

Tuition hikes likely if government rejects funding demands

Tuition fees will have to rise if the governments of the Maritimes provinces do not grant post-secondary institutions in the region an average increase of 12.5 per cent in operating grants, the ASSoc. of Atlantic Univ. has warned.

The increase is necessary to meet rising costs of more than 20 percent and wage increases for faculty and support staff "within the AIB (Anti-Inflation Board) guidelines," stated association chair Ronald Baker in a release Jan. 25.

The demand is contained in a letter to the Council of Maritime Premiers drafted the preceding week at Dalhousie University, where the 20 member assoc. of univ. and colleges met to discuss their needs and examine cost-cutting measures.

Baker said the 12.5 per cent increase was the minimum needed for institutions whose tuition fees, comprising about 20 per cent of revenue, "are already the highest in the country."

The letter to the premiers proposes a 10 per cent wage increase for employees,

noting that most wage settlements were below the AIB guidelines last year, while faculty in the region are the lowest paid in the country.

The increase the assoc. expects for 1977-78 is lower than the average yearly increase afforded Maritime post-secondary institutions in the three-year period between 1973-73 and 1976-77, which totalled 52.4 per cent, according to figures from Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

The association said at a recent news conference that the level of tuition fees next year depends on the premier's response. The answer may be given to the premiers council meeting in February.

Excerpts from a letter to the premiers

The Association of Atlantic Universities recommends to the Council of Maritime Premiers that it provide for an average increase in operation grants of 12.5% for '77-78.

This increase is needed if the Universities are to operate effectively and to avoid a state of crisis.

In recommending 12.5% the AAU considered primarily two factors: wages and salaries; and the very high inflation rates of university non-salary items.

It is ironic that many of the increases are the result of decisions by governments, or government utilities, or government-appointed board. Salary settlements are frequently the outcome of arbitration under the labour code and increases to meet minimum wage changes are mandatory. On the supply side, the recent federal imposition of import duty and sales tax on chemicals means up to a 30% increase, quite apart from inflation.

Student fees in the Maritimes are the highest in the country and have been for years. Students, of course, should pay a reasonable share of the costs of their education. And there is some feeling, we recognize, that many student in universities can afford to pay more. Against this there is the problem of those students just able to scrape together enough each year to pay for room, and board, and fees. And there is the bigger problem of teenagers from poor families, for whom each \$100 increase in fees is another layer on the financial/psychological barrier to university education.

Other income is virtually on a plateau and raising student fees offers the university the only chance to get additional operating revenue. If we hold the line on fees,

the increase in the government grant has to be spread across the whole budget.

The increase of 12.5% shrinks to 10% when applied right across the budget, using 80% as the regional average of government support per institution. Any increase of less than 12.5% then, will force the universities to raise tuition fees... a move bound to create student opposition and to further disrupt university operations during the coming year.

This is the first time that AAU has made a direct or public submission to governments on operating grants. Doing so implies no criticism of the MPHEC's work in advising the three Maritime premiers in this area.

The AAU, however, sees its institutions caught in a squeeze... a squeeze which has persisted since the early 70's. On the one hand, a rate of inflation well above average and a desire to pay fair wages; on the other, the concerns of Maritime governments over total public spending. Recent MPHEC figures show higher education support increasing 52.4% from 1973-74 to 1976-77, compared to a total government ordinary expenditure figure of 59.4%. And increases in government support for universities last year were the lowest in Canada.

Facing serious financial difficulties even in maintaining existing programmes, the AAU sees a duty to explain the universities minimum needs directly to governments and to the public.



The Missing Chaplains of January 13th'd issue
Father Brendan Megannety & Father Ron Evans

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