



**MINISTER
OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

Room 358
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8
CANADA

Mr. Jeff Harwood
Chair, Board of Governors
Assiniboine Community College

Dear Mr. Harwood:

As the recently appointed Minister of Economic Development and Training with responsibility for post-secondary education in Manitoba, I am very excited to work with all of our post-secondary partners to strengthen positive outcomes for students; to build the skilled workforce needed to drive Manitoba's economy forward; and to promote a high quality of life for all of our residents.

It became evident to me in the first few weeks of my new role, that our colleges and universities share these goals. I have also been pleased with the keen interest expressed by institutional presidents to work together to build a system of advanced education that leverages our strengths, grows our economy and delivers a brighter future for Manitoba as a whole. Together, we can contribute to achieving the outcomes of Manitoba's Economic Growth Action Plan, meet the objectives of the forthcoming Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, and deliver on the commitment to build 40,000 new jobs in our province.

The purpose of this letter is to provide strategic direction and outline expectations of Manitoba's publicly funded post-secondary institutions in achieving our shared goals.

Supporting Student Success

We all want Manitoba's post-secondary students to succeed with their studies, connect with good jobs and enjoy a high quality of life. To support student success, collaboration among institutions, industry and government is essential. Colleges and universities are expected to undertake focused efforts to increase positive student outcomes, including facilitating movement among institutions.

There is significant work to do. Our system must be accessible and provide high quality education that supports students to graduate with the skills and experience needed to thrive. Success can mean different things, including employment upon graduation or layering credentials but ultimately students will be putting the skills they gained to work and meeting a labour market need.

Over the next year, post-secondary institutions will work together, in partnership with the Province, to further define student successes and continue to build data capacity to enable measurement of outcomes over time. Going forward, leveraging this foundational data work, Manitoba will be developing a new model for post-secondary funding based on performance, and will be engaging institutions in the design.

Full participation of Indigenous people in Manitoba's economy is critical to improving quality of life and to building a stronger social and economic fabric of our province; and education is fundamental for reconciliation. It is expected that all institutions will partner with Indigenous communities to ensure that Indigenous students can access and successfully complete their studies gaining the skills needed for success and secure employment. This should be done in collaboration across all institutions, leveraging existing tables such as the Indigenous Education Blueprint, and focusing on leading practices that demonstrate evidence of positive outcomes.

Promoting student success also means ensuring that they can learn in a safe and appropriate environment. Manitoba introduced *The Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention Act* to strengthen student safety on campus, prevent incidents of sexual violence through education and training, and provide appropriate responses and accommodations to survivors. To support these efforts further, each institution should align their codes and policies to the highest standards, including banning intimate or sexual relationships between teaching staff and students they supervise, and establishing clear consequences for staff who breach the policy. A safe and healthy environment to study and work must be standard and not the exception. The Province will consider further legislative means to establish the highest level of protections for students and staff if required.

Partnerships with Industry

Post-secondary institutions need to be closely connected to industry to ensure programs meet workforce needs and students gain the right skills and competencies to succeed. There are numerous examples of successful partnerships at all of our Manitoba institutions, however, more alignment and collaboration is needed in order to meet the demands of our ever-evolving world of work.

Over the coming months, the province will establish a new table to facilitate greater dialogue between post-secondary institutions and industry in Manitoba. This will enable a closer connection to employers and innovators, and promote alignment. We will also coordinate connections with our industry sector councils, as well as our strategic and regional economic development partners. In addition, the department will be bringing forward new labour market information tools to assist institutions to respond to shifts in skills needed in our workforce and therefore the changes needed to our academic programs.

More than ever, it is critical that our colleges and universities be nimble and responsive, ceasing programs that lack responsiveness and value in a modern context and building programs that deliver the skills needed for today and tomorrow. It is expected that Manitoba's post-secondary institutions will become more agile and continuously make changes to their systems in order to be more responsive to the pace of labour market changes. To facilitate this shift, my department will also streamline and expedite its program approval processes.

Work-Integrated Learning

To help students connect to good jobs, drive innovation, and meet the needs of Manitoba's employers, more collaborative efforts with business and industry to increase experiential learning opportunities are required. This can include co-operative work placements, internships, land-based learning and practicums. Work-integrated learning opportunities should be considered for all advanced education programs. Over the coming months, my department will work with institutions to move this work forward.

I was pleased to hear at a recent meeting with post-secondary presidents that our colleges and universities are also eager to build greater opportunities for students to connect to work during their studies. Manitoba is well placed to be on the leading edge of this important facet of advanced learning.

International Education

Students coming to study in Manitoba from abroad add diversity and contribute to the skills and talent needed in our economy. Planning for international student recruitment must focus on connecting students to programs that build the skills that are in demand in Manitoba. All colleges and universities will be expected to work in partnership, in a coordinated, "Team Manitoba" fashion, to attract students to our province. This collaborative, systems approach will benefit all institutions, industry and our economy. This will also ensure potential students clearly see the benefits to studying and working in Manitoba; ensure that student recruitment is undertaken with integrity; and facilitate immigration opportunities.

Stewardship of Public Funds

The Province of Manitoba expends over one billion dollars annually on our post-secondary system, through direct funding to institutions and indirectly through student financial supports, tax credits and research funding, among other supports. Manitobans expect that all public sector organizations operate with sound oversight, financial accountability and transparency as core principles. Manitoba is continuing its efforts to achieve fiscal and workforce sustainability and this requires all of our public sector entities, including post-secondary institutions, to be aligned with government policies and priorities with respect to compensation for executive employees and management staffing levels.

The Province has made difficult decisions to help stabilize our finances while protecting our front line services. In the same way, we expect post-secondary institutions to ensure the financial sustainability of our post-secondary education system. Institutions must employ lean principles, reducing duplication, increasing efficiencies, and ensuring that expenditures consider value for taxpayer's dollars. Specifically, opportunities to develop and implement a shared services model for 'back office' functions, such as procurement, centralized applications, and other related administrative activities should be explored. In addition, institutions should coordinate academic programming to reduce duplication of effort and achieve economies of scale.

It is expected that institutions operate with balanced budgets, in a fiscally responsible manner. Institutions must seek approval from the provincial government on all institution-owned or controlled capital projects, including approval of related operating expenditures, regardless of the funding source. Each organization should develop five-year capital plans and submit those plans to the Province for review.

The success of Manitoba's students depends on the success of our partnerships and our ability to collaborate toward a shared vision. We need to work together to ensure that our students receive high quality education, one that gives our students the best chance for rewarding careers, and builds the skills and talent needed in our workforce. Institutions, industry, the Province, and others each have an important role to play in strengthening our economy and delivering positive outcomes for students.

I look forward to continuing dialogue and collaboration with our post-secondary partners to build a brighter future for all of Manitoba.

Sincerely,

Honourable Ralph Eichler
Minister of Economic Development
and Training

c. Mr. Mark Frison, President and CEO, Assiniboine Community College