

Policy Manual

Issues Policy

Issues Policy 03 (IS-03): A National System of Post-Secondary Education

Adopted by: Board of Directors

Adopted on: March 22, 2011

Summary:

In Canada post-secondary education is a shared responsibility between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. While the Constitution assigns jurisdictional authority for education to provincial governments, the federal government, through transfer payments to the provinces and federal programs, is the biggest single funder of post-secondary education and research in the country. However, despite the federal government's central role in post-secondary education, Canada remains the only major industrial country without national oversight over higher education.

After years of federal funding cuts throughout the 1990s, the quality and accessibility of universities and colleges are at risk. Skyrocketing tuition fees, fewer instructors, larger classes, fewer course offerings, reduced library holdings, and the commercialisation of research are all symptomatic of the continuing and chronic public underfunding of post-secondary education.

There is an urgent need for a pan-Canadian strategy on both the level of funding and the structures through which the federal government provides support for post-secondary institutions and students.

Policy:

- I. The Union supports:
 - a. Post-secondary education and research as a shared responsibility of the provincial and federal governments;
 - b. Federal financial and programmatic contributions to post-secondary education including, but not limited to:
 - i. Transfer payments to the provinces;
 - ii. Student financial assistance programs;
 - iii. Responsibility for Aboriginal education;
 - iv. Vocational training programs;
 - v. Post-secondary student summer employment programs;
 - c. The legislation of a federal Post-Secondary Education Act or the adoption of another binding form of agreement between the federal and the provincial and territorial governments that:
 - i. Includes the participation of Aboriginal leadership;
 - ii. Delineates the respective mandates of the federal and provincial/territorial governments;
 - iii. Establishes a dedicated and stable federal transfer for post-secondary education;
 - iv. Outlines funding and access formulas;
 - v. Establishes conditions for federal post-secondary education transfers that commit the provinces to uphold principles similar to those of the Canada Health Act, including:
 1. Public administration;

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2. Affordability;
 3. Comprehensiveness;
 4. Democratic governance;
 5. Academic freedom;
 - vi. Establishes mechanisms to enforce the conditions outlined Section I.a.iv.
 - vii. Guarantees Quebec the right to opt-out;
 - d. The appointment of a federal Minister for, and the creation of a federal Department of, Post-Secondary Education and Research for the purposes of managing:
 - i. Federal funding of post-secondary education and research;
 - ii. The Canada Student Loan Program and Canada Student Grant Program;
 - iii. A post-secondary Student Summer Employment Programs;
 - iv. The admission of international students in coordination with the Department of Immigration
 - v. The collection of data pertaining to post-secondary education;
 - vi. The collection of data pertaining to science and technology;
 - vii. The development and presentation of an annual report to the House of Commons and a National Advisory Council on Post-Secondary Education and Research, detailing federal, provincial, and territorial educational expenditures;
 - e. The creation of a National Advisory Council on Post-Secondary Education and Research, which would:
 - i. Bring together representatives, democratically elected by groups of their peers, from the post-secondary education and research communities, including:
 1. Students;
 2. Faculty;
 3. Support staff;
 4. Institutional administrators;
 5. Government;
 - ii. Ensure that post-secondary education and research promotes the public good;
 - iii. Oversee the maintenance of the conditions for federal post-secondary education transfers, as outlined in Section I.c.v.;
 - iv. Promote the harmonisation of federal and provincial post-secondary education and research policies;
 - v. Meet regularly with the provincial and territorial Ministers of Advanced Education;
 - f. The continued existence of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada and its adequate funding for meaningful participation with the federal Department of Post-Secondary Education and Research outlined in Section 1.d. and the National Advisory Council on Post-Secondary Education and Research outlined in Section 1.e.;
- II. The Union opposes:
- a. The use of constitutionally-provided provincial jurisdiction over post-secondary education to:
 - i. Abdicate or deny any or all federal responsibility for post-secondary education;
 - ii. Frustrate or otherwise diminish federal participation in post-secondary education.
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