



Category:	Accessibility
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Whereas:

ANSSA believes that anyone who is academically qualified, with the desire to pursue post-secondary education, should not be prevented from pursuing post-secondary education due to financial barriers – perceived or otherwise.

Government restraint in the funding of post-secondary education, particularly over the last decade, has resulted in costs being off-loaded to the user and their family. This has resulted in escalating tuition fee levels and extreme increases in student debt levels – doubling over the past decade alone. The past decade has also seen the federal and provincial student assistance programs rely less and less on grants and almost exclusively on student loans. A needs-based grant system is critical to ensuring accessibility to higher education and many cases the completion of a post-secondary education.

Presently in Canada there is a real disparity in university participation rates between young people from low-income and high-income families. Statistics Canada has reported that participation rates low-income groups increased from the late seventies to the late nineties, but the percentage difference in participation between the highest income and lowest income quartiles has remained roughly the same at 20%.¹ This same report found that young people from high-income families are 2.5 times more likely as those from low-income families to attend university. Approximately 40% of individuals between 18-21 years old from families in the highest income quartile attend university. However, only 24% of 18-21 year olds who come from families in the lower middle income quartile attend university and a mere 19% of those from the lowest income quartile attend university.² 36 per cent of individuals who completed high school but did not continue on to post-secondary studies reported that their decision was due, in part, to financial barriers.³

A recent MPHEC study which looked at the familial education background of post-secondary participants found that participants in the Maritimes tend to come from higher-educated families. The study also found that those who come from lower educated families carry higher debt loads than their counter parts from higher educated families. As family educational background is correlated to family income levels, the study found that should these trends continue the implications of growing debt aversion may result in further decreases in participation by students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.⁴ Nova Scotia is in danger of allowing the composition

¹ Corak, Miles, Garth Lippas and John Zhao. Family Income and Participation in Post-secondary Education. Ottawa: Statistics Canada Family and Labour Studies Division, October 2003, 11.

² Statistics Canada, *Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID)*, 1998.

³ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. “Why Don’t They Go On? Factors Affecting the Decisions of Canadian Youth Not to Pursue Post-Secondary Education,” E. Dianne Looker. 2001.

⁴ Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, “A Lasting Legacy: the impact of family educational background on graduate outcomes,” September 2004.

of its post-secondary student population to continue to become less, rather than more, representative of the general population.

In its creation of a creative economy, Nova Scotia needs to ensure that academically qualified students have the necessary means to pursue their education; we believe we will succeed on a foundation of meritocracy rather than familial wealth.

To succeed in bringing qualified students into the system, an objective evaluation standard must be established to determine whether the government is succeeding in the creation of an accessible public post-secondary system. ANSSA believes that such a standard, established on meritocratic principles, will help government focus its policy objectives and create consensus among political parties as to the purposes of the student financial aid system.

Therefore, ANSSA:

1. *Calls on* the Province of Nova Scotia to institute a guarantee that no Eligible Student shall be denied the commencement or continuation of his or her studies for financial reasons alone; and
2. *Defines* Eligible Student as a student, enrolled in full-time studies (60% of a full course load) at a Nova Scotian college or university, that is covered by student financial aid programs of the Province of Nova Scotia.