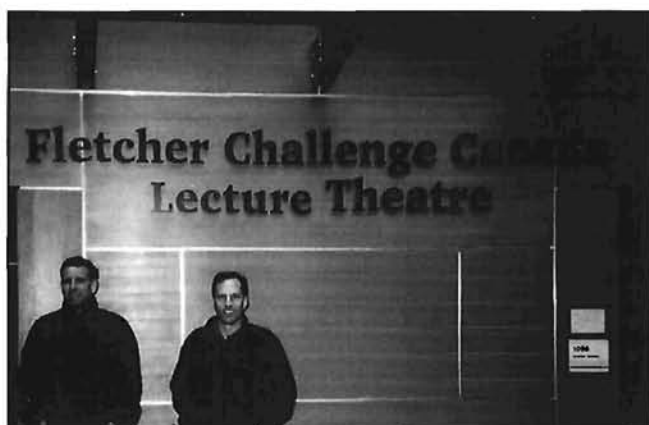


# Investing in the Future

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**O**n a recent trip to Canada I had an opportunity to visit the new Faculty of Forestry building at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The first thing that struck me when I walked in the front door was a large sign introducing the 'Fletcher Challenge Canada Lecture Theatre'. As I walked around the building's foyer I encountered a number of similar signs for other companies. Each of these signs is linked to financial donations or donations of building materials to UBC for the construction of the building. This new Faculty of Forestry building replaces the earlier H.R. MacMillan building, built in part through donations from H.R. MacMillan, the founder of MacMillan Bloedel.



Visting the Faculty of Forestry at UBC

While at UBC, we also visited the Centre for Advanced Wood Processing (CAWP). This is a university-based facility that serves the wood processing industry. It was built with substantial financial involvement from the wood products industry, including tertiary processors in furniture manufacturing. As well, the degree programme in wood processing offered through CAWP is to a large extent driven by industry involvement. In addition, CAWP provides substantial work-experience links to industry for its students through its co-operative programme.

Combining all this industry support with the extensive on-campus recruiting that goes on each spring for summer jobs, the visit raised some questions for me. What these facilities, and the programmes they support, reflect is an investment by the Canadian forest industry in their future human capital. While investment in innovation, processing and new technology is important, the educational investment also recognises that it is people who make all this happen and put it to profitable use.

So why is the forest industry in Canada so willing to invest at this level in forestry education while our own industry is not?

Although a number of forestry companies in New Zealand provide undergraduate scholarships, these are only

an important first step in providing for the future. What are really important are employment opportunities, particularly over the summer break. As we all know, first jobs are critical. They provide the initial experience that opens doors for both students and employers, allowing each to learn something about the other with no commitment beyond the summer period. First jobs are also critical in retaining people in the forest sector, providing them with a sense of what the industry is and how it works.

So why aren't there many summer job opportunities? Is our work pattern not as seasonal as in Canada, meaning that we do not need additional labour when students are on break? Have our companies all become so small and lean that they cannot afford the cost of taking on an inexperienced student? Or has the employment of students dropped out of our pattern of doing things so that we do not think about employing them, choosing to focus instead on our own immediate needs?

At the post-graduate level, our students also struggle to attract industry generated or sponsored projects for theses. The government has done some things to overcome the cost factor for companies to become involved in university-based research. Bright Futures and the Graduate Research in Industry Fellowships (GRIF) offer opportunities for the forest industry to leverage their training and research needs, by attracting matching government funding or subsidies for the student. Both of these even allow a company's own employees to study part time or they can use graduate students already at a university. In addition to these funding programmes, there are always graduate students looking for projects. The cost to a company of having a graduate student do a project as a thesis can be quite modest.

But these funding opportunities are not being taken up in the forest sector. Why aren't there many post-graduate project opportunities? Do we not do work that could be the basis of a thesis? Are all our time horizons so short that they would not suit a post-graduate student? Do we put all those types of projects to the side as possibilities for another time when we are not so busy? Or do we just not think about using the skills of post-graduate students?

I believe that a key factor in the long-term success of the forest industry in New Zealand will be to think of the education system when planning, to make use of the skills and enthusiasm there and to consider the importance of providing experience for tomorrow's leaders.

The other question that was raised by the visit to UBC was why a New Zealand-based company would provide a significant level of sponsorship into forestry education in Canada but not New Zealand. I do not have the answer to that but perhaps others do. At any rate, it would be nice to see the example transferred here.