



Be inspired. Be ready. Be better.

*The Action Plan to Transform
Post-Secondary Education in
New Brunswick*

Progress Report - March 2010

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Introduction

The Government of New Brunswick has made many investments and introduced numerous initiatives to assist with the transformation of post-secondary education in our province and to create better opportunities to learn for more New Brunswickers.

Education was one of the key planks of the Charter for Change and self-sufficiency agenda. Government recognized that in order to ensure a skilled and educated workforce for a self-sufficient future, they had to invest in it. There were gaps in the system, there was a pressing need for better collaboration between community colleges and universities, infrastructure had to be upgraded and there was a significant need to improve post-secondary education delivery.

There were varying opinions on the best approach to achieve a better system. We saw this with the Commission on Post-Secondary Education. But this report was followed by an important debate that brought forth many good ideas. These ideas became the basis of several initiatives that are now moving forward.

This debate was so informative, that when the Working Group was formed in the fall of 2007, they had a mandate to review the earlier report of the Commission and make recommendations. This helped create *Be Inspired. Be Ready. Be Better. The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* in June of 2008. Moulded by considerable research and consultation over two years, this plan provides a road map for producing a more vibrant post-secondary education model over a five year period.

Today, a little over a year and half since the Action Plan was announced, there has already been significant progress. Nearly 75% of the 33 priority action items have been or are being addressed and more than \$275 million has been committed for capital improvements and post-secondary initiatives.

The goal of continuing with these changes is to give students a high quality academic experience in New Brunswick.



More Affordable

One of the priorities of the Action Plan has been to address student financing. Government recognized that the cost of a post-secondary education can be a barrier to learning and may create a hardship for many families. Several initiatives and investments have been made to make post-secondary education and training more affordable. Government has:

- financed three years of tuition freezes at public universities to assist students without negatively impacting our institutions;
- frozen community college tuition rates for regular programs for the fifth straight year;
- created a timely completion benefit for graduates who finish their undergraduate degree, certificate or diploma after April 1, 2009 and within the established timeline of their program. This measure was put in place to allow qualifying students to have 100% of the provincial portion of student loans in excess of \$26,000 forgiven. This initiative will help shift the average debt of New Brunswick students closer to the national average of \$24,000. In the past, the average student debt was about \$34,000. More than 520 graduates have taken advantage of this benefit since it became available, which represents a government investment of nearly \$5.8 million. The benefit has helped to reduce the debt load of participating students by an average of more than \$11,000;
- introduced the Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) where students repay their loans based on what they can afford. Under this plan, monthly student loan payments are based upon how much a graduate earns, how much is owed on the student loans and on family size. Borrowers under RAP will never be expected to make payments exceeding 20% of their income. Also any payment will end 15 years after the last loan consolidation date and the government will assume any remaining debt at that time. There are also special provisions for borrowers who have permanent disabilities;
- doubled the New Brunswick tuition rebate from \$10,000 to \$20,000. New Brunswick post-secondary graduates who live and work in the province and pay New Brunswick personal income tax are now eligible for a non-taxable rebate of 50 per cent of their tuition costs, with a maximum lifetime rebate of \$20,000; and
- eliminated the assessment of parental and spousal income from eligibility calculations for New Brunswick student loans.



More Accessibility

As our province continues to improve its place in the global economy, jobs will demand a greater amount of advanced training and education. We need to prepare our workers now for that reality. Accessibility represents a far greater issue than just making education more affordable. We must find better methods for creating the best learning opportunities to help expand our workforce.

To that end, *Be inspired. Be ready. Be better. The Action Plan to Transform Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick* indicated that in addition to high tuition costs and student debt loads there were also a whole host of socio-economic factors that impacted participation. The plan made it clear that if we were to be successful, other efforts were necessary to help ensure that more Aboriginal New Brunswickers, low-income earners and those from other under-represented groups chose to pursue post-secondary studies. It was clear from this research that we needed to get more of our people involved by helping them to gain the necessary skills to improve their employment opportunities.

By using this plan as a roadmap there have been many actions to make post-secondary education more accessible. This has included:

- investing a total of \$7 million in funding over two fiscal years to help post-secondary education institutions develop a variety of projects for improving access and services to under-represented groups including students with special needs, Aboriginal students, first generation, and low-income earners;
- dedicating \$1 million of that amount to increase accessibility to post-secondary education for low-income earners as part of the provincial government's commitment in *Overcoming Poverty Together: The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan*.
- dedicating \$1 million of that amount to recruit Aboriginal New Brunswickers to pursue post-secondary education and to provide services for Aboriginal students attending post-secondary education to help ensure their success. The department is providing this financial support for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students at the University of New Brunswick (UNB); St. Thomas University (STU); the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) campuses in Fredericton, Woodstock, Moncton and Miramichi; Université de Moncton (U de M); and the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design (NBCCD); and
- providing free academic upgrading courses in French from the CCNB system through classroom delivery and in English from the NBCC system in the online environment.

Modernizing Community Colleges and Improving Post-secondary Education Infrastructure

In addition to improving accessibility and making post-secondary education more affordable, government has committed to introducing a new vision for the New Brunswick Community College. It was one of the key priority items of the Action Plan. To that end the community college system continues to transform into two modern, autonomous agencies.

The government has:

- provided the legal, legislative and developmental work to build a new governance model that is more autonomous. There will be an Anglophone college and a Francophone college, each led by a president and each with its own board of governors;
- introduced legislation to lead the existing community colleges into two autonomous post-secondary institutions this April; and
- initiated searches for two Boards of Governors and two community college corporation presidents.

Some of the key advantages once the colleges are autonomous include:

- the ability as corporate entities to create more partnerships and have easier access to sources of funding through both the federal government and private sector;
- improving the ability of each college corporation to work more closely with industry to develop a greater number of applied and technical programs that will prepare students for jobs that are in-demand; and
- creating a system that better reflects the respective needs of both linguistic communities, has a faster response to labour market needs, is more community-oriented, has more accountability, and can form partnerships more easily with other post-secondary institutions.



At the same time, responding to another priority of the Action Plan, the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design (NBCCD) is being enhanced, rebranded and transitioned into a centre for artistic and creative excellence. Government has invested more than \$1.3 million in the college. The most recent investment of \$500,000 has been allotted to modernize the facility and to further improve services for students. This plan will add to and improve teaching space and it will help to promote downtown Fredericton as a tourism destination showcasing artists and artisans.

Another priority item was to create a new community college campus in Fredericton. With \$4 million in federal funding and \$11 million in provincial funds, NBCC-Fredericton is being built on the UNB campus, strategically located near both UNB and STU.

These two projects are part of a two-year investment of \$121.7 million to improve or replace the infrastructure of community colleges. The investments include: \$44.1 million for the New Brunswick Community College (NBCC), Saint John, for the Centre of Excellence for Energy and Construction (Grandview Avenue campus) and for the Saint John Allied Health facility (located on the University of New Brunswick, Saint John campus); \$35 million for a new campus at the Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB), Edmundston; \$20 million to complete major renovations at NBCC, Moncton; \$15 million for the new NBCC Fredericton campus; \$3.6 million to complete the new multi-trades shop at CCNB, Bathurst; and \$4 million for various repairs and upgrades across the NBCC-CCNB network over two years, including \$500,000 for the College of Craft and Design in Fredericton.

The government has also committed to add another 1,500 training seats to the system over the next few years in addition to 1,000 already created. Under the current plan, the goal of 12,000 additional spaces will be achieved by 2015-16, a full two years ahead of schedule.

Government is also investing in university infrastructure through renewal and facility upgrades at the four public universities that will total \$80 million when the three-year plan is implemented.

Transforming Apprenticeship

Transforming apprenticeship is another priority. The development of a modern apprenticeship model continues with the goal to increase the number of apprentices from 3,630 to 6,200 by 2012-13. Apprenticeship is an important component of the post-secondary education spectrum which allows New Brunswickers to earn as they learn.

The work to improve the system to date includes:

- investing close to three million dollars to cover the cost of training more apprentices;
- implementing changes to shorten the length of time needed to complete training; and
- commissioning an independent report examining the apprenticeship governance model and initiating further consultation with stakeholders. Recommendations on governance will be considered by government later this year.

The number of apprentices has increased by 13 percent since the launch of the Action Plan to more than 4,100 apprentices.



More Collaboration, Efficiency and Better System Coordination

There have also been a number of actions taken to create a more efficient and collaborative post-secondary education system that is better coordinated, due in large part to an investment of close to \$3 million. These actions include:

- the establishment of a post-secondary education presidents' council, the New Brunswick Post-Secondary Education Advisory Forum. The forum is chaired by the department's Deputy Minister and includes representation from both community colleges and all four public universities;
- establishing partnerships to boost applied learning while providing \$575,000 for various projects in the province to support more collaborative efforts among institutions, business and industry, and communities;
- increasing the number of international students by establishing a working group last spring and by providing \$450,000 in funding for post-secondary education institutions to support several short-term international education projects. Work is also underway to develop a long-term provincial strategy for international education;
- working to make credit transfer easier between post-secondary institutions by investing \$200,000 to develop a web portal, establish a provincial committee on admissions and transfer and by working with Post-secondary Education institutions to pursue several pilot credit transfer projects from college to university in Nursing, Engineering and Business programming areas; and
- increasing the number of graduate students by establishing a Graduate Studies and Research Council and investing over \$600,000 for universities to fund and support the development of two virtual graduate schools, one in French and the other in English, to serve the province's two official linguistic communities. Work is also ongoing on the development of a strategy to enhance research opportunities in the province.

Conclusion

Government has taken numerous actions to move the Action Plan forward while investing in several other learning initiatives. The post-secondary education model is intended to be vibrant, flexible and student-focused.

It is anticipated that continuing with these changes will help students receive a high quality academic experience in New Brunswick. It is also important to ensure that New Brunswickers can obtain the education and skills they need here at home, so they can then stay to work, to raise a family and to help our province grow.

