

## 2.3.1 Manitoba

Manitoba is one of three Prairie Provinces. The province has a total area of almost 650,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is roughly the same as the other two Prairie Provinces. As of the 2009 population estimates, the population of the province was 1,213,815 (Statistics Canada, 2009), with 633,451 of those living in the capital of Winnipeg and approximately another 100,000 living in the surrounding communities (giving the capital region with over 60% of the province's population). In fact, the population density of the capital region is 131/km<sup>2</sup>, while the population density of the province is only 2.14 /km<sup>2</sup>.

### K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Province-led programme	Yes	
Other online programmes	Yes	Uses province learning management system and course content
Provincial-level policy	Yes	

### Online Programmes

In Manitoba, distance learners are supported with three options: Independent Study Option (ISO), which is print-based delivery; Teacher Mediated Option (TMO), which utilises audio conferencing; and Web-Based Course (WBC) Option or online delivery.

The ISO, which began in 1927, provides the opportunity and flexibility for school-age and adult learners to access a wide range of print-based distance learning courses from grades 8 to 12. Learners complete courses independently and at their own pace while having some access to a tutor/marker via email or phone. The Distance Learning Unit issues the credit to students who successfully complete an ISO course. Students may or may not be registered in Manitoba schools (e.g., home schooled children, students with parents overseas).

The TMO, which began in 1992, provides school-age and adult learners with access to specific distance learning courses scheduled within the school day. TMO learners use print-based distance learning courses supplemented with audio teleconference classes hosted by an instructor. Classes can be recorded and additional communication with the instructor occurs via email and phone, outside of scheduled class time. TMO courses are available to grades 9 through 12 students attending a school or an adult learning centre. Schools and adult learning centres issue the credit to students who successfully complete a TMO course.

The WBC Option, which began in 1997, provides schools and teachers with online distance learning courses using a web-based learning management system. Students participate in WBCs in a variety of ways (i.e., face-to-face in a classroom, at a distance, or as a blend of the two). The most common model involves a teacher structuring the course so that students complete their work independently, at their own pace, but within timelines established by the teacher. The teacher may be a staff member of the school in which the student is registered, or may teach the course at a distance

from another school or school division. In order to access WBCs a student must be registered in a Manitoba high school or adult learning centre that supports web-based course instruction. Students complete WBCs within the regular academic year/semester, and are assessed by their WBC teacher. Participating schools and adult learning centres issue the credit to students who successfully complete a WBC course.

## **Provincial Policies**

Currently, the Ministry is in the process of creating a new policy on distance learning for the province. The distance learning policy is still in draft form and awaiting final approval, but will be released in time to be implemented in 2010-11.

The original policy document was written in 2000 and was accompanied by a document outlining a peer review process as well. Both were out of date, and the Distance Learning Unit (DLU) and the Learning Support & Technology Unit (LSTU) of the Ministry were requested to renew the policy document so it better reflected the current situation in Manitoba, and to address all three distance learning options. The previous policy only addressed web-based delivery (distributed learning was the term used in 2000). In 2008, the Ministry hosted two forums seeking input from educators, school, and division administrators on distance learning in the province. The policy review committee met several times during the past year to work on the draft document and supporting documents and handbooks for each of the three options. All these items are currently under review.

## **Funding**

The ISO is completely funded by the Ministry. The registration fees that are collected based on enrolment are returned to the Manitoba Government's general revenue. The Ministry is responsible for the course development, administration and implementation of the programme including the contracting of 41 tutor/markers.

The TMO is self-funded, where one host school division collects and holds student registration fees that are then used to pay instructors. Schools and school divisions use funds from their per-pupil block grant/direct allocation to pay the registration fee. The Ministry is responsible for the course development, administration and implementation of the programme including the recruitment of 10 instructors.

The Ministry is responsible for the course development and learning management expenses for the WBC option. However, as schools are the ones who offer the courses (i.e., hire or allocate the teacher), these costs are funded through the school's per-pupil block funding.

## **Governance, Tracking, and Accountability**

The only reference in the Public Schools Act regarding distance education is that the Minister of Education can approve courses of study, including correspondence and other courses. The Ministry has issued other regulatory and policy documents, along with handbooks for each of the three delivery options (these handbooks are also being revised currently through the review process described above).

The Ministry maintains partial records on the number of K-12 students who complete distance courses. Completion data for the ISO courses is available, but not for TMO or WBC as they are managed and reported at the school level. The Ministry does maintain enrolment figures for all three options. For example, in the 2008-09 school year there were approximately 3,000 enrolments for ISO, approximately 500 for TMO, and approximately 5,000 students for WBC (i.e., about 8,500 student enrolments overall).

### **Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum**

After the course writer completes a new ISO course, the distance learning consultants review the content and correct errors and make suggestions. Once released to schools, a survey is attached to the first 30 courses registered by students. The Ministry uses their feedback as information to improve courses and to correct errors. The original course writers are often selected to be the initial tutor-markers. For vacant positions, the Ministry may advertise in the newspaper to create a database and receives recommendations from the Ministry's subject area consultants. Selection is based on subject matter knowledge and teaching experience, phone interview, and reference checks. The tutor-markers work at a distance and are under contract and the supervision of an ISO consultant. There is no formal process for staff evaluation and performance review.

The course content for the TMO comes directly from ISO. These instructors are under shared responsibilities between school divisions and TMO consultant, and are selected from a database of available teachers based on subject matter knowledge and teaching experience. There is no formal process for staff evaluation and performance review.

For the WBC option the Ministry contracts subject matter experts (SME) from the field (i.e., teachers knowledgeable in the subject content, new curriculum directions, current assessment practice, etc, as well as experience with web-based instruction) to be course developers. The course is developed in conjunction with the active participation and feedback from the Ministry's subject area development consultant, and the e-learning development consultant. An instructional designer is contracted to complete the layout and design work in the learning management system. As part of development of new courses the Ministry does a one-semester field validation with 2-3 online teachers, and their students, to get feedback on the course. The course is modified based on feedback before it is released for general school use.

Teachers are provided and supervised by the schools that elect to offer the courses. The Ministry makes a copy of the master course available, free of charge, to any teacher who wishes to have a section created for their use. Typically teachers use WBCs to teach students who are online, for blending with face-to-face instruction in the classroom, or as a professional learning resource.

Should a school or school division develop their own web-based course to meet local needs, the quality of content is the school division's responsibility. Should the school division elect to accept enrolment of students from other divisions there is an expectation that the course will have completed a peer-review process. The Ministry is also reviewing its guidelines for the peer-review process, as part of the policy revision that is under way.