

## Chapter 16

# Advanced Education—Working with the Advanced Education Sector to Achieve Ministry Strategies

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Advanced Education implemented the one outstanding recommendation we first made in 2015 about its processes to work with the advanced education sector to achieve Ministry strategies.

By August 2023, the Ministry, in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, identified specific, measureable targets and timelines to monitor progress toward achieving the Ministry's advanced education sector strategies (i.e., post-secondary education system that is accessible, responsive, sustainable, accountable, and provides high-quality education). The Ministry monitors progress toward achieving its strategies through a performance framework for post-secondary institutions and accountability reporting under the multi-year funding memorandums with post-secondary institutions.

The Ministry required post-secondary institutions to report on the status of measures developed through a performance framework, and to report on their assessment as to whether the post-secondary institution will meet their performance targets and by what date. We found the Ministry reviewed each institution's reports and provided feedback, including any follow-up questions for each assessment (e.g., challenges in meeting performance targets).

The Ministry also required accountability reports from post-secondary institutions outlining progress on their planned initiatives to promote long-term financial sustainability. For example, some institutions planned to increase international student recruitment. The Ministry noted that out of 134 initiatives outlined in the January 2023 accountability reports submitted from post-secondary institutions, 54% were on track and 21% were complete.

Analyzing post-secondary institutions' report submissions on performance measures, targets, and timelines can help the Ministry determine the effectiveness of its sector-wide post-secondary education strategies.

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for the post-secondary education sector that supports a growing Saskatchewan.<sup>1</sup> The Ministry provides leadership and funding to post-secondary institutions to ensure they are responsive to labour market needs, accountable and are effectively governed.<sup>2</sup>

The Ministry and a diverse group of post-secondary institutions comprise Saskatchewan's advanced (post-secondary) education sector, including regional colleges, Saskatchewan

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Advanced Education *Annual Report for 2022–23*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



Polytechnic, Indigenous and Northern Education institutions (e.g., Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies [SIIT]), and the Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan.

To be successful in achieving its mandate as well as fulfilling goals from its annual plans, the Ministry must engage post-secondary institutions in its strategies.

## 2.1 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our fourth follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2015 about the Ministry of Advanced Education's processes to work with the advanced education sector to achieve Ministry strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Our *2015 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 7, concluded that the Ministry had, except in the areas reflected in our two recommendations, effective processes to work with the advanced education sector to achieve the Ministry's strategies for the sector as set out in *The Ministry of Advanced Education Plan for 2014–15*. By August 2021, the Ministry implemented one recommendation and partially implemented the other recommendation.<sup>4</sup>

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out this follow-up audit, we discussed actions taken by Ministry management, reviewed Ministry communications to post-secondary institutions, and examined reports submitted by post-secondary institutions and the Ministry's analysis of these reports.

## 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at August 31, 2023, and the Ministry of Advanced Education's actions up to that date.

### 3.1 Specific, Measurable Targets and Timelines Monitored

***We recommended the Ministry of Advanced Education use specific, measurable targets and timelines to monitor progress toward achievement of its strategies.*** (2015 Report – Volume 1, p. 59, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2016)

**Status**—Implemented

The Ministry of Advanced Education, in collaboration with post-secondary institutions, identified specific, measurable targets and timelines to enable the Ministry to monitor progress toward achieving its strategies.

<sup>3</sup> 2015 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 7, pp. 51–62.

<sup>4</sup> 2021 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 19, pp. 167–170.

## Performance Framework

As noted in our *2021 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 19, the Ministry consulted with post-secondary institutions to develop a performance framework for the advanced education sector. The performance framework sets out expectations and key priorities for the sector such as accessibility (e.g., post-secondary education options available at a range of locations and modalities) and high quality education (e.g., programs provide skills and competencies required by Saskatchewan employers).

For each expectation in the performance framework, we found post-secondary institutions developed targets and timelines for its related measures. See **Figure 1** for examples of institutions' measures, targets and timelines.

**Figure 1—Performance Framework Measures, Targets and Timelines**

Measure	2022 Rate <sup>A</sup>	Target	Timeline
Percentage of first time students who enroll in the same program in the following year	70%	80%	2025
Percentage of programs with a work-integrated learning component	59%	70%	2025
Number of communities where the institution offers its programs	12	14	2024
Number of graduates and successful program completers	282	348	2024

Source: Adapted from information provided by the Ministry of Advanced Education.

<sup>A</sup> Rates obtained from January 2023 reports to the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Annually, post-secondary institutions reported to the Ministry on their performance measures, including a self-assessment on the progress made by the post-secondary institution to meet its targets.<sup>5</sup> We reviewed reports from three post-secondary institutions and found the Ministry analyzed each institution's reports and assessments, and provided feedback, including any follow-up questions on the assessments (e.g., challenges in meeting performance measures).

## Multi-Year Funding Agreement Memorandum of Understanding

In March 2021, the Ministry signed a multi-year funding agreement with post-secondary institutions for the period 2021–22 to 2024–25 that requires them to submit accountability reports to the Ministry on their planned initiatives for the additional funding.<sup>6</sup>

Starting in June 2021, the Ministry received accountability reports from post-secondary institutions twice a year outlining progress on their initiatives to promote long-term financial sustainability. In January 2022, these reports included timelines for implementing initiatives as well as expected targets and outcomes.

An example of an initiative was to increase international student recruitment in partnership with other post-secondary institutions. The post-secondary institution developed multiple objectives within the initiative, and included timelines for each objective, and an overall measure and target to help it determine success of the initiative.

<sup>5</sup> To align with varying academic years, universities and federated colleges report annually in June and training institutions (e.g., Saskatchewan Polytechnic, regional colleges, Indigenous institutions) report annually in January.

<sup>6</sup> The MOU provides post-secondary institutions with an additional \$60 million in operating funding to target areas such as COVID-19 pandemic recovery, revenue generation and sector collaboration. [www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/21/saskatchewan-delivers-multi-year-funding-investment-for-post-secondary-education](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/april/21/saskatchewan-delivers-multi-year-funding-investment-for-post-secondary-education) (27 September 2023).



We reviewed reports from three post-secondary institutions and found the institutions submitted appropriate progress reports to the Ministry. The Ministry subsequently analyzed submissions from post-secondary institutions and provided feedback to those institutions. The Ministry also summarized the status of each post-secondary institutions' initiatives and its analysis, and shared it internally. The Ministry noted that out of 134 initiatives outlined in the January 2023 submissions from post-secondary institutions, 54% were on track and 21% were complete.

Having performance measures, targets, and timelines can assist the Ministry in comprehensively assessing and reporting on achievement of sector-wide strategies and targets. Thorough analysis of post-secondary institutions' report submissions can also help the Ministry to determine the effectiveness of its sector-wide education strategies, or changes or supports needed.