

October 28, 2014

The Honourable Kelly Regan
Minister of Labour and Advanced Education
Department of Labour and Advanced Education
5151 Terminal Road, 6th Floor
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 1A1

Dear Minister Regan:

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce was pleased with your announcement a few weeks ago of public consultations on the future of Nova Scotia's university sector. Growing and Nurturing the Skilled Workforce is a key pillar of the Chamber's 2013-2018 Strategic Plan and a strong university sector will be an important partner in achieving that goal.

The One Nova Scotia Report made it clear that many sectors of our society will face challenges over the coming decades and universities will be no exception. On the surface there are many pressing issues facing the sector:

- Enrolment: The 2010 O'Neill Report projected that Nova Scotia's prime university demographic of 18-29 year-olds is projected to shrink by 24% from 2011-2031. Even worse, 70% of this decline is expected to occur by 2021.ⁱ While there is room to increase university enrolment from certain underrepresented groups and international students, Nova Scotia's changing demographics are a serious concern for our universities.
- Cost: Your department has stated that universities estimate that they will need an additional \$50 million over the next few years.ⁱⁱ As the provincial government continues to struggle with its finances, universities will be forced to innovate in order to deliver high quality education at an affordable cost. This fiscal strain will also increase the pressure on universities to be publically accountable for the money the public provides.
- Outcomes: It is no secret that it is a difficult time to be a young person looking for a job in Nova Scotia. While there are many factors that contribute to this problem, universities will have to work even harder to make sure that they are providing students with the skills they need to succeed in the job market.

These are all very challenging problems, and unfortunately, there are no easy answers. That said, it is important to take a step back and acknowledge the critically important role that universities play in Nova Scotia's economy.

- Exports: Nova Scotia universities have a large and growing population of international students who bring significant economic benefits to our province. Expanding our ability to deliver a

world-class education to students from other countries is very important for a province that has long struggled to increase its exports.ⁱⁱⁱ

- Recruitment: Universities are a magnet for recruitment with 48% of students coming from outside of Nova Scotia.^{iv} This gives us a chance to try and keep many talented young people that would never have come to our province otherwise.
- Research and Productivity: Our universities consistently perform innovative research and have a proven ability to attract outside research funds.^v Improving the commercialization of these discoveries is critical for building a more productive and innovative private sector.
- Educational Attainment: Nova Scotia has a very well educated workforce that serves as an excellent asset for companies looking to expand and move to Nova Scotia. The strength of our existing workforce is due in no small part to the work of our universities.

In conclusion, we are calling on the provincial government and universities to come together and build a post-secondary education sector that:

- Is fiscally sustainable and publically accountable;
- Provides all of its graduates with the tools they need to succeed in today's labour market;
- Continues to focus on delivering high quality education services to students from Nova Scotia, the rest of Canada, and the around the world;
- Delivers groundbreaking research discoveries and supplies the necessary partnerships to bring them to market.

The Chamber has been and will continue to be a champion of a strong university sector in Nova Scotia. Their economic impact on our province is undeniable and it is in all of our interests to do what we can to make this important sector even stronger. If you would like to meet to discuss these issues please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Valerie Payn, President and CEO
Halifax Chamber of Commerce

References

ⁱ http://studentsns.ca/nova-scotias-enrollment-challenge/#_edn1

ⁱⁱ <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20141008005>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.atlanticuniversities.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CONSUPReports/Export%20Value%20GP%20update_Dec%2712%20Final.pdf (page one)

^{iv} http://www.mphec.ca/media/53667/Enr_Table7_2012_2013E.pdf (page one)

^v http://www.atlanticuniversities.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CONSUPReports/Export%20Value%20GP%20update_Dec%2712%20Final.pdf (page two)