



## EDUCATING THE WORKFORCE

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TEMPUS FUGIT – NOW IS THE TIME

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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Province of New Brunswick, through its Commission on Post Secondary Education has issued a discussion paper identifying the issues it sees as key to the future of post secondary education in the Province. This document represents Team Fredericton's response to that call.

Team Fredericton is a collaborative economic and community development movement led by the City of Fredericton, UNB, St. Thomas University and the business community. It is our vision that Fredericton will become the most vibrant and successful small city in North America.

Our response focuses on the necessity of having relevant, innovative and responsive educational infrastructure to foster and drive local economies. In particular, we are interested in the post secondary education system providing a first class workforce to drive community and economic development. We see this as the prime mandate of that system.

Recent survey results of the employers in Fredericton showed high satisfaction with University training. Very low satisfaction was evidenced for community college and technical training.

We believe that we must treat postsecondary training as the vehicle used to ensure New Brunswick has a trained workforce without peer in North America. The universities and the colleges must work together to support their cities and regions. Approaching the education and training of our postsecondary students in such a manner would represent a shift in thinking and delivery.

For that reason we urge the Commission to recommend that this new approach be delivered first in Fredericton. While admittedly self-serving, we believe that this is the best approach. We do not currently have a community college and the Premier has committed to delivering one that is reflective of our economy's strategic sectors.

As a result we do not have legacy issues, or an existing curriculum to put at risk and we have excellent universities with which to collaborate.

We also urge the Commission to recommend that the Province move immediately to implement this project. As a Province we can't afford to wait.

Lastly we believe that we should not allow financial challenges to influence our vision of what we want to accomplish. The area of postsecondary education is quite simply too important to be driven by "what we can afford". We must determine what we need, and then figure out how we can pay for it. Anything less won't work.

Tempus Fugit.

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Team Fredericton is a collaborative economic and community development movement led by the City of Fredericton, UNB, St. Thomas University and the business community. It is our vision that Fredericton will become the most vibrant and successful small city in North America. To realize this vision we must, among other things, overcome the challenge of retaining our own youth, and attracting young families to live and work here.

We are very interested in the Commission's work on post secondary education because Fredericton has been an educational centre for a very long time. Our educational institutions have shaped our local economy, not only by their own activities, but also by the firms that have "spun out" of their activities. A very high percentage of the locally owned and controlled employers in our area can directly trace their founding back to the universities.

At the same time our community has suffered from not having a community college in the area. This fact has led to a shortage of qualified workers, higher costs and inefficiencies in our university system as those who desire post secondary training opt for the only option available to them and not the optimal one.

We are acutely aware of the challenges that our communities and the Province as a whole face in the globally competitive world. We believe in the theory that our country's cities are the economic engines that drive the economy. We have watched the national and provincial trends toward urbanization as more and more people move to our cities. We accept this as a fact and not a problem.

We reject the notion that New Brunswick is a rural province. Eighty percent of our population lives within 50 kilometers from a City Hall. In our view, the opportunity cost of policy development that does not take this fact into consideration is exorbitant. We believe that New Brunswick will succeed or fail in tandem with its cities.

While we recognize that education has its own rewards, we also believe that the overriding mandate of our post secondary institutions should be to provide to our governments, institutions and private sector a trained, innovative and available workforce. This workforce should be as good as any other in North America.

New Brunswickers and people throughout North America would recognize our postsecondary system as one that endlessly perused excellence and innovation. The system would be known to manufacture "*Smart People*" capable of participating in a meaningful way in the world economy.

If we can accomplish that goal this sector will assist us in our population growth strategy by maintaining a higher percentage of our young people and making New Brunswick a community of choice.

To provide this workforce we require an integrated post-secondary sector; one in which universities and colleges work collaboratively to provide educational, professional and technical learning. Sadly this is not the case now, and it appears to us that in the past the direction and support that was given to universities and colleges was as much about “distributing” benefits to various regions in the Province as it was about achieving excellence. This is not a sustainable situation.

We are primarily concerned about the community college system in the Province. In a recent survey our employers expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with community college and technical training while they expressed a high level of satisfaction with university training. We believe that this is due, at least in part, to a college network that was developed to train and distribute regional benefits rather than pursue excellence.

We believe that like other sectors, the educational sector benefits from clustering and that there is a certain scale required to support educational institutions of the scope and magnitude we require in order to compete. As a result we are in favour of “educational hubs”.

In the same way that the establishment of an energy hub in Saint John will be good for, and deliver benefits to the entire Province, the establishment of educational hubs will serve all. We must get out of the “me too” mindset that has plagued our approach to delivering education. We can no longer afford anything less than excellence.

This does not mean that we are in favour of abandoning the non-urban areas. Quite the opposite is true. From our educational hubs we can employ the innovative efforts of our e-learning and IT sectors to improve access.

We believe that our regions' have different structural make-ups that support different sectors. We believe that our colleges should take this into account. For example, the largest engineering cluster in the province is located in Fredericton, but the training of engineering technologists takes place in Moncton. We can no longer afford this missed opportunity, for either the student or the potential employer.

Our regions' college should support the sectors that drive our regions' economies. This means that all of our colleges will appear and operate differently. At the same time there are industries that follow the community's growth, and these include what many would call the conventional trades. The absence of trades people in a region can constrain its growth, or make that growth more expensive than it need be. For that reason all of the colleges should deliver this training.

All of our regions have growth plans that identify their strategic sectors and the college that serves that region must align their course offerings with those plans.

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### 3.0 MAXIMS

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Fredericton has been fortunate to be home to two excellent universities and their activities have shaped our community – perhaps more so than any other single factor. At the same time we have not had a community college in the area and that absence has also shaped our community. The observations and recommendations that follow are based on our experiences in community development in Fredericton and while our maxims have been developed for Fredericton they are, for the most part, true for the Province in general.

The City of Fredericton cannot consume all of its commercial output. As a result we must be a community of exporters.

Our “competition” comes from around the world, and most specifically from all of North America. To view issues from solely a Canadian perspective is very dangerous.

North American businesses cannot compete in the global market based on price. The standard of living we currently enjoy can only be supported by high value and value added output.

High value producers require all of the “classic” exporting advantages, such as transportation networks, stable supply etc., and most specifically an educated, innovative workforce. This workforce will be the producer’s most powerful differentiating attribute.

Communities are powered by the employment growth of a relatively few fast growing companies, who typically show high rates of innovation. In the vast majority of cases these companies are locally owned and controlled and not branch or subsidiary offices.

Innovative firms tend to cluster together, and most commonly cluster around educational institutions.

As innovative businesses themselves, educational institutions benefit as much from clustering as private sector operations.

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### 4.0 OBSERVATIONS

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The Commission has posed a number of specific questions that they would like answered and we offer our opinions below. These opinions are based on our experience and the Maxims detailed above.

1. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WOULD THE IDEAL POSTSECONDARY SYSTEM FOR NEW BRUNSWICK LOOK LIKE?

The ideal postsecondary system would be recognized by New Brunswickers and people throughout North America as one that endlessly pursued excellence and innovation. The system would be known to manufacture “*Smart People*” capable of participating in a meaningful way in the world economy.

2. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

The postsecondary system should provide a trained and competent workforce to the region/province. It should be an asset in the population growth strategy of the Province.

It would do so by assisting the attraction of immigrants by offering quality education for their children; technical and university training for themselves; coordinating technical and professional recertification and ESL programs, particularly technical ESL; and promoting the retention of foreign students.

3. CAN YOU SUGGEST WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AREAS?

While we recognize that accessibility is an important issue we believe that others, particularly those in rural areas, are more qualified to respond to this question.

However, we would note that there is an existing e-learning cluster in the Province that presumably would be able to assist in rising to this challenge. Too often in the past our institutions have assisted our emerging clusters in many ways except the purchase of their services or products. This distance conundrum could be an excellent opportunity to reverse that trend.

4. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE MORE GRADUATES TO REMAIN IN NEW BRUNSWICK?

This is an interesting question and one that has consumed a great deal of effort and mind share in recent times. All sectors of the Province are trying to figure out what can be done to retain our young people.

We believe that retention of graduates and particularly young graduates is a result rather than an activity. It has been well established over time that people “go where the work is”. In spite of technological advances in the last 15 years this is still largely the case. There are examples of “jobs following people” and we expect to see much more of this in the future but we need to recognize that for the most part the old adage remains true.

Therefore the *only* effective way to ensure the retention of our graduates is to foster a growing economy with new jobs. And not just any job will do. We need to support an economy that gives graduates the potential for career growth at the same time.

The creation of a large number of entry or junior positions would help retain graduates but without the potential for career growth we would see these people leave the area after 2 - 5 years. This is why, as mentioned previously, t Team Fredericton so highly values locally owned and controlled companies and positions.

5. CAN YOU SUGGEST INITIATIVES THAT WOULD HELP DECREASE THE DROPOUT RATE?

It is our opinion, especially in Fredericton, that the higher than normal dropout rate is linked to attitudinal and structural issues. In the first case, over the last 30 years society as a whole has viewed a university education as the preferred stream. This preference has resulted in “pushing” some high school graduates in this direction, even when they might prefer trade or technical careers. After a year or so in university they realize this is not for them and withdraw.

In Fredericton, individuals who are inclined to enter technical or trade steams have no local community college to attend. This increases the cost of following such a path and we believe results in a “diversion” to the university stream.

The cost of this mismatch to the public and private sectors cannot be understated.

6. IS NEW BRUNSWICK’S POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND EMPLOYERS?

We are uncertain as to whether or not the existing system meets the expectations of students and believe they are best able to answer that question.

However we do have an opinion as it relates to employers’ opinion in Fredericton. Recently through a Business Retention exercise we surveyed our city’s employers opinions of many factors affecting their businesses. Three questions were particularly relevant:

a) Opinion of Community Colleges

Of those expressing an opinion, fully 45% rated Community Colleges as Fair or Poor.

b) Opinion of Universities

Of those expressing an opinion, 93% rated Universities as Good or Excellent.

c) Opinion of Technical Training

Of those expressing an opinion, 62% rated the training as Fair or Poor.

The implications for our community are clear. Our universities are seen as providing a valuable service while our other postsecondary institutions are not viewed favourably. The “drag” on our economy that results is why most of our Recommendations, below focus on technical training and community colleges. The existing situation is simply not sustainable, and we ignore it at our own peril.

7. HOW DO YOU THINK NEW BRUNSWICK’S UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES RANK IN COMPARISON WITH OTHERS?

This question raises the issue of relative performance with other jurisdictions, always a thorny issue. We believe, however, that this relative performance needs to take a back seat for the present time. What we should be concerned with is our absolute performance, which as demonstrated above, is not meeting our employers’ needs.

8. WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF RESEARCH IN NEW BRUNSWICK’S POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS?

From our perspective there exists an opportunity to increase the amount of research done by increasing collaboration between existing institutions. For example, in Fredericton we have the universities, NRC, RPC, the Department of Agriculture, and the Hugh John Flemming Forestry Centre all doing research. By examining research opportunities based on the community’s capacity rather than the institution’s capacity we should be able to improve our “market share”. Given that there is a shortage of skilled technically trained staff we will need to concentrate this research. Based on the research assets in Fredericton it should be developed as a research “Centre of Excellence”.

We also believe that there is an opportunity for those institutions to better serve the private sector in solving their challenges. The cost of entry for many of our private sector organizations is too high for them to take up the research challenges that they face. This “customer base” represents a real opportunity for our institutions.

9. WHAT DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES?

The opportunity for innovation, mutual reinforcement, and synergies between community colleges and universities are plentiful. Like all business sectors, the educational field benefits from the advantages of clustering. Some examples of the benefits we would expect are:

- Opportunity for universities and colleges to share common facilities such as labs and libraries.
- Instructors will have easier access to upgrading and training through the existing education assets that will provide more and better-qualified instructors.

- Collaboration on course requirements (combined designations, dual credentials) as well as different types of applied programs, and more research opportunities which would strengthen both types of educational institution.
- Integration with co-operative and internship programs.
- Offering more students to the area.
- Instructors and professors have an opportunity to interact.

Daniel O'Brien, former President of St. Thomas University, suggested that it is "vital to have an integrated, mutually supportive system, and a strong college presence... would provide an attractive additional component to our post-secondary system".

A well integrated postsecondary system would present a significant opportunity to partner with local high schools, to offer apprenticeship and co-op programs, and to bring trades training back into the secondary school system.

In short, we believe that the universities and colleges should be closely aligned and very collaborative. This should yield articulated programs and in essence give our students a "polytechnic" option.

#### 10. WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND FAIREST WAY OF PAYING FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

This is a very challenging question for the Commission to consider, primarily because the definitions of effective and fair are so elastic. Moreover, they are very much influenced by where you sit. Students want to pay less while existing funders wish to see new partners at the table.

While we do not have any particular insight into the matter we do know that we should not allow the financial challenges to influence our vision of what we want to accomplish. The area of postsecondary education is quite simply too important to be driven by "what we can afford". We need to determine what we need, and then figure out how we can pay for it.

Anything else and we will be settling for less than we need or deserve.

#### 11. ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS?

Our other comments can be found below in the section entitled "Recommendations".

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## 5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

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We would respectfully make some additional comments to the Commission.

There are legitimate concerns around accessibility of postsecondary education, both from a financial and geographic point of view. However, we must also be mindful that in an attempt to deal specifically with geographic accessibility we can spread ourselves so thinly that what we actually do is provide a substandard experience. Bearing in mind that our competition comes from across North America we need to be committed to excellence first.

Dealing first with geographical accessibility, we need to accept the fact that postsecondary institutions need to be in communities of a certain scale to be effective. They face the same challenges as any other organization in recruiting and retaining their human resources. The recent demographic data throughout North America is clear in demonstrating that we are increasingly choosing urban centres in which to live. And the more highly educated the group the more pronounced this trend is. Postsecondary educators are certainly a highly educated subgroup.

Rather than try to stand against that movement we believe that we should embrace it. As we have previously stated Porter's clustering theory applies to the private, government and education sectors. It would stand to reason that there is a similar benefit to the Province in establishing and nurturing an educational hub as there is to establishing an energy hub. This hub, or hubs, should be center(s) of excellence in their respective fields.

Dealing with financial accessibility raises many issues, including who pays and the effectiveness of fiscal tools in delivering education. This is an area where we are much less comfortable in providing an opinion other than to observe that students have educational options; and in the event that this province is a high cost provider, we run the risk of seeing our students go elsewhere – and many of them will not return.

In terms of relevance and responsiveness we believe that the results of the Fredericton business retention survey are clear. The university side of postsecondary education is well regarded, but the other areas are not at all respected. We would also state that the results of that question relate to the province-wide system and not just the local area. Our businesses are, after all, buyers of all of the training delivered here.

One possible explanation for these poor results, particularly the community college results, is our belief that in the past the location of colleges was more about distributing economic benefit to certain areas than it was about quality education. In short the reverse of the clustering approach was applied. We cannot afford such a method in today's global world.

In terms of quality and accountability, our communities and the educational institutions that drive them must commit to excellence in their field, and their field must be sustainable. We simply cannot afford a "me too" approach from communities in soliciting educational support

from the Province. And candidly that is exactly what we have experienced over the last twenty years.

That is why when Team Fredericton was responding to the call for public input about the Community College system we were clear that we did not want such a “me too” campus in our community.

Our needs in the Fredericton Region, as they are in other regions of the Province, are unique. With a predominantly white-collar workforce, two university campuses, and the lion’s share of knowledge-based companies in the province, we have a number of distinctive clusters that require supporting infrastructure, including training infrastructure.

We would argue that these knowledge-based industries need vocational training offered in a manner customized to the local employer base and that the students need to be in close geographic and intellectual proximity to the employers. It would seem then that the most logical conclusion would be to establish a community college campus in Fredericton, managed in Fredericton and familiar to the needs of the Fredericton market. This last statement, the linkage to the regional needs is most important.

Fredericton also needs a community college campus to fill the growing need for quality-trained trades people in the community. It is imperative to have locals trained here, to work in the Fredericton area, and to be able to attract those from outside the region as well. The community must have a close relationship with the community college, especially in regards to job placements, and recruitment opportunities. Andrew Steeves, Vice-President of ADI Limited, echoed this statement, indicating a need for a variety of skill sets, as “a company cannot run effectively employing only engineers; there must be forces to provide support. Modern engineering and architecture projects are the product of teams of professional, technical, and trades people, each providing skills necessary for success”.

We were pleased to hear the Premier commit to a community college for Fredericton on the very first day of the election campaign. He was clear at that time that this college would embrace the concept that we presented to him.

In that regard the answer to your question posed as to whether or not this is an opportunity to create an institution designed to meet the needs of the twenty-first century would be a resounding “Yes”.

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## 6.0 CONCLUSION

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In closing we would like to thank the Commission for this opportunity to share our ideas and opinions. The influence that the post-secondary education system has on our ability to survive, thrive and prosper is without peer.

This means that as a Province we need to get it right and we cannot do that without a sense of partnership and urgency.

The current government has committed to a course of self-sufficiency. In our view, part of being self-sufficient is being able to educate and train the workforce necessary to support the growth and success of our local companies.

We need to accept nothing less than excellence because that will be the position of our competitors.