

What is the Future of Learning in Canada?

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The Canadian Council on Learning is an independent, not-for-profit corporation. Its mandate is to provide evidence-based information to Canadians so they can make the best decisions about learning throughout all stages of life, from early childhood through to the senior years.

www.ccl-cca.ca

Canadian Council on Learning

c/o University of Ottawa
50 Laurier East, Suite 108
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1H7

E-mail

info@ccl-cca.ca

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FINAL CCL PERSPECTIVES

On Canada Day 2011, Governor General David Johnston expressed a clear and compelling vision for Canada “where learning and innovation are strengthened to provide for a prosperous tomorrow”.

On July 2, while presenting the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, His Excellency encouraged Canadians to “think of ways to build a smarter, more caring, nation”.

His words are synonymous with the mission of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), whose mandate has been to help build a national learning architecture.

As the Governor General so clearly attested, learning lies at the heart of individual development. It is the foundation of collective prosperity, well-being and social cohesion. It is a bond to cement segments of great countries and vast spaces like those of our own country.

In the future, successful societies will be those that today recognize the value of learning and are making efforts to build the skills, attitudes and knowledge—not only among our youth, but also among our very young and those who have already made a lifetime working contribution.

Since its founding in 2004, CCL has acted as a significant force for improvement of learning conditions in every part of this land. With its federal funding completely withdrawn on March 31, 2010, CCL now prepares to cease its activities in spring 2012.

As we do so, we are setting clearly before Canadians our principal conclusions and frankly stating the daunting challenges that Canada must successfully meet to be that successful society of the future.

Our legacy statements must begin with an observation that we have emphasized repeatedly over the past six years: while Canada does possess strengths in lifelong learning and education, we are not setting the conditions for future success. On the contrary. We are not in practice reflecting Mr. Johnston’s shining vision of “building a smarter nation”. In many domains of learning across the life cycle, we are falling behind competitor countries, both in established and emerging economies. In some fields in which we began with a head start, we have lost the initiative and the lead.

Canada is slipping down the international learning curve.

In the months ahead, through its legacy statements, CCL will describe Canada’s performance in each phase of learning. For each, we will suggest the way forward, from early childhood development and learning through to the senior years.

The main challenges for lifelong learning in Canada may be stated as a series of crucial questions:

- 1) What specific steps will be required to improve each stage of learning?
- 2) Upon closure of CCL, how will Canadians be provided with transparent, authoritative and independent information and analysis of learning conditions in this country? (CCL was founded precisely because of the demand by civil society for just such a function.)
- 3) What mechanisms are required to ensure that levels of government co-operate fully—as they now fail to do—in the interests of the learning futures of Canadians of all ages?
- 4) How can Canadian publics, institutions, industry and governments work together to reverse present regressive trends and create conditions for future success?

In its final recommendations to Canadians through its legacy documents, CCL will provide answers to these and other demanding questions, based upon the cumulative experience and far-ranging, intense analysis and results of its work since 2004.

Our legacy statement is organized in conjunction with the four questions stated in this introduction, beginning with a review of Canadian performance in each stage of learning. In Part 1, readers may wish to consult our findings and recommendations on all phases of learning or for an aspect of particular interest. An inventory of relevant CCL reports and publications for each stage of learning is included for those wishing to explore any aspect in detail.

CCL closes its door, while expressing the fervent hope that our national learning challenges will be taken up by institutions, communities, non-governmental organizations and governments across the country.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CANADA SLIPPING DOWN THE LEARNING CURVE

In its final report to Canadians, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) reveals that Canada is slipping down the international learning curve.

The needs in this area are stark. The potential rewards are enormous. But we are falling behind competitor countries and economies. We are on the wrong road and must make a dramatic change in the course we are taking.

The principal cause of this unacceptable and deeply troubling state of affairs is that our governments have failed to work together to develop the necessary policies and failed to exhibit the required collective political leadership.

The necessary approach is voluntary and co-operative, respectful of provincial and territorial responsibility, but involves the development of clear trans-Canadian policies and actions.

The starting point for the proposed directions is the establishment of a federal/provincial/territorial Council of Ministers on Learning. In addition, there must be: clear and measureable national goals for each stage of learning, as described in this report; permanent, independent monitors to compare Canadian learning results to our stated goals; standing advisory groups, including educators and civil society, to consult on requisite national objectives and the means to reach these goals.

Through CCL, Canadians were offered an opportunity to set in place a vision, a mission, and a model for continuous learning which could unite Canadians in a common purpose. It was a much-needed national initiative. Although CCL will close in spring 2012, that need continues.

Without a sustained trans-Canadian approach, many learners will not reach their objectives. The country requires a national learning framework in order for its regions, provinces and territories to succeed. Without a national framework, we will miss the east-west learning railroad that should connect Canadians of all regions, generations and languages.

The vision of CCL was to link Canadians in sharing learning experiences and promoting the enhancement of learning as a core value of a distinctive Canadian society. Hence the transformative image of a trans-Canadian learning architecture which would entrench and maintain our economic stability and social cohesion. CCL closes; the vision endures.

This final report summarizes the state of learning for each stage of the life cycle.

Our analysis of Early Childhood Education and Learning (ECEL) illustrates a paradox that runs through each phase of learning in this country: huge discrepancies between what Canadians purport to believe and the actual programs and practices to which they have access. The discrepancies are due to the dysfunctional relationships among governments and the consequent absence of national goals.

With respect to ECEL, Canadians are acutely aware of its crucial significance throughout the lifetime of their children; yet Canadian public expenditures for ECEL are among the lowest in developed countries.

Canada has shown many strengths and achievements in K-12 education. Particularly striking is the inclusive and egalitarian character of our systems in comparison with those of OECD counterparts.

As a result of these advantages, Canadian students have consistently performed above the OECD average in standardized international tests.

However, Canadian performance is now slipping in both absolute terms and in relation to other economies. In the absence of a trans-Canadian plan for K–12 education—including joint interprovincial learning goals based on international standards—Canadian results in K–12 international testing will continue to decline.

Canada possesses no national system of post-secondary education (PSE). “System” connotes cohesion, strategic and coordinated planning across regional jurisdictions, and a set of agreed purposes and objectives, with policies required to achieve these goals. All these criteria are absent from the Canadian context.

As a result, although the demand for PSE is strong, expenditures and participation rates are currently high, and Canada has fine educators at every level, Canada is falling behind other countries in PSE.

The discrepancy between Canada’s performance and that of competitor countries acts as a significant drag on our productivity, innovation and access to proven quality. It is doubtful that Canada can maintain high standards of living without revitalization of this sector.

The first step in revitalizing PSE is the establishment of a national permanent organization for analysis and goal-setting for PSE, as a key initiative in developing a broad trans-Canadian strategy on PSE. This organization would work in partnership with the federal/provincial/territorial Council of Ministers on Learning.

The threat to Canadian innovation and productivity as a consequence of incoherence in PSE is enormously exacerbated by our poor performance in adult and workplace learning. Among other grave defects, we observe that the offer and take-up of opportunities to enhance skills is lower in Canada than in other developed countries. As well, rates of adult literacy compatible with productivity and active participation in a knowledge society are poor, and the numbers of Canadians below the requisite standard will rise over the coming 20 years.

Canada has lost a decade through inaction on adult learning since, in 2002, at Canada’s request, the OECD submitted its *Thematic Review on Adult Learning for Canada*.

The criticisms levelled then by the OECD are equally valid a decade later. OECD pointed out that Canadian adults were foregoing learning opportunities because of lack of cohesion and planning between federal and provincial governments and between the public and the private sector.

That Canada has not acted on any of the OECD’s still pertinent and valid recommendations is unsurprising: there is no locus of policy and implementation in Canada mandated and empowered to do so.

The last word

Canada is slipping down the international learning curve.

Yet it is not too late, and it is possible even in the absence of CCL, to take the necessary actions, despite our radically decentralized education sector. Canadians have indicated through CCL surveys of attitudes toward learning that they believe learning to be the single most-influential factor promoting individual and collective success.

As CCL closes its doors, we urge Canadians to take up the challenge.

PART 1:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Learning in the first five years of life has critical implications for well-being and later success in school, at work, and in the community—more so than learning at any other stage of life. It is a time when young learners develop attitudes about the value and purpose of learning, setting the stage for lifelong learning in all aspects of their lives. No other period has such far-reaching implications. Investments in early childhood learning produce the highest social and economic returns.

Early childhood education and learning (ECEL) affects health, well-being and skill development, and lays the foundation for reading, writing, mathematics and science development over the long term.

For the past 25 years in Canada, the number of children being cared for outside the home has been increasing steadily. The changing structures of the modern Canadian family, the lengthening of the average work day, and more women working outside the home have led to growing reliance on non-parental child-care arrangements, such as day care, nursery or preschool.

Positive Developments

- Canadians understand the importance of ECEL;
- Canadians understand the importance of free play; and
- Successful provincial models of ECEL have been created.

Canadians Understand the Importance of ECEL

According to CCL's 2006 Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning (SCAL), 87% of Canadians agree that learning during the preschool years is critical to success in life.¹ The 2006 SCAL also indicates that Canadian parents believe that early childhood learning should focus on attitudes—such as fostering a positive attitude toward learning—rather than only on “school readiness”.²

Canadians Understand the Importance of Free Play

Play nourishes every aspect of children's development. It forms the foundation of intellectual, social, physical and emotional skills necessary for success in school and life. Canadian parents appear to recognize the fundamental importance of free play to young children's development. According to the 2008 SCAL, nearly all parents reported encouraging their two- to five-year-olds to engage in daily, unstructured play for periods of at least 30 minutes.³

Successful Provincial Models of ECEL

There exist promising practices, programs and approaches to ECEL in several Canadian provinces, including movement toward early entry into kindergarten settings.

The Early Development Instrument

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) was created in 1997 to assess child development and school readiness at kindergarten age. It was designed by the Offord Centre for Child Studies (formerly the Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk) at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in partnership with the Founders' Network and the Early Years Action Group in North York, Ontario.

The EDI serves as an outcome measure for early life and as a baseline measure for the school years. Through a checklist filled out by kindergarten teachers, the instrument gauges physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge.

Each category contains a vulnerability threshold. Children who score below the threshold are said to be limited or vulnerable in that particular domain of their development. Communities are informed of the proportion of vulnerable children within their geographic boundaries.

The EDI gathers data on about half of all five-year-olds in Canada. It is used in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and other regions of the country. In British Columbia, for instance, the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) used the EDI to identify school districts where children were most in need of interventions.⁴

The Early Years Evaluation

The Early Years Evaluation (EYE) is designed to help educators assess the skills of children aged four to six, who are making the transition to school.

Five aspects of early child development and school-readiness are evaluated:

- awareness of self and the environment (general knowledge);
- social skills, behaviour and approaches to learning;
- cognitive skills;
- language and communication; and
- physical development.

The evaluation consists of a 10-minute assessment by a teacher and a direct assessment completed by the child over 20 to 30 minutes. KSI Research International Inc. has conducted three pilot studies to assess the reliability of EYE.⁵

Linked provincial databases in manitoba

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) at the University of Manitoba uses anonymous administrative databases that can be linked together for specific research projects (www.umanitoba.ca/centres/mchp/data.htm).

While the link between socio-economic status (SES) and school performance is generally well established, the creative use of provincial databases allowed the MCHP to produce even more telling statistics for a project known as the Child Health Atlas 2004.

When the Education Ministry's data on the performance of children taking the standardized Grade 3 language arts test are reviewed it reveals that 94% of students living in high-SES areas passed the test, compared to 83% of those from low-SES areas. However, when all children who should have been in Grade 3 in Winnipeg in 1998–1999 were included in the expanded dataset, only 50% of the children from low SES families passed the test.

Children from the lowest SES group were more likely to have failed the test, been absent or exempted, or had already been held back at least one grade and were therefore no longer with their Grade 3 cohort.⁶

Understanding the Early Years

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a research initiative funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). Under UEY, participating communities receive information on the school readiness of their kindergarten children, family and community factors that influence children's development, and the availability of local resources for children and families.

Launched in 1999 in North York, Ontario, UEY was refined as a pilot project in 12 communities. It has been a pan-Canadian program since 2004, with up to 100 communities receiving support between 2005 and 2008.⁷

The Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development

The Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD) aims to identify factors that affect the social development and academic performance of young people in the province.

The first round of the QLSCD began in 1998 with a cohort of 2,120 children born in 1997–1998. The children were surveyed annually from the age of five months to four years. A second phase of the study is now underway and will continue until 2011.⁸

Troubling Trends

- Inadequate public funding support for ECEL;
- High numbers of young children entering school without an adequate foundation;
- Insufficient training and remuneration of early-childhood educators; and
- Absence of national indicators or benchmarks of progress in ECEL.

Inadequate Public-Funding Support for ECEL

As in many aspects of Canadian learning, there exist paradoxes: discrepancies between what Canadians purport to believe and the actual programs and practices to which they have access.

Despite understanding the vital importance of ECEL, and despite several successful provincial models of ECEL, as a proportion of GDP, Canada's public expenditures on early-childhood services, including child care, were the lowest among 14 OECD countries that reported this information in 2004. Canada spent 0.25% of GDP on early-childhood services for children up to age six. Scandinavian countries, by contrast, spent between four and eight times as much, between 1 and 2% of GDP.⁹

The 2006 SCAL revealed significant gaps between parents' expectations of public support for early-childhood education and development and reality. The survey shows: two-thirds of parents believe that local child-care services are underfunded; that resources are inadequate for parents who stay at home with their children; and that Canadians want more support for both options.¹⁰

High Numbers of Young Children Entering School Without an Adequate Foundation

Despite the acknowledged importance of early learning, many of Canada's children start behind—and stay behind in school. Research indicates that 25% of Canadian children entering school lack the foundation needed for successful acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. Research also suggests that one child in four enters school in Canada with learning or behavioural difficulties that could affect future success in school.¹¹

Insufficient Training and Remuneration of Early-childhood Educators

Also in contrast to countries more advanced in ECEL, and in which domain experts are valued, Canada offers insufficient training and remuneration of early-childhood educators. If we truly believe this period to be the most vital in the learning cycle, we must recognize the much-higher levels of preparation and remuneration required to attract the best into this field.

Absence of National Indicators or Benchmarks of Progress in ECEL

As in many aspects of Canadian learning, the most problematic in ECEL is the lack of common, shared national indicators of progress. At present, there is no means of knowing how well our young children are progressing. We lack appropriate national measures to provide better understanding of quality, access, financing and policy of ECEL programs at a national level. In addition, the several monitoring regimes that provinces have put in place are not comparable with each other.

The lack of national indicators results in the continuation of sterile debates about types of early care required—sterile because no informed judgment may be made about superiority of models without nationally comparable means of monitoring results.

The Way Forward in Early Childhood Development and Learning

Moving forward in early childhood development and learning (ECDL) requires us to develop common, shared national indicators of progress, comparable to those being utilized or developed in other OECD countries. An expert advisory group on ECDL, under the auspices of the Council of Ministers for Learning, would assist in determining these indicators.

There is a need to set national long-term and short-term goals and benchmarks, while respecting provincial and regional determination of mode of service provision. Benchmarks and goals will encompass: outcomes, as measured at school entry and by agreed pan-Canadian indicators; levels of financing and support; and access. Monitoring of outcomes must be conducted by a third-party organization working under the auspices of the Council of Ministers for Learning.

Enhanced support for ECDL must be provided and flexibly deployed, to enable parents to select their preferred model. As well, there is a need for agreement on pan-Canadian parameters for enhanced training and remuneration of early-childhood educators.

KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 12

INTRODUCTION

During the elementary- and secondary-school years, children and youth develop the skills and knowledge they need to become successful adults. These years also represent a critical period when children and youth develop attitudes about the value and purpose of learning and about how to learn.

In a knowledge society and economy, the case is made that inculcation of a love of learning and of an ability to become independent learners are crucial attributes to be derived from school years. As educational systems become more learner-centred and less focused on the teacher, the role of the teacher and that of the school evolve rapidly.

Strong skills in reading, mathematics, science and problem-solving constitute the foundation that allows youth to participate successfully in PSE and the labour market. The foundation emerging from kindergarten to grade 12 (K–12) education also determines the extent to which individuals become engaged citizens capable of contributing to the well-being of their families, communities and society.

The pace of technological change is transforming the workplace and redefining the nature of work in our society. Skills such as decision-making, teamwork, leadership—as well as cross-curricular competencies like communication skills, interpersonal skills, financial literacy, and health literacy—are increasingly required to be successful in school, in the workforce and in personal life.

Positive Developments

- Canadian youth are competitive in international standardized testing;
- Canada is more egalitarian than other countries;
- Canadian parents appear satisfied with their children's schools;
- Canadian parents are engaged with schools and the education of their children; and
- Overall dropout rates are declining.

Canadian Youth are Competitive in International Standardized Testing

International data clearly show that young Canadians perform well.¹²

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial standardized test for 15-year-olds in member countries in the core areas of reading, mathematics and science. Since its inception in 2000, Canadian teens have scored consistently above the OECD average in all three domains.¹³ This appears to indicate that they are acquiring a solid foundation in these skills. The high point in achievement was reached in reading: in the first PISA assessment in 2000, Canadian 15-year-olds ranked second to Finland.

Our above-average international standing demonstrates that Canada's educators are well qualified and committed to learning and that past investments have proven effective.

However, see the caveats below.

Canada Is More Egalitarian than Other Countries

Canada also does better than most OECD countries in ensuring that students learn to read and write, and perform adequately in mathematics and science, regardless of family household income. Although socio-economic status remains a contributing factor to Canada's results in PISA, income level and immigrant status has a smaller effect than in most OECD member countries.¹⁴ A recent UNICEF report comparing equity among OECD countries concluded that Canadian education was among the most equitable.¹⁵

Canadian Parents Appear Satisfied with Their Children's Schools

Parental expectations appear to be met. According to CCL's 2007 SCAL, more than 60% of Canadians believe that our elementary and secondary schools are meeting or exceeding their expectations for teaching core subjects and for preparing students for further education.¹⁶

Canadian Parents are Engaged with Schools and the Education of Their Children

Many Canadian parents involve themselves in relationships with their children's schools and teachers. The 2007 SCAL revealed that very few parents believe that they spend too much time helping their children with their homework. They feel highly engaged in their children's' education.¹⁷

Overall Dropout Rates are Declining

Completing high school benefits the individual and the country. Research shows that high-school graduates are more employable, have a wider selection of jobs to choose from, and earn more money than those who leave school before obtaining their diploma. Studies also show that completing high school has potential health benefits. In general, high-school graduates make fewer visits to physicians and are more knowledgeable about what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle.

In contrast, non-completion of high school can limit individuals' employment and earning potential. The unemployment rate of those who have dropped out of high school is double that of other 20- to 24-year-olds. Earning potential is also more limited for those working in occupations with lower skill requirements.

High school dropout rates have declined by almost half since 1990, falling from 16.6% to 8.5% in 2010, as defined by non-completion by age 24. Particularly dramatic have been improvements in the Atlantic region.¹⁸

Troubling Trends

- Slippage in international standardized test scores;
- Boys are falling behind;
- The economic and social cost of dropping out;
- Absence of national shared-learning outcomes;
- Citizenship and civics underemphasized;
- Apprenticeships and school-industry partnerships;
- Results for minority French-language speakers; and
- Career prospects for teachers

Slippage in International Standardized Test Scores

The 2009 PISA results revealed that Canadian 15-year-olds have relatively strong sets of skills in reading, mathematics and science. However, the situation is more complex, offsetting to some extent this positive record. Canadian scores in all three domains have recently been slipping, not only relative to other countries, but also, in some cases, in absolute terms. An example: in the domain of reading, between 2000 and 2009, Canadian results showed a decline in the proportion of high achievers. In a global economy, this type of slippage may be one indication of a loss of future competitiveness.¹⁹

Overall, although Canadian PISA results continue to be above average, we have lost our early lead and are being overtaken by countries and regions that have adequate national planning and innovative programs for K-12 education.

Boys are Falling Behind

The exacerbating trend toward loss of male human capital has only recently been publicly acknowledged and openly discussed. "Political correctness" had heretofore been a major obstacle to open discussion.

In 2009–2010, the high school dropout rate for young men, at 10.3%, was significantly higher than for young women, at 6.6%.²⁰ The scores of male teenagers in both national and international standardized testing at ages 13, 15, and 16 remain well below those of young women in reading and writing, whilst the "traditional" gap favouring boys in science and mathematics has been successfully remedied.

As a result of substantial academic underachievement of young men, they have become an increasingly diminishing minority among university graduates and scholarship holders. Yet the gap is not filled by more male graduates from community colleges or by massive numbers of male apprentices completing their training. The societal and productivity impact of this phenomenon remains largely underappreciated.

The Economic and Social Cost of Dropping Out

Although overall high-school dropout rates are declining, the number of Canadians leaving school early are still higher than in the OECD. Also, the financial and social costs of dropping out remain high. CCL has estimated at \$1.3 billion annually the costs of social-assistance and criminal justice relating to dropping out. Canadians who do not complete high school lose \$8,000 per year due to illness and health-related expenses, while earning \$3,000 annually less than those who completed high school and undertook no PSE studies.²¹

Absence of National Shared-learning Outcomes

The absence of common, or shared learning outcomes among Canadian provinces and territories is the most important weakness of K–12 education in Canada—and is the single most-important reason for which our international standardized test scores will continue their decline relative to other OECD countries.

Successful educational systems are adapting to a highly competitive international environment by adjusting their programs, interventions and expectations to international standards. Although there can be flexibility in curriculum content, successful national systems have clear expectations of learning results for students, irrespective of their regions or languages.

Leadership from provinces and territories and the CMEC participate in many international educational meetings and conferences. The ostensible purpose of such gatherings is to learn from the examples of other countries, both their successes and their failures. In the unique case of Canada, the centrifugal forces that fragment educational efforts are so strong that they render meaningless the lessons to be derived from other countries' successful innovations. There is simply no locus of coordinated co-operation in Canada that can act nationally on lessons learned from abroad.

Citizenship and Civics Underemphasized

Canada has the weakest record of which we are aware in the teaching of national history. Also remarkable is the absence of shared learning outcomes for citizenship and civics education. Unsurprising, then, is the continuing trend among youth of indifference to participation in democratic and civic exercises, as well as the widespread ignorance of Canadian cultural and social life that is regularly documented by the Historica-Dominion Institute.

As a 2007 Historica-Dominion Institute quiz found, knowledge of political history has declined over the past 10 years. More than 80% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 failed the quiz's basic Canadian history exam.²²

Most Canadian provinces require only one high-school course in Canadian history, often carrying constructions of the past that are markedly different from those which are conveyed in other regions. As a result of this disparity and of our failure to develop shared mandatory curricula for civics and citizenship, there is very little sense of common identity among young people, whether Canadian born or new Canadians.*

Apprenticeships and School-industry Partnerships

A principal reason for Canada's shortage of highly trained and versatile tradesmen and other skilled workers is the bottleneck created by difficulties encountered by learners attempting to obtain placements in industry. This problem of access is compounded by the dearth of apprenticeship training programs offered through Canadian high schools. In contrast with countries in Central Europe, in which close partnership between industry and the educational sector allows the existence of a vibrant apprenticeship option for secondary-school students, the range in Canada is severely restricted. One result is disaffection of many male students, who leave school early because its relevance to working life is not made clear to them.

* For many years, a complacent argument against a shared history curriculum has been the alleged incompatibility of historical interpretation, depending on ethnic origin or language. The fatuousness of this argument has been laid bare in recent years by the ability of German and French educators, working collaboratively, to write common history books to be used in schools in both countries. Many similar examples may be found that relate peoples whose interactions have been catastrophically bloody. Yet views of Canadian pasts are frequently claimed to be so opposed that a common reading of history is not possible, except in television series.

Results for Minority French-language Speakers

In all standardized national and international tests in all core areas, results for francophone minority students have for decades been inferior to the Canadian average and to the results of French speakers and of the English-speaking minority in Quebec. Because of the extreme fragmentation of Canadian education systems among provinces, it has been impossible for educators in the affected regions to alleviate the deficiencies. The required critical mass has not been and is not present.

The 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indicate that minority francophone high-school students have weaker literacy skills than their majority-language counterparts. Reading scores for students enrolled in French-language schools in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba were lower than students in English-language schools in the same provinces. In Quebec, student performance did not differ significantly between the English-language and French-language school systems.²³ Similarly, the 2007 Pan-Canadian Assessment Program results suggest that francophone students in Quebec have stronger literacy skills than their minority-language counterparts outside of Quebec.²⁴

Career Prospects for Teachers

Although teaching is still recognized as a desirable profession, radical changes in the education sector have diminished its attractiveness to many. The intellectual and physical demands of the job, especially through policies of inclusion, are very heavy; reforms are frequent, requiring much adaptability; the change to a learner-focused environment in particular demands attention; pressure is exercised on teachers by parents wishing to secure advantages for their children in a competitive environment; feminization of the profession presents difficult challenges for both genders; incentives for leadership and for excellence are weak; teachers and schools often feel that they are held accountable for educational failings that lie outside their capacity of intervention; there are few options for teachers wishing to broaden their horizons by working outside the formal setting of instructing children and youth.

The Way Forward in the School Years

Common learning outcomes

Canada should develop common, shared learning outcomes, using carefully determined international criteria, for K-12 for all key subjects, and for each grade level. This approach allows for harmonization, similar to models in Switzerland or Australia. It does not require standardization or a national curriculum.

Shared learning outcomes afford all the advantages of a coordinated effort to improve educational outcomes by setting clear national objectives, while preserving the ability of provinces and territories, and of regions to innovate with respect to their curriculum and to remain attuned to local needs and characteristics.

Priority for civics, citizenship and Canadian history

Priority in the development of shared national learning outcomes should be given to core disciplines. These should include areas which are critical for a Canadian consciousness and identity, for civic participation in a democratic society, and for responsible international participation. Civics, citizenship and a firm grasp of Canadian history through mandatory study, with well-defined learning goals, are fundamental in this regard.

Opening the school to the community

Given current demographics, the school must become the hub for community learning, through integration of needs of children for formal education and needs of adults for informal or non-formal learning opportunities. There are already successful models in a few Canadian cities.

As the numbers of children in school continue to dwindle because of changes in our demographic situation, opening the school to learning for parents and grandparents of schoolchildren is the sole secure manner of preserving strong support for public education. It is also critical to the improvement of adult skills in numerous areas, including: language training, communication, computers, various forms of literacy and numeracy.

It will also offer the advantage of broadening the career prospects for educators, who should also be offered options to be seconded to the private sector and to government agencies, in conjunction with an enhanced set of professional possibilities.

Education and training of males

The education and training of boys and men represents a human-capital dilemma. It must be tackled creatively and without fear of accusation of “political incorrectness” at all levels of education and training systems, and especially in the early years of schooling.

French-language teaching and learning

In addition to deficiencies in French-language minority education, Canada has chronic shortages of teachers qualified to instruct in the French language, both in minority schools and in French-immersion programs. In a country that considers itself bilingual, Canada also shows a remarkable shortage of French-language options in most PSE institutions.

Canada needs a national French-language teacher-training college, in order to preserve and enhance bilingual education at all levels, including PSE.

School-industry partnerships

Canada should develop school-industry partnerships that make apprenticeship training in high school an attractive avenue. Useful models to be considered are to be found in German-speaking countries and in Scandinavia.

Summary of CCL’s Findings and Recommendations on K–12

The need for a coordinated national action plan

It must be noted that most of the steps required to remediate troubling trends and to move forward in K–12 education require, in the absence of a national ministry, coordinated national action. This action would include specific long-term and short-term publicly announced goals and benchmarks, and the existence of an autonomous body regularly reporting to Canadians on agreed-upon national goals.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

PREAMBLE

Canada possesses no national system of higher or post-secondary education (PSE).

For this reason, we refer to the “PSE sector”, rather than to a “HE system”. System connotes cohesion, strategic and coordinated planning across regional jurisdictions, and a set of agreed purposes and objectives, together with mechanisms required to achieve those goals. All these elements are absent from the Canadian context.*

Canada has 10 provinces and three largely self-governing territories of vastly varying sizes, populations and capacity to manage a successful PSE sector.

Within the education sector—particularly within PSE—interpretation of Canada’s original constitutional arrangements from 1867 (British North America Act, BNA) have varied according to the ideologies and prevalent attitudes and context of each period. It is not the case that the initial wording of the BNA provides indisputable constitutional direction to a 21st Century Canada. This is especially true of public PSE, which was simply neither mentioned, nor even contemplated in the BNA.

Thus, for example, the federal (central) government played a powerful role in PSE in the decades following WW2: in direct funding of universities; in the context of national policy development; in the creation of many new PSE seats to accommodate the post-war boom; in fostering research; and, in the 1960s, in the development of the “community college” sector. It invested massively in technical and related forms of training, in programs in continuing education, and in courses equivalent to initial university education.

Over the last few decades, as Canada’s economic, institutional and political structures have become more fragmented, constitutional provisions have been re-interpreted as excluding a significant policy or strategic role for the federal government. Thus, for example, there is no coordination between levels of government in PSE, except, within limitations, with regard to student financial assistance, Aboriginal education and research funding. Federal representatives at political and bureaucratic levels are systematically excluded from regular meetings of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada.

As a result of this situation, 13 educational jurisdictions in Canada exist, each with different types of PSE institutions whose mandates and missions vary. Further complicating matters is that indicators that are comparable even across institutions may not be readily available. There is a national policy vacuum that tends to be filled by the associations representing universities (AUCC) and community colleges (ACCC). However, these are not constrained to act in the public interest, but only advocate the perceived interest of their member institutions—which may or may not represent the public interest.

Lacking a genuine collective governmental partner in the provinces, the federal government tends to invest resources in those very-limited areas of PSE for which it may. In particular, its recent massive investments in university research, while needed and welcome are more an artefact of federal–provincial discontinuity than a matter of lucid national policy. These investments, because they are unaccompanied by allocation of resources in those areas off limits for the federal government—teaching and learning—have skewed the work of institutions away from teaching functions, and toward a greater concentration on research profiles of faculty and institutions.

* Among all the myths propagated over the past three decades designed to inhibit meaningful collective national action in learning, the barriers erected to impede progress in PSE have resulted in the most-perverse consequences for learners and society. Consequences include: narrowing of opportunities for learners; inhibition of learner mobility (and therefore a diminished sense of national cohesion); insufficient attention to quality of teaching and learning; failure to plan strategically through the establishment of pan-Canadian goals; difficulties for learners of all ages to navigate PSE systems to their benefit and compromised capacity for the R and D that drives innovation and productivity.

A particular anecdote serves to illustrate the balkanizing sleight of hand that has gone unnoticed by publics understandably bored and vexed by federal–provincial wrangling and power struggles. In June, 1988, the federal Secretary of State (equivalent to the present Minister of Canadian Heritage) addressed provincial and territorial (P/T) ministers responsible for higher education (HE). In his address, Minister Lucien Bouchard referenced joint federal–provincial responsibility for PSE. Such an assertion in 2011 would be unacceptable to some provinces. So far has the notion progressed that there can be no national PSE framework for HE—the sort of framework Bouchard might justifiably assert as necessary for any “real country”.

There do exist some regional interprovincial groupings in the PSE sector, but these are either ad-hoc (British Columbia-Alberta) or limited in scope and resources (Maritime Provinces Higher Education). The federal government has no role in any of these.

Despite all these structural shortcomings, Canada has achieved significant standing in PSE. It has been able to: provide high levels of public funding to PSE, even in difficult economic times; support high participation rates across the PSE sector; reduce disparities in access to PSE; maintain high standards of scholarship and quality; maintain a relative equivalence of quality across institutions and provincial boundaries; and attract increasing numbers of international students.

Past results, however, do not guarantee future success. It is likely that federal-provincial incoherence will damage Canada's PSE capacity and outcomes by: restricting inter-provincial and inter-institutional student mobility; impair our ability to offer PSE of the highest international standard; impede the development of a credible national quality-assurance agency; inhibit adequate proportionality of expenditures in research, and in teaching and learning; increase regional and inter-provincial disparities; and impair strategic planning in fulfilment of national labour requirements.

It is fervently to be hoped that Canadians will find solutions in PSE that incorporate both publicly agreed national goals and mechanisms, including a strong federal role, and the national experimentation and local accountability that follows on provincial jurisdiction.

INTRODUCTION

Post-secondary education refers to academic, technical and vocational programs and courses taken beyond the secondary-school level. The majority of Canada's PSE sector is provided through publicly funded institutions such as colleges, Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs), universities and university colleges. Graduates from PSE programs receive diplomas, certificates or degrees (undergraduate or graduate).

The economic and social benefits of pursuing post-secondary education have been widely documented. A skilled workforce is linked to higher productivity, innovation, economic growth, as well as to stronger communities with higher civic engagement and social cohesion.

Individual benefits include better wages and job satisfaction, fewer periods of unemployment, and improved health and quality of life.

Positive Developments

- Expenditures are high;
- Strong rates of participation;
- Quality of educators; and
- Educated immigrant population.

Expenditures Are High

Canada's expenditures on PSE are high in comparison to other OECD countries. Combined public and private expenditure on PSE increased especially rapidly between 1997 and 2005, swelling in constant dollars by 39% during that period.²⁵ Canada places second among 30 OECD countries in share of GDP for expenditures on PSE.²⁶ This high level of investment reflects the agreement of 87% of Canadians, according to CCL surveys, that a highly skilled and educated workforce is the single most-important element Canada needs to ensure its economic future.²⁷ (See Table 1 below.)

Strong Rates of Participation

Over the last 10 years in Canada, declines in the population younger than 15 years of age have coincided with increasing labour-market demand for post-secondary graduates. At the same time, an aging population means that Canada faces declines in the availability of experienced and knowledgeable workers in the labour force. These converging factors have made issues related to PSE access, participation and completion even more pertinent to Canada's future.

In 2009, the proportion of young adults participating in formal PSE rose to its highest point to date. Over the past 20 years the overall trend steadily rose, from 25% in 1990 to 37% in 2009.²⁸ Canada's PSE participation rates for youth rank very high when compared to rates across the world. By 2005, 58.1% of Canadian youth aged 20 to 24 had already completed a post-secondary education or were attending some type of educational institution, placing Canada third among 24 OECD countries. Canada ranked second in the proportion of the population aged 20 to 24 that had already completed their education—and held 10th position in the proportion still in education.²⁹

Table 1: Combined public and private expenditures on education, by level of education, Canada, 1997–1998 to 2004–2005 (2001 constant dollars)

	Pre-elementary, Elementary, Secondary	Trade- vocational	College	University	All Post- secondary	All Levels Combined
(Millions of 2001 Constant Dollars)						
1997–1998	40,209	6,168	5,066	13,214	24,448	64,657
1998–1999	41,545	6,909	5,099	13,778	25,786	67,332
1999–2000	41,501	5,587	5,757	15,316	26,660	68,160
2000–2001	41,304	5,808	5,667	16,580	28,055	69,359
2001–2002	42,295	5,632	5,824	17,466	28,921	71,216
2002–2003	43,696	5,366	5,720	19,231	30,317	74,013
2003–2004	45,722 ^e	5,395	5,801	21,232	32,428	78,150 ^e
2004–2005	48,235 ^e	5,485	5,914	22,598	33,998	82,233 ^e
Percentage Change 1997–1998 to 2004–2005	20	-11.1	16.7	71.0	39.0	27.2

Notes:

^a These data include Canada's spending on education in foreign countries (e.g., Department of National Defence schools) and undistributed expenditure.

^b Expenditures on private business colleges are not included.

^c Large year-to-year variations in public and private funding to school boards result from accounting adjustments to prior-year surpluses and deficits. Therefore, trends should be observed over a period of years, instead of from one year to the next.

^e Estimate

Sources: Canadian Education Statistics Council, *Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program 2007*, Table B.1.1 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, December 2007), Catalogue no. 81-582-XIE. Data updated Dec. 16, 2009. Estimate revised.

Quality of Educators

Canada's PSE educators are recognized internationally for their quality and for their record in peer-reviewed publications. The community college sector is considered internationally to be a strong and responsive component of Canadian PSE.

Providing quality in education is universally cited as a key goal by post-secondary institutions (PSIs), and by government departments and agencies responsible for PSE. Canada has a solid international reputation for producing PSE graduates who contribute valuable skills and knowledge to international labour markets, to global humanitarian agencies and to the international research and development community. PSE is a \$30-billion sector of the Canadian economy. Students, families and all levels of government invest in the PSE sector. Accountability to these investors is inherently tied to issues of quality.

Educated Immigrant Population

Nearly one out of five Canadian residents was born outside of Canada³⁰ and approximately two-thirds of Canada's population growth results from net international migration.³¹

In 2006, more than one in five university graduates living in Canada (21.5%) were immigrants with foreign credentials.³² Of immigrants who arrived in Canada in 2006, 43% had completed a university degree prior to immigration. Although 23% of Canadians aged 25 to 64 were born outside Canada, immigrants accounted for nearly one half (49%) of doctorate degree holders in Canada and for 40% of adults with a Masters degree.³³

Troubling Trends

- Losing ground in innovation, and research and development;
- Dilemma in male human capital;
- Immigrant skills not meeting labour-market needs;
- No national PSE strategy;
- No national quality-assurance system; and
- Fundamental data and information gaps on PSE.

Losing Ground in Innovation, and Research and Development

Research and development (R&D) is vital to a knowledge society and economy. It underpins competitiveness and productivity and fuels economic growth. R&D also helps deepen the knowledge and understanding required to protect the public interest and advance responsive public policy.

Despite having the highest ranking in 2007 among OECD countries for the proportion (48%) of the population having completed college and university, Canada ranked 20th out of 29 OECD countries in the proportion of science and engineering degrees to all new university degrees in 2006 (18% compared to 37% for top-ranked Korea). Canada ranked 18th in the proportion of PhD graduates in science and engineering to new doctoral degrees in 2006 (39% compared to 62% for top-ranked Greece).³⁴

Canada has markedly improved postgraduate education at the Masters level but lags OECD countries at the doctoral level—a driver of research, development and innovation. Between 1995 and 2005, Canada's share of master's degrees in engineering and computer science increased by 103%. While total doctoral degrees increased by 13%, doctoral degrees in engineering and computer science increased by only 1.2%.³⁵

Canada's poor performance in completion of apprenticeships acts as a drag on productivity, since a highly skilled workforce is a prerequisite for productivity gains. Our poor performance in apprenticeship completion is linked primarily to underdeveloped industry/education/government partnerships. This is an area in which national programs would be most valuable. Securing apprenticeships is the principal bottleneck—not the image of the trades.

Canada's inferior performance in R&D occurs despite high levels of government investment in university research. The explanation for this apparent paradox is that Canada is obliged to expend more per capita on PSE research largely because the private sector in Canada fails to provide an appropriate share of research capacity. Average funding from industry for R&D represents 64% of total R&D investment in the OECD, as compared with 48% in Canada.³⁶ Overall, Canada's total expenditures on R&D as a percentage of GDP have been consistently below the OECD average for decades—despite the considerable influx of federal funding over the last 15 years. In 2010, Canada spent 1.8% of GDP on R&D, compared with 2.3% in the OECD.³⁷

More importantly, some OECD countries have set higher targets—up to 3.5%—for future investment in R&D. As in all other areas of learning, Canada has no measurable goals.

As a consequence of the focus on university research, it is often alleged that teaching and learning suffer on university campuses.

Dilemma in Male Human Capital

The growing discrepancy between female and male success in education has resulted in a dilemma in male human capital.

Gender differences in educational attainment are evident from the high-school level onward. Despite a significant decline in Canada's high-school dropout rate over the last several years, male high-school dropout rates are consistently higher than female high-school dropout rates. Consequently, PSE opportunities for the young male population are more limited than they are for females. In addition, PSE dropout rates are higher for males than females, resulting in a shift in Canada's PSE attainment profile by gender.

Males are less likely to hold university and college credentials. In 2006, 42% of those aged 25–34 with an undergraduate degree were males, compared to 58% females.³⁸ By 2008, 62% of all university undergraduate completers were female and only 38% males.³⁹ Similarly in 2008, 41% of community college graduates were male and 59% were female.⁴⁰ The gap is widening. The difference is especially striking in elite professional programs and in attribution of academic scholarships, which require high grades from high-school completion.

Among those with community college diplomas, 44% were male in 2006 and 56% female.

There is now a 16 percentage point gap in Canada between men and women in overall PSE completion. This gap is growing ever wider and is more substantial than in other OECD countries.⁴¹

Were there evidence that males are particularly successful in other modes of formal or informal education and training, the concern about human capital implications of the enlarging gap would not be as pronounced. However, the poor rate of apprenticeship completion—an area traditionally dominated by males—is not suggestive that male learners are making up the difference through other models. One reason for this imbalance is found in differential rates of investment in the forms of education and training. During the period from 1997 to 2005, for example, private and public expenditures for universities increased by 71% in constant dollars. During the same period, investment in trade and vocational training declined by 11.1%.⁴²

To date, the consequences of the gender gap in post-secondary education have not been adequately assessed and may have implications over the long term. What, for example, will be the future impact of the under-representation of men at the university-undergraduate level? Given the strong relationship between education and income, this under-representation may affect men's earned income and the kind of professional learning opportunities offered to them.

Immigrant Skills Not Meeting Labour-market Needs

Canada's immigration policies include the awarding of points based on the applicant's level of educational attainment. While the system has yielded a high proportion of university graduates among immigrants, the proportion of PSE graduates in the trades dropped by half since 1996 from 10% to 5%.⁴³ According to the 2006 census, only 7.2% of the trades population were not born in Canada.⁴⁴

Recent changes in policy at Citizenship and Immigration Canada may assist in redressing the imbalance and bring immigration practices closer to labour-market realities and needs.

No National PSE Strategy

Canada is unique in the developed world for having no national strategy for PSE, no acknowledged and accepted goals, no benchmarks, and no public reporting of results based on widely accepted measures.

Without a pan-Canadian strategy to obtain the necessary data, the full potential of the enormous federal, provincial-territorial and individual investments in post-secondary education will not be realized. Rather, the present condition—where nationwide, coherent, coordinated and comparable data are unobtainable—will continue to prevail. Canada's capacity to assess and improve its PSE sector will continue to be compromised, as will its ability to compare performance with other countries.

A PSE strategy would offer a pragmatic approach that would promote mobility, efficiency, effectiveness and equity across the country, while providing benefits to all levels of our society:

- **Learners:** improved information regarding opportunities, better choices and responsive learning;
- **Institutions:** improved and more responsive programs;
- **Governments:** improved access to information on a national basis and more effective planning; and
- **Business and Labour:** improved ability to predict and respond to changes in Canada's workforce.

No National Quality-assurance System

As a result of the extreme fragmentation of education in our country, out of 30 OECD countries, Canada is the only one that has no formal PSE-accreditation system of programs and PSE institutions. As a result, students have difficulty navigating the PSE sector and assessing the fit of a particular institution to their needs. This becomes especially problematic for international students and therefore diminishes Canada's competitiveness in this ever-growing market. Membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, although sometimes viewed as a proxy for accreditation, may not reflect the diversity of institutions of higher learning now emerging in Canada.

While Canadian post-secondary education enjoys a reputation for quality, Canada lacks an informational framework through which to understand measure or clearly demonstrate the quality of its PSE sector. This situation poses challenges on several fronts—for institutions that want to demonstrate clearly the quality of their services to the public, for students who need to access the information they require to make the right PSE choices, and for governments who are accountable to the public for the systems under their stewardship. Developing a pan-Canadian framework for understanding quality in PSE may be necessary to promote and improve Canada's PSE sector, while ensuring also that students can make decisions about how best to meet their educational aspirations.

Learners indebt themselves through paying an increasing share of their studies through tuition and other fees; and as the focus on research grows as a result of Canada's R&D predicament, there is urgency to ensure not only quality control, but also to demonstrate to learners there exists an effective and internationally compatible quality-assurance monitor.

In the absence of an adequate quality-assurance process in Canada, CCL has published two documents intended to assist learners in their 'navigation' of PSE, in order to better inform their choices, and to indicate how such a national quality assurance could be constructed in our federative environment.^{45, 46}

Table 2: International overview of PSE processes and system-wide structures

	Major Review in Last 5 Years	System -wide Goals and Objectives	Funding Aligned with National Priorities	Quality Assurance Agency (ies) in Place	Ongoing Mechanism for Federal /State Planning	Federal Ministry of Education
Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
EU	Yes	Yes	N/A	Under development		
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Process under development	Yes	Yes
U.S.	Yes	Under review	Limited federal money targeted	Yes	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Federal Office of Education
U.K.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
N.Z.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
Canada	No	No	No	No	No The provinces and territories meet as the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the federal/provincial/territorial Forum of Labour Market Ministers meet regularly to share information	No Federal Human Resources Ministry funds labour-market programs, research, literacy and other initiatives related to PSE

*Available material not detailed enough to make conclusions at this time.

Fundamental Data and Information Gaps on PSE

Data required to track Canada's performance and progress are incomplete and scattered, are updated on different timetables and use different definitions. Filling such gaps is crucial to gain insight into PSE's challenges and opportunities in the 21st century, and to develop appropriate responses.

In preparing its annual reports on PSE, CCL was constantly challenged by a lack of information. In many cases appropriate data were simply not available. When they were available, they were often not comparable, not compiled or inadequate.

These informational shortcomings hinder the ability to report on the state of PSE in Canada. Only with a solid base of information will we know whether the billions of dollars invested are being used most effectively.

In particular, Canada:

- Does not have the information required to assess PSE capacity in relation to labour-market needs;
- Has no useful picture of the country's private providers of PSE (who they are, what they do, their capacity, their enrolment figures, what happens to their graduates);
- Has very little information since 1999 about community colleges regarding faculty, enrolment or capacity; and
- Has only a limited picture of part-time faculty at our universities.

It is a picture worth a thousand words. Table 2 (page 19) shows eloquently why Canada is falling behind in post-secondary education—other countries have or are establishing mechanisms to make success more likely. Canada is not.

The Way Forward in PSE

The specific shortcomings cited here and which are explained in detail in CCL's annual reports on PSE^{47,48,49} pale in comparative importance to the structural and systemic deficiencies of Canadian PSE.

The way forward for Canadian PSE urgently requires the elements and initiatives outlined below to make the sector more intelligent.

A national post-secondary strategy should:

- Possess three essential characteristics: clearly stated objectives; measures to assess achievement of objectives; and a systematic goal of cohesion and coherence among all the facets—comparable to the PSE strategies formulated by the European Union (EU) and other developed countries.
- Emulate the EU's convergence of all forms of education and training across jurisdictions, thereby promoting mobility and quality. This implies harmonization, rather than standardization, across jurisdictions.
- Create systems of accountability through agreement on national indicators for success in PSE, learning from the experience of the EU, Australia and other political entities.
- Create a pan-Canadian PSE data and information strategy which acts as the basis for indicator development and policy decisions.
- Establish goals and measurable objectives for Canadian PSE for both the short and the long term.
- Create and maintain a national forum on PSE that would include governments and NGOs and would not only establish national goals, indicators, and data, but also reach agreement on the mechanisms required to monitor and report annually to Canadians on progress.
- Construct a pan-Canadian framework for quality assurance.
- Establish a Canadian qualifications framework.

Why Establish a National PSE Strategy

The absence of a pan-Canadian focus explains our country's lack of national goals and benchmarks for PSE in accord with social and economic interests—and the consequent failure to develop measurements against which to assess our progress in post-secondary education.

Does all this matter? If the opportunity for Canadians to study is increasing, that surely constitutes improvement. If we continue to spend large amounts of public and private funds on high-quality research and teaching, this also reflects progress. What, then, the need for a national focus?

During the two generations following World War II, Canadians could take comfort from the fact that Canada was well ahead of most other advanced industrial countries that are now members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Opportunity to study was expanding more rapidly in North America than elsewhere and Canada became recognized as a world leader in producing a highly educated population.

For most of the 20th century, education was primarily a local matter. Foreign competition in PSE was limited. Few countries had coherent national strategies for tertiary education. What is now the European Union (EU) was even less integrated educationally and otherwise than Canadian provinces.

Progressively, and at an increasing tempo—particularly over the past 30 years—this reality has changed. Education—especially at the post-secondary level—is now global. International competition is fierce. Almost all countries have aggressive national strategies for PSE systems to advance their national interests, especially in terms of innovation, productivity and economic growth. The EU progressed from a collection of six common market states whose borders could take hours to cross, to an increasingly integrated entity with a collective European strategy and common benchmarks for PSE and skills development.

While others have been active, Canada has neglected to define and articulate national goals and corresponding benchmarks. The previously comfortable status quo is now out of sync with the 21st century reality.

A national post-secondary strategy should possess three essential characteristics: clearly stated objectives, both general and for specific periods of time; measures to assess achievement of objectives; and a systematic goal of cohesion and coherence among all the facets—as is the case in the EU and other developed countries.

The future of PSE in Canada is uncertain because it has none of these three essential elements. Consequently, and as this report illustrates, given the rapidly changing circumstances our country faces, it appears unlikely that learners will optimize the individual and community benefits from their educational experience. As well, Canada will not have the highly qualified workforce needed to realize its economic promise fully.

Nor, without the development of made-in-Canada quality-assurance processes, can Canadian content, language, culture and, ultimately, identity be assured.

Establishing a national agenda for PSE

In a country possessing a genuine PSE system, the troubling trends that CCL has consistently identified in its annual reports could be interpreted as invigorating challenges. Having celebrated the other achievements of the PSE sector and recognized its shortcomings, society—including all levels of government, institutions and NGOs—would move systematically and co-operatively to address the deficiencies. This is what successful societies of the future are now doing.

In the process, we would find that more public expenditure is not a panacea: the fundamental problem resides in the incohesion of the sector.

In Canada, by contrast with other developed and developing economies, no means of meeting urgent challenges to PSE exist. In a land where it is prohibited even for federal and provincial ministers to maintain a sustained collective discourse on PSE, how can there be any plan for remediation of deficiencies? And, with the closure of CCL forced by the withdrawal of all federal funding, there will be one fewer voice reminding us of uncomfortable truths.

The issue for Canadians, then, is not the nature of our challenges, nor the extent of present shortcomings. The issue resides in the alarming fact that we are systematically denying ourselves the capacity to deal with the problems. Inexorably, therefore, the problems will deepen.

In this way, we are creating the conditions for future failure, notwithstanding our positive past record in PSE. Without national strategic planning, we can but take one step forward and two steps back. If we fail to make our hodgepodge PSE sector more intelligent and harmonized, we will be bypassed by major competitors: they will eat our lunch.

During the course of its contributions to understanding the sector, the most frequently asked question of CCL related to the means of ensuring the cohesion necessary for the sector to meet its challenges. Most observers, while concurring with the troubling trends and the need for a coordinated national strategy, wanted to know what mechanisms would be required. Who would do what? How can we overcome longstanding intergovernmental dysfunction in relation to PSE?

In 2008, the CEO of CCL established a blue-ribbon group of experts on PSE and Canadian constitutional issues to advise on options for ensuring coordination through a pan-Canadian PSE strategy. Membership in the group included: the presidents of the AUCC, of ACCC, of the University Presidents Council of BC, of the Council of Ontario Universities, of the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial du Québec; vice-presidents of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, a community college president, and several experts in constitutionalism with specific reference to PSE.

Under pressure from governments anxious to suppress public debate on the need for a national education strategy, CCL refrained from pursuing to conclusions the deliberations of this group.

A draft form of some considerations brought forward to CCL as options toward a national framework for PSE is found in Appendix 1.*

A principal conclusion of this review is the need for a national, permanent organization providing information and analysis of PSE. Although the existence of such analysis does not guarantee that requisite action will be taken, it must be seen as the imperative first step towards collaborative action involving governments, institutions and their associations, learners and NGOs. It is often observed in other countries that it is the supply of critical information, publicly available, that drives a coordinated political process.

In part 3, on intergovernmental co-operation, we propose the model under which such an independent monitoring agency would be active. Under an effective national strategy for PSE, the monitoring agency would be mandated by a national council of ministers responsible for learning, including both P/T and federal governments.

Summary of CCL's Findings and Recommendations on PSE

The needs in this area are stark. The potential rewards are enormous, but we are falling behind and are on the wrong road. We must also make a dramatic change in the course we are taking.

The main cause of this unacceptable and deeply troubling state of affairs is that our governments have failed to develop the necessary policies, failed to work together, and above all have failed to exhibit the necessary political leadership.

It is not yet too late, and it is possible to take the required actions, despite our decentralized system.

The necessary approach is voluntary and co-operative, and respectful of provincial/territorial jurisdiction, but involves clear pan-Canadian policies and actions. The starting point for the proposed directions is the establishment of a national permanent organization and analysis on PSE as a key initiative in developing a broader pan-Canadian strategy on PSE.

* Please note that these considerations were not submitted to members of the advisory group for endorsement. They remained internal to CCL.

ADULT LEARNING AND WORKPLACE TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

The value and contribution of learning is evident at all stages of life. Ongoing learning can influence income level, job satisfaction, political participation, and health and well-being. It can also enhance Canada's economic productivity and competitiveness.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines adult learning as all forms of education or training taken by adults (those aged 25 and over) for professional or personal reasons.⁵⁰ Adult learning can take many forms, including returning to formal education, and non-formal and informal learning activities. It can include job-related education and training, participation in community and civic activities, attendance at cultural events, exposure to the media, and learning through information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the internet.

Adult learning can occur in many contexts, including in the home, at the workplace and in the community, and can be beneficial to adults of all levels of education and skills development. Through continuous learning, Canadians may maintain the skills and knowledge needed to make informed decisions and lead successful lives as workers, citizens, and as members of families and communities.

Canada's labour requirements have changed dramatically over the past generation, from a demand for physical labour to a growing need for knowledge workers. Consequently, employers are increasingly seeking skilled workers with a more education-based set of skills.

Canada's future prosperity depends on the strength of its learning sector and a range of complementary learning opportunities that meet the needs of all adult Canadians—regardless of educational attainment, age, socio-economic status or level of skills.

Canadian performance in adult and workplace training illustrates well our Canadian learning paradox: we recognize its importance but the incoherent and uncoordinated nature of its organization nationally obstructs its provision. Although many individuals, employers and employees acknowledge its significance, remedial action does not often follow.

Canada has lost a decade, and while we have stood still, better organized and focused international competition has moved forward.

Positive Developments

- Some individuals are seizing responsibility for learning; and,
- Some employers are making efforts to improve the skills of workers.

Some Individuals are Seizing Responsibility for Learning

According to Statistics Canada's Access and Support to Education and Training Survey (ASETS), 36% of working-age adults (aged 25 to 64 years) participated in job-related education or training* in 2008, an increase from 30% in 2002.⁵¹

Over four out of 10 adult workers (41%) participated in formal job-related training activities or education in 2008. One-fifth of those who participated (21%) undertook studies leading to a formal credential such as a degree, diploma or certificate and 87% took courses, workshops or seminars that did not lead to a formal credential.^{†, 52}

* According to ASETS, education entails formal modes of learning and is defined as structured learning activities that lead to a credential, i.e., programs that combine multiple courses toward the completion of a diploma, degree, certificate or license. In contrast, training entails non-formal modes of learning and is defined as structured learning that does not lead to a formal credential. It includes courses that are not part of a program, workshops or seminars.

† The percentages do not add up to 100 because some participants may have taken both a program of study and training activities.

A 2009 study released by the European Commission compared adult participation in education and training across 18 countries, including Canada. It showed that on average, 36% of adults aged 25 to 64 years had participated in any type of education or training, whether for job-related reasons or for personal interest. In comparison, a higher proportion (43%) of Canadians aged 25 participated in any type of education or training.⁵³

Some Employers Are Making Efforts to Improve the Skills of Workers

Workplace training has been shown to be an effective way for workers to improve and retain their job-related skills. Therefore, the availability of such training is considered key to keeping Canada's workforce competitive with other countries around the world. The availability of training at work provides opportunities for Canadians to improve their skills and work-related competencies—opportunities that they may not be able to access outside of work.

According to Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), 59% of Canadian workplaces offered some form of workplace training for their employees in 2005. This has shown an increase since 1999, when 54% of employers reported some form of workplace training.

Employer support for employee education or training can be provided in various ways. They may provide the training themselves, give the participants education leave, allow for flexible work hours, supply transportation or pay or reimburse the employee for tuition, registration or parking fees.

Employer support for education and training was appreciably higher in large establishments than in smaller ones.

Nearly seven out of 10 (69%) participants in education programs who worked in establishments with more than 500 employees received support from their employer, compared to 39% of participants who worked in establishments with fewer than 20 employees and 50% for all employers combined.⁵⁴

Troubling Trends

- Low Literacy levels limit Canada's potential;
- Many Canadians are not participating in continuous learning or training;
- Declining training efforts hampering our productivity;
- Limited learning in the community;
- No national system of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR);
- Poor labour-market information; and
- Incoherence.

Low Literacy Levels Limit Canada's Potential

Literacy encompasses a spectrum of skills ranging from basic literacy—knowing how to read and write—to multiple literacies, which describe the ability to decode, identify, communicate and evaluate information in many forms, delivered through various media.

Research shows that adults with low literacy suffer illness more often, experience more medication errors, have more workplace accidents, earn less, and are more likely to die at a younger age. Canada's social and economic well-being, health and competitiveness are strongly linked to literacy.⁵⁵

Data collected over the past decade indicate little or no improvement in the literacy levels of Canadians. The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) indicated that on the prose and document literacy scales, 42% of Canadian adults—about 9 million Canadians—performed below Level 3, the internationally accepted minimum considered necessary to succeed in today's economy and society.^{*, 56}

The survey also indicated that nearly 3.1 million Canadians aged 16 to 65 were at proficiency Level 1 on the prose literacy scale, and another 5.8 million were at Level 2.⁵⁷

Rates of adult literacy in Canada in the context of a knowledge society and economy are projected to stagnate until 2031.

* The literacy domains are measured on a 500-point scale broken into five levels of skill (Level 1 being the lowest, Level 5 the highest). Level 3 is considered to be the minimum level required by an individual to function in a modern society and economy.

Literacy projections for the period of 2001–2031, which take into account the impact of demographic shifts and population growth, suggest some disquieting trends:

- The proportion of adults with low literacy skills will remain virtually unchanged. As a result of population growth, Canada will have a 25% increase in the number of adults with low literacy skills from almost 12 million, to a total of more than 15 million adults.
- The number of senior citizens (aged 66 and over) with low literacy skills will double to more than 6.2 million.
- The number of immigrants with low-level literacy skills will increase by 61%, to a total of more than 5.7 million.
- The number of young adults (aged 16 to 25) with low literacy skills will remain almost the same.⁵⁸

While projections of adult literacy rates in Canada as a whole show little change over the coming decades, new data reveals that there are considerable differences among Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa. Ottawa can expect to see an 80% increase in adults with low literacy, from approximately 275,000 in 2001 to nearly 500,000 by 2031. Toronto and Vancouver meanwhile will experience increases of 64%, with the former increasing from 1.9 million in 2001 to nearly 3.2 million by 2031 and the latter from nearly 800,000 in 2001 to more than 1.3 million by 2031. Montreal is predicted to experience the lowest increase (20%) among the four major cities in the total number of adults with low literacy skills, from 1.5 million in 2001 to more than 1.8 million by 2031.⁵⁹

One of the primary factors in the increase will be the growing number of senior citizens who will have low literacy skills over the next generation. By 2031, CCL predicts that this number will reach 6.2 million—an increase of more than double from 3 million in 2001.

Another factor in the increase is the number of immigrants with low literacy. While the total proportion of immigrants with literacy skills below Level 3 will decrease from 67% in 2001 to 61% in 2031, the absolute number of immigrants with low-level literacy skills will actually increase by 61%, to more than 5.7 million by 2031.

Issues related to low Canadian levels of adult literacy extend well beyond the basic literacy that is concerned with reading and writing. They encompass also those related skills that require reading, combined with abilities in numeracy and other aptitudes.

CCL has mapped Canadian aptitudes in health literacy, and shown results that are more adverse than those for basic literacy. Health literacy is a composite of skills—dependent on, but different from—general literacy. This set of skills enables individuals to perform health-related tasks, such as reading nutrition labels, following medication directions or understanding safety instructions. To master health literacy, adults usually need, simultaneously, all three literacy skills: prose literacy, document literacy and numeracy.⁶⁰

More than half (55%) of Canadians aged 16 to 65 lack levels of health literacy required to read nutrition labels, follow medication directions, understand safety instructions or make informed choices for their own healthy living. Canadians with the lowest health-literacy skills are 2.5 times more likely to report being in fair or poor health than those with the highest skill levels. This is true even after correcting for factors such as age, education and gender. The three most-vulnerable populations, in terms of health literacy, are seniors, immigrants and the unemployed.^{*, 61}

Similarly, when CCL mapped Canadian numeracy skills, which are also related to financial literacy, unfavourable results were found. The results show that 55% of adult Canadians (aged 16 and over) had low levels of numeracy. Numeracy is the ability to use basic math skills in everyday life. It includes such skills as calculating a tip at a restaurant, balancing a bank account or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.[†]

Many Canadians Are Not Participating in Continuous Learning or Training

Those who most need learning opportunities are, ironically, the least likely to obtain them. All of this is occurring against a backdrop that includes an aging workforce, pending skills shortages and an increasingly competitive and demanding workplace. Individuals with low-literacy skills often express no interest in pursuing training and see little reason to do so, regardless of the financial incentives available.

* A map showing health literacy by region is in Appendix 3.

† A map showing numeracy by region is found in Appendix 3.

Many workers with insufficient literacy skills appear to be over confident about their own abilities and believe literacy skills have little impact on their job or on future employment prospects.

Of particular concern is the fact that many Canadians (38%) have not participated in education and training activities in the last six years according to data collected over the period 2002 to 2008. Twice as many Canadians (67%) with less than high school were disengaged from education and training activities, compared to those with PSE (30%).⁶²

Declining Training Efforts Hampering our Productivity

Over the past two decades, the education and skills of the labour force have become a very important factor in enhancing workplace productivity and in making improvements in the wages of employees.⁶³

Education and training, and the skills it creates, has a demonstrable impact on productivity and growth at both the individual and national level.⁶⁴ In particular, educational quality significantly impacts labour-market outcomes and per capita economic growth.⁶⁵ Consequently, knowledge and skills are important determinants of the economic success of individuals and countries. For example, differences in average literacy skill levels among OECD countries explain fully 55% of differences in economic growth since 1960.⁶⁶

Canadian productivity continues to decline relative to other developed economies, especially the U.S. Canada's performance lags in the provision of training days for managers and workers. According to Proudfoot Consulting's Global Productivity Report, Canadian companies identified a skills shortage as the number-one roadblock to efficiency improvements; yet they provide one of the lowest levels of training among the 12 countries surveyed. Canadian workers receive an average of eight days of training per year, the second-lowest level of the countries surveyed and 25% below the global average.⁶⁷

A comparable international survey from 2005 shows that Canadian employers ranked significantly lower than their European counterparts when it came to the availability of training in the workplace (see *Table 3*). Compared to 24 European countries, Canada would place 14th, well behind the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden and France.

According to a 2009 Conference Board of Canada report, companies in Canada spent an average of \$787 per employee on training, learning and development in 2008. In real-dollar terms, this level of expenditure represents a 40% decline over the past decade-and-a-half.⁶⁸

Before the recent rise of the Canadian dollar, economists speculated that lower Canadian productivity, in comparison with the U.S. and other OECD economies, was linked to the undervalued Canadian dollar.

Table 3: Proportion of firms offering training, selected countries, 2005

Country and ranking	Percentage of firms offering training
1) United Kingdom	90%
3) Denmark	85%
5) Sweden	78%
7) France	74%
9) Czech Republic	72%
11) Estonia	67%
13) Slovakia	60%
Canada	59%
15) Cyprus	51%
20) Portugal	44%
22) Latvia	36%
23) Poland	35%

Source: Canada figure from Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee Survey, 2005. All others from the EuroStat, Continuous Vocational Training Survey, 2005.

It was posited that a Canadian dollar at 65 or 75 American cents provided no incentive to Canadian industry to seek productivity improvements. We have seen over the past decade that the assumption that a higher Canadian dollar would occasion enhanced productivity, because of the loss of the currency advantage, was an illusion. Canadian productivity lags primarily because of its embedded structural cause: poor offer of workplace education and training, especially in basic skills like literacy and numeracy.

In 2007, CCL set before the federal government and in its reports five key principles that could be agreed among federal and provincial levels in Canada in order to govern improved and enhanced governmental support for skills development in the workplace.⁶⁹

The principles are:

- A comprehensive approach: a tool box or kit of validated and proven practices;
- Co-financing and co-responsibility;
- A coalescence of partners;
- A focus on demonstrating value for money and effort; and
- Validation/affirmation of individual achievement through certification and recognition.

There has been no federal-provincial body capable of taking up and utilizing these or any other broadly accepted principles in support of workplace training—which therefore continues to lag.

Emphasis by government on better support for workplace training would be included in a human infrastructure program that should accompany any investments in physical infrastructure.

Canadian productivity will straggle until Canadian industry responds to the need for enhanced training of all kinds which it itself routinely acknowledges is present and pressing.

Limited Learning in the Community

Canadian skills, such as literacy and numeracy, decline more quickly in Canada, after completion of formal study, than in some other OECD countries. Yet, results of international standardized testing (PISA) show that Canadian K–12 education is not the cause; it is superior to many.

CCL's work has identified three major root sources for Canadian underperformance in adult learning: insufficient preparation for lifelong learning in early childhood (see the section on ECEL), poor provision of workplace-related learning opportunities by employers, which is normally a major source of adult learning, and inadequate opportunity for community-based learning.

CCL's Composite Learning Index details the many ways in which community-based learning can occur. Compared with other OECD countries, Canada could improve its performance in several areas. In particular (see the section on K–12), we have not optimized our use of schools as venues for community-based learning.

It is also the case that urban sprawl in North America militates against community-based learning opportunities. In communities that suffer ribbon urban “development”, and which prioritize automobiles instead of adequate public transportation, distance impedes access to community learning sources and opportunities.

No National System of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is the process by which individual experiential or non-formal learning is recognized as valid by employers and by educational institutions.

PLAR is of significance both for improving the match of individuals to the labour market—whether they are Canadian or foreign born—and for enhancing the incentive to learn. People who have reason to believe that their learning from work or informal study will be recognized are more motivated to learn continuously, to improve their skills, to become more competitive. Conversely, the absence of such recognition acts as a motivational drag on lifelong learning.

Because of its national incoherence in adult learning, Canada has no national system of PLAR. As in other domains of learning, it has admirable pockets and models in various parts of the country, but these are not stitched into a cohesive whole—and therefore fail to exert the positive influence on labour market matching that a national PLAR system would have.

Under the auspices of CCL, a detailed sketch of a national PLAR program has been set out⁷⁰, but has not been acted upon because of the absence of any form of trans-Canadian leadership for adult and workplace learning.

Poor Labour-market Information

The match between skills and jobs in Canada appears to be inadequate. Yet, we cannot afford jobs without people and people without jobs. In its report on PSE (2009) CCL indicated the considerable discrepancy between training and job function in Canada.⁷¹

Better labour-market information available nationally is required, since workers are mobile nationally and internationally. This information must relate also to an improved national data base on outcomes of PSE. For example, it is not possible for employers to understand labour-force availability when Canada possesses no national statistics on annual graduation numbers from PSE by specific subject or skill areas.

Incoherence

In 2002, at Canada's request, the OECD submitted its Thematic Review on Adult Learning, Canada⁷². Although the OECD report was reviewed by CMEC at its regular meeting, no action was taken because there exists no forum or locus within Canada that has the authority or will to act on even the most obvious recommendations.

The criticisms levelled then by OECD are equally valid a decade later. OECD pointed out that Canadian adults were foregoing learning opportunities because of a lack of cohesion and planning between federal and provincial governments and between the public and private sectors.

The principal recommendations of OECD pertained to:

- Setting national benchmarks or targets for participation and outcomes as measured by rates of adult literacy and the acquisition of other essential skills;
- Ensuring appropriate levels of participation in adult learning;
- Developing a coherent national system of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR);
- Developing coherent and effective policies targeted to the specific learning needs of adults;
- Improving the literacy levels of adults;
- Enhancing labour-market information;
- Responding to groups with particular learning needs (working poor, Aboriginal people and immigrants);
- Increasing research efforts on the effectiveness of adult education; and
- Developing a pan-Canadian forum on adult education.

The Way Forward in Adult Learning

The way forward in adult learning reflects the still-valid recommendations made in 2002 by the OECD.

1) The most important step for adult and workplace learning—as for all other stages of learning—is to set national goals and benchmarks. Also as in other domains of learning, whereas these may not be legislatively or legally binding, they exert a powerful pressure on governments and organization in civil society to meet expectations, and to improve performance.

The sidebar below provides an example of public accountability from member states of the EU.

Public Accountability and EU Member States

- The EU transparently rates its performance in designated areas of learning and training for specific periods of time.
- Each country is rated for that same period of time, in comparison to standards set by other member countries.
- Specific goals for learning performance are agreed and made public for the EU and its member states for specific, relatively short time-frames.
- EU member states do not hide behind their inherent and obvious jurisdictional authority over Education to deny their responsibility to set goals, to publish results, and to coordinate with other member states.
- There is no reason for which, under present constitutional arrangements, Canadian jurisdictions could not establish any benchmarks and goals, together with transparent reporting of results, that they would select.

The following sidebar describes the five EU benchmarks in lifelong learning for 2020.

Five EU Benchmarks for 2020

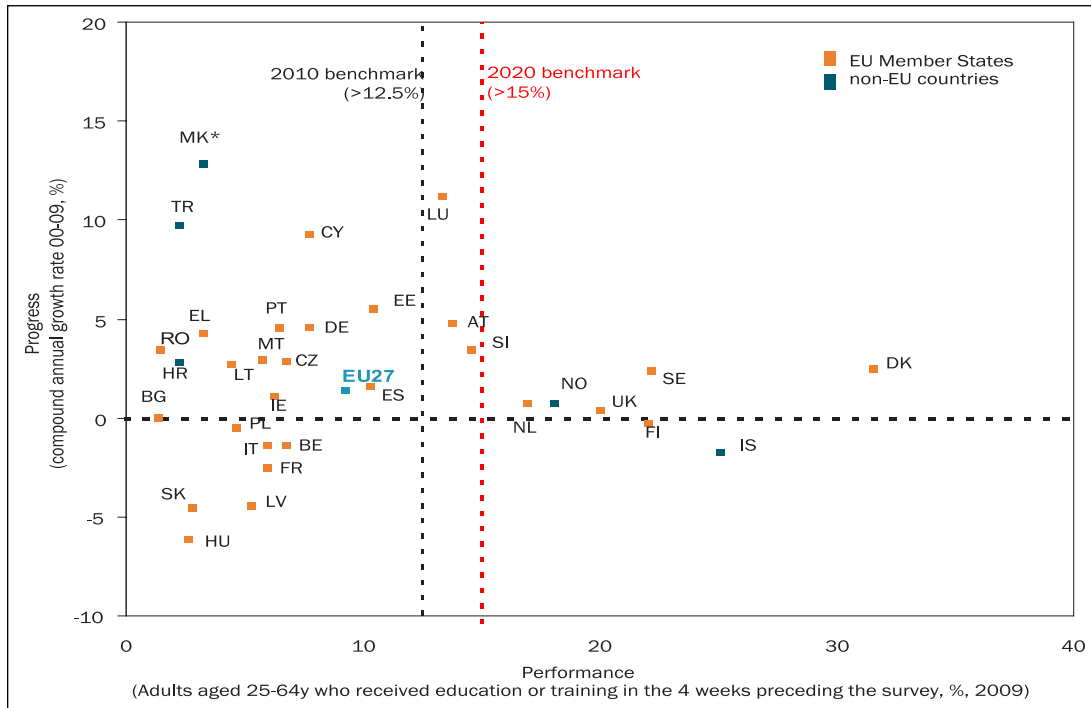
- At least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early-childhood education.
- The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%.
- The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%.
- The share of 30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%.
- An average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning.

2) Establish, under the federal-provincial Council of Ministers on Learning (see *part 3*), a standing expert advisory group on adult learning and a national forum on adult and workplace learning

These groups, as in other domains of learning, would assist ministers in: the national analysis of adult and workplace learning performance; the setting of appropriate benchmarking and goals for the long and the short term; advice on national programs and priorities that would help meet agreed goals. These functions would directly and indirectly favour immensely increased trans-Canadian coherence and thereby improve learning opportunities for adult Canadians in every region.

3) A national PLAR program

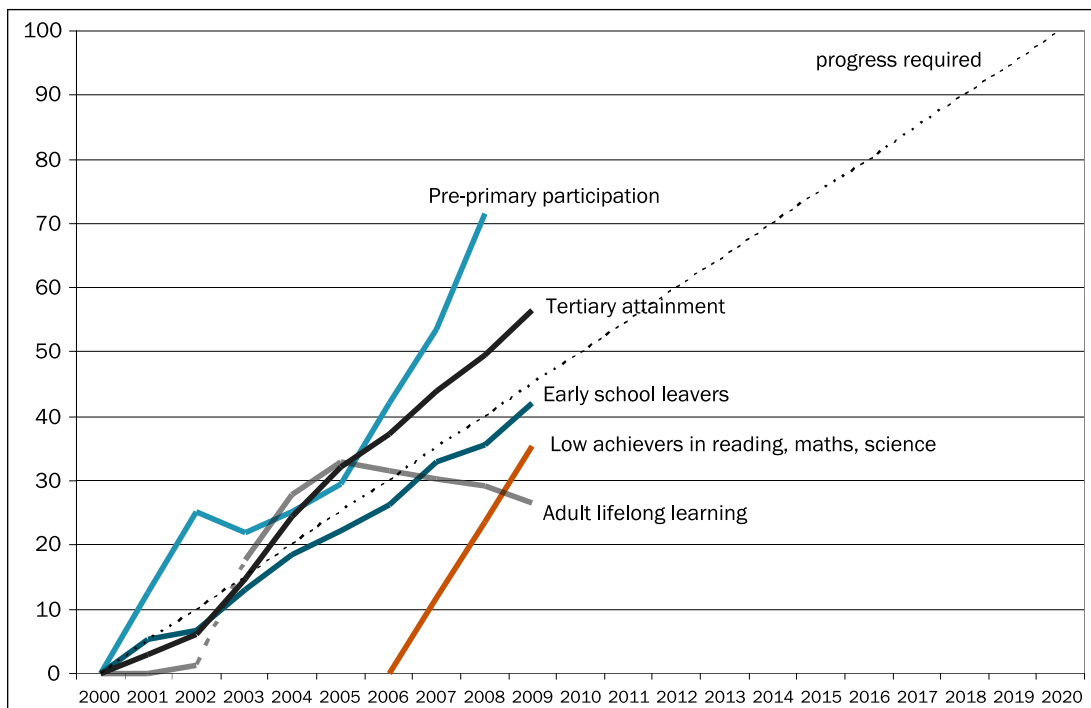
A national program for PLAR should be considered a priority by the advisory group and the relevant Council of Ministers on Learning.

Figure 1: Benchmark 2010 – Adult lifelong-learning participation

Notes: *MK: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Countries in the upper right quadrant have performance above the level of the EU benchmark (high share of adults participating in lifelong learning) and have been successful in increasing this share further in the past, while countries in the lower left quadrant have below EU benchmark performance and have not been successful in increasing this share in the past.

Source: Commission of the European Communities, *Progress Towards the Common European Objectives in Education and Training: Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*, (2011).

Figure 2: Trends toward the five benchmarks for 2020 (2000–2009)

Source: Commission of the European Communities, *Progress Towards the Common European Objectives in Education and Training: Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*, (2011).

Table 4: Country performance progress in each benchmark area, 2000–2006

	Low Performers in Reading	Early school Leavers	Upper- secondary Education	MST Graduates	Lifelong Learning
EU					
Belgium					
Bulgaria					
Czech Republic					
Denmark					
Germany					
Estonia	++				
Ireland					
Greece					
Spain					
France					
Italy					
Cyprus					
Latvia					
Lithuania	-				
Luxembourg					
Hungary					
Malta					
Netherlands					
Austria					
Poland					
Portugal					
Romania					
Slovenia	++				
Slovakia					
Finland					
Sweden					
United Kingdom	+				
Croatia	+				
Turkey					
Iceland					
Norway					

For low achievers in reading where only 2006 results were available: ++ performance above benchmark, + performance above EU average, - performance below EU average

	Above EU benchmark	Below EU benchmark
Increasing performance	Moving further ahead	Catching up
Decreasing performance	Losing momentum	Falling further behind

ABORIGINAL LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal people in Canada have long understood the role that learning plays in building healthy, thriving communities. Despite significant cultural and historical differences, Canada's First Nations, Inuit and Métis people share a vision of learning as a holistic, lifelong process.

In partnership with Aboriginal organizations, CCL developed the State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success⁷³, which represents the first comprehensive framework for assessing progress in Aboriginal learning in Canada—and in the world. The new framework incorporates elements common to learning models preferred in First nations, Métis, and Inuit societies, while ensuring consistency with indicators used elsewhere by CCL to evaluate educational progress.

The holistic framework for assessing Aboriginal learning is reflected in the summary below.

Positive Developments

- Informal learning;
- Colleges and trades; and
- Learning culture and traditions

Informal Learning

Participation in extracurricular activities

Informal learning and experiential learning—including participation in social, cultural and recreational activities—helps foster a desire to learn among Aboriginal youth while helping with the acquisition of new skills. Yet until recently, information on the state of Aboriginal people's informal learning has been limited.

New information reveals that in 2006, Aboriginal youth living off-reserve participated in extracurricular social activities at rates equal to or above Canadian youth. Almost one in three (31%) Aboriginal youth reported participating in social clubs or groups on a regular basis and 37% in art or music activities—compared to 21% and 27% of Canadian youth, respectively.^{74, 75}

In 2006, a large majority of off-reserve Aboriginal youth (70%) actively participated in sports outside of school and at least once a week—similar to the finding of 71% of Canadian youth in a similar survey.^{76, 77}

Volunteering in the community

Although research suggests that most adult learning is work-related, studies also indicate that much of adult learning occurs informally at home and in the community. Community involvement, through such activities as volunteering, contributes to social cohesion and serves to foster a strong sense of attachment to neighbourhoods and communities.

In 2006, one-third (34%) of Aboriginal youth and more than half (56%) of Aboriginal adults living off-reserve volunteered in their community on a regular basis; while 70% of First Nations adults living on a reserve volunteered within the last year.^{78, 79, 80}

College and Trades

Post-secondary completion rates

A growing proportion of Aboriginal people are completing their PSE credentials. In 2006, 41% of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 had completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma or a degree. Although this rate was lower than that of non-Aboriginal people (56%), Aboriginal people were on more equal footing when it came to rates of attainment at the college level (19% vs. 20%) and the trades (14% vs. 12%).⁸¹

Learning Culture and Traditions

Participation in cultural ceremonies

Aboriginal experiential learning, or learning by doing, is structured formally through regular community interactions such as ceremonies, sharing circles, meditation, or story telling, and daily activities. Participation in cultural ceremonies plays an important role in affirming Aboriginal people's cultural identity and knowledge of their heritage.

New information shows that more than one-quarter (28%) of all off-reserve Aboriginal children and 55% of Inuit children participated in, or attended, a cultural gathering, ceremony or activity, such as fiddling or drum-dancing.⁸²

Use of traditional skills

Learning from the land entails a significant amount of experiential learning through the use of traditional skills such as hunting, fishing or trapping. These activities represent an essential aspect of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learning.

Half (50%) of off-reserve Aboriginal adults took part in at least one of these activities in 2006. The participation rates were even higher (68%) for Aboriginal people living in rural off-reserve communities and Inuit living in northern communities (86%).⁸³

Troubling Trends

- Continuing gaps in learning outcomes between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals;
- Deficient broadband infrastructure;
- Impact of social and economic challenges; and
- Decline of Aboriginal languages.

Continuing Gaps in Learning Outcomes between Aboriginals and Non-Aboriginals

High-school completion rates

The familiar and concerning statistics of low high-school completion rates remain an important part of the picture of Aboriginal learning. In 2006, 40% of Aboriginal people aged 20 to 24 did not have a high-school diploma, compared to 13% among non-Aboriginal Canadians. The rate was even higher for First Nations living on reserve (61%) and for Inuit living in remote communities (68%).⁸⁴ These numbers are distressing given the importance of a high-school diploma in the pursuit of further education, training and employment.

Post-secondary completion rates

Despite the more positive statistics in post-secondary education (PSE), where a growing proportion of Aboriginal people are completing their credentials. The discrepancy in PSE attainment is a direct result of differences in attainment at the university level, where only 8% of Aboriginal people had completed a degree compared to 23% of non-Aboriginal Canadians.⁸⁵

The majority of Aboriginal people who participate in PSE attend either a college or trade school, rather than a university. Non-Aboriginal people in Canada are three times more likely to complete a university program than Aboriginal people.

Deficient Broadband Infrastructure

Access to broadband internet services

Increasingly, broadband internet services—including digital subscriber line (DSL), fixed wireless and cable—are becoming an essential part of the infrastructure that connects individuals, communities and organizations. It also plays a key role in cultivating lifelong learning by improving access to distance education and skills development.

Access to these services and learning opportunities are particularly important for Aboriginal people, many of whom live in small, remote communities across Canada. However, many Aboriginal people have limited broadband access. For example, First Nations people living on-reserve still rely primarily on slower dial-up internet service: according to Industry Canada only 17% of First Nations communities had access to broadband services in 2007 compared to 64% of other cities and small towns in Canada.⁸⁶

Impact of Social and Economic Challenges

Early learning in the home

The majority of researchers agree that the development of healthy reading skills begins in the home. Studies show that children's reading, language development and literacy appreciation are benefitted when parents and other family members engage their children in literacy activities.⁸⁷

Sixty percent of Aboriginal children five years old and under were read to daily by their parents or other adults in 2001—a rate comparable to that of all Canadian children of the same age (66%). However, among Aboriginal children these rates vary significantly based on Aboriginal identity.⁸⁸

Although the rates for Métis children (65%) and First Nations children living off-reserve (63%) were comparable to the general population, only 34% of First Nations children living on-reserve and 27% of Inuit children read, or were read to, on a daily basis.

Family living arrangements

Children and youth depend on the support their parents provide throughout their life for their emotional and physical well-being. One of the prime means of this support is family living arrangements which can influence many aspects of their community life, and impact their overall well-being.

Though the majority of Aboriginal children and youth (under the age of 15) lived with both parents (58%) in 2006, another 35% lived in a single-parent home—a rate more than twice that of non-Aboriginal children (17%). A further 7% of Aboriginal children, and 1% of non-Aboriginal children, lived in a house with no parent present.⁸⁹

Just over one-quarter (26%) of Inuit children and youth lived in single-parent families and another 4% lived with a grandparent or other relative. Traditional adoption practices among Inuit partially account for these rates. Inuit parents sometimes place their children with a relative to raise as their own, a tradition that has been passed down for thousands of years.⁹⁰

Slightly more Métis children (31%) lived with one parent and only 2% lived with a grandparent or another relative. Just over one-third (34%) of First Nations children living on-reserve lived in a single-parent home compared with 41% of off-reserve First Nations children. A considerable share of off-reserve First Nations children also lived with relatives other than a parent.⁹¹

Decline in Aboriginal Languages

Aboriginal language and cultural continuity are inextricably connected. Through language, Aboriginal Peoples transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another and make sense of their shared experience.^{92, 93} Research shows that language contains Aboriginal Peoples' worldview of their land and provides the "knowledge of technologies and life's rhythms of that specific place... [And is] a living, working, practical tool kit for survival in that specific region."⁹⁴

Although a majority of Aboriginal parents believe it is important for children to learn their ancestral language,^{95, 96} a smaller proportion of Aboriginal youth are speaking their Aboriginal language than ever before. In 2006, 12% of children and youth under the age of 15 reported speaking their Aboriginal language at home; a decline from 16% in 2001, or nearly 10,000 fewer speakers.

Despite the widely recognized importance of language to Aboriginal learning and Canada's overall social and cultural well-being, there has been a long-term decline in the learning and use of most Aboriginal languages.⁹⁷ A 2007 Statistics Canada report indicated that there were only a few of some 50 Aboriginal languages in Canada (including Inuktitut, Ojibway and various Cree dialects) that are expected to survive without concerted intervention.⁹⁸

Indeed, a recent national task force on Aboriginal languages in Canada concluded that the decline over the past six decades of mother tongue speakers has been dramatic; from 87% in 1951, to 21% in 2001 and 19% by 2006.⁹⁹

The Way Forward in Aboriginal Learning

CCL's methodology prioritized the transparent quantitative assessment of results, whilst recognizing and supporting measurement in Aboriginal contexts of a broader or different array of learning indicators. We have believed that this approach optimizes accountability and transparency while acknowledging the unique characteristics of Aboriginal learning.

CCL also believes that, for both Aboriginal communities and the broader society, there should be a shift of focus of policy and program development from one that reacts mainly to learning deficits—the deficiency model—to one that recognizes, builds upon and celebrates strengths. An example of this paradigm shift as applied to non-Aboriginal K–12 education is to focus on factors favouring the resilience of students (positive characteristics) in place of placing the main emphasis on “students at risk”.

Summary of CCL's Findings and Recommendations on Aboriginal Learning

The way forward recommended for Aboriginal learning therefore is to redress the troubling trends and to utilize CCLs' new holistic lifelong learning framework to:

- Develop more informed solutions that recognize the diverse needs of Aboriginal communities;
- Evaluate the success of policies and programs based on Aboriginal values and goals;
- Develop solutions that simultaneously address the social and economic conditions of Aboriginal communities that impact learning outcomes;
- Shift the current focus of policy and program development from one that reacts to learning deficits alone, to one that recognizes, builds upon and celebrates strengths; and
- Assist in challenging the negative stereotypes related to Aboriginal learning in Canada.

While the framework presents a more complete and balanced assessment of the state of Aboriginal learning in Canada—one that highlights many strengths—this does not necessarily mean that the learning conditions in all communities are acceptable. Rather, these strengths represent the kind of critical building blocks that can contribute to future improvements.

CCL hopes that Aboriginal communities, governments and researchers will use this Holistic Lifelong Learning Measurement Framework to monitor and report on the learning of Aboriginal communities.

PART 2: RESTORING A NATIONAL LEARNING AGENDA WITHOUT CCL

As CCL closes its doors, how will Canadians be provided with the authoritative, independent and detailed information on the state of learning in this country that is such a necessary driver of future educational progress? Who will carry forward the national educational agenda that will be a crucial determinant of the future opportunities and prosperity of Canadians and their communities in CCL's absence?

In order to answer this question about filling the space left by CCL's closure, we must first understand the significant gap in Canada's social fabric following the loss of CCL. We begin by a review of the reasons for which civil society demanded its creation in 2004.

Demand for an authoritative national body for lifelong learning (LLL)

In the years preceding the establishment of CCL, leaders from all walks of Canadian life —education, business, labour, government, Aboriginal organizations and non-governmental organizations of many kinds—agreed that Canada had to move beyond the rhetoric about lifelong and lifebroad learning. They wanted to see links among the various parts of our learning systems: a national roadmap for a culture of learning from early childhood right through life. They were not prepared to accept that we, as a society, should accept not to optimize learning just because education is a provincial responsibility.

People wanted to know what educational models and practices work well and which do not—in Canada and abroad—so that, in their various involvements, they could make choices fully informed by evidence.

Parents and grandparents wanted candid reports on the performance of the learning systems which exert such a powerful influence on the future of their offspring. They wanted full information, without filtering by government or leavened by jurisdictional dispute.

Employers wanted to know how to build successful training and continuous learning initiatives for employees.

Labour, community colleges, new Canadians, and others wanted to know how recognition of prior learning would allow people to progress educationally—and professionally—based on their actual competencies; and how we can develop a nationally mobile workforce.

From the standpoint of industry, we needed national perspectives, national solutions, to issues of workplace learning, so that we can actually create the conditions for innovation and productivity.

Canada is unique through the absence in this country of a central government's political accountability for education. But we could still offer ourselves adequate national capacity to observe and assess progress in all the various ways in which learning occurs.

CCL was established on April 1, 2004. It is the result of a cross-Canada consultation in 2003 following the Canadian government's announcement in the Fall of 2002, as part of the Innovation Strategy, to put in place and finance an organization dedicated to informing Canadians about learning issues and challenges.

CCL mission, mandate and methods

CCL has existed to assemble and disseminate research and knowledge about all key aspects of learning in Canada (see *Appendix 1*). This task is fundamental to our future because education and learning are the very foundation of a civil, democratic and prosperous society. Learning also lies at the heart of self-actualization, well-being and social cohesion. Successful societies of the future are those which are building TODAY the skills, attitudes and knowledge of self and of the world—not just among the young but also the very young, and the working population, and among those who have already made a lifetime working contribution to our society.

Through CCL, Canadians were offered an opportunity to set in place a vision, a mission and a model for continuous learning which can unite Canadians in a common purpose. It was a national initiative which we have much needed. Without a sustained pan-Canadian approach, many learners will not reach their objectives—the learning progress of some depends largely on the progress of all. This country requires a national learning framework in order for its regions, provinces and territories to succeed. Without a national framework, we will miss the east-west learning railroad which should link Canadians of all regions, generations and languages.

On the inception of CCL, many felt the acute sense of possibility that it anticipated: the opportunity of taking the transformative concept of a pan-Canadian learning architecture and giving it practical life through a unique model—one which would be quintessentially Canadian.

The vision of CCL was to link Canadians from all regions in sharing learning experiences and promoting the enhancement of learning as a core value of a distinctive Canadian society. Hence, the transformative image of a pan-Canadian architecture or roadmap which would entrench and maintain our economic stability and social cohesion.

From this vision emerged a mission that suffused CCL with enduring purpose at two levels: giving essential support to learners in their quest for continuous learning; and emphasizing the nation-building character of such an enterprise. CCL has been a catalyst, a facilitator and a connector.

A model of inclusion, collaboration and partnership was taken forward by CCL: only through partnership with learning organizations, community groups, other NGOs, governments and researchers could we establish a pan-Canadian learning architecture; or a garment that binds us all, a roadmap that connects us.

To build such a model, we needed to take advantage of existing national networks of expertise; but also of regional leadership and aspirations, together with the cumulative experience of learners and their groupings. We did not want islands of academic excellence in seas of community indifference.

The view that has driven CCL on is the premise that this is a country in which it is worth knowing our progress and outcomes on a national basis. Monitoring only locally or provincially will throw up solutions which are local and regional—and often none at all. Education issues just stubbornly refuse to confine themselves within provincial borders. Pan-Canadian analysis will direct us towards national approaches, where appropriate, that transcend provincial or even national borders—solutions that would enhance our sense of unity, our sense of purpose.

Asking questions is the basis of learning—and at the Canadian Council on Learning we ask a lot of questions. Like what works and what doesn't work in improving adult literacy? What are the keys to early childhood learning? How can we use education to improve the health of Canadians?

Our job is to provide Canadians with the most current information about effective approaches to learning for learners, educators, employers and policy-makers.

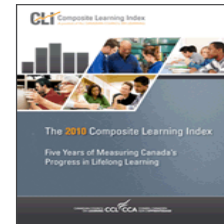
Our activities span the entire spectrum of lifelong learning through all stages of life (child, youth and adult), in many settings (home, classroom, community and workplace), and in different forms, from structured learning to self-directed learning and learning by doing. Our scope is also inclusive. We recognize the diverse cultures and circumstances of Canada's population, and the variety of learning settings and situations.

www.ccl-cca.ca

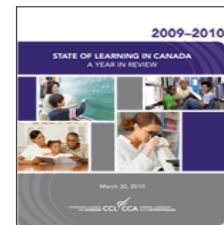
CCL has believed that measuring progress is the foundation for better performance. We therefore developed many sets of indicators and benchmarks by which we could judge ourselves and our progress in all our selected areas of learning. (*Composite Learning Index, Reading the Future: Planning to meet Canada's future literacy needs, Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding, Prose literacy map, Health literacy map, Document literacy map, Numeracy map, Data Warehouse*)

Key CCL Reports

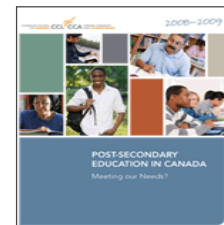
Composite Learning Index – The *Composite Learning Index* (CLI) is the first index of its kind in the world, measuring Canada's progress in lifelong learning. An annual composite indicator measuring the state of lifelong learning in over 5,000 communities in Canada.



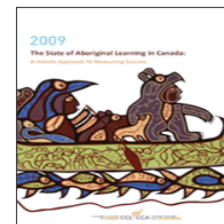
The State of Learning in Canada – Published annually, *The State of Learning* is a comprehensive synthesis of data and research on key aspects of learning in Canada, including early childhood learning; learning in school; learning in the post-secondary years; adult learning and Aboriginal learning. Relevant data indicators are used as measures of Canada's progress in learning.



State of Post-secondary Education in Canada – Published annually, the *State of Post-secondary Education in Canada* is a comprehensive synthesis of data and research, reporting on the progress of the PSE sector based upon eight goals and objectives. Each chapter introduces and defines a particular PSE goal, and presents data indicators on the topic.



The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success – Until now, a comprehensive framework for measuring Aboriginal learning has been unavailable in Canada, or, in fact, most of the world. *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* represents the first application of such a framework and marks an innovative approach to measuring Aboriginal learning in Canada.



CCL recognized also that the tale of learning progress is not told by imprisoning ourselves behind statistical bars: we found ways to describe the state of learning in some fields qualitatively and narratively—empirically grounded ways that evoke individual stories and community experience. (*State of Learning in Canada, Post-secondary Education in Canada, The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success, State of Adult Learning and Workplace Training, State of E-Learning in Canada, State of Learning in Canada: Early Childhood Learning*)

We found also that knowledge and change go hand in hand only if we also build enabling mechanisms and tools for knowledge production to come to fruition and make a difference. We need evidence-based practice; but also practice-based evidence about things we need to know. (*Lessons in Learning, The Journal of Applied Research on Learning, Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, State-of-the-Field Reviews*)

The work of CCL and its successor organizations is about public policy in that vast field we call learning. This carries importance well beyond policy-makers and researchers. Public policy is for the public: we needed to address issues in ways people can understand and use; to make a difference to people in communities; to put research to use in daily practice.

In this sense, CCL has been the expression of deeply felt aspirations for a national Canadian learning paradigm. The question, at inception of CCL, was asked: if we could envision learning in our society anew and construct it as we would wish, what would it look like? Put another way: we, like all societies, struggle within our particular context of financial limitations, of jurisdictional rivalries, competing interests, of ways of doing things. But, if we had the capacity to set that all aside and create a learning society in Canada, what characteristics would it have? What would it look like? How would we get there?

Restoring a national learning agenda without CCL implies recreating somehow: the ability to engender a national learning vision, framework and platform; the capacity to monitor and report transparently and publicly on Canadian learning outcomes at all stages of life; the setting of long- and short-term learning goals for Canada; the encouragement and dissemination of applied research on learning issues fundamental to all Canadians; the coherent linking of government and non-government contributors in support of recognized learning objectives; and the provision to Canadians of tools that can facilitate their learning.

We can enumerate at least some of the elements that will be required to alleviate the effects of the loss of Canada's unique national body advancing lifelong learning.

CCL has a proud record of accomplishment

Our Composite Learning Index, the first of its kind anywhere in the world, measures learning conditions, not only in the country as a whole, but in almost 5,000 individual communities. It shows that when you make learning conditions better, you inevitably make economic and social standards better. Europeans have told us they have been “inspired” by the Index, and are now working to produce a version for themselves.

Our annual report on the state of learning expands the boundaries of what learning is. It shows that it is not and should not be confined to formal schooling, and that it does not and should not ever end.

Our annual report on post-secondary education identifies the most important challenges facing Canada's universities and colleges. It also proposes creative ways to confront those challenges.

Our report on the future of adult literacy shattered the country's complacency by projecting that the number of insufficiently literate adults will not diminish, but will grow over the next 20 years.

Our partnership with Aboriginal organizations across Canada has developed three Aboriginal learning models, and created groundbreaking methods to assess learning among all indigenous people.

www.ccl-cca.ca

Replacing CCL

1) A successor organization

Because Canada's educational structures are the most fragmented in the world, carrying severely adverse implications for Canadian learners, CCL occupied an essential niche between governments and civil society. For this reason, the Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development hailed CCL as a model for member states. In this sense, since the function of CCL is indispensable to significant Canadian educational success, publics should demand the establishment of a successor organization.

In comparison to CCL, such an organization might have different priorities, a more shared mode of financing, different structures and management. However, building on the findings and vision of CCL, it would continue to construct a national learning architecture.

2) Canadians better informed about educational structures

Canadians are generally ill informed about how education and learning functions are structured and administered in their country. Most are unaware of its extreme fragmentation, and of the dysfunctional nature of federal-provincial relations in this field—and of the enormous disparity between Canada's national educational administration and leadership and that of other countries.

Many Canadians wrongly assume that the central government has (as is the case in other countries) a significant role in policy and organization of learning. They are unaware of the great educational and training strides being achieved in other lands—and even in transnational entities like the EU—through inter-jurisdictional co-operation and harmonization.*

A prerequisite for public demand for improvement of national learning policy appears to be a better understanding of how the system currently functions.

* As an example, the following sidebar provides an example of public accountability from member states of the EU.

3) Leadership from ministers of Education

In most countries, political leadership for education and learning is assured by ministers of Education, often working with other ministers responsible for innovation, economic development and other portfolios. Other federal countries, with provinces, states or regional governments similar to Canada's, have both national and regional ministers for Education. Examples of these are Australia, India, the U.S., Germany and South Africa.*

Public Accountability and EU Member States

- The EU transparently rates its performance in designated areas of learning and training for specific periods of time.
- Each country is rated for that same period of time, in comparison to standards set by other member countries.
- Specific goals for learning performance are agreed and made public for the EU and its member states for specific, relatively short time-frames.
- EU member states do not hide behind their inherent and obvious jurisdictional authority over Education to deny their responsibility to set goals, to publish results, and to coordinate with other member states.
- There is no reason for which, under present constitutional arrangements, Canadian jurisdictions could not establish any benchmarks and goals, together with transparent reporting of results, that they would select.

Canada is unique in lacking any such coordinating mechanism. The Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) has constituted, since 1967, a forum for discussion among provincial and territorial ministers of Education and their staffs. However, three glaring characteristics of CMEC prevent it from national leadership and effectiveness as a coordinating body:

- CMEC's principal mission is to protect against federal intrusion, actual or perceived, into the broad sphere of education. It acts as counterweight against precisely the kind of intergovernmental co-operation and cohesion that is required for successful educational development;

- CMEC works on the basis of consensus among its 17–18 member ministers, making it virtually impossible to develop any broad national agenda, program or setting of measureable objectives; and
- Ministers of Education usually remain in their portfolios for insufficient periods of time for them to fully grasp why and how national frameworks are crucial for provincial success. In addition, because their constituents are unaware of these same connections, ministers feel little public pressure to assume a share of responsibility for education in Canada as a whole.

For these and many other reasons there exists an enormous vacuum at the centre of national education leadership—instead of the robust mechanisms required of a knowledge society. The federal government is excluded from a meaningful role whilst provincial ministers are impeded by their very own pan-Canadian body and rules from exercising serious national leadership.

During its short tenure, CCL filled partially the gap by providing information and analysis on the state of learning in Canada and on regional and pan-Canadian learning conditions and issues. But it considered policy and programming in education and learning to be the responsibility of governments, educational institutions, communities and industry.

We hope that CCL's contribution has furthered the broader understanding, leading to compulsion on governments to act collectively in the public interest.

4) Leadership from networks, communities and foundations

CCL has witnessed the dearth of support for learning networks in Canada; and has attempted to support the emergence and maintenance of networks in the vital domains of adult and workplace learning, of early-childhood learning, of Aboriginal learning, and of health and learning.

* In PSE, for example, Table 5 illustrates eloquently the difference between Canada's incoherence and the mechanisms available in other federal states to provide coordination.

Table 5: International overview of PSE processes and system-wide structures

	Major Review in Last 5 Years	System -wide Goals and Objectives	Funding Aligned with National Priorities	Quality Assurance Agency (ies) in Place	Ongoing Mechanism for Federal /State Planning	Federal Ministry of Education
Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
EU	Yes	Yes	N/A	Under development		
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Process under development	Yes	Yes
U.S.	Yes	Under review	Limited federal money targeted	Yes	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Federal Office of Education
U.K.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
N.Z.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
Canada	No	No	No	No	No The provinces and territories meet as the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the federal/provincial/territorial Forum of Labour Market Ministers meet regularly to share information	No Federal Human Resources Ministry funds labour-market programs, research, literacy and other initiatives related to PSE

*Available material not detailed enough to make conclusions at this time.

The difficulties encountered by potential networkers mirror the extreme fragmentation at political levels in the educational arena. Thus, for example, even long-established and respected national bodies like the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) or the Canadian Education Association dispose of only minimal resources for national work: the preponderance of work reflects the provincialist concerns of regional government. Other national groupings, such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, are mandated principally to advance through advocacy the perceived interests of member institutions.

In the absence of CCL, there will need to occur a coalescing of interest and action across provincial and territorial borders, both through existing organizations and the creation of new networks.

Aspiration for increasingly prominent voices in national learning could emerge from various types of Canadian institutions. Examples of potential contributions from these groups will be found in subsequent sections.

a) *Municipalities*

The work of researchers such as Richard Florida, focusing on the productive capacity of innovative sub-regions has emphasized the enhanced role of municipalities and communities as drivers of their own potential for advancing learning and innovation. The invention by CCL of the Composite Learning Index (CLI) has strengthened the ability of communities to observe and act locally.¹⁰⁰ (www.cli-ica.ca)

Some Canadian municipalities have utilized the CLI as a means of assessing their local learning conditions and as a catalyst for improving these by collaborative and concerted effort. Following the adaptation of the CLI in Europe as the European Lifelong Learning Indicators (ELLI), similar potential for regional action is in evidence on that continent.¹⁰¹ (www.elli.org)

As national Canadian institutions continue to deteriorate in the face of ongoing fragmentation of Canadian social and political life, cities must do more to secure the well-being of their inhabitants, including in the domain of learning.

b) Foundations

With a few notable exceptions, foundations in Canada have not enjoyed the resources or breadth of their counterparts in the U.S. or Europe. However, as their resources grow, in both community and private foundations, their activism in the learning field should be expected to heighten proportionally. In some countries in Europe, foundations are powerful voices representing the increasing demand that civil society be allowed to influence positively educational processes and outcomes.

We can hope for a similar trend in Canada.

c) Industry

No group was more strident than business and labour in the demand for an entity like CCL, whose mandate went to the heart of their concern for skills development, training and productivity. CCL established private-sector roundtables in five Canadian regions as encouragement to industry to exercise leadership in the broad learning field.

We believed that the contributions of the private sector should not be limited to provision of capital for university infrastructure, research and scholarships. Working together across industries and along the supply chain, there is much that business and labour can accomplish in the public learning interest. Business groups in particular must take up this challenge.

d) Professional and institutional associations

Although groups like the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) and the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) were established primarily to represent the specific interests of their membership, they have the potential to exercise a powerfully positive influence for national strategies in education. (Examples of these will be given in subsequent sections). They must strengthen their commitment, in the broader public interest, to contribute to educational coherence in their respective areas of expertise.

e) CMEC and the Forum of Labour-market Ministers (FLMM)

We have seen that CMEC's history is largely that of a body restraining national coordination and coherence, acting often contrary to the public interest. FLMM, more promising in that it includes both provincial and federal ministers, has generally been a lame duck, with little support from member governments, and very little to show for its limited efforts.

History, however, does not determine the future. Pressed by Canadians to act cohesively in the national interest, CMEC, FLMM and their ministers and staff will do so. They must be encouraged to emulate the more-successful co-operative models, such as that in Australia, which aim for high levels of achievement through learning systems more harmonized and integrated across state borders.

f) Academic contributions

All of CCL's information, reporting and analysis has been and will remain in the public domain, accessible to researchers and activists at all Canadian universities, colleges and polytechnics.

Participants in these institutions can appropriate CCL data, analysis, methods and conclusions. They may carry the analysis further as they wish, using it to reach conclusions and recommendations that can inform future public policy.

g) Aboriginal organizations

In the area of Aboriginal learning, CCL has particular hope for leadership. The holistic Aboriginal learning models and assessment tools developed through CCL have been broadly accepted by First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

Using the knowledge and relationships generated by CCL through the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, leaders can advance national collaboration. Perhaps new networks will also arise from the ashes of the other national knowledge centres that CCL established in support of the five weakest links in Canadian learning.

h) Canadians acting on the evidence

Finally, individual Canadians and their families may use the cumulative stock of CCL findings, conclusions and recommendations, as available on its website even after CCL's closure:

- To inform their own decisions and learning pathways;
- To participate in the various networks that might improve learning;
- To demand of their elected provincial and federal representatives a series of measurable national goals for each stage of learning*, together with a national framework affording the coordination, inter-provincial harmonization and coherence necessary for the achievement of these objectives; and
- To demand a transparent, regular means of public monitoring and accountability for national results.

If this demand is met, Canadians will have established the conditions for future success in learning. If we fail, collective prosperity and well-being, and individual opportunity will diminish. Canada will continue to slip further down the international learning curve.

In the next section of this legacy statement, we describe the intergovernmental mechanisms that are required to ensure future learning success in Canada. We also recommend ways by which educators, learners, experts and civil society can link to those mechanisms in support of genuine national learning objectives.

* See further sections of this document for examples.

PART 3: INTERGOVERNMENTAL CO-OPERATION

What mechanisms are required to ensure that all levels of government co-operate fully—as they now fail to do—in the interests of the learning futures of Canadians of all ages?

Let us aspire. Let us constantly be aware of the possible. We will want to be challenged on the assumptions that underpin our structures and venerable practices, to be sure that they do correspond to what is best for learning; and not simply continue to conform to a traditional or preconceived model.

Implicit in the preceding review of Canadian performance in each phase of learning, and of CCL's guidance on the way forward for each, are the steps that must be taken through intergovernmental co-operation to impart coherence and cohesion to Canadian learning.

We begin by stating basic facts and principles on co-operation and harmonization. Appreciation of these criteria by participating governments may ease fears of aggressive intrusion by other levels of government.

- 1) National approaches do not constitute an intrinsic good. Their value extends insofar as pan-Canadian frameworks help to advance individual learning opportunities and outcomes; and facilitate attainment by jurisdictions and communities of their stated objectives. And they very often do.
- 2) Countries that articulate no learning goals are like schools with no stated learning objectives. Countries that are unable to declare goals publicly and report their achievement transparently resemble schools with no system of reporting student progress.
- 3) Countries and transnational political entities (like the EU) that set measurable goals are much more likely to progress rapidly in learning than those that do not.

They are setting the conditions for international competitive success in lifelong learning. Conversely, countries that do not are unlikely to remain competitive.

- 4) Canadian federal–provincial relations in education and learning are profoundly dysfunctional. While this fact is sometimes complacently disguised in public discourse as a virtue, it is an enormous handicap to the learning futures of all Canadian communities and regions.
- 5) The BNA, Canada's basic constitutional arrangement, does not preclude intense federal involvement in matters of education and learning.
- 6) No constitutional change in matters relating to education and learning are necessary to the establishment of the national frameworks essential for the attainment of Canadian goals throughout the learning cycle.
- 7) The establishment and achievement of Canadian learning objectives at all stages requires intense, continuous and targeted collaboration between federal and provincial levels. Models for such cohesive action, while always imperfect, can be observed in many lands—from Australia to India, South Africa and the EU.

Leadership in such a pragmatic structure does not inherently belong to any level of government. Just as the responsibility for learning does not reside in a particular territory. It is shared among governments, individuals, families and communities. This fact must translate into a dynamic and flexible intergovernmental relationship.
- 8) National learning policies and strategies are not successfully developed by governments in isolation. Intergovernmental bodies must find appropriate and continuing mechanisms for intense involvement of groups representing learners, educational and economic interests and institutions and NGOs.

- 9) Consensus among all jurisdictions must not become a requirement for action. Ways must be found to construct pan-Canadian platforms asymmetrically—that do not constrain all; and that cannot be blocked by one or two governments.

Basic mechanisms required for Canada

1) A national (intergovernmental) Council of Ministers on Learning

A federal–provincial body providing national leadership in learning would be analogous to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs in Australia, or to the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the EU. (see *Diagram 1.*)

Through this organization, national learning objectives for each phase of learning would be articulated publicly, both for the short and the long run. And this body would be accountable for results.

The Council would also be responsible for ensuring that resources match relevant objectives; that non-governmental groups be intensely implicated in the setting of goals; and that an autonomous body be mandated to report outcomes regularly to the public.

The Council would possess no legislative authority and would not administer educational programs and institutions at P/T level. It would have and fully use spending power and authority to initiate policy and administer new national programs in specific support of clearly delineated pan-Canadian learning goals.

This model is preferred in the Canadian socio-historical context to the creation of a federal education ministry, as in Germany, India or the U.S. It is also preferred to the Swiss model of constitutional change through referenda in each of the 26 cantons (jurisdictions), which is resulting in significant transfer of authority to national bodies for learning and training in that country. It is interesting to observe that the rationale for this country—far wealthier and innovative than Canada—is its fear of falling behind competitor countries in innovation and productivity by failing to harmonize across its 26 jurisdictions.

Under the proposed model, CMEC may choose to continue as a P/T body.

Federal representation through a single designated minister would offer the additional benefit of inciting improved cross-departmental communication and collaboration among the many central government departments and agencies with an interest in the broad learning field.

2) Functioning of the Council of Ministers on Learning

The new Council of Ministers on Learning would not be restricted by disabling rules demanding consensus.

The Council would be a platform for national strategic planning. It would require a two-thirds majority of its members to proceed with policies and programs (the federal government representing one member only). The Council would appropriate resources from all sources, without restrictions. Jurisdictions not participating (“opting out” of a process or program) would not be compensated with a share of funding, but would be admitted as observers if they wished.

The history of intergovernmental relations in education indicates that initial resistance by some would abate over time, as national strategies and programs demonstrate success and gather public support. Over time, this consortium model will become increasingly attractive to non-participants. It is therefore imperative in the early stages that the majority not allow itself to be intimidated by strident criticism by objecting jurisdictions. Bluster should be anticipated and politely ignored.

3) A national monitoring body

Under the aegis of the Council of Ministers on Learning, the national monitoring body would independently assess national progress on goals articulated by the Council and report them publicly. This function would resemble the monitoring and reporting function formerly resident at CCL, with the significant advantage that the new body would benefit from official intergovernmental remit.

A useful model is found in Switzerland. In the wake of the inter-cantonal harmonization of education (see *Appendix 2: Accord intercantonal sur l’harmonisation de la scolarité obligatoire [concordat Harnos]*) and training mandated by recent referenda, the Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education has been mandated to report results. Its reports are well received and influential with both governments and civil society.

In the health domain in Canada, the Canadian Institutes for Health Information have a similar function.

There should exist several smaller monitoring bodies, acting either separately or under the umbrella of the overall national monitoring group. Each stage of learning would possess this vital instrument. For example, as outlined in the section on PSE, there would be a cluster for assessing progress in PSE, and another for the evolution of ECEL.

4) Domain-specific advisory groups

Under the auspices of the Council of Ministers on Learning would operate a number of advisory bodies. These advisory groups would be specific to each phase of learning. They would be composite groups, including both government representatives and experts and spokespersons from interested national organizations.

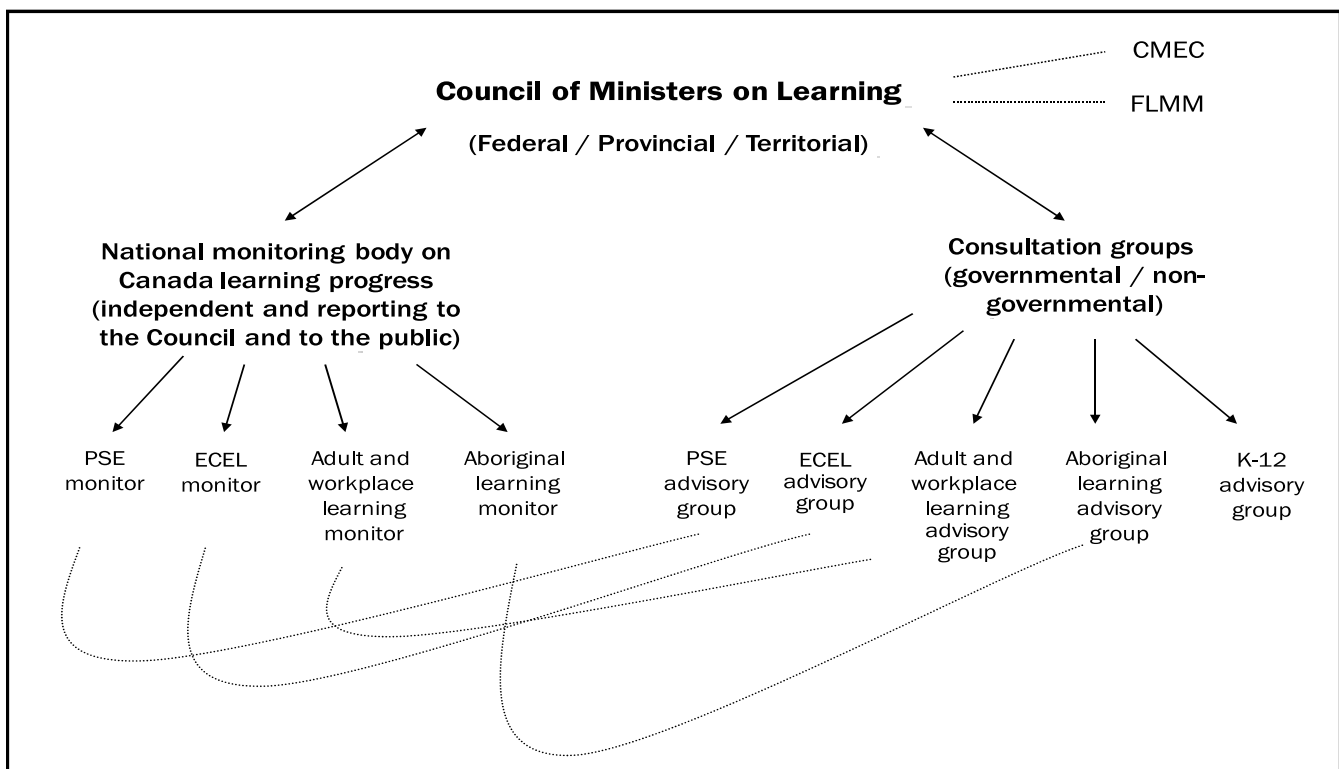
These advisory groups would relate to their counterpart monitoring cluster, so that the connection is made between information gathering, analysis and policy needs.

Like the monitoring bodies, advisory groups would not be provisional or temporary. They would act as continuing fora for deliberation and advice on essential issues for each phase of learning. Their principal tasks would be:

- Defining short- and long-term priorities and goals for their specific learning sector;
- Outlining the information, data sets and analysis required to assess progress;
- Monitor international developments in their sector, advising on approaches that merit consideration by Canada;
- Advise on national approaches and programs consistent with long- and short-term goals; and
- Organize conferences and other opportunities for interested groups and individuals to comment and to participate in the process.

Priority areas for the establishment of standing advisory bodies would be: post-secondary education, early childhood development and learning, national forum for adult education, training for the workplace, Aboriginal learning, measuring and mapping learning.

Diagram 1: Required intergovernmental mechanisms for improving learning in Canada



PART 4: WORKING TOGETHER

How can Canadian publics, institutions, industry and governments work together to reverse present regressive trends and create conditions for future success?

The first three sections of this legacy document have set out means by which non-governmental organizations of many kinds can assume their share of responsibility and leadership for our collective learning futures.

We freely acknowledge that the challenge for Canada, given the history and politics of education in the country, is not small. As Shakespeare declared: “If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men’s cottages princes’ palaces”. Even if it is clear that Canada needs to move quickly to remedy its learning deficits, will we have the will to do so?

Yet, Canadians have indicated through CCL surveys of attitudes toward learning that we believe it to be the single most influential factor determining individual and collective success.

As it closes its doors, CCL hopes that Canadians will take up the challenge.

APPENDIX 1

TOWARD A PAN-CANADIAN FRAMEWORK FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Draft 5
Aug. 4, 2008

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Part I: Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to advance the analysis contained in the Canadian Council on Learning's 2006 and 2007 reports on post-secondary education (PSE) in Canada. The paper explores concrete options for the development of a pan-Canadian approach to protect Canada's comparative advantage in PSE. For many years, Canada has had one of the highest levels of post-secondary educational attainment in the world, with high rankings in several PSE indicators when compared with international jurisdictions. Some of these rankings have begun to slip in recent years as other countries are beginning to see results from significant investment in education.

Part I of this paper presents background on CCL's 2006 and 2007 reports on post-secondary education and summarizes the main conclusions from those reports. The background section also reviews the recently released OECD review, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, focusing on suggestions regarding the development of a national framework for higher education derived from examination of PSE development in 24 countries.

Part II then reviews a range of potential approaches that Canada could adopt to promote pan-Canadian action in PSE. These options address the question of "How" Canada could move toward implementing relevant OECD recommendations that are based on lessons learned from the experiences of other countries. Leaving aside the "How" question, Part III identifies some priority PSE issues where a pan-Canadian approach is necessary to make significant progress. Part IV follows with the recommendation that a logical starting point for action is to address information and analysis requirements for the PSE sector. A summary is presented in Part V.

The intent of this paper is to encourage a dialogue on three questions:

- How can Canada move to defining a pan-Canadian agenda for PSE?
- What are the priority issues that would benefit from pan-Canadian action?
- What is the logical starting point for action?

Background

Post-secondary education* (PSE) is inextricably linked to the standard of living and to the quality of life for individuals and society as a whole. Research shows that PSE significantly affects Canada's labour market, productivity, level of innovation, economic competitiveness, as well as societal cohesion and equity. Consequently, PSE has become an important item on the policy agenda, both in Canada and in many international jurisdictions.

In its 2006 report, *Canadian Post-secondary Education: A Positive Record—An Uncertain Future*, CCL compiled and analyzed available information related to Canada's performance in PSE. The 2006 report tracked Canada's performance over time and in the context of international comparisons wherever possible. The report concluded Canada risked undermining its enviable achievements in PSE through complacency in the face of emerging fierce international competition in PSE. The report asserted that the PSE sector, as it is now organized and delivered across the country, is missing opportunities that would protect and increase Canada's accomplishments in PSE.

CCL, recognizing PSE as one of the most-critical factors determining the standard of living and quality of life in all parts of the world, called for a national dialogue on PSE. The report concluded that the traditional provincially focused approach to PSE in Canada should be complemented by a national framework containing three principal elements:

- Articulation of a set of explicit, well-defined goals and objectives for PSE at the national level;
- Development of a clear set of indicators and measures to enable continuous assessment of performance and progress made toward those goals and objectives at the national level; and
- Establishment of mechanisms at the national level that accomplish the first two elements.

* The term 'post-secondary education' is used by many countries to describe different aspects of education and training available after high-school or secondary-school completion. In this report, the term includes university and college education (including CEGEP in Quebec) and apprenticeship training.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses the term 'tertiary education', with a distinction between Tertiary-type A programs (which have a minimum cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary level) of three years' full-time equivalent) and Tertiary-type B programs (which have a minimum duration of two years full-time equivalent and focus on practical, technical or occupational skills for direct entry into the labour market).

The second CCL report, published in December 2007, was entitled *Post-secondary Education in Canada: Strategies for Success*. The 2007 report built on the first report, including suggested goals and objectives for PSE induced from various provincial and national sources. The second report contained updated data aligned with those suggested goals and objectives. It also proposed specific benchmarks for measuring PSE performance and progress in key areas.

In response to the glaring information gaps and inadequacies identified in the 2006 report, the 2007 report laid out a comprehensive pan-Canadian data and indicator strategy for PSE. It discussed in detail the types of information required to assess performance for PSE in Canada.

The 2007 report also provided an analysis of the rationale for pan-Canadian work on specific PSE issues. The report argued that a pan-Canadian approach would be required in particular areas:

- For issues that cannot practically or effectively be dealt with solely on a province-by-province level; or
- In instances where the programs and policies of the individual provincial and territorial jurisdictions would benefit through the added value made possible through a pan-Canadian effort.

These criteria helped identify the need to address pan-Canadian aspects for the following issues: portability of credits and credentials, quality assurance, accreditation and learner mobility. Questions of efficiency, economies of scale, effectiveness and accountability in PSE would also appear to potentially benefit from a pan-Canadian approach. However, the many ways in which policies and programs at the provincial, territorial and federal levels interact and mutually affect one another is only dimly understood, primarily because of two factors: lack of pan-Canadian mechanisms bringing together all the responsible actors and lack of comparable information across provincial/territorial jurisdictions.

Recognizing the increasing pressure that globalization of economies and labour markets places on post-secondary education, the OECD launched a major review, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, of 24 jurisdictions to examine how the organization, management and delivery of tertiary education can help countries achieve their economic and social objectives. Key questions included the economic and social objectives of tertiary education; sustainability, structures, links and mechanisms to ensure quality; mobilizing adequate funding resources; and national policies and mechanisms to ensure effective governance.

In April 2008, the OECD released its *Overview Report on the Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society Project*. It outlined 26 main policy directions, characterized as potentially useful ideas and lessons from the experience of countries searching for better ways to govern their tertiary education systems. Even though Canada did not participate in the OECD review, several of those policy directions are particularly relevant to the Canadian context. They include suggestions for the development of a national framework for tertiary education, many of them consistent with CCL's recommendations to develop pan-Canadian goals and objectives:

- Develop a coherent strategic vision for tertiary education;
- Establish sound instruments for steering tertiary education;
- Ensure the coherence of the tertiary education system where there is extensive diversification;
- Strengthen the ability of institutions to align with the national tertiary education strategy;
- Design a quality-assurance framework consistent with the goals of tertiary education;
- Assess the extent and origin of equity issues and make policy interventions to promote equity at much earlier stages;
- Improve data and analysis about graduate labour-market outcomes;
- Develop a national strategy and comprehensive policy framework for internationalization;
- Take advantage of international complementarities; and
- Create conditions for the successful implementation of reforms.

Table 5: Main challenges in tertiary education

Domain	Main challenges
Steering tertiary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating clearly the nation's expectations of the tertiary education system • Aligning priorities of individual institutions with the nation's economic and social goals • Creating coherent systems of tertiary education • Finding the proper balance between governmental steering and institutional autonomy • Developing institutional governance arrangements to respond to external expectations
Funding tertiary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of tertiary education • Devising a funding strategy consistent with the goals of the tertiary education system • Using public funds efficiently
Quality of tertiary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing quality assurance mechanisms for accountability and improvement • Generating a culture of quality and transparency • Adapting quality assurance to diversity of offerings
Equity in tertiary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring equality of opportunities • Devising cost-sharing arrangements which do not harm equity of access • Improving the participation of the least represented groups
The role of tertiary education in research and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering research excellence and its relevance • Building links with other research organizations, the private sector and industry • Improving the ability of tertiary education to disseminate the knowledge it creates
The academic career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring an adequate supply of academics • Increasing flexibility in the management of human resources • Helping academics to cope with the new demands
Links with the labour market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including labour-market perspectives and actors in tertiary education policy • Ensuring the responsiveness of institutions to graduate labour-market outcomes • Providing study opportunities for flexible, work-oriented study
Internationalisation of tertiary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing a comprehensive internationalisation strategy in accordance with the country's needs • Ensuring quality across borders • Enhancing the international comparability of tertiary education

Source: Paulo Santiago, Karine Tremblay, Ester Basri and Elena Arnal, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society Volume 1. Special Features: Governance, Funding, Quality* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008).

The OECD project is designed to draw attention to effective policy initiatives in countries that participated in the project and to suggest a comprehensive framework to guide post-secondary education policy development. An extract from the summary report illustrates the main policy challenges.¹⁰²

There is no doubt that individual Canadian provinces and territories address a number of these perspectives into their PSE strategies. A glaring gap in Canada, however, is failure to identify pan-Canadian goals, objectives, measures and benchmarks. As well, Canada has not made pan-Canadian progress on key issues such as quality assurance, enhanced credit transfer and credential recognition. These are areas where a pan-Canadian approach would add value, protect Canada's international reputation in PSE, and enhance mobility of students and labour-market participants. This inaction puts Canada at risk of missing opportunities to build on its track record of accomplishment and of falling behind other competitor nations in the quest for continuing progress for citizens.

Part II: How can Canada move to defining a pan-Canadian agenda for PSE?

The 2007 CCL report drew a distinction between traditional top-down, policy-oriented government-driven “intergovernmental relations” (IGR) approaches and more pragmatic, “bottom-up”, problem-solving sector-based “intergovernmental management” (IGM) approaches. Discussions and further analysis conducted since that report resulted in identification of three distinct—but not unrelated—avenues or approaches that could be taken to achieving progress on the issues identified as in need of pan-Canadian initiatives.

These three approaches are based on the lead ‘actor’ or source of initiatives—the sector itself, the provinces or the federal government:

- **PSE Sector-initiated** – led by PSE institutions, organizations or agencies at the regional or pan-Canadian level;

- **Provincially initiated** – led by provincial/territorial government authorities, at the regional or pan-Canadian level, and through such bodies as the Council of the Federation (COF) or the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC); and
- **Federally initiated** – led by federal departments or agencies, through policy, legislation or regulation, program or tax expenditures, and either acting alone or in concert with provincial–territorial or institutional partners.

Although each option is initiated by a key partner, success on any specific issue almost certainly requires involvement of most, if not all, the key partners. There are many components to the PSE sector in Canada, including all orders of government, intergovernmental and regional governmental organizations; sectoral institutions and organizations at the local, regional and national levels; business, industry and labour; and other groups of partners and stakeholders. Each has a stake in current and potential activities. The issue is how to move forward in a meaningful way so that all partners are included in an appropriate manner.

Each of these three approaches is explored in some detail below. The review of each approach includes:

1. Identification of potential options for action;
2. Overview of current related activities; and
3. Analysis of the factors that will impact the likely outcome.

A. Potential PSE sector-initiated approaches

Two approaches the PSE sector could adopt to pursue a pan-Canadian agenda are outlined below:

A coalition – A coalition or summit alliance (of individuals and/or groups in the PSE community and stakeholders from business, labour and industry) could coalesce around PSE priorities linked to Canada's economic and social goals. One 'kick-start' to this option could be a 2–3 day conference or meeting to develop a planning cycle and workplan. The agenda would be driven by the identification of specific issues and information would be used by the group to explore and define the issues. Consultations with relevant stakeholders and identification of trends would be an important part of this option.

Identification of specific issues for action – A more focused option might be to identify one or more specific issues related to pan-Canadian goals and objectives and move forward by identifying best practices (domestic and international for each issue). Working groups for each issue could develop plans for each issue. Although this type of activity could be part of the first option listed above, it does not necessarily have to flow from a pan-Canadian forum.

There are currently several initiatives underway in the sector that could be used as a basis for some of these working groups, including:

Access initiative – The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges co-hosted a conference and summit in April 2008 on issues of improving access for traditionally under-represented groups. The international conference, held in Toronto, brought together experts and practitioners from North America and Europe to exchange information and ideas. The post-conference summit, focused on Canadian issues, resulted in the determination to work within the PSE sector to build and sustain momentum on access issues, and to build a pan-Canadian perspective and mechanisms to maximize chances of meaningful progress.

Credit transfer initiative – The Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT) is an organization launched at the initiative of provincially-based specialist agencies in B.C. and Alberta responsible for credit transfer practices and programs. PCCAT is aimed at bringing together all those working to support student mobility and credit transfer in any province or territory in Canada, including institutions, government, agencies or associations. Its second annual meeting is scheduled for Toronto in mid-June 2008.

PCCAT's stated objectives are:

1. To support and encourage student mobility and transfer of credit within each provincial/territorial jurisdiction;
2. To support appropriate efforts to improve transfer of credits across jurisdictional boundaries;
3. To conduct and share research and data gathering/analysis;
4. To support and further the work of the CMEC Credit Transfer Working Group and to encourage the implementation of pan-Canadian protocols on transfer credit;

5. To establish professional networking mechanisms that allow participants to regularly share issues, resolutions and best practices in admissions and transfer;
6. To promote high standards in transfer credit assessment and administration;
7. To facilitate inter-institutional co-operation and collaboration, through articulation committees or other means; and
8. To promote recognition of the legitimacy of transfer agreements within jurisdictions and to rely on those agreements as the basis of granting transfer credit in other jurisdictions.

The credit transfer example is of interest because some jurisdictions have taken a different, and more ambitious, approach to forging articulation and transfer agreements between post-secondary institutions in their individual provinces, but have come to see the need for a more comprehensive, pan-Canadian approach to be developed in order to enhance mobility of learners. Agencies in B.C. and Alberta are generally viewed as the most advanced in this regard, and have taken a leadership role in working with colleagues in other jurisdictions to make progress more uniform across the country.

PCCAT is now moving toward establishing common pan-Canadian guidelines for transfer by developing templates for implementation by individual provinces. This allows provinces to decide on individual, practical and detailed implementation plans for their particular circumstances. The relatively slow pace of progress in implementing the minister-level agreement on credit transfer over the past number of years was likely inevitable, given the different approaches and priorities of the various jurisdictions. One weakness in this approach is that there is no way to measure the frequency of use of the guidelines or the variation in application across jurisdictions so it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the protocol, at this point.

With regard to the probability of successful progress on significant pan-Canadian issues, a sector-led approach shows much promise. A sector-initiated approach avoids the problem of having to wait for leadership from either the provinces or the federal government at a time when PSE is not seen as having the political benefits which might justify government action.

A sector-initiated approach can also build on existing strengths and initiatives in the PSE sector. If it is possible to overcome issues related to difficulty in building critical mass; limited ability to bear the research, data building and start-up costs; and fragmented leadership across several organizations usually have differing priorities, there may be the opportunity to make progress on one or two critical issues. Eventually the provinces and the federal government would have to be brought into such an initiative, but if the sector initiates action and can demonstrate good progress, government support may follow.

B. Potential provincially initiated approaches

There are several options for making progress under this approach, some of which build on existing initiatives.

Bilateral arrangements – Several existing bilateral arrangements between provinces may serve as a catalyst for action among clusters of provinces or among the provinces as a group. The Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) between British Columbia and Alberta as well as the Ontario/Quebec agreement on labour mobility represent examples of these types of action that might serve as the basis for making pan-Canadian progress on specific issues.

COF or CMEC initiatives – A second approach for provincially led action include building on current initiatives that the provinces as a group (through COF or CMEC) are currently pursuing. CMEC's work on quality assurance, for example, could be expanded to pursue quality assurance mechanisms for the country.

Coalition – Another approach might be to build a coalition of interested and willing provinces and territories to develop and pursue common pan-Canadian objectives. Several Premiers are PSE champions who understand the importance of PSE and who might be willing to encourage pan-Canadian issues, given the right circumstances.

Information initiative – There is the possibility of a Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI)-type initiative (focused on PSE information and analysis) initiated by the provinces. Recently, CESC and CMEC have undertaken the development of a data strategy; this might be a possible provincial first step towards a CIHI-type outcome on data.

Several current initiatives among the provinces/territories are relevant to a provincially initiated approach. The Council of the Federation sponsored a major summit on post-secondary education and skills in Ottawa in February 2006. This summit, co-chaired by Premier Charest of Quebec and Premier McGuinty of Ontario, was attended by stakeholders, people representing PSE institutions and organizations, students, faculty, business, labour and other interested parties, with federal officials invited as observers.

When the provincial and territorial leaders met in August 2006 for their annual conference, an updated paper was released. This paper echoed themes raised in the Council's discussion guide prepared for the February summit, but did not address the need for more explicit coordination of federal-provincial efforts. The August document instead made the traditional call on Ottawa to "restore" unconditional transfer payments that had been cut in the 1995 budget, and took the position that progress on the array of goals for PSE should focus on the internal efforts of the individual provinces, rather than on more coordinated interprovincial or federal-provincial efforts.

If the Council of the Federation were to make PSE a priority item, ministers could be directed to develop a strategic plan to address issues that would benefit from pan-Canadian action. They could also pursue further discussions with the federal government on particular items.

Another route for a provincially initiated approach is through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). CMEC was established more than forty years ago as the principal interprovincial mechanism for discussion of education issues in Canada. For the most part, CMEC focuses on exchanges of information about initiatives, including best practices, so that individual jurisdictions can be aware of, and learn from, the experience of the other jurisdictions' policy and program approaches to similar challenges. In 1993 and again in 1999, CMEC issued more general statements of policy, both entitled the "Victoria Declaration", given the location of the meetings at which the statements were finalized and approved. The 1993 Victoria Declaration reaffirmed provincial responsibility and leadership for education, although it also noted that "there has never been a greater need for joint action [among provinces], and stressed CMEC's commitment "to exploring with the federal government ways to achieve effective and fruitful cooperation".

In the 1999 Victoria Declaration, the CMEC "unanimously reaffirmed our responsibility for providing leadership in education at the pan-Canadian level" and identified eight priorities for joint action, including a focus on outcomes, sharing information on best practices, collaborating on curriculum initiatives, promoting policy-related research, strengthening the post-secondary sector and increasing access, supporting international activities, promoting mobility, and enhancing CMEC as a "forum for effective and fruitful cooperation with the federal government."

The two Victoria Declarations naturally dealt with the full array of education issues, rather than focusing only on PSE. But CMEC also issued its statement of "public expectations" about post-secondary education in 1999, and it was then and remains CMEC's most explicit public statement of broad objectives commonly shared across Canada with respect to PSE.

In 2003, CMEC commissioned an external appraisal of its mission, objectives and capabilities, "in order to establish a framework for the organization's future and a foundation for its renewal." This review, released as the Framework for the Future in December 2003, concluded that "there are pan-Canadian issues that need attention" and identified "a range of issues not currently being addressed." The review found that "the current organization has become consumed with information sharing" and that there is a "critical need to translate the vision for CMEC (as articulated in the Victoria Declaration) into an action-oriented work plan with specific deliverables." Further, the review found that there is a "need to develop a constructive dialogue with the federal government, a structure for this dialogue, and a mechanism for ongoing communication." The report recommended, among other things, that CMEC "seek the Premiers' endorsement for the agenda and provide regular reports on progress to the Annual Premiers' Council or the Council of the Federation", and that CMEC "decide on an option to engage the federal government in a dialogue on potential collaborative areas."¹⁰³

Since that review, CMEC has identified three major priorities for common action: literacy, Aboriginal education, and post-secondary capacity. In addition, ministers have endorsed principles regarding quality assurance in PSE, and commissioned work focused on the need for a comprehensive data strategy for education generally. This work could form the basis for further action, if the CMEC members could agree on an expanded and accelerated PSE agenda.

The recommendations regarding the need to develop a mechanism for ongoing federal–provincial dialogue on issues have not been pursued. It is important to note that a number of provincially led initiatives have been made on a regional rather than a national basis. Examples include the TILMA agreement between B.C. and Alberta (see above). While focused on labour-market and mobility issues, this initiative also has aspects that fully involve co-operative work of the two provinces' post-secondary sectors and institutions. The recent Ontario–Quebec agreement on labour mobility is another example of such a regionally focused provincial initiative. In post-secondary education, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Council brings together government and sectoral actors to work in concert on a number of regional issues of interest.

Several provinces have recently conducted reviews of their PSE systems in their respective provinces. Reports such as B.C.'s 2007 report on post-secondary education—Campus 2020—made specific reference to provincially led initiatives and recommended they be pursued as a first step in an ultimately pan-Canadian initiative to take action on issues such as data, quality assurance, credit transfer and accreditation.

In evaluating the probability of the success of a provincially led approach, it appears that the provinces have great difficulty in consummating pan-Canadian arrangements, despite the best of intentions and declarations. Individual provinces are, understandably, less interested in the national picture than in the domestic provincial scene they represent. There is little to be gained politically from the perspective of individual provinces in adopting a pan-Canadian perspective. Past experiences in such efforts have, in the view of many provinces, been time consuming, complex and often frustrating.

C. Potential federally initiated approaches

There are several examples of federally initiated approaches to building a pan-Canadian architecture in PSE, with many of these approaches involving the use of the federal spending power as introduced in federal budget initiatives. These federal initiatives often impose terms and conditions on the provinces and have been greeted with varying degrees of acceptance on the part of the provinces and territories.

Other options that might yield progress include the following:

Information and analysis initiatives – The federal government could decide to fund a CIHI-like initiative, with or without the participation of all the provinces—although, without any provincial/territorial support, it would be difficult to pursue this type of initiative successfully.

Pan-Canadian meeting – The federal government could call for a dialogue with the provinces on issues focused on competitiveness and productivity or skill shortages, for example, thus avoiding exacerbating jurisdictional sensitivities that would likely be inflamed by proposing a dialogue on issues of PSE. This approach might be more effective if initiated in the spirit of the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) or as a response to the COF work on PSE.

Series of bilaterals – Another approach the federal government could use to initiate action is one that has become particularly popular in recent years—the use of bilateral agreements with the provinces on specific issues. Most recently, Ottawa has launched initiatives aimed at effecting bilateral agreements with all provinces and territories under the terms of which federal EI and regular program (“consolidated revenue fund”) resources are transferred to and delivered through provincial training programs, subject to certain terms and conditions, including program criteria and accountability requirements.

Other – There may be some opportunities linked to current or anticipated initiatives (Private Members Bill C-398 or budget legislation) which could be used to introduce new federal action in the PSE field—either an accountability framework or a CIHI-like initiative.

In evaluating the likelihood of federally initiated action, it is important to note that the federal government has no jurisdiction in education, but has been active for decades in a wide range of areas directly and indirectly affecting PSE in Canada. Through its spending power, Ottawa is the major funder of research in post-secondary institutions, through the key granting councils. It provides billions of dollars annually in program and tax expenditures in support of student financial assistance; it transfers billions annually to the provinces and territories through the Canada Social Transfer; it provides program support for Aboriginal Canadians enrolled in PSE.

Ottawa's jurisdiction over such matters as immigration, foreign affairs, and trade and commerce can have an effect on PSE, depending on how that jurisdiction is exercised with respect to foreign students, for example.

Ottawa has traditionally played a role in “training”, which has, for pragmatic reasons, been seen as distinct from “education” despite the fact that much training involves provincial PSE institutions. The extent of federal involvement has also varied over time, depending on policy priorities, resource challenges, and constitutional sensitivities.

Over the past several decades, successive federal governments have also launched a number of more specifically focused initiatives, usually designed to involve provincial government agencies in delivery, for such priorities as literacy, older worker adjustment, recognition of foreign credentials for professions, allowances or tax credits for text books or tools for apprentices, and official-languages programming. In many instances, these initiatives have taken the form of “pilot project” funding, targeted to specific issues and aimed at identifying promising practices that could be subsequently ramped up to more comprehensive ongoing programs.

There is no doubt that a number of past federal initiatives have caused friction with provinces, who have criticized Ottawa for lack of prior consultation, requirements for matched funding, “skewing” of priorities or “inappropriate intrusion” into provincial jurisdiction through program terms and conditions or accountability provisions, or lack of guarantees of ongoing federal resource commitments once expectations and demand have been encouraged through the mounting of pilots.

Following the 2006 meeting of the Council of the Federation at which the provincial Premiers issued their statement on post-secondary education and training, entitled “Competing for Tomorrow”, the federal government proposed “Advantage Canada” in its Fall 2006 financial statement. “Advantage Canada” can be seen, in some respects, as a response to many of the points raised by Premiers regarding post-secondary and training goals, objectives and priorities.

The federal statement called for Canada to create “the best-educated, most-skilled and most-flexible workforce in the world”. The federal government committed to “working with provinces and territories to develop shared objectives and targets, clarify roles and responsibilities and enhance public accountability.” Its science and technology policy, issued following the February 2007 budget, outlined further initiatives aimed at maximizing the impact of federal research funding and forging more-effective linkages between research and innovation, and business.¹⁰⁴

To reinforce its desire to work together with provinces and territories on defining shared objectives and targets, Budget 2007 committed an additional \$800M—around a 25% increase in federal funding for post-secondary education transfers that would subsequently be indexed to rise at 3% annually—to be spent on post-secondary education through the Canada Social Transfer beginning in 2008–2009. This funding “will take effect in 2008–2009, following discussions with provinces and territories on how best to make use of those new investments and ensure appropriate reporting and accountability to Canadians. These discussions will build on the valuable work already undertaken by the Council of the Federation.”¹⁰⁵ Since then, there have been no public announcements regarding federal–provincial agreements or discussions pursuant to this provision.

Despite obvious federal interest, the existence of common economic goals and objectives, and the need to link PSE initiatives to many federal agenda items, it would be difficult for the federal government to initiate action in the PSE area without support from the provinces and territories. Ottawa's interest in post-secondary issues waxes and wanes, largely independently of what party is in power. There has been explicit recognition by federal governments over the past several administrations of the critical role of PSE in terms of innovation, productivity, competitiveness and general economic and social objectives but successive federal governments have shied away from pursuing a particularly activist role of promoting an explicit or comprehensive post-secondary agenda. This can be explained by a principled reluctance to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction, or unwillingness to expend the political capital necessary to take on the jurisdictional battles often triggered by federal “intrusion” in such areas.

Because of the militant (and variable) resistance of at least some provinces to federal involvement in PSE, most federal initiatives have therefore focused on areas of relatively settled federal interest—research and student financial assistance. For many years, federal government involvement has been conditioned not by clearly adduced national priorities, but—lacking its ability to intervene for federal–provincial planning of PSE—by its ability to intervene unilaterally. Even these areas, however, have resulted in federal–provincial tensions.

Given these factors, it is unlikely that the federal government will initiate action outside its well-established areas of policy and program activity without being invited by provinces to work with them.

Summary comments on the three potential approaches

The above outline of various potential approaches, as well as current and recent PSE initiatives in Canada, highlights several points:

- The fact that there are a number of possible avenues for making progress on important issues affecting PSE in Canada is encouraging. This should potentially allow for accommodation of differing circumstances in provinces and in the various sectors related to PSE.
- The wide range of initiatives recently undertaken by the PSE sector and governments does not represent a particularly coherent, effective or efficient approach to solving more urgent issues in need of a pan-Canadian approach. The fragmented efforts risk squandering opportunities, time and resources that could more usefully be focused if the relevant actors worked together to identify priorities, strategies, and roles and responsibilities.
- Despite the number of potential options outlined above, there does not appear to be an easy immediate approach to making progress on a pan-Canadian PSE agenda. Initiatives currently underway should continue while means to coordinate the outcomes to encourage synergies and link relevant projects need to be explored.
- One of the major obstacles that have consistently stood in the way of a more coherent strategic approach to PSE in Canada has been the need for leadership.

- No matter which approach is advanced, there is a need for information and analysis to address the fact that the PSE sector in Canada suffers from a lack of coherent, comprehensive, timely, key information, indicators, benchmarks and targets for PSE.

Part III: What are the priority issues that would benefit from pan-Canadian action?

In Canada, activities in post-secondary education have tended to be provincially focused, with the federal government playing an active role in the well-defined areas of research, student aid, and labour market-related initiatives. Discussions with stakeholders, partners and experts in PSE have led to identification of a number of PSE issues that require, or would benefit from, action at the pan-Canadian level. It is argued that a pan-Canadian approach would complement provincial work in PSE and position the PSE sector to meet global challenges related to growth of the knowledge economy and changes in Canadian society and culture.

These pan-Canadian issues have been categorized into two ‘clusters’—those related to competitiveness and productivity; and those related to opportunities for learners, although there is obvious overlap between the two. In addition, a third category—requirements for information and analysis—was identified and is closely related to the two clusters of issues.

1. Issues related to Canada’s competitiveness and productivity

All levels of government and society share a ‘common economic space’ related to the country’s economic and social goals—goals that demand common and concerted priorities and action on topics such as PSE, one of the primary drivers of prosperity. PSE issues directly related to Canada’s common economic space include:

- Access issues, including increased participation and attainment to meet current and anticipated skill shortages;
- Investments in research and development;
- Growth in the number of graduate students;
- The need for adequate numbers of highly qualified personnel (HQP);
- The need for adequate numbers of persons qualified in trades; and

- Assurance of the quality of post-secondary programs.

These PSE issues bring together a number of key priorities, including the need to respond to demographic shifts as they affect skills shortages; the development of highly qualified personnel; R&D as key to future economic prosperity; quality of life; and the country's standard of living. The issues are of particularly high priority for the federal, provincial and territorial governments given their responsibilities to nurture economic and social growth. The need for dedicated and focused resources to maximize effectiveness argues for a coordinated approach to be taken by those governments, acting in concert with system and other partners, including business and labour.

Roger Gibbins in his recent work on “Canadian Federalism in an Age of Globalization”¹⁰⁶ presents the argument that post-secondary education is a matter of national interest. He argues that students and graduates of post-secondary education are highly mobile and that issues related to quality, access and credit mobility should be addressed from a national perspective, as the “educational success for individuals is the essential foundation for national economic success.”¹⁰⁷

2. Issues related to opportunities for learners

There are a variety of issues which relate to the education and training of individuals—their ability to access and finance quality programs with recognized credentials:

- Student financial assistance review and reform;
- Credit transfer;
- Credential recognition (e.g. PLAR);
- Quality of post-secondary programs, including accreditation and quality assurance;
- Support for the development and mobility of highly qualified personnel; and
- Support for the development and mobility of persons in trades.

This cluster of issues is all about partnerships and collaboration in the PSE sector. A number of the issues focus on mobility, which would likely require leadership by the provinces and territories and which is also of importance to the federal government.

The issues cited under this cluster have, for the most part, been on the public agenda for some time, and various approaches have been attempted over the years. The relatively slow pace of progress to date demonstrates the many challenges standing in the way. Mechanisms or initial actions to focus on how to bring stakeholders together around specific issues and how to identify and nurture leadership roles in areas where there are current voids are essential.

3. Information and analysis

Many stakeholders referred to requirements for comprehensive, comparable, valid, reliable and timely information, and analysis to support decision-making processes. Information development was viewed as a means to construct a platform for the formulation of effective policy and program initiatives for the issues requiring pan-Canadian action. Initiatives to address information gaps were identified as essential first steps to make progress on the range of other issues that would benefit from pan-Canadian consideration.

This conclusion is consistent with one of CCL's central themes, common to both the 2006 and 2007 reports: Canada is simply unable to achieve the level of understanding required to assess performance and progress in meaningful ways. This inability results from the current fragmented, incomplete and inadequate approach to the collection and analysis of key information. As one example, Canadian information has not been available in past years for considerably more than half the cells contained in the annual OECD report, *Education at a Glance*.

Without a base of comparable, comprehensive, consistent, relevant and timely information, and an agreed-upon set of measurable indicators and benchmarks focused on the most-important issues of performance, Canadian governments, post-secondary institutions, and learners will continue to make decisions without the benefit of relevant information and analysis. This is costly in terms of wasteful and duplicative effort or missed opportunities. It is also risky, given that jurisdictions around the world have put in place the systems and mechanisms necessary to gather coherent and representative PSE measures. As a result, the European Union, Australia, the U.K., the U.S. and others have the capability that we lack in Canada to take evidence-based decisions about future policy and resource allocations based on comprehensive and meaningful information on PSE performance.

Part IV: What is the logical starting point for action?

Canada has been plagued by a lack of consensus on the focus for inter-jurisdictional initiatives. As mentioned above, a number of such initiatives have been undertaken in recent years, with respect to credit transfer, quality assurance, or access for underrepresented groups in society. CMEC's work on literacy, Aboriginal learners and post-secondary 'capacity' has also resulted in some important activities of this nature.

However, it is obvious that no matter which approach to foster pan-Canadian action is undertaken, lack of information and analysis is a significant barrier to progress. The fact that existing information sources do not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and contributions of the PSE sector is a situation requiring urgent action. Without comprehensive and internationally comparable PSE data, Canada is not in position to evaluate the management or evolution of the PSE sector.

There are many stakeholders in the PSE sector who are currently pursuing data definition, collection, and analysis projects in an effort to increase our ability to measure PSE outcomes. However, the lack of coordination and priority setting is hampering progress. The need for the PSE sector to adopt an information and analysis strategy—and work together to address gaps—is essential.

Current information initiatives in Canada

Sector-initiated

A number of universities and provincial sector organizations have been working for the past two years on the development and reporting of common university data (Common University Data for Canada or CUDC). In a large measure, this initiative arose as a result of a growing consensus that it would be helpful for all universities to be able to benchmark a number of indicators in a consistent and comparable manner. Some in the university sector also took the view that such an initiative was important in view of what they saw as the weaknesses of published reports such as those of *Maclean's Magazine*, and concluded that it was equally important for the sector itself to develop such a common set of indicators (rather than having it imposed upon them by governments, for example).

There was a Common Data Workshop of Vice Presidents and data analysis officers held in Toronto in February 2007. Following this a Steering Committee representing universities in all parts of Canada was established to undertake further exploration of a CUDC.

The Steering Committee next met in November 2007 and agreed to an analysis of the common dataset templates in use in Ontario, British Columbia and being developed in Quebec. It further agreed that a core template would be developed for consideration by the regional groups. Analysis of the Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium instrument and the National Survey of Student Engagement was undertaken with a view to incorporating some elements into a possible Common University Data for Canada (CUDC).

An analysis done for use in the CUDC exercise noted increasing support for institutional and government-mandated performance indicators across Canada. It also pointed out that, despite differences in specific indicators in use in various jurisdictions, there is a consistent set of common themes focused on accessibility, quality and accountability.

Analysis of the common dataset templates that have been implemented in B.C. and Ontario revealed a number of similarities in the type of data collected, and in specific indicators. According to the University of Calgary analysis, the two datasets share seven categories, 12 sub-categories and 18 indicators in common. This commonality suggests the emergence of “a shared consensus among the templates and provide[s] a starting point in the discussions towards a common Canadian dataset template.”¹⁰⁸ The paper noted that Quebec had launched a process with a view to developing such a common dataset template in that province.

These reviews and recommendations for a common performance indicator template for universities were to be considered at a further meeting of the Steering Committee on May 16, 2008. This initiative shows considerable promise. The development of a common, consistent, reliable, comparable and timely template of performance indicators for universities in Canada would constitute progress toward meeting the objectives set out in CCL's 2007 report regarding the need for a PSE data strategy.

Provincially initiated

In the autumn of 2007, CMEC and Statistics Canada, acting as the Canadian Education Statistics Council, commissioned work to make recommendations on a comprehensive data strategy for education in Canada. This strategy was to encompass all components of the education enterprise, not just PSE.

The work resulted in a report to CMEC in February 2008. CMEC's communiqué from that meeting contained a reference to data in the context of its discussion of post-secondary education capacity, stating that "Ministers agreed to develop a data and information strategy to further define the gaps between the skills Canadians will need in the future and the capacity of the postsecondary education system to deliver them."¹⁰⁹

In April 2008, CMEC issued a "joint declaration" called Learn Canada 2020, described as "the framework the provincial and territorial ministers of education, through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, will use to enhance Canada's education systems, learning opportunities, and overall education outcomes." With respect to post-secondary education, the declaration stated that "Canada must increase the number of students pursuing post-secondary education by increasing the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education." One of the key activity areas identified in support of the "four pillars of lifelong learning" considered in the statement had to do with education data and research. The statement set the objective of "creat[ing] comprehensive, long-term strategies to collect, analyze, and disseminate nationally and internationally comparable data and research."¹¹⁰

Federally initiated

Federal governments—like provincial governments—have been committed for some years to improving accountability for results achieved through the expenditure of tax dollars. In areas related to post-secondary education, recent federal initiatives have focused on evaluating in a formal way the impact of federally funded programs such as the research councils' funding, the Networks of Centres of Excellence, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, or Canada Research Chairs.

The negotiation of bilateral agreements with provinces and territories on labour market-programming matters, flowing from the last federal budget, has resulted in agreements providing for reporting of results achieved, and assurances that the federal resources are not being used simply to replace pre-existing provincial resources.

As noted earlier, the current government's 2007 budget contained a provision linking the boost in Canada Social Transfers targeted to post-secondary education to discussions with the provinces on objectives, priorities and accountability for results. It is not clear that there was follow-up on this topic.

As well, cancellation of the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation in the 2008 budget was accompanied by the announcement of major federal funding for a student grant program, to be run by the government itself, doubtless in close co-operation with the provinces. Whether that new program will have provisions related to performance accountability and reporting is at this stage unclear, but it would be surprising if there were not such provisions, given the approach taken by the government—and its recent predecessors—with respect to the importance of accountability.

The health model

There are many parallels between health care and post-secondary education with respect to the functioning of Canadian federalism, with primary responsibility for delivery resting with the provinces/territories while the federal government is the major funder. As was the case in the health sector, so too do Canadian policy-makers, administrators, educators, parents, learners and citizens need a clear and sound basis of evidence from which to make informed decisions about their futures.

The health sector made great strides in resolving those issues in the context of the major federal-provincial discussions over health that took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The agreements that resulted from these discussions, among other things, resulted in the development of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI)—now generally recognized as the major source of authoritative information and useful indicators with respect to health care in Canada.

CIHI, which gathers and analyzes standardized administrative data from hospitals and others in the health sector, works closely with Statistics Canada which has the ability to conduct surveys. It is an independent, not-for-profit organization with offices across Canada that “provides non-partisan information on the performance of the health system essential to sound decision-making.” (www.cihi.ca). It has an extensive database available to the public.

The lessons afforded by CIHI are of interest and relevance here. CIHI has carved out a strong reputation as the authoritative source of key health-care information, for governments, and for Canadians. It would appear that the major ingredients explaining this success are:

- Comprehensive but clear mandate for health statistics and reporting;
- Independence of status;
- Manageable governance structure, involving a reasonable number (16) of directors representing institutions and governments, on a regional basis;
- Support from provincial, territorial and federal governments;
- Secure and adequate funding, the bulk of which comes from the federal government; and
- Workable relationship with Statistics Canada, coordinating their “survey-focused” work on health care with CIHI’s “administrative data-focused” work.

The argument for a similar effort with respect to information and analysis in the PSE sector is not new. The CIHI model has proven to be an effective tool in the health field to gather, organize and disseminate reliable information about the sector and has been a focal point for fostering national coherence and shared recognition of priorities and problems in a very decentralized health-care delivery system. A PSE information and analysis initiative, although much smaller and more circumscribed, should have similar benefits.

Part V: Summary and conclusions

Review of current PSE initiatives contained in this paper demonstrates a great deal of activity in Canada, within the PSE sector, and within governments, with respect to a number of key issues of relevance to pan-Canadian interests. Many of these initiatives are related to key national economic and social agenda pursuant to Canada’s common economic space. The successful completion of the projects would start to fill some gaps in PSE mechanisms or information.

But there is a startling lack of coordination or concentration between and among those activities; each has been developed and pursued largely in isolation of the others. In some ways, this is cause for concern. The fragmented efforts of various partners on a number of different fronts, according to differing timetables and in pursuit of disparate objectives, threatens to cause confusion and may weaken our ability as a country to identify and pursue common interests and objectives in an effective manner. This—as was pointed out at length in CCL’s first two reports on PSE—should be a source of worry for Canadians, given the apparently more focused efforts being made in other jurisdictions with whom we are in competition.

In other ways, though, the very scope and range of activities is a cause for celebration and for hope. Recognition by many of what appears to be components of an emerging common agenda for pan-Canadian efforts in PSE could, ideally, constitute the critical mass of opinion and expertise and generate the momentum needed to make progress on a range of important issues. What is required is an effort and mechanism to “connect the dots”, focusing Canada’s efforts on critical PSE issues.

The OECD’s synthesis report on tertiary education sums up lessons derived from successes and failures of policy reforms in various countries. In cases of successful implementation of reforms, the OECD study identifies the “importance of the context in which tertiary education policies are proposed, the clarity of their objectives and rationales to all stakeholders, and the value of consensus-building during the policy development stage.”¹¹¹ Recognition of the need to face up to international pressure and competition, building consensus and trust over time among stakeholders through processes promoting consensual policy-making, and the combination of top-down and bottom-up participation of stakeholders are among the factors that are reported to have led to successful outcomes.

As pointed out in earlier CCL reports and in this paper, it would seem to be the case that information and analysis provides the potential fulcrum for leveraging progress in the short term. The effort to create a comprehensive approach to information and research on PSE and its impacts can provide the foundation for many efforts. Without such a foundation, we will continue to be at risk of designing policies and programs in the absence of relevant information and analysis, at a time when others are improving their ability to take actions that jeopardize our competitiveness.

Current initiatives on the information front are encouraging. The sector-initiated effort related to CUDC among Canadian universities is a very positive development. Indications from CMEC and CESC of their interest in developing “comprehensive, long-term strategies to collect, analyze, and disseminate nationally and internationally comparable data and research”¹¹² are positive signs of a willingness to make progress on this issue.

As well, involvement of other key partners with an interest and role in PSE in Canada would help validate such a template, and ensure that it covers issues of relevance to governments, learners and employers, for instance. The federal government’s role in the common economic space over which PSE has such determinate influence—through social transfers and direct funding for research, student financial assistance, Aboriginal education, and other programs—and the fact that Statistics Canada is a federal organization, point to the obvious need for Ottawa to be involved in the creation and pursuit of such comprehensive initiatives as a pan-Canadian information strategy.

Canada also has the successful experience of the CIHI model and, in the post-secondary sector, it is possible to envision a scenario where the key ingredients from the CIHI model are translated into something like a Canadian Institute for Post-secondary Information, or CIPSI.

1. The sector-initiated work being done under the rubric of CUDC could well be expanded to encompass the college sector, with leadership coming from the AUCC and ACCC.
2. The results of this work could be taken forward to provinces and territories as responsive to CMEC’s recent commitment to “comprehensive, long-term strategies” for information and analysis in the PSE sector.
3. The federal government could respond to these developments by committing to key funding and other support for the establishment of a CIPSI. A federal commitment to major funding for development of a “roadmap” may be a key factor in bringing together the various strands of work and providing them with the resources necessary to do the job.

With these factors in place, major progress could be made in meeting the critical PSE information and analysis needs of Canada related to measuring the performance and progress of PSE. Components that would contribute to the success of a comprehensive information and analysis initiative are in existence or being contemplated. What is required is leadership to bring those elements together in a practical, pragmatic and effective way. This is a complex issue, given the nature of the Canadian federation and historic developments with regard to post-secondary education but it is critical that Canada address this question so that the country’s accomplishments in PSE are protected and continue to support the country’s economic and social agenda.

APPENDIX 2: ACCORD INTERCANTONAL SUR L'HARMONISATION DE LA SCOLARITÉ OBLIGATOIRE (CONCORDAT HARMOS)

I. But et principes de base de l'accord

Art. 1 But

Les cantons concordataires harmonisent la scolarité obligatoire :

- a. en harmonisant les objectifs de l'enseignement et les structures scolaires, et
- b. en développant et assurant la qualité et la perméabilité du système scolaire au moyen d'instruments de pilotage communs.

Art. 2 Principes de base

1. Respectueux de la diversité des cultures dans la Suisse plurilingue, les cantons concordataires appliquent le principe de la subsidiarité dans toutes leurs démarches en faveur de l'harmonisation.
2. Ils s'efforcent de supprimer tout ce qui, sur le plan scolaire, fait obstacle à la mobilité nationale et internationale de la population.

IV. Instruments de développement et d'assurance qualité

Art. 7 Standards de formation

1. Aux fins d'harmoniser les objectifs de l'enseignement dans l'ensemble du pays, sont établis des standards nationaux de formation.
2. Ces standards de formation peuvent être de deux ordres, à savoir :
 - a. des standards de performance fondés, par domaine disciplinaire, sur un cadre de référence incluant des niveaux de compétence;
 - b. des standards déterminant certains critères en matière de contenu ou de réalisation.

3. Les standards nationaux de formation sont construits et validés scientifiquement sous la responsabilité de la CDIP. Ils doivent faire l'objet d'une consultation au sens de l'art. 3 du concordat sur la coordination scolaire du 29 octobre 1970.
4. Ils sont adoptés par l'Assemblée plénière de la CDIP à la majorité des deux tiers de ses membres, parmi lesquels doivent figurer au moins deux cantons à majorité linguistique non germanophone. Ils sont révisés par les cantons concordataires selon une procédure analogue.
5. La CDIP et ses conférences régionales se concertent au cas par cas pour développer des tests de référence sur la base des standards de formation ainsi fixés.

Art. 8 Plans d'études et moyens d'enseignement

L'harmonisation des plans d'études et la coordination des moyens d'enseignement sont assurées au niveau des régions linguistiques par les conférences régionales de la CDIP.

Art. 9 Portfolios

Les cantons concordataires veillent à ce que les élèves puissent attester de leurs connaissances et compétences au moyen des portfolios nationaux ou internationaux recommandés par la CDIP.

Art. 10 Monitoring du système d'éducation

1. En application de l'art. 4 du concordat sur la coordination scolaire du 29 octobre 1970, les cantons concordataires et la Confédération participent à un monitoring systématique, continu et scientifiquement étayé de l'ensemble du système suisse d'éducation.
2. Les développements et les performances de l'école obligatoire sont régulièrement évalués dans le cadre de ce monitoring. La vérification de l'atteinte des standards nationaux de formation fait partie de cette évaluation.

APPENDIX 3: CCL'S COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING

CCL published a wide variety of reports and tools free of charge to facilitate and support the progress of lifelong learning in Canada. CCL is the only organization in Canada to offer free online data tools on learning:

- Interactive maps provide an in-depth look at literacy scores and levels across Canada.
- A comprehensive Data Warehouse provides access to CCL's research data.
- No other reports in Canada provide a unique and comprehensive look at lifelong learning.
- Our reports use evidence-based research and rely on a standard set of indicators to measure performance.
- Our reports use data available at the Canada level and by provinces for the last 10 years and more as well as comparable international data.

Composite Learning Index

The *Composite Learning Index* (CLI) is the first index of its kind in the world, measuring Canada's progress in lifelong learning. An annual composite indicator measuring the state of lifelong learning in over 5,000 communities in Canada. Inspired by the UNESCO's Four Pillars of Learning (Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together, Learning to Be), the index is based on 25 different learning measures representing the different ways that people learn at home, at school, at work and in their community. Since 2006, the CLI tracks progress of lifelong learning and provides a valuable monitoring tool to measure the strengths and challenges of lifelong learning for each community in Canada.

The State of Learning in Canada

Published annually, the *State of Learning* is a comprehensive synthesis of data and research on key aspects of learning in Canada, including early childhood learning; learning in school; learning in the post-secondary years; adult and workplace learning and Aboriginal learning. Relevant data indicators are used as measures of Canada's progress in learning. The report monitors progress for each indicator and provides insight into where Canada currently stands.

The *State of Learning* lays the foundation for a culture of learning by providing relevant information for policy-makers, governments, educators and citizens that will help Canadians achieve their full potential.

- ***State of Learning in Canada: A Year in Review*** (March 2010)
- ***Securing Prosperity through Canada's Human Infrastructure: The State of Adult Learning and Workplace Training in Canada*** (September 2009)
- ***State of Learning in Canada: Toward a Learning Future*** (July 2008)
- ***State of Learning in Canada: No Time for Complacency*** (January 2007)

State of Post-secondary Education in Canada

Published annually, the *State of Post-secondary Education in Canada* is a comprehensive synthesis of data and research, reporting on the progress of the PSE sector based upon eight goals and objectives. Each chapter introduces and defines a particular PSE goal, and presents data indicators on the topic. Individual indicators are then explored in terms of their importance and applied as measures of the evolving state of PSE in Canada. Where possible, Canadian indicators are compared over time and to relevant data from other countries.

- ***Post-secondary Education in Canada: Meeting our Needs?*** (February 2009)
- ***Post-secondary Education in Canada: Strategies for Success*** (December 2007)
- ***Canadian Post-secondary Education: A Positive Record – An Uncertain Future*** (December 2006)

Challenges in Canadian Post-secondary Education

- ***Monograph 3: Tallying the Costs of Post-secondary Education: the Challenge of Managing Student Debt and Loan Repayment in Canada***
 - The third monograph in the series delves into the current state of the Canada's Student Loans Program (CSLP) and examines the long-term impact it is having on college and university students after they graduate. (September 2010)
- ***Monograph 2: Navigating Post-secondary Education in Canada: The Challenges of a Changing Landscape***
 - The second monograph in the series studies the need for a Canada-wide classification system for our post-secondary institutions. (September 2010)
- ***Monograph 1: Up to Par: The Challenge of Demonstrating Quality in Canadian Post-secondary Education***
 - This inaugural monograph discusses the complex challenges associated with defining and demonstrating quality in PSE. (November 2009)

State of E-Learning in Canada

The ability to access and use high-quality learning resources anytime and anywhere is an increasingly important element of all forms of learning. Challenges remain in terms of coordinating the tools, standards, practices and infrastructure necessary, and building the capacity and confidence of both providers and learners to use e-learning effectively. CCL's *State of E-Learning in Canada* improves Canadians' understanding of e-learning—particularly of its challenges, limitations and benefits—so that Canada may move forward in appropriate and relevant ways. (May 2009)

Literacy Reports

Both in its narrower sense—the reading, writing and numeracy skills needed to cope with everyday tasks—and in its broader, more nuanced sense—the multiple literacies required to thrive in a knowledge economy—literacy is interwoven through the full spectrum of CCL's work.

The Future of Literacy in Canada's Largest Cities

Thanks to new, previously unreleased data, CCL is now able to provide literacy projections on an unprecedented city level. CCL's new report, *The Future of Literacy in Canada's Largest Cities*, offers adult literacy projections for Canada's largest cities: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa. (September 2010)

Reading the Future: Planning to meet Canada's future literacy needs

This groundbreaking report provides Canada's first projections of adult literacy levels until 2031 for Canada, provinces and territories. It provides projections by gender, immigrant status and education levels. (June 2008)

Health Literacy in Canada

CCL's two health literacy reports examined the relationship between levels of health literacy and health outcomes. They also outline how certain characteristics, such as education and age, can affect health literacy.

- ***Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding*** (February 2008)
- ***Health Literacy in Canada: Initial Results from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS)*** (September 2007)

Interactive literacy maps

These interactive maps provide an in-depth look at the numeracy, prose and health literacy profiles for more than 50,000 communities and neighbourhoods in Canada as well as the country's major cities, economic regions and provinces.

- ***Prose literacy map***
- ***Health literacy map***
- ***Document literacy map***

Aboriginal Learning in Canada

First Nations, Inuit and Métis have long advocated learning that affirms their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions and values. CCL introduced three online, interactive learning tools, accessible from CCL's website. These online tools provide an opportunity to demonstrate how the Holistic Lifelong Learning Models can be used to identify data gaps, disseminate information to a larger audience and increase access to data and indicators.

Redefining how success is measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning

CCL and its Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations in Canada, have developed an innovative approach to measuring Aboriginal learning—one that should lead to more effective lifelong learning and contribute to a higher quality of life for Aboriginal Peoples across Canada. (November 2007)

The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success

Until now, a comprehensive framework for measuring Aboriginal learning has been unavailable in Canada, or, in fact, most of the world. *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* represents the first application of such a framework and marks an innovative approach to measuring Aboriginal learning in Canada. (December 2009)

Lessons in Learning

Lessons in Learning is published to provide Canadians with independent information about 'what works' in learning. Each publication focuses on a specific topical issue. All articles follow a consistent format and provide links to sources of data and related research.

Data Warehouse

Access to quality data is essential to researchers, academics and others working in the field of learning in Canada. To address this need CCL has developed a comprehensive online Data Warehouse that provides educators, researchers, policy-makers and the general public with free access to the majority of CCL's research data used over the past six years.

This warehouse includes all of the indicators used in CCL's State of Learning in Canada reports (2007, 2008, 2009–2010) and CCL's reports on the State of Post-secondary Education in Canada (2006, 2007, 2008–2009). In addition, some of the data has been updated with new previously unpublished information.

APPENDIX 4

For CMEC and provincial/territorial ministers to be motivated to assume national responsibility, three conditions are necessary.

1. Determined effort by at least one-third of ministers and their deputies to take on national and not just regional educational responsibility. This would be along the lines of the European Union, in which, although all states are sovereign in education, there is a powerful political motivation to work cohesively towards common education and training goals.

It would also require resolution by these ministers to utilize CMEC as a national platform for co-operative policy and programming of interested jurisdictions—including the federal government, when appropriate—even in the face of opposition from two recalcitrant provinces.

2. Pressure from the federal government.

The history of CMEC indicates that external pressure is vital to galvanize concerted pan-Canadian action by CMEC. An activist and interventionist federal government usually induces the necessary stimulus: since a principal impulse of CMEC is to preclude federal intervention into what some mistakenly construe as a sphere of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the fear of interposition incites ministers into useful collaborative action.

3. Pressure from publics.

As in most democratic societies, by far the most-influential factor stimulating collective pan-Canadian leadership from education ministers would be insistence from their own publics. This factor would potentiate the first two (above). It is predicated on Canadians understanding how education and learning is structured in their country; how uniquely these attributes inhibit success in learning; how, as a result, Canada's performance is slipping down the international learning curve; how national frameworks facilitate local educational success.

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