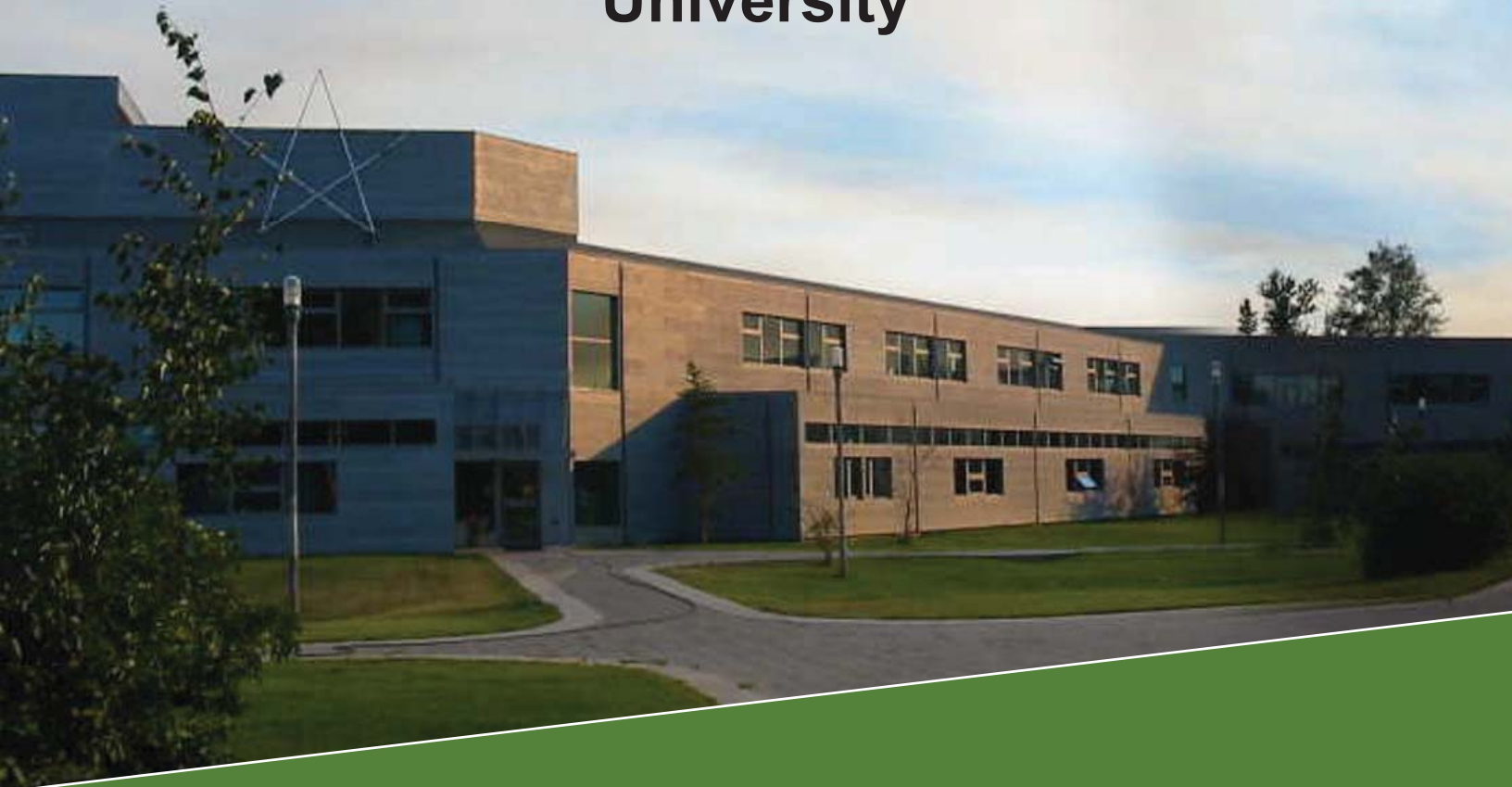


Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University



Town of Fort Smith
October 2018



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report supports the enhancement of post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories through the development of a polytechnic university that meets the needs of NWT students and has its main campus and headquarters located in Fort Smith.

This approach:

- **is intrinsically student-centred and focused foremost on the actual needs of northern students**
- **meets the needs of northern communities and families**
- **improves access to post-secondary education for northerners**
- **follows current trends in post-secondary education**
- **minimises socio-economic impacts on students and communities**
- **will be less expensive for students and the GNWT**
- **meets the stated principle of decentralization**
- **allows for more resources to be committed to K-12**
- **ensures cost effectiveness by expanding existing programs, services and facilities**
- **maintains the Town of Fort Smith as the education capital of the NWT**

The current Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) approach to post-secondary education has led to confusion and uncertainty which is already impacting post-secondary students and staff in existing programs as well the Town of Fort Smith. The [Aurora College Foundational Review](#) which was commissioned by ECE is deeply flawed and contains recommendations that are not evidence-based or related to current trends in post-secondary education.

The governance of Aurora College, and a future polytechnic university must rest with the post-secondary institution itself, rather than an Associate Deputy Minister within ECE. We recommend a polytechnic university transition team is developed and is based in Fort Smith.

The report provides recommendations for key actions in the next 5 years:

1. Confirm Fort Smith as the location of an enhanced Aurora Polytechnic University and Headquarters
2. Reinstate currently suspended Diploma and Degree Programs at Aurora College in Fort Smith
3. Develop a Vision for Post-Secondary Education in the NWT
4. Provide Funding for a Program and Service Review, a Polytechnic University Transition Team, and Capital Plan and Improvements
5. Undertake a Program and Services Review

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6. Build a Bicameral Governance Model
7. Explore Partnerships with Other Post-Secondary Universities
8. Draft Enabling Legislation
9. Develop New Program Offerings
10. Draft the Aurora Polytechnic University Strategic Plan and Academic Plan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of every prosperous society. With a presence in 24 communities, Aurora College is key to achieving true and lasting prosperity across the NWT. Nahendeh MLA Shane Thompson, Member's Statement

As the education centre of the NWT, the Town of Fort Smith is deeply committed to supporting post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories and has a demonstrated track record of providing it. Fort Smith is equally committed to seeing an expansion of post-secondary education at the existing Aurora College campus in Fort Smith. We see few, if any, advantages to supporting a brand new campus in Yellowknife as an alternative to improving and expanding the valuable assets the College already has available.

Centralizing post-secondary services in Yellowknife is contradictory to the GNWT's stated support for the decentralization of services within the NWT. The existing Yellowknife infrastructure is insufficient to accommodate the Polytechnic University Headquarters. We understand that the Yellowknife campus requires expansion to accommodate their existing programming. Both the Town of Fort Smith and many other communities in the NWT will be deeply and negatively impacted by such a move.

The objectives of this report are as follows:

- **To document the economic and social benefits of having the main campus and headquarters of Aurora College in Fort Smith;**
- **To discuss how a more decentralized model of post-secondary education results in stronger outcomes and aligns with current trends in post-secondary education;**
- **To compare identified employment demand in the NWT with current and proposed offerings at Aurora College; and**
- **To consider the experiences of other Colleges in their transition to a polytechnic; and**
- **To document next steps in the transition of the College to a Polytechnic University.**

Strengthening and expanding the role of Aurora College will better support indigenous learners in the NWT. The GNWT is a signatory to the Indigenous Education Protocol and has thereby agreed to the following actions:

1. Commit to making Indigenous education a priority.
2. Ensure governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous peoples.
3. Implement intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples through curriculum and learning approaches relevant to learners and communities.
4. Support students and employees to increase understanding and reciprocity among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
5. Commit to increasing the number of Indigenous employees with ongoing appointments throughout the institution, including Indigenous senior administrators.

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6. Establish Indigenous-centred holistic services and learning environments for learner success.
7. Build relationships and be accountable to Indigenous communities in support of self-determination through education, training and applied research.

This report provides added detail and depth to the original position paper presented by the Town of Fort Smith to the NWT Legislature directly in response to the MNP [Aurora College Foundational Review](#).

2.0 TOWN OF FORT SMITH

The Town of Fort Smith is perfectly positioned to support the provision of post-secondary education to students in the Northwest Territories.

Fort Smith is a friendly, welcoming community with much to offer its residents and visitors alike. The Town has modern facilities, including a pool, curling rink, and large gymnasium; excellent health and social services; and regular community programming for all age levels. Health and safety are ensured by the local RCMP detachment, a volunteer fire department, and the Fort Smith Health and Social Services Centre¹.

Fort Smith is the education capital of the NWT. All grades are available, from junior kindergarten to Grade 12, as well as French immersion and alternative education programs. The Town is also home to the largest of Aurora College's three campuses.

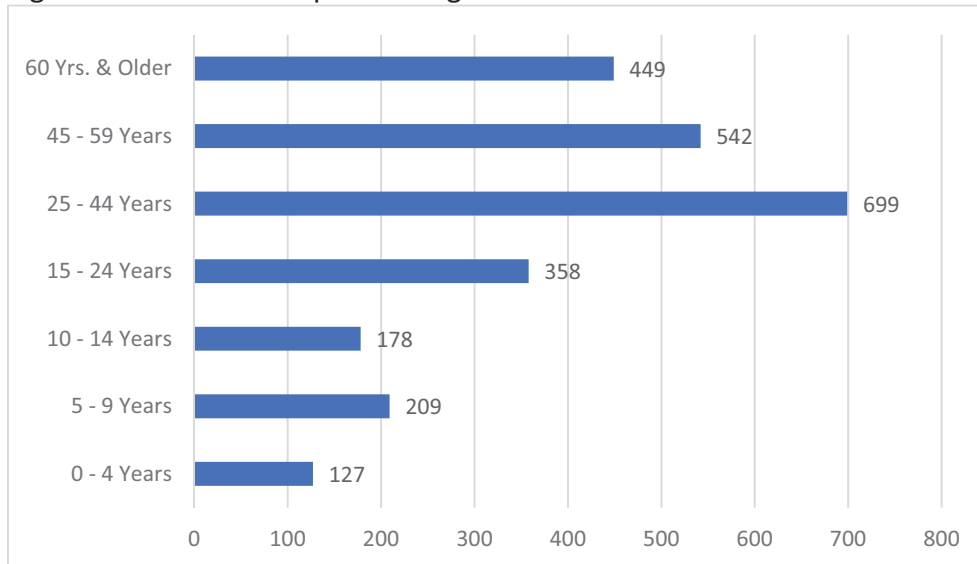
Fort Smith offers unique, world class opportunities. World-class rapids, the world's largest Dark Sky Preserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and territorial and national parks are all nearby. The Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre features impressive cultural and natural collections from the Thebacha region.

Fort Smith is a youthful community. The Town of Fort Smith has approximately 2,500 residents². The 2017 population profile shows that the largest age group in Fort Smith is 25-44. While this is significant, it is also worth noting that 34% of the population is under the age of 24. This youthful population has implications for all levels of education in the Town.

¹ Town of Fort Smith Website

² NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2017

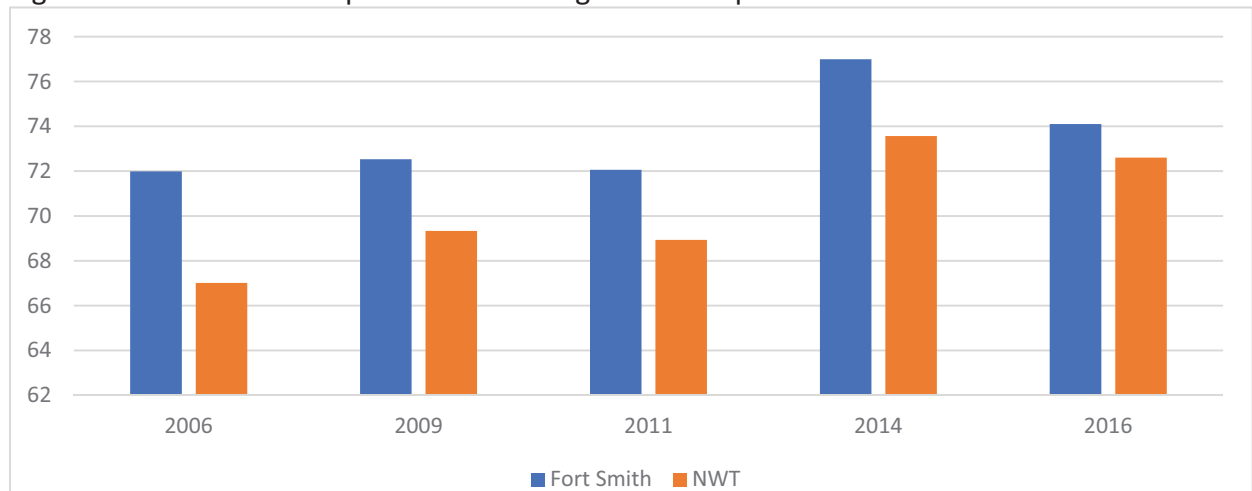
Figure 1: Fort Smith: Population Age Profile



NWT Bureau of Statistics

Fort Smith is a well-educated community. As shown in Figure 2, individuals holding a high school graduation diploma or having pursued post-secondary education have increased in Fort Smith over the past 30 years. High school completion and pursuit of post-secondary education is slightly higher on average in the Town than the rest of the NWT.

Figure 2: Fort Smith: % Population with a High School Diploma or more



Fort Smith has a diversified economy. As shown in Figure 3, there is a range of jobs in different industries available in the Town. The following information is from the 2016 Census Profile for Fort Smith. The principal occupations in 2016 were in education, law and social, community and government services and trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations.

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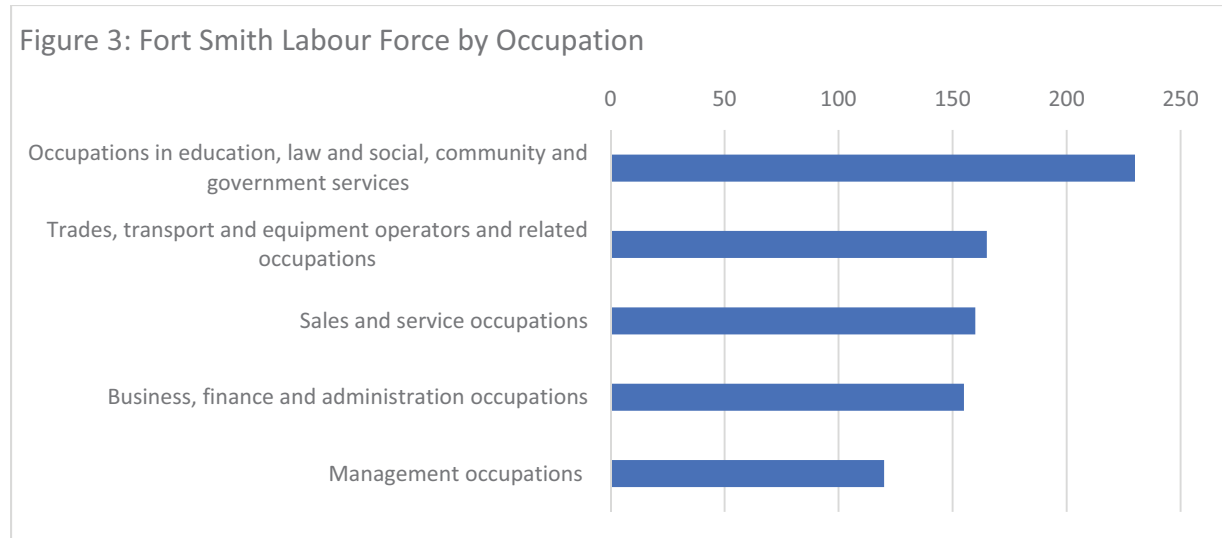
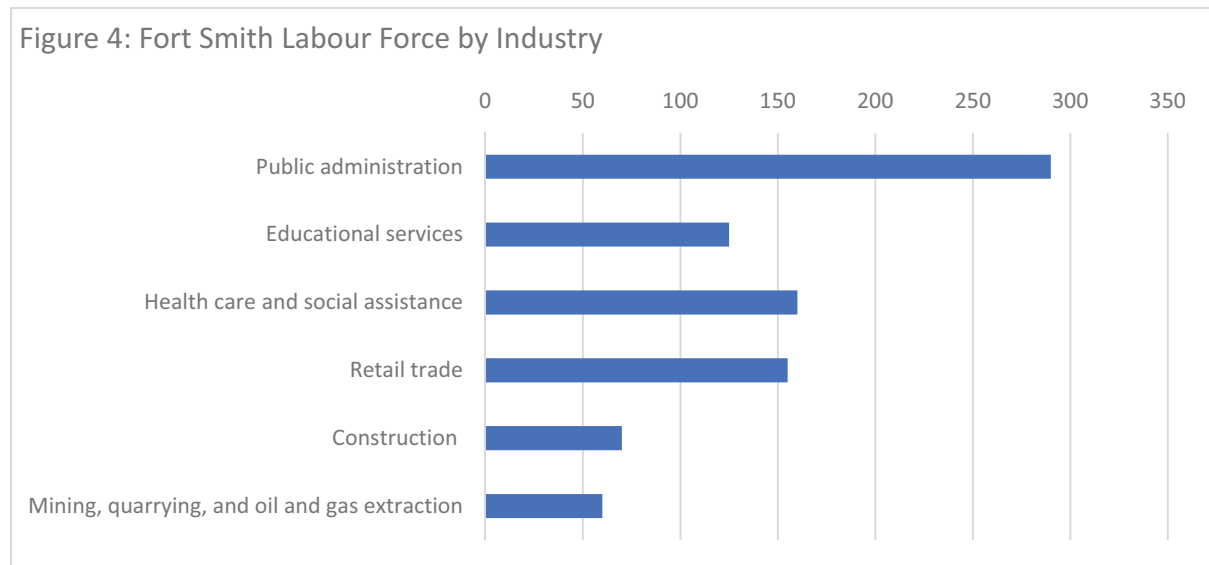


Figure 4 below shows the 2016 labour force by industry. It demonstrates the significance of public administration and educational services to the local economy. Aurora College is the key contributor to these sectors of the economy.



3.0 AURORA COLLEGE

Aurora College is a modern and comprehensive post-secondary institution connected through transfer agreements and partnerships to a wide network of technical schools, colleges and universities throughout Canada and the circumpolar world. In addition to a broad range of trades and apprenticeship training and certificate, diploma and degree programs, the College offers adult literacy and basic education as well as a variety of continuing education courses. Celebrating their 50th anniversary in 2018, Aurora College is well-positioned to work with Northerners to prepare them to build a strong and vibrant society in the NWT.

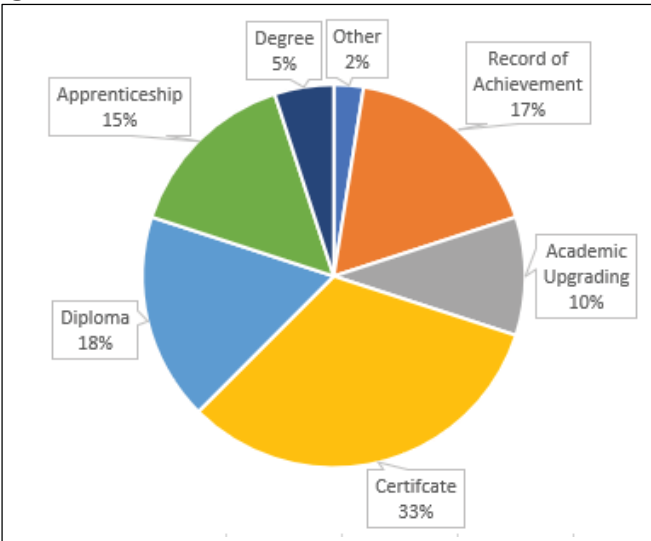
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Aurora College's core purpose is to deliver adult and post-secondary education, including the delivery of university-led programs and granting of prescribed university degrees and applied bachelor's degrees. It has campuses in Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife. Aurora College also has learning centers in 23 communities across the NWT. The main campus is located in Fort Smith.

3.1 Credential and Course Delivery

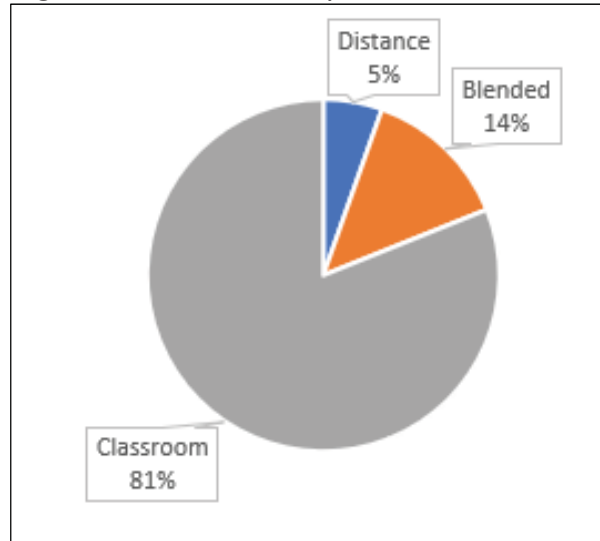
As shown in the figures below and the detailed table which follows, the College offers a variety of post-secondary credentials, the majority of which are certificate programs. For the most part, the programs are delivered in a classroom setting, but there are 5 programs which blend classroom and on-line work and 1 distance education program.

Figure 5: Credentials



Source: Aurora College

Figure 6: Course Delivery Method



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3.2 Program Offerings

Program	Credential	Duration	Method
Arts & Science Programs			
Environment and Natural Resources Technology Program	Diploma	2 Years	Classroom
Environmental Monitor Training Program	Aurora College Record of Achievement	5 weeks	Classroom
Traditional Arts	Certificate	20 courses	Classroom
School of Business & Leadership			
Business Administration	Certificate/Diploma	2 years	Classroom
Office Administration	Certificate/Diploma	1YR Certificate; 2YR Diploma	Classroom
Office Administration - Community Office Procedures Program	Certificate	140 days	Classroom
Office Administration - Computers in the Workplace	Certificate	5 courses	Classroom
Office Administration - Office Administration Certificate Program	Certificate	35 credits	Classroom

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Program	Credential	Duration	Method
School of Developmental Studies			
Introduction to the Mining Industry	Aurora College Record of Achievement	6 Weeks	Classroom
Literacy Outreach Centre	Academic Upgrading / Access Programs	9 months	Blended
Occupations and College Access Program (OCAP)	Academic Upgrading / Access Programs		Blended
University and College Access Program (UCAP)	Academic Upgrading / Access Programs		Blended
School of Education			
Aboriginal Language and Culture Instructor Program (ALCIP) II	Diploma	2 years	Classroom
Bachelor of Education Program	Diploma/Degree	4 year degree/3 year diploma	Classroom
Certificate in Adult Education	Certificate	nine three-credit courses and a three-credit practicum	Blended
Early Childhood Development	Certificate	Various (Part time study)	Distance
Early Learning and Child Care Diploma Program	Diploma	2 years	Blended
School of Health & Human Service			
Community Health Representative	Certificate	6 months	Classroom
Bachelor of Science in Nursing	Degree	4 Years	Classroom
Personal Support Worker	Certificate	13 courses - Flexible FT or PT)	Classroom
Post Graduate Certificate in Remote Nursing	Certificate	1 year	Distance
Social Work	Diploma	2 years	Classroom
School of Trades, Apprenticeship, & Industrial Training			
Apprenticeship Carpenter	Apprenticeship	8 weeks/year	Classroom
Apprenticeship Electrician	Apprenticeship	8 weeks/year	Classroom
Apprenticeship Heavy Duty Equipment Technician	Apprenticeship	15 weeks	Classroom
Apprenticeship Housing Maintainer	Apprenticeship	8 weeks/year	Classroom
Apprenticeship Plumber/Gasfitter Program	Apprenticeship	8 weeks	Classroom
Building Trades Helper Program	Aurora College Record of Participation	12 weeks	Classroom
Camp Cook	Other	12-18 weeks	Classroom
Fundamentals of Carpentry 1	Certificate	20 weeks	Classroom
Heavy Equipment Operator Program	Aurora College Record of Achievement	15 weeks	Classroom
Introduction to Underground Mining	Aurora College Record of Participation	6 weeks	Classroom
Observer/Communicator Training Program	Aurora College Certificate of Achievement	9 weeks	Classroom
Oil Burner Mechanic (TQ) Special	Apprenticeship	11 courses	Classroom
Pre-Apprenticeship Carpentry	Academic Upgrading / Access Programs	3 months	Classroom
Pre-Apprenticeship Heavy Equipment Technician	Aurora College Record of Achievement	12 weeks	Classroom
Underground Miner Training Program	Aurora College Record of Achievement	14 weeks	Classroom

Source: Aurora College

Aurora College Credential Profile: Social Work

Since its inception in September 1982, the Social Work Program at Aurora College has gone through a number of changes from its origins as a Social Services diploma. It has been offered in Fort Smith and Inuvik and is now located at the North Slave Campus of the College in Yellowknife. Indigenous and northern content have been added to the program, including specific courses such as First Peoples of the NWT and Culture Camp as well as integration of such content into other courses. Graduates receive credit towards a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) at the University of Regina or Yukon College.

The Social Work program has many strengths including:

- Meeting the market demand for social workers; social work is anticipated to be one of the top three jobs in demand for diploma graduates.
- NWT focused curriculum which is flexible and includes a number of Indigenous-specific courses which are relevant to social workers practicing in the NWT.
- Diverse student population that is representative of the population of the NWT. On average, more than half the students are Indigenous.
- Meeting many of the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) standards.
- The qualifications and quality of the social work faculty and sessional instructors.
- Support for indigenous learners including integrating Elders in the programming and the availability of an Indigenous counsellor.
- The availability of adequate housing for full-time students coming from outside of Yellowknife.

Both Yukon College and the University of Regina recognize the Aurora College program and provide for transfer credit that allows students to complete a BSW.

Aurora College currently offers degree programs through the School of Education and the School of Health & Human Services in collaboration with southern institutions. The Bachelor of Education Program is delivered in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing is delivered in partnership with University of Victoria³. One of the factors Aurora College will have to consider for transitioning to a university will be the degrees they offer without partnerships with other institutions.

Given the anticipated future demand of social workers in the NWT; the strengths of the existing program; students' positive feedback; the requirements of a polytechnic university and the recommendations made for the program, Aurora College should continue to develop the social work program and pursue the development and implementation of a Bachelor of Social Work degree program.

³ http://www.auroracollege.nt.ca/_live/pages/wpPages/ProgramsDegree.aspx

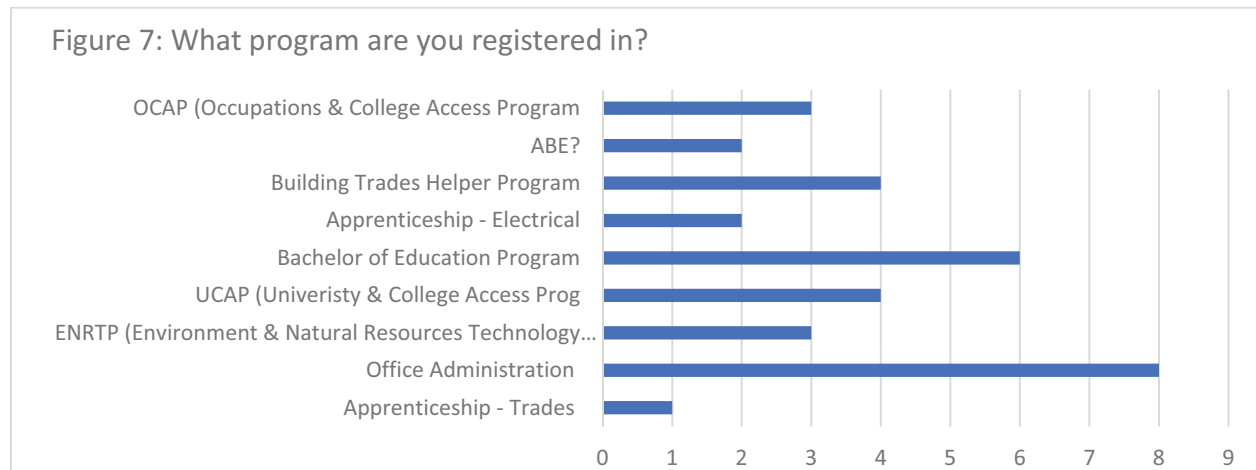
3.3 Student Experience in Fort Smith

Students who attend Aurora College’s Thebacha Campus in Fort Smith are generally very happy with the education they receive, the Town and the campus itself.

Fort Smith allows AC [Aurora College] students to move in and become a part of the community. People are embraced and are able to build meaningful relationships – whether it be with the new friends they make, the grocer or the postmaster. In Fort Smith, AC students and their families are engaged and made to feel like they belong. They are also encouraged to work there after graduation and make their home in Fort Smith. AC students become part of the rhythm of the community very quickly and know that they matter. Marnie Villeneuve, Teacher Education Program graduate, current PWK High School Teacher and lifelong Fort Smith resident.

The Fort Smith community as a whole supports students through discounts at local businesses and free access to the Recreation Centre which is within walking distance of the student residences. The Recreation Centre has a pool, fitness centre, gym, movie theatre, squash courts, a curling rink and offers a range of programs and services. The College itself offers organized activities such as the "Walk to Tuk," a September welcome BBQ, Christmas toy drives, Thanksgiving Feasts, and Aurora College week events.

A survey was available at the September College Community Services Fair and was completed by 34 students. Most respondents have been at the College for two to three years. The chart below shows the range of programs respondents are registered in which represents a good cross section of programs available at the College.

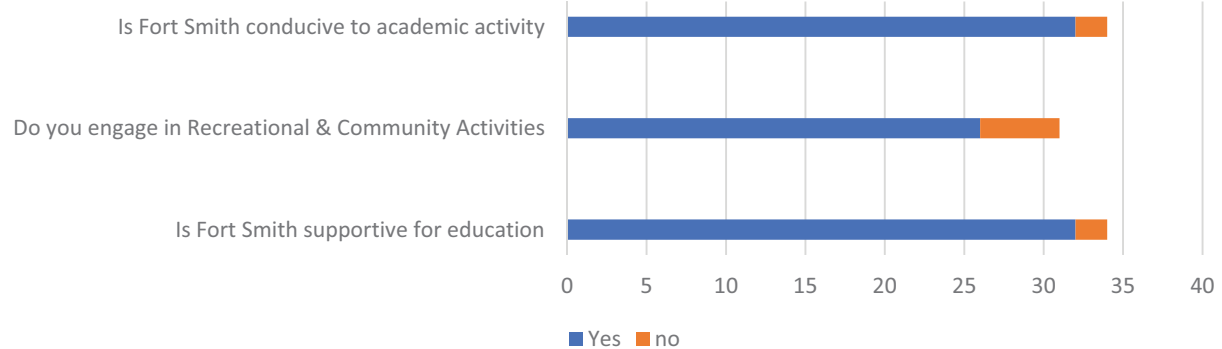


Most students indicated that they are not working while attending the College and only 20% had sought employment while in school.

Students were asked three questions about community support which are summarized in the chart below. The responses demonstrate a strong level of support both for the College and for the Town of Fort Smith.

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Figure 8: Community Support



A few comments from students about the College and the Town are presented below:

I am grateful to be in Fort Smith with my family and to complete my degree. I have found that the community is accessible, resourceful and supportive. The Town offers opportunities for students and families.

Loving every experience in Smith. Very friendly.

My experience is great so far.

School is going well, I am excited to complete the first semester.

Most of the respondents live in student housing. For those not living in student housing, all but one was able to find adequate housing in Fort Smith. One respondent also identified the need for more housing so that students can stay in the Town and work after graduating.



4.0 POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION TRENDS

There have been many changes to educational institutions in Canada over the past few years. Some of the changes occurring across Canada increase access and success for many who would otherwise not have been able to go to college or university. Advancements in technology, a changing student body and a paradigm shift in learning styles all drive these changes.

4.1 Advancements in Technology

New technology has created the expectation among learners that they can learn almost anything, anywhere and within a given timeframe. New forms of support for learning - instant mentoring, online peer networks, coaching from global support structures – will meet this demand.

In the United States, it is now the case that more than twice as many now take a class online as live on campus. There are more undergraduates enrolled in an online class than there are graduate students enrolled in all Masters and Ph.D. programs combined. Online learning is part of the standard mix of programs and course offerings across Canada, with very few higher education institutions not offering online learning to some degree. This is one of the changes which have occurred in a short period of time – just over twenty years – but which have a significant impact on pedagogy, programs and resources.⁴

The emergence of online learning has transformed access to learning for many students and has changed the dynamics of higher education. It is now the case that approximately 1.5 million online courses for credit are being taken by Canadian higher education students each year⁵. At the heart of this global competitiveness is a significant increase in learner mobility – a cornerstone of the twenty-first century. More learners are traveling further and more often for their education, whether or not they leave their home.

4.2 Changing Student Body

Given this new global competitiveness and the globalization of professions, employability skills and knowledge will lead to a blurring of geographic boundaries for access to learning, support and assessment which has led to an increase in international students as part of Canadian programs. Universities and colleges worldwide are currently competing for over 8 million international students.⁶ There is also an anticipated demand for older learners interested in university courses and programs.

Given the rate at which knowledge is changing and the speed at which new skills and competencies are required to take account of social, technological and scientific advances, learning will become increasingly a lifelong requirement for all.⁷

⁴ Contact North, 2016. The Future of Higher Education.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Understanding the shift in the student body means targeting the services and programs offered to a more diverse group of students, as well as those who will choose to be lifelong learners. The way that courses are taught is becoming equal in importance to the way the courses are offered.

4.3 Shift in Learning Styles

With new technologies and a changing student audience, learners will be looking for access to quality programs, delivered with flexible options supported by coaches, guides and mentors who can personalize learning and leverage the knowledge and skills the learner brings to their studies.

As access to knowledge is much more universal (aided significantly by advances in automatic translation engines and open education and research resources), then the curriculum itself also needs to reflect who the learners are, where they come from and are likely to return to.⁸

It will be vital to understand the student body to promote effective teaching style. The new 'classroom,' wherever that may be, will have to maximize the resources available to the students as learning materials will be increasingly available on a range of platforms. This is particularly critical as employers are looking at the applied skills that graduates have more than the credential. Employers are looking for portfolios and other demonstrations of knowledge, skills and competency.⁹

5.0 POST-SECONDARY READINESS/SUCCESS

. . . it is irresponsible to embark down a path of spending an unknown but undoubtedly immense amount of our limited funds on university when we have a graduation rate of 67 per cent in the NWT, which is actually closer to 40 per cent in the communities, and when many of the graduates require upgrading before they can even consider post-secondary. After high school, there is no shortage of universities to attend, but, before graduation, our students usually only have one choice of school, and those are the schools that we need to invest in if we want to effect lasting change for our residents. Hay River MLA RJ Simpson, Member's Statement

Fundamentally, skill development starts at an early age. This is why the GNWT is making significant investments in early childhood development through Right from the Start: A Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT. The Framework suggests changes to improve Kindergarten to Grade 12 education outcomes through the Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change. This Framework will build on existing efforts and drive change to improve student transitions and pathways to advanced education and careers that align with NWT labour market demands and opportunities.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Higher education is fundamental to individual health and welfare, social wellbeing and developing local economies. Education improves labour market prospects for individuals, reduces their risk of unemployment and boosts earnings.

Placing priority on skill development and closing education and employment gaps will help drive positive social and economic outcomes across the North. Significant investment will be required to close existing gaps in high school completion and post-secondary completion.

5.1 Post-Secondary Readiness

In the current information and technology-based economy, a high school degree is generally no longer sufficient to access well paid employment opportunities. It is essential that there are supports in place for high school students in the Northwest Territories to pursue post-secondary education.

We know that we have many high school graduates who must be better prepared for post-secondary, so we will redouble our efforts in the JK-12 system. At the same time, we will mobilize our network of community learning centres to ensure that upgrading and expanded training opportunities are accessible to everyone. Nahendeh MLA Shane Thompson, Member's Statement

The [Skills4Success Report](#) suggests providing credits to high school students for completion of external programs and dual credits for completion of post-secondary courses and/or programs to promote educational achievement. However, there needs to be support from all levels of government as well as teachers and parents to help students prepare for post-secondary education.

In [Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment](#),¹⁰ the key issue is that students' high school experiences often do not prepare them adequately for postsecondary education and the world of work. The findings of this report should inform the GNWT education programs and services review to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to maximise opportunities and successful outcomes for students.

The following supports were suggested to ease the transition from high school to higher education:

- **Dual-Credit Programs:** These could include such opportunities as courses taken in high school that are equivalent to those taken at a postsecondary institution or students earn up to an associate degree or 2 years of credit toward a baccalaureate degree while in high school.
- **Tech Prep:** This option combines a minimum of 2 years of secondary education with a minimum of 2 years of postsecondary education in a nonduplicative, sequential course

¹⁰ Bangser, 2008. Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment.

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of study. It integrates academic, vocational, and technical instruction, and uses work-based and worksite learning where appropriate and can lead to an associate or baccalaureate degree in a specific career field.

- **College Preparatory Programs:** This could include an integrated approach that includes scholarships for students meeting achievement and participation goals, summer institutes on college campuses, parental and community involvement, social services and academic enrichment programs at the school site, and interventions at “feeder schools” of participating high schools. There might also be opportunities for programs to utilize summer jobs, workshops, classes, and counseling to assist students who have average academic performance with their career plans and applications to college.
- **Scholarship and Financial Aid Programs:** A range of programs that combine some or all of the following elements:
 - Public and/or private funding.
 - Broad-based eligibility or a focus on economically disadvantaged students.
 - Academic or other requirements such as a threshold grade point average (GPA), graduation from a high school in the region, or attendance at a postsecondary institution in the region.
 - Commitment of college scholarship funds early (such as in the middle grades) or later in high school.
 - Stand-alone financial aid or accompanying academic, mentoring, and other supports.
 - Tuition tax credits as well as scholarship assistance.

To help support NWT students, there are currently six regional ECE Service Centres in the NWT that offer programs and services to help residents plan their career path, improve their skills and find employment¹¹. Career Development Officers work with individuals to provide career planning assistance, including:

- individual and group counselling;
- interest analysis and self-assessment (tools to help decide what they want to do);
- labour market information (information about the type of jobs available in the North);
- occupational profiles (descriptions of different types of jobs); and
- a career resource library.

The GNWT also has many resources for education and training including the following:

- education planning workshops;
- trades entrance exams and exam supervision;
- specialized supports for apprenticeships;
- college and university calendars from across Canada;
- internet access to postsecondary websites;
- NWT Student Financial Assistance (SFA) applications and information;

¹¹ Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE). NWT Education, Training and Employment Guide

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- scholarship information;
- telephone and faxing services for education purposes; and
- career planning workshops.

5.2 Post-Secondary Environment

Increasing the programs at Aurora College directly meets two of the goals from the Skills4Success: 4-Year Action Plan 2016-2020. Under each goal there are priorities, actions and measures. The following summarizes how transforming Aurora College supports each priority, action and measure.

Goal 1: Increase skill levels through relevant education and training

Priorities:

- Skills development and postsecondary education programs are aligned with labour market demands.
- Adult and basic education programs lead to employment.
- Programs focus on achieving defined outcomes in support of employment.
- Programs build long-term capacity for existing and emerging northern economic opportunities.

Actions:

- Work in partnership with Aurora College to create a renewed strategic plan that develops the NWT's labour market.
- Work with all post-secondary partners to ensure post-secondary programming aligns with in-demand occupations and supports NWT labour market needs.
- Improve access to programs to meet the needs of all learners.
- Align adult education and training to increase employability and essential skills.

Measures:

- Publicly-funded NWT post-secondary institutions offer programs that respond to NWT labour market needs.
- NWT residents have increased opportunities for in-demand employment or further adult and post-secondary education and training through upgrading, retraining, and ongoing skills development that links to employment.

How Aurora College Addresses Goal 1: One of the distinctive features of polytechnic and hybrid universities is that they offer a broad range of technical, technological, vocational and professional training programs from apprentice training to diplomas and certificates, as well as post-graduate credentials. These training programs are aligned with the local labour market to ensure students are being trained in skills that will be useful for the local economy and ensure that graduates are employable. Aurora College's transition to a polytechnic university will expand an institution in Fort Smith and will provide students with education and skills to enter the labour market upon graduation.

Goal 2: Bridge education and unemployment gaps through targeted supports

Priorities:

- Partners work together to streamline the delivery of career development supports and services.
- People have supports and incentives to increase competencies and improve individual well-being and employability to move into available jobs.
- People are supported through post-secondary education to develop skills that lead to employment.

Actions:

- Optimize the use of community learning centre services to deliver programs that lead to jobs.
- Increase labour market participation by removing barriers to employment.
- Improve accessibility of post-secondary learning through learning technology and platforms.

Measures:

- Learning technology and platforms exist and increase accessibility of post-secondary learning.

How Aurora College addresses Goal 2: Renewing and expanding close partnerships with industry will be essential for the transition of Aurora College. Partnerships with businesses and government services in Fort Smith will allow Aurora College to offer courses based on industry need so that students can be employed in available jobs when they graduate.

The courses at Aurora College are currently taught at three campuses and 23 community learning centres throughout the Northwest Territories. Aurora College will continue to operate each of the satellite facilities to increase the accessibility of education to those all over the Northwest Territories. In addition to accessible locations, Aurora College will capitalize on modern technology and explore the most effective learning technology and platforms to attract to students and allow for distance learning.

5.3 Unique Needs of Indigenous Students

High school completion is a critical success factor for indigenous students moving on to post-secondary education. The rate of high school completion for indigenous students remains significantly lower than for non-indigenous students. For example, in 2017, the graduation rate for non-indigenous students was 93.9% in the NWT while the graduate rate for indigenous students was 69.8%, a 24.1% difference. This highlights the need for the GNWT to continue focusing on meeting the unique needs of indigenous students to close this gap.

Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University

Education has been identified as a key determinant of health. For indigenous students, interactions with the education system reflect the historic and contemporary impacts of colonialism. These impacts can be summarized as:

- Socio economic marginalization through the poverty faced by many indigenous people in Canada
- Inappropriate education systems which include a lack of post-secondary opportunities in rural and remote communities
- Inequitable funding for education through systemic underfunding of community-based schools in indigenous communities¹²

Indigenous students coming from small communities often look for post-secondary options that feature smaller classes and have a smaller campus with fewer students¹³. This can make the transition to post-secondary more successful.

The continuum of education for children begins with early childhood education, moving through elementary and secondary school and finally to post-secondary. For indigenous students, additional support may be required to support high school completion. This can include pathways for high school completion for adult learners who left school early and now want to complete high school.

Aurora College is perfectly placed to meet the needs of indigenous and non-indigenous students wishing to further their education while at the same time remaining in the Northwest Territories. An added advantage is that completing post-secondary in the NWT increases the likelihood students will remain there to live and work post-graduation.



¹² “Education as a Social Determinant of First Nation, Metis and Inuit Health”, National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2016, pp. 2-7

¹³ Cynthia J. Gallop, “Supporting Success: Aboriginal Students in Higher Education”, Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Volume 46, No. 2, 2016, p.215

6.0 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Post-secondary education (PSE) is a growth industry in Canada. The real GDP of Canada’s universities and colleges grew by over 17% between September 2007 and September 2013 and full time equivalent enrolments in university and colleges increased significantly over the same period. These increases outpaced growth in the Canadian population.¹⁴

Canada’s post-secondary education institutions make major contributions to Canada’s economy. For instance, recent studies have estimated the following annual economic impacts: over \$4 billion by the University of Ottawa; \$816 million by Camosun College in Victoria, B.C.; over \$5 billion by McGill University; and \$10 billion by the University of British Columbia (UBC). The study of UBC estimated a government expenditure multiplier of 10, meaning that British Columbia taxpayers receive a \$10 benefit for every dollar of investment.

Over \$40 billion in spending flows through Canada’s colleges and universities each year, which generates over \$55 billion in economic activity—after multiplier effects. The significance of this to the Town of Fort Smith economy cannot be understated.

6.1 Direct Benefits

Individual PSE institutions are among Canada’s largest employers. For example, the University of British Columbia (UBC) employs over 10,000 people, making it Vancouver’s largest single employer. Direct spending includes spending on employment wages on goods and services. The table below taken from the Yukon College Socioeconomic Profile shows the total economic impacts of the College (p. 21):

Table 8. Direct Yukon College Spending – Multiplier Effects in Yukon 2014-2015

Type of Multiplier	Direct	Indirect and Induced	Total (Direct, Indirect and Induced)
Output	\$43.0 million	\$18.1 million	\$61.1 million
GDP	\$26.0 million	\$11.8 million	\$37.8 million
Employment (FTE)	449	84	533
Labour Income	\$22.2 million	\$5.0 million	\$27.2 million
Taxes on products	\$0.14 million	\$0.14 million	\$0.28 million
Taxes on production	\$0.19 million	\$0.53 million	\$0.72 million

It is estimated that every dollar spent on PSE creates \$1.36 of economic value added (or output) in the Canadian economy.

¹⁴ This section draws significantly from [The Economic Impact of Post-Secondary Education in Canada](#), The Conference Board of Canada, Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education, November 2014

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The relative local economic impact of a PSE institution depends on three things:

- its size (as an enterprise) in relation to the surrounding economy;
- the extent to which it draws students from other jurisdictions; and
- the extent to which it produces graduates and intellectual property that local employers use.

This analysis suggests that the local and regional economic impact of Aurora College is likely significantly higher than a larger university in a larger City.

This is supported by the March 2016 Yukon College Socioeconomic Profile which states:

Yukon College generates substantial economic activity and employment throughout the territory. Additionally, the College facilitates a higher quality and readily available workforce, increased productivity for employers, and increased earning potential for residents. The College also has a profound impact on the quality of life.¹⁵

The report estimates that the total Yukon College-related economic impact in 2014-2015 was \$62.2 million (\$43.8 million on direct impacts and \$18.4 million in indirect and induced impacts)¹⁶.

Universities benefit citizens at an individual level, as well as a governmental level. Canadians who acquire higher education can expect a double-digit annual return on their investment. The highest returns are realized in applied fields at the university level. Achieving a full credential is especially important in post-secondary education. For instance, completers earned 4 to 6 per cent more for a high school diploma; 6 per cent more than that for completion of a community college or trade school program without a high school diploma; and 3 to 5 per cent more than that for completion of a community college or trade school program with a high school diploma. However, the greatest earnings effect was at the bachelor's degree level, where completers earned over 20 per cent more than non-completers. As the economy and society place more emphasis on longer school stays, more flexibility may be required in the system. Although students may still wish to pursue advanced education, they are much more likely to want flexible learning options as they do so.

6.2 Indirect Benefits

Students and visitors attracted to a community by an institution also spend money in the local economy. The actual impact depends considerably on whether the student base lives at home or outside the home.

Aurora College students and their families purchase goods and services locally. With an estimate of annual expenses of \$24,000 per student for groceries, transportation, entertainment, rent, and other services, moving the campus out of Fort Smith would result in

¹⁵ Yukon College Socioeconomic Profile, May 2016, p.1

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1

a loss of \$7.2 million (based on 300 students) to local businesses and service providers. This cost is a very conservative estimate of what will be a significant impact.

In addition to the spending of students in in the local economy, PSE institutions are centres for social interaction and, therefore, attract travellers who visit the campus and students at the campus. This adds to the indirect benefits.

The broader and long-term socioeconomic impacts of Yukon College include¹⁷:

- provision of a continuum of educational opportunities for residents
- students can upgrade skills and education without leaving the Yukon
- local businesses benefit from a more skilled and educated workforce
- students with more education earn higher incomes and contribute more to the tax base

6.3 Human Capital

Post-secondary institutions make a major contribution to developing people (“human capital development”). The data show good returns for PSE. Evidence supports higher returns for academic streams of higher education over technical and vocational streams. This evidence may explain the push toward expanding degree-granting institutions (including conversions of colleges to degree-granting institutions) and the expansion of college transfer programs.

The broader and long-term socioeconomic impacts of Yukon College include¹⁸:

- provision of a continuum of educational opportunities for residents
- students can upgrade skills and education without leaving the Yukon
- local businesses benefit from a more skilled and educated workforce
- students with more education earn higher incomes and contribute more to the tax base

In fact, research on the value of education suggests a four year degree from Yukon College can be worth additional compensation over a 20-year work period of \$488,000 for men and \$296,000 for women relative to those who have completed high school¹⁹.

7.0 NWT LABOUR MARKET OVERVIEW

The Conference Board of Canada forecasts that over the next 15 years approximately 75% of available job opportunities in the NWT will require college, apprenticeship training or university education. The proportion of job opportunities open to people with less than a high school education is forecasted to be less than 10% over the same time period. This is troubling for the NWT, knowing that a high proportion of the current labour supply is low skilled according to their highest level of schooling.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.2

¹⁸ Ibid., p.2

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.2-3

Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University

7.1 Market Forecasts

The Conference Board of Canada forecasts that residents of the NWT will see 28,500 job openings in the base case scenario and 36,700 job openings in the high growth scenario over the next 15 years. The majority of these job openings result from replacement demand, while the number of jobs created by expansion demand will vary depending on changing economic conditions. Population dynamics and retirement will drive much of the replacement demand. The impending impact and significance of the aging workforce is reflected by the now 9,500 workers who are aged 45 and older; an increase of 40% between 2015 and 2030.

In the NWT, the employment rate for those with a university degree was 88%, a college diploma or trades certificate was 79%, a high school diploma was 61% and for those with less than high school it was only 38%.

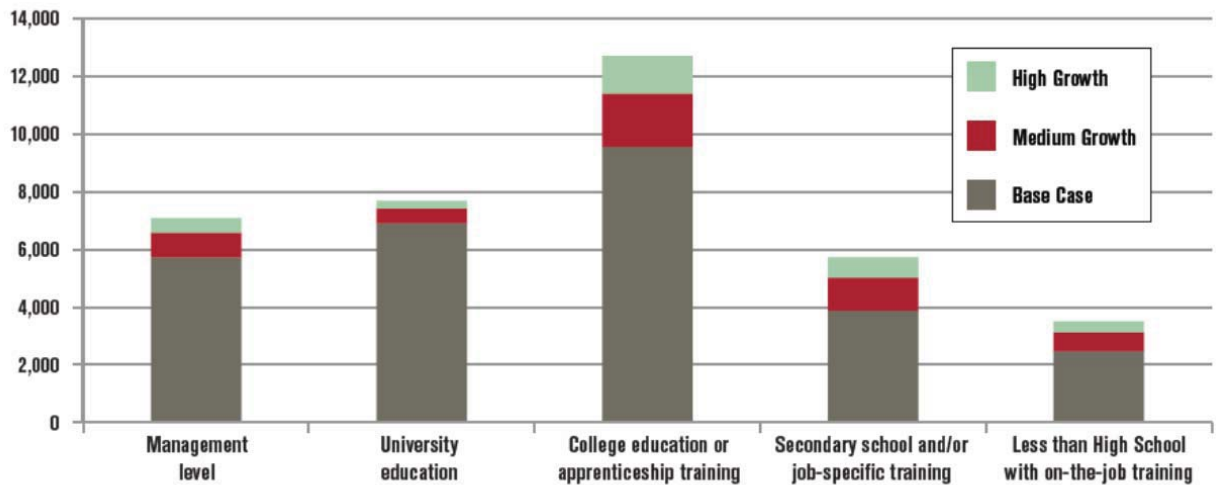
As per the GNWT's Skills4Success 10 year Framework, 2014, it is forecast that there will be 28,500 to 36,700 job openings in the NWT by 2030, and that most of the jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. Approximately 75% of the job openings will require college, apprenticeship training or university education. It is further reported that the demand and competition for skilled workers will only intensify in the coming years with an aging workforce and people exiting the labour market in large numbers.

Higher education is fundamental to individual health and welfare, social well-being and developing local economies. Education improves labour market prospects for individuals, reduces their risk of unemployment and boosts earnings.



Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University

Figure 9: Forecasted Job Openings among NWT Resident Workforce by Education and Training from 2015 to 2030



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

7.2 Linking Employment Opportunities with Post-Secondary Education

The tables below, excerpted from the 10 Year Framework, present the top 10 forecasted job openings from 2015 to 2030, classified by level of education or training required. The “Currently Offered” and “Potential Future Offering” columns identify those jobs that may have related education/training opportunities at Aurora College. Currently, programs for employment in 13 out of 40 occupation categories are offered at Aurora College. This supports expanding program offerings at Aurora College to address additional identified market demands.



Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University

Management Occupations PSE and extensive work experience			
Top 10 Occupations	Job Openings (Base Case – High Growth)	Currently Offered	Potential Future Offering
Retail and Wholesale Trade Managers	1,138-1,581		✓
Construction Managers	371-555		✓
Financial Managers	285-324		✓
Senior Government Managers and Officials	277-304		✓
Accommodation and Service Managers	238-254		✓
Facility Operation and Maintenance Managers	237-276		✓
Senior Managers – Financial, Communications and Other Business Services	233-251		✓
Senior Managers – Health, Education, Social and Community Services and Membership Organizations	202-222		✓
Managers in Social, Community and Correctional Services	198-220		✓
Restaurant and Food Service Managers	198-215		✓
Total Job Openings for all Management Occupations from 2015 to 2030	5,725 – 7,084		

University degree at Bachelors, Masters or Doctorate level			
Top 10 Occupations	Job Openings (Base Case – High Growth)	Currently Offered	Potential Future Offering
Elementary School and Kindergarten Teachers	777-843	✓	
Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses	740-837	✓	
Secondary School Teachers	577-623	✓	
College and Other Vocational Instructors	382-413		✓
Financial Auditors and Accountants	310-386		✓
Social Policy Researchers, Consultants and Program Officers	244-271		✓
Professional Occupations in Religion	213-226		✓
Lawyers	201-219		✓
Civil Engineers	197-204		✓
Social Workers	158-177	✓	
Total Job Openings for all University degree at Bachelors, Masters or Doctorate level Occupations from 2015 to 2030	6,907-7,688		

Looking Forward: Aurora College Transition to Polytechnic University

Occupations Typically Requiring a College Diploma			
<i>Two to three years of post-secondary education or three to four years of secondary school and more than two years of on-the-job training, specialized courses or specific work experience.</i>			
Top 10 Occupations	Job Openings (Base Case – High Growth)	Currently Offered	Potential Future Offering
Administrative Officers	688-889	✓	
Administrative Assistants	607-729	✓	
Social and Community Service Workers	479-543	✓	
Early Childhood Educators and Assistants	448-512	✓	
Accounting Technicians and Bookkeepers	408-483	✓	
Cooks	289-345	✓	
Air Pilots, Flight Engineers, and Flying Instructors	242-440		✓
Underground Production and Development Miners	232-425		✓
Police Officers	183-207		✓
Property Administrators	155-177		✓
Total Job Openings for all College Diploma Occupations from 2015 to 2030	7,249-9,121		

Occupations Typically Requiring a Trades Certificate			
<i>Two to five years of apprenticeship training</i>			
Top 10 Occupations	Job Openings (Base Case – High Growth)	Currently Offered	Potential Future Offering
Carpenters	378-566	✓	
Electricians (Except Industrial and Power System)	207-328		✓
Automotive Service Technicians, Truck and Bus Mechanics and Mechanical Repairers	189-270		✓
Heavy-Duty Equipment Mechanics	152-230	✓	
Plumbers	118-193	✓	
Welders and Related Machine Operators	113-177		✓
Construction Millwrights and Industrial Mechanics	102-178		✓
Aircraft Mechanics and Inspectors	95-178		✓
Contractors and Supervisors, Heavy Equipment Operator Crews	94-141		✓
Contractors and Supervisors, Electrical Trades and Telecommunications Occupations	89-134		✓
Total Job Openings for all Trades Certificate Occupations from 2015 to 2030	2,312-3,590		

7.3 Potential New Aurora College Course Offerings

Based on the above information, it is recommended that additional programs be offered by Aurora College to meet the market demands for these employment opportunities.

- Retail and Wholesale Trade Managers
- Construction Management
- Financial Management
- Senior Government Managers and Officials
- College and Other Vocational Instructors
- Lawyers
- Electricians
- Automotive Service Technicians, Truck and Bus Mechanics and Mechanical Repairers
- Welders and Related Machine Operators
- Plumbers

8.0 TRANSITIONING TO A POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Expanding the post-secondary options and programs in the north is an important element in retaining educated community members. There are obvious reasons why distance to a university creates an obstacle to post-secondary participation: the costs of moving and living away from home are too high, the emotional costs of leaving family and support networks are too high, and students living at a distance from a university may not perceive the benefits of attending one. The transition from a small community to a city can be difficult if not impossible for some students to make, thus reducing their opportunities to complete post-secondary education.

Canadian students living more than 80 kilometres from a university are only 58% as likely to attend university as students living closer²⁰. A series of accredited universities across the north will aid in the educational success of students across the northern territories. There are currently plans in all three of Canada's territories to give their residents local post-secondary education options. Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut all have different approaches but similar goals²¹. Nunavut Arctic College plans to announce a partnership with a southern institution. It wants to broaden the College's current offerings with a view toward the administrative needs of government and the technical requirements of the resource industry²².

This section of the report looks at two similar post-secondary institutions in Canada that are in the process of transitioning from a College to a Polytechnic University. Below are discussions of the plans and strategies for both Yukon College and Red Deer College.

²⁰ White Paper on Red Deer College as Central Alberta's Polytechnic University

²¹ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/education/article-canada-to-get-its-first-university-in-the-arctic-this-fall-with-more/>

²² Ibid.

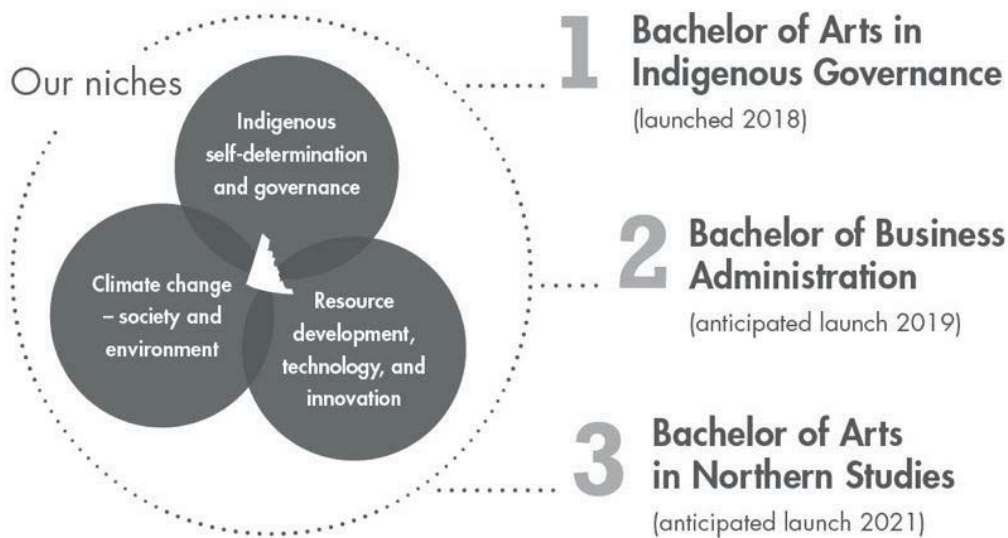
8.1 Yukon College (Yukon University)

Yukon College is making the transition from College to University but will be a hybrid university: “a flexible, post-secondary institution that includes a place and a pathway for every learner. They will provide greater opportunities for students to be grounded in research and education relevant to the North. Yukon University will be known for focusing on education and research relevant to populations in the North, contributing to a responsive, resilient and versatile economy and society²³.” The Yukon College approach closely matches Aurora College’s plans and objectives.

As a hybrid university, Yukon University will offer comprehensive programming including degree, diploma, certificate and skills training programs and university prep and enable hundreds of northern students to complete degrees close to home, beginning immediately²⁴.

Currently, Arctic colleges offer northern students degree programs such as education and nursing but the programs are run and degrees awarded by southern institutions²⁵. Yukon College is going to build on the programs they have offered previously that focus on the strengths of the north, and solely offer three degrees based on their existing niche programming. The following diagram shows the proposed degrees for Yukon University²⁶.

The first three proposed degrees of YukonU are:



²³ <http://yukonuniversity.ca/yukonu>

²⁴ <https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/news/201806/yukonu-path-reconciliation-north-north-north>

²⁵ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/education/article-canada-to-get-its-first-university-in-the-arctic-this-fall-with-more/>

²⁶ <http://yukonuniversity.ca/yukonu>

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Transitioning from a college to a university takes time, an investment in infrastructure, the development and offerings of degree-level programming, and requires a shift in governance towards a bi-cameral model. In fall 2017, Campus Alberta Quality Council confirmed that Yukon College meets the organization criteria and standards to deliver degree programs. The Yukon University legislation will be introduced and passed in the 2018-19 session of the Yukon Legislature. The internal shared governance and academic programming is in place²⁷.

The following steps are part of Yukon College's transition²⁸:



²⁷ <https://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/news/201806/yukonu-path-reconciliation-north-north-north>

²⁸ <http://yukonuniversity.ca/timeline>

8.2 Red Deer College (Central Alberta Polytechnic University)

Red Deer College (RDC) is seeking governmental designation as a polytechnic university, with the specific goal of achieving autonomous degree-granting status while protecting the diversity of its programming²⁹.

In the context of RDC's vision, the polytechnic university possesses these attributes:

- Autonomous degree-granting capability, via approval from Campus Alberta Quality Council and the provincial Ministry, rather than through a collaborative partner
- University transfer programming that maintains the ability of students to move on to programs in other Campus Alberta institutions
- Professional, arts, sciences, humanities, creative arts, and health sciences programming
- Trades programming
- Technology programming
- Continuing education programming
- Curriculum design autonomy to ensure innovation, laddering, multiple pathways, and responsiveness to marketplace demands
- Academic upgrading programming
- Diploma and certificate programming
- Collaborative degree programming
- Integration of research and applied learning

The Polytechnic University Task Force identified 7 themes for the proposed polytechnic university through engagement with 27 groups of people in face-to-face discussions reaching a total of 250 students and 270 faculty and staff at RDC. The themes are as follows:

- The transition to polytechnic university status should be well managed.
- The new entity—a polytechnic university—should be clearly defined.
- The existing College culture should be maintained, including the College commitment to learners and learning, a strong sense of community, and strong faculty/student and student/student engagement.
- The new entity should enrich Central Alberta and its communities.
- The new entity should have a strong academic reputation and credibility within Canada so that its degrees and other credentials are well accepted.
- The vision for the new entity should receive broad support from the existing RDC community.
- The new entity should possess institutional autonomy with respect to curriculum and degree granting.

Central Alberta's Polytechnic University (CAPU) would become known for its clear pathways from certificates and diplomas to undergraduate degrees, and for programming that provides:

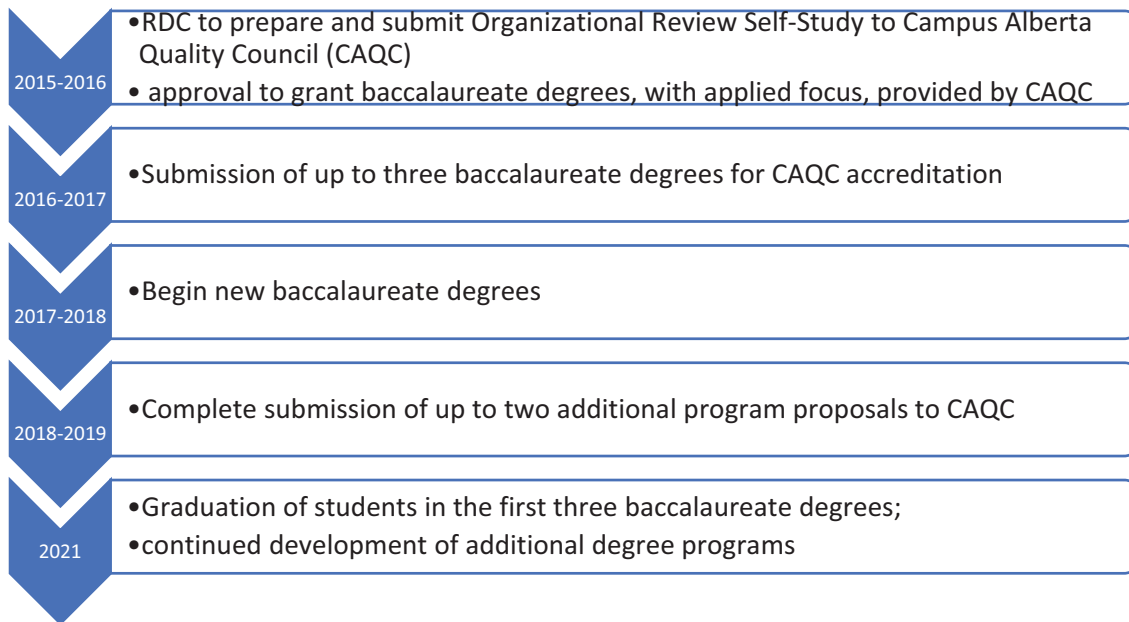
²⁹ Red Deer College. Central Alberta's Polytechnic University, White Paper.

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- Opportunities for experiential and applied learning and research in all degree programming
- Stronger connection between program curriculum and community needs
- Community-based applied research that provides opportunities to solve real-world problems in the region
- Laddering and pathway opportunities that promote educational mobility (from apprenticeship to professional and arts and sciences baccalaureates)
- Innovative curriculum and delivery
- International access and focus

To develop and launch these degrees, RDC requires base funding increments of approximately \$2 million per year over the next five years (\$10 million increase in total RDC budget by 2019/20). In addition to this funding, RDC will require reallocation of funding from their current collaborative partners to RDC base funding to continue current degree completion programs.

The Timeline for the Red Deer College transition is as follows:



The experiences of Yukon College and Red Deer College provide guidance to Aurora College as it moves forward in a similar direction.

Aurora College will need to evaluate its strengths and resources to select which diploma and degree programs to provide. For example, the Thebacha campus in Fort Smith has a significant strength in its proximity to Wood Buffalo National Park. Currently the College offers an Environment and Natural Resources Technology Program and an Environmental Monitor Training Program. The wide variety of historic sites, natural ecosystems and environmental monitoring programs that occur in the Country's largest National Park located only 25 kilometers from campus create a living lab for students. Aurora College could consider offering

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a program similar to Yukon College's Northern Environmental and Conservation Sciences, currently offered in partnership with the University of Alberta.



9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The GNWT needs to develop a shared vision for post-secondary education and conduct a proper needs assessment (including labour market statistics), condition assessment and capital plan for improvements to existing Aurora College facilities, including student housing. Based on these data-driven assessments, and a comparison to current post-secondary programs, the GNWT needs to identify new programming at both the diploma and degree level to meet the priorities identified in the needs assessment.

Based on the findings of this report, a number of recommendations have been developed. Following the Yukon College timetable, we see this as a 5 year process starting in January 2019 as shown in the table below. The needs of our students highlight the urgency of this project. Our action plan is presented below.

Recommendation	Completion Date
<p>Reinstate suspended Diploma & Degree Programs To meet critical student and labour market needs the Social Work Diploma and the Teacher Education Program should both be reinstated at Aurora College no later than the start of the 2019/20 academic year.</p>	2019
<p>Vision for Post-Secondary Education The GNWT should undertake a broad-based consultative process to develop a clear and consensus-building vision for all post-secondary education in the Northwest Territories, recognizing the importance of strong regional centres and the reality of their consensus government.</p>	2019
<p>Governance Aurora College Headquarters to remain in Fort Smith. Aurora College to continue to build a bicameral governance model, typical of post-secondary institutions in Canada which includes an academic Senate and an administrative Board. This will include the development of policies and procedures and other supportive documents.</p>	2020

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<p>Funding The GNWT to provide a polytechnic university transition budget to Aurora College which includes, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a program and services review; • an Aurora College transition team; • a capital plan which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a capital upgrade and expansion plan for the College; ○ improved student housing at Thebacha Campus and Breynat Hall, a former residential school, whose facilities are inadequate for single college students; and ○ new Yellowknife Campus for College programs. 	2019
<p>Program and Services Review Aurora College Transition Team to complete a thorough program and services review to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a review of existing programs and services; • additional programs and services to be offered based on market demand; and • an implementation plan to implement additional programs and services, including staffing, accreditation and infrastructure requirements. 	2019
<p>Partnerships Aurora College to explore partnership opportunities with existing universities that already have a Northern presence, such as Wilfrid Laurier and the University of Alberta, to determine whether these institutions could increase their presence and post-secondary opportunities in Yellowknife. These partnerships would benefit all NWT residents.</p>	2020
<p>Enabling Legislation The Aurora College Act will need to be replaced by the Aurora University Act. This Act will include legislation creating Aurora Polytechnic University, defining the College’s purpose and laying out the College’s governance. The legislation will codify Aurora College’s independence from the GNWT in operations and decision making.</p>	2021
<p>New Program Offerings Launch of Social Work Degree</p>	2022
<p>Aurora University Strategic Plan and Academic Plan</p>	2023