

Submission to the Postsecondary Review

By the

Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)



Regarding Accountability in the College Sector

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Accountability in the College Sector

The Ontario Public Services Employees Union (OPSEU) represents approximately 14,000 employees in 24 colleges throughout Ontario. These employees are separated into two distinct bargaining units at the present time – one for full-time professors, librarians and counselors, as well as partial load instructors, and one for full-time support staff.

One of our major concerns in the College sector is the issue of accountability. In the Rae Review Discussion paper, it is noted that there is a fine balancing act between accountability and autonomy. These concepts are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed you can have a great deal of autonomy when making decisions but ultimately you must be accountable to somebody for those decisions. Empowered employees, including managers, must be held accountable for their actions. I suppose that it is much like being Premier – you can make all sorts of decisions autonomously but at the polls you become accountable for those decisions.

In the College system, we have a situation where the President selects the Board and the Board selects and reviews the President. There is something inherently wrong with this picture. Presidential performance reviews are seen as too costly and decisions about performance are made over a pitcher of ice tea on a back patio. The future of our organizations is left to this process and this structure – this is wrong. The President reports to his or her hand picked Board. OPSEU's question to the Rae Review is this: who are these Boards accountable to?

A number of years ago, the Colleges began introducing the Carver method of governance. This model has systematically removed the Board from the daily operation of the College. The information that is provided to Board members is filtered information that comes only from the senior members of College administration. Conflict of Interest guidelines have been used to stifle any input from the internal members of the Board. This Board structure is not conducive to open sharing of information within the organization.

There is a personal liability aspect to volunteer Boards, one I am not sure that Board members are aware of. But even so, how can decisions be challenged? Members of the community have been directed not to talk to Board members. In one instance some community members asked (via e-mail to the Chair through the President of the College) a question of the Board, but there was no response from the Board. The only avenue for challenging decisions is in a very costly legal process as the public, the employees and the students have no other avenue to challenge, question or otherwise ask about decision making. This is not the type of structure that is responsive to the community.

Why should we be concerned about this structure?

Let us look at St. Lawrence College for example; it is typical of what we would find elsewhere in the system.

- Reported Presidential salary increases have been 3 times that of the other employee groups, rising from \$124,000 to \$178,000 (2003)
- Presidential reappointments have taken place without an evaluation process
- The spread between senior academic salaries and senior Vice Presidential administrative salaries has increased from about \$18,000 in the early 90's to \$46,000 currently
- Yearly lump sum re-earnable bonuses of 5% totaling \$132,784.32 were paid to managers in 2003
- We have employees who are given early leave incentives and then hired back the next day to their former positions on contract, and some are collecting pensions at the same time.
- There are cost overruns for various building projects

All of this is happening in a College which has continued to struggle with a deficit situation. This is just the tip of the iceberg. So we ask the Postsecondary Education Review and Mr. Rae, how can we make the Board accountable for these decisions?

To begin working towards achieving accountability throughout the system, we would recommend the following:

- An elected Board of Governors for each College within the system, to coincide with the municipal election - one seat to be guaranteed to a Chamber of Commerce and one seat to be guaranteed to Labour (selected through the Ontario Federation of Labour). Three internal representatives will also be elected but from their internal constituency groups. All other positions will be elected at large.

An elected Board of Governors will at minimum establish the link to the community so that all Board governors know that they are indeed accountable for their decisions on the next election day.

- A Provincial, standardized, formal evaluation process to be developed and used yearly for all Presidents and a formal comprehensive process for the reappointment of the President. This evaluation process must take into consideration input from all constituency groups.

At such a senior and influential level of the organization it is imperative that input be gathered and analyzed from all constituency groups in order to ensure that the President is indeed the best leader for the organization. This type of process would also ensure that Boards are at least somewhat aware of the internal workings of the organization.

Conclusion

OPSEU is adamant that new funding has to be injected into the Ontario postsecondary education system. However, it is not enough to simply provide funding without some stipulation around quality and accountability. The ideas above represent some of our thoughts on how to make the college system more accountable to the public and to involve those stakeholders who have a strong interest in rebuilding our college system, including members of the community as well as direct employees of the college. We look forward to working together in a collegial and collaborative manner on this issue.