

May 25, 2020

Name
Title
Institution
Email

Dear **Name**:

I would like to thank you and your institution for your efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleges and universities in our province have demonstrated flexibility and nimbleness by pivoting to support student success in a remote learning environment. In addition, Manitoba's post-secondary institutions have risen to the challenge through such efforts as donating personal protective equipment (PPE), deploying staff to support provincial PPE procurement, leading the fight against the virus through cutting edge research, and even having medical students volunteering to comfort patients who are isolated.

While Manitoba has done very well in limiting the transmission of the virus, we have nonetheless faced significant health and financial challenges and we anticipate that we are not out of the woods yet. One thing we do know is that our world will not be the same in the post-pandemic context. Our post-secondary system is not immune to the changes and must shift, respond and adapt to our new economic and labour market needs and realities in Manitoba.

Our colleges and universities will play a critical role in our province's economic recovery. Manitoba will have a new labour market landscape, with altered skills needs. Employees displaced in the economic downturn will be turning to our institutions to refresh their skills and connect to work. We have businesses who need employees with specific skills and abilities, and individuals who need good jobs. We want our students to succeed in their studies, and secure employment that provides a high quality of life for themselves and their families. Manitoba also needs to focus on leading the country in cutting edge research, attracting talent and promoting innovation in our province. Having strong and responsive post-secondary institutions is key to our future. Going forward, there will need to be more attention paid to supply and demand in our workforce. Students receiving general degrees, with the important power skills employers tell us are needed in the workplace such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication, must be connected to work during their studies to facilitate a quicker connection to employers upon completion.

COVID-19 is certainly affecting post-secondary education in Manitoba. Domestic student enrolment in the fall term remains uncertain and reduced international student enrolment could impact revenues. While some individuals will be seeking opportunities to up-skill, others may not have confidence or have questions about the value of on-line education. Revenue from campus services such as residences will be affected.

Recently, we worked together to articulate scenarios where institutions could harness savings from facility closures and other changes necessitated by the pandemic towards the fiscal challenges that the virus has imposed on our province. This exercise itemized savings from things like staffing and operations that are not fully engaged due to in-person service limitations over the spring and summer (e.g. cafeteria staff) and reduced costs from pandemic travel restrictions. We recognize that a full resolution of the complete financial impact of the virus on campus has not yet occurred, and we will need to continue to collaborate to review these issues and consider increases to tuition as well.

To ensure that our post-secondary institutions are able to respond effectively to these new economic and social realities, we are enhancing our support through the creation of a one-time Transitional Support Fund of \$25.6 million. This fund represents the savings identified by the recent review exercise and the restoration of the one per cent reduction in funding that had been planned in Budget 2020 prior to the onset of COVID-19.

Access to this funding will require your institution to submit a plan that articulates how this funding will be used to orient programs toward labour market demands; to ensure high quality education for our students through new and enhanced online materials and tools; and/or to respond to unanticipated changes in enrolments and other challenges posed by the coronavirus. Proposals for the fund should be submitted to the Department by September 15, 2020, when more information on the impacts of the pandemic to post-secondary institutions are better known. Significant dialogue should occur in advance of this to work together to understand the challenges and opportunities and inform proposals. The Department will then be able to respond to institutions expeditiously, so that you may appropriately plan and deliver for your students.

{Institution specific information}

Premier Pallister recently announced a new Manitoba Economic Opportunities Advisory Board, which will provide advice on economic recovery and the skills and knowledge needed for growth as we rebuild our economy. I expect that the talented individuals on this team will have suggestions for how we can rebound from the downturn and how our colleges and universities can partner with industry to promote positive outcomes for all of Manitoba. As noted in your mandate letter, we will be shifting to an outcomes-based funding model for our post-secondary system and programming alignments made today will better position your institution for future funding considerations. We will be seeking advice from the new Advisory Board on this, and I look forward to working with you as we develop this important framework. As their work unfolds, we anticipate further targeted investments to assist our post-secondary institutions as they align with the workforce needs of our recovering economy.

In addition, we are currently seeking input from the Advisory Board on the Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy, which represents a roadmap for our colleges, universities and industry partners to work together to improve outcomes. Thank you for your input into this plan, which complements the recently released Horizon Report and underscores the need for a team approach to higher education. The nimbleness and flexibility demonstrated by our post-secondary partners to shift in the face of COVID-19 will be key to shifting programming in the post-COVID world as we work together to rebound and grow, and this new funding will assist in that transformation journey.

Proposals and reports may be directed to Colleen Kachulak, Assistant Deputy Minister, Advanced Education and Skills, at Colleen.Kachulak@gov.mb.ca or 204-945-3990.

With this investment in our post-secondary system, combined with Manitoba's strong and resilient institutions and industries as well as significant collaboration across sectors, we have good reason for optimism as we recover and rebuild from this unprecedented situation.

Sincerely,

"Original signed by"

Jan Forster
Deputy Minister
Economic Development and Training

- c. Honourable Ralph Eichler, Minister of Economic Development and Training
- Colleen Kachulak, Assistant Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, Economic Development and Training
- Sonya Penner, Executive Director, Post-Secondary Education and Labour Market Outcomes, Economic Development and Training