

# **NBCC Brief**

## **Presented to the Commission on Post Secondary Education in New Brunswick**

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The New Brunswick Community College Special Operating Agency of the Department of Post Secondary Education and Training includes a network of 11 campuses (6 English and 5 French). The NBCC is part of that network and is comprised of the six English campuses as well as the College of Craft and Design.

The NBCC has adopted a “One College” model of operation. This model encompasses all aspects of the functions of academics and operations, including Marketing, International Recruitment, Contract Training, Student Success, Students with Disabilities, Registrar, and Learning Management.

The NBCC and the ability of the college to meet the training and education needs of New Brunswick students and employers are essential to the self-sufficiency of the Province. There are many factors to consider in building an adequate post secondary system; however, in this brief we have chosen to speak about the needs and challenges of the system within in the context outlined by the commission. Specifically we will focus on the issues we feel point the way to a more dynamic post-secondary system, one that will meet the needs of future students and help secure a prosperous and healthy society from a Community College perspective.

### ***OUR COMMITMENT***

The New Brunswick Community College has both the privilege and the accountability of being an indispensable partner in the successful future of New Brunswick. The strong agenda our government has established, the demographic issues we face, and the opportunities and challenges that come with the changing relationships we have within Canada and the world will set the agenda. The focus in every corner of our college must be on “Achieving Excellence” every day, and in every way to ensure NBCC is a solid partner in moving this agenda forward.

Achieving Excellence requires a focused investment of time, effort, and resources. The college has invested a great deal of energy into renewal and strategic alignment and we can be proud of the resulting accomplishments. This work provides the strong foundation we will build upon in order to meet the challenges before us.

Many stakeholders monitor our progress and measure our success. Our students and prospective students, our faculty and staff, our partners, New Brunswick employers, and our government each have their view of what success means. Our work as a college needs to measure up to those expectations.

NBCC must continue to improve accessibility and increase success. We can achieve this with a strategic commitment to increase opportunities for part-time learning, to develop flexible delivery models, and to create more opportunities for students to successfully complete by adjusting the timing of their course work.

NBCC must maintain an inventory of learning opportunities to provide the most value for the New Brunswick learner, and we can do this through the continued adjustment of program and course offerings. The percentage of resources dedicated to delivering training and turning out successful graduates needs to continue to increase. We must do this by engaging staff and faculty in effective and progressive learning around the challenges we face. In the end we must demonstrate improvements and productivity by measuring what we do and celebrating the results. We must be accountable and transparent with our students, the public, and ourselves as these improvements are implemented.

### *OUR ACCOUNTABILITY*

The Department of Post Secondary Education Training and Labour has clearly defined our accountability. The Government of New Brunswick is committed to higher education and in particular has focused on the role of the New Brunswick Community College system. Along with the public school system and universities, the College is one of the Province's most significant investments in New Brunswick's future. NBCC's contribution to the province's economy and society goes beyond education and training; the college has a direct impact on the communities in which it operates, on the businesses with which it interacts, and on the students it trains.

The government's current context for NBCC is established in four key areas:

- Accessibility and Success: Converting Increased Participation into Graduates
- Relevance: Engaging Stakeholders
- Learning Culture: Engaging Our Students and Staff
- Accountability: Focusing on Outcomes

### *OUR HISTORY*

Our history, and in particular the history of a governance (or lack there of) model, places the College in the same position as any other departmental branch of government and has a strong influence on the model we have today. These influences must be understood if change is to be effective.

- The location and capacity of our Campuses have not been planned. The system we have today is a compilation of financial, political, economic development and federal opportunity spending decisions transcending a 40 year period. Little regard has been given to the need or adequacy of the system and inappropriate results of the past are often strengthened by new political decisions of the day.

- The College has never gone through a budget planning and alignment process. It has been impacted time and time again by the budget decisions of Government. Today's existing budget is the result of a mixture of historical and political decisions, none of which were designed to make the College more effective. The budget model today is also riddled with funding inconsistencies, from campus to campus and program to program.
- A budget review of the last twenty years would show, with the exception of onetime capital investments, wage bill transfers for collective bargaining and tuition increases, our base budget (grant) is effectively less than it was twenty years ago.

## **OUR ISSUES**

The discussion paper raises a number of questions and makes a number of statements NBCC wishes to respond to.

### **Accessibility**

- NBCC supports the position expressed in the discussion paper that *"In a free and democratic society, access to post-secondary education is a fundamental value. It means that each individual has the opportunity to learn to acquire the knowledge and skills appropriate to his or her ability, needs, and interests. It means there must be no barriers imposed by income, age, or by choices made earlier in life."*

*NBCC believes that this discussion must also include the appropriate resources to ensure a menu of program offerings and supports consistent with the needs of Industry and appropriate to allow graduates to have successful lives and careers. This is particularly true in dealing with literacy issues, supports for students with special needs, and students with intellectual disabilities, but it also extends to financial issues and the logistics of access in a rural province.*

- While it is true that the Community College participation rates are much lower for New Brunswick, this rate is less dramatic when the numbers for University transfer programs are eliminated in provinces such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

"Are too many individuals entering university who would have been better served by another form of post-secondary education? Our quick answer is yes. The more complete answer, however, is that those other forms of post secondary education may well include a college model where the first two years of university are achieved at least in part within the Community College. We believe that there are many more New Brunswickers who would take advantage of and be successful in their post secondary experience if the initial experience was in an appropriate environment where they could be adequately supported.

The current model of negotiated credit transfer for specific programs in particular circumstances for certain students is much more of a PR process for the institutions than

it is an avenue of development for students. It is particularly important to note and remember many of the current transfer models lead students to dead-ended associate degrees.

*NBCC believes our most significant recommendation to the Commission is: all NBCC campuses should become involved in the direct and integrated delivery of a new fully articulated and accredited "First Two Years At Home" model to serve those New Brunswick students who are not currently participating in post secondary education.*

### Relevance and Responsiveness

- *Do students drop out because they were ill prepared, or because the programs they entered did not meet their needs?*

*NBCC believes this area must become an area of on going review and every PSE institution should be required to focus on Key Performance Indicators designed to target a reduction in the number of drop outs.*

- *Are college programs too narrowly focused? Is enough attention paid by colleges to general education, so that students are better equipped to find, or even create, jobs in this new and rapidly changing economy*

The Community College system has a long and proud history of providing graduates with the skills they need to be productive the day they enter the workforce. The development of technology and the speed of innovation in all career and vocational areas increased dramatically in the last two decades. This level of change will only accelerate in the next decade. The typical College response to these developments in New Brunswick has often been to add more "stuff" to our programs or to create new and specific programs with an even narrower focus. This reaction is not sustainable nor would our understanding of andragogy support it. This situation is further stressed by the input of accrediting bodies and industry partners who insist just because we know how to do it our graduates must.

NBCC's decision to offer General Studies for the 2007 school year and our earlier recommendation related to transfer programs create an opportunity for the College to change this situation. We are now positioned very well to create a new program model and paradigm. This new model must prepare our graduates with the skills they need today and those they need to be successful in the future.

*NBCC must be encouraged and supported to modify its program model to ensure all diploma students have an opportunity to add liberal arts and general studies options to their transcript within the graduation requirements without increasing the duration of their program.*

- *Are we responding adequately to the growing shortage of workers in the skilled trades? The fact that 97% of apprentices are still male suggests at least one possible missed opportunity.*

The current and future project needs of the Province seem to indicate a strong need for the immediate development of more programs for some skilled trades, particularly the construction trades. We believe this situation must be viewed with caution. The need will be to replenish the exit from the workforce of tradespersons in the next decade and to manage the spikes occurring as a result of major projects. It takes an average of over 5 years to train a journeyman and few current projected projects have timelines extending that far out.

The other factors to be considered relate to the management of Apprenticeship and practices such as the normal one-to-one ratio of apprentice to journeyman and the typical mobility of the construction workforce. To train and prepare sufficient trades persons to meet all major project needs on the table currently could mean we would cause a significant exit of these workers from N.B. at the end of the major project cycle.

These economic situations also typically result in employers and developers becoming more innovative with their approaches to work. It is not yet clear what impact innovation will have. There are some minor examples though and they have occurred in Fredericton in the last two years. The specific innovation has been the move of manufactured home suppliers into the apartment complex and commercial building market.

The Government's drive for self sufficiency will require a strong labor force, but more importantly it must be one adaptable to changes in the economy. A workforce only focused on "doing" is greatly damaged when the doing moves elsewhere. In New Brunswick we must focus on jobs insulated as much as possible from these changes. This will require a stronger focus on the development of technicians and technologists in order to support the opportunities of design, quality assurance and project management.

*NBCC will need to be provided with short-term funding (5 to 7 years) to allow for a significant increase in the number of pre-employment graduates in all skilled trade areas. A fast track to journeyman approach needs to be developed for all trade areas in shortage. The fast track approach should include a significant increase of the "in school" component of apprenticeship.*

*The College must work with Industry and the various accrediting bodies to create new pathways from skilled trades to the technician and Technology level to ensure a strong well stratified workforce and to reduce out-migration as the construction boom moves into ongoing production.*

- *Are our post-secondary institutions sufficiently flexible, able to adapt to changing circumstances in a timely fashion?*

NBCC has, over the last four years, converted its curriculum product from silo based to course based. This change positions the College for short term changes and modifications to the program model. We can now create a new option and introduce it in a very short time frame. However the creation of a new program direction is still a

lengthy process. This process starts with the validation of the need, the creation of a response model, costing and then the identification or sourcing of revenue to fund the program. If we utilize our cost recovery model and funding is available to our client/partners then our turn around is reasonable. If we defer to create a regularly funded subsidized model our turn around should not be less than two school years.

The current funding approach and model is also an impediment in other areas such as modifications to the delivery approach. The NBCC budget has become a program delivery and administration budget. There is no opportunity for future investment except within the current envelope. This means first we must decide to stop a program, then we must decide how we will use the revenue and then we must ramp up the new offering.

***NBCC must be provided with a new investment fund to allow for the development and transition of programs.***

- *Is the degree of centralized government control of the college system still appropriate? Should the colleges have greater independence, and should there be increased community representation on governing bodies, particularly by students and employers?*

The impact of central government control and influence on every component of the activity of NBCC impacts the potential of the College. While we are certain central government wants the strongest college possible we are still treated as a branch of a government department when decisions are made.

***The NBCC is strongly in support of moving forward with a change in Governance, towards one that would reflect more closely the standard for community colleges in Canada.***

### **Quality and Accountability**

- *Would a quality assurance model specific to New Brunswick that includes the New Brunswick Community College be more effective than the current MPHEC model?*

***NBCC has never been part of the activity associated with MPHEC so we are not directly in a position to comment. We would however see direct benefit of creating a quality assurance model for all post secondary education in New Brunswick. The benefit we see is the creation of a level playing field in terms of reporting and planning. It could also create a place for appropriate discussions about the issues of credit transfer and articulation.***

- *Do our institutions pay enough attention to teaching how to teach? Is teaching effectiveness monitored, and are programs in place to bring teaching quality to the highest possible level? Are students effectively involved in evaluating the quality of teaching? Does each institution, in short, place sufficient emphasis on the quality of teaching?*

We can never pay enough attention to how to teach. This is particularly true in the College environment where our students come from the most diverse backgrounds possible and most are focused on moving a career forward. While the diversity is the benefit it is also the challenge; teaching and learning methods need to be as diverse as our students. That being said, there are significant challenges to be faced with taking qualified trades people, technicians, business specialists, engineers, and health care workers who are experts in their field and transitioning them into being strong teachers. At the opposite end of the spectrum taking a trained a teacher and then providing them with the technical skills and expertise would bring even more challenges. Doing all of this in an environment where the College presents a wage scale for faculty that is often less than competitive with industry adds an additional element.

NBCC has approached this issue by creating and delivering an Instructor Development Program that spans new instructors' first three years of employment. The program is a requirement for all faculty and includes a significant academic component and a mentorship model. This model provides us with an opportunity to take well qualified people from industry who have the desire and drive to teach and provide them with an adequate transition.

- *Is there research role for Community Colleges?*

We believe there is an opportunity for a research role for NBCC. The focus of the role needs to be as part of a research team or an approach utilizing the skill sets of our faculty and the facilities we have. The ideal opportunities are in the areas of technology transfer and technical support to other researchers.

An example of a potential opportunity would be "Reduction of Trucking Costs in Atlantic Canada". A university and industry partner could provide the quantitative and structural support while the College could provide data capture and some analysis.

A significant restraint to the development of this opportunity within the College is the high level of faculty and facility utilization and the lack of resources for proposal development.

### Efficiency

- *The public has a right to expect it's publicly supported post-secondary institutions, colleges and universities both, to behave as parts of a provincial system. We should expect that, to the maximum extent possible, a credit earned in one provincial institution, college or university, is recognized by the others. The appropriate mechanisms to ensure this transparency need to be developed and enhanced, either by the institutions themselves, the preferred option, or by government. It may involve credit-by-credit protocols worked out in advance, along the lines of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer or the Nova Scotia Prior Learning Assessment Centre, or it might employ a more flexible system of block transfers. What is the mechanism that*

*would most appropriately and effectively achieve the desired objective for New Brunswick?*

The Province will benefit significantly from an increase in Post Secondary participation. The program models and the transfer opportunities create one set of access issues and the demographics, geography and economics of the Province create another set of access issues. If more New Brunswickers are to participate in Post Secondary Education we must ensure they can start where they are academically, economically and geographically. These issues need to be considered when we design a transfer system. We also need to ensure certification valued by industry and the student exists between the transfer opportunities.

The model needs to be as simple as we can make it and it needs to ensure some level of arbitration when institutions cannot agree. We believe a model focusing on block transfer sometimes supported by bridging programs will work best for most students in our traditional trades, vocational and technology programs. The development of the transfer agreement and thus any arbitration between institutions could be administered through the Quality Assurance Model (Higher Education Council).

The primary issue needing to be considered in this discussion is the role of the College is different from the role of the University. While we must create opportunities for those who wish to move from program to program or build on an existing certification, it is important to remember the College is essential in meeting specific workforce needs.

- *We need to question the degree of separation that exists between community colleges and universities, especially where both institutions are located in the same community. Does this so-called "binary divide" constitute the most efficient use of public resources? Would there be value in closer collaboration?*

The only place in New Brunswick this situation currently exists is Saint John. With effective transfer agreements and high levels of collaboration related to community issues this situation should not necessarily create issues.

- *Another situation that presents a unique opportunity arises from the decision to establish a community college in Fredericton. What should its role and relation to UNB and St. Thomas University be? Is this an opportunity to create a new kind of institution designed to meet the needs of the twenty-first century?*

The creation of a new Campus of NBCC in Fredericton would call for a great deal of collaboration between the PSE players. There are or would be opportunities for collaboration in the management of administrative services. We would need to ensure that the transfer and articulation opportunities are developed as they are in any other part of the province. Opportunities could exist in terms of facilities and facility management. There are most likely other opportunities for collaboration on the student service side. The College would benefit significantly from access to the library and sport facilities that are part of both universities.



The real point, however, is that the employment base in Fredericton needs a supply of well trained trades, technical, health care and business support College graduates to ensure a properly stratified workforce. This must be the focus of a Campus in Fredericton. The creation of a “new Kind” of institution could well distract all players from this important agenda.

Discussions related to collaboration in Fredericton must also consider The Maritime College of Forest Technology.

### **Collaboration with Differentiation**

- *Do individual colleges have the freedom to respond appropriately to the training needs of their communities? Should college and university facilities in the same community be more closely integrated?*

The only issue restricting College Campuses from responding appropriately to community training needs is access to funding. The integration of Colleges and Universities would create a situation making access to funding even more difficult. The College programs would always be at the end of the list for development.

### ***CONTACT INFORMATION:***

Richard Corey  
Executive Director NBCC  
500 Beaverbrook Ct., Suite 500  
P.O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5H1  
Tel: 506-453-8258  
Fax: 506-444-4960