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Edmonton.....A draft White Paper outlining an Agenda For Change to Alberta's public adult learning system is now available for public review. The draft is the next stage in the Adult Learning: Access Through Innovation initiative announced by Jack Ady last Fall.

"Everyone who expressed an interest in our public consultation process last year will receive a copy of the draft White Paper in the mail," Mr. Ady stated. "The paper proposes a bold, new vision for the renewal of the province's adult learning system to the year 2005. The mission, goals and strategies in this draft White Paper are consistent with the outcomes of the first round of public consultations and the budget roundtable that were held last year and the business plan that we announced last month." Ady then added, "We are getting closer to defining a new future for adult learning and I am looking forward to the debate during the round two of our public consultation."

Each copy of the draft paper will contain a questionnaire response from so that every interested Albertan can provide input. In addition, a second round of consultation will be held with more than 300 stakeholders including both those who deliver education and training services and those who receive them. Two meetings will be held with approximately 150 people attending each one: May 2-3, 1994, at the Edmonton Inn in Edmonton and May 5-6, 1994, at the Sandman Inn in Calgary.

The draft White Paper sets four goals for the future of adult learning in Alberta: to foster individual responsibility in a learner-centered system, to ensure responsiveness and accountability to learners and taxpayers, to enable Albertans to participate in a changing economy and work force, and to promote access to affordable, quality learning opportunities. The paper then goes on to suggest 24 strategies to reach those goals.

The deadline for receipt of written responses is May 11, 1994. Copies of the draft White Paper can be obtained by calling 1-800-463-4597. In Edmonton call 420-1162. The deaf or hard of hearing should call (TTY-TDD) 1-800-855-1155. In Edmonton call 429-4900.

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I. BACKGROUND

Learning is fundamental to the economic prosperity and social well-being of Albertans. Learning is the means by which we can identify and benefit from the opportunities made possible through change. It also enriches our lives by providing us with knowledge to better understand and respond to our world.

Adult learning in Alberta is at a crossroads. Our adult learning system includes publicly funded post-secondary institutions, community-based learning providers, apprenticeship and other industry-based training programs, private colleges and vocational schools. The system has served us well. However, we have reached a point where it must change fundamentally from what it has been in the past, so that Albertans can grasp the opportunities of the future.

This draft White Paper proposes a strategic plan for the transformation of Alberta's adult learning system. It describes a new vision for adult learning in Alberta and outlines the goals that must be met to realize that vision. The paper details the strategies proposed by Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development to achieve these goals.

This draft White Paper is put before Albertans for discussion and comment. The responses and advice from learners, taxpayers, business and industry, institutional board members, administrators and faculty, and other stakeholders will help define the department's policy framework for adult learning in Alberta. This will be outlined in a White Paper, along with clear indications of how the department intends to measure progress towards achievement of its goals.

Access through Innovation: A Strategic Planning Process

The ideas proposed in this document emerged from the department's consultation with Albertans, entitled *Adult Learning: Access Through Innovation*. It is part of a strategic planning process implemented by Advanced Education and Career Development in the fall of 1992 in response to a number of trends that are affecting adult learning in the province. These trends include:

- * Increasing numbers of learners - Due to the "echo baby boom", the number of high school students will increase over the next 10 years. This factor, combined with the recent trend for an increasing proportion of high school graduates to seek post-secondary learning, leads to a forecast of more adult learners.
- * Changing characteristics of learners - Immigration patterns, an aging population, and greater participation in the labour market by women, aboriginal Albertans, disabled persons and others who have been under-represented in the past, require the adult learning system to respond to a wider range of social, cultural and economic needs.
- * Changing economy - Economic restructuring, technological change and increased global competition are changing the labour market and the skills required for employment. This is resulting in more adults of all ages seeking more and different types of education, training and re-training.
- * Shift in emphasis of income support programs - Support for education, training and re-training, with the aim of increasing individual self-sufficiency and reducing dependency on social support systems, is a priority both provincially and nationally.

* Changing nature of educational program delivery - Alternative forms of program delivery are becoming more widely available through the use of advanced technology. There is also an increasing involvement by private providers of education and training services, and a recognition of the importance of learning opportunities offered through on-the-job training.

* Increasing pressure on resources - The budget for Advanced Education and Career Development will decrease by 15.8% over the next three years. This will directly affect publicly funded learning providers.

The first round of public consultation meetings took place in centres throughout Alberta during the fall of 1993. Albertans expressed their views on the challenges before us and how they might be confronted. During these consultations, people spoke about:

- * the significance of education to the social, intellectual and economic life of Albertans and their communities;
- * the importance of adult learning to the development of a skilled work force;
- * coordination in the system of adult learning, including the problems of transferability within the system;
- * the challenges to public institutions;
- * institutional funding and student finance; and
- * the roles of individuals, institutions, industry and government.

In addition to the public consultation process, the department engaged in a series of budget discussions on the development of its three-year business plan. In July 1993 a workshop was held with representatives of post-secondary institutions to discuss the 1994-95 budget. In November a budget roundtable was held, bringing together a broad range of stakeholders representing both the deliverers and recipients of educational services to discuss strategies that would contribute to the government's goal of deficit reduction.

The department's three-year business plan was released in February 1994. The responses to this draft White Paper will influence future business plans.

The public's involvement in this consultation process to date has been considerable. Albertans have made it clear what is important to them in the area of adult learning. This draft White Paper is the department's response to the messages and ideas we have heard.

Further public consultation meetings will be held in May 1994 to obtain response to the proposed strategies outlined in this draft White Paper.

A policy framework for university research

This draft White Paper does not deal specifically with the topic of university research. During public consultation, the role of university research was confirmed as a vital, important part of Alberta's learning system and the province's economy. Universities play a key role in developing and applying new knowledge. Among the issues that deserve further discussion are the contribution of research to the economic goals of the province, and its role in graduate education, training highly qualified people and the transfer of technology. Within the coming year, the department will be a lead partner in a separate consultation with key stakeholders to develop a policy framework for university research.

II. A NEW VISION FOR ADULT LEARNING IN ALBERTA

In response to what we have heard from Albertans, we see a new vision for adult learning in Alberta.

In the year 2005, Alberta's adult learners will be recognized for the excellence of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences that enable them to

- * take responsibility for shaping their futures,
- * participate in a changing economy and work force, and
- * enrich the quality of life in their communities.

Alberta's adult learners will achieve excellence by participating in high quality, life-long learning opportunities.

The vision focuses on Albertans as active learners.

With the focus on learners and their needs, certain expectations of those who provide learning opportunities become apparent. In the context of this vision, the mission of the department will be as follows:

Advanced Education and Career Development will lead and work with other partners in facilitating new directions for adult learning that ensure for learners and taxpayers an accessible, responsive and affordable system of adult learning that is accountable for results.

The vision and strategies in this document set new directions for the future of adult learning in Alberta. In a system oriented toward adult learners, learners will take more responsibility for their learning, encouraging providers to be more responsive to and accountable for addressing their needs.

A renewed adult learning system will be characterized by the following features:

- * Quality is a priority.
- * Individual responsibility is the key to independent learning.
- * The system is driven by responsiveness to learner needs.
- * Albertans' knowledge and skill requirements in a global economy are continually being met.
- * Access is available to quality learning opportunities, in the classroom, at home and on the job.
- * Learning technologies are effective components of the learning system.
- * Scholarship and research create new knowledge.
- * On-the-job education and training are integral to the system.
- * Learners' progress is improved by the ability to transfer program credits and recognition of prior learning and experience.
- * Grants to institutions encourage and reward productivity and quality performance.
- * Public expenditures are cost-effective.
- * Learning providers and the department are accountable for results.

Alberta will be known for the quality and affordability of its adult learning system.

III. CHANGING ROLES IN THE RENEWED ADULT LEARNING SYSTEM

A renewed system of adult learning will be made possible through the commitment and effort of all who are concerned and involved in adult learning. The strategies outlined in this document will produce fundamental change in the roles, functions and activities of all stakeholders in the system.

Active Learners

As the focal point in the adult learning system, learners will have a substantially greater role to play, as well as greater responsibility. Learning providers will share performance indicators with students to support more informed choice among learners. Access to learning opportunities will be maximized in response to demand. The learning outcomes and success of students will play an important part in the institutional funding system. Student finance services will ensure learners are not denied access to educational opportunities on the basis of financial need.

Learners will have a greater individual responsibility for educational choices and progress. As well, students will be expected to contribute a greater proportion of the costs of their education, in accordance with the benefits they receive.

Providers

Learning providers, both public and private, will be more accountable to students and taxpayers for the expenditure of public resources. They will be evaluated on the basis of results achieved. Publicly funded institutions will work together to maximize access on a province-wide basis. New, effective education technologies will be encouraged to improve access and productivity on campus and at a distance.

Learning providers will be more responsive to the needs of individual, community and the economy. They will solicit information from industry about the needs of the labour market and encourage employers to play a greater role in program design. There will be more emphasis on non-public revenue sources. Linkages between institutions will be improved to enhance students' ability to transfer between programs. Where appropriate, private learning providers will be accredited so that they may play an expanded role in the adult learning system.

Communities

Communities will play an active role in defining local learning needs and priorities and communicating these needs to education and training providers. As well, communities will continue to play a strong role in the delivery of learning opportunities on a local basis, both on their own and in partnership with other educational providers.

Business and Industry

Business and industry is a broad categorization which includes employers, employees, and professional and trade organizations. They will play an expanded role by becoming active participants in the adult learning system. They will have an enhanced role in providing advice to the system both in terms of overall direction and specific program design. Employers will take a greater role in job-specific training. Industry will also be expected to contribute more to the costs of education and training.

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In consultation with Albertans, government will take an active leadership role in setting policy and direction for the system of adult learning in Alberta. Expectations for the adult learning system will be defined, benchmarks established, and key performance measures published to ensure learners are able to make educational, career and financial decisions on the basis of informed choice. The government will retain its role of consumer protection. However, the department will move away from the current system of program approval towards a broader system of provider accountability.

Government funding (that is, taxpayer support) is provided to adult learning because learning opportunities provide benefits to society as a whole which are broader than the benefits that accrue to the individual. Public funding will continue to support those areas where broad public benefits are demonstrated. Systems of accountability and funding will ensure the taxpayer investment in adult learning supports the highest possible quality for the amount invested. Government student finance assistance will ensure access that to learning opportunities is not [denied](#) to qualified and motivated Albertans on the basis of financial need.

IV. GOALS

In order to realize the vision for adult learning in Alberta, four goals have been identified:

- * Foster individual responsibility in a learner-centred system.
- * Ensure responsiveness and accountability to learners and taxpayers.
- * Enable Albertans to participate in a changing economy and work force.
- * Promote access to affordable, quality learning opportunities.

Goal 1: Foster individual responsibility in a learner-centred system

We heard during Round One of our public consultation that Albertans want a learner-driven adult learning system. Individual Albertans expect the adult learning system to offer them opportunities that are relevant to their learning needs, enable them to pursue lifelong learning, and prepare them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate fully in the economy and society. Adult learners recognize they must take greater responsibility both for their learning outcomes and the cost of their education, in line with their needs, abilities and anticipated future benefits. A focus on learners is vital to ensuring the results achieved in the adult learning system meet the objectives of those it serves.

Goal 2: Ensure responsiveness and accountability to learners and taxpayers

Alberta's adult learning system is being challenged to do more. Throughout Round One of our public consultation, Albertans told us the adult learning system must be more responsive to the labour market, to the differing needs of communities and to the changing social and economic environment. In addition, Albertans want the system to be more accountable to its users, with a focus on measuring program outcomes/results. Learners, taxpayers, and employers want assurances that adult learning programs and institutions are meeting their objectives. Key performance measures need to be defined and communicated to the public so learners can make informed choices. Finally, Albertans told us that methods to recognize prior learning and allow for the transfer of credit within the adult learning system must be improved in order to promote learning throughout life.

Goal 3: Enable Albertans to participate in a changing economy and work force

Economic restructuring, technological change and increased global competition are resulting in changes in the labour market and in the nature of employment. The overall effect of the changes has been a gradual upgrading of the skill requirements in the labour market. Creativity and general reasoning and thinking skills are also becoming increasingly important. General education and specific skill training are linked to Alberta's economic competitiveness.

In addition, a fundamental shift in our social support programs from passive income support to support for education and training is placing increased demands on our adult learning system to prepare people for employment. Social policy is undergoing reform, both provincially and nationally. There is a need to clarify federal and provincial roles, coordinate policy and remove duplication of services.

A consistent theme heard during public consultation was the need for more involvement of business and industry in education and training. There was also a message that a

stronger focus was required toward meeting labour market needs. Effective partnerships among learners, education and training providers, industry, and the community are seen as the key to meeting these needs.

Goal 4: Promote accessibility to affordable, quality learning opportunities

The adult learning system must respond to the increased demand for learning opportunities at a cost that is within the ability of taxpayers and learners to pay. Funding arrangements that are linked to standards and results will be a key force in encouraging the innovation and program delivery changes that are necessary to meet this goal. The ways public resources are allocated should encourage effectiveness and productivity.

More than three-quarters of the revenue currently received by publicly funded post-secondary institutions is in the form of government grants. The current funding system presumes that dollars will drive quality. However, as comparisons with other jurisdictions indicate, the link between funding and quality is not direct. With the reduction in provincial operating grants to publicly funded institutions, there is an urgent need to improve the effectiveness of the use of public funding.