THE RESPONSE OF THE

COUNCIL ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

TO THE

OPERATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL

REVIEW OF THE MANITOBA

COUNCIL ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

FOR THE YEARS 2002/03 TO 2008/09

JANUARY, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Created by an act of the legislature, the Manitoba Council on Post-Secondary Education (COPSE), began its operations in 1997 with the passage of *The Council on Post-Secondary Education Act.* In accordance with its legislation, an operational and organizational review of the Council is to be undertaken to consider its performance in the role of planning and coordinating Manitoba's post-secondary education system. The second, and most recent, review of the Council was conducted in 2009 and is now complete.

The Final Report of the second Operational and Organizational Review of the Council was accepted by the Council in December 2009. The Review, covering the years of the Council's operations between 2002/03 and 2008/09, is based on the opinions and observations of stakeholders representing the post-secondary institutions and the Government. A total of 42 interviews were conducted to obtain feedback from stakeholders on several topics of relevance to the Council. The final report, prepared by PRA, Inc, presents 14 recommendations that encapsulates the responses from institutional stakeholders, and provides focus and guidance to the future work of the Council.

The report of this second Council review shared many similarities with that of the first, conducted by Dr. John Mallea, based on the first five years of the Council's existence, from 1997/98 to 2002/03. It is apparent from stakeholder responses that there is need for greater clarity in how the Council functions as an intermediary between the post-secondary institutions and the Government. Additionally, stakeholders have expressed willingness for more consultation with the Council, and the need for greater transparency in the Council's processes, actions, and feedback mechanisms on issues concerning the institutions. Stakeholders believe strongly in the value of strategic planning that articulates the Council's current focus and future direction. And, stakeholders expressed a desire for the Council to play a greater role in system coordination.

This Response to the review addresses the recommendations as well as some further comments from stakeholders as presented in the report. The Council has responded with several action statements to address the issues and concerns of stakeholders. It is through these actions that the Council will take direction to guide its present efforts and chart a future course.

This review would not have been possible without the co-operation and assistance of our institutional colleagues and the close working relationships that have been established. The Council recognizes the vital importance of the partnerships created and looks forward to ongoing collaboration with institutional representatives as we continue our work together to develop a post-secondary education system that offers relevance, diversity, accessibility, and excellence for all Manitobans.

The Council's Role as Intermediary

Among the 14 recommendations in the Council Review is a theme that calls for greater clarity concerning the Council's role as an intermediary between the post-secondary institutions and the Government. The review suggests that COPSE needs to be clearer among stakeholders about the meaning, actions, limitations and expectations concerning its role as an intermediary. This lack of clarity about the Council's intermediary role was also identified in the Mallea Report, and relates to the issues surrounding the need for greater transparency, discussed later in this report.

> The Review recommended that…
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> - COPSE should clarify what its role as intermediary means, spelling out to stakeholders exactly what this activity involves, what its limitations are, and what its expectations are of stakeholders and government.

The Report states that institutional stakeholders have difficulty judging the Council's effectiveness as an intermediary without more information about the Council's objectives, the differences in responsibilities between the Council and the Government, and the outcome of information provided by stakeholders to the Council.

The Council recognizes that the role of an intermediary between the institutions and Government is not well understood among the institutional stakeholders. To address these gaps in understanding, the Council will work closely with both parties to determine ways to add clarity to its role as intermediary.

Action: *COPSE will work with colleges, universities, students and other stakeholders to better define the Council's intermediary role and its relationship to the institutions.*

Action: *COPSE will work with Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy (MAEL) as contemplated in the COPSE Act, so as to better clarify its relationship with Government.*

Planning

A key finding of the Review is a need for the Council to play a more prominent role in overall planning for the post-secondary system. Responses from stakeholders clearly indicate the need for the Council to work with stakeholders to establish a vision for the post secondary system.

The Review recommended that…

- COPSE should develop, in consultation with Government and stakeholders, a vision for the PSE system in Manitoba, a strategic plan that outlines goals, and an operational plan that demonstrates how these goals will be achieved.

The Council recognizes the importance of establishing vision and direction in the system, while ensuring that key strengths in our system such as institutional autonomy are preserved. Collaboration and cooperation will be required.

Action: *Beginning in 2010/11, COPSE will begin working with post-secondary institutions, students, government and other stakeholders to establish a vision and direction for the post-secondary system.*

Part of this planning process will include the development of an operational plan to achieve the vision, as well as measures to track progress.

The Review recommended that…

- For any future reviews, COPSE's progress should be evaluated against specific goals and outcomes that it has outlined in a strategic plan, even if the plan does not directly align with its mandate and legislated roles.

Planning occurs on a number of levels. Since its creation, the Council has developed and renewed on a regular basis its own strategic plan for internal planning purposes. While this plan has been published every year in its annual report, to improve transparency, the strategic plan will be made accessible on its website.

Action: *COPSE will undertake its own strategic planning exercise in early 2010 to define the Council's objectives.*

As part of this strategic planning process, the Council develops operational plans and measures of its progress. This will also be the case with the renewed strategic plan.

System Coordination

The Review identifies the need for the Council to take a more proactive role in coordinating Manitoba's post-secondary education system. The Council's active engagement in system-wide coordination addresses an important part of its mandate, i.e., *to … coordinate the development of a post-secondary education system in the province…,* and fulfills opportunities to work more closely with the post-secondary institutions and other education providers on issues of mutual interest. While the Council has done some work in this area, it is recognized that more can and should be done.

The Review recommended that…

- COPSE should continue its effort to encourage dialogue among institutions in Manitoba about creation of a province-wide credit transfer system.
- COPSE should continue exploring ways to build upon current practices and, in particular encourage dialogue among the post-secondary institutions about the development of a standardized Quality Assurance process that meets the needs of the province.
- COPSE should continue to coordinate survey research while working with stakeholders to identify topics of importance.

The three areas identified above are avenues the Council will pursue with the post-secondary education system.

- **Credit Transfer Agreements**

In accordance with its legislated mandate, one of the Council's responsibilities is to *"facilitate the implementation of appropriate credit transfer arrangements between universities and colleges*". The Council has, in the past, convened credit transfer and articulation committees with representatives from the institutions, where coordination was required to facilitate recognition and transferability of certain programs. However, the Council has not facilitated credit transfer and articulation agreements on a system-wide scale, largely due to other priorities.

The Council continues to remain closely involved in credit transfer issues at a pan-Canadian level as a member of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Working Group, and through ongoing consultation with other provinces.

Action: *COPSE will continue to work closely with the CMEC Working Group on Credit Transfer and Manitoba's institutions to create a more coordinated system of credit transfer and articulation agreements.*

The Council recognizes however, the need to more actively engage Manitoba's institutions on a wider scale by building on credit transfer agreements already in place and working toward development of transfer policies and guidelines encompassing both the college and university sectors.

Action: *COPSE will encourage dialogue amongst the institutions to continue to build upon existing credit transfer agreements with the goal of establishing a coordinated system of credit transfer and articulation agreements on a province-wide scale.*

- **Quality Assurance Process**

COPSE recognizes the importance of developing a quality assurance process for the post-secondary education system. COPSE participates on the CMEC Quality Assurance Subcommittee to explore the topic in-depth and learn about best practices in other jurisdictions. Ultimately, an important objective will be to establish a quality assurance process appropriate for the Manitoba post-secondary context, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Action: *COPSE will continue to work with the CMEC Quality Assurance Subcommittee to stay connected with the most recent developments in quality enhancement across Canada.*

To further the objective of establishing a quality assurance process for Manitoba, COPSE recognizes that new policy development will be required.

Action: *COPSE will work with stakeholders to establish and manage a permanent working group of government and institutional stakeholders to begin discussions of a Quality Assurance process for Manitoba.*

- **Survey Research Projects**

The Council, in co-operation with the post-secondary institutions, has coordinated two province-wide surveys in the last few years: the Early Leavers Survey in 2007 and the Manitoba Graduate Outcomes Survey in 2008. The survey results provide valuable data on both a small and large scale informing the institutions and Government about relevant outcomes. The Council understands the importance of gathering survey data on a regular basis to inform practice, policy, and decision-making.

Action: *COPSE will continue to build on the successful coordination of two province-wide survey research projects in collaboration with institutional stakeholders.*

- **Other Areas Identified for System Coordination**

Additional comments from stakeholder groups suggest other areas in which COPSE might take a larger role. Issues such as system coordination, covering issues such as procurement, research among universities, impact of K-12 education on post-secondary, and student aid were mentioned.

The Council agrees that opportunities should be seized to further ways of sharing resources and creating synergies across the entire education system in light of current economic realities, and need for a more seamless transfer of knowledge and information. Making efforts to consolidate resources while building new knowledge can also contribute to a stronger, more efficient and sustainable system over time.

The Stakeholders commented that…

- COPSE could coordinate common sharing between universities. This would allow for cost savings and better programming in Manitoba.
- COPSE should make an explicit commitment to plan for university-level research.
- (COPSE should have) more acknowledgement and discussions of what is happening at every level of education and how this is going to affect post-secondary education in the future.
- Expanding the Council's role to include issues of student aid was seen as prudent given this is an integral part of the post-secondary education system. It would allow the Council to demonstrate a more complete understanding of the system if it were allowed to make recommendations on student aid.

Action: *COPSE will, in consultation with the institutions investigate opportunities for shared services in the post-secondary system.*

Action: *COPSE will explore with MAEL and other government departments the feasibility of assuming an active role in discussions regarding the responsibilities and resources associated with research funding in Manitoba.*

Action: *COPSE will continue to work with MAEL on the development of a data strategy that will allow for better data about transitions in the overall education system.*

Action: *COPSE will explore ways to work more closely with Manitoba Student Aid on issues of accessibility.*

Greater Transparency

A common theme underlying much of the Review is the need for greater clarity and openness particularly with regards to the Council's intermediary and advisory roles, as well as to processes linked to consultation, decision-making, and providing feedback. Issues related to the program approval process and the annual funding plan consultations were two areas identified as requiring clarification and follow-up with the relevant stakeholders.

The Review recommended that…

- COPSE should consider how to make its role as intermediary more transparent, including providing stakeholders with a synopsis of its recommendation to government, and providing feedback to stakeholders.
- While COPSE has many powers in legislation, it should develop guidelines as to what these powers mean in practice.
- For purposes of transparency in decision-making, COPSE should clearly articulate the criteria and objectives on which it makes its programming decisions.
- COPSE should make efforts to explain its programming decisions and regardless of whether a program is funded or not, should produce clear and demonstrable reasons for why the decision was made.
- COPSE should provide clear guidelines as to the nature of the information requested, how this information will be used and what its expectations are for the annual funding plan meetings. It should provide institutions with feedback on results of meetings.

As noted earlier, the Council will work closely with the post-secondary institutions and Government to determine ways to make its role as intermediary better understood and more visible. Further clarity is needed regarding practical applications of the Council's powers.

Action: *COPSE will work with colleges, universities, students and other stakeholders to determine ways to make the Council's intermediary role more transparent.*

Action: *COPSE will develop operational policies based on its legislative powers and post those policies on its website.*

- **Annual Funding Plan Meetings**

The Review reveals that institutional stakeholders attach much importance to the annual funding plan meetings with the Council. Institutional representatives clearly have a vested interest in these consultations and based on their comments, the Council needs to provide more contextual detail, follow-up, and information on the outcome of the discussions. From the Council's perspective, these discussions inform the annual funding plan that is prepared by COPSE for the Minister, as required by the *COPSE Act*.

Action: *COPSE will communicate its expectations to institutional stakeholders prior to their presentations at the annual funding plan meetings to demonstrate greater transparency in this process.*

Action: *COPSE will provide feedback to institutional stakeholders following their presentations at the annual funding plan meetings to demonstrate greater transparency in this process.*

- **Program Review and Approval**

The Council and the institutions have collaborated successfully on the program submission, review and approval processes for many years. As part of its programming responsibilities, the Council has maintained consistency in its use of the program approval form to evaluate program proposals, and in avoiding unnecessary duplication of programming across the system. The institutions however, have identified some areas pertaining to the priorities, criteria and decision-making processes used for program approval, where greater clarity is required.

Action: *COPSE will review its feedback processes to the institutions to ensure there are linkages between the criteria for preparing program proposals and the decision-making rationale used for program approval*.

Action: *COPSE will provide clear explanations for the reasons for the approval or non-approval of programs in the correspondence to the institutions following the Council's decisions.*

The Council will take a further general action in response to the need to increase transparency.

Action: *COPSE will publish an annual newsletter profiling its current activities and ongoing projects to post on its website, as a general means of adding greater transparency to the Council.*

More Consultation with Stakeholders

Consultation has been a key factor in the Council's success in establishing effective working relationships with post-secondary education partners. The Council places much importance on the value of consultation and has taken steps to increase it over time. Since the report of the first Council review, the Council initiated consultation with representatives from student organizations, and organized meetings with student and faculty representatives as part of the annual funding plan meetings. This is in addition to all other ongoing consultation.

The Review recommended that…

- If it doesn't have one, COPSE should work with stakeholders to develop an annual calendar that establishes the timing of consultation with each stakeholder group. This calendar should be developed well in advance of meetings to allow all interested stakeholders the opportunity to arrange attendance at these meetings.
- COPSE should provide feedback to stakeholders after consultations, which explains COPSE's understanding of results of information and initial reactions to positions put forward.
- COPSE members should be involved more fully in consultation with stakeholders.

The Council recognizes however that it needs to do more to engage stakeholder groups, by paying more attention to the scheduling of upcoming meetings, and providing sufficient feedback following the discussions.

Action: *COPSE will establish a calendar for meetings with stakeholder groups, i.e., faculty associations and student organizations, during the Council's regular meetings throughout the year.*

Action: *COPSE will, following formal consultation with stakeholder representatives at Council meetings, or the annual funding plan meetings, provide feedback to stakeholders either in-person or in writing in response to the positions put forward.*

The Council agrees that fuller participation in consultation with stakeholders should be encouraged.

Action: *COPSE will consider ways to increase the number of participants at the annual funding plan meetings.*

CONCLUSION

The Council on Post-Secondary Education has received and accepted the Final Report of the Review of the Council on Post-Secondary Education, covering the years from 2002/03 to 2008/09. This formal Response to the Review, on behalf of the Council, outlines several action statements that respond directly to each of the recommendations in the Report.

While it is recognized that some of these actions proposed can be implemented almost immediately, others, especially those that are more complex or require additional resources, will take longer. The Council acknowledges the significance of making every effort to act on the recommendations, and will work diligently, in co-operation with its partners in the post-secondary system and the Government to move forward.