

Labour shortage sparks funding boost

Workers needed in health, education

LARRY JOHNSRUDE
Journal Staff Writer
 EDMONTON

Edmonton universities and colleges will boost enrolments by 156 spots later this year with money from the provincial Access Fund, intended to meet demand for skilled workers in the business, health care and education fields.

Learning Minister Lyle Oberg announced \$40 million in extra funding Monday to increase training in high-needs areas.

"This will really enable us to expand access in the areas where it is needed the most," he said.

"We identified business, health care and education as high-priority areas that we needed to address immediately."

The money will create 692 more spots in colleges and universities across Alberta. Of those, 156 will be in Edmonton-based institutions.

"We're pleased the minister has recognized the demands being placed upon us," said Art Quinney, acting provost at the University of Alberta.

The money will allow the U of A to take 36 additional students in its bachelor of commerce program and another nine in bachelor of science in pharmacy.

The funding will also cover another 45 practical nursing spots at NorQuest

College this year and an additional 20 beginning in the fall of 2004.

"It will certainly help," said Elaine Foulon, vice-president of instruction for the college. "We have a waiting list that is a year long. We have about 150 people lined up waiting to get into our program.

"What this will do is help them get into nursing sooner and have that many more trained practical nurses in the field."

NorQuest is also getting funding for an additional 16 physical therapy assistants.

Also, Grant MacEwan college is getting funding for an additional 35 psychiatric nurses. The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology will get 15 more spaces to train paramedics.

Gerri Nakonechny, dean of health and community studies at Grant MacEwan, said the program will more than double in size. It now has 25 students. The new training spaces, to be added in January, will require extra staff, she said.

"We just can't keep up with demand for this program," she said. "We get five applications for every student we can take."

Along with the additional education spaces, the province is putting another \$2.3 million into boosting bachelor of education programs at King's University College and Concordia University College and into expanding program delivery for the new partnership between NAIT and Fairview College in northwestern Alberta.

ljohnsrude@thejournal.canwest.com