

Banff and Buchan Students' Association's engagement with Merger Options Appraisal

Outline of Development

The colleges were going through a consultation about whether or not the two colleges should merge or federate. Every stakeholder, students included, were invited to make their views heard. The students' association ran a series of focus groups with different students, to learn their opinion. The students' association then submitted their response to the Banff and Buchan College Board of Management.

The association was given ten days to consult with students and provide a response. This meant swift action was necessary to ensure the association engaged with as many students as possible. An emergency SRC was held and the Student Engagement Officer was able to email all staff to ask for their support in informing students of the meeting. Students attended the meeting and were consulted with regarding the options appraisal questions as well as how best the association could capture the views of as many students as possible. They went back to their own class and presented the options appraisal questions to their classmates and subsequently handed the responses in to the association office. Students felt passionate about Banff and Buchan College and were prepared to volunteer their time to visit classes and seek the views of other students. The student engagement officer was able to send out an all student email with the options appraisal questions and students submitted responses via email. The Student President and Executive Officers collated the responses into a concise response which was submitted to the senior manager appointed to conduct the options appraisal on behalf of the College Board of Management.

The students' association's response made it very clear that students thought there was not enough adequate information to make an informed decision about whether the colleges should federate or merge. In the end the colleges decided to merge, which wasn't what the students in Banff and Buchan wanted. What did become clear is that through the students' association engagement with other students, the students at Banff and Buchan were much more aware of the proposed changes that were happening, and were able to contribute to further consultations that happened. The concerns of Banff and Buchan students have been noted at the Regional Partnership Board and by both college principals, as well as other key members of board. This resulted in awareness that much more communication with students at Banff and Buchan College was needed. Consequently, there has been greater direct involvement between students and members of the Board of management. Board members have met with the

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student executive committee in the association office and have also visited concerned groups of students to hear their views.

The short timescale was a challenge, however, students felt so passionate about the college that they were more than willing to give up their time to make sure their views and the views of other students were known. The options appraisal questions were not written in a way that students could understand them and there were a lot of unknowns which made it very difficult to answer the questions. Having a session with management to write student friendly questions together would have been helpful as well as some question and answer sessions with members of the Board of management to allow students to be better informed. Having a staff member who could email staff and all students was very helpful as was the use of social media.

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