

THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE COCHRANE

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE
AND EMPLOYMENT**

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Government Response to the Aurora College Foundational Review

Mr. Speaker, later today I will table the Government Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Aurora College Foundational Review marking the end of a year-long review process.

This Review has provided an opportunity to step back and evaluate where we are today and where we need to be in the future. Postsecondary education is essential to the growth and prosperity of our territory, and Aurora College continues to play a critical role in providing residents with options for obtaining that education in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, in order to better meet student needs and changing labour market demands, it has been determined that Aurora College requires significant change.

I am pleased to announce that the Government will soon begin the process of transforming Aurora College into a polytechnic university. A polytechnic university combines the practical approach of a college education and the depth of study associated with a university program. Polytechnic programs are hands-on and technology-based, providing students with practical training for in-demand jobs.

The new institution would continue to focus mainly on applied and technical programs, as has been the case with Aurora College in the past, but with a wider range of qualifications available to students. At polytechnic institutions, students have the opportunity to bridge certificate and diploma credentials into bachelor's degrees, allowing for a great deal of flexibility within a defined range of academic programs.

At the same time, we have not forgotten the urgent need for more immediate incremental changes to Aurora College. We must strengthen the foundations of Aurora College as we prepare for transformational change in order to ensure the institution remains effective, efficient and sustainable, and that it meets the needs of students and industry, both now and into the future.

As the Minister responsible, I am accountable for Aurora College and overseeing the transformation process. We have begun forging a new path forward and I remain committed to ensuring we achieve greater public transparency and accountability at Aurora College, throughout the transformation period and at the new polytechnic university moving forward. Decisions must be properly informed and follow national best practices.

An overarching priority of the transformation will also be to maintain a strong institution with three vibrant campuses, each with quality programs that are sustainable and that use, and build on, the assets of the communities where they are located. We will also be strengthening our 21 Community Learning Centres. The Community Learning Centres will continue to be a vital part of the institution moving forward.

I remain committed to preparing the new institution to function at arm's length from Government as was universally supported by stakeholders. Such autonomy is a defining "best practice" of public postsecondary institutions in Canada. Achieving this requires a necessary balance, as the right mix of public accountability and operational independence is essential to the institutions long-term success.

Mr. Speaker, I will be working with the new Associate Deputy Minister to guide the College's transformation into a polytechnic university. One of the first steps will include developing an overall vision for postsecondary education in the north and bringing forward the legislation to make it a reality.

Rather than starting from scratch, we will build on existing Aurora College infrastructure, programming and human resources. This will allow for a fiscally responsible rate of growth.

The Review Report included 67 recommendations and the Government Response either partially or fully accepted all 67 of them. Some of the key commitments include:

- The hiring of an Associate Deputy Minister for Postsecondary Education Renewal.
- Development of a vision for postsecondary education in the NWT.

- Establish an Advisory Committee and Academic Advisory Council – to ensure the College continues to function well during a successful transformation.
- Develop an implementation plan to guide the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university.

We also remain on track to implement a new legislative framework during the life of this Assembly to govern postsecondary education. The primary objective of the new legislation will be to create a process of recognition that ensures the effective governance and quality assurance of postsecondary institutions and their programs.

During the life of this assembly, we will have achieved a great deal with regard to postsecondary education and are embarking on a new and exciting path forward. There is still a great deal of work ahead, but when the 18th Legislative Assembly concludes next year I believe we can all say, with confidence, that we will have done more to advance postsecondary education than any previous Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited by the path ahead for Aurora College and the opportunities a polytechnic university will provide to our residents, communities, industry and economy in the NWT.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.