



National Association of Career Colleges

A National Voice since 1896

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Protecting Access. Strengthening Integrity.

Student Aid Policy Priorities for a
Sustainable, Equitable System



July 2026

Executive Summary



Canada's student financial assistance system plays a critical role in ensuring learners can access post-secondary education and the training pathways that lead to employment.

NACC supports a student aid system that is accessible, financially sustainable, and protected by strong integrity measures. As governments consider changes to manage program costs and address emerging risks, reforms should preserve learner choice, apply equitably across eligible post-secondary institutions, and target demonstrated risks rather than institutional category.

Our guiding principle is simple: student financial assistance should follow the learner.

IN THIS BRIEF

- 2  Equitable Student Aid Policy Changes
- 3  Protect Student Aid Sustainability While Maintaining Access
- 4  Align Living Support Eligibility with Online Delivery Models
- 6  Evidence-Based Student Aid Policy
- 7  Institutional Integrity and Risk Management

Student Aid Funding



Goal

Ensure equitable access to student financial assistance while supporting the long-term sustainability of federal and provincial student aid programs.

Guiding Principle

Student financial assistance must follow the learner, supporting informed student choice and equitable access to eligible post-secondary institutions.

Changes to student aid policies must prioritize learner access, apply equitably across Post Secondary Institutions (PSIs) and not restrict learner choice or access to training pathways.

Priority #1

Equitable Student Aid Policy Changes

Details

Where governments determine that student aid costs must be reduced, any changes should be applied proportionately across all eligible learners and post-secondary institutions rather than targeting a single sector.

Rationale

Sector-specific reductions, such as the 2025 budget measure eliminating full-time study grants for regulated career college programs longer than one year, create inequitable outcomes without addressing underlying program cost drivers.

Policy decisions should be informed by workforce outcomes, return on public investment, and available evidence.

Regulated career colleges play a significant role in preparing graduates for employment in healthcare, childcare, skilled trades, technology, film, community services, and other sectors that support Canada's workforce and economy.

Priority #2

Protect Student Aid Sustainability While Maintaining Access

Details

Student aid policy should prioritize maintaining learner access to grants, loans, and other financial assistance while supporting the long-term sustainability of student aid programs.

Interest-bearing student loans are preferable to reducing grants, restricting eligibility, or eliminating access to student financial assistance for eligible learners. Where interest is applied, governments should maintain reasonable borrowing costs that support affordability while contributing to program sustainability.

Rationale

The primary purpose of student aid is to enable participation in post-secondary education and workforce development. Sustainability measures should preserve learner access wherever possible.

Interest-free loans combined with expanded grants have significantly increased program costs. Reintroducing reasonable interest rates can support the long-term sustainability of student aid programs while maintaining access for future learners, rather than reducing participation through grant reductions or tighter eligibility requirements.

Priority #3

Align Living Support Eligibility with Online Delivery Models

Details

Student aid policies should distinguish between online delivery models based on program structure and participation requirements rather than mode of delivery alone. Equivalent delivery models should be treated consistently across all eligible post-secondary institutions.

Fully asynchronous online programs (Full-Time attendance)

- Programs that meet full-time attendance requirements (whether credit-based or attendance-based), including a minimum of 20 hours per week of structured educational activity completed at times chosen by the student, should be classified as distance education.
- Students remain eligible for tuition and education-related costs but not living supports.

Synchronous online programs (Full-Time attendance)

- Programs that meet full-time attendance requirements with scheduled, instructor-led instruction (whether credit-based or attendance-based) with a minimum of 20 hours per week should continue to be classified as full-time programs, similar to in-person delivery.
- Students remain eligible for tuition, education-related costs, and living supports.

Self-paced online programs (Not meeting Full-Time attendance requirements)

- Programs without structured weekly pacing or full-time attendance requirements remain ineligible for student aid.

Rationale

Recognizing distinctions between online delivery models provides a clear and defensible framework for student aid eligibility while preserving access for legitimate learners. This approach aligns with existing federal definitions of distance education, supports program sustainability, and avoids penalizing learners based solely on delivery method.

Maintaining consistent treatment of equivalent delivery models across all institution types is particularly important for adult learners, working learners, parents, and career changers who rely on flexible but structured educational delivery opportunities to participate in post-secondary education.



Priority #4

Evidence-Based Student Aid Policy

Details

Student aid policy is best informed by measurable outcomes, including workforce participation, labour market demand, program completion, graduate employment, and return on public investment, rather than institutional category.

Funding decisions must be supported by available evidence and applied consistently across eligible post-secondary institutions.

Rationale

Student financial assistance is an investment in learners, workforce development, and economic growth. Policy decisions are strengthened when informed by measurable outcomes and evidence that demonstrate how different education providers contribute to workforce participation and community needs.

Regulated career colleges play an important role in preparing learners for employment through accelerated, career-focused training that responds to changing labour market demands.

Institutional Integrity and Risk Management



Goal

Protect learner access to student financial assistance by promoting strong institutional practices and contributing to effective integrity frameworks.

Sector Commitment

Regulated career colleges support strong oversight, clear accountability, and effective enforcement of existing rules. Integrity risks are best addressed through institutional behaviour and risk-based oversight rather than delivery model or institutional category.

NACC supports its members by promoting best practices, providing compliance-focused education, facilitating sector collaboration, and working with governments to strengthen integrity frameworks while preserving access for legitimate learners.

Priority Areas for Collaboration

Student-Driven Aid Applications



Student aid applications must be completed by the learner. Institutions support enforcement of existing rules prohibiting third-party completion or representation in student aid applications and remain accountable for the activities of third parties acting on their behalf.

Identity Verification and System Controls



Governments and student aid administrators should strengthen identity verification, data-sharing, and system controls to protect learners, safeguard public funds, and support the consistent application of eligibility requirements.

Institutions maintain robust processes to verify student identity, confirm enrollment and participation, and comply with existing student aid requirements.

Risk-Based Regulatory Oversight



Regulators apply enhanced oversight where risk indicators exist, such as:

- New institutions seeking designation
- Significant or rapid enrollment growth
- Ownership or control changes
- Repeated compliance concerns

Institutional History and Stability



Jurisdictions may consider minimum operational history requirements for student aid eligibility as part of broader institutional integrity frameworks, recognizing that approaches vary across Canada.

Resourcing Provincial Regulators



Provincial regulators require sufficient resources to implement risk-based oversight, investigate potential concerns, and enforce existing requirements. Investing in regulatory capacity is a cost-effective fraud prevention measure that helps protect public funds, supports institutional accountability, and maintains public confidence in student financial assistance programs.

Fraud Prevention Through Targeted Controls



Fraud prevention efforts should focus on identified risk factors, behaviours, and control mechanisms rather than broad restrictions based on type of PSI or delivery model

Rationale

These measures strengthen system integrity through shared accountability, effective oversight, and evidence-based risk management rather than broad sector restrictions. Together, they safeguard public investments while preserving equitable access for legitimate learners.



National Association of Career Colleges

A National Voice since 1896



National Association of Career Colleges

A National Voice since 1896



ADVOCACY BRIEF

PROTECTING ACCESS. STRENGTHENING INTEGRITY.

Student Aid Policy Priorities for a Sustainable, Equitable System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's student financial assistance system plays a critical role in ensuring learners can access post-secondary education and the training pathways that lead to employment.

NACC supports a student aid system that is accessible, financially sustainable, and protected by strong integrity measures. As governments consider changes to manage program costs and address emerging risks, reforms should preserve learner choice, apply equitably across eligible post-secondary institutions, and target demonstrated risks rather than institutional category.

Our guiding principle is simple: **student financial assistance should follow the learner.**



ACCESS

Learner choice
& opportunity



SUSTAINABILITY

Long-term viability
of student aid



INTEGRITY

Targeted, risk-based
oversight

★ OUR FOUR POLICY PRIORITIES



01

EQUITABLE STUDENT AID POLICY CHANGES

Where changes are required to manage student aid costs, they should be evidence-based and applied proportionately across eligible learners and institutions—not targeted at a single sector.



02

SUSTAINABLE STUDENT AID, WITHOUT SACRIFICING ACCESS

Long-term sustainability should be achieved while preserving access to financial assistance. Reasonable borrowing costs are preferable to reducing grants or restricting eligibility.



03

STUDENT AID THAT REFLECTS MODERN DELIVERY MODELS

Online programs should be assessed based on their structure and participation requirements—not mode of delivery alone—with consistent treatment across institution types.



04

EVIDENCE-BASED STUDENT AID POLICY

Funding and eligibility decisions should reflect measurable outcomes, including workforce participation, labour market demand, completion, graduate employment, and return on public investment.



STRENGTHENING SYSTEM INTEGRITY

Alongside these policy priorities, NACC supports strong accountability and effective fraud prevention. Integrity measures should focus on institutional behaviour and demonstrated risk, supported by:



Student-driven
applications



Identity verification
& system controls



Risk-based
regulatory
oversight



Institutional
history &
stability



Well-resourced
provincial
regulators



Targeted fraud
prevention



The objective: A student aid system that protects public investment while preserving equitable access for legitimate learners.

IN THIS BRIEF



03

Equitable Student
Aid Policy Changes



04

Sustainable Student
Aid, Without
Sacrificing Access



05

Student Aid that
Reflects Modern
Delivery Models



06

Evidence-Based
Student Aid Policy



07

Institutional Integrity
and Risk Management

These priorities reflect our commitment to a student financial assistance system that is accessible, financially sustainable, and protected by strong accountability and integrity.



JUNE 2026