

**Synthesis of Public Feedback to Learning Partners Advisory Council**  
**online consultation on their paper:**  
***Ambition, Excellence and Prosperity: Priorities and Directions for Learning***  
**March 23, 2017**

**Overview:**

- Nine respondents from January 6 to February 17, none since then
- Eight female, one male
- Four Charlottetown, two Summerside, three rural (all east of Charlottetown)

**1. Thinking about learners at different ages from birth to the senior years, what can be done to better support learners and advance learning excellence in Prince Edward Island?**

This question elicited the most comprehensive and detailed responses, with each respondent offering multiple suggestions.

***Roles and Next Steps***

One respondent proposed next steps for LPAC to undertake:

- Do a needs assessment with various age groups, more than "what could be done better", to help identify skills, talents, and opportunities that would meet the needs of all learners? Will the learner see themselves in the plan from birth to senior?
- Create a strategic plan of 3 to 5 years from the consultative/discussions gathered which identifies 3 or 4 priorities with specific goals linked to each priority that can be measured and/or monitored and then reviewed so the plan can be a living plan. The plan should have a clear vision and mission statement as a foundation.
- When activities/programs/experiences are identified for various groups, provide accessible communication tool(s) that allow for information to be disseminated in a variety of ways to help citizens to access opportunities to advance learning excellence in PEI on an ongoing basis; also to be current and up to date.

Re roles and responsibilities, one respondent noted:

- The community, government and private sector need to ensure that valued community organizations like PEI Literacy Alliance, Learning Disabilities Association, and Council of Persons with Disabilities are able to keep going and continue their important work.
- Another respondent called for more specialized learning through partnerships: "Instead of mashing everything up together in a modest university, the idea of creating high-quality institutions of learning that has already begun (the Vet College, the Culinary School, and the new Performing Arts College) should be taken farther."

Most of the remaining input focused on three themes:

1. provision of learning opportunities more responsive to people's learning styles and needs;
2. better access to learning; and
3. approaches re learners with special needs.

### ***More Flexible, Responsive Approaches to Learning***

A number of respondents called for a broader and more flexible approach to better respond to learners of all ages who do not learn best through traditional classroom approaches:

- **Re seniors:** "Hands-on and practical learning is important for older adults who want to maintain independent living" ... "Learning topics for seniors should foster mental and physical wellness. I am presently teaching a very gentle yoga class to seniors and I am seeing how eager they are to learn about their physical bodies and how to improve their well-being so that they can continue to live independently while contributing to society" .... "Learning events that have an intergenerational approach should be encouraged. This can be incorporated within existing festivals, municipal events etc."

Another respondent similarly called for a different approach to learning for low literacy adults who might have struggled in their formal education:

- **Re middle-aged men:** "One group of people that could benefit from small changes for learning is men ages 30-50 that struggled in school. The school environment was very different for them, they were told by their teachers that they were stupid and they were allowed to fail/quit. These men are quite capable and skilled but are unable to read course material and write tests at high levels. They lack self-confidence...." This respondent called for organizations, businesses and government to offer hands on/visual training and verbal testing as alternatives to encourage lifelong learning, and to make these available proactively rather than people needing to ask. Examples were provided of men who had been able to succeed using these approaches, or harmed by their unavailability.

As with adult learning, several respondents called for a more visual / hands-on / project based approach to children's and youth learning both formal and informal:

- **Re youth:** One suggested, in response to Q. 1 above, "Teach (youth) to: Tie knots, close a door, operate a broom, a wheel barrow, a shovel, a hammer, a saw, check oil, tire pressure, how engines work, wash windows, understand household cleaners, how a home heating system works, how to use electricity and not waste it, how to make a house energy efficient, how to sort waste, compost, recyclables, fix computers, Manners!!!!, how to sell, make change, do taxes, understand banking and credit, how to search for truth on the internet and know right

from wrong. Kids today are missing most of this and a lot more -- save the planet, make education practical."

- Another stated, "A more visual hands-on approach. Like the old saying goes. Children learn from what they see and hear."
- A third suggested a mixed approach, "For the young, we need small schools, integrated project-based learning, and the memorization of useful things like spelling, vocabulary, and math facts, along with enough noncompetitive physical activity in every day to keep their bodies from being weakened before they hit high school. For grades 10-12, there should be more options available, so that a person can get a Grade 12 certificate by combining basic education with trades education and apprentice working, or by concentrating much of their day on developing a real talent (art, drama, math), or by studying a wide array of academic subjects in order to be a good candidate for university, or even some combination of the three."

Another respondent noted the need to better respond to gifted learners:

- "There should be real resources available for the gifted and the academically challenged, both of whom tend to be severely neglected. How many geniuses have we tossed into the gutter of life by boring them to tears, cramping their minds and bodies, and humiliating them before their peers throughout the high school years?"

### ***Access to Learning***

Two respondents addressed various aspects of access to informal learning, especially for older adults:

- **Better access** is needed (re space, cost, timing, language) to affordable informal learning. Free space (e.g. public libraries, unused school classrooms) should be provided for informal youth or adult learning opportunities. More free or low cost learning opportunities in face to face settings are needed for older adults; online learning is not enough for many older individuals ... Learning should happen working hours for seniors and evenings and weekends for working age Islanders. .... Both French and English learning opportunities should be available leveraging the existing learning sectors.
- **Providers** Although learning opportunities for seniors in PEI are excellent overall, there is a need for more volunteers in some communities. Many seniors may have knowledge and skills to share, but may be in a tight financial situation and unable to afford to participate. "If there was a small per diem or stipend to assist with these types of things (for those who identify that they would benefit from it), then I think there would be more people come forward to assist." .... "I am presently teaching a very gentle yoga class to seniors ... I would love to be able to provide my classes for free so that it's accessible to everyone but I need to cover my expenses such as room rental, training and travel."

Another respondent addressed access to post-secondary learning and training for working adults:

- "University should be normal and available to all who have obtained a Grade 12 certificate or its equivalent. Age, income level, or disabilities should not be barriers.
- "Ideally, we would go to a work system in which every worker would receive a sabbatical for higher learning on a regular rotation, or in which people worked a four-day week and took courses on the fifth day, so that it would be normal for education to continue lifelong."

### ***School System Approaches re Learners with Special Needs***

One respondent outlined an approach to better serve children with special needs, while another expressed concern about current approaches:

- "It is my understanding that the waiting lists are very long, when assessing youngsters for learning disabilities. It is so essential that early intervention is key so this needs to be addressed. If it's a case that there are insufficient number of professionals available to complete assessments and follow-up, then engage Seniors who have professional backgrounds to volunteer some of their time. They could be trained in Train the trainer approach, to work with the youngsters & their parent(s) while they wait. Sometimes, parents don't know what to do or perhaps they too have some learning disabilities. Perhaps there is a valuable resource in our Seniors (50 plus) that is being missed or ignored. If Seniors are willing, they could be reimbursed for their transportation costs as their income may prohibit involvement."
- Reevaluate mainstreaming all students in public schools. "The demands placed on teaching staff when there is such a disparity within a classroom are a disservice to the challenged student as well as to their classmates." .... "Introduce more fluidity in all levels so kids are not locked into the same grade level for all subjects. Social advancement is not always (ever?) the best practice for students in public school K-12. "

## **2. How can you or your community / organization help to advance any of the priorities and directions for learning identified by the Council?**

Responses to this question varied.

Some respondents called for continued communications and awareness building:

- "Continue to tell the individual or group success stories of the public school system, post-secondary institutions, private schools and community organizations listed above. Local media is there for the public good, so use The Guardian, The Journal Pioneer, CBC, The Eastern Graphic, The West Prince Graphic and The Employment Journey on PEI."
- "... I am always looking for complimentary and affordable learning opportunities that I can suggest/ recommend to my senior students. If an online provincial directory or social media platform containing learning events is created one day, I would gladly promote it."
- "Open communication among parents and teachers."

Others called for expanded learning options or measures to promote participation in learning by various vulnerable groups:

- Newcomers: More support for the PEI Association of Newcomers to expand its volunteer English tutoring program. "The formal aspect of EAL through Holland College accommodates a large percentage of adult students needing the training but these new Canadians need to practice their English (or French); there are never enough tutors or conversation groups available. Without a good command of English, further learning and work opportunities are very restricted."
- Children and youth: "Children need a place to go with supervision, Charlottetown has nothing, it's a disgrace. Kids do bad things when they are bored and hungry. Fix it. .... Make the schools available ... Run them 24 hours a day if necessary, it's cheaper than prisons."
- Islanders in low income: "There should be an incentive for those participating in the community educational programs. ... Does poverty impede involvement? Then provide gift cards for participants (i.e.: \$10 for Sobeys or Atlantic Superstores. they may have Foundations that would contribute to the costs)."
- Seniors: "Does having seniors involved, keep them active and less inclined to end up in need of medical attention as often? Then consider an incentive such as a gas, grocery or leisure activity to give them that little incentive to attend. Do we have retired medical persons available to run a blood pressure clinic or blood donor clinic? These could be attached to an educational forum and free of charge for those who are participating."

### **3. How can we strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones to advance learning excellence in Prince Edward Island?**

Some respondents offered general advice to the Council:

- Go into each meeting or workshop session with an action plan in mind and follow-through with the action plan. A group that gets things done will attract new partners and renew energy in existing partners.
- Create an online alliance where all earning partners (large and small) can share what they have to offer and form partnerships with others.
- Alignment of initiatives that the government is focusing on. What does each partnership know about one another to see how they fit together? What are authentic ways to support each others' goals and objectives while at the same time keeping the integrity of individual partnership mandates? We are serving the common good to advance learning excellence.
- Partnerships between religious groups, medical professionals, artisan groups and businesses need to be fostered and developed. It's essential that the entire community gets behind education for all so that everyone has a stake in it and sees the benefits. Promotion can be verbal, written, visual and via social media. Contests for advertising can be a fun community engagement and can be divided by age categories, promoted through traditional means such as daycares, schools, employers, medical offices, senior centers, radio, newspaper and social media. Engaging the community includes sharing why they should 'buy in' and what advantages

it has for them and their family. Once this has been communicated in a number of ways, then there needs to be reinforcement of it. Too many initiatives fizzle out over time.

- ..." the participants need to be considered important stakeholders. Those volunteering to run the program are the stakeholder where it seems as though there's a lack. So, there needs to be some inquiries with those possible volunteer stakeholders to determine what would secure their commitment? What happened to former volunteers? Did they have health issues? Did they go unrecognized? (Volunteers don't do it to be recognized but it's a great way to reinforce their continued involvement.) Are there issues ... that an incentive could help with?"

As well, some specific partnerships were suggested:

- The community school model should be expanded to all communities and should include an online component and include more academic topics. beyond the typical guitar, knitting, scrapbooking, etc courses.
- The partnership between Holland College and the Confederation Centre of the Arts to produce a School of Performing Arts should be encouraged and supported financially and in other ways. It should be used as a template: Could UPEI and the legal community join forces to create a topnotch Pre-Law program? Could the UPEI Science Dept. and some of the leading farmers, both organic and commercial, join forces to develop a School of Agriculture? Could UPEI and the Acadian community join forces to create high-quality French language and culture courses?
- Another avenue that could be re-opened is the former School of Visual Arts that was operated by Holland College before it closed many years ago. Having to travel outside the province for craft training has greatly diminished the number of professional artisans on the Island and virtually wiped out all opportunities for amateur artists and craftspeople to take accredited formal training in the visual arts.

#### **4. How can the Council best engage with you to hear your views on supporting Islanders' learning?**

The majority of respondents identified email as the preferred avenue. Other, broader suggestions included:

- A phone-in show on radio or TV a couple of times a year would do. Social media and e-mail blasts would do weekly or monthly.
- I think Facebook or the newspaper is the other way [than email] to get people interested.
- This online site is an excellent way to get general feedback from a broad cross-section of the Island.
- ... a random survey might also be worthwhile [as] such a self-selective process is not very rigorous as far as gathering dependable research data is concerned...
- Hold a conference/Think Tank in Summerside and another in Charlottetown to receive input from all Islanders, communities, municipalities, employers, government, departments, non-government organizations, public libraries, culture groups, and others.
- Join students in their classrooms. Take in a class, see how they are being taught.

## **5. Please share any advice, ideas or experiences you have on any of the priorities and directions for learning set out in the Council's paper.**

Two respondents advised the Council to move to the next stages:

- I think it is more the so called 'nitty gritty', practical aspects of measurable goals that are needed to be spelled out as far as achieving the priorities and directions.
- It's not brain surgery, quit studying and get to work.

Others noted the importance of various learning supports and channels:

- An idea would be to create an online directory of all available learning opportunities. This would be useful to both learners and teachers.
- The manner in which libraries are opening up to engage the public beyond strictly lending books is great to see. Please try to give them more resources.
- It will be difficult to build digital literacy for all Islanders when home internet access is so expensive (and still so poor in rural areas).
- Don't tax books (as NL just did).
- Integrate the PEI Museum sites into the education curriculum. At present, it is necessary for teachers to "justify" their field trips to "unconventional" learning sites.

Lastly, two respondents urged consideration for special learner populations:

- I would urge particularly, in the realm of improving mental health and raising ambition, that you begin to look more at smaller schools rather than larger. The only advantage of larger schools is the ability to have more extracurricular activities, such as music and drama. By the high school level, the student would be better served by attending a high school dedicated to the arts. Overall, smaller schools promote better mental health because of the feeling of inclusion in a community, the reduction of peer pressure, and the sense that one has significance and is not just lost in the crowd.
- Speaking from my experience as a gifted student on PEI, and as a person who spent a brief time as a substitute teacher on PEI, the one thing that most dulls the ambition, dims the brightness, and destroys the promise of gifted students is that mocking, bullying, and humiliation. Schools cannot actually prevent mocking, bullying, and humiliation of students who stand out; when they try, it generally becomes more covert, but does not disappear. ... Smaller schools are much better for promoting ambition. An ambitious preteen can withstand the mocking, bullying, and humiliation of thirty students better than a hundred, and of a hundred better than a thousand.
- Keep helping adult learners who continue to have learning disabilities. Let them know the resources are there for them. Keep encouraging them, and their individual successes and their communities' successes with shine through.

Appendix: Detailed Comments on the Paper's "Directions for Learning"

Lastly, one respondent provided detailed comments on each of the paper's ten directions for learning:

1. *Build a culture of acceptance, inclusion, civic engagement, and belonging. Learning, both formal and informal, should foster within each person a responsibility to care for and support all those within society, to value our diversity, and to contribute to our social fabric.*

Being part of a special education review committee and equity/ inclusion/safe schools committee, I know that clarity of terms is essential. We spent a lot of time on what it means to be inclusive for example. The word inclusion is not owned by special education solely. Secondly, knowing the process and intent of the provincial initiatives of special education, equity and inclusion and safe schools for example helps to bring partnerships together and align work so that when facing an audience where all these are important, the facilitator can weave the common messages into a learning opportunity without overwhelming the recipient.

2. *Promote the mental health and well-being of Islanders at all ages.*

Mental health and well being is becoming a huge barrier to learning if you are not aware of the implications. In the board I came from, our mental health lead had many awareness and practical workshops for all staff of board to help them understand and recognize the different behaviors and issues and strategies to cope with mental health and well being? What are the DOING parts of information because just sharing information is not necessarily going to bring about change? Are our employers, employees in the different sectors getting exposed to mental health and well being issues? Do leaders of companies and businesses and educational services and such have awareness and practical sessions to help support those experiencing mental health issues or strategies to help leaders to support their people?

3. *Embrace a lifespan perspective on learning to prepare Islanders for long, healthy, engaged, and productive lives. To do this, we must continuously reshape and renew the systems and organizations that support learning and learners.*

If lifelong learning is important than how do we communicate it so that people know what is out there. And what are the needs of the different groups. Not what we think is needed but what is the interest or need of the group? How do we gather information and put it into a sustainable and living plan that is renewable and continuous as you note? I think it begins with a needs assessment of different age groups and go from there. Who is your audience? What do you know about them?

4. *Raise the level of ambition for all learners to foster curiosity, innovation, creativity, adaptability and resilience needed to thrive in a global future.*

I am interested in the wording of #4 'level of ambition'. Being a consultant and coordinator of teachers and working with senior leaders, it has been a huge journey to foster ambition. Not everyone believes they need to learn or have new learning as what they have been doing is good with them. I have learned that building relationships with audience is huge as well as delivery of whatever you are doing. How do we honor and value where the person is while inviting them into a new learning experience to foster those key words identified in #4?



5. *Create paths to prosperity for all, so that all learners can and will experience success in whatever unique form this takes.*

I learned this from a co-op consultant that we have to value whatever path people take and respect their decision. We need informed people who can support those who want to take different paths. For example, there are people who want to work when they leave high school - not go to college or university. So do we value work place decisions? Or if someone retires and wants to try something else even though age may be a factor, what are their options? How does one connect to those who lost a job by restructuring or got let go or fired? Where is the communication or agencies to help them get back on track or find out options? If mental health is part of the mix, how do we help the person get and hold down a job?

6. *Support educators to respond to multiple learner interests, talents, capacities, aspirations, needs and contexts, and to engage learners in active, collaborative and rigorous learning.*

What is the expectation of educators at all levels - day care, elementary, secondary, post-secondary and so forth? Do they have an annual educational plan for example? What learning sessions help educators glean knowledge of how to work with all learners and believe that they are teaching the learner not the subject? Do educators believe in differentiated instruction, using multiple intelligences, teach high yield literacy strategies, use a variety of instructional strategies and practices, provide assessment and evaluation practices that help learners show their understanding in a variety of ways through their interests and talents. Do they integrate learning - make connections in a cross curricular way? Do they know how to build a safe and welcoming inclusive space that will allow the learner to be active, collaborative and experience rigorous learning?

7. *Build digital literacy among learners and leverage existing and new digital technology tools to enhance learning.*

Building digital literacy is important but also build digital citizenship in each of us so that we can flourish in the 21st century. It is not just knowing the literacy of digital technology but enabling learners to benefit from and be confident with the use of the various technologies that support teaching and learning. One observation about using technology is the assumption that everyone has access to it or understands what different technologies can do. From experience that is not the case. When we give the tools, do we offer PD and learning sessions in and outside of educational settings for young and old alike? It is a tool, not the be all and end all. How do we prepare for new technologies while supporting the current ones? How do we support the different levels of learning - beginner, middle and advanced for example? There are the innovators and the followers. Is there the infrastructure on the Island that allows for the new technologies as well as current ones? Not everyone embraces 'the electric box' as commonly referred to by a few islanders that I have met. If you are going to embrace technology and expect those who lead to use it, you have to find time in businesses, companies, educational settings to allow for experimenting and trying them out as well as for the movers and shakers who just try the new iPad, iPod, MacBook Pro, digital camera, twitter, google classroom, Blackboard, D2L and so forth. How is digital literacy going to help if there is not an ongoing practical aspect to it for leaders/learners?

8. *Prepare learners to successfully transition into, through, and out of learning systems and opportunities throughout our lives. Transitions matter and need to be carefully planned, coordinated and supported with a focus on the learner.*

What is built into organizations, businesses, educational settings that allow for transition into whatever is taking place? In the educational sector, how does a learner who has a learning disability get support from college or university? Does the student get to have a tour and meet the staff or services that will help them transition more smoothly? Or if a child receive special education support, how does the SERT work with the teacher as they support the learning of the learner? Or if an employer receives a new employee or they transition to a new position in the organization, is there a entry and exit plan? Is there job shadowing? Job sharing? Take a child to work day? Co-op experiences? Apprenticeship? Career transition days which help learners know what kind of skills and talents employers are looking for?

9. *Diversify learning beyond the traditional classroom to multiple settings that reflect the diversity of learners lives, our interests and talents. This will better serve our unique needs and that of our communities, including our languages and cultures.*

One idea is creating an Outdoor Educational Learning Opportunity to extend the learning outside the classroom. Taking a budget and allocating funds to schools based on population and then have central funding for specific projects. Each school decides how to allocate the funds to classrooms or subject areas. Teachers complete a form to identify activity, cost of activity, transportation, need a supply or equipment or support staff, or guest. Each school had a budget line and spent it. A virtual list of outdoor education organizations or activities is listed with contact information. Then schools followed procedures to use funds and send copy of proposal to board and in turn board reports to ministry.

Another idea is our board is the social justice/religion 2-credit course where our students have an international mission trip. They create an opportunity to work with Free the Children and build a school in Kenya or Tanzania or Ecuador or India. They fundraise money, give talks about the mission trip and then go for two weeks in May to help build the school or water trench or whatever is needed. (It is life changing). It is when they come back that the learner does the most growth. How are they going to make a difference in the world after their experience?

10. *Strengthen existing and forge new partnerships among learning sectors, communities, municipalities, employers, government departments, non-government organizations, public libraries, culture groups, and others to share in the thinking, planning, and resourcing of learning opportunities for all learners at all ages.*

When you work with other community groups no matter what sector of the province, you have to know what they do and why they do it. You have to be willing to listen and hear what they have to say and be open to the possibility of aligning and partnering in a new way. Partnership is sharing and supporting one another. Question: How to align authentically and naturally?