

Brief of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations

Presented to

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

September 16, 2002

The Federation is pleased to have been again invited to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Finance.

Recently, great strides have been made by our federal government in providing meaningful financial support for our universities. However, just about all of this support has gone to research or research-related endeavours, and the ultimate outcome will be predictably disappointing. Why?

The old adage “you can’t sell from an empty wagon” is, it seems, the basis for an infinite number of adaptations. In the present circumstances, one of those adaptations could be “you can’t conduct world-class research in a run-down environment”.

As a result, while not wishing to look a gift horse in the mouth, nevertheless the university community must mute its applause for the current federal enthusiasm for ground-breaking undertakings on the part of Canada’s universities.

The Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA) was recently privileged to participate in the Innovation Strategy Symposium sponsored by Industry Canada on June 26 last in Moncton.

Two of the four topics identified by Industry Canada for discussion as “challenges” to a successful national innovation strategy were “Creating [and marketing] New Knowledge”, and “Developing Skills for the New Economy”.

Despite the emphasis on the place which the universities are, seemingly, expected to take in the vanguard of innovation, the FNBFA delegation was disappointed that the allocation of commensurate levels of “core funding” for them – in short, that which keeps their regular monthly bills paid – was wholly absent from the agenda of the Hearings until the FNBFA raised the issue.

The “Skills Challenge” was identified in the symposium materials as follows:

“Ensuring that, in years to come, Canada has enough highly qualified people with the skills for a vibrant, knowledge-based economy”.

This high-minded rhetoric is, therefore, greeted with some skepticism by the university community of small province such as New Brunswick, which does not enjoy the economies of scale of its counterparts in the more populous and prosperous parts of Canada. Although our federal government does not directly underwrite the operating costs of the nation’s universities, any alteration of the federal-provincial systems of transfer payments (from which, indirectly, the bulk of their operating funding still flows in the smaller provinces) has a profound and lasting effect on the bottom lines of their universities.

Hence, the abandonment early in the last decade of the **Established Programmes Financing Act** (EPF) formula in favour of the **Canada Health and Social Transfer** (CHST) formula has caused serious financial strictures in New Brunswick, and elsewhere, which the university community is in a constant struggle to accommodate.

Consequently, this call for the submission of briefs to the Committee is most timely. At this time, the Federation is involved in a public awareness campaign to draw the attention of Members of Parliament, Members of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly, and the general public to the problems created in the university community, both locally and nationally, by years of underfunding. The focal point of this campaign will be an information pamphlet, in both official languages, which will be distributed throughout New Brunswick within the next few days, and which reads as follows:

DID YOU KNOW...

- That the average first-year employment income of a Canadian university graduate is higher than the average annual income of all wage earners combined?
- That the unemployment rate for university graduates in New Brunswick fell by 20 per cent between 1998 and 2001?
- That one in every four new jobs created in Canada between 1999 and 2004 will require a university degree?
- That university tuition fees in New Brunswick in 2002 will be almost twice what they were in 1992?
- That the average New Brunswick student with a study-related debt load, who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 2001, owed almost \$30,000.00 at graduation?
- That there are now 10 per cent fewer university faculty in New Brunswick than there were in 1990, even though there are 7.5 per cent more students?
- That 25 per cent of all our Ph.D. graduates, our major source of replacement faculty, leave Canada within two years of graduation?
- That the ratio of university students to faculty in Canada in 1971 was only 23-to-one, but in 2001 was 39-to-one?
- That Canadian universities not only produce as many inventions as their counterparts in the United States, but also create 2.5 times more spin-off companies than American universities per dollar spent on research?
- That between 1993 and 2000, government funding per student for university research and teaching in Canada fell by 13%, while it increased by 20% in the United States?
- That in the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand, between 22 and 25 per cent of 18-to-21 year-olds are enrolled in universities, compared with only 18 per cent in Canada?
- That 90 per cent of Canadians believe that, after health care, education should be government's highest priority?

The foregoing statistics clearly demonstrate that our university system is in crisis. In fact, the only recent development which has served to mitigate the situation they portray has been the increased federal participation in research, discussed in the opening paragraph of this document, since the year 2000.

It must, though, be emphasised that, welcome as it is, this new-found commitment to research on the part of our federal government is a two-edged sword. Good research requires good infrastructure, and the existence of the latter must be guaranteed for the former to be fruitful.

We trust that the members of the Committee will reflect on the foregoing in the coming weeks, and that it will provide the basis for productive discussion between the Committee and the representatives of the Federation when the Committee holds its public hearings later this Fall.

Respectfully submitted by:

Claude Dionne, President

(per Desmond A. Morley, Executive Director)