

**RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER:
MODERNIZING THE NEW BRUNSWICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MAY 24, 2005 (REVISED)
PREPARED BY BRIAN BAXTER**

RESPONSE TO FORWARD

When attempting to meet individuals and employers' demands for education and training; issues such as child care, hours of operation and support services are not necessarily the most important items that must be considered when recruiting students to post-secondary education. The "let's make it easier" attitude does not enhance the quality of education that the student should receive.

This "let's make it easier" certainly has raised concerned in the United States as it relates to post-secondary education. In an article that appeared in Newsweek on April 13, 1998, entitled *Disorder in the Schools* states "What is clear is that as colleges become more thirsty for students, that thirst drives them to become less selective among applicants and less demanding of those admitted. So there is a trickling-down of sloth and mediocrity from higher education into secondary schools, which are not pulled towards excellence from above."

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RESPONSE TO STRUCTURE OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Over a thirty-two year period, it appears that the Community College structure in New Brunswick has had over eight re-organization changes. On average, the Community College system in New Brunswick has gone through a change every four years. This has placed stressed on the system in attempting to adapt to the needs of New Brunswick industry. It also appears that these changes were purely structural and did not result in better program delivery.

The Community College structure in New Brunswick has also developed a political mentality. It has not been managed independently but has ultimately had an elected Minister of the Crown as it's head. It gives the appearance that Community Colleges have either been built or expanded because of the location of the Minister's riding. *Do we really need eleven individual colleges spread over the province with separate administrations and in some cases competing against each other?*

The same may be said of certain programs that have been delivered at certain locations for political consideration instead of the strategic location.

There is no question that the Community College makes a significant contribution to New Brunswick's economy and society. However, it is also costing government a fairly substantial amount of money to keep the system ongoing. On average, each Community College student is being subsidized in New Brunswick at a rate of \$9,500 each in addition to their tuition as reported by the Assistant Deputy Minister of TED at an Advisory meeting in Moncton on March 17, 2005.

RESPONSE TO WHY DO WE NEED CHANGE?

The statement that "the New Brunswick Community College has done an excellent job in fulfilling its mandate to provide trades and technology training" could be challenged by various sectors of the New Brunswick economy but in particular the construction industry. This statement appears to be self-serving. "It could have been better expressed to state that NBCC has attempted to fulfill its mandate to provide trades and technology training." If the first statement was correct, why in February 2005 is NBCC questioning Why Do We Need To Change? In the Toronto Globe and Mail in a feature entitled "**Working Issues**" dated March 21, 1997, in an article entitled Organizational World Is Changing Before Our Very Eyes states "The skills I'm going to need to do my job tomorrow are very different than the skills I need today." The point is that change is constant and the education system is not immune to change.

RESPONSE TO WHAT DO WE NEED TO CHANGE TO GET THERE?

The objective to increase the number of college graduates by 80% is somewhat aggressive and may be unrealistic considering that this is a 13% increase on average each year over the six year window.

The emphasis on expanding student population is not in keeping with the current thinking among other post-secondary educational institutions in Canada. Many are projecting flat enrollments with the emphasis being placed on programs selections and excellence. Their challenges are in many ways similar to NBCC. Structural, financial and administrative issues are being faced but in some cases using a different approach. However, they have also been slow to react to change but now realize that they must change to survive.

It is interesting that it has taken us to 2005 to realize that significant changes are needed in the post-secondary education system. In the November 13, 1997 issue of **The Globe and Mail** in the Guide to Education an article entitled The Changing Job Market stressed the need to change the way we prepare individuals for careers. In the **Annual Report of Bruncor Inc.** (now Aliant) the President, Gerry Pond, entitled his address to shareholders entitled Changing the Way We Grow. So now let's move on and ensure that we are educating New Brunswickers for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

In the **Mount Allison Record** of the Winter of 1998, the then President, Dr. Ian Newbold wrote "To give young people the best at jobs, forget about complex bureaucratic employment planning. It doesn't work. Instead, focus on skills. Make sure that people get the skills they need for the work place, whether they get those skills from music, philosophy or the law."

CAPACITY/ACCESSIBILITY - RESPONSE

In a report entitled Survey of 2001 New Brunswick Community College Graduates, conducted by Baseline Market Research in 2002 and prepared for the Department of Training and Employment Development it was identified that over 31% of NBCC classes have ten or less students in them. This could be one of the reasons that some campuses are overstretched for space, while other campuses are not full.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT - RESPONSE

Many of NBCC campuses have substantial deferred maintenance in the millions of dollars which is a major financial challenge to the system. Again, the question is asked are there too many NBCC campuses?

Partnerships are vital to any organization and as such should be promoted within the NBCC community. One partnership not mentioned in your discussion paper is that with **private educators** within the province. Such partnerships would create tremendous synergism throughout the entire system. Duplication of programs could be eliminated and better utilization of resources could be obtained. Partnering with Private educators was given strong support by representatives from industry and labour at the Moncton Advisory meeting hosted by the then Department of Training and Employment on March 17, 2005.

NBCC has already taken the initiative to formulate an agreement between the New Brunswick Association of Career Colleges regarding credit transfer and articulation of programs which is the first step in creating such a productive partnership.

FUNDING – RESPONSE

There appears to be an impression that the NBCC system creates a positive cash flow to the province. It is suggested that if you back all expenses and government grants out of the system and subtract students' tuitions and revenue generated there would be a very substantial negative cash flow to the Province.

ITEM D TO K – RESPONSE

As it relates to items D to K of the Discussion Paper, most of our comments as it relates to these items will be addressed in our recommendations. However, there is a concern that if programs are splintered into separate courses, you run the risk of fragmenting the programs in which your retention rate could decrease.

There is a concern if NBCC welcome **all** potential students into the system there is a big risk of disrupting the entire Community College system. In **NewsWeek**, April 13, 1998 issue, George F. Will in his article Disorder In The Schools states “Too many college students have neither the aptitudes nor the attitude needed in college”. Are you really happy with the decorum in the NBCC atmosphere today that you can risk welcoming all potential students to the NBCC system?

In support of the 1998 NewsWeek article the Globe and Mail Editorial, dated April 11, 2005 entitled *How's the Education?* states; "Post-secondary expansion should not just be about making room for more warm bodies in lecture halls". It also cautions governments as it relates to increasing financial support for post-secondary education; "Government needs to learn how to measure quality before pouring money into the universities and colleges".

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The entire New Brunswick Community College system should be re-engineered.
2. The body that is given the responsibility to do the re-engineering should be composed of representatives of industry, professionals and educators, independent from the Community College system.
3. Consideration should be given to identifying each campus to a discipline of excellence.
4. Closing campus or eliminating structures on such campuses should be considered.
5. Program delivered must meet the needs of the New Brunswick economy both present and in the future.
6. Eliminate the political process from the system.
7. Place all the NBCC system under a Crown Corporation with an independent Board of Directors with appointments selected by industry, professional and government.
8. The Chair would be full time with an understanding of the economy of the Province of New Brunswick and appointed by the government.
9. The new structure would have a President/CEO, Vice-Presidents of Finance, Administration, Academic and Programs.
10. The Executive would report to the Board through the Chair.
11. An Advisory Board would be established made up of representatives from respective industrial and professional sectors of the province. This Board would have the responsibility to advise the VP of Programs of necessary changes in the curriculums.
12. Instructor and Administrative staff will be selected on merit and experience by the Corporation.
13. Consideration should be given in consolidating various campuses for administration and delivery of programs (such as Saint John and St. Andrews/Moncton and Dieppe/Miramichi and Bathurst.)
14. Emphasis must be placed on industry and client needs in developing the new Community College model.

15. To ensure that the Province will get full utilization out of the Post-secondary education system, the Premier should be encouraged to include the community college system, private educators and universities in his proposed Post-secondary Education Review Commission as mentioned in the last Speech from the Throne.
16. A Post-secondary Education Commission be established, including all parties in post-secondary (private & public) with the object of ensuring New Brunswick has a leading edge post-secondary education system. This could be tailored after the Government of New Brunswick's External Advisory Group On Access to Post-Secondary Education established in 2000.
17. Implement a method that can be used to measure the quality and value of what is being delivered to the students.

CONCLUSION

The Government of New Brunswick has a great opportunity to modernize and revolutionize the Community College system of the Province. There has never been a better time to take up this challenge.

The prosperity of our province depends on well educated people with marketable skills to meet the demands of the New Brunswick economy, present and future. This fact is emphasized in **New Brunswick's Prosperity Plan 2002-2012** which states "An educated, well-trained, skilled, adaptable labour force helps current business grow and attracts new investment from outside; it is an essential ingredient in growth economies."

Clients are becoming more demanding on the products they receive from post-secondary educators (**Business Week**, March 14, 2005, *A BETTER FIT FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION* – "The companies that pay the tab are demanding more specialization.") As these demands increase, pressure is put on the system to deliver an education that is "more responsive to the realities of the modern job market." (**Telegraph Journal**, December 29, 1997, *The double-edge sword of higher tuition fees.*)

The government has the opportunity to create a modernized Community College system which will assist industry, the health care sector and professional services as well as attracting more students to a post secondary-education. If done well, New Brunswickers could greatly increase its existing rate of only 30% of high school students who obtain a post-secondary education to meet the national average of 46%. This objective is necessary as the Government of Canada in a study prepared for the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation has "projected that 70% of future jobs will require some form of post-secondary education."

This is an exciting challenge which requires courage and risk which are two characteristics New Brunswickers possess.

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