

**New Brunswick Union of Public
and Private Employees (NBU)**

Submission to

**Commission on Post-Secondary Education
In New Brunswick**

Submitted April 30, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The NBU welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Commission's review of post secondary education in New Brunswick. We have 8300 members in twenty-one groups throughout the province, representing civil servants, health care and nursing home employees and service and manufacturing workers.

In particular we represent 1000 employees in four of the five bargaining groups established for employees of the New Brunswick Community College system: community college instructors, administrative support, non-instructional professionals, and apprenticeship program counselors. (See Appendix A for full list of positions). Our members deliver community college education to New Brunswick students and are dedicated to their institutions, their students and the province they serve.

BACKGROUND

NBU accepts the twin challenges as presented by the Commission in your discussion paper; being the demands of a global economy and the demographic reality of declining high school populations. We also accept that any review of higher education in the province must look at both our universities and our community colleges.

In 2005 the community college system undertook a public review of its mandate under the title "Modernizing the New Brunswick Community College". At that time we commented that the system was fighting for its survival. Economic influences over the past twenty years have left the system in a position where administrators are scrambling to find resources to maintain regular programs, let alone replace the aging physical plant and equipment and invest in new programs. While the special operating agency concept, introduced in 1996 was intended to place the system on a more secure economic footing, that has not yet happened. The College has, since 2005, launched an ambitious overhaul of the delivery of courses and programs, introducing greater access and flexibility for students including updating its curriculum content throughout, an initiative that has the support of NBU. The problem remains that it did not have sufficient resources to accomplish this and other tasks needed to improve the system.

RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER:

ACCESSIBILITY:

Over the last twenty years, through deliberate or accidental impact of public policy, the value of a community college education has been downplayed. The failure of direct government funding to keep up with rising costs has meant an ever increasing rise in tuition costs for college programs. This has made these programs less attractive, especially in years when there was not a ready market in New Brunswick for the skills learned in NBCC programs.

Government policy has also encouraged the rise of for-profit educators, especially in the IT field, competing with community college for students. Government, especially in the McKenna years, told students that they needed to go to university and that a trade education wasn't good enough. Now the lure of high paying unskilled work in Alberta is providing another option to high school students and young adults in the workforce.

Successive budgetary cuts, freezes on hiring and other downsizing of government has impacted on the ability of the community college system to counter these negative factors. The marketing budget of NBCC is miniscule compared to universities and some private providers in the region. Accessibility to modern, high quality trade and technical post secondary education is, in our view, primarily a function of government policy, and NBCC is much more constrained in its ability to meet the challenges of access than the universities in our province.

We agree that the growth of the current community college system into eleven campuses across the province was in large part unplanned and political. Nevertheless these regional campuses, particularly in the north, serve a vital social and economic role in their communities and must be seen as an indispensable public policy tool for the continued economic viability of the regions they serve. In the same way, the francophone campuses serve as key institutions in the preservation of a rural francophone culture in New Brunswick. Accessibility for New Brunswickers means educational opportunity where they live, not just in the large urban centers.

RELEVANCE AND RESPONSIVENESS:

A community college education remains as relevant as ever. University education is good but it isn't for everyone, and the reason students go to NBCC can be lost if the College either models itself too closely on a university model, or integrates to the point of losing its unique strengths and identity. Students have told our members the reasons for choosing NBCC over other education options are:

- small group instruction – having the instructor know who you are
- less focus on lecture and more on hands-on training
- practicum/internship experience
- job readiness - being prepared to start working in a job right away
- cost – still much less expensive than most options for post secondary education
- local- education in their home towns.

NBU believes the central focus of the community college mission should remain the delivery of courses and programs to give students the technical, trade or technological skills necessary to get a good job.

A major problem however is the ability, in a timely way, for our community college system to respond to the needs of industry and changing global and local labour markets. The NBU believes that the current governance model of NBCC is no longer appropriate. The NBCC is a division of the Department of Post- Secondary Education, Training and Labour and is run by government bureaucrats, in accordance with the dictates of the Civil Service Act, the Financial Administration Act and numerous government policies designed for the effective functioning of a provincial civil service, but

not for an educational institution. There are other models readily available, and one need only look to the College of the Atlantic in Newfoundland as an example.

QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Quality and accountability will be better assured if the College is able to be masters in its own house, with its own governance structure and policies. It is not clear what benefits would be derived from imposing oversight by a body such as the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission or a similar provincial institution. What is needed is a more responsive educational institution, that has the ability to make its own decisions, to be responsive and accountable to its community: students, industry, the local communities in which they are located, and to our linguistic reality. Control by central government, ie Fredericton, will always be necessary to the extent that they are charged with the duty of insuring taxpayers dollars are well spent, but in this area “more is less.”

Educational institutions can become obsessed with quality assurance models. In the past much energy has been expended in the NBCC system implementing the current fad with questionable results but at the end of the day quality education will be built through a combination of the right leadership, the best people we can attract as educators and administrators, and the resources to do the job.

EFFICIENTCY AND COLLABORATION:

The NBU supports many of the suggestions set out in the briefs of NBCC and UNB and in the discussion paper to achieve efficiencies and explore collaborative efforts between universities and the community colleges. In particular, we support a credit by credit protocol and the digital library and electronic infra structure idea at page 15 of the UNB brief. We are also open to the co-location of university and college facilities and the idea of basing first and second year university courses at local community college campuses. Full support of these concepts would have to await further discussion and a more fully developed concept. We also support the creation of a full community college campus for the Fredericton region.

What the NBU does not support is the subsuming of the community college as an institution, either provincially or locally, into the university model or as just a feeder system into university. There is a difference in emphasis, approach, and methods between university and community college that has to be maintained. The community college must maintain and enhance its unique identity and connection with the local community if it is to attract the right proportion of post secondary students.

FINANCE

As indicated above the college system has, in our view been unable to meet its potential because of a lack of government funding. The effects of under-funding are there to be seen in the system in aging infra-structure, limited marketing budgets, and no money to invest in new programs, and in salaries that are below regional averages and well below national averages.

There is a limit on the amount New Brunswick students will or can pay through tuition for a community college education. Our members in this system tell us that their graduates leave the province, like university graduates, to get higher paying jobs elsewhere, in large part because of high student loans. It is difficult for our instructors who have lived and worked in New Brunswick all their lives to see successive graduating classes, their children and their neighbors' children, leave the province to find work when in their day you could graduate without a lot of debt and enter the local job market.

There needs to be a revision of the funding arrangements for the community college system. The answer does not however lie in the integration of the university and college systems. In that regard we support the view expressed by NBCC in its brief that such integration "would create a situation making access to funding even more difficult. The College programs would always beat the end of the list for development".

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. NBCC retain its identity as an educational network that is distinct from our universities and continue to provide students with the trade, technical and technological skills necessary to secure good jobs in New Brunswick;
2. NBCC retain its vital role in the social and economic life of the communities and regions in which they are situated;
3. NBCC be moved outside of the civil service and be allowed to develop its own governance model;
4. Collaboration between universities and the community college is to be encouraged but not at the expense of a separate identity for the community colleges;
5. Funding arrangements for the community college system be revised to provide adequate resources to invest in new programs, plant and equipment , attract new students and recruit and retain the instructional staff, professional educators, and administrators needed to achieve the goals of a modern community college system.

Respectfully submitted this 30th day of April 2007

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Thomas Mann
Executive Director

APPENDIX "A"

Administrative support staff

Administrative assistants

Apprenticeship counselors

Community College Instructors

Community College Department Heads

Curriculum Assistants

Curriculum Development Officers

Deans

Guidance Counsellors

Literacy Coordinators

Project Managers

Secretaries

Training Consultants