

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Subject: Bill 12 – Impact on Nova Scotia’s Post-Secondary Education Sector

Overview:

Nova Scotia faculty members are raising serious concerns over the introduction of Bill 12. If passed, this legislation would grant the Minister of Advanced Education unprecedented authority over university governance, research priorities, and institutional decision-making. The bill is positioned as a measure for sustainability and accountability but has far-reaching consequences that could undermine academic independence and institutional autonomy.

Key Amendments:

1. Research Nova Scotia Corporation Act - Restrictions on Research Priorities

- Research Nova Scotia Corporation, an independent organization that funds and coordinates research in Nova Scotia, will be required to align its funding decisions with government-mandated priorities.
- The bill grants the Minister unilateral power to dictate key research priorities for the province.
- This shift threatens to eliminate funding for essential research areas that may not align with government interests, such as capacity building, forest growth, disability management, agri-genomics, and zoonotic infections.
- Bill 12 fails to account for the mission of universities – to provide students with skills in critical thinking, knowledge and analytical skills that are essential to fostering a healthy and sustainable democratic society.

2. Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act - Ministerial Authority Over University Funding Decisions

- Bill 12 introduces provisions that give the Minister unchecked authority to withhold critical operating funding if a university does not satisfactorily connect the social and economic priorities of the government and the university’s funding decisions
- The bill gives the minister the power to require a revitalization plan from the university. When these plans are required, and what is required by them is entirely at the discretion of the minister.

- Currently, the decision to enter revitalization is voluntary and determined by the university.
- This change threatens the autonomy of institutions and the right to collective bargaining for university employees, including faculty, administrative staff, and support workers.

3. Community Colleges Act

- Bill 12 will permit the Minister to authorize the Nova Scotia Community College system to begin granting undergraduate degrees.
- The bill will give the Minister power to approve the NSCC tuition and fee policy.
- Under Bill 12, the Minister will have the power to provide binding directions to the Board of the NSCC.

4. Private Career Colleges Act

- Colleges owned or operated by the provincial or federal governments will not be governed by the Private Career Colleges Act.
- The Minister will have the authority to appoint one or more employees of the Department of Advanced Education as “Internal Reviewer”, replacing the current role of “Senior Executive Director”.

New Legislation:

5. University Board Governance Act - Government Control Over University Boards

- Bill 12 recommends the creation of the University Board Governance Act.
- This Act would enable the Minister to standardize the composition of university Boards of Governors, limiting them to a maximum of 30 members.
- The Minister will have the authority to appoint up to half of the Board members, effectively allowing the government to influence university governance in a manner that may not reflect the best interests of institutions.
- Other mandatory appointments include the president of the university, at least one faculty member, at least one student body member, and other members as determined by regulations.
- The proposed Act implements term limits and training schedules for new Board members.



- The proposed Act fails to consider the role of Senates in the collegial governance of post-secondary institutions.

6. Limitations on Legislative Debate and Public Input

- Prior to introducing Bill 12, the Minister—who is also the House Leader—introduced a resolution to curtail debate and public consultation on legislation.
- The government now has the ability to limit debate length, invoke closure, and has replaced the Law Amendments Committee with the Public Bills Committee (effective February 26, 2025), significantly reducing public input opportunities.

Call to Action:

The Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers urges all stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, staff, and the public, to actively oppose Bill 12. Write or call the Minister of Advanced Education, the Premier, and Members of the Legislative Assembly, to ensure a transparent and fair legislative process that protects the independence of Nova Scotia’s post-secondary education sector.

Contact Information:

For further details or to get involved, please reach out to the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT) at ifo@ansut.ca