



CFS NS
2087 Gottingen Street
Halifax, N.S.
B3K 3B2

August 25, 2014

Premier Stephen McNeil
Leader, Liberal Party
P.O. Box 726
Halifax, NS
B3J 2T3

Hon. Jamie Baillie
Leader, PC Party
Centennial Building, Suite 1001
1660 Hollis St
Halifax, NS B3J 1V7

Hon. Maureen MacDonald
Leader, NDP
BMO Building
5151 George Street, Ste. 601
Halifax, NS B3J 1M5

Dear Premier McNeil, Mr. Baillie, and Ms. MacDonald:

The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition is comprised of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT), the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia (CFS-NS), and the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU). Together, we represent faculty, students and staff at over half of Nova Scotia's post-secondary education institutions. We write to you at a decisive moment in the history of post-secondary education in this province and, indeed, in this country. We want to see an open, broad-based participatory process including our respective organizations when the next round of MOU negotiations begin this fall.

The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition advocates for mechanisms to reduce post-secondary student debt in Nova Scotia, for increased flexibility and accessibility to post-secondary education in Nova Scotia, and for increased core funding to Nova Scotia Universities and Colleges to allow these institutions to maintain and, whenever possible, improve their commitment to excellence in teaching and academic research.

There is no question: post-secondary education in Nova Scotia faces considerable challenges. Dwindling public funds and a shifting demographic context over the last several decades have forced our universities to cut budgets for teaching faculty, learning resources, and student services, just as they have forced our universities to seek other revenue sources such as commercialization, corporatization, increased fees, and increased reliance on international enrolment. Our situation is not unique; indeed, we see similar trends across Canada as well as in the United States and other Western countries like Great Britain.

Over the last decade, the Coalition has presented successive provincial governments with polling data in 2005, 2007, 2010, and 2014, showing consistently strong public support for a

well-funded post-secondary education system in which faculty, students, and staff have meaningful roles in governing and directing our institutions of higher learning.

We have also presented data in ANSUT's 2012 report "A Culture of Entitlement" showing massive, largely unmonitored, increases in administrative expenditures and compensation packages at a time when students go ever deeper into debt to acquire quality education; a time when low-paying, under-supported and insecure employment is increasingly becoming the norm for teachers and staff. Similarly, research conducted by the Dalhousie Faculty Association showed that at Dalhousie, the share of spending on both administration and capital projects has increased significantly over the past 12 years, while the share of spending dedicated to academic and academic support functions has declined.

Lastly, we have presented successive provincial governments with alternative policy proposals generated not only from the data we have gathered but, more importantly, from the vast wellspring of experience with, and insight into, the post-secondary education system that our members bring to the table.

Yet none of our provincial governments, regardless of party affiliation, have seriously attended to our findings and policy alternatives. Thus, the public conversation that we need to have has not truly begun, and the public conversation we *have* remains dishearteningly confined to the quantitative question of money alone. It seems, moreover, that only university administrations—a tiny constituency in our universities, relative to those of faculty, students and staff; a constituency whose role it is to support the others—truly have the attention of whichever government is currently in office. As yet, there has been no attempt to meaningfully include faculty, students, and staff in the process of shaping and government our post-secondary education system.

The McNeil government stated during last year's provincial election campaign that: "... our post-secondary graduates are the key to Nova Scotia's future." The Ivany Commission said it believed: "... the post-secondary system can model – and potentially be the catalyst for – the kind of change required more broadly throughout the province". The Coalition agrees with the government and the Ivany Commission on these points: hence our efforts, so far frustrated, to provide viable ideas and options for public policy. For example, the continuing growth of private student debt seems to us to pose a great threat to the entrepreneurial spirit that both the government and the Ivany Commission imagine can get Nova Scotia back on its feet. We have proposed measures for making university education more affordable, and believe that students and young graduates who wish to become entrepreneurs are better positioned to do so when not saddled with ballooning debt.

With 70% of the jobs being created today requiring some form of post-secondary education, we need to provide access to higher education. We also need to ensure that our colleges and universities are helping us to deal with the challenges we face. Solving our growing environmental crisis, reviving our flagging democracy, producing accessible form of research and innovation, all depend on investing in our institutions of higher education.

All in all, the need for policy alternatives to have a strong and vibrant post-secondary education system has never been greater. And yet, as the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission reported in a media release on June 3, 2014, university enrolment among Nova Scotians has dropped three percentage points since 2003-04—a student population decline more precipitous than anywhere else in Canada.

It is time for real, broad-based public deliberation about post-secondary education in Nova Scotia, deliberation in which administrations do not alone speak on behalf of our universities, our teachers, our students, and our support staff.

We once again invite, this time in public and for the public, the government of Nova Scotia, the opposition critics, and all elected representatives to join us in, at long last, beginning the public conversation we so profoundly need. Since the 2013 provincial election, the Coalition has met with the opposition critics, and we thank them for their attention to our concerns. We look forward to the Liberal government joining them and us in broad, open discussions.

We ask that these broad discussions begin under the various legislative bodies of which you are a part. Firstly, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Province and the universities is about to be renegotiated, and it is imperative that faculty, students and staff be represented at the bargaining table, and not just the University Presidents through Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents (CONSUP). Venues for discussion with MLAs could include the Public Accounts Committee and the Human Resources Committee. Deliberations, lastly, could also occur under the auspices of the oneNS Coalition as part of its efforts to engage Nova Scotians in developing a broad-based action plan which will shift attitudes, tackle our demographic challenges, and support social and economic growth.

We invite your responses. It is vital that these deliberations and discussions begin as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Jessome
President
NSGEU

Marc Lamoureux
President
ANSUT

Anna Dubinski,
Chairperson
CFS-NS

Catrina Brown
President
DFA