



Hon. Trevor Holder
Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
Chestnut Complex
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Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1

June 27, 2022

Minister,

The recent decision by your department regarding the abolition of the New Brunswick-El Connect program raises grave concerns with students all around New Brunswick, as well as their families.

Due to the limited amount of information that was given, and the complete lack of notice regarding the end of the program, their concerns are absolutely understandable. The comments we received in the aftermath clearly show how people are all at once surprised, confused and distraught by the news.

This decision seems to have been rushed, foregoing any proper consultation. It's crucial to inform these decisions by assessing their impact on the affected population, to avoid causing any prejudice, or at least mitigate it where it is unavoidable. In our sector, plans are made long in advance and involve major expenditures, whether or not this type of unforeseen setbacks occurs.

The reactions to your decision show its impact to be major. Students' finances are significantly affected, in turn causing a risk to enrolment and graduation rates for postsecondary institutions. We have received a number of comments to that effect in a very short span. This impact is abundantly clear and above all, the damage done is immediate.

Close to 7000 people, in as many different situations, will be forced to find a way to make ends meet - while being a full-time student.

Mr. Holder, it's not that students don't want to work; they cannot work enough hours to sustain themselves without jeopardizing their studies. Obtaining their diploma is and must remain their main objective. That is why many scholarships prohibit working over 10 to 15 hours per week. Furthermore, the wages made during their studies can reduce the amount of student financing they receive. Working is not a viable option for everyone, for a number of reasons.

The rationale for eliminating this program is that students are not available to work while they study full-time. Realistically, how can this "help employers fill current vacancies," as is mentioned in the communications we received? Many are left wondering.

As you may know, the cost of studies keeps rising, year after year, as well as the cost of living, especially now with inflation at its highest since the 1980s. Many expenses are neither optional nor controllable cost-wise, and these costs keep on rising at a rate many people cannot cope with.

Many students are unable to live with their parents during their studies. They have to find housing, quickly, in an increasingly aggressive market which makes them vulnerable to accept less than favourable housing conditions. Housing that is deemed “affordable” routinely costs over \$1000 a month. It’s also very rare to find landlords that rent for eight months, so students must pay the full twelve.

Students’ health, especially their mental health, is put at risk by this increased financial pressure. What options are open to them? Either accrue tremendous debt which will weigh them down for years after graduation - if indeed they hold on until then - or exhaust themselves trying to deal with the immense stress of juggling a full course load and a job, while knowing it will never be enough to keep afloat.

In short, students’ frustration is palpable, owing to the glaring lack of any official announcement or information from your department, as well as the complete absence of solutions - or any expressed intention to that effect - which could help them face this daunting challenge, made all the worse by its unexpectedness.

In light of all of the above, FÉÉCUM and UNBSU are asking you to participate in a meeting where we can discuss this issue and identify potential solutions in order to alleviate some of the concerns expressed by our members. We find it hard to understand why this program ended so abruptly, and the resulting panic underlines the necessity of finding adequate solutions for New Brunswick students. This was entirely within your power, and in our view it is your duty to repair this mistake.

Rest assured, Minister, that we remain fully prepared to support you in the implementation of measures to improve this situation, and we’re hopeful that you will respond to our invitation.

Kind regards,



Jean-Sébastien Léger
Président, FÉÉCUM



Kordell Walsh
President, UNBSU



Josue Lunza Yoko
Président, AGÉÉUMCE



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