



ASSOCIATION OF
ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITIES

ASSOCIATION DES
UNIVERSITÉS DE
L'ATLANTIQUE

**Canada's
east coast
universities:**

**Contributing
to a better
future**

Submitted by the
Association of Atlantic Universities
(AAU)

August 13, 2010

Executive Summary

Canada's east coast universities play a pivotal role as economic anchors and engines in communities across the region. Our universities, led by the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) are committed to working collaboratively and cooperatively with governments and their agencies, the community college system, business and industry, national granting councils and federal laboratories and special interest organizations to make a positive difference in regional prosperity and social well-being.

In addition to enormous economic impact, our universities contribute mightily to the region's public policy development, social cohesion, cultural affairs and overall quality of life.

Our universities are in the people attraction, talent development and ideas business. These three integrated components are powerful contributors to our region's future.

Strategic federal government investment in regional innovation and research networks; domestic and international graduate student attraction and recruitment programs; international education brand marketing initiatives and improved Aboriginal student access to post-secondary education, have the potential to measurably improve regional productivity, competitiveness and population growth.

Contributing to Economic Prosperity and Public Policy in Atlantic Canada

As our region strengthens its national competitiveness following the economic recession, universities are more committed than ever to contributing to economic and social development and public policy issues. Our universities make a positive difference in the region. Our contributions now and in the future include:

Regional science and technology (S&T) opportunities analysis

In partnership with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), our universities have undertaken an in-depth analysis of regional capacity and national and international competitiveness in the areas of energy and the environment and biosynthetic materials science. This initiative is designed to contribute to Advantage Canada and the federal government's national S&T strategy.

Economic Impact of Universities in the Atlantic Provinces

In partnership with ACOA, the AAU has completed a report that updates the findings of a 2006 study of the economic impact of our universities on regional, provincial and local economies. The university sector represents a \$2 billion industry in Atlantic Canada. The details of the updated study will be released in Q4, 2010.

Social – cultural impact of universities in the Atlantic Provinces

In partnership with ACOA, this unprecedented Canadian study examines the impact our universities have on social policy, cultural affairs and quality of life across the region. The social-cultural impact study will be released in Q1 2011.

Public Policy Leadership

In 2010, the AAU launched *Solutions for Atlantic Canada's Future* – a public policy paper series. The quarterly series is designed to provide university-led thought leadership on critical issues facing the region. To date the public policy paper series has addressed the potential role our universities play in successful regional population growth strategy, and, building the knowledge economy.

Public Policy Development

In collaboration with ACOA, university leaders in Atlantic Canada will lead an initiative to prioritize public policy issues with a bias for action to improve regional competitiveness and productivity.

Atlantic Leaders' Summit

On October 6, the AAU will hold its second *Atlantic Leaders' Summit*, a gathering of university, private and public sector leaders from across the region. Participants in the 2010 *Atlantic Leaders Summit* will consider challenges related to regional energy transmission and the opportunities for greater collaboration and cooperation.

Regional education destination brand development

Our universities have created a regional brand to position Canada's east coast universities and the region as an education destination in select international markets. The brand positioning strategy is linked to attracting and retaining international students to our universities and facilitating their transition to becoming permanent residents of eastern Canada.

Regional literacy initiative

In collaboration with other like-minded organizations, our universities are leading a process to develop a regional coalition in-support of the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) literacy action plan: *Key to Learning and Path to Prosperity - An Action Plan for Atlantic Canada, 2009-2014*.

Climate change and sustainability commitment

University leaders across the region have signed a commitment to address climate change as well as promoting environmental and sustainability programs on-campus and in their local communities.

Knowledge Infrastructure Program synopsis

The investment in the knowledge infrastructure program by the federal government and our provincial governments will have a profound impact on university learning, living and research environments. The AAU will produce a detailed synopsis of the outcomes and impacts of the governments' *Knowledge Infrastructure Program* for release in Q1 2011.

Regional productivity and competitiveness study (pending)

The AAU proposes to launch a study in 2011 that will examine the role and contribution of our universities to regional productivity, competitiveness and innovation.

Building on Strength

The engagement of universities is clear. But, with additional resources, even more could be done to maximize the impact of their strengths – *people and ideas* – opening the door to new areas of success for Atlantic Canada.

The university sector believes that we must look to our strengths – our highly qualified people – to address regional challenges. These individuals possess the critical thinking, analytical and creative skills that will provide the solutions to the challenges we face. Support for researchers and students during their careers, and the research enterprise as a whole, is necessary to develop these highly qualified individuals. Universities recognize that sustaining effort in a period of restraint is tough and takes great leadership. However, it is precisely this type of persistence that is needed to ensure that Canada and our region continue building the economy of the future.

Sparking innovation and inspiring researchers

Through the Knowledge Infrastructure Program, the government of Canada and provincial governments are investing more than \$4 billion to build and improve critical research and teaching infrastructure on Canadian postsecondary campuses by March 31, 2011. As a result, universities are creating jobs in their communities and helping Canada return to economic growth and prosperity.

The new infrastructure will be coming on-line just as the new Canada Excellence Research Chairs, and Vanier and Banting Scholars arrive on university campuses. The timing is perfect to invest in the kind of research and knowledge transfer programs that will fully deploy the new infrastructure and new human capital that are essential in meeting the challenges Canada faces.

Continued investment in these areas is critical. Research and innovation are well understood as key assets for success in the increasingly competitive new global economy, enabling us to respond to the crises and big opportunities of today and to build the reservoir of knowledge and skills to face the unknown in the future. Coordinated support for student and graduate internships, interdisciplinary linkages between the government of Canada and provincial labs, regional clusters, national and international collaborative research networks complement the university learning environment and promote the dissemination of new information to the private sector. The combination of skills and shared knowledge is critical to drive Atlantic Canada's innovation, productivity and competitiveness.

Our vision must not stop at our borders. Canada must collaborate internationally with China, India and Brazil and countries in the Americas, and must build on strong partnerships with the U.S. and Europe. Global issues such as poverty, disease and climate change can be comprehensively addressed only by global research teams. By enhancing our global linkages, Canadians can access worldwide talent, markets and revenue sources, thereby leveraging other research investments.

In *Advantage Canada* and the government of Canada's S&T strategy, Canada embarked upon a path charted to success. Recent infrastructure investments and support for innovation enhance Canada's growing economic and intellectual strength. By maximizing these investments, the government can, even in times of restraint, support deep levels of inquiry – across disciplines, geographic boundaries and sectors.

AAU recommends that the Government of Canada:

- increase funding for curiosity-driven research programs (e.g., discovery grants/accelerators, open research grant program, and standard research grant program of the three agencies);
- redesign and improved accountability of the Indirect Costs Program in order to focus and heighten its impact supporting strategic research initiatives and commercialization overheads;
- better support to universities and a process in select target countries (in partnership with DFAIT) to attract and recruit Vanier and Banting Scholars to Canada; and,
- change programs such as NCE Strategic Networks and Networks of Centres of Excellence Programs to better facilitate and actively support federal participation in research networks with universities and business.

Enriching the university experience

When classrooms and labs are enriched by people from around the world, we all benefit.

Students from abroad bring diverse perspectives, expertise and skills to our campuses. Canadian students benefit from these perspectives, gaining cultural awareness, a broader skill set and build a wider network. This, along with an international learning experience in another country, helps young Canadians become global citizens. Fewer than three in 100 Canadian students study abroad – so international students in the classroom bring the world to Canada.

International students benefit from a world-class education, a rich diversity of institutions and locations in which to study, and opportunities for a career in Canada, or one back home. Graduates who return home often maintain their Canadian networks, creating mutually-beneficial international economic, diplomatic and cultural ties.

The immediate impacts on our communities and economy in Atlantic Canada are significant, too. In 2010, Dalhousie University's School of Public Administration carried out an expenditure analysis of the economic impact of international students in our region's universities and colleges on behalf of the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET). The study determined that the total economic impact of international students across Atlantic Canada is **\$565 million annually!**

Perhaps the most notable finding in the study is that **40 percent of survey respondents** expressed interest in permanent residence in Canada, 'suggesting that this group was a candidate source of future immigrants who could help address the region's demographic challenges.'

AAU recommends that the Government of Canada:

- Invest in the regional education destination brand marketing program led by the AAU. The regional education brand will complement the *Imagine Canada* brand. This investment will leverage the promotional activities of institutions and their regional association, and include targeted marketing activities in key countries that promote the excellence of Canada's east coast universities to potential students.
- Link the proposed investment to the regional population growth strategy led by ACOA.

Expanding access to university

According to a recent study by the Environics Institute, “pursuing higher education is the leading life aspiration of urban Aboriginal peoples today.” However, in reality, Aboriginal students face a unique set of social, economic, cultural and other challenges. Enabling more Aboriginal students to graduate from university can help these students reach their goals and give back to their communities.

Increasing graduation rates can also help Canada address demographic challenges by educating more people for high-value jobs. Canada’s Aboriginal youth population is growing at three times the national average, yet their level of university degree attainment is just one-third of their non-Aboriginal peers.

Many Canadian universities have developed programs, in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, to attract Aboriginal students and support them through to graduation. These programs are resource-intensive and for the most part, are not covered by provincial operating grants for classroom instruction. Many of these programs lack long-term, sustainable funding.

AAU recommends that the Government of Canada:

- Work with the university community, Aboriginal groups and other stakeholders to invest in programs and services that will help more Aboriginal students graduate from university. The investment strategy should build on the government of Canada’s review of funding for Aboriginal education (to which the university community offers its expertise and counsel), and should support the demonstrated success universities have had in increasing Aboriginal enrolment and completion and,
- Specifically, invest in the work being carried out by the AAU’s Working Group on Aboriginal Initiatives.

Conclusion

Our course through the recent global economic downturn has shown Canadians what it is like to come through a crisis and not only stay on our feet, but stand tall. What if we could meet the demographic shift or the impending health care crisis head-on with similar results? What if, instead of productivity and innovation casting a shadow, we could take important steps now that would diminish future effects *and* pave the way for a more successful Canada?

Universities focus on such questions and are eager to engage with Members of Parliament, the private sector, and our local communities on these urgent matters. The university community believes that the steps outlined in this document are realistic, smart moves for the immediate term. Health, success and quality of life demand an educated population and high quality universities. As does Canada’s ability to keep making its mark in the world – well beyond this year.

High performing universities are magnets. Fresh thinkers attract others, stimulate ideas that move the economy and spark new ways of doing things. Universities, with the appropriate resources, can be the engines of Canada’s *success agenda* – nurturing the people and ideas needed to solve world problems and pave the way to a better life for Canadians.

With Canada in the international spotlight as host of the 2010 Winter Olympics and the G8 and G20 summits, let’s continue to build on our successes and contribute to a better future for all Canadians. Our ability to do so depends on the strength and vitality of our universities, graduates and researchers and on our ability to share this excellence with the world.

For further information, contact:

Mr. Peter Halpin, Executive Director
Association of Atlantic Universities
Suite 403, 5657 Spring Garden Road
Halifax, NS B3J 3R4 Ph: (902) 425-4238/Fax: (902) 425-4233
E-Mail: phalpin@atlanticuniversities.ca
Website: www.atlanticuniversities.ca