



## MODERNIZING NBCC

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## PROVINCIAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	II
1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	1
2.0 INTRODUCTION .....	3
3.0 OBSERVATIONS .....	3
4.0 THE COLLEGE AND THE FREDERICTON REGION .....	5
5.0 REGIONAL PROFILE .....	6
6.0 CONCLUSION .....	9

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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Team Fredericton is a collaborative economic and community development movement led by the City of Fredericton, UNB, St. Thomas University and the business community.

We wish to create and foster a business and academic climate and quality of life that will support the retention, expansion and competitiveness of our existing businesses and industries. We expect that these activities will also cultivate the formation of new, high growth businesses where the founders or key officials within those firms will be principally based in Fredericton. It is also our intention to encourage collaboration and cooperation between the Federal and Provincial governments and all related agencies to accomplish these goals.

It is our vision that Fredericton will become the most vibrant and successful small city in North America. To realize this vision, we must overcome the challenge of retaining our own youth, and attracting young families to live and work in New Brunswick. The Province has recognized this, and their Prosperity Plan indicates the importance of providing opportunities for young people, in order to grow our economy.

We recognize that Fredericton in particular, and the Province in general, cannot consume all of its commercial output. As a result we must be a City, a Region and Province of exporters. Today the marketplace is increasingly global forcing us to compete worldwide..

Fredericton has taken a specific interest in the proposed renewal of the Community College system, and the importance of an available and trained workforce for our key sectors. The six sectors driving economic growth in our region are the knowledge industry, life sciences, consulting engineering, aerospace/ defence and light manufacturing, tourism and cultural industries. Providing these industries with a quality workforce is of utmost importance to the growth of the Fredericton Region.

In order for New Brunswick to compete in the international marketplace, it is important to stress the value of excellence, which includes providing training through Centers of Excellence. Each Center should be used to feed the needs of the communities in which they are located. Here in Fredericton, it would be crucial to feed into our six priority sectors, which are priorities in the Greater Fredericton Region Community Growth Strategy, which in turn, relates back to the Province's Prosperity Plan.

Fredericton needs its own Center, to work with the other post-secondary institutions in the area, to provide a workforce that is highly-skilled and well-trained in the fields that require such employees. It is important not to take away from other Centers, but create something special, which is unique to Fredericton and our needs.

Mac MacFarlane, Chairman of the Team Fredericton Advisory Committee summarized our position in the following way:



“Recent years have seen the growth of a vibrant knowledge-based economy in the Fredericton region, with successful firms operating in the fields of engineering, IT, technical manufacturing and other innovative fields. These firms operate regionally, nationally, and globally, and they contribute significantly to the province’s growing prosperity. The ongoing growth of these industries will, however, require the availability of skilled technicians and trades-people in addition to the university educated professionals graduating from New Brunswick’s universities. The shortage of such support people will curtail future growth and may in fact cause some of our existing businesses to relocate elsewhere in the country (or in the world). The enhancement of the NBCC offering in the Fredericton area, as outlined in this brief, is essential to the continued healthy growth of this key sector of the New Brunswick economy.”

Through our recommendations, we are issuing our support for the stance that the Province has taken to renew the Community College system in New Brunswick. We recognize that the Colleges are important building blocks for communities, and an effective system fuels economic growth for the regions in which they are centered.

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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The Province of New Brunswick has called for public input into the possible restructure and renewal of its Community College network. In February of this year, the Department of Training and Employment Development issued a document entitled *Modernizing the NBCC: A Discussion Paper*. This document describes the history of the New Brunswick Community College, particularly from a structural viewpoint. In addition it describes the key role a vibrant Community College can fill in workforce development and readiness. Lastly, it focuses on some of the major challenges facing the College, particularly as it relates to demographics and the need to substantially increase the number of graduates in coming years.

After a review of this document, Team Fredericton convened a meeting of interested stakeholders from the Fredericton area, which included representation from the municipal government, universities, Enterprise Fredericton, the Chamber of Commerce and representatives from the private sector, particularly the manufacturing, engineering, and IT sectors.

At this meeting, there was unanimous consensus that the Community College system was not only an important component of our education delivery system, but also a key component of our community-building infrastructure. This paper describes the actions we believe need to be taken to not only accomplish the goals laid out in *Modernizing the NBCC*, but also in pursuing our region's economic development goals, and ultimately the Province's Prosperity Plan.

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## 3.0 OBSERVATIONS

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*Modernizing the NBCC: A Discussion Paper* poses several questions and we will respond to these in order.

What do you think of “Where we want to go”?

It is our opinion the background provided in the document appropriately lays out the need for NBCC to change and be more responsive to both learners and employers. However, the description of the destination described in “Where we want to go” is vague, and lacks the detail necessary to comment on it. We certainly agree that the attributes described in this section are necessary requirements for an effective college but we would like to see more detail before we comment further. However, we would suggest that an appropriate goal for the College would be to become a recognized leader in technical training, with programs relevant to the needs of New Brunswick.

In regards to the values expressed in this section, we would offer the following observations made by the community stakeholders that attended our meeting:

- Learner – centeredness

The employers in the group noted that under the current circumstance, there are issues with standardization of quality of the various campuses of the College. Many examples of varying levels of proficiency from the same program, from different locations, make it difficult for them to appropriately value the graduate’s credentials. Also, the employers present expressed the belief that they, and students alike, are too “distant” from the College. In fact, a number of anecdotal examples of students preferring trades training, opting for university training based solely on cost, were quoted.

This “distance” was echoed by all the participants concerning a number of issues, and as a result we have raised a heading THE COLLEGE AND THE FREDERICTON REGION, below to address the matter more fully.

- Responsiveness

There was no question that the group believed that this was the most essential attribute a useful College needed to exercise. The overriding opinion was that if the College was truly responsive to the students, community, region and employers it served, then all other issues would be quickly resolved.

- Accessibility

We believe that this attribute is related to the “distance” issue raised above and so it is more fully discussed in THE COLLEGE AND THE FREDERICTON REGION.

- Accountability

Accountability was seen to be more than financial. It was agreed that the College should be accountable to the Province’s economic development strategy and its demographic challenges. In other words, our stakeholders would see educational excellence, that did not drive the previous two issues, as not being accountable.

- Innovation

Innovation is such a prerequisite for the Province’s survival, that there was no question that our College should pursue it relentlessly. The observation was made, however, that innovation comes in all flavours, i.e. high, medium, and low-tech and that we should not forsake one for the other.

Also, the opportunity for innovation, mutual reinforcement, and synergies would be greatly increased if a full-service community college were to be located within close proximity of the region’s universities. We would expect that this would be particularly true for the computer science, technology, and engineering disciplines.

- Efficiency\Flexibility

These are both necessary requirements and in our opinion related to “distance”.

What other values are important to you?

The other key value that was expressed was that the College needed to be both Provincial and “local” at the same time.

What do you think of the suggested road map?

The road map appears to be valid in terms of process and has identified the key issues in such a transformational exercise. In general terms, it is our opinion that the proposed actions are not yet sufficiently detailed for us to evaluate. We would be prepared to work more closely with the College in this regard if it would add value to the process.

Which of these governance options do you prefer and why?

It is our view that the governance needs to be at least a step removed from Government, so as to allow the College the ability to be more responsive and flexible. However, we also believe that the issue of governance pales in regard to the other issues, and that if they are addressed correctly the governance challenge will, in essence, solve itself by being structured as a result of the desired outcomes.

Are there other governance options you would like to see explored?

There were no other governance models identified.

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## 4.0 THE COLLEGE AND THE FREDERICTON REGION

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The Province has recognized the coming need for an increased number of post-secondary graduates, in order to fill a growing Provincial labour force deficit. The Fredericton region also has this need. Notwithstanding the fact that some of the existing Campuses may have surplus capacity, the types of increases required cause us to believe that they cannot be obtained with the present distribution channel. In any event, it may be desirable to add capacity in a cost effective manner.

While most of our comments will focus on capacity, which is of primary concern to us in the Fredericton area, we also recognize that there are other challenges that need to be addressed locally and Provincially such as:

- Skill sets and quality programs should be delivered at each location, tailored to suit the needs of individual regions.
- The College's image must be enhanced and more effectively promoted to the community. By offering programs that are not only appealing to citizens but also responsive to local labour market trends, the image of NBCC can be greatly enhanced.

President John McLaughlin of UNB mentions in *NextNB*, a series of discussion papers published by the University that our economy is changing at a rapid pace, which creates a demand for special skills and higher education. We must recognize this need, and provide opportunities that will focus on the strengths and abilities of our local citizens, and enable them to keep pace with this unprecedented rate of change.

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## 5.0 REGIONAL PROFILE

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Our needs in the Fredericton Region, as they are in other regions of the Province, are unique. With a predominantly white-collar workforce, two university campuses, and the lion's share of knowledge-based companies in the province, we have a number of distinctive clusters that require supporting infrastructure, including training infrastructure.

Enterprise Fredericton, in their Community Growth Strategy 2004-2007, has identified the sectors that this region wants to foster – those where we have a sustainable competitive advantage. They are:

- Knowledge Industry – includes such companies as NRC, Skillssoft and CGI. There is a great need for technicians, as well as security and privacy specialists to work with analysts in this sector.
- Life Sciences Industry – including organizations like BioAtlantech, Potato Research Center, and the Hugh John Flemming Forestry Center. There is also the opportunity to partner with the Nursing Faculty at UNB to fill the need for more healthcare service providers in the Province.
- Consulting Engineering – Fredericton is the engineering capital of Canada, and there is a great need for technicians to work with expert engineers in this sector. Trades people are a crucial part of engineering operations, and there are needs to be filled in this sector.
- Aerospace/ Defence and Light Manufacturing – Higher-end skills in these sectors are lacking in the Fredericton area. There are a large number of manufacturing companies that require skilled technicians, and with the development of our business parks and the new Aerospace and Defence Park, these individuals will be in even greater demand.

- Tourism – Being a capital city, and with the burgeoning economic growth that has been taking place in the region as of late, programs in tourism and related sectors will be in greater demand.
- Cultural Industries – With a chance to partner with the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, this sector provides a multitude of opportunities for growth.

The programs offered at the Fredericton Community College include Healthcare Aide, Human Services, Practical Nursing, Teacher’s Assistant, Office Administration, Health Unit Coordinator, Academic Studies, Electronic Data Development, Business Computer Applications, Professional Sales and Account Management, Administrative and Computer Applications, and Early Childhood Education.

It is apparent that these offerings do not adequately support all of the strategic sectors upon which our future growth and success will be based. These would have been an appropriate selection fifteen years ago, when Fredericton had a well-deserved reputation as a first class institutional community as Provincial Capital, home to two excellent Universities and the province’s utilities.

But since that time, an entrepreneurial “revolution” has been evidenced. So much so, that KPMG’s 2002 Competitive Alternatives Study found that Fredericton had the highest per capita concentration of entrepreneurs of all cities in the country.

Each of the identified sectors carries particular relevance to the needs of the Community College system in New Brunswick. The Province has identified such a need in its Prosperity Plan, especially in the knowledge-based industries, where “education, training, and literacy are bedrock economic programs” and “competition for skilled and creative workers is fierce”. The Provincial government recognizes the need and providing programs to service the need should be of utmost importance.

We would argue that these knowledge-based industries need vocational training offered in a manner customized to the local employer base and that the students need to be in close geographic and intellectual proximity to the employers. It would seem then that the most logical conclusion would be to establish a Community College Campus in Fredericton, managed in Fredericton and familiar to the needs of the Fredericton market. This last statement, the linkage to the regional needs is most important.

There would be little benefit to the region, and the Province, in the location of a “me too” campus in Fredericton, or any other area. While there are similar needs in all of our regions, particularly in the capacity-building areas such as the conventional trades we believe that Fredericton needs a “Center of Excellence” to support our region.

It makes sense then that this “Center of Excellence” approach would be of benefit to the other regions as well. If we, as a Province, are to truly compete on a worldwide basis, we need to be the

best and we need to support our entrepreneurs and workforce with nothing less than the best educational and training support.

Fredericton also needs a Community College Campus to fill the growing need for quality-trained trades people in the community. It is imperative to have locals trained here, to work in the Fredericton area, and to be able to attract those from outside the region as well. The community must have a close relationship with the community college, especially in regards to job placements, and recruitment opportunities. Andrew Steeves, Vice-President of ADI Limited, echoed this statement, indicating a need for a variety of skill sets, as “a company cannot run effectively employing only engineers; there must be forces to provide support. Modern engineering and architecture projects are the product of teams of professional, technical, and trades people, each providing skills necessary for success”.

We believe that some of the benefits of this approach would include:

- Recruitment would be aided by having workers trained locally that can service the needs of local businesses.
- Offering more students to the area as well as different types of applied programs, and more research opportunities would strengthen existing educational institutions.
- Instructors will have easier access to upgrading and training through the existing education assets that will provide more and better qualified instructors.
- Opportunity for Universities and College to share common facilities such as labs and libraries.
- Collaboration on course requirements (combined designations, dual credentials).
- Integration with co-operative and internship programs.
- Instructors and professors have an opportunity to interact.
- Addresses the demographic challenge facing the Province, by providing an integrated training and education system, thereby maximizing our retention of young people.

Daniel O’Brien, President of St. Thomas University, suggested that it is “vital to have an integrated, mutually supportive system, and a strong College presence in the City would provide an attractive additional component to our post-secondary system”.

There is also significant opportunity to partner with local high schools, to offer apprenticeship and co-op programs, and to bring trades training back into the secondary school system.

On the IT front, there is great potential to collaborate with NRC in various programs, including internship possibilities. There is a great need for IT training in the Fredericton Region, especially for

qualified technicians that are educated in the latest technology. Training in privacy and security is becoming increasingly more important in the marketplace, therefore requiring an increased number of well-trained, and highly skilled technicians.

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## 6.0 CONCLUSION

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Having a locally headquartered campus in the City of Fredericton is very important as an economic driver. In order to fill a growing deficit of highly trained trades people in the Fredericton area, there is a great need to increase the number of NBCC graduates. This could be accomplished, in the short term, with the expansion of the current NBCC Woodstock satellite location in Fredericton, to a Center of Excellence in one or more niche trades programs. In the long-term, economic growth for the region, and for the province, would benefit greatly from a fully developed, strategically integrated NBCC campus in Fredericton. In fact, this may be the best overall method to meet the needs projected in *Modernizing the NBCC: A Discussion Paper*.

It is our strongly held opinion that there is a promising future in the Community College system in this province, and we trust that the recommendations that we have made will provide a strong contribution to the development of a better NBCC system.