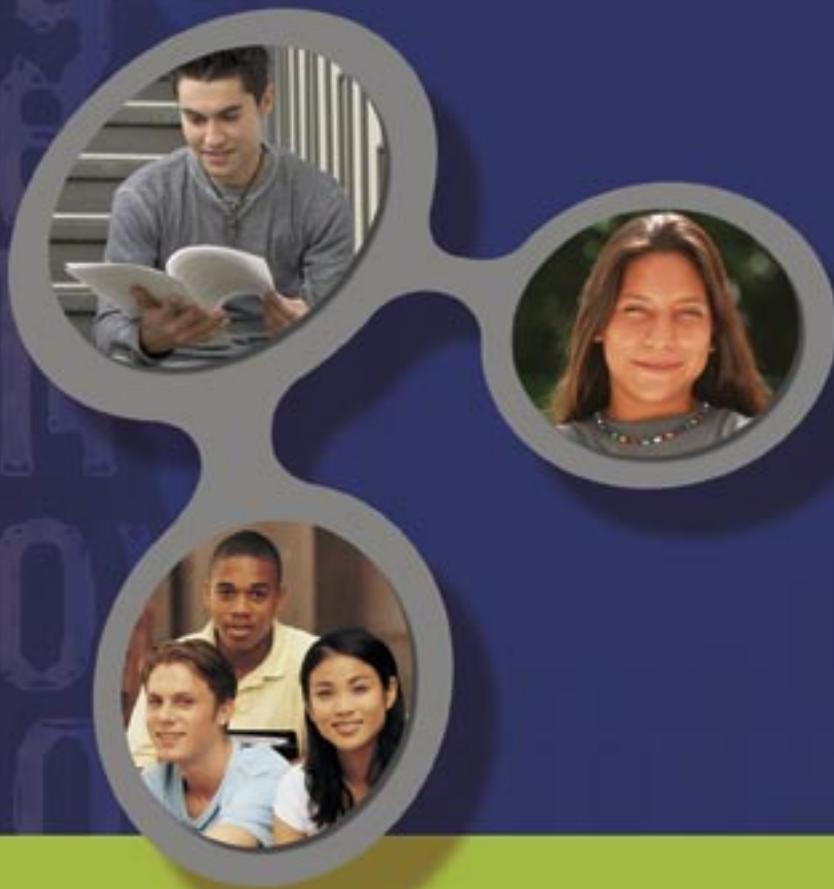


FORUM

# summary



## A LEARNING ALBERTA Dialogue and Direction

SUMMARY OF THE MINISTER'S FORUM

***Please note:***

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent those of the Alberta government.

This report is a summary of the individual thoughts, ideas and suggestions put forward by advanced education stakeholders at the ***A Learning Alberta*** Minister's Forum on November 1 and 2, 2005. Although not all of the information is reflective of the majority of stakeholders, it is valuable in the process of strengthening advanced education in Alberta.



## Executive Summary

On November 1 and 2, 2005 Advanced Education Minister Dave Hancock held a Forum to establish a new vision and policy framework for advanced learning in Alberta.

The Minister's Forum brought together approximately 250 students, faculty members, advanced education institutions, Aboriginal representatives, community learning agencies, literacy groups, immigrant support groups, basic learning, business, and industry training and apprenticeship representatives.

Forum participants reviewed a proposed vision and policy framework. The framework had been developed by a Steering Committee of diverse learning stakeholders established by the Minister. In preparation for the Forum, the Steering Committee led a series of discussion opportunities across the province, including:

- Regional discussion groups of diverse stakeholders
- An online survey
- Discussion groups held by MLAs
- Two Aboriginal discussion groups
- A discussion group for representatives of immigrant settlement and support services

Calling the Forum a “*unique opportunity to harness the collective wisdom of Albertans,*” Minister Hancock highlighted the significant role that Forum participants were playing in shaping the vision and framework for the future of advanced learning in Alberta. “*The Forum represents a crossroad,*” he said. “*Everything we envision for the future depends on us becoming a learning society.*”

Keynote speaker James Burke was asked to stimulate the audience with bold new ideas about a vastly different future for advanced education. He encouraged those attending the Forum to imagine a future where advanced education and learning are inclusive and not limited to a select few. He talked about historic patterns of invention and innovation and their profound impact on society, and profiled the key role of technology now and in the future. Burke stressed the importance of connections between information and ideas and of delivering learning in new ways to all people.

Forum participants reviewed each of the framework components on the first day, and generally agreed with the new direction, vision and framework. They recommended changes to the draft framework components and discussed proposed Priority Policy Directions which would set advanced learning on a path towards the new vision.

On the second day of the Forum, participants generated a series of proposed actions for the Steering Committee and Minister to consider as the new framework is implemented. These proposed actions ranged from strategic to tactical, from province-wide to local – and in their totality provide a robust “basket” of ideas from which to draw near and longer-term implementation plans.

## Major Themes

Over 16 individual discussion groups worked throughout the Forum to provide input and direction to the Minister and the Steering Committee.

There was general agreement that the vision for *A Learning Alberta* was the right direction. Alberta should plan, set policy for and take the steps necessary to build a learning society that:

- Recognizes, encourages and supports lifelong learning
- Focuses its system of advanced learning on the learner
- Understands learning in all its potential – for career, for discovery, for economic benefit, for self development and for the inherent value of knowledge for individuals and for society
- Sees the system as a seamless, flexible and adaptive range of learning opportunities throughout a person's life
- Recognizes that learning starts at the earliest stages of life and within the family
- Acknowledges that, for society, learning is an investment, not an expense
- Sets an ambitious goal for Alberta to lead in redefining advanced learning outcomes, systems and opportunities.

## On the Framework and Policy Directions

Vision: there were specific recommendations about language and wording in discussions about the vision, but the greater question posed was whether the vision should either *set* or *be* a bold target. Should Alberta set a measurable target as its vision, or define a targeted outcome as a goal of the proposed vision?

A number of examples of the types of potential targets were discussed in the various discussion groups. The key question asked was - does Alberta want to be incremental in its approach to this new vision or to take bold steps that would definitively set the path? For example, should Alberta's post-secondary institutions target to be in the top five within their category in Canada within five years?

The Policy Principles and Policy Outcomes were also discussed and consistent recommendations were:

- Include definitions and ensure consistency in the language.
- Better define the current system and provide this as context to the new framework.
- In general, principles and outcomes were acceptable – but more specific details were necessary before participants would be satisfied or comfortable with the components. The general feeling was, “*this is heading the right way, but we need to see details before we can fully buy in.*”
- Language is very important. Be very careful about the choice of words. Participants wanted more compelling language in certain places, and more specific language in other places throughout the framework.

- Participants said the connections between the elements of the framework needed to be more direct. It should be very clear, for example, that the principles of quality, accessibility, affordability, diversity and collaboration drive, and must be the focus of, all policy outcomes and policy directions.
- Including performance measures in the final policy framework was also strongly supported. Measures should be developed for both the policy principles (which were seen as motherhood statements without measurable indicators) and the policy outcomes. Regional discussions on proposed measures during the pre-Forum period should be useful as input to measures in the final framework.

## On Implementation

Messages were very clear and consistent about the importance of following through on the start made at the Forum. Certain messages about priorities for implementation were consistent among the 16 group discussions:

- Implementation starts with leadership. The Minister must lead and secure buy-in across government.
- Set bold targets. Don't approach this new direction too incrementally.
- Lead with a province-wide literacy initiative. There was strong agreement that Alberta should have a multi-sector literacy initiative immediately.
- Achieve sustainable funding. This is essential for both the current and evolving system.
- The target should be fixed tuition that is affordable, predictable and separate from institutional budget needs.
- Improve Alberta's high school completion rates.
- Develop a new framework for Aboriginal learning. Alberta's Aboriginal people must be part of *A Learning Alberta* and their traditions, language and culture must be the foundation of their learning opportunities. There have been a number of studies that provide a clear roadmap to develop an Aboriginal learning strategy – now is the time for action.
- Increase opportunities for advanced learning and centres of excellences in rural communities.
- Invest further in the humanities and social sciences.
- Government must reconsider how it functions and collaborates both internally and externally. Government's own systems are not sufficiently integrated or collaborative.
- Expand capacity, not just with additional post-secondary spaces, but through technology, advanced learning partnerships and other strategies.
- Community learning councils role should be reconsidered. They are an existing community resource that can play a greater role in communities identifying needs and opportunities and coordinating strategies and initiatives.
- Define roles and responsibilities across the learning system.
- Finalize the new vision and framework and communicate it across Alberta.
- Continue to engage all voices in *A Learning Alberta*.
- Develop an action plan with clear commitments and performance measures. Move forward on the policy directions in the framework.
- Report progress back to all the learning partners and to the public.

## Next Steps

At the close of the Forum Minister Hancock said, *“There is much to be done, given the ideas and input we have received. But we can now move forward with a sense of common purpose and a clear commitment to action.”*

The Minister indicated that: there will be a focus on strengthening and enhancing learning foundations and diversity; the critical role of community-based learning centres will grow; gaps in the networks and barriers in learning pathways will be identified and solutions implemented; and, the way post-secondary institutions are funded will be re-examined.

The Minister announced that subcommittees of the Steering Committee would be mandated to take action in three priority areas:

***Learning Foundations/Diversity*** – taking more education opportunities to communities; addressing the learning needs of diverse groups of Albertans; and setting clear targets for improving literacy rates – suggesting a target of a 50% reduction in low literacy rates in Alberta within five years.

***Support for Aboriginal Learning*** – establishing an Aboriginal education area within Advanced Education to lead results on Aboriginal education strategies and work more closely with Aboriginal colleges.

***Transforming the Advanced Learning System*** – defining roles and responsibilities for institutions, allowing them to become world class in specific areas; putting a top priority on research and innovation; expanding the number of graduate students in all areas including the social sciences and humanities; and focusing on new ways for apprentices and trades people to learn in their communities.

The Minister also announced specific initiatives including:

- Implementing a common student application system for public post-secondary institutions
- Developing a new tuition policy by Spring 2006
- Improving recognition of degrees, prior learning and transfer of credits
- Adjusting funding formulas to promote collaboration among institutions
- Re-aligning the administrative structure within Advanced Education to support the new vision.

The Minister set a timeline for the three sub-committees to develop action plans in each priority area and report by **March 2006**.

He concluded by saying *“Everything we envision for the future... for ourselves, for our families, for our children and grandchildren...requires that our province more and more become a learning society. My dream is that the Albertans who celebrate Alberta’s 200th birthday will be able to look back at us here today, and say “thank you... for your passion for education. And thank you for helping to create a Learning Alberta.”*



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Task #1: Assessing the Draft Policy Framework</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Task #2: Assessing the Draft Priority Policy Directions</b>	<b>7</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Task #3: Priority Initiatives — Moving Alberta Towards a Learning Society</b>	<b>16</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Task #4: Final Words and Next Steps</b>	<b>30</b>
<hr/>	

## Introduction

*A Learning Alberta* process brought together thousands of Albertans to talk about and seek solutions to the challenges of creating a knowledge-based province. The review process culminated in a Minister's Forum on November 1-2, 2005 in Edmonton, Alberta. It was attended by over 250 representatives from key stakeholder groups, including institutional leaders, community-based educators, students, literacy groups, Aboriginal community leaders, business and industry leaders, immigrant serving organizations, and apprenticeship and industry training groups.

The purpose of the Minister's Forum was to invite participants to review and respond to the work of the Steering Committee, based on input from the Regional Workshops, and to identify key initiatives that will move the province into the future as *A Learning Alberta*. It included a keynote address by James Burke, noted international author and broadcaster, two plenary panels and facilitated small group discussions on each of the two days.

This report summarizes the results of the small group discussions, according to the four tasks that participants were asked to complete:

- Task #1: Review the Draft Policy Framework
- Task #2: Review the Draft Priority Policy Directions
- Task #3: Provide Input into Implementation Strategy – Moving Alberta Towards a Learning Society
- Task #4: Final Words and Next Steps



## Task #1: Assessing the Draft Policy Framework

**Question: Looking at the current draft of the proposed framework (Vision, Principles and Policy Outcomes), do you think that, overall, this is the right direction for advanced learning in Alberta for the future?**

### 1-1 Overall Response

#### *Kudos*

Most participants saw their role as being to provide direction and input to the proposed framework. Reactions were generally positive: “Lovely words. I’m not opposed to any of them. Really cool.” “(Our) board would endorse these directions fully. Excellent direction.” One participant said it “looks wonderful but how does it translate into action?” Another said, “the document is great (but) obtaining the commitment to follow through will be the tough part.”

#### *Concerns*

A number of participants wanted to see a clear relationship between the four columns and/or between the chart and the details: “There is a disjoint between the visual framework and details outlined through the text of the document. The framework is supposed to guide the details.”

Others felt the framework should have other key components added. Suggested additions included “beliefs,” “strategies/actions” and “dollar amounts.” A number of participants wondered if the policy principles and outcomes were in priority order, or suggested that they should be prioritized.

Some participants said the framework was “broad, generic,” suggesting that it can be used to rationalize any action, and they said “it doesn’t guide any policy decisions that institutions might have to make under the guise of this framework.” Another participant said the framework was trying to do too much too fast: “All of the perspectives from community programs to graduate education...It’s hard to balance all of these...We cannot solve all of these problems at the same time.”

A few participants said the framework was missing a “context” and felt that this was needed up-front as a foundation. One person said, “I get nervous when we are constructing a new vision and principles without situating it in the current system and situation.” Another said, “We need to talk about the problems, not just the successes. We need to face the drop out rate, Aboriginal people, and jobs going begging. This new framework needs to integrate with the current context.”

Some participants said the framework could be more bold or visionary in order to move the province beyond where it is now: “The whole document speaks to incrementalism.” Another participant said it would be nice to see “fundamental change ... (a) paradigm shift, but based on the vision, we will essentially have the same type of system that we have now (institution centred).” However, in response, another participant said, “I’m not sure that the system can change fundamentally. Maybe we should only hope for strategic fundamental improvements.”

There were some calls to define terms, including “advanced education,” but this seemed to be more related to the process than to a deficiency in the framework: “because we haven’t had time to read the summary document, some of the terms used need defining...at first glance these terms (mean) different things to different people.”

## 1-2 Vision

### *Kudos*

Some participants were pleased with the revisions to the framework and felt that the Steering Committee had listened to comments that were made during the Regional Sessions: “There is an emphasis on the quality of life in the vision. This is new. The vision doesn’t focus solely on economic benefits, which is a good thing. The true value of education has to get beyond how much money one makes.” “I am pleased with the current wording of the vision. It needs to make sense to the common person.” “(I like) the interplay between advanced education and the social context. If we get our education system right, society will be better for it.” As with the framework in general, some participants said, “How can we disagree with (the vision)? What’s important is what comes after – the tangible objectives, targets, commitments, etc.”

### *Concerns*

“The vision is key...and I am not certain that this is a vision that inspires us to make the changes necessary to make a better system.” Some participants did not see a clear link between the vision and other parts of the framework: “There should be a closer tie between the vision and the principles.”

Many participants said, “the vision statement must be inclusive of all Albertans”. They acknowledged that some words have different meanings to different people. For example, “richer” could mean wealth, knowledge, or social experience. As well, the phrase “leads the world” could seem as appropriately ambitious to some and too lofty to others.

### *Suggestions*

Some participants said the vision should encourage Albertans “to embrace learning” and “to reach the highest level of educational attainment possible.” This will require a “cultural shift,” said one participant, adding that “the culture of Albertans is currently not to view education as an investment. We need to motivate people to become life-long learners.” Other participants said the vision should look beyond individual Albertans and reflect the benefits to society: “Learning is becoming an end in itself. A better focus is that learning leads to better citizenry, better society. Not just learning for the sake of it.”

Specific suggestions for additions or wording changes included:

- Add the sentence: “Alberta values education and educators.”
- Change the first sentence to: “Alberta leads the world in providing equal access to quality lifelong learning opportunities for all its peoples.”
- Change “Alberta leads the world” to “Alberta is recognized internationally as a leader...”
- Include a reflection of non-traditional learning.

- Expand the vision so that it is more “outward looking.” Include “that there are opportunities to learn for international students and individuals from other provinces.”
- Redefine “all peoples”: “All people (are) not just Albertans but people who contribute to our society who don’t even live in Alberta.”
- “Citizenship” should appear in the vision.

### 1-3 Policy Principles

#### *Areas of Discussion*

Most participants liked the policy principles and were pleased to see the addition of diversity and collaboration: “I like the policy principles – all can be supported.” “It is good that diversity and collaboration have been added, it shows that the Steering Committee listened to the feedback from the regional sessions and website.” One participant said, “this is an opportunity to not be cynical. Principles need to be vague because they guide, but they also need to allow progress.” Another participant agreed, saying, “these statements are broad, which is good because they are flexible enough to encompass different perspectives.” “The policy principles are good,” said one participant, “They can be used as the basis for a debate about what these now mean for us.”

Some participants asked if the principles were presented in priority order, with some saying they should be. One participant said, “I am delighted to see that quality is number one, but sad to see some other principles have been demoted. Accessibility and affordability are extremely important, but quality is number one. Do not lose the quality that is currently in the system to other considerations or principles.”

While no one disagreed with the inclusion of quality as a principle, some said we need “a better understanding about what quality means.” “There is quality in terms of academic program curriculum and there are quality outcomes,” said one participant. “There needs to be a distinction between the two. They are different measures and there needs to be better understanding of the difference.” Another participant said, “quality needs more inclusiveness of everything from apprenticeships to graduate studies.”

A few participants questioned the inclusion of collaboration as a principle: “Collaboration is not an appropriate principle. We can’t live up to this unless the funding approach, which fosters competition, is changed.” Another participant said, “Collaboration in some contexts is wonderful but in other contexts is problematic – particularly if you are talking about collaboration between pharmaceutical companies and research institutions. We need to be careful what the collaboration principle means.”

One participant said, “Diversity needs to be defined. (It) needs to include acknowledgement of multicultural perspectives to reflect the diverse population.” Another participant pointed out that “there is also the notion of program/system diversity as well as cultural diversity” that should be taken into account.

### *Suggestions*

A number of participants said sustainability should be considered as a policy principle: “Sustainability should be a part of the principles since sustainability has been an issue in the past.” One participant said, “Sustainability, as a principle, is our code word for predictable, stable funding of the system.” “If only one thing comes out of this (process), the province should develop a better method of planning so we can be sustainable,” said another. A few participants suggested that commitment be added as a principle.

A few participants said they would like to see the inclusion of Innovation as a principle: “There should be more emphasis on technology and innovation. Innovation should be included as a principle.” In response, another participant said, “diversity would lead to innovation and excellence.”

One group discussed the idea of Autonomy and whether or not it should be included as a principle. “Under the policy principles there should be a commitment to ensure reasonable autonomy for the institutions to make decisions. One participant said, “We want to produce autonomous learners. We also want autonomous institutions....(Researchers) need to be autonomous and able to face criticism from entrenched thinking.” However, another participant said, “I agree that autonomy is important but this principle may be covered under quality.”

Some participants would like to see Equality or Equality of Opportunity included as a principle. “A learning society has to have everybody learning. So a significant missing principle is ‘equality of opportunity’ or ‘inclusiveness’.” However, one participant suggested that equality of opportunity could be captured in the diversity principle, while another argued, “enhanced opportunities for students who have traditionally not participated in advanced education is not captured in the diversity principle.”

Other suggested principles included: Evaluation, Democratic Pluralism, Accountability, Cost Effectiveness, Discovery and Adaptability.

## **1-4 Policy Outcomes**

### *Areas of Discussion*

A number of participants said, “Outcomes need to be measurable.” One participant said, “these outcomes are not stated in a measurable way.” In contrast, one participant cautioned against putting too much emphasis on measurability: “Be very careful with measurement. Measures can limit innovation....What you measure gets valued and what you value gets measured. We need indicators but proceed very carefully.” It was also recommended that outcomes not be value-laden.”

A discussion on “learning centred” versus “learner centred,” which arose during the regional sessions, continued in the discussion groups. “We need to define the difference between a learning-centred society and a learner-centred society,” said one participant. “We are probably using the terms interchangeably but we need to be clear that they mean different things.” In general, institutional representatives favoured “learning-centred,” whereas other participants liked “learner centred.” “I like the focus on learners. At times the post secondaries forget that and focus on the institutions,” said one participant. “I understand learner-centred to mean starting from the students’ place not the teachers’ place.” Another said, “The concept of learner-centred was discredited in the 60s....Learner-centred terminology could get us in trouble in some areas.”

A number of participants argued that a strong focus on citizenship and the public good was missing and said they would like to see “citizenship front and centre.” They were concerned that “we are moving away from the model of citizenship as the systems/institutions become more business-focused.”

Participants identified what they saw as a number of missing elements in the policy outcomes, including:

- Citizenship and social good
- Sustainable communities – social, environmental and cultural elements
- Fostering innovation in a global perspective
- Learners as a group
- Underrepresented groups

### *Suggestions*

One participant questioned the use of the term “seamless” noting that “seamless does reflect access but not delivery or collaboration.” “Mobility” was suggested as “a better term.”

One participant suggested dropping “learning” from “vibrant learning communities.”

## **Task #2**

**Question: Looking at these seven Policy Directions, are there any others you think are essential to achieving this vision? What would you change or add?**

### **2-1 Overall Response**

#### *Areas of Agreement/Concern*

A number of participants were supportive of the policy directions. As with other parts of the framework, some participants were concerned that the policy directions were too broad to offer specific direction. However, others recognized that the details were provided later in the framework: “Some of the goals in the framework give it more definition.”

Some participants were concerned that the framework had moved too far away from current structures and foundations: “I read the document and have to ask, ‘where am I?’ We need to ensure the institutions are clearly identified in the framework.”

#### *Suggestions*

Some participants suggested that “the key point should be to optimize accessibility, affordability and quality, and (to) quantify them with targets under a sustainable, funded system.”

One participant said, “improve the language of the policy directions. Include adjectives that provide us with direction, for instance ‘strong’.”

## 2-2 Response to Individual Policy Directions

### *Building strong learning foundations and supporting learner success*

Participants agreed that building strong learning foundations was a key direction, with many saying that “for the advanced education system to be a success, enthusiasm for learning must be cultivated in families at the earliest stage possible.” As in the regional discussions, raising the literacy level in Alberta was identified as a key foundation.

### *Accelerating communities’ learning capacity*

Many participants felt that the policy directions needed to reflect the social value of learning to both Albertans and to Alberta society, and felt this idea could be captured under accelerating communities’ learning capacity. “A statement needs to be made about supporting the social structures that create a healthy learning community. The sense of a learning community through social interaction is very important to students and is not reflected here.” Another participant said, “What we are really trying to do is create a culture of learning. The talk I hear around the table is about economics. We need to foster the desire to learn. We value learning because it improves our quality of life.”

Some participants talked about the need to “level the playing field” for rural communities through advanced education. “You need to remember that people learn and work in different communities; not all communities have the same capacity.” Technology was seen as one way in which the field could be leveled: “We need to create the mechanisms and supports for the technology to be used in rural communities and Aboriginal communities. It is more than providing the technology; you need the supports, including facilitating collaboration among community agencies and groups.” However, one participant cautioned against seeing education as the full solution: “Using programs to revitalize the rural areas only works to a point. Rural delivery programs are not going to solve all rural development issues.”


### *Encouraging partnerships and collaboration*

In general, participants agreed that encouraging partnerships and collaboration should be a priority policy direction. However, terms have to be clearly defined: “if it means seamless transfer, this is a good thing.” One participant suggested language such as changing “encouraging” should be stronger - “establishing, rewarding or enabling partnerships.”

While some participants agreed that public-private partnerships should be encouraged, they advised caution: “there is a role for private, responsive institutions (but) make sure that the private sector doesn’t take over the institutions.” “Advanced education is a public responsibility but the private/ business community has a greater role to play as funders – not as recipients of government funding.” However, student representatives were cautious about increasing private contributions towards advanced education.

### *Fostering innovation and a global perspective*

Participants agreed with fostering innovation and a global perspective as a priority policy direction. Discussion focused on a broad interpretation of this priority beyond industry as well. Although it’s not



explicit, you can read a stronger push to commercialization and privatization in the document. (Innovation) also serves a function in citizenship,” said one participant. Another agreed, saying, “Global perspective serves innovation and citizenship functions beyond ‘global competitiveness and industry.’”

Participants said more detail was needed to grasp the full intent of this direction. One participant suggested that innovation and global perspective should be split into separate statements. Another said, “global perspective means a global interdependence, not just global competitiveness.”

One participant said “creativity” should be included in this concept. “Take the notion of innovation beyond science and technology.” Another said, “a reflection of social ingenuity as it relates to the social sciences and the arts should also be considered in the concept of innovation.”

#### ***Enhancing opportunities for technology***

A number of participants said it is not enough to simply have technology; the priority direction should also include removing the barriers to using technology. For example, cultural differences, accessibility to technology, etc.” “Internet and SuperNet access need to be universal; don’t take access to technology for granted. The focus should be on ‘Optimizing learning through technology’ or ‘enhancing access through technology’”; “Should this not be re-worded to ‘enhancing technological opportunities to increase advanced education access?’ This is a narrower but more accurate statement.”

Participants said we should also not lose sight of other types of learning in the drive to incorporate technology: “person to person learning should also be recognized as valuable. It’s not just about enhancing technology to enhance learning.” Another said, “technology is good but it takes money, learning capacity. (We still) need (the) human side to instill learning in people.”

#### ***Developing sustained investment strategies for advanced learning opportunities***

For many participants, developing sustained investment strategies was central to the policy directions. “Sustained investment—that is core—the rest won’t happen if that isn’t taken care of.” Another said, “I would like to see something in there to enforce the long-term commitment, sustainability of funds, by government to advanced education.” “We need to substantially increase the resources to get everyone involved in advanced learning opportunities. What about (saying), ‘accelerating investments in advanced learning opportunities’ rather than ‘developing sustained investment strategies?’”

Some participants cautioned against over-reliance on endowment funds: “We need to put tax dollars towards advanced education. Endowments are not the total answer or the final answer.

A key point throughout all discussions was the need to think of advanced learning as being “investment driven, not expense driven.”

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

In general, participants agreed that clarifying roles and integrating policy and strategies across the system should be a priority policy direction.

## 2-3 Additional Policy Directions

### *Promoting intergovernmental cooperation*

A number of participants said intergovernmental cooperation should be evident in the policy directions. “There needs to be a five-year intergovernmental ‘master plan’ that will support the Government of Alberta 20-year strategic plan,” said one participant. “Goals and priorities need to be adopted across government and by other ministries in order to fully implement the culture of Alberta as a learning society,” said another. “Infrastructure, HRE, Health and Wellness, Seniors and Community Development. These are all areas that need to be sure to connect with each other.”

### *Building a sense of shared responsibility*

A few participants said, “The responsibility for lifelong learning is shared by many different stakeholders.” One participant said, “There needs to be acknowledgement that many players have responsibility in supporting advanced education - government, student and institutional responsibilities.” Another agreed, emphasizing the role of learners themselves: “Lifelong learning starts at birth. People have to be educated about what is available, but they also have a responsibility to get informed.”

### *Reducing barriers to access*

Some participants said that reducing barriers to access should be identified as a specific policy direction. “The priorities need to focus on equitable access for citizens.” Another said, “Barriers that underpin a number of the priorities might need enabling legislation to allow these things to happen. (For example) institutions are competing for money; we need to remove these barriers to success.” One participant also pointed out the need to remove jurisdictional barriers for Aboriginal learners: “A focus is needed to deal with federal-provincial issues and jurisdictional responsibility, in particular when addressing Aboriginal access issues.”

### *Strengthening institutions*

“We need to ‘strengthening the institutions,’ in the framework. What about, ‘strengthening and reinforcing the institutions which are the centres of advanced learning’?” Another said, “policy directions should include supporting and strengthening existing institutions so they can deliver an enhanced mandate.”

### *Strengthening educational research capacity*

Educational research needs to be included within a discussion of policy directions. Participants suggested that strengthening educational research capacity be considered as policy direction. “Also attach a 1% funding goal to this statement – 1% of the department’s budget should go to educational research.”

### *Other suggested changes/additions*

Other specific suggestions for changes or additions of ideas or concepts to the policy directions included the following:

- Add continuous improvement
- Add curiosity and creativity



- Collapse the two bullets, “encouraging partnerships” and “clarifying roles” into one policy direction
- Add the concept of being adaptable and relevant in a rapidly changing world
- Add responding to the needs of the labour market
- Include fostering cultural innovation under the “fostering innovation” direction

**Question: If we are going to develop policies which focus on (each policy direction), what outcomes or policy goals need to be achieved?**

## 2-4 Overall Response

### *Clarify and expand content*

A number of participants said the policy framework moves in the right direction but needs “clarity and refinement. Terminology and priorities for policy development are not specific enough at this stage.” Another said, “Terms are too broad and use is confusing throughout.” Some of the specific terms that participants would like to see defined or expanded include:

- Learner
- Learning provider (institution or instructors?)
- Community and learning community
- Aboriginal communities
- Learning foundation

### *Impact on program delivery: two perspectives*

A number of community participants supported the policy directions, saying “These statements appear to move towards resolving community delivery issues.” In contrast, institutional participants were concerned about the apparent loss of autonomy: “The policy directions appear to be taking decisions away from autonomous institutions; (they) appear to be directives rather than policy statements.”

## 2-5 Suggested Outcomes/Policy Goals for Each Direction

### *Building strong learning foundations and supporting learner success*

**Increased educational attainment.** While this view was not the consensus, most participants agreed that increasing educational attainment was a key policy goal or outcome and said it should have specific targets. “Needs a specific target, such as the overall per capita degree rate should exceed the national average. Right now we under-produce undergraduate and graduate degrees,” said one participant. “Change the bullet to include establishing measures around participation and success rates,” said another.

**Increased participation rates and learner success.** A number of participants talked about increasing participation rates and learner success, particularly among underrepresented groups and Aboriginal people, as a key policy goal. This includes “a dramatic decrease in drop-out rates and an increase in participation rates prior to post-secondary as well as in the first year (of post-secondary),” said one participant. “Increase success in underrepresented populations and regions for early literacy and K-12 in preparation for post-secondary,” said another.

**Learners are supported to achieve individual success.** Participants identified a variety of policy goals or outcomes that are needed to support learners. These include:

- Increase functional literacy and literacy rates
- Prior learning assessments
- Reassess entrance requirements and set realistic criteria for qualified students
- Access to multiple entry points to the advanced learning system
- Utilize different learning models
- Access to educational supports, such as data, libraries and facilities
- Support transfer and transitions through the system
- Provide ancillary supports to learners with disabilities to increase access
- Provide transportation and accommodation supports
- Facilitate learners' understanding of their personal responsibility for education
- Maintain infrastructure

### *Accelerating communities' learning capacity*

**All qualified candidates can access advanced learning.** No qualified Albertan should be turned away from an advanced learning opportunity because of a lack of space or capacity in the system: "(There should be) a place for every qualified applicant, consistent with the needs of society and the economy." "Create regional trades training centres," suggested one participant. "(Provide) better access for (learners in) rural communities, beyond technology," said another. "If spaces are not available where a student is, then (provide) the opportunity and funds to relocate to other institutes/colleges within or outside of their area."

**Professionals and graduates are retained in rural communities.** While a number of participants agreed with this goal, some questioned Advanced Education's jurisdiction in this area: "This is an ambitious goal and may be outside the realm of advanced learning. Rather, this (should be) seen as a partnership with communities and employers."

Learning opportunities relevant to the needs of individuals and communities. A number of participants talked about the importance of the "relevance" of learning programs in policy development goals: "(Provide) relevant curricula that meet the needs of our economy and employ Albertans in meaningful jobs." "Expand learning opportunities that suit communities," said one participant. "(Provide) access to training and education programs that reflect jobs in the community," said another.

### *Encouraging partnerships and collaboration*

**Government leadership.** Provincial and federal government should share responsibility for advanced education, said participants, and should show leadership through effective partnerships.

**Incentives for collaboration.** If the goal is to increase collaboration and partnerships, then incentives for collaboration should be evident as a policy outcome, said participants. "Funding mechanisms should

encourage collaboration and partnership,” said one participant. “Recognize collaborative efforts between institutions and/or learning providers,” said another. “Partnerships should be encouraged across sectors and between ministries and levels of government, across education sectors (private, Aboriginal, etc.), not just (among) institutions. Everyone needs to be part of the solution.”

**Joint use of facilities and cost-sharing.** Participants said “greater joint use of facilities and cost-sharing among learning providers” should be an outcome of the priority policy directions. They would like to see greater access to resources across institutions (e.g. inter-library loans), and increased use of consortia and technology to facilitate collaboration. One participant suggested “affiliation agreements” between universities and small colleges “could extend investment.”

**Employers and industry engaged as partners.** Participants would like to see “strong partnerships between learning organizations and the business community in the broadest sense.” “Plan for more integrative programs,” said another. Some participants said the responsibility of educating and training employees should rest with employers.

**Seamless transition and transferability.** Participants would like to see more seamless transition between the K-12 system and the post-secondary system, including apprenticeship and technical training, and greater transferability between post-secondary institutions. “Standardized articulation transferability supports cross-pollination between institutions,” said one participant. Other considerations included: common curricula among institutions; common application process; and recognition of blocks of courses for credit.

**Increased partnerships with Aboriginal communities.** Some participants would like to see increased partnerships among Aboriginal communities, government and learning providers. One suggestion was for a “Minister’s Standing Committee for Aboriginal Learning” to guide advanced learning in Aboriginal communities and for Aboriginal people.

**A different perspective on collaboration.** One participant cautioned against putting too much emphasis on collaboration: “Collaboration always comes at the cost of competition. Not all competition is bad.”

### *Fostering innovation and a global perspective*

**Improved quality of life.** Innovation and a global perspective should result in improved quality of life. The results of research should be “developed and fed back into the system and economy.” This can also lead to “economic diversification” for the province. As one participant said, “we need a provincial economic plan beyond energy.”

**Globally competitive graduates.** A focus on innovation and global perspective should result in “highly skilled graduates from all programs (who are) globally competitive,” said one participants. Participants also talked about the “internationalization of Albertans” through advanced learning opportunities.

**Public-private partnerships.** Some participants said the private sector “needs to invest in research and innovation.” They believe a goal should be to “encourage partnerships (between) research facilities and

industry/business through collaborative action.” One participant suggested that “applied research done in partnership with private industry and/or levels of government (should be) rewarded through access to future funding.”

**Discovery, commercialization and spin-off companies.** A key outcome of fostering innovation should be the “discovery of new applications” and “new ways of doing things,” said participants. Discoveries should then be applied to enhance our economy and quality of life. A policy goal should be to encourage the commercialization of research, “with all due caution (that it is done) within an ethical framework.” An increase in spin-off companies would be a measurable outcome of fostering innovation, said participants, who would like to see “universities increase ‘incubation’ of new business spin-offs.”

**Incentives, training for innovation.** People and institutions should be rewarded for innovation, said some participants. “Institutions and students (should) receive scholarships and grants for innovative approaches and a global perspective,” said one participant. Another agreed, saying, “Fund any new program for the first two years, separate of base funding, (then) evaluate....If it’s successful, add to the base funding. (This would) allow institutions to try new things without the risk of losing money.” Other participants suggested the need for courses or training in innovation, creativity and a global perspective.

**Foreign learners and researchers are supported.** A number of participants talked about the importance of “attracting outside talent” and supporting foreign learners. One aspect of this goal is to become better at recognizing foreign credentials/qualifications and to integrate foreign professionals more quickly than any other province.

**Increased graduate students/studies.** “The role of graduate students is key,” said one participant. “Alberta is far behind on graduate studies and we are almost asleep on post-docs.” Another said, “we need to recognize the role of graduates in teaching....(We) need better training and professional development for graduate students and faculty for teaching and training for human resources.”

**Centres of Excellence.** Some participants said centres of excellence and/or innovation should be established in “strategic locations” to help foster innovation and a global perspective.

### *Enhancing opportunities for technology*

**Availability of technology.** Alberta needs to develop and extend access to a range of technology resources, said participants, to ensure we are using “current equipment for training and educational purposes.” One outcome might be the “development of more standardized technology across the system,” said one participant. “The SuperNet should be viewed as a public utility – accessible to all communities province-wide,” said another. “(Let’s make) our digital library and digital curriculum and on-line learning system among the five best in the world.” Some participants said technology includes more than “just computers”: “Move beyond computers and look at other learning technology, look at trade technology also.”

**Accessibility of technology.** A number of people suggested that students be provided with a laptop computer “paid for in tuition.” Others suggested laptop rentals, increased community access points or other strategies for making technology more affordable to students. Others said students should have access to “quality equipment and tools” that are needed by their program. One participant pointed out the need for “adapted technologies...for barriered learners.” Many participants said access to technology is not enough; students must be trained to use it effectively: “ensure adequate and appropriate training related to (using the) technology.” An outcome of this policy direction should be that “all learners and staff are computer and technologically literate,” said one participant.

**Technology plan for the province.** One participant suggested that the province needs a “well thought-out technology plan.” Others agreed, saying “government needs to provide leadership and facilitate systems to work together” and to “collaborate on purchasing (technology).” Government can also provide incentives to encourage this type of collaboration.

**Recognize the limits of technology.** Despite the general enthusiasm for technology in advanced learning, some participants cautioned against over-reliance on technology. “Technology should enhance a quality learning experience, not replace ‘human’ instruction,” said one participant. “Do not overestimate the role of technology. (The) main objective should be to improve the curiosity for learning,” said another.

### *Developing sustained investment strategies for advanced learning opportunities*

**Funding policy/investment fund.** A key outcome of this policy direction would be the development of a provincial funding policy and investment fund to provide stable and predictable funding for advanced education that would allow for long-term planning. Many participants responded to the suggestion of the Forum’s keynote speaker in suggesting that the province reinvest a percentage of the province’s GDP in advanced learning.

**Increased core funding.** Participants said there should be an “increase in core funding,” to reduce tuition rates, and replacement of envelope funding by core funding to promote long-term, strategic planning by institutions.

**Increased student funding, decreased debt.** Affordability of advanced learning for students should be a priority, said participants. “Scholarships, bursaries and manageable debt repayment are in place and working,” said one participant. We should see a “dramatic decline in student debt, especially debt that creates barriers to participation or contribution,” said another. Tuition fees should be lower and become a “stable percent of budget,” suggested one participant. Another said students should have “guaranteed support over the entire program of study.”

**Increased participation rates.** Sustained investment in advanced learning should directly impact participation rates, said participants. The goals should be that “any student can afford an education if he or she want one – not only the academic piece (tuition) but also student support services.” Another participant said there needs to be “student assistance programs that not only respond to ‘young’ but to ‘older’ learners with a realistic recognition of the costs of living in different locations.” This would increase participation among older learners.

**Appropriate infrastructure.** A number of participants said a key outcome of sustained investment should be that “facilities, equipment and technology are adequate and maintained.” Participants said “deferred maintenance is a huge issue. Government should deal with it...as a fiscal priority. Funding is critical for deferred maintenance, facilities, equipment and technology to match current standards and needs for programs.”

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

**A unified system.** Participants agreed with the need to clearly identify and define roles of the various players in the advanced learning system. “It does not look like a system. It looks more like a collection of distinct institutions and government departments,” said one participant. “The roles of the institutions should be clearer. (We) need to establish a plan, including criteria, to better define the appropriate roles/ types of institutions,” said another.

**Cross-ministry collaboration.** A key outcome of this policy direction should be “actual, real, measurable evidence of government departments working together on cross-ministry initiatives,” said one participant. One participant would like to see “cross-ministry development of policy that reduces or eliminates red tape. It was suggested that responsibilities for advanced learning currently in Advanced Education, Human Resources and Employment, Health and Wellness, Innovation and Science, Seniors and Community Supports, and Community Development be consolidated.”

**Pathways and transitions.** Some participants talked about the need for “seamless transition, back and forth, between (the advanced learning) system and the workplace.” A key outcome of policies should be that “anyone can transition out of the workplace and into a place of learning and to do this repeatedly through out their lifetime.” One participant said we “need better pathways for (learners in) trades and technology programs to advance into university degree programs.”

**Expand Campus Alberta.** A number of participants talked about Campus Alberta at various times in the discussion. Strengthening Campus Alberta was identified as a key outcome of the direction to clarify roles and integrate policy and strategies: “Expand the concept of the Campus Alberta to the colleges and institutes. Need to do this in a collaborative sense in keeping with the theme of the Campus Alberta.”

## **Task #3: Priority Initiatives**

### **– Moving Alberta Towards a Learning Society**

**Question: What Key Initiatives do we need to pursue to make significant progress on this vision and framework in the next five years? Consider key initiatives in – and between – the following: institutions, community-based learning networks, apprenticeship and training, business and industry, and government.**

### 3-1 Financial/Funding Initiatives

#### *Tuition fee policy*

**Proposed:** Develop a provincial policy that sets mandated annual increases and maximum ceilings for tuition.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Short-term

**Target:** Decrease rate of tuition growth rates.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- The target should be fixed tuition that is affordable, predictable and separate from institutional budget needs.
- Tuition should be disconnected from institutional funding; it should not be a stop-gap for institutional budgets.
- Quality should not suffer if tuition is reduced; government should make up the short-fall.
- Decrease current student contribution for post-secondary education.

#### *Review and overhaul Student Finance Board/student funding*

**Proposed:** Conduct a complete review and overhaul of the Students Finance Board and other student funding programs, looking at all “costs of learning,” including tuition, financial assistance, repayment of loans, living costs, etc...

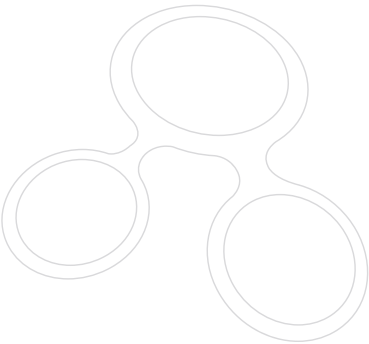
**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions, students

**Timeline:** Short- to Medium-term

**Target:** Financial obstacles are removed; cost is not a barrier to advanced learning.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Increase student loans/bursaries to accurately account for the costs of learning.
- Acknowledge cost disparities between cities and rural areas, including relocation costs for rural learners who must move to urban areas to complete programs of study.
- Eliminate loans and replace with grants and bursaries to reduce high administrative costs.
- Consider forgiving part or all of a loan if a student successfully completes a program of study. This could act as an incentive to complete.
- Consider a residency requirement for loan forgiveness.
- Automatic loan remission of a certain percentage for anyone who completes a program of study (adult upgrading, diploma, apprenticeship or degree).
- Postpone repayment of interest on student loans until post-graduate training is completed.
- Make student loans tax deductible (same status as capital investment).



### *Increase awareness of funding options*

**Proposed:** Implement a public education campaign to increase learner awareness of funding options.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Immediate

**Target:** Not stated

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Create an improved awareness of existing options for student funding.
- There needs to be a new language/discourse around student financial assistance.

### *Expand the concept of “public education”*

**Proposed:** Expand public education from a K-12 system to a K-14 or K-16 system to include fully funded post-secondary education (free tuition) for all.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Improved transition from high school to post-secondary; lower drop-out rate; improved accessibility and affordability; higher rate of educational attainment.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Two additional years of education could be funded past Grade 12.
- Develop a culture that emphasizes that continuing education is important and valued.

### *Funding for underrepresented groups*

**Proposed:** Review funding needs of underrepresented groups and develop appropriate programs.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Immediately

**Target:** A large core of individuals who are not currently participating in the system would be drawn in.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Re-examine access funding. Create a funding envelope to specifically address the needs of underrepresented groups, so they do not have to compete with bigger programs for access funding.
- Build recognition into base funding that there are unique costs to ensuring that people with disabilities can be successful in the advanced learning system.
- Base funding should be adjusted and special funding should follow the student, where required, to meet the goals of accommodation and inclusion for underrepresented groups.
- Use financial assistance to reach people who are not currently part of the system – e.g. Aboriginal people, immigrants, adult learners (especially those who did not complete high school).



***Accommodation subsidy***

**Proposed:** Develop a program to offer accommodation subsidies for students.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Immediate

**Target:** Reduce financial barriers for rural students who must re-locate; enrich the educational experience for all students.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Rural students who must move to an urban campus should have their accommodations fully subsidized.
- Local students should be encouraged to live away from home in residence/on campus because it builds a sense of community and enriches the educational experience.
- Government and institutions should collaborate to provide reduced residence costs.

***Institution funding***

**Proposed:** Establish more appropriate funding mechanisms for institutions.

**Lead:** Provincial Government/Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Short-term

**Target:** Institutions can increase focus on creative and relevant programming.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Provide increased and consistent funding to institutions.
- There needs to be a change in the base funding model, and a substantial increase in operating funding in order to implement some of these policy directions.
- Establish five-year sustainable funding intervals for post-secondary institutions that address infrastructure and deferred maintenance as well as operational costs.
- Establish a community-based learning fund. Institutions should create programs that meet community needs in order to access the fund.

***Education system funding***

**Proposed:** At a provincial level, move from cash management to asset management and investment. Invest a set percentage of the GDP in advanced education.

**Lead:** Alberta Government

**Timeline:** Medium- to long-term

**Target:** Alberta achieves and maintains the lowest tuition rates; expanded student population (e.g. by 33% in 5 years); surpass the Canadian average for graduates per capita.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Increase government investment in advanced education to 1.6% to 3% of the GDP.
- Link increases in system funding to the economy. As the economy grows, the investment should grow.
- Restructure funding for advanced education so it is supported through the tax base and not through windfall profits that are not sustainable.
- Charge a fair royalty for natural resources to support innovative projects and research.
- Set up endowments to make sure core growth areas are being funded.
- Flesh out the Access to the Future Fund (i.e. criteria).

***Corporate investment***

**Proposed:** Develop an investment model which provides incentives for industry to contribute to the post-secondary system.

**Lead:** Alberta Government, specific institutions

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Generate funding, connections and corporate buy-in; build employee support for life-long learning; increased work-study flow; co-op positions.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Consider tax breaks to corporations who contribute to post-secondary institutions.

***Federal funding for advanced education***

**Proposed:** Lobby federal government to increase the Canada Social Transfer.

**Lead:** Alberta Government

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Increased resources for advanced education.

**3-2 Leadership, Coordination and Collaboration**

***Unified learning ministry\****

**Proposed:** Combine all components of adult learning into one ministry.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Short-term

**Target:** Improved transitions from secondary to post-secondary; greater valuing of advanced learning.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Department should deal with education from “cradle to grave.”

*\*Note:* Although this suggestion was made in a number of groups, there was no clear consensus.

People came down strongly on both sides (unified ministry versus keeping ministries separate).

***Better coordination interim and across advanced learning system***

**Proposed:** Coordinate the advanced learning system in Alberta and develop partnerships and collaborations within and among government departments, institutions, industry and community-based learning networks.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, Education, institutions, industry and community-based learning networks

**Timeline:** Immediately

**Targets:** Reduced duplication; maximize impact; seamless transitions; reduced bureaucracy; increased efficiency; collaboration; continuum of services; better understanding of roles; symbiotic relationships; universal access; learner-centredness; flexibility; shared resources; shared excellence; better supported learners; build Campus Alberta; facilitate community-based delivery

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Combine/coordinate efforts and funding of Advanced Education and Human Resources and Employment in the area of education and training.
- Maintain apprenticeship training as part of the department of Advanced Education.
- Move post-secondary education out of Ministry to a “whole government” priority.
- Consolidate post-secondary curricula – improve transferability and recognition of prior learning.
- Government needs to establish an environment of collaboration in the system through policy/funding.
- Could allow learner to enter any institution in the province and access programs from all institutions

***Link to Learning Commission Recommendations***

**Proposed:** Link this process to the recommendations of the Learning Commission.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, Education

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Students develop a passion for learning from an early age.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- The Learning Commission recommendations should not be forgotten in developing life-long learning and dealing with literacy issues.

**3-3 Foundations for Advanced Learning*****Province-wide literacy initiative***

**Proposed:** Address the low literacy rates in Alberta.

**Lead:** Literacy Secretariat, Literacy Alberta, literacy providers, learners, Advanced Education, Education, post-secondary institutions

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Every 1% increase in literacy results in a 2.5% increase in GDP; improved access to learning; improved quality of life; 100% literacy in Alberta (long-term).

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Establish a literacy secretariat to take the lead.
- Increase investment in foundational programs learning programs: literacy, ESL.
- Cross-ministerial coordination will be necessary.
- Literacy is related to employment, health, and recidivism.
- Only 10% of literacy needs are being met by current programs.
- Coordinate literacy programs across the province.
- Increase awareness of existing literacy programs.
- Provide incentives to encourage participation by underrepresented groups.
- Increase community delivery of literacy programs.
- Increase early intervention head start program.
- Develop a media campaign on literacy to raise public awareness of literacy issues.

***Improve high school completion rates***

**Proposed:** Increase high school completion among young people and support adult learners to complete high school.

**Lead:** Central coordinating body; provincial government; institutions

**Timeline:** Long-term (10-20 years)

**Target:** Retrieve 25% of high school drop-outs within 4 years and help them complete GED.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Undertake a social marketing initiative to increase the percentage of students who complete high school.
- Recognize the difficulties that adult learners have in re-entering the learning system.
- Government and institutions should be responsible for recruiting students.

***Change/influence public attitudes***

**Proposed:** Develop a comprehensive campaign to promote the benefits of advanced education and the value of lifelong learning.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Long-term

**Target:** A learning society where lifelong learning is truly valued.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Need to change people's belief systems in order to inspire them to become lifelong learners.
- Target those already in the system, as well as those who are not currently motivated to participate.
- Need to inspire all of society, at all ages.
- Educate/reach people through families, community and education system.

### 3-4 Accessibility

#### *Review entrance requirements*

**Proposed:** Re-evaluate the academic (GPA) merit-based acceptance mode.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Increased access for all qualified students.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Reconsider the current target of 86% for entrance requirements at some institutions. This is a phenomenon meant to manage issue of capacity.
- Establish a reasonable, minimum prerequisite that would ensure a space for anyone achieving the minimum.
- Establish a common application system. This creates some challenges for the system but will be good for students.
- Currently, institutions that take students with lower grades are taking a risk. Funding rules put at a disadvantage those institutions that accommodate all learners.

#### *Prior learning assessment*

**Proposed:** Develop a PLAR (prior learning assessment and recognition) initiative.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, ACAT

**Timeline:** Medium- to long-term

**Target:** Increased access; equity.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Important to improve entry to system and to reward a broader range of learning that goes beyond formal learning.
- Seamless pathways for advancing learning. Takes into account experience beyond whatever 'ticket' a person has.

#### *Recognize foreign credentials/qualifications*

**Proposed:** Develop an initiative to improve processes for recognizing foreign credentials.

**Lead:** Professional associations, Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Not stated

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Provide ESL and bridging programs to assist immigrants in meeting the standards for their professions.

- Encourage institutions to develop affordable programs to assist immigrants in obtaining professional certification, so they can practice their professions.
- Expand the foreign credential program so that it looks at competencies. Include an ombudsman component to deal with issues on a case-by-case basis.
- Professional associations could become more involved in “internationalizing education.” We should be cross-referencing educational programs in different jurisdictions.

### ***Address needs of Aboriginal learners***

**Proposed:** Adopt the recommendations set out in the Aboriginal Education Framework and begin to invest resources to implement the recommendations related to post-secondary.

**Lead:** Advanced Education

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Increase participation by Aboriginal learners; increase access for Aboriginal learners.

#### **Considerations/suggestions:**

- In consultation with Aboriginal communities, build a separate framework to work through the advanced education component.
- Encourage Aboriginal leaders to get involved in post-secondary issues to help their communities recognize the value of advanced learning.
- Build capacity of Aboriginal leadership.
- Appoint Aboriginal leaders to boards of post-secondary institutions.
- Encourage institutional administrators to work with Aboriginal leaders.
- Government should commit to resolving the jurisdictional issues with respect to First Nations education, so that Aboriginals on reserve have the same access as those off reserve.

### ***Accommodate non-traditional learners***

**Proposed:** Develop flexibility in the learning system to better accommodate both traditional and non-traditional learners.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** A more learner-centred system.

#### **Considerations/suggestions:**

- Governments are inherently not flexible. Government needs to help create an environment that fosters flexibility (e.g. flexible funding systems).
- Service providers need to introduce flexibility into their programming and delivery.

***Facilitate career transition***

**Proposed:** Develop a strategy to facilitate career transitions.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, industry

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Not stated

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Create career pathways that would allow people to start in one stream and move to another, e.g. people with experience in the construction industry could offer a lot as teachers, but we need mechanisms to facilitate this transition.
- Connect the sectors in the system to enable transitions.

**3-5 Programs and Delivery*****Community learning councils***

**Proposed:** Review and strengthen the role of community learning councils.

**Lead:** Not stated

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Not stated

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Community learning councils could play a broker role, facilitating credit programs.
- Community learning councils need to partner with post-secondary institutions.
- We don't need new bricks and mortar – the infrastructure is already in place.
- Provide core funding to community learning councils.
- Fund community learning programs adequately to provide infrastructure, technology and learner support.

***Apprenticeship training***

**Proposed:** Review current processes for apprenticeship training and develop strategies to better meet the needs of both industry and apprentices.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT)

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Double the number of apprentices and skilled training graduates within a five year period.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Maintain apprenticeship under Advanced Education.
- Post-secondary institutions need to consult more with employers to determine what is required.

- There is a need to ensure integration of apprenticeship programs with institutions, etc. Courses should be listed in the transfer guide.
- There should be incentives for employers to hire and train apprentices.
- The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board limits the number of students that can be in a class. This is limiting and should be reconsidered.
- There are not enough journeymen to train apprentices. Need some flexibility in the system.
- Need to create different models to meet the needs of industry. Develop new programs where apprentices attend more technical training up front.
- Need to address why apprentices are dropping out. Need to look at how trades are designated, compulsory and optional. Compulsory trades offer more incentive for apprentices and journeymen to stay in the field.

#### *Value and expand general learning programs*

**Proposed:** Expand “general” programs within post-secondary education to allow students to develop a broad educational background before selecting a specific career/field of study.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** General learning is valued; students develop a broad educational background.

#### **Considerations/suggestions:**

- The first two years of post-secondary should be an exploratory time – but current government and institutional policies do not support this.
- We should be valuing general education in those first years before asking students to become more specialized.
- We lose a lot of students (drop outs) due to the lack of quality in these early classes/programs.
- The summary report talks about the importance of arts and humanities but there are no concrete, measurable actions in this area.
- Use the Alberta Ingenuity Fund model to facilitate and develop fine arts and humanities in the province, e.g. to attract a poet laureate, sculptor in residence, etc.

#### *Rural support and development*

**Proposed:** Develop strategies to support rural development through advanced learning.

**Lead:** Advanced Education, institutions

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Rural learners return to strengthen their communities; rural learners can learn in their home communities.



**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Provide incentives, such as a credit against student loans, to encourage people to return to their communities after post-secondary education.
- Provide professional degrees in rural and remote communities through partnerships with universities.
- Provide financial incentives (full cost-recovery) for collaboration between urban and rural institutions to provide access in rural locations.
- Require urban institutions to offer a certain percentage of their programming (e.g. 10% of budget) in rural communities. Programs should be based on the specific needs of the community.
- Provide tax incentives to students who live and work in rural areas upon completion of their programs.

***Encourage other forms of learning***

**Proposed:** Develop and promote non-credit and informal learning opportunities to increase access to advanced learning.

**Lead:** Not stated

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Increase access; increase opportunities.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Broaden the definition of learning and provide funding on this basis.
- Develop learning centres to sustain life-long learning and learning activities.
- Increase opportunities for experiential learning.
- Increase support for co-ops and internship opportunities.
- Develop non-traditional learning opportunities.

**3-6 Quality and Innovation*****Set standards for quality***

**Proposed:** Establish a threshold and common performance measures for quality.

**Lead:** Not stated

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Can demonstrate that our system and providers are world class.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Find a mechanism to recognize and identify standards for quality. Start by developing an inventory of learning providers.
- Quality indicators should be based on where we want our system to be in the future and should be a catalyst for change.
- Consult with all sectors to start creating these quality indicators.

### ***Establish centres of excellence***

**Proposed:** Establish key centres of excellence; build on strengths to develop critical mass and drive innovation.

**Lead:** Alberta Government; Advanced Education; Federal Government; institutions; economic development authorities.

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Attract leading people/talent to the province; encourage economic diversification; expand capability for future ingenuity and innovation.

#### **Considerations/suggestions:**

- Build capacity for centres of excellence in emerging strength areas.
- Establish centres of excellence.
- Consider the rural areas for centres of excellence.
- Create a centre for innovation/creativity to provide a vision and focus for all institutions in Alberta; a catalyst for 'out-of-the-box' thinking. Should be independent of government and not a graduate school.
- Fund through Access to Future Fund and private sector.

### ***Attract quality people***

**Proposed:** Attract top quality researchers, faculty and students to Alberta/Alberta institutions.

**Lead:** Institutions; Advanced Education; Innovation and Science; industry; apprenticeship and industry training

**Timeline:** Short-term

**Target:** Increased economic strength in new areas.

#### **Considerations/suggestions:**

- Short-term goal should be to solidify support for current initiatives and expand the number and scope in recognition of the potential in Alberta.
- Centres of excellence are part of this strategy.
- This is a resource issue. Need to exceed the national average for faculty salaries and provide facilities in which to work.
- High quality faculty leads to attraction of high quality students.
- Institutions should reward high quality faculty, staff and students (e.g. professional development opportunities, equipment, etc.).
- Employers of apprentices also need to consider the value of providing incentives to attract and retain quality people.
- Keep administrative duties of faculty to a minimum.

***Increase and support graduate education***

**Proposed:** Attract high quality graduate students and retain graduates in Alberta.

**Lead:** Institutions; Advanced Education; Innovation and Science.

**Timeline:** Short-term (adequate funding)

**Target:** Increased research which drives the new economy; address social issues; improved quality of life.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- The system needs to be adequately funded right now.
- Graduate retention is an issue in Alberta because there are only a small number of institutions in which they can move. Graduates are encouraged to be mobile.
- Consider partnerships with other provinces.
- Return to service agreements with students, whereby they receive incentives (e.g. loan remission) if they return to province after completing post-docs or other graduate training.
- Service agreements can also be offered to college and technical graduates to encourage them to serve in specific industries, regions, etc.

**3-7 Infrastructure*****Invest in infrastructure***

**Proposed:** Upgrade and expand existing infrastructure in institutions and communities.

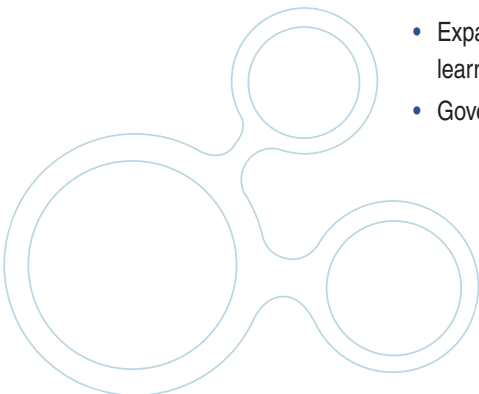
**Lead:** Communities/local consortium of educators; Advanced Education; Infrastructure and Transportation

**Timeline:** Medium-term

**Target:** Increased access; program design standardization.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Develop a long-term infrastructure plan for the province, including maintenance and new construction.
- Invest in infrastructure to provide capacity for increased participation.
- Focus should also be on deferred maintenance and expanding operations of institutions.
- Consider a “standard plan” to be used, resulting in maximum utilization.
- Set up a regional model to determine regional needs; build if necessary.
- Expand use of existing facilities to year-round operations. Facilities could be used to support adult learners for upgrading, literacy, etc.
- Government to provide investment in the costs for capital requirements of First Nations institutions.



### *Technology for learning*

**Proposed:** Provide students and institutions with the technology and supports they need for advanced learning.

**Lead:** Advanced Education; private sector

**Timeline:** Not stated

**Target:** Increased accessibility; universal accessibility to SuperNet.

**Considerations/suggestions:**

- Ensure access/equipment is accessible to all.
- Look at mechanisms to provide computers/laptops to students.
- Provide adapted technology, materials and supplies for students with disabilities/special needs.
- Extend SuperNet accessibility to “the last possible mile” in Alberta.
- Technology needs to be balanced with the human component; it must be adequately supported to be implemented.
- Build on current e-learning initiatives.
- Build on community library resources as possible venues for SuperNet access and learning centre concepts.

## **Task #4: Final Words and Next Steps**

**Question: 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? What might be the next steps in the process?**

### **4-1 Final Words**

#### *Involvement in this process is important*

A number of participants expressed their appreciation for being included in the process and felt that it was an effective process: “I appreciated bringing diverse voices together. Democracy is about discussion and small groups are good for that. It has been a worthwhile exercise for that.” “The Minister should know that there is support for this undertaking and I would like to congratulate (him) for this attempt. We have the opportunity to be the best and I hope (our) suggestions will have helped achieve this,” said one participant. Another said, “I support what I have been hearing throughout the process. (Our) community learning group thinks that this process has been inclusive and optimistic. Government is listening to us; it’s a good thing.”

### ***Desire for more preparation time***

Some participants expressed concern about the pace of the process and that they were not able to review the revised policy framework before the Forum.

### ***Continue to include more voices***

Although participants were pleased to see that the process had expanded to include some interest groups that had not been included initially – “for example, industry” – they identified other groups that were not included, such as “the liberal and performing arts groups.”

Overall, participants wanted to believe that their participation was meaningful and would lead to real change: “At the end of the day, we have had a good discussion, but the committee needs to be bold, unconstrained and it has to give us practical realities. Otherwise, we have just wasted our time.”

### ***Commitment to action***

Many participants said their final words to government were “make it happen.” “The next big challenge is political will,” said one participant. Another participant added, “We need fearless leadership in order to sell the vision to government and (to) actually see it through to implementation!” Given the 20-year time horizon for the vision, one participant said, “let’s make the framework non-partisan, something all parties can support.”

### ***Flexible, dynamic framework***

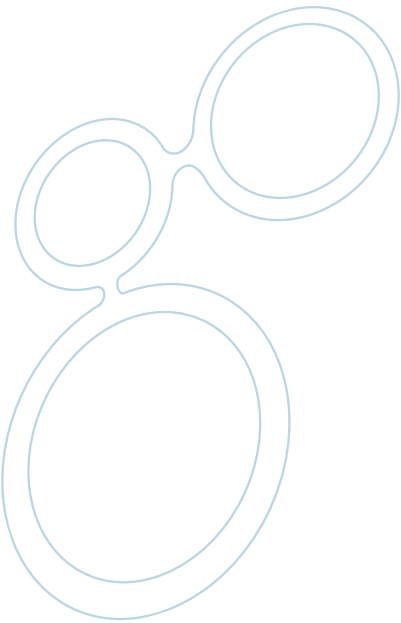
A number of participants said the framework should be flexible and dynamic, capable of “evolving over time as new developments arise.” “There needs to be something to sustain the framework to keep it dynamic and alive.”

### ***Build on existing quality***

“Ensure the quality of what we have now before we embark on the future.” Before we start funding new initiatives, said one participant, we need to provide “adequate funding for what we do now.”

### ***Focus on learners***

“The single most important message” from this process, said one participant, is the “need to switch focus from institutional-based teaching to individual learner-based capacity. Communities are an important ally in such a system.”



### ***Patience***

Although most participants were eager to see the framework implemented, a few said take the time necessary to do it right. "There has to be recognition that it will take time to implement this framework. We have to be patient. The long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term goals."

## **4-2 Next Steps**

### ***Involve all stakeholders in implementation***

Participants said they want to stay involved in the implementation process and encouraged the Steering Committee to involve a broad range of stakeholders. "This is not just the government's job. Industry is really important as well. We also need to engage the community. We need government leadership and involvement, but it won't happen if we don't bring more people to the table." Some student participants said, "consult with a broader range of students on issues, rather than just student organizations as they don't always represent the 'mainstream' students." Aboriginal participants were concerned that Aboriginal groups might be "left out of the process because of jurisdictional issues." "If this initiative is to succeed," they said, "Aboriginals must continue to be part of the process."

### ***Clarify roles***

A first step in the implementation process is to "clarify the roles and responsibilities of all players and how they contribute and are interrelated to one another," said participants.

### ***Identify Priorities***

Throughout the Forum, participants talked about prioritizing the various elements of the policy framework. As a next step, they said, "pick key priorities and get it done."

### ***Action Plan***

Participants said Advanced Education must take a leadership role in developing "a specific action plan around the framework with specific timelines and measures."

### ***Develop Policies***

Some participants said "the next steps have to be policies....There has to be a real commitment to sustainability." "In the short term, student debt and the cost of post-secondary education are the most important" issues to address through policies, said one participant. "Work to ensure the promised new tuition fee policy is in place for September 2006, with enough time to be implemented," said another.

### ***Communicate with the public and key stakeholders***

First, communicate the results of the review process and implementation of the framework to the public and, second, begin to change public attitudes towards lifelong learning. "There is a real need to get this information out to the public," said one participant. "People need to understand the scope and the challenges of this initiative." "We would like to see some action in the near future," agreed one group. "This should include a new emphasis on creating 'enthusiasm for learning.'"

