



**CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION OF NEW BRUNSWICK
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**CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY BRIEF TO
THE COMMISSION ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

IF NEW BRUNSWICK CAN'T BUILD, IT CAN'T GROW!

Introduction

When shop classes were removed from the junior highs and industrial arts from the high schools in the 70's and early 80's it set in place a chain reaction, which is negatively impacting the construction industry. Today's youth simply have had no exposure to the Trades and have no idea of the potential for careers in construction. The end result is that fewer people are interested in entering the industry, which is creating shortages in certain Trades, and this has further propagated the mind set that jobs in construction are careers of last choice. With the migration of Trades people to western Canada and the average age of construction workers now in their 50's, New Brunswick is now facing such a significant shortage that it may impede the Province's future economic growth.

While the initial steps in rectifying the situation involve Education rather than Post-Secondary Education, both have significant roles to fulfill, as does the construction industry itself. Since this brief is addressed to the Commission on Post-Secondary Education we will not focus on the need to reintroduce Trades into the schools, with input from the industry, but will concentrate on the role of higher education.

New Brunswick Community Colleges

There is no doubt within the industry that the NBCC system provides good quality Trades training or at least the best it can provide given the state of the facilities and tools. New Brunswick needs to make a significant investment in the buildings and equipment which are being used to educate the next generation of Trades people. Rather than attempt to expand campuses into every community requesting one, the department must target its efforts at refurbishing the facilities it has now. Some are simply in such poor condition that they are not conducive to learning. Much the same can be said for the quality of the tools. We need state of the art equipment if the students are going to derive the maximum benefit from their training. It is of little value to train them in the use of tools the industry stopped using years ago.

In order to accomplish this renewal goal, the NBCC and industry must work closer together and both need to begin thinking outside the box. For example colleges need to partner with tool manufacturers under agreements which would see the colleges test prototypes of equipment. Also, construction contractors take a more active role in donating time and equipment and also in providing a better learning environment for their apprentices.

The Construction Association of New Brunswick represents some 600 construction companies, industrial and commercial, union and non-union, and Francophone and Anglophone. These members believe that the first priority of the NBCC system must be this reinvestment in its infrastructure, not expending precious funding on splitting the bureaucracy into separate French and English entities.

Such a split can do nothing but increase the industry's concern over curriculum consistency. It is our understanding that each college instructor is responsible for its own curriculum and that this has resulted in a fair degree of inconsistency in what the apprentices are being taught. It is this Association's belief that the curriculum must be similar and based on the content which produces the highest pass rate on the interprovincial Red Seal certification exams. An essential part of this consistency drive would be the implementation of standard exams for all training blocks.

The Association also believes that the NBCC would benefit from the use of a selection system. Currently the selection criterion is basically "first come first served". It is our position that once a waiting list for a Trade gets to a critical number a selection process should be implemented. That process would test the student's aptitude for the Trade and some of the basic essential skills. We believe that this would have a significant affect in decreasing the drop-out rate and increasing successful completion of the Red Seal exam.

One of the most important areas of co-operation, that needs to be addressed between the colleges and contractors, is the approach to apprentice mentoring. Some Trades people work very well with apprentices and some do not. We recommend the establishment of an NBCC course which would better prepare Trades people to train apprentices. We could then dove-tail that with employers going into the classrooms to tell the apprentices exactly what will be expected of them once they are on a construction site.

Another primary area of concern for contractors is the safety of their workers, especially apprentices. Statistics have consistently shown that construction workers with less than six months on the job have over 85% of the accidents. The NBCC needs to increase its partnership with the NB Construction Safety Association to the point where these apprentices come to the job site fully safety trained.

The final area in which the construction industry needs the involvement of the NBCC Community is life long learning. There is a definite need within the industry for continuing education as equipment and construction techniques continue to evolve. Since the workers are already familiar with the NBCC campuses and their training methods, it makes sense to utilize their expertise to deliver up-grade training.

Apprenticeship

The Apprenticeship Branch provides an essential link between the NB Community Colleges and industry, but at a time when this relationship is critical in maintaining the construction work force their funding is being decreased. This speaks to simple economics, "if New Brunswick can't build, it can't grow".

The Province needs to increase rather than decrease its funding of the Apprenticeship Branch so that it can provide the level of support needed of it. The funding would benefit students and their parents by providing sufficient career counseling and information on the wide variety of Trades. It would also assist employers in learning how to best utilize the apprenticeship system.

Part of the role for the Apprenticeship Branch is the sometimes difficult task of enforcing standards. Without enforcement, rules are valueless and abuse exists. Apprenticeship simply does not have sufficient field staff to monitor important areas like apprentice to journeyman ratios or the scope of work to which the apprentice is being exposed. Since apprentices are only in the classroom 2 months per year and on the job the other 10, field monitoring is essential in insuring the apprentice receives quality on the job training, but Apprenticeship can't do so without sufficient resources.

Conclusion

Construction is the common element of two current government focus groups. The work of Self Sufficiency Task Force and the Commission on Post-Secondary Education intersect at the construction industry. If New Brunswick is to ever reach its self sufficiency goal it must have a healthy construction industry, as has been repeatedly stressed by groups like the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (APEC).

In both "Building for the Future: An Economic Profile of Atlantic Canada's Construction Industry" by APEC and "Construction Looking Forward" by the Construction Sector Council; the impact of construction on the local economies is well documented. However, in order to achieve the growth potential of the region we must have a sufficient supply of Trades people. The Construction Association of New Brunswick and its 600 member contractors stand ready to assist the Province and the Apprenticeship Branch with every type of support it can muster and by way of this brief offers its services to the Post Secondary Education Commission.