



603 – 5151 George St, Halifax, NS B3J 1M5

Questionnaire on Post-Secondary Education

Canadian Federation of Students – Nova Scotia
May 2017

NDP RESPONSES

Tuition Fees

At an average of \$7,218 per year for an undergraduate program, tuition fees in Nova Scotia are the second highest and fastest rising in Canada. High tuition fees have left many Nova Scotian families unable to afford a college or university education, and have caused student debt to skyrocket to an average of \$39,600 for an undergraduate degree. Numbers released by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission reveal that over the last decade the number of Nova Scotians pursuing a post-secondary education in Nova Scotia has declined by 10%.

Will your party commit to reducing tuition fees? What will this plan look like?

Yes. Gary and the NDP believe that the elimination of post-secondary tuition fees is an idea whose time has come.

The NDP plan would begin with the elimination of tuition fees for Nova Scotia Community College, opening the doors to opportunity to a generation that has largely had them shut. This policy would impact 11,000 full-time students and over 11,000 part-time students at all 13 campuses of the NSCC. It would be the first step towards making post-secondary education more affordable in Nova Scotia.

The Liberal government has allowed university tuition fees to skyrocket in Nova Scotia. Other provinces such as Ontario and New Brunswick have introduced policies to make university affordable, and we should be showing similar leadership in Nova Scotia.

An NDP government would take immediate steps to prevent further increases in university tuition fees, and would implement a strategy for reducing university tuition fees. More details will be released in an upcoming NDP platform announcement.

Core Funding

Throughout the 1990s, government funding for post-secondary education was drastically reduced resulting in massive tuition fee increases, larger class sizes, fewer professors, and an increased reliance on part-time contract instructors. In 2013, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that Nova Scotia's income tax gain from post-secondary degree holders offset public costs in 12.6 years. This financial justification is not to outweigh the social benefit of a highly educated population, which include higher levels of civic engagement, lower dependency on the public health care system, and a more efficient labour force.

What is your party's plan for increasing funding to core operating budgets for colleges and universities?

It is our view that the present moment requires long-term social investments in Nova Scotia. This includes investing in the education, skills and opportunities of our young people. An NDP government would work with the federal government to establish a funding formula that would increase the capacity of our colleges and universities to provide quality educational programs while reducing, and in some cases eliminating, the cost to students.

Needs-Based Grants

Students need financial assistance programs that meet three criteria: provide adequate levels of financial support to students who need it the most, when they need it the most; are easy for students and their families to access and understand; and combat the long-term impacts of rising student debt levels in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Student Grants program, introduced in 2008, exemplifies these criteria.

Will your party commit to increasing the portion of student assistance received in non-repayable, up-front grants?

Yes. Part of our plan for reducing the cost of post-secondary education includes increasing the amount of grant money available to students. An NDP government would look to successful models for tuition reduction in other provincial jurisdictions as the basis for establishing our own system of affordable post-secondary education here in Nova Scotia. The example set by the province of Ontario—which last year replaced a system of loans with a system of grants—should be considered as a path forward for our province.

Employment Support and Income Assistance

In 2000, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act was amended by regulation 67 so that recipients of income assistance could no longer apply for student loans. This shortsighted policy change has shut out many qualified Nova Scotians from pursuing a university degree, particularly single parents, whose costs of raising a family while in university cannot be covered by a student loan alone.

A 2013 study in British Columbia found that by allowing those receiving income assistance to access student loans, the provincial government actually saved money in the long term, as most students were able to find gainful employment upon graduation.

The CareerSeek program is supposed to alleviate the barriers created by regulation 67; however, only seven individuals have enrolled in the program in the past four years. This is compared to the 1600 students on income assistance prior to 2000.

Will your party commit to repealing regulation 67 of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act to ensure that persons in need are not denied assistance simply because they are students?

Yes. In the fall of 2016, the NDP caucus introduced a bill to prevent a government from denying people access to social assistance based on their status as a student. The NDP believes that education and training are key pathways out of poverty. Government policies should encourage people to access college and university, not create a series of bureaucratic hoops for people to jump through. An NDP government would repeal Regulation 67 of the ESIA Act.

Stakeholder Participation

With university Presidents looking out for their individual institutions, the current structure of the MOU Partnership Board cannot broadly evaluate the post-secondary education system in Nova Scotia. Students,

faculty, and staff are invested in ensuring that the system is sustainable and maintains its high reputation worldwide. The same is true on the institutional level, where, even with substantial cuts in funding, senior administrative salaries have ballooned over the past ten years. Without the power to ensure that university funding is used for core services, students are placed in a vulnerable position.

Will your party commit to putting students, faculty, and staff on the next MOU Partnership Board? Will your party sponsor legislation to increase the power of these groups on university boards?

Yes and yes. The NDP believes that the people who teach, learn and work in universities should have a say in strategic decision-making about our university system in Nova Scotia.

Gender-Based Violence

Rape culture is pervasive on Nova Scotia's campuses, with one in five women experiencing sexual assault at some point during her studies, and the majority of sexual assaults taking place in the first eight weeks of classes. For over 20 years, students have been organizing to prevent sexualized violence and protect survivors on campus, but the lack of standalone sexual assault policies and recent high-profile incidents, such as the St. Mary's rape chants and the Dalhousie Dentistry "Gentlemen's Club," prove that institutions are not motivated to take action.

Will your party commit to working with students to implement provincial legislation to combat sexualized and gender-based violence on campus?

Yes. The NDP recognizes sexual violence as a pervasive issue in post-secondary environments that requires urgent action. In the fall of 2016, the NDP caucus introduced legislation to mandate that colleges and universities have policies and services related to sexualized violence. It requires that these policies are developed with students and those offering training, prevention and support services in our campus communities. The legislation follows legislative actions in other provinces to combat sexualized violence on college and university campuses. We are committed to passing this important legislation and to being a partner in the work to prevent and respond to sexualized violence on post-secondary campuses.

MSI for International Students

International students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of the province's universities and colleges. In addition to the contributions to our campus communities, there is a significant economic benefit to international students studying in Nova Scotia. In 2014, international students spent \$324 million in our province, which resulted in 3,328 new jobs and \$142 million in wages. International students are a critical component of our economy.

A 2009 report commissioned for the government of Nova Scotia found that "the cost to Nova Scotia of providing MSI to those international students that have obtained MSI eligibility is less than \$90 per student per year". Offering MSI as another benefit to studying in Nova Scotia would benefit both students and the economy.

Will your party commit to eliminating the deferral period which prevents international students from immediately accessing Medical Services Insurance?

Yes. The NDP recognizes the value international students bring to our post-secondary institutions, and to our province as a whole. Making it easier to access MSI will help attract international students to our province's colleges and universities, which will have far-reaching benefits in Nova Scotia.

Youth Employment

Students in Nova Scotia are graduating into one of the weakest labour markets for youth in Canada. In 2016, there were 2,600 fewer youth employed than in 2015. This number fails to capture the number of missing youth jobs that Nova Scotia has yet to recover since the financial crisis in 2008. When population decrease is taken into account, in 2016 Nova Scotia had 4,200 less jobs for youth than before the recession.

At times of high youth unemployment, students are especially vulnerable to exploitation in the workforce. High competition for work means that students are forced to take on multiple, precarious, part time jobs. Increasingly students are also forced to work unpaid internships, sometimes even paying to work for free in the hopes of developing experience that will lead to paid work.

Will your party commit to extending regulations currently applied to Federal sectors, restricting the use of unpaid internships outside of workplace integrated learning programs, in all workplaces in Nova Scotia?

Will your party commit to eliminating the inexperienced minimum wage in Nova Scotia?

Under Stephen McNeil's leadership, Nova Scotia has lost 5,900 jobs for young people in the past two years, and in 2016 youth employment reached its lowest total since 1997. An NDP government will invest in our young people to give them the opportunities they need to stay and build a life here at home.

We are committed to introducing legislation to regulate unpaid internships.

The NDP will implement a \$15/hour minimum wage and eliminate the inexperienced minimum wage.

Fixed Election Dates

Engaging students in electoral politics should be a top priority for all political parties. One of the best ways to ensure this happens is to have elections take place when a majority of students are on campus. Post-secondary institutions can serve as hubs for students to receive education materials on how to vote and even have early access to on-campus polling stations. Election dates can be guaranteed in Nova Scotia by adopting fixed election dates that make sure polling day is in mid to late October. Fixed election dates will also guarantee that provincial elections do not overlap with municipal or federal votes, thereby helping prevent voter fatigue. Considering that Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada without fixed election dates, this is a long overdue reform to our province's electoral system.

Does your party support fixed election dates?

Yes. In keeping with our commitment to democratic principles, the NDP supports a fixed election date which would encourage and support the democratic participation of Nova Scotians, and in particular, young voters.