what the politician is saying?
- > Answer any questions they may have for you.
- > Reiterate your key points, and offer them some leave-behind materials.
- > Thank them for their time and ask for a photo.

How to Call Your Member of Parliament or Provincial Representative

A phone conversation can also be an effective way of sharing your views with your local politicians, and may be easier to arrange if scheduling an in-person meeting is difficult. A number of phone calls from different constituents can also help to build the perception of widespread support.

Preparing for the conversation

- Think about what you want to say. Focus on being short and to the point. A phone conversation is usually not very long and you won't have much time to get your message across.
- Do some research on the legislative calendar, available online. Politicians will generally not be in their constituency office during weeks when the legislature is sitting.

If you get voicemail

- Leave a brief message identifying yourself as a constituent, state the purpose of your phone call, and leave a phone number at which you can be reached.

During the phone call

- Staff will answer the call. Introduce yourself, explain that you are a constituent, and you would like to speak to the politician about post-secondary education.
- Do not be surprised if they tell you the politician is unavailable at that time. You can ask for a callback or ask for staff to convey your concerns to the politician.
- Explain your concerns directly and briefly, connecting the issue to local examples wherever possible.
- Ask directly if you can count on the politician's support and what they will do to promote the issue.
- Let the politician know this will determine your vote, but avoid revealing party affiliations.

After the phone call

- Send an email thanking the politician for their time and providing any additional information requested.
- You can also send a link to CUPE's material on post-secondary education.

A sample script:

Hi, this is Emily Doe. I live in your riding of Banff-Airdrie.

I would like to speak to you about post-secondary education. I'm worried about the current crisis in student debt, which has been caused by the shortfall in public funding for universities and colleges.

I'm still paying off my student loans more than a decade after I graduated from university. Student debt made me delay starting a family, and I still feel like I can't afford to take risks in my career because I need to be able to pay off those student loans every month. I'm afraid that if we don't take action now, things will be so much worse by the time my daughter graduates from high school.

This issue will determine my vote in the next election, so I would like to know your position on it.

Do you believe that the government should adopt the Post-Secondary Education Act and will you support increased funding for post-secondary education?

Thank you very much for your time.

How to Write your Member of Parliament or Provincial Representative

A single letter or email is less effective than a visit or a phone call, but many letters can help to convey a sense of broad support to a politician. You can also create a letter writing event or campaign with your Local. Encourage your members to follow the guidelines below.

Writing your letter

- A personal letter is much more effective than a form letter. Put the Key Messages (page 4) in your own words.
- Identify yourself as a constituent, and provide contact information, including your address.
- Include your own personal examples and stories so that the politician understands how this issue impacts their constituents.
- Try to keep the letter to one page, and definitely do not exceed two pages. Emphasize two or three main points.
- You can include additional information or point them to CUPE's website to learn more.
- Be as professional as you can. Proofread your letter to ensure there are no typos and ask a friend to review your letter before you send it.

Sending your letter

- Email and traditional mail are both equally effective ways to reach your representative.
- It doesn't matter which office you send the mail to – the constituency office or the legislature office. Communication will be handled the same at both offices.
- If you are sending a letter to a federal Member of Parliament, the letter can be sent without postage to either office, locally or in Ottawa.

A sample letter:

Brendan Maguire
Nova Scotia Liberal Caucus Office
P.O. Box 741
Halifax, NS B3J 2T3

Dear Mr. Maguire,

As one of your constituents, I am writing you because I believe that post-secondary education plays an essential role in our society and our economy. Estimates are that 70 per cent of jobs now require some form of post-secondary education. Higher education also contributes to making people healthier, happier, and more engaged in their communities.

But post-secondary education in Nova Scotia is in crisis today. Tuition fees have risen significantly faster than inflation, pricing post-secondary education out of the reach of some students. Many others are struggling with significant debt loads. Use of food banks on campuses and in communities is rising because a growing number of students can't afford to pay tuition and still put food on the table.

For post-secondary workers like me, this also has an impact. Universities and colleges are increasingly turning to precarious employment to keep costs low. Instead of hiring full-time, permanent positions, schools are hiring contract, casual and temporary employees. I've worked at Dalhousie University for five years, but every semester I have to wait with bated breath to find out whether I will get a new contract and continue to teach.

I understand that your government needs to make choices when it comes to public funding. But other choices are possible. Countries like France, Germany and Sweden have chosen to provide free tuition to all citizens, regardless of income level. We should follow their example and invest in our citizens and workers by adequately funding post-secondary education to improve access for students and working conditions for workers.

For more information, I have included a copy of CUPE's booklet *Post-Secondary Education: Our Choices, Our Future*.

Will you commit to supporting increased investment in post-secondary education and free tuition for all Nova Scotians?
What specific steps will you take to promote this important cause?

Sincerely,
Eva Smith

How to Write a Cabinet Minister

Cabinet ministers have responsibility for introducing legislation and proposing a budget to the legislature. Sending a letter to a cabinet minister can be an important way of signalling support for a particular legislative or budgetary measure. For instance, you can write the federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Labour to ask for a federal Post-Secondary Act. Or you can write your federal or provincial Finance Minister to ask for additional funding for post-secondary education in the budget.

Writing your letter

- Cabinet ministers receive the title “Honourable.” To be respectful, use this title in addressing your letter.
- Use “Dear Minister,” for your salutation.
- Do some research. Some governments make Ministers’ mandate letters – letters which outline which priorities the Prime Minister or premier expects the minister to focus on – public. Try to tie your request to the mandate they have been given.
- Follow the guidelines for writing to your local representative – be professional, make it personal, and keep it short and focused.

Sending your letter

- Email and traditional mail are both equally effective ways to reach a cabinet minister.
- You can find contact information for the Minister on their Department’s website or send your letter to their legislature office.

A sample letter:

Honourable Patricia Hajdu
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Labour
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Hajdu,

After the Second World War, Canadians embraced a progressive vision of higher education, understanding that education plays a role in social mobility, fosters economic participation and growth, and educates citizens for democratic participation. The federal government also recognized the important role that education plays in our society and our economy by providing funding for higher education. But over the past few decades, federal funding for post-secondary education has dropped dramatically, leaving post-secondary education in a crisis situation.

When my father was a university student thirty years ago, he could pay for his entire year's tuition with what he earned over the summer. But tuition has risen so rapidly since then that paying for tuition with my summer job is no longer an option. Even with a part-time job during the year, I still need to borrow money every year to pay tuition, and I will graduate with significant debt.

I am far from alone in this situation. Average student debt for a four-year degree is now more than \$26,000. Starting life with so much debt is preventing many young people like me from getting started in life. Faced with the prospect of precarious work when I graduate, I'm not sure when I will be able to start a family, or buy a house or a car, or do any of the things that previous generations considered the official transition to adulthood.

The chronic underfunding of post-secondary education is also impacting workers, and it's harming the quality of education. We need the federal government to return to the progressive vision of post-secondary education for the public good, promoting equality and social mobility and fostering engaged citizenship once again.

In order to accomplish this, we need renewed federal investments in post-secondary education and a Post-Secondary Education Act to ensure accountability for federal funding. Will you commit to introducing a federal Post-Secondary Education Act for Canada?

Sincerely,
Peter Chan

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor can be an effective way of building public support, in addition to being another way of catching the attention of elected officials.

Before writing your letter

- Decide where you want to submit your letter to the editor. Big newspapers will be read by more people, but smaller local newspapers receive fewer letters and therefore your chances of getting yours printed are better. Local papers are also more likely to catch the attention of your local politicians.
- Review the newspaper's website to find out if they have specific guidelines for length and format.
- Look for an article which you can respond to in your letter – having a tie-in to a recent article improves your chances of being printed.

Writing your letter

- Be very brief and concise. Most newspapers won't accept a letter that is more than 300 words.
- Get right to the point – there is no space for a flowery introduction.
- Think of your letter as three essential paragraphs: one to state the problem, one to provide local or personal examples, and the third to state the solution.
- Make sure you proofread your letter – or have a friend do it for you. Many editors will reject a letter that is poorly written or contains typos.

Submitting your letter

- Always submit your letter electronically. The newspaper's website should have guidelines on where to send your letter.
- Include your name, address, and a daytime telephone number.
- If at first you don't succeed, revise and submit again.

A sample letter:

Dear editor,

Your August 25 article “Rising Food Bank Use on Campus” underlines a serious and growing problem in post-secondary education in Canada. As governments have failed to adequately fund universities and colleges, tuition rates have increased dramatically. Many students are now struggling with high costs and significant student debt. A summer job is no longer enough to pay for education and living costs throughout the school year. In addition to rising food bank use, Canada is also experiencing an increase in the number of students who are homeless.

This student debt crisis hounds Canadians even after they have graduated. My son is still living with us four years after his graduation. His beginner’s salary is simply not enough to pay for his student loans and for rent on his own apartment. I don’t know when he will be able to make decisions that other Canadians take for granted, like buying a house or starting a family. Too many other young Canadians are in the same position as my son. Our society and our economy are worse off when these young people can’t participate fully because of their student debt.

We need the federal government to take action to end the crisis in post-secondary education. The federal government needs to be a strong partner in education again. The federal government should provide immediate investments in post-secondary education, along with a Post-Secondary Education Act to ensure accountability for funding. We also need the federal government to start working with the provinces and territories to work towards free tuition in Canada. In a wealthy country like Canada, no one should have to use a food bank in order to afford university.

Sincerely,
Andre Martin

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For More Information

cupe.ca/ourtimetoact
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