



POLYTECHNICS CANADA PRESENTATION
TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE
ON FINANCE
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS 2009

September 15, 2009

John Davies, Chair
Nobina Robinson, CEO

Thank you for the opportunity to be here Mr. Chairman.

I am the Chair of Polytechnics Canada. Joining me this morning is our CEO, Nobina Robinson. In my day job, I am President of Humber College in Toronto.

Polytechnics Canada is a growing national association of some of the largest colleges and institutes of technology in the country. We are degree-granting, research-intensive and industry-responsive, post-secondary institutions. We are united in our conviction that polytechnic education is essential for Canada's transition economy.

Our nine members have grown well beyond the traditional concept of a community college. Being a polytechnic institution means providing a broad range of applied, professional, technical and vocational programs. Our programs are employer-driven and lead to high quality jobs. We are committed to providing efficient and effective pathways for our learners to bolster the knowledge economy. We conduct research that addresses commercial needs and which solves problems for employers.

Polytechnics foster industrial innovation. We are helping a range of smaller and medium sized companies (SMEs) discover and implement new ways of doing things. We help them adapt new technologies and we help them apply new technologies to improve market outcomes. In doing so, we foster entrepreneurship in this country.

There is, unfortunately, no federal support for what we do. We receive little or no help for field-testing, design and development of new manufacturing processes. Without backing for these vital activities, new discoveries through *basic* research cannot easily reach the global market. I suggest it is the late-stage commercialization that needs federal attention and needs it now.

Industry demand for our commercialization services is increasing. Let me give you a few examples of what Polytechnics Canada members are doing to support industry innovation.

Algonquin College, here in Ottawa, is collaborating with HousAll to build low-cost, safe and healthy temporary housing solutions for victims of disasters at home and abroad.

In Calgary, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, called SAIT Polytechnic, is working with Volker Stevin Contracting to test a portable desalination system to decontaminate settling ponds.

Conestoga's telecommunications research projects involve major wireless carriers in addressing everything from networks to the manufacture of electronics.

Canadians who use the Firefox web browser will be proud to know that many Firefox upgrades are designed in collaboration with degree students and faculty from Seneca College's Centre for Development of Open Technology.

A researcher at BCIT has patented a device called a Heavy Tool Support Arm. It helps construction workers who need to hold heavy power tools like jackhammers in an overhead position for extended periods of time. A concrete restoration firm has now sealed a deal to sell the device.

At Humber, my institution, students from our Industrial Design degree program are working with SMEs to solve global problems with innovative designs. Among them are:

- Personal mobility devices for the visually impaired;
- Unmanned aerial vehicles to assist in police operations; and
- Temporary human waste management system for refugee camps.

These examples of polytechnic success—and time does not permit me to mention so many more—are all about improving commercialization outcomes. Any increased investment for polytechnic institutions will allow us to leverage more private sector money to create more success stories—and more jobs.

Last year Ottawa provided the university sector with over \$2.7 billion (*I emphasize billion*) for discovery-based research. By contrast, our nine members received only \$1.8

million of federal funding for applied research. In other words, for every dollar for university research, federal support for applied research amounted to one tenth of a cent. Industry innovation requires more federal spending on *applied* research to rethink the putting of so many of our eggs in the *pure* research basket.

Our recommendation for a commercialization voucher program for SMEs will help these firms with product research, product testing and quickly moving products to market. Our students benefit from the increased industry demand for their research services.

Second, the Technology Diffusion Centres we have proposed will act as incubators in our polytechnics to provide research experience for our students, in addition to technical support, technological development and training for the SMEs we serve. Our idea is based on the successes we have seen at Sheridan and BCIT, and notably in Quebec at the CEGEP level, where such a network of technology diffusion centres is well-established.

Finally, our request for new federal spending on improving labour market data is critically important to help our institutions achieve better outcomes, whether in applied research or in job creation.

While universities primarily educate for knowledge, polytechnic institutions educate for jobs. There is of course a vital link between knowledge and jobs, and polytechnic institutions help make that link by bringing industry closer to learning.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize that Polytechnics Canada is not calling for increased support because we feel some sense of entitlement. Rather, we are seeking to advance economic development and job creation throughout Canada.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.