

Backgrounder

“What We Heard: A Report on the Consultations on Public Post-Secondary Education in Newfoundland and Labrador”

Backdrop

On June 29, 2004, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced its intention to commission a white paper on post-secondary education. Dr. Wayne Ludlow, Commissioner, and Mr. Cyril Farrell, Advisor, conducted 21 province-wide consultations with students, post-secondary institutions, professional associations, employer groups and unions. Additionally, Dr. Ludlow received over 100 written submissions.

The accumulated information is presented in *What We Heard: A Report on the Consultations on Public Post-Secondary Education in Newfoundland and Labrador*. This document confirms the importance of post-secondary education to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and highlights the prominent role that Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic play in the post-secondary system. It is available online at www.ed.gov.nl.ca

What We Heard: The Post-Secondary Structure

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians clearly value our post-secondary system. Many respondents felt that one university and one college make our public post-secondary system efficient and effective, and positioned to be responsive to the larger public policy needs of our province. Therefore, we need a strategic plan. We need a system that fosters greater collaboration between our public institutions in the areas of planning, service delivery, and sharing of resources and facilities. Students should be able to move easily within the system. Programs should be more integrated, avoid duplication and provide for transferability. In this light, institutions need more points of contact regarding decision-making.

It is considered important to link programs to regional economic development goals and labour market needs. Programs should fit with community aspirations. Additionally, an integrated approach to the distribution of learning centres throughout the province should be part of a plan to develop a truly provincial post-secondary system.

There are many opportunities to link research to social and economic development. Government can play a major role by including institutions in defining strategic development goals, facilitating their cooperation through governance and assisting them with marketing efforts. Success will also depend on involving industry and community stakeholders.

What We Heard: Funding of Post-Secondary Education

Students saw funding of post-secondary education as an investment—that the best way to grow the economy is with educated people. Many felt tuition fees should be affordable and were opposed to linking tuition with earning potential. Many felt that fees should be competitive and consistent with an Atlantic Canada average, and that an increase should not result in a corresponding decrease in operating grants to institutions.

Many felt Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador student loans are too low to cover actual costs. Some favoured up-front, interest-free loans. Students preferred needs-based grants. There was overall praise for the debt reduction grant program. The relationship of federal funding to

post-secondary education needs to be explored. More funding is also needed to replace aging infrastructure and old technology.

Post secondary institutions could be greatly assisted by an enhanced provincial research and development fund to build research capacity and attract investments. Other possible sources of funding included international students, endowments, and international marketing or branding of educational products.

What We Heard: Post-Secondary Education and Population Needs

There are many in our society who experience barriers to post-secondary education. Participants felt government and institutions should promote wider accessibility by fostering changes and flexibility in the system which will help all individuals succeed. Awareness of a student's needs, and measures to address them, are crucial to continued success and should accompany the student through the system.

All participants agreed it is important to promote a culture of lifelong learning. To do this, we need to focus on two things. We must start early to foster a love of learning by investing in resources in young children and their parents so that learning will become second nature to the next generation. We must also invest in literacy development, including basic literacy training.