

Athabasca University B.C. Degree Announcement

Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell

Vancouver
Thursday, April 20, 2006

Check against delivery

The provincial government is endeavoring to make British Columbians the best-educated and trained people anywhere. We're increasing the capacity of our post-secondary system. Our plan is good news for students, their families and the future of our communities and our province.

The provincial government and post-secondary institutions like Athabasca University share common goals. We both recognize that in a changing world, education is becoming the single most important key to success.

B.C. is facing Canada's second-largest increase in the university-age cohort (18-24) in the next decade. Three-quarters of new jobs in the next decade will require post-secondary education.

Our government has been working to strengthen our network of colleges, institutes and online learning throughout the province. And that's why we are also creating new student spaces.

Athabasca University has taken up the challenge by offering innovative ways of providing education, such as its partnership with the College of the Rockies that allows students to do an Athabasca degree from the college.

In 2002, the government expanded the degree-granting authority for private and public post-secondary institutions, under new legislation. In January 2006, the Degree Quality Assessment Board of B.C. recommended that consent be provided to Athabasca University to use the word "university" in B.C. The Degree Quality Assessment Board also recommended approval that Athabasca receive exempt status, which allows Athabasca to forward any new degrees directly to me without prior review from the board.

Athabasca is the first public post-secondary institution located outside the province to undergo a quality assessment process in B.C. This will provide more choices for students while ensuring the quality of the degrees is comparable to other programs offered in the province.

With the added measure of degree quality assessment, students can make informed choices about the range and caliber of learning opportunities. It benefits us all to expand access. And it stimulates growth in sectors of the economy. Ultimately, increased access will help us to address shortage of skilled workers.

Athabasca has a long history of offering education through distance delivery. Distance education, and particularly online learning, provides exciting opportunities for students to find educational programs that meet their needs where and when they want.

One of the most exciting projects the government is working on to improve access is developing the full potential of online learning through BCcampus. BCcampus is a web-based gateway that offers one-stop access to online courses, programs and services at every public post-secondary institution in the province. It is a collaboration that encourages institutions to work together and share information to reduce duplication and redundancy. It also encourages faculty to share ideas and best practices through online conferences.

It's important that we continue to develop opportunities and access to higher education in our province. Strategic alliances with educational partners, including those in other jurisdictions, will

help British Columbia advance towards a better future. We are helping to expand choices for students because we know investing in students will create opportunities for all of us.

Thank you.

-30-