

Federal Funding For PSE needs revisions

OTTAWA (CUP) — The way the feds pay money to the provinces for colleges and universities in Canada is messy and causes more fighting than funding, and Ottawa should consider new legislation to gain more control, says a report to the Nielsen Task Force on Program Review.

The current money transfer system, Established Programmes Financing, does not establish any national education standards and encourages the feds and the provinces to "blame each other for any apparent deficiency."

"It is questionable whether the arrangement is still appropriate," the report reads.

The report is part of Nielsen's 21-volume inventory of almost 1000 government programmes, or \$92 billion of public services. The box of books, totalling 7,000 pages just in the English version, weighs 34 lbs. The French version is slightly heavier.

The report says Ottawa has four options on university financing: leave the system as is, continue to fund but on condition the provinces meet specific standards, pay students directly with vouchers and let their university preference dictate which universities survive,

or stop funding universities and colleges entirely.

The report seems to lean to the second option, a new law for post-secondary education financing. Because Canada's constitution says education is a provincial responsibility, this would spark a huge political storm, the report says.

"However, if federal financial support is considered necessary to ensure adequate institutional funding, or to ensure that national standards in the post-secondary educational systems are maintained, the effort to secure provincial agreement will have to be made."

The report says that the federal government could argue that it already funds most research in Canada, and since research and post-secondary education are closely linked, it should have a say in running colleges and universities.

The government could then set the following conditions on giving its funding dollars the report says:

- * that colleges and universities "provide an adequate supply of highly qualified personnel for the

public, academic and private sectors."

- * that provinces ensure that all Canadians who can learn and want to learn will not be deprived higher education because they can't pay,

- * that universities promote an authentic Canadian identity, including the two official languages.

Ben Wilson, Chair of the Ontario Manpower Commission, who headed the half-private, half-public study team, said in an interview that the report does not imply the governments should put conditions on funding for higher education.

Wilson said heavy disagreement between members of the study team prevented any one solution from shining through in the report. "There were some fairly distinct opinions that came out," Wilson said. But he would not name those opposing each other. "I don't want to betray my colleagues," he said.

Educators critics in Parliament and university lobby groups say they only support one option — keeping federal support for post-secondary education but making the provinces accountable.

Executive officer of the Canadian Federation of Students, John Casola, said "the other three options will in one way or another help take the bottom out of accessibility."

Casola said the "voucher" proposal, burrowed from the Macdonald Commission's report released last year, will "raise tuition fees, hamper curriculum planning and probably result in universities hiring PR people to sell their programmes to students."

NDP critic for education and youth, Howard McCurdy, agreed. "The voucher proposal is unthinkable," he said, and he called a complete withdrawal of federal support to universities "outrageous."

The study team's report said a withdrawal of federal support for post-secondary education may work, because "the expansive circumstances which brought the federal government into the financing of post-secondary education in the Fifties and early Sixties has passed."

But McCurdy said enrolment is growing.

A recent study by the National Consortium of Scientific and Educational Societies shows enrolment in Canadian universities has increased by 24 per cent since 1977-78, while per student expenditures declined 18 per cent in that period.

On student assistance, the study team says it preferred option is to leave student aid entirely to the provinces.

Other options include reforming the present system or replacing the Canada Student Loans Program with a refundable tax credit for students.

McCurdy criticised the proposal to make student aid a provincial responsibility, saying it could increase regional inequalities.



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