



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training Release Study on Post-Secondary Retention and Mobility

(Halifax, NS) – The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) and the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation released a Summary Report titled: *Moving Through, Moving On: Persistence in Post-Secondary Education in Atlantic Canada*. The focus of the study was on mobility and retention trends among Atlantic post-secondary students enrolled in universities and community colleges.

A major finding of the study found that while institutional data suggests that “drop-out” rates could be as high as 33% for both college and university students, many of those students were actually “switchers” to a different program of study and the revised drop-out rate is closer to 18.4 % for university students and 29% for college students. Further statistics can be found in the attached “Key Findings” page.

Ministers and senior officials responsible for post-secondary education are interested in policy issues around these mobility pathways and outcomes could be improved. This type of information could help students make better program choices and could also assist in determining timing for certain interventions. It could also assist students who struggle in their post-secondary studies to overcome those challenges and go on to complete their programs. Understanding these issues and answering such questions could result in more satisfied students, reduced post-secondary costs, and lead to a higher graduation rate.

The Atlantic ministers of education and training initiated a partnership with the Foundation and started this research project in 2005. This study is the first of its kind for the Atlantic region which signifies the importance and value of cross-jurisdictional and provincial/institutional collaboration.

The Main Report was jointly funded by CAMET and the Foundation, and was undertaken by Statistics Canada and researchers Ross Finnie (University of Ottawa) and Theresa Hanqing Qiu (Queen’s University). *Moving Through, Moving On: Persistence in Post-Secondary Education in Atlantic Canada* utilizes four consecutive years of administrative records on Atlantic community college and university students for the 2001-02, 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05 academic years. In addition to the Summary Report released by CAMET, the Main Report is being released today by Statistics Canada and the Foundation. The Summary Report can be found at www.camet-camef.ca and the Full Report at www.statcan.gc.ca.

CAMET is an agency of the Council of Atlantic Premiers (CAP), and its purpose is to enhance cooperation in public (Entry–12) and post-secondary education in Atlantic Canada by working together to improve learning, optimize efficiencies, and bring added value to provincial initiatives.

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For more information, please contact:

Marie-Josée Groulx

NB Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training &
Labour
506-453-8617

Jacquelyn Howard

NL Department of Education
709-729-0048

Charles Ayles

CAMET
902-424-8577

Dan Harrison

NS Department of Education
902-424-3150

Kim Devine

PEI Department of Innovation and
Advanced Learning
902-620-3774

Key Findings

This Summary Report focuses on the longitudinal profiles of approximately 18,000 university undergraduate and 8,600 community college students aged 17-20 who commenced a PSE program at a publicly funded Atlantic institution in the fall of either 2002 or 2003. Among university students, we find that nearly half (44%) of the 32.9% who previously would have been thought to have “dropped out” of PSE (because they were no longer enrolled at their first institution) actually either took a pause in their studies and subsequently returned, or switched to another institution but remained within the PSE system as a whole (the final attrition rate is just 18.4%). College students demonstrate less switching and pausing, but show a higher overall attrition rate (29.2%). PSE includes both universities and colleges.

More specifically, two years after initially enrolling in an Atlantic university, among Bachelor’s students aged 17-20:

- 66.4% were “Continuers” in their original program/institution;
- 8.4% were “Continuers” within the PSE system but had “Switched” (directly) to a different PSE program/ institution;
- 2.9% had left PSE but “Returned” to their original institution within one year;
- 3.2% had left PSE but “Returned” to a different institution within one year; and
- 18.4% is the adjusted two-year attrition rate after netting out “Switchers” and taking account of “Returners.” This is only 56% the level of the attrition rate when viewed from the perspective of individual institutions, our previous source of data on “drop-outs.”

Among community college students aged 17-20, the following pathways have been identified (again after two years):

- 52.2% “Graduated” (normal for these generally shorter programs);
- 13.1% “Continued” in their original program/institution;
- 1.7% “Continued” within the PSE system but “Switched” to a different PSE program/ institution;
- 2.8% left PSE but “Returned” to their original institution within one year;
- 1% left PSE but “Returned” to a different institution within one year; and
- 29.2% is the adjusted two-year attrition rate.

In both cases, even the adjusted two-year attrition rates do not account for the following:

- students who return to PSE after more than one year;
- students who switch or return to a PSE institution outside of Atlantic Canada;
- students who return to other types of non-degree/diploma PSE that are not the focus of this analysis; and
- students who discontinue their PSE at a publicly funded institution but continue in a private training institution that does not report to PSIS.

Results for students in master’s, Ph.D., and professional programs are also shown, as are other more detailed dynamics.

It is also worth noting that approximately one-third of recent post-secondary graduates (36.5% of Bachelor’s and 30.3% of college graduates) enrolled in another PSE program within three years of completing their first degree.

While the ability to continue in and complete a post-secondary program remains a challenge for some students, with associated policy implications, this analysis shows that many students pursue diverse paths as they work towards earning a PSE credential.