

# No More Farewells: Making a Place for Youth in Nova Scotia's Economy

students 

SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

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# Abstract

Nova Scotians are no strangers to youth unemployment problems. In the five years since 2008/09's "Great Recession," Nova Scotians under 35 have lost many more jobs than they have gained. As of August 2014, Nova Scotia's youth unemployment rate was 16.6%, (ages 15-24) still more than twice the 7.6% rate of 25-54 year olds. Meanwhile, the oneNS Report made it clear that Nova Scotia's ongoing demographic aging transition – driven by low birthrates, youth outmigration, and a poor record on immigration – threatens our Province's ability to maintain basic public services into the future.

This StudentsNS position paper explores the student and youth employment issue in Nova Scotia by: reviewing recent economic literature and labour market statistics; critically examining existing economic development and youth labour market policies of the Federal and Provincial Governments; and similarly examining experiential learning and career development programs available at each of Nova Scotia's 11 post-secondary institutions.

We find that, despite hundreds of millions in public resources directed toward these overlapping priorities, it is often difficult to isolate the impact of many programs and initiatives on actual student and youth employment in Nova Scotia. Moreover, whatever their individual and collective impacts, it is clear that the existing suite of programs and services (i.e. business-as-usual) will not be sufficient to dramatically alter our Province's demographic or economic trajectories.

With this in mind, we make a number of recommendations aimed at the Nova Scotia government, our post-secondary institutions, and every single employer in the Province of Nova Scotia. We identify the urgent necessity for a Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy to be led by the Province and implemented collaboratively by government, employers, and relevant youth-serving organizations. Embedded within the proposed strategy is the critical objective to ensure maximum impact from each public dollar spent on student and youth employment; this means investing more in the kinds of programs that lead to actual employment opportunities and spending less on programs that do not.

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# Statement of Values

StudentsNS' mandate is to represent Nova Scotia students at the provincial level, and move forward four fundamental values:

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Every qualified Nova Scotia student who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor other than qualification.

**AFFORDABILITY:** The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community that they choose.

**QUALITY:** Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

**STUDENT VOICE:** Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within their post-secondary institutions, and through the broader democratic process.

# Our Research Process

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Position papers are the primary outputs of our research. They aim to describe and clearly articulate Students Nova Scotia's Principles in approaching an issue, and Concerns that obstruct the realization of those principles. Finally, we propose Recommendations aimed at addressing the policy issues (and our specific concerns) in a manner that is consistent with our organization's values.

The Students Nova Scotia Board of Directors is comprised of student representatives from our eight member associations. It sets annual priorities for Students Nova Scotia activities, including research. Position Papers represent formal Students Nova Scotia policy and are approved by the Board of Directors at bi-annual Board Policy Retreats, following a draft's one-month release for consultations with students and other relevant stakeholders.

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# List of Common Abbreviations

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CBU – Cape Breton University  
CJG – Canada Jobs Grant  
Co-op – Co-operative Education  
GHP – Greater Halifax Partnership  
ER – employment rate  
ESDC – Department of Employment and Skills Development Canada  
LAE – Department of Labour and Advanced Education (Nova Scotia)  
LMA – Labour Market Agreement  
LMDA – Labour Market Development Agreement  
MPHEC – Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission  
NSCC – Nova Scotia Community College  
OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development  
PWA – primary working age population (25-54 year olds)  
PSE – post secondary education  
StFX – St. Francis Xavier University  
TFW – Temporary Foreign Worker  
UR – unemployment rate

# 1. Introduction

Since the great recession in 2008/09, youth employment has been the subject of a nearly constant stream of media attention and public conversation across the globe. Historically high youth unemployment has been a flashpoint for angry, sometimes violent, protests in Europe (e.g. United Kingdom, Spain, Greece), and North Africa and the Middle East (e.g. Egypt, Tunisia; Tapscott, 2011). Closer to home, the comparatively subdued Occupy movement in the United States and Canada has also been linked to high rates of youth joblessness (ILO, 2011).

Nova Scotians are no strangers to the problem of youth unemployment (Note: for an explanatory note of what constitutes ‘youth,’ please see Box 1 immediately following this section). In the five years immediately following “the Great Recession” of 2008/09, Nova Scotians under 35 have lost many more jobs than they have gained; among this age group, there were 8,100 fewer people employed at the end of the recession than there were before it began. Unfortunately, the employment struggles of Nova Scotia’s youth are not over. As of August 2014, the youth unemployment rate (UR) in Nova Scotia sits at 16.6%, more than twice the 7.6% rate of the primary working age population (PWA) of 25-54 year olds (Statistics Canada, 2014; Table 282-0087).

The report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy (oneNS Commission, 2014) concludes that the demographic transition taking place in Nova Scotia principally as a result of youth outmigration and low birthrates, threatens the Province’s ability to maintain basic public services. The Commission concludes that it is Now or Never for Nova Scotia to take action to modernize our economy and create more opportunities for youth and the economy.

In addition, in the Nova Scotia Youth Poll by Springtide Collective (2013), fully 42% of respondents identified “jobs and the economy” as the “most important issue facing Nova Scotia today.” This particular concern received more than three times more responses than the next highest concern, “social welfare and poverty alleviation,” which itself also indicates a preoccupation with economic issues.

StudentsNS is committed to taking action on these issues on behalf of our members and our Province. In this paper, we explore the enormous and constantly growing lit-

erature on the economies and youth labour markets of Nova Scotia, Canada, and the World. We also conduct a comparative analysis of post-recession youth job markets after the three most recent Canadian recessions (1981, 1991, and 2008/09). These lines of inquiry make it clear that we are in the midst of an ongoing youth employment problem, which unquestionably requires public policy intervention, but they also confirm that today's challenges are not uniquely awful in recent historical terms.

To identify appropriate policy solutions, we also critically examine the full range of government programs and services aimed at youth labour market development and youth skill development. This review includes a close examination of career-oriented programs and services – primarily student career counseling centres and co-operative education options - offered at Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions. Importantly, our analyses are built upon the premise that post-secondary institutions appropriately fulfill a dual mandate: they must be active and deliberate contributors to the development of a skilled and knowledgeable labour force even as they continue to be sites for pure academic pursuit.

Based on our research and analyses, we make a number of recommendations aimed at the Nova Scotia government, our post-secondary institutions, and every single employer in the Province of Nova Scotia. We identify the urgent necessity for a Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy to be led by the Province and implemented collaboratively by government, employers, and relevant youth-serving organizations. Under this strategy, we recommend:

- That employers in all sectors of Nova Scotia's economy - but particularly the Provincial Government and large flagship employers in the private sector – show leadership in hiring more youth, remunerating them appropriately, investing in their professional development, and providing meaningful opportunities to contribute and advance;
- That the Province implement numerous policy changes aimed at helping youth to access government-funded employment services and at ensuring that more youth are connected with actual employment when they do participate in such programs; and finally
- That all of our post-secondary institutions take the necessary steps to improve and/or expand opportunities for their students to participate in experiential learning (with the help of more targeted resources from government).

All of these recommendations (and many others) are made with the same goal in mind: to increase the number of economic opportunities available to young people in Nova Scotia. Measuring progress toward achieving this goal should be relatively straightforward, as it translates into more young people choosing to live and work in Nova Scotia and, in the long term, a healthier economy and more sustainable future for the Province as a whole.

### **Box 1: How do we define youth?**

The very definition of what constitutes ‘youth’ is somewhat amorphous. Depending on the context, references to youth in the media and in policy literature vary widely: the broadest definitions could include everyone from 13 to 35 years of age; and the most narrow would capture only those individuals between 13 and 18. In our analysis, we focus primarily on the demographic of 18 to 35 year olds (though with some variation due to data availability or to draw attention to particular features of the data).

We are primarily interested in individuals moving across two important life-course transitions: from high school into post-secondary education and from post-secondary education (PSE) into the permanent labour force (see note below).

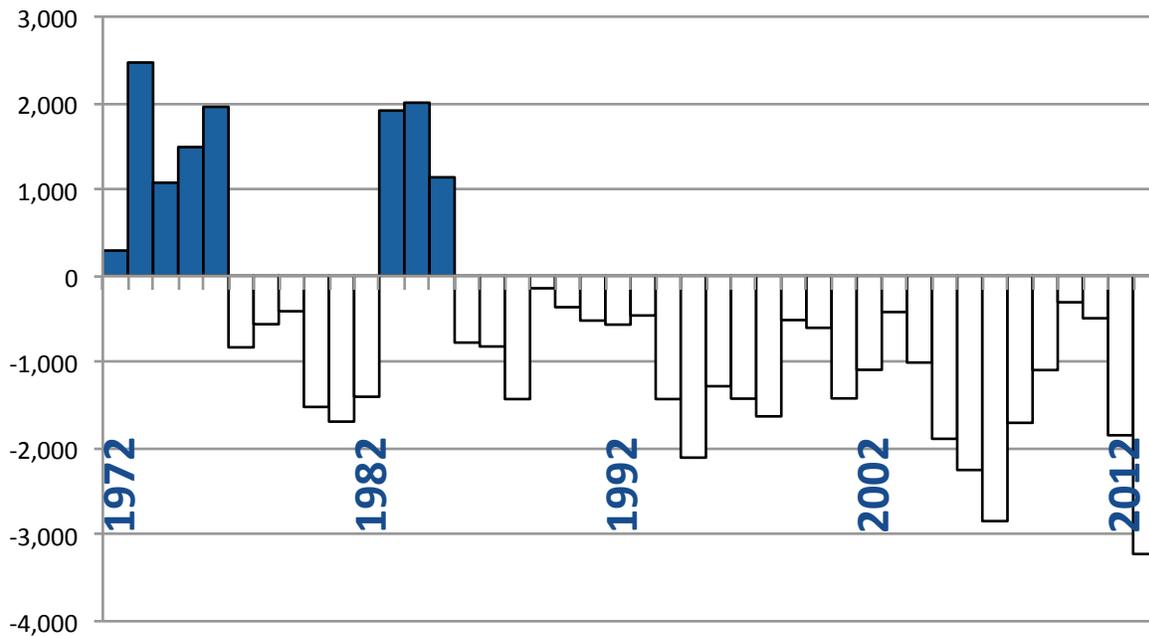
Of course, even these groups contain considerable variation, including individuals not participating (or planning to participate) in PSE; those pursuing their first PSE program; those transitioning into the labour market after obtaining a single credential; students pursuing consecutive graduate, professional, and/or other supplementary credentials after completing a first degree; and finally, multiple credential holders graduating into the permanent labour force closer to top end of this age range.

In addition to individuals facing various transitions, there are also many individuals under 35 that are well beyond the typical transitions, having achieved relative stability in the labour force, some degree of financial independence, and perhaps having bought homes or started families. In short, individuals at the top end of the age range may face circumstances much more similar to the ‘non-youth’ population. Likewise, at the bottom end of the age range, it is clear that 18 year olds entering PSE will face employment-related challenges more similar to those of high school students working part-time.

*NOTE: It is important to acknowledge the existence of a number of other possible transitions including: moving from high school directly into the permanent labour force, first-time entry to PSE from the labour force, and return entry to PSE from the labour force. Our analysis may shed light on some of these issues, but only indirectly, as we focus most of our attention on the route from high school, into PSE, and then on to the permanent labour force.*

## 2. Farewell to Nova Scotia: Youth Lost at Great Cost

For a long time, many Nova Scotia post-secondary graduates and other young people have been making the same rational, but often heartbreaking, choice to leave our Province. Nova Scotia has been a net loser of people aged 20-34 in each and every year since 1985 – a time when most of Nova Scotia’s current PSE students weren’t even alive (Figure 1) (Statistics Canada, 2014; Cansim Table 051-0012)! Over those 28 years, we have lost a total of 33,630 young people to other Canadian provinces – an annual average of 1,201 – along with all of the skills, talent and potential that they collectively possessed. Had we fared only marginally better, perhaps receiving a positive net influx once in every three or four years, our current situation might not be so urgent.



But here we are. Our population is aging and our young people continue to leave. Their leaving hurts twice as much because, as a small, relatively-poor province, Nova Scotia spends a disproportionate amount of its resources on PSE (StudentsNS, 2013) only to watch many of those we have invested in depart to seek jobs elsewhere. Our record of continuous net outmi-

**PRINCIPLE:** Attachment to the labour market and remuneration commensurate with skills and knowledge is fundamental to many students' and graduates' decisions to settle in Nova Scotia in the long-term.

gration is one of the main reasons that Nova Scotia's workforce in 2035 is projected to be 100,000 persons (or nearly 25%) smaller than in 2010, even as seniors' share of the provincial population balloons from 16% to 28% (oneNS Commission, 2014). We consistently fail to keep young people here from leaving and fail to attract people to move here from elsewhere.

**PRINCIPLE:** Good quality employment is individually subjective, but can be generally defined as meaningful, challenging, and providing fair compensation relative to an employee's level of education.

Optimistically, we can hope that these projections perfectly reflect what will happen if we collectively choose "never" – the painfully obvious wrong answer to the oneNS Commission's big question. Clearly, if these projections came to pass, we would be forced to lay an even heavier tax burden on the remaining workers who continue to toil away for all of us. But in reality, the situation would likely be much worse than

this. If Nova Scotians begin to realize, individually and collectively, that change is not coming, those with options (including the young) are very likely to leave in even larger numbers than before. This truly is Nova Scotia's worst-case scenario – an indefinite period of self-reinforcing decline, in which the inexorable loss of talented young people will make our economic turnaround ever harder to accomplish. Unfortunately, such a scenario is not implausible if we do not embrace significant change.

The most commonly cited reasons for leaving Nova Scotia include unavailability of jobs here in Nova Scotia; the perception (and often the reality) that there are more jobs offering better-pay available elsewhere; relatively high student debt levels and the desire to find a job that will help to pay debts off quickly (CASA, 2010); and other perceptions about Nova Scotia's relatively high cost-of-living and costs of doing business.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there may also be any number of non-economic reasons that could lead

<sup>1</sup> Some of these perceptions are well-founded. For example, as of 2013, Nova Scotia's cost-of-living (as determined by the Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index, Cansim Table 326-0021) is third highest among Canada's provinces and territories, ahead of only PEI and Alberta. Likewise, on energy costs alone (a frequent source of complaint across the province, we again rank poorly 10th out of 12, ahead of only PEI and the Northwest Territories (data for Nunavut Territory were unavailable). Unfortunately, unlike Alberta our high cost-of-living is not counteracted by relatively high incomes; at \$67,910, Nova Scotia's median family income (in 2012) was well below the Canadian average (\$74,540) and exceeded only that of New Brunswick and Nunavut (Statistics Canada, 2014; Cansim Table 111-0009).

On the other hand, the oft-mentioned high business tax environment in Nova Scotia can be easily discredited. To take just one example, we note that KPMG (the multinational tax accounting and auditing firm) recently ranked Halifax 5th (out of 41 comparable North American cities with populations under 1,000,000) in its ranking of lowest-cost business environments (KPMG, 2014; Surette, 2014).

youth to leave Nova Scotia. For example, some Nova Scotia youth make the decision to out-migrate long before they ever enter the workforce, and often before finishing high school and pursuing post-secondary education. Such individuals might be drawn to travel, or to follow in the footsteps of friends and relatives who previously left Nova Scotia; or they might be making a pragmatic pre-emptive decisions based on everything they know about

**CONCERN:** Nova Scotia has experienced 28 consecutive years of net negative interprovincial migrations.

**PRINCIPLE:** Employers must play a critical role in developing a strong and successful workforce.

living and working in Nova Scotia. Whatever the specific reasons, some of these factors are clearly difficult targets for effective public policy intervention.

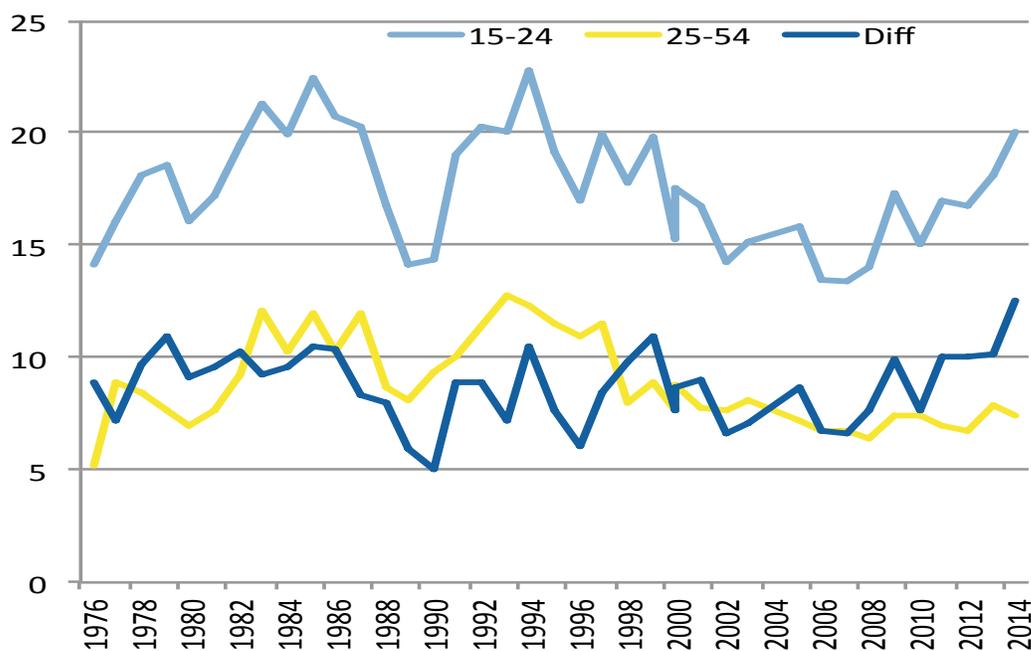
However, the evidence suggests that the strictly economic factors listed above continue to play the most significant role in Nova Scotia's dismal outmigration record and ultimately the solutions must principally be economic as well.

As the length and complexity of this report makes obvious, the challenging employment landscape for Nova Scotia's youth is the result of a tangled web of inter-related factors. And while the Nova Scotia government and local business leaders cannot control the national or world economies, the same list of economic factors suggests that locally-implemented policy solutions and strong multi-sectoral commitment to youth-friendly hiring policies, could make a big difference in addressing Nova Scotia's youth employment and outmigration problems (Amirault and Miller, 2012; Beale, 2012). In short, more economic opportunities for youth means more youth living and working in Nova Scotia and contributing to a brighter future for us all.

### 3. The Employment Landscape for Students & Youth in Nova Scotia

In Canada, we have been deluged with information on the youth employment problem, including competing claims about its causes and severity and even some suggestions that the current youth employment landscape, placed in a historical context, isn't much of a 'problem' at all (Gordon, 2010; Fong, 2012a, 2012b; Usher, 2013; Schirle, 2014 ). To make any intelligent commentary on what we ought to do about the youth problem – because the problem is real – it is necessary to wade through this sea of information.

#### 3.1 A Longitudinal View of Youth Employment

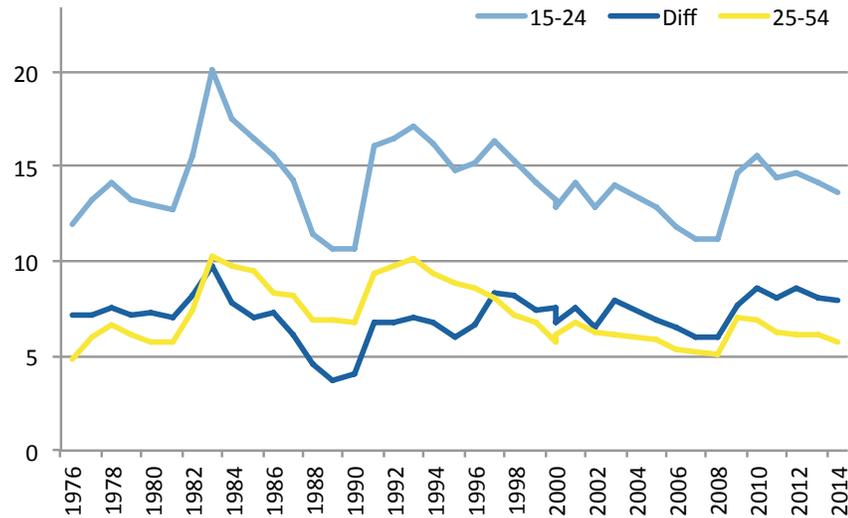


**Figure 2a.** Nova Scotia Unemployment Rates (1976-2014)

While recognizing the many existing complexities, we start our analysis where many labour market discussions often do, by examining the raw unemployment rate (UR) (Figure 2,a-c) (Statistics Canada, 2014, Cansim Table 282-0087). Since 1976, the UR for youth (ages 15-24) has consistently been above that of the primary working age (PWA) population (ages 25-54) in Nova Scotia and across Canada (see Figs 2a and b, respectively). Over the same period of time, Nova Scotia's youth UR has fluctuated in

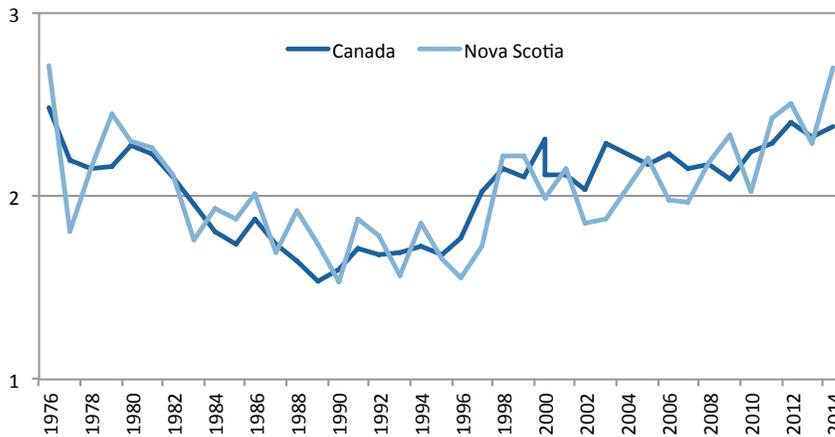
a range from roughly 15 to 23% and has generally tracked higher than the rate range for Canada as a whole (10-17%).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, Figure 2c shows the ratio of youth unemployment to PWA unemployment, both expressed as rates and tracked over time,



**Figure 2b.** Canada Unemployment Rates (1976-2014)

for Canada and Nova Scotia. This ratio is a rough measure of the strength of the youth job market in each jurisdiction relative to the broader PWA population. More often than not since 1976, this ratio has been larger in Nova Scotia than across Canada. In both cases, however, the gap between youth and PWA unemployment has been gradually increasing since reaching a low point in the early 1990s. Both have gone from well under, to well over, a 2-to-1 ratio with the Nova Scotia ratio still grow-



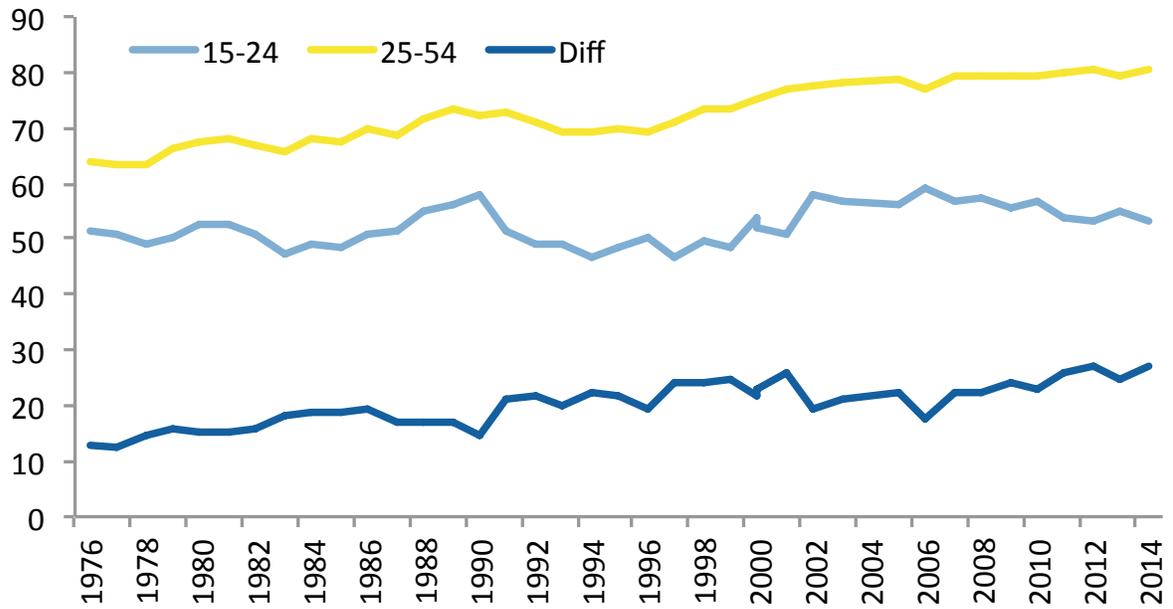
**Figure 2c.** Working Age/Youth Unemployment Ratio (1976-2014)

ing and currently on its way to 3-to-1 since the 2008/09 recession. In both jurisdictions, these ratios have not been this high since the 1970s (though they did approach their current levels in

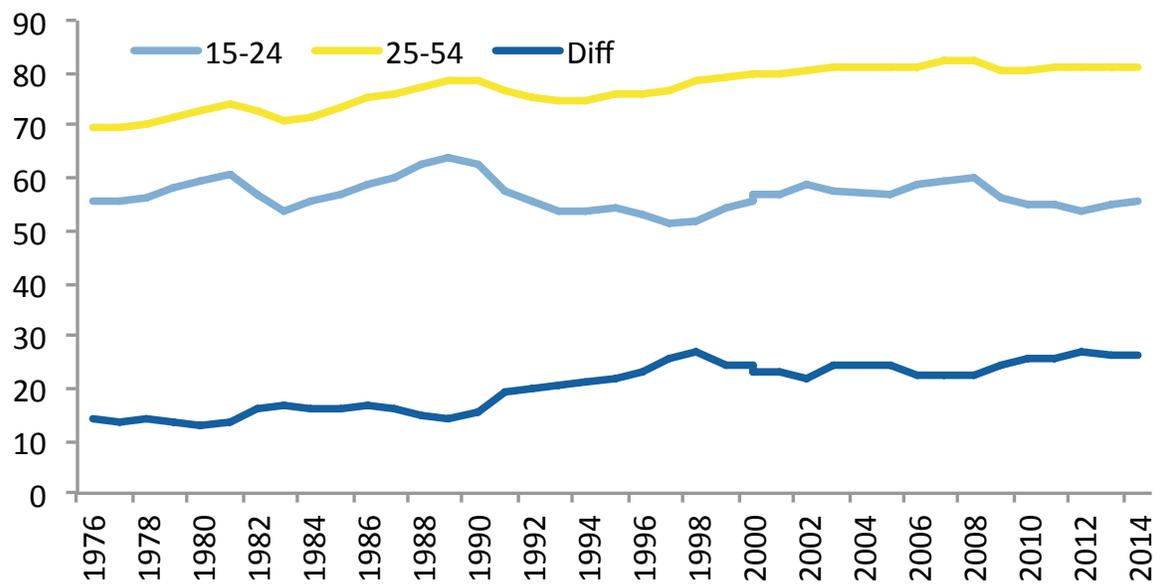
the late 1990s).

While this might give some indication of a deteriorating youth job market, there have been huge increases in post-secondary participation since the early 1990s. And since the raw UR only includes individuals actively seeking work, it is important

<sup>2</sup> From mid-1982 through early 1984, the national unemployment rate briefly spiked above 17%. It reached a maximum of almost 21% in October 1982 and dropped consistently back below 17% by late 1984.

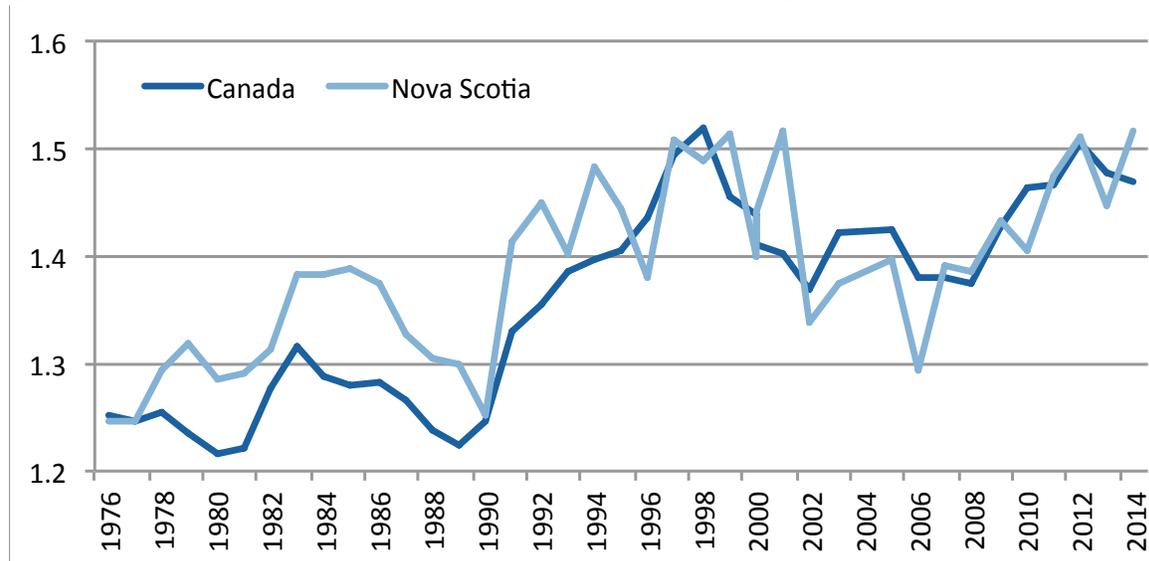


**Figure 3a. Nova Scotia Employment Rates (1976-2014)**



**Figure 3b. Canada Employment Rates (1976-2014)**

to look at other measures, like the employment rate (ER), which also accounts for discouraged job seekers and students attending university. Using this metric, we again see a gap between the youth and PWA populations, in both Nova Scotia and Canada (see Figure 3 a and b). In both jurisdictions, we see a growing ER differential between the two groups, but we also observe a relatively stable youth ER over time. Thus, the differential depends almost entirely on increased employment of the PWA group, rather than an obvious deterioration in the youth job market.



**Figure 3c. Working Age/Youth Employment Ratio (1976-2014)**

Based on this evidence, the most we can say is that the youth job market has not significantly improved over time and that, by comparison, the PWA labour market has been growing at a variable rate since the 1970s (Figure 3c). Incidentally, much of the growth in the PWA labour force participation can be attributed to increased participation of women.

The adverse labour conditions facing youth since the great recession of 2008 merit particular attention. There is considerable evidence to suggest that youth have been faring quite poorly, both in Nova Scotia and across Canada. During the recession, Canada's job market shed a total of 430,000 jobs, more than half of which were lost by people under 25 (Fong 2012a; 2012b). Since the depth of the recession five years ago (2009, quarter 1), Canada has regained over 1.2 million jobs in total, with only 2% of those jobs going to people under 25 and another 21% going to 25-34 year olds (Table 1a) (Statistics Canada, 2014; Cansim Table 282-0002).

**Table 1a: Canada Job Creation, by Age Group, in 1,000s (2009-2013)**

2009-2013						
Age Group	Change in Jobs (1000s)			% of TOTAL Job Gains		
	Total	FT	PT	Total	FT	PT
15-19	(221.5)	(99.5)	(122.0)	-18%	-10%	-35%
20-24	24.9	(76.2)	101.1	2%	-8%	29%
25-29	77.2	41.5	35.6	6%	4%	10%
30-34	178.9	152.7	26.2	15%	16%	8%
35-39	13.7	0.9	12.8	1%	0%	4%
40-44	(140.7)	(121.1)	(19.7)	-12%	-13%	-6%
45-49	(214.8)	(194.4)	(20.5)	-18%	-20%	-6%
50-54	212.1	189.9	22.1	17%	20%	6%
55-59	266.4	242.4	24.0	22%	26%	7%
60-64	232.6	190.0	42.6	19%	20%	12%
65-69	145.7	97.4	48.3	12%	10%	14%
70+	69.4	33.5	35.9	6%	4%	10%
NET	644	457	186	53%	48%	53%
TOTAL	1,221	948	349	100%	100%	100%

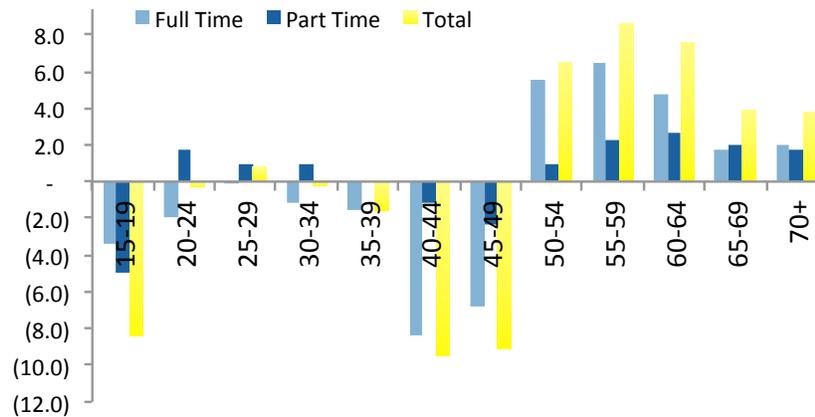
**Table 1b: Nova Scotia Job Creation, by Age Group, in 1,000s (2009-2013)**

2009-2013						
Age Group	Change in Jobs (1000s)			% of TOTAL Job Gains		
	Total	FT	PT	Total	FT	PT
15-19	(221.5)	(99.5)	(122.0)	-18%	-10%	-35%
20-24	24.9	(76.2)	101.1	2%	-8%	29%
25-29	77.2	41.5	35.6	6%	4%	10%
30-34	178.9	152.7	26.2	15%	16%	8%
35-39	13.7	0.9	12.8	1%	0%	4%
40-44	(140.7)	(121.1)	(19.7)	-12%	-13%	-6%
45-49	(214.8)	(194.4)	(20.5)	-18%	-20%	-6%
50-54	212.1	189.9	22.1	17%	20%	6%
55-59	266.4	242.4	24.0	22%	26%	7%
60-64	232.6	190.0	42.6	19%	20%	12%
65-69	145.7	97.4	48.3	12%	10%	14%
70+	69.4	33.5	35.9	6%	4%	10%
NET	644	457	186	53%	48%	53%
TOTAL	1,221	948	349	100%	100%	100%

Nova Scotia youth have fared even worse (Table 1b). Overall, the economy has produced 31,000 jobs since 2009 but only 2,000 net new jobs. For people under 25, the total number of jobs actually shrunk over the five-year recovery period and only 3% of gross jobs created went to individuals under 35. Broken down by employment status, as in Figure 4, we can see that Nova Scotia has actually produced a small net positive number of part-time jobs – less than 4,000 in total – for individuals aged 20-34; unfortunately, these were almost entirely offset by a loss of 3,200 full-time jobs.

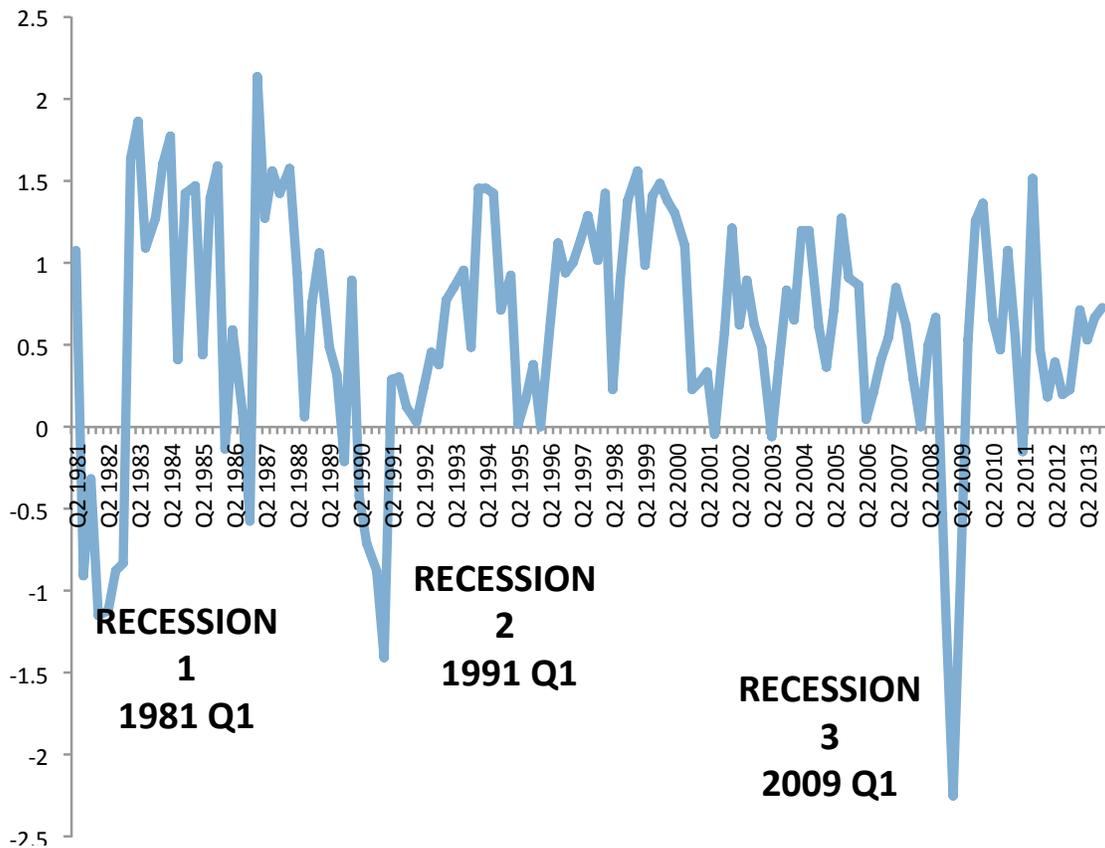
Notably, the larger trend in Nova Scotia’s job market is consistent with that of Canada as a whole and with the findings of other analysts. Fong (2012a; 2012b) has previously observed a significant return to the Canadian labour market by people over 60, with many such jobs concentrated in the service and retail sectors traditionally occupied by students. While our frame of reference is slightly different, the findings are much the same: across Nova Scotia, nearly all of the jobs created since the depth of the recession

(97%) have gone to individuals over 50. Even in the Halifax region, where Nova Scotia’s youth are concentrated, 97% of all jobs created between 2006 and 2012 went to workers over 45 years of age; and 58% went to workers over 55 (GHP, 2013).



**Figure 4:** Nova Scotia Jobs Created, by Age and Employment Status, in 1,000s (2009-2013)

Still, a number of analysts continue to argue that the employment struggles of the current generation of youth are not in any way unique, largely based on evidence that previous generations of youth suffered equally difficult employment conditions in the aftermath of recessions (Gordon, 2010; Fong, 2012b; Usher, 2013; Schirle, 2014). For this reason, it is instructive to reflect on the consequences of the 2009 recession in the context of what happened to the youth labour market following the previous recessions in 1981 and 1991 (Figure 5)(Statistics Canada, 2014, Cansim Table 380-0064).



**Figure 5:** Real Annualized GDP Growth Rate (%), by Quarter

It has now been more than five years since the depth of the 2008-09 recession: it was at the end of the first quarter of 2009 (i.e. March 31) when Canada reached its lowest point of negative economic growth (see Figure 5, Recession 3). As demonstrated above, this allows us to precisely track the number of jobs created in the five years since the recovery began. Moving backwards through time, we can similarly enumerate the jobs created over the same length of time (five years) in the aftermath of 1981 and 1991 recessions (Figure 5, Recessions 1 and 2, respectively).

Our comparisons of the three economic recoveries, as measured by job creation, are depicted in Tables 2 (a and b) and Figure 6 (a to c) (Statistics Canada, 2014, Cansim Table 282-0002).

**Table 2a:** Canada Post-Recession Job Creation, in 1,000s

CANADA				
	TOTAL	NET	FT-NET	PT-NET
1981-86	957	674	257	417
1991-96	905	209	(69)	278
2009-13	1,221	644	457	186

**Table 2b:** Nova Scotia Post-Recession Job Creation, in 1000s

NOVA SCOTIA				
	TOTAL	NET	FT-NET	PT-NET
1981-86	30	20	7	12
1991-96	19	(9)	(19)	10
2009-13	31	2	(3)	5

At the national level (Table 2a), total job creation data suggest that our recovery from the most recent recession (2009-13) has generally been better than the recoveries from 1981-85 and 1991-95, respectively. The Canadian economy has generated over 1.2 million jobs over this 5-year period, as compared with well under a million jobs in the previous two recessions. However, total job creation doesn't tell the whole story.

In each of the three recoveries, the net number of jobs created was much lower.<sup>3</sup> The 1991-95 recovery stands out as particularly difficult, creating just over 200,000 net new jobs in 5 years. Furthermore, the 1991-95 recovery actually generated a net negative number of full time jobs, meaning that all net new jobs came from the part-time category. Again, on a net basis, the current recovery looks relatively strong, generating a similar number of net new jobs to the 1980s recovery with nearly twice as many full time jobs.

Of course, national-level data can easily obscure very different events taking shape on a provincial level. In some ways, Nova Scotia's post-recession job creation data do mirror those of Canada as a whole (Table 2b). Most notably, the 1990s recovery stands out as being the worst of the three: creating the smallest total number of jobs, a negative net number of jobs overall, and a large loss of full time jobs. In contrast to the national picture, however, Nova Scotia's recent recovery period looks more like the horrible 1990s than the more promising 1980s. Our provincial economy has created 31,000 jobs over the past five years, but only 2,000 of those represent jobs that did not exist before the recession (and all of those were part-time in nature).

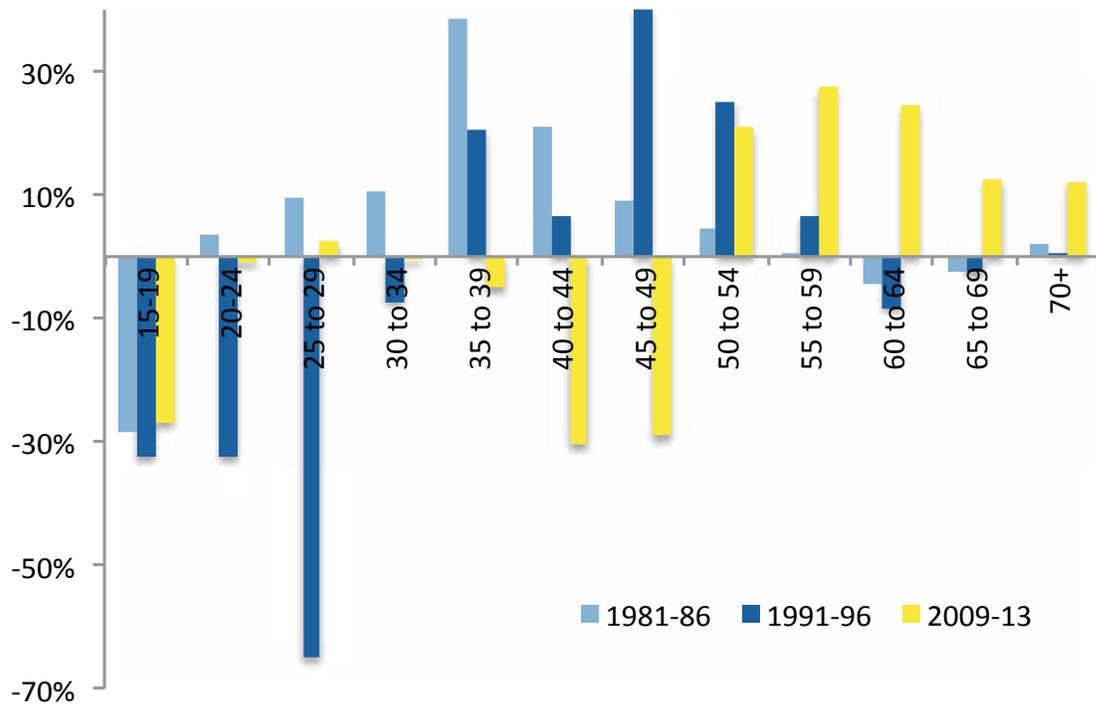
It bears mentioning that each of the recessions described above occurred within its own unique economic circumstances, meaning that the conclusions drawn by com-

<sup>3</sup> Net jobs calculation: in each job category, the total number of jobs in the economy at the depth of each recession was subtracted from the total number of jobs in the economy five years later. The net jobs count is, therefore, a measure of new jobs that did not exist five years earlier. In contrast, the total number of jobs created counts all jobs created over each five-year recovery, without subtracting offsetting job losses.

parisons between them must be interpreted with caution. But even if we acknowledge that job creation data are only one of many important economic variables, they are even more useful when broken down to assess the impact on different age cohorts and relationship to work (full- versus part-time) (Figure 6 a, b, and c) (Statistics Canada, 2014, Cansim Table 282-0002). Such an analysis helps to shed further light on which individuals in society are most likely to suffer in a recession.

**CONCERN:** Since the 2008/09 recession, 18-35 year-old Nova Scotians have lost more jobs than they have gained.

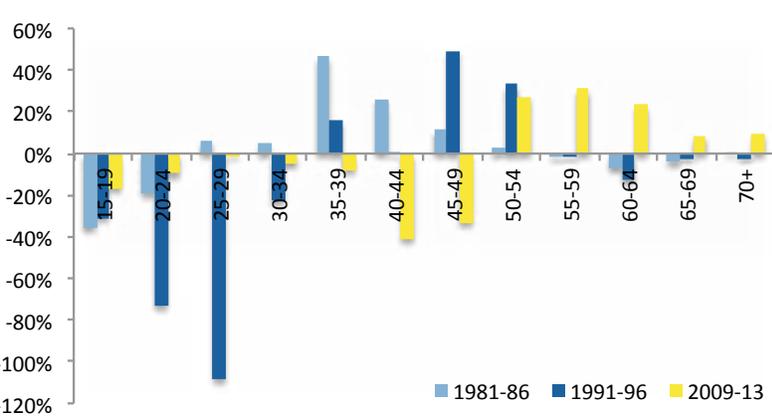
Looking at total job creation (Fig. 6a), we once again observe that the 1990s recession had the strongest negative impact on youth employment, with all age categories under age 35 receiving a negative share of the jobs created in the five years post-recession.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, individuals between 35 and 60 took up nearly all of the net new jobs. The story is much the same if we look only at full time employment (Fig. 6b). It is only when we examine the part time category that we see positive job growth for individuals under 35 (Fig. 6c).



**Figure 6a:** Nova Scotia Share of Total Post-Recession Jobs Created, by Age

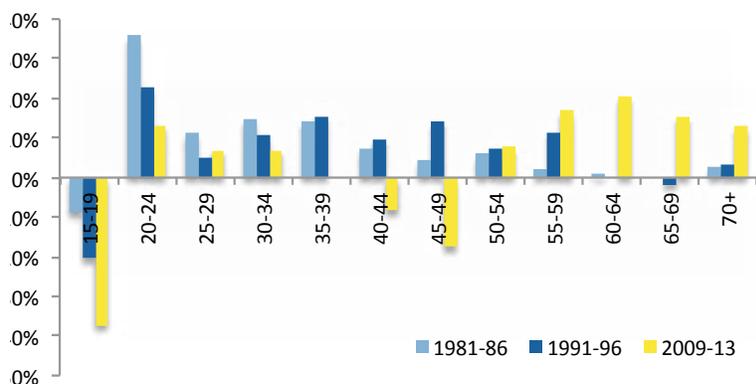
<sup>4</sup> In practical terms, a negative share of job creation means that the whole population under 35 years of age occupied fewer total jobs in 2013 than it did five years earlier. It does not mean that no under-35s were hired during that entire period; only that this group lost more jobs than it gained in the recovery.

In contrast, the 1980s recovery had a much smaller impact on youth, relative to other age groups. Other than the 15-19 cohort, Nova Scotians under 35 experienced modest net positive job growth while the only other demographic experi-



**Figure 6b:** Nova Scotia Full Time (Net) Post-Recession Jobs Created, by Age

encing net losses was individuals between 60 and 70 (Fig. 6a). Again, the full-time employment situation is broadly similar, except that 20-24 year olds also received a net negative share of jobs and more of the job gains were concentrated in the 35-50 age range. Finally, youth aged 20-35 took the lion's share of new part time jobs in the 1980s recovery, to an even greater extent than in the 1990s (Fig. 6c).

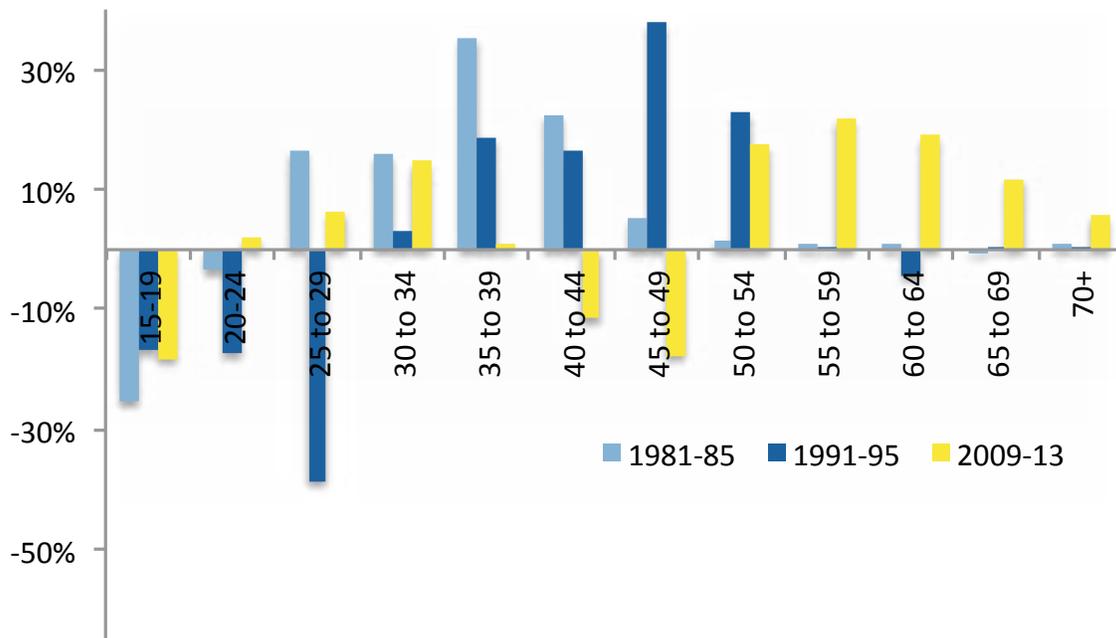


**Figure 6c:** Nova Scotia Part Time (Net) Post-Recession Jobs Created, by Age

The most recent recession recovery was clearly strongest for individuals over 50, who absorbed the majority share of total jobs created, and it was weakest for individuals under 20 and between 35 and 50 (Fig. 6a). Unlike the previous two recessions, 20-35 year olds received a modest, but positive, share of the total new jobs created. The full time job picture was similar, except that all youth cohorts received net negative jobs and all net new jobs went to 50+ year olds. In the part-time category, new job growth was largest in the 50+ group but was positive in all groups except the hardest hit 40-50 and under 20 cohorts (Fig. 6c).

**CONCERN:** Since the 2008/09 recession, a greatly disproportionate share of jobs created in Nova Scotia have gone to individuals over 25

Based on all of the above, it is clear that the most recent recession and subsequent recovery could have been worse for Nova Scotia's



**Figure 6d:** Canada, Share of Total Post-Recession Jobs Created by Age

youth: post-recession job creation was much weaker in the 1990s, for example. But today's youth are still not in great shape. In Nova Scotia, net new job creation has been very modest and highly concentrated in the part-time category, which suggests continued vulnerability in the youth population and its relationship to the labour market. At this stage, it is difficult to agree that this generation faces a historically awful employment landscape; but it is also easy to see why many youth feel significant anxiety about their individual job prospects and overall economic security.

### 3.2 Student Employment Challenges While Studying

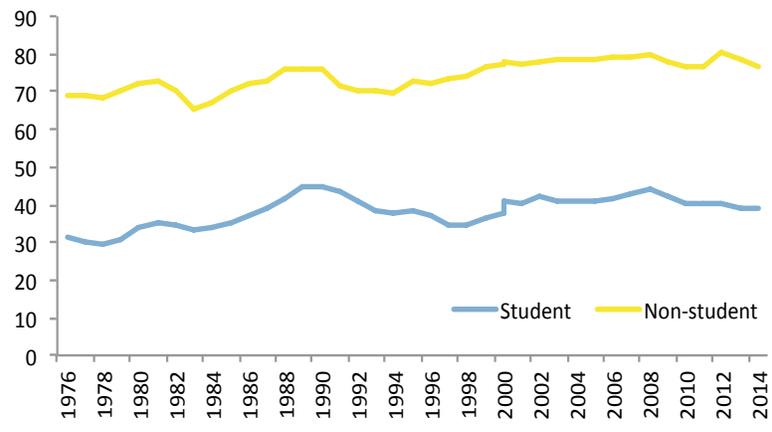
Over the course of one's studies, devoting time to paid employment can be an important, if not essential, part of the educational experience. For some students, it is necessary to work while studying simply to keep up with tuition and living expenses; and for others, devoting more time to work may help to minimize the amount of money they must borrow (Ouellette, 2006). In addition to strictly financial considerations, many students value the opportunity to gain practical experience working in their chosen field of study, either through experiential learning programs (e.g. co-op, service learning) or independently. In a labour environment where employers may seek two or more years of experience for so-called entry-level positions, working while studying is seen by many students as essential to a successful transition into a

career.

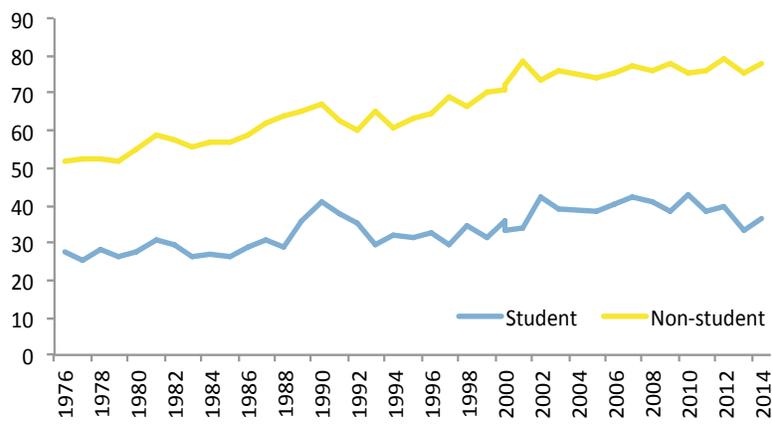
Given these pressures, it is important to more closely examine the employment activities of actual post-secondary students, independent of the broader population of non-student youth (Figure 7 a through e) (Statistics Canada, 2014, Labour Force Survey Public Use Microfile).<sup>5</sup>

In Canada (Fig. 7a) and in Nova Scotia (6b), the student employment rate has increased steadily since 1976 (both growing by less than 10% since that time, from 30% to just under 40%). This clearly shows that more students are working while studying, whether as a response to higher tuition and fees, broader participation in PSE, changing student employment norms, or some combination of the above.

As depicted in Fig. 7e, the average number of hours worked per week by Nova Sco-



**Figure 7a:**  
Canada, Youth Employment Rates (15-29 year olds) During Post-Secondary Study Period (Sept-Apr), (1976-2014)

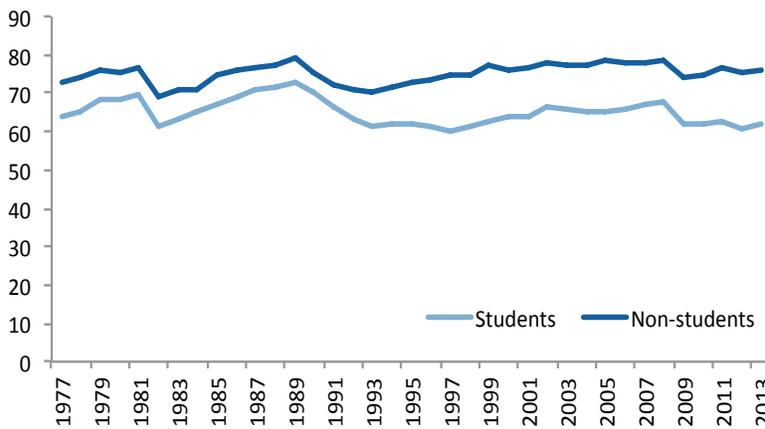


**Figure 7b:**  
Nova Scotia, Youth Employment Rates (15-29 year olds) During Post-Secondary Study Period (Sept-Apr), (1976-2014)

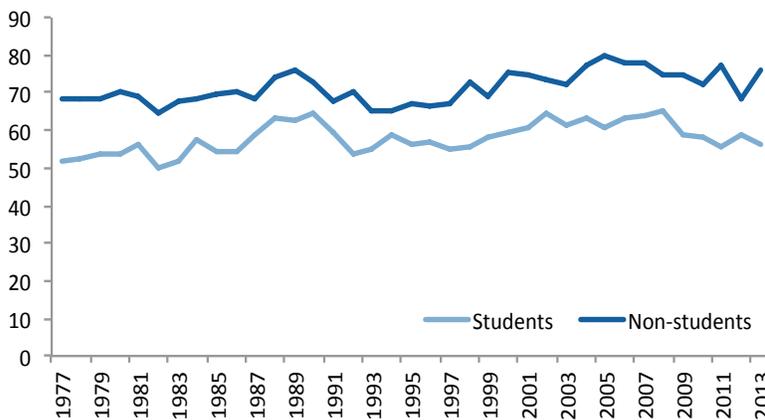
<sup>5</sup> The employment rates used in these figures refer to post-secondary students of all ages, which are primarily (but not exclusively) under 35 years of age. (Unpublished data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey Public Use Micro File, 1997-2011).

tia students during their studies has remained remarkably steady at around 20 since 1997.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, studies have shown that students' academic performance tends to suffer above the 20 hour per week level, suggesting the possibility that many students are working as much as possible to offset increasing costs even if it is not in their best interest academically (Motte and Schwarz, 2009).

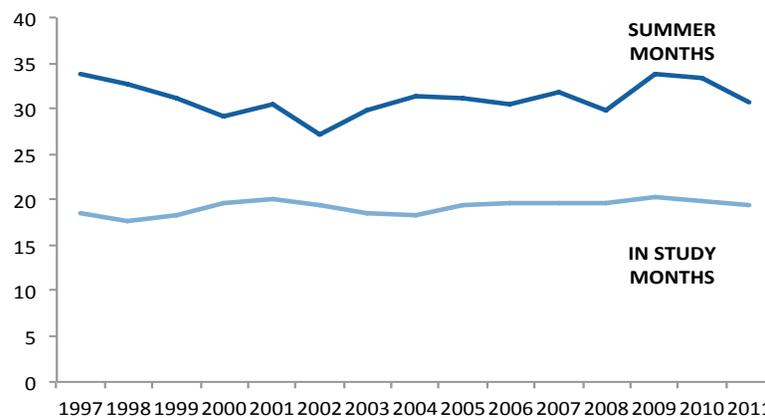
Not surprisingly, there is a different student work pattern in the summer months, with more students working a larger average number of hours while not actively studying (Figure 7c-e). Canada-wide, the student summer employment rate has generally fluctuated with the strength of the economy, closely tracking the non-student sum-



**Figure 7c:**  
Canada, Youth  
Employment Rates (15-  
24 year olds) During  
Post-Secondary Summer  
Months (Jun-Aug), (1977-  
2013)



**Figure 7d:**  
Nova Scotia, Youth  
Employment Rates (15-  
24 year olds) During  
Post-Secondary Summer  
Months (Jun-Aug), (1977-  
2013)



**Figure 7e:**  
Changes in Average  
Student Weekly Work  
Hours, by Time of Year  
(1997-2011)

6 This average refers does not include students who do not engage in any work while studying.

mer employment rate but remaining in the 60-70% range overall since 1977 (Fig. 7c). The same basic pattern emerges in Nova Scotia, with student summer employment fluctuating across a slightly larger (and lower) range between 50% and 65%. Since 1997, average weekly work hours in summer have fluctuated over a slightly wider range (27-34 hours per week) relative to in-study work hours. Combined with the in-study data above, it is clear that student employment efforts have remained relatively stable despite large increases in tuition and fees over this period (1997-2011 – MPHEC, 2014).

Since more recent student-specific data are not readily available, it is not clear whether student work effort has changed substantially as the recovery has dragged on, though the broader youth employment rate has remained stubbornly low since before 2011 (see Figs. 2 and 3). There are other indicators that youth employment effort and hours worked may have dropped involuntarily. Previous studies have demonstrated a significant return to the labour market of people over 60, occupying almost half of all jobs (49%) created in Nova Scotia since 2009, with many of those jobs concentrated in the service and retail sectors (Fong, 2012a – see Table 1b, and Figure 4). With competition from 60+ year olds and wider unemployment affecting the hard hit 40-50 year old cohort as well, it is highly plausible that many youth are finding it more difficult to find “traditional student employment.” This is perfectly consistent with qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus groups with students and youth from across Nova Scotia, many of whom have reported particular difficulties finding work in the summer months.

**CONCERN:** As a regulation under the Labour Standards Code, the indexation provisions in Nova Scotia’s Minimum Wage Order is subject to change at the behest of the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

Taken together, all of the above data suggest the possibility that the recession, combined with rising student fees and living costs, has made it more difficult for students to self-finance their education with employment income. The only mitigating factor for students is that Nova Scotia’s minimum wage has nearly doubled since 1997 (from \$5.50 to \$10.40), after growing very little in the previous decade (Statistics Canada,

2014)<sup>7</sup>. In 2011, *Nova Scotia’s Minimum Wage Order (General)* (N.S. Reg. 257/2011)

<sup>7</sup> A significant portion of this wage growth, \$2.10 in total, has taken place since 2009 and it was in 2011 that the NDP government first began indexing Nova Scotia’s minimum wage to CPI (LAE, 2014). As of April 2014, the new Liberal government has continued this practice. Notably, in addition to the headline minimum wage, Nova Scotia has also introduced an inexperienced wage rate that is \$0.50 lower for individuals with less than three months experience in a specific job.

regulation was indexed to match Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cut-off (LICO) measure – which, in practice, is used to demarcate the commonly accepted upper income boundary of those considered to be in poverty – and since that time has been indexed to annual changes in the consumer price index (CPI). As a regulation under the Nova Scotia [Labour Standards Code](#) (R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 246), the minimum wage order can be changed at the behest of the sitting Minister of LAE. As such, it is theoretically possible that the minimum wage could be de-indexed at any time. Further to this, the formal minimum wage review committee that makes annual recommendations to the Minister does not, to our knowledge, contain any youth or student representation.

The minimum wage is the prevailing wage for most Nova Scotia students: nearly 80% of youth under 25 hold a part-time minimum-

wage job while studying and almost two-thirds of all minimum wage workers are under age 25 (Statistics Canada, 2010). But the fact remains that minimum wage earnings are not sufficient to allow students to pay for their education without additional financial help. To demonstrate this, we

have modeled different scenarios in which we compare the full-year wages, annual tuition, and annual housing costs of a Nova Scotia student under various costing assumptions. Herein, we present two representative models, both of which assume “typical” weekly employment hours at minimum wage and average Nova Scotia university tuition; the models vary in their housing cost assumptions, with one based on the provincial average rent for a shared two-bedroom apartment and the other based on the provincial average rent for a bachelor apartment (Figure 8a and b) (CMHC, 2014; MPHEC, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2014 Labour Force Survey Public Use Microdate File).

**CONCERN:** Nova Scotia’s Minimum Wage Review Committee contains insufficient representation by students and youth.

As depicted in Figure 8b, the two models share the same overall shape (reflecting very similar cost and earnings trends), differing only based on the magnitude of the assumed housing costs.

In the model based on bachelor apartment living, typical employment hours at minimum wage have been insufficient to cover average tuition and housing costs since at least 1997. That year, the cost of rent and tuition exceeded typical minimum wage earnings by almost \$1,900. Over the next seven years, the deficit more than doubled to over \$3,800, based on rapid tuition growth and a slower wage growth. After an-

other seven years of more rapid wage growth and regulated tuition policy (including a three-year freeze from 2008-2010), the large gap between earnings and expenditures narrowed to under \$900. Finally, after three recent years of resumed tuition growth at 3% or more, the deficit has once again increased above \$2,100.

**CONCERN:** Given current labour market conditions and costs, it is difficult, if not impossible, for many students to self-finance their education with employment

**PRINCIPLE:** Students and youth should be compensated fairly for their labour.

In the model based on a two-bedroom apartment shared with one other person, the situation is different. As of 2013, the money saved by sharing living space would allow this hypothetical student a modest surplus of \$523. Still, it is important to note that the recent trend is not in students' favour, since the surplus was significantly larger just four years prior to this (\$1,383 in 2010). Furthermore, there are many other additional expenses not included in this analysis, including textbooks and essential items such as groceries

and transportation, to say nothing of 'extras' like clothing, cell phones, or entertainment. It is safe to conclude that neither of these two student models would be able to survive on their employment earnings alone.

These scenarios paint a clear picture of nearly insurmountable expenses faced by a minimum-wage-earning student working a typical number of hours. As demonstrated by our supplementary models (see Appendix), even working full-time hours in the summer and/or using even cheaper accommodations while studying does not drastically change the financial position of most students. Their ability to cover basic costs is highly questionable, making coverage of unexpected incidentals or supporting other family members on such an income nearly impossible.

**CONCERN:** Significant hours of paid employment while studying may compromise students' learning and academic performance and other stakeholders.

Of course, the more fortunate students can often draw upon familial supports and educational savings to avoid incurring student debt. But roughly one third of all Nova Scotian post-secondary students have no other choice but to borrow for their education (StudentsNS, 2013b; Student Assistance Office, 2013). The challenge for students to make ends meet is made even more difficult by the need to actually attend classes and complete their academic work.

Policy makers in Nova Scotia (and elsewhere) must carefully consider the potential impacts of the inexorably growing cost of PSE. Sub-optimal academic achievement, driven partly by a perceived need to earn money or avoid debt, is of little benefit to any of us. Tuition and fees policy, student financial assistance programs, and student/youth employment initiatives should all be tailored to foster short-term academic success and long-term economic success for all students.

## 3.3 Employment Challenges After Graduation

### 3.3.1 The Post-Graduate Labour Market

PSE proponents often point to significantly lower unemployment rates gained from going to university or college, as well as a lifetime earnings premium that we will discuss in more detail later. ESDC (formerly HRSDC) (2013) estimates that 70% of jobs created Canada over the next ten years will require a PSE credential and that number is expected to rise above 80% after 2020. Recent research indicates that bachelor's degree holders are twice as likely to be employed as high school graduates (Frenette and Morrissette, 2014). Data from Nova Scotia suggests a more complex relationship between education and employment (Statistics Canada, 2013, Cansim Table 282-0003).

Table 3a summarizes the total net number of jobs created in Nova Scotia between March 2009 and March 2014, by highest completed level of education<sup>8</sup>. Nova Scotia has experienced a net loss of 2,700 jobs over this period. However, individuals with at least one university degree actually gained almost 24,000 jobs. Somewhat surprisingly, the only other group to make positive gains over this period was high school graduates, which might reflect lower quality of jobs being created. Unfortunately, individuals with college certificates or diplomas were the net job losers.

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<sup>8</sup> This analysis is based on a different set of data than the analysis depicted in Figures 4 to 6 and Tables 1 and 2, which explains the differences in final job count numbers.

**Table 3a-d:** Nova Scotia Post-Recession Job Creation, by Highest Level of Education Completed (March 2009-March 2014)

<b>A. ALL NET JOBS</b>						
	15-24	25-44	45-54	55-65	65+	SUM
0 to 8 years	-0.7	-1.5	0.4	-2.5	-0.8	-5.1
Some HS	-4.4	-7.1	-5.9	-1.5	-0.1	-19
HS Graduate	2.0	-3.5	3.4	4.8	1.4	8.1
Some PSE	-3.1	-2.0	-1.5	-0.8	0.1	-7.3
Certificate / diploma	-1.2	-3.1	-3.9	4.6	0.4	-3.2
University	0.3	8.1	3.5	9.3	2.6	23.8
<b>SUM</b>	-7.1	-9.1	-4	13.9	3.6	-2.7

<b>B. FULL TIME NET JOBS</b>						
	15-24	25-44	45-54	55-65	65+	SUM
0 to 8 years	-0.2	-1.4	0.3	-1.8	0.2	-2.9
Some HS	-0.7	-6	-4.4	-0.7	0.4	-11.4
HS Graduate	1.3	-2	3.3	2.9	1.1	6.6
Some PSE	-1.7	-1.9	-1.8	0	0.0	-5.4
Certificate / diploma	-2.2	-3.9	-3.5	1.9	0.5	-7.2
University	-1	5.1	4.3	7.6	0.9	16.9
<b>SUM</b>	-4.5	-10.1	-1.8	9.9	3.1	-3.4

<b>C. PART TIME NET JOBS</b>						
	15-24	25-44	45-54	55-65	65+	SUM
0 to 8 years	-0.4	-0.3	0.1	-0.5	-0.7	-1.8
Some HS	-3.7	-1	-1.5	-0.9	0.0	-7.1
HS Graduate	0.6	-1.5	0	1.9	0.3	1.3
Some PSE	-1.4	0	0.2	-0.8	0.0	-2.0
Certificate / diploma	1	1	-0.6	2.6	0	4
University	1.4	3.1	-0.9	1.7	1.6	6.9
<b>SUM</b>	-2.5	1.3	-2.7	4	1.2	1.3

D. TOTAL JOBS							
	15-24	25-44	45-54	55-65	65+	SUM	SHARE
0 to 8 years	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.4	1%
Some HS	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0%
HS Graduate	2.0	0.0	3.4	4.8	1.4	11.6	28%
Some PSE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0%
Certificate / diploma	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	0.4	5.0	12%
University	0.3	8.1	3.5	9.3	2.6	23.8	58%
<b>SUM</b>	2.3	8.1	7.3	18.7	4.5	40.9	100%
<b>SHARE</b>	6%	20%	18%	46%	11%	100%	

Tables 3b and 3c summarize the same net jobs data broken down into full-time and part-time jobs, respectively. These tables indicate that full time jobs represented the vast majority of losses. Again, college diploma/certificate holders were hit particularly hard, losing 7,200 full-time jobs, which were only partially offset by part-time gains of 4,000. In contrast, university graduates made most job gains in the full time category (71% of total increase). The high school graduate category also gained primarily in the full-time category (82%).

**CONCERN:** While having a PSE credential generally provides a competitive advantage to Nova Scotia job seekers, recent graduates under age 25 continue to have difficulty attaching to the labour market.

Taken together, these data seem to indicate that a university degree confers a major advantage to individuals seeking employment in the Nova Scotia labour market. It is, however, also important to look at the ages of the individuals gaining (and losing) jobs. The data in Tables 4a to 4c clearly show that job gains for university degree holders have disproportionately gone to individuals over

the age of 25, meaning that most first-time university graduates are still finding it difficult to attach to the labour market. In particular, university graduates under 25 have gained a miserly total of 300 jobs, reflecting a net loss of full-time jobs offset by a slightly larger gain in part-time jobs<sup>9</sup>.

Table 3d provides a simpler analysis of job creation since 2009; it excludes all job losses to highlight groups that have made gross job gains in the post-recession

<sup>9</sup> Note that the totals in Table 3a are not a perfect match to the addition of full-time and part-time jobs from Tables 3b and 3c. This is due to a combination of rounding errors and small discrepancies in the data.

period. Overall, Nova Scotia's economy has created 41,000 total jobs. Looking at job gains by educational level, it is clear that investing in PSE is crucially important in Nova Scotia's labour market: while 29% of jobs have gone to individuals with high school education or less, fully 70% have gone to individuals with a college or university credential<sup>10</sup>.

**PRINCIPLE:** The Province has a responsibility to assist students to successfully transition to the labour market.

Nova Scotians under age 25 have gained only 2,300 jobs, with the vast majority being filled by high school graduates (i.e. low skill jobs). Looking at individuals with PSE credentials, most gains have gone to older Nova Scotians. In the college certificate/diploma group, all 5,000 jobs created have gone to individuals over 55 years of age. The 24,000 jobs for university graduates are more evenly distributed by age: just over half went to individuals over 55, one-third went to 25-44 year olds, and the remainder went to 45-55 year olds.

So, while having a university degree generally confers a competitive labour market advantage on individuals seeking work in Nova Scotia, this is clearly less true for recent graduates. Since over 80% of Nova Scotia's university students are undergraduates most of whom will complete their programs before the age of 25, it is clear that the majority of first time graduates are having a difficult time attaching to Nova Scotia's labour market.

### 3.3.2 Precarious Work

The job data described above are consistent with broader trends in the Canadian labour market indicating an increased prevalence of so-called precarious employment since 2008 (MacEwen, 2014). A recent study by Angela MacEwen makes a number of important points:

- First, despite accounting for only 20% of all jobs in the labour market, part-time employment has grown almost twice as fast as full time employment (5.9% vs. 3.3%). Similarly, Nova Scotia's part-time employment has grown by an even more modest 1.7%, while full-time employment has actually declined by 1.2%;
- The number of underemployed part-time workers (those looking for more work)

<sup>10</sup> According to the 2011 Federal Census, 46.2% of Nova Scotia's population over 15 years of age has a high school diploma or less, while the remaining 53.8% has at least one PSE credential (Department of Finance, 2014).

- has grown by 29%;
- The ranks of the unemployed workers, discouraged individuals wanting work, and discouraged individuals no longer wanting work all increased in number; and finally
- When these individuals are included (using Statistics Canada’s “supplemental” unemployment data), the full rate of under/unemployment is roughly double the base unemployment rate that is commonly reported. Not surprisingly, certain groups are more likely to be underemployed, including youth (15-24 years old) and women, who are generally more likely to be employed part-time.

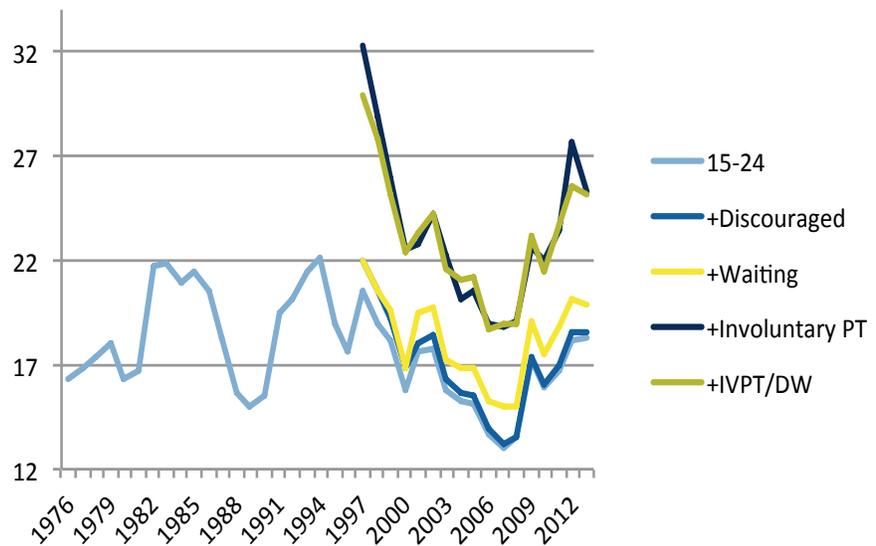
The under/unemployment situation in Nova Scotia is very similar to the national picture described above. Figure 9 (a to c) plots Nova Scotia’s base unemployment rate and supplementary underemployment rates for various age groups (Statistics Canada, 2014, Cansim Table 282-0086). In the youth age group (15-24), the total under/unemployment rate (including discouraged workers not seeking work, job seekers awaiting call back, and involuntary part-timers) currently tops out at approximately 25% (almost 10% higher than the base unemployment rate). In contrast, the 25-54 and 55-64 age groups top out at 10.5% and 11.5%, respectively, both roughly 4% above the base unemployment rate. Thus, not only do the youth rates run at more than twice the rates of the older population; the gap between the base unemployment and the under/unemployed rates is considerably (and consistently) larger for youth.

**CONCERN:** Precarious employment arrangements – including unemployment, involuntary part-time employment, temporary and contract employment, underemployment (based on credentials), and low wage/low benefit employment – are prevalent in Nova Scotia’s the youth labour market.

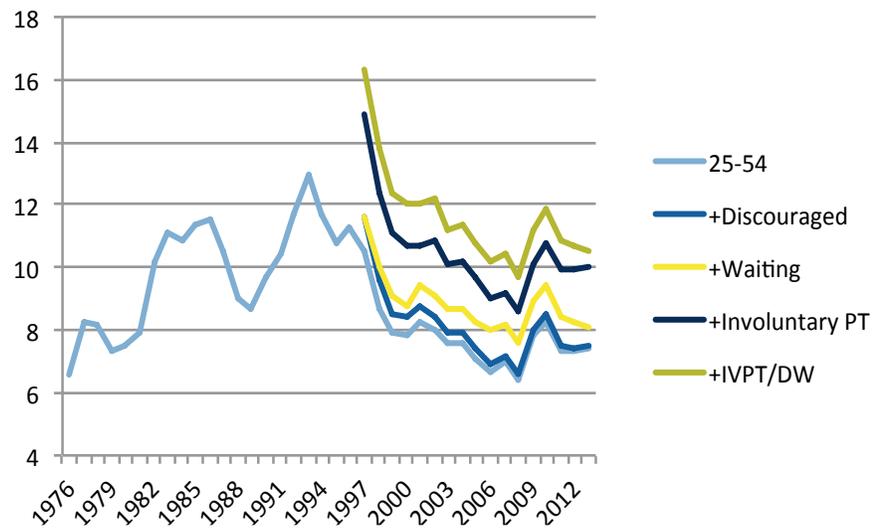
**CONCERN:** Common indicators used to describe Canada’s labour market strength, the unemployment and employment rates, fail to capture the full extent of precarious work.

MacEwen correctly asserts that Canada’s approach to statistical reporting on the labour market – typically using the base unemployment rate – is fundamentally flawed. But she goes a step further, convincingly arguing that even the supplemental under/unemployment rate does not go far enough to describe the true nature of the job market. This is because only a fraction of individuals not in the labour market are

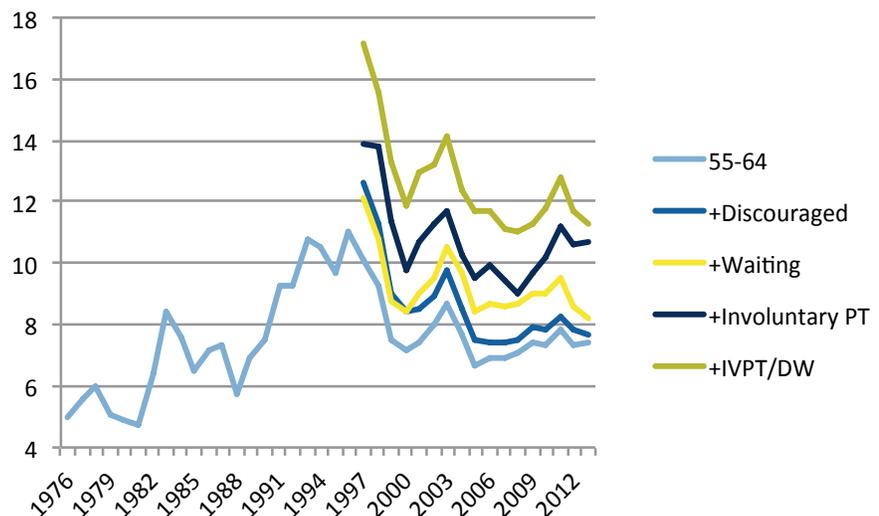
**Figure 9a:**  
Nova Scotia, Base Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24 year olds) and Supplementary Rates, (1976-2013)



**Figure 9b:**  
Nova Scotia, Primary Working Age Unemployment Rate (25-54 year olds) and Supplementary Rates, (1976-2013)



**Figure 9c:**  
Nova Scotia, Older Working Age Unemployment Rate (55-64 year olds) and Supplementary Rates, (1976-2013)



Note: Including discouraged individuals not seeking work (D), job seekers waiting for call back (W), and involuntary part-timers (IVPT)

captured by the supplemental measures.<sup>11</sup> For example, McEwen estimates the current number of underemployed individuals in Canada to be 910,000, while Statistics Canada’s methodology<sup>12</sup> results in an estimate that is less than half of that (445,000).

### 3.3.3 Post-graduate earnings

The O’Neill Report on Nova Scotia’s university system cited a wage premium of approximately \$750,000 for the average Nova Scotian university graduate relative to the typical high school graduate (p. 81). Yet, research from Statistics Canada and the OECD indicates that Canadian PSE credential holders earn smaller annual earnings premiums (relative to high school graduates) than in other developed countries (McMullen, 2009; OECD, 2012a – see Table 5, reproduced from StudentsNS, 2013c).

**Table 4.** Selected Outputs from PSE Education System in Canada (reproduced from StudentsNS, 2013)

	Canada Average	OECD Average	OECD Rank
<b>TERTIARY EDUCATION ATTAINMENT</b>			
Share of population with a degree (25-64)	51%	31%	2nd
Share of population with a degree 25-34	56%	38%	3rd
Share of population with a degree 55-64	42%	23%	3rd
College Diploma (25-64)	24%		1st
University Degree (25-64)	26%		8th
<b>LABOUR MARKET AND EARNINGS</b>			
Annual earnings premium over a high school diploma (25-64)	38%	55%	25th (of 32)
Annual earnings premium over a high school diploma (25-34)	28%	37%	n/a
Annual earnings premium over a high school diploma (55-64)	55%	69%	

Not only is the earnings premium lower in Canada, but Canada is also one of the few developed countries to experience a decrease in this earnings premium since 2000 (minus 4% overall from 2000-2009), even as OECD nations experienced an

<sup>11</sup> Currently, only 12% of all underemployed workers are included in the supplementary unemployment data, including individuals who are underemployed due to being discouraged from seeking work or currently awaiting a reply from a prospective employer. The other 88% of underemployed individuals are not reflected in the supplementary rates but their reasons for unemployment include illness, personal or family responsibilities, being in school, and the catch-all category ‘other.’

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada derives its estimate of underemployed persons based upon the volume of underemployment, measured in hours, and divided by an average number of weekly full-time hours.

average increase of 10%. To explain these data, OECD and Statistics Canada point to a relatively large population of Canadian PSE graduates earning less than median income (18% university degree holders, 23% of college credential holders). Under-employment is understood to be a key part of the explanation because 43% of this subpopulation reported a “main activity” other than employment in the year in question – 2006 (McMullen, 2009). These trends are due in large part to the impact of the 2000s oil boom driving higher earnings among low-skilled workers.<sup>13</sup>

Geography also turns out to be important to earnings within Canada, as highly educated individuals from Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and New Brunswick were more likely to have lower earnings than similar individuals in other provinces (McMullen, 2009). Importantly, this study is based on 2006 census data, therefore describing features present in our labour market even before the 2008/09 recession. It is likely that things have worsened since, especially in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, neither of which has benefitted from the windfalls of an offshore resource boom like Newfoundland and Labrador.

A geographic basis for lower than expected earnings among the highly educated is hardly surprising. Incomes in Atlantic Canada historically lag well behind the Canadian average. Median family incomes have grown quickly of late in Newfoundland and Labrador (now Canada’s seventh highest of 13 provinces and territories) but PEI, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick all remain near the bottom of the table, ranking tenth through twelfth, respectively (ahead of only Nunavut). Of course, in addition to lower incomes across the board, Nova Scotia’s PSE system is disproportionately large relative to the provincial population. The annual graduation of more than 10,000 PSE graduates in Nova Scotia alone likely creates further downward pressure on wages among the educated.

In spite of these factors, a 2009 MPHEC survey leaves some reason for optimism. It found that, despite many participants experiencing difficulty in finding stable, well-paying jobs immediately after graduating, fully 80% of 2007 Nova Scotia respondents were employed full-time in Nova Scotia when the survey was conducted; and they were earning an average

**CONCERN:** Between 2000 and 2009, Canadian post-secondary graduates have experienced a 4% decrease in the annual earnings premium relative to the earnings of a high

<sup>13</sup> Of course, a declining PSE earnings premium is not intrinsically negative. The premium could increase, for example, as a result of increased poverty among individuals without a PSE credential, and a decrease could therefore reflect greater economic equality. In this case, however, we have strong evidence of rapidly growing income inequality in Canada (OECD, 2014), which makes the declining premium a legitimate concern, especially in a context where private costs to attend PSE continue to grow.

annualized salary of over \$40,000 (MPHEC, 2011). There are a number of reasons to be cautious about these data, most crucially that they were obtained before the 2008/09 recession had made its full impact felt on the youth labour market.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this, the survey largely fails to account for 2007 graduates that left the Province over the two-year period because they were unable to find suitable employment. In spite of these shortcomings, Nova Scotia's students should feel somewhat heartened that decent jobs have become available to recent Nova Scotia graduates, even if there are too few of these jobs and if the search is horribly frustrating.

**CONCERN:** Significant periods of unemployment upon graduation can have long-term negative impacts on career advancement and lifetime earnings potential.

Compounding declines in the PSE earnings premium, the great recession will have long-lasting negative impacts on many young people because being unemployed or underemployed early in one's career has been shown to diminish future career prospects, leading to 'wage scarring' that can persist over a full working lifetime (Kahn, 2010). Wage scarring refers to the econometric phenomenon whereby every 1% increase in the unemployment rate causes a long-term loss in wages of 6-7% for individuals graduating into the weakened labour market. For some individuals, this period of wage scarring can last more than 15 years. Based on wage scarring models, Schwerdtfeger (2013) estimates that Canadian university graduates will lose over \$23 billion in earnings between 2009 and 2030.

Finally, gloomy long-term projections for the global economy faces suggest that it will be more difficult for today's youth to accrue personal wealth in the decades to come. The OECD predicts that Canada's aging population will slow economic growth considerably over the next 50 years (2010). The impacts of public debt accumulated and the costs associated with climate change mitigation and remediation will also have an assuredly large, yet unpredictable, impact on future growth (Cinq-Mars, 2007).

### 3.4 Other Considerations for Youth, Employers, and Policymakers

In addition to the issues addressed above, there are a number of other labour market factors and student- and youth-related challenges that are worthy of additional attention.

<sup>14</sup> Later in 2014, the MPHEC's will release findings of its 2012 graduating survey, covering the experiences of 2010 graduates two years after leaving university. The in-province employment and earnings statistics from this release should provide a much clearer picture of Nova Scotia's post-recession youth labour market.

### 3.4.1 Canada's Labour and Skill Shortages: Myth or Reality?

Misinformation about the labour market often passes for knowledge in media coverage, reaching the kitchen table and even, in some unfortunate cases, the Cabinet table (MacEwen, 2014a, Stanford, 2014). Most students are familiar with the old trope that “arts and humanities degrees are worthless” and many people have come to take it as an article of faith. This idea appears in a variety of other forms: sometimes with zealous emphasis on the need for more science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates; sometimes by talking about skilled labour shortages or skills mismatch;<sup>15</sup> and sometimes as “people without jobs and jobs without people.” The problem is, most of these claims are demonstrably false.

First, while it is true that the earnings premium for bachelor's degree holders has been shrinking, it continues to be 25% higher than college certificate/diploma holders 20 to 34 years old; and it widens further for individuals 35 and over (Usher, 2013)<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, regardless of average incomes, individuals with bachelor's degrees (arts or sciences) are more likely to be employed than college credential holders; over the last several years, the unemployment rates of new bachelor's degree holders have been 2-5% lower than new trades/apprenticeship graduates. Our earlier analysis showed that college graduates have in fact suffered recent job losses in Nova Scotia, whereas high school and university graduates have made marginal gains.

Next, the federal government's own job vacancy projections for 2011-2020, based on the Canadian Occupational Projection System, indicate current and projected labour shortages in only five of the 144 occupational classes (ESDC, 2011). And while occupational projections are always unpredictable at best, the five highest demand job classes are very telling. First, only one of the five is related to the skilled trades – construction management – but it is not a trade in itself. The other four categories – doctors and dentists; registered nurses and nurse managers; managers of health, education and community services; and human resources and business services – mostly require at least one university degree, with 50% of projected vacancies concentrated in the frontline highly-skilled medical fields, and roughly 40% in business or social science-related fields. In short, the overall labour demand data do not support

<sup>15</sup> In actual fact, skilled labour shortage and skills mismatch are entirely different, but often-conflated concepts. Labour shortage refers to a situation where there aren't enough workers to fill jobs. Skills mismatch refers to a situation where the pool of available labour lacks the skills needed to do particular jobs.

<sup>16</sup> Due in large part to the energy boom in the Prairies and in Newfoundland, the university-to-college earnings gap for men has already shrunk to a negligible difference but it remains large for women.

the claim that arts and humanities degrees are obsolete or drastically oversupplied. To the contrary, the data tend to suggest that demand for such skills will not only continue to be high, but it will be much stronger than the overall national demand for skilled tradespersons.

More recent large scale studies have confirmed that there is no evidence of a current or future large-scale labour shortage in Canada, that any existing skills shortages are concentrated in specific industries or geographic regions, and that these isolated cases tend to be cyclical in nature (McDaniel, 2014; PBO, 2014). The McDaniel study further concludes that Canada is generally underutilizing the skills of a number of groups, including youth, Aboriginals, disabled persons, unemployed older workers, and highly educated immigrants.

Finally, on an international level, Canada ranked in the bottom half of OECD countries in job creation between 2008 and 2012, as measured by the change in the overall employment rates (OECD, 2013b). Thus, in many parts of the country, including Nova Scotia and the other Maritime Provinces, our problem continues to be a shortage of jobs, and not a shortage of willing workers or appropriate skills.

### 3.4.2 Exploitative Labour Practices

**PRINCIPLE:** Unpaid experiential learning in the workplace may be acceptable in the context of a program providing students with academic credit or a certification.

Many students and young people are also questioning the larger economic systems we all live and work in. For example, the practice of offering unpaid internships has been hotly debated across Canada over the last several

years. While there is basically no data available on unpaid internships, labour experts estimate that there are somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000 currently working in Canada (Sagan, 2013; Usher, 2014). Multiple arguments have been advanced against the practice, including the fact that under most circumstances it is illegal in Canada to employ any person without providing at least the prevailing minimum hourly wage in the jurisdiction where the labour is performed (Stewart-Mckelvey, 2012).

Nova Scotia's [Labour Standards Code](#) and the associated [Minimum Wage Order](#) regulations contain similar provisions, but say nothing whatsoever about the issue of unpaid labour. In practice, however, it has been considered legally permissible to em-

**PRINCIPLE:** Interns should enjoy the same basic legal rights as all other workers.

**CONCERN:** Some Canadian employers engage in illegal and/or exploitative practices with interns.

ploy students to perform unpaid labour provided that the employment relationship is part of the student's formal education or professional training (CBC Online, 2013). A recent decision by Nova Scotia's Labour Standards Board – in the case of Smetana vs. Ocean View Manor Society – is the first to give legal precedent in Nova Scotia on the issue of unpaid internships (Stewart-McKelvey, 2013). In that decision, the

Board effectively formalized the previous convention by concluding that a participant in a training-based mentorship term was not technically an employee under the Labour Standards Code and was, therefore, not afforded any of the protections under the Code, including minimum wage provisions and worker's compensation protection.

StudentsNS agrees that unpaid internships may be appropriate as part of an official experiential learning opportunity. In these arrangements, both the employer and the unpaid "employee" receive a tangible benefit from the relationship, i.e. labour for course credit. But the absence of any formal workers' rights leaves interns vulnerable to other forms of illegal exploitation, including exposure to unsafe work conditions. This is a very real concern, which was painfully highlighted in two recent high profile work-related intern deaths in Alberta and Ontario (Canadian Press, 2014).

This is part of the context in which the Province of Ontario recently decided to crack down on illegal internships at a number of large media companies. This crackdown was only possible because Ontario already had clear rules in place<sup>17</sup>, which were often poorly enforced but allowed the government to act quickly in response to changing circumstances. Ideally, Nova Scotia would establish a similar set of legislated conditions for unpaid internships. This would help to remove the subjectivity of Labour Standards Board decisions on the issue.

Closer to home, the anxiety and reality of precarious work has been the genesis of

<sup>17</sup> The Ontario Employment Standards Act affirms that an individual being trained by an employer is considered to be an employee (and must be paid at least minimum wage) unless all of the following conditions are met.

1. The training is similar to that given in a vocational school;
2. the training is for the benefit of the trainee;
3. The person providing the training derives little, if any, benefit from the activity of the trainee;
4. The trainee does not displace existing employees of the person providing the training;
5. The trainee does not acquire any right to become an employee of the person providing the training; and
6. The trainee is advised that no remuneration will be provided for the time spent in training

unionization drives within the food service industry in Halifax (Canadian Press, 2013). These drives have been attributed to the fact that jobs once considered temporary or 'student' jobs have now necessarily become a longer term option for some young people, which has led employees to demand greater security and employment conditions. The unionized coffee shops trend reflects the reality many young and talented people are working in low-paying jobs for which they are grossly over qualified.

**CONCERN:** Unpaid internships aggravate inequality by conferring competitive labour market advantages to individuals who can afford to participate in a period of unpaid work.

Yet another important issue can be found in the recent firestorm of controversy about Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs). The federal government's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is intended to fill acute labour shortages in situations when employers are demonstrably unable to find Canadian workers to fill available jobs, but has been expanded dramatically over the last several years and criticized widely for allowing employers to bypass able and willing Canadian workers. For the employer, the advantages of TFWs include the ability to offer lower wages and, more or less, to maintain a pool of captive labour with lesser rights than the typical Canadian worker.

Most of the controversy has been related to TFWs being approved to work in low-skill retail and food service jobs at the expense of young Canadian workers (often students), with high profile cases arising in multiple provinces in recent months (Carmen and Meissner, 2014). In addition, a recent report from the C.D. Howe Institute has confirmed that recent TFW program changes designed to expand and expedite access to the TFWP have actually had a strong negative impact on local joblessness rates of Canadians (Gross, 2014). In light of these and other reports, the federal government briefly suspended all new TFWP approvals for the food service industry to conduct a departmental review of the TFW program (CBC Online, 2014). Upon completion of the review, the government announced a large number of changes to the existing TFW program, including measures to limit employers' ability to access TFWs except as a last resort, to impose tougher penalties on employers that contravene program rules, and to develop better local labour market information (Government of Canada, 2014).

### 3.4.3 Employer Perspectives on Youth Workers

Interestingly, much of the rhetoric used to defend the use of TFWs in low skill jobs

has revolved around Canadian workers being lazy, disloyal, and unreliable. These descriptors are strikingly similar to the terms used by Nova Scotia employers to describe their experience with youth employees in a recent survey by the Greater Halifax Partnership (GHP, 2009). The top five barriers to youth employment identified were lack of commitment, motivation, work ethic, attitude, and communication skills. While we have no doubt that these answers were given honestly and based on truly held beliefs, there are many reasons to be wary of such broadly drawn conclusions (Pierce, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2010; Hartman, 2014).

**PRINCIPLE:** Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

First, though it borders on cliché to point it out, it is an empirical fact that older generations tend to view younger generations with skepticism and even disdain. According to Stephen Pinker, the noted Harvard Psychologist:

*[P]eople often confuse changes in themselves with changes in the times, and changes in the times with moral and intellectual decline. This is a well-documented psychological phenomenon. Every generation thinks that the younger generation is dissolute, lazy, ignorant, and illiterate. There is a paper trail of professors complaining about the declining quality of their students that goes back at least 100 years" (Pinker, 2014).*

**PRINCIPLE:** Commitment to continual improvement in teaching is fundamental to a high quality post-secondary education system.

To be fair, there is some evidence in support of real generational differences vis-à-vis personal relationships to work. For example, according to polls conducted by Pew Research Center (2010) in the U.S., members of Generations X and Y are

much less likely than Baby Boomers to value "work ethic" as a defining virtue of their generations. In fact, even a majority of Gens X and Y believe boomers have stronger work ethic. Unfortunately, the reasoning behind these beliefs was not explored in the study; but it is plausible that participants of all ages had a more traditional definition of work ethic in mind – one based on showing up to work every day, being on time, and putting in a solid eight hours.

Of course, by this standard, it is not surprising that Gens X and Y would not identify

with or prioritize “work ethic” as a high virtue. First, there is close to universal agreement – from youth, older workers, and from hiring managers – that young people tend to be much more comfortable with using time-saving technologies as well as much more flexible to working irregular hours (Pew Research Center, 2010). In fact, a recent survey of Canadian youth found flexible work hours to be amongst the highest priorities of youth job seekers (Equals6, 2014). This preference does not arise out of a need to minimize work or shirk responsibility; rather, the youth surveyed saw flexible hours as an important mechanism to achieving healthier work/life balance.

But perhaps the very best evidence against charges of poor work ethic is the high level of educational achievement by today’s youth. As of 2013, 71% of Canadians between 25 and 44 held a post-secondary credential – an historic highpoint - driven largely by rapid growth in PSE participation rates since 1990 (Statistics Canada, 2013; Cansim Table 282-0004 ). Similarly, 26% of 15 to 24 year olds also held a PSE credential in 2013, which was just shy of the 27% highpoint in 2012. In our interpretation, these data clearly demonstrate unquestionable commitment and work ethic on the part of Canadian youth, most of whom dedicate years of their lives and tens of thousands of dollars toward education and job training. These are hardly the hallmarks of a lazy, unmotivated generation.

Similarly, on the subject of commitment and loyalty to employers, recent surveys indicate that a majority of young people would prefer to work for government – historically a very stable employment environment – flies in the face of the prevailing stereotypes (Equals6, 2014). Of course, government also has a reputation for providing strong salary, benefits, professional development, and advancement opportunities, all of which rank highly on the list of employer priorities for young people.

Despite some employers’ suggestions to the contrary, it is generally not the case that youth job seekers are demanding exorbitant salaries – nearly three quarters (74%) of entry-level Canadian job seekers would accept an annual salary of \$50,000 or less, while a third of such individuals would accept less than \$40,000 (Equals6, 2014). In our view, entry-level salaries at this level are not out of step with the historically high (and constantly growing) costs of PSE in Canada. Thus, what employers interpret as disloyalty or poor level of commitment might instead be evidence that their current packages of employee benefits do not engender loyalty.

Finally, and no less significantly, the issue of youth attitudes must be addressed. Again, the available evidence contradicts the negative stereotypes that too often

pass for common knowledge. First, today's youth are optimistic: despite graduating into a labour market even weaker than Canada's, 90% of recent U.S. youth still believe they will eventually reach their own long-term financial goals (Pew Research Center, 2010). The same survey also suggests that today's youth have great respect for their elders – they recognize and appreciate the work ethic and moral values of their parents' generation and also reported having fewer disagreements with their parents than Baby Boomers did at the same age. This difference in intergenerational conflict might also explain why Gens X and Y were more likely to feel responsible for the future care of aging parents and grandparents than previous generations expressed at the same age.

Youth actually could make legitimate complaints about employer attitudes in Canada. By international standards, Canadian firms' investments in employee training are middling at best. According to the OECD (2013b), just 31% of working age Canadians (25-64) participated in some form of job-related training. While this is slightly higher than the OECD average of 28%, it falls far short of the standard set by the world's strongest performers, e.g. Sweden (61%), Norway (47%), and Finland (44%). With respect to the amount of training received annually, the Canadian average of 49 hours per year is well below the OECD average (59 hours) and less than half of world-leading Denmark (105 hours per year – OECD, 2013b). The resulting perception of Canadian employers is that they have actively sought to download their training responsibility (and costs) onto government and students.

Based on all of the above, it is fair to conclude that many of the stereotypical narratives surrounding young workers are grossly exaggerated, if not entirely untrue. This further suggests that Nova Scotia's employers should reflect carefully on their past efforts to attract and retain young talent. For many of these employers, StudentsNS would like to suggest the possibility that their past experiences with youth job seekers and youth employees might say more about their organization than about the youths themselves.

## Box 2: Nova Scotia Youth Employer Award

StudentsNS has often been critical of government, post-secondary institutions, and members of the business community for their collective failure to address the critical shortage of employment opportunities for youth. While we have a clear responsibility to draw attention to such failures, we also believe it is important to highlight organizations with a strong record for hiring young people and fostering a work environment that empowers them to succeed.

Some Nova Scotia employers are utilizing innovative and effective techniques to engage youth in their businesses, and are seeing the benefits of having youth play a prominent role in their operations. With such employers in mind, StudentsNS has worked with partners including the Province, the Greater Halifax Partnership, Fusion Halifax, Nova Scotia Business Inc. and Dalhousie University to develop a Nova Scotia Youth Employer Award program. The program will serve a number of important functions, including:

- Providing opportunities to recognize and promote employers committed to youth attraction and retention;
- Demonstrating to employers that youth engagement can be beneficial for their organization; and
- Helping to educate Nova Scotians that meaningful youth employment opportunities do exist in this province.

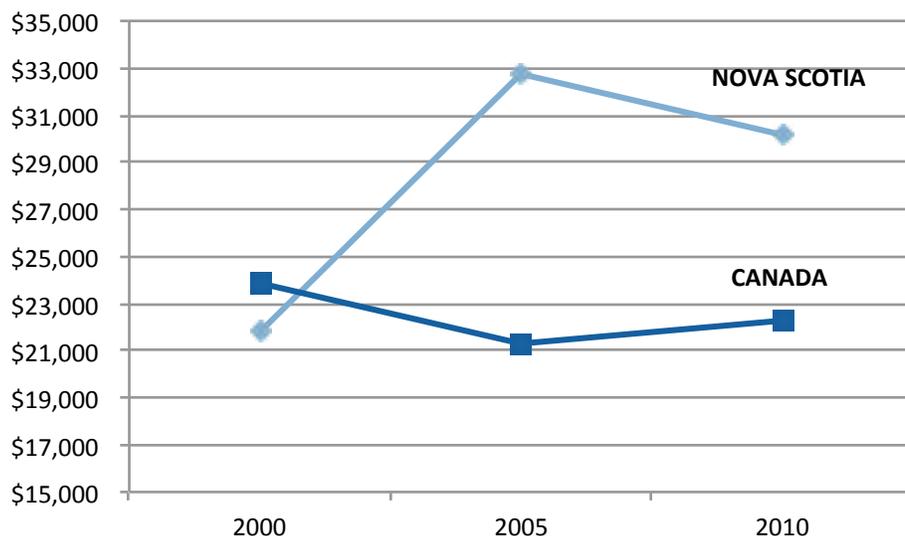
The first Award competition will soon be formalized and announced. If successful, this Award should contribute to the creation of new opportunities for youth employment and, by extension, an improved record for attracting and retaining talented young people to help build a stronger, more prosperous Nova Scotia.

### 3.4.4 Student Debt, Anxiety, & Uncertainty: Hallmarks of a “Lost” Generation?

After being sold for years on the idea that an expensive education is a sure route to a bright future, many graduating students are surprised and frustrated by the realities of the labour market – employers’ demanding highly-specific skills and experience for entry level jobs, a lack of jobs in their specific field of study, and the need for even more education to find a job they love. Given the prevalence of youth unemployment and precarious work in Nova Scotia, it is hardly surprising that so many students and youth report anxiety about their futures (Grant, 2012).

Though Nova Scotia’s student financial assistance and debt relief programs have improved enormously in recent years (for details, see StudentsNS, 2013b), Nova Scotian university graduates still have the second highest debt levels at graduation (\$30,200) of any Canadian province (New Brunswick now has the highest debt levels at \$35,000 – Statistics Canada, 2014; National Graduates Survey Public Use Data). Nova Scotians’ average student debt at graduation (\$30,200) also remains well above the Canadian average (\$22,300), though we are now in the middle of a strong downward trend whereas the Canadian average is trending slightly upward (Figure 10).

To complement the National Graduates Survey data, Statistics Canada’s Survey of Financial Security (SFS) provides the most up-to-date source of Canadian student debt data. Unfortunately, the SFS it does not report debt at the level of the individual borrower. Instead, it reports debt at the households<sup>18</sup>, meaning that debt reported may have accrued to more than one person living within the same household. Despite this quirk, SFS data still allow us to observe the general trends in national and



**Figure 10.** Nova Scotia and Canada, Average Undergraduate Student Debt at Graduation in 2000-2010  
provincial student debt.

Based on the SFS, Table 5 shows that Nova Scotia is one of only two provinces (the other is Quebec) that reporting less fewer student debt-bearing households in 2012 than in 1999. While these data could potentially represent a real decline in the num-

<sup>18</sup> Possible combinations could include: married or common-law debt holders or a co-habiting roommate debt holders, parent and child debt holders, or multiple sibling debt holders.

ber of students carrying government debt into graduation, it is much more likely that it represents higher than average outmigration and a shrinking youth population in Nova Scotia over the past decade. Importantly, this smaller number of households bore less combined debt (across the whole population of student-debt holding households), and less average debt per household.

Taken together, these student debt data suggest that Nova Scotia's student assistance policy changes have had a strong positive impact on graduate debt. But, in spite of these positive signs, it is important to acknowledge that students graduating with debt do not tend to compare their financial situation to a decade earlier. Instead, they feel the very real and current pressure of a large personal debt and they, quite understandably, seek employment that will pay well enough to help pay down this debt.

**CONCERN:** Nova Scotia undergraduates continue to graduate with the second highest student debt levels in all of Canada.

Critically, in a national survey of recent graduates, students with high debt levels reported greater likelihood of leaving their province of study in search of work (CASA, 2010). In particular, high-debt graduates native to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were least likely to remain in their home province to seek employment after graduating (32% unlikely versus 18% nationally).

Students and youth are making other rational economic choices in response to their individual circumstances. Some are saving money by living with their parents well after they graduate from PSE programs: youth aged 20-29 were nearly twice as likely to live with their parents in 2011 than they were in 1981 (Statistics Canada, 2014).<sup>19</sup> Still others are choosing to seek out more education, as demonstrated by the rapid growth in the graduate and professional student population at Nova Scotia universities (MPHEC, 2014b), as well as the growth of university graduates pursuing additional training at the NSCC.

Young Canadians are graduating with the knowledge that they are more educated than any previous generation, but that they will find it harder to attach to the labour market, save for a mortgage down-payment, or pay the costs associated with having children, especially if they are graduating with significant debt (Kershaw, 2014). For current students, the pressure to perform academically, pay their bills, avoid debt, and gain meaningful real-world experience while studying – all while being inundat-

<sup>19</sup> While the overall percentages are larger for 20-24 year olds than 25-29 year olds (60% versus 25%), the proportion within the 25-29 group has grown much more quickly.

ed with stories about a bleak labour market – can be overwhelming.

In this light, Nova Scotia’s students and youth are asking many tough questions. With respect to their own educational path, some students wonder whether they have chosen to study the right discipline or program. And while students must ultimately take responsibility for their educational choices, they are right to ask whether our education systems are preparing them adequately to succeed in the world of work.

**Table 5a-c:** Student Debt Held by Canadian Households, by Province of Residence (in 2012 dollars)

	<b>A. TOTAL DEBT (\$1,000s)</b>		
	<b>1999</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>CANADA</b>	25,706	25,839	28,272
<b>NL</b>	1,091		604
<b>PEI</b>	102		F
<b>NS</b>	983		820
<b>NB</b>	908		1,038
<b>QC</b>	5,067	4,512	3,221
<b>ON</b>	11,105	9,597	12,318
<b>MB</b>	542		610
<b>SK</b>	884		885
<b>AB</b>	2,065		3,282
<b>BC</b>	2,958	4,559	5,204

	<b>B. AVERAGE DEBT (\$)</b>		
	<b>1999</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>CANADA</b>	17,947	16,378	15,500
<b>NL</b>	27,772		15,000
<b>PEI</b>	15,196		F
<b>NS</b>	19,257		17,400
<b>NB</b>	17,554		19,400
<b>QC</b>	13,624	11,943	8,900
<b>ON</b>	20,174	16,720	16,000
<b>MB</b>	19,126		14,400
<b>SK</b>	19,519		15,500
<b>AB</b>	16,244		17,600
<b>BC</b>	18,078	18,653	20,200

	C. NUMBER OF FAMILY UNITS		
	1999	2005	2012
<b>CANADA</b>	1435	1574	1827
<b>NL</b>	39	..	40
<b>PEI</b>	7	..	11
<b>NS</b>	51	..	47
<b>NB</b>	52	..	54
<b>QC</b>	371	378	361
<b>ON</b>	551	576	769
<b>MB</b>	28	..	43
<b>SK</b>	45	..	57
<b>AB</b>	127	..	187
<b>BC</b>	163	244	257

NOTE: Data series colours indicate overall positive debt trend (green); negative debt trend (pink); and negligible or unknown trend (yellow).

In the public school system, for example, do we adequately equip our young people about the career options available to them and suited to their personal goals and preferences? Are they fully counseled on the educational paths available to reach those goals? Or are they simply told, “you’re a smart kid, go to university” or “maybe you’re not cut out for university, try community college” and sent on their way?

At the university or college level, are students encouraged to review their educational and career goals and personal priorities? Are they truly enabled to explore different areas of inquiry or are they simply counseled to fill out their academic degree requirements and left to figure the rest out on their own?

At all levels of education, are students provided with a sufficient number and diversity of experiential learning opportunities related to their interest? Or are they primarily left to decide on their career path without any hands-on experience?

Unfortunately, the answer on all of these fronts is that we could be doing much better.

## 4. The Role of Government

In Nova Scotia, all governments – federal, provincial, municipal, and First Nations – are collectively engaged in a broad range of economic development and workforce development activities. In fact, as reported in the oneNS report, our governments combine to spend literally billions of dollars each year on these activities – the Province alone invests nearly \$2 billion annually (oneNS Commission, 2014)<sup>20</sup>. The underlying goal of all such government initiatives is to create economic growth and well-paying jobs for Nova Scotians; and many of these programs are designed with specific focus on increasing the employment prospects of students and youth wishing to live and work in Nova Scotia.

Though it might come as a surprise to many Nova Scotians, there are actually so many employment-related programs and services for youth that it would be impractical to describe them all here. Instead, the aim of this section is to briefly summarize the overall governmental approach to boosting youth employment in Nova Scotia and, at the same time, to highlight initiatives that stand out as requiring further attention. We focus on the activities of the federal and provincial governments, which are responsible for the bulk of this activity.

### 4.1 Federal Government Employment Programs

While provincial governments in Canada are ultimately responsible for managing many aspects of their local economies, each Province's economic success is inextricably linked to numerous programs and policies of the Federal Government. Among Ottawa's exclusive constitutional powers are a number of policy areas that impact Nova Scotia's economy profoundly, including international and interprovincial trade, banking and currency, copyrights and patents, communications, transportation, and finally, the employment insurance and old age pension systems. Among the shared federal-provincial constitutional powers are things like immigration, fisheries, and agriculture. Based on this list alone, the oneNS Commission is clearly right to assert that a strong and supportive Federal Government partner will be essential to Nova Scotia's economic turnaround.

<sup>20</sup> Notably, this estimate does not include the \$1.1 billion invested annually at the very base of Nova Scotia's economic pyramid: children and youth under 18 in the public education system (Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013).

## 4.1.1 Economic Development Agencies (EDA)

Until recently, the Federal Government was responsible for two EDAs in Nova Scotia, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC). Both organizations engage in similar activities, which include funding enterprise development at various stages, investing in community economic development, and engaging in policy development and advocacy by representing regional interests within the federal government. On average, ACOA invests approximately \$70 million annually in Nova Scotia (oneNS Commission, 2014), while ECBC has invested upwards of \$50 million annually over the last several years. In its 2014 budget, the federal government announced plans to dissolve ECBC and to bring its activities under the umbrella of ACOA.

## 4.1.2 Youth Employment Strategy

This is a horizontal initiative involving 11 different federal departments collaborating to deliver three program streams: Skills Link, Career Focus, and Summer Work Experience (see Table 7) (Service Canada, 2014).

- Skills Link directly funds employers and community organizations to help youth facing employment barriers to develop a broad range of skills and knowledge; it also promotes the importance of education and skills for labour market participation.
- Career Focus funds employers and organizations to design and deliver programs that help youth make informed career decisions, develop skills and gain work experience.
- Canada Summer Jobs helps employers create summer work opportunities for students.

In addition to the above, the federal government also delivers the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) through the Public Service Commission of Canada. The FSWEP helps to match students registered through a national PSC inventory with temporary jobs in the federal public service.

**Table 6:** Labour Market Programs Under the Federal Youth Employment Strategy

<b>Program Stream</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Program</b>
Skills Link	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada	First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program
	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Housing Internship Initiative for First Nations & Inuit Youth
	Employment and Social Development Canada	Skills Link
Career Focus	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	Career Focus Program
	Canadian Heritage	Young Canada Works at Building Careers in Heritage,
		Young Canada Works at Building Careers in English and French
	Environment Canada	International Environmental Youth Corps
	Employment and Social Development Canada	Science Horizons Youth Internship Program
	Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada	Career Focus
	Industry Canada	International Youth Internship Program
		Community Access Program (CAP) Youth Initiative (Career Focus stream)
	National Research Council Canada	Technical Work Experience Program (TWEP), Computers for Schools
	Natural Resources Canada	NRC Industrial Research Assistance Program
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada	Science and Technology Internship Program	
Summer Work Experience	Canadian Heritage	First Nations and Inuit Summer Work Experience Program
		Young Canada Works in Both Official Languages
		Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations
	Employment and Social Development Canada	Young Canada Works for Aboriginal Urban Youth
	Industry Canada	Canada Summer Jobs
		Community Access Program (CAP) Youth Initiative (Summer Work Experience stream)
		Small Business Internship Program
Parks Canada	Young Canada Works	

### 4.1.3 Labour Market Funding Agreements

In addition to direct program funding described above, the Federal Government (through Employment and Social Development Canada – ESDC) also enters into funding arrangements with each of the provinces and territories, which, in turn, deliver a broad range of local programs and services based on specific needs determined at the provincial level. The federal agreements in place with Nova Scotia are as follows (see next subsection for details) (ESDC, 2014c).

- Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement (LMA) – The goal of the LMA is to increase the labour market participation of under-represented groups and to increase the skills and employability of the overall labour force. To be eligible for LMA-based programs, persons must be: unemployed but ineligible for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits; employed but lacking a high school diploma or other credential; or possess low levels of literacy and essential skills (LMA funding in 2012-13 - \$16.5 million).
- Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities (LMA-PD) – The LMA-PD aims to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities by providing education and training, creating employment opportunities, connecting employers and persons with disabilities, and building public knowledge of employment barriers for persons with disabilities (LMA-PD funding in 2012-13 - \$8.34 million).
- Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) – The LMDA funds programs to help unemployed persons receiving EI benefits quickly find and return to work, and to develop a labour force with skills to meet current labour market demand (LMDA funding for 2011-12 - \$80.2 million).

Over the past year, the federal and provincial governments have been negotiating the terms of a new program, the Canada Jobs Grant (CJG), which was initially announced in the 2013 federal budget. The stated goals of the CJG include helping employers to fill shortages in labour and/or specific skills by providing money for employee training. The final CJG agreements with most provinces will see the federal government contribute \$10,000 in value with a \$5,000 contribution from the employer.<sup>21</sup> While the details of the final agreement with Nova Scotia are currently unavailable, other provincial agreements will fund the CJG using 40% of the funding previously allocated to LMA programs. To allow further flexibility for small businesses,

<sup>21</sup> The original announcement in Budget 2013 indicated that the \$15,000 grant would be cost-shared equally between Ottawa, each Province, and the individual employer. Most provinces indicated that they would be unable to make the \$5,000 contribution without sacrificing other programs under the LMAs and/or LMDAs.

**CONCERN:** Nova Scotia-Canada Labour Market Agreement funding reallocated to the Canada Jobs Grant could threaten existing and effective labour market and skills development programs targeting vulnerable Nova Scotians.

the updated agreements reportedly allow employers' contributions to be allocated to compensation and not necessarily direct training investment (Government of Canada, 2014). It remains to be seen whether the CJG will have any real impact on youth labour markets in Canada, but the objective of the program to leverage employer investment in skills training is a worthy one, especially in light of the private sector's dismal record on this front. At the same time, reallocation of LMA funding to finance

the unproven CJG is somewhat concerning, especially given the possibility that it may threaten useful programs for vulnerable Nova Scotians.

## 4.2 Provincial Government Employment Programs

As we alluded to above, the Province administers a large number of economic development and workforce development programs, with some of the latter funded through existing agreements with the federal government (LMA, LMA-PD, and LMDA). As indicated in Table 8 the Province of Nova Scotia invests nearly \$2 billion annually – spread across 14 different departments, agencies, and Crown corporations – in a combination of direct program spending, equity investments, and business loans. At least in theory, all of these activities are helping to create opportunities for Nova Scotia youth.

But a significant fraction of that total provincial spending does, in fact, go directly to youth through targeted programs and services. Unfortunately, it is difficult to pin down an exact dollar value for a number of important reasons:

- Government departments typically do not track program spending by age as part of regular practice;
- The number and variety of programs and services targeting youth are dispersed across government such that no single department has a complete inventory of all programs and services available to help youth attach to the labour market (see Box 2 for some examples; see Appendix for full list of all such programs); and
- In some cases, the portion of departmental or agency spending specifically targeted to youth may be difficult to isolate – the most obvious example being grants to universities and colleges, which would require considerable analysis to tease apart.

**Table 7:** Provincial Government Spending, Investment, & Lending on Economic, Workforce, & Resource Development Initiatives (2012-13) (modified from oneNS Report, p. 43)

Department or Agency	Program Spending	Loans Portfolio	Investment Portfolio
Agriculture	\$64		
Economic, Rural Development & Tourism	\$172		
Energy	\$29		
Fisheries & Aquaculture	\$9		
Labour and Advanced Education (includes Assistance to Universities and NSCC)	\$726		
Natural Resources	\$99		
Agricultural & Rural Credit		\$171	
Fisheries Development		\$101	
Nova Scotia Business Inc (NSBI)		\$60	\$48
Innovacorp		\$4	\$23
Jobs Fund (now Invest Nova Scotia)		\$278	\$32
Market Development Initiative Fund		\$4	
Strategic Opportunities Fund		\$75	
Perennia Food & Agriculture, Inc.		\$0.10	\$0.70
Total	\$1,099	\$693	\$104

Despite these difficulties, it is fair to say that the Province spends in the hundreds of millions each year to create opportunities for youth and to train youth for those opportunities (when grants universities and colleges are included). Not including university and college funding, total youth-targeted spending is, conservatively, in excess of \$100 million.

#### 4.2.1 Uncertain Impact

Of course, spending money is easy; spending it effectively is much more difficult. The perception that Nova Scotia's government has made some questionable economic investments – sometimes driven by politics rather than a sound business case – sparked the oneNS Commission Report (2014) and the review of Provincial economic development programs completed by Tom Traves in February (Traves, 2014). Both reports offer findings that highlight the critical importance of youth for Nova Scotia's

economic turnaround. Given that these reports represent hundreds of pages and many thousands of research hours, it is obviously impossible to replicate all of their work through the student and youth lens. It is, however, useful to summarize some of their key findings.

The oneNS report, for example, has shone a bright light on many of the things that are holding Nova Scotia back, including:

- An inability to retain our own young people and attract others (especially immigrants) to settle here;
- Economic conservatism within the population that makes us reticent to accept change from the status quo and reflexively negative toward any change that does happen;
- Regional parochialism that fosters unnecessary and unproductive ill-will between different regions of the province (e.g. urban v. rural, Halifax v. everyone else, Cape Breton v. Mainland, county v. county); and finally
- Mistrust that our leaders in government and business are committed, or even capable, of taking steps to turn things around.

While the oneNS report focuses mainly on high-level economic issues, Traves' report speaks to many of the same issues by highlighting specific deficiencies within the existing regime of economic development programs, including:

- A history of poor, politically-expedient spending decisions from the Cabinet-controlled Jobs Fund;
- Overlapping mandates of provincial economic development bodies including the Jobs Fund, Innovacorp, and NSBI;
- Insufficient coordination of government services for business (e.g. business applications, trade development, export programs, etc.)
- An investment gap with respect to early stage venture capital and a lack of services for new start-up companies; and
- Insufficient and irregular reviews of programs and services leading to concerns about transparency, accountability, and effectiveness.

Based on our own review of Nova Scotia's existing youth labour market attachment programs, StudentsNS has arrived at a number of youth-focused conclusions that echo the main themes of the both reports.

**CONCERN:** Some government employment programs targeting youth place too little emphasis on connecting people to actual jobs.

**CONCERN:** Wages for students employed through the Province of Nova Scotia's Student Employment Program decline each year relative to inflation.

There are many worthy youth skills development and labour market attachment initiatives offered by government or government-funded community service providers. Many of these programs are administered through Employment Nova Scotia, within the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Program targeting varies widely by age range, gender, disability status, family income, ethnic or cultural background, immigrant status, previous skill level, etc. Targeting these various groups according to their unique needs is both appropriate and desirable, but public reporting on most programs provides insufficient information on outcomes.

Program outcomes are often reported as dollars spent, number of 'clients served,' and some general statements about program activities. Except in programs where the goal is to connect individuals to specific jobs most program reports give little indication of whether clients gained employment, obtained measureable skills and knowledge, or received subsequent programs and services through another program stream.

Many of the programs and activities inventoried focus primarily or exclusively on youth skill development and knowledge acquisition, often with no specific connection to a job opportunity as a result of program participation. While it would not be appropriate or constructive to eliminate basic training programs – these are essential for youth facing barriers to labour market attachment – it would be highly desirable if more programs were designed with the objective to create pathways connecting participants to actual jobs (see Box 3 for examples). The ongoing struggles of youth in Nova Scotia's job market suggests that, even for highly-skilled workers, the linkages between training and labour market attachment must be strengthened (see Section 3).

### Box 3– Youth Employment Programs Resulting in Jobs for Students/Youth

The Provincial Government fund and/or administers a number of programs with a clear objective of connecting students and youth to actual jobs.

1. **START** - This program provides financial incentives primarily to small and medium-sized businesses (and non-profits) to hire ready-to-work Nova Scotians facing specific employment barriers. Individuals who graduated from a post-secondary institution within the past three years, individuals seeking apprenticeships, and youth entering the labour force for the first time are all eligible for START program funding, along with individuals from numerous other groups facing employment barriers (e.g. African and Aboriginal Nova Scotians).
2. **Student Career Skills Development Program (SCSDP)** – This program offers wage subsidies to non-profit organizations hiring Nova Scotia students to career-related summer jobs. The program reimburses \$8.50 per hour for up to 35 hours per week.
3. **Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive (SCEI)** – This program offers wage subsidies to private businesses hiring Nova Scotia students to complete paid co-operative education work terms. Employers must pay co-op students a minimum of \$15 per hour (+4% vacation pay) to be eligible for a subsidy of \$7.50 per hour for up to 40 hours per week.
4. **Co-operative Graduate Placement Program (CGPP)** – This program provides financial incentive to employers that hire graduates of co-operative education programs to permanent positions. Employers can receive up to \$7,500 in wage subsidies to hire new co-op graduates for one year at a salary minimum of \$35k.
5. **Graduate to Opportunity** – The current Provincial Government proposed this program in the 2013 election and announced \$1.6 million in annual funding for the program in its 2014/15 budget (the same budget in which the \$49 million Graduate Retention was eliminated). The details of this program have yet to be fully explained but the program will reportedly provide businesses with payroll incentive after they have employed new PSE graduates for at least 12 months.

#### 4.2.2 Poor Coordination

In general, a lack of coordination between youth-serving government departments and agencies makes it difficult to navigate the many programs available. Without in-depth knowledge of the full range of government and community service providers – knowledge that virtually no individual student or youth can be expected to have – it is unacceptably difficult for youth seeking employment help to know where to go, who to ask, or what to ask for.

Similarly, young Nova Scotians with an interest in starting a business or social enterprise face far too many barriers to success. Access to timely and accurate procedural advice, availability of venture capital, and connections to appropriate technical expertise have all been identified by others as potential barriers to the start-up of any successful business in Nova Scotia. For PSE students not studying in business and for all youth facing labour market barriers, these challenges may seem insurmountable. While the government funds multiple initiatives around the Province aimed at addressing such issues, the level of youth and public awareness about these programs is unclear.

The recent announcement of four Innovation Sandboxes in collaboration with Nova Scotia's postsecondary institutions is another promising step, but it is far too early to make any judgment of the initiatives' effectiveness (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014). In light of the Traves report, however, one critical question will be how well the Sandboxes function alongside existing innovation and business investment initiatives – e.g. NSBI, Innovacorp, Invest Nova Scotia, and the ACOA-funded Springboard Atlantic, Inc. – and critically, whether any of these services will be structured to create targeted access for youth (either within PSE or outside).

**CONCERN:** Youth entrepreneurship programs and services offered or funded by government are poorly coordinated and difficult to navigate.

**CONCERN:** Youth employment programs and services offered or funded by government are poorly coordinated and difficult to navigate.

Despite the vast array of programs available throughout the Province, individual students and youth continue to encounter barriers to programs that would be beneficial to them. Eligibility requirements for programs based on EI-status are common, as are individuals being refused government-funded training programs because they are deemed to be employable. Another common example includes potential immigrants (including international students) having difficulty navigating government processes for establishing citizenship and/or getting their foreign professional credentials recognized.

Finally, in addition to the so-called “red tape,” associated with settling here, many young people encounter other unwelcoming circumstances that ultimately lead them to take their talent and potential elsewhere. This includes international students facing both subtle and overt forms of racism; students from other provinces (or even different parts of Nova Scotia) being prejudicially characterized as “Come From Away”

and having their ideas dismissed for this reason alone; and it also includes mischaracterizations of youth as spoiled or entitled when they express genuine concern about their futures and that of Nova Scotia.

## 5. The Role of Post Secondary Education Institutions

Facing a difficult job market, many Nova Scotia students and recent graduates are, quite justifiably, turning a skeptical eye back toward their universities and colleges and asking: *“Why didn’t you prepare us for this?”*

At the same time, many employers and business advocates have abdicated most, if not all, responsibility for training new recruits and increasingly look to governments and post-secondary institutions to ask similar questions: *“Why aren’t you training students with ‘the right skills’ to meet our needs?”* *Why aren’t they ‘job ready’?”*

And government, observing these trends and feeling pressure to both manage the public purse responsibly and to be seen as ‘doing something’ to create jobs, also turns to post-secondary institutions and effectively asks: *“What exactly are you doing? What’s our return-on-investment? Show us your value!”*

These are but a few examples of the forces, both internal and external, that create continuous pressure for PSE institutions to change. In one way or another, all of these forces serve the needs of “the knowledge economy” – with students seeking rewarding and remunerative careers, businesses seeking workers that will increase profits, and governments seeking positive economic outcomes. Of course, some pressure to change is healthy and productive; any institution determined to remain in the past is surely on the fast track to irrelevance. Most PSE institutions know this, which is why they continue to challenge old ideas and put forward new ones to help shape our understanding of the modern world.

With a public post-secondary system made up of ten separate universities and 13 inter-dependent community college campuses, evaluating student employment programs is an enormous task. To fulfill this task, StudentsNS reviewed all relevant program information that was publicly available on each institution’s website; we interviewed student career and/or co-op services staff at five institutions; and we requested detailed program budget and outcomes data through FOIPOP.

This section begins with a theoretical discussion about the intended purpose(s) of PSE in the modern context. We then turn to a more practical discussion of various programs and activities offered by Nova Scotia PSE institutions to help enhance the

future employability of their students, providing brief program descriptions, highlighting exemplary programs and drawing a number of broad conclusions applicable across the system. We finish with a brief review of post-secondary institutions activities as youth employers.

## 5.1 Post Secondary Education: To What Purpose(s)?

To be clear, StudentsNS has been at the head of the pack calling for Nova Scotia's PSE institutions to change some of their ways. We firmly believe in full administrative transparency and real accountability for the huge amounts of money invested in PSE by students and the public (StudentsNS, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d). We also believe that PSE institutions should be able to demonstrate their value through a commitment to academic quality assurance, cutting edge research and scholarly pursuits, top-notch student services, and yes, by demonstrating effort to help strengthen Nova Scotia's economy as well as its natural, social and cultural environments.

But, in fairness, we also recognize that our expectations, combined with the myriad expectations of many other stakeholders, represent an enormous burden for our PSE institutions. Post-graduate employment outcomes are the perfect case-in-point. Fed by the stubbornly tough job market, a constantly changing economy, and a growing consciousness of income inequality, people from all walks of life are questioning the value of PSE and seeking assurances that their investments in PSE will not be wasted. As discussed in Section 3, much of this seems to be based on flawed interpretations of the available data – because the financial returns to PSE still exist – but public perception has already begun to profoundly change policy at the government level, and at the level of individual institutions.

In the United States, for example, the Obama administration recently proposed a new institutional funding model that would reward schools based, in part, on their graduates' employment outcomes (Field, 2013; White House, 2013). Closer to home, the University of Regina recently launched an employment guarantee program, the UR Guarantee, stipulating that program participants unable to find suitable work within six months of graduation may return to the university for an additional year of free undergraduate study (CBC News, 2009; University of Regina, 2014)<sup>22</sup>. Unfortunately, it is too early to properly evaluate this program from a benefit-to-students perspective,

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22 In this case, 'free' means no tuition or student fees are charged.

because it was only introduced in 2009<sup>23</sup>, but it is worth mentioning that such a guarantee is clearly much more plausible in a booming economy like Saskatchewan's, and obviously less so in a perpetually struggling economy like Nova Scotia's.

Nevertheless, in these two examples we see clear evidence of the public's changing expectations around PSE. These institutional responses (by government and by schools) demonstrate that the proverbial cat is out of the bag. Like it or not, PSE is, at least in part, about employment prospects and it has been for a very long time. Our universities and the NSCC have already embraced the dual academic mandate of providing both education and employment-ready skills. Of course, community colleges and vocational schools have always been about employability; but so too have universities, as is evident when one considers the longstanding existence of numerous undergraduate programs (and even whole faculties) linked to very specific career trajectories.<sup>24</sup> Many such programs include a combination of theoretical training in a classroom setting and experiential learning in a practical, work-like setting. In the best of these blended learning programs, each learning environment is designed to integrate with and enhance the learning that takes place in the other.

**PRINCIPLE:** Any claims by a program, institution, or government about a particular certification directly transitioning to a job should be supported by empirical evidence.

Graduate studies, the undisputed pinnacle of academic pursuit, are all about the study and mastery of very specific fields of knowledge, ways of thinking, and methods of analysis. Many, if not most, graduate students pursue a Masters or a Doctorate because they have identified a personal aptitude and/or a burning passion for that field of inquiry. And whether in academia or some other setting, the learning undertaken in graduate studies most often ends up feeding one's

life's work. With this in mind, it is increasingly difficult to justify the claim that pure academics and employment do not mix.

PSE institutions have helped to create higher expectations around graduate employment outcomes. In the game of institutional prestige building, many universities and colleges are quick to point out shining examples of their own success: by pointing to the singularly successful careers of alumni and by advertising flattering post-

<sup>23</sup> Critically important questions include: How many students try to claim UR Guarantee benefits? And how much work is involved in validating such claims? Because the first students to be eligible for the program graduated only a year ago, there is little evidence to decide either way. Based on how strictly the program criteria are interpreted in practice, it is possible that very few individuals would be eligible for the program even if they struggled to find work.

<sup>24</sup> University programs often linked to specific careers include business, commerce, engineering, teacher education, social work, medicine, dentistry, nursing, and computer science.

graduate employment rates and earnings. Most institutions are all-too-happy to use these measures as student recruitment and fundraising tools but stridently opposed to their use as official measures of institutional performance.<sup>25</sup>

**PRINCIPLE:** Institutions have a responsibility to provide students with the information needed to have a realistic and reasonably accurate understanding of their job prospects when investing in a post-secondary education.

It is however, very risky to move with every change in the direction of the economic wind; and even riskier still, to embrace large institutional changes based on highly uncertain future economic forecasts. Viewed through the lens of student employability, this serves as a caution sign to anyone claiming to know, with any degree of certainty, where the best jobs will be in 20, ten, or even five years. One thing is certain in the modern economy: change happens fast. Whole industries are born, matured, and collapsed in a decade or less.

Workers once deemed irreplaceable are made redundant by rapid technological change. And of course, most of us are vulnerable to the boom-bust cycles of capitalism.

In this context, PSE institutions are right to resist the kind of change that would shift their focus away from the broader objective of educating people to the much more utilitarian, but ultimately futile, goal of producing workers. The reality, of course, is much more nuanced. Most PSE institutions are simultaneously advancing both of these goals by supporting the development of highly educated people with a broad range of transferrable skills.

Yet, it does not matter what some traditionalists believe to be the proper role of universities – most often some variation of ‘creating informed, critical-thinking citizens.’ Nor does it matter that many people have preconceived notions about community colleges and polytechnic schools – either that they are ‘lesser schools for lesser students’ OR that, to the exclusion of elitist universities, they are the only places to acquire technical and applied skills suitable for ‘the real world’ and ‘real jobs.’

**CONCERN:** The notion that the university is a centre for job training and meeting labour market demands may have negative effects on the quality of education, academic freedom, and the diversity of programs offered.

<sup>25</sup> StudentsNS does not advocate for the use of employment outcomes to measure institutional performance or allocate funding.

**PRINCIPLE:** While graduate placement and employment rates are important, the quality of Nova Scotia post-secondary education does not hinge on its ability to directly transition into jobs, but on its ability to prepare students to be adaptable and versatile learners with a plurality of skills.

In reality, of course, none of the extreme points of view has ever been true. And for good reason: in a free, pluralistic society, it is offensive and inaccurate to reserve ‘good citizen’ status for those with university degrees; and it is equally damaging and prejudicial to suggest the domain of ‘useful work’ belongs only to those with a trades certificate or diploma. Worst of all is what these views imply about people with no PSE credentials at all: should people uninterested or unable to pursue PSE be deemed lesser citizens or as incapable of being

productive contributors to society? Ideally, all citizens ought to be respected, valued, and empowered to contribute, in their own individual ways, to the economic, social, and cultural growth of our society. Elitist and anti-elitist attitudes based on where (or whether) someone went to school will do nothing to help us achieve this ideal.

Luckily, most Canadians and Nova Scotians recognize the danger in these exclusionary ideas. The Nova Scotia university and college students consulted for this project certainly do. At the same time, however, those same students believe there should always be a place for the small minority of students who attend university (or college) based on the inherent value of education alone, irrespective of its impact on future employability.

There are undoubtedly still some students, academics, and members of the public that are uncomfortable with any association between universities and the concept of job-readiness. But it is clear to StudentsNS that their battle is lost. The links between education and employment have always been there; and the majority of Nova Scotia students and Nova Scotians, in general, are just fine with that. In fact, through this project it has become clear that many students in programs with a less explicit career focus – for example, a B.A. in English or a B.Sc. in Biology – are hungry for more information and more formal opportunities for career-related learning. Almost no one is asking for all programs to be redesigned with the workforce in mind, but almost everyone believes that it possible (and desirable) to provide students with relevant career development opportunities without compromising the core missions of our PSE institutions.

**PRINCIPLE:** Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

## 5.2 Career Preparedness Programs

Currently, most PSE institutions offer their students a similar range of programs and services aimed at promoting career preparedness. In this paper, we refer to two categories of services: (1) Career Counseling and Skills Development, and (2) Experiential Learning.

### 5.2.1 Career Counseling and Skills Development

Many of the programs and activities under this heading are typically organized under the broad umbrella of student services. For the most part, these services tend to be optional and they are open to all students on an ongoing basis.

#### 5.2.1.1 Student Career Centres

	Program	Budget (2013)	Staff Resources
<b>Acadia</b>	Cooperative Education	\$123,615	2.5 FTE
	Career Services	\$41,763	1.0 FTE
<b>Atlantic School of Theology</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Cape Breton</b>	No data available (at no cost)		
<b>Dalhousie</b>	Failed to respond to FOIPOP request		
<b>Mount St Vincent</b>	Career Planning Services	\$70,000 in staff costs \$16,000 in shared expenses with co-op	1 FTE Coordinator/Career Counsellor 3-4 PT Student Career Assistants 0-1 Career Counselling Practicum Student
	Cooperative Education	\$287,383 in staff costs \$16,000 in shared expenses with Career Planning Services	5 FTE: 1 Manager, 2 Co-op Coordinators, 1 Employer Liaison, 1 Internal Liaison PLUS support from Faculty Advisors
<b>NSCAD</b>	No such departments; career counselling available through Dalhousie		

	Program	Budget (2013)	Staff Resources
<b>Saint Mary's</b>	Cooperative Education	\$389,187 (\$353,327 to salaries)	0.5 FT Manager 3.0 FT Employment Development Officers 1.0 FT Secretary
	Student Employment Centre	\$104,968	0.5 FT Manager 1.0 FT Employment Development Specialist 1.0 FT Secretary
	Career Services	\$10,000 (DNI staffing costs)	0.4 FT Manager 2.0 FT Career Counsellors 2.0 FT Career Information Specialists 1.0 FT Co-Curricular Record Coordinator 0.5 FT Secretary 1 FTE Student Staff
<b>St. Francis Xavier</b>	Cooperative Education	\$7,350 (DNI staffing costs)	0.5 FTE Manager 1.0 FTE Co-op Coordinator
	Career Centre	\$6,000 (DNI staffing costs)	0.5 FTE Manager 1 Sessional Career Adviser Position Left Vacant
	Service Learning	\$200,000 budget \$20,000 external funds for PT Student Leaders/Bursaries	3.5 FTE 3 PT Student Leaders (12 hrs/week X 24)
<b>King's College</b>	No such departments; career counselling through Dalhousie		
<b>Sainte Anne</b>	Cooperative Education	\$101,559	1.0 FT B.Ed. Practicum Coordinator 0.2 FT Business Co-op Coordinator
<b>NSSC</b>	Career/Co-op	Experiential learning and career counselling is integrated in program curricula. Individual budget lines are, therefore, unavailable.	
	Entrepreneurship	\$229,606 (\$107,005 to salaries)	1.0 FTE 1.0 Casual

### 5.2.1.1 Career Counseling

These services typically involve confidential one-to-one sessions between a student and a career counselor. Counselors typically guide students in their educational and career decision-making based on a number of factors including the student's personality, academic and life goals, preferred modes of learning, and any personal issues

or barriers that could negatively impact the student's success, creating a dialogue that allows the student to become more self-aware about all of these factors. Counselors work with each student to develop strategies aimed at overcoming any existing barriers and achieving success.<sup>26</sup> Career counseling is a valuable supplement to department-based academic advising, which is often limited to ensuring students are on track with the appropriate credits to complete their current degree requirements.

#### **5.2.1.1.2 Basic Job Seeking Skills**

Most career centres provide assistance with writing strong cover letters, building an effective resume based on one's skills and experience, and job interview preparation and coaching. They typically offer workshops to groups of students as well as one-to-one assistance to individual students requiring more intensive help.

#### **5.2.1.1.3 Job fairs/Networking/Industry Liaison**

Typically, career centre staff members are involved in helping students and graduates to identify employment opportunities through a number of avenues, including: organization and hosting of job fairs and employer information sessions; referrals to potential employers and community members for informational interviews; and training in effective networking skills.

#### **5.2.1.1.4 Skills Capture and Communication**

This category represents a student learning process that is integral to ensure that the student receives the maximum benefit from all of the other services described above. It is, essentially, a two-step process of helping students to identify and articulate their own skills and knowledge. First, the student is helped to identify all of their employment-relevant experience (whether academic, employment, or community/personal experience). Then, the student must learn to translate their learning from those experiences into a set of practical skills and competencies that would be useful to employers in the student's chosen field. Once a student has a firm handle on the transferrable skills they possess, they are much better positioned to market themselves to potential employers.

#### **5.2.1.1.5 Co-Curricular Records/Portfolio Learning**

To help students identify and communicate their skills and competencies, a number of Nova Scotia institutions have been experimenting with alternative methods

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<sup>26</sup> While career counseling services are available to all students, some aspects of the process can involve a nominal fee-for-service model – typically associated formal student assessments aimed at probing a student's personality and educational interests.

of reporting student outcomes. As described in a recent StudentsNS report (2014), Acadia, Dalhousie, MSVU and SMU all offer their students the option to complete a co-curricular record (CCR). The CCR is essentially a supplement to the academic transcript. It allows students to track and certify their on-campus activities (e.g. sports teams, volunteer work, involvement in clubs and societies) and, in some cases, to identify the skills developed through these experiences. CCR programs at different schools vary from a simple list of activities to requiring students to make detailed written statements based on their experiences. While CCRs may help students to reflect on their non-classroom activities, they have been fairly criticized for limiting their focus to include only university-approved extra-curricular activities (Elias & Drea, 2013).<sup>27</sup>

A similar approach to CCRs is the portfolio-based learning used at NSCC. All NSCC students are required to develop a portfolio. Finished portfolios are not graded but are carefully reviewed with a career advisor prior to graduation. By encouraging students to reflect upon their learning, building a portfolio helps students identify their goals and transferrable skills (NSCC, 2014). Importantly, the process of developing the portfolio and its contents is unique to each individual but must address three broad questions: Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How do I get there? (NSCC, 2014). In addition to a more explicit focus on self-reflection, NSCC portfolios can be further differentiated from CCRs in that they apply to the full range of student activities (on and off-campus, general, academic and occupational skills). Thus, the portfolio has the advantage of being inclusive to all students, regardless of involvement in official institutional activities.

### **5.2.1.2 General Skills Development**

In addition to explicitly career-focused programs, most institutions offer a number of other programs that can supplement students' academic and career development.

#### **5.2.1.2.1 Writing Centres and Remedial Learning**

Programs providing students with additional writing, literacy, and numeracy help may be offered at the institutional and/or department level. These may be just as important to students' career development goals because they help students to overcome

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<sup>27</sup> Exclusion of non-institutional activities clearly disadvantages students that, for whatever reason, do not participate in officially sanctioned extracurricular activities. Obviously, non-university experiences may be just as valuable to the student so it is arbitrary to exclude them. Students may not be able to participate because they have family obligations, have to work to finance their studies, are involved in other volunteer activities, or simply because they must maximize their study time.

their academic deficits and become confident in their skills and abilities.

### **5.2.1.2.2 Language Training**

Programs designed to improve students' ability to communicate in English may be particularly important for the employment prospects of international students hoping to work in Canada. Similarly, many English speakers may also wish to improve their French-speaking ability in order to be more employable with the Federal government.

### **5.2.1.2.3 Other Skills**

In addition to all of the skills outlined above, most institutions provide a host of other opportunities for extra-curricular personal development. For example, these could include assistance with public speaking (through programs like Toastmasters), workshops on leadership or mentorship, and extracurricular courses in the use of specific computer technology.

## **5.2.2 Experiential Learning**

In the context of PSE institutions, experiential learning simply means any mode of learning with a distinct practical component, including learning that takes place in a laboratory, tutorial, or workshop session. With respect to student employability, however, the most relevant programs are employment-based co-operative education programs and community-based service learning programs, both of which provide opportunities for applied learning in real-world, non-classroom settings.

### **5.2.2.1 Co-operative Education**

Co-operative education (co-op) programs are academic programs structured to include both in-class theoretical training and practical work-related training. Some programs are designed to include mandatory co-op work terms as an explicit graduation requirement; and others are available to a broader range of students as an optional component of their degree.<sup>28</sup> The type and number of co-op programs available in Nova Scotia vary by institution, from zero programs to many programs operating across multiple faculties. At this time, none of our institutions offer co-op as an option to students in all of their academic programs.

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<sup>28</sup> At some institutions, specific program offerings are associated with quasi-mandatory post-graduate practicum terms that, while not part of official academic requirements, are required in practice to begin a career in the chosen field.

### 5.2.2.2 Service Learning

Another approach to experiential learning at some institutions is service learning, which is based on volunteerism. Such programs exist at fewer schools but they arguably offer equally valuable and enriching experiences applicable to students' future employability. These programs tend to be academically focused, offering course credit based on a combination of time served and meeting learning outcomes.

Service Learning programs are available at a number of Nova Scotia institutions, including Cape Breton University (CBU, 2014), Dalhousie (Dalhousie University, 2014), the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC, 2014), and St. Francis Xavier University (StFX, 2014). Institutions take varying approaches to service learning, with Dalhousie and CBU offering opportunities associated with specific programs, while StFX and NSCC offer service learning to the broader student population. Regardless of these differences, service learning is available to a small minority of students at all institutions. Finally, it is important to note that each of these programs approach service learning with the dual goals of enhancing students' learning and inculcating within them a commitment to community service. Enhanced employability is more a byproduct of service learning programs than a formal goal, but the experience is nonetheless extremely valuable to students seeking to broaden their experience and/or enhance their resumes.

**CONCERN:** Only a minority of Nova Scotia post-secondary students have access to experiential learning opportunities.

### 5.2.2.3 The Problem with Post-Graduate Internships

Of course, even as PSE institutions seek to provide their students with more opportunities to enhance their employability, in other cases they inadvertently act as a barrier to student success. For example, it is not uncommon that graduates of certain career-focused academic programs be required to engage in post-graduate experiential learning (i.e. internship, residency, accreditation, etc.) before becoming eligible to begin working. Some of these requirements can take the form of unpaid internships that can be several months to more than a year in length. Unfortunately, as recent graduates, individuals engaged

**CONCERN:** Individuals required to participate in unpaid post-graduate experiential learning or accreditation to achieve employability often experience significant financial hardship because, as recent graduates, they are ineligible for government-based student financial assistance.

in such unpaid work have no recourse to apply for student financial assistance. They are officially non-students, despite being in the midst of more required learning. Our PSE institutions and our governments can do more to help students in this situation to experience a smoother, more financially secure transition into the labour force.

### 5.2.3 Summary Analysis

Based on the large pool of institutional data collected, including interviews with staff at five campuses, it was possible to draw a relatively small number of conclusions that, more or less, apply to most institutions. Each institution has its own history and approach to aiding in student career development. Some schools have no formal programs or services whatsoever (e.g. AST, NSCAD) but the majority of schools are engaged in a similar range of activities, typically organized under the program headings of co-operative education and/or career services.

**PRINCIPLE:** The development of core competencies, including critical thinking, literacy and teamwork, is important not only for students' careers, but for their personal well-being.

Without exception, co-op and career program staff members we spoke with were knowledgeable, passionate, and committed to providing excellent service to their students. For the most part, they also spoke highly of the support received from other parts of their institutions, highlighting for example, mutually supportive relationships among different student service providers and mostly strong relationships between co-op program staff and faculty members.

Co-op and career services programs generally operate on tight budgets with limited staffing resources. Almost without exception, the program staff members that we spoke with indicated that their ability to serve the student population was limited by resource and staffing constraints.<sup>29</sup> On this point, members of even the best-staffed programs suggested that they could help more students, more intensively, and in a more timely fashion, were it not for these constraints. It should be noted that, in all but one case, staff were careful to share the view that their programs had not been singled out for funding reductions relative to other student service divisions within

<sup>29</sup> At one institution, staff expressed concern about a recent decrease in student participation in co-op and career-related programs. This is a surprising result given economic conditions and almost universal student pre-occupation with post-graduate employment. Based on conversations with students, one possible explanation for this could be a lack of awareness among some students and a reputation of poor program quality among other students. Based on the data available, the most likely explanation for this struggling program is that the resources available are insufficient to fulfill the program goals and objectives.

their respective institutions. All program staff expressed interest in expanding their programs to serve a wider segment of the student population, including earlier outreach to students about the programs on offer (i.e. earlier in students' programs of study) and better coverage of students for whom some services are not currently available (i.e. policies limiting co-op programs to students in specific programs or faculties).

**CONCERN:** Student career and employment services at Nova Scotia's post secondary institutions suffer from inadequate funding and coordination

Not surprisingly, nearly all program staff expressed great enthusiasm about the importance of providing students with opportunities for self-reflection and experiential learning as preferred educational practices. Further to this, they also emphasized that the value of their services to students increases dramatically when the students are motivated and actively engaged with the services offered. In other words, students achieve the best results when they consider this a core part of their PSE learning, rather than as a supplement or a short cut to a job.

Many of the best practices identified in this report are consistent with the approach taken at Memorial University, which continues to develop its own model of "career-integrated learning" (Youden Walsh, 2012). This approach to student career development – led by Karen Youden Walsh – posits that students are much better prepared to capture and communicate their skills and knowledge when program and course curricula have clearly defined technical learning outcomes that can be expressed as graduating student competencies (GSCs).

In common language, GSCs are defined as the "skills, behaviors, [and] attributes which academic institutions value and feel are critical to obtain through their programs." (Conference Board of Canada, 2014; Youden-Walsh, 2012; p. 13). When course and program curricula are designed with specific GSCs in mind, evidence shows that students are better equipped to translate their acquired GSCs into tangible employability competencies - the "skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work"

While the exact outputs may be very different, the career-integrated learning process has strengths in common with the portfolio-based learning approach discussed above. Both approaches rely on empowering learners to identify the employability advantages of their acquired skills and knowledge. In theory, however, career-inte-

grated learning represents the intentional integration of skills development into core educational curriculum, whereas the portfolio approach simply provides a medium and method for capturing and communicating those skills. Our research suggests there is an appetite among students for this kind of approach, provided the integrity of academic teaching and learning is maintained.

Finally, just prior to publication, a report examining the activities of career service offices at 26 Canadian universities and 11 community colleges was released (Usher and Kwong, 2014). The report identified three key attributes shared amongst the top-performing universities: data-driven processes for continuous program improvement; a focus on providing job-seeking skills (not just job listings); and emphasis on strong internal partnerships within the institution. As the authors rightly point out, none of these attributes are particularly resource-intensive, meaning that quality of career services is largely a function of service orientation. This finding is consistent with our own findings, in that the strengths of programs at Nova Scotia institutions are largely a function of having competent and dedicated staff members that embody the three attributes identified by Usher and Kwong (2014).

Based on the above, there is clearly no magic number representing the ideal level of resources to fund a high quality post-secondary careers services office. We do know, however, that the services currently available at Nova Scotia institutions are inadequate to meet student demand. Thus, in spite of the findings of Usher and Kwong (2014), any effort to scale up already successful programs will surely require more resources.

### 5.3 PSE Institutions as Youth Employers

In addition to their roles as educators and student career service providers, Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions also employ several thousand Nova Scotia students each year, in both the summer months and the primary September-to-April study period. This employment can take the form of part-time non-skilled work in various on-campus service units and more academically oriented work as lab instructors, teaching assistants, markers, and research assistants. It is important to note that many of the students "employed" by the PSE institutions

**CONCERN:** The pay ratio between the highest paid employee and lowest paid 10% of employees exceeds an eight-to-one ratio at most public post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia.

**CONCERN:** Several Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions do not maintain usable electronic human resources records pertaining to the students they employ.

may be graduate students funded by their own research awards or those of their research supervisors.

Unfortunately, the nature and precise number of students employed by Nova Scotia PSE institutions is unclear. The Association of Atlantic Universities often cites a combined \$38 million in institutional “student financial assistance ... in the form of scholarships, fellowships, bursaries, and on-campus employment” provided to Nova Scotia university students, but it does not break these numbers out any further (AAU, 2010). To our knowledge, there is no publicly available information on student employment at the NSCC.

For this project, we requested (as part of the FOIPOP requests cited above) all available student employment data from each of Nova Scotia universities and the NSCC. The information provided is summarized in Table 9.

Several of Nova Scotia’s universities were unable to provide any information on students employed by their institution. One institution (Dalhousie) failed to provide any response to our request despite several attempts to contact their FOIPOP administrator. SMU indicated that these data were unavailable in the format requested and provided no data. Other institutions – StFX, Acadia, and CBU indicated that harvesting the data requested would require extensive searches through voluminous electronic and/or paper records. Searches of this nature would require StudentsNS to pay significant fees – In the case of CBU, nearly \$5,000. As a not-for-profit organization with limited resources, StudentsNS declined to pay the requested fees, so this information is, unfortunately, absent from this report.

Table 9 therefore presents a very incomplete picture of student employment by PSE institutions in Nova Scotia. Several institutions complied with our request at no additional cost, and the data provided confirms that students are largely employed in part-time roles, and are typically remunerated in a range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars per year.

In an economic environment where every youth job opportunity is precious, it is somewhat troubling that our PSE institutions’ student employment data is so difficult to access. In some cases, our institutions report having no electronic records of student employment, which in 2014, is nothing short of alarming. Our PSE institutions, as a whole, are likely to be among the largest employers of students and youth in the

province. Thus, these institutions are important employers of youth in Nova Scotia. This is particularly true in the case of international students, who until this year could only be legally employed in Canada in on-campus activities unless they obtained a special work permit (StudentsNS, 2013a). Better institutional data on student employment activities would help us to better understand this important source of student income, work experience, and career development.

**Table 9.** Students Employed by Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Institutions

Institution	Student Employment Data				FEE NOTES
Acadia	No data provided without significant cost (see fee note)				\$50 per hour to produce, 'significant' staff time required
Atlantic School of Theology	27 student employees		TOTAL = \$25,867 MAX = \$5,792 MIN = \$40.17 AVG = \$958		No charge, returned \$5 application fee
Cape Breton	No data provided without significant cost (see fee note)				\$4,774 to provide any information
Dalhousie	Failed to respond to FOIPOP request				n/a
Mount St Vincent	<p>Most students earn between \$12 and \$16 per hour, per student earnings estimates unavailable without additional cost.</p> <p>Total student compensation: \$508,000 in operational departments; \$475,000 in research-related roles; \$1.48 million in casual staffing costs (primarily filled by students)</p>				Additional cost for more detailed data.
NSCAD	119 student employees	TOTAL = \$151,630 MAX = \$3,742 MIN = \$31.67 AVG = \$1,274	17 graduate teaching assistants	TOTAL = \$77,500 Fine Arts (AVG) = \$5,000 Design (AVG) =	n/a
Saint Mary's	Student employment data, by job function, not available.				
St. Francis Xavier	Data available but not provided (see fee note)				\$150 per hour to produce report
King's College	276 student employees	TOTAL = \$546,488 MAX = \$3,742 MIN = \$31.67 AVG = \$1,980	23 teaching assistants	TOTAL = \$111,929 AVG = \$4,866	n/a
Sainte Anne	125 student employees		TOTAL = \$265,831 MAX = \$10,261 MIN = \$107.10 AVG = \$2,127		n/a
NSCC	196 student employees		TOTAL = \$417,639 AVG = \$2,131		n/a

## 6. Make a Place for Youth in Nova Scotia

At this point in our history, Nova Scotia needs as many young people as we can get. We must work to retain more of our own and attract others from across Canada and around the world. We must also create more opportunities for young Nova Scotians that have historically been excluded from economic success, including African Nova Scotians, Aboriginal Nova Scotians, persons with disabilities, and low-income persons in general. The evidence is clear. Failure to do better on all of these fronts will leave us, before too long, with an increasingly elderly population and not nearly enough young, productive workers to pay for all of our collective needs. Presumably, we will reach a tipping point when young people with any other options will almost always choose to go elsewhere. We must do everything we can to avoid this.

Our current political and economic environment provides ample fuel for people inclined to be pessimistic. Unfortunately, it is sometimes argued that Nova Scotians, in aggregate, are such a people. And further, that despite the many problems we face, one of our biggest is a pervasive culture of pessimism: a deeply engrained, shared attitude that draws upon every negative turn of events to help reinforce the narrative that Nova Scotia is a Province in inevitable decline. Of course, this diagnosis (along with many others) was most recently made in the oneNS Report (oneNS Commission, 2014); and it is our belief that this claim is generally accurate.

Thus, while simply creating more opportunities for young people is clearly the most important issue to be addressed, there is also a need for Nova Scotia's government, business, and thought leaders to communicate more forcefully and effectively about our many existing economic success stories. The Workforce of the Future Table and Communications Nova Scotia are already developing strategies and materials to achieve this goal, hoping to lay the groundwork for future examples of economic success.

StudentsNS supports this initiative, in principle, because we also believe that Nova Scotia has a lot to offer; and because it will be harder, in theory, for Nova Scotians to be pessimistic about new opportunities if they can more readily see the benefits of previous and emerging economic initiatives. At the same time, however, we must also recognize that public relations campaigns will not do nearly enough. If telling success stories were the only thing required to change Nova Scotia's fate, we surely

would have found a more sustainable economic path long ago.

To truly foster optimism about Nova Scotia's future, our government and business leaders must make two fundamental commitments.

First, they must adopt a “do no harm” approach to economic stewardship. Clearly, our situation requires urgent action, but it also requires that the number of sound economic decisions begin to greatly outnumber the unsound ones. As a negative example, the current government has attempted to frame the elimination of the \$50 million Graduate Retention Rebate (GRR) as a sound decision, based on the program's ineffectiveness and the need to trim the budget deficit. In reality, however, taking this decision without equivalent investment in new youth retention programs has badly undermined morale amongst the very demographic Nova Scotia so desperately needs to retain (Brierley and Williams, 2014).

In addition, those same leaders must commit themselves to developing a comprehensive provincial strategy to transform our Province into an attractive place for young people to live, work, and build a future. A sound strategy – if followed by decisive action and adequate investment – could create many new employment opportunities and change an untold number of attitudes about what Nova Scotia has to offer. The Provincial Government should take the lead in this initiative, with the knowledge that the \$35 million in annual GRR-related “savings” it recently realized would provide an excellent resource base to immediately begin funding activities under the strategy.

***RECOMMENDATION: In cooperation with students and youth, relevant partners in the private and not-for-profit sectors, and post-secondary institutions, the Province of Nova Scotia should immediately develop and implement a comprehensive Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy.***

Government must be the driving force ensuring that the strategy translates into immediate and substantive action, rather than becoming yet another forum for study and consensus building. This can be accomplished by setting ambitious public goals, by placing high expectations of commitment on everyone involved (especially itself and employers), and by investing in public programs and services designed to help partners to meet these expectations.

## 6.1 Employer Engagement

Nova Scotia employers have an essential role to play in making Nova Scotia a desirable place for young people to live and work. For us to succeed, they must be committed to hiring youth, providing appropriate training, and offering fair compensation; and they must not succumb to derogatory (and largely disproven) stereotypes about the work ethic, commitment level, or the attitudes of young workers. Rightly or not, many Nova Scotians hold the view that private employers in this Province are trapped in a low wage mentality, refusing to offer wages commensurate with the talent available. While it is difficult to assess such a claim objectively, it is clear that now is the time for civic-minded employers in this Province to step up and offer their best compensation to young job seekers.

***RECOMMENDATION: Nova Scotia's private employers must commit to hiring more students and youth, compensating them fairly, and supporting their individual success within their respective organizations.***

For small and medium enterprises, this might mean paying your current employees just a little bit more or offering inexpensive perks to make the workplace more attractive (e.g. flexible work hours, telecommuting options, etc.). For Nova Scotia's larger flagship enterprises, this means investing in your businesses in ways that create more opportunities for co-op students, for research internships, and for entry-level employment targeting recent graduates. In general, it means recognizing that your organizations benefit financially from being located in Nova Scotia and, very likely, from some form of direct public funding for your business activities. As our most successful "corporate citizens," you have a responsibility to invest in the future of this Province by investing in youth.

Of course, for some Nova Scotia employers, the critical importance of hiring youth at this time in our Province's history may not be entirely obvious. Likewise, some employers may also be unaware of the numerous government incentives designed to encourage the hiring of students and youth (see Section 4). Finally, still other employers may be aware of such programs but unwilling to take advantage simply because they consider the administrative costs to be too high to participate. To maxi-

mize the opportunities available for young workers in Nova Scotia, the Province must take steps to eliminate these barriers.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should implement and/or fund an information and outreach campaign designed to educate employers about the benefits of hiring youth and the government assistance programs available to help them do so.***

This complements the recommendation for employer outreach to encourage hiring of international students and other newcomers in StudentsNS' (2013a) report, *International Students and the Future of Nova Scotia's Universities*. A campaign at the scale of "Ships Start Here" would help to raise awareness of our growing youth deficit and build momentum toward making Nova Scotia a destination of choice for more young people.

Encouraging more employers to hire youth (and possibly take advantage of youth hiring incentives) is a critically important objective. But it is also important to acknowledge and promote the existing Nova Scotia employers with youth-friendly hiring and human resource practices. As outlined in Box 2 (above), StudentsNS has recently co-developed a Youth Employer Award program along with partners in government, non-profit, and business communities. Funding and implementation of this award would be an excellent first step in this direction. The initial rollout of this award could potentially be integrated with the other employer-targeted campaigns recommended above. Such a campaign would help to highlight the truly outstanding youth employers already at work in Nova Scotia as well as a broader group of employers actively participating in the Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should fund the implementation and annual administration of the Nova Scotia Youth Employer Award program.***

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, there will always be employers that choose not to be good corporate citizens, by offering minimal compensation and working conditions, or perhaps by choosing to exploit employees with limited bargaining power (e.g. internship candidates, low skilled youth, temporary foreign workers). For

this reason, it is crucial that the Province of Nova Scotia takes seriously its role in enforcing labour laws.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should strengthen and enforce existing labour laws to eliminate the exploitation of unpaid labourers, excepting the case of pre-approved internships associated with academic programs.***

To further support youth workers, many of whom earn minimum wage through part-time employment, the Province can also take further steps to strengthen Nova Scotia's minimum wage policies. Appropriate steps would include enshrining annual CPI-based increases to the minimum wage in the Labour Standards Code and making space for better youth representation on the Minimum Wage Review Committee.

***RECOMMENDATION: Nova Scotia's Labour Standards Code (R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 246) should be amended to include the precise consumer price indexation formula used to calculate annual increases to the provincial minimum wage, which can currently be found in the Minimum Wage Order (General) (Regulation 257/2011, Section 6).***

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should include a representative of Students Nova Scotia on the Minimum Wage Review Committee as an employee representative***

## 6.2 More Focused and Evidence-Driven Government Intervention

That we need more economic opportunities in Nova Scotia youth is a given. But as the oneNS report suggests, another set of explanations for youth outmigration is likely to be found in the attitudes of Nova Scotians, both individually and collectively. Young people entering the workforce today have grown up hearing that Nova Scotia (and/or their specific community) has no future to offer them. Some may have seen older siblings, cousins, and friends go elsewhere in search of work; while others may have parents that split time between working in Alberta's oil fields and visiting their families in Nova Scotia; and still others might have always planned on leaving to experience another part of Canada or another part of the world. In short, it is clearly impossible to define any one reason why young people choose to leave Nova Scotia. It is also clear that we must make further efforts to better understand the reasons

why youth have left in the past as well as the factors that might influence the current generation of youth to stay in the future.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should commission a comprehensive qualitative study of recent interprovincial migrants to and from Nova Scotia and a similar forward-looking study at the factors being considered by current young people deciding to stay in (or leave) Nova Scotia.***

The research from this study should support effective policy-making to support youth retention and attraction in the context of a coordinated provincial strategy. In recent years, government decisions around youth retention and attraction have not been supported by adequate evidence, including most notably the \$49 million GRR program. That being said, as the oneNS report has argued, it truly is now or never for Nova Scotia. Action on the provincial strategy should not wait for this study to be completed; instead, the Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy should be highly adaptable to new empirical evidence and changing circumstances.

In Section 5, we highlighted the extent of government spending and activity with respect to economic and youth workforce development. Nova Scotia's numerous economic development agencies and the demonstrable commitment to spending on youth-targeted programs are undeniable advantages for creating more employment opportunities for youth. At the same time, the lack of coordination across government and service delivery agencies creates considerable confusion for the students and youth seeking services. In light of this fact, the Province should take the necessary steps to achieve better coordination among these many programs and services, not just through integration in an overarching strategy, but also through effective communication with stakeholders.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should establish a single, easily navigable online resource for youth employment program information as well as a centralized intake and advisement system for youth seeking government-funded services (ideally telephone or web-based).***

Such a resource would provide youth job seekers and prospective employers with detailed information on the available government programs and services intended to create job opportunities for youth. In addition to a passive information available through the web portal, the service should also provided personalized guidance to

individual youth job seekers and prospective employers of youth seeking government assistance.

In addition to providing better access to program information, the Government must also make a strong commitment to the practice of establishing clear objectives and outcome measures for all youth employment programs (including both new and existing programs).

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should offer a range of programs and services to help Nova Scotia youth from all backgrounds to attach to the labour market, including basic training and skills development programs for vulnerable youth populations.***

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should prioritize increased spending on programs and services that connect students and youth to actual jobs in Nova Scotia, including wage subsidies and/or tax breaks to employers hiring students, youth, or recent graduates.***

Nova Scotia simply cannot afford to squander scarce resources on ineffective programs. The Province should continue to offer a broad range of basic training programs targeting different subpopulations of youth; but it should also prioritize programs and services that connect youth with actual employment opportunities.

***RECOMMENDATION: New or expanded incentive programs encouraging private employers to hire students and youth, including the Graduate to Opportunities Program, should be carefully designed to ensure new incremental youth job creation.***

To ensure that new and existing programs have the desired impact of attaching Nova Scotia youth to the local labour market, all such programs should be designed to ensure that subsidized youth hiring does not simply replace youth hiring that might have occurred independently. A working mechanism to enforce this principle could be as simple as limiting eligibility for such programs to employers that can clearly demonstrate annual growth in the number of youth hired (i.e. that the employer hired more youth than it did the previous year).

Along the same lines, the Provincial government's role as an investor and/or lender to private businesses – whether through NSBI, Innovacorp, or Invest Nova Scotia

(formerly the Jobs Fund) – should be used as leverage to ensure that government-supported economic development activities create employment opportunities for Nova Scotia post-secondary graduates and other youth.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should attach specific provisions for the hiring of students, youth, and recent graduates to all public investments and/or loans made with private businesses.***

In addition to increasing expectations on employers, however, the Province should also enhance their existing wage subsidy programs by indexing the subsidies provided (and the actual employee wage) to the annual rate of inflation. In the absence of such a policy, subsidized wages for youth decline each year relative to inflation, thereby reducing the incentive available to interested employers.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should index wages to inflation for those employed through its wage subsidy programs, including the Student Employment Program, relative to the year each program was introduced.***

While promoting creation of youth jobs in other organizations should be improved and expanded, the Provincial Government should also seek to establish itself as a best practice leader for youth-friendly hiring. To facilitate this, the Province should initiate a full review of its hiring policies (including a focus on maintaining job-appropriate experience requirements), new employee training policies, and other human resource policies to ensure the creation of maximal opportunities for youth within the Provincial public service.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should review its hiring, new employee training, and other human resource policies to minimize any existing barriers to youth employment. Based on this review, the Province should develop a human resource strategy to create specific opportunities for youth to enter the public service.***

Just prior to publication, the Province announced its intention to develop just such a strategy to expand youth opportunities within the public service (Public Service Commission of Nova Scotia, 2014). StudentsNS applauds the stated intention of this announcement and calls upon the Government to design and implement this strategy transparently, and with the full participation of actual Nova Scotia youth.

The last critical items for the government to address are the barriers to immigration and credential recognition for international students and potential immigrants. While the Provincial Government needs significant help from the Federal Government to improve our immigration outcomes, the Province can, on its own, make a commitment to providing open-ended counseling and administrative assistance to all potential immigrants interested in settling in Nova Scotia.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province should invest in comprehensive immigrant settlement assistance resources through post-secondary campuses and/or Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services.***

This investment should include supports for recent international graduates of Nova Scotia PSE institutions, pursuant to the recommendations in StudentsNS' previous report, "International Students and the Future of Nova Scotia Universities" (2013a). In particular, the Province should prioritize reinvestment in the lapsed International Graduates Pilot Program to insure that all international students at Nova Scotia PSE institutions have access to specialized employment, career, and immigration counseling.

### **6.3 Easing the Education to Employment Transition**

Based on the available evidence, it is clear to StudentsNS that the largest struggles for new PSE graduates occur in the initial transition to labour market, with many experiencing a significant period of unemployment or underemployment in the first two years after leaving school. Thus, for the province, it will clearly be critical to connect new graduates to employment opportunities either before they graduate or very early in the vulnerable post-graduate period.

With this in mind, another set of obvious targets for early investment in youth retention are universities and colleges themselves. Based on our analysis, it is clear that most of Nova Scotia's PSE institutions capably provide student employment programs that help to prepare students for the labour market. Unfortunately, existing resource constraints help to ensure that even the strongest programs are only available to a small minority of students. To expand the access and impact of such ser-

vices, the Province should ensure that all institutions are adequately funded to serve the diverse and growing employment-related needs of Nova Scotia's PSE students.

***RECOMMENDATION: The Province of Nova Scotia should provide additional funding to universities and colleges through a targeted funding envelope to create and/or expand the student career services programs available on all campuses.***

Unfortunately, the same resource constraints also limit the availability of experiential learning opportunities to a fraction of students at each of our PSE institutions, typically limiting these opportunities to students in specific programs. New provincial funding for co-operative education programs would not only create new opportunities for students to gain career-related experiences, it would also reinforce the educational goals through the practical application of academic learning.

***RECOMMENDATION: All of Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions should be funded to make experiential learning opportunities available to students across all academic departments.***

In combination, increased funding for student career services and experiential learning programs strongly support the broader goal of retaining more PSE graduates in Nova Scotia. Students that gain specific career-related experience and/or connections with local employers are more likely to attach quickly to the labour force upon graduation, thereby avoiding the difficulty many students face in the immediate post-graduate period.

For their part, PSE institutions must also take steps to ease the transition of students into the labour market. In particular, they can take steps to integrate post-graduate internships and professional accreditation practicums into their core curriculum. As described in Section 4, many such post-graduate requirements offer little or no remuneration to participants. By re-designing academic programs with this in mind, PSE institutions would help students to establish eligibility for student financial assistance and, in turn, could potentially generate modest revenue from these students.

***RECOMMENDATION: Post secondary institutions should make every effort to incorporate experiential learning and professional accreditation requirements into their academic programs to ensure that students maintain eligibility for government-based student financial assistance.***

In addition to expanded student services and experiential learning opportunities, institutions can also do more to empower students to take responsibility for enhancing their own employability, by helping students to capture and communicate the skills and knowledge they acquire in their academic and extracurricular activities. To facilitate this, all institutions should commit to establishing clearly defined learning outcomes (and corresponding graduating student competencies) for all course and program offerings (Youden Walsh, 2014).

***RECOMMENDATION: Post-secondary institutions should publish clearly defined learning outcomes, and corresponding graduating student competencies, for all program and course offerings.***

As outlined in StudentsNS' recent report on institutional quality assurance, "Focus on Learning:

A Student Vision for Improving Post-Secondary Education in Nova Scotia," (2014), such practices would help to affirm institutional accountability to learners by articulating precisely what students are supposed to learn as well as how this learning is transferrable to students' future employment.

Similarly, all institutions should also establish alternative tools for communicating student achievement, preferably based on the NSCC's mandatory E-Portfolio program. Such a tool not only allows students to capture a broader range of activities; it also encourages students to explore their experiences more deeply than a simple transcript, thereby helping them recognize the key attributes they can offer to prospective employers. Finally, while the portfolio approach is not currently available at any Nova Scotia university, it has been highly successful at NSCC and has also proven effective in a Canadian university setting at McMaster.

***RECOMMENDATION: Post-secondary institutions should establish alternative tools allowing more comprehensive reporting on student achievement, capturing a broader range of extracurricular activities and requiring significant commitment and self-reflection on the part of the student.***

The oneNS Report emphasized the pressing need for more entrepreneurship in Nova Scotia; once again, our PSE institutions as critical assets in this mission. The Province recently acknowledged this finding in the creation of four Innovation Sandboxes as sites for commercial (and/or social) collaborations between institution-

based researchers and business/community partners (Government of Nova Scotia, 2014). StudentsNS is hopeful that these sandboxes will spur more entrepreneurship among PSE students but we believe there is more that can be done. To help facilitate entrepreneurial thinking across institutions, institutions could develop workshops on entrepreneurship and social enterprise, informational outreach materials targeting students in non-business faculties, and/or cross-disciplinary elective course offerings targeting the same group. The combination of outreach and optional programming would create intellectual space for cross-faculty entrepreneurial activity without the need to interfere with core curriculum.

***RECOMMENDATION: Post-secondary institutions should develop and offer optional programming on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship for students in non-business faculties.***

Finally, in addition to all of the above, Nova Scotia's PSE institutions can also send a clear signal – to their students, their employees, and the public – that, as high profile public employers, they are strongly committed to ranking among Nova Scotia's very best youth employers. First, they can establish a practice of publicizing key statistics regarding the employment of students by their institutions. This practice would help to legitimate PSE institutions as key players in the broader effort to employ students and youth and encourage graduate retention.

***RECOMMENDATION: Nova Scotia's post secondary institutions should maintain and regularly publish statistics on the students employed by the institution and the wages and benefits paid to these students.***

While employing thousands of students and youth is certainly an important contribution to the youth labour market, institutions could send another strong signal by affirming their commitments to a basic standard of wage fairness. By obtaining Wagemark Certification, Nova Scotia's PSE institutions would ensure that their very lowest paid employees are adequately compensated and that their highest paid employees are not egregiously overcompensated in relative terms.

***RECOMMENDATION: Nova Scotia's public post secondary institutions should obtain Wagemark certification, certifying that their highest paid employee does not earn more than eight times the wages of their lowest paid 10% of their workforce.***

## 7. Conclusion

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## 8. StudentsNS Policy Resolution

Based on the evidence throughout this report, it is clear that Nova Scotia's recent history of economic stagnation has had a profound impact on the life choices of our Province's young people. By any objective measure, 28 consecutive years of lost youth starkly indicates a prolonged failure to create the necessary conditions for young people to succeed in our Province.

Given that vast landscape of existing youth labour market programs available in Nova Scotia – and the correspondingly large government investments that fund them – StudentsNS agrees with the oneNS Commission's conclusion that government, by itself, cannot hope to fix Nova Scotia's economic woes. What government arguably can do is attempt to bring coordination and focus to the many activities that are already taking place and make it as easy as possible for young people lacking opportunities to connect to the resources they need.

While we call upon the Provincial Government to take a leading role in the Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy, we also identify essential roles for PSE institutions and for Nova Scotia employers with an interest in the future of our Province (i.e. all of them). Regardless of their various targets, the common theme unifying many of our recommendations is the establishment of youth service philosophy that refuses to say 'no.' Whatever a youth's background, current barriers, and future goals might be, he or she should be able to find an answer within a well-funded, highly-coordinated youth employment network that is more tightly focused on connecting individual youth to actual employment opportunities and appropriate training. If a youth wants to learn a new skill, find an existing job in their field, or explore the possibility of starting a business, Nova Scotia's government and its committed private sector partners must find a way to help. This approach will clearly demonstrate our Province's collective commitment to helping youth find success and will set the conditions to put us all on a path to a brighter future.

**WHEREAS StudentsNS holds the following PRINCIPLES:**

Attachment to the labour market and remuneration commensurate with skills and knowledge is fundamental to many students' and graduates' decisions to settle in Nova Scotia in the long-term.

Good quality employment is individually subjective, but can be generally defined as meaningful, challenging, and providing fair compensation relative to an employee's level of education.

Employers must play a critical role in developing a strong and successful workforce.

Students and youth should be compensated fairly for their labour.

The Province has a responsibility to assist students to successfully transition to the labour market.

Interns should enjoy the same basic legal rights as all other workers.

Unpaid experiential learning in the workplace may be acceptable in the context of a program providing students with academic credit or a certification.

Any claims by a program, institution, or government about a particular certification directly transitioning to a job should be supported by empirical evidence.

Institutions have a responsibility to provide students with the information needed to have a realistic and reasonably accurate understanding of their job prospects when investing in a post-secondary education.

While graduate placement and employment rates are important, the quality of Nova Scotia post-secondary education does not hinge on its ability to directly transition into jobs, but on its ability to prepare students to be adaptable and versatile learners with a plurality of skills.

The development of core competencies, including critical thinking, literacy and teamwork, is important not only for students' careers, but for their personal well-being.

**AND WHEREAS StudentsNS has identified the following CONCERNS:**

Nova Scotia has experienced 28 consecutive years of net negative interprovincial migration.

Since the 2008/09 recession, 18-35 year-old Nova Scotians have lost more jobs than they have gained.

Since the 2008/09 recession, a greatly disproportionate share of jobs created in Nova Scotia have gone to individuals over 25 years of age.

As a regulation under the Labour Standards Code, the indexation provisions in Nova Scotia's Minimum Wage Order is subject to change at the behest of the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

Nova Scotia's Minimum Wage Review Committee contains insufficient representation by students and youth.

Given current labour market conditions and costs, it is difficult, if not impossible, for many students to self-finance their education with employment income.

Significant hours of paid employment while studying may compromise students' learning and academic performance.

While having a PSE credential generally provides a competitive advantage to Nova Scotia job seekers, recent graduates under age 25 continue to have difficulty attaching to the labour market.

Precarious employment arrangements – including unemployment, involuntary part-time employment, temporary and contract employment, underemployment (based on credentials), and low wage/low benefit employment – are prevalent in Nova Scotia's the youth labour market.

Between 2000 and 2009, Canadian post-secondary graduates have experienced a 4% decrease in the annual earnings premium relative to the earnings of a high

school graduate, although the OECD as a whole experienced an overall increase of 10% over the same period.

Significant periods of unemployment upon graduation can have long-term negative impacts on career advancement and lifetime earnings potential.

Some Canadian employers engage in illegal and/or exploitative practices with interns.

Unpaid internships aggravate inequality by conferring competitive labour market advantages to individuals who can afford to participate in a period of unpaid work.

Nova Scotia undergraduates continue to graduate with the second highest student debt levels in all of Canada.

Nova Scotia-Canada Labour Market Agreement funding reallocated to the Canada Jobs Grant could threaten existing and effective labour market and skills development programs targeting vulnerable Nova Scotians.

Some government employment programs targeting youth place too little emphasis on connecting people to actual jobs.

Wages for students employed through the Province of Nova Scotia's Student Employment Program decline each year relative to inflation.

Youth entrepreneurship programs and services offered or funded by government are poorly coordinated and difficult to navigate.

Youth employment programs and services offered or funded by government are poorly coordinated and difficult to navigate.

The notion that the university is a centre for job training and meeting labour market demands may have negative effects on the quality of education, academic freedom, and the diversity of programs offered.

Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

Only a minority of Nova Scotia post-secondary students have access to experiential learning opportunities.

Individuals required to participate in unpaid post-graduate experiential learning or accreditation to achieve employability often experience significant financial hardship because, as recent graduates, they are ineligible for government-based student financial assistance.

Student career and employment services at Nova Scotia's post secondary institutions suffer from inadequate funding and coordination.

Several Nova Scotia post-secondary institutions do not maintain usable electronic human resources records pertaining to the students they employ.

The pay ratio between the highest paid employee and lowest paid 10% of employees exceeds an eight-to-one ratio at most public post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia.

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT StudentsNS makes the following RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In cooperation with students and youth, relevant partners in the private and not-for-profit sectors, and post-secondary institutions, the Province of Nova Scotia should immediately develop and implement a comprehensive Youth Attraction and Retention Strategy.

Nova Scotia's private employers must commit to hiring more students and youth, compensating them fairly, and supporting their individual success within their respective organizations.

The Province of Nova Scotia should implement and/or fund an information and outreach campaign designed to educate employers about the benefits of hiring youth and the government assistance programs available to help them do so.

The Province of Nova Scotia should fund the implementation and annual administration of the Nova Scotia Youth Employer Award program.

The Province of Nova Scotia should strengthen and enforce existing labour laws to eliminate the exploitation of unpaid labourers, excepting the case of pre-approved internships associated with academic programs.

Nova Scotia's Labour Standards Code (R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 246) should be amended to include the precise consumer price indexation formula used to calculate annual increases to the provincial minimum wage, which can currently be found in the Minimum Wage Order (General) (Regulation 257/2011, Section 6).

The Province of Nova Scotia should include a representative of Students Nova Scotia on the Minimum Wage Review Committee as an employee representative

The Province of Nova Scotia should commission a comprehensive qualitative study of recent interprovincial migrants to and from Nova Scotia and a similar forward-looking study at the factors being considered by current young people deciding to stay in (or leave) Nova Scotia.

The Province of Nova Scotia should establish a single, easily navigable online resource for youth employment program information as well as a centralized intake and advisement system for youth seeking government-funded services (ideally telephone or web-based).

The Province of Nova Scotia should offer a range of programs and services to help Nova Scotia youth from all backgrounds to attach to the labour market, including basic training and skills development programs for vulnerable youth populations.

The Province of Nova Scotia should prioritize increased spending on programs and services that connect students and youth to actual jobs in Nova Scotia, including wage subsidies and/or tax breaks to employers hiring students, youth, or recent graduates.

New or expanded incentive programs encouraging private employers to hire students and youth, including the Graduate to Opportunities Program, should be carefully designed to ensure new incremental youth job creation.

The Province of Nova Scotia should attach specific provisions for the hiring of students, youth, and recent graduates to all public investments and/or loans made with private businesses.

The Province of Nova Scotia should index wages to inflation for those employed through its wage subsidy programs, including the Student Employment Program, relative to the year each program was introduced.

The Province of Nova Scotia should review its hiring, new employee training, and other human resource policies to minimize any existing barriers to youth employment. Based on this review, the Province should develop a human resource strategy to create specific opportunities for youth to enter the public service.

The Province should invest in comprehensive immigrant settlement assistance resources through post-secondary campuses and/or Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services.

The Province of Nova Scotia should provide additional funding to universities and colleges through a targeted funding envelope to create and/or expand the student career services programs available on all campuses.

All of Nova Scotia's post-secondary institutions should be funded to make experiential learning opportunities available to students across all academic departments.

Post secondary institutions should make every effort to incorporate experiential learning and professional accreditation requirements into their academic programs to ensure that students maintain eligibility for government-based student financial assistance.

Post-secondary institutions should publish clearly defined learning outcomes, and corresponding graduating student competencies, for all program and course offerings.

Post-secondary institutions should establish alternative tools allowing more comprehensive reporting on student achievement, capturing a broader range of extracurricular activities and requiring significant commitment and self-reflection on the part of the student.

Post-secondary institutions should develop and offer optional programming on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship for students in non-business faculties.

## 9. References

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