



Room for improvement

Business leaders give educational institutions a failing grade; Don Bureaux says they have a lot to learn

The Moncton crowd were by far the most critical, but they weren't alone. Attendees at all four *Atlantic Business Magazine's* #thinkBIG2018 thought leadership workshops expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with our education systems.

In Charlottetown, we were told that educators need to “reframe failure, starting with K-12 so that everything becomes a growth opportunity, not a failure.”

Halifax attendees said they want an increase in experiential learning as well as “hybrid curriculums (developed) in partnership with innovative firms like Google and IBM”. They also talked about connecting businesses to students “early in the game” so they are more aware of market growth and job opportunities—and make post-secondary decisions with that in mind.

In St. John's, workshop participants dittoed the call for private sector/education collaboration, adding that they'd like more cross-sectoral research and entrepreneurial incubation with colleges and universities.

Monctonians criticized what they saw as a lack of innovation and entrepreneurship in schools.

“We have non-entrepreneurs putting together curriculum to promote entrepreneurial thinking who never really liked it. Pairing students with business owners, creating connections that are unconventional but real-life learning exposure is key.”

Moncton attendees then went even further, calling the current education system “anti-quoted” and based on “industrial-age methodologies”. They recommended restructuring the way we organize grades and classes: “instead of grouping students by age, group them by capabilities and interests. We're behind the times, forcing students through a pre-designed stream.”

Are our systems of learning failing to meet their students' potential? Have our educators really fallen that far out of step with the “real world”?

Not at all, says Don Bureaux. Speaking in defense of the post-secondary community, the president and CEO of the Nova Scotia Community College (and an attendee at our Halifax workshop) said that higher learning has been busy building ever-stronger and more cohesive linkages with the private sector.

The following is his full response.

Don Bureaux, president and CEO of the Nova Scotia Community College: The world is changing, and fast. We are experiencing what many are calling the “fourth industrial revolution”—a movement driven by big data, quantum physics, automation, robotics and artificial intelligence. It’s going to be disruptive and has the potential to stimulate immense positive change, both economically and socially, within our region.

Atlantic Canada has the essential elements to be nationally and globally competitive in this new economic environment. The interconnectedness of this new economy will allow organizations to access information and use technology, like software-based solutions and 3D printing, to reach clients and customers on a broader scale like never before.

With this exponential change comes the need to step away from the status quo and develop solutions for the many new exciting opportunities to come. Gone are the days when the Atlantic region had a low-skilled, low-cost labour market as one of its competitive advantages. For the economy of tomorrow, our workforce will need to be even more innovative, entrepreneurial and nimble. Our colleges and universities will be more critically relevant than ever to help support and inspire this transformation.

One of Atlantic Canada’s greatest assets is the number and quality of post-secondary institutions the region boasts. With over 20 colleges and universities, there is tremendous capacity for education, innovation and research.

Across the entire post-secondary sector, institutions offer programming that prepares students for the coming economic changes. For example, Nova Scotia Community College launched a program designed to train students in cybersecurity, a growing area of need within a more digital economy. New Brunswick Community College recently created a similar program in partnership with CyberNB—helping make Atlantic

Canada a recognized global leader in the protection of online information.

Along with data and technology, food science and food safety are growing sectors that our region is well positioned for, with multiple institutions offering courses ranging from culinary programs to resource management. Holland College, for example, is home to Canada’s Smartest Kitchen, where research and development are making the region a leader in the industry.

And post-secondary institutions are not doing it alone. At the Halifax Chamber of Commerce fall dinner event in early November, InnovaCorp CEO Malcolm Fraser laid out the five key components to creating a world-class startup ecosystem, and he believes they are all working in Atlantic Canada now. The list included academic institutions, private corporations, entrepreneurs, government and risk capital.

These are key ingredients in helping the region attract activity and investment. Following the federal legalization of cannabis, Université de Moncton, in partnership with the Government of Canada, Genome Atlantic, Genome Canada, New Brunswick Innovation Foundation (NBIF) and Organigram Holdings Inc., announced the creation of an institutional research project focused on cannabis—a perfect example of the success that emerges from the type of collaboration that Malcolm Fraser identifies.

There are many other major initiatives in the region that have tapped into the potential of emerging economic areas, including big data and oceans research, that maximize and leverage the vital role that colleges and universities play within this ecosystem.

Just over five years ago, IBM chose Nova Scotia for its new Client Innovation Centre. This led to the creation of 750 high-paying jobs in a growing sector—analytics and big data. A major deciding factor for IBM locating in Atlantic Canada was the strength of its post-secondary institutions and the avail-



ability of graduates, program offerings and research initiatives needed to support its work.

Additionally, the federal government recently announced the Ocean Supercluster as one of the recipients of funding from its Innovation Superclusters Initiative. It is the only Atlantic Canadian supercluster chosen out of a total of five that represent groups from across our country. The Ocean Supercluster is a dynamic partnership of private, public and post-secondary expertise worth hundreds of millions of dollars. It is expected to generate more than \$14 billion in Gross Domestic Product growth and create over 3,000 jobs over the next decade, solidifying Atlantic Canada as a global leader in oceans research and commercialization. A critical pillar in this important nation-building initiative is the number of Atlantic colleges and universities that will work closely with the private sector to help bring it to life.

Beyond playing a critical role in large initiatives, the impact of our region's post-secondary institutions on the economy also extends into the small and medium-sized business sector. Several institutions, including public colleges as well as Dalhousie, University of New Brunswick, Memorial University, Cape Breton University and Acadia University, all offer programming specific to entrepreneurship throughout their curriculum and this has a direct impact on the landscape of the region.

Halifax-based Volta Labs and Yarmouth-based Ignite Labs

serve as hubs for startups, working closely with industry and educational institutions to support entrepreneurs in the region. Companies like Proposify in Halifax, HeyOrca in St. John's and HotSpot in Fredericton are all growing and have connections within colleges and universities in their region.

While enhanced economic prosperity is one of the critical goals for post-secondary institutions to pursue, their impact on the region's quality of life is of equal importance. Our colleges and universities recognize that a healthy community is an economically and socially vibrant community.

Our institutions of higher learning help bring success to the region by linking people together to share ideas and build solutions, on campus and in business, and they help break down the isolation that can be created by an increasingly technological world. For the health and advancement of our society, we need people who can think critically and speak openly to create a better understanding of our world, connect ideas and develop solutions—an important role for post-secondary institutions.

Former U.S. President, Barack Obama said, "The nation that out-educates us today will out-compete us tomorrow."

As we ready for the onset of the fourth industrial revolution, I believe our colleges and universities are more relevant now, than ever.

FEEDBACK

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