



December 19, 2003

The Right Hon. Paul Martin, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Prime Minister's Office
House of Commons
Langevin Block
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

Recently, a number of organizations representing elements of the post-secondary education community have had the opportunity to meet and discuss the challenges we face. In the course of our discussions it has become clear that we hold a number of views in common on certain central issues, and we are now writing to share these perspectives with you.

Accessible and high quality post-secondary education is vital to Canada's economic, social and cultural development. As you know, a knowledge-based society such as ours places a high value on post-secondary education and skills development as a key component of economic growth and wealth creation, contributing to Canada's high standard of living and quality of life as well as the health and well-being of its cities and communities. Post-secondary education very much underlies the three themes you have recently articulated: strengthening the social foundations of Canadian life, building a 21st century economy, and ensuring a place of influence and pride for Canada in the world.

We believe that post-secondary education must be a priority at both the national and the provincial levels. No Canadians should be denied the opportunity to benefit from a university or college education because they cannot afford to attend, because there are no spaces available, or because there are inadequate supports in place to help them complete their studies. Students understand the value of post-secondary education and in increasing numbers want access to it in order to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they can then use both at work and in their daily lives. To ensure that students from all backgrounds can act on these expectations, many will need greater access to financial resources.

Although the federal government has made significant contributions to Canada's research effort, general funding of post-secondary education has not kept pace with enrolment growth, resulting in a dramatic rise in the size of classes, the relative decline of libraries and other educational resources, the serious deterioration of campus infrastructure, and, in many cases, inadequate equipment and technological support. Without additional support, we risk denying individual Canadians, particularly those who are most vulnerable, the ability to achieve their full potential.

Post-secondary educational institutions must have the capacity – faculty and staff as well as physical and technological infrastructure – to ensure that all students receive a quality education. It is clear that they will need additional resources to respond to the growing needs of society and of students.

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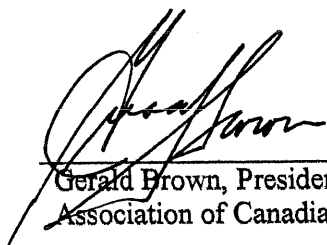


In light of the importance of post-secondary education to the realization of the three objectives you have set, it is essential that the federal government take the opportunity to re-invest in Canada's post-secondary institutions. The most important step it can take in this regard is to work with the provinces and territories to design and implement a transfer to the provinces and territories for the specific purpose of funding post-secondary education. The design of this transfer arrangement will require federal, provincial and territorial agreement on a set of principles or purposes that ensure that the funds are invested in post-secondary education in a transparent fashion while respecting the provinces' need for flexibility in setting their own post-secondary education priorities.


We also urge the federal government to increase the resources it makes available in the form of non-repayable needs-based grants. We must also provide the supports and incentives needed to encourage individuals from non-traditional groups to pursue and complete higher education in a timely manner. Our country cannot afford to disenfranchise segments of our society, such as students from low-income families, Aboriginal Canadians, individuals with disabilities, and adult learners.

In the immediate term, the government should express in the upcoming Speech from the Throne the importance of post-secondary education to the realization of the government's objectives. Over the longer term, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues in developing specific proposals concerning this matter of national importance.

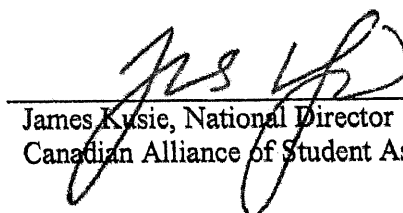
Sincerely,



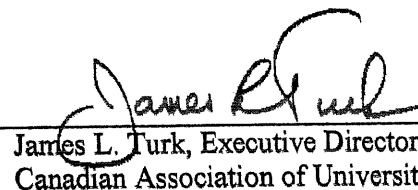
Gerald Brown, President
Association of Canadian Community Colleges




Robert J. Giroux, President
Association of Universities and Colleges of
Canada




James Kysie, National Director
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations



James L. Turk, Executive Director
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Doug Owsram, President
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Social Sciences



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