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## **Proposed Adult Education Policy Framework**

Our proposed adult education policy framework for Ontario builds on the experience of other jurisdictions, the advice of stakeholders, and the advice in the literature consulted.

## Experience of Other Jurisdictions

Through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and interjurisdictional collaboration, education ministers have a forum to support and improve adult education and training to obtain both economic and social benefits by sharing expertise and best practices and by developing a definition and a policy framework for adult education in Canada.

CMEC conducted a survey of provinces and territories in June 2003. At that time, only Quebec, Alberta, and New Brunswick had developed or were developing comprehensive policy frameworks in lifelong learning.<sup>25</sup> Ontario's Adult Education Review had not yet begun.

The CMEC study included an overview of international trends in adult education and lifelong learning. The following were of interest to Ontario:

- Developed countries focus on adult education to address labour market needs and link adult education to the development of a sustainable knowledge economy. Thus they focus on accessibility for disadvantaged groups and people with low literacy levels, and are increasingly formalizing programs for outreach and education.
- The role of social partners in shaping adult education policy has increased, particularly partnerships between governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and community groups.
- More and more adults are seeking recognition of their prior learning, knowledge, and skills.

- Stakeholders are exploring the appropriate use of ICT to support lifelong learning.
- There is limited use of research findings to improve the theory and practice of adult education.<sup>26</sup>

The report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>27</sup> concludes that the key to improving adult learning opportunities in member countries lies in an integrated approach to policies and practices regarding access and participation. The report highlights five key dimensions of policy initiatives:

- making learning more attractive to adults by a learner-centred approach that includes adult learning principles, flexibility in the provision of services, outreach policies, and recognition of prior learning
- measures to stimulate employment-related training for workers and the unemployed, engage the private sector, and remove barriers to participation
- financial incentives to invest in the human capital of adults, at both the individual and enterprise level, and stimulate participation
- approaches to improve the quality of adults' learning with an emphasis on quality control and outcomes measures
- adopting a co-ordinated approach with an emphasis on partnerships among the various players, including government, business, labour, public and private delivery agencies, and community organizations

The OECD report concludes by stressing the importance of making explicit the roles of the various actors in adult learning — individuals, business, delivery agents, and government — if a policy framework is to be implemented successfully.

<sup>25</sup> John Biss, *Adult Learning and Adult Education*, p. ii.

<sup>26</sup> John Biss, *Adult Learning and Adult Education*, pp. 10–12.

<sup>27</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices: Highlights* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003), p. 8.

## Proposed Policy Framework

The elements of our proposed adult education policy framework are meant to guide program planners and decision makers to put in place a comprehensive set of programs and services to meet their priorities and to create mechanisms for planning, funding, management, and accountability that are transparent and ensure effective and efficient use of public resources.

The policy framework proposes action on six key elements:

1. investment in skills development
2. learner pathways
3. accessibility and inclusion
4. innovation and excellence in teaching and learning
5. funding and accountability
6. research

### 1. Investment in Skills Development

- a range of program options to meet learner needs — language skills, literacy and numeracy, upgrading, opportunities for high school completion, workplace-related skills, co-operative and supported work placements
- programs and services that enable participants to make the transition to higher-level learning, to getting or keeping a job, or to greater involvement in the community
- monitoring developing needs for new skills
- identifying and monitoring the economic and social benefits of adult learning
- engaging partners to invest in adult learning

### 2. Learner Pathways

- valuing and recognizing prior learning
- common and standard tools to assess learning and skill acquisition
- validating credentials
- information and referral

- learning benchmarks
- partnerships for service delivery
- clear pathways to the workplace or other learning opportunities such as secondary school credit and diploma, apprenticeship, postsecondary
- co-ordination and linkages among funding and delivery agencies
- service planning and co-ordination to meet local needs

### 3. Accessibility and Inclusion

- accommodating learner needs
- addressing barriers to learning
- learning close to home or work
- access to training supports — child care, transportation
- outreach to potentially excluded learners
- meeting the particular cultural and linguistic needs of various communities (francophones, Aboriginal people, the deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind)
- compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*
- access to educational opportunities throughout life

### 4. Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning

- flexibility to respond to local needs
- professional development and communities of practice for the adult education workforce
- province-wide access to and sharing of resources and materials to support learning
- use of ICT to support learning where appropriate, given access issues such as costs of technology and limited literacy levels
- sharing best practices through local, regional, and provincial forums and online mechanisms

## 5. Funding and Accountability

- support for government priorities
- incentives for innovation and local partnerships
- links to a broad range of agreed-upon outcomes
- links to return on investment across a number of indicators
- accountability and clear roles and relationships among funding ministries and delivery agencies
- accountability measures for achievement of economic, social, and personal development goals
- accountability mechanisms for monitoring and continuous improvement
- accountability mechanisms to enable flexibility and innovation to meet local needs
- efficiency and effectiveness

## 6. Research

- labour market research
- research on the results of adult education investments, including social outcomes
- research on best practices in adult education
- applied research
- dissemination of research to support excellence and innovation and to enable evidence-based decision making in policy and practice

Further details of the proposed policy framework would be designed and implemented through action on the recommendations discussed in Section 7 of this report.