

Fall 2024

# EDUCATION ACCORD SUBMISSION



# Dear Education Accord Advisory Board,

*The following brief is being submitted by the MUNFA Executive Committee on behalf of our Union.*

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA) represents and unites over 800 faculty, librarians, field and cooperative coordinators at Memorial University.

The mission of our Union is as follows:

*‘to strengthen the academy through solidarity, advocacy for fair working conditions, and advancing excellence in teaching and scholarship. Our work is based upon our right to academic freedom, collective bargaining, and the unhindered pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination. We value collegiality, transparency, accountability, and fairness.’*

We have, in some way, shape or form, participated in numerous educational review processes over the past 25 years (for recent relevant examples see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Our positions and recommendations throughout all of these reviews have remained consistent throughout the years and with each review/consultation.

Memorial University plays an integral role in our province - academically, socially, culturally, and economically. Our one and only public University also has a special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The plaque in our Arts & Administration building on our St. John's Campus reminds us of our legacy. It reads:

***“This University was raised by the People of Newfoundland as a Memorial to the fallen in the Great Wars..that in freedom of learning their cause and sacrifice may not be forgotten.”***

Newfoundland and Labrador requires a public University with the resources and capacity to give students an unfettered freedom to learn and the kind of education that they need to succeed.

Our province needs an adequately funded public University where teaching, research, and knowledge mobilization are given the support they need to thrive for the betterment of our society.

We deserve a public University that is accessible to all and of the highest quality. Students need a system of financial assistance and grants that reduce the barriers of pursuing a post-secondary education and which eliminates student debt.

The province needs a University that serves the public good. Memorial University must be a place where students, faculty, and staff are valued and supported.

However, the ability of our University to fulfil its special obligation and critical role in our province is being seriously and critically degraded by years of funding cuts. These funding cuts are impacting our members and the people of this province in profoundly negative ways.

Our campuses are crumbling around us, tuition fees are increasing at alarming rates to try and make up for the funding shortfalls, student debt is climbing, enrollment is dropping, research and teaching are suffering, the quality of education is declining, workers are trying to do more with less, they are burning out, they are leaving, labour relations are strained, and morale is plummeting. Continuing to allow the deterioration of our University's ability to function properly is a disservice to the people of the province and to the memory of those it honours. We should also be clear that funding cuts to Memorial University not only negatively impact the University community and our members - they hurt the province as a whole.

The profoundly negative impacts that a decade of funding cuts is having on our province's University cannot be overstated. Funding to MUN has been cut by more than 52% since 2013 (excluding Medical School). If the provincial government continues with their current plan, this number will rise to 57% in the next three years.

Memorial University currently has \$481M in deferred maintenance needs that have been identified.

The [facilities condition index](#), or FCI, rates the condition of infrastructure on our campuses. Zero to five per cent is excellent, five to ten is good, and anything above 10 per cent is fair to poor. The [University has a modest goal of 12%](#), yet they fail to even meet that weak target - coming in with a current overall FCI of 28%

At the projected spending level of \$4M annually, Memorial will continue to experience additional deferred maintenance, which will result in a projected FCI of 47% in 10 years.

The deterioration of the University's facilities is a physical symptom of the decay in support of its research, teaching and learning mandates. We constantly hear from our members about the frustrations, stress, and declining morale they are experiencing by working in a University that has been subjected to over a decade of drastic funding cuts. Our members went on strike to fight for a better University for all but some of the most pressing issues cannot be won at the bargaining table - they require applying pressure on politicians and decision-makers.

Continuing to allow the degradation of the University's ability to function properly is a disservice to the people of the province and to the memory of those whose name it was established. Funding cuts to Memorial University not only impact the faculty, students, and staff of the University community - they hurt the province as a whole. We are the principal training ground for the province's teachers, doctors, nurses, entrepreneurs, and civil servants.

We would caution against an 'apples to oranges' comparison on funding levels with other Atlantic provinces. Memorial University is the sole University in our province. Claims that provincial funding of Memorial University is higher than in other Atlantic provinces are misleading. While the Bank of Canada's Consumer Price Index (CPI, a measure of inflation) increased [73%](#), over the same time period:

- [Domestic undergraduate tuition at Memorial increased almost 87%.](#)
- [International undergraduate tuition at Memorial increased almost 680% \(the third highest increase in all Canadian provinces\).](#)
- [Domestic graduate tuition at Memorial increased over 147%.](#)
- [International graduate tuition at Memorial increased over 263%.](#)

These massive increases in tuition are misguided attempts to transfer shared public responsibility of funding the province's public University onto those least able to afford it.

As we have stated above, Memorial University has an obligation and role within our province that sets it apart from other Universities in the region or in the rest of the country. The foundations of our society are directly linked to our University; our healthcare, education, governance, private sectors, etc. all heavily rely on our University to provide high-quality education.

Our province should adequately fund our public University. In fact, we should be leading the way as an example to follow in this country for the myriad of individual and societal benefits that result from increased funding and support for post-secondary education.

Simply put, cuts must end and funding needs to be restored (and increased) to Memorial University. Doing so would be an investment in our province, its people, and our collective future - one that will pay huge dividends for generations to come.

Given the devastating effects of the Province's funding cuts, our Union's focus in this brief is on reinvigorating and re-funding our post-secondary system. With regards to recommendations regarding post-secondary education, and, more specifically, Memorial University, we strongly urge the Education Accord Committee to do the same. We would strongly recommend that the Accord make concrete recommendations about restoring funding to our public post-secondary system, including Memorial University.

Our position and recommendations regarding governance, independence, and the need to recognize 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 are well documented. However, all of these issues (and more) are negatively impacted by the sustained cuts our University is experiencing.

While funding has been removed over the past decade, we cannot simply view this phenomenon as an irreversible trend; funding decisions are political decisions. The decision to cut (or, for that matter, restore) funding for Memorial University is about political will.

Restoring funding for Memorial University is an investment in the province, its people, and our collective future.

A recent [report](#) shows that Memorial adds approximately \$627 million to Newfoundland and Labrador's economy each year and supports 9,922 jobs throughout the province. 66,000 Memorial graduates represent more than 12 percent of the province's overall population and over 20 percent of the province's working-age population.

Alumni have earned \$1.37 billion in additional income annually due to their degree(s) from Memorial. The ripple effect of this additional income on the economy is \$2.06 billion in GDP impact.

Memorial University's mission states:

***'Freedom and Discovery: Supporting the freedom to pursue knowledge that is based on individual and collective intelligence, curiosity, ingenuity and creativity'***

MUNFA supports this goal and it is one that should not be forgotten when we think about the vital role of the University in and its special obligation to our Province. Post-secondary education cannot be viewed through the lens of a financial return on investment or labour market objectives alone. Memorial University must be a place where students and faculty have the freedom to pursue and mobilize knowledge. Providing students with the skills and tools to be able to think critically is of great benefit beyond meeting short-term labour market needs. Arts, humanities and social sciences provide students with advanced knowledge necessary for creative thinking, innovation, communication, problem-solving and cross-cultural understanding.

In order to meet its special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador it is critical that Memorial University maintain its status as a comprehensive University and that support for this status continues to be enshrined in legislation. If we are unable to offer a full suite of programs in the humanities, the natural and social sciences, education, and the applied sciences, on the one hand, some students may be denied the chance to realize their full potential; and on the other, we will lose highly skilled people from our own province and the ability to attract such individuals from Canada and around the world.

The goals of our Union - as outlined in this and previous submissions/briefs - aligns with the overall terms of the Education Accord:

***'to reimagine the education system to ensure students and learners at all levels receive the educational services they need in the classroom, are prepared for the modern global economy, and develop strong decision-making skills to foster positive health and well-being.'***


The Education Accord process allows us an opportunity to revitalise, re-focus, re-fund, and reinvigorate our province's post-secondary system. We, collectively, have an opportunity to be bold and we urge the Committee to not simply create a plan within the confines of our current political and fiscal reality, but to have the courage to envisage an education system that is properly staffed, resourced, funded, and supported; one which serves the needs of our province and its people in the short, medium, and long-term.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have any questions, comments, or concerns on this submission.





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