

SKILLS CRISIS THREATENS ECONOMY, SAYS HEAD OF COLLEGES ASSOCIATION

Ottawa, April 17, 2008—Speaking before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology today, Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) President James Knight called on the Government of Canada to set its sights on a skills shortage that threatens our economy.

“Canada is facing a skills crisis,” said Knight. “The opportunity cost for students, employers and the economy is enormous. Waiting will not make the problem go away.”

According to a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 42 percent of shortages are in occupations that usually require college or apprenticeship training in comparison to seven percent of occupations that require university education.

“Pressure on colleges and institutes to meet the needs of employers is intense,” said Knight. “Unfortunately, thousands of qualified students, who with training would be employed immediately, languish on wait lists owing to a capacity shortfall.”

Knight told the committee that Canada’s community colleges and technical institutes, many built more than 40 years ago, needed capital investments to repair and expand classroom facilities and modernize technical equipment.

“Four decades ago, as a result of federal leadership and investment, Canada built college facilities with an anticipated life span of 40 years. These institutions remain positioned to deal with the skills crisis, but require recapitalization to meet today’s demand, enhance productivity, and help build the foundation of a sustainable knowledge economy,” said Knight.

Knight added that the capacity crunch faced by Canada’s community colleges extended beyond just bricks, mortar and equipment but was compounded by their own skills shortage.

“Reductions in funding have inhibited college and institute faculty in their ability to remain on the leading edge, to invest in the latest technologies and to promote the professional development of their staff and instructors,” said Knight.

To remedy this, the Association calls for the creation of a national faculty development fund as part of the necessary recapitalization of Canada’s colleges and technical institutes designed to foster skills upgrades among college teaching staff.

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