

MEMORANDUM

Date : April 12, 2007

To : Mr. Jacques L'Écuyer and Dr. Rick Miner
Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick

From : Éloi Duguay

Copies : Brenda Boucher, Mike McIntosh, Cecil Freeman, Phil Lepage,
Gary Jocheman

Subject : **BNB Comments in response to Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick Discussion Paper**

Attached, please find BNB's comments relative to the first discussion paper released by the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. BNB generally agrees with all the issues and concepts brought forward in the discussion paper but would like to take this opportunity to present our opinions and ideas on post-secondary education as they relate to economic development.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important initiative and look forward to further discussions as the Commission progresses.

Post-Secondary Education is integral to Economic Development

Business New Brunswick is very much aware of how the post-secondary education system can affect our quality of life. Through our clients and stakeholders, we see first-hand how a well-educated, flexible, mobile and committed workforce is needed to meet the demands of today's knowledge-intensive and global economy. The ability to leverage economic development opportunities is increasingly contingent upon the ability to meet the needs of business and industry through a highly-skilled workforce. Jurisdictions that are unable to determine and adapt to evolving trends, build on existing strengths and develop partnerships between government, business, industry and educational institutions will not be as competitive in the future.

If New Brunswick is to reach self-sufficiency, it will require a post-secondary education system that is flexible and meets our changing needs for skilled-workers. Moreover, we

must challenge existing paradigms and change the way we think about education in order to enact the type of transformation that will ensure our success.

Partnerships and Collaboration

In an effort to reach the goals associated with self-sufficiency, serious discourse between the people who hire students and the people who train students must take place. These types of discussions have occurred intermittently in the past; however, a true network between educational institutions, government, business and industry must be operated on an ongoing basis.

Considerations:

- NB should promote and develop an integrated network of post-secondary learning facilities in NB. Universities and colleges must work together to meet our educational needs and realize our immediate and long-term goals in New Brunswick.
- An integrated network of learning facilities with common goals and objectives will facilitate portability between programs and institutions. Students must be given every opportunity to determine where they fit in the education system before they drop out, become discouraged or fail to reach their potential.
- More attention to private sector training partnerships can be sought to enhance the skills being taught to our students. The private sector is in many cases, well-equipped to deliver training based on knowledge of current technologies and processes and frequently has strong linkages between industry and entrepreneurs.
- Industry participation in all learning facilities will help to ensure that students graduate with the skills that companies need to be competitive. For this, it is crucial that industry be asked to participate on Provincial Advisory Committees or Focus Groups to review curriculum and delivery.
- The New Brunswick Securities Commission recently released a report that included a recommendation that the Province offer financial incentives for businesses to attract management talent. In discussing this recommendation, it was suggested by industry stakeholders that consideration should also be given to allocating more resources to developing this talent in NB as opposed to relying on outside recruitment to address the issue.
- Training institutions will need to integrate academic studies with work experience. Cooperative (Co-op) training for example, is a model which allows students to alternate terms of classroom studies with terms of paid, full time employment. This model can help reduce the “no experience – no job” barrier,

which exists in NB. An enhanced co-op model would promote greater interaction and participation between learning institutions and the private sector. It is also recommended that co-op programs be designed in a manner which includes instructors as well. Instructors would benefit greatly from practical experience with industry in order to gain familiarity with technologies and processes.

- Post-secondary institutions need to work closer with secondary schools to ensure secondary students receive essential counseling on the full range of career paths available to them. Counseling must be unbiased in the sense that vocational and technical occupations receive the same promotion as careers produced through academic education.

Incentives and Policies

"Lifelong learning" is a practice that people must adopt to maintain skill competencies and to remain competitive and gainfully employed. In the near future, it may be necessary for learning institutions to teach specific knowledge and skills, as well as foster the capacity to continually learn and adapt. In this model, New Brunswick will be better able to address competitiveness and productivity issues by reaching out to all who are employable including the underemployed and those who require retraining.

The concept of lifelong learning supports the approach that legitimate learning can take place in multiple venues in addition to the classroom. New Brunswick is well-positioned in the distance education and online university sectors and these ought to be expanded to reach our population as a whole and provide greater opportunities. Our inherent strengths in information technology and the knowledge industry combined with our largely rural demography make lifelong learning an easily targeted objective.

Considerations:

- NB should consider a review of educational reforms previously introduced in Ireland and other European countries. The Irish educational system generally supports shorter, more practical courses. Since the traditional university approach is to provide more conceptual and abstract courses to students, it sometimes takes a relatively long time for new graduates to adapt themselves to firms' requirements. The more applied nature of some post-secondary courses in Ireland has been instrumental in making Irish domestic firms more productive and in attracting multinational corporations to Ireland.
- Operating programs at post-secondary institutions on a full year basis (as is the practice of the University of Waterloo) is an option to consider as this would provide more options to students as well as provide employers with a more year-round balance of student labour.

- Analyze all programs and courses to determine if it is necessary for them to be maintained on a 40 week schedule or if certain programs can be accelerated by graduating more students in less time on a continuous intake basis.
- Colleges should proceed with an evaluation of their current delivery model to enhance accessibility to the student population. A new delivery approach should create opportunities for students to complete their training at their own pace. For instance, there is a need to further explore on-line distance education as a delivery model for theory based training as a method to cut costs and increase accessibility, especially within rural communities. In our opinion, as programs become more flexible and accessible, the number of first-time and adult students will increase.
- NB should explore the possibility of implementing alternative or pre-tech schools concurrent to secondary schools to accommodate students unable to excel in existing curriculum and delivery models currently offered in the educational system.
- NB should explore the possibility of implementing a selection process, involving industry, to assist the students in making a proper career choice, especially in the area of vocational trades.
- It is recommended that more funding or programs be allocated to upgrade the existing workforce. This would allow industry options to improve productivity and compete on the global market. For this, it is strongly suggested that colleges place more emphasis on customized training delivery. NB may also explore the possibility of revamping the current apprenticeship training system to better meet the needs of industry.

Conclusion

As stated previously, post-secondary education is integral to economic development. The challenges that confront us, however, are far easier to identify than the solutions. We need to increase the number of people attending colleges and universities, train them better than other jurisdictions and make meaningful work available so they can be a part of a productive, innovative and committed workforce.

Éloi Duguay
Deputy Minister