



## **The Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations**

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### **Improvements to Student Aid a Positive Step, Program Still Requires Tweaking**

(Halifax) – Students intending to fund their education with government student loans will graduate with less debt in the coming years. Student representatives from the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) are pleased with the spirit of this and other improvements to student assistance announced in Tuesday’s budget address.

The debt cap of \$28,560 will be phased in incrementally over the next four years. It will apply only to new loans taken out and will take effect upon the successful completion of a student’s program of study.

A study from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission released earlier this year revealed that 73 per cent of graduates in the Maritimes left their first degree with an average of \$37,013 in debt. A third of these individuals borrowed \$45,000 or more to study.

“A debt cap at this level will do a great deal to help students who would otherwise be graduating with a huge amount of debt,” says Mark Coffin, Executive Director of the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations. “The slow phase in of the cap, and the completion criteria required to apply the cap are concerning, but nonetheless it is positive the government is moving in this direction.”

Other improvements in the student assistance program include the following:

- a modest increase of weekly maximum assistance rates by \$10/week
- A doubling of the in-study earnings exemption on student loans from \$50 to \$100 per week
- An increase in the textbook allowance, of \$500 annually

Currently there are 2,275 students in Nova Scotia whose annual recognized need outweighs the maximum amount of available assistance by an average of \$2,043. An additional ten dollars per week will do little to help these students as the cost of tuition and other

goods continues to rise. Students across Nova Scotia had a collective unmet need of 4.65 million dollars in 2009.

"The announcements made about student assistance on Tuesday will, without a doubt, help students," adds Coffin. "However, there is much more work needed improve student assistance."

"We are hopeful the government will continue to cooperate with students to work towards our hope of having the best student assistance program in the country."

In addition to student assistance reforms, ANSSA is hopeful that the government will take other measures to improve access to post-secondary education.

Early outreach programs like Pathways to Education and effective communication strategies about the nature of student assistance available are critical pieces of the puzzle as well. These tools are necessary to encourage first-generation post-secondary students and debt averse individuals to enroll.

Other items in the budget address included a previously announced four per cent cut in funding for the universities and permitting tuition to rise by up to three per cent for the foreseeable future.

ANSSA looks forward to participating in meetings to help shape the next funding agreement for universities that will span 2012 – 2015. Student representatives will be working to ensure the assistance measures announced Tuesday will not simply be used to cushion the blow of even greater tuition increases in future years.

**The Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) is a not-for-profit, non-partisan lobby group representing the interests of over 80% of Nova Scotian students. We are over 35,000 students at Cape Breton, Dalhousie, Saint Mary's, Acadia and Saint Francis Xavier Universities and the largest student organization in the Maritimes.**

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