

Government of New Brunswick

Terms of Reference Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

Background

Nearly five decades ago, a Royal Commission on Higher Education (1962), chaired by John J. Deutsch, provided a number of important recommendations for the post-secondary sector in New Brunswick including the transfer of St. Thomas University to Fredericton, the establishment of a campus of University of New Brunswick in Saint John, the consolidation of the numerous existing French-language institutions into a single university, and the restructuring of the Provinces student financial assistance system. There have been several other efforts since then to examine various aspects of the Province's post-secondary sector, but none have explored it in as much detail, or recommended such fundamental changes:

- The Committee on Higher Education in the French Sector (1975), chaired by Louis LeBel, made additional recommendations relating to the Université de Moncton.
- The Commission on Excellence in Education, co-chaired by Aldéa Landry and James Downey, undertook a comprehensive overview of New Brunswick's entire education system. *To Live and Learn: The Challenge of Education and Training* (1993) recommended a number of changes related to post-secondary education, training, and the promotion of lifelong learning.
- The *Multi-Year Funding Plan for New Brunswick Universities* (1999), chaired by Médard Collette, focused almost exclusively on university funding.
- *Modernizing the New Brunswick Community College* (2005), a series of government-initiated consultations with local stakeholders, staff and students

Revisions of the post-secondary sector have not been limited to New Brunswick. Six other provinces have already launched post-secondary education commissions during the past three years:

- Quebec's Parliamentary Committee on Education completed a review on *Quality, Accessibility and Funding of Universities* (2004), followed by a ministry-led review of the college system.
- Ontario's independent commission under former Premier Bob Rae undertook a *Postsecondary Education Review* (2005), and British Columbia launched *Campus 20/20* in August 2006.
- Three provinces – Newfoundland & Labrador (2005), Alberta (2006), and Saskatchewan (launched May 2006) – established ministry/legislative task forces to examine their post-secondary sectors.

In launching its own Commission on Post-Secondary Education, New Brunswick faces the added challenges of:

- 1) A relatively large and diverse post-secondary education and training system within a relatively small Province;
- 2) A commitment to provide equivalent levels of educational opportunities to two linguistic communities: francophone and anglophone;
- 3) A rapidly declining youth population.

Mandate

Students and their post-secondary education and career success must be the focus of and driving force behind Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. New Brunswick's young people must be as fully as possible informed about and prepared for the post-secondary career and educational options available to them.

Although post-secondary education is primarily targeted at young people, New Brunswickers of all ages, whether planning to enrol on a part time or a full time basis and no matter where they live, should have access to the greatest possible range of post-secondary education and training options.

The focus on young people and students is hampered however by their rapidly increasing share of the total cost of a post-secondary education. This increasing share of the financial burden to students is coupled with labour market demands for more education and training. Finally, traditional groupings of choices for the students between education, training and apprenticeship are no longer as easily made in a world of rapidly changing social, economic and most particularly technological environments. The focus on students is thus challenged by new concerns for resources and the fundamental directions to adopt in the post-secondary sector as a whole.

With a network that includes eleven NBCC/CCNB and seven public university campuses, many private trainers, private-for-profit and religious degree granting institutions and apprenticeship, many opportunities for post-secondary education and training already exist within the Province. The Commission will recommend ways to ensure that the largest possible number of New Brunswickers can be assured access to and the possibility to complete a quality post-secondary education. Our graduates should be able to compete and succeed in the workforce and contribute their full potential to society and the economy, and our institutions should be able to compete with the best from across Canada and around the world.

The Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick will need to examine the entirety of the post-secondary education and training opportunities that are available to current students and learners:

- Public universities
- Private universities, both denominational and for-profit
- The NBCC/CCNB network
- Apprenticeships
- Private trainers
- Other aspects of literacy and lifelong learning

Five broad themes should guide the overall direction of the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick:

Accessible We must ensure that all qualified New Brunswickers of all ages are able to pursue post-secondary study, that post-secondary education and training is affordable, and that students are able to complete their post-secondary credentials in a reasonable time frame.

Relevant We must ensure that young New Brunswickers are well informed about and prepared for their post-secondary education and career choices, that the post-secondary sector meets the needs and priorities of New Brunswick, that workers have opportunities to continually enhance their skills and that immigrants and expatriate New Brunswickers are recruited to help fill the human resource needs of the Province.

Quality Quality assurance mechanisms will ensure that students, government and the general public are able to understand the costs, benefits, and outcomes of post-secondary education and training, that the quality of programs offered is second to none, and that the institutions themselves – both public and private – offer quality infrastructure, teaching and learning.

Competitive New Brunswick’s post-secondary institutions must identify their “Centres of Excellence”, and adapt to the new realities and demands of international recruitment, on-line teaching and training, and other innovative methods of delivery. Graduates of New Brunswick post-secondary institutions must also acquire the skills and training that will permit them to become strong competitors in a global marketplace.

Collaborative Collaboration and cost-sharing initiatives within and among post-secondary institutions and sectors, as well as within the Atlantic region as a whole and developing national and international partnerships could help develop an affordable and sustainable post secondary system.

Process

An independent Commission, operating in close collaboration with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour will be in the best position to undertake the following:

1. Gather and summarize data relevant to the broad range of post-secondary education and training issues facing the Province;
2. Develop a discussion paper, for release sometime early in 2007, that will guide the mandate and consultations of the Commission;
3. Undertake from February-May 2007 the broadest possible consultations with post-secondary stakeholders and the public through some combination of the following: facilitated roundtables, public events, individual consultations and submissions, websites, etc.
4. Examine the findings and recommendations of other provincial commissions, and consider best practices across Canada and elsewhere in the world, to identify options that are best suited to the needs, challenges and opportunities of New Brunswick.
5. Develop a final report, for submission to the provincial government during the summer of 2007 that includes objective, creative, and thought-provoking advice and recommendations for the future direction of the post-secondary education and training sector.