

CANADIAN COLLEGES AND INSTITUTES' FEDERAL BUDGET PRIORITIES

**ACCC SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS 2003**

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Introduction

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Pre-Budget Consultation's invitation to present its views on the measures the government should be taking to ensure economic growth and job creation, investment in all members of Canadian society and, enhancing the desirability of living in rural and remote parts of Canada.

Representing 150 publicly-funded community colleges, institutes of technology, cégeps and university colleges, ACCC is the national and international voice of Canada's colleges and institutes. Colleges are the largest suppliers of advanced adult training and education with 2.5 million full and part-time students with campuses in over 900 communities in all regions of Canada. **The mandates of Canada's colleges and institutes all share a common purpose - to improve the economic and social well-being of their communities.**

They represent the primary national network mandated to support government, industry and labour in the design and implementation of a national human resources strategy that provides Canadians, both employed and unemployed, with the tools required to become life-long learners.

The federal government's long-term commitment to develop the knowledge, skills and capacity of Canadians across the country, from those in major urban centres to the most rural and remote areas is key to sustained socio-economic progress. By reaching the populations of over 3,000 communities across Canada, colleges and institutes are uniquely positioned to respond to the federal government's vision to make Canada one of the most innovative and skilled countries in the world. These institutions are providing flexible and adaptable community learning resources and are involved in community networks of employers, civic groups and local/regional governments. They are often the catalysts for industry-education interaction, addressing the relationship between a skilled employable workforce and healthy community and local economic development.

As such, the Association's submission to the Standing Committee on Finance provides a series of recommendations which we firmly believe will contribute significantly to achieving the federal government's vision of making Canada one of the most innovative and skilled countries in the world.

1. Ensuring Access to Post-Secondary Education

With the learning needs of our communities constantly changing, it is critical that we focus on: upgrading the current workforce; accelerating the provision of skilled trades training; facilitating the application of new technologies; and, more importantly, addressing the skills inclusion of those without post-secondary education. Adult learners with basic/low essential skills, or those with or at risk of learning disabilities, represent a significant percentage of the Canadian population. They are most likely to be unemployed or employed in low-income jobs with poor prospects for advancement and few opportunities for work-based training. Current programs and screening tools need to be enhanced or new ones developed to accelerate the inclusion of such groups within the post-secondary training system. If the exclusion of specific groups is not addressed, these learners will face the risk of non-entry to the workforce or be relegated to minimum wage jobs. The need for retooling and acquiring new skills and competencies, in both traditional and non-traditional occupations, for these groups as well as women and First Nation learners, must be facilitated by accessible and inclusive post-secondary institutions.

For people living in remote or isolated communities, access to quality learning opportunities is also a significant challenge. Distance becomes an obstacle that inhibits the ability of rural Canadians to take advantage of training. However, access to training/skills upgrading, particularly in the use and application of new technologies, is essential if these communities are to be part of a larger knowledge-based economy. The rural/remote Canadians who are also members of the designated at-risk groups are multiply disadvantaged.

As community-based institutions with campuses in over 900 communities, colleges and technical institutes are ideally suited to respond to the needs of these specific groups. The leadership that these institutions have displayed in increasing access, effectiveness and efficiency through the application of prior learning assessment and recognition principles and practice have given colleges a strong foundation for supporting an individual's learning needs. Some colleges have extensive experience working with disadvantaged individuals and long established connections to groups such as agencies servicing immigrants, friendship centres, etc. There is also a varying degree of experience in working with displaced workers such as those in the cod fishery and most recently in the forestry sector.

The economic and social conditions of today's society have also resulted in a range of issues affecting accessibility to education: obstacles faced by needy students both before and during studies, an aging student population with a different set of financial and family obligations, new immigrants lacking the skills to integrate the job market, the needs of graduates coping with a combination of high debt and the challenges facing many families struggling to save for their children's education. Student debt and the alarmingly high cost for an individual to attain a post-secondary education is contributing to a significant socio-economic schism between the privileged and underprivileged in Canada.

We believe that there is an opportunity to further elevate the role that colleges and institutes play in developing human potential, to capitalize on the expertise of the system as a whole and assist the government in meeting its targeted strategic objectives.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges recommends:

- G** creating and supporting **College/Institute Access Centres** which would provide ongoing and multi-faceted learner support services and tools to help support the delivery of learning and training for designated groups such as aboriginals, new immigrants, single parents, older displaced workers, unemployed and at-risk workers. The above services would help support learner success in areas such as: essential skills; apprenticeship; post-secondary courses at the preparatory, certificate, diploma, applied degree and apprenticeship levels; fast track/flexible program streams for foreign-trained professionals; and, accelerated training for those in adjustment situations.
- G** **increasing social transfer payments** to support the college/institute capacity to meet the increased learning needs of students, support infrastructure and address deferred maintenance.
- G** **expanding Canada Study Grants** to include full-time students with high unmet needs.
- G** expanding the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Program eligibility criteria to **include first year college/institute students**. The current model excludes these students from the eligible pool of Millennium Scholarship recipients.

2. Strengthening the Innovative Capacity of Communities

Canada has a national network of over 150 colleges, institutes, cégeps and university-colleges in over 900 communities in all regions of Canada. By directly impacting on economic growth in their surrounding communities, colleges and institutes are powerful economic engines that help regions achieve and sustain economies that are vital to their future prosperity. Colleges and institutes are poised to play an even more significant role in Canada's competitive agenda.

Skills Development

Colleges and institutes are Canada's largest skills training network serving over 2.5 million students and providing learning opportunities in over 3,000 communities in all regions of Canada. SMEs already recognize their local college or institute as a provider of high-quality customized training. New software products and systems are continually introduced to the workplace, as are regulatory changes requiring skills upgrading and certification, and colleges are viewed as a primary provider of functional skills upgrading and certification for SME employees. In rural and northern areas, the local college is a vital source of technical skills training and often the only mechanism to assist in ensuring that rurally based SMEs are functioning on par with marketplace demands.

Clearly, these institutions are strategically positioned **to respond to HRDC's forecast which states that 72% of the 1.3 million new jobs expected to be created between 1999-2004 will require some form of post-secondary education, of which the largest percentage of new job creation will require a college diploma or trade certificate.**

Canada's colleges and technical institutes must be at the forefront, working closely with the federal government in developing a national set of actions which will address skills shortages, meet the changing needs of Canadian businesses and contribute to the economic growth of our nation.

Bringing it to Market: Product Development, Business Incubation and Technology Commercialization

Colleges and institutes also serve as a development and testing ground for SMEs, whose ability to develop or adapt new products, processes, and business model is key to the economic prosperity and international competitiveness of Canada. Institutions from across the country, both urban and rural, work with business and industry to:

- develop new or enhanced products and processes
- develop prototypes
- research, adapt and commercialize new knowledge and technologies
- simulate, test and analyze products and processes
- conduct market and product feasibility studies
- develop marketing strategies to help businesses plan and expand
- develop and incubate new business by providing access to equipment, technologies, "pilot plants" and expert staff

Many colleges and institutes offer state-of-the-art market technologies and the latest in scientific laboratories for research. With the value of college and institute applied research and development estimated at \$100-200 million annually, students and faculty benefit from exposure to new ideas and methodologies, bringing this knowledge to the workplace and the classroom, respectively.

The College and Institute sector is ready to be a major partner in Canada's innovation strategy through its comprehensive support for the country's small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges recommends:

- G** the support of a **National Alliance of College/Institute Regional Innovation and Technology Commercialization Centres** with regionally-based and regionally-determined structures, of which a college or a college consortium would form an anchor. The core functions of the centre would include market intelligence, applied research, business development support, commercialization support, product and process development, financing, market entry support, skills development and knowledge/skill transfer to employees, and community support.
- G** **targeted funding for colleges and institutes** to support their research and development activities within the umbrella of federal granting council programs and policies;
- G** the creation of **College/Institute Chairs** which would contribute to the renewal of faculty by providing the leadership to ensure that instructional processes are on the leading edge in meeting the needs of industry, and ensuring that faculty keep at the forefront of research and development.

Conclusion

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges is pleased to have this opportunity to present our perspectives to the Standing Committee on Finance. ACCC reiterates its commitment to work with the government in developing policies and programs that will contribute to the economic success and prosperity of Canada.