

policy – pan-canadian strategy

For much of the current decade, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) has supported the development of a Pan-Canadian strategy for post-secondary education (PSE). Additionally, calls for a national strategy for higher education have been echoed throughout the PSE sector by a variety of stakeholders. The following piece is meant to highlight some of the reasons behind such a call. Further, OUSA also asserts that a national strategy must include a dedicated transfer of funding from the Federal government.

Principle One: All those who benefit from the post-secondary education system must work together to ensure that it is properly supported.

A key principle of OUSA's position on university funding is that every stakeholder that benefits from post-secondary education (PSE) has a responsibility for ensuring that the system is properly resourced. Two of the most important stakeholders for making sure that PSE in Ontario is properly resourced are the Federal and Provincial governments. Together, the governments of Canada provide the foundations for an affordable, accessible, accountable and quality education system for the students of Ontario. However, to be successful, it is important that the major levels of government in Canada work together to develop a Pan-Canada Strategy for PSE.

Concern One: Constitutional jurisdictions are often used as an excuse for inaction, rather than as a catalyst for creating cooperation between multiple levels of government.

In Canada the argument of constitutional jurisdiction has often limited action on PSE from the Federal government. Within the Constitution Act, the Provincial governments are given jurisdiction over education. However, the Federal government is responsible for issues of national interest. As such, it is clear that provincial and federal governments both have a stake in PSE. While it should therefore be clear that both parties have a joint role to play in supporting a strong Post-Secondary Education system, the unfortunate reality is that often in the past there has been little cooperation between the two layers of government.

Within recent memory, hope for a national strategy has been buoyed by an increasing level of intergovernmental cooperation in PSE. One example of improved cooperation was a symposium hosted by the Council of the Federation in 2006.¹ The outcome of the symposium was the release of a statement from the Council entitled *Competing for Tomorrow: A Strategy for Postsecondary Education and Skills Training in Canada*.² While this is encouraging, there has been little work done to involve the Federal government in the provincial partnerships that have been formed since this time.

Recommendation One: The Ontario government must work with the government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments to develop a Pan Canada Strategy for Post-Secondary Education.

To clarify the roles of the Federal and Provincial governments related to PSE, it is imperative that an organized national strategy for PSE be developed. In order for this to happen the Provinces and Ottawa must come together to develop a vision for post-secondary education to meet the demands of a globalized knowledge economy. In order to develop a vision for PSE the first ministers must hold a meeting specifically on this issue. Additionally, at the time of

¹ Canadian Council on Learning, Toward a Pan-Canadian Framework for PSE, accessed online at http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/3E447B26-B71D-43E6-90FF-215AB628A3E2/0/PSE_PART4_EN.pdf

² The Council of the Federation Website, Postsecondary Education and Skills Training, Accessed online at <http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/summit/STsummit.html>

a national conference on PSE, it is important that the governments of Canada to involve all of the stakeholders in the visioning for higher education in Canada.

Recommendation Two: A Pan-Canadian strategy for Post-Secondary Education must include terms for a dedicated transfer for Higher Education.

Any national strategy that comes forward on PSE, to be successful, requires a dedicated transfer. While the task of developing a dedicated transfer seems daunting, it should be noted that the process has happened in recent history. For instance, as a part of the development of the Health Care Renewal Accord, the Federal government (working with provincial partners) created a dedicated transfer for Health Care funding.³ The same can be done for PSE with sufficient political will.

Recommendation Three: A Pan-Canadian strategy for Post-Secondary Education must include a strategy for data collection.

The ability to collect and compare information is vital for decision-makers, especially the ones in charge of the millions of people and billions of dollars that flow through the post-secondary education system every single year in Canada. However, we do not have centrally-collected, verified and public data available at the national level to evaluate our performance and quality. In fact, Canada ranks last among the 40 OECD nations when it comes to post-secondary data availability for the annual *Education at a Glance* international survey.⁴ To develop an education system that competes on a global scale, Ontario and Canada need adequate measuring sticks. OUSA adds its voice to the growing chorus of researchers, institutions and governments looking for progress on a national data collection strategy.

CONCLUSION

It is evident to many of the stakeholders of Canadian PSE that the status quo is no longer good enough. If Canada is to remain competitive in the shift to information economies, a strong vision and strategy for PSE is necessary. For Canada to develop a strong unified vision for PSE, there is a clear need for the Provinces and the Federal government to work together to develop a strong strategy that includes a dedicated transfer to make certain that the system is properly funded. As such, the government of Ontario must take a lead in encouraging other provinces to come together with the Federal government to develop a vision for Canadian PSE.

³ Government of Canada, *The Budget Plan 2003: Building the Canada We Want* (Toronto: Queen's Press, 2003).

⁴ Canadian Council on Learning. Canada's PSE performance: file under 'm' for missing. (20 Sep. 2007). Online. 29 Feb. 2007. <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Newsroom/Releases/20070920ReleaseCanadasPSEperformance.htm?Language=EN>

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WHEREAS all those who benefit from the post-secondary education system must work together to ensure that it is properly supported.

AND WHEREAS constitutional jurisdictions cannot be an excuse for inaction, but must rather be the catalyst for creating cooperation between multiple levels of government.

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