

September 8, 2006

The consultation themes and questions:

1. Objectives for post-secondary education (PSE) and training

- *What objectives should Canada aspire to for PSE and training?*

Canada's competitive position in the world is at risk. As pointed out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development productivity growth in the Canadian business sector averaged only 0.7 percent per year from 2000 to 2005. Relative to the U.S. in particular, gaps in productivity account for a difference of about US\$8200 in average annual income between Canadians and Americans.

Canadian businesses are facing increased competition from the emerging economies of China and India. These countries have large and deep pools of talent from which to draw. Canada has a smaller workforce which means our competitive position will be eroded if we do not invest in skilled and knowledgeable workers. We need to work smarter and harder than the global competition by equipping our people with the education and training required to meet the demands of the global marketplace.

Unfortunately, as a society we have become more invested in acquiring knowledge for its own sake versus acquiring knowledge and skills to be applied in the workplace. We have made a disproportionate investment in post-secondary university education versus applied education and have failed to address systemic perceptions that undervalue the critical contribution of applied learning and research to sustaining and growing our economy

Our collective failure to adequately value and invest in applied learning has contributed to the unemployment of 1.14 million people including immigrants with inadequate language training and poor credential recognition, workers who have been consigned to low paying jobs with no opportunity to improve their skills and knowledge because they neither have the time nor money and aboriginal peoples that have yet to experience the benefits of education and skills policies.

It is also contributing to our inability to fully embrace current market opportunities in key regions of our country such as British Columbia and Alberta.

Objective 1

Canadian PSE and training should be improved by creating a higher level of market relevant skills (both hard and soft) for a larger number of Canadians. Governments and the broader public must endorse the concept that applied learning from apprenticeships to applied degrees is essential to providing the skilled personnel to sustain our economic infrastructure. We need to recognize and value different forms of education as being distinct but no less important. PSE and training should combine critical thinking with theoretical understanding and practical competence and be more responsive to market demand.

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Systemic barriers exist in Canada's post-secondary education system. Members of Polytechnics Canada which operate in three provincial jurisdictions (Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia) are legally authorized to offer degree programs which meet the rigorous standards of each Province's quality assurance agencies. The offering of applied degrees in BC, Alberta and Ontario is a signal that there is a demand for more career-focused credentials. Notwithstanding the obvious market demand and public scrutiny, graduates from these programs continue to encounter obstacles when they either want to transfer to a university or pursue graduate studies, outside their jurisdiction. The absence of a national accreditation process has resulted in certain institutions denying admission on the basis of non-membership in an advocacy organization – Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. We are closing doors rather than opening them.

Objective 2

Canada should enhance credential value and improve worker mobility by establishing a national standards network to facilitate national credit and apprenticeship transfer and prior learning and recognition standards (PLAR), to enable adult learners to fast-track their learning requirements and their credential opportunities.

Over the last 13 years, federal and provincial transfer funding for post-secondary education has been dramatically reduced while federal research dollars have increased. With a few exceptions, the provincial funds that Canadian polytechnics receive do not include money for research activities or infrastructure.

Federal research and development funding policy, agencies and programs of previous governments have tended to focus on basic, primary and curiosity based research rather than applied research as conducted by polytechnics. Thus, even though they are the third pillar of post-secondary education in Canada, polytechnic institutions have not generally benefited from the increased tax dollars for research and as such face chronic under funding for the requisite education and research infrastructure. Polytechnics need predictable and adequate core funding for basic operating and infrastructure investment.

Objective 3

Canada should work to restoring balance in PSE education and training by:

- i) ensuring that the money transferred to the provinces to fund public post-secondary education is used to fund all sectors of post-secondary education equally;**
- ii) investing in funds to facilitate the requisite investment in infrastructure and operations of polytechnics; and**
- iii) directly funding workplace training at polytechnics.**

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- *Which objectives would you rank among the top three priorities for action?*

The three objectives as described above

2. Clarifying roles and responsibilities in PSE and training

- *Given what you have identified as objectives, what would be the most important roles for the Government of Canada to play?*

Developing a national people and skills strategy in consultation with representatives from business, labour, government, polytechnics, colleges and universities which addresses how Canada can differentiate itself in competitive world markets and implement the programming to guarantee we have the skilled workforce to be successful in selected sectors.

Ensuring that money transferred to provinces is distributed among all sectors of post-secondary education equally.

Funding the creation of a national model for obtaining, cataloguing and distributing current and relevant labour market data to facilitate better co-ordination among governments, employers and institutions in identifying and providing knowledge skills needed to meet market demands.

Providing funds to facilitate the requisite investment in infrastructure and operations of polytechnics for applied learning and research.

Utilizing the cross-jurisdictional capacity of polytechnics for skills training. Making more immigrants eligible for job training.

Allowing skilled worker immigration applicants to earn as many points for trade experience as for academic credentials.

Partnering with industry, polytechnics and other governments to facilitate training initiatives responsive to market demands.

All of which is respectfully submitted on behalf of Polytechnics Canada

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