

**BRIEFING TO THE COMMISSION ON POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

PRESENTED BY:

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NEW BRUNSWICK
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Thank you for the invitation to address the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick. As the first private institution to be granted designation under the Degree Granting Act of The Province of New Brunswick, Lansbridge University welcomes the opportunity to provide our insight and experience to the important and timely work of the Commission.

The Commission, in its discussion paper, identifies a number of issues and questions relevant to its mandate. Specifically, the Commission is seeking input on issues including accessibility, relevance and responsiveness, quality and accountability, efficiency, collaboration with differentiation, and finance. After providing some background on LUNB, we will provide a private university perspective on these issues and questions. LUNB sees a valuable role for the private university sector in NB as an important complement to the public post-secondary sector.

Background

Lansbridge University – New Brunswick (LUNB) has offered degree programs in business administration in an on-line format since its inception in 2000. Beginning as Unexus University of Learnsoft Solutions, LUNB focuses on providing relevant, flexible, affordable and market-driven management education. Our students are primarily working professionals whose busy lives permit them to access higher education on a part-time basis from their place of residence.

LUNB is owned and operated by Lansbridge University Corporation (67%) and Learnsoft Corporation (33%) and, with the exception of a peripheral relationship through partial ownership, operates wholly independently from Lansbridge University of British Columbia (LUCBC). LUNB has been built and operated primarily by New Brunswickers who understand the local needs of business and students.

LUNB, as a private university, is funded wholly through private investment and the tuition fees of its students. The university's student population is largely comprised of Canadian residents from across the country, USA residents, and a portion of students living abroad. Our plans include a significant broadening of availability of our MBA program in Canada and abroad, the development and delivery of on-line corporate training, and the delivery of relevant certificate and diploma level programs locally. The university contributes directly to the local economy and with additional investment, hard work, and a focus on relevance and quality, will significantly increase this contribution.

Since its first class of 10 students in the MBA program, LUNB has worked closely with over 300 students to provide relevant business management curricula that are rooted in quality. Our graduates have gone on to become key decision makers in industry and government in Canada, the USA, and abroad. Indeed some of our graduates have gone on to enrol in and complete further graduate programs at well recognized universities in Canada and in the USA.

As the first designated private university in New Brunswick, LUNB has recognized the importance in its role as a 'pioneer' and has sought independent verification of its commitment



to operational effectiveness, academic quality, and accountability. While eagerly awaiting the implementation of the private universities quality assessment mechanisms by the Province of New Brunswick, LUNB underwent application and assessment for accreditation by the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) of Washington, D.C. In June 2005, and after a thorough review, LUNB received accreditation from DETC. DETC is an independent accrediting body that is recognized by both the USA Secretary of Education and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. LUNB will also undergo a regular review by the NB Department of Higher Education through the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), and we welcome this opportunity to work with the Department and MPHEC in the continuance of our commitment to quality.

Accessibility

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...it means there must be no barriers imposed by income, age, or by choices made earlier in life.

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007

LUNB, as an on-line university permits working adults, who have career and family obligations, access to higher education without the requirements of forfeiting their career earnings or position, relocation, or sacrifice of their family obligations. The full cost of education includes tuition fees, the opportunity cost of not working full-time, and the added costs of relocating and holding a second residence. In many cases our students would not be able to engage in higher learning as a result of the financial and personal barriers imposed by full-time, in-class learning.

LUNB and other private on-line universities in NB specialize in developing and utilizing the latest communication technologies for the delivery of relevant and meaningful learning opportunities. The private sector complements the public sector by continuing their investment in these technologies and delivery methods, thereby permitting access to higher education that students might otherwise not be able to engage.

In addition, on-line delivery permits international students to engage in learning 'in' the province of NB. This has the added advantage of exposing future industry and government decision makers living abroad to NB based education, professional networks and future industry opportunities.

Relevance and Responsiveness

Is New Brunswick's post-secondary system meeting the needs of the province, including students and employers? Do students drop out because they were ill prepared, or because the programs they entered do not meet their needs? Are post-secondary institutions sufficiently flexible, able to adapt to changing circumstances in a timely fashion?

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007



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LUNB, and other private universities in NB, owe their very existence to the fact that they must remain relevant, meet the needs of their students and their employers, and remain flexible and adaptable.

Every student carefully considers his or her cost of time, lost wages, and tuition fees in her or his decision to investment in their future through continued learning. Private institutions, deriving 100% of their revenue from tuition fees, must demonstrate to students that their investment is wise. If we were not flexible and responsive and if we offered irrelevant programs, we would simply not exist.

LUNB focuses on providing programs and curricula that are directly relevant and that result in real employment opportunities for our graduates. Our decision making structure is relatively flexible and permits a quick response to rapid change while respecting the need for maintaining quality assurance.

Quality and Accountability

Questions of quality and accountability lie at the very heart of the public interest in post-secondary education. Questions of quality and accountability extend to the private sector as well. It is one thing to rely on market forces to weed out weak or incompetent instruction. It is quite another to have confidence that students...are receiving quality education and training.

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007

LUNB fully appreciates and understands the roles that quality assurance and accountability play in the public confidence of the New Brunswick post-secondary degree 'brand'.

The private and public universities in NB have an equal responsibility to put quality at the forefront of their mandates. In addition to accountability directly to their students, private universities undergo a rigorous application process by the Department of Post-Secondary Education through their designated quality assurance body, MPHEC. Subsequent institutional reviews are conducted on private institutions by MPHEC on behalf of the Department. In addition, private institutions may chose to seek accreditation from independent accrediting bodies.

LUNB, in addition to its internal quality assurance procedures, sought and received accreditation in June 2005 by DETC, as mentioned above. The university is also looking forward to its institutional review to be conducted by MPHEC in the summer of 2007. LUNB regularly receives and responds to student assessments of teaching quality and effectiveness, and ensures that its professors are well qualified Ph.D. holders in their teaching discipline.

While it is one thing to undergo intermittent review by independent bodies such as MPHEC and DETC, it is another for institutions to provide ongoing transparency of its quality assurance



and operations. While LUNB is undergoing a transformation of its academic quality assurance and governance structure to provide more public transparency, we also advocate for the establishment of an association of private universities in NB. Such an association will have as its mandate a self-governing role, a unified voice to government and other interested parties, and an opportunity for sector members to collaborate on items of benefit to all constituents.

Efficiency

The central question here is whether and to what extent the internal structures of and operations of our post-secondary institutions work to advance the central objectives of accessibility, relevance and responsiveness, quality and accountability. ...to the maximum extent possible, a credit earned in one provincial institution, college or university, is recognized by others.

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007

LUNB views the role of private universities in NB as being complementary to that of the public institutions of the province. As stated, the private universities provide access to many students who would otherwise not be able to participate in post-secondary education. In addition, the sector, in some cases, provides programming that is specialized and may not be offered through the public system.

The extent to which the private universities can further complement the public universities goes beyond the access and programming issues discussed above. LUNB, for example, has significant expertise in other provincial and international markets. Imagine for a moment a student in India, and another student in Yellowknife, each enrolled in an on-line LUNB BBA program. Each of these students would like to complete his or her degree, in-class, at UNB. While a number of LUNB graduates have gone on to study in further post-graduate programs at well recognized universities throughout North America, the reality exists that the credit receiving institution has sole jurisdiction in determining the transferability of credits. In most cases, this decision is in the hands of the well intentioned faculty members of that receiving institution. In the case of the students from Yellowknife and India, their decision to continue their study in NB is contingent on credit transferability.

LUNB strongly supports and advocates the establishment of mechanisms and protocols supporting credit-by-credit transfer among all institutions in the province, where appropriate. For the public system to develop such protocols with the private universities, would result in even greater transparency of the private institutions and an opportunity for students living elsewhere in Canada or abroad to enrol in other NB institutions after completing some credits at LUNB. In this case, LUNB would have to demonstrate fully and clearly to UNB how their courses are substantively equivalent to the target UNB credits.

Private universities are permitted to deliver degree tracked courses under the Degree Granting Act of the Province, yet they are excluded from membership in key university associations, bodies, and organizations. Bodies such as that which might develop credit transfer protocols.



Permitting private universities to participate fully and equally with public institutions on this, and other initiatives, will result in even greater transparency of these institutions, and improved system efficiency.

Collaboration with Differentiation

We live in an increasingly global environment in which international competitiveness has become the key to welfare and prosperity of nations and provinces. [Our institutions] must be able to face and succeed in international competition. We do not think greater standardization ... is what the new global reality requires. [Institutions] must decide where they can excel... But differentiation must be accompanied by collaboration.

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007

It is the very nature of private universities to differentiate by seeking out unique areas of opportunity for educational offerings. To remain vibrant and to grow requires that these institutions provide unique, relevant and meaningful programs in both domestic and international arenas. To this end, the private universities play an important role in providing 'niche' programs where the public institutions might not have the resources or opportunity to do so.

In addition to these unique program offerings, the private universities invest continuously in the development of improved technologies for the delivery of education via the internet. Imagine collaboration between the public universities and the private universities where these technologies are used to deliver learning opportunities to single parents, house bound individuals, or persons living in remote areas of the province. Individuals who cannot afford to relocate or are not able to relocate, or who cannot forfeit their obligations to family or other commitments.

Again, the example provided above of the international student wishing to both gain and share international experience while attending an excellent degree program at both on-line at home and in-class in New Brunswick speaks to the need for further collaboration. What better way to fully engage the global environment than to invite students from around the world to participate in NB learning opportunities in an affordable and practical way.

Finance

For many students there is no alternative to living away from home, which adds substantial to the total cost, as does income that must be foregone for many, especially older, students. ...Similarly, modern communication technologies make distance education a realistic alternative for some students and we need to explore ways of enhancing its ability in New Brunswick.

CPSENB Discussion Paper, Mar. 2007

Other than access to the federal and some provincial student loan programs, LUNB is fully financed through tuition fees and private investment. The private universities do not draw on



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the public purse, but rather they contribute to the overall investment of higher education in the province.

Again, and not to be repetitive, there is great opportunity for the public and private universities to collaborate and provide broader access while improving efficiencies. Organizations such as Learnsoft, LUNB and other private on-line institutions are well positioned to work with the colleges and public universities of NB to provide a realistic alternative to New Brunswickers combining on-line technologies with existing post-secondary curricula.

Conclusions

LUNB appreciates the opportunity to address the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, and we thank you for your time and consideration.

Private universities are well positioned to provide greater access to education for New Brunswickers. Our program offerings are relevant to today's industry and institutional requirements and we must remain responsive to changes in their requirements. LUNB fully appreciates and understands the need for a quality mandate and for accountability of all institutions. Closer collaboration with public bodies and institutions will result in increased accountability and transparency.

LUNB sees an important and necessary role for private universities as complements to the public post-secondary education system. We would very much welcome the opportunity for real and meaningful collaboration with these fine institutions to the benefit of all New Brunswickers.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Chris Pilgrim
President
Lansbridge University – New Brunswick