

# opinions

## Education report badly flawed - students

The recommendation of the external committee to the Council on Higher Education that Dalhousie University's School of Education be terminated demands a response from all those who are committed to excellence in Nova Scotia education.

We reject the report's paternalistic suggestion that students should be cut off from their choice of career by government quotas based on employment prospects. Today no one enters a university programme, general or professional, with a guarantee of employment upon graduation.

The proposed elimination of doctoral studies in education is a short- and long-term mistake of immense proportions. These are the most dynamic times for education since the Second World War: new technology, dramatic social change, difficult economic readjustment, and a host of other factors are changing both the climate in which our schools must operate and the expectations that they must meet. The report itself acknowledges how vital the need is for research, now and in the future. It is folly to suspend educational research just at the moment when we have the greatest need of it. It is also unwise to leave educators in Atlantic Canada dependent on the field work of expensive American and Toronto consultants.

Of equal concern is the review team's apparent determination to ensure that Nova Scotians who wish to pursue scholarly work in the field of education — as fully a third of us are interested in doing — must leave Atlantic Canada. To exacerbate the 'brain drain' from this province and region is clearly not in anyone's best interests.

Several of the recommendations contained in the report are at the odds with "the Council's mandate to ensure a rational, effective and accessible provincial university system." The committee's recommendations represent a significant impairment of the accessibility of teacher education in Nova Scotia. Given the already frighteningly competitive nature of entrance to BEd programmes — in each of the past several years there have been ap-

proximately 800 applicants for the 90 places in Dalhousie's School of Education — the recommended reduction of places will work to the further disadvantage both of minority candidates and of those whose breadth of experience (an essential among those which make good teachers) may have come at some cost to their undergraduate averages.

Those candidates with low income or with family obligations will face an additional impediment: expense. In a time of spiralling tuition costs, dwindling bursaries, and increasingly restrictive access to loans, a second year of study — which has nowhere been demonstrated to produce more effective teachers than single-year programmes — will effectively bar many from the profession.

In addition, it should be observed that this second year of study will double the cost of educating each teacher. If, as the report makes clear, one of the principal motives informing the move toward university rationalization is expense, then one has to wonder how substantial savings can be effected by halving enrolment but doubling the cost of each graduate.

The external committee's "institutional impression" of Dalhousie casts doubt on the competence of the entire report. The assertion that the Dalhousie doctoral programme's "own base within professional education is not secure, and its reputa-

tion with practising educators would appear to be extremely weak" is particularly questionable. Did the reviewers establish any criteria for judging the doctoral programme, the coursework and research of its candidates, or the dissertations of its graduates? Did they examine the employment or publication history of those holding doctorates in education from Dalhousie? Did they disclose their methodology for polling "the profession" about the efficacy of the doctoral programme? They did not, and indeed it is clear that they did not canvass "the profession" on this subject at all. The external reviewers failed to do any of the most elementary work necessary for evaluating a doctoral programme. To dismantle a respected and important doctoral programme on the basis of such an un scholarly — indeed, antischolarly — document seems imprudent, to say the least.

The external report glosses over far too many issues to warrant acceptance. The plight of currently enrolled part-time students is a case in point: such students are given until September 1995 to complete their degrees, but those universities anointed by the report are given until then to have their new programmes in place. How could a part-time Dalhousie BEd student complete his or her course work if Mount St. Vincent does not implement its new secondary school courses prior to the

deadline? Staff considerations are equally vague: in one place the reports seems to suggest that all present staff will be accommodated in some way during the rationalization, but elsewhere seems to give those universities which will retain education departments a veto over any reassignments. Such internal contradictions indicate that this report is far short of the comprehensive analysis required by the council's mandate, and by the people of Nova Scotia.

Finally, we stand by the quality of Dalhousie's Bachelor of Education programme. Although the report makes no mention of Dalhousie's BEd — a curious oversight for a document purporting to take a comprehensive overview — it is implicitly quite critical of this programme. As the present students, we are in far

better position than the external reviewers (who were here for less than a day) to judge the quality of our instruction. We came to Dalhousie in part because of the university's reputation and in part because this School of Education is respected nationwide — notwithstanding the report's bald, unsubstantiated, and rather bizarre assertion to the contrary — and we have not been disappointed.

The report is an ill-formed and ill-advised act of administrative vandalism which will not accomplish the goals set for it, but which will compromise the welfare of Nova Scotians now and in the future.

Tammy Cowan  
Richard DeMerchant  
Lynne Genik  
Jeannie MacDonald

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**THE SURGEON**  
**GENERAL HAS**  
**DETERMINED**  
**THAT THE**  
**GRAWOOD**  
**ON THURSDAY**  
**NIGHTS IS A**  
**VERY SERIOUS**

**GOOD**  
**TIME!**  
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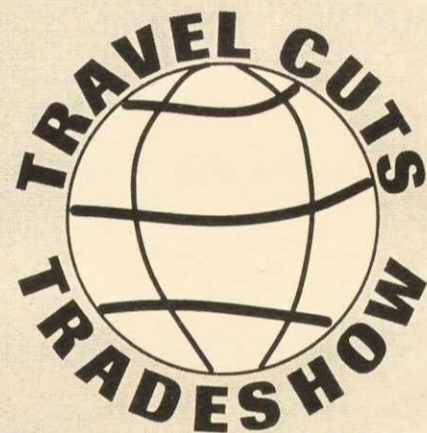
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5th Uisce Beatha & Blackpool with Ashley MacIsaac

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