

STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE APPEALS BOARD

ACTIVITY PLAN

APRIL 1, 2014 TO MARCH 31, 2017



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board

Chairperson's Message

Honourable Kevin O'Brien
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills
West Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Minister:

I am pleased to submit a three-year Activity Plan for the Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board (The Board). Pursuant to the *Transparency and Accountability Act*, the Board is defined as a category 3 entity and therefore must prepare an activity plan. This plan covers the period April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2017. The Board recognizes the vision and mission of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills and is committed to its supporting role of ensuring that post-secondary students have reasonable access to an appeal process for student financial assistance. The Board has reviewed all strategic directions from the Minister of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills and has prepared this plan in accordance with the applicable component.

My signature below is on behalf of the Board and indicative of the Board's accountability for the development of this plan and the achievement of its objective.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Pike".

David Pike
Chairperson

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Overview

Structure and Activity:

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board (the Board) is established under authority of section 11 of the *Student Financial Assistance Act*. The Board was established in November 2004 and holds regularly scheduled meetings. The Board has regulated service standards establishing time limits during which it must hold hearings and communicate subsequent decisions.

The Board, consisting of a panel of seven persons appointed by the Minister of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, includes:

- one representative from Memorial University,
- two students attending educational institutions in the province,
- one representative from the College of the North Atlantic,
- one representative from a private educational institution in the province,
- two employees of the Provincial Government.

Board members serve without remuneration as per section 18 of the *Student Financial Assistance Administration Regulations*. Appointments to the Board are for one, two or three year terms, and no member of the Board can serve for more than two consecutive terms. Incidental expenses incurred by the Board are minimal and are covered in their entirety by the Department of Advanced Education and Skills. The Board is not required to prepare financial statements.

Board meetings are held at the Student Financial Services Office at Coughlan College. Appellants may participate in person, via teleconference or video conference. They may appear with or without representation, or be represented by a person of their choosing.

Appeal and Review Process:

Tier One - The initial appeal:

A person who is not satisfied with the decision respecting the amount of financial assistance for which she or he is eligible may appeal. The appeal is to be in writing and submitted to the Minister for a review of that decision. The review will take place within 14 days. The applicant will be immediately notified of the outcome in writing once the review takes place.

Tier Two - The Board appeal:

If a person is not satisfied with the tier one decision, they may submit their appeal to the Board for a hearing. The Board is required to hear and consider an appeal not more than six weeks after receiving a request. A person who makes an appeal to the Board has the right to be present, with or without representation, or to be represented by a person of her or his choosing.

Decisions of the Board are made by a majority vote of members present at the meeting in which the decision is made. The Board must notify the appellant of its decision, including the reasons for the decision, in writing not more than ten days after the appeal is heard. Decisions from the Board regarding appeals are final and binding.

Mandate

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board's mandate is established under section 12 of the *Student Financial Assistance Act*, as follows:

- (1) A person may make an appeal to the appeal board with respect to a denial, term, condition, amount of a student loan, financial assistance, interest or payment relief made or established under this Act.
- (2) Appeals made under subsection (1) shall be made in accordance with the regulations.
- (3) The appeal board or a committee of the appeal board shall, in writing and not more than 10 days after the hearing and consideration of an appeal, notify the appellant of its decision and the reasons for that decision.
- (4) A decision of a committee of the appeal board and of the appeal board on an appeal is final and binding.

Values of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board performs its duties within the core values established by the Department of Advanced Education and Skills.

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| Diversity: | Appreciating the individuality of others by words and actions. |
| Leadership: | Empowering staff to guide and inspire others. |
| Service Excellence: | Providing timely access to responsive programs and services that are delivered by knowledgeable and friendly staff. |
| Innovation: | Encouraging new and efficient ways of developing and delivering programs and services. |
| Respect & Dignity: | Showing acceptance and sincerity for the beliefs and behaviors of all individuals. |
| Teamwork & Partnership: | Working together with colleagues and partners to develop and deliver appropriate supports and services. |

Primary Clients

The primary clients of the Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board are post-secondary students who applied for student financial assistance and wish to appeal the amount of student financial assistance for which they have been deemed eligible.

Vision and Mission

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board is committed to supporting the vision and mission of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills by ensuring that all individuals in the province who require financial assistance to access post-secondary education have access to an appeal process. This process ensures that each applicant is treated with the principles of reasonableness, fairness and objectivity.

Vision of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills

The vision of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills is growth through employment, strength in diversity, dignity by inclusion.

Mission of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills

By March 31, 2017, the Department of Advanced Education and Skills will have improved the quality and the delivery of supports and services.

Objective

Issue One: Hearings

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board is a quasi-judicial body established to ensure due process with respect to student financial assistance. In accordance with the strategic direction provided by the Department, included in appendix A, an enhanced post-secondary system contributes to the social, cultural and economic development of the province.

The Board meets as required upon receiving a request for an appeal hearing. To ensure a timely response for the appellant, the Board is required to hear and consider an appeal not more than six weeks after receiving the appeal. The decision must be communicated to the student not more than ten days after the hearing.

This process provides clients of student financial services access to an appeals process which supports the affordability of post-secondary education.

With respect to the Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board, the following objective is the focus for each of the fiscal years ending March 31, 2015, 2016, and 2017. This objective will be reported upon in each of the respective annual reports.

Objective:

By March 31, 2015 the Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board will have held hearings for students accessing the student loan program who appealed their eligibility and rendered a decision in a timely manner.

Measure: Held hearings and rendered decisions in a timely manner

Indicator 1: 100% of scheduled appeals heard within 6 weeks of receiving a request for an appeal

Indicator 2: 100% of appeal decisions provided to students within 10 days after the appeal hearing

Conclusion

The Student Financial Assistance Appeals Board is committed to supporting the mandate of the Minister of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills and will continue to do its part to further the vision and mission of the Department. The Board will achieve this by ensuring that post-secondary students who require financial assistance have access to an effective and fair process of appeal during which individual circumstances can be examined in accordance with the *Student Financial Assistance Act and Regulations*.

Appendix A

Strategic Directions

Strategic directions are the articulation of desired physical, social or economic outcomes and normally require action by more than one government entity. These directions are generally communicated by government through platform documents, Throne and Budget Speeches, policy documents, and other communiqués. The *Transparency and Accountability Act* requires departments and public bodies to take into account these strategic directions in the preparation of their performance-based plans. This action will facilitate the integration of planning practices across government and will ensure that all entities are moving forward on key commitments.

Title: Post-secondary Education

Strategic Direction: An enhanced post-secondary education system that contributes to the social, cultural and economic development of the province.

This outcome supports the policy direction of government. It requires systemic intervention by the Department and its entities in the areas of:

Components of Strategic Direction	Being Addressed by Other Entities Reporting to the Minister	Being Addressed in the board's activity plan
1. Post-secondary infrastructure	X	
2. Affordability and student access		X
3. Programming	X	
4. Apprenticeship policy and training	X	