

November 1, 2018

Dr. G. Kachanoski
President
Memorial University

E-mail: psereview@mun.ca

Dear Dr. Kachanoski:

RE: Response to the Independent Review of the Public Post-Secondary Education System in Newfoundland & Labrador Draft Terms of Reference

The Executive Committee of MUNFA, the Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association, while disappointed that Government did not consult us at an earlier phase of drafting despite our request to be involved, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Independent Review of the Public Post-Secondary Education System in Newfoundland and Labrador. We wish to raise concerns on several fronts about the review as conceived in the draft ToR. We do not believe it offers the best approach for the future of Post-Secondary Education in this province, particularly in relation to the role of Memorial University.

Problems with the framing of the Review:

- MUNFA questions the true independence of any review that is framed to meet a specific political agenda, in this case the Liberal Government's *The Way Forward*. The starting point for a truly independent review should be a reaffirmation of the fundamental value – and values - of higher and further education in Newfoundland and Labrador (see below).
- As a further consequence of the extent to which the Review reflects the *Way Forward* agenda, as well as the extent to which the draft Terms of Reference make narrowly prescriptive statements about the appropriate ends of PSE, MUNFA does not believe that the Draft document adequately recognizes the importance of Memorial's institutional autonomy. Indeed, without taking that autonomy as a starting point, we are concerned about the potential of the Review to further erode Memorial's independence.
- MUNFA does not believe that the Terms of Reference, as currently drafted, adequately distinguish between the purpose and contribution of the University and the College. While these institutions complement and can support one another, they serve distinctive purposes that must be recognized in the terms guiding any major review.

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Failure to recognize the core values and roles of the public university:

- MUNFA is deeply concerned that the Scope of the Review completely ignores the most fundamental values of university scholarship and education. Neither academic freedom, nor critique, nor comprehensiveness, as embodied in a diverse community of academics and as reflected in the root meaning of the University as “the whole” are even mentioned. Instead, the Review emphasizes fiscal, economic, administrative and management issues.
- The emphasis in the terms of reference is heavily weighted towards industry-targeted training outcomes for students and revenue generation through business spinoffs. But as MUNFA wrote in response to the 2004 White Paper: “The university is not a ‘knowledge factory’ that produces marketable products, but a place for training students to think independently, critically, and creatively.” A major contribution of the public university is to prepare students for active democratic citizenship.
- Further, Memorial University is the provincial university of Newfoundland and Labrador. As such, it has a special obligation to offer a comprehensive set of programs, secured by the academic freedom of the scholars delivering them. **Only thus can the university fulfill its vital role of preparing students for a wide and unforeseeable range of careers by giving them skills that are vital across a wide range of professions.**
- Similarly, for the university to thrive and make its full contribution, we must secure curiosity-driven research underpinned by academic freedom. The over-emphasis on narrowly-applied or commercially-driven research is simply short-sighted given the major and unanticipated breakthroughs that have resulted from research unfettered by expectations of short-term, targeted outcomes.

In conclusion, MUNFA believes that it is critical that, as it proceeds with the Review, the Committee of Experts commits to consulting widely. In particular, they must solicit meaningful input from all the affected groups, notably faculty, students and university staff and their representative organizations. We reiterate that any review of Post-Secondary Education must start from the fundamental and distinctive value of the public university in this province. **Newfoundland and Labrador needs university graduates fitted to meet a lifetime of challenges – social, economic and political - the nature of which cannot be predicted today nor readily quantified.**

Sincerely,

Robin Whitaker PhD
President, MUNFA

c: Hon. A. Hawkins, Minister, Advanced Skills, Education & Labour