

Chapter V

THE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION TRANSFER

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter III, the post-secondary education* component of the Established Programs Financing (EPF) arrangements provides large unconditional transfers to the provinces for the general support of post-secondary education; neither the federal government nor the Parliament of Canada receives an accounting for these transfers. In this respect the post-secondary part of EPF starkly reflects the singular approach to education in the Canadian federation. The BNA Act and Canadian history have given the provinces virtually full control of education policy, programs and institutions. Consequently, the national system—in reality a dual system based on the two major languages—mainly consists of 10 provincial approaches. At the post-secondary level there is even more diversity, reflecting the autonomy of some 55 degree-granting institutions across Canada. The whole is co-ordinated, to a degree, through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and through a variety of associations concerned with educational matters. The federal government ostensibly has no role to play. In fact, however, it is heavily involved through spending by many agencies in such areas of federal responsibility as skilled manpower supply and scientific research and development (see Annex II-D), as well as in general (EPF) support for higher education. Table V-1 provides details on these expenditures and transfers. It shows estimated direct federal expenditures on education at all levels totalling some \$2 billion and further transfers to provinces totalling

\$3.6 billion in 1981-82. Total spending on education in Canada for the same year is forecast at \$25.6 billion.

It is clear to the Task Force that the Canadian post-secondary education sector is in a period of difficult adjustment. Furthermore, much of the evidence we heard suggests that this painful process of accommodation to rapid change will be protracted. We therefore see our role as suggesting how the two orders of government might co-operate more closely to facilitate provincial and institutional responses to change. A co-ordinated response would help to ensure a post-secondary sector adequate to the needs of a vast, regionally-diverse country in a highly competitive economic environment, and adequate also to serve the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of individuals in a bilingual and multicultural society.

Post-secondary institutions—not just universities, but also colleges, research institutes, libraries, archives and the like—are part of the intellectual and cultural fabric of any society. The enduring strength of a society ultimately rests more on these institutions than on economic, industrial or military power. They are avenues along which people pursue knowledge of themselves, their values, their goals as individuals, their reasons for existence. The extent to which these institutions successfully achieve their purposes and enable individual members of society to realize and expand their potential as human beings is not something that can accurately be measured statistically, nor can it be ensured simply through financial support.

In this chapter we deal at some length with problems of federal support of post-secondary institutions, largely through financial transfers to provincial governments. In particular, we empha-

* See Annex B to this chapter for the definition of post-secondary education applied from 1967-68 through 1976-77 for purposes of the original 'cost-sharing' post-secondary transfer program.