

Background:

1. Promote enrollment in programs that address key labour shortages on PEI.

This would include a variety of measures, developed in consultation with industry, educational institutions, and labour groups. For example, a Green Government would make sure there is adequate support for Island workers looking to reskill or upskill, including at little or no cost. We would provide experiential learning opportunities on PEI that are relevant to students' area of study which not only gives them relevant skills but increases their employability after graduation.

2. Work with community organizations and employers to retain skilled graduates and recruit internationally-trained workers.

A Green Government would work to enhance programs offered by various non-governmental organizations to support newcomers and help employers retain recent graduates and immigrant workers. Organizations would include the Immigration & Refugee Services Association of PEI, the Greater Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce (e.g. [Lead the Shift](#) program), and the Atlantic Student Development Alliance.

3. Convene a panel of employer and employee representatives from the construction industry to explore the creation of a wage grid for construction.

This is modeled on Manitoba's *Construction Wages Industry Act* which sets out a wage grid for construction industry jobs; this provides transparency and promotes wage fairness in the sector, while also signaling the wages that are available to workers outside the province. Manitoba's Act has been in place for decades and has the support of both industry and workers. Any changes to the grid are done in consultation with those parties. According to BuildForce Canada, Manitoba is one of the few Canadian provinces that expects to have more entrants to the construction sector than retirements over the next 6 years.¹

4. Improve our student financial assistance programs, including:

- **Cover expected student loan payments for the 2023-24 year to support recent graduates in this period of high inflation and economic uncertainty.** Rather than simply defer student loan payments, this would immediately reduce graduates' debt loads, encouraging them to spend money in the local economy. This would cost an estimated \$2.35M.
- **No longer require payments on student loans where a person has less than \$40,000 in gross income.** This would follow changes made by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. This threshold would be indexed to inflation in subsequent years and would also increase based on household size.
- **Update student debt forgiveness programs to encourage more students to work on PEI after graduation.** Currently, the Debt Reduction Program only applies to

¹ <https://www.buildforce.ca/en/lmi/forecast-summary-reports>

students with student financial aid from PEI, effectively excluding other recent graduates who might otherwise be incentivized to live in PEI. We would explore potential changes to the Debt Reduction Program, including reviewing the possibility of covering students' debt payments to other student financial assistance lenders, in an effort to attract and retain a broader group of recent graduates.

- **Increase financial assistance for graduate students doing innovative research.** Graduate student education has less student financial assistance available, despite the innovative nature of many of these programs. A Green Government would immediately dedicate \$500,000 in non-repayable assistance to support graduate students doing innovative research, with the possibility to provide greater funding in the future.

5. Review funding agreements with Island postsecondary institutions to make sure they have adequate and predictable funding.

Our post-secondary institutions receive a large portion of their funding from the provincial government in annual grants; however this share has been declining. Alex Usher of Higher Education Research Associates notes that UPEI's public funding has declined by 11% in real terms over the last 5 years—the largest decline of any Atlantic province.²

The PEI Auditor General has flagged concerns with PEI's funding agreements with universities; the last agreement for grant funding in 2021.³ A Green Government would ensure multi-year funding agreements are in place to provide greater long-term predictability in funding. This will give our post-secondary institutions more stability and enable them to better plan ahead.

In recognition of our commitment to support the implementation of UPEI's new strategic research plan, we would also consider restricted funding for the purpose of furthering its objectives.⁴

² <https://higheredstrategy.com/provincial-budgets-2022/>

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-auditor-general-annual-report-2023-1.6768057>

⁴ Available here: https://files.upei.ca/research/upei_strategic_research_plan.pdf