

MPHEC: When unive

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A few weeks ago, an austere group of academic and business figures handed the premiers of the three maritime provinces a document that included a pricetag, somewhere around 150 million dollars.

That exact amount is what the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) believes the governments of the three provinces will have to give the region's post secondary institutions during the 1978-79 academic year.

The governments, represented by an ad-hoc committee of civil servants, ministers, and their assistants in consultation with the provincial treasury boards, will scrutinize the figure, and in all probability cut this, and hand it back to the MPHEC which will divide up what it is given among the 30 institutions under its jurisdiction.

This is the second year the MPHEC has gone through the motions of preparing estimates on the costs of running post secondary education in the maritime region and making an impartial request to government on behalf of the institutions for subsidies. The commission, if true to last year's form, will have no hesitation telling government what effects their cuts in the recommended subsidies will have: poorer academic quality and reduced educational opportunity for the people of the maritimes.

History

Per capita, there are more degree granting institutions in the Atlantic Provinces than anywhere else in the world, 17 in all, with about 20,000 students from a population of over two million. An unusual statistic, taken by itself, for a region that is commonly accepted as the bottom end of the socio-economic scale in North America, and has far less non degree granting and technical institutions than the national average.

Historically, however, that statistic makes plenty of sense. Post-secondary institutions in the Atlantic Provinces were originally formed almost completely along religious sectarian lines—the Catholics founding, among others St. Mary's and St. Francis Xavier, the Baptists, Acadia, the Methodists Mt. Allison, and the leader in denominational higher education, the Anglicans, who opened Kings College near Halifax

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in the early nineteenth century. Although reactions against rampant sectarianism produced some developments, notably the creation of Dalhousie, and the Nova Scotia Technical school, the situation remained much the same until the latter half of this century when governments began direct public involvement in higher education.

Government Intervention began in the early sixties when public financing of the institutions increased dramatically: Nova Scotia formed a "grants committee" in 1963; the New Brunswick Higher Education commission was formed in 1967; and Prince Edward Island formed a grants committee in 1968 in conjunction with a major

reorganization of post-secondary institutions into UPEI. Within the Atlantic, the only exception to the trend has been in Newfoundland, where Memorial University was formed at the initiative of the government, first as a college in 1923, and later as a university in 1949.



Baker: going to market

Until 1967, the federal government financed Post secondary education by providing a direct per capita subsidy to the provinces (\$5.00 in the last year it operated, 1965-66); the provinces divided up the money among the institutions on the basis of enrolment. With the negotiation of the federal Fiscal Arrangements act in 1967, the Atlantic provinces were given the option of continuing a per capita arrangement, or entering into a 50-50 matching grants system with the federal government. Nova Scotia was the only province to opt for the matching system, the other provinces apparently not being able to match the federal government dollar for dollar.

Federal funding reduced some of the provincial burden for direct funding but the provincial higher education committees assumed more control in the decision making process as the provinces moved toward non-sectarian, public, higher education. The institutions, meanwhile remained autonomous entities, ultimately responsible through their charters to the legislatures of each province.

A regional approach to post-secondary education began in 1964 with the formation of the Atlantic Association of Universities (AAU). The AAU began as a voluntary association among the presidents of a number of Atlantic institutions and had as its stated purpose "to assist the co-ordination of higher education, to ensure high academic standards in a period of rising costs and to avoid unnecessary duplication of faculties and courses of study". The administration of their own institutions had led the universities to ignore the simple fact they had common interests and cooperation on a regional level could only improve matters.

The AAU began cooperative efforts at various levels: they took a

united approach to the federal government with regard to operating assistance, university business officers cooperated on the matter of financial statistics, they met with grants committees, and created sub committees, perhaps the most important of which was the Academic Vice-Presidents committee. In addition there were associations with other regional associations.

Clearly the trend toward regionalism in the area of higher education was very real, and the AAU favored the idea of a regional body with government sanction that could deal with all aspects of common concern to the institutions and governments. In fact such a recommendation was part of a report commissioned by the AAU in 1968 as part of the maritime provinces study on the possibility of interprovincial union.

A regional approach to maritime issues was politically inhibited, and until 1971, got no further than a study. However, in the summer of that year, the maritime premiers saw the regional overlap demanding more than fleeting attention and decided to solidify cooperation somewhat more with the creation of the Council of Maritime Premiers (CMP). The decision to launch the MPHEC was the first tangible result of cooperation among the three premiers following the creation of the council.

The premiers were, however, a little ahead of themselves. As Jeff Holmes, executive director of the AAU, put it in a report to the International Council for Educational Development "the decision to launch the MPHEC was made by the premiers in the euphoria of their first meeting... the announcement took the maritime premiers by surprise and created some consternation. The assumption had been that they would be consulted about the timing of such a move and the terms of reference of the commission".

Nevertheless, the initiative had begun and the task of laying the organization groundwork for the commission was taken up by William Jenkins, a former principal of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. Fifteen months of planning and consultation followed during which the concept was presented with much opposition: the provinces and other interest groups could not agree on a chairperson, the Nova Scotia Education minister publicly opposed losing direct provincial control of post-secondary policy making, the New Brunswick Acadian population feared the loss of their culture in the larger populace.

Financial Planning

The commission did eventually form with the passage of an act in the three maritime legislatures giving the MPHEC the purpose of "assisting the provinces and institutions in attaining a more efficient and effective utilization and allocation in the field of higher education in the region".

MPHEC membership is ultimately the sole concern of the CMP which holds the final appointment responsibility. There are 15 members, 5 chosen from the public and 5 from government and other non academic institutions, all selected by the premiers, and 5 members chosen by the universities through the AAU, frequently including

representatives who are not necessarily with a university.

The body is mandated by the Premiers Council to carry out a number of specific activities within the general functions of planning and recommending policy in the area of higher education in the region.

The most significant function of the MPHEC, the one that affects everyone involved in the regional

take into account decisions about discussion.

The MPHEC recommended the subsidies to the year by 11.5 per centation to the stated clearly gap in the level secondary ins Maritimes and

The MPHEC is now little more than a fish-pond from which the government usually toss out grab bags to the in lieu of a straight face to face ha

higher education system is the matter of financial planning and recommendation to the premiers council. During the autumn of each year, the MPHEC receives a budget and five year spending projections from each institution. The administrations outline general budget areas and allocations for the year ahead including a request for subsidy to supplement tuition fees and other revenue sources; that information is compiled for the CMP by the MPHEC which usually modifies the requests to fit regional consistencies. The commission then decides on an arbitrary figure that represents the government cost of financing post secondary for the year in question.

The total figure is passed to the regional and provincial treasury boards who decide to either accept or reject the MPHEC proposal, and in the latter case arrive at another figure that will be passed back to the MPHEC, the commission considers the amount given by the governments and allocates a certain amount to each institution through a Formula based on enrolment and other weighting factors.

In addition to handling the real grant amounts for the year ahead, the commission also provides the CMP with projections two years in advance of the budget year, which the premiers and their representatives, presumably, at least, also

widening... disparities will in a lower quality education in the and a reduction opportunities students".

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The premier few: the MPH 10 percent tuition previous was increase in C should be con The AAU, also widening gaps port, went public request for a increase, such are apparently MPHEC.

Not surpris went to the C projection bas operating ass until 1980. The based on the initial year, 1 million: instead was given \$13 the task of p based on grant



MPHEC: universities present their