

Brief of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations

Presented to the

Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission

February 3, 2002

Foreword

The Commission has invited the Federation to meet with it to discuss issues in post-secondary education which the Federation believes should be addressed at this time. It has returned to the successful format it used for a similar meeting in 1998, wherein several interested parties joined in a common discussion of shared concerns. Consequently, herein the Federation will attempt, primarily, to demonstrate how its major concerns are interrelated.

Faculty Renewal, Research, and Library Maintenance

There has been a reduction of the order of 10% in the number of university faculty in this province in the last decade. Even in the best-case scenario, this is expected to grow to 50% over the next ten years. (In the late 1980's, the Federation informed the Commission that it expected that, towards the end of the 1990's, the "bulge" caused by the inordinately high number of faculty members hired in the 1960's and 1970's would begin reaching retirement age. However, the Federation's projections were disputed, and no action was taken.)

The focus of the Federation's concern at that time was on the recruitment of faculty to replace those who would retire. However, the retirement of individuals who were members of the "bulge" affects not only New Brunswick but also, to some extent, every other modern society as well. In particular, it affects the rest of Canada and the United States – and it is to these places that there has been a flight of faculty, who find themselves in a "seller's market" for their skills, to fill the vacancies left by the growing number of retirees.

At the University of New Brunswick, for example, between 1992 and 2001 – at this time the most recent years for which the Federation has been able to obtain the relevant statistics – there were more than 100 faculty resignations. Of those, 45 were in the years 1999-2001 alone. It must be emphasized that these were resignations, not retirements.

These individuals simply went to work elsewhere, and the problem is obviously growing exponentially. In other words, recruitment to offset retirements is not the only problem – retention has become an equally important issue.

It is facile to state that faculty are willing to relocate to pursue their respective callings in another province or country, or not to come to or remain in New Brunswick at all, because they are motivated by money. This implies that they are merely looking for the place which offers them the biggest paycheck, and this is most unfair to them. University faculty are, in fact, motivated to work by the same things that motivate most of us. While the size of the paycheck is important, it is not the only determining factor – and it is usually not the most important one.

Money to support their research is also an attraction, because job satisfaction is high on the list. As the Federation explained to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance at its recent public hearings in Halifax, talented academics, not only in New Brunswick but throughout the Atlantic region, are frustrated by the poor quality of research facilities and infrastructure. Even though they may have been born here, or have settled and raised their families here, or both, many of them feel they are squandering their talent by remaining here when they know they could be working more effectively, and that their work would be getting more recognition, somewhere else.

The announcement in the recent federal budget of \$200 Million for university research must be put into its proper perspective. Even if there is a weighting in favour of small universities in the distribution of these funds, it is likely that they will share less than \$10 Million – and there are many, many “small” universities in Canada. Consequently, it is necessary for our provincial government to become involved to a measurable extent, as are others, in research funding.

In Ontario, for example, in 2001 the Harris government instituted the **Premier’s Platinum Medal for Research Excellence**. Every year for the next six years, two such medals will be awarded to senior researchers in that province. With each medal goes a

\$1 Million research grant spread over two years. Therefore, for a mere \$12 Million – a drop in the bucket, even by New Brunswick’s modest standards – the excellence of the work of six senior researchers in Ontario is not only meaningfully acknowledged but is also tangibly encouraged.

Furthermore, the **Platinum Medal** is an adjunct to the existing **Premiers’ Research Excellence Awards**, which support Ontario’s most promising young researchers. These, Premier Harris is reported to have said, will help Ontario’s “best and brightest young researchers build top-notch research teams”. We would be naïve not to recognize that, given this type of government incentive, the members of those “top-notch research teams” are just as likely as not to be recruited from the ranks of those leading researchers who are already in, or may otherwise have come to, the province of New Brunswick. (As the competition for faculty grows, the province of Quebec - not to be outdone - has recently instituted a five-year income tax holiday for university faculty recruited into some of the science disciplines.)

Abysmal library facilities are another deterrent to faculty either staying in New Brunswick, or coming here to work. University funding from government has steadily fallen over the last few years. To give another example: according to Mount Allison University president Wayne McKay, it is now less than 45% of what it was 25 years ago. Naturally, cutbacks of this magnitude have affected every department of every university, but their libraries have fared at least as badly as the rest. Enormous cutbacks in the acquisition of scholarly journals have been required, as four factors conspire to force the cancellation of subscriptions to them. The first factor is that mentioned above – where there is a shortage of money, cutbacks must be made. Another is that the price of these articles has risen at a far higher rate than that of general inflation. As well, there has been increased sub-specialization, whereby the acquisition of a plethora of publications may now be required to cover all the latest developments in a particular field, where only a few years ago one or two publications would have filled researchers’ needs. Also, a large number of scholarly publications found in Canadian libraries are imported from the United States. Compounding the shortage of acquisition funds, therefore, is the poor

performance of the Canadian dollar in recent years, and the corresponding low exchange rate which has further inflated their cost.

Summary

As has been shown above, the province of New Brunswick is losing university faculty members at a rapid rate, through both retirements and resignations in unprecedented numbers. This outflow is unlikely to abate in the foreseeable future, unless significant steps are taken. The Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) estimates that Canada as a whole will have to replace approximately 20,000 faculty members by the year 2010. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada places this number higher, at around 30,000. Therefore, with such an overall demand, New Brunswick is going to be hard pressed to attract university faculty from outside the province in the coming years – and could, foreseeably, have difficulty even in persuading its own residents to join or remain in their ranks unless bold steps are taken soon.

Last year, the Federation discussed with representatives of the Commission a joint initiative to encourage university students in New Brunswick – who may not otherwise have done so – to consider joining the ranks of faculty in this province. The Federation hopes, therefore, that potential undertaking will be fully discussed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Respectfully submitted by the
Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations