

OPINION

Goodyear should look to Canada's colleges, institutes and polytechnics to get innovations 'out the door'

Colleges, institutes and polytechnics are leaders in applied research and technology transfer, yet the role of these institutions in Canada's research and development agenda is not adequately understood.

By JAMES KNIGHT

Re: "Minister Goodyear says government's investing \$10.2-billion annually in science and technology," (*The Hill Times*, Oct. 12, p. 18). Mr. Goodyear says that "Canada does very well at supporting 'basic, discovery-oriented research' but Canada is not doing well 'getting our innovations out the door.'" I suggest that the minister look to Canada's colleges, institutes, and polytechnics as the key solution to this dilemma.

Colleges, institutes and polytechnics are leaders in applied research and technology transfer, yet the role of these institutions in Canada's research and development agenda is not adequately understood. They help businesses start, develop and grow, and are vital contributors to our innovation system. Building on a half-century of experience, they embody an enormous concentration of expertise on the application of technology to process improvement and product development. They are graduating our next genera-

tion of innovators and entrepreneurs. More than any other institutions, they are key to improving Canada's lagging productivity.

By focusing research on product development, prototyping, business incubation, model simulations and commercialization, they address real-world challenges, and produce the highly-skilled talent needed to apply and sustain an innovative practices workforce.

They house centres of excellence and technology transfer that work with industry partners in fields such as manufacturing, cold climate innovation, agriculture, biotechnology, aquaculture, sport innovation, boreal research, sustainable infrastructure, aerospace, photonics, plastics, microelectronics and nanotechnology.

The following testimonials by businesses supported by college and institute applied research express the value of this service:

"Partners [with Nova Scotia Community College] particularly noted that they had the experience of working with academics before, and found it easier to work with the college. Universities may do some applied research but it is generally of secondary interest for them."—Shaw Resources

"We saw an increase in capacity by approximately 30 per cent [in our first year working with Northern Alberta Institute of Technology] and 10 per cent in our second without increasing our employee base."—All Weather Windows

"As a small company involved in the development and marketing of medical and assistive devices, we value highly resources that help us compete in the market place against mostly non-Canadian

competitors. The involvement of a local facility in research [at Georgian College] is a significant advantage for us."—Drew Gibney, president, Dynamis Mobility

"Our relationship with the Applied Geomatic Research Group at Nova Scotia Community College has resulted in our ability to move away from the traditional diminishing revenue sources of mapping and data conversion, into more leading-edge applications, which sets us apart from traditional competition."—Mike Pearson, CEO, GeoNet Technologies Inc.

"The project was complicated and we kept putting it on the back burner. Bringing Humber College into the picture gave the project the kick-start it needed. We had a positive experience and will definitely work with Humber in the future."—Shaun Ricci, COO, N4 Systems Inc.

"The [Fanshawe College] students exceeded our expectations and not just from the content point of view, but in their professionalism ... the recommendation to track venture capital was a novel idea the company had not considered. 3M later adopted a similar approach as a global business strategy."—3M Canada

Canada once ranked third among OECD countries in labour productivity, a key determinant of living standards. We are now ranked 17th. Canada leads in *per capita* public investment in discovery research, but is at the bottom of the barrel in productivity growth. Innovation and the diffusion of new technologies characterize the college/institute model. Investment here will increase productivity, but colleges receive a fraction



Photograph by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

Knock, knock: Gary Goodyear, minister of state for science and technology, told *The Hill Times* last week that Canada does a good job of supporting basic, discovery-oriented research, but doesn't do well 'getting innovations out the door.'

of one per cent of federal R&D investments. The ACCC calls on the federal government to increase in federal R&D funding by five per cent, and to dedicate the additional amount to college/private sector applied research projects.

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