

submits proposals that take into account the constraints of the Canadian constitution.

We also considered excellence in Canadian universities. Many of the people who met with the Committee recounted the decline in the quality of teaching and research at our universities; mediocrity we were told has become a way of life. In our view, the quality of teaching and undergraduate education is not a matter that can be addressed by a federal parliamentary committee. Research, however, is different. We were told that research is both underfunded and deteriorating in quality. We believe that these trends must be reversed and that a change in the way we fund research will be required.

Our order of reference called for an examination of activities of the Government of Canada in its financial support of post-secondary education and vocational training. Early in our hearings we decided that we could not adequately examine the vocational training programs of the Government of Canada while attempting to do justice to the fiscal transfer programs in respect of post-secondary education and to the research programs of the three research granting councils. We therefore leave a review of the vocational training programs of the federal government to another day.

A few words respecting the National Finance Committee, as well as the intent of its members, are in order. The general responsibility of the National Finance Committee is to contribute to a more effective and efficient use of federal expenditure: specifically, in this study, we sought to gain a better understanding of the financial role of the federal government in the field of post-secondary education in Canada.

We were most fortunate to have had as wide a composition of membership on our Committee as we did. Each was able to view the subject-matter from his or her own perspective. Academics, accountants, public servants, businessmen, interested citizens, politicians — federal and provincial — all of whom in their roles as parliamentarians provided objective and dispassionate advice.

Solutions, however, were not easily arrived at. Our report might have become mired in the past. We weighed carefully whether, with our individual experience of the past, we could make any contribution to the intellectual future of the country; there was concern that historic political baggage would slow us down, even to a stop. It was with considerable disruption of those traditional views that we opted to address the future.

In the chapters that follow we examine some of the issues related to post-secondary education which will have to be addressed if this country is to achieve that high quality — that “Grail” — sought by us all.