

October 26, 2004

Dr. Wayne E. Ludlow
Commissioner
c/o Department of Education
4th Floor, West Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John' s, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Dr. Ludlow:

The Executive Committee of MUNFA would like to express its concerns about the proposed White Paper on Post-Secondary Education, the process by which it is being conducted, and the far-reaching implications of some of the premises under which it is being conducted.

- First, we are dismayed that so few of the real stakeholders in post-secondary education in general, and in the university and its future in particular, have been identified. Among these we number students, academic staff members, and administrative staff.
- We believe strongly that a university is a place of intellectual exploration and discovery, not just a place for communicating 'facts' and 'information' . The kind of institution we envision requires a high degree of autonomy in the conduct of instruction and in the assessment of student performance.
- While we are keenly aware of the cost of post-secondary education to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, we need to recognize that the university operates competitively in national and international contexts, not just a provincial one.
- There are significant differences between a college such as CONA and a university such as MUN, and their goals and mandates are radically different. We do not believe significant gains are to be made in blurring these mandates.
- The university is not a 'knowledge factory' that produces marketable products, but a place for training students to think independently, critically, and creatively.
- MUN' s position as the only university in the province combined with its mandate to offer a comprehensive set of programs demands a significant faculty complement. While some perceive this as a costly luxury, it should be seen as an attraction for studying at MUN.

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- Raising tuition fees may bring MUN in line with other Atlantic universities and lessen the burden on the province's budget, but without complementary programs to increase student grants and loans, it will only increase the already high financial burden that most students face, or deter some from attending university.
- Academic freedom, which among other things entails unfettered choices in subjects and methods of conducting research, is one of the fundamental principles by which academic staff members produce new knowledge. Curiosity based research has produced significant breakthroughs in all areas. The expectation is for university researchers to conduct only research that has the potential of commercial exploitation, or even give priority to such research, seems very short-sighted. Once again, it demonstrates a lack of understanding of how different the business and academic sphere are and should remain.
- The responsibility to attract investment and create business opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador lies with the business community and the provincial government. The university's responsibility is to educate students in habits of thought that will make them more valuable members of society.

In conclusion, we are concerned that many of the points raised in the documents circulated as part of the White Paper process fail to address the real issues: that our province needs university graduates with quality education, and that we train students for a life-time of contributing to society in ways that are not easily quantifiable. It is our view that any report made to government should stress the long term value of a university degree, not just in monetary terms, but also for enhancing the quality of life in our society.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Schipper
President, MUNFA

cc: Dr. A. Meisen, President
Hon. D. Williams, Premier
Members, House of Assembly