



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Association of Canadian Community Colleges**

Serving Canada's colleges, institutes, cégeps, university colleges and polytechnics

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## **COLLEGES SAY BUDGET BEGINS TO ADDRESS ADVANCED SKILLS CRISIS**

**Ottawa, January 27, 2009** – The stimulus package in today's federal budget begins to address a key requirement for Canada's future productivity and economic growth: more college and institute graduates with advanced skills.

"Canada's colleges and institutes badly need an infusion of new capital to renovate, retrofit and expand facilities, and to acquire leading-edge technology for teaching purposes," says James Knight, President of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC). "This budget has announced measures to help address these needs and to provide increased capacity for advanced skills development," adds Knight.

In pre-budget consultations, ACCC raised the spectre of an economic recovery stumbling on a skills crisis that has already limited growth in many industries. The Association proposed a package of ready-to-go college projects to stimulate employment growth now. The long-term benefit will be a richer employment market.

Even before the recession, colleges were turning away thousands of qualified students owing to capacity limitations. With the downturn and rising unemployment, more students are returning to college to acquire the skills that remain in demand and to secure their careers for the long-term. In addition, colleges are being called upon to retrain workers displaced in sectors that are performing poorly. More than 90 percent of college graduates find employment within six months of graduation. Their skills enhance competitiveness and productivity.

The \$2 billion announced for post-secondary education is apparently to be shared, with 70 percent for universities and 30 percent for colleges. "We find this disappointing and surprising," says Knight. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that in the area of skills shortages, college grads are required ahead of university grads by a ratio of six to one. Moreover, universities have typically received large allocations from the Canada Foundation for Innovation which received a total of \$750 million in this budget. "Rather than a predefined ratio, selection on the basis of the employability of graduates would be better for the economy. Large numbers of university grads subsequently enrol in college to acquire advanced skills for employment."

The budget also announced major investments in retraining, much of which will be delivered by Canada's 150 colleges and their 1,000 campuses.

Both the private and public sectors are crying out for more IT specialists, construction technologists, renewable energy specialists, medical professionals such as ultrasound operators and nurses, and countless other categories of highly skilled college graduates.

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