



Dalhousie Faculty Association

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September 9, 2021

The Honourable Tim Houston  
Premier of the Province of Nova Scotia  
One Government Place, 7th Floor  
1700 Granville Street  
PO Box 726  
Halifax NS B3J 2T3

Dear Premier Houston,

On behalf of the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) I congratulate you on being elected as Premier of Nova Scotia.

The DFA is the exclusive bargaining agent for approximately 1,000 teaching, research, professional librarian and professional counselling staff at Dalhousie University. Under the leadership of a volunteer Executive Committee, the DFA deals with issues of common interest to our members and addresses the broader interests of the academic community.

While your election platform *Solutions for Nova Scotians* included little to no mention of university education in Nova Scotia, as a graduate of Saint Mary's University with an accomplished career based on that education, and a father of two, you understand the value provided by the ten universities in our province. I will therefore draw your attention to an issue particular to Dalhousie and to two issues affecting post-secondary education more broadly in Nova Scotia.

### **Dalhousie Pension Plan**

In July 2021, the DFA sent [a letter to Deputy Minister, Department of the Finance and Treasury Kelliann Dean](#). We have had no response or feedback to this letter, so I take this opportunity to raise it here to ensure that you are aware of it.

The DFA is one of several employee groups that participate in the Dalhousie Pension Plan which is a defined-benefit, employer-sponsored plan. The DFA had an independent actuary Mr. Paul Chang provide an historical analysis of the funded position of the Dalhousie Pension plan on a going-concern basis. Despite the position taken by members of the Dalhousie Administration, the Dalhousie Pension Plan is in a healthy position.

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The analysis includes the contributions made by employees and the employer. All data are publicly available in the regular valuation reports. Mr. Chang's analysis takes into consideration the provincial funding requirements first introduced in 2019 that require funding to a higher level based on a new Provision for Adverse Deviation (PfAD) framework.

To summarize the analysis, the Dalhousie Pension Plan is in an excellent financial position. The plan is 97% funded as at the most recent valuation (January 31, 2020) which is above the historical average of 96% dating back to 2006. If the additional PfAD requirements had not been imposed – which increased the funding target by 7.7% – the plan would be 102% funded. Based on the most recent valuation, employer contributions to the plan (9.15% of payroll) are at the lowest level since 2006, the first year included in the analysis.

## **Two Issues Affecting Post-Secondary Education in Nova Scotia**

### **1. Increased Reliance on Part-time/Contract Faculty**

A decrease in government funding of the post-secondary education sector has led to an increased reliance on precarious employment across Canada. Here in Nova Scotia, a growing number of teachers are employed by our universities on short-term contracts. Most of these faculty members have no income security (the majority of them make less than \$20,000 a year from teaching), no job security and very little time to prepare their courses as they often receive last-minute notice of employment. None of these things support quality education for university students in Nova Scotia. Details can be found in a 2016 report by Dr. Karen Foster, [Precarious U: Contract Faculty in Nova Scotia](#).

The majority of respondents in Dr. Foster's study said they believe they are not paid fairly, noting their hourly pay was far below minimum wage when they divide their per course salary by the number of hours they work per term. Also, several pointed out that contract faculty wages in Nova Scotia are much lower than in other provinces. With the current soaring cost of rent and home ownership, contract faculty cannot easily afford to live here to deliver high quality education.

### **2. Rising Tuition Rates**

Undergraduate and graduate students attending university in [Nova Scotia pay higher tuition](#) than most other students in Canada. On average, our students pay among the highest tuition in the country. Current programs for loan forgiveness and financial assistance are helpful to some degree but the government must do more.

Students are graduating from Nova Scotia's universities with significant debt loads, hoping to enter the workforce in a province whose residents are taxed more than most all other Canadians. According to the latest statistics posted by the Nova Scotia Finance and Treasury Board in 2015, the [average student debt load](#) at completion of a Bachelors degree in Nova Scotia is second only to graduates from New Brunswick universities. A student that graduates with crippling debt is less likely to stay in Nova Scotia, leaving for more opportunity and better pay, and therefore the province is less likely to capitalize on the educational investment of that student. As the [median age of Nova Scotians rises](#), there is a desperate need to ensure younger, well-educated people stay to maintain a vibrant economy.

The soaring rates of tuition must be addressed. Lower tuition would increase accessibility from various underrepresented groups, and would help to ensure that our universities attract the best and the brightest from across Canada. After they fall in love with Nova Scotia's charms, they won't have to say farewell to Nova Scotia.

As you fulfill your mandate, the DFA would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and/or your relevant Ministers to provide input and perspective on measures to address the tuition issue and other issues affecting post-secondary education in Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,



Dr. Tara Perrot  
President, Dalhousie Faculty Association

- cc. Alan MacMaster, Minister, Department of Finance and Treasury and Minister,  
Department of Labour  
Kelliann Dean, Deputy Minister, Department of Finance and Treasury and Deputy  
Minister, Department of Labour  
Brian Wong, Minister, Department of Advanced Education  
Nancy MacLellan, Deputy Minister, Department of Advanced Education