

NEWS RELEASE

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Liberal Platforms get Failing Grade from Students, Staff and Faculty

K'JIPUKTUK (Halifax) The post-secondary education (PSE) sector does not seem to be a priority for candidates in the upcoming Liberal leadership election, says an alliance of students, staff and faculty (SSFA) that represents 20 unions or associations with over 20,000 college and university employees and students across the province.

“The students, staff and faculty who attend Nova Scotia universities and colleges deserve a leader who will look at this sector and acknowledge its importance within Nova Scotia,” says Scott Stewart, SSFA president and professor at Cape Breton University. “From a strictly economic perspective, universities are the third highest goods producing industry in Nova Scotia, generating over \$880 million in student and research exports each year. This figure is certainly worthy of the attention of our next premier, yet it appears that none of the candidates seem concerned with the fate of PSE in Nova Scotia.”

Students agree. “Thousands of students have made the decision to pursue higher education in Nova Scotia,” says Joanna Clark, Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia and SSFA Member. “Thousands of faculty members have made the decision to dedicate their lives to teaching and thousands more staff members are committed to supporting these institutions in both administrative, technological, and custodial roles. We are all looking for a premier who will see the potential in our sector as part of the foundation of a strong Nova Scotian economy. But with tuition for Canadian students currently the highest in the country at NS universities, it appears that the three leadership candidates are not amongst them.”

The most detailed plan comes from Randy Delorey, who focuses primarily on re-skilling employees who have lost their jobs due to COVID, but his plan lacks clarity on supports for Nova Scotians who have managed to maintain their minimum wage or precarious work throughout the pandemic. “Focusing strictly on co-ops and skills training also dismisses the social value of university programs,” says Christina Warren, SSFA member and NSGEU Board Member of Post-Secondary Occupational Council. “During the inauguration last week, the world was captivated by Amanda Gorman’s poetry, but as a holder of a sociology degree, this educational path does not seem worth mentioning in candidates’ post-secondary plan. Having a balanced view of the need for a mix of educational opportunities ensures that the people of our province will have the ability to access the best educational programs for them, not be forced into a stream that limits their abilities and creative thinking.”

Iain Rankin’s comments on PSE focus on applied research, co-op programs, and support for new graduates, but fails to acknowledge the barriers students face when trying to enroll in PSE to begin with. “If we cannot get students in the door,” says Warren, “we will have no students in research or co-op programs, let alone graduating.”

The third candidate, Labi Kousoulis, makes no mention of PSE. “This is egregious, given that he has been Minister for Labour and Advanced Education since 2017,” says Warren. “As Minister of this portfolio, one would expect that he would have some level of insight or creative inspiration that he would like to lead to fruition should he be selected as the Premier of our province. Sadly, Mr. Kousoulis has omitted from his list of “visions” the entire sector for which he was Minister. To SSFA members, this indicates a glaring lack of leadership quality that makes one question Kousoulis’ knowledge and confidence of the portfolio he oversaw.”

The SSFA believes the PSE sector in Nova Scotia is about more than education; it is a pathway for immigration and community building, a gateway for entrepreneurship and research innovation, and an economic driver in urban and rural communities. Its members are disheartened that none of the candidates for premier seem concerned with the fate of PSE in Nova Scotia.

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Background:

Formed after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSFA represents 20 unions or associations with over 20,000 college and university employees and students across the province, all of whom are essential to the work of higher education in the province.