



Manitoba Federation of Labour

Discussion Paper
Regarding Post-secondary Education
Tuition Review

Adopted by MFL Executive Council – April 2009

dm.cope342

In spring of 2008, Manitoba student groups requested that the Manitoba Federation of Labour attend a rally at the Legislature to protest the ending of Manitoba's post secondary education tuition freeze. The Government had announced that the freeze on tuition rates, which had been reduced by 10% in 1999 and then frozen, would be lifted in 2009, and slowly increased to the pre-1999 rates.

As a result of the Government's announced end to the tuition freeze, as well as the request by students to join them in their protest, the MFL Executive Council, at its April 2008 meeting, discussed the matter and passed the following motion:

M/S/C that the MFL support affordable, sustainable post secondary education with increased support for Students."

The MFL Executive Council asked that a Tuition Review Committee be struck.

The Committee began its discussions by examining the issue of a long term tuition freeze, and the effect such a freeze has on post secondary education. There are those who argue that there should be no cost to students who wish to pursue post secondary education. Thus, they argue, any increases to tuition fees are wrong. Furthermore it is argued, tuition fees ought to be eliminated entirely.

While the Committee agreed in theory with the notion of free post secondary education for all, the Committee determined that a lack of public resources makes free post secondary education unrealistic at this time; however, the eventual goal should be to reduce tuition fees if it is not possible to entirely eliminate them. With this in mind, the Committee proceeded with its deliberations on the basis that high quality post secondary education ought to be equally accessible and affordable to all Manitobans.

At the outset, the Committee agreed that that a simple tuition freeze alone was not, in and of itself, the answer to creating affordable, accessible, high quality post secondary education for all Manitobans who wished to receive same. Concerns were raised that the current system was not working fairly for all. Some concerns raised were:

- Often, universities were considered the only kind of post-secondary education, with little or no emphasis placed on Community Colleges and the Apprenticeship model.
- Rural and northern students were at a disadvantage.
- Young Aboriginal people do not have equal access to post secondary education.
- Access to publicly funded, high quality education is every Manitoban's right.
- All levels of education should be delivered by government in a similar way as health care.
- There are too many barriers to people receiving education, including tuition fees, access to adequate housing and other basic essentials

Recommendations:

The recommendations of the Committee listed below are not intended to be an exhaustive list, nor are they listed in order of importance. The Committee welcomes additional suggestions.

1. Affordable housing for students, especially for those who must travel from their communities to attend school, must be an integral part of Manitoba's affordable housing strategy, and be made a core measurement in the Manitoba Student Aid Program.
2. Young people must be given more and better information about, and access to, the Apprenticeship option for post secondary education.
3. When discussing the issue of post secondary education, we must expand our dialogue to include Community Colleges, such as Red River, Assiniboine and University College of the North. These institutions need to be adequately funded and be fully accessible to students from underprivileged northern and rural communities.
4. The number of Aboriginal students must increase, in all post secondary education institutions. Both the provincial and federal governments must allocate more resources for Aboriginal students, and in particular, must contribute further investments in the Manitoba ACCESS programs, Manitoba Bursary must implement the immediate removal of the 2% funding cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, as well as allocate appropriate funding to clear the backlog of students on waiting lists.
5. Assistance for rural and northern students' housing and other living expenses needs to be increased. The provincial government must improve the Manitoba Student Aid Program to ensure that rural and northern students receive a fair assessment of their assets and needs.
6. Financial cuts in post secondary education must not be achieved on the backs of those who work in post secondary education institutions.
7. Both federal and provincial support for Post Secondary Education (PSE) should be increased in recognition of past shortfalls. In no circumstances should the level of funding adversely affect the ability of public PSE institutions to maintain current funding. It must be recognized that inadequate levels of funding adversely affect both tuition levels and faculty and staff retention, recruitment and the overall quality of post-secondary education.
8. Governments should strongly encourage public post-secondary institutions to maintain or, preferably over a period of time, decrease tuition fees through a funding model that will meet the needs of the institution. Investment in PSE is especially important in times of recession and tuition fees should not be a barrier to those under financial strain who would benefit from additional educational and training opportunities.
9. Where costs of ancillary services are increasing, the government should recognize those costs by providing additional funding. These costs must never be covered by increasing fees paid by students or by reducing wages.

10. The tuition freeze thaw, no matter how gradual, must not become a justification for decreased government funding. Education is a form of infrastructure, and investment in it pays both short and long-term social, economic, and cultural dividends to the province as a whole.
11. It is critical to emphasize funding for the core functions of public post secondary education institutions, above and beyond targeted financial support to students.
12. Above all, fairness needs to be built into the post secondary education system in order that access is available to all, regardless of family income. This access must be to all programs, including, for example, the professional facilities at universities, where higher fees are a serious impediment to enrolment for some students, and those with long apprenticeship periods during which earning power is seriously limited.
13. We recognize and support that, in addition to increased investment in post-secondary educations, government needs to have an effective retention strategy. Tax rebates for graduates who remain in Manitoba ought to be increased so that more graduates will chose to stay in Manitoba, if possible, and their acquired skill sets are not lost to Manitoba's socio-economic fabric.

The Committee feels that the MFL, along with our affiliates and Young Members Committee, should meet with all students groups, and not just those who represent university students, in order to clarify our recommendations. Our goal would then be to work towards establishing a common position. It is important that we have a long term policy on affordable, accessible, high quality post secondary education, in all its forms.

The MFL, our affiliates and our Young Members Committee should work with like minded student groups to lobby the government to improve access to post secondary education in Manitoba.

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