

THE FORUM
background



A LEARNING ALBERTA
Dialogue and Direction

Letter from the Minister - an invitation to make a difference

This Minister's Forum is a unique and important opportunity to set a framework for the future of advanced learning.

First and foremost, it is an opportunity to change the way we think about advanced learning in Alberta.

It's time to think beyond our traditional systems of advanced learning and think about a more inclusive and responsive system for Alberta – a system that inspires and supports the full diversity of learners and learning opportunities in both institutional and community-based learning options.

At the Forum, we want to hear your bravest views and boldest opinions about this new vision for advanced learning. We want you to help clearly define the policy directions needed to change from what Alberta has today to what we envision for the future. And we want to talk frankly about what will be necessary to make it happen.

There will be many chances, both formal and informal, to express your ideas and opinions on these and other issues throughout the day and a half we have together. Members of the *A Learning Alberta* Steering Committee will be participating throughout the Forum, and they will use your input to recommend a new policy framework and key policy directions for advanced education to me.

I look forward to meeting you at the Forum, and I encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity and tell us what you think about these new directions for advanced learning.

Yours truly,



Dave Hancock, Q.C.
Minister



A Learning Alberta: Steering Committee

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Mr. Russell Carr (co-chair) – Carr Leiren and Associates

Mr. Phil Gougeon (co-chair) – Assistant Deputy Minister of Adult Learning for Advanced Education

MLAs

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Mr. Ray Danyluk, MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council, Member of the Standing Policy Committee on Agriculture and Municipal Affairs

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Ms. Sharon Matthias – President, Matthias Inc Designing the Future

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Mr. Eric Newell – Chancellor, University of Alberta

Dr. Frits Pannekoek – President, Athabasca University

Ms. Alexis Pepin – Past President of the University of Alberta Graduate Students Association and member Graduate Students Association of Canada

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Welcome!

When he made advanced education the top priority for this government in early 2005, Premier Klein said that merely being good is not enough for Albertans. *“We must develop a great system of advanced learning in order for the province and its people to meet their full potential.”*

As a participant in ***A Learning Alberta – Dialogue and Direction***, the Minister’s Forum on Advanced Learning, you are an important part of a process that has been underway across Alberta since January of 2005. Led by the Honourable Dave Hancock, Minister of Advanced Education, a new vision and policy framework is being developed to guide future directions in advanced learning for Alberta. You represent the many diverse voices bringing their perspectives to this task.

This vision and framework will reshape the way we think about, deliver and set policy for advanced learning for the generations ahead.

Taking Part in Shaping the Future

Alberta is starting a new century in an enviable economic position.

Alberta leads the country in growth and prosperity, but with that growth come challenges that require thoughtful, forward-looking responses. These include:

- Maximizing opportunities for all Albertans to share in the province’s prosperity and quality of life.
- Attracting, retaining and developing the human capital needed to sustain growth.
- Providing the social and physical infrastructure needed to support growth.
- Recognizing and realizing our province’s rural strengths and opportunities.
- Sustaining safe communities, a healthy population and quality in learning.
- Ensuring the environment is protected in the face of growth pressures.
- Developing the best strategies and policies to ensure a secure and prosperous future.

Alberta must sustain a globally competitive economy for the future – an economy that adds value across its traditional resource sectors, as well as new and emerging sectors such as life sciences, nanotechnology, environmental and information technologies and value-added manufacturing. At the same time, Alberta must support learning in the arts and humanities to foster the creativity that drives truly innovative societies.

The key to this future is a robust, knowledge-based economy, spurred by Albertans with a desire to learn and adapt throughout their lives. It is people and their ideas, creativity, knowledge and wisdom that will advance this province into the 21st century.

What A Learning Alberta is About

Listening to People

In January and February of 2005, Minister Hancock held a series of Roundtables, called *A Window of Opportunity*, which asked a broad range of people to think about the future of advanced education and speak frankly about the present situation. Community-based educators, universities and colleges (both private and public), literacy groups, students, faculty, Aboriginal educators and leaders, business, industry, and apprenticeship and industry training stakeholders as well as the immigrant community and those representing the disabled took the challenge and identified the issues facing learning in Alberta now and for the future.

Stakeholders clearly said that:

- Alberta needs a strategic vision for advanced education.
- The vision must acknowledge the tremendous benefits of learning, not just to the economy, but to the lives of *all* Albertans.
- Spending on advanced education must be seen as an investment, not only as an expenditure.
- Alberta has a unique opportunity to develop an integrated advanced learning system. Our future success depends on collaborative rather than competitive action.
- The vision must support resources in communities and regions as well as in urban centres, and harness the power of new technologies to achieve the best learning opportunities possible.
- Alberta's advanced learning system must also recognize and value the diversity in character, cultures, needs and aspirations of Albertans.

Acting on What was Heard

In June 2005, the Minister asked representatives from a wide range of learning interests to serve on a Steering Committee. He tasked them with setting a new vision and directions for advanced education in the province – a vision that recognizes both institutional and community-based learning opportunities. The project is called *A Learning Alberta: Framing the Challenge*.

The Steering Committee looked at best practices and current research. It also received input from Albertans and developed a draft vision and policy framework that it took to Albertans for discussions about the future.

Throughout September and October 2005, Albertans had opportunities to discuss the draft vision and policy framework through an online public forum, regional meetings, and MLA meetings. These discussions have enabled many people, approximately 3,000 to date, to shape the directions and ideas of the *Learning Alberta* Policy Framework. Key themes from all of these discussions will determine the recommendations made to the Minister by the Steering Committee after the Minister's Forum.

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

The Minister's Forum – Dialogue and Directions for *A Learning Alberta*

Building on the work of the Steering Committee, the Minister of Advanced Education has invited over 280 people to this Forum from across the learning sector to give him direct advice and input on a new vision and policy framework for advanced learning. In addition, he is asking participants to provide their views on which policy directions should be priorities over the next three to five years to ensure measurable progress.

Members of the *A Learning Alberta* Steering Committee will be participating throughout the Forum, and using your input to recommend policy directions for advanced education to the Minister.

Designing a New Future for Advanced Learning in Alberta

The Policy Environment is Changing

Shifts in policy priorities have occurred over the last decade in Alberta and continue to evolve.

The *A Learning Alberta* Policy Framework reflects a number of the emerging policy shifts:

- A greater integration of economic and social policy. Traditionally Alberta, indeed all of Canada, has looked at these sectors as separate and quite distinct.
- Recognition, through key strategies, that learning and education are fundamental sources of well-being and opportunity for citizens. In the past, policy in Alberta has focused primarily on income and employment opportunities.
- A rethinking of education spending as a critical *investment* in the future rather than an immediate *expenditure*.
- Recognizing that the *capacity and vibrancy of communities* can be extended significantly when government, business and communities work together for shared social and economic benefits.
- Shifting our focus from *management accountability* (a focus on efficiency and economy) to an emphasis on *policy accountability* (a focus on effectiveness and equity).
- Refocusing and tracking *outcomes* of policy, programs and expenditure rather than measuring inputs and outputs.
- Breaking down the “silos” between sectors, industries, providers and government departments. Integrating policies, planning and programs across areas of responsibility.
- Putting the experiences of the people and organizations impacted by policies at the centre of policy planning, rather than allowing government requirements and processes to drive the design of policies and programs.



A New Vision and Policy Framework

Discussions of the Steering Committee's draft vision and policy framework were frank and constructive. Responses from all discussion channels are summarized in a report titled *A Learning Alberta*, Regional Discussions Summary and are available at www.allearningalberta.ca. Representatives of the Steering Committee attended all regional discussions.

As a result of these discussions, the initial vision and framework have changed in a number of significant ways.

The current policy framework now includes **Five Key Components**:

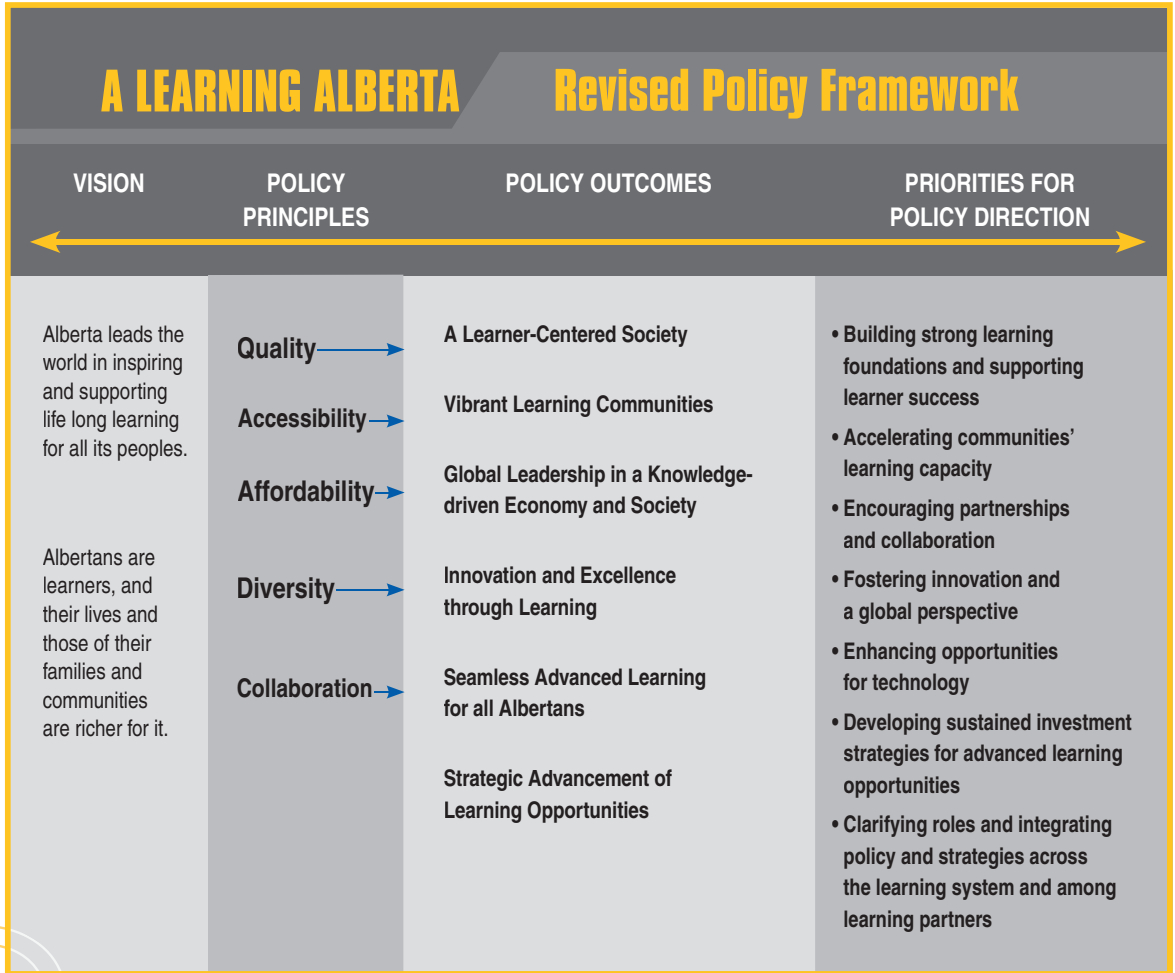
A **vision** for advanced learning in Alberta

The **principles** that must be respected in developing advanced learning policies

The **outcomes** that policies must seek to achieve

Specific areas that are **priority policy directions** for advanced learning

Ideas for the types of **performance measures** that should be used to track progress on the new vision and outcomes



Proposed Vision

There is agreement that the vision should be ambitious, clear and simply stated. It should challenge Alberta to lead in the world – and it should capture and express the profound impact learning has on the lives of people.

As a result of input, the revised vision is:

Alberta leads the world in inspiring and supporting life long learning for all its peoples.

Albertans are learners, and their lives and those of their families and communities are richer for it.

Proposed Policy Principles

The draft policy framework is now driven by five key principles to be used in setting future policies. Policymakers must consider if individual policies and programs support **Accessibility, Quality, Affordability, Diversity and Collaboration:**

Accessibility

Premier Ralph Klein has said he believes that anyone who wants to pursue advanced learning in Alberta should be able to do so. Advanced Education Minister Dave Hancock has said that we must inspire Albertans to take advantage of all opportunities to improve themselves in whatever ways they want or need.

Key factors in ensuring access include:

- Removing barriers to participation in learning opportunities.
- Ensuring flexibility throughout the system, for example:
 - Easy transitions into advanced education for under-represented groups, such as rural populations, immigrants, persons with disabilities, low income learners and adults with low basic skills
 - Transferability of credentials
 - Acceptance of competencies as well as credentials
- Policies and programs that recognize and support different ways of learning.
- Removing the barriers to education for Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.
- Strengthening learning opportunities in rural and remote communities by delivering education in new ways.
- Defining the role of technology in delivering learning opportunities, and supporting technology with people to work with learners.



Quality

A high quality education system must meet the needs of learners, society and the economy.

Key factors in ensuring quality include:

- Developing curricula that reflect the changing needs of society and the economy and equips learners with relevant skills and knowledge.
- Acknowledging that learning and literacy start in families, from a child's earliest experiences, and that it continues throughout life.
- Ensuring learning success in the basic education system (Kindergarten to Grade 12).
- Attracting and keeping the best faculty, staff and students.
- Finding the balance between meeting students' needs and meeting the needs of Alberta's innovation system.
- Integrating technology into research and teaching in ways that support learners wherever they are.
- Ensuring that facilities and equipment support the drive for innovation and excellence.
- Enabling innovation and excellence in both learning and research to ensure Alberta is globally competitive.

Affordability

Education must be affordable if it is to be an accessible life long pursuit for Albertans.

Key factors that affect affordability include:

- Finding the appropriate balance between what the individual pays and what public dollars support in providing formal learning opportunities.
- The costs that learners face in addition to tuition - costs such as books, technology, housing, transportation.
- The rate and frequency of tuition increases.
- Learners' debt loads.
- The need for financial assistance to be flexible and responsive to learners' individual circumstances.
- Accessibility to educational opportunities outside of urban areas.
- Flexibility in moving between work and learning opportunities.

Diversity

Alberta's advanced learning system respects the rich diversity of learners. It also acknowledges and adapts to the diversity of communities, cultures and traditions, learner aspirations and abilities.

Key factors in respecting and supporting diversity include:

- Increasing the participation rates of rural populations, Aboriginals, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and adults with low basic skills.
- Flexible learning pathways that adapt to the diversity of learners.
- Effective supports for adult learners throughout the learning system.
- Greater collaboration among community and cultural groups, schools, and advanced learning providers to improve the success of a diversity of learners.
- Culturally sensitive learning environments to engage all people in advanced learning and improve their experiences and success in learning.
- Community organizations and advanced education providers playing a greater role supporting the full array of transitional and learning needs of people.
- Attracting and retaining greater numbers of international students.

Collaboration

A resilient, responsive and adaptable learning system is built on a strong foundation of partnerships, coalitions and networks – both formal and informal. Learning partners must be supported in their efforts to collaborate in common purpose – creating a fully participating learning society.

Key factors in fostering collaboration include:

- Programs and policies across all government departments that promote collaboration over competition.
- Community organizations, advanced education institutions, industry, and schools working together on local and regional learning needs and outcomes.
- Defining the roles of public and private institutions, community providers and agencies, and businesses in providing learning opportunities.
- Building and reinforcing the applied research capacity of college and technical institutes through increased collaboration between industry, public and not for profit organizations and communities.
- Investment strategies to promote joint use facilities and cost sharing among providers.
- Incentives in funding policies to encourage collaborative programs and the adoption of shared or compatible platforms across institutions, including libraries, application systems and learning tools.



Policy Outcomes

During discussions, people were asked what outcomes advanced learning policy must achieve to realize the new vision. A number of policy foundations were presented. Albertans have said that policy for advanced education in the future must achieve:

A Learner-Centered Society

The learning choices and aspirations of individual learners are understood, respected and addressed. They are at the very core of Alberta's learning system. Learners are inspired by, and support, learning organizations and communities.

Vibrant Learning Communities

Learning opportunities reflect the diverse needs of communities of interest, culture and geography. The capacity of communities to achieve their learning potential is supported by collaboration among their learning partners – industry, government, learning institutions (public and private) and community and cultural partners.

Global Leadership in a Knowledge-driven Economy and Society



Alberta's society and its economy are attuned to global opportunities driven by knowledge and discovery. Albertans create and share knowledge and use it in innovative ways. Knowledge networks that enable learners (students, teachers, researchers and industries) to succeed in a dynamic global marketplace are developed and supported.

Innovation and Excellence through Learning

Creativity, discovery and outstanding scholarship and research are nurtured, supported and celebrated across the diversity of Alberta's learning system. Technology is used effectively to support learning quality.

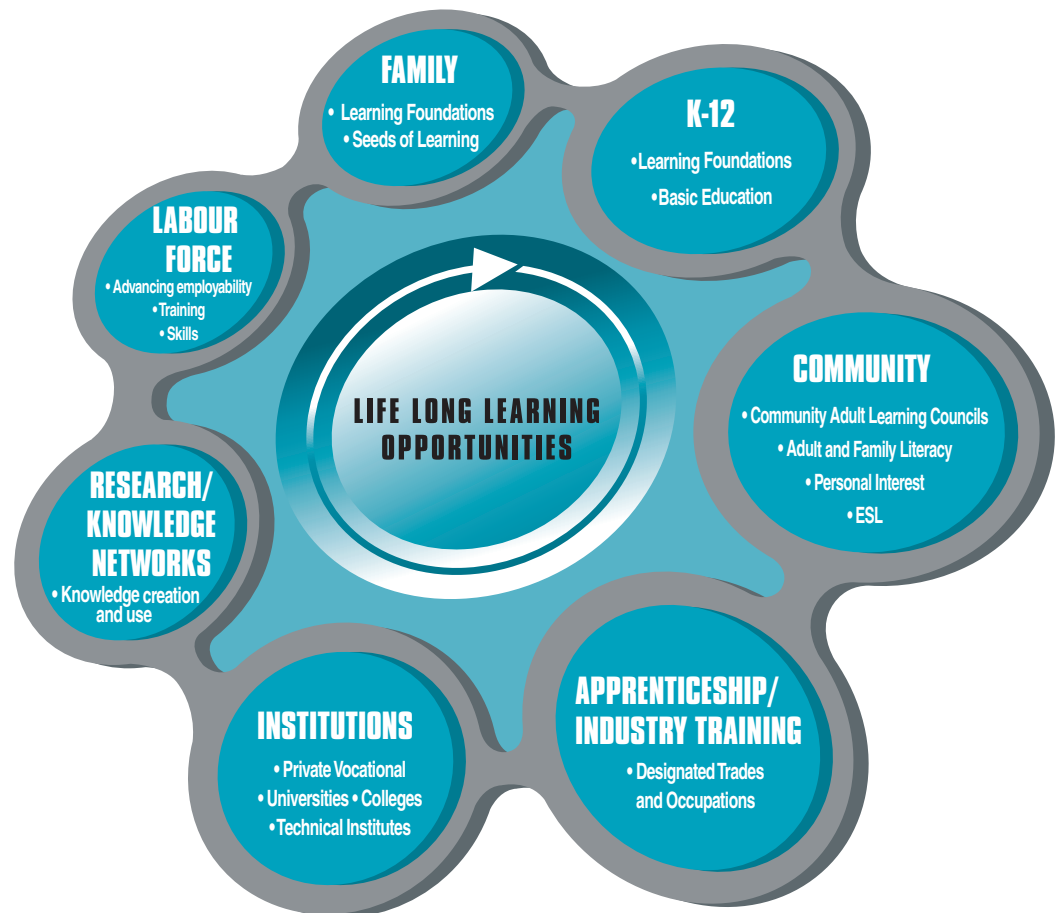
Seamless Advanced Learning for all Albertans

The roles of learning providers across a highly integrated system are clear. Alberta learners move easily through a broad array of learning opportunities throughout a life long journey of learning.

Strategic Advancement of Learning Opportunities

The vision of a true learning society for Alberta is pursued with foresight, a persistent commitment and sustained strategies and investment.

Seamless Learning Opportunities in Life Long Learning



Priorities for Policy Development

In the next three to five years policy development in advanced learning in Alberta will focus on:

Building Strong Learning Foundations and Supporting Learner Success

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- Increased overall educational attainment by learners.
- A focus and investment in basic literacy and learning skills.
- A high level of participation and successful learning outcomes among under-represented Albertans, including Aboriginal peoples, rural, persons with disabilities, and socio-economically disadvantaged Albertans.
- Seamless transition throughout the system is enabled through transferability, laddering, and recognition of credentials across providers.
- Alberta develops responsive ways of recognizing prior learning and experiences.
- Adult learners have effective supports in place throughout their learning lives.
- Aspiring learners have a high level of awareness of the importance of advancing their education as well as opportunities, tools and supports to achieve their own success.

Accelerating Communities' Learning Capacity

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- Learning providers contribute toward the development of vibrant communities.
- Employers, learning providers, schools and other community organizations facilitate seamless movement between work and learning and enable concurrent learning and working.
- Alberta communities play a key role in attracting and retaining professionals within their communities, including faculty and staff within their advanced education institutions.
- Aboriginal communities are more integrated into the advanced learning system, contributing to more successful outcomes for more Aboriginal learners.
- Learners access a broad array of program opportunities within their communities through new and innovative delivery strategies.
- Student assistance programs respond to the needs of rural learners, so that costs are not barriers to access.
- Learning communities and organizations are healthy and economically vibrant.

Encouraging Partnerships and Collaboration

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- Policies, programs and funding mechanisms encourage collaboration and partnership over competition.
- The collaborative efforts of schools, community organizations, non-profits, and post-secondary institutions improve transitions, learning and outcomes.
- Greater joint-use facilities and cost sharing among learning providers.
- Government policies encourage increased private sector contribution toward advanced education programs and student assistance, in recognition of the benefits gained by the private sector from advanced learning.

Fostering Innovation and a Global Perspective

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- Research and discovery of new knowledge build Alberta's innovation capacity.
- More research is conducted within the private sector.
- The applied research capacity of colleges and technical institutes is actively developed.
- Commitment to excellence and innovation are established in both learning and research.
- Private, not for profit and public organizations have the capacity to use new knowledge in innovative ways.



- The key role graduate students play within the learning system in knowledge development is recognized. Graduate programs are expanded and graduates are retained in Alberta.
- International education is recognized through global partnerships, exchange programs for faculty and students, second language programs, attraction and retention strategies and development initiatives.
- Alberta's advanced education system supports immigration and the advanced learning and employment needs of immigrants.
- Curricula are relevant and responsive to the needs of globally competitive graduates and industry.
- There are more international students studying in Alberta and more Albertans studying outside of Alberta.

Enhancing Opportunities for Technology

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- SuperNet and technology are widely accessible and used effectively to support distributed learning.
- Investments are made to enhance the digital library, digital curricula, and on-line learning programs throughout the system.
- Learners have access to quality equipment and tools that support instruction.
- Technological skills and abilities are taught that can be transferred to the work environment.



Developing Sustained Investment Strategies for Advanced Learning Opportunities

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

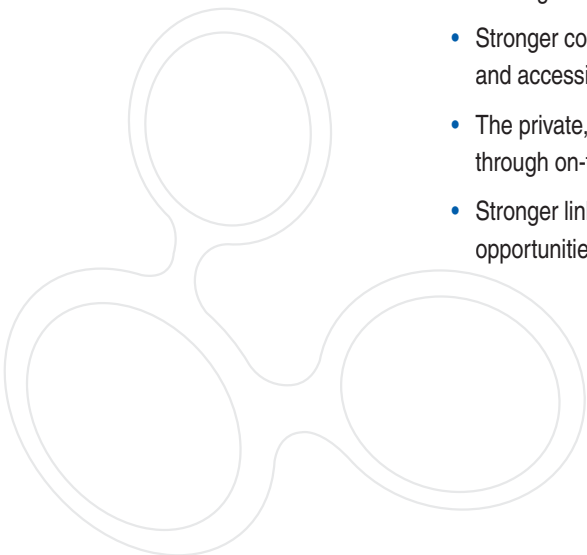
- Strategic investments in human resources, facilities, equipment, technology, programs, and other supports.
- Needs-based student assistance programs consider the full range of costs incurred by learners, including tuition, books, technology, housing and transportation.
- Investments support libraries, joint use of facilities, administrative systems, and application systems.
- Resource allocation is equitable and promotes flexibility. The system responds quickly to emerging needs.
- Student assistance responds to diverse student needs including mature learners and those that are currently under-represented within the system.
- Student debt repayment mechanisms respond to students' employment and income circumstances after graduation.



Clarifying roles and integrating policy and strategies across the learning system and among learning partners

Examples of the goals of this policy priority:

- Critical policy links are made between cross-government responsibilities such as rural development, services to persons with disabilities, Aboriginal issues, applied research, K-12 issues, and immigrant training and employment initiatives.
- Learning providers and partners have broad access to quality information. Key measures are tracked including access, participation, and successful learning outcomes across socio-economic and regional dimensions and non-traditional and traditional forms of learning.
- Stronger coordination of learning opportunities among providers, to ensure system-wide quality and accessibility are maintained.
- The private, not for profit and public sectors assume greater roles in advanced learning through on-the-job training.
- Stronger linkages between post-secondary institutions and private, public and not for profit opportunities to meet the needs of learners.



Input on Policy Measures

Many of those who spoke out during the discussion process said they wanted a fundamental change in what government measures in tracking progress towards the vision and in ensuring policy principles are applied and outcomes achieved.

People said clearly that measures should be developed that focus on the principles and policy outcomes. They said it is important that qualitative, not just quantitative, measures be developed. Ideas for possible measures included:

- Learners' satisfaction with the quality of their learning experience.
- Improved participation and attainment rates, especially among underrepresented groups.
- Provincial literacy rates.
- Levels of sustainable, predictable funding for learning programs.
- Quality of life indicators (crime rate reduction, health status, suicide rates, etc.)
- The number of Aboriginal teachers and learning environments sensitive to Aboriginal culture and traditions.
- Numbers of immigrants employed in their areas of education/training/experience.
- Alberta's performance in anticipating and responding to skills shortages.
- Availability and access to rural learning opportunities.
- Alberta's increased employment and productivity.
- Tracking transitions among learning options.
- Levels of student debt.
- Timely application of new knowledge.
- The number of learning organizations and communities.
- Student access to scholarships and bursaries.



The Next Steps

The Steering Committee will review and consider all the ideas and opinions expressed throughout the discussion process, including the Minister's Forum. They will prepare a report to the Minister within eight weeks of the Forum. The report will present their final vision and policy framework and recommend priorities for action in advanced learning over the next three to five years.

The Steering Committee's report will be made public and shared with you and all others who have participated in this process since January.

The government will review and respond to the report. The Minister of Advanced Education has indicated this will happen early in 2006.

Thank you for helping to shape the future of advanced learning in Alberta!

Appendix

Alberta's Advanced Learning System Today

Alberta's advanced education system comprises public board-governed institutions, the apprenticeship and industry training system, community consortia, private providers and community-based organizations – all offering a broad range of credit and non-credit programs to learners in the province and beyond.

Public Board-governed Institutions

There are 21 public, board-governed institutions in Alberta, consisting of four universities, 14 colleges, two technical institutes and the Banff Centre for Continuing Education.

They offer skills training, certificate, diploma, applied degree, and degree programs. Universities offer the vast majority of degree programs whereas colleges and technical institutes generally focus on applied degree, diploma, and certificate programs. A range of non-credit courses is also offered.

Apprenticeship and Industry Training

The Alberta apprenticeship and industry training system is an industry-driven system. Industry establishes training and certification standards in more than 50 designated trades and occupations and provides on-the-job training. The government provides the legislative framework and administrative support. The technical institutes and colleges provide technical training. Trade and occupational certificates are granted by the Government of Alberta.

Community Consortia

There are four community consortia in Alberta. Community consortia coordinate the delivery of credit learning opportunities to learners in communities not directly served by an advanced education institution.

Private Institutions

There is a diverse range of private institutions including private religious and private Aboriginal institutions. There are currently eight private institutions authorized to offer degree programs in select disciplines such as arts, science and education. In addition to private institutions with degree granting status, Alberta's advanced education system includes other private institutions that offer non-regulated programs.

There are also more than 140 private institutions offering licensed vocational programs. These programs are vocation specific, generally less than one-year in duration and are created to respond to current labour market demands.

Community-based Providers

Alberta Advanced Education also supports a range of non-profit voluntary organizations that provide part-time, non-credit learning opportunities with an emphasis on adults with barriers to accessing learning.

Support is provided through grants to 83 Community Adult Learning Councils, 73 volunteer tutor adult literacy programs and over 40 family literacy programs – all three provide direct programming to adults. Additionally, grants are provided to three support organizations (the Community Learning Network, Literacy Alberta and the Centre for Family Literacy) to provide professional development.



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