

Feedback from the Conversation with Minister Schmidt



On October 17, 2017 ACIFA had the privilege of a face-to-face conversation with Mr. Marlin Schmidt, Minister of Advanced Education. It was a good meeting. The conversation was real and informative. We asked nine questions of the Minister, and here are his responses:

1. Can you share any information about changes to the funding model? The rumour is that funding model changes will be tabled in the legislature this fall.

Minister: It is not possible to give detail information about this yet because the consultant, MNP, is just finishing their report. The timeline for tabling or implementing these changes are being pushed back. What we have in mind is to find a more rational way of assigning funding into the system. The block transfers, as it is done now, does not provide enough accountability or transparency.

2. How does the Minister think the transition of our sector to the labour code is going?

Minister: It is important to note that the intent of these legislative changes was not to favour one group over another but only to set up an even playing field. There is a special division set up at the Labour Board now to deal with any post-secondary education issues. Setting up a separate division like that at the Labour Board is the government's way of acknowledging the uniqueness of the PSE sector.

3. There is an undertaking to provide training to ACIFA members to help with this transition to the new labour regime. When can we expect that to happen? Maybe at our conference in May next year?

Minister: We are comfortable sending somebody from the department to attend the ACIFA conference again and provide training to ACIFA members.

4. Where are things at on governance issues such as the Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABC) review? Will we still be asked for input on that review, or not?

Minister: The ABC review had various aspects. Some of it will be tabled this fall, others will be postponed until spring. The conflict of interest has been tabled in the legislature. For more information, please visit the Legislative Assembly's website where you can read a copy of the decisions regarding roles, mandates, and executive compensation. Board governance and the funding model decisions will be rolled out over the next six months.

[http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills_status&selectbill=027&legl=29&session=3.](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills_status&selectbill=027&legl=29&session=3)

5. ACIFA's strong request regarding governance is for greater say for our Academic Councils. Academic Councils make academic decisions while the Board of Governors is responsible for business decisions. An increase in effective faculty voices in the deliberation around academic issues (such as program prioritizations or performance measurements/matrixes and so on) will be beneficial for quality teaching. Can greater power for our Academic Councils be enshrined in legislation, similar to the way it is done in BC?

Minister: We are open to receiving more information in this regard. If Colleges and Technical Institutes are granted these greater powers will they use these opportunities well? Universities have had bicameral governance for a long time and yet it does not seem to give them the satisfaction or result they were hoping for. Will it be different for the Colleges and Technical institutes?

[Note: We assured the Minister that we have learned a great deal from universities in this regard. If greater say is granted to our Academic Councils, we will respectfully optimize the right to engage on all academic matters.]

- 6. The consultation on roles and mandates – the six sector model – happened in June, 2017. What does the Minister see as “next steps” following that consultation? Does the government aim to table those changes soon? Or what can we expect to happen next?**

Minister: We do not expect significant changes to the six sector model. The government’s impression is that the six sector model by and large has served the sector well.

[Note: ACIFA concurred with that impression.]

- 7. When will the tuition freeze run out? ACIFA is concerned about the lack of regulation for international student tuition fees.**

Minister: We do not want international student to crowd out local students. The announcement about the suspension of the tuition freeze will be coming out soon.

- 8. We reminded the Minister that the process of “administrative densification” is continuing across the system. We explained that this means taking faculty roles and responsibilities out of association/union purvey and supplanting that by managers. Should there not be concern about more managers, greater duplication of administrative tasks and greater surveillance of faculty?**

Minister: We are looking at the administrative functions as part of the funding model review. Government is committed to ensure that public resources are directed to educating students and are not supporting “administrative densification.”

- 9. We pointed out that the process of “corporatization” is alive and well. We explained that this means management is obsessed with the reputation of the “the brand” and in the process does everything they can to minimize risks. Does this not lead to attempts to control faculty, to limit faculty from questioning ideas or speaking out inside or outside the classroom?**

Minister: The reputation of any school is very important for students. To find good positions with qualifications for that particular school, its reputation is critical.

[Note: We concurred with that and added that the reputation of any school should be based on the quality of education it provides and not because the school becomes an “entertainment centre” of sorts. We explained that the role of good teachers, like our ACIFA members, are to challenge students and, if necessary, to push them out of their comfort zones. This occasionally creates some discomfort for students. Limiting teachers’ ability to ask difficult questions from students limits teachers’ ability to broaden students’ minds and perspectives.]

The Minister thanked us and said we gave him a lot to think about.