

Equal Opportunity and Post-Secondary Education

Comments and Recommendations

for the Honourable John McNie

Minister of Colleges and Universities

Presented by the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ontario has committed itself to "a plan for action" for "equal opportunities for women in Ontario." The provincial agencies and institutions of post-secondary education have a crucial role to play in such a program, providing training, incentives, and models for the women of Ontario as they move to participate fully in society.

In general, the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women supports the principles of the Government's stated policy in respect to women and post-secondary education. These principles have been endorsed repeatedly, over many years, by both governmental groups and interested citizens. We would like, however, to make some comments and pose some questions in respect to particular aspects of the policy. We will discuss the Green Paper's intentions regarding community colleges and part-time education, and in respect to the special educational needs of rural, immigrant, and native women. We will also comment on the concept and potentialities of "open education", and the structural means of implementation of the proposed program. This includes the recommendations of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario, which the Green Paper notes that the Government is now considering.

A. "Equal opportunity for Women in Ontario": Implications for post-secondary education.

1. Community colleges

(a) In post-secondary education, institutions other than universities are relatively more important for women than for men. In 1968-69, 40% of the women in Ontario enrolled in post-secondary education were in courses in such institutions as community colleges, as compared to 22% of the men (Marsden and Harvey, 1971). The Green Paper supports the increased participation of women in both federal and provincial training and re-training programs. It does not, however, mention the role of community colleges as a route of access to universities. It is particularly important for women that all students with the interest and ability be given the opportunity to move on to university. What are the Government's plans in this respect? We urge the Government to take measures to ease transfer among the institutions of post-secondary education in Ontario, without penalties of time or credit.

(b) The Green Paper notes the problem of sex-stereotyping and sex-division in the courses available at community colleges. The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women has already discussed this problem with the Ministry in respect to Seneca College's training programs for flight attendants. We support the Government's intention to encourage the community colleges to "develop policies that will encourage the participation of Women in programs that suit their individual capacities, regardless of traditional sex-typing of occupations." (p. 25). However, we would like more information about the Government's plans for implementing this policy.

According to the Green Paper, "enrolment statistics should be examined from time to time, and if there is no sign of significant improvement in female participation in a diversity of programs, alternative measures may be employed on the initiative of the government." What statistics are to be examined, and who is to examine these statistics?

What are the criteria for "significant improvement?" e.g. ratio of male to female enrolment? Ratio of drop outs? Job Placement? Ratio of male to female-oriented courses?

Will such statistics be made public?

What alternative measures are contemplated?

2. Part-time education for women

(a) The Green Paper recognizes the need for a new form of support for women in part-time programs. The current forms of financial aid do not fit the special needs of such groups as single women, female heads of single parent families, and women with husbands who are unwilling or unable to support their training or re-training. We are glad to note the Government's intention to provide economic incentives to institutions of post-secondary education to adapt to the needs, financial and otherwise, of part-time students. We urge the Government to develop plans for the specific and varying financial needs of women in part-time post-secondary education.

We would also like further information on the following points:

Will spacing-out of tuition payments, as described in the Green Paper, be possible for the academic year 1973-74?

Will bank loans in fact be made more accessible to part-time students, as indicated in the Green Paper?

To what extent will the modified assessment procedure referred to in the Green Paper, improve the position of married women?

To what extent are the facilities of the Canada Students Loan Plan being made available to part-time students? Will the Plan be modified, as suggested in the Green Paper, to permit conditional repayment?

(b) We are glad to note the Government's awareness of the need for other than financial support for the education of married women and particularly women with children. Counselling, orientation, and guidance services are all essential. Day care is even more important. We urge the Government to develop a specific plan for providing day care and other support services at and in conjunction with the institutions of post-secondary education.

The Ministry should be prepared to finance day care centres as part of its program of support for post-secondary education.

3. Rural women

We are glad to note that the Green Paper has devoted considerable attention to the educational problems of rural women, and that the Government is prepared to encourage the participation of such women in various programs available for training and re-training. In general, we are glad to note the intention to widen the scope of courses supplied for rural women by the province. We support strongly the programs designed to ease the transition from rural to urban areas.

Given the problems of education by television, noted by the Green Paper, we are surprised at the absence of any comment on the possibility of using radio programming. The notion of "open education" seems particularly relevant to the problems of rural women in isolated communities (see section B of this brief).

4. Immigrant women

(a) We support any move to broaden the educational programs for immigrant women. More than just language training is needed. The generation gap which causes such unhappiness in immigrant families can be narrowed if immigrant women from different cultures come to understand the opportunities for and situations of their children in Canada (Marsden, 1973). Such training which might be at the post-secondary level, could be offered in the native languages, through radio and television, or through direct programs in working places and community centres. The new programs and welcoming services currently being established in the city of Toronto should make a special effort to meet educational as well as other needs of immigrant women.

(b) Well-trained and well-educated immigrant women should be provided with the opportunity to continue with their former occupations in Canada. Special attention should be paid to the needs of these women in the period when they are working to satisfy the professional licensing requirements in the province. Such persons should not be excluded, even inadvertently, from the appropriate programs of support. More information is needed both on the occupational skills of these women, and on their needs for additional post-secondary education in order to continue their former occupations (Hawkins, 1970).

Much of the responsibility for services to such skilled immigrant women is left with the voluntary and professional organizations. The result is probably considerable loss of talent from the activities of these women. Does the Government plan any more active involvement with this area?

5. Native women

We support the Government's concern for the educational needs of native women. In particular, we would hope to see the Government modify the entrance requirements for teacher's aides at the Colleges of Education so that native women can qualify for entrance. Training programmes must be established in Ontario for the spouses of persons working with native

peoples. Recommendation 93 of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women urges "expanded comprehensive courses" for such spouses, to familiarize them with native cultures, traditions, and languages.

Tangible support must be given to the study of the culture, history, and sociology of native women. Few attempts have been made in Canada to study native women and their life apart from the male life and economy of their communities. (Cheda, 1973, Marsden, 1973).

B. The "open" concept in post-secondary education

Education at home, on a part-time basis, through the media of television and radio, can place post-secondary education within the reach of many persons who would otherwise be unable to participate. Most of these persons are women, many of them with the additional responsibility of raising and socializing children. Under such circumstances, the basic human right to education becomes doubly important, for society as a whole, as well as for the individuals concerned.

"Open" education is thus a means to overcome the barriers to education presented by financial pressures, family responsibilities, and place of residence. For women in the home, open education obviates the problem of providing day-care and community facilities, and provides a non-institutional situation where they will not suffer from lack of confidence. Open education has an obvious role to play for such special groups, already referred to, as rural, immigrant, and native women.

1. Ryerson Open College

We deplore the fact that the only Ontario institution with experience in credit education via the media is terminating its program. Educational opportunity seems to have taken second place to jurisdictional and budgetary concerns.

Ryerson Open College has shown that an open university can be economical, when allowance is made for the large number of listeners in addition to those registered; with respect to registered students in an introductory course, the per-student cost was no higher than in a comparable conventional course on a university campus (O.E.C.A. Report, p. 10). A stronger signal from radio station CJRT would undoubtedly have increased the enrollments among a potential audience estimated by the BBM at 10,000 a week for radio and 40,000 a week for television (O.E.C.A. Report, p. 9).

For any open university course, of course, overall cost per student drops with enrollment, since the high initial costs of research, preparation, and air time remain constant.

Ryerson Open College has shown that women find an open university convenient, and that they are highly motivated by it. 75% of those enrolled in 1971 - 72 were women, and half of these were housewives. More of the women stayed in the courses, and they made higher grades: 31% of the women received A's, as against only 9% of the men (O.E.C.A., Report, p. 3).

We urge that the Government reactivate Ryerson Open College. If necessary the program could be supported through some other institution of post-secondary education, but it seems wasteful to dissipate the experience accumulated at Ryerson. We do not, however, feel it appropriate that the possibility of an open university in Ontario should turn on the internal struggles of one institution; the Ministry is abandoning a responsibility in allowing this to happen.

2. The "Open Academy"

We recognize the legitimate concern on the part of existing institutions of post-secondary education that the proposed "Open Academy" might compete with them for funds and students.

However, the Open Academy need not be a separate institution (as the C.O.P.S.E. report advocated) granting its own degrees. If the Government gave the existing colleges and universities budgetary incentives to participate in open education, many of these institutions would cease to see the proposal as a threat.

Thus the Open Academy should be preserved as an idea (rather than established as an institution) operating through the existing structures to provide credit education in Ontario.

C. "The Learning Society: Report of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in Ontario": implications for women.

1. Assessment

The Report accepts the undeniable fact that women are one of the groups most at a disadvantage in relation to post-secondary education. Referring to our brief and our tables (pp. 24-25), it discusses at some length the "distressing picture in post-secondary education." (P. 24). Recommendations 34-42 enunciate the appropriate intentions about the attainment of equal treatment. Throughout the Report, women are cited (along with Franco-Ontarians and native peoples) as needing special assistance.

However, the Report disavows Government responsibility for positive remedial action. Upon the recommendation of such groups as the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, it has discarded the use of quotas proposed in the draft report. The new agencies of post-secondary education in Ontario are not to be expected to play any positive role in improving the status of women. Instead, "we now place the responsibility for change where it properly belongs," (p. 60) -- with the individual institutions of post-secondary education. In the

previous paragraph, the report had noted, "even within the considerable realm for action remaining, these same institutions have done pitifully little to improve the rates of attendance and employment of women." The only other implementation indicated is an outline of plans for improving participation that "should" be monitored by the proposed new provincial council supervising post-secondary education (rec. 42). The sectoral councils are similarly urged that they "should" prepare and publish plans for increased participation of women (rec. 40). We cannot regard these provisions as adequate.

Nor does the Report provide any means of enforcement. Monitoring and publication of statistics seems unlikely to have much impact. This is all the more true, since the Report does not provide any means of guaranteeing the representation of women in the new agencies which are to make policy for the institutions of post-secondary education.

Women are the only one of the three disadvantaged groups given special attention by the Report for whom no means of representation is provided. In the case of both native peoples and Franco-Ontarians, the Report talks of the "right" to "participate in making decisions about their educational future." (p. 62). "Only the recipients of special programmes can judge their effectiveness," (p. 61). There is no awareness that these considerations also apply to women. The native peoples are to have two special new organizations, an Advisory Committee and an Educational Research Centre (recs. 43, 47). They and the Franco-Ontarians are to be represented on library boards (recs. 48, 79) and Franco-Ontarians are to be specifically included on all the appointive bodies for post-secondary education. No such arrangements are to be made for women.

2. Recommendations

In general, the treatment of women in post-secondary education in Ontario will depend on the extent to which the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education are modified to provide active participation by the Government. Further, the Government should strongly encourage post-secondary institutions to move towards equality for women. It is essential that the talents of women in the agencies governing post-secondary education be tapped in this exercise. We therefore direct your attention to our recommendations in the attached brief, which was submitted to the hearings of the COPSE last year. (See Appendix A).

(a) Whenever appointments are made to governing bodies in post-secondary education, women's groups should be among the organizations making nominations. (our rec. 3; COPSE's recs. 91, sec. 4c, 92 sec. 4c, 93, sec. 4c, 94, sec. 5, 96, sec. 4a).

(b) Individual appointments to governing bodies in post-secondary education should be made equally to men and women. (our rec. 4; COPSE's rec. 81).

(c) Women should also be represented on library boards, (COPSE's recs. 48, 79).

(d) A Task-force on the status of women in post-secondary education could be used to co-ordinate the activities of the individual institutions of post-secondary education (COPSE's rec. 95).

(e) Consideration should be given to the use of with-holding of funds as a machinery for enforcing production and compliance with plans for equalizing the status of women in the various institutions of post-secondary education. (see our recs. 1 and 2).

D. Conclusion

In respect to post-secondary education, the Government now has before it not only the Green Paper, but also the recommendations of its own elaborate Commission (COPSE). Their proposals support acceptable principles in respect to equal opportunity for women in post-secondary education in Ontario. However, as we have shown, their proposals lack detail, while provisions for implementation and enforcement are ineffectual, vague, or even non-existent. We would now like to see the Government, including this Ministry, demonstrate the seriousness of its intentions by moving to put its principles into practice. For the Government as a whole, the first step will be the appointment of ~~the~~ promised provincial Council on the Status of Women, and the assignment to this Council of such tasks as implementation of the proposals regarding women in post-secondary education. For the Ministry, the first step might be the framing of the new organization of post-secondary education in such a way that women have an explicit and prominent role in the decision-making processes.

In any case, it is no longer enough to state good intentions. We shall wait eagerly for action that is as commendable, and more productive, than the principles.

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