



Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged Higher Education and Regions

- OECD/IMHE International Conference -

**19-21 September 2007
Valencia, Spain**

PANEL DISCUSSION CONCLUSIONS FOR POLICY: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Rachel Bard, Deputy Minister
Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
Fredericton, New Brunswick - Canada

Good morning.

My name is Rachel Bard and I am the Deputy Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in New Brunswick, one of Canada's ten provinces.

New Brunswick is located on Canada's east coast and is one of the Atlantic Provinces, which consist of the three Maritime Provinces: New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia; and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Atlantic Canada was one of 14 regions that participated in the OECD study "*Supporting the contribution of HEIs to regional development*" resulting in a final synthesis report that has been launched at this conference.

First, I will provide you with a quick overview of the challenges facing Canada as a whole, followed by a synopsis of the unique challenges facing Atlantic Canada. Finally I will outline the challenges and broad policy directions for post-secondary education (PSE) and skills training in New Brunswick, some of which we share with the rest of Atlantic Canada and Canada, and some of which are uniquely our own.

In Canada, post-secondary education (PSE) institutions face considerable challenges throughout the next decade. Meeting those challenges will require focus, innovation, and creativity. We must continue to excel in those areas where we traditionally do well and address those areas where we can improve.

Canada has an aging workforce, with a growing immigrant and Aboriginal workforce; we need to fully capitalize on the skills and education of our mature workers, immigrants, and Aboriginal people. Rapidly changing technology is changing how our industries work – and workers must keep pace. We need to produce more researchers and place a greater emphasis on research and innovation because research and innovation create opportunities and help raise output per worker.

Geographically, Canada is the second largest country in the world — almost 10 million square kilometres (3.8 million square miles) — with a population density of 3.3 people per square kilometre, one of the lowest in the world. A very large portion of the population of approximately 33 million lives in four major urban centres and within 300 kilometres of the southern border with the United States.

Canada is divided into 10 provinces and 3 territories and responsibility for education is under the exclusive jurisdiction of each province and territory. While there are a great many similarities in the provincial and territorial education systems across Canada, there are important differences that reflect the geography, history, culture, and corresponding specialized needs of the populations served. However, the comprehensive, diversified, and widely accessible nature of the education systems in Canada reflect the societal belief in the importance of education.

Although there is no federal department of education, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), formed in 1967, is an intergovernmental body that provides leadership in education at the pan-Canadian and international levels and contributes to the fulfillment of the constitutional responsibility for education conferred on provinces and territories through which Ministers assume pan-Canadian leadership in education. CMEC is the national voice for education in Canada and, through CMEC, the provinces and territories work collectively on common objectives in a broad range of activities at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.

Late in 2005, ministers of CMEC and labour market ministers met and provided input to a pan-Canadian policy framework issued by Canadian provincial premiers in July 2006: *Competing for Tomorrow: a Strategy for Postsecondary Education and Skills Training in Canada*.

To build a workforce that is qualified, flexible, adaptable, and innovative, Canadian Premiers outlined five key priorities for PSE and skills training in Canada:

- **Improving access** – the labour force of the 21st Century must have highly educated and trained workers. Canada's economy needs more new apprentices and more committed employers to produce a professional and skilled workforce in the trades and to help ensure employers have access to the skill supply they need. Access must be improved for the many Canadians who have been traditionally disadvantaged and underrepresented;
- **Enhancing quality** – continual improvement of PSE and skills training is crucial. New investment in teaching, faculty, and infrastructure is critical to maintaining and improving the quality of the education and skills training Canadians receive;
- **Increasing participation in the labour force** – many immigrants to Canada face unfair barriers when they are looking for a job to match their skills. Aboriginal people, women, persons with disabilities, social assistance recipients, older workers, and youth also face serious barriers to employment. Everyone who is able to must have the opportunity to participate in a thriving economy;
- **Developing workplace skills** – employer partnerships and investment in training must increase from current levels in order to strengthen workplace skills, especially as technology and global markets continue to evolve. In addition, publicly-funded skills training must adapt to meet emerging needs;
- **Expanding research and innovation** – productivity growth is lagging in Canada. In addition to improving economic competitiveness, research investments boost PSE and innovation, and provide benefits to society as a whole.

Since 2004, seven of Canada's ten provinces have undertaken reviews of PSE in their respective provinces, ranging from a review of specific issues of affordability and accessibility to full-scale commissions reviewing all aspects of PSE and skills training. Five provinces have published reports with recommendations (Quebec, Ontario, Newfoundland/Labrador, BC, and Alberta) and two provinces, Saskatchewan and my home province of New Brunswick, have reports due this autumn.

As anticipated, final reports and recommendations from these various studies include several common themes that will determine jurisdictional policy for the next decade in PSE:

- **The knowledge economy and the global environment** – several provinces note the importance of meeting the needs of the global knowledge economy, including better apprenticeship systems, improved partnerships with business and industry, and improved capacity. Canadian students need to be educated to be internationally competitive and better prepared for future realities.
- **Accessibility: Recruitment, Retention, and Success** – we need improved transitions: our educational systems need better methods of recruiting students into the PSE system and improved credit transfer systems between and among PSE institutions once they are there; we need to enhance the use of distance education and develop outreach programs for rural and northern students; as well, we need better support services for our students to ensure their success.

- **Affordability: Funding and Student Financial Assistance** – most provinces note the high cost of tuition with some recommending tuition freezes; provinces also recommend a review of the federal and provincial student financial assistance programs; provinces need to develop mechanisms to maintain adequate and stable funding for both students and institutions.
- **International Students and Under-represented Groups** – most provinces note the need to attract more international students, including top international researchers; provinces need to develop better methods of recognizing international credentials and the prior learning of our immigrant population; we need to encourage Canadians from under-represented populations to participate in PSE, including our Aboriginal population, persons with disabilities, those with low incomes, the older adult population, the unemployed and the under-employed, adult learners, and rural and northern Canadians. There are various tools and mechanisms that can assist in this area, including distance education, improved student services, better community outreach programs, improved adult basic education services, and improved methods of assessing and recognizing prior learning (both credentials and competencies).
- **Integration/ Collaboration** – several provinces note a need to clearly define the mandates, roles, and responsibilities of their universities and community colleges, and recommend closer collaboration between and among all PSE institutions, both private and publicly-funded, but with consideration given to the need for differentiation, developing the concept of specialization and centres of excellence. We need to develop partnerships with the community, especially industry and business.
- **Quality/ Accountability** – education and training must be current, flexible, responsive, relevant, and appropriate. Issues of quality are linked to institutional accountability, research capacity, international reputation, and labour market needs. Most provinces link quality assurance to degree and diploma standards and accountability.

In Atlantic Canada, we face a number of challenges:

- Our population is aging and declining and the availability of workers will soon be a major problem. Related to these trends is the fact that Atlantic Canada, with 7.6% of the national population, receives less than 2% of all immigrants to Canada. As of April 1, 2007 (Statistics Canada), for the first time, the four Atlantic provinces all recorded more deaths than births during the same quarter. This means that we can rely only on international and interprovincial migration for an increase in our population.
- The region has lower literacy rankings in comparison to the national average and lower levels of formal education than the rest of Canada:
 - 29.5% of Atlantic Canadians have less than grade 12 (Canada – 22.9%);
 - 16.3% of Atlantic Canadians have a university education (Canada – 20.7%); and
 - graduate students are less than 7% of the total full-time student population, *about* half the national average.
- Too many well-educated young people leave Atlantic Canada for employment opportunities in Canada's largest urban areas. Rural communities are emptying out as residents head west to find steadier work and higher pay in the oil fields of northern Alberta. This, combined with fewer people seeking careers in skilled trades, is resulting in serious skill and labour shortages.

- Current health care demands are creating funding pressures for education, and competition for funding dollars has reached new levels for both the federal and provincial governments in Canada.

The fiscal challenges of the 1990s left their mark on PSE across Canada. As governments shifted their focus to deficit reduction, many universities and colleges increased tuition fees and other revenue sources and cut costs in an effort to meet their core mandates of higher education and research. A major share of those cuts fell in the area of facilities renewal and adaptation. The Atlantic region faces some particular challenges with regard to the age of its facilities. A number of our universities were founded in the 1800s and have historically significant buildings to maintain. As well, the inability of Atlantic Canada to keep pace with national levels of investment in post-secondary sectors directly erodes the competitive position of universities and colleges relative to their national and international counterparts.

Infrastructure

Atlantic Canada's universities and colleges have a uniquely important role to play in transforming the region's economy through innovation. They can also make a strong and growing contribution to Canada's skills and innovation goals. These outcomes can only be attained, however, by meeting the challenge of renewing the region's PSE infrastructure. This challenge is substantial as the needs are greater than anywhere else in Canada. Resources required to address post-secondary infrastructure needs are more limited than anywhere else in Canada and options such as private sector funding are narrower. These challenges must be met and overcome if Atlantic Canada is to realize the opportunities of the knowledge economy.

Research and Innovation

It is important to build capacity (human and physical) to enable Atlantic institutions to effectively compete in national programs but to also provide them the complementary funding required under federal programs to efficiently implement the research awards they receive. The PSE system is essential to the future of Atlantic Canada. The system's health and its capacity for education and research will determine the region's prospects for future social and economic well-being. The needs are substantial, but so too is the opportunity for innovation-led competitiveness and prosperity—and in a national context, the needs remain relatively small in absolute terms. The region's post-secondary institutions are eager to sustain their heritage of serving learners from across Canada and beyond, and to build upon their research strengths and areas of excellence to help meet the goals of the national innovation agenda. Reinvestment in R&I must take place through partnerships founded on the recognition of the needs, circumstances, and potential of the region and its knowledge infrastructure.

Faculty Renewal

Atlantic Canada is facing a retirement challenge similar to the rest of Canada. As universities outside Atlantic Canada contend with a growing number of faculty retirements, there will be increased competition to retain and attract highly qualified candidates in Atlantic Canada. Failure to attract and retain qualified faculty and researchers will affect the success rate in obtaining funding and in undertaking meaningful research. This will also seriously affect the quality of instruction and certainly impede our ability to retain and attract new graduate students.

Attracting International Students

As population numbers decrease in Atlantic Canada, there will be a corresponding decrease in enrollment in our post-secondary institutions. Attracting international students and retaining them after their studies to live and work in Atlantic Canada will help curb the declining population trends and diversify our campuses and our communities.

Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

We need to provide direct service delivery of adult literacy programming, including workplace based literacy/learning programs. Adults with low literacy skills, regardless of employment status, need access to training. We need to encourage greater participation in adult and lifelong learning by increasing access to learning opportunities, providing more opportunities for Atlantic Canadians to learn in a variety of settings and modes: in classrooms, in community meeting places, in the workplace, by teleconferencing, through online courses, etc.

Skills Development

A major factor in achieving prosperity in Atlantic Canada is the quality of our workforce. If knowledge and creativity are the human capital for building economic success, then a well-educated population is an essential prerequisite for the new knowledge-based economy. We need to:

- retrain old economy workers as skilled, literate new economy workers;
- strengthen apprenticeship training systems and encourage youth apprenticeship models;
- improve access to lifelong learning opportunities for all Atlantic Canadians, especially those from disadvantaged groups;
- address the need for increases in both quantity and quality of the workforce through immigration, inclusion, retention of skilled workers, and lifelong learning; and
- improve the availability of reliable, accessible, and timely labour market information.

Enhancing Atlantic Canada's prosperity and position in Canada depends on many factors, including the improvement of the quality of our educational opportunities, which implies both quality programming and state-of-the-art facilities. Atlantic Canada's educational systems must be competitive, not only nationally, but internationally.

My home province of New Brunswick (NB), with a population of 750,000, includes four (4) publicly-funded universities: the University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, Mount Allison University, and the Université de Moncton; the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) and the Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB), a community college network made up of 2 colleges with 6 English campuses and 5 French campuses located throughout the Province; and the Maritime College of Forest Technology and Collège de Technologie forestière des Maritimes, as well as 3 private chartered universities, 2 private online universities, and a number of private career and occupational training organizations in a wide range of fields including dental assisting, massage therapy, truck driving, cosmetology, travel and tourism, business education, and computer-related programs.

New Brunswick faces the challenges of:

- A relatively large and diverse PSE and training system within a relatively small province;
- A commitment to provide equivalent levels of educational opportunities to two linguistic communities: francophone and Anglophone;
- A population where over 51% is considered rural, compared to 22.8% nationally, and where seasonal economies are a reality for many workers;
- A tradition of out-migration, particularly among youth in rural communities;
- A rapidly declining youth population and declining enrolments in community colleges and universities.

In January 2007, the Premier of New Brunswick established the Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick as a forum to discuss ways to meet PSE challenges. It was created to make recommendations on the future direction of the entire PSE sector including universities, community colleges, private institutions, adult learning, online institutions, and apprenticeship.

Through a rigorous consultation process that included public roundtables, community events, individual consultations, and meetings with NB's various PSE interest groups, the Commission focused on the following themes and challenges:

- **Accessibility** – NB university enrollments and participation rates are fairly high compared to the rest of Canada but our drop-out rate is also high; enrollments and participation rates in the community colleges are far below the national average. Our Aboriginal population is under-represented in our PSE institutions.
- **Relevancy and Responsiveness** – Our PSE system must meet the needs of students and employers. Curricula must be relevant. Our students need to be equipped to find or create jobs in the new knowledge-based economy.
- **Quality and Accountability** – We need to create mechanisms to monitor and report on quality assurance for our PSE institutions. We need an appropriate accountability framework.
- **Efficiency** – We need appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure transparent credit transfer between and among our PSE institutions. We need to develop mechanisms to assess and recognize prior learning. We need closer collaboration between our community colleges and universities, and we may need to consider developing specialized centres of excellence.
- **Collaboration with Differentiation** – To be internationally competitive, we need to develop our human capacity. Our universities and community colleges need to develop strategic plans that are creative and innovative.
- **Affordability** – We need to consider new ways of reducing the total cost of PSE and to simplify our student assistance programs. New Brunswickers need the means to pursue PSE at a cost that they can reasonably afford.

The Commission's report with recommendations will be released at the end of September.

In the meantime, what are we doing in NB to address the challenges in our PSE system? I'll outline a few of our most recent strategies:

- **Meeting the Demographic Challenge** – NB has created a Population Growth Secretariat. Through a provincial consultation process of town-hall meetings, written briefs, and individual comments and suggestions, New Brunswickers are engaging in the creation of a population growth strategy. Representatives of the Population Growth Secretariat are seeking input from the public with respect to retaining current New Brunswickers, repatriating former residents, and expanding immigration and settlement activities. Key stakeholders, including all levels of government, other provinces, the business community, non-government organizations, as well as community-based organizations, academia, and labour groups have been encouraged to provide input regarding the development of the strategy in four specific areas: repatriation, retention, immigration, and settlement.
- **Immigration** – Through the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET), the Atlantic Provinces are conducting a feasibility study to consider the possibility of an Atlantic approach for foreign credential and competency assessment and recognition to ensure a consistent approach to International Credential and Competency Assessment and Recognition (ICCAR) in the Atlantic Region. If the results, due in October 2007, are positive (and early indications resulting from the consultation process are that they will be), the Atlantic Provinces will establish an Atlantic ICCAR centre.
- **Recruitment and Retention** – Recruitment and retention are important tools in ensuring that our future labour force needs are met but our approaches to each one must take into account the needs and desires of those we seek to recruit and retain. Work/life balance, flexible hours, multicultural awareness, and settlement support programs are but a few examples of the types of policies that appeal to youth, immigrants, and others entering the workforce, now and in the future. In NB, we have implemented several initiatives designed to attract and retain PSE students:
 - New Brunswick students enrolled for the first time at a university and who are attending provincially-funded New Brunswick universities are eligible for a one-time benefit of \$2,000 CDN;
 - Under the New Brunswick Tuition Rebate program, anyone from anywhere in the world who pays tuition, graduates from an eligible post-secondary institution, lives and works in New Brunswick, and pays New Brunswick personal income tax, will be eligible for a non-taxable rebate of 50% of their tuition costs with a maximum lifetime rebate of \$10,000 CDN which may be claimed any time up to 20 years from the first year that credit is earned;
 - Beginning in August 1, 2007, NB students can choose not to include their parent's or partner's income in their applications for financial assistance.
- **Partnerships and Consultation** – Our Department has launched an initiative to help address labour market imbalances that will bring together and engage stakeholders through a combination of Internet-based and face-to-face meetings, leading up to a Skills Summit early in 2008. The process differs from the traditional consultative process. We are asking our stakeholders to work with us to build an action plan that they too will be responsible for implementing, to help lead NB further down the road to self-sufficiency. Through an online forum, participants will discuss and help find solutions to several key issues, such as skill shortages, labour market information gaps, future human resource needs, barriers to work, and the importance of raising public awareness of our changing labour force, culture, and values.
- **Research and Innovation** - The New Brunswick Innovation Foundation (NBIF), a catalyst for innovation and change in New Brunswick, is an independent corporation focused on

stimulating innovation as a means of improving productivity and moving the knowledge-based economy forward. With seed capital in the total amount of \$35 million from the Province, the NBIF supports the development of innovation by making targeted and leveraged investments in research and development and early stage innovative-led companies in New Brunswick.

Those are but a few of the initiatives we have implemented. We know that with the release of the final report of the Commission on PSE in NB, our Department will be tasked with responding to the recommendations made in the report and developing appropriate policies and strategies. We realize that NB's PSE institutions will have to start working as a system instead of individually. Just recently, two of our universities, Mount Allison University and St. Thomas University, announced they are partnering to purchase and maintain new computing servers and storage area network. This will allow them to maintain their servers and store their data much more cost effectively and efficiently. The improved system will be housed at Mount Allison, with both universities sharing the costs, and provides an example of the potential for cost savings that can result from inter-institutional cooperation.

We will need to find ways to upgrade the literacy qualifications of those individuals who may be unemployed or underemployed. We are exploring partnerships with employers so that workplace literacy programs can be offered on-site, either after work or incorporated into the work day. The key to the success of the approach is that learning is tied directly into employees' day-to-day work experiences, encouraging retention.

We have to create a system and provide incentives so that the academic, social, and economic needs of the Province are addressed through the programs that are offered at our PSI's. Universities and colleges must keep up their recruiting efforts and continue to be innovative in developing courses that will draw people to their doors. Our schools must make sure they stay on the radar of those would-be students.

We know that we are going to have to be smarter than our competitors. That means we have to ensure that our young people are better trained and better educated than in the past. And it means we have to learn how to keep more of them in New Brunswick, in Atlantic Canada, and employed. It means we have to do better at creating opportunities for those already out of school to continue their education and upgrade their skills. It means we have to find ways to break down the silos that too often stand as barriers between parts of our PSE system, imposing too heavy a price or even preventing individuals from progressing through what should be a seamless system, often only because they made a particular choice at some earlier stage.

In conclusion, as policy makers and leaders in PSE and training, we are committed to ensuring that the policy directions we take over the next ten years raise the potential for our citizens to benefit from the emerging knowledge economy. We will focus on providing high quality education for a high technology future in a global economy. We will pay more attention to graduate programs. We will improve trades training and apprenticeship programs, and address skill shortages. We must develop more effective policies to assist lower income students and under-represented groups. We need to invest properly in education for the 21st. century.