

January 26, 2018

I am writing on behalf of the Executive of the Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL) in response to the paper entitled *A Vision for Adult Education in Ontario* prepared by the Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration. We currently represent 12 Ontario universities, (Carleton University, University of Guelph, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Ryerson University, Trent University, University of Waterloo, Western University and York University). Since most of the guiding questions within the paper refer more to current individual institutional practice, our comments are directed more towards the broader vision and scope of the paper.

First, I would like to provide some information about our organization: as our title suggests, the Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL) is a professional association of educators who develop and deliver degree and non-degree continuing education programs. Our members include administrators and practitioners such as faculty, instructional designers and educational technologists. Through collaboration and sharing OCULL advocates for adult learners at Ontario universities, develops collegial networks, and provides opportunities for professional development for its members. These goals are achieved through Community of Practice webinars, an Annual Retreat, and our listserv, as well as building partnerships with organizations, government, and industry for the benefit of members and client groups. OCULL has existed since 1994 and is an affiliate of the Council of Ontario Universities.

The member institutions of our association are Ontario universities that have been serving the needs of adult learners in dedicated ways through their continuing education and online learning units. Their credit and non-credit programming and learner supports continue to serve the full spectrum of adult learners. As an example, many university continuing education units already offer various carefully developed university level programs for adult learners who are new to either the country and/or who require further educational preparation, as well as specific professional and career-oriented programs tailored to their individualized needs.

Overall, the paper does a good job of presenting the current programming that is in place with funding from the ministry and outlines a variety of good ideas such as the concept of dual credentials, the partnership with Code for Canada and the emphasis on bridge training programs within an integrated framework. On the other hand, the manifold work of University Continuing Education units perform in supporting capacity building in the labour market, (i.e. credit and non-credit continuing education options, part time undergraduate degrees, university certificates, graduate diplomas and other credentials, flexibility, open access and digital education), needs to be supported, recognized and leveraged by the Ministry in the overall structure of The Adult Education System described on page 15 of the paper. In fact, the paper does not highlight any of the opportunities provided to adult learners with university in-class continuing education and online university continuing education.

In responding broadly to the guiding question in Part A, the paper clearly identifies that there is still important work that needs to be done to meet the information needs of adult learners (Questions 2 and 3). OCULL would support the creation of a provincial portal and sustained

investment in designated staffing on a regional level covering all education sectors, including universities and colleges combined, to ensure both proper dissemination of information to adult learners along with effective reaching out to adult learners.

In addition to promoting the more wide-spread acceptance and standardization of PLAR across the various educational sectors, OCULL would also welcome the creation of a framework that identifies core competencies and essential skills for adult learners (Question 20) and a system-wide competency mapping to all adult education/continuing education university and college level programs based on these competencies. These competencies should include transferable/soft skills to make adult students more adaptable and responsive to changing workforce expectations.

One suggestion to ever-changing 21st-century demographics and workforce imperatives particularly in the Professional, Finance, scientific (STEM) and IT sectors is through Adult Education university competency-based education (CBE) since full-time positions in these sectors usually require a University undergrad degree or higher (not CBE at the college level).

Such a program would be personalized at the level of the individual and delivered in a Makerspace environment with:

- i) high employment outcome-driven, “deep learning” content and real workplace projects; and
- ii) wrap-around "learner care" support modalities including virtual tutors via texting, Skype and email; with updates to course content, activities and hands-on application every 4 months to ensure currency with workforce needs.

Possible Results of CBE Programs would answer the imperatives of how to reduce for employers’ human capital skills' gaps by building CBE Makerspace programs; and how to yield for adults Millennials and Gen Z entry into the current and next fastest-growing job markets with built-in career portability, advancement and longevity.

Overall, there is no clear definition of what constitutes an adult learner and the multitude of socio-economic and work-life balance pressures with which they have to cope. The paper also appears to be centered very much on serving adult learners in urban and Anglophone settings. Ontario is a vast province with rural, francophone and Indigenous populations whose needs are not adequately reflected or identified in the paper. We would like to see a more inclusive representation of today’s adult learner as it relates to the province’s planning for a prepared workforce.

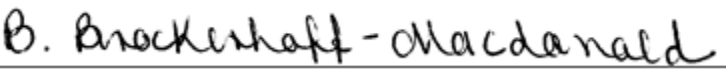
In closing, we would like to highlight that the lack of recognition of current university continuing education programming in support of adult education in Ontario is very short-sighted as universities through their continuing and adult education units are uniquely focused on the learning and career needs of today’s—and tomorrow’s—adult learners. They are providing responsive programming to adults’ transitioning to Canada, and to adults who are seeking

academic and professionally focused certificates and diplomas that prepare them for new and emerging jobs.

As the discussion around a comprehensive vision for adult education in Ontario continues, OCULL would respectfully ask for more inclusion and recognition of the contributions that university continuing education units are making to creating and supporting a competency-trained and skilled workforce. Our voice should be included in helping shape the steps necessary to create a strong and prosperous Ontario.

OCULL looks forward to be invited to, and to participate in, the Ministry's next steps as they unfold.

Respectfully,



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