

Students stand helpless as CAUT and AUCC discuss tuition fees

OTTAWA (CUP) - Within months, the federal cabinet will make a decision which could result in drastic tuition fee increases and fundamentally alter the way universities deal with governments.

Plans for amendments to the Fiscal Arrangements Act, which indirectly provides the bulk of money for university and community college operations, are being discussed secretly as the government here announces austerity measures and spending restrictions.

Ominously, students appear to be taking a minor role in the decision-making process, results of which could interfere with enrolment levels, expansion of programs, university autonomy and academic standards in every province.

At the same time, university administrators, represented by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), appear to be making progress in selling the idea of a "national universities policy" and of federally encouraged "regional centres of (academic) excellence".

If accepted, this would give the federal government power over university policy, formerly controlled exclusively by the provinces.

There are also pressures - supported by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) - for the government to cut its broad-based (and unconditional) contributions to post-secondary education by making students pay greater tuition fees.

An extensive series of meetings of provincial, federal and university officials begins this month to thrash out the new law, to be presented to parliament before the end of the year.

THE ACT: MIND-BOGGLING

The act they are debating is a mind-boggling document with intricate definitions and complicated equations. It outlines a method of calculating federal assistance for post-secondary education while providing a system of tax revenue equalization among the provinces.

Basically, the federal government offers to share 50-50 most of the operating costs of most public and private post-secondary institutions recognized by the provinces.

Funds obtained from tuition fees (about 15 percent of the total) and endowment are added to provincial government grants in calculating the matching federal funding. This means provincial governments pay about 35 percent of university and college operating costs.

The three smallest provinces, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New

By MARK BUCKSHON
For Canadian University Press

Brunswick, which don't have many post-secondary institutions, take advantage of a provision in the law allowing them to collect a flat \$15 per capita annual payment.

Last year the federal government paid the provinces \$1.2 billion for higher education. This year, because a 15 percent limit in annual increases set in 1972 will be reached for the first time, the fiscal transfers are set at \$1.67 billion.

Not included as eligible operating costs for federal funding are costs of ancillary services such as residences and food services, and money for capital debt or depreciation.

Not surprisingly, the provinces don't mind receiving the money from Ottawa, especially since no strings are attached. The provincial governments can choose which institutions to spend their money on, and don't even have to use the money received for post-secondary education.

The provincial education ministers will meet in Vancouver next week (January 13 and 14) to work out their position on the revised Act Revisions. Next month their collective group, the Council of Ministers of Education, comes here for a federal-provincial ministers meeting.

The ministers have generally remained silent about their position on the Act. It is unlikely they would support any move to cut funds to their treasuries.

But the universities, in what appears to be a shrewd move, are giving the provinces another problem by offering Ottawa a trade-off of increased federal control of university policy in exchange for increased money.

Officially the AUCC is remaining silent pending a private meeting January 15 between its executive and Prime Minister Trudeau. "I don't want to say anything about the content of our brief until then," AUCC president Michael Oliver said January 6.

But a copy of the association's first draft brief, discussed at a board of directors meeting in October, shows an awareness of the balance between federal and provincial politics.

The AUCC supports its argument against "provincialization" of universities with arguments for academic "centres of excellence."

"The general effect of federal funding by unconditional transfers ... has been a provincialization of universities to such a degree that there is little assurance that national objectives will receive attention commensurate with their importance for balanced university development," the brief states.

"The reliability of Canadian university standards, a consequence of the development of 10 university systems each with 50 percent of their costs borne by Ottawa, carries with it a danger of insufficient diversity and insufficient concentration of resources to produce true centres of excellence."

In general, AUCC says there is a tendency for provincial governments to duplicate resources, resulting in several mediocre quality institutions. It points out, as an example, the difficulty of having Asian Studies programs in every province.

But the association is believed to be afraid that any change the government makes now in a funding arrangement might cost the universities money, so

Oliver is expected to support anything major

CAUT WANTS

Meanwhile, CAUT is insisting that provincialization be bypassed and funded by the universities

CAUT points to provincialization as mentioned.



But CAUT is requesting direct funding for operating expenses which should be requested by the universities

CAUT claims that universities have been stable in recent years

"We conclude that a mixture of financial aid, which would be a component of the increased student aid program

The task for the large-scale change which would be a greater percentage of costs, and increased loan

Students participating in decision-making people who will make decisions

Students also the debate on Act

NUS: POLICIES

An official department, which said policy officials from AUCC