

Developing an Accountability Framework for British Columbia's Public Post-secondary System

Accountability in the Public Post-secondary Education System

Introduction

As part of its vision of a top-notch education system for British Columbia, the government is increasing access to and choices for quality post-secondary programs so that students can fully participate in and benefit from an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

This requires that B.C.'s post-secondary education system be managed in a manner that ensures it puts students first and meets British Columbia's needs by addressing current and future skills shortages. Progress in this direction has already been made by increasing operating autonomy for institutions through provision of block funding and deregulating tuition fees.

While government is committed to making the post-secondary system more autonomous and offering more choices for students, it is also committed to fiscal responsibility and openness and transparency in reporting performance. And even though the province has many excellent institutions and programs, post-secondary education as a system is fragmented, which reduces its ability to fully respond to student and economic needs. In addition, current accountability in the system is based on compliance with statutory authority and financial accountability through accounting procedures, which do not allow actual outcomes to be measured or assessed. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the degree to which the system meets student needs or aligns with the province's social and economic development.

Increased autonomy and flexibility in the post-secondary system need to be balanced with accountability to ensure that student expectations are addressed, that high-quality, relevant programs are offered, that there is value for taxpayers' investments and that the system supports the economic and social needs of the province by producing qualified workers.

To create such a balance, the Ministry of Advanced Education is leading the development of an accountability framework to align the system with these goals and objectives. An accountability framework will serve as a results-based performance management system that encourages system-wide collaboration and integration necessary to quality education.

The accountability framework applies to B.C.'s 27 public post-secondary institutions. As private institutions do not receive public funding, they will not be included. However, they will be subject to other equally rigorous accountability mechanisms through a cost-recoverable, self-regulated private training sector board that will be established to replace the Private Post-secondary Education Commission.

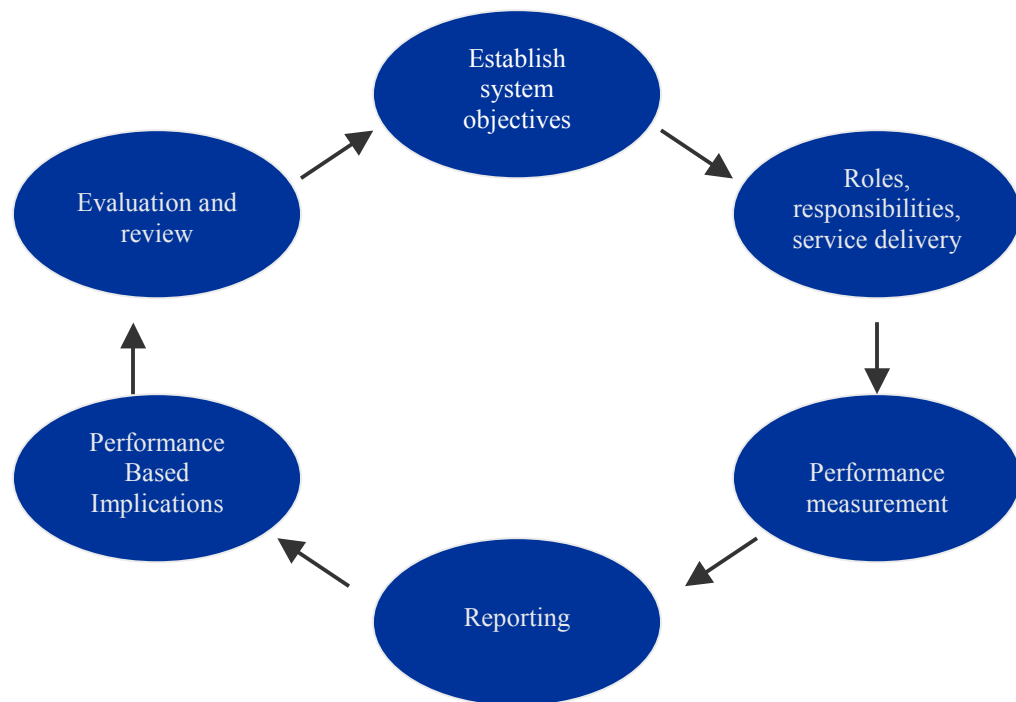
In order to create a framework that is effective and relevant over time, students and partner institutions will be involved in the process of developing the framework through discussion of an accountability proposal developed by the Ministry.

The Ministry's proposal shifts the focus of accountability to measuring actual outcomes to determine if goals and objectives are being achieved, and whether public expenditures are effective and publicly funded post-secondary institutions are performing well. Shifting the focus of accountability to outcomes or results supports institutional autonomy while ensuring that the system supports government's goals and commitments.

Features of the proposed accountability framework

An effective accountability framework entails a specific set of goals and objectives, strategic system planning and performance reporting.

The Ministry of Advanced Education's proposed accountability framework establishes a cycle by which the Ministry, along with system partners, identifies strategic goals and objectives for the post-secondary system that are consistent with government's priorities while they also recognize and accommodate unique elements of individual institutions' mandates. Measures related to these goals and objectives will be developed and information collected to assess the degree to which those goals and objectives have been achieved.



Under the proposed structure, the key elements of service planning, performance measurement and reporting are drawn together and integrated. Processes will be set-up through which the Ministry and institutions can set goals and ensure that strategic direction is effective in steering both the system and individual institutions, which is critical to ensuring that institutional differences are accommodated within a framework

that applies to the whole system. Processes will also be established for regular reporting on those performance measures and performance information is used for future planning and decision-making.

Under the Ministry's proposed accountability framework, clear roles and responsibilities will be laid out for the Ministry, the system as a whole and institutions. The framework will change the way the Ministry of Advanced Education manages the public post-secondary system and formalize the roles that the Ministry and the each of our 27 public institutions will play.

In addition, the framework itself will be subject to periodic review and assessment as to whether it is providing useful and relevant performance information and contributes to ongoing improvement and enhancement of the quality of education.

Performance Measures

The main instrument of accountability in the Ministry's proposal is a set of performance measures to determine and report on success in meeting strategic goals and core business objectives.

The Ministry of Advanced Education's current service plan [create link to www.aved.gov.bc.ca] is directly linked to government's strategic vision of a top-notch post-secondary education system for British Columbia. Given the importance of integrated planning in building such a system, the initial phase of the framework will be based on the Ministry's service plan to set strategic system-wide direction.

The Ministry's two strategic goals are:

- creating a top-notch education system through promoting a more efficient and integrated post-secondary education system, enhancing student choice, improving quality of education, and balancing the cost and benefits of post secondary education.
- supporting economic and social development in British Columbia through reducing skills shortages, expanding training and skills development and expanding the province's research capabilities.

As the Ministry's service plan will provide strategic direction for the post-secondary system, the performance measures that will be used for the initial system-wide accountability framework will be related to the measures reported by the ministry. Ministry staff will work with public post-secondary institutions to review and refine the measures and scrutinize the methodology behind them.

The effectiveness of the proposed framework relies on the relevancy of performance measures and coordination of the data collection for those measures. In the past, performance measurement and data collection initiatives have proceeded separately for

different sectors of the post-secondary system. The proposed framework will be based on clear performance measures and coordinated data collection that will help create a coherent, integrated system, while recognizing the respective mandates of different institutions within the system.

Overall Benefits

A coordinated, system-wide accountability framework will encourage collaboration between system partners, support ongoing enhancement of quality education, and demonstrate open and accountable management of public resources. By providing a broad outline of strategic direction for the system and its planning and reporting processes, the framework supports operating flexibility for institutions and allows them to focus on promoting student access as well as the system's relevancy and responsiveness.

Clarifying the accountability relationships and determining what is expected from each partner will lead to increased effectiveness in managing the system and provide benefits on many levels:

- Students will be able to get quality programs that lead to meaningful jobs and careers. The proposed framework will provide incentives for institutions to respond to these needs.
- Employers will be able to access an adequate supply of graduates with the skills they require. The framework will encourage institutions to provide programs to areas of labour market demand.
- Institutions will be able to clarify their mandates, determine their overall goals and objectives and better plan and coordinate with other institutions. The framework will provide incentive for excellence, innovation and improvement.
- Through tools that are not too intrusive, government can ensure all system partners are heading in the same direction to ensure the post-secondary system delivers value to the public.
- Taxpayers will be informed of post-secondary system and institutional plans, activities and performance and have evidence that public funds are achieving results.

Next Steps

The Ministry has initiated meetings with key post-secondary partners, including students, administration and prospective employers to work on the development of the framework. It is anticipated the initial framework will be in place for the 2003/04 fiscal year.

However, adopting the new framework will be an evolutionary process. And while the Ministry is leading the development of the accountability framework based on its current service plan, consultation will take place with system partners for future service plans to enhance strategic direction based on government's priorities and use the knowledge and expertise in the system to guide future evolution of the framework.

Feedback on the Ministry's approach to accountability in the public post-secondary system is welcome. To be considered, feedback is requested no later than January 31, 2003 and can be submitted through:

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