

Fees, Funding and Student Voice at the Nova Scotia Community College

students 

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Abstract

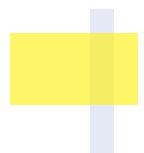
In 2014, StudentsNS welcomed its first non-university member: the Student Association of the Nova Scotia Community College Kingstec Campus in Kentville. This report explores fees, funding and accountability structures at the College, as well as student financial assistance to college students. We seek to identify opportunities to improve or expand access, affordability, student voice and quality of education, with an emphasis on the first three values in particular. We find that the Nova Scotia Community College has prioritized access and affordability and delivered important outcomes, attracting more students from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education, and notably mature learners. The College also has relatively low cost programs because of their shorter length and lower fees. However, College students' debt levels remain higher than the national average, are leading to elevated default rates and have been neglected by the Province as compared with university students' debt. In terms of student voice and accountability, the College and the Province need to work harder to ensure transparency to the public and meaningful student participation in decision-making. We identify a number of modest policy changes that the College and the Province could pursue to address these challenges and help the College better serve Nova Scotians and deliver on its mandate.

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Statement of Values

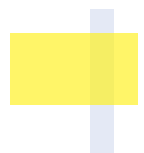
Students Nova Scotia is built upon the belief that post-secondary education can play a fundamental role in allowing both the individual and society to realize their full potential. Students Nova Scotia's values are pillars built upon this foundation. They give direction to our work and reflect our organizational goals.

Accessibility: Every qualified Nova Scotia student who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental ability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.

Affordability: The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community of their choice.

Quality: Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

Student Voice: Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.



Our Research Process

Position papers are the primary outputs of our research. They aim to describe and clearly articulate Students Nova Scotia's Principles in approaching an issue and Concerns that obstruct the realization of those principles. Finally, we propose Recommendations aimed at addressing the policy issues (and our specific concerns) in a manner that is consistent with our organization's values.

The Students Nova Scotia Board of Directors is comprised of student representatives from our six member associations. It sets annual priorities for Students Nova Scotia activities, including research. Position Papers represent formal Students Nova Scotia policy and are approved by the Board of Directors at bi-annual Board Policy Retreats, following a draft's one-month release for consultations with students.

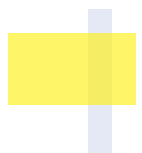
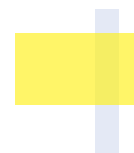
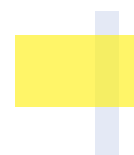


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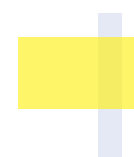


Abbreviations

AB	Alberta
ATI	after-tax income
ACCC	Association of Canadian Community Colleges
AGNS	Auditor General of Nova Scotia
ANS	Apprenticeship Nova Scotia
ANSSA	Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations
BC	British Columbia
CAF	Canadian Apprenticeship Forum
CAL	Canadian Apprenticeship Loan
CASA	Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
CAUS	Council of Alberta University Students
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCNB	Collège communautaire du Nouveau Brunswick
CEGEP	Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel
CNA	College of the North Atlantic
CSLP	Canada Student Loans Program
COGS	Centre of Geographic Sciences
CONSUP	Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents
CRA	Canadian Revenue Agency
CSF	College Services Fee
DCS	Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
DM	Deputy Minister
EI	Employment Insurance
EMSI	Economic Modelling Specialists International
ENS	Employment Nova Scotia



GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRR	Graduate Retention Rebate
HCSCF	House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
HERC	Higher Education Review Committee
HRM	Halifax Regional Municipality
ISF	International Students Fee
LAE	Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education
LICO	Low-Income Cut-Off
MB	Manitoba
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPHEC	Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission
MRGA	Minister's Reference Group on Apprenticeship
MSOL	Moderate Standard of Living
NB	New Brunswick
NBCC	New Brunswick Community College
NL	Newfoundland and Labrador
NS	Nova Scotia
NSAA	Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency
NSATSD	Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Training and Skill Development
NSCC	Nova Scotia Community College
NSCCSA	Nova Scotia Community College Student Association
NSLWD	Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development
NSSAP	Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ON	Ontario
P-12	Primary to Grade 12
PCC	Private Career College
PE	Prince Edward Island



PSE	Post Secondary Education
PSIS	Post-Secondary Student Information System
PSSSP	Post-Secondary Student Support Program
QC	Quebec
RAP	Repayment Assistance Plan
SA	Student Association
SFA	Student Financial Assistance
SK	Saskatchewan
StatsCan	Statistics Canada
StudentsNS	Students Nova Scotia
UFDF	University Funding Distribution Formula
VP	Vice President



1. Introduction

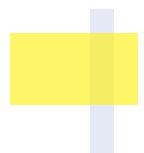
As the province's second largest post-secondary institution and its "primary training arm", the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) is an essential part of Nova Scotia's rich post-secondary education (PSE) tradition and a major actor in the provincial economy. To date, much of Students Nova Scotia's (StudentsNS) research and analysis has been focused on the university system. In 2014, StudentsNS welcomed its first non-university member: the Nova Scotia Community College Student Association (NSCCSA) of the Kingstec Campus in Kentville.

All post-secondary students share many of the same goals and concerns: advocating for affordable and accessible education, enhancing campus health services, and improving post-graduation employment. There are however a number of fundamental differences in their institutions with respect to programming, funding, mandate and governance. Community college students also face many distinct challenges. To be a strong and effective advocate for community college students, and all our members, StudentsNS needs to better understand specific circumstances of NSCC students and their institution. This paper is a critical step in that process, providing a macro-level discussion and analysis of enrolment, funding, governance, and graduate outcomes at the NSCC, as well as a profile of the NSCC's role in Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system.

Analysis was conducted according to the StudentsNS four values: accessibility, affordability, quality, and student voice. The study sought to address three (3) broad questions:

1. What are NSCC student graduation and employment outcomes?
2. How does NSCC governance and funding compare to Nova Scotia universities and community colleges in other jurisdictions?
3. How does current system funding and governance impact on accessibility, affordability, quality and student voice at the NSCC?

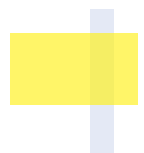
We find that the Nova Scotia Community College has prioritized access and affordability and delivered important outcomes, attracting more students from communities that are traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education, and notably mature learners. The College also has relatively low cost programs because of their shorter length and lower fees. However, College students' debt levels remain higher than the national average, are leading to elevated default rates and have been neglected by the Province as compared with university students' debt. In terms of student voice and accountability, the College and the Province need to work harder to ensure transparency to the public and meaningful student participation in decision-making.



We identify a number of modest policy changes that the College and the Province could pursue to address these challenges and help the College better serve Nova Scotians and deliver on its mandate. These recommendations address:

- Student Finances
- Funding and accountability
- Student Voice
- Apprenticeship

StudentsNS used multiple research methods in preparing this report and addressing these questions. In addition to a literature review, a brainstorm was conducted with NSCC students to determine their priority concerns to be addressed in the paper and interviews were conducted with officials from the NSCC and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Institutional and government reports, data, and statistics were also used.



2. Overview of the NSCC

In Canada, *college* is somewhat of a catch-all term generally used to describe non-university PSE institutions such as community colleges, colleges of applied arts and technology, technical institutes, polytechnic institutes, and *collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEPs – Fisher, 2008). Typically, they provide primarily vocational and technical training, through programs that are generally shorter in length than those of universities.¹ Nova Scotia's primary public college is the NSCC.

2.1 History

Nova Scotia's approach to vocational and technical training has evolved significantly since the province's first Mechanic Institutes were established in the early 1800s (Ivany, White and Myers n.d.). The modern incarnation of the NSCC can be traced to a 1988 paper entitled "Foundation for the Future – A White Paper on a Community College System for Nova Scotians." At that time, Nova Scotia had 19 colleges and the "system" was perceived as inefficient and expensive – characterized by low enrolment rates, limited course offerings, and program duplication (Crocker and Usher 2006). The White Paper outlined a plan for a new community college system for Nova Scotia and a new approach to vocational and technical training that would meet the needs of Nova Scotians from a variety of backgrounds and experiences who might otherwise "fall through the cracks" of the existing educational system (Province of Nova Scotia 1988).² As a result, the existing vocational and technical training schools were brought together to form the NSCC system in 1990 (Province of Nova Scotia 1994).

Internal and external pressures demanded further change, however. The College continued to be perceived as inefficient and decision-makers felt more could be done to make the College more cost-effective and responsive to the labour market. In 1993, for example, plumbing and steam fitting continued to be offered separately at 12 college campuses, at a cost of about \$48,000 *per student*, or \$1 million in total. Yet, roughly 50% of Nova Scotia's plumbers and steamfitters were receiving Employment Insurance (EI) and only 30% of 95 plumbing graduates and 14% of steam-fitting graduates found employment in their fields (Province of Nova Scotia 1994).

1 Quebec's CEGEPs are unique in that, in addition to vocational and technical training programs, they offer Diplomas of College studies (Diplôme d'études collégiales). These Diplomas required for Quebec students who wish to attend university and effectively replace Grade 12 and first-year university.

2 In preparing the paper, the Committee conducted public hearings and 173 briefs were received from a wide variety of stakeholders. The consultations had a general consensus that "the chief needs are to expand the scope of educational programs so as to include students not directly served and to coordinate the programs of the existing occupational education system without duplicating programs offered by the public schools or universities" (Province of Nova Scotia 1988).



Simultaneously, PSE and training were growing increasingly important as a result of economic, technological, and social changes such as urbanization and a shift from traditional industries to a more knowledge-based economy (Province of Nova Scotia 1988, 2, Ivany, White and Myers n.d.).³ A strong community college system was viewed as essential for the Province’s economic and social vitality.

In January 1996, the *Act Respecting Collège de l’Acadie and the Nova Scotia Community College* (or the Community Colleges Act) established the NSCC as an independent institution, whereas it had previously operated under the administrative responsibility of the Department of Education and Culture (AGNS, 1999). The *Act* gave the NSCC a specific mandate: “enhancing the economic and social well-being of the Province by meeting the occupational training requirements of the population and the labour market of the Province”.⁴ Described by the provincial government as the province’s “primary training arm”, the college’s explicit aim to help develop a skilled workforce differentiates it from universities, the other principal PSE institutions in Nova Scotia.

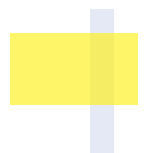
The architects of the new NSCC consulted with a range of stakeholders including employers, employees, elected officials, community leaders and students to determine community needs and a new vision for the NSCC (Ivany, White and Myers n.d.). This led to a new mission statement that remains in place today: *Building Nova Scotia’s economy and quality of life through education and innovation* (Ivany, White and Myers n.d., 2). The College adopted a transformative and community-focused vision of education reflected in two of the College’s strategic goals: “a distinctive student experience” and “portfolio education” (Crocker and Usher 2006).⁵ The college also made a commitment “to opening pathways and providing equitable opportunities to access our programs and services”, i.e. accessibility (NSCC 2014b).

Principle: Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.

3 This shift was evidenced by the fact that between 1990 and 1998, Nova Scotia’s economy generated 49,000 new jobs requiring some PSE. Over the same period, 36,000 individuals with no PSE lost their jobs (Ivany, White and Myers n.d.).

4 Scholars have identified three broad “strands” of Community College missions: (1) a curricular focus (academic, vocational, and remedial); (2) purposes of the institution (individual and community development, social and economic mobility of the individual, and social stratification and social reproduction); (3) educational and training role (route to a bachelor degree, job preparation – Levin, 2000). All three “strands” are evident in the NSCC’s mission, which may also reflect a shift identified by Levin (2000) and other scholars. Levin argues that since the 1990’s the mission of community colleges has “less emphasis on education and more on training; less emphasis upon community social needs and more on the economic needs of business and industry; less upon individual development and more upon workforce preparation and re-training” (Levin 2000, 1-2).

5 The StudentsNS report “Focus on Learning” (2014) includes a further discussion on e-portfolios including their potential application in the university system.



2.2 Enrolment

Canada is ranked first among members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for tertiary attainment of 25-64 year olds, largely as a result of college enrolment. We also rank first among OECD countries for the proportion of 25-64 year-olds with a college education (24%), and eighth for the proportion of 25-64 year olds with a university education (26% - OECD, 2012).⁶ In Nova Scotia, 49% of 25-64 year olds have attained tertiary-level education; 24% at the College level and 25% at the university level (StatsCan 2012a).⁷ This is very close to the Canadian average (51%) and well above the OECD average (32% - OECD, 2013).

Table 1: Participation of Nova Scotians in College and University by Age

Year	18-24 Year Olds			25-29 Year Olds			30-34 Year Olds		
	College	Univ	Total	College	Univ	Total	College	Univ	Total
2011/12	10	30	40	4	10	14	3	4	7
2010/11	10	26	36	3	8	11	1	5	6
2005/06	7	30	37	3	8	11	2	3	5
2000/01	9	25	34	3	5	8	1	3	4
1995/96	7	22	29	2	4	7	1	3	5

StatsCan 2012c

Table 2: NSCC Full and Part-time Certificate and Diploma Enrolment 2004–05 to 2014–15

04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
8,495	8,978	9,847	9,922	10,505	10,959	10,759	10,688	10,676	10,866	10,745

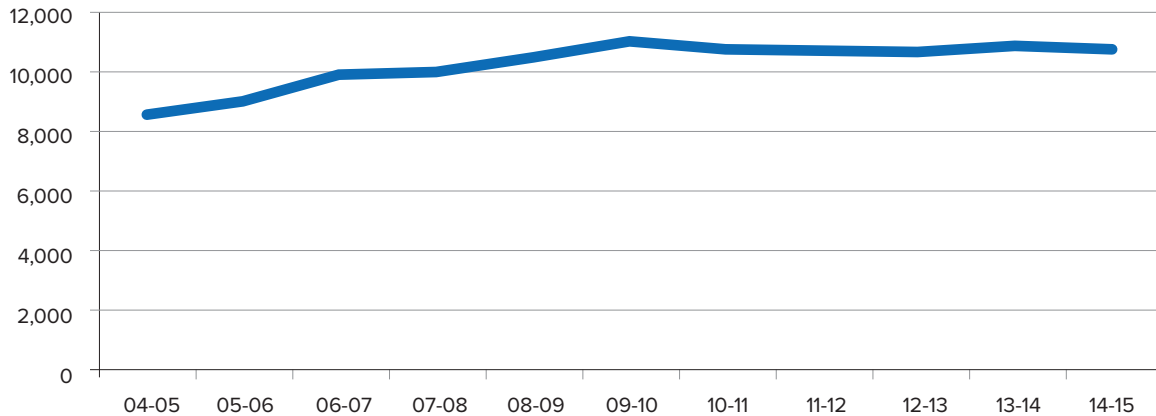
Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

6 One of the reasons for Canada's high rate of college attainment is Quebec's CEGEP system. CEGEP is mandatory for students considering PSE in Quebec and is equivalent to Grade 12 and first-year university for many students. The uniqueness of this system makes it difficult to compare college completion/participation nationally and internationally. For example, between 1990 and 2006, college completion rates for those aged 17-19 were over 35% in Quebec, but only around 10% for the rest of Canada. (<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/education/college-completion.aspx>).

7 In Nova Scotia, 23.1% of residents aged 25-64 have a College Diploma and 23.4% have a University Degree.



Figure 1: NSCC Full and Part-time Certificate and Diploma Enrolment 2004-05 to 2014-15



Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

The NSCC's total enrolment in diploma, and certificate programs was 10,745 in 2014-15 (see Table 2).⁸ For the 2012-2013 academic year, approximately 12.1% of 18-24 year-old Nova Scotians were studying at the NSCC, representing as much as a 50% increase over the preceding decade.⁹ More precisely, enrolment has increased by 20% since June 2005, but enrolment increases averaged 5.1% per year between 2006 and 2009, accounting for all the growth. Since 2009, enrolment has declined by 2%.

Concern: Enrolment in certificate and diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College declined between 2009 and 2014.

The NSCC's mandate emphasizes local students. In fact, the College explicitly prioritizes admissions in the following way:

- 1. Canadian citizens and permanent residents living in Nova Scotia (i.e. with a permanent mailing address in Nova Scotia)*
- 2. Canadian citizens and permanent residents living outside Nova Scotia*
- 3. Individuals who are not citizens or permanent residents of Canada"*

(from Academic Calendar).

⁸ Total enrolment at the NSCC can be difficult to track due to the different programs and academic loads, and the NSCC's admissions policy that allows for continuous intake. These counts do not include apprenticeship technical training or continuous education programs.

⁹ Participation rate was calculated using total enrolment at NSCC in 2012-2013 (10,676) divided by the population of 18-24 year olds in Nova Scotia in 2012-2013 (88,575). The population number was the same used by the MPHEC in their analysis of the university participation rate (2014). From 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 participation in college and trade education in Nova Scotia was 8% (HRSDC 2014). These two types of statistics are not perfectly comparable, we need more information at this point on the basis for the HRSDC statistic.

As a result, enrolment at the NSCC is driven overwhelmingly by Nova Scotia residents. Fully 96% of NSCC students in 2013-14 were residents of Nova Scotia. International students represented less than 1% of total enrolment at the NSCC in the 2012-2013 academic year, in contrast to 15% of Nova Scotia's total university enrolment (MPHEC, 2013b).

Table 3: NSCC Fall Enrolment by Residency*

RESIDENCY	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Nova Scotia	10,179	10,222	10,043	10,035	10,427	10,281
Other Canadian Provinces	485	353	460	406	332	339
International	64	51	47	67	79	125
Unknown	231	133	138	168	28	0
Overall NSCC Total	10,959	10,759	10,688	10,676	10,866	10,745

*These counts are as of September 30th of each academic year
Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014 & 2015.

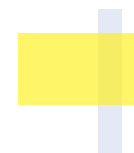
The NSCC now has 13 college campuses and six community learning centres in urban and rural communities across the province.¹⁰ The campuses range widely in enrolment, from as few as 195 students to as many as 2,691 (See Table 4). Maintaining locations across the Province is in keeping with the NSCC's principle of access, as it provides an opportunity to those who may not have the financial means, flexibility, or desire to leave home to attend a PSE institution.

Table 4: 2014-15 Fall Enrolment by Campus and Academic Load*

CAMPUS	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	TOTAL ENROLMENT
Akerley	932	59	991
Annapolis Valley	400	19	419
Burridge	368	25	393
Cumberland	341	102	443
Institute of Technology	864	111	975
Kingstec	840	61	901
Lunenburg	380	23	403
Marconi	1,071	58	1,129
Pictou	662	49	711
Shelburne	111	84	195
Strait Area	614	37	651
Truro	748	95	843
Waterfront	2,298	393	2,691
Overall NSCC	9,629	1,116	10,745

*as of September 30th
Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

10 Community Learning Centres are located in Amherst, Digby, and Wagmatcook First Nation.



2.3 Program Offerings

The NSCC's program offerings are divided into five academic Schools: Access, Applied Arts and New Media, Business, Health and Human Services, and Trades and Technology (NSCC 2014f). In Fall 2014, the NSCC offered 116 full and part-time certificate and diploma programs at its five Schools and there are a total of 277 program sections. Program offerings vary by campus and reflect regional economic needs.¹¹

The NSCC also has four specialized institutes: the Nova Scotia Nautical Institute, the School of Fisheries, the Aviation Institute, and the Centre of Geographical Sciences. The development of these institutes reflects a shift towards applied research in areas that include renewable energy, geomatics, and nautical technology.

Principle: Post-secondary institutions play vital economic, social, and cultural roles in Nova Scotia, most significantly by educating students.

Table 5: Schools, Institutes and Programs

SCHOOLS/INSTITUTES	DESCRIPTION/ PROGRAM OFFERINGS
School of Access	Offers programming to support students in their learning and prepare them for continued studies. Programs include: Academic & Career Connections, the Adult Learning Program, African Canadian Transition Option and English for Academic Purposes (NSCC 2014f). ¹²
School of Applied Arts and New Media (six campuses)	Offers 28 programs at six different NSCC campuses in the fields of communications, information technology, new media, and geomatics.
School of Business (every campus)	Programs are offered at every NSCC campus through a mix of full-time, part-time, and online programming. Programs include: Business Management, Applied Business Technology, Tourism, and Culinary Arts.
School of Health and Human Services	Offers certificate and diploma programs to prepare students for careers working with human services agencies and on health care teams.
School of Trades and Technology	Offers a range of certificate and diploma programs in fields such as Aerospace, Engineering and Applied Science, Transportation, Manufacturing, Energy, Heritage, Oceans, the Built Environment, and Natural Resources and Environment. The School also offers apprenticeship programs and journey person diplomas in the skilled-trades.
Aviation Institute Dartmouth	Offers an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer diploma with three specialties: Avionics, structures, mechanical.
Centre of Geographic Sciences (COGS – Lawrencetown)	Offers diplomas and advanced diplomas in surveying, mapping, marine geomatics, remote sensing, geographic information systems, and business geographics. The largest centre of its kind in Canada.
Nautical Institute (Port Hawkesbury)	Offers certificate programs to professionals already in the field and two four-year diploma programs in Marine Engineering Technology and Marine Navigation Technology.
School of Fisheries (Shelbourne)	The School offers courses and programs in Fishing Certification Upgrading, Small Commercial Vessel Operation, Marine Safety, Global Maritime Distress Safety System Radiotelephone Operation, and Fish Harvesting Technology.

¹¹ Interview, June 2014.

¹² The Academic and Career Connections program is for students who have a high school diploma, but require additional knowledge and skill development before beginning a college diploma or continuing in their chosen profession. The Adult Learning Program and African Canadian Transition Option are for students working to complete a high school diploma. English for Academic purposes is offered to landed immigrants and Canadian citizens who want to improve their language skills.

Over the past five years, the most popular NSCC programs (in terms of the number of first-choice applications received) were Business Administration, Human Services, and Practical Nursing.

Table 6: NSCC Programs by First Choice Applications

PROGRAM	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Business Administration	1407	1387	1349	1380	1222
Human Services	1329	1264	1269	1215	1182
Practical Nursing	1184	1127	846	1293	1377

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

Admissions at NSCC are conducted on a rolling basis and use the principle of “first applied, first in”. This means that a student’s application is assessed for meeting the minimum requirements and the student is admitted if (1) the requirements are met and (2) there are available seats in the program. This is very different from the typical university admissions model where there is an application period and all applications received during this period are assessed comparatively to determine who will be admitted.¹³

The number of available seats per program is supposed to be determined by labour market demand and resources, not student demand (Willick, 2012). The College keeps program waiting lists, but caps them at roughly the number of available seats.¹⁴ In August 2014, 115 of the sections were waitlisted (41.5%) including most sections at the School of Health and Human Services (62.3%) and School of Trades and Technology (58.5%), as shown in Table 7.

¹³ The NSCC’s “Special Admissions” policy is discussed in the StudentsNS report: “Disable the Label: Improving Post-Secondary Policy, Practice and Academic Culture for Students with Disabilities” (2014c).

¹⁴ NSCC waitlists change continuously and vary by program. Consequently, it was not possible to have a total number of applicants on the waitlist.



Table 7: Sections and Waitlists by School

ACADEMIC SCHOOLS	PROGRAMS STARTING SEP. 2014	SECTIONS (IN-CLASS, ON-LINE, FULL- AND PART-TIME, NOT INCLUDING SUSPENDED SECTIONS)	SECTIONS WAITLISTED	PERCENTAGE OF SECTIONS WAITLISTED
School of Access	3	28	1	3.6%
School of Applied Arts and New Media	15	23	4	17.4%
School of Business	16	55	8	14.5%
School of Health and Human Services	21	53	33	62.3%
School of Trades and Technology	61	118	69	58.5%
Total	116	277	115	41.5%

NSCC 2014d. Counts do not account for the three-week processing delay for new applicants.

In terms of enrolment, participation in advanced diploma programs increased 26.9% between 2009-10 and 2013-2014, while enrolment in the High-School Graduate Diploma for Adults increased by 19.9%.¹⁵ Yet, while this program growth is encouraging, enrolment in certificate and diploma programs declined by 3.9% between 2009 and 2013 and the majority of enrolment is in these credential types (85% in 2013-14).

Table 8: NSCC Fall Enrolment by Credential Type

CREDENTIAL	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Advanced Diploma	201	242	222	262	255
Certificate	3342	3066	3232	3015	3034
Diploma	6288	6356	6055	6015	6225
High-School Graduate Diploma for Adults	1128	1095	1179	1384	1352
Total	10959	10759	10688	10676	10866

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

The growth in Advanced Diploma enrolment may reflect increasing numbers of students with university experience enrolling at the NSCC (CBC 2014). There is no recent national-level data on this supposed trend, but Ontario has reported a 40% increase in the number of university graduates attending college over the past five years (Marjo 2013). We do not have longitudinal numbers for Nova Scotia, but according to the NSCC's Incoming Student Survey, 49.8% of new NSCC students in 2014 had already pursued some form of PSE, while 10.5% had already completed a university degree.¹⁶ This has importance policy implications and highlights the

¹⁵ Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014. It is difficult to gather accurate data as to the proportion of students pursuing articulated programs through the NSCC or other Maritimes community colleges into universities. The MPHEC found that college students represented 18% of all Maritime university transfer students in 2009 (141 out of 788 students in total), about half of which were from programs with an articulation agreement (correspondence, MPHEC, 2015). This study only included 10 universities and notably excluded the University of New Brunswick and Mount Saint Vincent University.

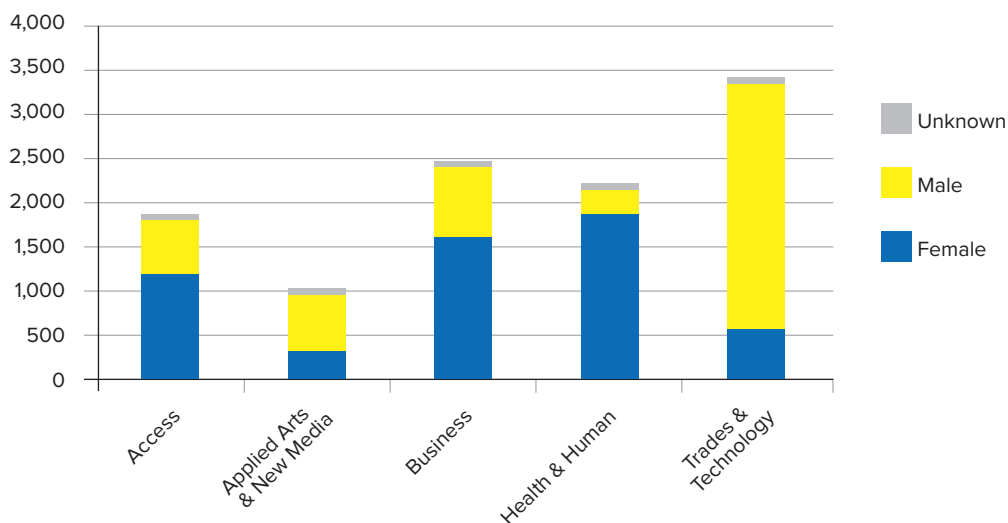
¹⁶ Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.



importance of developing strong partnerships between universities and the NSCC and the importance of clear and comprehensive credit transfer processes.

In 2014-15, women accounted for 51% of total NSCC enrolment, meaning that the NSCC has achieved gender parity in its student population (vocational education traditionally has higher participation among men). As shown in Figure 2, there are significant inequities in registration between programs, with women comprising 86% of students in the School of Health and Human Services and men representing 84% of students in the School of Trades and Technology. There have been significant efforts to support greater participation of women in the Trades, including notably the Women Unlimited initiative.

Figure 2: School Enrolment by Gender (2014-15)



Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2015.

2.4 Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is a responsibility of the Province, principally administered through the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency (NSAA), but which involves multiple stakeholders.¹⁷ The NSCC's position as the Province's "primary training arm" is, in fact, perhaps best evidenced by its role delivering both apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training.

2.4.1 APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Apprenticeship programs provide preparation for a career in the skilled-trades by combining interspersed on-the-job (80%) and technical training (20%). Basically, apprentices are paid workers following a strict training regime outlined in Figure 3.

¹⁷ Other major stakeholders include industry and the Federal government.

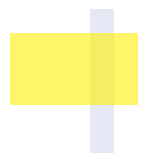
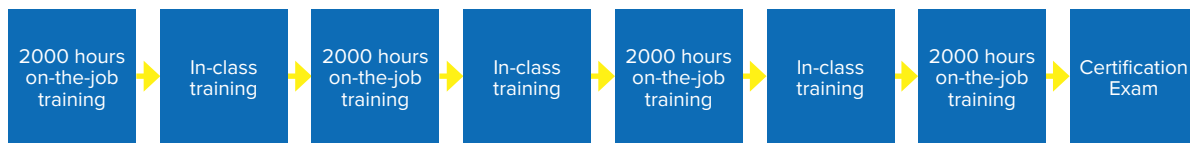


Figure 3: Sample pathway through the Apprenticeship System (for a program requiring 8000 hours of on-the job training).



Individuals who can find a suitable employer to hire and train them can enter directly into the apprenticeship program from high school. The employer and apprentice must then register with the NSAA, which will assign a Training Officer to assist with completing paper work, accessing training, etc. The employer provides on-the-job training, notably by assigning a journeyman to supervise the apprentice (a journeyman can only supervise one apprentice at a time). They must also allow the apprentice to attend technical training and pay the apprentice according to relevant regulations and collective agreements (NSAA 2014). The apprentice is required to complete technical and on-the-job training hours, and successfully pass all necessary certification exams.

Principle: The Nova Scotia Community College plays a vital role in the Nova Scotia economy by providing essential vocational and technical training.

The NSCC's School of Trades and Technology provides roughly 95% of all apprenticeship technical training for the Province of Nova Scotia.¹⁸ Training is offered both on-line and in the classroom and at different times throughout the year to provide flexibility. Each week of training costs \$87.61, paid to the NSAA.

The School of Trades and Technology delivered instruction to 2,283 apprentices in 2013-14.¹⁹ Between 2000 and 2010, the number of registered apprentices in Nova Scotia increased by 3.3% per year and enrolment in technical training at the NSCC grew at the same rate (3.54% - StatsCan 2012b). However, these numbers include a 22% drop in enrolment in the training component of apprenticeship in 2009-10, from which the system still has not fully recovered. As well, Nova Scotia's annual growth rate in apprenticeships is one-third the national average of 11.6% (StatsCan 2012b).²⁰

18 Apprenticeship training is also provided by: Insulator (Heat and Frost), Local 116; Plumbing and Pipefitting, Local 56, Carpenter Millwright Trades College (Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, 2014).

19 Interview, June, 2014.

20 Nova Scotia had 4,824 apprentices in 2000 and 6,405 in 2010, whereas the national numbers more than doubled from 199,074 to 430,452 in the same years. Presumably, some part of this difference is related to Nova Scotia's declining youth population.

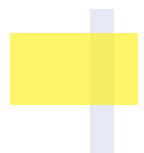
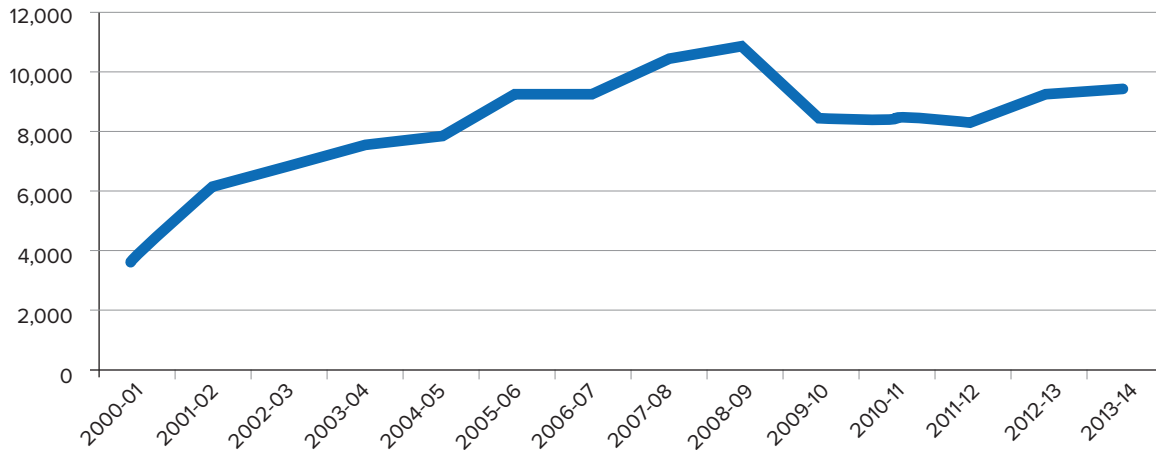


Figure 4: Apprenticeship Enrolment in technical training at the NSCC (in-classroom and on-line)



*As of August 15th, each year
Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014 & 2015. Apprenticeship Nova Scotia and the Department of Education 2006.

2.4.2 PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

Individuals who pursue direct entry into apprenticeship tend to have pre-established contacts in the trades, such as a relative and/or current work for a journeyman or other employer who wishes to support their apprenticeship.²¹ A national survey conducted by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF – 2007), found that the majority of apprentices had not completed any formal pre-apprenticeship training, but almost two-thirds had completed trade-related work. Pre-apprenticeship programs tend to be a popular option for students who have little or no experience in the trades.

Table 9: National participation in trade-related pre-apprenticeship work or training

	YES %	NO %
Trade-related work	61.8	38.2
In-class training in the same trades area	27.5	72.5
Pre-apprenticeship training related to current trade training	23.7	76.3

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum 2007.

The NSCC’s pre-apprenticeship programs are also delivered through the School of Trades and Technology and include one and two-year diplomas. Diploma graduates can count their training towards the technical training requirements of the apprenticeship (i.e. one-year diploma counts as first block, two-year diploma counts for first and second blocks). The programs provide entry-level skills and experience that can help students secure an apprenticeship position with an employer.²² Notably, pre-apprenticeship can assist those apprentices who have been out of school for

21 Interview, June, 2014.

22 Correspondence with NSCC official, June, 2014.



a period of time to integrate back into an academic environment and develop the skills and study habits required in the apprenticeship technical training (CAF 2007). In certain trades, employers seem especially reluctant to hire apprentices who have not completed a pre-apprenticeship program.

The NSCC also assists pre-apprenticeship students in finding apprenticeship placements, although students are encouraged to do much of the work themselves, to learn about the job seeking process and to build their comfort-level dealing with potential employers. Students must choose five potential employers, prepare questions, and talk to all of them. Students then choose their own apprenticeship rather than the NSCC choosing for each student.²³ The NSCC offers particular support to students who are having difficulty finding a placement, in some cases offering apprenticeships at the college itself.²⁴

In Fall 2013, there were 2,352 students enrolled in pre-apprentice programs at the NSCC, representing roughly 22% of the NSCC's total certificate and diploma enrolment.²⁵ Pre-apprenticeship programs are in fact growing rapidly: 2013 enrolment was 8% higher than the preceding year, while the 14.4% enrolment growth from 2009 to 2013 exceeded considerably the 8.5% increase in apprentice enrolment over the same time period. Over this time, the three most popular pre-apprentice programs were Carpentry (Diploma), Culinary Arts, and Electrical Construction and Industrial (Certificate), accounting for roughly a third of pre-apprenticeship enrolment in 2013.²⁶

Youth Apprentices

There is a third avenue for accessing Nova Scotia's apprenticeship program aside from direct enrolment or pre-apprenticeship programs: Youth aged 16-19 may register as Youth Apprentices. After finding a suitable employer and registering in the system, Youth Apprentices can work full, or part-time while attending high school, and their on-the-job training may be part of a high-school co-op program such as Options and Opportunities (LAE, 2008). Youth Apprentices receive credit for hours worked towards obtaining their trade certification.

2.5 Access

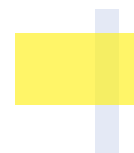
The NSCC's activities to support traditionally marginalized Nova Scotians are especially significant. Mature students, rural students, students with disabilities and

23 Interview, June 2014.

24 Interview, June 2014.

25 Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.

26 Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, 2014.



Aboriginal students are better represented at the NSCC than within Nova Scotia's universities.

In terms of mature students, the average age of NSCC students is 25.3 years old. There are at least 2,307 NSCC students above the age of 29 in 2014, and 296 learners above the age of 50 (see Table 10).

Table 10: Average Age by School

SCHOOL	10-NOV	11-DEC	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Access	28.9	27.8	27.5	27.3	27.8
Applied Arts and New Media	24.4	23.4	23.1	23.3	23.2
Business	26.3	25.6	25.6	25.7	25.5
Health and Human Services	27.6	27	26.8	26.3	26.9
Trades and Technology	24.7	23.8	23.7	23.5	23.5
Overall	26.3	25.6	25.4	25.2	25.3

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, November 2014.

The NSCC's many different campuses are also essential to the organization's access mandate, as they make it possible for rural students to attend PSE within or near their own communities. Between 2006-07 and 2009-10 and continuing in 2013-14 and 2014-15, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) had the lowest rate of NSCC participation of any county. The highest rates were for Inverness, Pictou, Richmond and Yarmouth in 2006-10 and Annapolis and Richmond (NSCC 2013b, 29).²⁷

The NSCC tracks participation by Aboriginal students, African Canadian students and students with disabilities, overall and by campus for the first two groups. Enrolment of members of each of these groups has increased significantly since 2010, by as much as 37% in the case of Aboriginal students, while total enrolment stagnated (see Table 11). Higher representation of Aboriginal students in particular is closely related to the NSCC's distribution across Nova Scotia, as they are relatively well represented on many campuses outside HRM, especially in Cape Breton (NSCC 2013b, 32). Across Canada, members of visible minority groups comprised 13% of the general population in 2006, but represented 10% of Canadian college students (all disciplines), 4% of Canadian undergraduates, and 6.5% of apprentices (ACCC & CAF 2006).

Table 11: Fall Enrolment of Aboriginal Students*

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	408	425	458	507	559
% of overall college enrolment	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%

**As of September 30th*

²⁷ Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, November 2014.

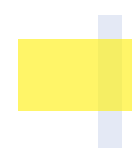


Table 12: Fall Enrolment of African Canadian Students*

AFRICAN CANADIAN	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	420	419	437	449	449
% of overall college enrolment	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%

*As of September 30th

Table 13: Fall Enrolment of Students with Disabilities*

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrolment	1163	970	1097	1278	1333
% of overall college enrolment	11%	9%	10%	12%	12%

*As of September 30th

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, November 2014.

The NSCC also supports individuals needing to access education in response to shifts in the economy and/or to escape the poverty trap. Employment Nova Scotia (ENS) and the Department of Community Services (DCS) have multiple programs to assist individuals who are chronically unemployed (and using EI), underemployed or on income assistance to complete programs at the NSCC. In 2010/11, there were 1,878 student enrolled through ENS programs and another 663, enrolled through DCS (NSCC 2013b). These numbers have since fallen significantly, as shown in Table 14.²⁸ The table also shows the number of NSCC students supported through their First Nations, notably through the Federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

Table 14: Fall Enrolment for Sponsored Students*

SPONSOR	FALL 2013	FALL 2014
Department of Community Services	500	413
Employment Nova Scotia	1,117	916
First Nations	199	194
Grand Total	1,816	1,523

*as of September 30th

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, January 2015.

Table 15: NSCC First Generation Students*

INCOMING STUDENT SURVEY	2013-14	2014-15
% of incoming students who reported they were first generation	37%	35%

*From the Incoming Student Survey

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, January 2015.

NSCC statistics from 2010 found that 45% of NSCC students are first-generation PSE attendees, i.e. neither of their parents have a PSE credential (NSCC 2013b, 30), although this number has since fallen to 35%. The evidence shows that the single

28 StudentsNS will be completing further work focused specifically on these programs in 2015.



greatest determinant of PSE participation in Canada is the educational background of one's parents (see Finnie & Mueller, 2008). In general, the likelihood of PSE attendance rises with parents' level of education, especially in terms of university. Children of high school dropouts are significantly less likely to attend PSE, while any PSE in the parental background has a positive impact on PSE attendance. In this context, the large proportion of 'first generation' students attending NSCC highlights the importance of our community college system in helping Nova Scotians to overcome the largest known barrier to PSE access.

The Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy (NSCBNE 2014) identified thirteen economic development goals for the province of Nova Scotia, including that "The proportion of Nova Scotia's working age population with a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree, including apprenticeship completion, will have increased from the current 55% to 65%". Given the decline in Nova Scotia's youth population, there will almost certainly have to be an increase in older learners attending PSE to meet this goal, an area in which the NSCC is much more experienced and prepared than Nova Scotia's universities.²⁹

2.6 Graduate Employment Outcomes

The NSCC boasts the employment outcomes of its students as evidence of its institutional quality and success. While StudentsNS does not believe that employment outcomes are a direct indicator of educational quality, employability is certainly an explicit part of the NSCC mandate and indicator of its performance as the Province's "primary training arm".

Across all age cohorts and genders, Canadians with a postsecondary certificate or diploma (including trade certificates) have higher employment rates (70.6%) than high school graduates (60.6%) or those who have only completed some post-secondary education (59.9), although employment rates are highest for university graduates (74.7% for Bachelor Degree and Graduate Degree holders - StatsCan, 2014).³⁰ The 2006 census data (the most recent StatsCan data on this topic) also shows significant earning premiums for PSE over high school graduates.

Sources of more local level data reveal very similar trends, outlined in Table 15.

29 This topic will be discussed in an upcoming StudentsNS position paper concerning Access.

30 American findings parallel those of Canada. According to data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, graduates of two-year community college diploma programs have significantly lower unemployment rates than high-school graduates (7.4%) or people who have not completed their college diploma (6.6% - Leonhardt, 2014). Interestingly, they found a difference between graduates of occupational college programs (4.0%) and academic programs (4.8%). University graduates have the lowest unemployment rates at 3.4% for those with a Bachelor's degree and 2.7% for a post-graduate degree (Leonhardt 2014).

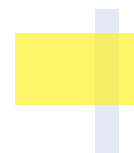


Table 16: Median Earnings in 2005 (for full-time, full-year earners, age group 25-64)

	HIGH SCHOOL	TRADES OR APPRENTICESHIP	COLLEGE	UNIVERSITY BELOW BACHELOR	BACHELOR	POST-BACHELOR
Canada	\$37,403	\$39,996	\$42,937	\$47,253	\$56,048	\$66,535
Nova Scotia	\$31,749	\$35,850	\$36,683	\$44,475	\$50,889	\$63,998
Halifax	\$34,750	\$39,023	\$39,400	\$45,953	\$51,875	\$64,857
Cape Breton	\$26,117	\$32,707	\$34,136	\$44,888	\$48,907	\$63,002

StatsCan 2010

As with employment rates, college and trades graduates in Nova Scotia have higher average earnings than high school graduates, but lower average earnings than university graduates. Residents of Halifax earn more than the Nova Scotia average, but still less than the Canadian average at all levels of educational attainment.

In 2014, Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI 2014) released a report on Atlantic Community Colleges that found that graduates of a two-year diploma program will, on average, earn \$12,000 more each year than someone with a only a high school diploma or equivalent. Over a working lifetime, this would amount to roughly \$411,400 in higher income. The report calculates that these higher earnings result in a return on investment to students of \$2.50 over and above every \$1 in costs.

NSCC Economic Impact

EMSI (2014) examined an NSCC education's impact on student earnings, but also looked at the NSCC's broader impacts on the Nova Scotia economy. They concluded that for every provincial taxpayer dollar spent on the NSCC, the province receives a value of \$7.20 in benefits due to students' economic contributions and savings in social spending (income assistance, reduced crime) for as long as the graduates are active in the labour force.

The main way the NSCC assesses the success of its graduates is through its annual Graduate Survey, which emphasizes graduates' employment outcomes in particular. The most recently published survey was conducted in 2013 and surveyed eligible students from the 2011-12 graduating class. Table B summarizes the Graduate Survey findings from 2006 to 2013.

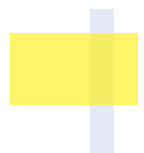


TABLE 17: NSCC Graduate Survey Employment outcomes

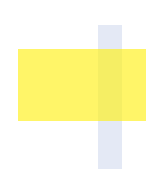
EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
% of graduates participating in the workforce	97%	97%	97%	97%	96%	96%	96%	97%
% of graduates employed	91%	91%	92%	86%	87%	87%	86%	86%
% of graduates employed in their field of study	83%	86%	88%	83%	80%	83%	83%	83%
% of employed graduates living in Nova Scotia	93%	93%	92%	94%	94%	95%	94%	89%
Average annual earnings of grads employed in their field of study	\$27,962	\$30,052	\$33,029	\$30,357	\$31,855	\$33,841	\$36,204	\$39,455
% of graduates satisfied with the overall NSCC experience	95%	95%	96%	95%	95%	95%	93%	92%

NSCC 2014b.

The global recession of 2008 is generally considered a benchmark in analyzing employment related data. The Graduate Survey shows that, in the depth of the recession in 2009, there was a dip in graduate employment, the number of graduates employed in their field, and in average annual earnings. In the five years since, employment rates have stayed the same, but average annual earnings of grads employed in their field of study have surpassed pre-recession levels in real terms.

Between 2012 and 2013, average annual earnings of grads employed in their field of study increased nominally by roughly 9%. At the same time, the number of graduates working in Nova Scotia decreased from 94% (2012) to 89% (2013), its lowest surveyed level. More advanced analysis would be required to establish correlation between these two variables, but it is an interesting finding in light of persistent lower wages in Nova Scotia and youth outmigration. It is important to note that these are NSCC-derived data, based on voluntary survey responses from graduates. Data on the entire population of NSCC graduates (in any given year) are not readily available through Statistics Canada or any other source, which makes it difficult confirm the accuracy and representativeness of this survey data.

In 2013, graduates of the Human Services and Practical Nursing School had the highest employment rates (93% in 2013) and the highest percentage of graduates working in their field (92% in 2013), which perhaps helps to explain the relative high demand for this school's programs discussed in Section 2.3. Graduates from the School of Applied Arts and New Media had the lowest average employment rate in 2013 (81%) and the lowest percentage of graduates working in a field related to their studies (75%), but the highest average annual earnings (\$46,344), due to earnings among Geomatics and Information Technology graduates. Graduates from the School of Business had the second-lowest rates of employment and graduates



employed in their field and the lowest average-wage of graduates employed in their field.³¹

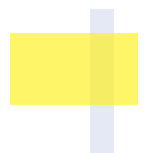
The key to reaping the benefits of a college education is not just enrolment and attendance, but actual completion and graduation. Investing time and resources into PSE without completing the degree can be a costly endeavour. According to data from the 2009 Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) survey (in Finnie & Qiu, 2009), first-year leaving rates among college students in Atlantic Canada (22.6%) are higher than those of the region's university students (15.1%).³² At the college level, there was not a significant difference in leavers by gender, but older students tended to have lower leaving rates than their younger counterparts (Finnie and Qiu 2009). Among those who left college in their first-year, 11.5% (age 17 to 20) and 10.4% (all ages) returned to studies. Most students (8.5 and 8.4 %, respectively) returned to the same institution and level of study. Of the remaining students, 2% and 1.4% switched to university and 0.9% and 0.6% switched to a college in another province (Finnie and Qiu 2009).

NSCC data from 2006-2011 indicates that approximately just over 70% of students in one-year programs persist to completion, as compared with just 55% of students in two-year programs (NSCC 2013b). These numbers should be very concerning.³³

31 Some of the School's popularity may be attributable to articulation agreements that allow NSCC students to continue at a university after finishing their two-year diploma.

32 The same data indicated that 5.1% of first-year undergraduate university students switched institutions, but that college students had a negligible rate of "switching" (1.3% - in Finnie & Qiu, 2009).

33 StudentsNS will be initiating separate work focused on student retention in 2015.



3. Funding at the NSCC

The NSCC's total expenditures for 2013 were \$203,521,027. This represents a 24.22% real (36.5% nominal) increase since 2007, while the NSCC has reported annual budget surpluses since at least 2008. However, annual expenditures were nominally cut by 0.97% between 2011 and 2013 (NSCC 2008a, 2009, 2010a, 2011a, 2012b, 2013a).

The NSCC's biggest expenditure is, by far, salaries and benefits. In 2013, salaries and benefits accounted for 69.4% of College expenditures and grew in total by 21.8% between 2007 and 2013.³⁴ Operating Supplies and Services, the second biggest expenditure area, accounted for only 17% of total expenditures and increased by 17% in total between 2007 and 2013. It is normal for PSE institution expenditures to be concentrated in human resources, as learning institutions must accumulate staff with the knowledge and expertise to deliver instruction and (conduct research especially in the case of universities). As well, even without a change in the number of staff, indexed pension contributions and salary increases almost inevitably lead to increased human resources expenditures. The difficulty is balancing these expenditures so that they do not take drive cost increases that are unaffordable for government and students, and pull too much money away from services, program offerings and maintenance of a safe, healthy, and suitable learning environment. The NSCC must necessarily manage all dimensions of its finances responsibility to support quality of education and deliver value to students and the public.

Principle: Publicly funded institutions should be accountable to government, students and the public.

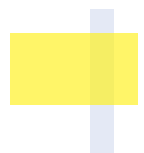
We cannot delve further into the NSCC's spending in this report. However, we can and must pay special attention to how the college is funded.

The NSCC receives the bulk of its funding from two principal sources: Provincial operating grants and student fees. In 2011, Provincial government funding accounted for 65.2% of the NSCC's revenues, while tuition contributions amounted to 18.4% (CAUT 2014).³⁵ Contrary to the trend at the university level, the importance of tuition and fees as a source of funding has actually diminished over time, falling from 20.4% of operating revenue in 2001. The NSCC aims to limit tuition to just 16% of total revenues.³⁶

34 These growth figures do not account for inflation.

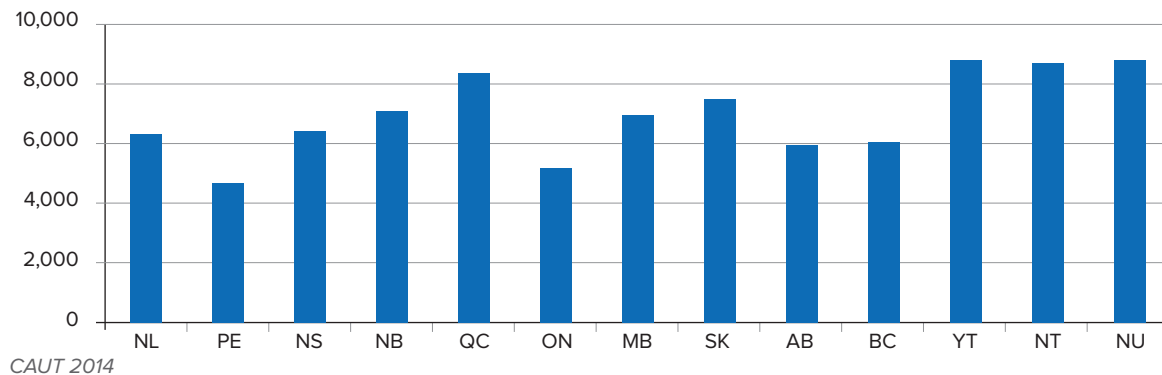
35 Federal government funding makes up an additional 6.2%.

36 Interview, December 12 2014.



The proportion of community college funding from government in Nova Scotia is around the national average. Nova Scotia's proportion of public funding in fact exceeds the national average when you exclude the arguably non-comparable jurisdictions of Quebec³⁷ and the Territories. Of the four Atlantic Provinces, Nova Scotia is second to New Brunswick for the proportion of provincial funding as a share of revenues.

Figure 5: Provincial/Territorial Government Funding as a share of Community College revenue 2011



3.1 Provincial Operating Grants

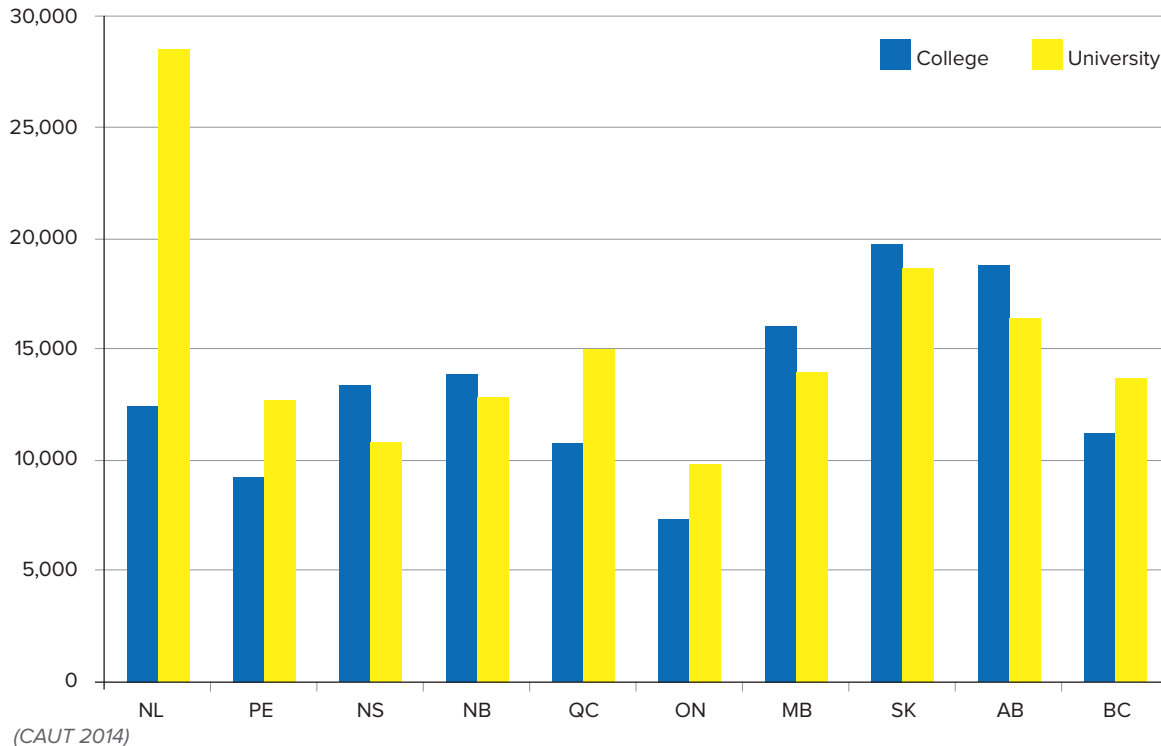
For the 2012-13 academic year, operating grants provided by the Province to Nova Scotia's community college and universities totaled approximately \$443 million. Of this total, 29.3% went to the NSCC and 70.7% went to the universities. In 2012-13 30% of in-province Nova Scotia PSE students were at the NSCC compared to 69% at university, with PSE funding proportional to this enrolment, although clearly disproportionate when out-of-province and international enrolment are considered. We can also make a comparison with other provinces' funding to universities and colleges (see Figure 6).

Principle: The Nova Scotia Community College must receive adequate funding to achieve its objectives as identified by government, students and the institution itself.

³⁷ Given the prominent role of CEGEPS in Quebec's publically funded school system, again effectively delivering the equivalent of Grade 12, it is unsurprising that Quebec's system has a higher proportion of provincial funding.



Figure 6: Provincial funding per full-time equivalent student to colleges and universities (2011-12)

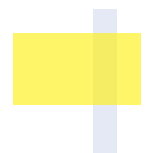


While these statistics may suggest per-student public funding for NSCC students outstrips that provided for university students, it is important to note that these numbers are limited to one-year snapshots. When you consider the funding based on the length of an individual student's studies, individual university students are provided significantly more funding by the public given that their programs are generally longer (4-year undergraduate programs, for example).

3.1.1 DETERMINING TOTAL OPERATING GRANTS

A type of "incremental budgeting" is used to determine the value of the NSCC's operating grant each year, through a process involving both the Province and the NSCC Board of Governors. The Board submits estimates to the Province for the upcoming year's budget and the Province reviews and assesses the estimates in consideration of a number of factors: the previous year's budget (used as a "base year"), new financial pressures (e.g. new infrastructure, increased utility costs, etc.), areas where College expenditures have been reduced, and the Provincial fiscal situation. The Province also considers revenue generated from tuition.

Between 2009 and 2014, the NSCC's operating grant increased at an average nominal rate of 2.15%. When adjusted for inflation, however, annual operating grants only increased by 0.34% per year, and were cut in both 2012 and 2014. The significant funding increase in 2010 corresponded with the construction of the



Centre for the Built Environment, which created 5,000 additional full, part-time and continuing education seats at the Waterfront Campus (NSCC 2010b).³⁸

Concern: Annual operating grant increases to the Nova Scotia Community College are not consistently keeping pace with inflation

Table 18: NSCC Operating grant from provincial government

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NSCC Operating Grant	\$119.5	\$123.1	\$129.1	\$129.7	\$131.5	\$132.9
Nominal year-to-year percentage change		2.99%	4.88%	0.47%	1.34%	1.09%
Operating grant in 2009 dollars		\$122	\$124.1	\$122.8	\$123	\$121.5
Real year-to-year percentage change		2.02%	1.73%	-1.01%	0.19%	-1.23%

Source: NSCC 2009, 2010a, 2011a, 2012b, 2013a.

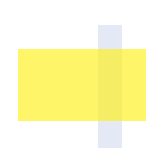
In contrast, Nova Scotia universities' operating grants were cut nominally by 10% between 2011-12 and 2013-14 and are being cut in real terms once again in 2014-15. At the same time, allowable 3% tuition increases make a greater contribution to universities' budgets, given tuition comprises a higher proportion of their total revenues, such that the total changes in institutional funding are less significant than this might seem to suggest. Nevertheless, the differences between the Province's approaches to these different PSE institutions seem to reflect a perception that the NSCC is more responsive to public policy priorities (including notably workforce development), more targeted at Nova Scotia residents, and more cost-effective or efficient. We cannot assess the latter assertion in this report, but the former assertions are fundamentally true, irrespective of whether we agree that PSE institutions should be responsive to public policy priorities or with the specific public policy priorities pursued.

While NSCC funding varies from year to year based on agreements between the Province and the College (regarding program spaces, new construction, etc.), there is no standard reporting regarding how these decisions are being made or how funds are to be spent. Therefore, students and the public are ill positioned to understand these decisions or provide input.

3.1.2 FUNDING FORMULA

A funding formula is a formal process for allocating funding based on a set of predetermined variables (CAUS 2014). The formula may determine the total amount of the grant depending on the program and/or how the overall operating grant

³⁸ The Province owns the NSCC's buildings; so capital investments become part of the Province's property portfolio unlike university buildings (Personal communication, December 2014).



should be distributed among institutions or between institutional priorities. For example, Nova Scotia has established a University Funding Distribution Formula (UFDF) to distribute the annual operating grant amongst the universities based principally on enrolment, with different bin-weights to reflect variable costs in different programs.³⁹

Proponents of funding formulae argue that they provide greater stability and predictability, increase transparency, and thus provide a more even playing field for institutions within a system (CAUS 2014). In cases where portions of funding are tied to specific outcomes or activities, formula funding can also be used to incentivize certain behaviors and reward positive results. Variables selected for funding formulae often reflect the values of the government of the day; many were initially driven by a need to increase enrolment and were thus tied to enrolment numbers. As enrolment has increased the focus has moved to equity and accessibility and the funding formula variables may reflect this (CAUS 2014).

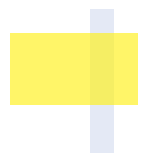
Detractors argue that formula funding is actually destabilizing for institutions. Many institutional costs are static and not vary little based on factors like enrolment, so tying funding to these factors makes institutional finances more instable. Formulae also can weaken institutional autonomy. Finally, formulae risk creating perverse incentives for institutions to try to game the system, including competing more aggressively in ways that can undermine the wellbeing of the PSE system as a whole. Interestingly, as a result of these concerns Nova Scotia's UFDF has not been allowed to track changes in enrolment and therefore basically existed almost exclusively in name (StudentsNS, 2013c).

No funding formula is in place with respect to the NSCC. Of course, the community college system in Nova Scotia is very different than the university system. As the NSCC is Nova Scotia's only publicly funded college, there are no concerns around equitable allocation between institutions, although the college could conceivably host internal conflicts regarding funding distribution between campuses. Furthermore, unlike with the universities, the Province is directly involved in managing NSCC costs by assisting in determining program offerings and the number of available seats in each program.

Still, a funding formula could provide some value to the NSCC system, in particular to enhance institutional accountability and responsiveness to public policy goals. A formula might also help to allocate funding between NSCC campuses.

The 1988 White Paper concerning a new Community College (Province of Nova Scotia 1988) presented a number of funding formulas along with potential incentives

³⁹ The University Funding Distribution Formula has been discussed in a previous StudentsNS position paper: "Getting the Most from our Universities: a New Approach to System Planning and Funding" (2013).



and drawbacks that have been summarized in Table 19. It ultimately did recommend a cost-based, program-by-program formula for the NSCC.

Table 19: Different Funding Formulae

Unit-Based	Enrolment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflects number of FTEs - Affected by previous year's enrolment - Penalizes institutions with large PT enrolments - Incentive To increase number of students?
	Course Weights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflects course cost - Promotes concentration on expensive programs
	Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflects number of FTE - Does not generate flexibility in staffing
Cost-Based	Cost Plus, w/ Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflects institutional costs determined on valuation day - Incremented in response to inflation costs - Promotes status quo - No incentive to innovate
	Program-by-program cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflects actual cost of standardized programs - Must be adjusted to accommodate increased enrolment and course enrichment - Results in a different per student grant from college to college - Permits innovation

Province of Nova Scotia 1988

A 2004 report of the AGNS, criticized the Province and the College for not having a funding formula in place. According to the AGNS, “this causes considerable difficulty for the Minister, the College and the Department in planning financial affairs” (56). The Report further notes that “the Department of Education, in consultation with the College, has not defined expected outcomes for the Province’s funding to the College including expectations regarding accessibility, enrollment levels, and costs to be borne by students” (56). The AGNS critique seems to focus more on funding not being used as an incentive for producing desired outcomes (accessibility, affordability) than on how funding is being distributed between campuses or programs.

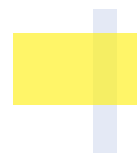
Concern: The Auditor General of Nova Scotia has criticized the Province and the Nova Scotia Community College for not having a formal funding formula in place.

3.2 Student Fees

For the most part, students fund the remainder of the NSCC’s operations through a combination of tuition and other fees. That being said, the Province and Federal governments provide some additional support, by providing students with funds to pay their fees through different financial assistance mechanisms.

3.2.1 TUITION FEES

The NSCC and the Province boast the college’s low tuition fees relative to other post-secondary institutions as evidence for their commitment to PSE access and affordability. Tuition for a full-time diploma program at the NSCC is \$3,040, compared



to \$5,336 (after the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary for Nova Scotia resident students) for university undergraduate arts and science programs.⁴⁰

Looking at Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia's tuition for diploma or certificate programs (domestic) is in line with the other Maritime Provinces, but significantly higher than Newfoundland and Labrador.

Table 20: Community College Tuition in the Atlantic Provinces

PROVINCE	DOMESTIC DIPLOMA OR CERTIFICATE TUITION 2014-2015	INTERNATIONAL TUITION 2014-2015
New Brunswick	\$3,150	\$6,300
Nova Scotia	\$3,040	\$9,800
Prince Edward Island	\$3,600-\$6,600	\$7,165-\$10,165 (Domestic + \$3,565)
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$1,795	\$8,250

CCNB 2014, CNA 2014, Holland College 2014, NBCC 2014, NSCC 2014g

Students in different programs pay different tuition fees, however, and Table P above excludes both the NSCC's free and most expensive programs (see Table 21). Tuition is lowest or free for programs that specifically support learners facing special barriers to education. Meanwhile, tuition in Aviation is \$9,000/year, Recording Arts is \$10,000 for the full year, and Health Information Management is \$9,785 in the first year.⁴¹

Table 21: NSCC Full-time Tuition by Credential Type

PROGRAM TYPE	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Full time certificate and diploma programs	\$2,700	\$2,781	\$2,865	\$2,950	\$3,040
Full-time advanced Diploma Programs	\$3,700	\$3,811	\$3,925	\$4,515	\$4,650
Academic and Career Connections Certificate	\$1,120	\$1,154	\$1,190	\$1,220	1,255
International Students	\$7,800	\$8,034	\$8,275	\$9,515	\$9,800,
NS School for Adult Learners	\$0				

NSCC 2014c

NSCC tuition is not regulated by government through a formal tuition cap, or provisions in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the NSCC and the Province. Instead, the NSCC's Board of Governors must submit a tuition recommendation to the Province's Executive Council for approval. Over the past five years, domestic tuition has increased by 3% annually, which is consistent with the

40 Average University undergraduate tuition (for both arts and sciences combined) in 2013-2014 was \$6,619 (according to data from the MPHEC).

41 Tuition for these three programs did not increase for the 2014-15 academic year (NSCC 2014c).



3% increases in university tuition (see Table 22).⁴² This increase exceeded annual inflation of 1.9%.

Concern: Tuition at the Nova Scotia Community College is growing faster than the rate of inflation.

Table 22: Nominal Percentage Change in NSCC Tuition by Program

PROGRAM TYPE	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Full-time certificate and diploma programs	3%	3%	3%	3%
Full-time advanced Diploma Programs	3%	3%	15%	3%
Academic and Career Connections Certificate	3%	3%	2.5%	2.9%
International Students	3%	3%	15%	3%

NSCC 2014c

The exception to the trend of 3% tuition increases was in the 2013-14 academic year when full-time tuition for advanced diploma and international students increased by 15%.

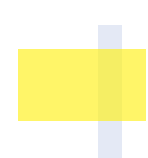
Principle: The Nova Scotia Community College must be supported in upholding its value of accessibility and work to increase post-secondary participation.

Principle: The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student or make them financially unable to live in Nova Scotia.

Concern: A lack of tuition regulations can leave students vulnerable to arbitrary tuition increases.

Charging higher tuition to international students is commonly justified by the fact that they and their families are not contributing to the taxes in Canada that finance public support to our post-secondary education. However, public support is entirely justifiable when it will demonstrably support public policy outcomes for Nova Scotia.

⁴² Although these increases match the 3% tuition growth allowed to universities under their MOU with the Province, but there is no rule that the NSCC must follow this convention.



3.2.2 ANCILLARY AND AUXILIARY FEES

Besides tuition, students are also on the hook for a variety of ancillary and auxiliary fees. The MOU between the universities and the Province defines ancillary fees as: “fees for non-academic services such as residence accommodation, food services, health services, and student association” (StudentsNS 2013a). Auxiliary fees are understood as: “supplies, equipment, labs, field trips, or other items that students must pay in order to enroll in or complete a program or course” (StudentsNS 2013a). StudentsNS has previously further divided these fees into four categories:

1. Residence and meal plan fees that are not compulsory for all students.
2. Standard ancillary fees that are compulsory for all students
3. Fees that function like standard ancillary fees for students in specific programs
4. Auxiliary fees for specific courses

These categories are not a perfect fit with the types of fees charged at the NSCC, in particular because many fees are charged at the campus level. Table 23 summarizes the fees charged at the NSCC using a modified categorization:

Table 23: NSCC Auxiliary and Ancillary Fees 2014-15

RESIDENCE AND MEAL PLAN FEES	STANDARD ANCILLARY FEES	FEES FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS	AUXILIARY FEES FOR SPECIFIC PROGRAMS
<p>The NSCC has one residence: Davis Hall at the Truro Campus.</p> <p>There are three types of rooms available and fees include the room and a meal plan.2 Double Room: \$5700; Single Room: \$6100; Super Single Room: \$6500.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - College Services Fee (\$100) - Student Health and Dental (\$238 d; \$650 i) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Student Fee (\$1000) - U-pass for metro students (\$164) - Student Association Fees (mandatory for all but variable by campus) 	<p>There are additional program fees incorporated with each course of study. Examples of mandatory additional costs: safety equipment, criminal record checks, portfolio supplies, CPR and First Aid.</p>

NSCC 2014e, 2014g

Figure 7 shows the different fee levels at each campus and how the fees have increased over time. The spike in fees at Metro campuses in 2010-11 comes from the introduction of the U-pass. The spike in fees across all campuses in 2012-13 is from the introduction of the College Services Fee (CSF).

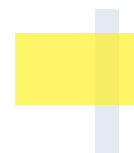
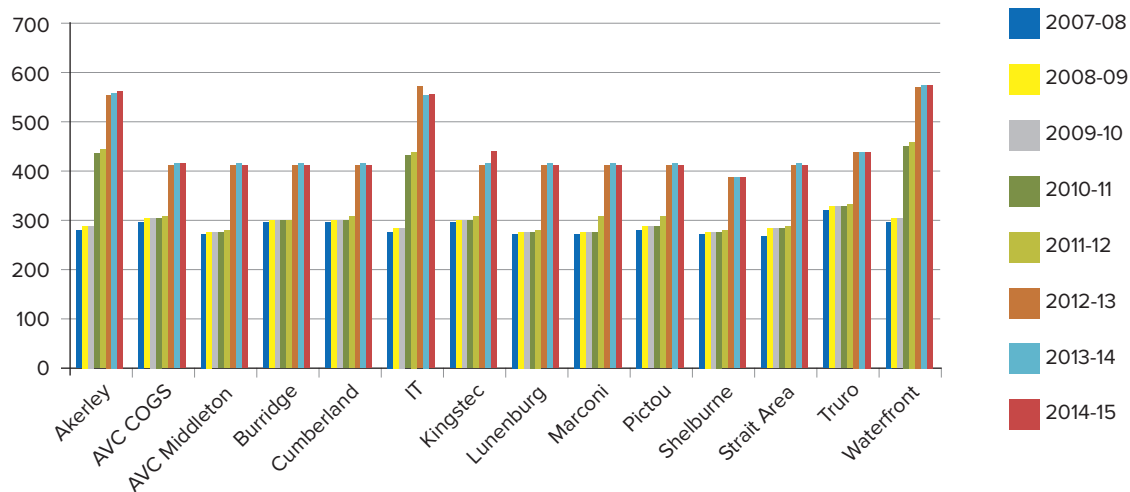


Figure 7: Student Fees for full-time domestic students



NSCC 2014e, 2014g

The most expensive programs discussed earlier (Aviation, Recording Arts and Health Information Management) also require the payment of program-specific fees, while they also often have costs associated with work placements. When these fees are included, the cost to complete the two-year Health Information Management Program reaches a total of \$27,374.

3.3 Student Financial Assistance

The Federal and Provincial governments each operate financial assistance programs to support Nova Scotians seeking a PSE credential. With respect to NSCC students, these programs can be separated into two categories: Student Financial Assistance (SFA) and Financial Assistance to Apprentices.

3.3.1 STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Federal government provides SFA to help students pay for their fees and living costs to attend PSE through the Canada Student Loan Program (CSLP), while the Province does the same through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program (NSSAP). Both programs first assess students' *costs*, then their *resources* (including savings, income and parental or spousal income), to determine their need. This need is then met (to a maximum amount) through a combination of loans and grants. In general, students access CSLP aid initially, then NSSAP aid if their need exceeds the amounts provided by the CSLP. Aid is delivered through a combination of loans and grants depending on students' need and other variables.

CSLP grants support students on low-incomes and medium-incomes, with dependents, or with disabilities, who have at least \$1 in financial need. Low-income grants are particularly noteworthy, providing \$2,000 to students whose familial (dependent students) or personal income (independent students) falls below the



low-income cut-off (LICO). To access CSLP grants, students must complete a needs assessment, but are not required to accept the loan amounts that are offered to them.

In Nova Scotia, NSCC students have a lower rate of SFA usage (30%) than university and private career college (PCC) students (StudentsNS 2013b, 28). Of those who access SFA, only 45% have sufficient need to require NSSAP support, as compared to 65% of university students and 81% of PCC students. This almost certainly reflects how the lower cost of NSCC tuition reduces a student's assessed need, although the location of NSCC campuses across the province in many areas without other post-secondary institutions may also allow more students to live at home and further reduce living costs. Additionally, ENS, DCS and First Nations support over 1,500 NSCC students each year, as discussed earlier. Some of these students might still receive student assistance, but many may be made ineligible by this support.

In 2011, the average student loan for full-time NSCC students was \$6,203 (CAUT 2014). This amount was just below that of full-time university students (\$6,502), but significantly higher than the national average student loan for community college students (\$4,471 – CAUT 2014). Average college student debt was \$14,500 in Nova Scotia in 2010, as compared with \$14,000 nationally (in Usher, 2014). In comparison with university graduates, college graduates are actually doing quite well in Nova Scotia by this measure: average debt for university graduates in Nova Scotia was \$30,200. In particular, Nova Scotia university graduates' debt exceeds the national average (\$22,300) by 35.4%, whereas college graduates' debt is just 3.6% above the national average.

Yet, while the average loan amount was lower, NSCC students continue to have higher default rates on their CSLP loans (see Figure 8). As discussed earlier, university graduates enjoy higher average employment rates and earnings.

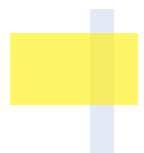
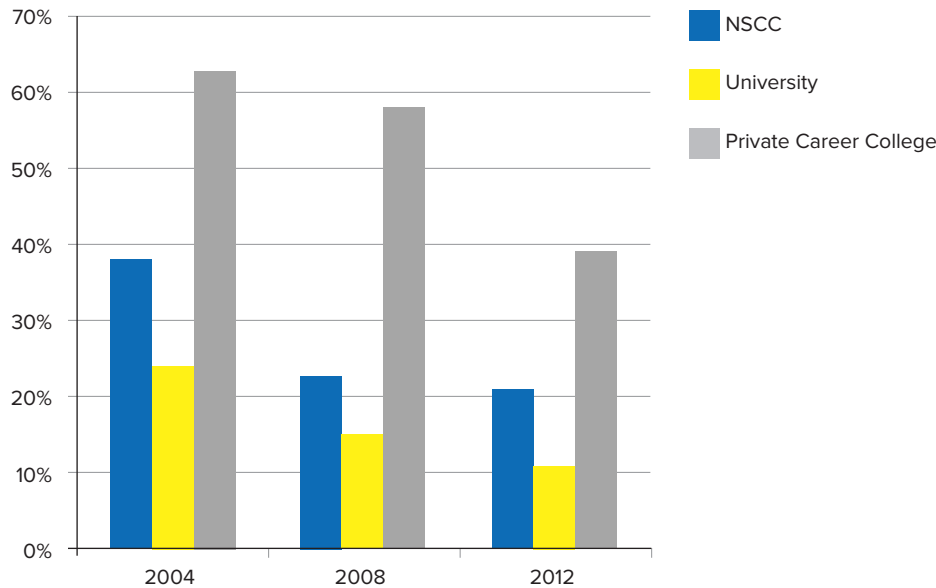


Figure 8: Canada Student Loan Program Default rates in Nova Scotia



Source: CSLP 2014

The default rate has decreased from 38% in 2004, to 21% in 2012, with the most significant decline between 2004 and 2008. This timeline corresponds to significant improvements to the CSLP and NSSAP, including perhaps most significantly the introduction of a revamped Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) in 2008.⁴³ Under the RAP, a borrower's monthly payments may be as low as \$0 and may not exceed 20% of total family income, with the precise payment amount determined based on a formula in the Canadian Student Financial Assistance Regulations (StudentsNS, 2013b). In addition, the repayment term may not exceed 15 years, or 10 years for borrowers with permanent disabilities. Basically, the RAP should ensure that almost no student is driven into default by low graduate incomes, although to what extent graduates are aware of the RAP is unknown.

3.3.2 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO APPRENTICES

Multiple programs are in place to assist apprentices in financing their training and cost of living. The intergovernmental dynamic is an important characteristic of the apprenticeship system as the province manages it, but a lot of program- and individual-level funding comes from Ottawa.

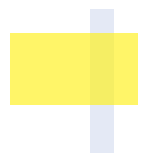
⁴³ Personal correspondence, September 2014. Other notable SFA improvements over this time period include the introduction of the Canada Student Grants (2009), and conversions of Nova Scotia student loans to grants at a rate first of 20% (2008), then 30% (2011), 35% (2012) and finally 40% (2013). However, all of these improvements took place after 2008 and by this time the most significant decline in default rates had already happened. Of course, default rates are a product of graduates' ability to finance loan payments and loan payment amounts represent just one side of the issue, the other being graduates' incomes, which also evolved over this period.



Existing Federal programs that support apprentices include:

- The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant is a taxable grant of \$1,000 per year, worth up to a maximum of \$2,000 per person, available to registered apprentices once they have successfully finished their first or second year/level (or equivalent) of an apprenticeship program (Service Canada, 2015).
- The Apprenticeship Completion Grant is a taxable grant of a maximum of \$2,000, available to registered apprentices who have successfully completed their apprenticeship training and obtained their journeyperson certification in a designated Red Seal trade.
- The Tradesperson's Tools Deduction allows tradespersons to deduct part of the cost of tools they must acquire as a condition of employment from their income for income tax purposes.
- The Apprenticeship Job Creation Tax Credit encourages employers to hire new apprentices in eligible trades by providing a tax credit of 10 per cent of the wages payable to eligible apprentices in the first two years of their apprenticeship (CRA, 2015).

The 2014 Federal Budget proposed an expansion of the CSLP to include the Canada Apprentice Loan (CAL). The CAL will provide apprentices with loans to cover technical training costs of up to \$4,000 per training period, without charging interest until after the apprenticeship program is completed or terminated. The Government expects that at least 26,000 apprentices per year will apply. The estimated net cost of these loans to the Government would be \$25.2 million for the first two years and then \$15.2 million each subsequent year.



4. Governance

The NSCC's governance is complex, given the institution has many different stakeholders and a close relationship with government.

4.1 Internal Governance

Within the NSCC, there are multiple governance actors. These include the administrative leadership (represented by the Board of Governors and the President), students and industry.

4.1.1 THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS AND PRESIDENT

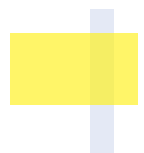
As specified in the Community College Act, the NSCC is an independent institution led by a Board of Governors. The Board of Governors appoints a President to act as the College's Chief Executive Officer. The responsibilities of the Board of Governors, the President and they are outlined in the Act.

The Board of Governors includes both elected and appointed members. Elected members include: two College students; one faculty member; one administrative staff member, and one support staff member. Of those members who are appointed, the Minister nominates between five and seven, and the Board appoints between five and seven (Nova Scotia House of Assembly 1996).

The Board has many responsibilities, including: setting tuition fees and payment schedules; establishing guidelines for the growth, suspension or transfer of any program of study; determining organizational policies; evaluating programs of study; managing and reporting on College expenditures; and, publishing an annual academic report on enrolment, graduation outcomes and other information as required by the Minister (LAE/NSCC, 2013).

As Chief Executive Officer, the President is responsible for the general direction and management of the College including programs and services, business affairs, and other matters as delegated by the Board (LAE/NSCC, 2013).

In 2004, the AGNS released a follow-up report to its 1999 audit of the NSCC and concluded that the College was overall "well managed and governed". The AGNS found the recommendations from its previous 1999 audit had largely been implemented, and identified best practices in governance such as: annual Board member self-evaluations, the use of a balanced score card approach for reporting on key performance indicators, annual Board planning meetings, the regular cyclical review of Board policies, and the development of work plans for the Board and its committees (AGNS 2004).



Best Practice: Five-Year Organizational Reviews

Under the Community College Act, the NSCC is required to publish Organizational Reviews every five years. The last review (NSCC 2013b) completed covered the period from 2006-2011. The Reviews answer seven specific questions:

5. Does the College have an adequate mission statement and a plan that clearly states its objectives, and are these clearly communicated to its community? (Review of mission statement and planning)
6. Does the College offer programs and other services that best meet the needs of its community? (Review of program and services)
7. Does the College attract and retain an appropriate number and mix of students? (Review of enrolment data, with tracking for participation by geographic location and membership within identified underrepresented communities)
8. Do students achieve appropriate outcomes? (Review of graduate survey data)
9. Does the institution obtain, organize and administer resources so that student outcomes are achieved at a reasonable cost? (Review of budget and operational efficiency)
10. Is the institution maintaining and building its intellectual and physical resources, including the quality of its employees, curriculum and physical plant? (Review of assets)
11. Does the college have systems that produce information that enables management to answer the above questions? (Review of management systems and practices)

From StudentsNS' perspective, the Organizational Reviews demonstrate dramatically greater transparency and accountability to the public on the part of the NSCC than is the case for many Nova Scotia universities. To our knowledge, no universities deliver equivalent reporting. The only drawback with respect to the Organizational Reviews is the fact that they are only published every five years, leaving significant information gaps over the intervening years.

4.1.2 STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Student representation on the Board of Governors and through campus Student Associations (SAs) provide the most important institutionalized avenue through which students can express their views and participate in the governance of the NSCC.



Principle: Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

Pursuant to article 56 of the Community Colleges Act, two student representatives are elected to the Board of Governors each year (Nova Scotia House of Assembly, 1996). One represents the HRM campuses and the second represents the remaining campuses. Student representatives are elected for one term, but may run for a second term, and participate in all Board activities and on standing committees. There is an item on each Board Meeting agenda to hear from the student representatives.

As well, each NSCC campus has its own SA, and all students who have paid the SA fee are automatically members (NSCC Student Services 2003).⁴⁴ Each SA has an elected Executive Committee composed of a President, Vice President (VP) Finance, VP Communications, VP Services, VP Activities, and two representatives from each program (one voting and one alternate – NSCC Student Services, 2003). In addition, each Executive Committee is required to appoint an SA Advisor, who is a non-voting member of the council who provides advice and support.⁴⁵ Any fee-paying student is eligible to run for an executive position in the annual elections.

SAs are governed by the NSCCSA Common Constitution. According to the Constitution, SAs are responsible for: “fostering mutual cooperation and understanding” and they are “the core decision-making unit for NSCC students”. The SA fulfill these responsibilities by organizing and supporting enriching activities and projects (including chartered societies and clubs), and promoting responsible student conduct. Clubs previously supported by SAs include a Running club, a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Queer club, and a Mental Health Committee.

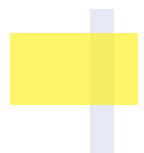
Each SA is accountable both to its student body and the College administration. It must provide students with a copy of its budget and Annual Report, and also file biannual financial statements with the Student Life Coordinator and the Manager of Administrative Services. The Annual report includes a financial report, an activities report, a committees report, and a minutes report.

4.1.3 INDUSTRY

Industry is active in a range of activities at the NSCC such as program development and review, applied research, and the provision of work placement and apprenticeship opportunities. The NSCC's relationship with industry is formalized

⁴⁴ Typically students in a program longer than 12 weeks are assessed Student Association fees

⁴⁵ Interview, June 2014.



in the MOU, which states: “The Province and the College will work together with current and emerging sectors of industry to ensure that the Province is well positioned to provide the workforce of the future” (LAE/NSCC, 2013). This explicit role contrasts starkly with universities, where collaboration with industry is much less common, much more informal and dramatically more controversial.

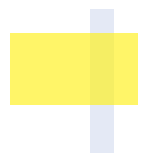
The presence of many stakeholders can complicate College governance as competing interests can impact decision-making and result in mission drift. Having industry as a key stakeholder can create a tension between the goal of being a community-focused, open access institution, and being an institution that serves the needs of the economy and the level of academic rigour that that implies (Levin 2000).

4.2 Relationship with the Province

The Province is understood to be not only the NSCC’s primary funder, but a major partner with close involvement in the College’s operations and management (LAE/NSCC 2013). The NSCC may be independent, but it is not so independent as a university.

As outlined in the *Act*, the Minister for LAE is responsible for making appointments to the NSCC’s Board of Governors, approving study programs, approving annual financial estimates, and tabling the College’s annual report in the House of Assembly (LAE/NSCC, 2013). Additionally, the Minister may commission a review of the NSCC’s mandate, programs, finances and any other matter related to the operations and management (Office of the Legislative Counsel 2011). In contrast, the Minister does not present universities’ annual reports to the House of Assembly, has considerably less authority in appointing representatives to their Boards of Governors, and generally may not commission any kind of review of universities’ operations whatsoever without the institutions’ consent and agreement.

The relationship between the Province and the NSCC is further defined in an MOU between the two parties. The MOU outlines administrative relationships, and outcomes the parties would like to achieve. Areas for collaboration include: budgeting and the business plan, program development and review, inclusion and retention of students from underrepresented groups, applied research, accountability, and the graduate survey (LAE/NSCC, 2013). The MOU also formalizes the NSCC’s budget process, stating that: “The Province and College shall work closely together throughout each fiscal year on matters related to budget development and financial planning, including tuition fee structure, prior to the Board’s review and recommendation to the Minister”. The current MOU is the first such agreement between the Province and the College, and was signed on



September 10, 2013 by the Deputy Minister (DM) of LAE and the President of the NSCC (LAE/NSCC 2013).⁴⁶

Program Development and Review

An area that demonstrates important collaboration between the various stakeholders in NSCC governance is program development. Under the terms of the MOU, the College is required to work closely with the Province when developing or modifying programs (LAE/NSCC 2013). A new program is first developed by College staff and subject experts, and then submitted to the Board of Governors for review and approval. The program is then submitted to LAE and reviewed by the Higher Education Review Committee (HERC). In making its assessment, the HERC considers factors such as labour market information, and requires letters of support from relevant industry leaders. If recommended by the HERC, the Minister then approves the program. The NSCC may not offer any program that has not been approved by the Minister.

To ensure that programs are providing the necessary competencies for the labour market, the College reviews each program at five-year intervals, and analyzes labour market information to determine the best mix of programs and best location for each program based on regional labour market data (LAE/NSCC 2013). Students and faculty are included in program review processes and their feedback is solicited on a continuous basis (StudentsNS 2014a).

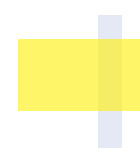
The DM is charged with the provincial responsibilities included in this MOU, which he/she delegates to the Department’s Higher Education Branch, to work with other relevant government departments as necessary (for example, the Department of Health and Wellness on programs concerning health care workers). The President bears the responsibilities of the College with respect to the MOU and is required to meet annually with the Minister, DM, and Chair of the Board, and quarterly with just the DM (LAE/NSCC 2013).

The NSCC MOU is inspired by Nova Scotia’s MOUs with its universities. The differences between the MOUs are instructive with respect to the different PSE institutions’ relationships with the Province and students.

Table 24: MOU Core Objectives

NSCC-PROVINCE MOU CORE OBJECTIVE	UNIVERSITY-PROVINCE MOU CORE OBJECTIVE
“To formalize the role of the parties in meeting the occupational training priorities of the Province of Nova Scotia and the needs of the labour market”	“To achieve a system-wide cost structure that is sustainable relative to the fiscal capacities of the Province, can deliver the goals of Clause 1, and is consistent with a fair and competitive tuition revenue regime (...)”.

⁴⁶ The MOU will remain in effect until March 31, 2016.

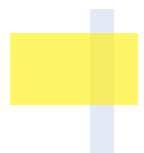


The NSCC MOU's core objective is much broader and encompasses the overall mandate of the College. It is also more focused on the external objectives of the College. The universities MOU core objective is more focused and concerned primarily with addressing the institutions' financial management. Of course, these differences reflect the considerably lesser independence of the NSCC vis-à-vis government.

4.3 The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship System

Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system also has a governance structure, which is in fact newly established. In response to a report (2014) by the Minister's Reference Group on Apprenticeship (MRGA), the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency (NSAA) was officially established on July 1, 2014 as an agency of the Crown. The mandate of the new agency is: "stewarding and operating a relevant, accessible and responsive industry-led trades training and certification system, and improving access to and participation in the system by Aboriginal persons, African Nova Scotians, differently-abled persons, immigrants, women and members of other under-represented groups" (LAE 2014b, 5). The NSAA is ultimately answerable to the Minister (NSAA 2014).

After less than a month of existence, it is impossible to assess what impact the agency has had, and will have. According to the MRGA report (2014), challenges to Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system included demographics, capacity, difficulties for small and rural employers and apprentices, and the differing capacities between sectors in the system, and the need for a system that is responsive to changes in technology and stakeholder needs. To function optimally, the apprenticeship system certainly needs buy-in from all participants, especially employers. Concerns around employer engagement have been cited as one of the key motivations for changing the apprenticeship system's governance; government is explicitly acknowledging industry as the key stakeholder in Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system. Both Federal and Provincial Governments continue to develop new policies to create national standards, facilitate labour mobility across the provinces, and better include employers in decision-making.



5. Challenges

The NSCC and its students face a range of challenges in the present and moving forward.

5.1 Demographics and Participation: Cause for Worry?

Demographic changes and declining rates of PSE participation should be a cause for some significant worry for the NSCC (OECD 2012). StudentsNS (2013a) has previously found that in Nova Scotia, the 18-29 year old demographic is projected to decline by 24% (or 36,000 people) between 2011 and 2031. The O'Neill report (2010) included a projection of the total population of Nova Scotia's 17-29 year-olds (40). This projected decline in the 17-29 demographic is despite an overall population increase of 2.4% over the same period. This demographic has represented roughly 78% of NSCC students since 2010.⁴⁷

Table 25: Demographic trends in Nova Scotia

	2015	2020	2025	2030
Population 17-29 years of age	143,400	130,000	118,100	112,600
Percentage Change		-9.34	-9.15	-4.66

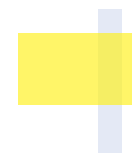
O'Neill 2010

In 2014, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) released a report detailing university participation in the Maritime Provinces. They found that home province university participation peaked in 2002-03 at 24.6% and since that time has declined to 21.1%. The national participation rate of Nova Scotians has also declined by 3.0%. Yet, despite the demographic shifts and the decline in participation at the university level, the NSCC has seen an increase in participation among the same demographic (18-24 year olds). As discussed, however, enrolment has not been growing steadily, but peaked in 2009-10 and then has declined every year since except 2013-14, by a total of 2% (see Section 2.2).

Concern: Demographic decline and current trends in post-secondary education participation threaten the sustainability of Nova Scotia's post-secondary sector.

The variations in NSCC enrolment have not been spread evenly across the province. Since 2009, enrolment has fallen at every campus except Cumberland (+31%),

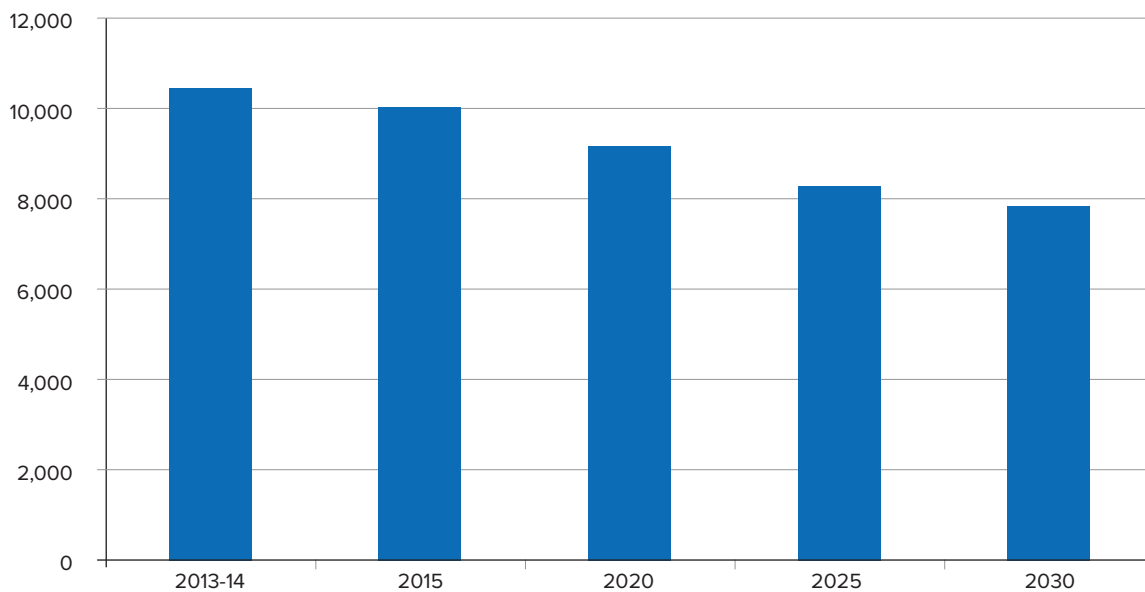
⁴⁷ Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, November 2014.



Waterfront (+20%) and Truro (+3%), although the shifting of programming to the Waterfront campus has been a significant factor in the drop in enrolment at the other two HRM campuses. Burridge Campus in Yarmouth has had the greatest decline in enrolment among rural campuses (-29%), followed by Kingstec (-19%), Pictou (-13%) and Lunenburg (-11%). Basically, enrolment in the HRM has increased by 6% while enrolment outside of HRM has fallen by 7%. Much of the narrative of NSCC growth is focused on the Waterfront Campus and may be largely echoes of boom years between 2005-2009 when enrolment increased annually by 5%. The increased concentration of the NSCC in the HRM is particularly interesting in light of higher attendance among rural Nova Scotians.

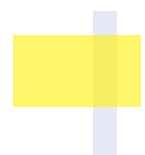
As discussed earlier, Nova Scotia residents encompass 96% of NSCC enrolment. We have also shown that rural Nova Scotians disproportionately study at the NSCC, and these are also the regions of the province that are aging most rapidly. Using population projections, enrolment numbers and participation rate data for Nova Scotia, we can model projected NSCC enrolment over the next 15 years assuming no change in the participation rate from the 2013-14 academic year (7% for the 18-29 cohort)⁴⁸ and population projections from the O’Neill report (2010).

Figure 9: Projected enrolment of Nova Scotia residents at the NSCC



According to this projection, to maintain the 2013-14 enrolment level of 10,866 in 2030, the total out-of-province and international student enrolment would have to increase by 626%, or sevenfold, from 411 in 2013-14 to 2,984 in 2030. Of course, the consistent presence of waiting lists does suggest our projected need may be partially mitigated through higher acceptance rates from the already present population, but certainly not fully. Again, the decline in Nova Scotia’s population will

⁴⁸ Using 148,200 as the base population and 10,427 as NSCC enrolment.



not be evenly distributed across the Province and could have especially serious impacts on certain rural campuses.

Universities have been much more aggressive in identifying international students as a key part of their long-term recruitment strategies. In the long-term, the NSCC may also wish to look abroad for students, notably to meet local demand for skilled labour, which would have important implications for the College's operations. International demand for community college education is very different from university education, with students perhaps less likely to seek a community college credential to support a livelihood elsewhere in the world. Considering this, and the NSCC's mandate to support the local workforce, there could be an even greater need for coordination with immigration processes and services at the NSCC.

We do not necessarily assume that the NSCC should remain the same size. It may be appropriate to pursue a strategy of gradual downsizing. However, at the very least there should be a public conversation about the future of the NSCC, and the possible benefits and other implications of a strategy that places greater emphasis on recruitment from outside the province.

5.2 Financial Challenges

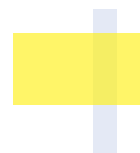
Notwithstanding relatively low tuition fees and shorter programs at the NSCC, NSCC students are confronting multiple important financial challenges.

5.2.1 STUDENT DEBT

While student debts among college graduates in Nova Scotia are considerably smaller than for university graduates, they still exceed the national average. Even more importantly, the considerably higher default rates among college graduates strongly suggest that college graduates' debt deserves as much attention and action as undergraduate debt. Yet, notwithstanding the NSCC's more generous fee structure, college students have not benefited from the same supports as undergraduates to help reduce their debt.

In 2011, the provincial government introduced the Debt Cap program to limit the amount of provincial student loan debt incurred by four-year undergraduate degree program students (LAE 2012).⁴⁹ The debt cap equates to the maximum CSLP debt that could be accumulated in a four-year period, \$28,560, and forgives any provincial debt incurred in excess to this amount. The degree must be completed within eight years, but the assessment will only take into account the first four years of study, such that if the degree takes six years to complete that student will only be covered for the first four years (LAE 2012). At the time, the Province estimated that the debt cap would deliver an average benefit of \$10,000 to recipients (ANSSA 2011).

⁴⁹ This does not include professional undergraduate programs such as medicine, dentistry or law.



A number of criticisms have been raised relative to the debt cap. It delivers debt relief at the back end of a student's studies, as opposed to providing full grants up front, and debt-averse students may not realize the debt cap exists and be discouraged by the prospect of accumulating debt. The cap is also limited to just four years of benefits at a time when many students take much longer to complete their degrees; especially those who must reduce their course load as a result of a disability or to work part-time.

Regardless, this program evidently does not deliver any benefit to NSCC students. Smaller program changes have delivered some support to NSCC students, including the conversion of 40% of provincial student loans to grants since 2008.

Concern: The provincial debt cap does not benefit community college graduates even though they have higher default rates than university graduates.

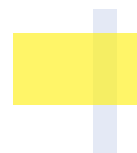
The recently eliminated Graduate Retention Rebate (GRR) similarly prioritized university graduates over college graduates. The GRR provided tax relief for graduates who remained in Nova Scotia for six years after graduation, to incentivize graduates staying in the province and to help them pay off their student debt. However, the annual rebate was worth just \$1,250 for college graduates, compared to \$2,500 for university graduates. StudentsNS was a strong critic of the GRR program because it concentrated support for graduates after their studies, was not an effective measure to support youth retention, and was regressive in supporting graduates with higher incomes more than those on lower incomes (see StudentsNS 2013b).⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the GRR provides further evidence of recent government prioritization of debt reduction for university graduates first.

The default rates also underline the importance of maintaining relatively low costs at the NSCC, considering graduates have lower earnings, greater difficulty finding employment, and clearly a harder time paying off their debts. This is relevant not only to local students in regular diploma programs, but also international students and students in more expensive programs. This is especially important considering the NSCC's mandate to specifically fill labour market needs in Nova Scotia, as debt levels are associated with a higher likelihood to leave the Province post-graduation for work (CASA 2010).

5.2.2 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SHORTFALLS FOR MATURE STUDENTS

As discussed earlier, NSCC students average 25.3 years of age. More than 35% of NSCC students are 25 or older. Mature students in Nova Scotia can face nearly

⁵⁰ Considering that community college graduates generally earn lower incomes than university graduates over their lifetimes, the higher maximum credit amount for university graduates arguably represented another regressive feature of the GRR program.



insurmountable financial barriers to PSE access as a direct result of existing SFA eligibility criteria (see StudentsNS, 2013b).

Existing policy assumes it is reasonable for a married couple including a student to live well below a moderate standard of living (MSOL – as defined by the CSLP for parents of dependent students). As a result, a student-working couple is afforded an annual cost allowance that is \$16,000 below that of a dependent student's parents. When comparing couples with one to three children, this difference rises well above \$20,000. As a consequence of this differential standard of living, a student's spouse is expected to make a much larger contribution than would a parent with a similar level of income. Depending on total income and other allowable expenses, a dependent student's parents may be required to contribute under 5% of their total after-tax income (ATI); whereas a student's working spouse may be expected to contribute a much more significant share of ATI (40-50%) to their educational costs.

CONCERN: Married couples with at least one person on student financial assistance are expected to live well below a moderate standard of living, as defined by the Canada Student Loans Program.

CONCERN: For married student financial assistance applicants, the financial contributions expected of a student's spouse are unrealistically large.

CONCERN: The student contribution assumptions fail to consider potentially important financial priorities including personal (and/or spousal) retirement savings, registered education savings for dependent children, and registered disability savings for any family member.

In addition to this eligibility barrier for married students, there are other significant barriers that mature students are more likely to face. For example, students with young children must typically incur significant child care costs so that they can allocate time to studying. In Nova Scotia, one month of child care for a child under six can easily cost \$1,000. Even low income parents that receive a full Nova Scotia Child Care Subsidy and (\$21 per day) and the maximum SFA allowance for child care (\$476) may fall short of their total monthly costs. This is because the financial need of low income students often exceeds the maximum level of federal/provincial assistance available, leaving the student with so-called 'unmet need' but no real reduction in monthly costs.

Of course, the largest cost of PSE for any student is the opportunity cost of spending time studying as opposed to earning income in the labour market. By virtue of their previous education and/or work experience, the opportunity costs of PSE for mature students will often be much higher than those of a student entering college



or university directly from high school. This will almost always be true of individuals engaged in professional careers (i.e. those requiring PSE credentials or equivalent experience) who are returning to school to upgrade their skills and their productivity.

Finally, mature students are also more likely to have Registered Retirement Savings Plans and other investments that are considered by SFA policy to be ‘resources’ when calculating a student’s eligibility for assistance. StudentsNS has questioned this practice previously because, using a life course approach to public policy, it makes little sense to force any student (or their parents) to compromise their retirement savings if they prefer to use the government student financial assistance (SFA) system instead. The available evidence indicates that few Canadians are saving enough for their retirements, so government SFA policy should seek to avoid creating disincentives to retirement savings for individuals who might consider pursuing further PSE later in life. In a similar fashion, students with children should be incentivized by SFA policy to enrol in Registered Education Savings Plans and Registered Disability Savings Plans for their own children without limiting their own access to PSE in the present. *StudentsNS* opposes any policy that forces loan applicants to heavily discount their current or future wellbeing (or that of their children) to pursue education.

These PSE access barriers is particularly problematic in Nova Scotia’s current PSE enrolment landscape. As our domestic population of ‘traditional’ PSE entrants (18-24 year olds) dwindles, it is becoming more difficult for Nova Scotia’s colleges and universities to meet enrolment targets. If mature students are thought to be a solution to the institutions’ enrolment problems, it is clear that SFA policies must continually adapt to reflect the needs of the changing age profile of Nova Scotia’s student population.

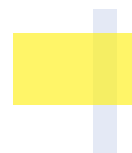
5.2.3 UNPREDICTABILITY OF FEES

As we have indicated, NSCC tuition is not formally regulated and may vary significantly from year to year. Students register for PSE programs based on an understanding of the cost and arbitrary and dramatic increases in a single year can significantly impact on a student’s ability to support this cost. Yet, students at the NSCC have no reasonable way of planning for the full cost of a multi-year program.

For example, the 15% increase to Advanced Diploma and International Student fees in 2013 was announced in June. Students were left with minimal time to prepare for the cost increase. It also resulted in a real increase in Advanced Diploma tuition of \$487.50 between 2010-11 and 2014-15.

5.2.4 ANCILLARY FEES

We have previously characterized ancillary fees as “tuition by another name”, meaning that they are a way for institutions with regulated tuition to circumvent tuition caps by charging supplementary fees (*StudentsNS* 2013a). Nova Scotia’s



universities, for example, increased ancillary fees by 13.4% per year between 2011 and 2014, more than doubling campus renewal fees, under circumstances in which their funding was being cut nominally by 10% and tuition growth was capped at 3% per year (StudentsNS September 4, 2014).

Maintaining low tuition fees at the NSCC is a priority for the Province. However, the NSCC can increase revenues by masking tuition increases as a different fee.

Concern: To maintain the impression that tuition is low, ancillary and auxiliary fees are used to increase Nova Scotia Community College revenues instead of increasing tuition.

The most noteworthy increases in the NSCC's ancillary fees were in 2012, when the CSF and the International Students Fee (ISF) were introduced (NSCC 2012c). According to the NSCC, the CSF (\$100) pays for identity cards, transcripts, and technology, and was introduced to address rising costs, but also cancelled out many smaller fees that students previously had to pay for. The ISF (\$1000) was introduced to: "support continued improvement and development of dedicated services and supports for International students", which includes the International student guidebook. These new fees suggest a number of questions.

Firstly, why is it that the NSCC needed the CSF in 2012 specifically to address rising costs, whereas the fee was not needed to address those costs previously, notably in relation to the services identified? The NSCC's operating grant was cut by 1% relative to inflation in 2012, while tuition increased by 3%. It is quite apparent that the CSF was introduced to help offset the impact of financial constraints, through much the same approach as the universities. In 2012, the College was contacted by StudentsNS to get more information on these new fees. In fact, a senior NSCC administrator admitted in conversation in 2012 that these fees were charged to get around government opposition to increased tuition.⁵¹

Secondly, how are the different services funded through these fees "ancillary" and not core to the operations of a college, funded through the operating grant and tuition? The NSCC does not actually provide any information on where ancillary fee revenues are being spent, so it is impossible to know whether the cost of services in line with the revenues collected, or if the revenues are spent on entirely different things. There is no indication what "dedicated services and supports for International students" have been created through the ISF beyond a new orientation guide. The NSCC has indicated that it is tracking international student requests for English as additional language support starting this fall and creating a resource guide based on this information, as well as working with the SAs to have international student

⁵¹ We generally do not quote these kinds of conversations directly in reports, however in this case the conversation was taking place in the context of a request for information on student fees through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, therefore a more formal circumstance.



liaisons on each campus to organize monthly get-togethers.⁵² Yet it seems apparent that the \$79,000 collected through the ISF in 2013-14 should support more activities than just these, and that the full scope of additional services should have been planned before the fee was approved. Many of NSCC International's services are also targeted at domestic students, services that are valuable but not appropriate to fund through an international student ancillary fee.

Such concerns are not unique to the NSCC. A previous StudentsNS report (2013c) noted that universities "are not accountable for ensuring the funding they receive to support international students is actually spent on services for those students".

Concern: It is unclear what services are funded by the International Student Fee.

Thirdly, what kind of services should be considered ancillary and eligible for funding through ancillary fees? The CSF example suggests services that were once funded through core funding became ancillary only when core funding was not growing quickly enough.

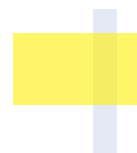
Finally, what is the process for deciding to introduce or increase ancillary fees? These fees are supposed to be paying for ancillary services that are not core to the operations of the college. Therefore it is reasonable to expect students to have a greater say in whether they want the services that these fees would pay for. Generally, students do not have a problem paying for additional services that they feel are beneficial, such as health and dental plans, and SA fees. However, it is unclear whether the NSCC consults SAs and the broader student community at all when introducing or increasing ancillary and auxiliary fees. To our knowledge, no student consultations were conducted prior to the introduction of the CSF and the ISF.

Principle: Students should be meaningfully consulted and informed anytime an ancillary or auxiliary fee is increased or introduced.

Concern: The Nova Scotia Community College does not have a formal consultation process concerning ancillary and auxiliary fees.

In contrast, the MOU between the Province and Nova Scotia's universities states: "In circumstances where students are to be faced with compulsory fee increases relating to ancillary operations, recognized student organizations on each campus will be consulted at least four weeks in advance of the approval by the university

52 Correspondence, August 19, 2014.



of the proposed increase. This timing is to allow for effective student input into the proposal prior to the decision” (CONSUP/LAE 2011). StudentsNS has been very critical of this clause, as the consultation requirement is inadequately defined, such that universities have been able to introduce new ancillary fees in the face of staunch student opposition. Nevertheless, the clause does signal some commitment from the signatories towards respecting students’ voices in determining what services they wish to fund, whereas the MOU with the NSCC has no such provision.

5.3 Accountability

The poor respect for student choice in the process of approving or increasing ancillary fees at the NSCC is one element of a structure that systematically excludes students from meaningful engagement in decision-making. The NSCC’s governance structures make it remarkably unaccountable to its student body.

5.3.1 LIMITED REFERENCE TO STUDENTS IN THE NSCC MOU

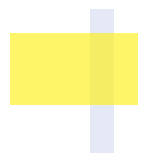
There is dramatically more focus on students and student consultation in the universities MOU compared to the NSCC MOU. By way of illustration, the word student only appears twice in the NSCC MOU, compared to 22 times in the universities MOU. Moreover, the two references in the NSCC MOU are not directly related to student consultation, whereas the universities’ MOU includes explicit sections on student consultation around issues such as tuition, ancillary and auxiliary fees, and amendments to the MOU, and stipulates that all parties are “committed to ongoing, meaningful consultation with students throughout the term of the MOU”. Consultation is loosely defined, but it further states “the Partnership will meet annually with representatives of Nova Scotia student organizations to discuss their work plan, and progress and to obtain student input” (CONSUP and LAE 2011). There are no such provisions in the NSCC MOU for consultations with the SAs.

Concern: The Memorandum of Understanding between the Province and the Nova Scotia Community College does not include specific provisions concerning student consultation.

This is not to suggest that student consultation does not take place at the NSCC. However, not having a specific reference to students and consultation in the MOU provides a strong indication that students are not viewed as important players in the high-level policy development of the College, nor in its relations with the Province.

5.3.2 WEAK STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNANCE

SAs are intended to “provide communication and understanding between the student body and the College” (NSCC Student Services 2003, 1). According to the



NSCCSA Constitution, this communication is achieved through contact with the two student representatives on the NSCC Board of Governors.

Firstly, there is no defined process for how Board of Governors representatives are expected to communicate with and report to the SAs, nor is it clear how two student representatives can maintain communication with 13 different SAs. Without formal reporting mechanisms and requirements for consultation, it is difficult to ensure that there is adequate and clear communication between the Student Governors and the SAs.

The Board of Governors makes key decisions concerning operating budgets, tuition, programming, and student fees. For SAs to meet their mandate, it is essential that student views are adequately represented in these discussions and that the decision-making process is understood and communicated.

Concern: Current provisions for communication between student representatives at the Board of Governors and the Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations are ill defined and inadequate.

In the absence of communication between the SAs and student Board of Governors representatives, direct consultation between SAs and campus administration are even more important. The SA Presidents do have meetings with the President and campus Principals, but these generally take place at the behest of the administration and they are not formally required. The frequency of meetings varies significantly between campuses.

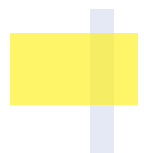
Concern: Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations and campus administrations do not have formal structures or expectations for collaboration.

Secondly, two out of nineteen is a comparatively small number of student representatives at the NSCC Board of Governors, especially considering that they are expected to represent the views of the NSCC's almost 11,000 students at 13 campuses. In comparison, Dalhousie University has three student representatives on its Board of Governors, though certainly similar difficulties in terms of representatives for different campuses and the relative weight of students' voice.⁵³

5.3.3 DETERMINING “LABOUR MARKET DEMAND”

Anecdotally, there is a strong perception in the sector that program spaces in some programs do not correspond to labour market demand. Certain programs may be

⁵³ The Dalhousie Board of Governors does not have a seat for students outside of Halifax, notably at the Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture in Truro, and the student representatives account for only three representatives out of 24 in total.



undersubscribed relative to labour market demand to save costs, while others may be oversubscribed in an effort to boost enrolment and funding.

The Medical Lab Technicians program has an elevated wait-list, but the number of seats has not been increased to accept everyone on the wait-list, reportedly because the NSCC does not want to flood the market with graduates that will not find employment (Willick, 2012). However, individuals have questioned whether the true cause for restricted enrolment is program cost, in a highly resource-intensive program.⁵⁴

Pre-apprenticeship programs are of particular concern for the opposite reason. For those who choose to pursue a pre-apprenticeship program as a means to access the apprenticeship system, there is a significant opportunity cost (time and money). With respect to cost, the tuition for two years of pre-apprenticeship is equal to approximately \$6,080, whereas the first two 8-week blocks of technical training replaced by this pre-apprenticeship training only cost \$1,401.76. On top of this, apprentices are being compensated for full-time work, while pre-apprentices are students and generally not paid to attend class. While graduates can receive advanced standing, this standing requires significantly more hours of work.

Concern: Individuals are, on average, not entering the apprenticeship system until later in life, resulting in a higher opportunity cost of returning to school and decreasing the likelihood of completing the program.

These realities led the MRGA (2014) to find that “there are too many pre-apprentice seats, while too few sections of apprenticeship technical training are available”. This concern is not only relevant to government and NSCC decision-makers, but even more so to the learners that are spending time and money to occupy the pre-apprentice seats.

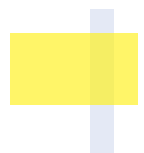
Interviewees further assert that the number of pre-apprentices far exceeds local labour market demand in certain trades. It would appear that programs are more geared towards the national labour market than the local.⁵⁵

The new apprenticeship agency will be changing how spaces are determined for apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.⁵⁶ They plan to reinstate trade advisory committees on a trade-by-trade basis, which will shift power in determining spaces from the NSCC into the hands of industry. A trade that has been identified for early work is construction electrician.

54 Interview, June 2014.

55 Interview, October 22, 2014.

56 Interview, January 2015



5.3.4 GRADUATE SURVEYS

Surveys provide valuable information to policy-makers and any interested party. This is challenged by a lack of system-level data and analysis and this has been compounded by the elimination of StatsCan surveys, such as the Community College Student Survey, Youth in Transition, and the Adult Education and Training Survey (Junor and Usher 2004, House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance 2014). The NSCC's graduate survey helps to counteract the negative impacts of the changes in StatsCan practices, but there are a number of problems with the current design and implementation of the NSCC's graduate surveys. It seems, notably, that the survey places too much emphasis on collecting data that supports marketing and maybe even lobbying, and not enough evidence on how the NSCC could improve its programs and services.

For the purpose of the Survey, for example, "average annual salary" includes graduates working full-time in a field related to their studies. The earnings of those working part-time or in an unrelated field are not reported. Post-secondary institutions are not solely responsible for the employment outcomes of their graduates, but having this data would give the broader policy-making community a more complete picture of graduate outcomes.

Compared with surveys in New Brunswick (MQO Research 2013) and Ontario (Algonquin College 2014), the NSCC survey provides dramatically less information specific to particular programs. Program-specific data is dramatically more helpful for prospective students and their families, as employment outcomes notably can vary wildly between different programs. A significant limitation on the quality of survey data is relatively low survey completion rates, as shown in Table 26. Without higher participation, data at the level of particular programs simply cannot be relied upon.

Table 26: 2013 Graduate Follow Up Survey Completion Rates

SCHOOL	COMPLETION RATE
Access	36%
Applied Arts & New Media	41%
Business	41%
Health & Human Services	36%
Trades & Technology	33%
Overall NSCC	37%

Correspondence, NSCC Institutional Research Department, January 2015.

Concern: The Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey does not obtain adequate program-level data.



The survey previously excluded students with disabilities (surveyed separately – NSCC, 2012), but will include them as of 2014, which is an improvement. It does not track students based on their membership in the other identified priority access groups. The NSCC does implement an early leavers study each February, surveying students who left their studies to determine what challenges they faced and whether they plan to resume their studies, and tracks persistence for members of underrepresented groups.

To help inform the development of articulation agreements and credit transfer processes, the survey could ask more about students who have previously completed some PSE. As more graduates move between the NSCC and Nova Scotia's universities, it will be increasingly important to track the outcomes of graduates from both types of PSE. This highlights the inherent limitations of conducting graduate surveys at the NSCC in isolation from the Province and region's universities, considering the interactions between the different types of PSE institutions and the importance of data comparability.

5.4 Apprenticeship-specific challenges

Apprentices and prospective apprentices specifically encounter a number of different challenges. On the one hand, employer engagement can make it very difficult to enter the apprenticeship system. On the other hand, it is not entirely clear whether those who choose to take pre-apprenticeship programs will have an adequate return on their investment in time and funds.

5.4.1 EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Studies have found that employer participation is a major entry barrier for many prospective apprentices. In a 2006 Survey conducted by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges and the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (ACCC & CAF, 2006), 63% of respondents reported having found an apprenticeship placement within three months of beginning their search, with the average for this group at two months. However, for the 37% who did not find an employer in the first three months, the average waiting time was seven months. This is a significant period of time in terms of the opportunity cost of education including lost-earnings, and delayed completion of PSE.

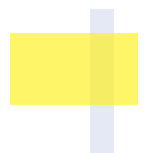
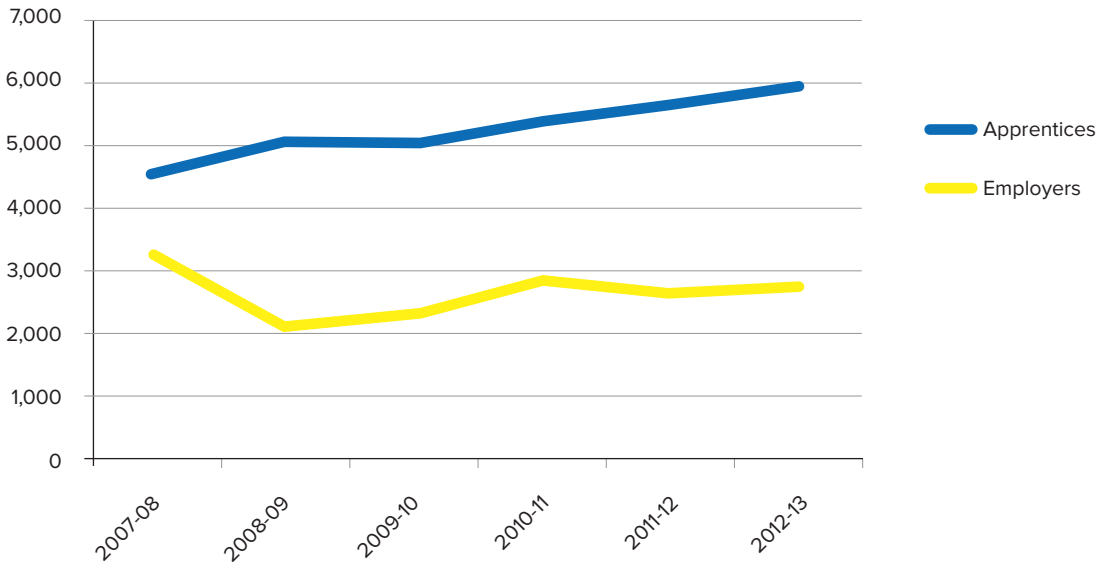


Figure 10: Apprenticeship participation in Nova Scotia



NSAA 2014b, ANS & NSLAE 2012, ANS & NSLAE 2011, ANS & NSLWD 2009, NSATSD 2008

Apprenticeship is necessarily linked to the labour market to an even greater extent than other forms of PSE. A weak labour market can make it more difficult for prospective apprentices to find placements, while apprentices can often be the first laid-off if an employer must cut their workforce. The total number of Nova Scotia employers hiring apprentices declined by 35% between 2007 and 2008 as Nova Scotia's economy went into recession. Since 2009, however, the total number of participating employers still has not recovered to 2007-08 levels. Still, the number of active apprentices has increased annually since 2007-08, which could indicate that employers are hiring multiple apprentices, apprentices were in technical training at the time the count was conducted, or apprentices are leaving the province for their workplace training.

As well, research suggests employers do not provide apprentices with adequate support. According to the MRGA (2014), many employers see the hiring of the apprentice as their main role, not supporting apprentices once they are working for them. Aside from salary costs, barriers to providing more workplace learning identified by employers include poaching, time off the job, a question as to whether the benefits outweigh the costs, and regulations that impede labour mobility or create different standards across the country (HCSCF 2014; Saunders 2008).

On the other hand, a 2008 study conducted by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF) found that, on average, "for each \$1 invested in an apprentice, a benefit of up to \$1.38 accrues to employers". The study also found that employers who hired their apprentices at the end of the program had lower turnover. Still, the publicly available data shows that more research needs to be done to understand trends in hiring apprentices overall. Canada does not have a great track record for the provision of workplace training (relative to other OECD nations) and, while recognizing that



different organizations have different capacities, employers must be willing to invest their own resources as well (StudentsNS 2014b).

In terms of NSCC efforts to support employers, the MRGA also asserted that the current training budget and schedule changes “didn’t seem to connect to industry demand for training and services”. This echoes concerns at the national level that trade schools are not sufficiently flexible and do not offer courses at times convenient to apprentices (HCSCF 2014, 15).

5.4.2 ENGAGING PRE-APPRENTICE AND APPRENTICE STUDENTS

There are also challenges in the engagement of apprentices in governance. This is true both with respect to the NSCC and the NSAA.

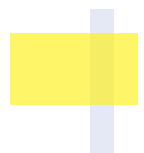
Students in the pre-apprentice program are assessed SA fees and are members of their campus SA and have a representative on their respective council. Apprentices, however, have 5-8 weeks of technical training per year and thus are not assessed SA fees. In the workplace, unions and trade affiliations represent apprentices, but it is no less important that apprentices have representation with the institution that provides their technical training and that mechanisms are in place to obtain their feedback.

Concern: Apprentices do not have formal representation at the institutions where they receive technical training.

With respect to the quality of education, apprentices and pre-apprentice students can provide feedback through regular course evaluations, graduate surveys and as part of the program review process (focus groups are conducted with present and past students).⁵⁷ Students are encouraged to speak with faculty and the academic chair to address concerns. Recently, the apprenticeship program also conducted a survey of 500 apprentices to provide benchmarks around student satisfaction with the program and preparedness for the workplace. Employers were consulted for their perceptions as well. This survey was just recently concluded and a report is forthcoming. This is a very important exercise and something that should be conducted on a regular-basis. The NSCC regularly consults with industry when developing technical training and apprentices should be recognized as important actors in the process as well.

Similarly, the new NSAA has strengthened employer engagement in decision-making dramatically to try to strengthen the apprenticeship system. It is concerning, however, that strengthened employer engagement could come at the expense of apprentices’ own say, or at the very least not be accompanied by increased apprentice participation in decision-making. The Minister’s assertion that “without

⁵⁷ Interview, June 26, 2014.



employers, apprenticeship simply doesn't work" is very true, but it also obviously does not work without apprentices. It is important to balance the need for industry buy-in with decision-making that also promotes and protects the interests of apprentices, as well as the broader public.

5.4.3 LATE ENTRY INTO APPRENTICESHIP

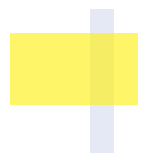
The average age of new registrants in Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system was 28 in 2011-12. This supports findings that most apprentices enter the system after having been in contact with the labour market, not directly after high school (ACCC & CAF, 2006). In this sense, apprenticeship is not considered a direct alternative to university or a college diploma program.

These facts support Sharpe and Gibson's (2005) argument that apprenticeship is not viewed as a "school to work" institution, but more of a means of retraining, or assisting older workers to transition within the labour market. The lack of integration between the education system and apprenticeship means that apprenticeship is not clearly communicated or understood by Primary to Grade 12 (P-12) students and the public as a viable option. Guidance counselors tend to promote academic PSE programs over vocational programs and this feeds some of the perception that apprenticeship is for students with poor marks, or no other options (Sharpe and Gibson 2005).

Industry has also expressed concern that Canadian students are not receiving sufficient information on careers in the trades and that there is a lingering perception that trades are a last choice and that they do not require high-level skills. In its testimony to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance (HCSCF – 2004), the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum and Merit Contractors Association argued that "poorly performing students are encouraged to enroll in apprenticeship and skilled trades programs", and in their view "these programs now require strong mathematics, science, language and communication skills" (15).

What is concerning is that "returns on investment in education are higher the younger the age at which one makes such investments" (ACCC & CAF 2006). Some argue that the lower opportunity-cost of being an apprentice at a younger age means they are more likely to complete the program compared with older students (Sharpe and Gibson 2005). More research on how pre-apprenticeship program completion affects retention and time-to-completion in the general apprenticeship system could be valuable to support strengthened system integration and program offerings.

On the other hand, providing opportunities for lifelong learning and for adults to retrain and enter new fields of work is incredibly important. The apprenticeship system may be attracting older learners in large part because it is the most



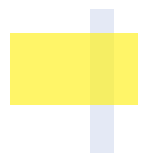
affordable option to secure a credential, one through which they will be able to continue taking home a paycheque.

5.4.4 QUALITY OF APPRENTICESHIP AND PRE-APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Significant concerns were raised in interviews respecting the quality of trades training specifically at the NSCC, especially among industry and government representatives. Given that we cannot substantiate these concerns, we will not relate them in detail. Speaking generally however, they range from poor pedagogical methods to weaknesses in curriculum design, which mean apprentices and students waste significant classroom time and may not be adequately prepared for success.⁵⁸ Programs may be simply too long relative to the content that needs to be learned. In pre-apprenticeship, some programs may be insufficiently applied and do not adequately connect theory and practice.

Concern: Apprenticeship and Pre-apprenticeship training delivered by the Nova Scotia Community College may not meet expectations for curriculum design and delivery.

58 Interview, November 2015.



6. A Better College for Students

The NSCC is a critical asset for Nova Scotia, supporting economic and social development across the Province, notably for individuals who would historically face significant barriers to participation in PSE. However, we have identified a number of challenges facing NSCC students. The Province and the NSCC can and must take action.

6.1 Student Finances

In many ways, pursuing studies at the NSCC is relatively affordable compared to other PSE options, due to the lower opportunity cost associated with shorter program lengths and lower tuition fees. NSCC graduates do have relatively lower debt levels. However, debt levels for NSCC graduates are higher than the national average while graduate earnings are lower, and default rates remain significantly more elevated than for university graduates. Considering also how many financial aid programs are less advantageous to NSCC students, these students' financial picture is far from rosy.

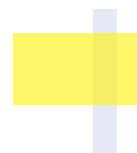
Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should commit to reducing Nova Scotia college graduates' ratio between debt and post-graduate earnings to at least the national average.*

This commitment would ensure NSCC students graduate with debt-levels below the national average, which they will be more able to finance with earnings in Nova Scotia's labour force. This is especially important considering evidence associating higher debt levels with a greater likelihood to leave Nova Scotia post-graduation in search of higher paying work (CASA 2010). Multiple steps would need to be taken to support this goal, in terms of both fees and financial aid.

Over the past five years, domestic diploma and certificate tuition has increased by 3% annually, outpacing inflation, and advanced diploma and international students have had unpredictable annual increase of as much as 15%. The Province and the NSCC must move to control costs to students.

Recommendation: *The Province should freeze tuition at the Nova Scotia Community College nominally until unemployment recovers to pre-recession levels.*

The NSCC must live within the means of its funders to support it. In times of poor economic conditions, the capacity of students to fund the NSCC is especially limited. In 2014, unemployment in Nova Scotia was at 8.82%, as compared with 7.64% in 2008 (StatsCan 2015). We recommend that tuition be frozen at 0% nominal growth, a real tuition reduction, until employment rates recover. This step would also help to



make the NSCC more accountable for its graduates' employment outcomes, which is in keeping with the NSCC's role as the Province's principal training arm.

Our tuition recommendations would apply across NSCC programs that charge tuition fees, excepting international students. In their case, these steps would not go far enough.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia should eliminate international student differential fees at the Community College, within the context of a Community College-based immigration strategy.*

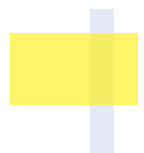
Nova Scotia faces dramatic demographic decline and significant need for newcomers to maintain and enhance our economic, social and cultural vitality. Considering our circumstances, we have previously recommended that the Province of Nova Scotia should develop an international education strategy to help support greater immigration to Nova Scotia, and the NSCBNE Report subsequently recommended that Nova Scotia strive to double the proportion of international students who settle in the province post-graduation. As local demographics further threaten enrolment, the NSCC should also consider seeking students overseas, and should not do so to simply boost its bottom-line, but to boost immigration and the value that the NSCC is delivering to our province.

Vocational programs can be linked more closely to immigration and helping graduates to transition into our workforce. Meanwhile, it is reasonable to expect that international students at NSCC are less likely to be seeking skills that they can use elsewhere in the world, and more focused on employment within Canada. High costs and debt burdens could drive these graduates out of Nova Scotia to places where earnings are higher, especially because they will often have less personal connections to retain them in Nova Scotia and college graduate earnings are generally lower. Eliminating international differential fees would be an important element within a broader strategy for supporting immigration through the NSCC.

Simply regulating tuition, however, is not adequate to protect the cost of PSE considering how institutions like the NSCC have used ancillary fees to circumvent these regulations. Ancillary fees must also be controlled through multiple steps.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should clearly define the types of services that may be considered ancillary and funded through an ancillary fee.*

An ancillary fee must somehow be distinguished from tuition, as opposed to simply being tuition by another name. The NSCC and the Province need to define what constitutes an *ancillary* service that can be funded through an *ancillary fee*, as opposed to core operations funded through tuition, and not allow services to shift between ancillary and core status depending on the institution's financial circumstances.



Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia should require that the NSCC must pursue a formal consultation process, which is agreed upon with the Student Associations, to be able to introduce new ancillary fees or increase ancillary fees faster than the rate of inflation.*

Given that ancillary fees should fund ancillary services of the NSCC and not its core operations, students should have the say over whether they wish to finance these additional services. This is the practice in Ontario, where the specific process for determining student consent must be agreed upon between the PSE institution and the student association.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College must develop a mechanism to report on how ancillary fee revenues are being spent.*

Finally, once ancillary services are specifically defined, the NSCC should have to track whether the fees collected to fund these services are actually doing so, or being shifted into general operating revenue. This is especially important when students have agreed to fund the specific service.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College, in partnership with international student representatives at the NSCC and Students Nova Scotia, should conduct a review of services funded through its International Student Fee and act to ensure fee revenue is either spent on effective and targeted services or reimbursed to students.*

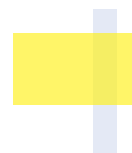
Targeted international student services are very important, including supports for arrival, social integration, language skills acquisition, academic transitioning and employment (see StudentsNS 2013c). However, it is not clear that these services are being funded through the current ISF.

Once tuition and ancillary fees are regulated appropriately the NSCC will be in a better position to inform prospective students of their cost of studies.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should provide students with an accurate explanation of the full costs of their program when they enroll.*

These recommendations would ensure that students would not continue to face significant, unpredictable cost increases just months before the beginning of the fall semester. Instead, the NSCC could let students know from the start exactly how much they will charge the student for their program.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For many international students this still may not overly mitigate cost variability given fluctuations in currency exchange rates, as is very apparent in 2014-15.



The Province of Nova Scotia also needs to take steps to improve SFA for students at the NSCC, including to make more funding available to NSCC students and lessen the debt burden that they face post-graduation.

Firstly, our research suggests that many students are not benefiting fully from programs that are already in place. The Province and the NSCC need to take steps to better inform students and graduates about the Federal and Provincial SFA programs.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Community College, high schools and the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning should develop a strategy to inform active and prospective community college students about the relevant policies and benefits of the Canada Student Loan and Nova Scotia Student Assistance Programs.*

The default rates of NSCC graduates strongly suggest that NSCC students are not aware of the RAP program, as practically no graduate eligible for RAP should go into default. Students also may not realize that CSLP and NSSAP loans offer dramatically better conditions with respect to interest and repayment than private loans and credit card debt. Simply expanding information on SFA could significantly improve the financial circumstances of many NSCC students.

Student assistance program improvements must extend beyond greater information however. The program must better serve those NSCC students who do access it.

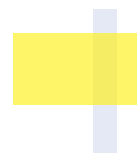
Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should convert all its loans to grants for Nova Scotia residents who wish to pursue studies at the Nova Scotia Community College.*

This policy would effectively cap NSCC graduates' debts per year at the maximum loan amount offered by the CSLP. It would deliver debt relief in particular to students with the greatest financial need.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia should introduce a low-income grant through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program that supplements the Federal Low-Income Access Grant to fund the full cost of tuition in regular diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College.*

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia should introduce a middle-income grant through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program that supplements the Federal Middle-Income Access Grant to fund half the cost of tuition in regular diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College.*

These recommendations would ensure that low-income students can access full-grant funding to cover their tuition at the NSCC, and middle-income students for half their tuition, without having to take on student loans. The value of the recommendations in 2014-15 would be \$1,040 per low-income student and \$720 per



middle-income student. The total cost to government would be \$1.871 million at the most, without accounting for the fact that many low- and middle-income students would already be eligible for provincial assistance, which already comes 40% in the form of grants and we have recommended should be 100% grant. This could be a very valuable intermediate step on the way to the 100% grant recommendation.

The Province should also adapt the RAP program to recognize that eligible graduates may become aware of it at different points in time.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should allow retroactive enrolment in the Repayment Assistance Program, and encourage the Canada Student Loan Program to do the same.*

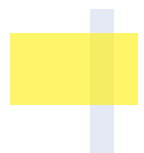
Graduates should be permitted to claim RAP benefits retroactively if they are not made aware of the program until later on, even when they have gone into default, for the program to have its full impact on graduate debt. This is especially true because the cost of implementing this policy would only be in savings that result from individuals being unaware of a program that they are eligible for.

Recommendation: *The cost allowances used by the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program to calculate applicants' available resources should be sufficient to allow all applicants and their families a similar standard of living, regardless of whether the student is a dependent or married.*

As NSCC students are often older they are also often married, which significantly impacts on their ability to access SFA. The expected financial contributions of students' working spouses can approach 50% of a family's after tax income, leaving little left over to meet unanticipated family costs or to invest in other important priorities like retirement, education savings for any children, and/or disability savings programs for eligible family members (e.g. children, parents, spouse – StudentsNS 2013). A standard of living allowance closer to the moderate allowance to parents of dependent students would be much fairer to students with working partners.

Finally, we previously indicated that the most significant cost of PSE attendance is in foregone earnings. For mature students, especially those with dependents, this is an especially significant challenge as they often have greater financial responsibilities. While the summer break may be intended to provide students with an opportunity to earn work income that can support their costs of education, such income may not meet costs for many mature students (especially single parents who face a trade-off between work income and childcare costs), while there is no guarantee that students will actually secure work.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should consult students and consider steps to accelerate programs with high concentrations of mature students and students with dependents, notably by reducing summer breaks.*



Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should review its policies to consider how they might better facilitate students pursuing their studies year-round to accelerate completion.*

Accelerating programs can help to reduce students' costs and help them enter the occupation they are training for more quickly; earning a higher income that allows them to provide for their families. Both the NSCC and the Province should consider steps to allow students to complete their programs more quickly. In the HRM, the NSCC could provide more accelerated programs on some campuses relative to others, so that both options are available within the community. The NSCC could also consider steps to coordinate breaks with seasonal economic activities that would allow students to finance their studies, particularly at the local level.

Many mature students may also need and value a break in the summer, perhaps to reconnect and spend time with children. The Province also must recognize that students have costs in the summer that they may not be able to finance independently and that do result from or impinge upon their studies.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should take steps to assist students with summer living expenses.*

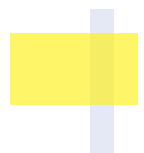
Again, this recommendation is especially important with respect to mature students who may not be able to meet their costs through seasonal work in the summer. Students and their families must live year-round, not just during the academic year.

6.2 Provincial Funding and Accountability

To deliver good quality education without downloading costs on students, the NSCC must be able to rely on sustainable, predictable operating grant funding from the Province, in contrast to large variations in annual operating grants over the past five years. StudentsNS has previously recommended that: "University operating grants should increase annually at the higher of either the real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate or the provincial rate of inflation" (StudentsNS 2013). This same recommendation extends to the community college system.

Recommendation: *Operating grants for the Nova Scotia Community College should increase annually at the higher of either the nominal growth rate of Nova Scotia's Gross Domestic Product or the provincial rate of inflation.*

As government revenues generally increase at the rate of GDP growth, this recommendation would basically commit government to providing a consistent share of its revenues to the NSCC each year. In instances where the economy is not growing, the NSCC would receive inflationary increases in revenues to help cover its cost growth. This recommendation would not prevent the Province from providing additional funds to the NSCC for specific projects, as was done with the development of the Waterfront Campus.



Of course, it is critically important to ensure that the NSCC is accountable for the funds that it receives from the Province, while the Province must be transparent and accountable with respect to the funds it is providing to the NSCC. Many of the following recommendations are partially addressed through the NSCC's five-year Organizational Reviews, but the difficulty is often during intervening years, where only limited information is available.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should establish clear and transparent practices for public reporting on funding agreements and where any additional funds are being allocated.*

As the Auditor General has argued, it is difficult to determine what specific NSCC initiatives the Province is choosing to fund from year to year, or what outcomes the parties wish to pursue. The relationship between the NSCC and the Province needs to become more open, to ensure students and the public can understand and have a say in the direction of their community college. The creation of the MOU has helped to formalize this relationship and improve transparency and accountability, but it does not go far enough.

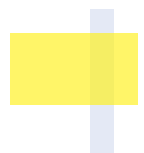
Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia should improve the transparency of decision-making around determining the capacity of programs based on labour-market demand.*

Whether or not concerns about the NSCC's decisions around program spaces are legitimate, the NSCC should provide more information on why these decisions are being made. This would be best achieved through a standardized, public report on each decision made around caps on program-enrolment. The report would not need to be long, it could be only a page or two in length, but provide the standard data that would inform any capacity decision. This transparency will help to inform students about the merits of different programs and keep the NSCC and the Province accountable to their mission.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should provide objective data on graduate employment outcomes where prospective students find information about how to enrol.*

This recommendation also echoes the AGNS. Considering the NSCC's emphasis on vocational training, it is apparent that they should be upfront with prospective students about the jobs they are training for so that students have the best information possible to determine whether the vocation is right for them. This information should notably indicate whether opportunities are present within their local community or possibly elsewhere in the province.

Of course, the usefulness of this information depends in large part upon the quality of the NSCC's Graduate Survey.



Recommendation: *The Province and the Nova Scotia Community College should work together to improve the Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey, notably to provide more accurate program-level information on graduate outcomes.*

The Graduate Survey does not currently provide adequate information at the level of particular programs, it is too general respecting the outcomes of all graduates. Improving program-specific data would better inform NSCC decisions about program capacity and prospective students' choices of programs. The most significant obstacle seems to be survey response rates, which limits the representativeness of data. The NSCC and the Province need to put more effort into increasing response rates to improve the validity of the Graduate Survey.

Information from the NSCC Graduate Survey should also help to better inform the NSCC's activities around promoting access and equity.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey should include voluntary questions as to students' age and membership in targeted access groups.*

Students have the right to choose whether they wish to be identified by ethnicity or age. However, tracking these variables in the NSCC Graduate Survey would improve the Survey's utility in supporting the NSCC's Access mandate, such that the college can track not only how many students enroll from underrepresented groups, but the success of these students.

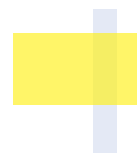
The Survey should serve less as a marketing tool than to provide a complete picture to students and the public and allow prospective students to make more informed choices. Moreover, it would give the College a better understanding of graduate outcomes and student retention and inform continuous improvement at the institutional level.

In completing this report, we received invaluable support from NSCC staff. However, we should not need to submit data requests to access basic information, such as enrolment by campus and program type. Data on the community college system should also not be isolated from university data.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should publish its student data online in an open and accessible format.*

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should consider working with the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission to collect and publish post-secondary information system data on community college students in the Atlantic Region.*

The MPHEC currently provides access to data on enrolment and fees at Maritime universities through their website, without the need to submit requests, while some



data is also released by the Association of Atlantic Universities. It is highly unusual that the NSCC does not make this same basic information more readily available.

The MPHEC could provide a great host for this type of information, providing third-party validation, and allowing for comparison across the region. Perhaps most importantly, greater integration of data would be an important step towards treating the NSCC and Nova Scotia's universities as components within a single PSE system. We need to be able to compare and contrast data between our universities and college to effectively plan for and support students' diverse pathways. This may require significant changes in funding and resource allocation within the NSCC and the MPHEC, but would help to improve the quality of data.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province should complete a public review of the Community College's long-term viability at the institutional and campus level.*

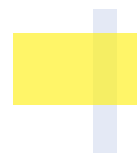
Finally, the NSCC and the Province need to be clearer in terms of how they plan to respond to the challenges posed by Nova Scotia's steep demographic decline, both at the college and campus level. We are not aware of whether a public review of the NSCC's viability has been completed; there has been much more significant attention in this area on the province's university system. Yet, there are obviously very challenging circumstances ahead for the NSCC and its campuses, notably as they rely dramatically more than universities upon local communities for their enrolment. The NSCC is also gradually becoming more concentrated in the HRM. It is important to have a public dialogue on how the NSCC will weather the changes in Nova Scotia's population, including any further shift of emphasis into the HRM.

6.3 Student Voice

While the NSCC has room for improvement when it comes to public reporting, it may need even more dramatic reforms in terms of accountability to students. Students must be given a more important role in the governance of the college. The Province and the NSCC are not sufficiently student-centered in their priorities, as evidenced by the limited reference to students in the NSCC MOU, or in their decision-making processes.

Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should amend their current Memorandum of Understanding to include explicit provisions for student consultation.*

The MOU is a three-year agreement, but only 12-months old. As per Section 21, amendments are permitted with the consent of both signing parties. Amendments should seek to include elements around student consultation akin to those present in the MOU between the Province and Nova Scotia's universities, at minimum.



Recommendation: *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should work with the Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations and Students Nova Scotia to introduce a roundtable where the three parties can discuss challenges and plans for strengthening the Nova Scotia Community College.*

This Roundtable could fulfill a requirement for student consultation under the MOU. While the integration of students into spaces where the Province and Nova Scotia's universities come together to make decisions has been highly imperfect, it still would represent significant improvement relative to the circumstances of the NSCC. Such a table would be invaluable as a space for consultation on priorities and fees, notably to inform the development of the next MOU.

Recommendation: *Student representatives should be included as observers within the negotiation process for the next Memorandum of Understanding between the Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia.*

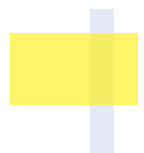
The roundtable itself may not, however, be the ideal forum for negotiating the next MOU, as if it resembled the current student-government roundtable that is catered to university students, it would include many student representatives from campuses across the province, numbers that may be unwieldy. Nevertheless, student representatives should be empowered to participate in negotiations for the next NSCC MOU, so their ideas and priorities can better inform the NSCC and LAE representatives.

These important changes would empower students within the context of governance processes involving the NSCC and the Province. However, changes also need to be made to strengthen student voice within the NSCC, first of all within the Board of Governors.

Recommendation: *Student representatives to the Board of Governors should receive additional Board training specific to their role as student representatives.*

Current training for student representatives at the Board of Governors is simply inadequate, considering their relative unfamiliarity with board governance practices and many college-level concerns. Additional training could include a specific session on how to engage with the SAs and how to communicate Board decisions. Student representatives should be provided with College specific documents such as financial statements, annual plans and annual strategic goals, and a current Board Member should be present to review these documents and conduct a private question and answer session, considering that student representatives may be more comfortable asking questions about Board participation in a small group.

The NSCC and the Province should consider increasing the number of student representatives at the Board of Governors. This would provide more opportunities for consultation with SAs, lighten the workload of the student representatives and allow them time to develop a more in depth understanding of their particular working



groups and be better-informed participants. It is challenging also to represent diverse campuses, but a third representative could be helpful in this area, notably if the representative seats were divided regionally, with one from the HRM, one from the Southwest and one from the North. Additionally, students must balance multiple commitments such as work, family and other volunteer initiatives, and increasing the number of reps increases the likelihood that at least two representatives will be present at all Board meetings. This change would require an amendment of the Community Colleges Act, however.

Of course, the Board of Governors is not the only avenue for formal student participation in governance. Students should also be empowered to help steer the direction of their particular campuses.

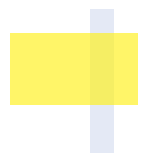
Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Community College should establish cross-college expectations for campus-level structures for engagement with student association leadership.*

Considering that student engagement in governance varies significantly across NSCC campuses, the college should create standard basic expectations for campus practices to support student voice. The ability of students to participate should not vary dramatically based on the leadership of each campus.

These points should not be taken to indicate that it is entirely up to the NSCC and the Province to strengthen NSCC students' voice. Much of the responsibility for strengthening NSCC students' voices in fact resides with the students themselves and their SAs. As a member-driven organisation, it is not StudentsNS' place to make recommendations for our members or non-member SAs. However, we can suggest ideas for reflection, considering the importance of student voice at the NSCC.

A broader review of the NSCCSA Common Constitution may be worthwhile, potentially with the assistance of an external partner (not affiliated with the NSCC), representatives from each SA, student representatives from the Board of Governors, and the SA advisors. Student unions at Nova Scotia's universities are conducting an independent review presently that could provide a valuable model for the NSCCSA.

In particular, the NSCCSAs should consider outlining specific ways in which the student representatives at the Board of Governor communicate with SAs and vice versa. Particular areas of concern include reporting requirements, frequency of reporting, and a requirement for regular in-person meetings. Clear reporting also has a long-term benefit of providing a record and institutional memory that may be lacking in light of the high turnover of student leaders at the NSCC, due to shorter program length even more so than at universities. Without these mechanisms, there may be important gaps in the accountability and representativeness of the Board of Governors representatives.



6.4 Trades and Technology

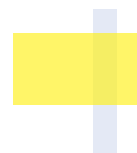
Engaging students enrolled in short-term programs can be very challenging. Due to the length of their technical training sessions, apprentices are not members of their campus SA. It is therefore essential that robust and consistent feedback mechanisms be in place so that apprentices can provide input into their training program and communicate any suggestions or concerns. The NSCC currently provides many ways for apprentices to provide feedback on their technical training and should continue to do so. With respect to the NSAA, every effort should be made to include apprentices on all working groups and their unique needs should be considered in organizing these working groups and the corresponding activities.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency should outline clear steps for engaging apprentices in policy development and the decision-making process.*

Given that the apprenticeship system is a responsibility of the province, it is important that apprentices have representation on decision-making bodies. To this end, apprentices will be included on the working groups of the new NSAA. It is too early to determine if this inclusion will be meaningful or not, however, as we have argued previously (StudentsNS 2014a), consultation must consider the unique circumstances of the learners and these working groups must make every effort to develop schedules that accommodate apprentices during both their technical and on the job training, develop materials that are accessible to all participants, and provide an open space where apprentices' feedback is valued.

Recommendation: *The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Nova Scotia Community College should conduct a review of the in-class training delivered by the College, in a view to making improvements in instruction.*

The frequency and seriousness of concerns about quality of instruction is sufficient to merit a review of the quality of instruction at the NSCC's School of Trades and Technology. Such a review should empower students and apprentices to participate and provide their feedback on the quality of instruction and how instruction could be improved.



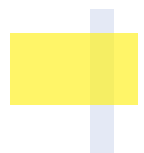
7. Conclusion

The NSCC provides training directly related to labour force demand, at least formally, providing assurance to its students that their education will help them secure a livelihood. It emphasizes education that works for diverse students, including those who learn best by doing and who are driven to work with their hands, but also students who are more traditionally academic. It is a relatively affordable option because its programs are relatively shorter and because it has low tuition.

The NSCC systematically fosters lifelong learning and opportunities for many individuals whose horizons would otherwise be greatly limited. Universities could learn a lot from the NSCC. The NSCC is different from Nova Scotia's universities. It is becoming more important than ever to recognize, however, that these differences do not make either type of institution superior or inferior. Students are moving from diplomas at the NSCC into bachelor's degrees and graduate studies at universities. As well, students are completing university degrees then shifting into the NSCC. We must begin to think of our diverse PSE institutions as parts within a system, in which increasingly students are transitioning between the different parts to create their own unique paths. The notion that one time of education is *higher* than the other is breaking down.

That being said, the NSCC has work to do to improve access, affordability, quality of education and student voice. This report proposes recommendations to address these challenges; controlling fees, reducing student debt, stabilizing college finances and ensuring the college and the Province are accountable.

This report is certainly not the last word from StudentsNS on the NSCC, in fact it is much closer to the first. We are committed to ensuring NSCC students are more powerful actors within the NSCC and can have their voices heard in our province.



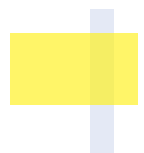
8. Policy Resolution

Whereas StudentsNS has the following Principles:

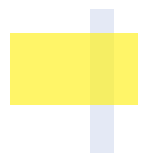
- *Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.*
- *Post-secondary institutions play vital economic, social, and cultural roles in Nova Scotia, most significantly by educating students.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College plays a vital role in the Nova Scotia economy by providing essential vocational and technical training.*
- *Publicly funded institutions should be accountable to government, students and the public.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College must receive adequate funding to achieve its objectives as identified by government, students and the institution itself.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College must be supported in upholding its value of accessibility and work to increase post-secondary participation.*
- *The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student or make them financially unable to live in Nova Scotia.*
- *Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.*
- *Students should be meaningfully consulted and informed anytime an ancillary or auxiliary fee is increased or introduced.*

Whereas StudentsNS has identified the following Concerns:

- *Enrolment in certificate and diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College has declined between 2009 and 2013.*
- *Annual operating grant increases are not consistently keeping pace with inflation*
- *Annual operating grant increases to the Nova Scotia Community College are not consistently keeping pace with inflation.*



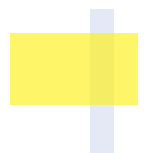
- *The Auditor General of Nova Scotia has criticized the Province and the Nova Scotia Community College for not having a formal funding formula in place.*
- *Tuition at the Nova Scotia Community College is growing faster than the rate of inflation.*
- *A lack of tuition regulations can leave students vulnerable to arbitrary tuition increases.*
- *Demographic decline and current trends in post-secondary education participation threaten the sustainability of Nova Scotia's post-secondary sector.*
- *The provincial debt cap does not benefit community college graduates even though they have higher default rates than university graduates.*
- *Married couples with at least one person on student financial assistance are expected to live well below a moderate standard of living, as defined by the Canada Student Loans Program.*
- *For married student financial assistance applicants, the financial contributions expected of a student's spouse are unrealistically large.*
- *The student contribution assumptions fail to consider potentially important financial priorities including personal (and/or spousal) retirement savings, registered education savings for dependent children, and registered disability savings for any family member.*
- *To maintain the impression that tuition is low, ancillary and auxiliary fees are used to increase Nova Scotia Community College revenues instead of increasing tuition.*
- *It is unclear what services are funded by the Nova Scotia Community College's International Student Fee.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College does not have a formal consultation process concerning ancillary and auxiliary fees.*
- *The Memorandum of Understanding between the Province and the Nova Scotia Community College does not include specific provisions concerning student consultation.*
- *Current provisions for communication between student representatives at the Board of Governors and the Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations are ill defined and inadequate.*
- *Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations and campus administration do not have formal and regular meeting structures.*



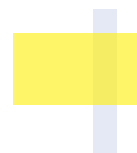
- *Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations and campus administrations do not have formal structures or expectations for collaboration.*
- *Apprentices do not have formal representation at the institutions where they receive technical training.*
- *Individuals are, on average, not entering the apprenticeship system until later in life, resulting in a higher opportunity cost of returning to school and decreasing the likelihood of completing the program.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey does not obtain adequate program-level data.*
- *Apprenticeship and Pre-apprenticeship training delivered by the Nova Scotia Community College may not meet expectations for curriculum design and delivery.*

Be It Resolved That StudentsNS makes the following Recommendations:

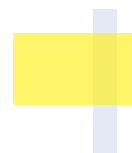
- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should commit to reducing Nova Scotia college graduates' ratio between debt and post-graduate earnings to at least the national average.*
- *The Province should freeze tuition at the Nova Scotia Community College nominally until unemployment recovers to pre-recession levels.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should clearly define the types of services that may be considered ancillary and funded through an ancillary fee.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia should require that the Nova Scotia Community College must pursue a formal consultation process, which is agreed upon with the Student Associations, to be able to introduce new ancillary fees or increase ancillary fees faster than the rate of inflation.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College must develop a mechanism to report on how ancillary fee revenues are being spent.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College, in partnership with international student representatives at the NSCC and Students Nova Scotia, should conduct a review of services funded through its International Student Fee and act to ensure fee revenue is either spent on effective and targeted services or reimbursed to students.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia should eliminate international student differential fees at the Community College, within the context of a Community College-based immigration strategy.*



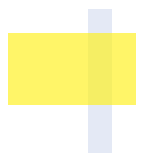
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should provide students with an accurate explanation of the full costs of their program when they enroll.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Community College, high schools and the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning should develop a strategy to inform active and prospective community college students about the relevant policies and benefits of the Canada Student Loan and Nova Scotia Student Assistance Programs.*
- *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should convert all its loans to grants for Nova Scotia residents who wish to pursue studies at the Nova Scotia Community College.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia should introduce a low-income grant through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program that supplements the Federal Low-Income Access Grant to fund the full cost of tuition in regular diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia should introduce a middle-income grant through the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program that supplements the Federal Middle-Income Access Grant to fund half the cost of tuition in regular diploma programs at the Nova Scotia Community College.*
- *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should allow retroactive enrolment in the Repayment Assistance Plan, and encourage the Canada Student Loan Program to do the same.*
- *The cost allowances used by the Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program to calculate applicants' available resources should be sufficient to allow all applicants and their families a similar standard of living, regardless of whether the student is a dependent or married.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should consult students and consider steps to accelerate programs with high concentrations of mature students and students with dependents, notably by reducing summer breaks.*
- *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should review its policies to consider how they might better facilitate students pursuing their studies year-round to accelerate completion.*
- *The Nova Scotia Student Assistance Program should take steps to assist students with summer living expenses.*
- *Operating grants for the Nova Scotia Community College should increase annually at the higher of either the nominal growth rate of Nova Scotia's Gross Domestic Product or the provincial rate of inflation.*



- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should establish clear and transparent practices for public reporting on funding agreements and where any additional funds are being allocated.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia should improve the transparency of decision-making around determining the capacity of programs based on labour-market demand.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should provide objective data on graduate employment outcomes where prospective students find information about how to enrol.*
- *The Province and the Nova Scotia Community College should work together to improve the Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey, notably to provide more accurate program-level information on graduate outcomes.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College Graduate Survey should include voluntary questions as to students' age and membership in targeted access groups.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should publish its student data online in an open and accessible format.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should consider working with the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission to collect and publish post-secondary information system data on community college students in the Atlantic Region.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College and the Province should complete a public review of the Community College's long-term viability at the institutional and campus level.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should amend their current Memorandum of Understanding to include explicit provisions for student consultation.*
- *The Province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Community College should work with the Nova Scotia Community College Student Associations and Students Nova Scotia to introduce a roundtable where the three parties can discuss challenges and plans for strengthening the Nova Scotia Community College.*
- *Student representatives should be included as observers within the negotiation process for the next Memorandum of Understanding between the Nova Scotia Community College and the Province of Nova Scotia.*
- *Student representatives to the Board of Governors should receive additional Board training specific to their role as student representatives.*
- *The Nova Scotia Community College should establish cross-college expectations for campus-level structures for engagement with student association leadership.*



- *The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency should outline clear steps for engaging apprentices in policy development and the decision-making process.*
- *The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Nova Scotia Community College should conduct a review of the in-class training delivered by the College, in a view to making improvements in instruction.*

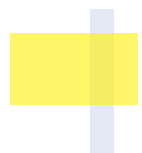


9. References

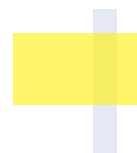
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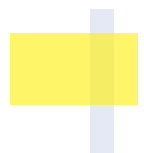
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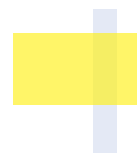
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