

STRENGTHENING ONTARIO'S ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM



*A discussion paper to guide public consultation
about ways to improve adult education in Ontario*

December 2017

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We invite all adult education partners to share feedback about strengthening the adult education system in Ontario to ensure that adult learners are well supported and able to achieve their goals. Feedback may be provided in written responses submitted by January 31, 2018. Adult learners will also be invited to participate in targeted focus groups. We will report back on the findings of this consultation and next steps in winter 2018. For information on how to participate, see page 7.

About the Consultation

This discussion paper is designed to support a transparent, equitable, and inclusive conversation with adult education partners, including current and prospective learners, those who work with adult learners, and other key partners supporting the delivery of adult education. We are seeking your feedback on priority areas identified by the provincial government to fulfil the vision of a seamless and learner-centred adult education system¹ that provides all Ontarians with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills and participate fully in Ontario's highly skilled workforce and constantly evolving society. Your feedback is valuable and will help us further develop and implement plans for adult education in Ontario.

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development and its partner ministries, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, have identified key priorities on which to solicit your input. With your feedback and collaboration, we hope to build on the strengths of the existing system to make it more seamless and learner-centred.

We are eager to hear:

- ◆ your ideas on how, together, we can better support the diversity of adult learners' needs and abilities;
- ◆ your feedback on the ideas, priorities, planned actions, and next steps that we have developed so far, as set out in this document.

1. Adult education programming in Ontario provides opportunities for adults to pursue a wide variety of learning, career, and personal goals. Programs are available to support adults in upgrading their language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, as well as specific workplace skills; accessing apprenticeship, college, and university programs; and making use of their international qualifications and experience. For more information, see "Current Adult Education Programming: An Overview" on page 14.

Based on what the government has heard from partners so far, we have identified priorities for enhancing adult education programs and the overall system to improve the learner experience. The government is already moving forward with certain priority initiatives (“What We Are Doing”) and planning others (“What We Are Planning”). We are also exploring the priorities to be addressed in the future (“What We Are Exploring”).

We are looking for feedback on the following.

What We Are Doing

The government is currently:

- ◆ enhancing access to information about programs and services;
- ◆ improving and expanding literacy and essential skills training through the government’s investment in the Literacy and Basic Skills program;
- ◆ introducing innovations in adult secondary education programs; and
- ◆ providing programming for immigrants.

What We Are Planning

The government is developing plans for:

- ◆ enhancing support for regional collaboration and partnerships;
- ◆ improving procedures for recognizing prior learning for adults to support efficient pathways; and
- ◆ piloting new program models (for example, Contextualized Essential Skills and Career Pathways).

What We Are Exploring

The government is exploring potential strategies for:

- ◆ improving system intake, guidance, and pathway planning; and
- ◆ strengthening the recognition of core competencies for success in a 21st century economy and society.

How to Participate

We encourage you to participate in this consultation. Your thoughts and opinions are important to us and will inform the government's next steps in implementing the priority actions already underway, those for which we are planning, and priorities we are exploring.

Throughout this discussion paper, you will find guiding questions that are intended to prompt your feedback on priority areas and next steps. You are free to select which questions you would like to respond to. Some of the questions are targeted to adult education service providers, while others are more general. If you wish, you may also go beyond the guiding questions to share additional feedback.

Please submit your comments by e-mailing us your written submissions at lifelonglearning@ontario.ca.

If you have any questions on how to participate in this review, please e-mail lifelonglearning@ontario.ca.

Please note: All comments and submissions received will become part of the public record.

We will report back on what we heard from this consultation and share next steps in winter 2018.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Introduction

The evolving knowledge economy, the effects of globalization, and the rapid pace of technological advances across all sectors continue to change the landscape in which we work and live.

There is convincing evidence to suggest that in Ontario, as in other OECD² countries, the pace of economic and technological change may make it increasingly difficult for people to acquire the skills that are in demand, so that they can participate fully in civic life and the workforce. Even today, almost 700,000 Ontarians between the ages of 25 and 64 are without a high school diploma. Lifelong learning opportunities are essential to enable all Ontarians to participate successfully in our ever-changing highly skilled workforce. The government is committed to supporting Ontarians in learning throughout their lives.

Each year almost 200,000 Ontarians participate in adult education programs. Nevertheless, data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)³ indicate that many more Ontarians, both unemployed and employed, would benefit from the opportunity to upgrade skills that are foundational to their success, including language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. It would appear that the need for accessible, high-quality adult education programs in Ontario is greater than the number of learners currently being served. The government is committed to ensuring more accessible, flexible, relevant, and engaging learning opportunities to help more adult learners achieve their education, career, and personal goals. The province is also committed to supporting adult learners more effectively in overcoming barriers that may limit their participation.

2. The OECD is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a forum in which the governments of thirty-five member countries work together to foster prosperity through economic growth and sustainable development.

3. The PIAAC is a household study conducted by the OECD to assess key cognitive and workplace skills needed for successful participation in 21st century society and the global economy.

There is a great diversity of needs, abilities, backgrounds, and aspirations among the population participating in adult education programming today, as well as among those who might benefit but are not yet enrolled in adult education programs. These groups include:

- ◆ adults who want to develop the skills they need to fully participate in the 21st century knowledge economy and society;
- ◆ adults who are completing secondary school or are upgrading their learning in order to enter postsecondary education, apprenticeship training, or employment;
- ◆ immigrants, including internationally trained professionals and tradespeople, who want to improve their language skills, upgrade their workplace skills, or establish Canadian equivalency of foreign credentials to prepare for better job opportunities and more active participation in society;
- ◆ Indigenous people seeking to upgrade their skills in culturally appropriate settings that allow them to remain connected to their communities;
- ◆ francophone learners who want to achieve their goals through programs in their own language;
- ◆ people with disabilities who want to obtain the skills they need to participate more fully in the workplace or in their communities, including Deaf and Deafblind learners who want to upgrade their skills in their own language and in culturally appropriate settings;
- ◆ workers, including self-employed professionals, seeking to update their skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the workplace or economy and/or to prepare for a career change;
- ◆ individuals who want to move toward greater self-sufficiency and independence.

Every Ontarian who participates in adult education programming is unique and has individual learning goals. Adult learners have diverse personal needs and learning pressures, whether they are caring for young children, have recently immigrated, or left school some time ago for personal reasons. In many instances, “their re-entry into the learning environment ... requires a profound leap of courage, and yet their learning success is integral to the health of our communities and our economy.”⁴

4. Kathleen Wynne, 2005, “Letter from the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education”, in Ontario Ministry of Education, *Ontario Learns: Strengthening Our Adult Education System*, p. 1.

The Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration have been mandated to work more closely together to strengthen the adult education system. As well, it is important for these ministries to continue to work closely with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Community and Social Services, to improve opportunities for adults receiving social assistance and other supports and services to participate in education and training. Better coordination among ministries will support the government's goal of making the system more seamless and learner-centred and will enable more adults to participate in lifelong learning to upgrade their knowledge, literacy, numeracy, language, and digital skills.

A Vision for Adult Education in Ontario

The government's vision is of a seamless, learner-centred adult education system that provides opportunities for all adults living in Ontario to develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in Ontario's highly skilled workforce and constantly evolving society.

This vision is built on the principles of accessibility and inclusion.

A strengthened adult education system will support more adults and be more responsive to the local and changing needs of learners, service providers, and other partners, including employers.

In a learner-centred system, adults will easily be able to navigate information sources about their learning options and will be supported in identifying appropriate pathways tailored to their individual needs and goals. Individuals' prior learning and experiences will be recognized in a consistent way across the province, and more opportunities will be provided for adults to learn in settings that are flexible and meaningful to them.

In a seamless system, adult learners will be better supported through program transitions as they work to achieve their learning, career, and personal goals and to fulfil their potential. Government, service providers, and other key stakeholders will be partners in ensuring accountability for learner outcomes.

By enhancing the system to improve access for our adult learners and better support their varied needs and aspirations, the government seeks to ensure that more Ontarians are equipped with the skills they need to participate fully in the Ontario of today and tomorrow.

Background

In 2004, the Adult Education Review was launched at the request of the Minister of Education and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (now Advanced Education and Skills Development). The final report, *Ontario Learns: Strengthening Our Adult Education System*, was released in 2005 and offered a policy framework with recommended actions to support and improve adult education in Ontario. Over the years, some of these recommendations have been implemented. However, there is room for improvement in order to fulfil the vision of a seamless, learner-centred adult education system.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education made a commitment in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* to “ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace” (p. 13). The ministry subsequently launched its Adult Credit Education Strategy, which supports school boards in exploring innovative ways to engage adult learners and in building capacity to assist adult learners in achieving their goals. Significant work has been done by the Ministry of Education and school boards to foster a more collaborative, regional approach to strategic planning, to ensure a wide range of accessible program delivery options for adult learners, and to facilitate needed transitions to other adult education and training programs. The government’s current multi-ministry effort to strengthen the adult education system builds on this work and on the many other strengths of the existing system.

The report of the Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*, released in June 2016, emphasized the importance of ensuring that adult learners have access to high-quality learning opportunities that are adaptable and appropriate to their

diverse needs and contexts. In September 2016, the Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration were mandated to work together to strengthen the adult education system.

The [2017 Ontario Budget](#) announced the new Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan, which confirms the province's commitment to major initiatives in education, training, and skills development. The government will work with its partners to strengthen the adult education system by (1) improving access to programs that match adult learners' individual needs, (2) making transitions between programs smoother and simpler, and (3) implementing ways to recognize adult learners' prior learning and skills. The government's investments in adult education will also help more adult Ontarians enter programs to improve their literacy, numeracy, language, and digital skills. Opening doors for adult learners will support the growth of our economy as it helps people in their everyday lives.

Building on these reports and on what we have heard from adult education partners in the field in recent years, the government has identified the key priorities shared in this paper.

The Pillars of a Strong Adult Education System

The Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), Education (EDU), and Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) share stewardship for adult education programs in Ontario. Working closely together, and informed by what we have heard from adult education partners over the years, the ministries have identified the following key pillars of a strong adult education system:



Learner-Centred Opportunities

Learners will have access to high-quality learning opportunities, based on their individual needs and abilities



Clear, Coordinated Pathways

Learners can easily navigate clear pathways linking the programs that best help them achieve their goals



Meaningful Outcomes

Learner pathways will lead to relevant outcomes that are well understood by the learner, education partners, and employers



Collaboration

Foundational to these three pillars is a collaborative and shared responsibility for and accountability to adult learners across the province. Ensuring a partnership across ministries is an important element in supporting collaboration across the system. Collaboration at all levels will be central to achieving the government's vision. The province, service providers, and learners are all key players in supporting adult learners to succeed.

These four pillars provide the framework for establishing priorities and implementing initiatives that will help to strengthen Ontario's existing system of adult education.

Current Adult Education Programming: An Overview

Currently available adult education programming in Ontario provides a wide variety of opportunities for adults to pursue their learning, career, and personal goals. Programs are available to support adults in:

- ◆ completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD);
- ◆ upgrading their language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, as well as a range of specific workplace skills;
- ◆ accessing apprenticeship, college, and university programs; and
- ◆ making use of their international credentials and experience.

Adult education programs are delivered in a variety of models to accommodate diverse goals, learning needs, and personal situations, including full-time in-class programs, part-time and evening classes, “blended” models enabled by technology, fully online courses, and experiential learning opportunities.

There are other training options available to adult learners, such as the General Education Development (GED) assessment, which, upon successful completion, provides learners with an Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate. There are also transition programs offered by some universities to prepare adult learners for university and other postsecondary education and training programs, as well as retraining programs such as Ontario’s Second Career program.

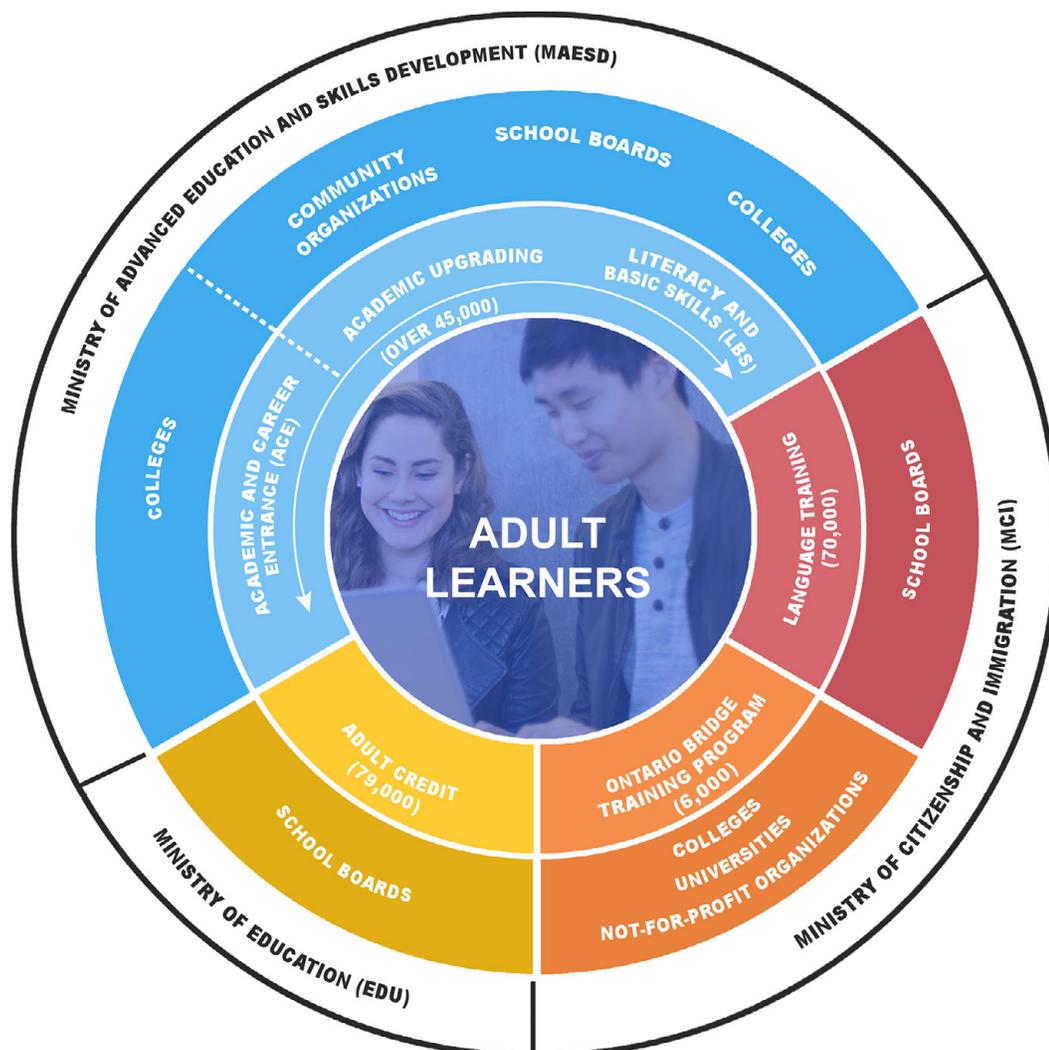
Programs that fall within the scope of this consultation include:

- ◆ the Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program for immigrants, offering both English- and French-language training, delivered by English and French school boards (MCI);
- ◆ literacy, numeracy, and digital skills training through the Literacy and Basic Skills program, delivered by community agencies, school boards, and Ontario colleges (MAESD);
- ◆ academic upgrading programs and the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate, delivered by Ontario colleges to support entry into apprenticeship and college (MAESD);

- ◆ secondary school courses for adults that provide credits towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and/or prerequisite credits needed for postsecondary education, delivered by both English and French school boards (EDU); and
- ◆ the Ontario Bridge Training Program for highly skilled, internationally trained immigrants, delivered by a variety of not-for-profit organizations in Ontario, including colleges and universities, occupational regulatory bodies, employer associations, and community agencies (MCI).

The following graphic illustrates the adult education programs in Ontario that are within the scope of this consultation, the types of service providers that deliver each program, and the ministry responsible for administering each program. The graphic emphasizes the central importance of adult learners within the system.

The Adult Education System



What We Have Heard So Far

Over the years, the Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration have heard from adult education partners across the system. These partners include learners, service providers, support organizations, and employers. Through this consultation, we hope to build on what we have learned to inform next steps.

Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

We have heard from our partners that the current system has strengths as well as opportunities for improvement.

The hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who access adult education annually know the value of these programs. Nevertheless, there are many adults in the province who would benefit from adult education opportunities but who are not aware of the available programs and services. While numerous learning pathways exist, they are not always easy to identify and find. We have heard that Ontarians would be better supported through easy-to-navigate information and resources. More can be done to support the information needs of both learners and service providers.

Our partners have emphasized the importance of the province's leadership in and commitment to adult education – particularly (1) in facilitating better coordination, communication, and accountability at the provincial level, and (2) in supporting local delivery. We know that to improve provincial services, coordination across government is essential. We have heard consistently that communication and collaboration among service providers, including regional partners, is important both for supporting seamless pathways for adult learners and for ensuring the availability of programming that meets local needs. We have been told that the province needs to be more responsive to local innovation and partnerships – that we should support and build on what is working well. We have heard that the system could be more responsive overall to learner and community needs – that

mechanisms for giving feedback are either lacking or are not as effective as they could be.

In addition, our partners have emphasized the importance of recognizing individuals' prior learning, so that they are not required to duplicate their education and training. We have heard that it is important for the system to prepare adults for success by supporting their acquisition of the skills and competencies needed to succeed in our changing world. These include language, literacy, numeracy, and other essential skills that support lifelong learning; numeracy skills to manage personal finances; and skills to enable individuals to navigate digital environments and solve problems using digital tools. We have also heard from many partners that the system needs to be more culturally responsive and relevant – we need to ensure that programs are inclusive, accessible, and appropriate to learners' needs.

A commitment to a coordinated, collaborative, and shared approach to the delivery of adult education and training programs and services is critical to the success of the work ahead of us. While all of the government's priorities – those that we are moving ahead with, planning, and exploring – build on the strengths of the existing system, we know that there is much more to learn from our partners about how we can collectively improve Ontario's adult education system and support lifelong learning.

Please see page 7 for information about how to share your feedback with us.

Guiding Questions

We are interested in hearing from you about how we have characterized the system's strengths and opportunities for improvement and how we can improve our methods of engagement.

1. Is anything missing from the strengths and opportunities for improvement described in this discussion paper?
2. How can channels of communication among adult education partners be strengthened? What role should the government play?

What We Are Doing

The government believes that there are opportunities to strengthen the connections among programs and services to better support Ontarians through an adult education system that is seamless from the learner's perspective. We have identified and are acting on four priorities that build on the strengths of the existing system.

Information Navigation

The province is excited to have established a partnership with [Code for Canada](#), an organization that brings together government innovators and civic technologists to build digital solutions that work for citizens.

Code for Canada supports collaboration between government and digital technology experts through a fellowship program that embeds teams of people with "strong technology, design, and data skills into government departments to work on the issues that matter to Canadians".⁵ In early November 2017, a cross-disciplinary team of digital professionals from Code for Canada began working with the Ministries of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Education, and Citizenship and Immigration to identify opportunities to enhance support for learners in obtaining timely, accurate, and relevant information.

Code for Canada will soon be reaching out to key adult education partners in order to define the objectives of the digital solution and better understand user needs as they develop and test solutions.

This process will be collaborative and transparent. As government lead, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development is thrilled to be working with the Ontario Code for Canada fellowship team. And the Code for Canada fellowship team is eager to use its collective skills to make government solutions work better for Ontarians.

5. <https://codefor.ca/about-us/>

Once the digital solution developed with Code for Canada is nearing release, professional development opportunities will be made available for service providers to learn how best to use this new resource with adult learners.

Guiding Questions

We are interested in hearing from you about how access to information about adult education programs and services can be improved so that learners can make informed decisions about the learning opportunities available to help them achieve their goals.

3. What can be done to meet the information needs of adult learners more effectively?
4. What can be done to ensure that learners and potential learners have easy access to clear information about learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs and interests?
5. What types of digital information resources are you currently using to meet your own information needs and the information needs of learners to support their referral to and navigation of services? What types of information or tools would you like to use that are currently not available or accessible to you?

Literacy and Essential Skills Training

Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program provides literacy, numeracy, digital, and other essential skills training to residents of Ontario who are 19 years of age or older, who are able to speak and listen in English or French well enough to benefit fully from the program, and who want to improve their skills so that they can pursue further education, training, or employment or gain greater independence.

On June 16, 2017, the government announced a commitment to invest \$185 million over four years (above base funding) to enhance essential skills programming for adults. This announcement signalled recognition of the need to embark on a multi-year process to improve the LBS program and greatly expand provincially funded essential skills training to reach more Ontarians and enable them to upgrade their skills.

We heard through the 2016 **LBS program evaluation**, conducted by independent consulting firm Cathexis Consulting Inc., and through conversations with the network of LBS service delivery and support providers in Ontario, that the current LBS program has many strengths. We also heard that there are a number of opportunities for improvement. The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development is working closely with the LBS network and other adult education partners to improve the current LBS program and expand the reach of literacy and essential skills training in Ontario.

Innovations in Adult Secondary Education Programs

Ministry of Education secondary school courses for adults, delivered by both English- and French-language school boards, provide credit towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and/or prerequisite credits needed for admission to postsecondary education programs. School boards providing adult education have long sought for creative ways to support the success of adult learners.

The Ministry of Education's Adult Credit Education Strategy, launched in 2014, supports school boards in building on the innovative practices that are already in place and in exploring new ways of delivering programs and services through a regional and shared approach. Innovation under this strategy has focused on four key priorities:

1. providing access to regionally coordinated, flexibly delivered adult credit education programs that effectively meet adult learner needs;
2. providing coordinated information, intake, assessment, and referral services;
3. providing regionally available and consistently applied Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for mature students working towards a high school diploma; and
4. providing regionally available guidance, career counselling, and pathway planning.

These four key priorities align with and build on the four pillars (identified on page 13) that underpin the province’s multi-ministry efforts to strengthen the adult education system.

As part of the broader multi-ministry effort, support is being provided for improving and streamlining processes that will help learners earn an OSSD as quickly as possible and facilitate their transition to further education, training, and the workplace. Resources are being provided to support pilot projects offering dual-credit programs for adults – programs that to date have not been readily available. Dual-credit programs enable learners who are working towards their OSSD to take college or apprenticeship courses that count towards both their OSSD and a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree, or a Certificate of Apprenticeship.

Support is also being provided to enable school boards to explore more community-connected experiential learning opportunities for adults. Such experiences lead learners to a better understanding of potential educational and career pathways, and in doing so, assist them in making informed decisions about their next steps.

Guiding Question

6. What else can be done to support the success of learners in adult credit programs?

Programming for Immigrants

Ontario’s adult education programs support and promote social and economic inclusion and community engagement among immigrant Ontarians.

The Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program

The Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program provides classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) and French as a Second Language (FSL) to eligible adult immigrants to help them gain the language skills they need to work and live in Ontario.

The program is offered by public and Catholic school boards across Ontario. Each year, the program serves approximately 70,000 learners at about 325 locations.

The province has been working with the federal government – specifically, with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada – to better coordinate provincially and federally funded language training in Ontario. This initiative includes the introduction of the Coordinated Language Assessment and Referral System (CLARS) as the single point of access to both provincial and federal language training in Ontario, as well as the implementation of Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) as a consistent approach to assessing and reporting on language-learning outcomes.

The province is also undertaking other enhancements to the Adult Non-Credit Language Training Program, including e-learning pilot projects to improve access to language training across Ontario.

The Ontario Bridge Training Program

The Ontario Bridge Training Program helps highly skilled immigrants to obtain a licence and employment in their field without having to duplicate previous training and education. Since 2003, more than 350 bridge training projects have assisted upwards of 60,000 highly skilled newcomers in more than 100 regulated and non-regulated professions to continue their careers in Ontario.

Projects offered include academic and technical training; occupation-specific workplace culture and communication training; licensing exam preparation; opportunities to obtain Canadian workplace experience through internships, clinical placements, job shadowing, and mentorships; and recruitment and retention strategies to help increase the capacity of employers to integrate skilled immigrants effectively into their organizations.

The government has been working to ensure that available bridge training projects are responsive to the needs of internationally trained professionals. New funding streams were introduced in 2017–18 for new pilot projects.

Guiding Questions

7. What other education and training services would help adult immigrants settle, find jobs in their fields, and improve their English or French in order to prosper in Ontario?
8. What can be done to help immigrants navigate among the various programs offered to support them?

What We Are Planning

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships

The province's efforts are intended to build on the strengths of the current system to ensure that the learner is at the centre. We are aware that current incentives and other structures do not promote referrals between service providers. We believe that the province can do a better job of helping service providers deliver a more learner-centred experience. Central to this effort are regional collaboration and partnerships that will enable local adult education providers to tailor services to the needs of the learners in their communities.

Support will be provided to service providers to help them develop and foster relationships with other providers in their communities. Strengthened partnerships will facilitate referrals and the provision of seamless client services across the system, improving our ability to support the full range of learner needs and accommodate the cultural and linguistic diversity among learners.

At the secondary level, Ontario school boards have established regional partnerships to support planning among local providers. The province is exploring ways to encourage expansion of these regional partnerships to include representation from a broader range of education and training providers and to strengthen cross-system partnerships. We believe that encouraging greater collaboration and coordination across sectors will help streamline referral processes, facilitate learner mobility, and ease transitions for learners.

Guiding Questions

We are interested in hearing from you about how cross-sector collaboration and coordination of adult education can be better supported to ensure the availability of seamless programs and services for learners.

9. How do you currently collaborate with other service providers and across sectors to plan and deliver adult education programs and services?
10. What can be done to help service providers and organizations build stronger collaborative relationships?
11. What incentives or incentive structures would give service providers the support they need to refer learners to the programs and services that best meet their needs and goals?
12. What can be done to improve planning and coordination at the regional and local levels? What role should the government play?

Recognition of Prior Learning

Adult learners are a diverse group with varied educational backgrounds and skills and a wide range of valuable life and employment experiences. People now develop skills and knowledge through many different sources and means, both within and across jurisdictions. Improving opportunities for the recognition of all learning, both formal and informal, is critical to supporting effective adult learner pathways to further education and the workplace.

The province would like to provide more consistent recognition of all relevant adult learning, minimize requirements that may call for the duplication of learning, and facilitate more seamless adult learning pathways.

We need a better understanding of current barriers that adult learners may face in working to complete their education in order to identify ways to appropriately honour and recognize learning that has already been achieved.

Guiding Questions

13. What existing tools and practices for recognizing learning are working well? What tools and practices are not working well?
14. Are there gaps that need to be addressed or other opportunities that can be explored?
15. What can be done to better address the issues of lost time, duplication of learning, and the need for more expeditious pathways?

Pilot Projects for New Program Models

We have heard from employment and training service providers about the need for more short-term, customized training options to enable learners to gain the skills they need to compete in the job market. Research shows that programs that integrate essential and technical skills training can be successful in reaching learners who might struggle with learning or motivation in training that lacks a real-world context. In addition, preliminary results from non-experimental research suggest that industry-centred career pathway programs can improve educational attainment, employment, and wages for adult workers in low-paying occupations.

The new Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan, announced in the province's 2017 budget, committed the province to supporting pilot projects to explore the viability of innovative skills-training models in Ontario.

This effort is being led by the Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation (OCWI), a research network spearheaded by Ryerson University that provides coordinated leadership on innovative, evidence-based approaches to employment and training programming and service delivery. The centre is mandated to help improve the delivery of the province's employment and training programs.

In the summer of 2017 the OCWI released a "call for project proposals", which closed in fall 2017. Priority areas for pilot projects include: Career Pathways program models, designed to help lower-skilled job seekers move along a pathway towards

sustainable and high-quality employment; and Contextualized Essential Skills training models, designed to help job seekers prepare for in-demand occupations and improve their essential skills.

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development is looking forward to the results of these and other pilot projects from the OCWI, and to continuing to work with the OCWI and training providers to test new and innovative models for training in order to support the province in making evidence-based program and policy decisions. For more information about the OCWI and the projects it is supporting, please visit the [OCWI website](#).

Guiding Question

- 16.** What other innovative program models should be considered for use in Ontario?

What We Are Exploring

Improved Intake, Guidance, and Pathway Planning

Adult learners have unique needs and goals that require a range of learning-related and broader “wraparound” supports, such as child care and/or educational and career counselling. At the same time, adults may not have access to the same guidance resources as younger learners in Ontario’s formal education system. We have heard that, without adequate guidance and support in choosing and entering programs and in pathway and transition planning, adult learners may lose motivation as they attempt to navigate the complex system in Ontario. We have also heard from learners, service providers, and other adult education partners that there are ways in which the system’s capacity to provide needed guidance and support for pathway planning can be improved.

The government is considering ways to strengthen the system’s capacity in these areas to help learners reach their goals. Many service providers are currently fulfilling a guidance function by doing pathway planning with learners. The ministries are interested in exploring how to enhance this function across the system. This can be accomplished by improving access to reliable, timely, and easy-to-navigate information and by reinforcing support for learners – for example, by equipping all service providers with the tools and skills they need to effectively advise on and develop a learning pathway with each learner.

Guiding Questions

We are interested in hearing from you about promising practices and about how the province can support program intake, pathway planning, and learning transitions to enable adult Ontarians to expeditiously achieve their learning, career, and personal goals.

17. How are you currently conducting guidance and pathway or transition planning, including learner needs assessments? Specifically, what effective intake assessment processes and tools are you currently using?

(continued)

18. How can the system better support the delivery of guidance and pathway planning for adults, and by whom should this role be fulfilled?
19. How would better integration of data and records across programs and service providers support learners *and* service providers?

Recognition of Essential Skills and Core Competencies

In *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*, the Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel emphasized the importance of skills and competencies.

In research, the terms “skills” and “competencies” are sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes with distinct meanings. For the purpose of this discussion document, a skill is defined as the ability to perform tasks and solve problems. A competency includes not only cognitive elements (such as the use of theory, concepts, or tacit knowledge) but also functional aspects (such as technical skills), interpersonal attributes (such as social or organizational skills), and ethical values. A core competency is broader and may actually comprise multiple skills as well as attitudes and knowledge (e.g., collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving).

The term “skill” can be further broken down into groupings, such as “occupational” and “essential” skills. The Government of Canada’s [Office of Literacy and Essential Skills](#) describes essential skills as those that are needed for work, learning, and life – that is, they are the foundation for learning all other skills and for allowing people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.⁶

6. For more information about essential skills, refer to the [Ontario Skills Passport](#), which was developed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, and provides clear descriptions of Essential Skills and work habits that are important for success in work, learning, and life.

The province is exploring the development of a “**core competency framework**” to support the recognition of competencies that are important for Ontarians to develop across their lifetime in order to be personally successful, economically productive, and actively engaged citizens in our economy and society.

A core competency framework could assist Ontarians by:

- ◆ identifying the core competencies that are important for participation in Ontario’s highly skilled workforce, and in our 21st century economy and society;
- ◆ supporting employers in recognizing and articulating the core competencies that they want from workers;
- ◆ supporting workers in better understanding and moving towards attaining the core competencies that employers seek;
- ◆ supporting workers and learners in identifying and describing the core competencies that they possess;
- ◆ providing a means for recognizing workers’ and job candidates’ transferable abilities without relying solely on their credentials or qualifications (such as degrees and diplomas); and
- ◆ providing a common vocabulary for the core competencies (e.g., critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation) that can be used across all sectors.

In winter 2016, the Ministry of Education released a foundation document for discussion, *21st Century Competencies*, which provides key findings from an in-depth review of 21st century competencies across the available literature, as well as a list of six competencies that support the development of learning in all subject areas across the K–12 system.

Ontario has also taken a leadership role among the provinces in developing a set of **pan-Canadian global competencies** that were endorsed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) in July 2016. These competencies are:

1. critical thinking and problem solving;
2. innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship;
3. learning to learn / self-awareness and self-direction;
4. collaboration;

5. communication; and
6. global citizenship and sustainability.

The further exploration of a core competency framework for Ontarians will be guided by the efforts already being undertaken by the province.

Guiding Questions

We are interested in hearing from you about how the province can support the recognition of essential skills and core competencies.

20. Would it be helpful for adult learners to have a provincial framework that identifies core competencies and essential skills? Would it be helpful for organizations delivering adult education programming to have such a framework?
21. What can be done to better recognize the core competencies and essential skills that are meaningful to Ontarians over the course of their learning and working lives, and to Ontario employers across all sectors? What role should the government play?

General Discussion Questions

Is there anything you would like to tell us that was not covered above? Here are some final questions to guide your thinking.

General Discussion Questions

22. Are there any other system enhancements needed that were not mentioned in this discussion paper?
23. What else would help make the system more seamless and learner-centred?
24. What are the most urgent priorities that need to be addressed in the short term?
25. What can be done to better support all adult learners, including immigrant learners, Indigenous learners, francophone learners, Deaf and Deafblind learners, learners with disabilities, and others?
26. What forms of discrimination or systemic barriers do adult learners experience? What would help make access to adult learning opportunities more equitable?
27. Do you know of any promising practices that are being adopted in Ontario or in other jurisdictions that we could build on to improve our adult education system?

In Conclusion

Looking to the future, the Ontario government re-emphasizes its commitment to enhance the inclusiveness and accessibility of the adult education system, and to make it more responsive to local conditions and the evolving needs of all partners. A strengthened system will help learners more easily receive recognition for their prior learning and skills, find programs that match their individual needs, and transfer between programs as needed. Opening doors for adult learners not only helps people in their everyday lives but contributes to a strong economy.

It is the responsibility of all those involved in the delivery of education and training, and of those who are working to build strong communities in Ontario, to come together around our shared commitment of enabling adult learners to receive the high-quality education and training that will help them achieve their goals. With open dialogue, innovative thinking, and a willingness to explore new solutions, we can design a more accessible, flexible, learner-centred adult education system with the capacity to equip Ontarians for the evolving challenges of the 21st century.

Next Steps

This consultation is an important step towards the goal of strengthening the adult education and training system in Ontario. In winter 2018, we plan to report back on what we heard through this process and to outline next steps.

Thank you in advance for your participation and thoughtful input.

Appendixes

Summary of Guiding Questions

Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

1. Is anything missing from the strengths and opportunities for improvement described in this discussion paper?
2. How can channels of communication among adult education partners be strengthened? What role should the government play?

Information Navigation

3. What can be done to meet the information needs of adult learners more effectively?
4. What can be done to ensure that learners and potential learners have easy access to clear information about learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs and interests?
5. What types of digital information resources are you currently using to meet your own information needs and the information needs of learners to support their referral to and navigation of services? What types of information or tools would you like to use that are currently not available or accessible to you?

Innovations in Adult Secondary Education Programs

6. What else can be done to support the success of learners in adult credit programs?

Programming for Immigrants

7. What other education and training services would help adult immigrants settle, find jobs in their fields, and improve their English or French in order to prosper in Ontario?

8. What can be done to help immigrants navigate among the various programs offered to support them?

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships

9. How do you currently collaborate with other service providers and across sectors to plan and deliver adult education programs and services?
10. What can be done to help service providers and organizations build stronger collaborative relationships?
11. What incentives or incentive structures would give service providers the support they need to refer learners to the programs and services that best meet their needs and goals?
12. What can be done to improve planning and coordination at the regional and local levels? What role should the government play?

Recognition of Prior Learning

13. What existing tools and practices for recognizing learning are working well? What tools and practices are not working well?
14. Are there gaps that need to be addressed or other opportunities that can be explored?
15. What can be done to better address the issues of lost time, duplication of learning, and the need for more expeditious pathways?

Pilot Projects for New Program Models

16. What other innovative program models should be considered for use in Ontario?

Improved Intake, Guidance, and Pathway Planning

17. How are you currently conducting guidance and pathway or transition planning, including learner needs assessments? Specifically, what effective intake assessment processes and tools are you currently using?

18. How can the system better support the delivery of guidance and pathway planning for adults, and by whom should this role be fulfilled?
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Glossary

Adult learners. Learners who are typically 19 years of age or older and who want to upgrade their skills or qualifications to pursue further education, obtain stronger employment outcomes, or participate more fully in society.

Core Competency. An ability that involves a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a particular context.

Diversity. The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Equity. A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

Essential Skills. Abilities that (i) are needed for work, learning, and life, (ii) are the foundation for learning all other skills, and (iii) help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

Inclusive education. Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all. Learners see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

Literacy and Basic Skills. The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program provides literacy, numeracy and other Essential Skills training to residents of Ontario 19 years of age or older who can communicate in English or French and who want to improve their skills to pursue further education, training, or employment or to gain greater independence.

Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan. A commitment by the Ontario government to major initiatives in education, training, and skills development. Through the plan, the province has made a commitment to work with partners to strengthen the adult education system to better support learners in (i) accessing programs that match their individual needs, (ii) transitioning between programs, and (iii) receiving recognition for their prior learning and skills.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). The formal evaluation and credit-granting process whereby students may obtain credits for prior learning.

Skills. Abilities that individuals need to have in order to perform specific tasks.

Systemic barriers. Barriers to success that are caused by biases embedded in policies, practices, and processes and that often result in differential treatment. The impact of these barriers is detrimental for many and can have lasting consequences. When factors such as race, class, gender identity, religion, and physical or intellectual ability intersect, they can create additional barriers and unique experiences of discrimination for some students.

The Partner Ministries

The following ministries are partners in this discussion paper and consultation:

The **Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development** provides policy and program direction and financial support to postsecondary education institutions; delivers the Ontario Student Assistance Program; gives the universities the authority to grant degrees; and registers private career colleges. The ministry develops policy for labour market training and mobility; conducts labour market research; administers and regulates the apprenticeship system in Ontario for skilled trades; provides a network of community-based agencies with funding to deliver skills training, employment preparation, and literacy and basic skills services to youth and adults; supports adjustment services for workers facing the closure of their company or plant; supports a network of local boards; and represents Ontario in its negotiations with the federal government on training issues.

The **Ministry of Education** administers the system of publicly funded elementary and secondary school education in Ontario, in accordance with the directions set by the provincial government. The ministry also provides education services to blind, Deaf and Deafblind students at specialized schools. The Minister of Education, through the ministry, issues curricula; sets requirements for student diplomas and certificates; and provides funding to school boards for academic instruction and for building and maintaining schools. The minister may also set policy for student assessment, which is then carried out by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The EQAO gives the minister advice on assessment policy and issues reports on the results of its assessments.

The **Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration** promotes full participation for all Ontarians such that they enjoy the social and economic benefits of life in the province and contribute to their communities. The ministry maximizes the social and economic benefits of immigration and builds stronger communities through activities focused on greater citizen participation.