MPHEC
Maritime Provinces
Higher Education
Commission

CESPM
Commission de
l'enseignement supérieur
des Provinces maritimes

MPHEC Multi-Year Business Plan
2003-2004 to 2005-2006

Public Release
June 2003

The Council of Maritime Premiers

Le Conseil des premiers ministres des Maritimes

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The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) was established in 1974. The MPHEC is an "agency of the Council of Maritime Premiers" that acts as a "regional agency for post-secondary education" (PSE). Its initial mandate was to "assist the Provinces and the institutions in attaining a more efficient and effective utilization and allocation of resources in the field of higher education in the region."

In June 1997, the Ministers of Education in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island agreed, after extensive review, to renew and refocus the Commission's mandate through an "Agreement Respecting the Renewal of Arrangements for Regional Cooperation Concerning Post-Secondary Education". This renewed mandate was ratified by the Council of Maritime Premiers.

Under this agreement, the "Provinces agree to continue to provide for the operation of the MPHEC as a regional agency for post-secondary education". The primary orientation of the Commission has been re-directed toward "improving and maintaining the best possible service to students as life-long learners", primarily within the university sector. This is to be achieved through four key areas of intervention: quality assurance, data and information, cooperative action and regional programs. Parallel legislation is needed in the three provinces to give legal effect to the Agreement.

1.   INTRODUCTION

This is the Commission's second Multi-year Business Plan. It is intended to provide stakeholders with an understanding of the Commission's role, focus and priorities during the next three fiscal years (2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06). The first section of the Business Plan explores the Commission's environment and challenges. The second section describes the Commission's strategic and operational framework. The third section outlines the nine major objectives pursued by the Commission while the fourth section describes the Commission's priorities, proposed deliverables and resources required during the planning period. The Business Plan concludes with a brief description of proposed annual reporting and evaluation mechanisms.

The Commission's top strategic priority over the planning period will be to increase and then sustain the production of value-adding information outputs across all mandated functions.

2.   ENVIRONMENT AND CHALLENGES

The Commission's environment is characterized by two key interrelated dimensions: a variety of stakeholder groups expressing different and generally conflicting expectations, and the requirement for the Commission to sustain compliance of several of its stakeholder groups in the absence of legal standing. These dimensions have become quite salient due to the qualitative differences introduced by the 1997 Agreement which shifted both the role of the Commission and its focus.

The Agreement modified the Commission's role, away from a leadership position sustained primarily through functional relationships with its stakeholder groups (approving programmes for funding purposes, collecting data for funding purposes and analysis, allocating funding, etc.) to a role of assistance and advice to these stakeholder groups. The Agreement also shifted the focus away from the rational use of resources toward the quality of service to students as life-long learners. The mechanisms through which the Commission is accountable need to be modified to reflect this shift. The transition in terms of role and focus is still very much at play approximately five years after the Agreement was signed.

2.1   Diverse stakeholder groups, disparate expectations

The first dimension characterizing the Commission's environment is the existence of diverse stakeholder groups, each with its own set of expectations of the Commission. While this reality has existed since the Commission's inception, the difference in role that the 1997 Agreement introduced has increased its importance.

The Agreement specifies that the "Commission may provide other services or functions to one or more institutions or Provinces as set out in its business plan". It adds that "the Commission may be asked by Provinces to provide advice or services to them for determining funding policy or for providing funding in support of post-secondary education". The Commission provides analysis and advice, as well as administrative services to the Province of New Brunswick related to university funding. It provides administrative services to the Province of Prince Edward Island related to both university and college funding.

The Agreement restricts the scope of the Commission to universities and university education, while allowing for the possibility of extending the Commission's scope to cover other post-secondary institutions, should provinces agree to do so. There are currently eighteen post-secondary institutions within the scope of the Commission with total enrolments of 53,831 FTE (2000-2001). Notwithstanding the Commission's restricted scope mentioned above, two (Holland College, Maritime Forest Ranger School) offer solely non-degree programmes. The other sixteen institutions are the publicly-funded universities in the region. Of these, two (University College of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia Agricultural College) offer college-level programmes in addition to degree programmes. The institutions within the Commission's scope are therefore quite diverse.

The preceding paragraphs describe an environment that presents a significant challenge to the Commission. This challenge might best be summed up as the management of asymmetrical relationships:

?   *With the institutions within the Commission's mandate:* The Commission no longer reviews, nor approves college-level programmes, as specified by the Agreement. The Commission collects, on behalf of Statistics Canada, college-level enrolment data but does not validate, analyse, nor disseminate them. Therefore, most of the work performed by the Commission is performed with sixteen institutions (one in PEI, four in NB and eleven in NS). Within these sixteen institutions, significant variation exists in terms of institutional context and size which often require different approaches to fully recognize these differences. Furthermore, each of these institutions also expects the Commission's publications, analysis and advice to consider and reflect its specificity.

?   *With Provincial Departments of Education:* In the area of university funding, as described earlier, the Commission performs more duties for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island than for Nova Scotia, which over the last few years has completely transferred over this function. However, in the area of quality assurance (programme review and approval, and the monitoring of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures) and data and information (collection and analysis of data) the balance is reversed. The eleven Nova Scotia institutions account for approximately 70% of the institutions within the Commission's scope.

The true challenge presented by asymmetrical relationships rests much more in the differing and often conflicting expectations of the various stakeholders than in the asymmetry itself. Addressing this challenge requires a sound articulation of the Commission's mandate for stakeholders to ensure they hold realistic expectations. Some measures are already in place to help the Commission address the challenge. They are embedded in the Commission's operational framework (described below), its board composition representative of the key stakeholder groups and advisory committees, half of whose appointed members represent bodies external to the Commission.

Over the planning period, additional measures to improve the Commission's ability to manage these relationships will be developed and implemented as required.

The first area to be explored to that end will be the re-definition of the Commission's accountability mechanisms. Prior to the approval of its renewed mandate, the Commission was accountable and reported to the Council of Maritime Premiers. In 1997, the Agreement re-defined the Commission's accountability as follows: "the Commission is funded by the Provinces and is accountable to them, reporting to the Ministers responsible for post-secondary education". The Agreement charges the Council of Maritime Premiers with establishing the Commission's budget following advice from the Ministers responsible for post-secondary education in each Province. However, since the signature of the Agreement, the Commission's traditional accountability mechanisms have not been reviewed or adapted. At present, the Business Plan is the primary vehicle reflecting the Commission's accountability to the Departments of Education. The other vehicle is the Departments of Education's representation on the board. The Commission's Annual report, as well as its detailed annual budget submission are still presented to the Council. These mechanisms may very well be sufficient. However, considering that the reporting relationship of the Commission was significantly redefined in 1997, it has not been established whether the current mechanisms are satisfactory for the Commission's primary stakeholders.

The renewed mandate has led to several important changes in the business process; these changes and their impact have not been fully documented and have not been collated in one document. Therefore, over this period, priority will be given to documenting and ensuring adherence to the Commission's operating policies and procedures. This will assist the organization in ensuring transparency for stakeholders, its board and staff alike. Furthermore, long-standing policies and procedures that may have been affected as a result of the implementation of these changes will be reviewed.

2.2   Sustain stakeholders' compliance in the absence of legal standing

The Commission is a rather unique organization in the country. It operates on the basis of "good faith" and a shared perception among the stakeholders that working together on converging interests will benefit each and all stakeholders and ultimately, "the changing learner community". The Commission can be called on for advice by any or all of its stakeholders: individual governments, institutions, students and the public. It can influence the decisions and the strategic directions of these stakeholders but has no regulatory levers to enforce one particular direction rather than another. Its value lies in its ability to inform, persuade, and stimulate a network of mutually-beneficial and highly diverse partnerships on post-secondary education in the Maritimes. While the above identifies some of the positive features of the organization, it also paints the picture of an organization made vulnerable in the absence of a clear delineation of its role, authority and accountability.

Essentially, the Commission must sustain stakeholder groups' compliance specifically in the area of quality assurance and data collection, with limited authority to do so. "An Agreement Respecting the Renewal of Arrangements for Regional Cooperation Concerning Post-Secondary Education" (1997), signed by the Ministers of Education of the three provinces, currently constitutes the basis of the Commission's authority to carry out its mandated duties. Under Section B.1, the Agreement states: "Provinces agree to amend the parallel legislation in effect in each province so as to give effect to the points set out in this agreement."; Section J states "Ministers will examine legislative requirements necessary to give effect to this Agreement." Encouraging developments on this front have recently taken place. At the time of writing, the new MPHEC Act, drafted to reflect the revised mandate, had just recently gone through a third reading and was awaiting proclamation in Prince Edward Island. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are expected to adopt this legislation in the fall 2002 session.

Communications in winter 2002 between MPHEC staff and provincial privacy commissioners/review officers or equivalent in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, have raised some questions regarding the legal authority of the Commission to store and disseminate the data it collects. Until the legislation has been proclaimed in all three provinces, this situation is, in the best case, unsettling, and in the worst case, threatens the ability of the Commission to collect and disseminate data, and to carry out its quality assurance functions.

The realm of data collection and dissemination is not alone in its vulnerability to the potential impact of the Commission's current legal status. Quality assurance is a central function of the Commission, and includes the programme review process and the monitoring of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures. Its functioning relies solely on the voluntary participation of institutions. The Commission recognizes its stakeholders' desire to comply and that their cooperation has enabled the Commission to fulfill its mandated role to date. While in the past the Commission had recourse in cases of non-compliance (primarily through its decision-making role in the area of funding), now it has none.

Perhaps the argument can be made that voluntary participation by institutions is better, as it requires buy-in and lends a certain positive air to the process, therefore making legal authority unnecessary. The Commission's functioning is dependent on the assumption that such a wave of good faith can be sustained over the long term. In effect, the absence of legislation poses, for the Commission, the challenge of ensuring compliance in the absence of either a carrot or a stick, which it historically had through its funding allocation role.

3.   STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

3.1   Mission

The Commission operates on the basis of the Mission Statement first published in the 1999 Business plan. This Mission Statement reflects stakeholder consultations held in the Maritimes during the process leading up to the 1997 Agreement reorienting the Commission's role and functions and the production of the Commission's first-ever multi-year business plan. It also reflects the values or "principles" agreed to by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) in February 1999 in its "A Report on Public Expectations of Postsecondary Education in Canada". Over the years, a few minor changes have been made to the mission statement to enhance its clarity.

MPHEC MISSION

As an Agency of the Council of Maritime Premiers that provides advice to Ministers responsible for Post-Secondary Education in the Maritimes, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission:

**Assists institutions and governments in enhancing
a post-secondary learning environment
that reflects the following values**:

? **Quality:** continuous improvement in the quality of programmes, institutional practices, and teaching

? **Accessibility:** programme, delivery, and support services that optimize PSE availability

? **Mobility:** portability of learning and credits throughout the PSE system in the Maritimes

? **Relevance:** effective and responsive interaction among learners, the work force, and the community

? **Accountability:** evidence of value, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of public and learner investment

? **Scholarship and Research:** commitment to the

3.2   Board

Representation on the Commission covers the three Maritime provinces and all major stakeholders from each of these provinces, including governments, post-secondary institutions and the public-at-large. Each of these members brings a unique perspective. The new draft legislation specifies that at least two members are students; the current legislation however does not specify student representation on the Commission. Students are nonetheless included as a separate category in Figure 1 on the composition of the Commission as of July 30, 2002, considering that the Commission is required, as per the Agreement, to give first consideration to students.

**Figure 1
MPHEC Membership**
(as of July 30, 2002)

- University
- Government
- Public-at-large
- Students (part of public-at-large category)
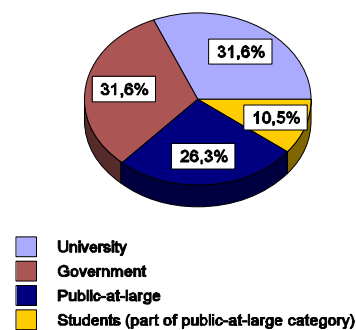
The composition of the board is a great asset for the Commission, especially in terms of dealing with stakeholder groups' expectations. The balance of membership aims to ensure that decisions are made from a regional collective perspective. Care must nonetheless be taken to ensure that the diversity of views and expectations does not unduly restrict the Commission's ability to act.

3.3   Advisory committees

The Commission's operational framework relies heavily on the use of advisory committees. The Commission also employs *ad hoc* committees and working groups as dictated by issues. At press time, the Commission only had one working group, the Graduate Follow-up Working Group. Its standing committees are:

?   Finance Committee
?   AAU-MPHEC Academic Advisory Committee
?   AAU-MPHEC Advisory Committee on Information and Analysis
?   AAU-MPHEC Quality Assurance Monitoring Committee
?   New Brunswick/Prince Edward Island Educational Computer Network
?   Comité provincial des sciences de la santé du Nouveau-Brunswick (CPSSNB; New Brunswick Provincial Committee on Health Sciences)

The use of standing committees greatly enriches the Commission's ability to generate advice and analysis. The Commission's reliance on these committees allows it to process more information, to analyse more comprehensively and in a more timely fashion. Perhaps more importantly is that the Commission draws, through its Committees, on a wider network of resources and perspectives. All its committees but one (the Finance committee) rely in part or entirely on the institutions (Academic Advisory Committee, Information and Analysis Committee, Quality Assurance Monitoring Committee, and NB-PEI ECN) or the community (CPSSNB) directly involved in the area for members and issue identification.

This web of individuals participating directly or indirectly in the Commission's deliberations increases the quality and the credibility of Commission decisions. This network constitutes an asset for the Commission in ensuring that stakeholders understand the Commission's mandate and the limits in its role. As is the case for the board, care must be taken to ensure that the reliance on committees does not lead to unreasonable delays in the process. A balance must also be found and maintained between too limited an involvement of the board in the issues dealt with by committees and the temptation to redo the work performed by committees.

3.4   Staffing

The Commission has had since its inception a staffing ceiling of 11 FTE. In addition, three contract workers have been hired under the Information Framework project initiative. At the time of writing, the organizational structure was under review. It is expected that early in the planning period a new organizational chart will be in effect and job descriptions will be drafted for every position. At this time, the Commission has on staff expertise in the following areas: data collection/management, data analysis, academic programme review, finance, project management and event organization. Staff is responsible for most of the Commission's day-to-day activities; staff receives directions from the board and the advisory committees and provides support to the board and these committees. The flow of information from staff to committee/Commission members and back is one of the Commission's greatest assets. It allows staff to benefit from a "sober second look" from a variety of perspectives while committee/commission members benefit from the knowledge and expertise developed by staff. Section 5.3, below, provides more detail on the resources required to realize this business plan and deal specifically with the challenges pertaining to a contractual data management team.

4.   FUNCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The Commission's mandate specifies its primary orientation as follows:

"In carrying out its functions, the Commission will be asked to give first consideration to improving and maintaining the best possible service to students as life-long learners.

This includes:

(a) assuring that programs of study are of optimum length and best quality;

(b) stressing prior learning assessment and recognition, and credit transfer, to implement the principle that duplication of effort should not be required in order to gain credit for learning which has been successfully accomplished;

(c) providing for smooth transitions between the learning force and the labour force;

(d) providing equitable and adequate access to learning opportunities, including making those opportunities available at times and places convenient to the learner;

(e) assuring teaching quality."

The 1997 Agreement also identifies four functions, or areas of intervention, for the Commission. They are:

? quality assurance,
? data and information,
? cooperative action,
? regional programs.

Since the signature of the Agreement, the Commission has agreed that, because it does not have direct contact with learners, the best way it could achieve its primary orientation was by providing assistance to institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment.

To flesh out these areas of intervention, the Commission has agreed to pursue the following objectives:

(1) Provide assurances that programmes developed by institutions within the MPHEC's scope meet agreed-upon quality criteria.

(2) Confirm that institutions within the MPHEC's scope have appropriate policies and practices to ensure the on-going quality of their programmes.

(3) Facilitate and promote cost-effectiveness of, and accessibility to, the broadest range possible of programmes.

(4) Collect, store and maintain quality, comprehensive and relevant information across all mandated functions.

(5) Devise data and information products providing stakeholders with value, across all mandated functions, especially related to key post-secondary education issues.

(6) Increase awareness of, and dialogue on, Maritime PSE issues and opportunities, both in the Maritimes and nationally.

(7) Promote and facilitate cooperation within the Maritimes and with other provinces and external partners to, among other things, facilitate, among institutions and among governments for example, the development of cost-effective and collaborative approaches to PSE administration, programmes and policies.

(8) Provide advice and services to the Provinces, as requested.

(9) Ensure the effective and efficient management of Commission resources (corporate objective).

5.　IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

5.1　Strategic priority

Over the planning period, the Commission's mission, *to assist institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment,* will be articulated primarily through an increased and, thereafter, sustained production of value-adding information outputs across all mandated functions. This strategic priority is the best way for the Commission to really assist institutions and governments in improving and maintaining the best possible service to students as life-long learners. It will also allow the Commission to demonstrate on an on-going basis the value it adds for each stakeholder group which should encourage their compliance. Stepping up production of value-adding outputs will also provide further benefit to stakeholders primarily through better-informed decision-making. This priority is the cornerstone of the Commission's business plan.

5.2　Deliverables

The specifics of the implementation plan of the Commission's objectives can be found in the following workplan, which will be updated annually. Each objective is linked to the four key functions of the Commission and includes key deliverables planned during the period.

Objective	Function	Action/Deliverable	Timeline
(1)　Provide assurances that programmes developed by institutions within the MPHEC's scope meet agreed-upon quality criteria.	Quality Assurance	Assess new programmes through the Commission's programme approval process	On-going
		Assessment of the effectiveness and benefits of articulated programmes	TBD
	Quality Assurance/ Data and Information	Publish a Programme Profile	TBD
(2)　Confirm that institutions within the MPHEC's scope have appropriate policies and practices to ensure the on-going quality of their programmes.	Quality Assurance	Assessment of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures	On-going
		Publish assessment reports	On-going
(1) and (2)	Quality Assurance	Review the Commission's Quality Assurance Policy	2003-04

Objective	Function	Action/Deliverable	Timeline
(3) Facilitate and promote cost-effectiveness of, and accessibility to, the broadest range possible of programmes	Regional Programmes/ Data and Information/ Quality Assurance	Identification of regional programmes (through the programme approval process)	On-going
		Administration of the Regional Transfer Arrangement	Annually
		Administration and modification, as required, of inter-provincial agreements (NB-Québec; tripartite agreement; NB-NFLD; NFLD-NS, etc);	On-going
		Administration of Official Languages in Education (NB)	On-going
		Support to CPSSNB	On-going
		On-going monitoring of CNFS (Centre national de formation en santé/ National Health Training Centre) for francophones	On-going
		Participation to Atlantic Advisory Committee on Health Human Resources	On-going
		Regional coordination of university distance education broadcasts on ASN	Quarterly
(4) Collect, store and maintain quality, comprehensive, and relevant information across all mandated functions (inputs)	Data and Information	ESIS data collected, cleaned and stored	Twice/year
		Provide support to institutions (ESIS)	On-going
		UCASS data updated (data from Statistics Canada)	Annually
		CAUBO database updated (data from Statistics Canada)	Annually
		Standardize the collection and confirmation of graduate data	TBD
		Devise and develop Programme Information Database System	2004-05
		Standards for data confidentiality implemented	2003-04
		Security controls are in place and improved as technology evolves.	On-going
		Transfer to CIP coding	TBD
		In-house standardized query and reporting system completed	2005-06
		Devise and develop a database for Commission memoranda/decisions	TBD

Objective	Function	Action/Deliverable	Timeline
(5) Design data and information products providing stakeholders with value across all mandated functions (outputs)	Data and Information	Graduate survey - report on class of 2002 in 2003	2004-05
		Trends series publications	1-3/year
		Enrolment data released	Annual
		Statistical Compendium published	TBD
		Selected ESIS outputs published	TBD
		Presentations to government officials in each province of recent trends in PSE (suggested)	TBD
		Provide support to institutions (ESIS)	On-going
		Publish extensive analysis of the post-secondary environment in the Maritimes	2004-05
		Other issues are explored as required	TBD
		Explore best practices in research networks	TBD
		Assess effectiveness of Graduate Survey Programme	2003-04
		Update data dictionary	On-going
		Institutional tuition survey	Annual
		Provide timely responses to *ad hoc* requests/inquiries for data output	On-going
(6) Increase awareness of, and dialogue on, Maritime PSE issues and opportunities both in the Maritimes and nationally. (7) Promote and facilitate cooperation within the Maritimes and with other provinces and external partners to, among other things, facilitate, among institutions and among governments for example, the development of cost-effective and collaborative approaches to PSE administration, programmes and policies.	Cooperation/Data and Information	Organize symposium/ workshop/ forum/conference as issues require	TBD
		Administer NB/PEI ECN (support to Board and Technical Committee; prepare audited financial statements; prepare administrative budget and ensure adherence; pay invoices)	On-going
		Support to Statistics Canada (re: ESIS)	On-going
		Liaison with CMP/CAP and APEF	On-going
		Participation to Atlantic Action Plan	On-going
		Liaison and consultation with stakeholders (institutions, student and faculty associations, AAU)	On-going
		Distribution of programme proposals	On-going
		Commission meetings held on institutional campuses	5-6 times/ year
		Staff participation in various (regional and elsewhere) committees and associations	On-going

Objective	Function	Action/Deliverable	Timeline
(8) Provide advice and services to the Provinces, as requested	Varies	Provide FTE/WFTE counts to generate 3 year average of WFTE for funding purposes (NB only)	Annually
		Request and review submissions of three year capital projections, and develop recommendations; subsequently administer (NB)	Annually
		Participate in various provincial committees/task forces	On-going
		Manage various reserves	On-going
		Participate in NB Public Accounts/Estimates	Annually
		Provide audited financial statements	Annually
		Monitor accumulated deficits (institutions)	Annually
		Assist NB in preparing and analyzing various budget scenarios for annual post-secondary funding allocation	Annually
		Administration and distribution of approved funding (NB and PEI)	On-going
		Administration and distribution of special projects funding (NB)	On-going
		Respond to *ad hoc* requests for financial information and analysis	On-going
(9) Ensure the effective and efficient management of Commission resources	Corporate	Prepare and update the Commission's operating policies and procedures manual	2003-04
		Clarify and document the Commission's accountability mechanisms	2003-04
		Integrate data management team within base funding	2003-04
		Ensure appropriate staffing for activities	On-going
		Administer Commission's base budget	On-going
		Documentation of MPHEC Data Management System	On-going
		Support to Board activities	On-going
		Support to Committee proceedings	On-going
		Maintain and improve IT infrastructure (LAN, FTP server, DNS server, Web server, Email server, PCs etc)	On-going
		Annual Report	Annually
		Budget submissions	Annually
		Business Plan update (August 2003 to August 2004)/New Multi-year Business Plan (August 2005)	Annually
		Redeployment of web site, thereafter regular update	TBD/ On-going
		Devise and implement a communication plan	TBD

5.3   Resources

The workplan outlined in the preceding pages reveals an ambitious plan to be realized with limited and uncertain resources. The renewed mandate presents the challenge of integrating new functions within an already-established structure and reflects a shift in focus, rather than the complete suppression of functions. The maintenance of certain of the Commission's functions (for example its roles in university funding in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and the administration of the Regional Transfer Arrangement) even through a re-ordering of its priorities, has required that its resident expertise be maintained at past levels.

The Commission historically has had a staffing complement ceiling of 11 FTE; this ceiling remains in effect.

Over the last five years, the Commission has undertaken major initiatives meant to allow the fulfilment of its new mandated functions. The initiatives developed and implemented in the area of quality assurance were entirely absorbed within the established staffing complement and budget level. This was achieved through the re-design of processes and a re-ordering of priorities.

However, in the area of data and information, this could not be done for two major reasons. First, the Commission's stakeholders agreed over the last five years on the data elements to be collected in addition to identifying a minimum threshold in terms of data quality which required additional resources.[1] Second, the technological infrastructure supporting the data management system required to pursue the above also requires, on an on-going basis, additional human and financial resources. In the area of data and information, the additional resources needed over the last five years were provided through special project funding. The result is that approximately 75% of the resources in this sector are funded through special project funding, subject to annual approvals, and performed by contractual staff, subject to annual renewals.

The danger is clear: the data and information function is integral to the success of the Commission as it supports all mandated functions, and while the area is fully integrated in the business process, it is not integrated into the resource base.

The integration of the Commission's data management capacity within its permanent base is essential to the full implementation of the Commission's renewed mandate. Not to do so will only lead to severely curtailed outputs in the data and information function, and will severely impair the Commission's ability to fulfill its functions in the area of quality assurance and administration of regional programmes. This will need to be fully addressed early on in the planning period if the deliverables identified herein are to be provided.

All other data collection activities undertaken over the last several years[2] were completed through special project funding, as the Commission does not have within its budget the flexibility to fund such studies. Special projects will continue to be funded on an *ad hoc* basis, as this provides the Commission and its stakeholders with a high level of flexibility. Requests for funding for these special projects will generally be made annually.

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[1]For example, being able to audit the enrolment data submitted by the institutions and being able to track students over time; both require more staff to process the data and more time to analyze it.

[2]Such as the Graduate follow-up survey programme, the study on research, the study on accessibility, etc.

6.   ANNUAL REPORTING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Commission's workplan covers the planning period, but will be updated annually. It will also constitute the basis for annual evaluations and reporting. A new multi-year business plan will be submitted in August 2005. Additionally, the Commission will report annually, through its budget submission, on its performance during the past year and deliverables for the next year.