

Premiers vote to unify Education Commissions

The Council of Maritime Premiers has received the approval of the three provincial governments to organize a single Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission to maintain a sound system of higher education for the people of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

The following describes the content of proposals formulated by the Council for governmental consideration on the establishment of the Commission.

The recommendation for a single higher education commission was suggested by the Association of Atlantic Universities in the study "Higher Education in the Atlantic Provinces for the 1970's". Recommendation IV, page 93 states:

"Accordingly, whether Maritime political union comes about or not, we advocate one university grants committee adequately staffed to serve the three provinces. In considering this recommendation, we have pointed out some of the frustrations that would be inevitable. However, on account of the regional facilities in specialized fields, the smallness of the area, and the impossibility of providing adequate staff at a reasonable cost for three committees, we believe that this is the proper solution. If one committee is not deemed politically feasible, we advocate at the very least a far closer working agreement between the various provincial committees, with continuous consultation and with sharing of staff properly qualified to provide statistical data, financial analysis and research".

The Maritime Union Study, in looking for an input on higher education consulted with the Governments of the three provinces and, with them, agreed to establish another study group of four persons to review the needs for a region-wide policy in this field. The study group consisted of the three chairmen of provincial granting agencies, Messrs. Murphy, O'Sullivan and Sheffield together with Dr. H. J. Somers of the Association of Atlantic Universities. Among other suggestions to the Maritime Union Study, this group reported:

"If there is need for co-operation among educational institutions, there is just as important a need for the governments of the Maritime Provinces to approach their policies toward higher education on a region-wide basis.

It will make no sense at all for each province to try to be self-sufficient in every aspect of higher education. For a number of advanced, specialized and professional programmes, the most likely result of such an approach will be to create second- or third-rate schools which have very high costs in relation to the standards achieved."

It was in response to this type of thinking which also came from many other sources that the Premiers of the three provinces began to think in terms of a single commission for higher education. It seemed that the advantages of a single agency to co-ordinate this large and very important activity were well worth exploiting. Some of these advantages appear as follows:

From the point of view of the professional educator, there are many additions and improvements to higher education programs that can be identified as desirable and justifiable for the Maritime region. From the viewpoints of students and parents, it is highly desirable to have the widest possible choice among programs that are of satisfactory quality. From the taxpayer's position, there is a very real limit to the amount of public support that can be made available for such programs, regardless of how desirable they may seem to be from these other viewpoints. We do not have as three separate provinces, or even as a region, the resources to do immediately all the things that are "desirable" in the field of higher education. It will be most difficult, if not impossible, for the three provinces to continue to make their plans separately and avoid wasteful duplications of effort and expenditure in the future.

The concept of the single Commission is to make one group of interested citizens responsible for listening to the views of the professional educators, the students, parents, and the public at large concerning what would be "desirable" future developments in higher education. After hearing all viewpoints, this group would recommend to the governments concerned a fair, efficient and practical plan for resolving differences and for allocating the limited resources available. Once a plan has been approved by the governments concerned, the group would attempt to ensure the effective management of the re-

sources in a manner consistent with approved priorities.

The Commission will have the responsibility to advise the Council of Maritime Premiers and, through the Council, the provinces with respect to plans for the development of a comprehensive program for higher education. The Commission will consult closely with the provincial ministers responsible for higher education and with the institutions under its jurisdiction in all matters that affect them.

Because its emphasis will be on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education system, the Commission will focus particularly on developing comprehensive plans. In so doing it will seek to minimize self-defeating competition and duplication. At the same time, it must be recognized that elements of competition and duplication may indeed be desirable and necessary if programs are to be kept vital and if Maritimers, are to have access to a reasonable variety of educational opportunities. The Commission will also concern itself with providing increased institutional specializations within the region. While economic efficiency and more effective use of scarce resources will be key factors in the basic philosophy of the Commission, due regard must be paid to encouraging and supporting those programs and institutions which play unique and distinctive educational roles in those areas in which they are located.

The Commission will be directed to take account of the need to ensure that opportunities in the field of higher education are available to the French-speaking residents of the region. In addition, both the Commission and its staff will have the capability to offer services in the French language.

Maritime universities and certain other institutions of higher education will be brought within the jurisdiction of the new Com-

mission at the outset. Other institutions may come within the jurisdiction of the new Commission if a decision to this effect is taken by the Council.

The Council will direct the Commission to study the needs of the region for Applied Arts and Technical education as well as ways and means of meeting such needs, and to report their conclusions and recommendations to the Council hopefully by July, 1975.

The spheres in which the Commission will be asked to advise are: the future structure and development of higher education in the Maritime region; the support for new programs or institutions; the desirability of terminating support for some existing programs; co-operation among the institutions of higher education; the encouragement of regional centres of specialization; provision or access to educational services not available or not economical within the region; systems of student aid; and the definition of the institutions to be included within the new system.

It will be the responsibility of the Commission to make recommendations to the Council of Maritime Premiers, and through the Council, to the three provinces concerning the estimated expenditures called for by the approved programs of studies for the institutions of each province. In so doing, the Commission will take into account the estimated enrolments and other variable factors. The Commission will also be expected to assist the Council in securing the agreement of the three provinces on such proposals or in working out acceptable alternatives. In addition, the Commission may be called upon to recommend methods and pro-

cedures for the implementation of agreed plans.

In developing plans and alternatives it is anticipated that the Commission will undertake or support research into higher education programs for the region. There is a reservoir of expertise in the Maritime area and it will be used to help solve many of the problems of the region.

The annual report of the Commission, reviewing its activities and recommendations and containing its audited financial statements, will be tabled in each of the three provincial legislatures.

The membership of the Commission will represent various aspects of the public interest within the region. Approximately one-third will come from the institutions (including both executive and faculty nominees); the remainder will be drawn from among senior public officials and from the public at large.

Members will be expected to make their own personal contributions to the single purpose of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education in the region.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission will be required to meet at least four times a year, with the time and place of the meetings to be set by the Chairman of the Commission, its chief executive officer. The headquarters for the Commission will be at Fredericton. Insofar as possible, the present staffs will be absorbed by the new Commission.

The three separate higher education agencies, the Prince Edward Island Commission on Post-Secondary Education, the University Grants Committee of Nova Scotia and the New Brunswick Higher Education Commission,

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