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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Advanced Education and Skills Development

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Deborah Matthews
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development
900 Bay Street
3rd Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Dear Minister Matthews:

Welcome to your role as Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives. Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress on making Ontario North America's leading jurisdiction for talent, skills and training. As a government, we have achieved the following key results:

- Introduced the Ontario Student Grant, which will provide free tuition for tens of thousands of Ontario students, eliminate provincial student loan debt for tens of thousands of Ontario students, and increase access to interest-free and low-cost loans, starting in the 2017-18 school year.
- Have begun work on the recommendations of the Premier's Expert Panel on the Highly Skilled Workforce.
- Invested \$250 million that will serve up to 150,000 clients through Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy.
- Successfully implemented with the federal government the Postsecondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund, which will lead to investments of more than \$1.9 billion in Ontario.
- Launched a new suite of Youth Employment programming, including Youth Job Connection and Youth Job Link, to help all young people access employment opportunities.
- Passed legislation to require colleges, universities and private career colleges to adopt a sexual assault policy, developed with significant input from students, and to be renewed — with student involvement — at least once every three years.
- Enabled Six Nations Polytechnic, an Aboriginal Institute, to offer a standalone degree program.
- Established the new Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation to provide leadership and support research and innovation in the employment and training system.

As Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development, you will be responsible for the province's advanced education and training, with a focus on supporting the full continuum of learning in partnership with the Minister of Education — from the early years to postsecondary education, and lifelong learning system — that puts the learner and student at the centre. Your mandate is to work collaboratively across government and with our broader public sector partners, including students, colleges, universities, private career colleges, labour, employers and other service providers to:

Create a More Seamless, Integrated Client Focused Employment and Training System to Improve the Experience for Workers and Job Seekers and to Help Ontarians Prepare for the Jobs of the Future

- Working with the Minister of Education, Minister of Labour and Minister of Finance, stakeholders including labour, other employers, colleges, secondary schools and other groups, develop a modernized apprenticeship system focused on increasing completion rates, increasing the participation of traditionally under-represented groups, and creating clearer, better pathways for learners.
- Working with the private sector, launch employment and training programs to allow individuals to acquire the skills and literacies that are required to adapt to the changing nature of the workplace. This should include workplace based programs as well as those targeted to underrepresented groups.
- Working with the Minister Responsible for Accessibility, support the development of a provincial employment strategy for people with disabilities by the end of 2016.
- Lead the development of an integrated, learner-focused Adult Education System, working with the ministers of Education, and Citizenship and Immigration. This should include a focus on adult learners having access to quality learning opportunities.

- Working with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, engage the federal government to improve labour market transfers, to better meet the employment and training needs of all Ontarians including exploring opportunities to support employment and training needs for youth.

Increase Access to High-quality and Affordable College and University Education

- Drive implementation of the new Ontario Student Grant, the single-largest modernization to the Ontario Student Assistance Program, which will make average tuition free for eligible low- and middle-income students, and will reduce the cost for many more. Implementation of the Ontario Student Grant, which takes effect in September 2017, should include working with universities and colleges to develop tools to more accurately calculate actual tuition costs and better communicate them to families, as well as implementing net tuition billing by 2018. This work should also be aligned with efforts to make it easier for students to complete online tasks that support their postsecondary education or training.
- In close partnership with the Minister of Education, and with advice from the Minister of Children and Youth Services, postsecondary institutions, education leaders, students, parents and researchers, develop an access strategy to address the non-financial barriers to postsecondary education for underrepresented groups, including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities and mature students.
- Work with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the Minister of Education and other partners to increase participation in postsecondary education for Indigenous students and provide more opportunities for all students to learn about Indigenous cultures.
- Establish a permanent Minister's Student Advisory Council with students from all parts of the postsecondary education system and regions of the province. This council would share their ideas and provide advice on a variety of topics regarding Ontario's postsecondary education and training system.
- Work with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, college and university leaders, students and other partners to enhance access to mental health services for students.
- Work with the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs to deliver on the commitment to establish a planning board and to study potential market demand for a French-language university associated with a current institution in central southwestern Ontario.
- Work with postsecondary institutions, employers and other partners to support the goal of ensuring that every student has at least one meaningful experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from postsecondary education.
- Proceed with the new York University - Markham Centre Campus in partnership with Seneca College and issue a second targeted call for proposals for a postsecondary facility in the Peel and Halton regions by fall 2016.
- Work with the college sector to mark the 50th anniversary of colleges in 2017.

Building Ontario's Highly Skilled Workforce for the Modern Economy

- Drive the overall implementation of the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy and in partnership with ministers across government, lead the following work:
 - Work with the Minister of Economic Development and Growth to establish the Planning and Partnership Table by fall 2016.
 - By March 2017, establish a Workforce Planning and Development Office, within the ministry, to drive the delivery of the Expert Panel's recommendations.
 - Support sector specific partnerships between postsecondary institutions and employers.
 - Implement a provincial Labour Market Information Strategy to improve access to credible, high-quality information that will help job seekers, students and their families make informed decisions about their future and help employers undertake workforce planning.
 - Develop a centralized system with accessible and publicly available data.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Continue to build a strong postsecondary system that supports student success and ensures the overall financial sustainability of the sector. Continue work to reform the University and College Funding Models and use the new round of Strategic Mandate Agreements to support sustainability and a high-quality, student-focused postsecondary system.
- Work with the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science to ensure the alignment of funding to postsecondary institutions with Strategic Mandate Agreements.
- Work with the Minister of Finance, President of Treasury Board and our partners in the university sector to support greater sustainability including engagement with the sector on university pension plans, compensation and faculty renewal.
- Continue to engage with Aboriginal Institutes, Indigenous partners and the postsecondary sector to develop a framework that supports Aboriginal Institutes.
- Continue to engage with students, the postsecondary sector, and Ontario's trading partners to develop a Postsecondary International Education Strategy.
- Continue to support and work closely with the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer and Ontario Online to support multiple pathways to postsecondary education, credit recognition between institutions, and new digital learning platforms for students.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

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