



# **Accountability Report**

2023–24

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Advanced Education



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ISBN 978-1-77448-663-4

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## Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of the Department of Advanced Education for the year ended March 31, 2024, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of the Department of Advanced Education outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments, and opinions by Department management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of Department management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Department of Advanced Education's 2023-24 Business Plan.

*Original signed by:*

*Original signed by:*

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The Honourable Brian Wong  
Minister

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Ryan Grant  
Deputy Minister

## Measuring Performance

The Department of Advanced Education envisions a high-quality, collaborative, innovative, and inclusive post-secondary education system that is focused on helping all learners thrive; and where the Department is a key partner and contributor. Our strategic priorities that shaped initiatives and programs to support our mandate in 2023-24 are the following:

- Supporting a student-centered post-secondary education system where all learners thrive.
- Driving a high-quality, relevant, accountable, and sustainable post-secondary education system.
- Promoting Nova Scotia as a centre for research and innovation excellence.

Some highlights of the initiatives and programs are outlined in the following section.

### Supporting a student-centred post-secondary education system where all learners thrive

- Advanced Education partnered with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to develop a new funding stream under the Affordable Housing Development Program to support the development of new student housing which will launch in 2024-25.
- In 2023-24, the Department committed to the creation of a total of 270 additional new student beds at four Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) campuses in Springhill, Kentville, Bridgewater and Halifax. Combined with the three other NSCC student housing projects underway or complete, these new builds bring the total number of new NSCC student housing spaces since 2021 to 620.
- The Province required that all universities in the Halifax Regional and Cape Breton Regional Municipalities demonstrate progress by October 2025 towards having enough student housing beds to accommodate at least 15% of their full-time student enrollment, through the new one-year bilateral funding agreements between the Province and the universities.
- In 2023-24, the Province supported Nova Scotian students with the cost of post-secondary education by providing a one-time grant of \$1,350 to almost 12,000 students and invested to reduce the cost of textbooks through Open Educational Resources (OER).
- The Post-Secondary Advisory Council for African Nova Scotian and Black Students was created to develop a framework for post-secondary recruitment and retention that supports racial equity and equal opportunities for African Nova Scotian and Black students. Through principles defined in the Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education, the committee to work to complete a framework for post-secondary recruitment and retention. In 2023-24, the Committee completed an inventory of current university and NSCC programs, initiatives and activities related to advancing educational equity and inclusion for African Nova Scotian and Black students.
- Advanced Education supports access, retention and recruitment of Mi'kmaq and Indigenous post-secondary students. The Mi'kmaq and Indigenous Post-Secondary Recruitment and Retention Committee is tasked with addressing issues of equal opportunity, advancing strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of Mi'kmaq and Indigenous learners in post-secondary education, and responding to the recommendations in the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada regarding post-secondary education. Meetings are continuously held with the presidents and staff of universities and NSCC to enhance support and access for Mi'kmaq and Indigenous students to post-secondary institutions and each institution has developed and are implementing Mi'kmaq and Indigenous post-secondary recruitment and retention strategies.

- The Department continues to work on requiring sexual violence prevention policies at Private Career Colleges. In 2023-2024, the Department worked on amendments to the Private Career Colleges Operational Regulations. These amendments will require all Private Career Colleges to develop their own policies with stipulations for specific provisions, processes, and safeguards responsive to best practices, including a victim-centred approach and one that is broadly trauma-informed.

### **Driving a high-quality, relevant, accountable, and sustainable post-secondary education system**

- Throughout the 2023-24 fiscal year, the Department finalized new one-year bilateral agreements for 2024-25 with the province's 10 universities. The agreements are the cornerstone of government's approach to sector funding and oversight, which focuses on enhanced university reporting requirements as well as performance targets around student housing, health education and provincial strategic priorities. The one-year agreements and required planning and data sharing from universities will allow evidence-informed analysis to inform the development of future agreements between government and the universities which will be implemented for April 1, 2025.
- Throughout 2023-24, Advanced Education participated on the Microcredentials Working Group, which is lead by Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration. The Working Group created a Microcredentials Community of Practice in September 2023 to build capacity and connections in the provincial microcredential ecosystem and includes representatives from universities and the NSCC. The community consists of partners who work together to further tool development, learning, sharing of best practices, and quality assurance. Advanced Education continues to collaborate with the community to foster sustainable learning systems and multiple learning pathways in the province.
- In collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department invested in 75 additional seats and two accelerated Bachelor of Education programs at Cape Breton University which will help get more teachers into Nova Scotia's classrooms faster. The eight-month online pilot allows students to complete the program from anywhere in the province, and the 12-month in-person program replaces the university's 15-month program.
- The Department worked collaboratively with the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment and Dalhousie University to increase the number of first-year seats starting in September 2023 in Diagnostic Medical Ultrasound, Radiological Technology and Respiratory Therapy to support current and future health workforce needs. The graduating class from these three programs will increase to 66 by 2026-27.
- In September 2023, Advanced Education, in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness and the Michener Institute of Education at University Health Network, launched an online flexible

program option for Nova Scotians interested in becoming a Medical Laboratory Technologist (MLT). Nova Scotia committed \$6 million over three years to support a class of up to 40 students, and students are required to sign a return of service agreement with Nova Scotia Health. Michener Institute of Education also offers a bridging program in partnership with the Province for internationally trained MLTs looking to work in the province and for domestically trained MLTs who require additional education supports before writing the licensure exam. There have been three cohorts of students since the program began in January 2023.

- In 2023-24, the Department worked with the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment to launch a new Physician Assistant Program at Dalhousie University, which began in January 2024. The two-year master's program is open to 24 students with priority to Nova Scotian applicants who meet the program's eligibility criteria. The Province invested \$5.6 million to develop the program and is providing \$1.5 million in annual funding. This investment supports Action for Health, the Province's plan to improve and transform healthcare in Nova Scotia, by investing in education and training opportunities to ensure the health needs of communities are met.
- Government invested in a new Master of Nursing, Mental Health and Addictions program in 2023-24 at Dalhousie University, so registered nurses wanting to gain advanced skills and education in mental health and addictions care can do so in Nova Scotia. Dalhousie's School of Nursing will be the first in Atlantic Canada to offer this program, and it will be launched in the fall of 2024 with space for 22 students. Graduates of the program will have career opportunities in advanced nursing practice, leadership, administration, management and education.
- Advanced Education and Health and Wellness announced a new nursing program at Acadia University as a satellite site of Cape Breton University's Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. The program started in September 2023 and will eventually transition to a standalone program at Acadia. The Province is also investing in a new state-of-the-art nurse training facility at Acadia University that is expected to be open for the 2026-27 academic year and will support Acadia to obtain accreditation for a standalone nursing program.
- Advanced Education and Health and Wellness also announced a one-time expansion in NSCC's practical nursing program with 30 additional seats at each of the following six campuses: Annapolis Valley, Lunenburg, Strait Area, Truro beginning in September 2023, and Burr Ridge and Kingstec beginning in January 2024, for a total of 180 new seats.
- Advanced Education, Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Health created an implementation plan to enhance the nursing clinical placement process based on findings from the Nursing Clinical Placement Review conducted in 2022-23. Clinical placements are a key part of post-secondary training for nurses and supports the growth of the province's healthcare workforce. To inform the implementation, a consultant was hired to complete an inventory of nursing clinical placements in the province and identify gaps and areas for improvement, in order to strengthen efficiencies, access, and availability of clinical placements in the province. The findings from this work will be incorporated into the nursing clinical placement implementation plan.
- Advanced Education continued engagement with post-secondary institutions to offer a progressive Continuing Care Assistants (CCAs) program. Under the progressive model, students can complete their CCA courses by studying three days a week and working two days a week in paid positions

within the continuing care environment. The Department worked with Private Career Colleges to approve amendments to their CCA programs to improve program content and delivery options.

## **Promoting Nova Scotia as a center for research and innovation excellence**

- In 2023-24, the Department supported Research Nova Scotia (Research NS) in the advancement of its mission-oriented approach and provided input into its newly developed Focused Research Initiatives (FRI) program. The FRI program was created to address gaps in Nova Scotia's current research support system by providing substantial, secure, and flexible funding so teams can tackle important Nova Scotia challenges. To do this, Research NS will select two or three research teams to receive between \$5 and \$20 million over 5 to 7 years. The FRI program will support post-secondary education systems in fostering excellence and equity in research and innovation.
- In 2023-24, Advanced Education provided \$3.4 million to support the Mitacs program, which generated 915 internship units for the year. This is part of a four-year \$13-million commitment with Mitacs to create up to 3,244 paid internship opportunities for post-secondary students which provides students with valuable research experience. In total, approximately 4,244 internship units will be provided in Nova Scotia over the four-year period 2022-23 to 2025-26.
- Advanced Education continued to support Nova Scotia Sandboxes in 2023-24 with \$800,000 provided for operational funding. NS Sandboxes are collaborative spaces where students gain skills and experience beyond their curriculum of study, to network, and to receive mentorship and guidance in the early stages of innovation. In 2023-24, Sandboxes hosted more than 690 events with participation from 15,960 students. The Department also worked with five Sandboxes across post-secondary institutions on a Food Sovereignty and Security Prototyping Project, which provided 20 students with paid internship experiences. From the project, five prototypes were developed and tested across the province.
- The Department has continued to advance the development of an Innovation and Research Framework. In 2024-25 a Research and Innovation Committee will be formed to collaborate with universities and other research and innovation stakeholders, to align research and innovation activities with provincial priorities and needs, as well as foster partnership and coordination among government, post-secondary institutions, industry, and other stakeholders.



## Financial Summary and Variance Explanation

Departmental Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)	2023-2024 Estimate	2023-2024 Actual	2023-2024 Variance
<b>Program &amp; Service Area</b>			
Administration	661	1,068	407
Strategy, Policy & Partnership	1,442	2,182	740
Program and Service Delivery	73,059	76,986	3,927
Nova Scotia Community College	170,645	170,621	(24)
Grants to Universities	461,427	492,473	31,046
<b>Total: Departmental Expenses</b>	<b>\$707,234</b>	<b>\$743,330</b>	<b>\$36,096</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenue	(8,800)	(10,384)	(1,584)
Fees and Other Charges	(40)	(39)	1
Ordinary Recoveries	(11,449)	(15,765)	(4,316)
<b>Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries</b>	<b>(\$20,289)</b>	<b>(\$26,188)</b>	<b>(\$5,899)</b>
TCA Purchase Requirements	\$99,472	\$95,567	(\$3,905)
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)	74.0	63.4	(10.6)
Department Funded Staff			

### Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:

Department of Advanced Education expenses were \$36.1 million or 5.1 per cent higher than the estimate primarily due to \$13.9 million to Acadia University for the Nursing Program, \$13.3 million to Cape Breton University largely for the Medical Campus, \$2.4 million for the Nova Scotia Student Loan Program as a result of higher than anticipated utilization, \$2.2 million in fully recoverable additional post-secondary accessibility services and equipment, \$2.0 million to Mount Saint Vincent University for the Child Care Study Centre, \$1.2 million to the Nova Scotia Community College for the Sydney Waterfront Campus, and \$1.1 million to the Michener Institute of Education.

### Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:

Department of Advanced Education revenues, fees and recoveries were \$5.9 million or 29.1% higher than estimate primarily due to \$2.8 million in the NS Student Loan Program due to higher than anticipated interest and recoveries, and \$2.2 million in additional post-secondary accessibility services and equipment, fully recoverable from the Federal Government.

### Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:

Department of Advanced Education FTEs were 10.6 lower than estimated, primarily due to the natural vacancy experience realized throughout the year.

## Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011. The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith. The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations;
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets;
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment; or,
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing.

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Department of Advanced Education:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2023-2024
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing	n/a
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing.	n/a