

ACCESS FOR ALL

**ACCC Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources,
Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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As the national and international voice of Canada's 150 publicly-funded community colleges, institutes of technology, cégeps and university-colleges across Canada, a primary role of the **Association of Canadian Community Colleges** is to engage proactively in discussions and debate with respect to the role and capacity of these institutions in the nation's economic and social development. With campuses in over 900 communities across the country, 1.5 million full-and part-time learners, and 60,000 professionals, our institutions play the pivotal role in employer, individual and government-funded skills updating and have traditionally been the implementers of federal retraining programs for the unemployed.

The skills, knowledge and innovation of the individual will become the most powerful drivers behind Canada's economic and social prosperity. As such, to ensure a steady supply of qualified workers, Canada will need to mobilize all of its resources to remain competitive in the global economy.

Increased skill requirements, rapid technological change, the demographics of an aging population, a smaller workforce and the rapid decline in skilled workers throughout almost every industry will soon lead to a decline in the labour force growth nationwide, with the result that workers and in particular, skilled workers will become an increasingly scarce commodity across the country. We cannot as a nation, continue to ignore the realities of our current and future workforce:

- Canada's supply of skilled labour is in serious decline. By the year 2020, labour shortages are expected to reach 950,000.¹
- According to the results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, 42% of working-aged Canadians have literacy skills below the level necessary to participate successfully in the knowledge economy. We cannot truly move forward as a nation if we leave almost half of the population behind!²
- Aboriginal peoples and immigrants will in the near future represent a significant percentage of the active population and will require special attention in any training strategies.
- We must facilitate post-secondary education and training opportunities for all Canadians so that they have the necessary skills to be productive and contribute to Canada's social and economic prosperity.

Since Canada's primary competitive advantage will be the quality of its workforce, the Association firmly believes that skills development and training are critical for an economy that is knowledge based. Significant progress has been made in building a prosperous and inclusive society, where Canadians have the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge that enable them to contribute to society and the economy. However, Canada must ensure that it has a highly skilled adaptable labour force that can respond and drive the economy of tomorrow, and to be able to make the best use of skills of those already in the labour market. Canada must continue to design and implement policies and programs which give all Canadians entry into this skills-based economy and then help them remain active participants. This includes employees who want to advance their careers through improved skills and training, designated at-risk groups such as adult learners with basic/low essential skills, Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, older displaced workers, people living in remote or isolated communities and seasonal workers. **Further investments in human resource capacity must be the critical priority of Canada's social and economic policy.**

1 Labour Market Development Agreements: Their Impact on Education and Training, Discussion Series, Canadian Alliance of Education and Training Organizations, 2001

2 Movement for Canadian Literacy, Literacy in Canada: It's Time for Action, November 2004

The time has come for all stakeholders- all levels of government, labour, industry, and post-secondary institutions- to work together to develop a strategy which will encompass the needs of both the employed and unemployed, and recognizes the diversity of individuals who need opportunities for learning and training.

It is imperative that the federal government take the lead in developing a **Pan Canadian Workforce Development Agenda** which will ensure that quality, post-secondary education and training are within reach of every Canadian.

A Pan-Canadian Workforce Development Agenda

The Agenda - a set of major national policies and initiatives - will ensure that Canada has the resources in place to build a highly skilled and adaptable workforce, compete in a global marketplace.

Principles

- The agenda must be based on the principle of inclusivity, providing access to learning opportunities for **all** Canadians. They must have the opportunity to develop and use their skills and knowledge to the fullest. This includes:
 - upgrading the current workforce, including employees who want to advance their careers through skills and training, the underemployed and working poor,
 - accelerating the provision of skilled trades training,
 - facilitating the application of new technologies,
 - the skills inclusion of those without post-secondary education,
 - meeting the learning needs of aboriginal peoples,
 - facilitating immigrants labour market integration,
 - providing enhanced learning opportunities for people with disabilities,
 - Canadians living in urban, rural, remote and northern areas,
 - targeting the waste productivity of the un-employed, adult learners with low/basic essential skills, older displaced workers who lack the necessary skills to successfully re-enter the job market, seasonal workers, and the untapped pool of skilled women in non-traditional roles.
- While the Federal Government must take a leadership role, there must be a concerted effort with provinces, territories and communities. Communities are best attuned to human resources needs with their own environment. The creation of community partnerships which bring together industry, labour, community economic development organizations, colleges and institutes and other public education providers is vital.
- The agenda must promote a commitment to lifelong learning among our citizens, encouraging individual investment in learning. Canada must develop a culture in which individuals value knowledge and training and possess the means to seek these opportunities.
- It must capitalize on the significant contribution that aboriginal peoples and immigrants make to our society and our economy.

Supporting a Pan-Canadian Workforce Development Agenda

Access to post-secondary education and training are key to building Canada's future workforce. We must, as a nation, address our real problems and engage in a proactive strategy to ensure that quality, post-secondary education and training are within reach of every Canadian. Post-secondary education and skills training are essential priorities of a Pan-Canadian Workforce Development Agenda.

We wish to draw the committee's attention to the following four (4) key initiatives:

College/Institute Access Support Fund

Creative and flexible training initiatives and support systems will be required to meet the training needs of a diverse population. As Canada's largest skill trainers - 1.5 million learners - colleges and institutes are well placed to address the skill gaps facing the nation. Offering diplomas, apprenticeship programs, post-diploma programs, applied degrees, joint degrees, career/technical programs, certificates, pre-trades, workplace training, on-line and distance education, colleges and institutes are the people's choice for accessible post-secondary education that works. Colleges and institutes are already in partnership with labour unions, government departments, sector councils, municipalities, business and industry to develop and deliver workplace training programs and services. Among the many advantages of customized-on-site training programs developed by colleges and institutes are the flexibility they offer employers and employees, their ability to link to practice, the immediate transfer to the workplace of new and upgraded skills and knowledge and the recognition of previous worked experience, as well as reductions in training time, absences and travel costs.

To ensure that colleges and institutes respond more effectively to labour force requirements, the Association, with the support of HRSDC, created a Sector Council Support Unit to work more closely with a variety of sector councils. This has led to more collaborative approaches in addressing the human resource needs across a range of sectors of the economy to ensure that Canadian workers are learning the skills needed for today's workforce.

Clearly, colleges and institutes must be at the forefront, working closely with the federal government in developing future training strategies which will address skills shortages, meet the learning needs of a diverse student population and contribute to the economic growth of our nation.

The Association recommends the creation of a **College/Institute Access Fund** which would enable colleges and institutes to enhance and broaden their wide range of programs, deliver education and training in a variety of formats and geographic locations and meet the learning needs of a diverse student population.

A New Learner Support System

The confusing complexity and prevalence of many different types of financial assistance mechanisms for post-secondary learning and training add to the inaccessibility of funding for many current and potential learners. Research has shown that reducing financial barriers in the first couple of years of post-secondary education leads to successful completion and graduation of all Canadians. We must provide the supports and incentives needed to encourage individuals from non-traditional groups to pursue and complete post-secondary education and training in a timely manner.

The Association recommends the creation of a new Learner Support System which:

- is guided by the principles of universality, portability, simplicity, rationality and flexibility;
- reduces complexities of existing systems;
- increases access to post-secondary education;
- includes grants for the first two years of post-secondary education and;
- supports bridging mechanisms for the disadvantaged; including those with low literacy skills.

The creation of a Post-Secondary Education Transfer Fund

According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada data, the challenge to strengthening the economy/labour market alignment is expected to become even more compelling. HRSD forecasts that some form of post-secondary education will be required for 72 percent of the 1.3 million jobs created.

As countless presentations by the Association to both the Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities over the numerous years have demonstrated that the massive cuts to PSE transfers have had serious deleterious impacts on the capacity of colleges and institutes to deliver learning and training to our future workforce.

Furthermore, the blend of PSE transfers into the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) has led to a lack of transparency and accountability back to Canada's Parliament. The people of Canada expect more accountability for the spending of their money - they want clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Health care was separated from the CHST for exactly these reasons.

The Association recommends the separation of post-secondary funding from the Canada Social Transfer, and the creation of a separate Post-Secondary Education Transfer Fund, restoring funding to 1992/93 levels, adjusting for inflation and demographic growth.

Infrastructure

Human Resources and Social Development Canada predicts that the largest percentage of new job creation will occur in occupations that require college diplomas or trade certificates such as construction and transportation trades, health and human services, computer technology, and protective services.

If we are to maximize the full capacity of our institutions and ensure that colleges and institutes are at the forefront in meeting the challenges of an ever increasing complex set of skill needs, colleges and institutes will require modern equipment and infrastructure. These facilities are expensive and will require constant renewal. While we acknowledge that the most recent federal included some funds, it can only address a small portion of the needs of our institutions.

The Association recommends the creation of a College and Institute Infrastructure Enhancement Fund including funds for modernization and equipment acquisition.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) wishes to applaud the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for undertaking a study on employability issues in Canada and for providing the Association with the opportunity to highlight several areas that we believe the Committee should be addressing in their study. In closing, we recall to your attention our primary recommendations:

- **The federal government must take the lead and move forward with governments, business, labour, educational institutions and other community groups to develop and implement a comprehensive pan-Canadian Workforce Development Agenda which will address the pressing skill gaps facing the nation.**
- **The federal government must act now to reinvest in an essential component of prosperity: the quality, capacity and access to Canada's post-secondary and skill system. Canadian colleges and institutes represent a master key able to open the door to skills development for a diverse range of learners in all regions of the country.**
- **The Association recommends the creation of a College/Institute Access Fund which would provide multi-faceted learner support services and tools within communities, particularly those in rural and remote communities, in disadvantaged groups in urban settings, and in aboriginal communities where demand for skills and literacy development is particularly significant.**
- **The Association recommends the creation of a new Learner Support System which:**
 - ▶ **is guided by principles of universality, portability, simplicity, rationality and flexibility,**
 - ▶ **reduces complexities of existing systems,**
 - ▶ **increases access to post-secondary education,**
 - ▶ **address the concerns of Aboriginal communities, immigrants and other disadvantaged groups,**
 - ▶ **includes grants for the first two years of post-secondary education.**
- **The Association recommends the separation of post-secondary funding from the Canada Social Transfer, and the creation of a separate Post-Secondary Education Fund, restoring the funding to 1992/93 levels, adjusting for inflation and demographic growth.**
- **The Association recommends the creation of a College and Institute Infrastructure Fund including funds for modernization and equipment acquisition.**