

## ***Check Against Delivery***

Remarks for Dr. Andy Hakin, President & Vice-Chancellor, St. Francis Xavier University  
& Chair, Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents (CONSUP)  
Halifax Chamber of Commerce Fall Dinner  
Wednesday, November 12, 2025

- Good evening, and my thanks for the introduction, Patrick.
- As many of you know, Patrick is one of the thousands of Nova Scotia university graduates who make this province what it is today.
- That's the story of our graduates. They are innovators, entrepreneurs, public servants, and changemakers — driving progress in every sector from healthcare to high-tech, from the creative industries to clean energy.
- On behalf of all Nova Scotia's universities I wish to thank Patrick and the Halifax Chamber for this opportunity to share an essential but sometimes overlooked story — the story of how our universities are not only centres of learning, but also *one of the most powerful economic engines in Nova Scotia*
- Over the course of tonight's presentation you will hear from my colleagues, who will provide insights and examples of how the university sector in this province continues to support the prosperity of our communities and all Nova Scotians.
- I'd like to begin with a simple truth:
- NOVA SCOTIA'S UNIVERSITY SECTOR PROVIDES A Powerful COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR THIS PROVINCE – AN ADVANTAGE That for decades, has been central to our ability to grow, diversify, and modernize our economy, not just here in Halifax, but across every region of the province.

- What many don't realize is just how significant this advantage is: our universities are Nova Scotia's second-largest export industry - second only to seafood. This means that students who come here from across Canada and around the world, *contribute more to our economy than almost any other industry.*
- From a purely economic standpoint, universities are one of Nova Scotia's smartest investments. Together, they contribute more than two billion dollars **every year** to the provincial economy, activity that sustains communities, strengthens industries, and grows our tax base.
- A large share of that activity happens right here in Halifax, home to six of our ten universities.
- Consider this: there are nearly 41,000 students studying at Nova Scotia's ten universities — more than the population of Bedford. Each of them rents housing, buys groceries, books appointments, and eats in restaurants. Their daily spending generates steady, predictable revenue for local businesses — your businesses — and keeps thousands of Nova Scotians employed.
- But the benefits go well beyond the spending power of students. **Universities are major employers**, and the sector as a whole represents a significant portion of the province's institutional employment with well-paying jobs, while also supporting jobs in many industries that may not be top of mind, like construction, retail, and restaurants.
- And it's important to recognize that the post-secondary sector is **THE talent pipeline for businesses**, developing the skilled workforce that businesses need — from nurses and teachers, to engineers, accountants and entrepreneurs.
- 90% of our graduates gain employment post-graduation.

- Importantly, university faculty members and students are on the forefront of driving innovation and commercialization. Universities attract nearly \$300 million a year in research funding to this province. Research launches new products, technologies and start-ups. Universities are incubators for entrepreneurship and innovation.
- And of course, we can't forget the **impact** that Nova Scotia's higher education sector has on **population growth** – the sector's ability to attract students who stay and build their careers and live right here in Nova Scotia, supporting our economic bottom line and helping to offset population decline.

The reality is that graduates choose to stay and work in Nova Scotia. In fact, **71% of INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CHOOSE TO STAY AND START CAREERS RIGHT HERE IN THEIR NEW HOME.**

- University activities annually generate more than \$200 million in provincial tax revenues,

Of course, we can't talk about the strength of our sector without acknowledging the headwinds we've faced.

- In recent years, Nova Scotia's competitive advantage has been tested — most notably by the federal cap on international students introduced in 2023. Since that policy came into effect, international enrolment has declined by nearly 38 percent. That represents more than a loss in tuition revenue; it's a direct hit to one of our province's most effective strategies for economic and population growth.
- But while the short-term impact has been significant, this moment has also clarified something important: our universities are essential infrastructure for growth — and that makes them worth protecting and reinvesting in.

- But I challenge you to think beyond the **direct revenue and economic benefits** that Nova Scotia's post-secondary education sector provides.
- Universities are also part of the knowledge economy, an entire other currency that delivers an improved STANDARD AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL NOVA SCOTIANS based on knowledge and information – taking the research and discoveries that happen on our campuses, and translating that learning to everyday life, ultimately improving our quality of life.
- Universities are tackling the priorities of our Province.
- And perhaps there is no better example, than HEALTH CARE.
- Universities are critical partners in Nova Scotia's Action for Health, determined to make a difference in the standard of care we receive and our quality of life. Over the last few years alone, working collaboratively with our provincial partners, we have:
  - created a new medical school at Cape Breton University – creating more family doctors
  - added new seats for nursing students at Acadia University
  - Designed a program for healthcare data analytics at Saint Mary's University and,
  - Created a new, youth-focused, Doctor of Psychology program and mental health clinic at MSVU
  - Established a new Nova Scotia Lung Wellness Clinic at Dalhousie University
  - Invested in a centre for health innovation at my university, StFX, that will create solutions to improve Nova Scotia healthcare, particularly for rural Nova Scotians.

- But what you may not realize, **is that the efforts at our institutions also include research around the determinants of health.** Addressing questions such as how can we adjust our habits in order to stay healthy, longer?
- This work helps to keep Nova Scotians out of the strained health system. Upstream health problem solving works for everyone.
- And this brings me to an issue that we know is very important to any business audience.
- To continue the example: A HEALTH CARE ACTION AGENDA for the good of the population... costs money. And to afford it, we must grow the economy – which is further prioritized by the province’s aspirations to double Nova Scotia’s population by 2060.
- And this is where... I submit... we have a ‘come full circle’ moment.
- Again, it is imperative that we understand the important strategic role universities have in our growth.
- This time let’s zero in on the province’s goal to double the population: Universities ARE A COST-EFFICIENT immigration strategy.
- Not only are universities attracting people to work and live within our communities, we are also attracting young, higher-income, and better-educated people that Nova Scotia needs as its foundation for growth.
- And we all win in this scenario by the very nature of who universities attract
  - achieving growth while reducing the strain on healthcare associated with a younger population, while still providing Nova Scotia with fresh, entrepreneurial energy and skilled workforce to succeed in tomorrow’s economy.

- Investing in universities is good strategy. The university sector is an economic flywheel — once you invest in it, the momentum builds and keeps driving growth on its own power.
- As we continue to attract more, young taxpayers to our communities, we are mindful of issues such as housing. But this is an opportunity for us and our economy.
- By working with governments we will address these issues — build new residences and so ensure that pressure is relieved on community housing.
- We will continue to build momentum.
- The economic answer is not to pare back, but to continue to invest forward.
- Tonight you will hear just a few specific examples of how our institutions, my colleagues, are addressing the needs of Halifax and beyond.
- Our message tonight is this: when universities thrive, Nova Scotia thrives.
- Universities attract talent, drive innovation, and create the workforce that powers our economy. If I can leave you with just one thought, perhaps it's this: our universities are essential infrastructure for growth — and that makes them worth protecting and reinvesting in.
- When we invest in universities, we're not funding an expense — we're fueling an economic flywheel that keeps Nova Scotia and its economy moving forward.
- As you hear from my colleagues tonight, I invite you to think about this: what happens when we treat our universities as essential infrastructure for

growth — just as vital as roads, ports, or power grids? Because that's exactly what they are.

- Together we need to keep this flywheel turning.
  
- Thank you.
  
- I now invite Patrick back to the stage to introduce OUR NEWEST COLLEAGUE, MICHAEL KHAN, PRESIDENT OF SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY.