BOLSTERING ADULT BASIC EDUCATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

Recent policy and funding reforms by the provincial government have affected fundamental aspects of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programming in British Columbia. This study explores the systemic problems faced by ABE programs because of these reforms. It focuses on understanding factors, which in recent years have impacted program quality and outcomes. The study relies on qualitative data compiled through interviews and case study analysis. Finally, the study formulates and assesses policy alternatives for program improvement.

Keywords: Adult basic education, adult literacy, program evaluation
Executive Summary

Projections indicate that by the year 2031, about 9 million Canadian adults of working age will have literacy skills that are too low for them to be effective in modern roles as workers, citizens and members of families and communities. In part, these low adult literacy levels result from inadequate basic skills training, particularly in high schools. Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs are one way through which British Columbia (BC) aims to increase adult literacy and educational levels.

Since 2002, several funding and policy reforms have resulted in changes to ABE programs. Therefore, this study explores the impact of these reforms on the quality of BC’s ABE programs. Overall, the study’s goal is to formulate, analyze and recommend policy changes that will address current shortcomings in ABE programs.

Findings

The study used interviews of educational practitioners to investigate the inherent problems in BC’s ABE programs. The findings fall under the following categories:

- **Resources** - includes the adequacy of student financial aid in the form of Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP) funding, disadvantages of block funding and the repercussions of tuition-free programming.
- **Teaching and Learning** – includes the focus of ABE programs on preparing students for postsecondary education, rather than the workplace. Interviewees also indicated that ABE programs are not effective at accommodating students with special needs and learning disabilities
- **Outreach and Promotion** – includes the perception by other university and college programs and departments that ABE programs do not belong in postsecondary
institutions and that there is a misalignment of systems, funding streams, policies and programs.

Additionally, a case study analysis of ABE programs in the US states of Washington and Wisconsin contributed to the development of several policy alternatives that were evaluated using five criteria – cost, effectiveness, equity, administrative feasibility, and stakeholder acceptability.

**Policy Recommendation**

The best policy alternative - the “Augmented Status Quo” - comprises the following improvements:

1. Switch from block funding to targeted program funding
2. Increase outreach and promotion
3. Integrate program and service delivery related to education, training and employment services for Employment Insurance clients and Social Assistance recipients
4. Provide reasonable accommodations and assessments for students with special needs and learning disabilities.

The “Augmented Status Quo” is likely to improve access, service provision and participation in ABE programs, with the long term objective to increase adult literacy levels in British Columbia. Overall, this policy alternative enhances BC’s provision of ABE programming.
Acknowledgements

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1: Introduction

Projections indicate that by the year 2031, about 9 million Canadian adults of working age will have literacy skills that are too low for them to be effective in modern roles as workers, citizens and members of families and communities. These adults will account for about 40% of the working age population (CCL, 2008) and their low levels of literacy will exist for several reasons. First, about 25% of graduating high school students will have inadequate literacy. Second, each year about 10% of all high school students will not graduate. Third, the influx of immigrants who do not use English or French as their first language will contribute to low literacy skills. Fourth, throughout their lives adults tend to lose their literacy skills if they are not being used regularly (Maxwell, 2010).

Low adult educational levels, and hence low levels of adult literacy, have consequences for the success of public policies. Some of these policies include: economic development, health, justice and social services. Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in British Columbia are an important way through which adults can increase their literacy levels, complete secondary education, and become gainfully employed. BC’s ABE programs focus on increasing literacy skills, improving English proficiency, and earning secondary school credentials like the General Education Development (GED) diploma. When adult education succeeds in meeting the aforementioned outcomes, it contributes positively to adult learners’ lives, the economy and society in general. Additionally, those who benefit the most from adult education are the vulnerable members of society such as women, Aboriginal people, immigrants, older workers in lower-skill sectors and lower-skilled youth.
Despite the current and projected levels of adult education and literacy, there is insufficient and inefficient delivery of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programming, which provides educational and literacy instruction at the functional levels of middle through high school in reading, writing and other subjects. Wait times for entry into ABE programs can be as long as 6 to 8 months and 30% of enrollees drop out (OECD, 2002). Therefore, this study explores how policy and funding reforms which occurred in 2002 have impacted BC’s ABE programs. Specifically, using interviews of educational practitioners (i.e., instructors, department chairs and college deans) and case study analysis, this study will investigate current problems experienced by adult basic education programs. The goal of this study is to formulate, analyze and recommend policy changes that will address current shortcomings in ABE programs.

This study is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of adult basic education in Canada. In Section 3, I describe ABE programs in BC’s colleges and universities. Sections 4 and 5 describe the policy problem and stakeholders, and the research methodology used, respectively. Section 6 presents interview findings while Section 7 presents the case study analysis. Section 8 presents the policy objectives and criteria which are used for policy analysis, while Section 9 develops and analyzes policy alternatives, providing a recommendation based on these analyses. Lastly, Section 10 provides a conclusion for the study.
2: Adult Education for Less-Educated Adults

This section provides an overview of adult basic education, adult literacy and some of the main concepts related to adult education.

2.1 What is Adult Basic Education?

Adult basic education (ABE) includes the basic educational skills of reading, writing, spelling, and numeracy which are required by all adults to function adequately in a modern technological society. ABE also includes the teaching of skills and abilities which adults require to function adequately in their daily roles as citizens, parents, and workers (Toronto Board of Education, 1994). ABE courses provide an opportunity for adults to attain a secondary diploma, to take additional courses with the intent of finding a better job, or to obtain course prerequisites that allow them to enter college or university. Most adults who come to Canada from non-English-speaking countries do not need basic education since they have typically received it in their country of origin. Rather, these adults seek English as a Second Language instruction.

The courses offered under the umbrella of ABE include academic skills in mathematics and English, academic upgrading, life skills or career upgrading courses, English as a Second Language and Adult Special Education and adult literacy programs (BCCAT, 2008). ABE programs exist because of inadequate adult literacy and educational attainment levels, as explained in the succeeding section.

2.2 Statistical Characteristics of Canada’s Less-Educated Adults

Literacy levels are a major source of concern in adult educational policy. Research shows that there is a strong relationship between educational attainment and literacy skill level (Myers
and de Broucker, 2006). Moreover, data from the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALSS) shows that individuals with low levels of education also tend to have low literacy skills as adults. Additionally, findings from the 2003 IALSS show that about 9 million, or 42% of Canadians aged 16 to 65, have literacy skills below the level considered necessary to live and work in today’s society.

IALSS data also shows that 80% of the Canadian population, aged 16 and over, who have not completed high-school, fail to meet minimum literacy levels required for them to function in today’s society and workforce. Additional results from IALSS show that 52% of high-school graduates, 36% of college graduates and 22% of university graduates do not have adequate literacy levels (HRSDC and OECD, 2005).

Across all literacy domains on IALSS (i.e., document literacy, prose literacy, numeracy and problem solving), adults in the Yukon, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and BC have proficiency scores higher than national averages. New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nunavut are below the national average (IALSS, 2003). Two out of every five BC adults aged 16 and over perform below the “expected” prose and document literary levels. Additionally, at 49%, the proportion of BC adults aged 16 and over with numeracy scores below the “expected” level is only slightly lower than the 55% proportion nationally. Therefore, even though BC does not have the worst literacy levels in Canada, there is still room for improvement.

In society, the groups with the lowest literacy rates are high school dropouts. While Canada’s drop-out rate is lower than that of the United States, Germany and France, it is higher than that of nine other industrialized countries which include Austria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and several countries in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. Figure 2 (CCL, 2007) shows 2002 dropout data for some industrialized countries that are comparable to Canada. It indicates, for example, that Canada’s dropout rate of 11% was more than double that of Norway at 5%.
There are further reasons to focus on improving the educational levels of less-educated adults. First, an increasing proportion of aging workers means there can no longer be a reliance on the renewal of workforce skills since most of the people who will be in the workforce in 2015 are already part of it today. Second, the rapid pace of change in technology and the demands of the knowledge economy mean that job skill requirements are frequently changing. Additionally, skills training can help improve the future employment prospects of laid-off workers while helping growing industries to meet their skill needs (Saunders, 2009).
2.3 Benefits of Education for Less-Educated Adults

The preceding discussion of literacy rates and high school dropout rates highlights a big problem facing Canada today. Research shows that adult education can significantly improve the economic situation of individuals with low educational attainment (Zhang and Palameta, 2006). Moreover, raising the literacy of adults at the lowest literacy levels is more important to economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates (Coulombe and Tremblay, 2005). Research also indicates that low levels of education and literacy are the key factors which perpetuate poverty. For example, supporting income assistance recipients to upgrade their skills and acquire educational credentials allows them to secure jobs that pay a living wage and helps them and their families to move out of poverty (Butterwick and White, 2006).

Additionally, when less-educated adults upgrade their education, they work more and earn more and there are related benefits to their families (e.g., their children show improved performance in school) and society in general (e.g., lower rates of recidivism; Strawn, 2007). Other social returns include the reduced need for expenditure in areas such as unemployment benefits, welfare payments, pensions, social insurance and healthcare. There is also growing consensus that the social prosperity of a nation is related to its educational system (Wolfe and Haveman, 2001). Table 1 presents a more comprehensive list of benefits to less-educated workers when they participate in adult education.
Table 1: Benefits of Adult Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>For Society</th>
<th>For the Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher Tax Revenues</td>
<td>• Increased Salaries and Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased Productivity</td>
<td>• Higher Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More Consumption</td>
<td>• Improved Savings Levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Better Workforce Flexibility</td>
<td>• Better Working Conditions</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Less Reliance on Government Financial Support</td>
<td>• Increased/Professional Mobility</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>For Society</th>
<th>For the Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lower Crime Rates</td>
<td>• Increased Levels of Health/Life Expectancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More Charitable Giving and Volunteering</td>
<td>• Higher Quality of Life for Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher Quality of Civic Life</td>
<td>• Better Consumer Decision Making</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved Social Cohesion/Appreciation of Diversity</td>
<td>• Increased Personal Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher Ability to Adapt to and Use Technology</td>
<td>• More Hobbies, Leisure Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from THECB (2008)

2.4 Barriers to Participation in Adult Education

Three types of barriers make it difficult for adults to obtain basic skills training. These are: individual (student), institutional and policy barriers (Bragg, et al. 2009). Therefore, effective ABE programs try to reduce the impact of each of the three barriers, which are explained in more detail below.

Individual barriers exist since many students come to ABE without the foundational academic and computer skills necessary for today’s learning environment. Other students have multiple personal, family, employment and financial challenges that impact attendance.

Institutional barriers occur in the form of inappropriate placement tests that are not sufficient for diagnosing competency gaps and abilities, the inadequacy of support services, poor scheduling of classes, and an inappropriate learning environment and program design. Lastly, policy barriers exist because of the misalignment of systems, funding streams, and policy and program requirements for ABE programs and low-income students. For example, welfare policies present a barrier to some students because they restrict or deny access to educational opportunities, but
move income assistance recipients off welfare into low-wage jobs, while reducing welfare expenditures and thereby worsening poverty levels (Butterwick and White, 2006). To address these barriers and ensure student success, ABE programs must have specific characteristics as explained in the next sub-section.

2.5 Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education Programs

Research shows that institutional practices have a complementary effect on student performance, participation and retention (Jenkins, 2011). Therefore, in order to optimize outcomes for less-educated adults who participate in ABE programs, it is important for these programs to follow practices associated with high performing educational programs. McDonagh (1999) found that standards of practice were inconsistent across ABE programs. Additionally, those involved in adult literacy services also felt that the development of quality standards would improve their practice.

It is important to note that a wide variety of institutional and organizational frameworks exist (Jenkins, 2011), but some are more appropriate for the ABE context. The Quality Framework developed by Ireland’s National Adult Literacy Agency is particularly pertinent for ABE programs and has received endorsement from numerous academics and researchers (Bailey, 2005). Harvard University’s National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, a prominent adult learning research project, also endorses this quality framework. The framework provides a way of looking at five main quality areas involved in running an ABE program, as shown in Figure 2. This framework has the following components (McSkeane, 2006):

- **Resources** – provide a stable, high-quality ABE service over the long-term and programs need to have enough suitable resources for the range of courses they offer. Some of these resources include funding, staffing, materials and premises.
- **Management** – includes manager’s role in recruiting, motivating and supporting staff; manager’s roles in ensuring that learners have a positive experience; and the manager’s role in operating an efficient administrative system so that it is clear to
funders, such as the government, that the program is operating efficiently. Management’s role also includes planning and evaluating the programs activities, as well as articulating and implementing a vision for the program.

- **Teaching and Learning** – addresses the uniqueness of individuals since students come to ABE programs with different abilities and interests. Consequently, ABE programs need to have a wide range of teaching strategies and accommodations that cater to different student needs. These needs might be prior knowledge, confidence, learning disabilities or physical disabilities.

- **Progression** – refers to the process of moving from adult education to other learning experiences or life opportunities such as paid work or involvement in community or voluntary activities. An important aspect of progression is giving students the chance to achieve qualifications that accredit their learning.

- **Outreach and Promotion** – involves linking with other agencies and groups and is an important strategy that helps ABE programs help those who are hard to reach or reluctant to take part in adult learning. It also includes that promotion and marketing of these programs.
Figure 2: Adult Education Program Quality Framework

- **Resources**
  - Teaching resources
  - Premises
  - Staffing

- **Outreach & Promotion**
  - Networking
  - Partnerships
  - Promotional

- **Management**
  - Planning
  - Support learners
  - Staffing

- **Progression**
  - Learner guidance
  - Student Accreditation

- **Teaching & Learning**
  - Learning & development
  - Assessment

High Quality ABE Program
Therefore, an adult literacy program should work towards achieving an optimal combination of these components. The Quality Framework promotes planning, continuous improvement, and accountability and is used as a tool for the evaluation and building of better programs.

In summary, the last decade has seen increased government interest in supporting adult learning as a way to mitigate expected workforce attrition because of an aging labour force (Conference Board Of Canada, 2005), to improve productivity through skill development of the least educated, and to improve social outcomes. However, even with the acknowledgement of these needs, there remain challenges to the education of adults because of program complexity which is intertwined with the complexity of policies, funding and the relationship with other systems, as explained in the next section.
3: Adult Basic Education in BC’s Colleges and Universities

This section describes the BC government’s role in the field of adult education from a policy and institutional perspective. Additionally, it describes ABE program structure, program framework, program funding, student funding and recent policy reforms.

3.1 Provincial Literacy Goals

In 2005, BC’s Premier announced five Great Goals for a Golden Decade, and the number one goal was “to make BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent”. To achieve this goal, the ReadNow Strategy was created in 2006 and the Auditor General recommended improvements in 2008. Its key provision was to coordinate literacy and programming for developmental learning across the province. Another element was the engagement of communities, postsecondary institutions, and school districts in literacy and developmental learning. As an extension of the ReadNow strategy, the Adult Opportunities Action Plan was developed. The plan’s goals are to: (a) reduce barriers and increase participation in adult literacy programs and courses, (b) improve literacy rates for key populations, including Aboriginal people and immigrants, and (c) coordinate quality programs that produce results (AVED, 2007).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for literacy coordination under the ReadNow strategy, while the Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development and the Ministry of Science and Universities are responsible for adult literacy and lifelong learning. Within BC’s educational system, adults learn basic skills through Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. BC uses two public systems to offer ABE programming: high schools offer the Adult Graduation program in its school districts facilities, while colleges and universities provide a wide variety of
ABE courses. The ABE programs administered through school districts have a limited scope and focus mainly on helping learners to get high school diplomas, while the ABE programs administered through colleges and universities not only help learners to attain high school diplomas, but provide additional adult literacy and basic skills training. Funding, student and course characteristics for both systems are generally comparable for both systems. During the 2009-2010 academic year, there were 27,800 students in school districts and approximately 26,000 students in colleges and universities. Similarly, in 2008-2009, there were 78,700 postsecondary course registrations in colleges and universities and around 64,500 course registrations in school districts. The biggest difference was in expenditure. During the 2009-2010 academic year, the province spent $42.5 million in school districts and $77.1 million in colleges and universities (data provided by the former Ministry of Advanced Education)\(^1\).

This study focuses only on ABE programs in colleges and universities because of their broader offerings. However, some of the findings from this study might be applicable to ABE programs in school districts. The next section provides more details about ABE programs offered in colleges and universities.

### 3.2 Program Structure

Eighteen publicly funded post-secondary institutions comprised of 12 colleges, 3 university-colleges and 3 publicly funded institutes, 2 of which have an Aboriginal focus, offer developmental programs for adult learners in BC. These programs consist of adult basic education (ABE), English-as-a-second-language instruction, and adult special education (ASE) for people with developmental challenges. Although BC refers to these programs as “developmental programs”, for simplicity, this study simply refers to them as ABE programs. Appendix A provides a list of BC’s ABE institutions and their locations.

---

1 A study by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers (BCCAT, 2008) provides additional comparisons of the two systems.
ABE includes the broad spectrum of educational courses ranging from basic literacy (i.e., reading, writing and numeracy) to high school courses (e.g., law, history, calculus, history, chemistry, physics, etc). Students enrol in ABE in order to complete high school, prepare for postsecondary education or to gain employability and life management skills. The term ABE is used generically and institutions use alternative terms like: adult upgrading, high school completion, college or university preparation, developmental programs, access programs and career programs (AVED, 2010).

In BC, adult learners use ABE programs as a way to increase their literacy skills, a way to complete grade 12, or to upgrade their knowledge in specific subject areas so they can access new career options or pursue postsecondary education (FPSE, 2006). Others use ABE programs for career enhancement or promotion, while immigrants access ABE programs for English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and in order to improve their English comprehension and communication skills.

ABE programs and courses follow the guidelines and requirements established by the former Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (now divided into the Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development and the Ministry of Science and Universities). These programs allow students to complete prerequisite courses for post-secondary programs and upgrade their basic literacy skills. ABE students also complete specific courses to earn course completion certificates while some complete high school to earn the British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma. Others use ABE programs to prepare for the General Educational Development high school equivalency tests and as a way to enter college or university programs. Some ABE students also use it as a way to meet employment requirements, to upgrade their skills for entry into the work force, and to improve skills for personal benefit (VFW, 2010).
3.3 Program Framework

To be eligible for the ABE program, students must be 19 or older, or have a high school graduation diploma, or be 17 or 18 years of age and out of public school for at least one year. Within the ABE framework the first course level is the Fundamental (up to Grade 8) level and it includes courses in reading, writing, spelling and math. The next level is the Intermediate level (up to Grade 10) which includes English, math, science, and social studies. The Intermediate level meets the entry requirements for many vocational programs. Advanced level (up to Grade 11) courses include English, math, biology, chemistry, physics, and computer studies. The Advanced level meets the requirements for many postsecondary programs. Lastly, the Provincial level (Grade 12) includes courses in English, math, biology, chemistry, physics and computer studies. Passing the Provincial level qualifies students for the British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma. Figure 3 (AVED, 2010) shows the ABE program framework and the progression of course levels.

Figure 3: ABE Program Framework

The province-wide institutionalization of partnerships among ABE colleges and universities occurs through the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer. This
organization establishes criteria for transferring courses and credits among ABE institutions, using articulation committees comprised of ABE faculty and staff. The organization also provides students with information regarding admission policies for all BC postsecondary institutions and the requirements for transfer. Overall, these services create a higher level of coherence and transparency in BC’s ABE programs (OECD, 2002).

Figure 4:  Distribution of Course Registrations by ABE Level

![Figure 4: Distribution of Course Registrations by ABE Level](image)

Source: Data provided by the former Ministry of Advanced Education

Annually, BC’s ABE programs provide services to approximately 26,000 students. Figure 4 shows the distribution of course registrations by ABE educational level between 2004 and 2009. The Fundamental level consistently has the smallest number of course registrations. Since 2006-2007, the number of Advanced ABE course registrations has been on the rise and in 2008-2009 they were at their peak. Additionally, apart from the Provincial level registrations, all course registrations increased after 2007-2008. Excluded from Figure 4 are additional ABE courses that do not fit the strict definition of ABE courses and can be thought of as comprising an “Other” category that includes between 17, 200 and 21, 000 course registrations each academic year.
3.4 Funding

An important aspect of the relationship between ABE programs and the provincial government is funding. Table 2 shows the trend of former Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development’s block funding to institutions and includes full-time equivalent (FTE) targets for every public postsecondary institution that delivers adult basic skills training as outlined in the institution’s budget letter. FTEs provide a measure of total student enrolment by program and are reported by the institution on a fiscal year basis. One FTE represents the equivalent of a normal full-time course load in a given year. Units or credits taken by all students (both full and part-time) in a given program and level are divided by the applicable full-time load to determine FTE enrolments.

It is noteworthy that funding showed increases each year, despite the economic downturn. Funding for ABE tuition-free programming also began in 2007-2008, providing a significant increases to program funding as part of the province’s ReadNow Strategy for meeting provincial literacy goals explained in Section 3.1

| Table 2: ABE Funding and FTE Trends in BC’s Postsecondary Educational System |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| FTE Funding (millions)*             | $57.1      | $56.3   | $58.0    | $63.9    | $70.2    |
| Number of FTEs                      | 7,934.7    | 7,813.5 | 8,061.6  | 8,876.0  | 9,745.0  |
| ABE Tuition (millions)**            | 0         | 0       | $6.9     | $6.9     | $6.9     |
| Total                               | $57.1      | $56.3   | $64.9    | $70.1    | $77.1    |

*Note: This calculation is based on actual FTEs x the standard $/FTE
**Note: The ABE tuition-free funding was built into the block operating grants in 2007-2008 and is on-going funding which has no expiry date.

Source: former Ministry of Advanced Education
Apart from program funding, the province also provides financial aid to ABE students. In 2007, the provincial government made ABE tuition-free for all students and increased financial aid for adult learners. ABE students also receive support through the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Plan. This Plan supports the additional costs of going to school which include student fees, books, travel and childcare. However, ABE students are not eligible for student loans (Butterwick and White, 2006). The Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Plan is provincially funded and is designed to provide direct educational costs for students enrolled at BC public postsecondary institutions in programs such as: (i) academic upgrading (when not repeating courses for better grades), (ii) pre-vocational, (iii) English language training, and (iv) adult special education (MAESSB, 2006).

Using a needs assessment procedure, students are awarded assistance in the form of grants. This student assistance program begins on May 1 and ends of April 30 every year. Institutions administer these grants and must adhere to policies and procedures outlined by the province throughout the process. Only citizens, permanent residents or protected immigrants (e.g., refugees) are eligible for Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Plan funding (MAESSB, 2006). Students who show financial need may receive aid to help with payment of books, supplies, or transportation.

3.5 2002 Policy Reforms in BC’s ABE Programs

Butterwick and White (2006) provide a good summary of policy changes that currently impact BC’s ABE programs and low-income, low-skilled adult learners. Specifically, in the 1990s, Canadian social policy reform led to funding cuts in public services, higher education and social welfare programs. Transfer payments from the federal government, through the Canada Health and Social Transfer, were affected in the mid-1990s because of reductions in transfer amounts and the removal of targets for specific programs and populations. Consequently, BC responded to these federal changes by reforming welfare policy and regulations related to
accessing further education. The welfare reforms resulted in large reductions of support for employment and training programs, and access to education, particularly for income assistance recipients.

Important sources of funding during this period came from Institution Based Training and Expanded Capacity funds which aimed to increase student retention, successful completion of basic education studies, and the number of student spaces in postsecondary programs. Skills for Employment grants also provided targeted funds to postsecondary institutions to support Employment Insurance and income assistance recipients. At this time as well, ABE Student Assistance Plan funds were also available to adult learners.

Reforms by the newly elected provincial government in 2002 resulted in the elimination of Institution Based Training funds. Additionally, in 2002 income assistance recipients could no longer participate in postsecondary programs. The provincial government also made it difficult for disability benefits recipients to qualify for and maintain student benefits. These changes made it difficult for income assistance recipients to participate in educational upgrading programs such as ABE. At the time of these legislative changes, students enrolled in Institution Based Training and Expanded Capacity funded programs were forced to withdraw from their programs in order to avoid losing welfare benefits.

Furthermore, targets for specific programs such as educational upgrading programs and low-income students were removed and although Expanded Capacity funding was continued, it was incorporated into the overall block funding received by postsecondary institutions. The move from targeted program and student funding to block funding for institutions in 2002/2003 was another significant provincial government policy reform that impacted ABE programs. Specifically, between the move to block funding and the change in welfare policy in 2002/2003, ABE programs have suffered in terms of perceived importance, financing and capacity to provide access to adult learners.
Overall, this section shows that BC’s ABE programs are complex and have numerous features that could easily not function optimally if there is no alignment among policies, funding and program features. ABE programs are further complicated by the vulnerability of low-income, low-educated adults that comprise the majority of students in the programs. In the next section the policy problem and key stakeholders for this study are discussed.
4: Policy Problem and Key Stakeholders

The policy problem which guides this study is the following: recent funding and policy reforms by the provincial government have negatively affected the quality of ABE programs. In this statement, “quality” is defined by the extent to which ABE programs fulfill the components of the Quality Framework described in Section 2.4. Impetus for this study comes from the view within the community and government that the cumulative impact of recent policy and funding changes in the public postsecondary system has had a disproportionately negative effect on ABE programs and their students (FPSE, 2006a).

Prior research and advocacy by academics and professional organizations in BC underscores the importance of this policy problem. For example, the Federation of Postsecondary Educators (FPSE) of BC, which represents over 10,000 faculty and staff in BC’s postsecondary institutions, advocates improving the quality of ABE programs. In 2006, FPSE representatives testified to the legislature’s Select Committee on Education regarding the need to change ABE’s provincial policies and funding, if BC was to successfully meet the goal to become the most literate jurisdiction in North America. Among their criticisms of recent policy reforms are the deregulation of tuition fees, the move to block funding and the persistent underfunding of per-student needs, which they perceive as worsening the quality of ABE programs. The FPSE also believes that given the impending skills shortage in BC, the importance of providing quality ABE programming is now more important than ever (FPSE, 2006a; 2006b).

Academic researchers like Butterwick believe that the province has moved away from an innovative and cost-effective model for the delivery of education programs to low-income adults. She believes that after 2002, they abandoned college-based programs that provided upgrading literacy, and English as a Second Language programs for income assistance recipients with
multiple barriers to employment. Essentially, there was $4.2 million for around 20,000 people on income assistance, which provided a great service for minimal cost, but this funding was removed (FPSE, 2006c). Therefore, Butterwick believes that recent policy and funding changes by the provincial government have negatively affected the quality of ABE programs and decreased accessibility to those who want to obtain a high school education, further educational opportunities and better employment opportunities (Butterwick and White, 2006; Butterwick, 2010). These research and advocacy examples illustrate the relevance of the policy problem.

The major stakeholders of ABE programs are adult learners, faculty and staff of ABE programs and the provincial government. However, given that the focus of this study is on the policy aspects of ABE programming, rather than the personal experience of adult learners, evaluation and analysis does not directly reference the perspective of adult learners. Nevertheless, an improvement in ABE programs would increase the range of program options and accommodation of student needs, as well as address barriers to learning and optimize the availability of resources. From a provincial perspective, ABE programs would benefit from the enhancement of relationships between overseeing ministries (i.e., Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development and the Ministry of Science and Universities), better resource use, and coordination of policies related to adult learning. The provincial government benefits from the efficient and effective functioning of ABE programs so that their educational policies and goals for adult literacy, adult education and adult learning are successful.
5: Methodology

In this section I describe the two research methodologies used for gathering and analyzing data on current issues affecting the quality of ABE programming, as defined by the Quality Framework in Section 2.4. The first is semi-structured interviews and the second is a case study analysis.

5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary research methodology. This methodology is pertinent for the aforementioned policy problem because it allows study participants to provide open-ended and richer answers to questions. All interviews were conducted over the telephone and the list of interview questions is provided in Appendix B. These questions were geared towards learning about inherent problems in ABE programs. Specifically, there were questions related to ABE policies and the relationship between ABE programs and the provincial government, provincial policies and reforms, and interviewee background information.

The Quality Framework introduced in Section 2.4 is a useful conceptual framework for analyzing the policy problem and provide an important basis for the analysis of interview transcripts. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a way of tagging recurrent words, phrases and ideas in order to capture patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is most appropriate for semi-structured interviews because it brings coherence and structure to complex qualitative data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Another important aspect of the semi-structured interviews is the sampling of interview participants. Using personal contacts that have relationships with ABE programs, I received a few names for potential interview participants. In addition, I also searched college and university
websites for the email addresses of ABE practitioners of various colleges throughout the province. The response rate was around 10%, and at the end of each interview I requested references for additional interviews – known as snowball sampling. This sampling approach was particularly helpful for providing access to deans and program chairs that are busier and more difficult to reach. Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of the 18 interviewees and Appendix C provides additional details. This sample includes ABE instructors, Program Coordinators, Department Chairs and College Deans.

The interviews occurred between November 5 and November 29 in 2010. I recorded all the interviews and subsequently transcribed them. Additionally, as explained above, I used thematic analysis to analyse the interview transcripts.

Table 3: Interviewee Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percent of Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experiences</td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 - 20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>ABE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given ample time, it would have been preferable to obtain a larger sample that is more representative of ABE practitioners in BC. However, interviewees generally gave consistent
responses to interview questions. The additional relevance of the data collection approach stems from the broad spectrum of ABE practitioners’ perspectives included in the sample. Specifically, instructors’ responses most often identified problems related to both the demand and supply side of ABE programs, while deans, coordinators and program chairs most often identified problems related to the supply side. Although the study focuses on the supply side of ABE programming, the instructor’s views were helpful in providing a more complete understanding of important issues that would have otherwise been omitted from the analysis. The instructors’ views do not however influence the results because thematic analysis only provides the most dominant themes, shared by a majority of the studied sample.

Furthermore, this study makes additional contributions to research on ABE programs because typically research focuses on student aspects of ABE programming such as attrition rates and barriers to educational attainment (e.g., BCCAT, 2008). Few studies look at entire ABE programs and gain a holistic perspective of policy impacts on these programs.

### 5.2 Case Studies

To augment the interview findings, I also conducted a case study analysis. Data collection consisted of document and website review of information on ABE programs in the two US states of Washington and Wisconsin. The two cases were selected because of their highly-acclaimed ABE programs and recent system-wide policies that support basic skills services. Analysis focused on a general overview of ABE programs with a specific focus on aspects that directly or indirectly relate to the problems identified in the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the case study analysis was as follows:

- **Access and Coordination** - describes the extent to which adult learners can enter ABE programs and how these programs are managed in that jurisdiction
- **Funding** – identifies financial and other resources available to the program
• *Workplace Bridging* – explores mechanisms that exist for coordinating institution-based learning with provision of employability skills
• *Instruction* – illustrates the types of innovative teaching strategies and teaching environments that exist
• *System Alignment* – explains the extent to which governmental agencies and departments collaborate in order to provide cohesive policies and funding that benefit low-income, low-education adults
• *Support Services* – evaluates the types of supports available particularly to students with disability

Subsequently, the linking of case study findings to the Quality Framework contributed to the formulation of policy alternatives and evaluation criteria, as explained in the section which follows.
6: Semi-Structured Interview Analysis

As noted in Section 5.1, I used thematic analysis to analyze the semi-structured interviews with the Quality Framework as a conceptual framework. The purpose of these interviews was to explore how provincial government policy reforms have impacted the quality of ABE programs. This section presents only the problems and barriers identified from these interviews: Resources, Teaching and Learning, as well as Outreach and Promotion, based on components of the Quality Framework.

6.1 Resources

Interviewees indicated that student and program funding contributed to the problems faced by ABE programs and these fall under the Resources component of the Quality framework. The Resource sub-themes include the adequacy of ABESAP funding, disadvantages of block funding and the repercussions of tuition-free programming.

6.1.1 Insufficient and Inconsistent Student Financial Aid

All interviewees cited the availability of student funding as a major challenge facing the viability of ABE programs. Lack of funding prevents students from attending ABE programs and affects their outcomes. Specifically, almost all interviewees indicated the inconsistency of ABESAP funding because funding criteria often change and the amounts available to students vary across years, sometimes with no advance warning from the programs. A prevalent opinion was that ABESAP funding is important for many students and its inconsistency is a source of frustration for both practitioners and students as expressed in this response by an instructor (Interviewee #18):
One of the real policies that drives everybody crazy in the field is the fact that we only get student funding from ABESAP funding and we have no access to student loans for students at the upper end of our programs. And so there is not enough money for them to live on to come back to school.

The continual reduction of ABESAP funding also serves as a barrier to ABE access for many adult learners. Most interviewees acknowledged the problems with ABESAP funding and a Dean (Interviewee #13) expressed the ongoing problem as follows:

...but now this year ABESAP funding has been reduced. in a survey of the deans it appears that we are only receiving 50% of the funding that we got last year. usually we get extra funding in January, but we’re not counting it and we’re going to be down by 50%. this significant reduction in funding will affect a lot of students and programs.

Table 4 summarizes opinions about the adequacy of ABE and ABESAP funding and indicates the magnitude of the problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instructors</th>
<th>Chairs/Coordinators</th>
<th>Deans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABESAP funding applications are complicated</td>
<td>0/9</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABESAP funding is adequate</td>
<td>1/9</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABESAP funding well-managed by the ministry</td>
<td>1/9</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, interviewees indicated that funding challenges have particularly adverse impacts on students with special needs. Given the accommodations required by students with special needs, attending ABE programs might be cost-prohibitive for most. An example provided by Interviewee #3 is the high cost of creating Braille materials for blind students. Therefore, program and student funding have a substantial impact on the adequacy of ABE resources, and have consequences that go beyond just resource provision.
6.1.2 Disadvantages of Block Funding

As explained in Section 3.6, in 2002 the provincial government moved from a funding system in which they gave targeted funding to ABE programs to one in which they now provide block funding to institutions. With the block funding approach, the provincial government leaves it up to each institution to distribute the funding to specific program and departments. Some interviewees indicated that this new arrangement has resulted in the reduction of funding allotted to ABE programs because of competing administrative priorities. In the words of Interviewee #14:

Instructors are burning out because the workload is too much. Because of the block funding that the government gives to the institution they do not tell the institution what to spend on where. They don’t give a directive and because of that what happens is the institution decides how they are going to spend it. So over the years they have forced us to work more to deliver more FTEs on less money.

A Dean (Interviewee #13) summarized the opinion expressed by the majority of interviewees about the problems which arise from block funding in this response:

We no longer have targeted funding for postsecondary programs. What we have is block funding. So each postsecondary institution is given their pool of money which will be allocated throughout the institution as seen fit. That means that whereas before there was a pot of money that had to be used for ABE, isn’t happening necessarily. Now in our institution we’ve been treated very fairly, but in other institutions I know that postsecondary ABE programs have been cut because they want to offer university-level courses.

There is also frustration based on the perception that the province is not providing adequate financial support that will allow ABE programs to work effectively. For example 6 out of 7 chairs/coordinators indicated that block funding is problematic. Additionally, most interviewees concluded that ABE programs had better funding when there was targeted funding.
6.1.3 Repercussions of Tuition-Free Programming

When asked about the consequences of making ABE tuition-free in 2007, interviewees indicated that because ABE programs became non-revenue generating, they attained lower priority and lower standing in the agendas of colleges and universities. This perception created tensions between ABE programs and other revenue generating programs in colleges and universities. This internal friction and lack of revenue generation places ABE program at the frontline of any funding, resources, or staffing cuts. As a result, ABE instructors feel much less secure about their jobs than their colleagues and interviewees indicated that ABE program staff suffers low moral because of the constant negativity.

Tuition-free programming calls into question the appropriateness of this move because of its repercussions as described by a department chair (Interviewee #14):

The government should be looking at accountability for ABE and postsecondary ed. the money is where you mouth is in terms of who you are and how you make a difference in somebody’s life. We’re quite successful here, but we’re starved for finances. So we have such committed people, who work hard and trying to help these students who are in such a place of need. I think the tuition-free thing is really great. That’s a good thing, but the govt has to make sure that they give the institution enough money to cover that. Because if they don’t it causes this internal divide between the programs because people are pointing at us going “you guys don’t even bring any money in”. and we’re going “well, we can’t and we like it that way. It needs to be that way because it’s about access for students.” but at the same time they don’t realize that some money comes in. But anyway, the govt has to realize they’ve got to pay for every piece of that and they’ve got to let people know that they are doing that so that they are not going to be coming down our throats for it, right. “Let’s get rid of you guys because we want the money.” I don’t know if it’s policy that needs to be created and shared – I’m not really sure how that works.

A Dean (Interviewee #12) provided another illustrative perspective on tuition-free programming as follows:

Because ABE is tuition-free, government has established a tuition add-back, but it doesn’t reflect the increases in tuition value and it doesn’t increase according to increased numbers of students. Essentially it’s a static amount . . .when ABE was made tuition-free there was a calculation done to estimate the value of tuition that was lost by making it tuition-free and that was then put into the college’s operating budget but it is based on numbers at a very low ebb. So we have about
60% more students than we did then, but we still have the same tuition add-back. So that creates a constriction within the system as well.

Overall, the majority of interviewees indicated problems with the institution of tuition-free programming, particularly as it relates to the stability of ABE programs.

### 6.2 Teaching and Learning

Most interviewees indicated that ABE programs focus on preparing students for postsecondary education, rather than the workplace. They also indicated that ABE programs are not effective at accommodating students with special needs and learning disabilities as explained in this section on Teaching and Learning.

#### 6.2.1 No Specific Focus on Preparing Students for the Workplace

When asked about the adequacy of ABE programs in meeting the needs of employers, most interviewees indicated that ABE programs do not meet the needs of employers as shown in Table 5. For example, a college Dean (Interviewee #11), echoed the opinions of many other interviewees with the assertion that there is a disconnect between the expectations of the provincial government and ABE programs by saying:

> The integration with social assistance has been very poor. The provincial govt does not fully endorse upgrading education as being a way to facilitate people moving off social assistance. They tend to look for short term fixes for people who are on assistance. Those of us involved in adult basic education believe strongly in getting people a firm foundation so they can have a variety of choices once they get off social assistance. That’s something we’ve struggled with between govt policy and our educational beliefs. So there’s a policy disconnect.

From the interview responses to the question about whether ABE programs meet the needs of employers, it was apparent that ABE programs do not focus on employability. Rather, many interviewees view the role of ABE as preparing students for postsecondary education. A college Dean (Interviewee #11) expressed the common opinion held by most interviewees with
regards to the effectiveness and adequacy of ABE programs in meeting the needs of employers when he said:

Really the intent of ABE is two-fold – so before I answer the question I was going to clarify something. One of the roles is around transition to postsecondary education and one is around employment. We have a dual relationship and I would say across the province ABE programs have advisory committees that ensure that we’re preparing the kind of people that employers want, but also making sure that we meet the needs of students so they can be successful in the postsecondary education programs as well. So I think it’s hard to have multiple masters – certainly we know that our students are employed after being involved in adult basic ed programs, but often they are jobs that are about helping them to stay alive and afloat while they simultaneously pursue postsecondary programs and get jobs that are closer to what they really want to be doing.

As shown in Table 5, the majority of respondents believed that ABE programs meet the needs of students, but not those of employers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Interviewee Opinions about Effectiveness of ABE Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion Agreement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE programs meet needs of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE programs meet needs of employers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2.2  **Barriers for Students with Special Needs and Learning Disabilities**

Another government-related barrier brought up by interviewees was the inability of ABE programs to provide mandatory assessment of learning disabilities. Without a legal requirement to assess students that instructors perceive as having learning disabilities, they cannot effectively teach or help students that need help, especially when those students deny having a problem or are unaware that they have a learning disability.
Additionally, in comparison to regular ABE programs, interviewees indicated that Adult Special Education (ASE) programs require more resources and hence are more expensive. As a result, these programs have become a more important target of funding cuts. Therefore, current financial pressures exacerbate challenges for ASE programs since postsecondary faculty members do not believe as though students with permanent and cognitive disabilities should be in postsecondary institutions. Interviewees indicated that ASE programs are now required to enrol special needs students (e.g., students with communicative or mental impairments) using the same funding formulas as regular students. In other words, special needs students no longer qualify for additional funding to facilitate the provision of reasonable accommodations. Specifically, ASE programs are required to enrol the same number of students in a class as regular students, even though these students require more attention from instructors as indicated in the following instructor quote (Interviewee #10):

In the past, adult special education was funded separately – like it was a separate calculation to other ABE funding. So because you are functioning like most university classes there’s a minimum – like all university instructors are expected to produce a certain number of full-time equivalents. So that means a certain number of students times a certain amount of classroom instruction per course and throughout the whole year. When you are dealing with students that have a wide variety of learning and cognitive disabilities as well as other mental and physical disabilities, you can’t have the same number of students in a classroom so the student-to-instructor ratio is not too large. So previously the adult special education students were allotted a higher dollar value per student than a fundamental ABE student. The situation now is that all students are allotted the same amount of money per student and also all the full-time equivalents are calculated exactly the same way.

Therefore, reduced funding has also made it difficult for ASE programs to provide the special equipment and learning aids that are helpful to students with special needs. As a result, ASE programs face additional challenges to those faced by traditional ABE programs.
6.3 Outreach and Promotion

The final identified theme was Outreach and Promotion. Specifically, interviewees indicated that other postsecondary programs do not believe that ABE programs belong in postsecondary institutions and that there is a misalignment of systems, funding streams, policies and programs.

6.3.1 Outsiders Believe that ABE Does Not Belong in Postsecondary Institutions

There is tension between ABE programs and other university programs, which do not believe that ABE programs belong in a university or college setting. Some interviewees attributed this perception to a poor understanding of the value of ABE programs and the fact that provincial budgets already include these programs and they are not merely a drain on institutional resources. This response from a program chair (Interviewee #14) illustrates the perceptions of many ABE practitioners:

To lessen tensions, one of the biggest things is education. They think up the hill that if they cut ABE they are going to get the money. So they need to understand that money is given to this institution specifically for this area. And if it gets cut that funding gets cut. If that little piece of information got out there, that would be really important. There are a lot of supporters who understand the importance of ABE and how we do move students. We ladder them up. We get them ready and they are ready when they are done with us.

Interviewees indicated that another source of tension results from faculty perceptions that ABE programs did not belong in postsecondary institutions since they were teaching secondary school subject matter as indicated by this response from and instructor (Interviewee #1):

Every area is pointing at every other area to cut. So we’re being faced right now – especially with the university side – going like why would we have ABE here? They don’t bring any money in and it’s high school courses. Why are they in a university? So we are really struggling with this right now . . . big, big finger pointing with people saying we don’t need you guys here.

Therefore, interviewees believe that the rest of the institution is not aware of the value of ABE programs or the fact that they exist because of a provincial mandate.
6.3.2 Misalignment of Systems, Funding Streams, and Policy and Program Requirements

Given that ABE programs primarily cater to low-income and less-educated adults, some of the barriers these adults face are related to governmental income and employment assistance as indicated by the summary in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instructors</th>
<th>Chairs/Coordinators</th>
<th>Deans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI restrictions are a deterrent</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare restrictions are a deterrent</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker’s Compensation is a deterrent</td>
<td>4/9</td>
<td>3/7</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about government barriers that exist for ABE students, interviewees indicated that adults who receive some kind of social assistance (e.g., welfare or Employment Insurance) cannot take ABE classes or attend school as explained by an instructor (Interviewee #18):

A lot of the EI programs won’t allow students to come back to school and so it’s a real problem for somebody on EI because they are not allowed to come to school during the day because they are supposed to be looking for work. And so it’s a terrible barrier for them when they are not allowed to come. We have basically lost all people who used to be on welfare. They simply can’t come to our programs anymore ... there is very little support for them to come. They won’t give them daycare, they won’t give them bus passes. There all kinds of issues for people who are on welfare to coming back.

These views are consistent with the reported changes in ABE enrolments in 2002/2003 when the provincial governments eliminated Institution Based Training funds and tightened welfare requirements as discussed in Section 3.6. These changes have also resulted in
demographic shifts among ABE students as corroborated by numerous interviewees. Interviewee 
#3’s comments exemplify these changes to the ABE population when he said the following:

The ABE population has changed distributions since those times. What we tend to think of as traditional ABE students – people coming back for retraining, people who did not graduate high school, a lot of people coming off welfare and into the ABE system to get some sort of education – now those students are much, much fewer in the ABE system now and they have been replaced by teenagers who didn’t do quite well enough in high school.

In summary, this section relies on the experience of ABE instructors to understand the underlying problems in ABE programs. Specifically, thematic analysis indicates that current problems in ABE programs can be grouped under Resources, Teaching and Learning, and Outreach and Promotion. Interestingly, many of these perspectives are consistent with historical reforms of ABE programs and the associated impact of funding and policy changes. These three components are now used for analyzing ABE programs in other jurisdictions as described in the next section.
7: Case Study Analysis

This section presents a case study analysis that focuses on evaluating salient features of ABE programs in the US states of Washington and Wisconsin. The case study evaluation criteria directly or indirectly relate to the problematic aspects of BC’s ABE programs. Table 8 summarizes the analysis and key findings are provided at the end of the section.

7.1 Washington State

Access and Coordination

Washington State’s ABE programs provide adult education and literacy services that include workplace literacy, family literacy, and English Literacy to about 75,000 participants annually. These programs are offered by the state’s community and technical colleges and by community-based organizations with funding from a variety of sources – federal, state, and local. The programs are open access and have low tuition costs. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges handles financial, policy and legal matters for both students and programs (WTECB, 2011)

Funding

Washington State uses a version of performance-based funding called the Student Achievement initiative. This initiative’s purpose is to improve public accountability by more accurately describing what students achieve each year, and to use financial incentives as way to increase levels of student achievement. The achievement measures used are: basic skills gains, first year retention, mathematics pass rates and number of certificate/degree completions. The rationale behind using these measures is that they focus the institutions on short term and
intermediate outcomes that provide meaningful momentum towards degree/certificate completion for all students. Performance-based funding was initially dropped in 1999, and then was re-established in 2007 (Dougherty, et al., 2011; SBCTC, 2006b).

ABE adults are eligible for special funding in the form of Opportunity Grants which help low-income adults train for high-wage, high-demand careers. Only Washington State residents who can prove financial need are eligible. The grants pay for up to 45 credits and cover tuition, fees, and up to $1,000 per year for books and supplies. Additionally, recipients are eligible for tutoring, career advising, childcare and transportation (SBCTC, 2006a).

Workforce Bridging

Washington State’s Integrated Basic Educational Skills Training (I-BEST) program integrates academic and career technical education content so that students can increase basic skills, while earning credit for occupational credentials. The program enrols students in non-credited ABE and at the same time they take college-credit occupational courses that incorporate instruction in occupationally-related reading, writing and mathematics. The content taught and the numbers of hours of instruction vary across colleges, but both the occupational and ABE instructors must be present in the classroom for at least half the instructional time (Bailey and Cho, 2010).

This program exists throughout Washington State and colleges receive 1.75 full-time (FTE) reimbursements if evaluations of the program indicated that the I-BEST students were more likely than the traditional group to enrol in higher-level courses, to gain basic skills and to continue to the next year of college (Wachen, Jenkins and Van Noy, 2010). These findings indicate the value of integrated learning.
Instruction

The technical and community college system uses online learning as a way to increase student convenience and institutional flexibility. Additional advantages include increasing access to college by reducing the time and cost of commuting, and allowing students to study on a personalized schedule. These supports include student online readiness assessments, course management system tutorial, 24-hour technical and reference librarian support, and faculty development support (Jaggars, 2011).

Disability Support

Washington State does not have an approved policy on serving students with disabilities. However, ABE practitioners and administrators used the Learning Disabilities Quality Initiative (SBCTC, 2006c) to address these issues. Through this initiative they developed flagging, screening, interventions and testing processes. They also developed training for learning disabilities.

7.2 Wisconsin

Access and Coordination

Wisconsin’s ABE programs run largely through the Wisconsin Technical College System with governmental oversight by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The latter provides services to about 50,000 participants annually. To a lesser extent, community based organizations and correctional facilities provide basic skills training. Several types of programs are in place. These include Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, Adult High School, and Workplace Adult Basic Education. The programs open access and have low tuition costs. The ABE population is similar to BC in that it comprises of employed and unemployed adults and high school graduates. However, unlike BC, the Wisconsin ABE system also includes at-risk high school graduates contracted by local school districts (COWS, 2008)
Funding

Federal funds are distributed through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act using a formula that weights the number of adults (16 and older) in each state who do not have a high school diploma and are not enrolled in school. States must match 25% of their federal contribution with state or local funds. In Wisconsin these funds are distributed to 16 technical college districts, and to a lesser extent, to community based organization and correctional facilities. In addition to federal funding, at the state level general purpose revenue also funds ABE programs and is allocated to college districts through a combination of competitive and non-competitive grants (Dahlk, 2006).

Workforce Bridging

Workplace Adult Basic Education provides basic skills upgrading at worksites as a way to overcome barriers faced by adult learners like family responsibilities, transportation limitations or additional jobs in their attempts to upgrade their basic skills. Under this program, technical college staff engages employers and labour to deliver workplace-specific training. Since the instruction is related to specific jobs at the locations where it is delivered, employers and workers perceive it to be particularly relevant (Dahlk, 2006).

Instruction

Instruction and curriculum is delivered in computer-equipped learning labs which utilize individualized instruction, computer-based instruction, small group work, and coursework using the technical college state curriculum. Instruction occurs in several locations which include colleges, local Workforce Development Centers, at community-based organizations, within correctional facilities, and in some K-12 classrooms (COWS, 2008).
System Alignment

Less-educated adults on social assistance are required to upgrade their skills. Specifically, under W2, the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program, or unemployment insurance, work and training requirements require the pursuit of ABE training. Additionally, from a governmental perspective, ministry websites make a strong effort to market skills-upgrading programs.

Disability Support

ABE students with disabilities have access to special needs support services. These services include career counselling, and workshops provided by Workforce Development Centers (COWS, 2008). Therefore, ABE programs support students with disabilities through education and information, thus improving their learning opportunities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Aspect</th>
<th>Quality Framework Component</th>
<th>Washington State</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access &amp; Coordination</td>
<td>1) Resources</td>
<td>• Technical &amp; Community Colleges</td>
<td>• Technical College System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Outreach &amp; Promotion</td>
<td>• Community-based organizations</td>
<td>• Community-based organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• State Board for Community &amp; Technical Colleges manages program and student funding</td>
<td>• State Technical College Board coordinates ABE programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>1) Resources</td>
<td>• Federal, state and local funding</td>
<td>• Federal, state and local funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses performance-based funding</td>
<td>• No performance-based funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunity grants help low-income adults train for high-wage, high-demand careers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace bridging</td>
<td>1) Resources</td>
<td>• Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) initiative</td>
<td>• Workplace ABE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>• Workplace literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Outreach &amp; Promotion</td>
<td>• Uses innovative online learning which includes student assessment, course management, reference librarian and faculty development</td>
<td>• Instruction and curriculum delivered in computer-equipped learning labs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>1) Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>• Uses innovative online learning which includes student assessment, course management, reference librarian and faculty development</td>
<td>• Instruction and curriculum delivered in computer-equipped learning labs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Alignment</td>
<td>1) Resources</td>
<td>• ABE training mandated through W2 welfare program and unemployment benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Outreach &amp; Promotion</td>
<td>• ABE training mandated through W2 welfare program and unemployment benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>• ABE training mandated through W2 welfare program and unemployment benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Support</td>
<td>1) Resources</td>
<td>• Learning Disabilities Quality Initiative used at state level</td>
<td>• Special needs students have access to support services according to legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Teaching Learning</td>
<td>• Learning Disabilities Quality Initiative used at state level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Outreach &amp; Promotion</td>
<td>• Learning Disabilities Quality Initiative used at state level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3 Key Findings and Implications for BC

The preceding case study analysis uses features of ABE programs in Washington State and Wisconsin as a way to inform the BC context. Apart from summarizing findings from the case studies, Table 7 also conducts an analysis of the program features using the Quality Framework. Therefore, any of the case study evaluation criteria (i.e., Access and Coordination, Funding, Instruction, Workforce Bridging, System Alignment, and Disability Support) that relate directly or indirectly to at least two of the problematic components of the Quality Framework are used for formulating policy alternatives. In other words, when a case study evaluation criterion relates to at least two interview themes (i.e., Resources, Teaching and Learning, Outreach and Promotion), it is worthy of consideration for improving BC’s ABE programs.

Additionally, a program feature that appears in only one of the case studies (i.e., Washington or Wisconsin) is classified as a secondary component and can only be included as a subset of a policy alternative. A program feature that appears in both case studies (i.e., Washington and Wisconsin) is classified as a major feature and will be a dominant aspect of the proposed policy alternative. Given the preceding discussion of major and minor features, the following program features are classified accordingly for the BC context:

- **Access & Coordination** – administration of ABE programming in both states is centralized. In contrast, BC provides ABE programming in both high schools and postsecondary institutions with oversight from multiple ministries. Therefore, this feature is classified as a major program feature because it exists in both case studies.
- **Workplace Bridging** – both jurisdictions use contextualized and accelerated learning which combines academic learning and employability skills. This feature is also commonly referred to as workplace ABE. Therefore, this feature is classified as a major program feature because it is part of both case studies.
- **System Alignment** – Wisconsin aligns ABE programming with welfare and social services for low-income, low-educated adults with as a way to help them gain
employability skills. ABE programs in BC mainly focus on preparing students for postsecondary education. Therefore, this is classified as a minor program feature.

- **Disability Support**—Washington State has an initiative for supporting students with learning disabilities, while Wisconsin provides support for students with special needs. Therefore, this is classified as a minor program feature because both case studies do not have the feature in the same format.

The preceding program feature classifications into minor and major features are incorporated into policy alternatives as major or minor improvements, respectively.
8: Policy Objectives, Criteria and Measures

Having analyzed the semi-structured interviews and case studies in Sections 6 and 7, respectively, this section outlines policy objectives for addressing the policy problem. Additionally, this section describes policy analysis criteria and measures associated with them.

8.1 Policy Objectives

The long term objective of the selected proposed policy alternative is to increase adult literacy levels in BC. In the short term, the proposed policy alternative will:

1. Increase access to adult basic education
2. Improve provision of adult basic education programming
3. Encourage adults to participate in adult basic education

8.2 Criteria and Measures

Table 8 outlines the five chosen criteria which are: cost, acceptability, effectiveness, horizontal equity and administrative feasibility. Each criterion has an associated measure that facilitates the ranking of proposed policy alternatives. After ranking the policy alternatives, a total score indicates the best alternative for addressing the policy problem. An explanation of each criterion follows in Table 8.
Table 8: Criteria for Evaluating Policy Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government funding</td>
<td>Extent to which the provincial government would find the policy favourable given the need for increased funding</td>
<td>&lt;$3 million increase..........................</td>
<td>Highly favourable (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$3 million - $5 million increase</td>
<td>Moderately favourable (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$5 million increase...........................</td>
<td>Unfavourable (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>How many barriers (individual, institutional and policy) to adult basic education does the policy address</td>
<td>3 barrier types addressed....................</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 barrier types addressed.....................</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 barrier type addressed......................</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal Equity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs vs. traditional students</td>
<td>Extent to which traditional and students with special needs would benefit from the policy</td>
<td>Both types of students gain some benefit................</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Only one type of student gains some benefit................</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neither type of student gains any benefits................</td>
<td>None (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Feasibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of implementation</td>
<td>Levels of coordination required</td>
<td>ABE program only...............................</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ABE program + provincial government.............</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ABE program + provincial government + other entity.......</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability to ABE programs</td>
<td>The extent to which the policy increases outreach and promotion</td>
<td>Increased outreach and promotion................</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased outreach or increased promotion, but not both..............</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No difference in outreach or promotion........................</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cost

Cost is measured by the amount of government funding required to support that policy alternative. Specifically, this criterion evaluates the government funding required in addition to the usual funding for ABE programming. Table 2 in Section 3.4 shows that ABE program funding from the provincial government increased each academic year from 2004 to the present. Specifically, there was an $8.6 million increase in total ABE funding between 2007 and 2008, a $5.2 million increase between 2008 and 2009, and a $7 million increase between 2009 and 2010. Therefore, it is likely that the provincial government would be willing to provide modest funding increases for promising initiatives that would help to fulfill BC’s goal of becoming the most literate jurisdiction in North America.

As discussed in Section 4, Butterwick and White (2006) and the Federation for Postsecondary Educators of BC (FPSE, 2006c) believe that the province moved away from a cost-effective model for the delivery of education programs to people on income assistance worth about $4.2 million in 2002 and serving around 20,000 recipients. If this funding is restored, it would improve the current provision of ABE programming. Therefore, using this value as a baseline measure for cost and adjusting for inflation, assuming a 3% rate since 2002, restoring this programming in 2011 would cost approximately $5 million for the year 2011. This $5 million cost is the same as the lowest increase to ABE funding between 2008 and 2009 as shown in Table 2. Hence, policy alternatives that will require more than $5 million in additional funding would be unfavourable to the provincial government. Policy alternatives requiring at least 60% of this amount (i.e., between $3 million to $5 million) in additional funding per year are likely to be moderately favourable while those that require less than 60% of this amount (i.e., less than $3 million) in additional funding per year are likely to be favourable.
Although increased outreach and promotion is likely to bolster enrolments it is unclear by how much. ABE programs have struggled with accurate forecasting as expressed by this quote from a Dean (Interviewee #11):

We struggle with ... as the economy heats up, the demand for ABE lessens because there are more jobs out there and so we have a bit of a boom and bust model – right now we have far more students than we can serve and there isn’t a way for us to access increased financial resources to support the increased demand. In other words we are turning away students right now. Whereas when it’s quieter, when it’s busier in the economy there is less demand and there is no way for us to respond to those changes.

Therefore, given funding challenges and the difficulties in forecasting demand, this policy evaluation will not address the potential need for more seats as there are no easy solutions.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness measures how much of an improvement a proposed policy alternative would produce in addressing the policy problem. The literature review in Section 2.3 and responses from interviewees indicated that adult learners face individual, institutional and policy barriers to the pursuit of training and education. Therefore, on the effectiveness criterion, a proposed policy scores high if it addresses all three types of barriers, it scores medium if only two barriers are addressed, and low if only one barrier is addressed.

Horizontal Equity

Horizontal equity evaluates whether the proposed alternative may impact the equality with which burdens and benefits are distributed between groups with comparable attributes. A pertinent attribute for a proposed policy alternative in this study is its capacity to provide equal or comparable benefits to traditional and special needs students (this includes both developmental and learning disabilities). This criterion is measured qualitatively and dichotomously according to whether or not traditional and special needs students both benefit from the policy. That is, if both special and traditional students derive some benefit it scores high; if only either special needs or
only traditional students derive some benefit it scores medium; and it scores low if neither traditional nor special needs students derive some benefit.

**Administrative Feasibility**

This criterion evaluates the difficulty of implementing and managing a proposed alternative by the various stakeholders. Specifically, it measures ease of implementation by evaluating the levels of coordination required for proposed policy alternatives. Therefore, a policy alternative scores high if implementation is required only in ABE programs, it scores medium if administrative coordination requires collaboration between ABE programs and the provincial government, and lastly, it scores low if coordination occurs between the ABE program, provincial government and another entity (e.g., employer).

**Acceptability**

Acceptability measures the extent to which key stakeholders would agree with a proposed policy alternative, based on its potential to address the policy problem. A useful measure of acceptability is the extent to which ABE practitioners would accept a policy alternative and this would occur because the alternative increases outreach and promotion. Therefore these two features not only have the potential to improve the standing of ABE programs in college and universities, but they may also indirectly lead to an adjustment of social welfare restrictions because governmental agencies understand the importance of barriers facing these programs. A secondary impact of outreach and promotion would be the potential increase in student enrolments. As noted during interviews, there were tensions among departments because some viewed ABE programs as a drain on the institution because of their lack of revenue generation and because they felt as though secondary school level instruction should not occur in postsecondary institutions. Interviewees partially attributed this problem to ineffectual outreach and promotion.
Therefore, a policy alternative scores high if improves both outreach and promotion. It scores low if it increases either outreach or promotion, but not both. It scores low if it does increase either outreach or promotion.

These five evaluation criteria provide a useful framework to gain further insights into the overall value of any proposed policy alternatives. Therefore, in the next section each policy alternative is ranked on each of the five criteria. A total score is computed using the five rankings, leading to the selection of the best alternative.
9: Policy Alternatives and Analysis

This section describes three policy alternatives that have the potential to address the policy problem. An analysis and comparison of three policy alternatives, using the criteria and measures outlined in Section 8, will assist with the selection of an optimal alternative to address the policy problem.

It is important to note that given current funding pressures, the provincial government is unlikely to increase ABE program funding drastically. Therefore, even though the availability of funding was a major challenge identified by the interviews, the policy alternatives suggested are not designed to be excessively “expensive”. Additionally, even though Alternatives #2 and #3 build on Alternative #1, this does not disadvantage their potential selection based on the evaluation criteria used. Specifically, the criteria are weighted equally and only cost, might unfairly advantage Alternative #1 since it is a less complex alternative. However, if upon evaluation, Alternatives #2 and #3 are disadvantaged by cost, this will be taken into account when making a recommendation.

9.1 Alternative #1: Augmented Status Quo

9.1.1 Description

The aim of this alternative is to eliminate the problems identified in the interviews. The formulation of this alternative is informed not only by the interviews, but also by the case study analysis. This alternative is called an Augmented Status Quo because there is no major overhaul of current ABE programs. The suggested improvements are as follows:

1. Switch from block funding to targeted program funding;
2. Increase outreach and promotion. This would occur in the form of newspaper, TV and internet promotion in colleges and universities, to employers and to BC citizens at large. Additionally, synergies and collaborations would be sought with other governmental departments and agencies, particularly those that interact with low-income and less-educated adults;

3. Integrate program and service delivery related to education, training and employment services for Employment Insurance clients and Social Assistance recipients. This integration and coordination of services would eliminate policies that restrict or deny access to adult basic education and hence increase access for individuals that would benefit from lifelong learning. Studies have shown that systems which integrate recruitment, assessment, and retention strategies vastly improve outcomes for income assistance adult learners who face multiple barriers to their pursuit of education (Butterwick and White, 2006). Additionally, collaboration among the government agencies that provide social and employment assistance to create policies that facilitate participate in ABE programs would ensue;

4. Provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities and programs serving them, in a way that promotes program viability and sustainability, and robust outcomes. Specifically, Adult Special Education program funding and resource allocation needs modification (i.e., FTE allocations) as does the assessment of learning disabilities.

The preceding changes to current ABE programs are partially a response to the problems identified in the interviews and partially informed by adult learning initiatives and program characteristics of comparable jurisdictions based on the case study analysis.
9.1.2 Analysis

Cost

The goal of this policy alternative is to improve on the current administration of ABE programming by eliminating the deficiencies identified from the interviews. As occurs with most programming improvements, some costs are incurred. Therefore, the purpose of the cost criterion is to quantify these additional costs.

First, the outreach and promotion based on the proposed media, specifically, advertising of ABE programs can occur through ministry and literacy organization websites, through literacy events and conferences, and through literacy coordinators for a cost of around $100,000 for the entire province. Second, the provision of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities and a change in funding allocations using modified FTE calculations would increase the funding required for programs.

Given that Adult Special Education programs and students with learning disabilities are a small proportion of all ABE programming; this cost of reasonable accommodation could range somewhere around $200,000 per institution, based on prior funding provided to special ABE populations as reported by Butterwick and White (2006). Therefore, overall costs from increased funding to ASE programs and for the ABE program campaign would be roughly less than $5 million (i.e., 18 institutions × $200,000/institution = $3.6 million + $100,000 for ABE program campaign funding). Hence, the cost of this proposed alternative would be moderately favourable (Score=2) to the provincial government.

Effectiveness

This alternative addresses all three barriers stated in Section 2.4: individual, institutional and policy barriers. Specifically, the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities are addressed, the capacity of the institutions to provide support services is
increased and policies related to income assistance and social services are addressed. Therefore, this alternative scores high (Score=3) on effectiveness as measured by the extent to which it improves accessibility.

**Horizontal Equity**

This policy alternative would fulfill the horizontal equity criterion for both special needs and traditional students for a few reasons. First, increased outreach and promotion would attract both types of adult learners. Collaboration among ABE programs and government departments that serve low-income, less-educated adults would equally improve service provision, access and funding for both types of learners. The use of targeted funding would also ensure that all ABE programs have more consistent and adequate funding, benefitting all learners. Therefore, Alternative #1 exhibits high horizontal equity for all types of students (Score=3).

**Administrative Feasibility**

To implement this policy alternative, only the province and ABE programs would be involved in coordinating administrative and implementation activities. Specifically, coordinating policies and resources related to social assistance would occur first at the provincial government level and then with ABE programs. Additionally, increasing outreach and promotion would occur between the province and ABE programs. Therefore, it scores medium (Score=2) on a measure of the extent to which it is easy to implement.

**Acceptability**

Increased outreach and promotion of ABE programs provincially means that this alternative receives a high score (Score=3) for acceptability. The outreach would help to address the perceived low status of ABE programs, remove the policy barriers faced by students and potentially increase enrolments.
9.2 Alternative #2: Augmented Status Quo + Moving Postsecondary ABE Programs into Secondary Institutions

9.2.1 Description

As noted in Section 3.1, apart from colleges and universities, BC’s secondary school system also administers ABE programming through K-12 school districts. Almost every school district offers ABE programs in which adult learners can finish required courses for the British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma, or they can complete a reduced number of credits. Therefore, adult learners can earn a graduation diploma with a mix of courses from either the secondary or the postsecondary ABE systems (AVED, 2010). According to Interviewee #17, the difference between the secondary and postsecondary systems lies in the fact that school districts have limited academic subject offerings and focus on preparation for the British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma. Therefore, there are essentially parallel ABE systems in the secondary and postsecondary systems.

Interviewees indicated that tensions between ABE programs and other academic programs in colleges and universities arise because of the perception that ABE programs do not belong in postsecondary institutions. Additional tensions arise because ABE programs are tuition-free and hence non-revenue generating, thus upsetting other departments that perceive ABE programs as merely draining limited financial resources.

To avoid the tensions among faculty departments, this alternative suggests consolidating provincial oversight and delivery of ABE programs and moving them entirely to high schools. This alternative makes sense because the case studies showed that Washington and Wisconsin have streamlined and centralized ABE program delivery. Additionally, this alternative would include the features of Alternative #1 to use targeted funding, increase outreach and promotion, collaborate with other governmental agencies that serve ABE programs, and increase accommodations for with disabilities and special needs.
9.2.2 Analysis

Cost

Given that this alternative also includes costs of Alternative #1, there would already be a $3 - $5 million cost as explained in Section 9.1.2. Given these high initial costs, this alternative would have low favourability (Score=1) with the provincial government.

Effectiveness

Similar to Alternative #1, this alternative addresses individual, institutional and policy barriers. Therefore, it scores high on effectiveness (Score=1).

Horizontal Equity

As was the case with Alternative #1, this alternative scores high (Score=3) on horizontal equity requirement because both special needs and traditional students would benefit from improvements in ABE programs. Additionally, the move to high schools would provide additional access since there are far more school districts than there are colleges and universities.

Administrative Feasibility

If postsecondary ABE programs are moved into high schools, coordination would occur between the province and ABE programs. Therefore, similar to Alternative #1, Alternative #2 scores medium (Score=2) on the ease of implementation because only two stakeholders are involved.

Acceptability

Moving ABE programs to the K-12 system would be unacceptable to practitioners in colleges and universities and even some employers who place more value on ABE diplomas in comparison to those from high schools. An issue identified in the interviews was the perceived low status of ABE programs and moving them entirely to high schools might only serve to
reinforce the views held by those who disparage them to begin with. Some adults may also be unwilling to return to high school and therefore might not enrol in ABE programs. Therefore, this alternative would score low on acceptability (Score=1).

9.3 Alternative #3: Augmented Status Quo + Expansion of Employer-Sponsored and Workplace Adult Basic Education

9.3.1 Description

As noted previously, a significant proportion of adults in the labour force need to increase their literacy skills and raise their educational attainment, but have difficulty doing so because of family, financial and other limitations. For these adults, acquiring basic education skills in the workplace would be a convenient and effective way to access skill development by receiving instruction at the worksite. Moreover, ABE practitioners would be a readily available resource to help with the delivery of ABE training in the workplace. Policy instruments to incentivise employer investment in workplace adult basic education include government campaigns, financial incentives, regulation or direct provision of training by governments (Brisbois, Pollack, and Saunders, 2009).

Given that this approach to adult basic education occurs on the job, employers and workers view it as more pertinent and practical than if it had occurred in a postsecondary institution. Research has shown that educational programs in the workplace help employees to become more assertive, confident, and articulate, and it allows them to improve work habits and abilities (Alamprese and Kay, 1993; HRSDC, 2000).

Barker (1991) associates workplace programs with several benefits for the workplace and worker and these include:

- a system for continuous workforce upgrading;
- improved communications with employees;
- awareness of links between basic skills and job performance;
• awareness of skill deficits of employees;
• a ripple effect of graduates who promote skills upgrading;
• awareness of public and commercial education services;
• increased efforts at plain language in both written and verbal communications;
• sensitization to needs and worries of employees; and
• successful partnerships with educational institutions and government.

Additionally, Barker (1991) believes that workers are more inclined to participate in skills upgrading programs when they are employed, rather than unemployed because of the stresses arising from unemployment. Moreover, this alternative increases motivation, participation and learning output by valuing the work and life experiences of adult learners.

Research indicates that Canada has lower rates of participation in job-related training than many other advanced nations. Dominance of the Canadian economy by small- and medium-sized firms poses a challenge to the provision of job-related and basic skills training because employers do not have economies of scale to implement custom-designed employee training programs. Structural and institutional issues such as lack of information and the difficulty of calculating return on investment present additional challenges. Studies show that employer-supported training is worthwhile because of benefits such as increased productivity, reduced accidents and error rates, increased employee health, increased customer satisfaction and increased employee retention (Myers and de Broucker, 2006).

Currently, workplace adult basic education rarely occurs and in jurisdictions where it does occur, it tends to be underfunded (Dahlk, 2006). With this policy alternative, adult learners who would like to learn basic educational skills will have more than one route for pursuing their learning goals – in the workplace and in postsecondary institutions. Additionally, this policy alternative requires inclusion of the ABE program improvements described in Alternative #1. Furthermore, promotion of job-related education and training at the provincial level would stimulate demand. Similar to initiatives in Quebec, promotional campaigns would target
employers who invest the least in job-related education and training, along with unions and associations that represent employees and employee groups (QMOE, 2002). Therefore, Alternative #3 is cumulative in that it includes the changes suggested in Alternative #1.

9.3.2 Analysis

Cost

Costs arising from the “Augmented Status Quo” are around $4 million. Additionally, to encourage and facilitate workplace adult education, the provincial government would need to provide financial incentives to workplaces, in addition to curriculum and technical support. Therefore, this alternative would cost in excess of $4 million dollars and would be unfavourable (Score=1) to the provincial government given current funding pressures.

Effectiveness

By adopting the Augmented Status Quo for ABE programs, this alternative addresses institutional, individual and policy barriers. By increasing employer-sponsored and workplace adult education, this alternative addresses institutional barriers since more working adults can access basic education at the workplace instead of solely in postsecondary institutions. Individual barriers such as financial constraints are no longer a problem because of educational support by employers and the fact that adult learners would not have to quit their jobs or lessen their income in order to pursue their education. Societal stigma, fear and difficulty of navigating the postsecondary education system are also negated for those who receive basic skills training on the job. Therefore, by addressing structural, institutional and individual barriers, Alternative #3 scores high (Score=3) on effectiveness.

Horizontal Equity

Since Alternative #3 incorporates all aspects of Alternative #1 by adopting the “Augmented Status Quo”, there is partial fulfillment of horizontal equity as previously described.
However, since there are fewer workplaces capable of providing the full range of accommodations required, that means there are less opportunities for employer sponsored and workplace ABE training for adults with developmental and learning disabilities. Overall, Alternative #3 scores low (Score=1) on the horizontal equity criterion.

**Administrative Feasibility**

Unlike the first two policy alternatives, Alternative #3 would require coordination of activities among the provincial government, the ABE program and employers. Therefore, this policy is more difficult to implement given the increased number of parties involved. Hence, it scores low (Score=1) on administrative feasibility.

**Acceptability**

ABE programs would not completely accept increases in workplace basic education because that would increase competition for learners and thereby reduce their student numbers. However, increased support from employers would increase ABE program prestige and bring visibility to adult basic education. Therefore, ABE programs would score this option as medium in terms of acceptability (Score=2).

### 9.4 Policy Evaluation Summary Matrix

Table 9 summarizes the policy evaluation conducted in Sections 9.1.2, 9.2.2 and 9.3.2. This evaluation appraised the efficacy of each proposed policy alternative by assigning scores using a measure for each associated evaluation criterion. The last row of Table 9 shows that Alternative #1 received the highest score and hence is the preferred alternative. Since there is only a one point difference between Alternatives #1, #2 and #, there was no inherent Cost bias to this alternative.

For the purposes of this study, the five evaluation criteria have equal weights since the intent of the evaluation is to provide some rigour in their comparison. Given that this evaluation
is qualitative and subjective, there may be no gains derived from assigning different weights to evaluation criteria that are perceived as more important. However, once an alternative is adopted and implementation considerations are made, different stakeholders would have different weights and each should calculate the outcome with their own preferences.

Table 9: Summary Evaluation of the Proposed Policy Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Options</th>
<th>Augmented Status Quo</th>
<th>Move to School Districts + Augmented Status Quo</th>
<th>Workplace ABE + Augmented Status Quo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criterion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government funding</td>
<td>Moderately Favourable (2)</td>
<td>Unfavourable (1)</td>
<td>Unfavourable (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal Equity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Feasibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of implementation</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability to ABE programs</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>Medium (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.5 Policy Recommendation

The best policy alternative is the one which receives highest total score for each evaluation criterion in Table 9. This policy alternative also aligns well with the policy objectives outlined in Section 8.1. With these two considerations in mind, Alternative #1 – “Augmented Status Quo” - is the best policy alternative for reducing the barriers faced by adult learners, increasing access to ABE programs, improving program efficiency and effectiveness and raising the profile and visibility of ABE programs in BC.

Therefore, in the short term (i.e., within 2 years) the province should revert to the use of targeted funding and improve accommodations and service provision for students with special needs. In the medium term (i.e., between 3 and 5 years) the Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development and the Ministry of Science and Universities should collaborate with other ministries and departments that provide services for low-income, less-educated adults to integrate systems, funding streams, and policy and program requirements. Lastly, in the long term (i.e., 5 to 10 years) the province should initiate a plan to increase access to adult basic skills training by partnering with other organizations, agencies, governmental departments and relevant stakeholders.

This policy recommendation supports the government funding, accessibility, horizontal equity, administrative complexity, and effectiveness evaluation criteria. Specifically, this alternative is not excessively expensive and is equitable for both traditional and special needs students. Moreover, given that this alternative would improve outreach and promotion and aims to increase the number of student enrolments annually, it would be acceptable to both ABE programs. Furthermore, it facilitates the alignment of social and employment assistance programs as a way to reduce the barriers faced by low-income and less-educated adults.
10: Conclusion

The educational system is an important driver of the social, cultural and economic health of BC. Its prominence has increased because society and the economy have become increasingly dependent on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge and information. Therefore, educational institutions have a vital role in the nurture of BC’s intellectual and human capital through education and skills training. Subsequently, ABE programs are important not only for increasing literacy rates, but also for helping less-educated members of society gain employability skills.

This study has some limitations. The sampling of interviewees and case studies was not scientific; therefore, the samples used are not representative of the population of ABE programs or personnel. Particularly, only 3 Adult Special Education and only 2 Deans were interviewed. This lack of representativeness may lessen the validity of the findings. Additionally, two components of the Quality Framework (Management and Progression) were not included in the analyses and hence the evaluation of ABE program quality is not comprehensive. Lastly, in the current economic and financial climate the proposed policy alternative cost might be prohibitive and therefore, improvements to ABE programs would be minimal.

Future research should include the two omitted Quality Framework components. Inclusion of these omitted components will increase completeness in the evaluation of ABE program quality and the impact of related provincial policies. Additionally, a large-scale survey would be a good way to incorporate a wider set of perspectives and opinions. It would also be worthwhile to understand the problems from the perspective of the provincial government. Furthermore, investigation into learning opportunities for students with disabilities would be another important direction to pursue.
Appendices
# Appendix A: British Columbia’s Postsecondary Institutions with ABE Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Campus Location(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>British Columbia Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camosun College</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capilano University</td>
<td>North Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of New Caledonia</td>
<td>Prince George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of the Rockies</td>
<td>Cranbrook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Multiple</td>
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<td>Kwantlen Polytechnic University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Langara College</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicola Valley Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Island College</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Lights College</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okanagan College</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selkirk College</td>
<td>Castlegar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thompson Rivers University - Open Learning</td>
<td>Kamloops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the Fraser Valley</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Community College</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Island University</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon College</td>
<td>Yukon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Interviewee Information

1) What is the nature of your involvement in ABE programs (instructor, department chair, dean, etc)?
2) For how long have you been directly involved with ABE programs in BC?
3) What subject or skill areas are you involved with and in what capacity?

ABE Policies and Relationship to Provincial Government

1) Currently, how would you characterize the effectiveness and adequacy of ABE programs in terms of how well they meet the needs of adult learners and employers?
2) What are some of the challenges faced by ABE programs in their attempt to promote literacy, pursuit of higher education and improve employability?
3) What government-related barriers make it difficult for adult learners to join ABE programs (e.g., welfare, EI restrictions, or Worker’s compensation).
4) How helpful has the province been in trying to resolving these issues?
5) How would you describe the relationship between the provincial government (MOE, AVED) and ABE programs?

Specific Provincial Policies and Reforms

1) In general, has the province been able to adequately address the challenges facing adult learners (support with tuition and fees, childcare issues, weakness of prior educational background)?
2) How did the elimination of ABE tuition fees in 2007 affect learners and ABE programs (insufficient resources, student-to-teacher ratio)?
3) Are there any problems with how this policy was implemented? Could the province have rolled out this new policy differently?
4) Would you say that provision and administration of ABESAP funding has been done well and why?
5) Has the ABE Articulation framework and process worked well and why?

Questions Not Included

1) Are there any important issues related to ABE programs and the provincial government’s role that you feel we have not covered?

Future Interviewees

1) Do you have recommendations for other people that I could interview?
# Appendix C: List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
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<td>ABE</td>
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<tr>
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<td>#15</td>
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</table>

*Note: ABE = Adult Basic Education, ASE = Adult Special Education*
Bibliography

Works Cited


