

The Association of Atlantic Universities Supports the Atlantic Economic Panel Report's Call for Talent

HALIFAX, NS – [September 28, 2026] – The Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) applauds the Atlantic Economic Panel Report and its highlighting of the role the region's sixteen universities can take in supporting a business-led vision of Atlantic Canada's economic transformation. Atlantic universities have a well- established and significant role in fostering entrepreneurship and innovation and helping grow businesses by creating a talent pipeline and supporting commercialization and technology adoption. As anticipated, the Report confirms the universities' role in building Atlantic Canada's prosperity, identifying several areas where universities have an important role to play, noting: "Atlantic Canada will build the most educated, productive and opportunity-ready workforce in Canada, recognizing that people are the region's greatest competitive advantage."

Dr. Andy Hakin, Chair of the AAU, said that the report is a welcome roadmap to prosperity and Atlantic Canada's university sector is an essential part of the region's ability to achieve success. "When we speak about the generational opportunities that are in play right now, an educated workforce is the essential piece of the puzzle." Dr. Hakin notes that "the Atlantic Universities have partnered with the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce to launch a Prosperity Charter. The Charter is a commitment between universities and the Atlantic business community to work closely together to better ensure there is a match between talent and opportunity. Says Hakin: "Our universities graduate 20,000 students each year. This presents a massive opportunity for our business community and our region. We are committed to ensuring our graduates find opportunities to live, work, and contribute to the well-being of Atlantic Canada."

The Panel identified workforce pressures as a major risk, "impairing the region's ability to sustain growth, modernize industries, and deliver major projects on time and at scale." The report estimates "441,000 hires will be needed over the next decade to replace retiring workers and fill new positions." Dr. Hakin said that the Atlantic universities welcomed the Panel's recommendation to grow the region's talent pipeline through the retention of graduates and attraction of international student talent. "We know that international students want to stay in Atlantic Canada when they graduate. If they have a Canadian degree, are fluent in French and/or English, have settled into our communities and feel welcome, and have local work experience, what more could we want? International students add tremendous value to our classroom and university experience, many are entrepreneurial, and want to work in the region after graduation. For a region that does not have strong natural population growth, international students can be a solid pathway to population growth."

Dr. Hakin said that he was pleased to see the call for a “One Atlantic Canada Workforce Strategy” and that the Association of Atlantic Universities is ready to contribute. “Atlantic universities contribute to growth in many ways. Yes – we are among the largest employers, we are community hubs, and we have a role in supporting the demand for talent. We are also a significant research and development engine for the region. We have a history of working in partnership with business, industry, and governments. It is time to focus and amplify our collective efforts.”

For the Association of Atlantic Universities, how the Atlantic Economic Panel Report’s recommendations will be implemented is the critical next step. “The universities need to be at the table when practical steps towards prosperity and building on opportunities are discussed” said Dr. Hakin. “Through our collaborative work around the Association of Atlantic Universities table, I can readily say, “We are ready, able, and willing” to lean into the imperatives described in the AEP Report.”

-30-

The Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) represents the interests of universities across the region, ensuring public visibility for the important role they play in preparing future leaders of our communities, in path-breaking research and innovation, and in contributing to the economic, cultural and social prosperity of life in Atlantic Canada.

Media Contact:

Ava Czapalay, CEO
Association of Atlantic Universities
aczapalay@atlanticuniversities.ca | 902-425-4230