



## Red Deer College to become a Polytechnic University

Central Alberta is a growing, vibrant and innovative region, playing an integral role in Alberta's economy. As the third largest City in the Province, Red Deer is home to 100,807 residents, and serving an estimated 212,326 people. The population growth in Red Deer exceeds the provincial average.<sup>1</sup> Since 1965, Red Deer College (RDC) has served Central Alberta with a wide range of programming, from continuing education, trades training, academic certificates and diplomas, university transfer, academic upgrading, and applied degrees.<sup>2</sup> Situated along the Hwy 2 corridor, RDC is strategically poised to play an even greater role in educating a work force that is skilled, relevant, and community minded. A key pillar in the success and prosperity of Central Alberta has been and will continue to be our post-secondary institution RDC.

Over the years, in response to the growing region's need for better access to undergraduate degree programming, RDC has collaborated with Alberta universities with great success. But this is just a start. The community continues to let RDC know that student's needs are only partially met. A 2011 survey indicated that almost 50% of high school students would enroll in a degree program if it was offered at RDC. A 2014 survey of RDC Creative Arts alumni indicated that 80% of those graduates would have completed degrees at RDC if the option would have been available.<sup>3</sup>

The distance to a university is an important factor to the learners and community of Central Alberta. Physical access to higher education is a key proponent to increasing the level of participation by reducing financial costs, emotional costs, and the loss of support networks. Students leaving Central Alberta for higher education often get jobs where they go to school. This drains our local workforce of talent when workers do not return to Central Alberta to support local employers and innovation.

Another serious issue is the growing skills gap in Alberta, and Canada. Local employers regularly cite the lack of available skilled workers as a major obstacle to their growth and continued prosperity. Hon. Perrin Beatty, President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce states "The employment landscape is changing in Canada. The demand for high-skilled workers is growing while the need for low-skilled workers is declining. We need to make every effort to align education with our employment market. We all need to be on the same page if we want Canadians to have the skills to support a world-leading economy." Mr. Beatty also adds, "we realize the nature of the workplace is shifting. The best

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<sup>1</sup> <http://finance.alberta.ca/aboutalberta/population-projections/2015-2041-alberta-population-projections.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rdc.ab.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/84803/polytechnicuniversitywhitepaper-final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

insurance any individual can have against changes in labour demand is skills, education and experience.”<sup>4</sup>

Educating job-ready graduates is also a concern. Of the 10 countries studied in the McKinsey survey, Canada had the largest disparity in expectations between employers and post-secondary institutions. Only 34% of employers think that graduates are adequately prepared to enter the workforce, compared with 83% of education providers.<sup>5</sup> Leading the way on collaboration with employers are the polytechnics. Their focus on providing applied education to deliver talent for a well specified employer need means they have to be very closely in tune with the needs of the market.<sup>6</sup>

For Central Alberta to realize its full potential, it requires a highly educated work force with the in-demand skills that our businesses, health care, education and service sectors need. The success and prosperity of Central Albertans and Central Alberta businesses would be vastly improved if Red Deer College were to have the ability to offer the people and businesses of the region the relevant skills and education required for a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

**Recommendation:**

The Red Deer and District Chamber of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta designate Red Deer College as a Polytechnic University.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.chamber.ca/media/news-releases/150914-linking-employers-needs-with-education-is-crucial-to-canadas-competitiveness/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.chamber.ca/download.aspx?t=0&pid=92fc5fd5-ea5a-e511-9f7a-000c29c04ade>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*