

# Alberta Advanced Education Collaborative Initiatives Among Alberta's Post-secondary Institutions



Audit Report Executive Summary

October 2017

## Who

Alberta Advanced Education.

## What

Follow-up performance audit

## When

We conducted our field work from July 2016 to February 2017, and substantially completed our audit on March 17, 2017.

## Quick Facts

- Alberta has 21 publicly funded post-secondary institutions
- Alberta's public post-secondary institutions spend about \$5.4 billion annually
- Collaboration among the institutions can improve services to students and make the advanced education more efficient, effective and sustainable

## Learn More

[advancededucation.alberta.ca](http://advancededucation.alberta.ca)

## Why we did this audit

Alberta has 21 publicly funded post-secondary institutions, such as universities, colleges and technical institutes. In 2002 the government created Campus Alberta—A Policy Framework, designed to formalize and encourage collaborative initiatives among post-secondary institutions.

We performed an audit in 2013 to determine if the Department of Advanced Education and public post-secondary institutions had adequate systems to plan, govern, implement and sustain the collaborative initiatives among Alberta's institutions.

In the original audit, we found institutions executed collaborative initiatives with no ministry strategic or business plan for collaboration. Institutions did not understand what the department expected Campus Alberta to achieve or how to achieve it.

We recommended that the department work with institutions to develop:

- a strategic plan and accountability framework
- processes and guidance to plan, implement and govern collaborative projects

The objective of this follow-up audit was to determine if the department has implemented the two recommendations from our July 2013 report. We selected the Campus Alberta Unified Services program as the collaborative initiative to examine for this follow-up audit.

## What we concluded

In this follow-up audit, we concluded that the Department of Advanced Education has not implemented our recommendations to work with institutions to:

- develop and communicate a strategic plan that clearly defines:
  - the minister's expected outcomes for Campus Alberta
  - initiatives required to achieve those outcomes
  - resources and funding needed to carry out the strategic plan
- develop relevant performance measures and targets to assess if the outcomes are being achieved

# Alberta Advanced Education Collaborative Initiatives Among Alberta's Post-secondary Institutions (continued)



- publicly report results and the cost of achieving them
- review and clarify the accountability structures for governing collaborative initiatives
- develop processes and guidance on how to plan, implement and govern collaborative initiatives

Collaboration allows post-secondary institutions to share costs, resources and best practices. Alberta's students are not getting the full benefits of collaboration because the department still has no plan for how institutions should work together.

## Why this is important to Albertans

Alberta's 21 public post-secondary institutions spend about \$5.4 billion annually. They contribute to the government's priorities of building a knowledge-based economy and improving the social well-being of Albertans. The government wants these institutions to collaborate in an effort to improve services to students and make the advanced education system more efficient, effective and sustainable.

## What we examined

We interviewed department management and reviewed documentation to learn how management responded to our recommendations. We also examined the department's processes for overseeing the planning and delivery of the Campus Alberta Unified Services program.

## What we found

### Develop strategic plan and accountability framework—*recommendation repeated*

The department still does not have a strategic plan or accountability framework for collaboration among post-secondary institutions.

Department management indicates that two current government reviews of post-secondary institutions have delayed implementation of the recommendation. Management is examining post-secondary institution funding allocations and is participating in a government-wide review of agencies, boards and commissions that includes a specific review of post-secondary institutions. Both reviews plan to be finished in fiscal 2017–2018, and management is waiting to see if the results of these reviews impact the department's design of an effective strategic plan and accountability framework for collaborative initiatives.

### Develop processes and guidance to plan, implement and govern collaborative projects—*recommendation repeated*

The department has not worked with post-secondary institutions to develop processes and guidance to plan, govern, implement and report on collaborative projects.

## What needs to be done

The Department of Advanced Education, working with post-secondary institutions, should:

- develop and communicate a strategic plan that clearly defines the minister's expected outcomes for Campus Alberta, initiatives to achieve those outcomes, the resources required and sources of funding
- develop relevant performance measures and targets to assess if the outcomes are being achieved
- publicly report results and the costs associated with collaborative initiatives
- review and clarify the accountability structure for governing collaborative initiatives
- develop systems and guidance for institutions to follow effective project management processes for collaborative initiatives

## Consequences of not taking action

Without a strategic plan and accountability framework, there is a high risk that the department will not achieve its collaborative initiative goals cost effectively — or at all.

## Read the full report at:

[oag.ab.ca](http://oag.ab.ca)

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