

**REMARKS BY**

**PETER HALPIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES**

**PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE GROUP OF 13 (GG-13)**

**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE  
STUDENTS**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Good morning.

I am Peter Halpin, executive director, Association of Atlantic Universities – the AAU.

The AAU is principally an advocacy organization, working on behalf of the presidents of the 17 universities across the region.

The AAU works hard at ensuring public visibility for the important role our universities play in preparing future leaders of our communities; in path-breaking research and innovation, and in contributing to the economic prosperity and social development of life in Atlantic Canada. It is a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to meet with you this morning.

The range of topics you will address during your conference, such as partnerships in graduate student research, community engagement with university research, inter-university cooperation and regional policy development are also important thematic areas for the AAU.

My purpose this morning is to address those topics from an AAU perspective and in the context of the serious challenges confronting the university sector.

It is no secret that the aftermath of the recent worldwide economic recession and staggering levels of government debt has resulted in considerable fiscal pressure on universities. Governments, whether in the U.K., the U.S.A. or Canada, have cut university operating grants in dramatic fashion. At the same time, government expectations concerning the output of universities – graduates with the right stuff to meet labour market demand and improved commercialization of research – has never been greater.

In short, it is an environment of doing more with less and demand for greater accountability for results.

From a public communication point of view, the university sector has to work harder than ever at more effectively communicating the value and contribution our institutions make to economic development and prosperity, and, social development and quality of life.

During my initial conversation with Bryce, he mentioned interest in two AAU research initiatives: *smarter together* – our 2006 economic impact study, updated in 2010, and *thriving together*, our just released study of the social and cultural impact of our universities across the region. Both of these studies were designed to quantify the role and contribution of our universities to regional economic and social development.

The economic impact of universities in Atlantic Canada shows that this region's universities are major drivers of prosperity in Atlantic Canada. These findings help provide a foundation for the intensifying debate about the role of universities in fostering economic growth and in serving as instruments of public policy in other areas, including immigration.

The social cultural impact study measured the extensive social and cultural contribution of universities, showing that hundreds of thousands of Atlantic Canadians annually take advantage of the rich range of programs and events offered by universities, not only on campuses, but in communities at home and abroad.

*Smarter together* and *thriving together* enable the AAU to make a fact-based case to governments and others about the important return on investment delivered by universities to the economy and society.

I invite you to visit our web site – [www.atlanticuniversities.ca](http://www.atlanticuniversities.ca) – to learn more details about both of these studies.

A common urban myth that our sector must constantly combat is the perceived lack of inter-university collaboration and cooperation. The AAU focuses much of its time, energy and resources on fostering an environment that encourages, enables and facilitates as much

collaboration and cooperation among our institutions as reasonably possible and where it makes good sense.

Research is one area where a great deal of institutional collaboration has occurred.

This AAU brochure provides some excellent examples of research collaboration among our members and how we contribute to a knowledge advantage in Atlantic Canada.

The foremost example of which is Springboard.

Springboard is a network of 14 universities and three community colleges working together to enhance technology transfer and promote commercialization.

By working together, Springboard helps ensure that smaller universities have access to the support services they need while larger, more research-intensive universities – Dal, Memorial and UNB – can access specialized resources across the region.

Since its creation in 2004, Springboard is held up as a national model for a university-led, research commercialization network.

This past February, eleven of the AAU's member universities signed a memorandum of understanding with the Atlantic policy congress of first nation's chiefs.

This collaborative program carries out research linked to the needs of aboriginal communities in the region, conducts workshops to improve strategic decision-making and develops a repository for information pertaining to aboriginal economic development.

For the past three years, our 17 University Presidents have committed to the collaborative development of a regional education destination brand. That brand is designed to create greater awareness and understanding among prospective international students of our region's place in the world and the high quality, world-class educational opportunity our diverse range of institutions offer.

The AAU strongly believes, and many others agree, that the recruitment of international students to our campuses and their retention post-graduation is the most effective regional immigration policy tool available.

Our university leaders have also recently committed to working closely together to advocate that our provincial governments make a much more significant investment in graduate student scholarships.

Canada is in desperate need of more masters and PhD students. Currently, our region is not nationally-competitive in this area because our provincial governments contribute the least toward graduate student scholarships in the country. That is a situation that must be corrected. Partnerships and community outreach are also an important AAU priority.

In partnership with the Atlantic Canada opportunities agency – ACOA and, NSERC Atlantic, the AAU recently completed a regional science and technology opportunities analysis.

The purpose of that undertaking was to determine if our region has the R&D capacity and nationally recognized expertise to create a university, private sector and federal government partnership.

The partnership must be nationally competitive and fit within the federal government's national S&T strategy.

In consultation with private sector interests, the analysis revealed that our region has significant R&D expertise and entrepreneurial drive to successfully compete nationally and internationally in the areas of remote sensing and bio-synthetic materials.

Here in Nova Scotia, our universities are working in partnership with the government in the development of a new provincial R&D strategy. We are also providing our institutional expertise in-support of the government's interest in development of an international trade and commerce strategy.

We are also working closely with the government's economic development agency – Nova Scotia Business Inc. – to help that organization strategically attract major international financial services firms to the province.

The AAU has also recently partnered with the economic development association of Canada to determine ways in which our universities can add value to the work of community economic development agencies.

To that end, the AAU is in the process of developing an outreach initiative designed to ensure community and regional economic developers are fully-aware of the opportunity to work with the university research community and business schools to help them succeed in attracting business and industry to their communities. Our mission is to make this a win-win relationship between our universities and those responsible for generating economic prosperity across the region. There is an important role for universities to play in public policy development.

That is a responsibility the AAU takes seriously and we have undertaken two initiatives to provide leadership in addressing issues and opportunities important to regional success.

The AAU produces a quarterly public policy paper that is widely distributed nationally and regionally.

To date, the AAU's public policy paper series has addressed topics such as the role of university R&D in the growth of the knowledge economy; the new energy reality in the region and regional population growth strategy.

Again, I invite you to visit our web site where you can access the entire AAU public policy paper series.

Finally, the AAU has initiated the Atlantic Leaders' Summit. The purpose of the Summit is to bring together Senior Business, Industry and Community Leaders from across the region to participate in a candid conversation about critical issues.

To date, the AAU has hosted two Atlantic Leaders' Summits: the first focused on the regional population challenge and the labour market, and, our capacity for innovation.

The second Summit focused on the region's energy challenges and the need for considerably more collaboration and cooperation among electrical utilities and provincial governments concerning the transmission of electricity.

Next month, we will present an Atlantic Leaders' Summit on regional competitiveness and productivity.

Canada badly lags most OECD countries in productivity and competitiveness and our region has the poorest performance in the country.

It is the biggest challenge facing our region.

Outputs from the Atlantic Leaders' Summit can also be found on the AAU website – this includes summit reports; public policy papers and video presentations.

In summary, I hope this brief overview of AAU programs and activities has provided greater insight into our connection to the issues your group has identified for discussion:

The importance of graduate students in the economy, strategies for community engagement, best practices for inter-university collaboration and cooperation and the role of universities in regional economic development and public policy development.

Again, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share the AAU's advocacy priorities, programs and activities with you and i look forward to answering any questions you may have.