

April 15, 2025

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

Hon. David Piccini,
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
14th Flr, 400 University Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1T7

RE: Ontario Business Imperative: Qualified People, Diverse Talent

Dear Ministers Quinn and Piccini:

Congratulations on your re-election and renewed mandate to protect Ontario's economy and enhance its competitiveness. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) looks forward to working with you and your government to drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Today, I write on behalf of our [Workforce Development Policy Council](#), a group of business leaders from a wide range of sectors, including the post-secondary education sector, skilled trades, newcomer services, employment readiness organizations, and local boards of trade and chambers of commerce representing the voices of small and medium-size businesses, to provide recommendations that will strengthen Ontario's current and future workforce.

People are the driving force behind economic success. To support our economic competitiveness, Ontario must address labour shortages and skills gaps, and prepare our workforce for the demands of a rapidly evolving economy. This requires ensuring that our people are qualified for future labour market needs, prioritizing access to education, and investing boldly in the quality of our universities, colleges, and Indigenous Institutes.

As the legislature resumes, the Ontario Chamber urges your government to build upon recent efforts and take the following steps to invest in our talent pipeline and safeguard our future global competitiveness:

- 1. Ensuring a robust and financially sustainable post-secondary education sector:** To strengthen Ontario's global competitiveness, there is an urgent need and compelling opportunity to make strategic, transformative investments in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

- Increase base operating grants for post-secondary institutions and Indigenous Institutes, allowing them to sustainably maintain and expand programs, student job placements, experiential learning, and cooperative education to meet labour market demands and respond to needs of sectors facing acute shortages.
- Fully fund enrolment expansion to reflect shifts in demographics and meet demands from Ontario high school students and adult learners. This will maintain program quality and build capacity to attract, retain and upskill talent for Ontario's businesses and communities.
- As the U.S. faces a growing brain drain, act boldly by enhancing funding discovery and applied research to make Ontario a world leader in innovation, attract top-tier global talent, and spur economic development. Funding can enable researchers to engage with and study cutting-edge technologies, elevating knowledge creation, mobilization, and commercialization capacity, while protecting intellectual property and data sovereignty.
- 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.

2. Addressing labour shortages in key economic sectors and regions: Labour shortages continue to persist across key sectors, posing challenges to economic growth, regional development, and Ontario's overall competitiveness and productivity.

- Collaborate with industry, educational institutions, and Indigenous Institutes to develop a workforce strategy that aligns program funding, enrollment planning, and job placements with real-time labour market needs in sectors facing acute labour shortages, such as hospitality, tourism, agriculture, infrastructure and construction, engineering, and mining.
- Tailor the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) to target candidates in sectors and regions facing shortages as a pathway to residency.
- Work with other provinces and territories to eliminate barriers to interprovincial labour mobility and credentialing to ensure Ontario remains competitive with access to a larger talent pool.

3. Increasing funding for skills training and supporting the workforce of the future: Strong partnerships between government, industry, and academia are essential to closing skills gaps and driving sector-specific growth. As emerging technologies transform business

operations, it is critical to prioritize workforce development to ensure Ontario's labour force remains agile and competitive in a rapidly evolving economy.

- Incentivize employer participation in experiential learning programs, including industry-recognized in-class projects, mentorship initiatives, and virtual reality training modules, particularly targeting small businesses and employers in remote or underserved regions.
 - Collaborate with post-secondary institutions and employers by funding and developing new programs, micro-credentials, work-integrated learning opportunities, and skills training tailored to the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), local economic development, and high-demand sectors.
 - Strengthen partnerships with post-secondary institutions to expand training opportunities that prepare workers for AI and other emerging technologies, building a resilient and future-ready talent pipeline.
- 4. Fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce:** Equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion are foundational to Ontario's economic prosperity and labour market resilience.
- Expand access to financial and legal support, mentorship, and skills training for disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous people, racialized communities, people with disabilities, and women, while scaling evidence-based programs that increase their representation in skilled trades, STEM, and other high-demand sectors.
 - Streamline the recognition and transfer of international credentials to enable immigrants with foreign professional qualifications, particularly in healthcare, construction, and manufacturing, to contribute fully to the labour force.
 - Improve access to affordable childcare, including daycare, preschool, and after-school programs, to support workforce re-entry for women.

As we deal with shifting economic headwinds, there has never been a greater need for a proactive policy strategy that seeks to support the industries of today and strengthen the foundation for the industries of tomorrow. The OCC and its members are committed to working collaboratively with your ministries to respond to today's threats and build towards our shared goal of inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch
President & CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

cc.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance

Maureen Adamson, Co-Chair, OCC Workforce Development Policy Council & President and CEO, Colleges Ontario

Kelly Hoey, Co-Chair, OCC Workforce Development Policy Council & Executive Director, Halton Industry Education Council (HIEC) - ApprenticeSearch.com