

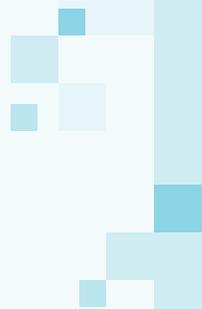
# The Consultation on Adult Literacy in Manitoba



## What We Heard

*Report Submitted to*  
Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy

November 2008



## Preface

I was honored to be engaged by the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy to assist in the development of the adult literacy strategy. In this capacity, during the Spring and Summer of 2008, I helped to design the consultation process and presided over the consultation meetings.

My experiences in the consultations put me into contact with a wide variety of literacy practitioners, all of whom shared a strong commitment to their adult students as people and as learners who need to develop their literacy skills. My meetings with the adult learners were most significant and I will always remember the sincerity and the recommendations that they brought to the table.

I come away from this task filled with respect for our adult learning practitioners, as well as for the staff of the Adult Learning and Literacy Branch.

I am confident that the staff of the Department will use the consultation information to support and to guide an even more effective adult learning system in Manitoba.



DWIGHT BOTTING

# Acknowledgements

This consultation has drawn upon the wisdom of many people including:

- Students attending and affiliated with Adult Literacy Programs and Adult Learning Centres and the Learners Speakers Bureau
- Staff and representatives of Adult Literacy Programs, Adult Learning Centres, Workplace Essential Skills programming, and English as an Additional Language programs
- Staff and other representatives of non-government organizations and business
- Presidents and staff of Manitoba universities and colleges
- Individuals of the general public

Recognition is given to the staff and other representatives of the Aboriginal Education Directorate and the Departments of Competiveness, Training and Trade; Labour and Immigration Manitoba; and Advanced Education and Literacy for their efforts in arranging stakeholder meetings.

Appreciation is extended to Susan Toderash of the Policy and Planning Branch for her administrative assistance throughout the consultation process, particularly regarding arrangements and registration for the consultation sessions.

**To each of you, this report would not have been possible without your willingness to share your experience, insights and vision for literacy in Manitoba. Thank you for contributing your time to discuss the challenges and opportunities for a provincial adult literacy strategy.**

# Introduction

Manitoba recognizes and values the advantages of a fully literate citizenry. However, the adult literacy skills of many Manitobans are not at levels which enable them as individuals to participate fully in an increasingly knowledge-based society and economy.

In April 2008 the Province of Manitoba initiated consultations with key stakeholders and the public for input into the development of a provincial-wide adult literacy strategy. The individuals and groups (including literacy practitioners, immigrant organizations, aboriginal organizations, non-government organizations and business representatives) who participated in the consultations recognized the importance of literacy to the social and economic well being of individuals, families, and communities.

*Adult Literacy in Manitoba: A Discussion Paper* (April 2008) provided participants in the consultation with background information and stimulated thought and discussion regarding the literacy challenge in Manitoba. This document included questions for consideration and discussion in the consultation sessions:

- What literacy-related competencies are necessary for an individual's meaningful participation in Manitoba in the year 2016?
- What are the best ways to raise the literacy levels of all Manitobans?
- What are the best ways to raise the literacy levels of those with the greatest literacy needs?

- What should be the key goals and components of an adult literacy strategy?
- In a literacy strategy, what are the key roles for government, industry, individuals and communities?
- What would be an ideal literacy promotion campaign?
- Should literacy be a high public policy priority?
- How should we measure progress of the literacy strategy?

The Province retained Dwight Botting, former Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy, to lead the consultation. The consultation team led by Mr. Botting included two representatives from Advanced Education and Literacy, Elaine Phillips and Barbara Wynes.

# Background

## What is Literacy?

Literacy refers to the skill base that enables people to participate and adapt to change in the workplace, the home and community life. It provides a foundation for further learning and includes the following:

- written communication skills – reading text, document use, writing
- numeracy
- thinking skills to learn and solve problems
- oral communication and interpersonal skills

In a society that is becoming more complex, and in an economy that is increasingly competitive, literacy skills are critical. In fact, in a knowledge-based economy literacy is the skill base for labour productivity. The widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) requires that individuals have literacy skills and can apply them in a technical environment.

Ideally, early childhood experiences and schooling provide a strong literacy foundation. Our adult experience, training and schooling should provide the enhancements to this foundation. Literacy skills are basic for a person's development as an adult learner.

## Manitoba Literacy Challenge

In 2003, Canada participated in the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) which measured prose literacy, document use, numeracy skills, problem solving and the use of information and communication technology. Canada's performance was in the middle when compared to other countries and ahead of the United States. Manitoba was generally situated at the Canadian average.

A closer look at the Manitoba IALSS results indicates that approximately 40% of working age Manitoba adults had literacy scores at level 1 and 2 on the survey scale. This represents approximately 285,000 Manitobans between the ages 16 and 65 with literacy scores below level 3, which is considered the minimum level for full participation in a knowledge-based economy and society. While a high percentage of this group is employed, their literacy skills limit their employment opportunities and ability to adapt to change in the workplace. This poses challenges to employers seeking a labour force with higher literacy skills required for the problem solving and creativity needed in a competitive and technological global market.

# Literacy Statistics (IALSS, 2003)

Total population 16-65 717,000

| Manitoba Distribution by Level | Prose           | Document        | Numeracy        |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Level 1                        | 91,000 (12.7%)  | 93,210 (13.0%)  | 130,494 (18.2%) |
| Level 2                        | 194,000 (27.0%) | 192,873 (26.9%) | 230,157 (32.1%) |
| Level 3                        | 294,000 (41.0%) | 294,687 (41.1%) | 253,101 (35.3%) |
| Level 4/5                      | 138,000 (19.3%) | 136,230 (19.0%) | 103,248 (14.4%) |

Preliminary analysis, based on 2003 data, conducted by Scott Murray<sup>1</sup> projects the proportion of Manitobans with literacy levels below Level 3 forward from 2003 to 2016. His findings indicate that, although younger people have higher literacy scores than those in the past, the projected size of the adult group with low literacy scores will not decline by 2016 simply as a result of improved school performance. A high percentage of adult individuals with low literacy are and will be employed. One of Murray's main conclusions, therefore, is that the solution to the adult literacy problem is in upgrading the literacy skills of existing working age adults.

The economic impacts of low literacy, particularly among adults, are not sufficiently recognized by employers. Research indicates that Canadian employers do not invest in employee training and skill development at a level comparable to many other developed countries. International studies estimate that countries with 1% higher average literacy scores experience 1.5% higher GDP per capita. With shifting economic realities, including global communication and international commerce, the productivity of Manitoba's labour force will be a crucial factor in the province's future.

In addition to addressing the skill levels of working age Manitobans, there are several groups that require particular attention:

- Demographic projections indicate that Aboriginal peoples will play a more prominent role in Manitoba's future labour force. There are unique needs with respect to literacy and language among Manitoba's Aboriginal populations.
- Skilled immigrants are viewed in Manitoba as an important source of future labour supply. Many new immigrants face language barriers to full labour market participation.
- There are other population groups with particular literacy needs – francophone, under employed and unemployed.

There are clear social benefits associated with increased literacy skills in areas of health, justice and social cohesion/cultural inclusion, personal empowerment, and active citizenship. For example:

- Health and literacy are related. Research indicates a strong relationship between a person's literacy level and his/her physical well-being. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has stated that higher literacy and numeracy levels help to reduce demands on the health systems, which is important as countries struggle to finance the cost of providing health services.
- There are also significant relationships between literacy and the justice system. Evidence suggests that increases in literacy levels may act to reduce crime levels.
- Many Manitobans who are clients of the social services system require personal support as well as literacy development. In the long term, addressing literacy needs should support reductions to the costs associated with social services.

## Responding to the Literacy Challenge

The government of Manitoba is concerned about the adult literacy challenge in the province. In order to stimulate renewed action, it has passed legislation, *The Adult Literacy Act*, which requires the development of a provincial adult literacy strategy to address the literacy needs of all citizens of Manitoba.

*The Act* also establishes the Manitoba Adult Literacy Program (MALP) as a component of the strategy. MALP is the government's commitment to providing ongoing support for agencies that offer programs for adults seeking to improve their literacy skills. Improved literacy skills enable adults to have the ability to better understand and employ printed information in daily activities at work, in their community and in their family life.

The provincial adult literacy strategy will be the platform for the focus and commitment of the government's action on literacy. It will also outline potential roles for community and industry partners.

# ■ Consultation Process

The consultation process was designed to engage key stakeholders and the public to contribute their knowledge and experience to the shaping of the adult literacy strategy. The information gathered, as well as the on-going feedback during the development and implementation of the strategy, will serve as a foundation on which to build a strategic response to address the literacy challenge in the province.

On April 14, 2008 the discussion paper, *Adult Literacy in Manitoba*, and the consultation process were launched at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Pan Canadian Literacy Forum in Winnipeg.

An Adult Literacy Strategy website, [www.manitoba.ca/adultliteracystrategy](http://www.manitoba.ca/adultliteracystrategy), provided electronic access to *The Adult Literacy Act*, the discussion paper, consultation process (including schedule and registration and submission information, as well as contact information).

The discussion paper served as a starting point for the consultations. As expected, other issues and information were also put forward for deliberation when developing the strategy.

Information was gathered using public session presentations, focused discussions with adult literacy learners and practitioners, meetings or roundtables, and written submissions.

All consultation sessions were facilitated by the consultation team led by the consultant. The other team members, representatives from Advanced Education and Literacy, were responsible for recording the discussion and assisting and supporting the facilitator as appropriate. Public session presentations also were audio-recorded.

## Literacy Learner and Practitioner Discussions

Focused discussions with adult literacy learners and practitioners were held in Brandon, The Pas, Thompson, Winkler, and Winnipeg. Discussions with learners were held in separate meetings from those with practitioners/instructors.

The focused discussions were chosen as an effective means to gather detailed and insightful information about people's experiences and factors that enhance and impact people's literacy and learning. The format of the discussions enabled people to share their thoughts on the importance and impact of literacy from their perspective and to build on the perspectives and experience of others in the group. Initial questions focused the topics and follow-up questions probed to elicit clarification and details.

The consultant introduced each discussion with the context of *The Adult Literacy Act* and strategy and the purpose for the consultation discussion. The introduction included two or three overarching questions which served as both a starting point and an outcome for the session:

- How do we get more learners in the programming/training?
- How can we make the programming (the system) more effective, holistically? How can we do this better?
- What should be the priorities?

All the discussions focused on the guiding questions from the discussion paper and the above overarching questions.

# Summary of Consultation Participation

| Consultation                                  | Number of Organizations Represented | Number of Participants                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Literacy Practitioner Session - Brandon       | 6                                   | 11                                                                        |
| Literacy Practitioner Session - The Pas       | 3                                   | 8                                                                         |
| Literacy Practitioner Session - Thompson      | 4                                   | 6                                                                         |
| Literacy Practitioner Session - Winkler       | 6                                   | 7                                                                         |
| Literacy Practitioner Sessions (6) - Winnipeg | 29                                  | 73                                                                        |
| Adult Learner Sessions (5)                    | 19                                  | 32                                                                        |
| Stakeholder Meetings (15)                     | 49                                  | 87                                                                        |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>116</b>                          | <b>224</b>                                                                |
| Public Sessions - Winnipeg (2)                | –                                   | 14 presentations                                                          |
| Public Session - Winkler                      | –                                   | 1 presentation                                                            |
| Written Submissions                           | –                                   | 27 submissions<br><small>19 written plus 8 at the public sessions</small> |

## Stakeholder meetings

Meetings and round table discussions were held with key stakeholders groups including immigrant organizations, representatives from the Aboriginal community, non-government organizations and agencies, representatives from the francophone community, and business.

These sessions followed a format similar to that of the learner and practitioner discussions.

## Public Sessions

Public sessions provided opportunities for individuals and groups to make oral presentations regarding the adult literacy strategy in a public forum. Each presentation was limited to 20 minutes. Presenters were encouraged to provide a written copy of their presentation at the public meeting.

Public sessions were scheduled in Brandon, The Pas, Winkler, and Winnipeg and were advertised in newspapers, announced at the Pan Canadian forum, posted on the adult literacy strategy website and referenced in all consultation correspondence.

## Written Submissions

Written submissions were submitted through the website, by email and by regular mail. Written submissions also were received at the public sessions. Submissions were received from those involved in the literacy field, from stakeholder groups, and from concerned members of the general public.

# What We Heard

The ‘What We Heard’ section presents a summary of the views, ideas and opinions that consultation participants shared and discussed with the consultation team.

This section is organized according to the questions that were included in the discussion paper, *Adult Literacy in Manitoba*. Summary points are clustered conceptually; the order of presentation does not reflect the frequency of comments or priority.

## *What literacy-related competencies are necessary for an individual’s meaningful participation in Manitoba in the year 2016?*

Consultation participants supported the need for literacy competencies. There was no fundamental disagreement with the description of the literacy skill base as articulated in the Discussion Paper. In addition a number of points were emphasized:

- The increasing need to be able to use literacy foundation skills to analyze and process information was a recurring topic. In one case this was referred to as document literacy.
- The inclusion of Essential Skills instruction in adult programming was noted as an important means to focus learners on work readiness.

- The importance of functional literacy was identified. To this end there were a number of references to the need for better ‘health literacy’ for patients, particularly for seniors, immigrants and those functioning at low literacy levels.
- A number of other functional challenges were referenced, with particular mention of understanding and completing government-related documents, including the wording of client registration procedures and regulatory guidelines.
- There was expressed need for plain English in government service to the public. Many participants placed emphasis on the way oral communication is conducted by government personnel when communicating with the public.
- The difference between literacy training and English as an Additional Language (EAL) for immigrants who are already literate in their native language was emphasized. EAL is considered to be language training and not literacy training.
- The importance of cultural context particularly in literacy development with our Aboriginal citizens was noted.
- The importance of not being tied to one definition of literacy but to recognize the range of literacies that exist in our diverse population and complex society was identified.

Related to many of these ideas was the emphasis on literacy skills as fundamental to an individual’s active participation in society and the opportunity to gain access to a better way of living.

## *What are the best ways to raise and maintain the literacy level of all Manitobans?*

In Manitoba the literacy movement has grown and been nurtured through an environment that is strongly community based. It is then not surprising that the consultation participants based many of their comments about raising literacy levels on the strength of their local involvement at the teaching-learning level.

### DELIVERY STRUCTURE

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Most participants felt that there was a strong need for a more coherent system that continues to facilitate the community-based model.

- There was a general call for more collaboration and partnership between programs, support agencies and government departments.
- There were many parties who advocated enhanced literacy program accessibility including flexible hours of operation and more programs located within practical distance of learners.
- There was strong advocacy to create “one stop shops” in certain strategic locations. These larger program centres would be structured to meet the needs of all of their adult learners.
- There were specific calls to integrate literacy and Adult Learning Centre programs in some manner.
- There was also a call to have centres focus on, or specialize in, providing service to certain kinds of learners.

- Libraries, a socially inclusive service, were recognized by some participants as key resources in terms of holdings, expertise, outreach, internet access, facilities availability and general support services. At present they are seen to be peripheral players.
- A few participants indicated that in many communities there are no libraries and no access to books, particularly in the North.
- There was one specific call for a Minister’s Advisory Council on Adult Literacy as well as regional councils to facilitate input on implementation and evaluation.
- There was one call for an Institute of Literacy independent of government, which would conduct and disseminate research.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

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There were many suggestions that related to the very important process of learning in the literacy classroom:

- There were numerous calls to further promote the active participation of learners in developing learning plans, deciding the learning/instruction process, and assessing – a key adult learning principle.
- There was distinct advocacy for a variety of teaching approaches based on learner needs and community capacity. In other words, there was little call for standardization.
- There was one specific call for specifying a number of target groups and designing suggested methods for the teaching/learning process for each one.

- There were a few strong calls to officially recognize Family Literacy as an effective adult literacy strategy which is relevant and an important contributor to better family life.
- There was one call for explicit learning plans for each adult learner.
- There was one call to purchase and adopt a specific software learning program that is believed to be most effective.
- Many indicated that there was a need for more contact hours for learners where their personal circumstances allow.
- Many practitioners wanted a better method of assessing learners' needs in order to build more effective programming.
- There were many calls for more professional development training for volunteer tutors and paid instructors/teachers. One presenter advocated for sufficient and current professional development as a means to attract and retain staff.
- There were a few strong calls to establish a modern and complete teacher resource library and to make it easily accessible.
- There was discussion among some practitioners regarding the current 'Literacy Stages' curriculum framework. There were reactions against the mandating of 'Stages' particularly if this were tied to funding. A few supported the use of 'Stages' for appropriate learners. Some organizations identified that the implementation of the Stages curriculum framework depends on sufficient program hours and learner contact time, which current funding levels do not support.
- There were a few calls to increase the promotion and use of the General Educational Development (GED) as an option for learners.
- There were some recommendations to establish a credible provincial post secondary program for teaching methodology. However this was not unanimous. A few groups, while not opposing the post secondary education component, objected to mandatory certification and the bureaucratic constraints that might come with it.
- There was general agreement that there should be a unique and specifically articulated set of skills that an effective adult literacy teacher/instructor should possess.
- Everyone who commented felt that the pay rates were too low for the teachers/instructors. There was one call for paid preparation time. However there was no consensus as to how far to fill the current gap that exists between literacy instructors/teachers and certified teachers.
- There were some strong recommendations both for and against standardizing wages according to credentials.
- There were many calls for transportation subsidies for learners.
- There were calls to strengthen the current Learn Line which provides important support for adult students in literacy programs.
- A few literacy programs are funded for operation in the summer. This was considered to be a good example of flexibility.

## ADMINISTRATION

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Although there were not many detailed comments about program administration, those received were pointed and clear:

- Although there was acknowledgement that government funding to adult literacy had improved in the last year or two, no one felt that the current level of funding to adult literacy organizations was adequate. There were also many calls to increase ALC funding.
- There were many calls to reduce the burden of yearly funding applications and to proceed to multi year funding, particularly for well-established programs.
- There was a recommendation that government review the responsibilities of the ALC Directors as they relate to the ALC Boards. This governance issue needs clarification and should not be duplicated in the regulations of *The Adult Literacy Act*.
- There were two criticisms of government for not consulting when drafting *The Adult Literacy Act*.

## WORKFORCE/EMPLOYMENT-BASED FOCUS

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It was generally agreed that the literacy skills of Manitoba's workforce are the foundation of the province's productivity and that employees with strong literacy/essential skills face better chances of promotion and job security. In Canada both the provincial governments and the federal government contribute to labour market skill development.

- Business representatives indicated that there is a current labour shortage in many of Manitoba's industry sectors. Entry-level employees do not need a specific job related skill base but need to have the capacity to learn. This is closely related to their level of literacy.
- The problems in the North were clearly delineated and unique approaches were called for. The tight labour market in Thompson is creating some serious problems. Coupled with related problems in supports such as living accommodation, it is affecting learner retention. Many who leave or bypass literacy training for jobs are not prepared and labour market turnover is very high for this group.
- In many cases employers are turning to the immigrant community to fill entry level shortages as well as shortages where there are needs of specific skill sets.
- Many employers are not convinced of the benefits of the literacy development of their workforce. Many employees are also not convinced of the need to improve their foundation skills. This awareness issue is not new to our province or country.
- There was a lack of consensus as to who should be responsible to address the issue of workforce literacy.
  - Comments from those outside of business called upon employers to contribute to the literacy development of its employees.
  - Some employer representatives, although not disagreeing, felt that it was preferable to adopt better hiring practices than to engage existing employees in workplace literacy strategy initiatives.

- Government was seen as a key partner in funding research studies to demonstrate the productivity benefits of strong workforce literacy skills.
- The government sponsored workplace Essential Skills movement has gained credibility in the business community and is seen as the key element in workplace literacy development. Some employers are responding to Essential Skills in their specific workplaces in partnership with government. There were calls to increase the volume and capacity of this government commitment and in some cases there were calls to make Essential Skills a mandatory component of government funded employment-related literacy.
- There were some specific comments to indicate that workers with strong literacy skills function in a safer manner in the workplace.
- Some participants pointed to successful initiatives in other countries, for example Australia and New Zealand, suggesting that Manitoba consider adapting those initiatives to Manitoba circumstances.
- The mobility of our current Aboriginal population was noted as a specific challenge to the provision of literacy.
- There were some positive comments about the Apprenticeship program through University College of the North (UCN) and Frontier School Division which allows ALC students to complete their high school academic credits while working towards Level 1 carpentry. There was also a positive comment about the school/work cooperative programs sponsored by the Technical Vocational Initiative.
- There was one strong recommendation to train adult educators with the skills to be able to work in Northern communities.
- There was strong advocacy to meet the specific need for on-reserve literacy training particularly in the remote communities. It was noted that many learners are accessing provincially funded programs outside of their communities.
- There was a specific call for a vast improvement to programming and supports for Aboriginal women who are single parents.

## ABORIGINAL FOCUS

The Aboriginal participants (learners, instructors/practitioners and organizations) who provided input were very clear as to which direction programming should take in order to properly address the serious literacy needs of their adult population. The specifics of their comments were:

- There was passionate advocacy to develop effective separate approaches that would provide suitable autonomy to program providers and culturally appropriate experiences for the learners.
- The first language of many Aboriginal people is not English. There was a call for at least one centre dedicated to teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) for Aboriginal adults. There was also a call for reinvigorating an EAL curriculum for these learners.
- It was noted that some off reserve ALCs charge tuition to First Nation students who live on reserve.

## IMMIGRANT FOCUS

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As previously mentioned there were a number of comments that underlined the difference between Adult Literacy and English as an Additional Language (EAL). The EAL programming is funded and administered through Labour and Immigration Manitoba (LIM).

- There were a few comments from literacy practitioners in rural areas to include immigrant language development as part of the general approach to meeting the language development needs of their clients. That is to say, have it on the same site.
- In some cases literacy programs accept learners who have completed EAL training. Some other literacy programs accept immigrants who by-passed EAL to go straight to work and are now coming back to develop their English language skills.
- Testing for work-related certification is a unique challenge for immigrants. Many practitioners felt that the test construction creates cultural biases that get in the way of testing the specific skills and knowledge necessary for certification. This is felt to be specifically true in Apprenticeship and the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES).
- Financial living supports for immigrant learners are seen as a barrier to effective English language development.
- A recent development has been to set up and operate a central language assessment and referral centre for all new immigrants Winnipeg English Language Assessment and Referral Centre (WELARC). This is considered to be an important improvement in programming support.

## FRANCOPHONE FOCUS

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In Manitoba Francophone literacy needs are essentially coordinated and offered through an organization called Pluri-elles (Manitoba), Inc. Funding for Francophone literacy is provided by both federal and provincial governments. Many of the issues characterizing English literacy are present in the French domain. There are also some differences that were raised during the consultation:

- In Manitoba the literacy skills of the Francophone population are lower than those of the English population. This factor is consistent with other provinces that have a significant French population.
- Many recommendations for improvement are similar for both French and English programming:
  - Improve wage levels of staff
  - Provide more and better training for practitioners/instructors
  - Increase program hours
  - Strengthen Family Literacy
  - Provide better transportation for learners to access programs
  - Simplify the yearly program application process
  - Emphasize the importance of teacher/trainer student relations
  - Emphasize the importance of flexibility, particularly regarding the hours of program availability.

- The Francophone clientele is considered to be diverse. Many of the students are attempting to reacquire their original language; some are trying to acquire French by virtue of having become part of the French community. Also some are immigrants who do not have a strong foundation in their original language, that being French.
- There is currently no program to provide adults with high school credits through the Mature Student Diploma program.
- There were many strong requests for better cross-departmental coordination within the provincial government. This would include departments who are delivering programs as well as those who are supporting learners.
- The calls for centralization and coordination were often tempered by the strong desire for local control. Discussions of the regulatory provisions in the new legislation were limited. However, in many cases participants were wary of too many regulations and bureaucratic controls.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

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There was significant feedback received on teaching and learning. The following points provide summary comments:

- Despite their commitment to local literacy activity, all the participants saw the value in some kind of facilitative structure to promote the flow of learners through the system, a learning continuum.
- There are currently a large number of literacy and ALC programs as well as a number of specific literacy support agencies/organizations. Many felt that this array provides confusion at the local level and there is a need to provide rationale for this array in order to clarify the over-all roles of the players.
- Staff turnover remains problematic despite practitioners' strong commitment to the literacy cause and government's commitment to the literacy field. Better wage levels and training were regarded as important to provide staff stability.

## *What are the best ways to raise the literacy levels of those with the greatest needs?*

The Manitoba literacy landscape is characterized by a variety of strong commitments by programs to instruct those with low literacy levels. The students and the practitioners spoke passionately about the importance of their endeavours.

Many of the students have had significant interference or interruptions in their education. They are now trying to develop a much needed literacy foundation. Some of these have the ability to learn quickly. Some have been struggling with learning for most of their lives because of some form of intellectual disability or learning disability.

Students with low literacy skills present a unique challenge. In many ways their needs are similar but more intense than the other students. Retention of these learners is a serious problem. However there are some special points of emphasis and unique approaches that were referenced in the discussions.

Comments were characterized by an extremely high degree of commitment and certain frustrations:

- Because re-entering the educational process presents emotional challenges, both students and their instructor/teachers emphasized the importance of classroom relationships with their instructor/teachers as well as their peer group.
- There were many calls for special, innovative approaches to teaching. Some of these were one-to one tutoring, support groups and a broader curriculum that deals with lifestyle issues (e.g. nutrition) as well as specific literacy. Multi-faceted, holistic approaches were considered to be a must.

- Access issues were mentioned in many instances. Flexible hours were a vital component to the retention of these learners, many of whom have irregular hours through part-time employment.
- Proximity of the program is another key element. Most of these learners do better when the program is near their residence or home community.
- The literacy levels of our senior population are quite low and there were calls for unique approaches to this problem.
- When many of these learners decide to attempt to resume their education, they are not sure where the programs are located. If their first contact is with a program that is beyond their capabilities, frequently no one is responsible to see that they are referred to the appropriate program.
- An important barrier for these learners is lack of social and personal supports:
  - Repeatedly participants reported that Income Assistance staff does not consistently recognize literacy as a legitimate activity for its clients. In some cases it is supported, in others it is not.
  - Many students are unemployed but are not eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) due to the technical requirements inherent in the EI program. Because members of this group are characteristically lacking in personal savings, regular assistance cheques are a must. There is no system in government that has the responsibility for the developmental needs of these potential literacy learners. The myriad of rules and regulatory procedures facing low income Manitobans who need literacy training is mind-boggling.

- There are other serious barriers including lack of child care, lack of transportation and the need for on site counseling. As an example where child care is available many times it is only through good fortune and the complexities of ad hoc arrangements.
- There was a distinct cry for support workers to advocate for learners.
- One submission recommended the establishment of a learning assistance program rather than learning being negotiated as part of an income assistance program.

Adults with developmental disabilities have significant impairment to their intellectual and physical learning. There is no formal system of services to meet the literacy needs of this segment of Manitoba's population. At present there are a few dedicated agencies and advocacy groups who have set up ad hoc arrangements to provide service as best as they can. Comments focused on these learners were:

- There is a need to develop expertise in terms of needs assessment and program delivery for each learner.
- Improvements in programming should be researched-based.
- In many cases individual learning plans and one-to-one supervised tutoring are necessary. In other cases classroom-based instruction can be effective.
- There is a need to support better training for volunteer tutors and paid instructors.

- When questioned, participants indicated that the school system's cumulative records could not be accessed to provide a basis for assessment and program delivery for each student.
- Funding is an obvious issue in all aspects of delivery.
- A coalition of professionals who are currently seriously involved in adult literacy with the developmentally disabled community provided the consultation with recommendations regarding:
  - A literacy strategy for learners at every level
  - A model for learning
  - The training of tutors
  - A cohesive communication network.

## *What should be the key goals and components of the adult literacy strategy?*

Almost all of the participants in the consultation agreed with the general goals as articulated in the Discussion Paper: to increase the number of learners and improve the literacy skills of Manitobans.

Participants, based on their community-based experience, focused their comments mainly on the teaching/learning components of a literacy strategy. Less attention was given to the components of a provincial-wide literacy strategy, as reflected in the limited responses noted in the remaining sections of the report.

Some specific components of an Adult Literacy Strategy were emphasized:

- The teaching/learning process
- Employment-related literacy
- Recognition of the specific skills of the instructors/teachers
- A distinctly Aboriginal approach
- Explicit strategies to address students with disabilities
- Health literacy
- Increased funding
- Cross departmental coherence
- Inclusion of public libraries
- Plain language
- Cautionary use of regulations
- A structure to provide input to the Minister
- Promotion activities

## *In the literacy strategy, what are the key roles for government, industry, individuals and communities?*

### **ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

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Most of the input called upon the provincial government to play a leadership role in the strategy by facilitating a spirit of collaboration with all stakeholders and creating a structure and process for collaboration on implementation and evaluation. Government should:

- Lead any literacy promotion campaign.
- Provide better core funding.
- Support new program establishment to provide better access.
- Ensure that special supports are in place, particularly to assist in assessment and referral and to provide learner support for accessing other services related to health, housing, family or personal counseling, child care, and transportation for example. Most of the opinions on this saw these services provided by an agency outside of government.
- Raise awareness levels of the importance of literacy throughout all government departments particularly in communication to the public.
- Coordinate efforts with the school system. i.e. the strategy should be for all ages.
- Partner with the federal government on items of mutual jurisdiction (e.g. Aboriginal literacy, workplace literacy).
- Continue to develop strategies and partnerships to address employment related literacy.

## ROLE OF INDUSTRY

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Those who commented felt that employers should provide more opportunities for employees for Literacy/Essential Skills training as well as skill development. Many of these comments were based on the knowledge that business productivity would rise, as a result of investment in employee skills development.

## ROLE OF COMMUNITIES

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Everyone assumed that programming would continue to be community based and operated by organizations at that level. Along with this comes the responsibility to ensure that programs are related to local needs.

There were a few strong calls to situate any provision of centralized supports (e.g. research, student assessment) outside of government.

There was support and commitment to work under government's facilitation on providing ongoing input into implementation and evaluation of the strategy.

## *What would be the ideal literacy promotion campaign?*

There was limited discussion on this aspect of the strategy and no clear pattern of ideas emerged. Most of the suggestions related to attempting to attract more low level students.

- Most of the discussion recognized that there had to be an awareness raising of the general public as to the existence of programming and its economic and social benefits.
- Many felt that at present most program information is spread by 'word of mouth'.
- Promotion campaigns should be on-going.
- The campaign should address the stigma problem that people with low literacy skills face.
- To be effective the campaign should not be solely print-based.
- Community information sessions could be conducted through local program centres.
- Libraries should play an important role in marketing programs.
- Mimic the "Participaction" campaign.
- On two occasions there were clear opinions that there should be no promotion until programs are adequately funded and proper student support services are in place.

### ***Should literacy be a high policy priority?***

The consultation received little input on priority. Most participants implied through their remarks that greater priority must be paid to literacy policy in government.

Some comments indicated that government decision makers need to understand the large payoff to individuals, the economy and society from gains in literacy levels.

### ***How should we measure progress of the literacy strategy? How will we know that actions taken to raise and maintain literacy levels have been effective?***

There was brief but significant input on measuring the progress of the strategy.

- Suggestions for meaningful data regarding learners included:
  - Results of the international literacy surveys
  - Progress related to learner-centred goals
  - The number of adults accessing literacy programming
  - ALC graduation rates
  - The number of Mature Student Diplomas granted
  - The number of GED completions
  - Successful transitions to post secondary levels of education
  - Sustainable employment successes from the EI/EIA funded client base who received literacy training.
- One submission called for external evaluation of programs based on government criteria.
- One submission called for a yearly statistical report on progress.
- Many of the presenters assumed that the dialogue on evaluation of the strategy would continue after the provincial adult literacy strategy was announced.

# Conclusion

‘What We Heard’ reports on the consultation on Adult Literacy in Manitoba. It summarizes the responses and the discussion of stakeholders and organizations who participated in the consultation process. At times there was a consensus as to how to proceed with certain important elements of the adult literacy strategy. At other times there was clear division as to how to address certain implementation issues.

The document acknowledges and thanks the individuals and organizations that provided input to the consultations. The sincerity of all learners/students, practitioners and interested parties was constantly displayed during the process.

The Adult Learning and Literacy Branch of the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy will take the lead in working with other departments to draft a provincial adult literacy strategy to better address the literacy needs of Manitoba’s adult population.

Community participation is an important backbone to the existing literacy activity in Manitoba and will continue to characterize future efforts. The government looks forward to continue to work with the adult literacy field, organizations, communities, employers and other stakeholders in a spirit of collaboration to develop the adult literacy strategy.

If you have any questions or comments regarding ‘What We Heard’ or the next steps in the strategy process please contact:

**Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy**  
c/o Adult Learning and Literacy  
350-800 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 0N4

E-mail: [alitstrategy@gov.mb.ca](mailto:alitstrategy@gov.mb.ca)

Phone: (204) 945-8247 or  
toll free 1-800-282-8069 ext. 8247

Website:  
[www.manitoba.ca/adultliteracystrategy](http://www.manitoba.ca/adultliteracystrategy)

# APPENDIX

## Current Programming

At present, there are publicly supported adult learning systems that support the development and maintenance of adult literacy skills.

**Adult Literacy Programming** provides direct instruction for individuals to develop and apply skills in reading text, document use, writing, oral communication, and numeracy. The development of thinking skills, problem-solving and computer use are typically embedded in the instruction. Manitoba's programming focuses on the first three levels of literacy which are aligned to the levels used in the IALSS assessment. Work completed at level three is eligible for credit towards a mature high school diploma.

**Workplace Essential Skills:** The Essential Skills are considered to be the skills needed to be successful at work. They provide a foundation for learning other more technical or occupational specific skills. Essential Skills are reading text, document use, writing, numeracy, working with others, continuous learning, oral communications, computer use and thinking skills. Essential Skills bring a work related focus to general literacy skills. Programming is workplace or occupation specific and frequently embedded in training programs.

**Adult Learning Centres (ALCs):** These Centres integrate literacy upgrading with programming for adults to obtain secondary education courses and credentials (high school diploma) required to pursue further education and employment. Some high schools also serve adults in this way.

**Apprenticeship:** Strong literacy skills are foundational to the development of trades competencies and certifications.

**Colleges and Universities:** These institutions provide courses of study leading to various academic and occupational credentials (certificates, diplomas and degrees). Generally, they play a key role in the development of higher level literacy skills which enable individuals to effectively manage complex information and to stimulate innovation and creativity.

**Adult English as an Additional Language (EAL) Programming** provides language training for immigrants in support of settlement and labour market integration. Adult EAL Programs are referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Most participants are well educated and arrive in Manitoba with strong literacy skills. Students with interrupted schooling, or little or no formal education in their own language require specialized instruction referred to as **EAL Literacy**.

# ■ Consultation Participants

## **This consultation has drawn upon the wisdom of many people including:**

Students attending or affiliated with Aboriginal Learning and Literacy Centre; Adult Basic Education Program of Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre; Brandon Friendship Centre; Community Adult Learning Centre-Flin Flon; Elmwood GOAL Program; Journeys Education Association; Kelsey School Division Adult Education Program; Learner Speakers Bureau; MacLeod ALC; Open Doors Adult Literacy Program; Pluri-elles (Manitoba); Portage Learning and Literacy Centre; Programs Using Lifelong Skills in Education (PULSE); Selkirk Adult Learning Program; Samaritan House Training Centre; Stephenson Britannia Adult Literacy Program; Swan River Adult Education Program; Victor Mager Bridge Program

Staff and other representatives of Adult Literacy Programs and Adult Learning Centres, and Essential Skills programming, including Adult Education Centres (AEC); Agassiz Adult Education Centre; Aboriginal Community Campus; Aboriginal Literacy Foundation; Adult Basic Education Program of Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre; Association of Parents and Professionals for Literacy Education (A.P.P.L.E.); Brandon Friendship Centre; Brandon Literacy Council;

Bridges to Communication-Employment Projects of Winnipeg; Elmwood GOAL Program; Empower Education Centre; English at Work, DAWN (Determining & Addressing Workplace Needs); Fieldstone Ventures Education and Training Centre; Frontier School Division Adult Education Program; Interlake Adult Learning Association (IALA); JobWORKS Employment Education Programs; John Howard Society of Manitoba; Journeys Education Association; Keewatin Adult Learning Centre; Kelsey School Division Adult Education Program; Laverne Morrisseau Adult Education Centre; LiteracyWORKS; Lord Selkirk Learning Centre; Luxton Adult Learning Program; Midland Adult Education Centre; Morden Adult Education Centre; Open Doors Adult Literacy Program; Pembina Valley Language/Education for Adults (PVLEA); Pluri-elles (Manitoba); Programs Using Lifelong Skills in Education (PULSE); Regional Alternative Education Centre; Ste. Anne Adult Learning Centre; Salvation Army STEP Program; Samaritan House Training Centre; South Eastman English and Literacy Services (SEELS); Steps to Success – YWCA Thompson; Stevenson Britannia Adult Literacy Program; Victor Mager Adult Literacy Program; Winnipeg Adult Education Centre EAL Programs; Winnipeg Second Stage Program; Workplace Education Manitoba; Workplace EAL; Yellowquill College

Staff and other representatives of non-government organizations and business: Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce; Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg; the Aboriginal Education Training and Literacy Adult Advisory Council (AETLAAC); Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Workforce; Adult Secondary Education Council; Bookmates, Inc.; Bristol Aerospace; Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development; Dynamic Resource Management; Employment Solutions for Immigrant Youth; English as an Additional Language (EAL) Link; (The) English Skills Centre; Fort Garry Seniors Resource Centre; Frontier College; Hudbay Mining, Inc.; Information and Communication Technologies Association of Manitoba; Literacy Partners of Manitoba; Loewen Windows; Manitoba Aerospace; Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres; Manitoba Customer Contact Association; Manitoba Library Association; Manitoba Lotteries Corporation; Manitoba Métis Federation; Mother of Red Nations Women's Council; National Indigenous Literacy Association; North Central Development (Thompson); Restorative Justice; Red River College Language Training Centre; St. Amant Adult Literacy Services; Society for Manitobans with Disabilities; Success Skills; Thompson Chamber of Commerce; Thompson Crisis Centre; Thompson Homeless Shelter; Thompson Reading Aides Council; UFCW (Thompson); Winnipeg Public Library Board; YWCA Thompson; Winnipeg School Division Adult EAL Program; Workplace Education Manitoba

Presidents and staff of Brandon University; University College of the North (UCN); University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg

Members of the general public who have specific interest in literacy

Staff and other representatives of Aboriginal Education Directorate; Industry Training Partnerships of Competiveness, Training and Trade; Language Training Branch of Labour and Immigration Manitoba; and Policy and Planning and Adult Learning and Literacy of Advanced Education and Literacy

## ■ Notes

1. Scott Murray is the International Study Director for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey and the President of DataAngel Policy Research Inc. He was the Director, Education Outcomes at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) where he was responsible for their programs of adult and student skill assessment. Mr. Murray has also held the post of Director General, Social and Institutional Statistics, and Director of Special Surveys Division at Statistics Canada.

# Information Resources

*Adult Literacy in Manitoba: A Discussion Paper*. April 2008.  
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/adultliteracystrategy/paper.html>

Statistics Canada. 2005. *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada  
[www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)

Statistics Canada. 2005. *Building on Our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada  
[www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca)

National Adult Literacy Database: an online repository containing program models, teaching and learning materials, assessment tools, research documents, etc.  
[www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca) and [www.naldatwork.ca](http://www.naldatwork.ca)