

Proposed college overhaul may benefit adult students

The president of Fanshawe College says the changes would enable more people to engage in life-long learning.

By Alan Bass
The London Free Press

Life-long learning will become a reality for more people if the provincial government adopts a report calling for an overhaul of the community college system, Fanshawe College president Barry Moore says.

"If the recommendations of the report are implemented I think there would be a lot more mature adult students, full-time and part-time, coming back to the educational process," Moore says. "For fuelling the economy that's very important."

The recently released 174-page report — called Vision 2000 and written by representatives of labor, business, education and government — outlines reforms it says must be implemented over the next 10 years to ensure Ontario's work force and economy continue to flourish in an era of increasingly rapid change.

25 YEARS OF CHANGE: Twenty-five years ago — when the college system was created as a job-training alternative to university — the economy was dominated by manufacturing and resource industries, most people shared a European cultural heritage, the traditional household was a male-headed nuclear family and

VISION 2000

To adapt to changes in society in Ontario over the last 25 years and to keep pace with changes in the next 10 years, the report compiled by representatives of labor, business, education and government recommends that community colleges:

- Continue to emphasize skills training but put more stress on academic subjects and generic skills than job-specific skills so students are more adaptable and less likely to get stuck in dead-end occupations.
- Pay more attention to the needs of adult students, especially part-timers, and make the college system more accessible to women, single parents, minorities, the physically disabled, aboriginal people and the functionally illiterate.
- Create and enforce system-wide standards so all colleges offer a consistent quality of education.
- Give adult students academic credits for their previous life and job experiences and give immigrants credit for overseas training.

workers expected one career to last a lifetime, the report says.

But today the economy is dominated by the service sector, the population is increasingly multicultural, many households are headed by a single breadwinner and very few people will hold the same job throughout their lives.

As well, the baby boom that spurred the creation of the college system is over. For the next few decades, population growth will slow.

The report urges the Ontario government to offer better financial support to adult upgrading programs.

It also urges the government to establish a special body to forge closer links between universities and colleges so students can move from one system to the other or even combine university and college courses into a specialized advanced degree.

SHOULD GO FARTHER: Moore says he likes the idea of closer university-college ties but believes the report doesn't go far enough. He thinks colleges should be able to teach the first two years of a university degree, but the Vision 2000 report explicitly rejects this.

Tom Collins, Western's academic vice-president, says he believes closer college-university co-operation is possible, but only in some subjects.

"Where it probably would not work would be in the strictly technical areas or the strictly training areas," Collins says. "I can't imagine that in automotive studies . . . it would be very easy to transfer credit or to combine (with university studies). But in some areas it could work."

The provincial government is asking interested parties to respond to the report by the end of November.