

Take Back Our University:

MUNFA's Take on the Public Post-Secondary Education Review

The provincial government has now released the [Terms of Reference](#) for its independent review of public post-secondary education (PSE) along with the names of the Committee of Experts appointed to oversee the review.

Given the [devastating effects](#) of the [Province's funding cuts](#), MUNFA will embrace this opportunity to argue for reinvigorating our post-secondary system. We encourage our members to do the same. Unfortunately, despite some improvement on the [draft Terms](#), our initial take is that Government's framework still risks directing the review away from those questions most critical to real renewal of Newfoundland and Labrador's provincial university.

On the most immediate level, MUNFA remains sceptical about the independence of any analysis defined so explicitly by a specific political agenda. Government has directed the review committee to consider, alongside the Terms of Reference, "the industry development plans created through The Way Forward in developing a strategic vision of post-secondary education for the next decade."

As we said in our [response to the draft terms](#): "The starting point for a truly independent review should be the reaffirmation of the fundamental value – and values – of higher and further education in Newfoundland and Labrador." It should not approach education as a means to a particular end, that of the Liberal government's economic "roadmap" for our province's future.

The Terms of Reference themselves often reinforce this political directive. A new reference to institutional autonomy – missing from the draft framework – is welcome. But respect for Memorial's autonomy is diluted by the continued focus on organizing public PSE to deliver "outcomes" for industry and commerce. The very vocabulary of the framework is that of corporate management, not education and scholarship.

Similarly, while "institutional differentiation" has been added to the final terms, MUNFA had hoped for a more integrated recognition that, complementary though they are, the purpose and contributions of the University are distinct from those of the College of the North Atlantic.

MUNFA is pleased that the Committee of Experts brings significant first hand knowledge of post-secondary education to the review process, but wonders if it would benefit from somewhat greater diversity. Committee members' expertise derives principally from the applied and administrative realms -- an important perspective, but one that would usefully be combined with the experiences of those who have focused their careers on post-secondary teaching and basic research in the sciences, social sciences, creative arts or humanities.

Next Steps

MUNFA will engage wholeheartedly at every stage of the review process. We will make a robust case for the intrinsic public good of a strong provincial university. Substantive and offering concrete proposals, our input will be grounded in the conviction that meaningful renewal must start with the core values of academic freedom, critique, and comprehensiveness, as embodied in a diverse community of academics and reflecting the root meaning of the University as "the whole."

Newfoundland and Labrador deserves a public university with the resources and organizational focus needed to give students the kind of education that is vital across diverse professions, preparing them for an unforeseeable

range of careers and fitting them to meet a lifetime of social, economic, and political challenges, the nature of which cannot be predicted today.

The starting point must be recognition of the value of teacher-scholars and the need to balance research and training for industry and commerce with meaningful support for teaching and curiosity-driven research conducted under conditions of academic freedom, including freedom of inquiry and comment without deference to any particular political program.

As the nature of the formal review process becomes clearer, we will seek input from MUNFA members on specific issues. In the meantime, as we develop our response, we welcome feedback and ideas. Please send them along to membership.munfa@mun.ca.