Alberta Tuition Framework





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1.0. Introduction

Alberta's adult learning system provides learning opportunities to people of all backgrounds throughout the province. It plays an integral role in helping build vibrant and inclusive communities across Alberta by helping learners achieve personal and professional objectives, preparing graduates for the demands of a dynamic 21st century labour force, promoting a resilient and diversified economy, and helping solve critical questions and challenges, including those related to environmental sustainability. The largest and most well-known component of this system is the network of 26 publicly-funded post-secondary institutions, where the vast majority of formal credentialed learning in the province takes place.

The cost of learning at these post-secondary institutions is shared by government, the institutions themselves, and students. Students make a considerable contribution to their education by paying tuition and fees. Therefore, at 20 institutions across the province, most tuition and fees are regulated by the Government of Alberta, meaning there are controls on the amounts that students can be charged (the other six institutions operate under different regulatory frameworks!). Establishing these regulatory controls is a critical role for the Government of Alberta which helps ensure that the cost of post-secondary education is within reach for Alberta learners.

This document outlines the broad framework for student tuition and fees, which encompasses statutory, regulatory and policy requirements for institutions, government, and student associations. It provides a high-level understanding of what is required from each, allowing for students, institutions and the public to know the parameters of tuition policy in Alberta.

This document does not provide detail on individual post-secondary programs, nor does it provide detailed operational requirements for institutions. This framework is intended to provide a transparent explanation of tuition policy, thereby helping Albertans make informed choices about their education.



¹ The institutions not subject to this framework are The Banff Centre, Ambrose University, Burman University, Concordia University of Edmonton, The King's University, and St. Mary's University.

2.0. Adult Learning System Vision and Principles

Vision

The vision for Alberta's adult learning system is:

Every Albertan has the same opportunity to fulfill their full potential and contribute to their communities by obtaining a high-quality post-secondary education regardless of financial circumstances.

Principles

This vision is guided by the following principles for adult learning in Alberta:

Accessibility: Every Albertan should have the same opportunity

to get a post-secondary education.

Affordability: Every Albertan should have the same opportunity to get a post-

secondary education, regardless of financial circumstances.

Quality: Albertans should get the best education possible here at home.

Accountability: Post-secondary education providers must be accountable

to students, the government and Albertans.

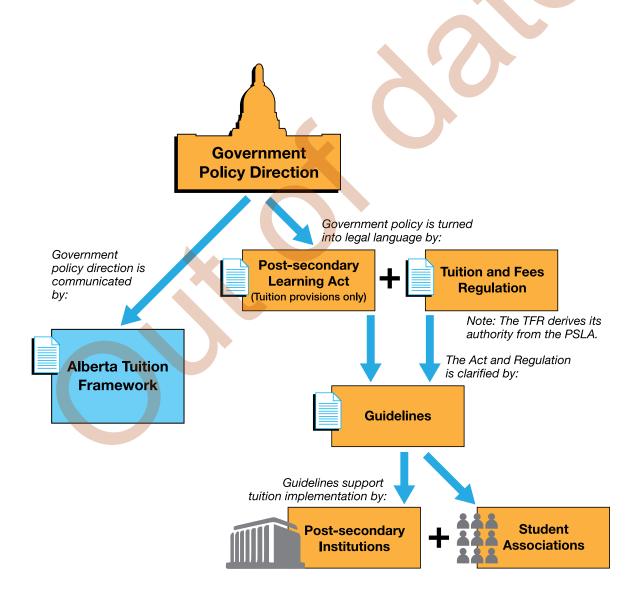
Coordination: Albertans should get full advantage from a

diverse post-secondary system.

In the Alberta Tuition Framework, the primary focus is on affordability for students, which has a clear linkage to the accessibility of the system. The framework also addresses accountability by ensuring that institutions are accountable to students and government for the tuition and fees they charge and collect. Although these principles are the main focus of this framework, given that tuition and fees are a large component of institutional revenues, they also have an impact on the quality and coordination of education in the system. This framework is not the only policy that impacts the affordability of post-secondary learning in Alberta. Student aid programming, including loans, grants to lower income student loan borrowers, and scholarships and awards also support the affordability of adult learning.

3.0. Policy Connections

The Alberta Tuition Framework is a high-level policy document that reflects formal government policy direction on tuition and fees at most institutions. While this framework reflects the policy direction, the policy direction is given legal effect through the <u>Post-secondary Learning Act</u>, and the <u>Tuition and Fees Regulation</u>. In addition to the framework and the legislation/regulation, a guidelines document helps institutions and student associations with implementation of the Act and Regulation by providing detailed operational instructions for implementing the framework. Tuition compliance documents feed into this process to ensure accountability. Therefore, while the framework is not a legal document, it is government direction and informs the legal and operational/compliance components of tuition in Alberta.



4.0 The Alberta Tuition Framework

The policy framework governing tuition and fees in Alberta largely falls into six categories, described below. Those categories are:

- How tuition is set
- · How tuition increases
- Exceptional tuition increases
- International student tuition
- Executive graduate programs
- Mandatory non-instructional fees



Student Involvement, Consultation and Publication

Before discussing the specific aspects of the framework, it is important to address the role of students in tuition policy in Alberta. Students are at the heart of the mandate and work of post-secondary institutions. Particularly on matters related to tuition, student voices are of pivotal importance, and must be considered from several perspectives. In a modern adult learning system such as Alberta's, students need to be treated as the largest and most important stakeholder in order to ensure they can reach their educational objectives, and apply their learning in their communities.

The importance of students is reflected in a number of ways in this framework, including through an enhanced role in the decision-making process surrounding some aspects of tuition and fees. One of the most critical ways in which students are to be involved is through institutions' regular, ongoing consultations with them. Institutions are required to have at least two consultation meetings with the student association (or student associations, if the institution also has a graduate student association) each year to discuss tuition and fee increases. Institutions are also required to provide the student association(s) with anticipated increases to tuition and fees for a four-year period. This consultation is expected to be meaningful, inclusive and substantive, where student input is considered and addressed, rather than obligatory and superficial. Student associations, in turn, are expected to provide meaningful and helpful input to institutions that respects the institution's budgetary needs, and that reflects the fact that students must share in the cost of adult learning. Student associations should also represent a range of perspectives from the diverse group of students they serve, including students who are most vulnerable to tuition changes. In addition, the confidentiality of the budgeting process is to be respected by all parties. Students are also expected to be active and constructive participants in tuition deliberations at board of governors meetings.

For transparency, institutions are required to publish all of their tuition and fees, so the rates of tuition and fees are made clear to students.



4.1 How Tuition Is Set

When an institution begins offering an academic program,² the tuition is set by the institution's board of governors. When offering apprenticeship technical training, tuition fees (referred to in the *Post-secondary Learning Act* as "apprenticeship instructional fees") and apprenticeship material and service fees are set by the Minister.

- For academic programs for domestic learners, when an institution wants to offer a new program, the board of governors sets the tuition and program fees which are submitted to the Minister as a part of the program approval process. If the program is approved, the tuition and program fees in the application become the tuition costs for students in the first year.
- Apprenticeship tuition is set by the Minister.
- Apprenticeship material and service fees are set by the Minister.

Tuition is set in this way to ensure the Minister plays a role in consumer protection for students. Institution boards, which are accountable to the Minister, set tuition rates for all academic programs. Similarly, because the government develops and administers the overall apprenticeship system, the Minister sets apprenticeship tuition and material and service fees for those programs.

How Tuition Is Set:

- Academic program tuition -> Institutional boards of governors
- Apprenticeship tuition -> Minister
- Apprenticeship material and service fees -> Minister



² For the purposes of this document, "academic programs" includes most programs of study, which are defined in the *Post-secondary Learning Act* as a group of credit courses that, on completion, leads to the granting of a degree, diploma, or certificate. It also includes programs approved under the *Student Financial Assistance Act*. It does not, however, include apprenticeship technical training programs. These programs are approved under the *Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act*, and their tuition and fees are governed by the *Post-secondary Learning Act*. Tuition and fee policies differ between these two types of programs.

4.2 How Tuition Increases

For academic program tuition for domestic learners, tuition increases are generally capped – unless an exceptional increase has been applied (see below). The cap is based on annual changes to an inflationary measure called the Alberta Consumer Price Index (CPI). This cap is produced using data provided by Statistics Canada and can be applied on an institution-wide basis (i.e. if the CPI cap is *X* per cent, individual programs may vary by more or less than *X* per cent, provided that the overall average per learner across the institution is *X* per cent).

How Tuition Increases:

- Academic program tuition -> CPI average across the institution
- Apprenticeship tuition -> CPI
- Apprenticeship material and service fees -> CPI
- All programs -> No greater than 10%

For apprenticeship tuition, the Minister may increase fees by no more than the CPI cap – unless an exceptional increase has been applied (see below). Similarly, the Minister may increase apprenticeship material and service fees generally by no more than the CPI cap for all apprenticeship programs (barring an exceptional increase).

For all domestic students in academic programs, and for apprenticeship programs, there is also a 10 per cent cap on tuition increases – except in cases where an exceptional tuition increase applies (see below). This means that no domestic student will pay more than 10 per cent higher than what students paid the previous year. For academic programs, this means that while institutions have flexibility to apply the CPI cap across their institution, that flexibility is limited by a requirement that tuition does not increase in any program by more than 10 per cent. In the event that the CPI cap was higher than 10 per cent, the 10 per cent cap would ensure that no domestic student's tuition (either those taking academic programming, or apprentices) would increase by more than 10 per cent over what they paid the previous year.

The Minister also has the authority in legislation to freeze all regulated tuition (such a freeze of tuition would not apply to international students). Therefore, the increase mechanisms outlined above only apply in years where tuition is not frozen.

Unless it is frozen, tuition increases annually to reflect the fact that institutions face higher costs to deliver programming each year. It increases by the CPI cap/10 per cent limit in order to provide a high degree of predictability to students that is reflective of general increases to the costs of goods and services in the Alberta economy.

4.3 Exceptional Tuition Increases

For academic programs, student associations and institutions can jointly apply to the Minister for an increase to program tuition that does not count against the CPI cap, and which can be (though not necessarily) more than 10 per cent, only if the increased tuition would result in improvements in program quality.

If the Minister is convinced that the proposal will improve the quality of the program in a way that justifies the increase, the Minister can approve the proposal. Examples of improvements could include program instructional improvements, new program resources, program delivery improvements, additional learner services and supports, meeting new regulatory requirements (in some cases), etc.

In addition to the requirement that the proposal be jointly submitted by both the students and institution, proposals for exceptional increases are subject to a number of additional requirements:

Exceptional Tuition Increases:

- Academic program tuition
 -> joint student/institution
 proposal to Minister
 - » Affected students consulted and grandfathered
 - » No more frequently than once every five years for a program
- Apprenticeship tuition and material and service fees
 Minister decision
 - » Consultation required with apprentices and institutions offering apprenticeship programs
 - No more frequently than once every five years
 - » Cannot be implemented until the subsequent academic year
- Students and institutions cannot submit a program for an exceptional increase more frequently than once every five years.
- While the council of the student association representing the impacted program (the undergraduate or graduate student association, depending on the program) must sign off on the application to demonstrate student consent, that student association must consult with students in the impacted program, in part to determine if the quality improvements would be meaningful.
- If the proposal is approved, students in the impacted programs must be
 "grandfathered," meaning the new higher tuition rate will not apply to them (it
 will only apply to new cohorts). Existing students' tuition will continue to be set
 according to the CPI cap/10 per cent limit rules outlined above, although they
 are entitled to the benefits of the quality improvements in their program.

Once an approved exceptional tuition increase has been implemented, the increased rate becomes the new tuition rate (for non-grandfathered domestic students), subject to regular CPI cap/10 per cent increases.

The Minister can also order an exceptional increase to the apprenticeship tuition or material and service fees for one or more apprenticeship programs once every five years. Before doing so, the Minister must consult with apprentices and institutions that provide apprenticeship technical training, and may also consult with student organizations. If such an increase is introduced, it cannot be applied until the following academic year. Once an approved exceptional increase in apprenticeship tuition or material and service fees is introduced, the fees for that trade will continue to be subject to regular CPI cap/10 per cent increases at the new rate(s).

A mechanism for exceptional tuition increases is in place to allow students and institutions to work together to improve the quality of programming. This mechanism ensures that programs do not necessarily get stuck in a revenue model that prevents students from accessing top quality programs, while also putting in place safeguards to protect students.

4.4 International Student Tuition

Institutions' boards of governors have the authority to set tuition for international students at their own discretion. Similarly, the rates at which international student tuition increase are entirely at the discretion of institutional boards. This provides institutions with flexibility to set tuition rates at a level that reflects both the cost to deliver the program and the requirements of attracting international students.

While institutions maintain considerable flexibility, they are required to inform international students of the tuition the student will pay for each year of

International Student Tuition:

- Institutions can set and increase tuition as they choose
- Students in approved programs must be guaranteed their tuition rates in their offer of admission

their studies in approved programs. These tuition rates are guaranteed as long as the student remains in that program for the regular duration of the program. Institutions are not able to increase those tuition rates higher than what has been guaranteed (even if an exceptional tuition increase is approved for domestic students). These guaranteed tuition rates must be communicated to the international student in their offer of admission. This ensures that an international student is fully aware of the tuition they will pay each year of their program, and will not be subject to unpredictable and unaffordable surprise tuition increases, which can jeopardize their continuation in the program.

Apprentices must be Canadian citizens, permanent residents, convention refugees, or protected persons, and would not qualify as international students. Therefore, rules related to international students only apply to academic programs.

This approach to international student tuition ensures that institutions have the flexibility to set international student tuition at a rate that reflects the market and

the cost of delivery, and that international students in approved programs have full knowledge of what they will pay in their program in Alberta in advance, and can make an informed decision before committing to studying here. It provides a balance between financial flexibility for institutions and predictability for international students.

4.5 Executive Graduate Programs

Universities offering regulated graduate programs can apply to the Minister to offer a similar graduate program at the executive level whose tuition is unregulated, provided revenues from the program directly fund access initiatives at the institution.

Executive graduate programs must be:

- Course-based
- Part-time
- · Taught with a flexible delivery method
- Targeted to working professionals (from Canada or abroad)
- Oriented toward preparing students for advancement within their current profession.

The tuition for these executive programs is unregulated, even for

international student learners in the program (i.e. the institution need not guarantee tuition to an international student enrolled in a designated executive graduate program).

If a program is approved for designation as an executive program, the institution offering it is required to continue to offer a similar non-executive program with regulated tuition. The institution is also obligated to maintain enrolment in the non-executive program to ensure it continues to be accessible to non-executive students.

These executive programs are required to be offered at a tuition rate that exceeds the cost to deliver the program (i.e. no government grant funding can be directed to the program), with meaningful excess revenues directed to access initiatives at the institution. These access initiatives can be for, but are not limited to, scholarships, additional seats, initiatives aimed at underrepresented groups, or other access initiatives the institution conceives. If revenues are not directed toward access initiatives, or the program criteria outlined above are not met, the Minister can de-designate the executive program.

Executive Graduate Programs:

- Executive graduate programs with unregulated tuition can be offered to working professionals
- Similar program with regulated tuition must continue to be supported
- Revenues for the program must be directed toward accessibility initiatives

These executive graduate programs help meet the emerging and growing need for programming targeted to working professionals seeking to advance in their careers, while ensuring accessibility in a regulated, non-executive stream, and providing additional revenues to improve accessibility at the institution.

4.6 Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees

Mandatory Mandatory Non-instructional Fees (MNIFs) are fees that students (including apprentices and international students) must pay for specific goods or services that typically enhance the student experience. They are not related to instruction in a specific program and are not optional. Examples include fees for student athletics and recreation, health services, sexual assault centres and Wi-Fi access. Student association membership fees are not considered MNIFs because students have the independent authority in the Post-secondary Learning Act to set these fees, meaning government does not regulate them.

Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees:

- Comprehensive MNIFs prohibited
- MNIFs must be no more than cost-recovery
- If less than cost-recovery, MNIFs can only increase by 10% per year
- Student association(s) sign-off is required prior to introducing a new MNIF

MNIFs provide important goods and services to students, and students

have expressed a willingness to pay for them, provided the goods and services are offered in a transparent fashion. MNIFs must be for specific goods or services, or for a group of related goods and services (e.g. an MNIF for athletic services such as access to a track, weight room and locker room, etc.). Comprehensive MNIFs are not permitted, meaning an MNIF cannot charge for a basket of unrelated goods and services. It is important for students to be able to understand the exact goods and services for which they are paying, which can be obscured by comprehensive MNIFs.

MNIFs are required by the *Post-secondary Learning Act* to be no more than cost-recovery (institutions cannot charge students more than is needed to offer the goods and services, thereby generating excess revenue). Once the cost-recovery threshold is reached, the rate of increase for the MNIF depends on the cost to deliver the good or service. For those MNIFs where students are charged less than cost-recovery, institutions can raise the cost of the MNIFs by no more than 10 per cent per year until the cost-recovery threshold is reached.

If an institution wishes to introduce a new MNIF, either at or below cost-recovery, students must consent. The student association (or both student associations, if the institution also has a graduate student association) must approve the new fee prior to its introduction.

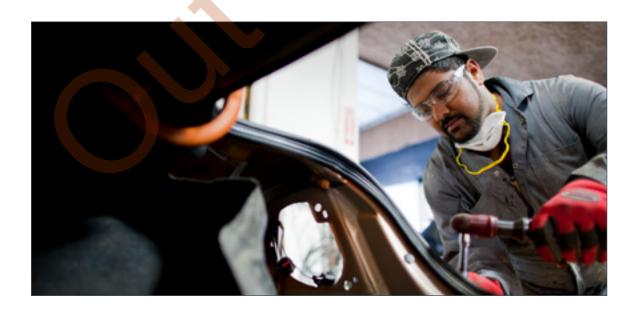
Similarly, if an institution wishes to make substantive changes to an existing fee, the consent of the student association(s) is also required. A substantive change would include a change to the scope of what goods and services are supported, or the students to whom the fee is charged. Student consent is not required for minor or administrative changes to existing fees.

For a fee classification tool which assists institutions in determining what fees are regulated as MNIFs, and what fees are classified otherwise, see Appendix 2.

Although policies vary by institution, apprentices taking technical training are generally required by institutions to pay MNIFs on a pro-rated basis, recognizing the shorter duration of their programs, and the fact that they typically do not access as many services.

The Minister also has the authority in legislation to freeze all mandatory non-instructional fees, including those charged to international students. Therefore, the increase mechanisms outlined above would only take effect in years in which MNIFs are not frozen, even if student approval is provided.

MNIFs pay for goods and services that many students want and need, and students have indicated a willingness to pay for them. This approach ensures students have full knowledge of what they are paying for and do not pay for more than what they are receiving. It also ensures that new MNIFs are supported by students and pay for goods and services students genuinely want or need.



5.0. Exclusions

This framework covers most of the tuition and fees paid by the majority of students studying at publicly-funded post-secondary institutions in Alberta (other than the excepted institutions, noted previously). This includes tuition, program fees, apprenticeship tuition, apprenticeship material and service fees, executive graduate program instructional fees, and mandatory non-instructional fees.

However, there are a handful of tuition and fee categories that are not regulated and fall outside of the framework. These fees are not controlled by the Government of Alberta in any way, and institutions can charge the amount they deem necessary for these fees. These categories are:

- Tuition for courses taken by distance delivery by individuals living outside Alberta
- Tuition for courses offered outside Alberta on a cost-recovery basis
- Tuition for courses provided under a third-party contract
- Tuition for non-approved programming, such as continuing education.
- Fees for equipment or materials that are retained or leased by students
- Fees for some work placements or practicum experiences (those where the organization providing the placement or practicum is not financially supported by government)
- User fees (non-mandatory fees for goods and services such as lockers, parking, etc.).

For a more detailed description of the various types of fees (both regulated and not), see Appendix 3. For additional detail on the tuition and fees included and not included in this framework, see Appendix 4.

6.0. Conclusion

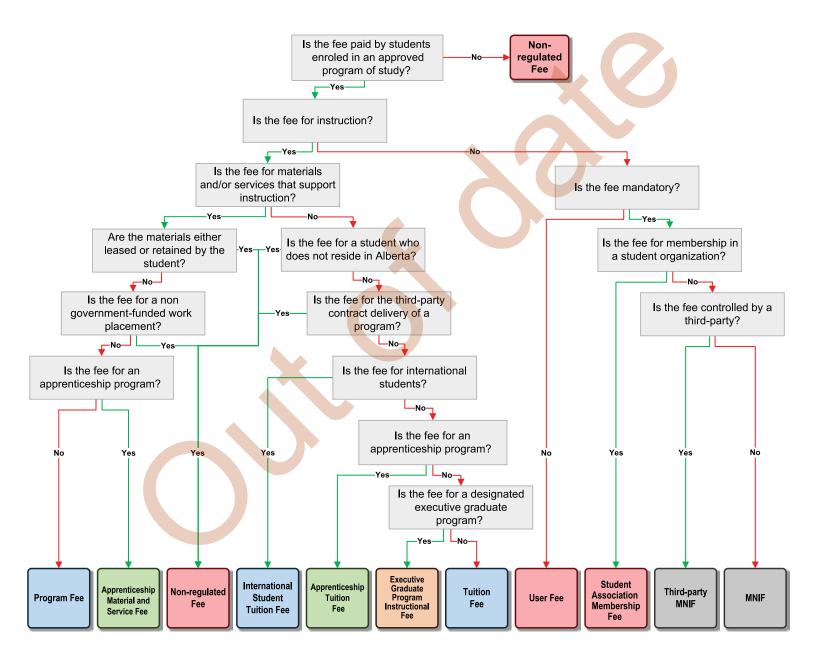
Adult learning is one of the best and most important investments that an Albertan and the government can make. Tuition and fees are the mechanisms by which students share in that investment. This framework seeks to strike a balance between ensuring that a post-secondary education is affordable and accessible in Alberta, that institutions are accountable for student contributions, and that quality and coordination are preserved in the adult learning system. By ensuring that tuition and fees are controlled in a way that is fair, transparent and affordable, Alberta can continue to have a post-secondary system that provides learners with the tools to reach their personal, academic and career goals. This will ensure that regardless of financial circumstances, Albertans will be able to fulfill their full potential and contribute to their communities while benefiting from Alberta's prosperity.

Appendix 1: Alberta Tuition Framework at-a-Glance

Component	Type of Tuition or Fee	Policy	
4.1 How	Academic Program Tuition	By board of governors (through program approval process)	
Tuition Is Set	Apprenticeship Tuition	By Minister	
	Apprenticeship Material and Service Fees	By Minister	
4.2 How Tuition Increases	Academic Program Tuition	 Capped at a CPI average applied across the institution No program can increase by more than 10% 	
	Apprenticeship Tuition	 Capped at CPI for each apprenticeship program No apprenticeship program can increase by more than 10% 	
	Apprenticeship Material and Service Fees	 Capped at CPI for each apprenticeship program No apprenticeship program can increase by more than 10% 	
4.3 Exceptional Tuition Increases	Academic Program Tuition	 Joint student/institution proposal to the Minister Affected students must be consulted and grandfathered Cannot propose the same program for an exceptional increase more frequently than once every five years 	
	Apprenticeship Tuition and Material and Service Fees	 Minister decision Consultation required with apprentices and institutions offering apprenticeship programming No more frequently than once every five years Cannot be implemented until the academic year following the Minister's decision 	
4.4 International Student Tuition	International Student Tuition	 Boards of governors can set and increase tuition International students are guaranteed their tuition rates for the duration of their program in their offer of admission 	
4.5 Executive Graduate Programs	Executive Program Instructional Fees	 Minister can approve a proposal for an executive graduate program for working professionals Similar program with regulated tuition must be supported Revenues from the executive graduate program must be directed to accessibility initiatives 	
4.6 Mandatory Non- instructional Fees (MNIFs)	Mandatory Non- instructional Fees	 Comprehensive MNIFs are prohibited Institutions can charge no more than cost-recovery for MNIFs If an MNIF is below cost-recovery, it cannot be increased by more than 10% Student association(s) must approve any new MNIFs 	

Appendix 2: Fee Classification

Fee Classification Flow Chart



Appendix 3: Fee Types and Definitions

Tuition Fees	Fees identified in an institution's calendar or in a supplement to its calendar as tuition fee or fees for instruction for courses that are part of programs approved by the Minister under the Programs of Study Regulation (except exclusions).	Tuition includes Program Fees , which are fees paid by a student to the institution in courses that are part of programs approved by the Minister under the Programs of Study Regulation (except exclusions). International Student Tuition Fees: Tuition fees charged to an international student.
Executive Graduate Program Instructional Fees	Executive Graduate Instructional Fees: Fees payable by a student for courses as part of an executive graduate program.	
Apprenticeship Fees	Apprenticeship Instructional Fees: Fees to be paid by a student in respect of instruction in apprenticeship technical training. Apprenticeship Material and Service Fees: Mandatory fees to be paid by a	student to an institution for materials and services that facilitate instruction in apprenticeship technical training, but does not include fees for equipment or materials that are retained or leased by the student.
Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs)	MNIFs: Fees charged to students that support specific goods and services that enhance the student experience, and that are: • not tuition fees as defined in the TFR, • required in order to complete programs approved under the Programs of Study Regulation or	designated under the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act, and not membership fees for a student organization. Third-Party MNIFs: MNIFs whose levels are entirely determined by a third party and whose revenues are entirely flowed through the institution to the third party.
Fees Not Regulated by the TFR	User Fees: Fees for goods, services or activities that students may access on an as-needed basis. Students are not required to pay these fees in order to enroll in or complete their program of study. Student Association Membership Fees: Fees levied on the membership of a student association for the maintenance of the association. Exclusions to Tuition Fees: Tuition fees for: • non-approved programming (e.g. continuing education), • courses taken as part of a distance delivery program by individuals who do not reside in Alberta, • off-campus cost-recovery programs, and • courses provided under a third-party contract.	Exclusions to Program Fees: Mandatory fees for the following materials and services that facilitate instruction: • equipment and material retained or leased by the student, • work placements for which provincial funding has not been provided, and • travel for field trips and/or practicums. Exclusions to Material and Service Fees: Mandatory fees for materials and services that facilitate instruction in apprenticeship technical training that are retained or leased by the student.

Appendix 4: Tuition and Fees

Included and Not Included

Included in this Framework

Tuition

· e.g. fees for instruction in an English degree program

Program fees

e.g. laboratory fees for a course in biology

International student tuition guarantees

· e.g. a guarantee to an international student for both years of an Advanced Care Paramedic diploma program

Apprenticeship tuition

 e.g. instructional fees for a Heavy Equipment Operator apprenticeship program

Apprenticeship material and service fees

 e.g. fees for copper wires for an Electrician apprenticeship program

Executive graduate program instructional fees

 e.g. fees for participation in an Executive Masters of Business Administration program

Mandatory non-instructional fees

· e.g. fees to access institutional recreation facilities

Not Included in this Framework

• Distance delivery course tuition (for non-Albertans)

 e.g. fees for instruction in an English degree program taken online by a resident of Manitoba

Cost-recovery course tuition (offered outside Alberta)

 e.g. fees for instruction in a Psychology program offered in another province or country (not through distance delivery)

Non-approved programming tuition

 e.g. fees for instruction in continuing education courses not approved by the Minister

Third party contract-delivered course tuition

 e.g. fees charged by contract to a corporate entity for instruction to its employees

User fees

· e.g. fees to rent a locker

Some work placement/practicum fees

- · e.g. fees for a co-operative education placement
- Equipment or materials fees (if retained or leased by students)
 - · e.g. fees to lease medical equipment



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