

FNBFA President's Blog # 1 – September 9, 2020
Provincial Election Campaign 2020

Strong Universities = Strong New Brunswick

As the 2020 provincial election gets underway, we can expect a great deal of discussion and debate around how our tax dollars should be managed and spent. The province's debt, the economy, healthcare, population growth, and the resumption of activities following the post-pandemic period will undoubtedly be at the forefront of all parties' platforms, as they are among the most important priorities for all New Brunswick citizens; however, will investing in our public universities figure prominently in the political parties' platforms, or among the top priorities of voters?

Many New Brunswickers may be surprised to learn that one of the best ways to stimulate our economy, strengthen our healthcare and improve the health of our citizens, and reverse the current trend of declining demographics in the province is by investing in our public universities. The recovery desired by all of the activities coming out of confinement cannot happen without the contribution of public universities. We must emphasize here that the public universities have once again proved their adaptability by successfully transitioning, within a few days of notice, from face-to-face education to distance education following the spring confinement decree.

In recent years, two important studies have been carried out by the University of New Brunswick and the Université de Moncton measuring their economic impact in the province. Their findings surpass expectations: the economic impact of UNB on the province's economy is estimated at \$1.5 billion, while that of the Université de Moncton was found to be approximately \$1.6 billion. These economic benefits to New Brunswick stem from, among other things, research and development activities, entrepreneurship and start-up companies, the universities' operations and the number of people that they employ across the province, and the contributions that are made to the province by their graduates.

Further studies show that university graduates have higher rates of employment and salaries; therefore, the economic impact of our universities' graduates, or alumni, cannot be overstated. Not only do they directly advance our economic and social development by way of their professional activities, but they are also able to make greater contributions to the tax revenue that we need to support our social programs and public healthcare system. Furthermore, higher educational attainment is strongly correlated with better health. According to the 2016 report from Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Canadians with higher levels of education (and

therefore higher incomes) are healthier and they rely less heavily, overall, on healthcare services, keeping costs down.

New Brunswick's public universities also play an important role in our population growth. All four public universities attract students from outside New Brunswick and Canada, and they also make critical contributions to keeping New Brunswick's youth and talent in the province. Mount Allison University, as one example, reports that 60% of its student population come from other Canadian provinces and other countries. St. Thomas University has found that 71% of its graduates stay in New Brunswick, a number that increases to 88% in the case of the Université de Moncton, where 7 out of every 10 graduates return to their county, in New Brunswick, to live and work.

It is very clear, from every angle, that every dollar invested in our public universities yields a much greater return; in fact, the return on these investments may be unparalleled by any other sector. Adequately funding New Brunswick's public universities improves our economic and social development, it helps to adequately fund our social services, it strengthens the future of our youth, and it contributes to retaining and increasing our population. When we invest in our public universities, we invest very wisely, indeed. Strong public universities make a stronger and healthier New Brunswick.

In short, a vibrant public university sector means a more vibrant and healthy New Brunswick, able to meet the challenges of the post-pandemic recovery.