



ASSOCIATION OF  
ATLANTIC  
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**REMARKS BY  
PETER HALPIN, AAU**

**For the  
Society for Teaching and Learning  
in Higher Education (STLHE)  
'Presidents Panel'**

**Dalhousie Arts Centre  
Dalhousie University  
Thursday, June 22, 2017  
8:45 – 10:15 AM**

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Good morning, it's a great pleasure for me to participate in this morning's panel discussion.

I hope my perspective adds some value to the conversation.

I'm Peter Halpin, Executive Director, Association of Atlantic Universities – the AAU.

The AAU is an advocacy organization, working on behalf of the Presidents and students of Atlantic Canada's 16 universities.

Knowing that my colleagues will better address both the challenges and dilemmas in post-secondary education, I will focus my comments on an important aspect of our work: fostering and enabling collaboration.

By and large, I believe we've succeeded in persuading our key stakeholders – Government funders, political representatives, business and community leaders – of the value and contribution of universities to the region's future prosperity and social well being.

Having 16 universities in a region of less than two-million people is a great economic and social development asset, but also a challenge.

Atlantic Canada has the most rapidly aging and declining population in the country.

It also has the lowest attraction and retention rates for new immigrants in Canada.

These two factors contribute significantly to the acute fiscal challenges now facing our four provincial governments.

As the principal funder of higher education and having first hand knowledge of the demographic challenges, our Provincial Governments, from time to time, question the sustainability of our universities.

A high level of regional collaboration among our universities and others is paramount to our sustainability, not to mention meeting the expectations of governments, politicians, the public and students.

A large part of the AAU's mandate is to find the ways and means to enable and promote inter-institutional collaboration, as well as partnerships with the private sector, governments and communities.

My intention this morning is to briefly share some of the most notable examples of university collaboration in Atlantic Canada.

As I've noted, our region has the most rapidly aging and declining population in the country.

That demographic challenge has resulted in a slow but steady erosion of domestic student enrolments across the region.

That situation has been somewhat offset by the historic attraction of our universities - especially those in Nova Scotia - to out-of-region students – principally from Ontario.

In Nova Scotia alone, there are more than 14,000 out-of-province students studying at our ten universities.

Over the past ten years, enrolment of international students in our universities has increased by more than 100%!

Today, there are more than 13,000 international students studying at Atlantic Canadian universities.

Those students represent nearly 20% of total full-time, university enrolment in the region.

As the region's domestic population continues its steady decline, the value of international students to future institutional sustainability grows in importance.

It's now accepted that our universities are talent magnets and the best source of new immigrants to the region.

With the assistance of the Atlantic Canada opportunities agency – ACOA – the AAU and its member universities are working toward marketing the region and its institutions to international students as a welcoming education destination in the world.

The AAU recently led an international student digital marketing research study on behalf of the region's post-secondary education sector.

The results of that study will equip our universities and colleges with: actionable information about key international target markets, and their cultural nuances; who to target within those markets; and, when, where and how to engage student prospects.

We know from a 2016 AAU graduate retention study that an astonishing 75% of international students would choose to stay in their province of study following graduation if given an opportunity to do so.

We've just completed a follow up study among those international students to gain insight into what has happened to them since their graduation a year ago.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, the AAU will host the Atlantic Leaders' Summit.

The theme of the summit is the international student experience in Atlantic Canada.

The summit will bring together recent international student graduates, employers, community leaders and governments to discuss the collective action we need to take to reduce the barriers

facing international students who want to stay and work in Atlantic Canada following graduation.

This university-led effort in support of student retention and regional population growth is a prime example of our working in close collaboration with other key stakeholders to change the demographic future of our region.

Other examples of inter-institutional collaboration among our universities, include, but are not limited to:

- Student mental health
- Prevention of sexual violence on campus
- Indigenous education, specifically institutional response to the truth and reconciliation commission's recommendations to Higher Ed and,
- The regional research enterprise

Finally, we are also working hard at fostering even more collaboration between our universities and the region's six community colleges.

Later this summer, an AAU delegation of presidents will meet with community college presidents, to discuss how we can collaborate more effectively to better support the five-pillars of the Atlantic growth strategy, which are:

- Skilled workforce and immigration
- Trade and investment
- Innovation
- Clean growth and climate change and,
- Infrastructure

I hope I have provided you with a sense of the commitment of our university leaders to greater collaboration among universities, colleges, governments, the private sector and communities, with the ultimate goal of improving Atlantic Canada's economic prosperity, social development and population growth.

Thank you