

summary



A LEARNING ALBERTA
Dialogue and Direction



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Introduction

A Learning Alberta: Framing the Challenge is a comprehensive review of the advanced education system in Alberta. The review brought together thousands of Albertans to talk about and seek answers to the challenges of creating a knowledge-based province. In particular, Albertans were encouraged to comment on a proposed policy framework that will help guide the future of advanced education in Alberta.

Three specific opportunities were offered for Albertans to comment on the policy framework:

1) Regional Consultation Sessions with Stakeholders

- Grande Prairie – September 19
- Edmonton – September 21
- Calgary- Aboriginal Groups – September 26
- Calgary – September 27
- Lethbridge – October 3
- Edmonton-Aboriginal Groups – October 12
- Calgary-Immigrant Groups – October 14
- Fort McMurray – October 18

2) MLA Consultations with Constituents

3) On-line Forum

This report provides a summary of input from all Regional Consultation Sessions. Participants in the regional sessions were provided with an Information Package for Discussion, which included the proposed policy framework, *A Learning Alberta*, and asked them to respond to specific questions about each section.

Discussions were wide-ranging and clearly reflected the key factors/characteristics presented in the policy framework and the results from Stakeholder Roundtables in January and February 2005, in which institutional leaders, community-based educators, literacy groups, Aboriginal community leaders, business, industry and apprenticeship and industry training stakeholders were invited to present their views on where advanced education in Alberta should be in 20 years. To avoid repetition of those key factors, this report presents feedback specific to the questions about the proposed policy framework that were asked in the regional sessions.

Vision – A Learning Alberta

**What do you think are the most essential components of *A Learning Alberta*?
What components, concepts or phrases in the vision resonate with you?**

Comments About the Framework, Words Used

In general, participants liked the vision and the concept of “a learning province.” Some felt it was not bold enough and was “generic to any province in Canada,” saying that the vision should answer the question: “What sets Alberta apart from every other province?” Others said the vision was too business/economic-focused. One participant said “different values and terms guide education,” suggesting that words like creativity, honour, respect and originality be included.

Many participants said that the idea of advanced learning as a “cornerstone of society” resonated with them and “reflects what we are striving for (as a province).” However, participants from immigrant-serving organizations reacted negatively to the “cornerstone metaphor,” which they see as “bricks and mortar to hold some people in and (keep) some people out.” They preferred the word *heart* rather than *cornerstone*.

While most participants said the words *inspired*, *full potential*, *diverse skills*, *talents* and *imaginations* resonated with them, the words that created a more negative reaction in some participants included *aggressively*, *leveraging* and *citizens*. Others liked the word *aggressively*, saying that “we need an aggressive vision” for advanced education. Leveraging was seen as “exploitive” by some, too business-oriented by others. One suggestion was to change the word *leveraging* to *embracing*; another suggested *valuing*.

Concerns about the word *citizens* were that it excluded certain groups, including landed immigrants and students from other provinces and countries. One participant said the document needs to “clarify who citizens are – perhaps a preamble is needed.” Participants suggested changing citizens to “residents,” “individuals” or “Albertans,” or simply to start the sentence with “Albertans seize their future opportunities...” and delete “of its citizens.” Some participants from Aboriginal communities said languages and cultures need to be reflected in the vision. One Aboriginal participant suggested using “all people, including our Aboriginal people” instead of *citizens*.



“People need to be inspired at an early age. Learning starts at home – at the kitchen table.”

“We need to respect all learning and career choices.”

Inspiration

Participants agreed that inspiration and motivation are essential components of *A Learning Alberta*. They said people must believe they can succeed at higher learning. However, some participants, particularly those from immigrant-serving organizations, said that the word *inspired* did not capture the reality of the immigrant experience: “The majority of people are inspired but are explicitly prevented from achieving their potential – it’s about the methods and policies (that are) preventing them from achieving their potential. The inspiration is already there.” Specific suggestions from these participants were to add “and supported” after *inspired*, or say “where the system inspires all citizens to achieve their potential.”

Many participants said people need to be inspired at an early age, particularly within the basic education system (K-12), to prepare for and succeed in the advanced education system. “(We) need to start with parenting skills and teach literacy and life skills to parents so (children) can have better opportunities,” said one participant. Participants said that students in the basic education system should have access to career counsellors, career practitioners, and people from business and industry to inspire their thinking. There was some concern that school counsellors tend to focus on traditional occupations to the exclusion of other choices: having “little expertise about non-traditional occupations, (school counsellors) have difficulty communicating, inspiring and encouraging students in these fields.” Participants also said that advanced education institutions that educate and support students need to be inspired.

Individual Achievement

Not only must students be inspired to embark on advanced learning, they must be supported and encouraged to achieve their full potential. Many participants said that the idea of individuals reaching “their full potential” resonated strongly with them. “Through higher education, society is stating that it has an ambition to inspire individual citizens to believe in themselves, to better themselves.”

Social Benefit

While most participants liked the focus on individual self-improvement and achievement, they also recognized that when individuals reach their full potential we all benefit as a society. Education must be seen as “a true social good.” As one participant said, to be a progressive society “the learner’s place in the learning system, and in society, is always to question the status quo and (to work) to make a better society.” Some participants said they would like to see the vision state that postsecondary education is a priority for the province; others said we must be vigilant if we want to make advanced education a true cornerstone.



Learning is Valued

“Learners need to be looked at as an asset, not an expense. This belief has to permeate general perceptions,” said one participant. Other participants said that not only must society value higher learning but students, themselves, must value it: “Students see learning as getting it over with. (They) need to see the value in learning itself.” Many participants said the Vision must reflect this idea of “valuing advanced education,” suggesting that it be included in the first sentence: “Alberta is a province where all citizens value learning.”

Participants from Aboriginal communities were particularly concerned about the high school completion rates among Aboriginal people and the low value given to learning: “Often there are no expectations within Aboriginal communities for our own students to get an education. A lot of Aboriginal people have not had a good experience with schooling and don’t trust the system.”

Accessibility

Accessibility was seen as an essential component of *A Learning Alberta* by all participants; however, some pointed out that access “is a complex issue” that requires further discussion. Most participants defined access as “opportunities and spaces...available to all citizens” and said “we need to build a system where there is a place for everyone.” Participants identified numerous real and perceived barriers to access (see discussion under *Policy Principles*), including academic requirements and financial barriers that may be limiting access by qualified students.

Participants from Aboriginal groups pointed out that “80% of our people leave our community to access education and jobs. When you say equitable access for all Albertans, you must consider those in small communities as well.” Participants from Aboriginal and immigrant-serving organizations would like to see the words *equitable and equal* applied to access. One suggestion was to change the title of the framework or to make the vision simply, “*A Learning Alberta for All Albertans*.”

Affordability

A number of participants noted that affordability is not mentioned in the vision but is an essential component of *A Learning Alberta*. Affordability was discussed both in terms of individual learners (“we need to address affordability and support to the students”) and what we, as a society, can afford (“aspire to be the best system we can afford”).

“Learning is an investment in the future. Not an annual expense.”

“Don’t view Aboriginal communities as ‘special groups’. Instead ask how we can recognize the contributions Aboriginal learners can make.”

Respect for Diversity

Many participants responded positively to the word *diverse* and agreed that “diverse skills, talents and imaginations (are) important because today people need a variety of skills to work successfully.” One participant said that the word *diverse* suggests a broader focus than the “previous focus on technology and sciences” and appreciated this broader focus. Some participants said they would like to see the word *diverse* expanded to reflect a greater respect for diversity of the learners themselves, saying that “diversity of participants is extremely important to get a good outcome.”

Inclusion

Participants from Aboriginal communities, immigrant-serving organizations and those representing people with disabilities all talked about the importance of *inclusion* as an underlying principle. “Inclusion needs to be stated because it reflects the new multicultural and diverse Alberta,” said one participant. Inclusion was an important concept for participants from Aboriginal and immigrant communities. Many were concerned that Aboriginal people were not explicitly identified in the vision. “If you are not explicitly included you are excluded,” said one participant. Inclusion needs to be based on respect for cultures, languages and traditions.

Broad Definition of Higher Learning

Many participants liked the use of the words *higher learning*, *advanced education* and *life long learning* in the Vision, saying that – together – the words reflect a broad definition of higher learning. However, others would like to see the words clearly defined in the policy statement: “This is much bigger and broader than post-secondary education” and the policy framework needs to reflect that.” Some participants, particularly those from immigrant-serving organizations, said the words *higher learning* and *advanced education* implied institutional learning, which excludes many immigrants. They would prefer to see *life long learning* used throughout the framework: “Take out ‘higher’...It’s not that you reach a pinnacle and then (are) done...Life long learning employment opportunities that lead to integration into the community are just as important.”

Global Perspective

Many participants noted that the social benefits of higher learning will not only come from our own citizens but by attracting “the best and the brightest” to study in Alberta. For this reason, they felt that the word “citizen” was too limiting, failing to recognize the contributions made by non-citizens: “(It) looks like we’re putting up walls around the province in this vision (when) in reality a lot of graduate students come from other provinces. (The vision) needs to be more global and national in scope.” Another participant said, “Alberta is a net importer of other people’s people. We need to recognize and capitalize on that.”

Quality Basic Education

Quality basic education in the K-12 system is an essential component of *A Learning Alberta*. Many participants talked about the necessity of having students who are well-prepared by the basic education system in order to be successful at higher learning levels: “What needs to be worked through is the preparation that enables people to be successful in a high quality (advanced education) system.”

Participants from immigrant-serving organizations were particularly concerned about the basic education system and its ability to support students from immigrant and refugee families: “Immigrant and refugee youth are very inspired, but we have a 61% drop-out rate in Alberta. The K-12 system needs to work harder with immigrant and refugee youth. The youth have given up on the system and the system has given up on them.”



“The principles cannot be viewed separately. They are all related and impact each other.”

Policy Principles

Are these the right principles to drive future directions and decisions in advanced learning?

In general, participants agreed that *access*, *quality* and *affordability* are the right principles to drive future directions and decisions in advanced learning. Many spoke to the interrelatedness of the three principles and the need to talk about them in this way: “The three principles cannot be viewed separately. They are all related and impact each other.” Some participants said only two principles were necessary: Accessibility and Quality. For them, “accessibility and affordability are the same thing.”

Giving this interconnectedness, participants said the framework must show “some balance among the various principles; show (the) links and relationships.” They also identified a number of other principles that may or may not be subsumed under the principles of *access*, *quality* and *affordability*. These other principles are listed below.

Collaboration

A number of participants, particularly (but not limited to) those from smaller communities, said the current system creates competition between institutions for students and resources. The concept of collaboration – among institutions of higher learning, government departments, and private sector – was frequently identified as critical to the success of a higher learning system. Many participants said it should be included as a principle. One participant said, “the policy framework should support the learner not (promote) competition amongst institutions.”



“The advanced education system needs to be flexible. It needs to respond to the different needs and realities of learners.”

Flexibility

Many participants said the advanced education system needs to be flexible, able to respond to the different needs and realities of learners. Participants from immigrant-serving organizations said flexibility is needed to help new Canadians overcome barriers to higher learning: “Differentiated ways of assessing individual talents, learning styles, skills, etc. (are needed) and should be directional to fill in the gaps, e.g. the language piece for an individual.” Others said “more flexible learning modules are needed,” pointing to co-op programs and apprenticeship programs as examples.

Some participants said learners themselves need to be flexible, able to “mutate, adapt, change to the environment as well as the technical skills required – at the end of the day, the ability to adapt becomes critical.”

Sustainability

Sustainability was identified as something separate from affordability. One participant said a sustainable system is one that “(gets) people to do things that will keep the economy going.” Another said the principles “need to reflect sustainability. (Advanced education) is a long-term investment.”

Development

Development of individuals and communities was identified by some participants as a primary purpose of advanced education. Others said there needs to be a relationship between individual learning and human resource development in the province. In contrast, some participants were concerned about “viewing people as human capital – warehousing people to meet the needs of industry.”

Value of “learning for learning’s sake”

As a counterpoint to the idea of advanced education existing to “feed the needs of the labour market,” a number of participants said that the value of “learning for learning’s sake” should be included as a principle.

Success

Access without supports to enable people to be successful is meaningless, said participants. Therefore, *success* should be added as a principle.

Equity

Many participants said equity is fundamental. “It is not about equality, different groups will have different barriers and will need to be treated differently,” said one participant. “Removing barriers to learning opportunities is critically important.”

What do you think is essential in order to ensure: Accessibility

View Education as a Right

Some participants felt that access would be ensured if education, “all the way from kindergarten to graduate school,” was seen as “a right not a privilege.” These participants said “our notion of universal education needs to change. If we are saying that more and more people need a post-secondary education, then why is there a cost? We need to start thinking about K-14 or even K-16.” Another participant said, “Has the Steering Committee looked at the UN principle that education is a fundamental human right? This stance would change everything.”

However, there was not general agreement on this perspective. Other participants pointed out that “countries with free tuition do not have greater completion rates.” One person asked, “Should everybody in Alberta truly have access to post-secondary learning? Is this what we are trying to encourage?”

Break Down Barriers

Participants identified a range of barriers to participation in advanced education that include: systemic, financial, geographic, ability, language, literacy, cultural and transportation. Even the strong economy, which draws people into the workforce as unskilled (but highly paid) laborers, was seen as a barrier to higher learning. Low literacy/illiteracy was frequently identified as a barrier to higher learning and one that must be addressed to ensure “access to all.” “Artificial entrance requirements” set by institutions were seen as a barrier to adult students.

Participants also identified a variety of barriers faced by students with disabilities, including the “attitudes” of staff, faculty and peers; funding issues; and availability of specialized supports (e.g. sign language assistants). “What is needed is a universal design for systems so that classrooms and curricula are set up for learners with diverse needs,” said one participant.

Participants from Aboriginal communities said government policies and programs often create barriers to access for Aboriginal learners. One participant said, “change delivery models to allow (Aboriginal) students to live in their home community versus moving to Edmonton...Bring learning to the student not the other way around.”

Many participants said we need to undertake “continuous investigation of the barriers” so that we can design a learning system that understands and breaks down these barriers.

“Barriers to learning need to be identified and understood. Then they need to be removed.”

Respect Diversity

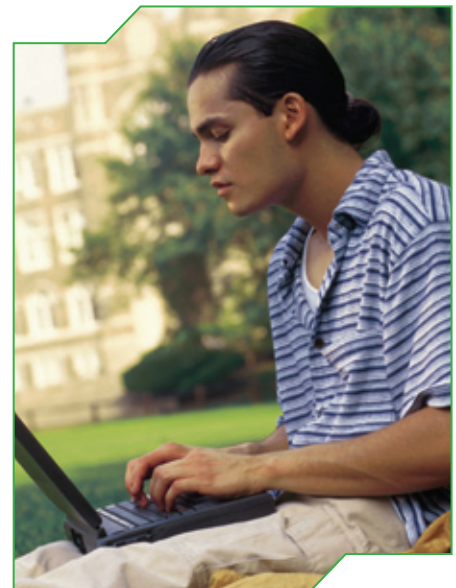
An accessible system is one that is equally accessible to all individuals of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Participants said we need to respect and value our Aboriginal people, immigrants, international students and students from various cultural backgrounds if we are to benefit as a province.

One participant from an immigrant-serving organization said, “policies must be long term. Immigration is continuous. (We must) recognize new arrivals as well as the people who are already here.” Another said, “(the) current rule of up to 19 years of K-12 (education) penalizes teenagers who arrive with limited formal education. This rule was designed for the Canadian-born.” Some participant said we may need to debunk the myth that international students take spaces away from Albertans. Others said our institutions and communities need to recognize the skills that immigrants bring to our province.

Some participants were offended by language that tended to group people together. One participant who said, “(you) can’t group all those people as underrepresented groups. You minimize their uniqueness...Each of these almost deserves its own statement.” Another participant said the term Aboriginal should be replaced by “First Nations, Metis and Inuit” to “identify and respect each group separately.”

Cultural Sensitivity/Address Racism

Participants from both immigrant-serving organizations and Aboriginal communities, were deeply concerned about the impact of attitudes on people’s ability to succeed at basic education and higher learning. As one participant explained, “access means schools needs to be a desirable place to go. Children entering school (who are) met with racism/favoritism often find school non-desirable in no time.” Participants were concerned about a system that is “not designed well to include Aboriginal learners.” “Debate will not fix it,” said one participant. “You need to redesign the system with cultural sensitivity as a foundation.” Participants said: “Anyone completing a degree should have confidence that they will be able to get a job in their studied subject without facing hiring discrimination.”



“Transition issues are real throughout the learning experience – from high school to post-secondary, from rural to urban areas. We have to manage these key transitions well.”

Prior Learning Assessment

Participants from immigrant-serving organizations said prior learning assessment and recognition was critical to accessibility for all Albertans, not just immigrants and refugees. Prior learning assessment recognizes that much learning occurs informally and values the skills and knowledge that immigrants and refugees bring to our province. One participant said, “the skilled immigrant can begin assessments of their language, academic and work experience while they are waiting for the immigration process to conclude.” Participants said, “(we) need a consistent approach to prior learning assessment and recognition across Alberta. There are too many hoops wherever you go; levels are different; stakes are higher or lower.” Participants also noted that professional organizations must come to understand the value/equivalences of post-secondary education obtained in other countries.

Infrastructure and Capacity

Some participants said there needs to be “effective planning” to ensure we have “capacity in proportion to growth,” particularly in large urban centres. This could include a continuous improvement plan for infrastructure and infrastructure renewal. Others said creativity may be as important as infrastructure in ensuring capacity: “new buildings aren’t always the answer (to the) access issue. We need to be more imaginative when offering community-based learning.” Some participants noted that the university-college sector is in a growth phase and that accessibility issues can be addressed in this sector.

Manage Transitions

Many participants talked about the need to support students through key transitions: from high school into post-secondary institutions, from rural areas into urban areas, from cultural communities into the “mainstream,” from one part of the higher learning system to another (e.g. non-credit to credit), and from the advanced education system into employment. One participant said, “institutions have no clue as to what the transition issues really are for Aboriginal students. Coming from a rural to an urban environment is huge.” A number of participants said that transitional training, supportive environments and other supports are essential to ensuring access, retention and success of learners.

Affordability

View Higher Learning as an Investment

Adequate, sustainable and predictable funding was a strong, consistent theme throughout the review process. Most participants said the framework was just paper unless the government demonstrated its commitment to higher learning through its funding policies. In particular, participants said funding for advanced education must be seen as an investment that has the potential to pay significant and long-term dividends to the province: “We can financially justify investment in advanced education. For every 1% increase in education (spending) there is a 1.5% increase to the national GDP. We can (also) make a case for investment in literacy (which returns) greater economic growth and savings in health care.”

Maintain an Appropriate Balance

In general, most participants agreed that society benefits from advanced education and, therefore, should share the cost. A number of participants said affordability should apply both to what the student can afford and what society can afford: “education may be affordable to the student, but what about whether it is affordable to society?” The challenge, they said, is finding the appropriate balance between what the student or private sector pays and what the government pays: “Can government make a decision about what their (financial) responsibility is versus...private responsibility? Absolutely.”

For some participants, affordable means student funding is equally available to all students: “If you meet all other requirements to qualify for adult or higher education, then money should be made available for you...Either it’s accessible to all, or it’s not. Be careful what you promise. Affordable policy needs to ensure that funds will be in place to support learners now and in the future.”

Some participants did not like the word *affordability*, suggesting that “the word says something we don’t intend. (Our) intention is to reduce the financial barriers.” Others simply said the word *affordability* needs to be defined.

Reasonable Tuition

Many participants were concerned about the cost of tuition at Alberta’s institutions of higher learning. They said the province needs a tuition policy that considers affordability, accessibility and quality – not just the revenue needs of an institution. For some, tuition was seen as “a tax on participants” who said “institutions should receive their money independent of the number of students (who attend).” According to one participant, high tuition today does not just impact current generations of students but will impact future generations as “students give up hope at a young age when they hear about high tuition.” Other participants said tuition should be reasonable but not free. “There should be a sense of the value of education.”

Recognize Other Costs

Many participants pointed out that tuition was often the “smallest expense,” particularly for those who have to relocate to pursue higher learning. Cost of living was identified as the greatest cost for most students and a considerable burden for single parents and other single students living away from home. One participant said, “supports need to be tailored to meet the needs of the specific learner.” Another said, “financial assistance should be flexible to the needs of families – not just individuals (who are pursuing higher education).”

Manage Student Debt

Concerns about high student debt may stop many qualified students from pursuing higher learning opportunities. This is particularly an issue in rural areas where the cost of living away from home can make higher learning inaccessible: “People (from rural areas) don’t attend university because it costs more to travel to urban areas and to live away from home. This means affordability is influencing university participation.” One participant from Fort McMurray pointed out that the student loan system “does not recognize that families (of a potential student) may have other expenses and cannot contribute to post-secondary costs...People in Fort McMurray make a lot (of money) but need a lot for basics because things cost so much.”

Participants wanted to see “flexible and responsive financial assistance” fleshed out, saying “we need a system of grants and bursaries in the province in order to ensure affordability and accessibility.” One participant said, “we need to review our financial support system. Current rules and regulations (that are) framed for specific populations or situations inadvertently leave other people out.” Another participant was concerned that the system “seems to award people who choose what the system allows. If they make money themselves, then they are penalized.” Participants also said people need better information about the financial assistance programs that already exist in the province.

Offer Tax Incentives

A number of participants said people should be offered tax incentives that make it easier to go back to school. “There are no financial or tax incentives to go to school,” said one participant, who noted that “in some jurisdictions (students) are allowed to defer taxes until they graduate.” Another participant said, “In the US, you can deduct the cost of living (while going to school). In Canada, you have a high loan payment and no tax advantage.” One participant suggested that the province offer “tax incentives for companies to train people.” Some participants would like to see an incentive that would make loans for higher education tax deductible or forgiven after working for a number of years, this would encourage “life long learning.”

Support Upgrading and Staff Development

Business and industry have an important role to play in making life long learning affordable. As one participant said, “Industry takes on the responsibility for much of the education and training for those who don’t graduate from the formal training process. The reality is that the training provided by industry becomes a jumping off point for learners to go on to other opportunities.” Another participant said the policy framework needs to include “a more prominent role for employers, including the informal learning... that occurs on the job.”

Transferability

Transferability of programs among institutions in Alberta is already “very good,” according to some participants, and an important factor in making higher learning affordable.

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“How you define quality must be internal to Alberta, but it must match and stand the scrutiny of other jurisdictions.”

Financial Supports for Newcomers

Participants from immigrant-serving organizations would like to see more directed resources to assist immigrants and refugees pursue higher education. One participant said, “what about families who arrive with limited resources? They have to pay for their own retraining and so they don’t have the resources to put funds into an RESP.” Another said there needs to be more continuity and greater commitment to helping newcomers achieve educational goals: “There is lots of money available (for ESL) but when its finished, if (the student) wants to continue on to post-secondary training, there’s much less support. (This) sets up false expectations for learners.”

Quality

Recognize the Primacy of Quality

Many participants said, of the three principles, quality is pivotal. “There is no point in having an accessible system that is not of quality,” said one participant. Another said, “Affordability and accessibility are non-issues if there is no quality.” Some participants would like to see a definition of quality in the policy framework. “How you define quality must be internal to Alberta,” said one participant. “But it must match and stand the scrutiny of other jurisdictions.” Other “criteria” suggested by participants for defining quality included: “Quality is incorporated in the idea of a seamless, integrated, dove-tailed system,” “Quality should incorporate the nine essential skills needed for employment success.”

Balance Quality and Quantity

A number of participants talked about the relationship between the quality of advanced learning programs and the “quantity” of students (i.e. the number of seats/spaces available). They warned that “increasing numbers and retention, squeezes out quality” and said that policies to improve accessibility and affordability must be shown to be effective “without sacrificing quality.”

Credentials versus Competency

While most participants agreed that competency was an important measure of quality, there were different perspectives on the importance of credentials. “Quality measures the fitness of the intended use. The challenge of credentials is that they don’t capture quality,” said one participant. Another said, “Advanced learning is about a credential of some sort. The credential starts at the lowest level of learning. (We) must not water down any of Alberta’s credentials.” One participant suggested that credentials are a measure of the accessibility and affordability of the system: “quality means credentials are credible, attainable and affordable.”



“Equipment for trades training needs to match what is being used at the worksite; it needs to be current.”

Quality of the Learning Experience

Many participants said higher learning, particularly in formal settings, should be about more than academics. The whole “learning experience needs to be part of how we measure quality outside of the classroom,” said one participant. Participants said a quality learning experience should engage students with their communities through meaningful activities.

Quality People and Equipment

“Investment in facilities and instruction is essential” to maintain quality. The ideas that “quality begets quality” was a common theme in the review. Participants talked about the need to attract “quality faculty” and to provide the physical space and equipment they need to carry out meaningful research. They also talked about the importance of retaining quality instructors for trades training and providing equipment that is on the leading edge: “equipment for trades training needs to match what is being used at the worksite; it needs to be current.” One participant from an Aboriginal community noted that “there are gaps in resources available (to Aboriginal communities) to hire professionals such as teachers to work in Aboriginal communities. This becomes a quality concern.”

Quality Training Programs

For some participants, the principle of *quality* “conjures up images of institutions, not training centres.” They said “quality must be inherent in training at all levels, not just institutions.” To ensure quality in training programs, participants said there need to be “processes in place to ensure high standards are maintained.” In particular, they would like to see “provincial standards for graduation with local mentorship and support.” A number of participants expressed concerns about students having to move to an urban centre for apprenticeship training, particularly the impact on smaller communities: “Offering some training only in the city isn’t workable... Skilled workers remain in (their) home community when they’ve trained locally.”

“Competition hurts quality but collaboration improves it by giving students more and richer opportunities.”

Quality Literacy Programs

Illiteracy and low literacy were of significant concern to participants. As one participant pointed out, “if one in three Albertans has literacy issues, we need to create quality programming so they can become a vital part of the Alberta economy.” A number of participants were concerned about the “over dependence on volunteers to educate in literacy and at the community level.” They suggested that “literacy practitioners (be required to) have enhanced credentials, like a degree” and that the programs provide ongoing training for instructors to meet required competencies.

Ensure Quality Basic Education

The importance and quality of Alberta’s basic education system was discussed throughout the review. Some participants focused specifically on graduation rates: “to have the quality system, we must have the highest graduation rates from high school, college, technical/apprenticeship (programs) and university levels.” However, others talked about the need for a basic education system that better prepares students for higher learning. Participants suggested that “better trained career counsellors in K-12 and more integration of post-secondary (institutions) with the K-12 (system) are needed.”

The lack of quality basic education was a particular concern in Aboriginal communities: “The K-12 system is failing Aboriginal kids. Supports are needed to address these basic foundational needs.” One participant said, “when our Aboriginal students graduate with a grade 12 diploma, they go on to post-secondary institutions and they can’t pass a grade 10 entrance exam. The institutions are not ready for these graduates (and) the students are certainly not learning.”

Reduce Competition / Increase Collaboration

Participants said that coordination and collaboration are essential to ensuring quality but there is currently no incentive to cooperate. Competition among institutions was a particular concern for participants from rural communities but it was also identified as a concern by those from larger urban centres. Participants pointed out that current policies, which reward institutions for number of students, have a negative impact on collaboration: “Once scarcity was introduced and the forces of competition, then collaboration went out the window.” They would like to see Advanced Education clarify the “expectations, rules, principles and vision” of the higher learning system, rather than encourage “survival of the fittest and fastest.” As one participant said, “Competition hurts quality but collaboration improves it by giving students more and richer opportunities.”



“We often measure quality in the short-term. But the real impact is long-term.”

Learn from Others

Participants from immigrant-serving organizations said that there is much our province can learn from other countries, with respect to providing quality higher learning opportunities. “If we are a true learning society, then learning is not a one-way process. Alberta can learn from what newcomers bring. Alberta is not the best at everything. We have a lot we can learn from what other countries are doing... We (currently) have an assimilationist model.”

Cultural Relevance

Both participants from Aboriginal communities and those from immigrant-serving organizations talked about the importance of cultural relevance in assessing quality. They said higher learning programs should reflect the diversity of people in the province: “Whatever culture the people are, they should see themselves in the curriculum.”

Monitor and Evaluate

Participants said to ensure quality in the higher learning system, programs must be regularly monitored and evaluated. However, they expressed some concern over “who judges quality” and the current measures used to assess quality (i.e. student satisfaction and employment) “We often measure quality in the short-term. But the real impact is long-term. Our measures of quality are more about a management tool. We spend a lot of time barking up the wrong tree.” One participant suggested that “part of policy should include a review process at relevant intervals to ensure we are on the right track.” Another participant said, “go back to the vision – quality is linked to the success we have in achieving the vision.”

Policy Foundations

Are these the right foundations to create *A Learning Alberta*?

What would you change, delete or add?

Comments on the Framework

Participants said they would like to see each of the policy foundations defined in the document. One participant said the framework “needs to use active words and create an energy.”

Participants from Aboriginal communities were concerned about the lack of an explicit statement about Aboriginal learners: “Why is there mention of attracting and retaining international students and immigrants but not explicit mention of attracting and retaining Aboriginal students?”

“The system focuses on jobs. Jobs are important but (they) cannot be the sole focus of the system.”

Make Explicit Value Statements

Many participants said the draft framework lacks a clear statement of what is important to Albertans with respect to higher learning and that these values should be included in the vision. This “lack of clarity at vision (leads) to a lack of clarity throughout the framework,” said one participant. There was a sense that the Policy Foundations reflected values but that these were not explicit. Participants said equity, equality, learner-centredness and community-based could be stated as values. However, some participants said innovation and excellence are “part of quality” and not actual values.

There was concern about what some participants saw as an economic-orientation: “the system focuses on jobs. Jobs are important but (they) cannot be the sole focus of the system.” One participant said, “in Alberta there is a huge sense that we don’t value the arts – and that is reflected again in this current draft. Life long learning and adult learning...need to include the arts.” Some participants were concerned about low literacy rates and would like to see an explicit statement that says “we want to help more Albertans achieve their potential.”

Consider Learner *Responsive* or *Learning Centred*

Some participants expressed concerns about *learner centred* as a Policy Foundation. One participant suggested *learner responsive* as an alternative: “learner responsive might indicate the reality of operating an institution while keeping the students’ interests and needs in mind.” Another said that “learner-centred ignores the benefits to society.” A number of participants suggested *learning centred*, which allows institutions to focus on the idea of learning rather than the learner. One participant cautioned, “don’t eliminate quality for the sake of being learner-centred” and suggested “it would be timely to do research around what quality is in a learner-centred environment.”



What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta's advanced learning system is learner-centred?

A Holistic View of Learning

Not only do we need a broad definition of higher learning, as previously discussed, but participants said a "community, holistic approach" is needed to ensure Alberta's advanced learning system is learner-centred: "Our current system is degree-centred, teacher-centred and economy-driven. (We) need to view learner-centred beyond the self-actualized individual to a collective community-centred view."

For some participants, a holistic view means starting with "literacy through the continuum of parenting, life skills, volunteer training through to (graduate education)." For others, it means addressing many of the issues already identified, including: barriers to access; quality basic education and preparation for advanced learning; the complete learning experience; and managing transitions. One participant said, "While programs have been developed for example to train oil rig workers, these programs have not listened to the need to take care of the holistic needs of the Aboriginal learner and to ensure their success in these programs. Aboriginal worldview needs to be incorporated into programs."

Funding for Learners

Reducing financial barriers is essential to a learner-centred system. One participant said a "fundamental value (should be that) no student will be denied access because of a lack of money." Other participants said funding must be available and flexible enough "to accommodate different kinds of learners." Learner-centred tuition policies and the availability of grants and bursaries are also needed. Participants from Aboriginal communities said government programs need "to update their funding to ensure Aboriginal students have equitable access to post-secondary (programs)."

Consult and Involve Learners, Providers

Most participants said "to be learner-centred, the learner must be involved in decisions." This means providing meaningful opportunities "to evaluate the system, give feedback and for the system to listen and respond to their needs." Some participants also identified the need to actively involve staff, "especially professors and instructors," in institutional decision-making.

Give Students Choice

Many participants said students should not feel coerced by a jobs-mentality to choose only certain types of programs: "dictating program choice by funding only certain programs or funding the student that will be economically viable after graduating is counterintuitive to what education is about...There is a broader societal value." However, some said students must be accountable to society for their choices: "(it is) not appropriate that learners learn what they want when they want to learn it." One suggestion is to institute a "voucher" program, whereby all Albertans would have access to funding for higher learning.

"Dictating program choice by funding only certain programs or funding the student that will be economically viable after graduating is counterintuitive to what education is about...There is a broader societal value."

“Value all learning, including community-based, general interest programs/courses. Any type of learning is a great thing to do.”

Focus on Learner Needs – Not “One Size Fits All”

Many participants said a learner-centred system should focus on the needs of learners and not be “one size fits all.” “We’ve got to get away from defining the ‘average’ student as 18-24,” said a number of participants, pointing out that the system needs to recognize part-time students, single parents, working people, mature students and others who participate in the advanced learning system. The system must also recognize different learning and teaching styles: “open things up so that traditional lecture-style education is not the only option.” However, some cautioned against relying too much on technology: deliver (instruction) to students where they are – e-learning hasn’t improved success rates.”

Participants also said a learner-centred system “needs to respect cultural diversity” and should demonstrate “cultural sensitivity.” One participant from an Aboriginal community noted that “nearly 50% of Aboriginal learners are over 30 years of age. These people have already had families and are older learners. This makes the Aboriginal learner a unique demographic. Don’t view Aboriginal learners as young grade 12 graduates.” A participant from immigrant-serving communities said, “(Our) education system is still based on a Eurocentric model. There has to be some way of enabling people of other cultures to feel comfortable accessing the system. Given the increase in immigration in Alberta, we will need to ensure that the system is responsive to the diverse needs of learners.”

Recognize Other Types of Learning / Preferred Learning Methods

A learner-centred system should value informal, self-directed learning, such as that offered by libraries, as well as non-credit general interest programs. “Value all learning, including community-based, general interest programs/courses. Any type of learning is a great thing to do,” said one participant. Not only does this support the concept of life long learning, “it could be a person’s first general interest course that gets them interested in pursuing further advanced education,” said one participant. Another participant said, “It’s really not just about access to the formal system; it also means learning within the family and the community...Collective peer learning needs to be visible and funded.”

Seamlessness and Transferability

Participants said students in a learner-centred system should be able to move seamlessly through the processes involved in pursuing higher learning. “What can we get rid of so that students can move more seamlessly through the system?” asked one participant. “How about one form for application for registration, for student finance,” for anything else the student requires to enter the system? One participant said “We are very compartmentalized. We need cross-ministerial conversations to dismantle silos. This doesn’t just apply to government – agencies and organizations need to work to eliminate silos...dismantle barriers.” In particular, some participants said Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Education and Advanced Education need to collaborate to ensure seamlessness.

Transferability was a significant concern for some participants, who noted that “a lot of credits still won’t transfer easily,” “mobility between institutions is a problem” and “transferability is a large issue, especially for foreigners.” One participant suggested the idea of a “personal portfolio of learning to take from one institution to another and have it turn into a credential.” “Learning should follow the student,” said another.

Flexibility

Flexibility is an important part of a learner-centred system, said participants, particularly those from immigrant-serving organizations. The system must be “flexible to acknowledge international qualifications,” said one participant. “This includes academic credentials, life and work experience.” Other suggestions were for “flexible timelines to achieve outcomes,” “flexible entrance requirements” and flexibility in where programs are delivered.

What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta’s advanced learning system is community-based?

Define Community and Community-Based

Many participants said they would like to see the words *community* and *community-based* defined in the policy framework. They pointed out that communities can be “based on (geographic) region, common interest, gender, ethnicity, etc.” “The term community-based is deceptive,” said one participant. “One meaning is place-based the other meaning is ‘what the community wants’.” “We don’t know what community-based means,” said another participant. “But it is important to discuss and clarify what it means.”

Community-based appeared to mean different things to different participants. For example, one participant said “community-based refers to education beyond that in formal post-secondary institutions.” Another said “it is a generic term for all involved in advanced education.” Still another said, “community-based means the collective of people who come together to determine what they need to learn and co-create knowledge they can share and use.” An Aboriginal participant said “within the Aboriginal community, this means having linkages between communities and institutions, yet, maintaining the autonomy of the local community. Community-based, not systems-oriented.”

Promote Collaboration

Participants liked the idea of “collaborative planning” and its promise that communities will have an opportunity “to participate and be involved in the system.” However, as noted earlier, participants pointed out that current policies promote competition rather than collaboration. “Until you have a measure for collaboration, you are not going to collaborate,” said one participant.

“The system must be flexible enough to acknowledge international qualifications. This includes academic credentials, life and work experience.”

“Programs should not be developed by listening primarily to industry voices. Program development must involve community voices.”

Consult and Involve Communities

Just as a learner-centred system should consult and involve learners, participants said a community-based system would provide opportunities for meaningful involvement by communities: “Give communities more ownership of the learning and the institutions of learning.” Community involvement recognizes that the “community and delivery agents are in the best position to determine (community) needs, not government,” said one participant and means “(asking) a community what they would like and how they would like it.” “If it is really community-based,” said one participant, “then the community has to have a mechanism to make decisions...The intent is to create grassroots initiatives that really come from communities.” Some participants cautioned against giving industry too much power: “Programs should not be developed by listening primarily to industry voices. Program development must involve community voices.”

Benefit the Community

A community-based learning system would increase accessibility to higher learning, particularly for those in smaller communities. One participant said, “we need to ensure that a broad, diverse base of educational opportunities (is available) in all communities – not just respond to immediate needs in a particular community.” Many participants said community-based learning opportunities encourage people to stay in rural areas. “Research shows that if they move away (to pursue higher learning), they may not come back,” said one participant. This also creates a hidden cost to employers who “try to train staff themselves instead of sending them to a larger centre, where they may not come back.” One participant suggested that the province should offer “grants or loan rebates for students (who) return to their communities to work after graduation.”

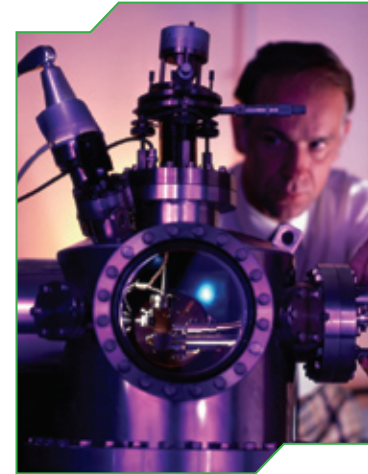
In addition to keeping people in rural areas, participants identified a number of benefits to community-based learning. It allows people to draw on “the entire community as a network of support,” said one participant. Another said “it is easier to excel in a smaller group. (It is) a confidence builder for students to go to school in a smaller community.” Educational institutions in rural Alberta can play an “economic development role,” said one participant, as a “major community employer, facility (provider), (and through) community leadership”; this important community role should be acknowledged and supported through funding.

“Think globally, act locally”

Some participants said there needs to be a balance between being community-based and focusing on “globally-based learning opportunities that lead to community development.” As one participant said, “there is a need to balance community needs with general degree requirements.” Industry participation also needs to be “carefully considered,” said one participant. “(We need to) balance supply and demand of students and industry.”

Address “Stigma” Associated with the Provider

Participants from immigrant-serving organizations said “there is a huge stigma around where and who provides the program.” This concern “needs to be reflected in policy,” including closing the “funding discrepancies between those funded in community versus institutions (communities are far under-funded compared to institutions.)” One participant said, there needs to be a “consistent approach to program funding. We’re all in the education field and should be treated the same based on demonstrated need and results.”



“There needs to be a consistent approach to program funding. We’re all in the education field and should be treated the same based on demonstrated need and results.”

What do you think is most necessary to ensure Alberta’s advanced learning system is innovative and excellent?

View Innovation Broadly

Many participants said the concept of innovation needs to be broadly defined. “I sense that innovation is focused on technological innovation,” said one participant. “This needs to be expanded to include a broad view of innovation in education.” Another participant said, “innovation is required in teaching styles and learning.” One participant reacted to the characteristics of innovation and excellence, pointing out that “the characteristics miss the concepts about helping people reach their full potential.” Some participants were concerned about linking *innovation* and *excellence*. “Excellence negates innovation,” said one participant. “Excellence means there is only one right way. Encouraging innovation means different ways of looking at things.”

Encourage Creativity

Many participants said we need to encourage and support creativity “from the early years.” “How does the system nurture the creativity that children are born with?” asked one participant. “The system needs to encourage this.” However, another participant said “the (current) education system beats creativity out of people.” “Innovation is not found in a box,” said one participant. “Create an atmosphere to think outside the box to allow for innovation.” A participant from a rural community said, “there is a great unrealized potential for innovation in smaller communities,” and suggested that “a centre is needed for the exchange of information and ideas.”



“We need to be a ‘world-player’ so that we can pass on the best possible learning system to our kids.”

Communicate Excitement!

A number of participants said a vision of innovation should convey energy and excitement. “This component of the framework is the most passive and almost boring,” said one participant. Another said, it “needs richness and excitement.”

Global Focus

Many participants said we need to have an “international focus” and be “world player” in order to ensure an innovative and excellent advanced learning system. “International exchange is critical to success,” said one participant. “The exchange of ideas is a critical ingredient.” Participants said a global focus in advanced education would include being more open to international students, providing local students with international experiences and opening up immigration, “bringing in the best people from other parts of the world to work and train Albertans.” However, one participants said, “the whole focus on the need to be globally competitive is disturbing.” Another said, “get away from international, global, economic basis and focus on the advancement of a human being, rooted in community development.”

Promote Existing Excellence and Innovation

Alberta already has excellent people doing innovative work “all over the province,” said participants. “We need to do a better job of promoting what we have.” Participants mentioned that Alberta Ingenuity Fund and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research as ways we are already promoting and achieving excellence in the province. One participant said, “the government should capitalize more on what’s going on and bring more financial support to these initiatives.”

Innovate Only When Necessary

A number of participants reacted to the word *innovation*, asking “why do we have to innovate? What’s wrong with something that is tried and true and provides excellent results?”



Participants said excellence should be more important than innovation and that we “need to focus on the quality of the system” rather than always looking to make “innovative and broad change.” It is “important not to seek innovation for itself,” said one participant. “We need to recognize and retain what is valuable.”

Fund People and Infrastructure

For many participants, the way to promote innovation and excellence in the advanced learning system is simple: invest in people and infrastructure. “Investment in student scholarships, infrastructure and research all lead to innovation and excellence,” said one participant. Another participant said, “if you build it they will come: funding for research and excellent faculty attracts other great young minds.”

Support Both Pure and Applied Research

While some participants said researchers should have complete independence to pursue questions of interest – “whether or not it has any eventual commercial value” – others said we need “a way of channeling resources into areas that have more application in our society” and “we need to establish a link to the value to society.” Participants would like to see “a leader in government step forward and knit together the agendas of various ministries” that all have a role and interest in promoting research and innovation. Others cautioned government against “micromanaging” research, saying that government’s role should be to provide “a little bit of bricks and mortar...to support innovation and research.” Some participants said innovation should be encouraged in a broad range of areas – beyond science and technology – to include humanities, social sciences and education. “Community-based learning (also) needs to be included in innovation,” said one participant.

Commercialization of Research

While participants recognized the significant role that Alberta’s universities play in research commercialization, some said they would like to see colleges and technical institutes become “larger players.” Others said the private sector “can share in some costs and work cooperatively with the intellectual expertise in the universities and research institutes” to capitalize on innovation.

Promote Knowledge Sharing and Transfer

Innovation and knowledge must be shared among the various stakeholders in the advanced learning system in order to ensure excellence, said participants. This includes making “connections between small communities and large ones (to share) the latest research to help better deliver training and programming.” Participants said there need to be “mechanisms to transfer knowledge around communities” and among institutions of higher learning.

Recognize Aboriginal Contributions

Participants from Aboriginal communities said innovation means recognizing “different Aboriginal knowledge and languages as a base for community development.” One participant suggested creating a Centre of Excellence in indigenous languages, saying “Alberta could take a leadership role here nationally. Epistemologies could be shared.”

“If you build it, they will come: funding for research and excellent faculty attracts other great young minds.”

Policy Outcomes / Quality Measures

What would you add, change or delete from this list of Quality Measures?

A key issue for many participants was whether or not the proposed quality measures would, indeed, measure quality. “These are quantitative measures and not quality measures at all,” said one participant. “Participation rates don’t get to the quality of the system.” Another participant said, “How do we measure quality of the post-secondary system? This list doesn’t cover what should be measured, nor does it get at what is a quality system. More measures are required.” Participants identified a number of additional measures, some of which echo those in the policy framework and many others that are new. These measures are listed below.

Alberta has increased employment and productivity

One participant said we need to “track the learners from high school to university to the labour force. Another said, “if you don’t have a job at the end of your education, then your education has been for naught. You get an education for an end purpose – a job.” This measure should also track individuals, particularly newcomers and Aboriginal people, from unemployment and under-employment to full and meaningful employment.

Alberta is able to forecast and respond to skill shortage

Participants said we “need to get better at measuring what our (human resources) needs will be in the future – both in the short and long term.” They see “coordination between ministries (as) essential,” particularly between Advanced Education and Human Resources and Employment.

Alberta learners are able to move seamlessly through the system

Participants said the mobility of learners within the system and in and out of the province should be tracked and measured. We should see “an increasing number of routes...between entry points...toward different outcomes,” said one participant.

Alberta attracts the “best and brightest” from around the world

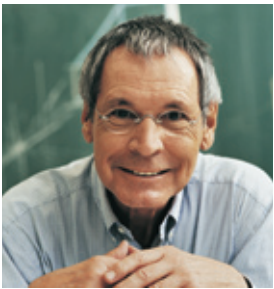
We should measure the proportion of international students who come to study in the province and the number who stay after graduation. Diversity of participants in the workforce should also be measured. This should include our ability to retain foreign-trained doctors and other professionals who may otherwise be “lost to the U.S. because of frustration with barriers in Canada.”

Alberta rewards communities, advanced learning institutions and private sector partners for collaboration

Participants said collaboration should be rewarded and that structures and reward systems that promote competition should be dismantled.

Alberta has strong participation and educational attainment rates

Most participants agreed that participation and completion rates are an important measure of success (but not necessarily of quality). This includes increased high school graduation rates, as a pre-requisite to advanced learning. Some participants said that graduation from college and university was a more important measure than participation. Others said the total number of people in education should be tracked, including those in non-credit programs.



“If we really (want) to be a world class society and believe that quality is central, we need to consider how satisfied learners are with their outcomes and how satisfied employers are with the skills of the learners.”

Alberta has strong participation and educational attainment rates among Aboriginal people

Many participants from Aboriginal communities said participation and educational attainment rates for Aboriginal people must be a separate measure: “As they are written, we could accomplish (all of these measures) and still fail Aboriginal learners. You need an Aboriginal specific measure.” One participant said, “education participation and success rates, if accurately gathered and maintained, could then be compared with the funding and initiatives focused on Aboriginals.”

Alberta has strong participation and educational attainment rates among people with disabilities

One participant said the “Bill of Rights clearly articulates the rights of disabled students to access advanced education. Institutions need to be cognizant of this.” In addition to participation rates among students with disabilities, we also need to measure the “quality of their experience.”

Alberta has strong participation and educational attainment rates among newcomers (immigrants and refugees)

The participation and educational attainment rates of newcomers is an important indicator of the quality of the higher education system in Alberta, said participants from immigrant-serving organizations.

Alberta’s students have decreased levels of debt

The debt load of Alberta’s students needs to be tracked and compared “nationally and internationally.”

Alberta’s students report high quality learning experiences

Participants said “track the student experience – this will tell us about quality.” This should be done at both the institutional and system levels. “Focus on access to classroom materials, quality of classes, quality of instructors, ease of movement through the system, availability of needed resources, etc.,” said one participant.

Alberta’s students are highly satisfied with their learning experiences

As one participant said, “If we really (want) to be a world class society and believe that quality is central, we need to consider how satisfied learners are with their outcomes and how satisfied employers are with the skills of the learners.” Another said, “did the individual meet their goal? If it was met, then education was affordable, accessible and quality.”

Alberta’s students have greater access to scholarships, bursaries and grants

Participants said the increased availability of financial assistance to Alberta’s students would be an important measure of accessibility and affordability.

Alberta's ministries collaborate to enhance advanced learning

The breaking down of silos within and between ministries would be an indicator of success, said some participants.

Alberta has strong literacy rates

Participants said a strong commitment to literacy is a key component of a quality advanced learning system. One participant said "the International Adult Literacy Survey...needs to be a benchmark for the future."



"Real policies and cash (are needed) to make sure the Aboriginal youth, and youth in more general terms, are fully aware of the range of possibilities available to them."

Alberta's advanced education institutions have sustainable, predictable funding

Most participants said sustainable and predictable funding for institutions and students is an important quality measure.

Albertans have access to community-based learning opportunities

The number of students who have to leave their communities to pursue higher learning will be a measure of the system's quality.

Alberta learners are aware of the opportunities available to them

All potential students in Alberta should be aware of the learning opportunities that are available to them, said participants. In particular, awareness strategies directed at Aboriginal learners "are crucial," said one participant. "Real policies and cash (are needed) to make sure the Aboriginal youth, and youth in more general terms, are fully aware of the range of possibilities available to them."

Albertans have an improved quality of life

As a corollary to viewing advanced education as an investment, most participants said improvements in Albertan's quality of life will be an important measure of the quality of the higher learning system. They suggested a number of possible measures including: health status indicators, crime rates, incarceration rates, suicide rates, social assistance number, health care costs, community development, environmental protection, etc. Aboriginal participants said it would be important to ask, "how well are communities doing on the reserve or settlements as a result of higher education? What are the social and economic factors (that result) from higher education?" Another participant said, "if the framework is truly useful, then the impact will be visible in the socioeconomic status of refugees and immigrants."

Albertans value and respect Aboriginal culture and people

Participants from Aboriginal communities see education as a key strategy for changing the way Aboriginal people in Alberta are perceived. "We need to change and evaluate our progress at every step toward changing the mainstream mindset, so that Aboriginal culture is seen as a benefit to Alberta society." They also see it as an important strategy for changing the way Aboriginal people see themselves: "facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal students...to enhance feelings of cultural self-worth."

"Our learning system must respect and embrace diversity."



Final Words

What final thoughts, issues or ideas would you like to provide to the Steering Committee and the Minister about the future of advanced learning in Alberta?

Consultation Process

Some participants were concerned about the “speed” of the consultation process and what they saw as flaws (particularly the apparent lack of students involved in the process). As one participant said, “we need to balance the need for speed to meet the timelines (with) the need to get this right.” Other participants were satisfied with the process, saying “this has been an open and mature environment for discussion” and “general consensus has been reached on the major issues.”

Policy Framework

Some participants said the policy framework was “institutional and ordinary.” They encouraged the Department to provide a more “creatively written” document. “What ultimately comes out needs to be inspiring and compelling,” said one participant. Participants liked the concept of lifelong learning but were concerned that it was often lost in the document: “Keep and value the broad definition of lifelong learning throughout the document – not just in a few places. The framework tends to slide back into advanced education too often.” One participant liked the policy framework but said the models of delivery are needed to assess the value of the framework: “we need the flexibility to say we agree with the principles but need to make sure they are reflected in the models of delivery...I hope the government will bring us back to look at those models.”

Commitment to Aboriginal Education

Participants from Aboriginal communities would like to see the province make a strong commitment to Aboriginal education, including giving Aboriginal people control over their own education system: “Hand over the controls, capacity and funding for Aboriginal education to Aboriginals and see how it goes. You are spending the money anyway, why not let Aboriginals have increased self-determination in terms of advanced education as well?” Others called for more collaborative approaches: “Collaborative arrangements are needed for Aboriginals to effect curriculum design and (have) an ongoing stake in their own education.” One participant said, “fund Aboriginal post-secondary institutions on an equitable basis as other post-secondary institutions. Core funding and developmental research funding is needed.” Another said, “there is a call for an Aboriginal policy framework (for advanced education) similar to the K-12 framework.”

“Think big. Don’t be afraid to shake up the system. You won’t get the changes unless you shake it up.”

Commitment to Change

Participants were impressed by the Department’s apparent commitment to change and encouraged the minister to “remain steadfast and courageous. Change is never easy.” One participant encouraged the government to move forward boldly. “Think big. Don’t be afraid to shake up the system. You won’t get the changes unless you shake it up.” However, another cautioned against moving too quickly: “the current system works well. Be careful not to get rid of things that work just because there is a desire to change.” One participant said the government must create a different “consciousness” if it hopes to bring about change: “the problem cannot be resolved from the same consciousness that created (the current system). It seems like we’re stuck in the same old scientific logical model that is strapping us, excluding community,

adult and arts education and the non-economic reasons for learning (social capital). I challenge the Minister to create a different consciousness.”



