

## Quality of Education

### Principles

Standards for quality of post-secondary education allows institutions and faculty to efficiently communicate program expectations to students.

Consistent teaching standards for course content and delivery aid in ensuring a high-quality academic experience across virtual and in-person environments

Given the colonial structure of post-secondary institutions, standardizing the diversification of curriculum will increase enrollment and encourage student participation in previously exclusive spaces.

### The Issue

The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary environment has undergone a significant disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many institutions offering fully online or varied versions of blended models of course delivery. Given the shift to new methods of teaching and learning, and the eleven year timespan since the last comprehensive review of the post-secondary sector in Nova Scotia, there is a need for an overview of the quality of education in the province. “Eighty-three percent of students are concerned that they will not receive an education valued the same as in previous years”<sup>1</sup>, however, due to shifts in the post-secondary educational environment this year, these sentiments may continue for years to come and affect enrollment, among other things.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission reported that “university participation of Maritimers in the Maritimes has been steadily decreasing over the past decade”<sup>2</sup>, and the home provinces participation rate in Nova Scotia decreased by 1.3% over ten years<sup>3</sup>. We know that international student enrollment has gone up by 23.2% in 2019-20, however, these increases will not be able to fully offset the consistent increase in youth-out-migration in Nova Scotia, as it impacts housing and taxes. Post-secondary students in Nova Scotia face significant financial challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and “75% of students believe that COVID-19’s impact on their financial and employment situations will last beyond 2020”<sup>4</sup>. Students unable to find work in Nova Scotia and unable to afford their education, will likely seek opportunities outside of Nova Scotia, greatly impacting our economy and the educational landscape as a whole.

### The Role of the Provincial Government

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<sup>1</sup> “Students are still worried.” CASA. June 15th, 2020. [https://www.casa-acae.com/students\\_are\\_still\\_worried\\_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4](https://www.casa-acae.com/students_are_still_worried_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4)

<sup>2</sup> *University Enrollment 2019-2020*. 1st ed. Vol. 18. Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2021. 1-4. <http://www.mphec.ca/media/200206/Annual-Digest-2019-2020.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *University Enrollment 2019-2020*.

<sup>4</sup> “Students are still worried.” CASA. June 15th, 2020. [https://www.casa-acae.com/students\\_are\\_still\\_worried\\_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4](https://www.casa-acae.com/students_are_still_worried_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4)

The post-secondary sector in Nova Scotia is critical to the economic success of the province, as seen in the 2020-21 Fiscal Budget where education and preparing youth for the workforce were key investment principles<sup>5</sup>. Given the shift for all ten universities and the Nova Scotian Community College system to some form of virtual or blended learning, there has been extensive changes to the quality of this new form of education, and “68% of students believe that their remote classes do not offer the same value as their in-person classes”<sup>6</sup>. The perceived decline in educational quality is however not fully due to COVID-19. The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission reported a consistent decline in enrollment in Nova Scotia for home province residents (-0.8%), students from other Maritime provinces (-0.4%) and Canadian students from outside the Maritimes (-0.7%) for 2019-2020<sup>7</sup>, with all numbers reported before the impact on enrollment due to COVID-19.

In 2015, the Nova Scotia Provincial Government undertook a comprehensive review of the Nova Scotia public education system through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development<sup>8</sup>. The result of this review was “Nova Scotia’s Action Plan for Education”<sup>9</sup>, which laid out goals for a fundamental change to the school system. In 2018, the provincial government released the “Nova Scotia Teaching Standards” Comprehensive Guide, in order to fulfill the goals of the review<sup>10</sup> and as a means of ensuring high quality teaching in Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia post-secondary sector however, has not had a comprehensive review since 2010 when the “Report on the University System in Nova Scotia” was prepared by Tim O’Neill for Premier Darrel Dexter<sup>11</sup>. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education is required to complete an Accountability Report pursuant to the Nova Scotia Finance Act<sup>12</sup>, however, this report does not outline areas of improvement for programming, but rather for allocation of government funds. The Nova Scotia post-secondary system is in need of another comprehensive review in order to facilitate the creation of standardized methods of course delivery, grading and diversifying curriculum, evidenced by the move to increased virtual learning. The Nova Scotia Provincial Government and Nova Scotia’s universities have a Memorandum of Understanding

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<sup>5</sup> *Budget 2020-21*. Report. March 2019.

<https://beta.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/documents/6-1692/ftb-bfi-039-en-budget-2019-2020.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> “Students are still worried.” CASA. June 15th, 2020. [https://www.casa-acae.com/students\\_are\\_still\\_worried\\_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4](https://www.casa-acae.com/students_are_still_worried_covid19?fbclid=IwAR08aGBJXboMvlgOC93cd2IA8qrxSVrXdfUWJ3LtR300E3wkSfhvTcat5t4)

<sup>7</sup> *University Enrollment 2019-2020*.

<sup>8</sup> “Nova Scotia’s Action Plan for Education.” Nova Scotia’s Action Plan for Education.

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/education-actionplan>.

<sup>9</sup> *The 3Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild—Nova Scotia’s Action Plan for Education*. Publication. 2015.

<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/sites/default/files/docs/educationactionplan2015en.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards Excellence in Teaching and Learning Comprehensive Guide*. Publication. July 2018. [https://srce.ca/sites/default/files//Nova Scotia Teaching Standards-Comprehensive Guide-2018.pdf](https://srce.ca/sites/default/files//Nova%20Scotia%20Teaching%20Standards-Comprehensive%20Guide-2018.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> O’Neill, Tim. Report on the University System in Nova Scotia. Publication. September 2010.

[https://novascotia.ca/lae/HigherEducation/documents/Report\\_on\\_the\\_Higher\\_Education\\_System\\_in\\_Nova\\_Scotia.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/lae/HigherEducation/documents/Report_on_the_Higher_Education_System_in_Nova_Scotia.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Nova Scotia. Department of Finance. *Finance Act*. 69B. NS, 2010.

[https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/61st\\_2nd/3rd\\_read/b035.htm](https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/61st_2nd/3rd_read/b035.htm).

which is negotiated and signed every five years, outlining shared priorities and current memorandum of understanding runs from 2019-20 to 2023-24<sup>13</sup>. The Nova Scotia Provincial Government through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education has the jurisdiction to once again pursue a comprehensive review of the post-secondary sector in order to facilitate standards for quality of education.

## **Theme 1: Course Delivery**

### Principles

Standards for quality of post-secondary education allows institutions and faculty to efficiently communicate program expectations to students.

Consistent teaching standards for course content and delivery, aid in ensuring a high-quality academic experience across virtual and in-person environments

### Concern

The post-secondary landscape has not had a sufficient and comprehensive review since 2010, which in combination with the shift to new forms of learning in the 2020 Academic year is leading to decreased enrollment and affecting students perceived value of their education.

### Resolution

The Nova Scotia Provincial Government in partnership with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education should engage in a comprehensive review of the post-secondary system in NS, similar to the 2015 review of the secondary school system.

### Supporting Evidence

As previously mentioned, universities in Nova Scotia are facing declining enrollment across the board, given the short term impacts of COVID-19 and the long term shift of the learning environment towards an increasingly virtual space. Additionally, given blended learning models, and the lack of jobs for new graduates, there is an increasing need for a review of the current post-secondary education system. In 2015, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development underwent a comprehensive review process, resulting in a formal package outlining standards for teachers and its impact on quality of education in the province<sup>14</sup>. While the Department of Labour and Advanced Education does have to follow standards for the allotment of investments in accordance with the Nova Scotia Finance Act<sup>15</sup>, there are no current requirements for

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<sup>13</sup> "Province, Universities Sign Memorandum of Understanding." Nova Scotia Labour and Advanced Education. January 22, 2021. <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20190913001>.

<sup>14</sup> *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards Excellence in Teaching and Learning Comprehensive Guide*

<sup>15</sup> Government of Nova Scotia. Department of Finance. *Finance Act*.

standardization of course delivery, which would encourage use of best practices and instill a positive perception of post-secondary in NS. The implementation of standards for course delivery will ensure efficiency for faculty who themselves are also adjusting to a new learning environment, and will provide clarity for students about expectations and how to be successful [need stats for faculty perceptions]. The International Organization for Standardization recognizes the implementation of standards for programming as essential elements as they ensure reliability, interoperability of departments & faculties and as good practice in the codification of knowledge [cite]. Through the implementation of standards for teaching in post-secondary, Nova Scotia would emerge as a leader in the higher education community, in recognizing that the landscape is changing and stakeholders would benefit from guidance.

An issue with the implementation of standards for course delivery lies within the area of academic freedom for faculty and staff, and how standards may inhibit the sharing of free ideas and knowledge. However, standards for course delivery, as evidenced by the standards created for the secondary school sector are focused on supporting excellence of teaching within the classroom and supporting high expectations of student excellence, as opposed to restricting current practices. [cite]

## **Theme 2: Diversifying Curriculum**

### Principles

Given the colonial structure of post-secondary institutions, standardizing the diversification of curriculum will increase enrollment and encourage student participation in previously exclusive spaces.

### Concern

The secondary school system in Nova Scotia has invested in the decolonization and inclusivity of the core curriculum, leading to recognition and increased quality. However, the post-secondary system has not undergone the same process, encouraging Nova Scotian and Maritime students to seek a more diverse curriculum elsewhere.

### Resolution

The Nova Scotia government and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education should implement an “Inclusive Education Policy”, with a focus on an anti-racist education model.

### Supporting Evidence

Our Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, mainly due to immigration and increasing enrollment of international students, and as the learning environment changes due to COVID-19 and other factors, we need to be increasingly aware of the diversity of our curriculum. Shibao Guo at the University of Calgary examined the cultural diversity in Canadian post-secondary curriculum and found three possible models for diversifying curriculum; the intercultural education model, the multicultural education model and the anti-racist education model<sup>16</sup>.

The intercultural learning model is focused on faculty and students reflecting on perceptions of different cultures, examining the genuine lived characteristics of those cultures, and finally learning to adjust teaching styles based on how culturally different students learn best<sup>17</sup>. This approach is lengthy, and often only teaches tolerance and acceptance of different cultures but fails to examine “how higher education curricula, as well as pedagogical practices, contribute to inequities in learning environments”<sup>18</sup>.

The multicultural learning model is based on “the elimination of prejudice and discrimination in the education system”<sup>19</sup> with the goal of changing what happens in the classroom, such as reforming the curriculum and changing best practices<sup>20</sup>. However, because this model is heavily focused on changes to classroom systems, it fails to see “how societal inequities faced by marginalized groups are reproduced in educational environments”<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, the anti-racist education model has four key components; “(1) integrating multiple centres of knowledge, (2) recognition and respect for difference, (3) effecting social and educational change: equity, access, and social justice, and (4) teaching for community empowerment”<sup>22</sup>. Changes in accordance with the key components understand that while change can happen within the classroom setting, it must also be matched by change at the structural and institutional level.

“Black students, those who self-identify as indigenous and those with disabilities are significantly less likely to experience the opportunities and successes of their peers

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<sup>16</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007). Nurturing cultural diversity in higher education: A critical review of selected models. 37. 27-49.

<sup>17</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007)

<sup>18</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007)

<sup>19</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007)

<sup>20</sup> Bennet, C. (2001) Genres of research in multicultural education. Review of Educational Research, 71(2), 171–217.

<sup>21</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007)

<sup>22</sup> Guo, Shibao. (2007)

within provincial education systems”<sup>23</sup>, highlighting the need for institutional and structural change, such change that was enacted in the secondary school system through their “Inclusive Education Policy”<sup>24</sup>. Currently, the Department of Labour and Advanced Education does not have an Inclusive Education policy, despite advancing inclusion and creating diverse workplaces being part of their 2020-21 business plan<sup>25</sup>.

### Summary of Resolutions

The Nova Scotia Provincial Government in partnership with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education should engage in a comprehensive review of the post-secondary system in NS, similar to the 2015 review of the secondary school system.

The Nova Scotia government and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education should implement an “Inclusive Education Policy”, with a focus on an anti-racist education model.

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<sup>23</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission (2017). *Left out: Challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Canada's schools*.

<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/left-out-challenges-faced-persons-disabilities-canadas-schools>.

<sup>24</sup> Canada. Government of Nova Scotia. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. *Inclusive Education Policy*. September 2020. <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/inclusiveeducationpolicyen.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> *Business Plan 2020-21*. Report. Labour and Advanced Education. February 2020.

<https://novascotia.ca/government/accountability/2020-2021/Labour-and-Advanced-Education-2020-2021-Business-Plan.pdf>.