The 2021 Federal Budget:

A Higher Education Strategy Associates Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

On Monday, April 19th, 2021, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland rose in the House of Commons to deliver the Trudeau government's fifth budget. In the twenty-five months since the previous budget, Canada has suffered a debilitating COVID pandemic, and the government spent nearly $400 billion more than it has collected to support the economy though the accompanying economic crisis. Clearly, deficits needed to come down from stratospheric levels, but there was significant debate among private-sector economists about how quickly normal growth and hence normal federal expenditures would re-establish itself in the wake of the pandemic, particularly given the size of the stimulus being planned in the United States. While the government signalled significant stimulus spending, as budget day drew closer there were increasingly loud voices claiming that such an effort might be unnecessary.

At the same time, the Finance Minister signalled that her number one priority for the budget was to establish a national childcare program, something the Liberals have promised but have never really delivered, mainly because of the difficulty in putting together a plan which could satisfy diverse provincial needs given vastly different pre-existing levels of investments (as anyone with knowledge of the post-secondary education file could have told them…). This was clearly going to be an enormous undertaking, one that would eat up a great deal of available funds. Thus, despite this being a deficit budget, and despite a lot of money going to "recovery" and "stimulus", it seemed quite unlikely that this budget – contrary to the previous two - would be one in which post-secondary education played a significant role.

Over the following pages we detail the elements of the 2021 Budget ("A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth and Resilience"): as it turns out, the sector did receive a grab-bag of measures, but without a whole lot of coherence with respect to the role that knowledge was likely to play in future economic growth.

STUDENT AID

Budget 2021 promises substantial investments to strengthen student financial aid in Canada. The changes focus largely on grants and improving loan repayment conditions and is embodied in the renaming of the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) as the Canada Student Financial Assistance Program (CSFAP).

STUDENT GRANTS AND REPAYMENT CONDITIONS

The budget does not follow through on the Liberals 2019 platform commitment to increase the amounts for Canada Student Grants (CSGs) by 40%. However, the Government doubled the value of these grants in response to the pandemic, and the budget commits to maintaining the doubled amounts for two more years – to July 2023. The table below indicates CSG value in 2019, under the current temporary program and if implementation followed the 2019 platform commitment.

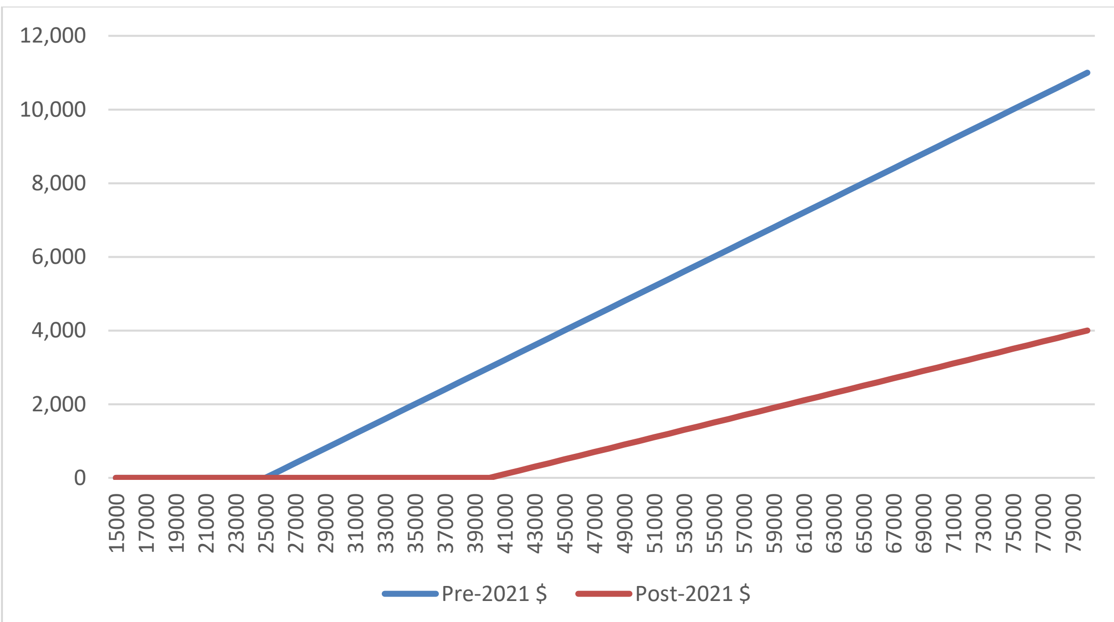
	Original Grant 2019	Temporary CSG	2019 Platform Commitment
Full Time	$3,000	$6,000	$4,200
Part Time	$1,600	$3,200	$2,240

Ultimately, the tradeoff appears to be a higher top-up in the short-term, but no guarantee of long-term permanence. The electoral attractions of this strategy seem obvious – the Liberals can both point to significant present increases in the CSG and have the option of promising on the campaign to increase the CSG permanently. Student advocacy organisations will need to be attentive that the government is not subtly walking back its commitment to increase the CSG.

The most significant permanent changes for the greatest number of program beneficiaries relate to the Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP). The RAP is designed to reduce the burden of repayment for post-secondary graduates who have modest earnings. In 2020-21, there were just over 330,000 Canadians participating in the RAP.

Previously, those who earned less than $25,000 per year were exempted from making payments on their student loans, while payments for those above this income threshold were capped at 20% of their marginal income above $25,000. The budget proposes firstly to raise the $25,000 threshold for single graduates by 60% to $40,000, a threshold which will be indexed to inflation moving forward. On top of this, the budget indicates that the cap on monthly student loan payments will fall from 20% of household income to just 10%. The following figure indicates the maximum amounts a graduate might be expected to pay towards their loans under the new structure, for incomes up to $100,000.

MAXIMUM LOAN PAYMENTS IN DOLLARS BY INCOME FOR AN INDIVIDUAL RECIPIENT



These changes increase the generosity of the RAP for recipients. They will also increase participation in the program, because they will raise the levels of income at which student loan payments could account for a relevant proportion of household income. Without attempting to define what might constitute financial hardship amongst graduates, this policy targets considerable resources to address such hardship where it might exist, more efficiently than would any form of broader debt forgiveness or interest rate reduction. This change continues to bring Canada closer to operating a de facto income contingent loan program.

The Liberal Platform for the 2019 Federal Election promised to strengthen the RAP, among other student financial aid commitments. As shown in the table below, the budget strengthens RAP to a much greater extent than the 2019 election promise, though there is no extended post-graduation grace period for student loan payments, or exemption for parents of children under the age of five. Those with the lowest incomes who might have benefitted from such payment exemptions will obtain much the same benefit from the RAP improvements in the budget – the greater RAP expansion is more targeted to those with the greatest need, as opposed to a universal program that would benefit many graduates earning high incomes.

Comparing the 2019 Platform and 2021 Budget with respect to Canada Student Loan repayment conditions

Elements	2019 Platform	2021 Budget
Repayment assistance program (RAP)	Raising the repayment threshold from \$25,000 to \$35,000	Increase the threshold for repayment assistance to \$40,000 for borrowers living alone from current \$25,000, and for students from larger families. Reducing the cap on monthly student loan payments from 20% of household income to 10% of household income. Indexing new cut-offs to inflation. Cost of \$203.5 million over four years, then \$64.2 million per year ongoing.
Grace period on student loan programs following graduation	Extend the grace period from six months to two years. Exempt parents of children under age five from making student loan payments.	Nothing directly, but RAP improvements would address the same problem for many families with low to moderate incomes.

As one last temporary measure focused on repayment conditions, the budget promises to extend the waiver of interest accrual on Canada Student Loans and Canada Apprentice Loans for an additional year until 2022-23.

Supports for Students with Disabilities

The other significant change to the CSLP focuses on students with disabilities. CSLP is the vehicle for important financial assistance of up to $20,000 to students with disabilities, to assist in financing assistive technologies and other forms of support. These students are also eligible for more generous repayment assistance on their loans. To date, however, eligibility has been restricted to date to those with a "permanent" disability, defined as:

> *A functional limitation caused by a physical or mental impairment that restricts the ability of a person to perform the daily activities necessary to participate in studies at a post-secondary school level or in the labour force and is expected to remain with the person for the person's expected life.*

This limitation to permanent disabilities has long been subject to criticism, notably with the rising awareness of mental wellness and mental illness and shifting ideas about what constitutes a permanent disability. As well, the cost of diagnosing a permanent disability was a major barrier to accessing disability assistance. The budget indicates that the CSLP will extend supports to students whose disabilities are "persistent or prolonged, but not necessarily permanent". This represents an important improvement, although how to define "persistent and prolonged" and how it will be verified will surely remain a subject of important debate. The Government estimates that the new policy will increase the number of students and graduates receiving support by approximately 40,000, an increase of over 50% relative to the number of recipients of such supports in 2018-2019 (just under 77,000).

Other Changes

Additional changes to the CSLP relate closely to a three-year pilot program called Skills Boost, announced in the 2018 Budget, intending to support learners who return to studies from the workforce. The 2018 Budget firstly topped up the CSG for such students by $1,600, and secondly allowed students to have their eligibility or CSLP grants and loans assessed based on their current year's income rather than their prior year's income. The latter element recognized that the previous year's income might have little relevance to a learner's financial circumstances while in post-secondary education – especially where the learner returned to post-secondary education precisely due to a loss of employment and/or income. The 2021 Budget extends the $1,600 CSG top-up for an additional two years to July 2023, and perhaps more significantly permanently grants learners the right to using the current year's income rather than previous year's income in determining their financial aid eligibility and amounts. This last change has potentially significant implications for strengthening access to student financial aid among adult learners moving forward.

The last, modest investment is to support scholarships in memory of the lives lost in the shooting down of Flight 752 from Tehran to Kyiv. Approximately 51 of the 176 passengers aboard were employed or studying at Canadian post-secondary institutions, a profound loss for these institutions and their communities.

THE OVERALL FISCAL IMPACT

Together, these changes represent a substantial increase in student financial aid spending. The biggest expenditure in the budget by far is temporary. The Government of Canada will spend $3.1 billion over two years on the doubled CSG. Suspending interest accrual on student loans will cost $392.7 million in 2022-23.

The permanent spending changes are more modest, but nevertheless quite significant. We can provide an indication of the significance of changes based off the CSLP 2018-2019 annual report. Expenditures from the three major permanent program changes in order from largest to smallest are listed below. The increase in supports for students with disabilities is the most significant. In most cases, the estimated ongoing spending after 2025-26 is lower than for 2025-26, though all spending from these programs depends on economic projections.

COMPARISON OF PERMANENT CSLP EXPENDITURES TO 2018-2019 FIGURES

	2018-2019 Spending	Annualised cost of Budget 2021 changes to 2025-26	Approximate percentage increment
Extending supports to students with persistent or prolonged disabilities	$120 million*	$109.5 million	+91.3%*
Repayment assistance program (RAP) modifications	$248.2 million	$98.6 million	+39.7%
Skills Boost**	NA	$73.2 million	NA

* This includes only spending on grants for students with disabilities, and not repayment assistance benefits. ** This includes both elements relating to this program, i.e. the grant and the flexibility in years used to calculate eligibility for assistance.

YOUTH JOBS

The federal government highlighted the severe economic strain the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young Canadians, especially those in racialized and otherwise under-represented communities.

CONNECTING YOUTH TO JOBS

The budget commits $721 million over two years to connect youth to high quality employment opportunities. There are three initiatives in this area: The Student Work Placement Program (SWPP), the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) and the Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program.

The Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) was created in the 2019 budget, and has sought to connect post-secondary students with paid work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences. The program emphasised in particular a wage subsidy, of up to $5,000 per student – or $7,000 for students in first year or from under-represented groups such as women in STEM, persons with disabilities, newcomers, Indigenous students and members of visible minorities. These amounts would represent respectively up to 50% or 70% of the wages for the employed students. The 2021 budget commits to increasing the subsidy under the program to 75%, or $7,500, for all students. It would also increase the number of sponsored placements by 20,000 to 50,000 in total, an increase of 66.7%. The 2019 budget had committed already to increase the number of placements to 40,000 by 2023-2024, so the 2021 budget essentially accelerates the growth in the program from what was previously been planned.

The YESS program focuses on supporting vulnerable youth facing multiple barriers to employment. These youth would not typically be post-secondary education students, but is focused especially on youth who are or would otherwise likely be not in employment, education or training (NEET). The Fall 2020 Economic Statement committed $575.3 million in 2020-21 and 2021-22 to support 45,300 placements over these two years. The 2021 budget commits additional funds to support 7,000 additional placements in 2022-23. We had difficulty interpreting these figures, but our impression is that the new money reduces the decline in the program in 2022-23, but the program is still set to fall back in size markedly.

Finally, the CSJ programme provides youth with temporary employment in the summer months. Subsidies can cover the full minimum wage cost of employing a student under terms set in the Fall 2020 Economic Statement. In the Fall 2020 economic statement, the government increased funding to the CSJ program to support an additional 94,000 placements in 2021-22. The 2021 budget commits to supporting 75,000 additional job placements in 2022-23.

The table below provides an analysis of these 2021 budget commitments relative to previous commitments. The most expensive of the commitments is to the CSJ, in dollars and relative terms.

YOUTH PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

Program	Relevant year	Prior commitment	2021 Budget	Change
SWPP	2021	$148	$239.8	+162%
YESS	2022-23	$60	$109.3	+182%
CSJ	2022-23	$112	$371.8	+332%

Overall, these investments speak to an ongoing commitment to supporting youth employment through wage subsidy schemes. Only the YESS programme will be reducing in size relative to the pandemic period, albeit still remaining larger than what was previously planned, while the other two programmes are set to continue growing. It is difficult to assess the need for these programmes in the current conjuncture. Youth have been disproportionately disadvantaged by the pandemic-induced recession. The question is whether they will be disproportionately disadvantaged in the recovery. If these incentives lead employers to create jobs they would not otherwise then the programs should prove worthwhile. It is difficult to judge in advance whether that will be the case.

Skills and Trades Training

In a what's old is new again moment (look up the old Sectoral Councils), the new Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program (SWSP) will promote collaboration amongst employers and sector associations to deliver industry-relevant training. The aim is to deliver training to 90,000 Canadians over three years starting in 2021-22. A new Apprenticeship Service will aim to assist 55,000 first-year apprentices in Red Seal construction and manufacturing trades by providing $5,000 for small and medium-sized employers to hire a first-year apprentice, and $10,000 to hire a first-year apprentices from underrepresented groups. Finally, a new Skills for Success program will provide funding for organisations that deliver training in literacy, numeracy, and transferable soft skills for an estimated 90,000 Canadians. Allocations for these three programs total $1.728 billion over three years. Once in full operation, it appears that annual funding for the programs will $365 million for the SWSP, $217 million for the Apprenticeship Service and $125 million, judging by allocations in the last of the three years.

MITACS

Mitacs is a not-for-profit organisation that has been consistently receiving significant funds from the Government of Canada. The organisation's focus has been especially on graduate students. The budget commits $708 million in funding for Mitacs to provide at least 85,000 WIL placements over the next five years. The budget seems to be another step in an on-going shift in Mitacs' orientation from promoting advanced applied research and innovation towards principally acting as a sponsor for student employment. This is an evolution that appears to have been little acknowledged.

THE CANADA DIGITAL ADOPTION PROGRAM

As part of a new Canada Digital Adoption Program, which is designed to support jobs and aid small and medium-sized businesses with adopting new technology and move some operations online, Budget 2021 devotes modest resources to "helping businesses seize new technological opportunities" through research and development taking place in colleges, CEGEPS, polytechnics, and some businesses.

Beginning in 2021-22, $46.9 million is earmarked over two years to support R&D taking place in place is these locations. Another $5.7 million over two years, also starting in 2021-22, is designed to give businesses more access to the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program's Interactive Visits. Here, firms can access the expertise, facilities, and equipment available at the Technology Access Centres found at many colleges.

Also notable is the Digital Adoption Program's pledge to train 28,000 young Canadians, which it calls "a Canadian technology corps," and send them into the field to work with small and medium-sized businesses. Budget 2021 is silent on where this youth "technology corps" will receive this training, however.

Innovation

Innovation Funding

Budget 2021 expanded significantly on innovation funding announced both in the 2019 Budget and in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement. The most eye-opening commitment was an incremental expansion of the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), with another $7.2 billion committed starting in 2021-22 over seven years. This fund was first announced in 2017 with a commitment for $1.26 billion annually over five years and there was an increased commitment of $100 million per year over five years in 2019. Budget 2021 substantially increases the SIF pool. Large tranches of those funds are earmarked towards specific sectors, including $5 billion towards the Net Zero Accelerator (which is inclusive of the $3 billion announced in the 2020 Statement), $1.75 billion towards aerospace, and $1 billion in support for Canada's life sciences and bio-manufacturing sector.

The $5 billion earmarked towards creating the "Net Zero" economy are spread out over a wide range of initiatives, including investment in clean technology projects, promoting the spread of zero emission vehicles, investing in carbon capture technology, and so on. Many of these fields are in areas where the Canadian PSE sector can and will undoubtedly contribute, but there is limited money that is specifically orientated towards the sector.

For SMEs, the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistant Program has been provided with $500 million over five years and $100 ongoing thereafter to expand the IRAP with an aim of supporting 2500 "innovative" firms.

And finally, there's a send-off for the superclusters—the budget earmarked $60 million over two years to continue supporting projects launched under those initiatives, which provides them with some runway to complete their operations and for recognizing exceptional outlays arising from COVID.

TARGETED RESEARCH FUNDS

Some of the funds within the SIF have clear links to PSE: the Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy funds includes $162.2 million over ten years to attract and retain top academic talent in this field, $48 million over five years towards the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research that is partially committed towards knowledge mobilization, and $40 million over five years to provide additional computing capacity for national AI institutes across the country.

CIHR received $250 million over three years to implement a new Clinical Trials Fund. A considerable amount of this money will go to health research hospitals and academics. There is another $250 million over four years to be directed towards the tri-council to create a new biomedical research fund. Both funds are generally geared towards creating a stronger bio-manufacturing sector. One of the highlighted beneficiaries of this investment in biomedical research is Saskatoon's Vaccine and Infection Disease Organization, which is connected to the University of Saskatchewan.

While the Budget is quick to note that these funds "goes beyond responding to COVID-19," one can't help but think that Canada's incapacity to rapidly produce vaccines plays a role in the genesis of these new funds.

There are some other funds earmarked for the tri-council, including:

- $46.9 million over 2 years, starting in 2021-22, for establishing NSERC-funded research partnerships between colleges, CEGEPs, polytechnics, and businesses.
- $12 million over 3 years for SSHRC to "fund academic research into systemic barriers facing diverse groups."

These funds are substantial, but compared to the overall outlay in innovation funding, we see that the government does not necessarily see the value in providing funding for basic inquiry research. There is still a sense that the government is seeking to pick winners rather than fund growth more broadly.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In contrast to innovation funding, Budget 2021 provides little in the way of new infrastructure investment in post-secondary education—there is no redux of the Strategic Investment Fund for new buildings here. The most notable effort is found within the $2.2 billion investment over seven years toward “growing a vibrant domestic life sciences sector,” Within this life sciences investment, $500 million over four years is earmarked for the Canada Foundation for Innovation to support the infrastructure and bio-capital needs of both postsecondary institutions and research hospitals (this is *in addition* to the biomedical research fund, above).

This investment in research hospitals and bio-science facilities aside, this level of infrastructure funding is far below what postsecondary associations wished for. Universities Canada had called for $7 billion in funding for “shovel-ready infrastructure,” a significant jump from the $3.8 billion it requested previously.

Postsecondary institutions also wished for an investment in green campus infrastructure. Some of this investment will likely come from the increase in SIF funding. However, there may be some shortfalls here, as the U15 called for a Green Campus Infrastructure and Innovation Fund worth $2 billion, while Polytechnics Canada had asked for a relaunching of Budget 2016’s Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investments Fund that would promote both new construction and green retrofits.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

This budget expands the existing financial support programs for Indigenous post-secondary students and institutions, recognizing additional support they need during COVID-19. Budget 2021 provides an additional $150.6 million to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the Inuit and Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategies over the next two years. An additional investment of $102 million will be allocated in 2021-2022 and $75 million in 2022-2023, though no word is mentioned on how this funding will be split across the three programs.

This investment builds on previous funds. In Budget 2019, First Nations received $327.5 million over five years to renew and expand funding for PSSSP and $7.5 million over three years to support engagement on the development of integrated First Nations regional post-secondary education models. Budget 2019 allocated $125.5 million over ten years and $21.8 million ongoing for a new Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy, and $362 million over ten years and $40 million ongoing for a new Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy.

SUMMARY OF INDIGENOUS PROGRAM SPENDING

	As of 2018	2019 Budget	2021 Budget
First Nations' Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP)	$372 million annually	$327.5 million over five years $7.5 million over three years to the development of integrated First Nations regional post-secondary education models	Additional $150.6 over two years (2021-23) to mitigate COVID-19 impact.
The Inuit Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy	0	$125.5 million over ten years and $21.8 million ongoing	
The Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy	0	$362 million over ten years and $40 million ongoing	

This year's budget also provides an additional $26.4 million to Indigenous post-secondary institutions as a one-time payment in 2021-2022 as COVID-19 support. However, no actual model for future spending was announced (which suggests that these discussions are going nowhere fast), but the government put some money on the table anyways, presumably to show some degree of good faith. It will be interesting to see how these discussions progress.

This totals to an additional investment of $177 million to continue the Government's specific COVID-19 support to Indigenous and Northern communities and organizations initiated in 2020-2021. Thus, in response to COVID-19 and to mitigate its impact Indigenous post-secondary students, the Government of Canada invested last year $75.2 million in distinctions-based support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation students pursuing post-secondary education. This investment largely recognizes the financial difficulties many students have been facing during the pandemic. It aims to compensate for lost income that many Indigenous students rely on for educational and living expenses.

Budget 2021 also provides $8 million over 2021 to 2023 to the NWT to support the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university. After a few years of deliberation, the North West territorial government has released the implementation plan to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university over the course of six years. This plan’s milestones include an academic plan, re-establishing a new board of governance and completing a quality review of the university’s plans and programs. In November 2020, Aurora College also announced a transformational three-year strategic plan, ‘Strengthening the foundation and planning for change’, including the integration of research and innovation as a strategic priority. The investment promised to Aurora College is comparatively lower than what Yukon College received. It was announced then that Yukon College would get the investment of $26M over five years for the construction of a new science building as part of its transformation to Yukon University.

International Students

Less than a week prior to Budget 2021, immigration minister Marco Mendocino announced a new immigration pathway for approximately 40,000 international graduates who are already in Canada. Part of an effort to aid 90,000 essential workers and international graduates achieve permanent residency to aid the country’s post-Covid economic recovery, the plan offers a path to permanent residency for individuals who have completed an eligible post-secondary program in Canada no earlier than January 2017, are employed in Canada with a valid work permit, and reside in Canada with valid temporary status when applying and when the application is approved. This temporary stream will remain open until November 5, 2021 or when it reaches its limit, whichever comes first.

Little is said, however, about international students, whether they are currently in the country or are prospective attendees of a Canadian institution. Universities Canada had lobbied for an official recognition of international students' $21.6 billion impact on the Canadian economy. It also called for a dedicated federal transfer to universities to compensate for the decline in international student enrolment and for more investments in branding, recruitment, and visa processing. Though visa processing is included in Budget 2021, the $6.3 million provided over three years is to support faster processing and improved service delivery for temporary foreign workers, not international students. No new federal supports for international students are forthcoming in Budget 2021.

VARIA

Change to postdoctoral taxes: Budget 2021 corrects an issue pertaining to earned income that may be of interest to postdoctoral fellows. While income earned from a postdoctoral fellowship is fully taxable income, it did not qualify as income for the purpose of determining contribution limits to registered retirement savings plan (RRSP), limiting the contribution room that postdoctoral fellows may have had. Budget 2021 makes postdoctoral fellowship income earned in 2021 and subsequent years count toward deductible RRSP contributions and allows for postdoctoral fellows to apply retroactively for an adjustment in their RRSP contribution room for relevant years from 2011 to 2020.

Bilingual Education Support: The Budget notably provided $121.3 million over three years to "make high-quality post-secondary education minority-language education available across Canada." While this fund may have been in the works for a while, the timing of this announcement is rather conspicuous given the crisis at Laurentian.

Community Workforce Development Program. Noting the need to help communities to develop resilience and diversity their economies, the federal government intends to spend $55 million over three years, starting in 2021-2022, for a Community Workforce Development Program administered by Employment and Social Development Canada. The program is intended to fund community-driven plans to address workforce development. employment training, and work placements. There are two streams: a national stream for major sectors like energy and regional streams that align with regional development agencies.

Conclusion

This is a difficult budget to evaluate as it contains so many temporary or short-term measures. Many of the items which are of the most interesting in this budget - on student financial aid, Indigenous education, youth employment - are time-limited to two years. Others are intriguing but vague - more money to MITACS but for what purpose is unclear, something that looks like a resurrection of the sector councils. It is, to be honest, occasionally amazing how little detail there is in a budget that took 25 months to prepare.

Some things are positive. The student aid package, for instance, contains several extraordinary measures. What people may choose to focus on is the two-year extension of last year's doubling of Canada Student Grants from $3,000 to $6,000, it’s not clear whether this will be permanent and therefore it's not clear in the end how significant it will be. On the other hand, the changes to the RAP repayment threshold and the repayment maxima which will completely change how young borrowers experience their first couple of years of repayment. But there is also the issue of changing the definition of permanent disability, which is likely to provide over 40,000 students with extra assistance.

It was something of a genuine surprise that there was no major dedicated fund for post-secondary infrastructure because infrastructure is a simple play (universities and colleges may still benefit from some general infrastructure funds but nothing dedicated). Less surprising was how much of the R&D funding in this budget is going into boutique, bespoke endeavours (AI! Quantum!) and how little is going into general inquiry-based research. It's not just a matter of the government basically ignoring the 2017 Naylor report which *specifically* argued against such boutique spending; it suggests that when it comes to research, the government is still chasing hi-tech sugar highs rather than attempting to catalyse innovation and growth more broadly.

It's a mixed bag: useful, smart stuff on student aid, welcome but unstructured initiatives on Indigenous education, but when it comes to turning Canada into a genuine knowledge economy, the steak-to-sizzle ratio continues to disappoint.