

Arrangements for Coordination Between University and College Sectors in Canadian Provinces

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of a study of provincial level arrangements for coordination of planning and operations between university and college sectors in Canada. The data are drawn from a survey of senior government and sector officials in which respondents were asked to describe existing arrangements for coordination and to comment upon the importance attached to, and priority issues for, coordination; characteristics of effective structures for coordination; and their satisfaction with existing arrangements. The findings indicate that inter-sector coordination is perceived as an important issue; that coordination structures are most developed in the provinces in which there is the strongest mandate for articulation between sectors; and that efforts are under way in most provinces to refine and improve structures for inter-sector coordination.

Résumé

Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude sur les modes de coordination, à l'échelle provinciale, de la planification et du fonctionnement intersectoriels des universités et des collèges au Canada. Les informations utilisées pour les fins de cette analyse ont été obtenues à partir d'une enquête effectuée auprès des hauts fonctionnaires des gouvernements provinciaux et auprès des institutions

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d'enseignement postsecondaire. L'objet de cette enquête a porté sur les modes de coordination en place, sur l'évaluation de l'importance attribuée à ces activités, sur les questions prioritaires nécessitant la coordination, sur les caractéristiques des structures de coordination qui s'avèrent les plus efficaces, et enfin sur le niveau de satisfaction en regard des structures existantes. Les résultats de l'enquête indiquent qu'on attache généralement une grande importance aux structures de coordination intersectorielles; que les provinces possédant les structures les plus développées sont celles ayant établi un mandat clair de coordination; et enfin, que toutes les provinces sont déjà engagées dans un processus qui vise à développer et à améliorer les structures existantes.

Canadian higher education is often described as having at least two distinct sectors - the universities and community colleges. The operations of each sector may impinge on the other sector(s) in a variety of ways, for example, with respect to competition for funds, joint programs, transferability of credit, and overlapping markets for adult and continuing education. Given the interdependence of the sectors, a number of questions emerge concerning the structures and processes which are or could be employed to ensure that the planning and development of each sector takes account of the implications for the other sector(s): Is there a need for inter-sector coordination? What arrangements for coordination between university and college sectors currently exist? How satisfactory are the existing arrangements? What are the characteristics of effective coordinating structures?

In this paper we will address these basic questions by discussing the findings of a recent survey of key actors. We will begin by describing the various contextual factors which formed the basis for our interest in this topic, followed by a description of the survey method, and a summary and analysis of our findings. It is not our objective to provide comprehensive, definitive answers to the questions noted above. Rather, given the absence of any existing study or data on intersectoral coordination, our goal is to provide a modest contribution to what we suspect will be an ongoing policy debate by bringing to attention the importance of the topic, describing the structures and arrangements for system level coordination which presently exist, and reporting the perceptions of a sample of relevant provincial government and sectoral officials on the related issues.

Context

Postsecondary education systems in nearly all jurisdictions are comprised of a variety of institutional types, including universities, community colleges, technical institutes, adult education centres, and other tertiary level institutions. Often, public institutions of the same type are grouped together and operate in certain respects as, and/or are treated by public authorities, as a system. For example, in the binary structures which are common in North America, the university sectors and the community college sectors each typically exhibit some features of *intra-sector coordination*: i.e., they fall under the jurisdiction of a sectoral planning or coordinating agency, there is some rationalization of funding among the institutions within each sector, and there is some coordination of capital expansion, admissions, approval of new programs, and financial and operational reporting.

Given the potential for overlap of objectives and activities between different types of postsecondary institutions and the complementarities between sectors, a question arises as to whether there is a need for *coordination between sectors*. On *a priori* grounds, it might be supposed that the need for such coordination would vary among jurisdictions, depending upon the particular role and mandate ascribed to the respective sectors in different jurisdictions. For example, one would expect the need for inter-sector coordination to be greater where community colleges offer the first two years of university programs than where the role of colleges is restricted to terminal occupational training. Even in the latter case, however, there may be a public interest in inter-sector coordination: for example, in regard to the rationalization of non-credit adult education courses; interface with employers in seeking placements for work experience components of cooperative education programs; siting and control of expensive capital equipment; decisions as to which sector should have responsibility for programs in emerging and/or marginal occupations for which the training may be in the university or non-university sector (such as nursing, secretarial science, industrial accounting, and some of the medical technologies); and funding levels of the respective sectors - which may determine which sector can best accommodate students who are on the margin insofar as their preference for or acceptability to one or the other sector is concerned (on the choice process for such students, see Anisef, 1986; Stokes, 1988).

Arrangements for handling inter-sector coordination in regard to the above noted and other issues range from comprehensive, formal state level structures on the one hand, to institutional level, ad hoc initiatives, on the other. An example of the limiting case at the former end of the continuum would seem to be the

Australian approach which involves a national agency with jurisdiction over all postsecondary institutions and an intent to treat universities, colleges of advanced education, and institutes of technology as elements of a unified national system (Smith, 1990:8). In North America, arrangements for inter-sector coordination have been described in published literature only for the United States, and even there, only a quite limited amount of published literature is available. While some states have consolidated higher education supervisory agencies with jurisdiction over all public postsecondary education, the dominant theme in the literature has to do with the lack of effective coordination between sectors, and concern over leaving the responsibility for coordination to the vagaries of autonomous action on the part of individual institutions within the framework of decentralized structures (Meinert, 1977; Kissler, 1982). Some approaches which have been tried in the United States to achieve better coordination, particularly with respect to enhancing articulation,¹ include the establishment by institutions of Offices of Articulation, and the formation of voluntary Articulation Consortia involving representatives of all institutions in a given locale (Shafer, 1974). Meinert reports, however, that many educators believe that really effective coordination can be achieved only by state agencies which have jurisdiction over all postsecondary institutions.

Canadian higher education is characterized by the existence in all provinces of at least two distinct sectors, universities and community colleges; and, additionally in most provinces, of other more specialized institutions, such as open learning institutes, or those specializing in law enforcement, music, fine arts, transportation, marine science, medical technology, or other branches of technology, which may or may not be administered as part of a provincial university or college system (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Skolnik, 1986). Further, the role and mandate of the non-university institutions vary among provinces, with some having an explicit university transfer or university preparation role (British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec - and as is developing in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia & Newfoundland), and others having no such formally mandated role (Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick). These differences would suggest that the perceived needs for, and extant priority given to, inter-sector coordination may well vary substantially among provinces.

Because of differences on the part of the two sectors in their respective histories and relationships to government, coordination between universities and non-university institutions did not develop as a natural outgrowth of the evolution of the two sectors. In the majority of provinces, community college systems were established only after almost all the universities in those provinces were

already in existence; and in such a situation, the specific issues which might give rise to a perceived need for coordination would emerge, if at all, only after a considerable time. Further, the non-university sectors tended (albeit to varying degrees) to be directed by a provincial ministry, while universities enjoyed considerable autonomy. For this reason (and probably other reasons as well), no provincial government has superimposed a single coordination mechanism or agency over the two sectors. Thus, the most likely way for a coordination structure to come into existence would have been through the voluntary initiative of representatives of each sector, and such would be likely to occur only after a sufficient period of time for leaders in each sector to become aware that there might be a problem in need of attention. An exception to this generalization is the case of Quebec, where at the time of establishment of the CEGEPs their mandate was such that it was probably clear to all concerned that substantial coordination with the universities would be necessary if they were to fulfil their mission. The same realization likely developed, though perhaps in less sudden or dramatic fashion, in British Columbia and Alberta, commensurate with the point noted above about the different roles of the nonuniversity sectors in these provinces.

Methodology

The comments above are intended to indicate briefly the basis for our *curiosity* regarding both current arrangements for inter-sector coordination in Canada, and the opinions of key actors as to the need for such coordination. Regarding the latter, we should note that the research which we will describe here is somewhat unusual in that part of the research activity itself consists of determining whether the subject of the research is of sufficient perceived significance as to warrant the effort. In particular, we wanted to avoid colouring our research by starting from an initial position with respect to the importance of achieving coordination between the university and college sectors: i.e., we did not want to presume that some formal structures and processes for coordination were essential, and then assess our data from that perspective. On the other hand, we could not take the fact that there has not been a single published study in Canada on this subject - though we unearthed administrative documents pertaining to the issue in some provinces - as indicating that it does not warrant investigation. There are no doubt issues of significance to Canadian higher education which have not yet been the subject of much study.

Our research involved a survey of key actors and an analysis of relevant documents, most of which were provided by our survey respondents. Identified as key actors were the Deputy Ministers responsible for universities and/or

colleges in each province and territory, the heads of all provincial postsecondary intermediary bodies and the various provincial associations of universities or colleges, and the heads of the few corresponding inter-provincial bodies, such as the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. Because our focus was on *provincial level* arrangements for coordination, rather than bilateral arrangements at the institutional level, we did not include university or college CEO's or others whose primary attachment is at the institutional level, though the views of such persons as to the importance of provincial level coordination could certainly influence the effectiveness of any arrangements for coordination.² Similarly, because of our focus on provincial arrangements - and because of provincial jurisdiction over postsecondary education - we did not include national agencies in our survey.

In an effort to get at the major questions about coordination presented in the introductory section of this paper, our questionnaire³ included items on: respondents' perceptions of the need for coordination; issues and policy areas for which coordination might be warranted; description of existing arrangements; and opinions on the adequacy of those arrangements, improvements which respondents would like to see, and factors which should be taken into consideration in developing or modifying arrangements for coordination. The questionnaire and an explanatory letter, which summarized the objectives of the project, were distributed by mail in February, 1990. Those who did not respond to the initial mailing were telephoned in April in an attempt to encourage their participation.

We received responses from 18 of the 28 agencies surveyed (64%), covering all but one province. Response rates by region were: Western Provinces (the grouping in which we included also the territories), 70%; Ontario, 80%; Quebec, 50%; and Atlantic Provinces, 57%. In addition, we received one unsolicited response from a provincial association of universities which was not listed in our source directories but which heard about the survey, giving us a total of 19 responses. Responses were received between February and June of 1990, and our data on existing structures should therefore be viewed as a 'snapshot' of arrangements which were in place during that time.

Although a response rate of nearly 67% is normally cause for satisfaction in surveys of this type, the failure to obtain the remaining responses must be considered at least a modest limitation of the study. Yet after examining the pattern of responses and non-responses, we have reason to believe that the findings are broadly representative of the population sampled. There was only one province for which no response was received; and one other where only one of two

respondents surveyed responded. In cases where more than one response was received from a province, the responses tended to be quite consistent with one another; and there were some very clear patterns across provincial (and sectoral) boundaries with respect to several items: for example, with regard to the issues for which coordination was needed and what were thought to be the characteristics of an effective coordination structure. Also, of course, it should be noted that the study did not deal only with perception; a major focus was on describing the existing arrangements and structures, and in most cases the responses in this regard were augmented with publicly available documentation.

In the commentary which follows, we are constrained by our undertaking not to report information which could identify individual respondents. The principal effect of this constraint is to limit our capacity to identify provinces which had only one or two responses in regard to opinion items, though we can refer to general tendencies among regional or other groupings of provinces, or among categories of respondents. A further limitation of the study is that, as its goal was to provide a broadly comprehensive snapshot of existing arrangements for coordination across the country, it does not provide the depth of analysis of any particular provincial arrangements that might be obtained through an intensive case study of those arrangements.

The Need for Inter-Sector Coordination

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of developing or improving mechanisms and processes for coordination between university and college sectors, in relation to other issues facing higher education, on a four point scale, as: one of the most important issues to address in postsecondary education; of middling importance; one of the least important issues; or not an important issue at all. Seven rated it as one of the most important issues, nine of middling importance; one placed it between middling and least important; one said least important; and one did not respond to this item. That almost all rated coordination within the first two categories, and almost half rated it as among the most important issues, suggests that our effort to investigate this subject was warranted.

Among respondent categories, a slight majority of senior government officials rated this issue as most important, while a slight majority of sector respondents rated it of middling importance. This difference may be due to the fact that the government officials have responsibility for both sectors, whereas the sector respondents internalize responsibility for only their own sector and are more preoccupied with other issues pertinent to that sector, as, for example, funding.⁴ This difference among respondent categories might also imply that

sector officials may come under some pressure from governments to do more to coordinate certain of their activities.

Almost three-fourths of the respondents from the provinces with the most highly articulated relationship between colleges and universities (British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec) rated coordination as a most important issue, while only about one-fourth of respondents from the other provinces as a group did so, indicating a strong relationship between perceived importance of this issue and the mandate of the non-university sectors among the provinces. As to the policy areas which give rise to the need for coordination, almost all respondents, including those from provinces where transfer of students from colleges to universities is not an official element of the colleges' mandate, identified transfer as one of the principal concerns warranting efforts at provincial coordination. Three-fourths of respondents also identified system planning or funding, including rationalization of resources and facilities and avoidance of duplication, as additional motivating factors. In addition, a few respondents identified improved provision of opportunities for adult education and distance education, professional development of academic staff, and monitoring of student outcomes as other needs to be addressed through inter-sector coordination.

Several respondents related the need for increased efforts toward provincial coordination to the increasing complexity of provincial higher education systems. For example, one respondent suggested that, "...in this country, ... we are moving ... towards a development of what will be, in effect, a *single* postsecondary system operating on a continuum" [emphasis added]; and another stated that :

I anticipate a system which is much more complex than the "two-sector" model you [the authors, in our covering letter] describe Over the next decade I am sure we will see the emergence of colleges which grant degrees, and "universities" which have varying definitions of involvement in research and graduate studies. As demand is projected to significantly exceed resources we shall probably find new partnerships and collaborations emerging. All of this means, of course, that the coordination and articulation of the system will inevitably become more complex.

Existing Structures for Coordination

The formal structures currently in place for inter-sector coordination at the time of the survey are depicted in Table 1. It will be noted that a single government ministry or department has the major supervisory responsibility for both

universities and colleges in each province. While this has not always been the case, and while additional ministries may have responsibilities for certain activities of colleges and universities, the fact that a common ministry oversees both sectors in each province has significant implications for inter-sector coordination. It suggests, for example, that a single Minister and, one would expect, a number of senior officials review and discuss policy matters for both sectors. It is reasonable to assume that this arrangement provides a greater potential for inter-sector coordination - if such is desired - than a situation in which each sector is under a different ministry.

While the single ministry structure for both sectors offers the potential for coordination, the extent to which substantive coordination is actually effected at the ministry level varies from province to province. Only one formal ministry level coordinating committee was identified, the Postsecondary Issues Committee in Manitoba, which consists of the Deputy Minister of Education and Training, the Executive Director of the Planning and Research Branch, the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Postsecondary Adult and Continuing Education Division, and the Executive Director of the Universities Grants Commission.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, most respondents felt that *if* there is to be meaningful coordination, formal structures for it must involve others besides or in addition to ministry officials. Such formal structures are of two types: one focussing upon broad issues of system planning and development, and attempting to identify and facilitate cooperation in regard to any issues which cut across sector boundaries; and the other which concentrates upon matters related to articulation. Both types of committees or agencies are found in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec; and in addition, the first type exists in Saskatchewan and the second in Nova Scotia.⁵ Typically, the first type of committee includes representatives of both the ministry and institutions. For example, the Joint Policy/Planning Advisory Committee in British Columbia (JPAC) brings senior representatives of all postsecondary sectors together with ministry officials and provides advice on system-wide policy and planning issues. A larger and more formalized body, the University/College Liaison Committee in Quebec (CLESAC), includes representatives of the ministry, seven universities, three CEGEPs, one private college, the Council of Rectors and Principals of the universities, and the Federation of CEGEPs. Its responsibilities include: ensuring coordination between the two sectors in respect to the objectives of each sector, seeing to the complementarity between sectors and avoiding unnecessary duplication, and facilitating "harmonious passage" of college students to

university. While the CLESAC's responsibilities overlap the fourth and fifth rows in Table 1, Quebec has two subsidiary committees which have specific responsibilities for coordination of articulation between the CEGEPs and universities. One (CPRSA) deals with the programmatic aspects of articulation and has representatives from all universities and CEGEPS; while the other, BEC, deals with the management of student records.

A well established example of an articulation committee of the type referred to in row 5 of Table 1 is the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer. The Council is an independent body reporting to the Minister of Advanced Education and is "responsible for developing policies, guidelines, and procedures designed to facilitate transfer arrangements among postsecondary institutions" (Alberta, 1989:1). The Council plays an active role in the implementation of transfer policies through monitoring, mediation, and research, including the annual publication of all existing admissions policies and transfer arrangements in Alberta postsecondary education. Its membership includes representatives from the public, universities, public colleges and technical institutions, provincially administered institutions, hospital schools of nursing, and private colleges.

In March, 1989, the B. C. Minister of Advanced Education and Training announced the creation of the B. C. Council on Admissions and Transfer, with similar responsibilities to those of the Alberta Council. However, in keeping with recent developments in British Columbia which involve the development of cooperative arrangements between the universities and colleges to increase accessibility to degree programs in the interior of the province, the B. C. Council appears to have a broad responsibility for stimulating cooperative ventures and system coordination. The B. C. Council's statement of purpose is:

To provide leadership in achieving an overall goal of maximizing advanced education opportunities for students through inter-institution transfer, cooperative ventures, differentiated roles and mission requirements and other arrangements which lead to the various post-secondary institutions working together *as a system* [emphasis added].

The membership of the B. C. Council includes two students (one college, one university), three college/institute administrators, one administrator from each university and the Open Learning Agency, and one school superintendent.

In addition to the bodies indicated in rows 4 and 5 of Table 1, several provinces have more specialized bodies, some permanent and some ad hoc, which deal with particular aspects of college/university relations. These include

provincial associations of registrars that have membership from all postsecondary institutions in the province; task forces or committees on adult/continuing education, distance education, and facilities utilization; and committees comprised of staff from different sectors and concerned with particular program areas for which the different sectors are each engaged in related training and professional development activities.

In contrast to the provinces which have committees indicated in rows 4 and 5, which involve representatives of all sectors, the only formal committees in Ontario which have responsibility for considering issues which cut across sectors are intra-sector committees. Both the Council of Ontario Universities and the Committee of Presidents of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology have recently established committees on college/university relations, though it is not clear yet whether these are intended to be permanent.

Recent interest in college/university relations in Ontario appears to have been spawned initially by a conference in October, 1988 in which the Ministry of Colleges and Universities invited representatives of the two sectors to come together to discuss issues of mutual interest, especially articulation; and subsequently, by the undertaking in 1989 by the Council of Regents for the CAATs of a major review of the mandate of the colleges, entitled *Vision 2000*. Historically, the CAATs were established as an alternative to the universities, with their emphasis being on occupational training and retraining, adult education, and community service. Systemic linkages between colleges and universities were eschewed - though there was provision for bilateral agreements⁶ between individual colleges and universities for the provision of university credit courses in the CAATs. In their first two decades, the colleges developed quite independently of the universities (see Jones, 1991).

In recent years, there has been increased concern about several issues which cut across the college-university boundary: inconsistency of treatment by universities of those students who do go on from various colleges to university; the limited opportunity for college graduates in some fields to achieve full professional certification or recognition without a university degree; the increased activity of American universities in the province seeking to address this demand; and alleged gaps in the present postsecondary structure in regard to polytechnic education. These issues have been examined in the course of the *Vision 2000* review of the CAATs, a participatory process which involved a number of representatives from the university sector.⁷ The Study Team which examined these issues considered two approaches to dealing with them. One was "the formation of a provincial institute without walls which would provide

degrees for combined college-university studies" (Ontario, 1990: 6). The other model considered was "a coordinating body that would facilitate arrangements which increased transferability between colleges and universities".

In its final report, Vision 2000 recommended the establishment of a "provincial institute without walls for advanced training" which would have among its objectives to: "facilitate the development and coordination of arrangements between colleges and universities for combined college-university studies"; and "offer combined college-university degree programs, with instruction based at and provided by colleges and universities" (Vision 2000, Final Report: 99). This institute would incorporate some of the functions of coordination structures in other provinces, e.g., providing leadership in the development of college-university links and publishing annually a calendar which describes program coordination arrangements between provincial colleges and universities. In having also the capacity to award degrees for combinations of courses taken in universities and colleges, the recommended institute - which in this respect is modelled on the U.K.'s Council on National Academic Awards - would have powers extending well beyond those of the coordinating structures in other provinces. The report suggests that these augmented powers might enable the institute to stimulate the development of innovative, cooperative college-university programs generally, through providing a model for such innovations, for example in regard to prior learning assessment; and it might also address needs for joint college-university programming that are not addressed by the colleges and universities. In October, 1991, the Minister of Colleges and Universities announced that, among the Government's responses to Vision 2000, will be the establishment of a task force to "undertake a feasibility study into innovative ways for colleges and universities to cooperate in offering new credentials for advanced training", including the examination of the institute without walls proposed in the Vision 2000 Report (Allen, 1991).

Finally, in regard to structures for inter-sector coordination, the last row of Table 1 shows that in all provinces there are arrangements at the institutional level, generally involving bilateral consultation—and often formal agreements—between individual colleges and universities. As the focus of our study is on provincial level coordination, we have not examined institutional arrangements in any depth. Also, a number of respondents have indicated that however valuable the institutional arrangements are, they cannot achieve the same ends that can be attained through provincial level coordination.

Satisfaction With Existing Arrangements

In general, respondents from British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec were satisfied with the existing coordination arrangements, though some indicated that much remains to be done regarding overall system development, and that maintaining the commitment of universities is an ongoing struggle. Most of the respondents from other provinces felt that there is a need for more formalized coordination structures than those which currently exist. In Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, active efforts are underway to develop structures appropriate to recent changes in the non-university sector, and there seems to be a feeling of excitement and optimism about the imminent responses to the challenge of coordination. In the remaining provinces, the subject of coordination is under review, at least in some quarters, but the likelihood and direction of development is not yet clear.

Several respondents commented that satisfaction with the existing arrangements may differ by sector. It was suggested that colleges are generally in favour of relatively high levels of inter-sector coordination, while universities generally prefer voluntary, bilateral arrangements between institutions (though it should be emphasized that this observation is drawn from a limited number of responses). From the university perspective, the move towards formal inter-sector coordination may be viewed as a reduction of, or infringement on, university autonomy. There may also be concerns regarding the potential for cross-sector homogenization, or the 'upward drift' of some institutions in an attempt to obtain higher status. Further research at an institutional level might indicate the extent and strength of differences in perceptions about inter-sector coordination between sectors, and illuminate the various factors or beliefs which underscore such differences.

Characteristics of Effective Coordination Structures

Regarding characteristics of effective coordination structures, most respondents felt that the major responsibility for coordination must rest with representatives of universities and colleges and that institutional members of coordination committees must assume ownership of the problem. Several stated that an effective coordination body would not include government officials at all,; but others opted for broadly based committees consisting of institutional representatives, government officials, and individuals representing other interest groups, such as employers of graduates. Other factors which were identified as enhancing effectiveness were: clarity of the coordinating agency's mandate; stature—derived, for example, from legislation or empowerment by the appropriate Minister;

having the 'right' people; and respecting the roles of the various provincial institutions. Several respondents suggested that clarity of institutional mandates is necessary to facilitate the effectiveness of any coordination structure.

It was generally accepted that the coordination process involves a tension between public accountability and institutional autonomy. There are no solutions to reconciling this tension, though some suggested that having a third party to mediate, and in some circumstances arbitrate, between the two sectors could be useful. In fact, one of the stipulated responsibilities of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer is to mediate between institutions. Though some respondents identified elitism or resistance on the part of universities as a major barrier to coordination, most respondents felt that maintaining institutional autonomy, particularly for the universities - the extent of autonomy of the non-university institutions varies a great deal among the provinces - was essential. Indeed, a respondent from British Columbia felt that one of the factors which had contributed to the success of coordination arrangements in that province was that they had protected the autonomy of provincial universities, and had thus enabled the tapping of institutional initiative and creativity.

Summary and Conclusions

This study has addressed a subject which there is reason to believe may be of growing importance in Canada, but about which there had been no prior efforts to collect even rudimentary data in a comparative provincial perspective. To fill that gap, the authors undertook a survey of key policy actors in each province, eliciting from them information on present arrangements and structures for achieving coordination between university and other postsecondary sectors; the respondents' perceptions of the need for such arrangements; their satisfaction with existing structures, and what they believed to be the most important characteristics of effective structures for coordination. For purposes of this study, key actors were defined as Deputy Ministers responsible for universities and/or other postsecondary sectors in each province, heads of provincial intermediary bodies for university and other sectors, and heads of provincial and inter-provincial associations of universities and other postsecondary institutions.

Our analysis suggests that college/university coordination is generally considered by key actors to be a matter of considerable importance particularly -- but not only, in regard to working out arrangements for students who wish to proceed from community colleges or other non-university institutions to universities. A considerable majority of respondents indicated that coordination was important also in regard to system planning, funding, and rationalization of resources and facilities.

We found that approaches to coordination vary across the country, with policy/planning committees under the aegis of a provincial ministry and articulation committees comprised of broad representation from all sectors being the most predominant structural forms. As might be expected, approaches to coordination are most developed and formalized in those provinces in which the postsecondary education systems have had mandated articulation between sectors for quite some time; i.e., Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec. In general, respondents from these provinces were satisfied with the existing arrangements. In other provinces, particularly Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, college/university relations appear to be a subject of increased attention recently - in most cases pursuant to a desire to facilitate greater movement of students between sectors and/or develop inter-sectoral programming. In those provinces, efforts are under way to develop provincial vehicles for effecting greater coordination -- at the policy level, if not at the operational level as well.

Considering that some provinces are now searching for approaches to inter-sector coordination, while key actors in others report satisfaction with their arrangements for coordination, it would be tempting to conclude that structures like the JPAC in British Columbia, the CLESAC in Quebec, or the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer could provide effective models for those provinces which wish to develop new structures for coordination. Such a conclusion is, however, premature for two reasons. First, such a conclusion would require a more in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of these structures than it was the purpose of this study to undertake. Second, the coordination structure which is most appropriate for any province depends upon the particular policy objectives desired. As the policy objectives related to inter-sector coordination differ considerably between say, British Columbia and Quebec, so too do the instruments used to achieve coordination, i.e., the JPAC and the CLESAC. Thus, in examining coordination structures in other provinces, it is important to take into consideration possible differences in provincial policy goals. These qualifications notwithstanding, those provinces which are presently searching for more effective structures for inter-sector coordination could do worse than to begin by studying the arrangements which exist in the provinces which have been at this endeavour the longest.

Notes

¹ Articulation has been characterized as “a process, an attitude, and a goal” (Meinert, 1977:491). As a process, it involves the coordination of policies and practices among sectors of the educational system to produce a smooth flow of students from one sector to another. As an attitude, it means that educators in all sectors are willing to transcend institutional self-interest and work together to achieve the maximum developmental benefits for the student. As a goal, it envisions the elimination of artificial barriers, so that the totality of a jurisdiction’s educational resources “becomes one unbroken flow, which varies in speed for each individual”.

² Of course, some of the heads of provincial associations of universities or colleges are also CEOs of institutions.

³ The questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.

⁴ The qualifier in our questionnaire, “in comparison with other issues currently facing postsecondary education in your province”, appeared to influence some respondents to choose “middling: rather than “most important.” For example, one respondent noted that he gave “great weight” to that phrase. He stated that “the need for improved processes for policy coordination between the university and college sectors is great indeed;” but that in the context of that qualifier, he would have to rate it as of middling importance.

⁵ The Nova Scotia community college system is in the developmental stage. The committee referred to consists of one representative of the Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, an intermediary body for university affairs, and one from the Department of Advanced Education and Job Training, on behalf of the community college system. The committee, which liaises with both the universities and community colleges, will be advising on, among other things, arrangements for coordination. Though it has a broad mandate to advise on the development of the college system, it appears to be particularly interested in articulation.

⁶ The relatively small number of bilateral agreements which have been developed are described in one of the background studies prepared for Vision 2000 (Marshall, 1989).

⁷ The background studies for Vision 2000 dealing with these issues are by Stokes, Dennison, Skolnik, Smith, and McFadyen, all 1989 publications.

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