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Drummond report’s proposal for PSE funding levels fails to adequately address future enrolment trends

HAMILTON – Within the recently released Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, post-secondary education (PSE) was featured heavily, comprising 30 of the 362 recommendations. While many of the recommendations will prove to benefit the overall student experience, there are certain suggestions which warrant considerable criticism.

Student enrolment has seen severe increases over the past few years causing extensive campus capacity issues across the province, and in particular at McMaster University. With enrolment projected to increase by an average of 1.7 per cent annually through 2017-2018, the numbers translate to one of every six adults in Ontario will be enrolled in the province’s post-secondary institutions. The problem, however, is the recommendation to only grow government funding for post-secondary education by 1.5 per cent annually. This funding model clearly does not keep pace with the projected enrolment rate of the province. The end result will be an environment wherein the growing financial burden will be placed on students, in an effort to maintain the escalating pace of the PSE system. At McMaster, with average enrolment inflation rate between five and six per cent, the proposed recommendation is unsustainable and has the potential to result in major service cuts and/or tuition increases.

“Investment in post-secondary education is a high priority for the McMaster Students Union, and with ever increasing gaps in the funding models, the inability to keep pace with the system may lead to quality deficiency issues of larger classes and more sessional professors”, said Alicia Ali, Vice President (Education) of the McMaster Students Union (MSU). “While we are happy to see a strong emphasis on quality indicators and teaching excellence, the innovations happening across Ontario universities, particularly at McMaster, will not be able to continue if funding levels are not tied to enrolment rates.”

It is the hope of the MSU that the Ontario Government will recognize the strains that universities will experience given these projected enrolment rates, and subsequently ensure that contributions are tied to enrolment level increases. Maintaining and enhancing the student experience as has been emphasized by past investments in post-secondary education and should rightly continue into the future.

For more information, please contact:

Alicia Ali
Vice President (Education)
McMaster Students Union
vped@msu.mcmaster.ca
905-525-9140 ext. 24017