MRFA Model PSE Platform

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Purpose

Post-secondary education in Alberta needs champions – citizens and the next generation of policymakers who recognize the great value and strategic importance of a healthy, well-supported PSE system to the future of this province – people who understand that PSE is a core need in the broad public interest, not an individual luxury. If you are seeking public office and care about PSE and about our current and future students, we ask that you consider adopting this platform. If you are a citizen, even if you are not yet eligible to vote, we encourage you to share this model platform and ask each candidate what they are doing, specifically, to help ensure that Alberta's PSE system is accessible, affordable and of high quality.

Overall Vision for PSE in Alberta

An autonomous, diverse, strong and well-supported system of post-secondary education, accomplished through universities, colleges and technical institutes, promotes an enlightened, engaged citizenry and a healthy democracy. It both enhances individual quality of life and has clear benefits to society at large. It drives innovation and economic diversity, while ensuring a skilled, adaptable workforce. Post-secondary institutions play a major role in the cultural and economic lives of their surrounding communities.

Post-secondary education in Alberta shall be accessible, affordable and of high quality.

Accessible: although per-program admission must necessarily be competitive, overall there shall be a sufficient quantity of student seats in Alberta so that no qualified Alberta applicant is denied the opportunity to study in this province.

Affordable: student tuition and fees shall not present a significant barrier to participation by qualified Canadian applicants, regardless of socioeconomic background. It shall be possible for students to earn an education by focusing on their studies full-time, and without needing to accumulate stifling debt loads.

High quality: vibrant curricula shall be developed, delivered and regularly renewed by a well-supported faculty complement. Faculty shall have sufficient time and resources to engage with and mentor students, including individually, to maintain professional and scholarly currency, and to serve their academic and institutional communities. To ensure the integrity of this support, the clear majority of faculty at each institution shall have full-time appointments.

Funding and Tuition

The provision of accessible, affordable, high quality programs requires predictable, stable and sufficient per-institution, per-program and per-student funding. These shall be accomplished as follows:

- each PSE institution shall have adequate operating revenue to

        - support its academic programs at the target enrolment for each
        - deliver essential student services
        - maintain a well-supported, majority full-time faculty complement
        - focus on its core educational mission
    - at each PSE institution, the majority of operating revenue shall be through operating grants

the annual change in each institution's base operating grant shall not be less than the rate of inflation (where programs and target enrolments are constant)

- Alberta shall strive to have the best-funded and most affordable PSE system in Canada. On average across all PSE institutions, the amount of institutional revenue from operating grant funding shall recover to at least 70%, with no more than 20% from student tuition and fees, by 2020
- operational funding for PSE shall be budgeted based on stable provincial revenue sources. Further, a PSE-specific stabilization fund shall be established so that operating grant levels can be predicted reliably over a multi-year window starting no later than 2018
- funding for campus capital projects shall be accompanied by appropriate "lights-on" operational funding adjustments

Legislation and Regulation

- tuition regulation legislation shall be maintained, such that tuition increases are never greater than the rate of inflation
    - tuition market modifiers shall not be used to bolster general institutional revenues
    - the introduction of non-instructional fees shall require Ministry approval, and increases in existing fees shall be regulated

Consultation

- consultation shall be undertaken with stakeholders, and best practices shall be examined in other jurisdictions, in order to determine a maximum percentage of institutional expense budgets that may be allocated for administrative functions
- faculty, staff and students are well-positioned to provide input on the current state of our PSE system. Regular consultation shall include opportunities for input to government from student, faculty, staff and public stakeholders

System-Wide Issues

- opportunities for cooperation and coordination between institutions and with government shall be explored, while respecting institutional autonomy. It is not the role of government to dictate the set of available programs
- coordination of transfer credit between institutions shall continue to be facilitated provincially, while respecting the ability of each institution to offer a broad range of programs, and while respecting institutional differences and diversity of mandates