

# **BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE:**

## **Public Opinion on Post-Secondary Education in Nova Scotia**

JANUARY 2014 | NOVA SCOTIA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION COALITION



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*Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition*

# Post-Secondary Education in Nova Scotia: What the Public Thinks

The Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition is comprised of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT), the Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia (CFS-NS), and the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU). The Coalition brings together faculty, students, and staff concerned with the current state of post-secondary education in the province.

In February 2005, the Coalition commissioned its first poll of 800 Nova Scotians to find out their views on post-secondary education, accessibility, and student debt. The poll's key findings included significant support for lower tuition fees, recognition that student debt loads were becoming

unmanageable, and a belief that government funding for post-secondary education should be increased.

Since then we have commissioned further public opinion polls in 2007, 2010, and 2013. Each poll has showed sustained or growing support for increased funding to our universities and colleges, replacing provincial student loans with non-repayable student grants, and reducing tuition fees.

This document includes results from a commissioned poll of 800 Nova Scotians conducted by Opinion Search Research from December 9th to 16th. It shows that the public continues to have serious concerns regarding the affordability and accessibility of post-secondary education, as well as declin-

ing government funding. It also shows strong public support for measures to improve the accountability of universities for the way they spend the funding they receive.

This brief provides an excellent opportunity for the incoming Liberal government to improve post-secondary education in Nova Scotia. It lays out a clear mandate to reverse the damage done by government underfunding to our universities, and to finally deliver accessible higher education to students and their families.



# Polling Results at a Glance

- **More Nova Scotians** are concerned about the affordability of post-secondary education than taxation or crime.
- **87%** of Nova Scotians think post-secondary education should be a high priority
- **85%** of Nova Scotians think tuition fees should be reduced
- **1 in 3** Nova Scotians surveyed said that in the past year they or someone in their family did not attend college or university because it would mean taking on too much debt.



- **58%** of respondents are very concerned and **28%** are somewhat concerned that students will have to leave the province for higher wages because of large debt loads.
- **60%** of Nova Scotians think that government funding should make up a higher portion of university funding
- **60%** would pay higher taxes to make PSE more affordable.
- **91%** of Nova Scotians think that support services are important, while 65% think there need to be more of such services.
- 800 Nova Scotians surveyed over 7 days in December.
- Margin of error: +/- 3%, 19 times out of 20.



# Government Priorities

More Nova Scotians are concerned about the affordability of post-secondary education than taxation and crime.

**On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is “not at all concerned,” and 10 is “very concerned,” how concerned are you with each of the following issues:**

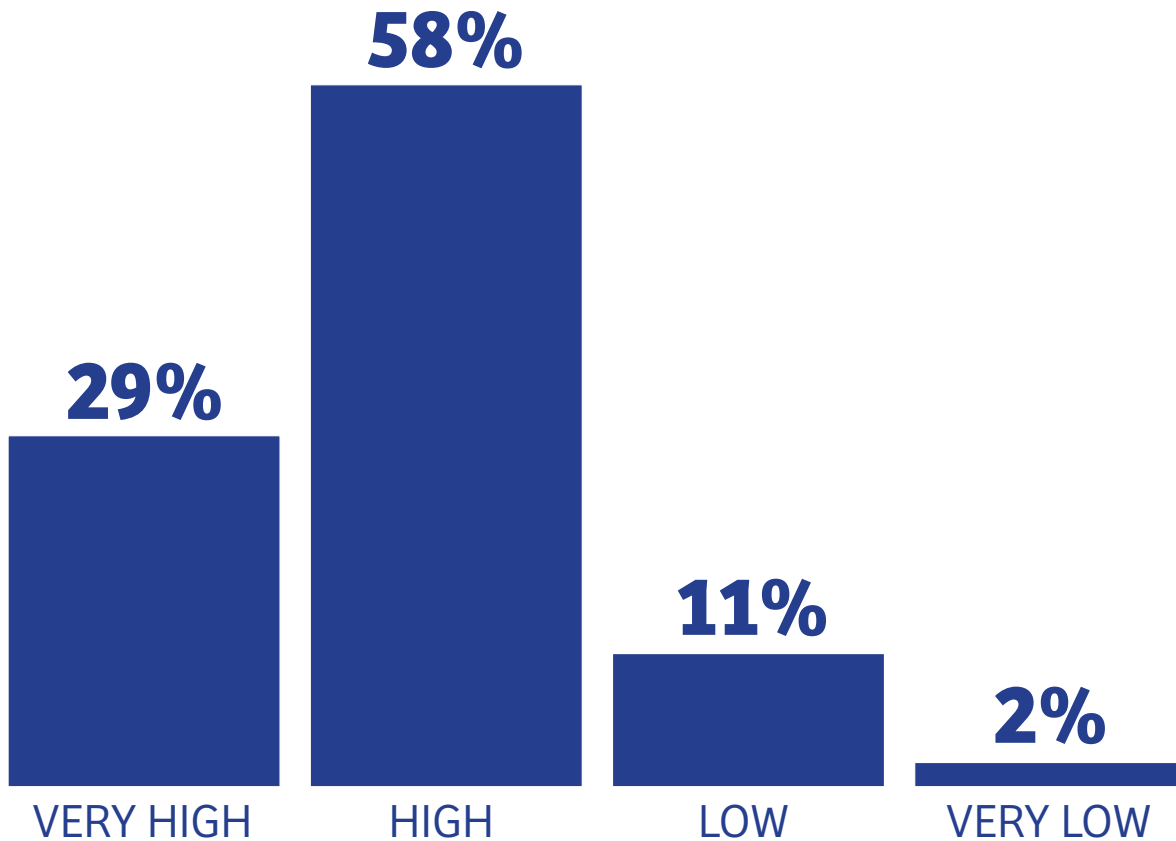
(% of Nova Scotians surveyed who answered 8 or higher)

<b>Unemployment and the job market:</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>The affordability of post-secondary education:</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>The quality of health care in Nova Scotia:</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>The level of taxation in Nova Scotia:</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>The quality of primary and secondary education:</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>The level of crime in your community:</b>	<b>39%</b>





How high a priority should post-secondary education be for the government of Nova Scotia?



**87% of Nova Scotians think post-secondary education should be a high priority.**

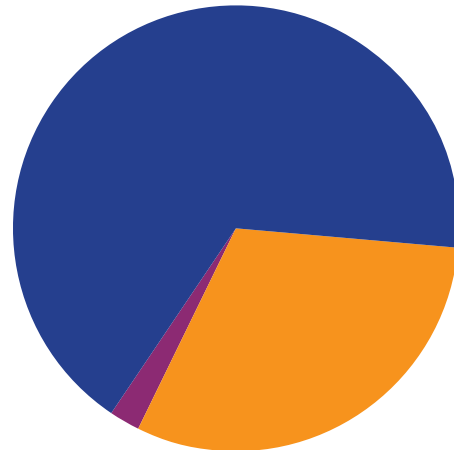


# Access to PSE

Do you believe that currently, in Nova Scotia, most people who are qualified to go to university and college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?

MANY PEOPLE DON'T HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY

**67%**



BLANK  
**02%**

MOST PEOPLE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY  
**31%**

Which of the four issues best reflects the reason you are concerned?

University and College Education is Too Expensive for Many People	<b>84%</b>
Family Responsibilities Make it Difficult to Get a Post-Secondary Education	<b>10%</b>
There are Not Enough Programs Available	<b>03%</b>
There are Not Enough University or College Spaces for all Qualified Applicants	<b>02%</b>

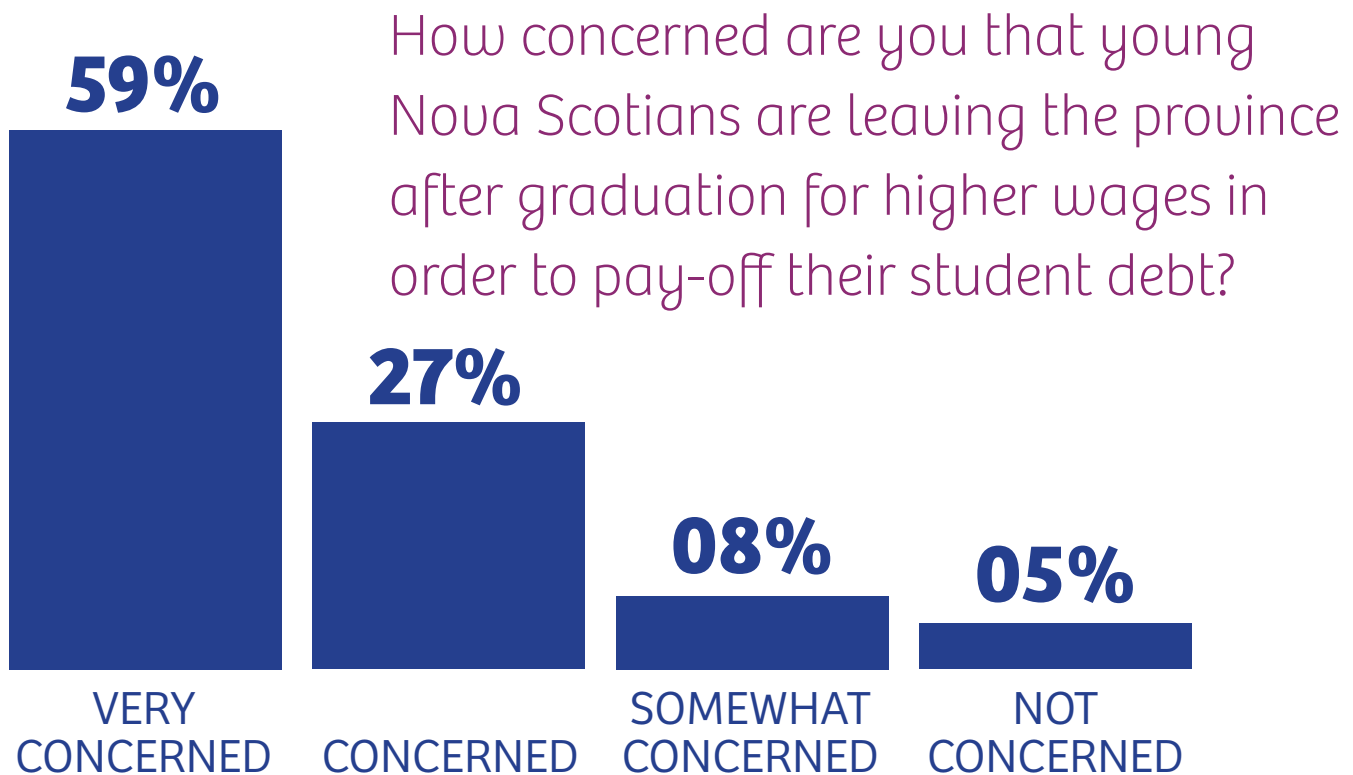




# Student Debt

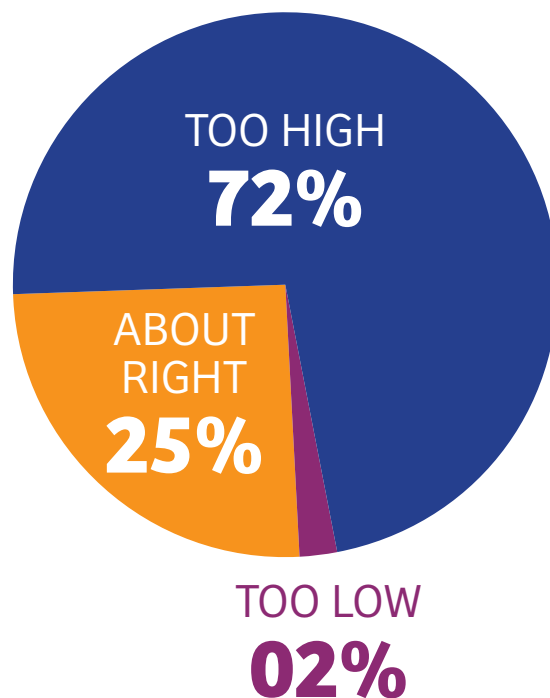
**29%** of Nova Scotians surveyed said that in the past year, they or someone in their family **did not attend college or university** because it would mean taking on **too much debt**.

Only **7%** of Nova Scotians believe that **expanding the provincial student loan program** is an **effective** method for improving access.



# Tuition Fees

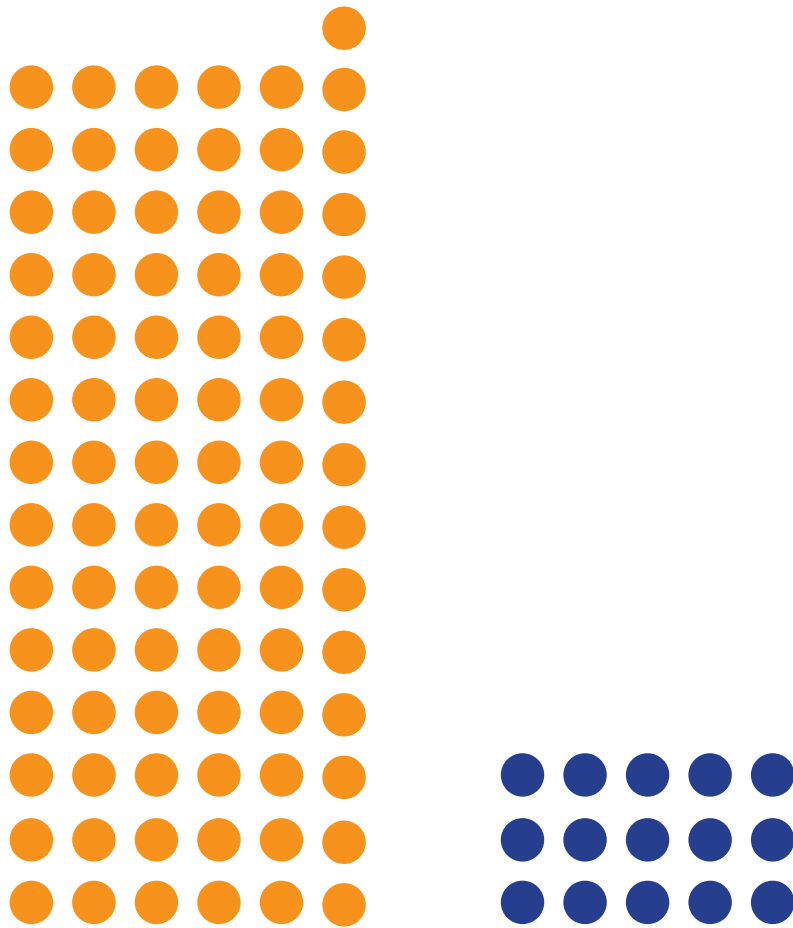
Undergraduate students in Nova Scotia pay an average of \$6185 per year in tuition fees. In your opinion is the level of fees too high, too low, or about right?



**Nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Nova Scotians think tuition fees are too high.**



Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose reducing tuition fees for students in Nova Scotia?

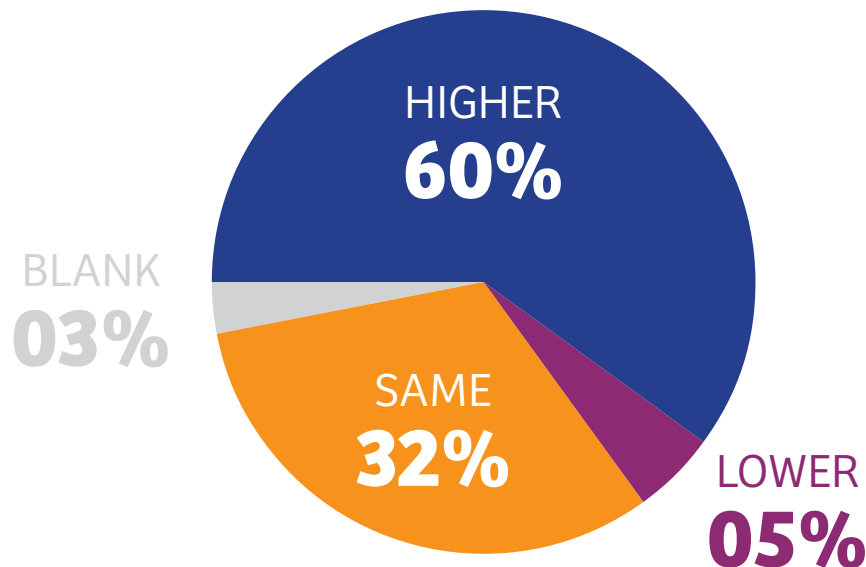


**85% of Nova Scotians support reducing tuition fees.**



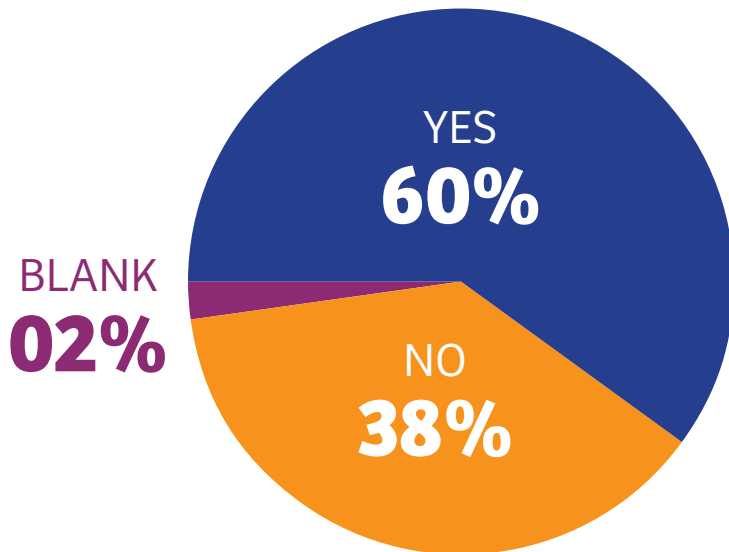
# Funding

University revenue comes from several sources, including government grants, tuition fees from students, and donations from private individuals and corporations. In 1978, government funding made up 80 per cent of revenue for universities in Nova Scotia. In 2008, government funding accounted for 46 per cent. Do you think that government funding should make up a higher proportion, or should stay the same?



The majority of Nova Scotians would pay higher taxes to improve the affordability of colleges and universities.

Would you be willing to pay a small increase in your income taxes if you knew that it would go to improving the affordability of the university or college in your area?

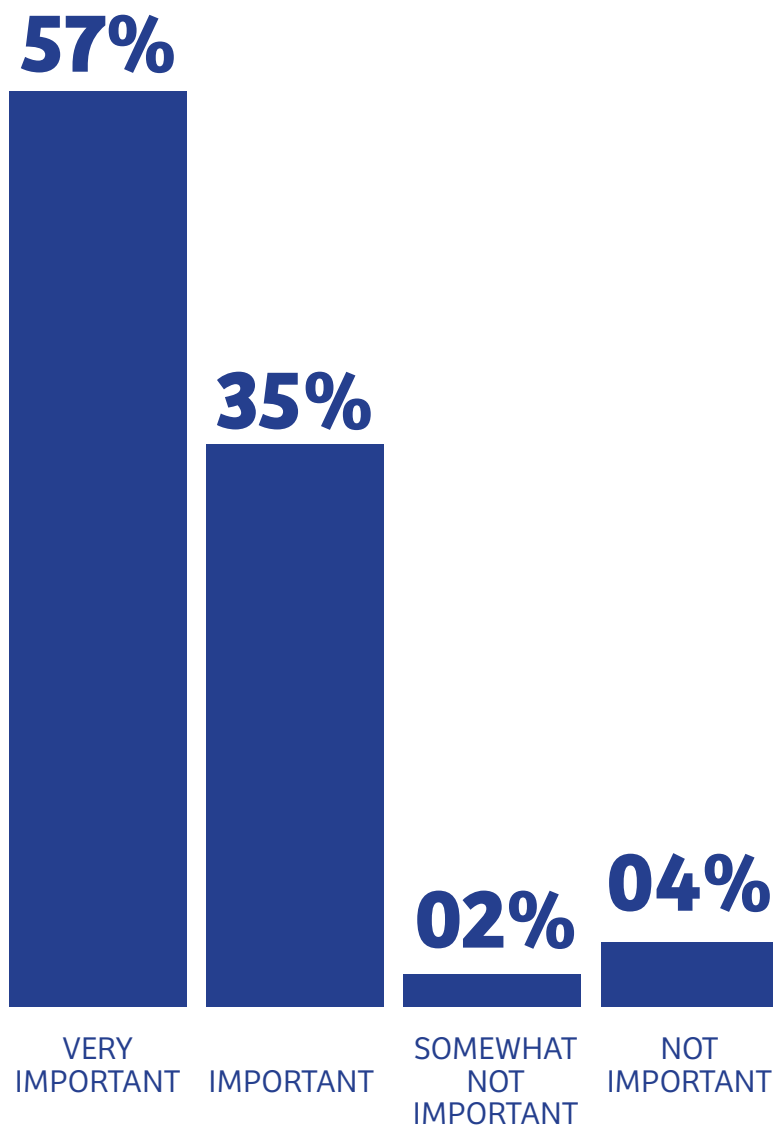


**65% of respondents with incomes below \$70,000 would pay higher taxes to make PSE more affordable.**



# Student Services

How important do you think that support services, including academic advising, services for students with disabilities, library services, and other forms of support are in in post-secondary education?

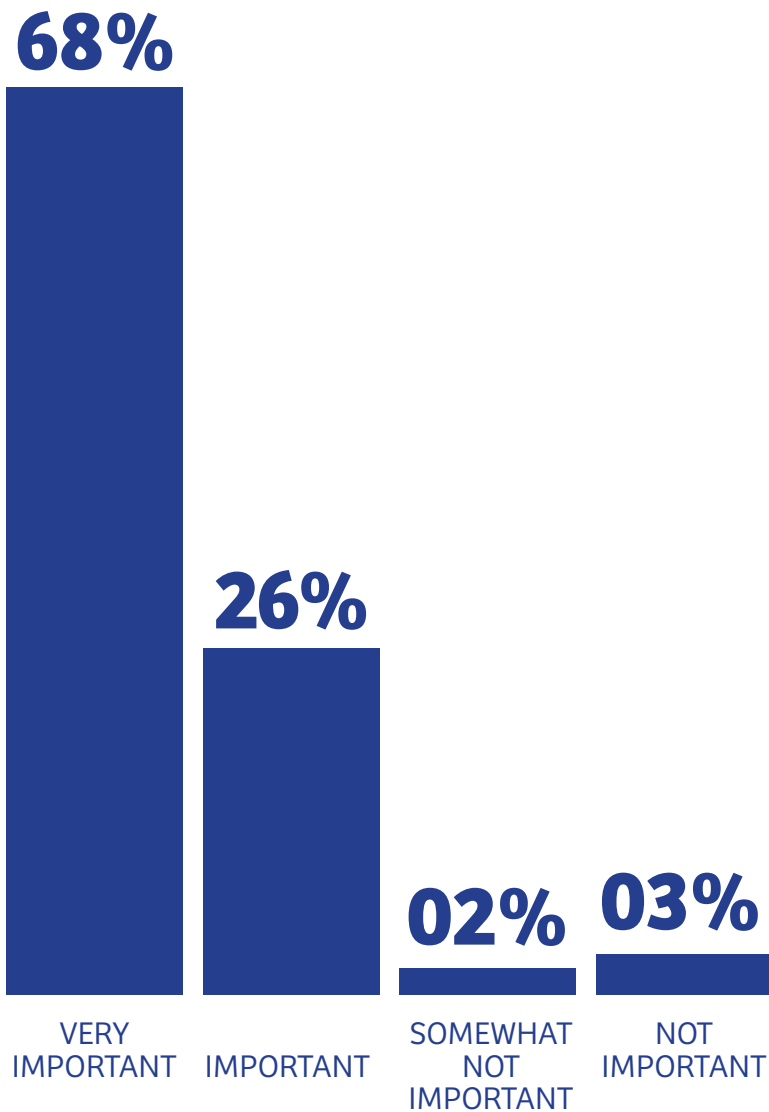


Do you think there should be more or less of those services?

**61% More Services**  
**28% Same**  
**04% Less**



# How important do you think that health and mental health services are in in post-secondary education?



Do you think there should be more or less of those services?

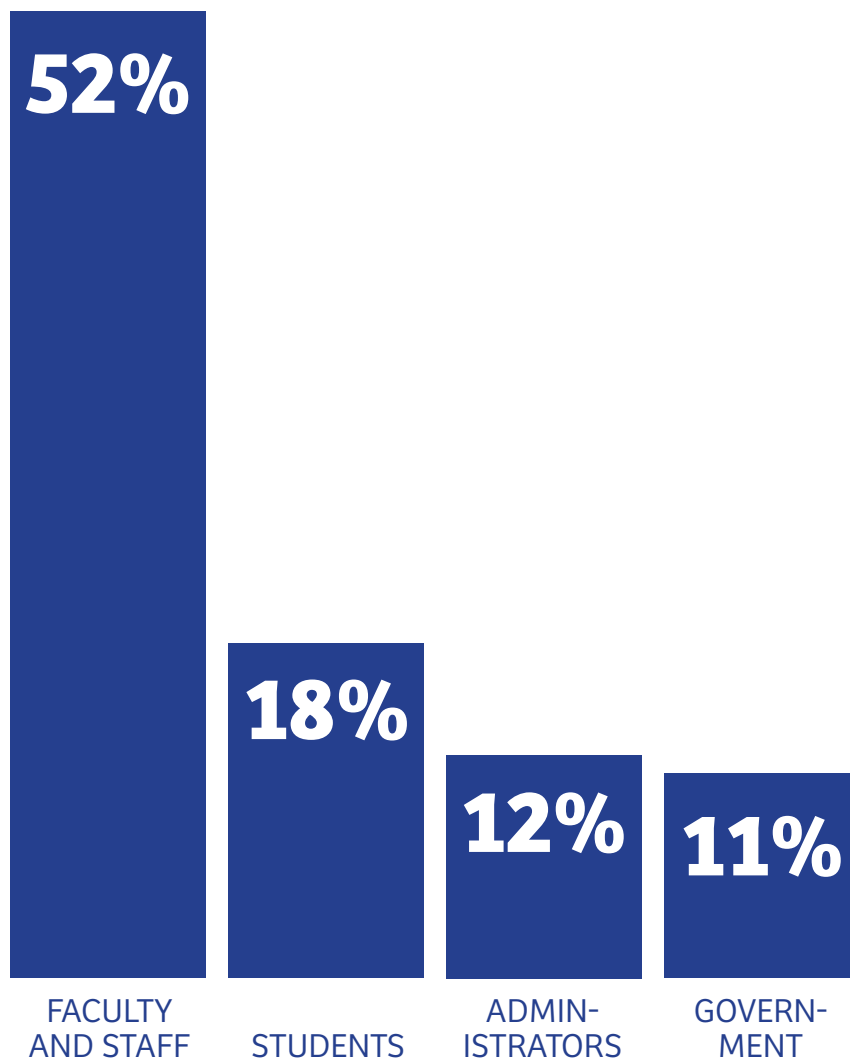
**72% More Services**  
**19% Same**  
**03% Less**



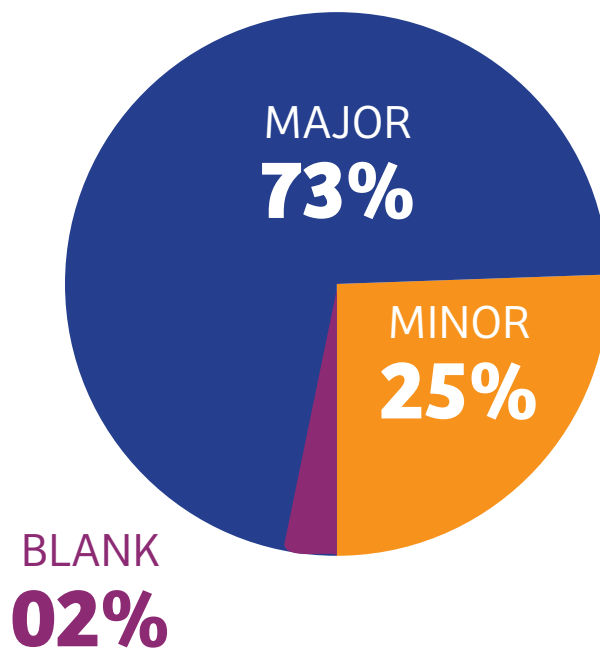


# Governance and Accountability

Who do you trust most to develop standards in post-secondary education?



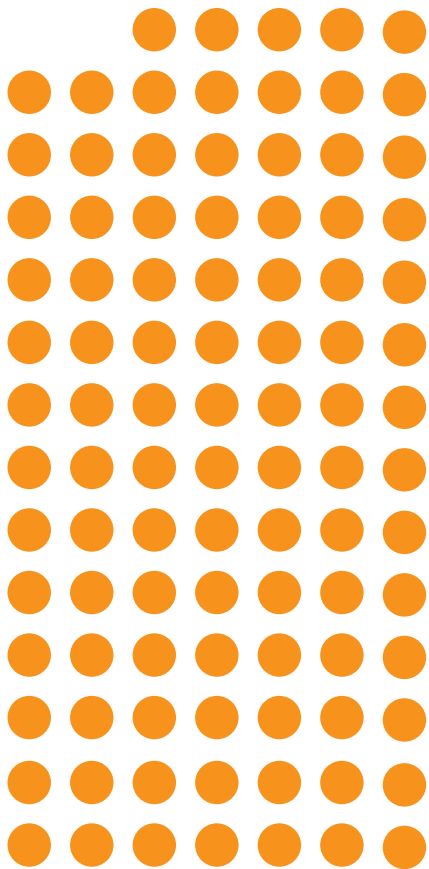
What role should students, faculty, and staff play in decision-making at post-secondary institutions?



**Nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Nova Scotians support a major role for students, faculty and staff at Nova Scotia's universities.**



Should universities adhere to standard accounting procedures?



**Nova Scotians overwhelmingly believe that increased accountability is needed from our universities. Only 1% believe that these institutions should be exempt from standard accounting procedures.**







**NSGEU**

