

Canadian universities commit to progress on equity, diversity and inclusion

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Universities Canada members voted to uphold seven “inclusive excellence” principles and to undertake an action plan from 2017 to 2022.

At Universities Canada’s fall membership meeting, university presidents endorsed a set of principles to [advance diversity, equity and inclusion](#) on their campuses, and committed to a five-year action plan to measure their progress and outcomes.

“It’s the coming together of a number of things that have led us on this path,” said Mike Mahon, the president and vice-chancellor of the University of Lethbridge, who was voted in as the new board chair of Universities Canada at the meeting on Oct. 25. On top of the many conversations over the years in the university community around creating inclusion, “there is this landscape around us – the commitment of the federal government to be as inclusive, diverse and equitable as possible,” he said, and that includes efforts to increase equity and diversity in the [Canada Research Chairs program](#).

“We need to challenge ourselves to do a better job in terms of recruitment and retention of diverse communities,” Dr. Mahon said, adding that faculty and staff should reflect the diversity of the student population. “Similarly, on the research front, we do need to challenge ourselves to look at many of our practices – whether that be peer review, who sits on panels, these sorts of things – so that we ensure a diversity of perspectives.”

As part of the action plan spanning 2017 to 2022, Universities Canada will conduct a regular survey of member institutions to collect and share data to inform best practices. The national organization also intends to “promote investments in the K-12 pipeline, in student aid, mobility and work-integrated learning opportunities, scholarships, research grants and programming” as part of its federal advocacy.

The seven inclusive excellence principles that member universities voted to commit to are as follows:

1. We believe our universities are enriched by diversity and inclusion. As leaders of universities that aspire to be diverse, fair and open, we will make our personal commitment to diversity and inclusion evident.
2. We commit our institutions to developing and/or maintaining an equity, diversity and inclusion action plan in consultation with students, faculty, staff and administrators, and particularly with individuals from under-represented groups. We commit to demonstrating progress over time.
3. We commit to taking action to provide equity of access and opportunity. To do so, we will identify and address barriers to, and provide supports for, the recruitment and retention of senior university leaders, university Board and Senate members, faculty, staff and students, particularly from under-represented groups.
4. We will work with our faculty and staff, search firms, and our governing boards to ensure that candidates from all backgrounds are provided support in their career progress and success in senior leadership positions at our institutions.
5. We will seek ways to integrate inclusive excellence throughout our university’s teaching, research, community engagement and governance. In doing so, we will engage with students, faculty, staff, our boards of governors, senates and alumni to raise awareness and encourage all efforts.
6. We will be guided in our efforts by evidence, including evidence of what works in addressing any barriers and obstacles that may discourage members of under-represented groups to advance. We commit to sharing evidence of practices that are working, in Canada and abroad, with higher education institutions.

7. Through our national membership organization, Universities Canada, we will work to generate greater awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusive excellence throughout Canadian higher education.

While not binding on Universities Canada's members, the principles are meant to serve as a guide that is adaptable to the needs of individual institutions. In a similar vein, in June 2015, member institutions [committed to a set of principles on Indigenous higher education](#) as a step toward closing the education gap and creating more opportunities for Indigenous students.