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Concerns and Recommendations Regarding the 2025 Expert Panel Report on Post-Secondary Funding and Alberta's Competitiveness

Dear Minister McDougall,

We appreciate the Panel's efforts and recognize several positive elements in the Expert Panel Report on Post-Secondary Funding and Alberta's Competitiveness. In particular, we welcome

- **Movement toward more predictable base funding**, which supports long-term planning and operational stability.
- **Separation of major IT investments from operational budgets**, which will strengthen cybersecurity and innovation capacity.
- **Reduction of reporting burdens and streamlined program-approval processes**, which will lessen administrative overload and support institutional agility.

However, we are deeply concerned about several recommendations that, taken together, risk undermining Alberta's post-secondary sector, its autonomy, and its public mission.

1. DEI and "Institutional Neutrality"

The report frames diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives as potential threats to merit and academic freedom. This framing rests on the false assumption that existing structures are neutral and meritocratic. DEI initiatives do not diminish merit; they help correct longstanding inequities in access and participation.

Likewise, the report's use of "institutional neutrality" misinterprets the University of Chicago's Kalven Report. Kalven protects universities' internal independence so they can challenge societal assumptions; it does not support externally imposed silence on social, ethical, or political issues. Redefining neutrality in this way risks chilling academic speech, preventing institutions from responding to issues such as racism, climate change, or human rights, and ultimately undermines academic freedom.

2. Cluster Funding and Marketization

The proposed cluster-based model reduces education to workforce training and economic utility. This approach

- Masks the real cause of financial strain—decades of declining public funding.
- Privileges large research universities over teaching-focused institutions.

- Devalues humanities and social sciences, which are essential to civic life, leadership, ethical reasoning, and democratic resilience.
- Introduces instability through frequent recalibration cycles.

Education is more than labour-market alignment; it is also the cultivation of informed, critical, and responsible citizens.

3. Tuition Cap Removal

Allowing tuition to rise without limits for each new cohort will create inequities between students in the same classroom, harm those who delay entry by even one year, and place an increasing financial burden on students. This undermines accessibility at a time when affordability is already a major barrier.

4. Institutional Autonomy

While the report claims to support institutional autonomy, its recommendations, such as restricting DEI initiatives and redefining neutrality, significantly increase government direction over university governance, values, and intellectual priorities. Performance-based funding tied to government-defined metrics further constrains independence and risks distorting academic decision-making.

Overall Concerns

Taken together, these recommendations shift Alberta's post-secondary system away from its core mission of broad knowledge creation, critical inquiry, and public service. They advance a model that increases government control, narrows the educational purpose to short-term economic goals, and weakens the intellectual diversity that drives innovation.

Predictable base funding is welcomed and important. Our main concerns are about academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and equitable access. A strong post-secondary system requires stable funding, respect for disciplinary diversity, and protection of universities' ability to speak openly, pursue critical research, and serve the public good.

Conclusion

We urge the Ministry to reconsider the report's recommendations on DEI, neutrality, cluster funding, and tuition caps, and to engage in meaningful consultation with faculty, students, and institutions. Alberta's competitiveness and prosperity depend on a post-secondary sector that is autonomous, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant—not one constrained by narrow economic or political directives.

We would welcome the opportunity for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Brenda Lang

MRFA President