

2.1.2 Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia, one of the four original provinces that formed Canada, has a population of 939,531 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Located in the Atlantic Canada region, the province has a total area of a little more than 55,000 km², giving it a population density of 17.49 people/km² — the second highest in Canada. The capital of the province is Halifax, located in a fairly central location on the province's eastern coast. The capital region accounts for approximately 40% of the province's population.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	
Provincial-level policy	No	Although there is language included in the Provincial Teachers' Agreement

Online Programmes

There is currently one online learning programme in Nova Scotia: the Nova Scotia Virtual School (NSVS). There is also a correspondence study programme (CSP) that began in 1920 and continues to this day — although the Department of Education is currently in the process of transitioning these courses to an online delivery format. At present there are approximately 1,800 students and 2,200 course enrolments in CSP.

The educational television programme (ETV) began in 1960 and is no longer in operation. It was funded by the Department of Education and began as a way of providing competent teachers in high school mathematics, science, and French as a second language to students in rural schools. It consisted of a partnership with the Canadian Broadcasting Company to develop and then broadcast the high school curriculum. By the late 1970's, ETV was changing from direct teaching of individual classes to the creation of broader educational resources that were not otherwise available. The most notable was the Mi'kmaq series that recreated four seasons in pre-European contact Maritimes.

The NSVS is responsible for providing central course management platforms, while the eight school boards in the province are responsible for providing the individual course content and the teachers who teach those courses. Two of these school boards have created their own district-based online programmes (i.e., Strait Regional School Board Virtual School and Chignecto-Central Virtual School), although students from any of the school boards are able to enrol in courses offered by these two board-based programmes.

A third school board, who actually has the longest history in online learning, is Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) — the pan-provincial school board for French first language students. CSAP uses both room-based video conferencing and the two online platforms used by English school boards. CSAP also has a sharing arrangement for online programming from the Province of New Brunswick. Over the past two years there have been approximately 650 students per year enrolled in the NSVS from the eight English-speaking school boards and the CSAP.

Provincial Policies

Learning Resources and Technology Services, a Division of the Public Schools Branch of the Department of Education, manages all distance education programmes in Nova Scotia.

Approximately half the students enrolled in courses offered through the CSP can also be attending a public school; the other half are adult students or live out of the province, while students enrolled in courses from the NSVS are usually also enrolled in a brick-and-mortar school.

Funding

The delivery of CSP courses is mostly self-funded from tuition fees. In many instances these fees may be actually paid by school boards, Department of Community Services, Department of Justice, Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning, or other sources.

The Department funds the online learning platforms (i.e., *Marratech*® and *Moodle*®) used by the school boards through the NSVS. The individual student enrolment fees are typically provided as regular programme seats and are funded from the per student allocation attributed to each school board. In addition, the Department provides additional funding for 250 seats in online courses with a priority on students from small high schools.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

There is currently no legislation specifically related to K-12 distance education in Nova Scotia, however, there are 11 provisions of legally binding guidelines included in the agreement between the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. As a contract between the Government and teachers' union, most of the provisions deal with teacher certification and workload issues. For example, all distance education teachers must have provincial certification, their distance teaching load shall be considered part of their teaching assignment, the maximum size of a synchronous section is 22 to 25 students from up to five school sites, school boards shall provide professional development focused on online learning, distance courses must be scheduled during the traditional school day, among others.

Interestingly, the agreement also indicates that school must appoint a distance education coordinator and that these responsibilities shall be included as a part of that teacher's overall teaching assignment (although without outlining the specific responsibilities of this coordinator). There are also specific provisions that must be included in a student supervision plan, which all schools must have.

Finally, one of the provisions relates to the creation of a "standing Distance Education Committee consisting of two representatives from the Department of Education, two representatives from the Nova Scotia School Boards' Association and four representatives from the Union... to address issues surrounding distance education" that meets at least twice a year and provides annual written reports" (p. 100).

The Department of Education does not track student performance for online courses, but does keep this information for those enrolled in the CSP.

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

The CSP courses are developed directly by the Department of Education and course writers are selected in response to a provincial request for proposals. Writers are selected based on their suitable responses to these requests. Course writers must have experience teaching the Nova Scotia Public School Program. The Department hires “markers” on a contractual basis for the CSP. Successful markers are individuals with current teaching experience with the course(s) in question.

The school boards provide online course content and select the teachers responsible for teaching them. These teachers generally have experience teaching the specific course in a face-to-face environment, and online learning experience is also preferred. At present, the Department has an Online Steering Committee that is developing a standard for online courses in Nova Scotia and, with funding; this standard will be the basis to guide evaluation of and creation of online courses.