

**Minister's Response to Report and Recommendations
of the Review Panel on Teacher Education**

May 1, 2008

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

I wish to sincerely thank the members of the Review Panel, Dr. Dan O'Brien, Hon. Myra Freeman, and Mr. Bill Whelan, for the comprehensive review process they undertook and for their focused recommendations designed to improve the quality of public education in Nova Scotia.

The purpose of this review was to take the "pulse" of teacher education in the province. A significant re-design of the system was undertaken in the mid-1990s and this was confirmed as an appropriate direction for Nova Scotia in 2000. The mandate of this review was to consider progress in light of the two previous reports on teacher education, to recommend policy directions on several specific issues, and to advise on current issues facing the system and necessary course corrections. The Review Panel did an excellent job in all areas of their mandate and I wish to commend them for their contribution to ensuring an effective teacher education program in the province.

I would also like to thank those who contributed to the review process and the many Nova Scotians who took the time to write to me with their views on the Review Panel Report. Their input and comments received careful consideration in the preparation of my response.

ISSUES RAISED DURING THE REVIEW

Six areas of concern were identified by the Review Panel through this review process, including the quality of teacher preparation, responsiveness to teacher supply and demand, rigorous selection of candidates, quality of the student practicum, program length and delivery models, and the need for better communications and responsiveness to the needs of today's classroom. I would like to touch upon each of those before outlining my response to the recommendations.

First, ensuring a high quality program is critical to maintaining the excellence of our teaching workforce. Our teachers need strong skills in the areas of classroom management, program planning for students with special needs, differentiated instruction, diversity, and in many other important areas related to providing high quality instruction. I also recognize that all partners have a role in ensuring teachers are well-prepared to enter the classroom and supported as they meet new challenges.

A significant theme throughout the Review Panel's report is the importance of carefully managing the supply and demand for teachers in Nova Scotia. In principle I support the need for matching the number of B.Ed seats in the province with the potential for these new graduates to apply what they have learned in our classrooms. I know the number of substitute teachers has seen significant growth over the past number of

years but I also know that many young people in Nova Scotia want to have an opportunity to enter the teaching field. It is a careful balance to maintain and I have given this much consideration in my response.

Maintaining rigorous admission standards is also an important consideration in any limited enrolment professional program. I agree with the importance of teacher education candidates having strong interpersonal and communication skills, literacy and numeracy skills, positive attitudes toward children and motivation to teach. Our Nova Scotia universities have comprehensive selection procedures and I applaud their efforts to be even more responsive to the labour market needs in Nova Scotia.

The student practicum is a critical component of the BEd program and I strongly support having a small task force examine the effectiveness of the practicum experience. I would add that co-operating teachers play a very important role in this process as well as the university faculty to ensure a relevant learning experience. Student teachers need to have opportunities to comprehensively de-brief their learning experience after each is completed. We also need to do more to encourage and support student teachers in rural practicum experiences and to encourage them to consider employment with rural boards after graduation.

There was no consensus on the program length or delivery models in the report. However, I do note that many jurisdictions appear to be moving toward the Nova Scotia model of a post-baccalaureate 16-month program, recognizing that our teachers need more preparation time, not less, for the challenges of today's classroom. I do support our universities continuing to explore flexible delivery options as student demand changes while maintaining high quality standards.

Finally I would like to applaud the Review Panel on their identification of the need for more systematic communication and consultation among all key partners to respond with agility to the changing needs of the classroom. The Department of Education, school boards, schools, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, and the universities offering approved BEd programs all have important roles to play ensuring that this professional program has the appropriate balance between the theoretical the applied aspects of learning.

In my view, the Review Panel is to be commended for its identification of the key issues. They have provided a solid foundation upon which to base my response to their recommendations.

MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that a Minister's Advisory Council on Teacher Education be established to identify and advise the Minister of Education on current and emerging issues relating to teacher education in Nova Scotia and to recommend policy and program directions to ensure the continued efficacy, relevancy, and responsiveness to the Nova Scotian public education system.

Minister's Response: I support the establishment of a new advisory council to provide the Minister of Education with strategic advice regarding the teacher education program, identify and consider current and emerging issues, gather information from various stakeholders to support its deliberations, make ongoing recommendations on key policy issues and program imperatives, and advise on issues that relate to teacher education. Detailed terms of reference will be developed outlining the mandate, authority, accountabilities, reporting structure, and membership of the minister's advisory council.

Recommendation 2 and 3

The Review Panel recommends that the existing enrolment corridors for teacher education programs (Acadia University 115, Mount Saint Vincent University 115, St. Francis Xavier 101, USA 80) be maintained with one adjustment.*

The Review Panel recommends that the BEd enrolment corridor of 115 at St. Francis Xavier University, as recommended by the Post-Shapiro Report, be fully funded.*

Minister's Response: I support maintaining the existing corridors at Acadia University, Mount Saint Vincent University and the Université Sainte-Anne, and I support fully funding the enrolment corridor of 115 (230 over two years) at Saint Francis Xavier University.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel recommends that universities with approved programs be encouraged to introduce compressed delivery options in response to student needs.

Minister's Response: I support this recommendation and encourage universities with approved programs to monitor and respond to student demand for compressed program options while ensuring maintenance of the high quality, 60-credit hour, post-baccalaureate program standard.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education request that Université Sainte-Anne reassess and provide evidence of the need to continue its five-year integrated program.

Minister's Response: This recommendation is not supported at this time as the Université Sainte-Anne has indicated a continuing student demand for the integrated program and it assists the université in responding to the strong demand for French First Language teachers in Nova Scotia.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that Acadia University suspend admissions to its integrated BSc/BEEd program and submit a request to offer this program to the Minister of Education for approval as recommended by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

Minister's Response: This recommendation is not supported at this time. However, Acadia is asked to monitor student demand for this program, and determine the future of the program, based on that demand.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister's Advisory Council on Teacher Education examine regularly, as part of its mandate, the balance between the theoretical and applied aspects of the BEd programs and recommend changes where necessary.

Minister's Response: I support this recommendation and examining the balance between the theoretical and applied aspects of the BEd programs will be included in the ongoing mandate of the new Minister's Advisory Council on Teacher Education.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education establish a task force to review practicum-related concerns and develop recommendations to improve the quality of the practicum of the B. Ed program (The task force should include representation from the key parties, including university and school board officials engaged in the practicum placement process. Preferably the chair would be an independent appointee who is knowledgeable of university-based professional practice learning.)

Minister's Response: The practicum component of the Bachelor of Education program is critical to the preparation of teachers in Nova Scotia. I support this recommendation and a small task force will be struck to fully examine the issues identified by the Review Panel and recommend solutions where needed.

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that school boards, with support from the Department of Education and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, develop a resourced, province-wide induction program to support new teachers.

Minister's Response: Recognizing that all professional programs have some form of induction programming to support their transition to the workplace, I support the development of a province-wide teacher induction program, and recognize that many school boards currently have initiatives and programs in place. Future development, implementation, and resources require further discussion with school boards.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel recommends that discussions at the ministerial level be held between the governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador regarding the practice of universities offering programs outside their own jurisdictions, which compromises the policy directions of the receiving province.

Minister's Response: While I applaud the entrepreneurial efforts of universities in other jurisdictions to grow their enrolment bases, the direction being taken by Memorial University does have the effect of undermining the policy intent of the Government of Nova Scotia to carefully manage the supply of teachers to ensure that there is adequate employment in the province for our new graduates. I plan to initiate in a collegial dialogue with my counterpart in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to discuss opportunities to better balance these competing goals.

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel recommends that the Registrar of Teacher Certification reassess the education program at the University of Maine to ensure that certification requirements are being met.

Minister's Response: I support the intent of this recommendation and I have requested that the Registrar of Teacher Certification conduct a thorough review to ensure the program requirements, including the practicum requirement, are fully met for certification purposes.

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education advise Saint Mary's University of the government's policy of regulating teacher supply and its continued support for the rationalization of the BEd program in four institutions in Nova Scotia and request that Saint Mary's consider a discontinuation of the articulation agreement with the University of Maine.

Minister's Response: This recommendation is not supported as Saint Mary's University is not requesting to offer the Bachelor of Education program in Nova Scotia. However, it is my understanding that Mount Saint Vincent has had a dialogue with Saint Mary's University about the possibility of a future partnership. I have indicated I would support the development of a 5-year integrated program for 20 seats to provide this option for English-speaking students under the condition that the proposed program clearly meets Nova Scotia teacher certification standards and at least 70% of the students admitted to the program have undergraduate degrees in the areas of labour market need in Nova Scotia as highlighted in the Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2007 Update, or subsequent revision. These areas of demand include math, physics, physical education, fine arts, family studies, core French, French immersion, and technology education.

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel recommends that Nova Scotian school boards give priority in the allocation of practicum places to students from approved BEd programs offered by institutions in Nova Scotia.

Minister's Response: I support this recommendation in principle and I refer this issue to the Nova Scotia school boards for action.

Recommendation 14

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education advise Dalhousie University of the government's policy of regulating teacher supply and its continued support for the rationalization of the BEd program in four institutions in Nova Scotia and request that Dalhousie consider a discontinuation of the arrangement with Memorial University.

Minister's Response: I support this recommendation and will indicate to Dalhousie University that any university offering the BEd program will require ministerial approval after legislation is passed. Program approval by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission will also continue to be required. It will be noted that ministerial approval is not guaranteed.

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education introduce legislation to provide the Minister with explicit authority that requires ministerial approval for any Nova Scotian university intending to introduce BEd programs directly or through articulated agreements with other universities. This approval would assist the province in managing the supply of teachers.

Minister's Response: I am supportive of this recommendation and will introduce new legislation in the Fall of 2008. In addition, to ensure the Bachelor of Education program in Nova Scotia is responsive to the changing needs of the classroom, I will introduce a requirement that universities offering the Bachelor of Education program, whether alone or in partnership, enter into a contractual agreement with the Province. Terms will include program requirements and expectations as well as renewal arrangements. The Province will contract with universities as required to meet its labour market demand. Contractual arrangements would only be considered after the university has received approval from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

Recommendation 16 and 17

The Review Panel recommends that the proposal by Cape Breton University to deliver its own BEd program not be approved.

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister of Education advise Cape Breton University of the government's policy of regulating teacher supply and its continued support for the rationalization of the BEd program in four institutions in Nova Scotia and request that Cape Breton University consider a discontinuation of the arrangement with Memorial University.

Minister's Response: I do not support recommendation 16 of the Review Panel Report. I do support Recommendation 17, with the following conditions. I will permit Cape Breton University to continue its current arrangement with Memorial University for the current cohort and continue with a September 2008 student intake. I have recommended to Cape Breton University that they seek formal program approval from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission for their own B.Ed program.

If program approval is granted by the MPHEC by January 2009 for a sixteen-month, 60-credit hour program, I will approve a Bachelor of Education program at Cape Breton University with a maximum enrolment corridor of 40 seats under the condition that the proposed Bachelor of Education program clearly meet Nova Scotia teacher certification standards and at least 70% of the students admitted to the program have undergraduate degrees in the areas of labour

market need in Nova Scotia as highlighted in the Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand 2007 Update, or subsequent revision. These areas of demand include math, physics, physical education, fine arts, family studies, core French, French immersion, and technology education. I will also expect that Cape Breton University discontinue their current arrangements with Memorial University once the September 2008 cohort completes their program. There will be no future in-take of students after September 2008.

Recommendation 18

The Review Panel recommends that the Minister create a committee to examine the development of a standardized assessment against agreed upon criteria as a component of the Nova Scotia teacher certification process.

Minister's Response: I do not support this recommendation due to concerns with regard to the mobility of teachers under the Agreement on Internal Trade. We must respect the Agreement on Internal Trade and the mobility of teachers under that agreement.

Recommendation 19

The Review Panel recommends that the Department of Education develop a communications strategy to alert high school and university students and their parents of the current labour market realities for prospective teachers.

Minister's Response: I support measures to ensure our high school and university students and their parents have access to high quality labour market information so they have a good understanding of the realities of the Nova Scotia teacher labour market.